

RETIRED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION NORTHERN IRELAND

Minutes of 77th Annual General Meeting Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone Wednesday, 16th October 2019 at 11.00am

Welcome

Chairperson, Sandra Savage welcomed guests and members and read apologies. Platinum Financial Planning Ltd. was thanked for sponsoring the tea/coffee & scones on arrival and the Ulster Tatler magazine for the photographs and publicity which would appear in their November 2019 edition.

Sandra particularly welcomed Seamus Lynch, Public Affairs Manager, Age Sector Platform; Susan Thompson, President, Ulster Teachers' Union; Kevin Daly, Chair, Northern Committee, Irish National Teachers' Organisation; Sandra E. Douglas, National Educational Union and Jayne Grimason from Platinum Financial Planning Ltd., Belfast.

Chair also thanked the branch officers for their hard work throughout the year and was delighted this year again that all eleven branches had offered events and activities for their respective membership. Sandra also thanked Mary Marley for standing in so competently for Vice-Chair.

Guests Present

Seamus Lynch	Public Affairs Manager, Age Sector Platform;
Kevin Daly	Chair, Northern Committee, Irish National Teachers' Organisation;
Susan Thompson	President, Ulster Teachers' Union;
Sandra E. Douglas	National Education Union;
Dr. Brian Cummins	Stranmillis College, Belfast;
Annette Currie	Past Officer, Association of Teachers and Lecturers;
Jayne Grimason	Platinum Financial Planning Ltd., Belfast;

Apologies

Alan Tolson	Platinum Financial Planning Ltd., Belfast, sponsor tea/coffee & scones
Cathy McGovern	Cornmarket Insurance for Teachers, Belfast, sponsor tea/coffee & scones
Renée McClelland	North-East
Sr. Anne McWilliams	North-East
Chris Wilson	North-West
Mary Kirkpatrick	North-West
James Bell	North West
Laura Adair	Mid-Ulster
Winifred Thompson	Mid-Ulster

& 16 further apologies by e-mail.

Brian Cummins

To help facilitate the distribution and filling-in of questionnaires from Dr. Cummins for Stranmillis University College, Belfast, he was invited to address our members before the meeting on the nature and methodology of his research, explaining that retired teachers were central to this outcome.

2018 Minutes

The Minutes of the 76th AGM, held on Wednesday, 17th October 2018, already tabled, were taken as read. No matters were arising. The Executive Committee Report, Financial Report and Hon. Secretary's Report, already tabled, were taken as read. No matters were arising. Mary Marley proposed and Iris Clarke seconded the adoption of all reports. All reports were adopted.

Vice-Chair

President, Iris Clarke thanked Mary Marley for standing in as Vice-Chair during the recent vacancy adding that she had brought her previous experience as Chair, between 2012 and 2014, to the position. Iris declared that the position of Vice-Chair would now be open for nominations. Robina Atkinson proposed Eugene Magill as Vice-Chair. This was seconded by Mary Marley and unanimously agreed by meeting. Eugene was consequently elected as Vice-Chair for a period of three years (October 2019 to October 2022).

Awards

Chair, Sandra Savage, proudly cited the following two members for their long service and commitment to the association and Iris Clarke, President, presented personally engraved Belfast Crystal Plaques to them:

Mary Marley, Chair of Executive Committee 2012 – 2014 and Vice-Chair 2018 - 2019;
Dorothy McIlmoyle, Executive Committee Representative, North-East Branch 2008 – 2019.

Sandra added that there were two further members to be awarded, Anna Maguire and Brendan Corrigan, Executive Committee Representatives, Fermanagh Branch but that this was to take place at a special ceremony which includes lunch at the Killyhevlin Hotel, Enniskillen on Wednesday 22nd November 2019.

Seamus Lynch

Chairperson, Sandra Savage welcomed Seamus Lynch, Public Affairs Manager, Age Sector Platform, stating that he was central in the formation and activities of the Northern Ireland Pensioners' Parliament. Seamus thanked RTA for the invitation to address the members.

Seamus began by declaring that after working unstintingly for the past eleven years to achieve a voice for the 300,000 older people in Northern Ireland, he was dismayed that Age Sector Platform was to cease functioning on the 31st December 2019 especially since 17% of those older people live in poverty.

He stated that Age Sector Platform, which was established in 2008, is a charity which supports older people have their say on the issues that matter most to their health and social & economic wellbeing. Policy issues that were being dealt with as part of "A Strategic Framework for the Health and Wellbeing of Older People" were:

- State Pension & 'Triple Lock';
- Warm Home Discount scheme;
- Smartpass, Free TV Licence for over 75's & Winter Fuel Allowance;
- Transformation of Health Service;
- Age Discrimination Legislation;
- Loneliness, Isolation & Elder Abuse.

He expanded on some of these by referring to the Triple Lock which was introduced in 2011 by the coalition government and which guarantees that the basic state pension will rise by a minimum of either 2.5%, the rate of inflation or average earnings growth, whichever is largest. Before 2011, the state pension rose in line with the retail price index measure of inflation, which was consistently lower than annual rises in earnings or 2.5%.

In talking about the Warm Home Discount Scheme (worth £140 per year), he explained that it was introduced by UK Coalition Government on 1st April 2011 for people in England, Scotland & Wales for those on the guarantee element of pension credit, but not in Northern Ireland despite the fact that Fuel Poverty Levels in UK at the time were:

- England 16%
- Wales 26%
- Scotland 28%
- N. Ireland 42%

Seamus added that, to exacerbate the problem, excess Winter deaths as a result of cold related illnesses in N.I. from 2015 to 2016 were 640, rising between 2017 and 2018 to 1500, an increase over a two-year period of 130%.

In talking about Transformation in Health & Social Care, he mentioned that the Health & Social Care system in N.I. has seen seven fundamental reviews setting out major changes of direction in the last 20 years. In a wide-ranging 2016 review by Spanish health care expert, Rafael Bengoa, 'Systems Not Structures' the report concluded that:

“The stark options facing the HSC system are either to resist change and see services deteriorate to the point of collapse over time, or embrace transformation and work to create a modern, sustainable service.”

The review's specific recommendations were then used as the basis of a ten-year plan in 2016 entitled 'Delivering Together' which remains an ambitious and detailed programme of change.

In talking about Age Discrimination Legislation he mentioned that the Irish Republic introduced an Equal Status Act in 2000, the Equality Act was introduced in G.B. in 2010 but nothing has been accomplished in N.I.

In talking about Protecting Key Pensioner Concessions, he mentioned that there was substantial media attention to this issue before the 2017 General Election but now the Government has complained that it cannot afford pensioners and that there is considerable doubt about retaining the Triple Lock, the Winter Fuel Allowance and Free TV Licences for over 75's.

In our favour, he concluded, there is still hope with the DUP and the *Confidence and Supply* Agreement.

Following a Q&A session, Sandra thanked Seamus and presented him with an engraved Belfast Crystal plaque.

Kevin Daly

Chair, Northern Committee, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Kevin Daly, thanked the association for the invitation and mentioned that he began to have an interest in lobbying after studying the Engineers' Strike in Belfast, 1919 which resulted in successfully reducing the number of working hours from 57 to 44 per week.

The lesson he took from that strike was that the workers were fore-warned that their employers Harland & Wolff could not afford this reduction but eventually they found out that they could.

He stressed that there is much to be positive about in teaching and through a long struggle alongside sister unions, like the UTU and NEU, an agreement was now in the pipeline.

The opportunity for a reduced work load had finally presented itself although there was still considerable work to be done around a series of reviews comprising ETI inspections, employment models, debating the purpose of education in a changing environment etc.

He sincerely hoped for the prospect of the statutory bodies handing professional values back to the teaching professionals themselves and, by avoiding the emphasis on examination results, restoring a love for learning into our classrooms. This could be partly achieved by realizing that education is not the servant of industry.

Sandra thanked Kevin and presented him with an engraved Belfast Crystal plaque.

Susan Thompson

President, Ulster Teachers' Union, Susan Thompson, thanked the association for the invitation and stated that she is Vice-Principal of Sir Robert Hart Memorial School, Craigavon where she also teaches P3.

She always held the principle that a good teacher is like a candle which consumes itself to light way for others.

She has been working with INTO and NEU on issues of pay and conditions of service, stress and workload, ETI inspections, SEN cuts, oversize classes and professional development.

In addition, she has attended several world-wide conferences on initiatives in education.

Susan explained that she found it difficult to understand why there has always been no money for education when, for example, she herself and many millions like her pay so much in tax every month.

She finished by saying that the UTU trusts completely its teachers and thanked them along with all teachers in N.I. for their endless hours of motivation, persistence and professional dedication.

Sandra thanked Susan and presented her with an engraved Belfast Crystal plaque.

Sandra E Douglas

Representing the National Education Union, Sandra E. Douglas mentioned that it used to be the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, founded in 1898, affiliated to the National Union of Teachers but, through a process of amalgamation and re-branding, it is currently the largest education union in Europe with 435,000 members.

The NEU, she explained, embraces a liberal education with a broad but balanced base and, while their members strive to maintain idealistic and altruistic values, they are mindful and very much aware of real world issues.

It has been her privilege to teach young people and while perspectives in education are constantly developing and changing, she is convinced that traditional core values continue to remain the cornerstone in society.

Sandra proudly pointed out her association with RTANI adding that she was delighted to be a Committee Officer of the North-Down Branch.

In particular, she paid tribute to the commitment and unstinting work done by Sandra Savage and Valerie Ardill.

It was, however, with deep regret that she observed the closure of Age Sector Platform as she had been an active member of their Health & Social Care Committee. Here, she commended Seamus Lynch, Eamonn Donaghy and Nichola Johnston for their enthusiasm and significant contribution to the welfare of older people in NI.

Chair of RTA thanked Sandra and presented her with an engraved Belfast Crystal plaque.

A.O.B.

There being no further business, the date for the 78th AGM & Annual Conference was set for Wednesday, 14th October 2020, at the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown where, in addition to our regular speakers, the President of the UTU and the Chair of the Northern Committee INTO, our principal speaker will be Baroness May Blood MBE.

Announcements

Chair announced that the Tyrone Branch AGM and Lunch would take place on Tuesday, 3rd December 2019 in the Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh and that Bryan Gallagher, noted author, broadcaster and former Headmaster of St. Joseph's College, Enniskillen would be the guest speaker.

Chairperson Sandra Savage duly closed the meeting for lunch at 1.00pm.