

History of the Retired Teachers' Association from 1943 to now

1943 – 1952

Chairman

1943 – 1951 Mr. Robert Judge
1952 Mr. W. Johnston

Hon. Secretary/Treasurer

1943 – 1945 Mrs. Judge
1946 – 1951 Mr. J. Savage
1952 Miss J.F. Fetherstonhaugh

For the first nineteen years, the Chairman of the RTU, the Retired Teachers' Union, enjoyed the title of President. On stepping down from office, Mr. Robert Judge was the first Hon. Life President and held this title until his death in 1956. Since 1962 the two offices of President and Chairman have been filled with the exception of the five year period between 1967 and 1971.

Both Mr. Robert Judge and his wife guided the RTU through the early years until it was well-established. For the next six years, Mr. J. Savage proved a worthy successor to Mrs. Judge.

The Executive, which was made up of representatives from each of the counties, had to make many representations to the Northern Ireland Government Ministers. Many frustrations were experienced due to the fact that N.I. policies and decisions had to await and follow those made at Westminster.

Issues and Concerns

- Pension levels of secondary and technical teachers and Junior Assistant Mistresses.
- Anomalies under the "Pensions (Increase) Act 1944 NI".
- Adverse effect of the Means Test.
- The ever-widening gap between the incomes of serving and retired teachers, particularly following the major salary review of 1950 which gave serving teachers between 70% and 107% increases. This was seen as so unfair to retired teachers that unanimous support was given by Borough, Urban and Rural Councils and Parents' Associations.

1953 – 1962

Chairman

1953 – 1961 Dr. J.T. Lamont
1962 Mr. J. Wells

Hon. Secretary/Treasurer
1953 Miss J.F. Fetherstonhaugh
1954 – 1957 Mr. J. O’Kane
1958 - 1962 Miss J.F. Fetherstonhaugh

Every meeting of the Central Executive Committee during the second decade was taken up with the plight of retired teachers whose pensions were being seriously eroded by the rapid rise in the cost of living. Any increases in pensions had to await the introduction of the Pensions (Increase) Bill of which there were no guarantees.

Much of the officers’ time was taken up ‘educating’ as to the need for action, the 52 Stormont MPs. Replies from the Ministers of Education and Finance were such as to convince the Central Executive Committee of the Retired Teachers’ Union to look to the National Union of Teachers in England and the Scottish Retired Teachers’ Association for advice and support.

The first mention of the Public Service Pensioners’ Council appeared in the Minutes of a meeting in 1955. The assistance of the Ulster Teachers’ Union and the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation was sought and resolutions an improvement in pensions appeared on the conference agendas of these bodies. Friendly relationships were established with the Retired Civil Servants’ Association and ideas shared. One immediate benefit was that the RTU learnt that, each year, the RCSA was given a list of all newly-retired civil servants. Since then, DENI has furnished the names and addresses of all teachers as they retire.

Issues and Concerns

- The low level of retired teachers’ pensions.
- Seeking pensions to be based on the last three years of service rather than the last five.
- Pensions to be equivalent to those currently retiring.
- Some financial recognition for those who had paid contributions for more than forty years.

1963 – 1972

Chairman
1963 – 1965 Mr. T. Jamison
1966 – 1971 Mr. J. Lilley
1972 Mr. A.R. Taylor

Hon. Secretary/Treasurer
1963 Miss J.F. Fetherstonhaugh
1964 – 1972 Mr. P. Macnamee

In 1964, Mr. Paddy Macnamee was elected Hon. Secretary/Treasurer. Membership had dropped from over 700 in the late fifties to just over 300. It was thought that this

drop may have been due to apathy following a recent modest increase in pensions but the difficulty of collecting subscriptions must have played a big part.

An Executive member, Mr. G. O'Donaghue from Castlewellan, made the suggestion that meetings should be held in each region at least once each year. He undertook to organise one in Newcastle and one in Newry. Other meetings soon followed and in 1968 Mr. Macnamee suggested that the Area Committees which had been set up should be made into real branches. With this growth in awareness of the importance of locally organised meetings came the great growth in membership. As a result of the energy and enthusiasm of Mr. Macnamee in supporting the newly-established Branches, membership rose from 316 in 1964 to over 2000 when Mr. Macnamee died in 1975.

Issues and Concerns

- Recruitment.
- Fight to have pensions linked to current salaries.
- Keeping abreast of all pension changes in England and Wales. Welcome given to Labour Government's promise in 1970 to have pensions reviewed every two years. In 1972 an annual review was agreed subject to the cost of living index rising by 2%.

1973 – 1982

Chairman

1973 – 1974 Mr. A.R. Taylor
1975 – 1977 Mr. J.F. McShane
1978 - 1982 Mr. T.H. Dalzell

Hon. Secretary/Treasurer

1973 – 1974 Mr. P. Macnamee
1975 – 1977 Mr. A.R. Taylor
1978 – 1982 Mr. E. Navin

In 1975, on the death of Mr. P. Macnamee, the RTU suffered a very great loss. For eleven years he had given outstanding service to the Union and the establishment and growth of the eleven Branches was, in no small measure, due to his dedicated service. In recognition of his work and the support he received from his wife, Sally, the Union elected her to be the first Honorary Life Member.

During Paddy's illness and for two years following his death, Mr. A.R. Taylor stepped down from the Chair and took over the office of Hon. Secretary/Treasurer. The RTU was extremely well-served by 'Dick' who did so much work in arranging the major change of having subscriptions deducted by the Ministry of Education.

The RTU was also indebted to Mr. Vincent Bunn who stepped in to lead the Union when Mr. McShane had to step down for health reasons. Failing health prevented Mr. Bunn from continuing in office for more than a few months.

In 1982 the RTU was admitted to membership of the Public Service Pensioners' Council which normally meets in London twice yearly. The main function of this body is to exert as much pressure on all MPs and the Government on all matters affecting all elderly in general and all retired Public Servants in particular.

Issues and Concerns

- Consideration given to introducing a Chain of Office for Chairman. A sponsor, however, could not be found.
- Attempt to get the Ministry of Education to have authority to give appropriate pension increases more than once a year when the cost of living kept eroding the value of money.
- Requested and achieved to be on the National Union of Teachers mailing list thus keeping RTU up-to-date with all pension movement in England and Wales.
- Work begun to have Countdown Cards given to RTU members. Enlisting the support of teacher organisations presented problems.
- Welcome given to Social Security Pension Act which became operative in April 1978 and which gave annual increases based on the higher of the prices or wages index.
- The new Hon. Secretary/Treasurer, Mr. Edmund Navin, was welcomed in 1978.

1983 – 1992

Chairman

1983 – 1987 Mr. T.H. Dalzell

1988 – 1989 Mr. J. Trewsdale

1990 - 1992 Mr. R.B. Neilly

Hon. Secretary/Treasurer

1983 – 1989 Mr. E. Navin

1990 – 1992 Mr. R.O. Jameson

Mr. Navin continued to serve the RTU as Hon. Secretary/Treasurer until the 1989 AGM. For ten years, Mr. A. McKee as President, Mr. TH. Dalzell as Chairman and Mr. E. Navin worked together to ensure the continued growth of the RTU. In an attempt to increase membership in the Belfast area, it was decided to add to the Central Executive Committee representatives from North, South, East and West of the city. The practice of including in membership the dependents of deceased members was not proving successful so it was decided to discontinue this.

A computer error in 1986 resulted in the prices index being wrongly calculated. To correct this, £10 was paid to all state pensioners but it would have been impossible to make good the amount due to each Public Servant receiving an occupational pension. The Government paid £55,000 to the RTU on the condition that any retired teacher, not just members of the RTU, could make a claim on the Benevolent Fund set up. The officers of the RTU, with the assistance of DENI, did great work in drawing up an acceptable constitution for the Fund.

An analysis of how different branches were represented at the 1990 AGM showed that, of the seventy attending, fifty were from the Greater Belfast area. It was decided to hold the 1991 AGM in Dungannon.

In recognition of Mr. Navin's excellent twelve years of service, the RTU made him its first Vice-President.

Issues and Concerns

- Seeking to have pensions increased by the higher of the indexes; wages or prices.
- The Fowler DHSS Act of 1987 which permitted younger Public Servants to seek alternative pension schemes in the private sector.
- Anomalies arising due to the fluctuations in the rate of inflation.
- Injustice caused by the failure to upgrade pensions of women who retired before equal pay was obtained.

1993 – 1997

Chairman

1993 Mr. R.B. Neilly

1994 – 1997 Mr. J.C. Leitch

Hon. Secretary/Treasurer

1993 - 1997 Mr. R.O. Jamison

The major increase in the number of members attending the AGM since the venue was moved out of Belfast in 1993 continued. The number increased yet again when, in 1995, the even more central location of Cookstown was chosen. In this context, it is worth noting the remarkable attendance recorded at the first AGM when means of transport were not as they are today!

At the 1994 AGM it was decided to drop the title of 'Union' and to become 'The Retired Teachers' Association N.I.'. It was felt that 'Association' more accurately reflected our role.

With only two exceptions, the Wages Index had been greater than the Prices Index since 1980 when the former was removed from the annual calculation of pensions.

Strenuous, but unsuccessful efforts were and are continuing to be made to ensure that pensioners enjoy the increasing wealth of the nation.

The Executive made submissions to the Public Service Pensioners' Council on the equalisation of the pension age for men and women and also on the crippling cost of long-term care resulting from Government policy to reduce hospital provision for the elderly in need of such care.

The death of the President and former Hon. Secretary/Treasurer, Mr. Edmund Navin, was recorded in the Minutes of the 1995 AGM when the Chairman paid glowing tribute to his work over ten years as Secretary in addition to many years on the Executive.

The Benevolent Fund, set up in 1989, had, in eight years, paid out grants amounting to £58,550.

The Association continued to be greatly indebted to the DENI Teachers' Pensions' Branch for the most helpful support given in so many ways.

Issues and Concerns

- The cost of long-term care as a result of the reduction of National Health Provision.
- The continuing erosion of the value of both State and Public Service pensions since the dropping of the link with the Wages Index in 1980.
- The fact that the growing credit balance in the Northern Ireland Teachers' Superannuation Account is regarded as 'notional' when the deductions from the salaries of teachers was and is 'real'.

1998 – Present

Chair

1998 - 2000 Mr. J.C. Leitch
2001 – 2008 Mrs. Robina Atkinson
2009 – 2011 Mr. J.D.T. Rawlings
2012 – 2014 Mrs. Mary Marley
2014 – Mrs. Sandra Savage
2023 – Mrs. Mary Sands

Hon. Secretary/Treasurer

1998 - 2001 Mr. R.O. Jamison
2002 – 2005 Mrs. Margaret Wilson
2006 – Mr. Brendan McGlone

Already some years into the 21st century, the setting up of a website for the Retired Teachers' Association Northern Ireland became a significant challenge, particularly

since an increasing number of teachers taking early retirement were skilled in ICT. The website was launched in April 2008.

The Government's White Paper proposal to raise the state retirement age to 68 had implications for existing teachers and RTANI members. Through the PSC, the Government was lobbied to include measures to protect those in high stress occupations from a higher state retirement age. While it was noted that, from 2007, most public sector schemes would have provided pensions for life for all retirees, members' attention was drawn to Government plans to raise the qualifying age for occupational pensions to 65 from 2013.

A model letter, which could be downloaded, was placed on the RTANI website for those retired teachers living abroad who are affected by the removal of index-linking.

RTANI took up corporate membership of Age Sector Platform, a cohesive, representative and sustainable statutory body working across a broad range of diverse older peoples' membership organisations to campaign, lobby and seek to influence Government policy relating to older people as well as monitoring the implementation and impact of existing and new legislation in Northern Ireland.

Issues and Concerns

- Pensioners who live outside of the U.K. have found that their pensions are not index linked as they are for those who remain living in the U.K.
- The ceasing of widows' pensions upon remarriage or co-habitation, a common feature amongst public sector schemes. Legal advice indicated, however, that there was no apparent route to win an equal-opportunities case as the provision applies to widows, widowers and civil-partners, and so no unlawful discrimination could be identified.
- RTANI had called for the restoration of the earnings link, as opposed to a retail price index link, for those aged 70 and over and, eventually, full restoration for all pensioners. A Government White Paper had proposed restoration of the link from 2012.
- Poor standards of care and ineffective complaints procedures experienced by older people either in their own homes or in private or statutory Care Homes.
- Setting up a website for the Retired Teachers' Association Northern Ireland.
- Canvassing membership opinion on the issues of recruiting and retaining officers at local branch level.