

Retired Teachers' Association Northern Ireland

Minutes of 69th Annual General Meeting
held at Corick House, Clogher, Co. Tyrone
Wednesday, 19th October 2011 at 11.00am

- Welcome* Chairman, Des Rawlings welcomed guests and branch members.
He read aloud a letter from Former President, Robert Thompson apologising for today's absence and explaining that he would be undergoing hip-replacement at Altnagelvin Hospital. Robert conveyed his best wishes for a successful meeting and kind regards to outgoing and incoming officers.
Chairman thanked Kim Silkstone, Financial Services Ltd., Bangor for kindly sponsoring the tea/coffee & scones on arrival, Nichola Pearce, Adelaide Insurance, Belfast for the kind donation of £100 and Heather Petticrew, Manager, Ulster Bank, Lisburn for the donation of £25 towards AGM costs.
- Apologies*
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| Anne O'Reilly, | Chief Executive, Age N.I. |
| Eddie McArdle, | Registrar, General Teaching Council |
| Marie Magill | Belfast Branch |
| John Stuart | Mid-Antrim Branch |
| Nicola Pearce | Adelaide Insurance, Belfast |
| Heather Petticrew | Manager, Ulster Bank Ltd., Lisburn Branch |
| Robert Thompson | Recent President |
| William Devlin | Age Sector Platform |
| June Houston | Secretary Craigavon Branch |
| Margaret Kennedy | Executive Representative Craigavon |
| James Bell | Derry City |
| L. Morrison | Ballymoney |
| Barbara Chapman | Newtownbutler, Co. Fermanagh |
| Fern Turner | National Association of Head Teachers |
| Vincent Murphy | Fermanagh Branch |
| Margaret Pinkerton | Mid-Antrim Branch |
| Robert Pinkerton | Mid-Antrim Branch |
| Valerie McKee | Dargan Press, Mallusk |
| Lucy Alcorn | Secretary North East Branch |
| Colm Lambe | Co-opted Executive Representative |
- Guests Present* Jacqueline Friel, DENI
Hilary Henderson, DENI
Kim Silkstone, Financial Services, Bangor
- Total present* 104
- Chairman* Des Rawlings drew members' attention to the significance of the extra-ordinary meeting held on 25th May 2011, emphasising that the Executive Committee was perturbed at certain trends, including the difficulty in obtaining officers at branch level as well as the small number of members who regularly attend meetings and events. With the forecast drop in numbers taking early retirement, he anticipated an eventual significant fall in membership. Des pointed out that there are two branches without a secretary and a possible third branch in the near future.
Chairman drew members' attention to a questionnaire (*see page 4 of these Minutes*), the primary outcome of the afore-mentioned meeting, and asked members to select, from the list, five suggestions which, in their opinion, might help alleviate the problems needing addressed.
In declaring that his three-year term of office had finished, Des thanked Hon. Secretary for his efficient organisation and also for the creation and development of the website. He thanked past Chairman Robina Atkinson, President Iris Clarke and Vice-Chair Mary Marley for their assistance and support and also the members of the Central Executive Committee and Branch Secretaries for their goodwill and help, particularly during the recent months. Des thanked, also, his wife Helen for her encouragement.
- 2010 Minutes* The Minutes of the 68th AGM, held on Wednesday, 13th October 2010, were taken as read, proposed as a correct record by Robina Atkinson and seconded by Ian Dixon. No matters were arising.

- Executive* The Executive Report was taken as read, proposed as correct by Sandra Savage, seconded by James Calderwood and passed unanimously.
- Finances* From the 2011 AGM Report, Hon. Treasurer outlined our Current Account and Business Reserve Account. It was proposed as correct by Eugene Magill, seconded by Anne Liggett and passed unanimously.
- Secretary* Hon. Sec. reported that the website was expanding and becoming brighter and more lively with additional information, more downloads, more photographs, a new section on an address and presentation, in 1944, to our founder Robert Judge and plans to include information and advice about pensions and finance from Kim Silkstone, Financial Solutions, Bangor.
 Hon. Sec. thanked Renée McClelland, North-West Branch, who continues to act on behalf of the RTA in her work with Age N.I. He particularly thanked Renée for organising the photographs of the 1944 presentation which she was able to obtain from Robert Judge’s family. Hon. Sec. had approached Renée with a view to obtaining the family’s permission to include photographs of Robert Judge and family on the website.
 In commenting on the membership of RTA, Hon. Sec. reported that our current membership stands at 2594 and dropped year-on-year by around 30 members. He also reported that we have more members than we had in 1990. Records of numbers etc., he added, are available from the *Downloads* page of the website.
 He also welcomed some newly-retired teachers to the AGM and added that the annual subscription, which remains at £5 per annum, represented value for money in terms of gains in pension-related issues through our continued membership of the Public Services Pensioners’ Council, Age N.I. and now, Age Sector Platform.
 The Hon. Secretary’s Report was proposed as correct by Rosemary Rainey, seconded by Martha McCartney and passed unanimously.
- Age N.I.* In the absence of Anne O’Reilly Chief Executive Age N.I., Hon. Secretary stated that he had given a £100 cheque for our 2011-2012 corporate membership to Renée McClelland.
- PSPC* Chairman Des Rawlings thanked Vice-Chair Mary Marley on her attendance at the PSPC Conferences in London as a representative of RTANI, adding that it was a useful avenue for us to receive information like this.
 He also mentioned previous Hon. Sec. Margaret Wilson who had been elected as an officer within the PSPC, stressing the grievous loss it had been to us to lose this representation. Des emphasised that, if the state of affairs in ROI is any indication to go by, then our only hope lies with our continued allegiance to and membership of umbrella groups like PSPC, Age Sector Platform etc.
- Age Sector* Hon. Sec. reported that William Devlin from Age Sector Platform had intended to address the meeting but sent an apology when he was summoned to Brussels at short notice a few days previously. Hon. Sec. had already placed photocopies of his intended address for members attending the AGM (*see pages 5 & 6 of these Minutes*).
 In his absence, Robina Atkinson who had been attending the meetings of the Education Committee of Age Sector Platform talked about her work with Age Sector Platform stating that the group in general and William Devlin in particular were both dedicated to helping pensioners.
 In issues such as concessionary enrolment fees for evening classes, pensioners’ courses in Lifelong Learning, organising lobbying marches to draw attention to fuel-poverty among pensioners, grants (especially the fuel-grant) from central government to make a difference to pensioners’ life-style and the implications of other financial restrictions faced by pensioners, Robina assured meeting that Age Sector was campaigning actively on our behalf. Robina ended by stating that, if the government treated pensioners properly, then the state pension should be £195 per week!
- Adoption* Eugene Magill proposed the adoption of all Reports. This was seconded by Wesley Beasant and subsequently accepted unanimously by the Meeting.
- Hon. Auditor* Robina Atkinson proposed and Rosemary Rainey seconded continuing with Patricia Halliday.
- Elections* President, Iris Clarke, reminded members that there would be two elections of Officers; Chair and Vice-Chair.

The following nomination was accepted;

Chairman	Mary Marley	Proposed by Des Rawlings	
		Seconded by Anne Liggett	<i>Elected</i>

The following nomination was accepted;

Vice-Chair	Sandra Savage	Proposed by Robina Atkinson	
		Seconded by Ian Dixon	<i>Elected</i>

Iris reminded Meeting that the Hon. Secretary was appointed by Central Executive Committee, not the AGM, as the position involved advertising, short-listing and interviews etc.

Secretary Brendan McGlone Not up for re-appointment *Continuing*

Iris informed members that Des Rawlings would be invited to become the fourth co-opted Executive Representative, taking Sandra's place, leaving the four Executive Representatives as; Robina Atkinson, Ian Dixon, Colm Lambe, Des Rawlings.

This new appointment (Des Rawlings) was proposed by Wesley Beasant and seconded by Brian Edwards.

Guests Jacqueline Friel, DENI, in apologising for not being able to attend the 2010 AGM because of a new computer system in her department, outlined the benefits that this system had already brought to both working and retired teachers. Jacqueline stated that her department was pleased to assist RTANI in providing information digitally to Hon. Sec. regarding newly retired teachers, changes of address, deaths and resignations etc. Jacqueline accepted a token of appreciation from Hon. Sec. for the valuable work her department does for us.

Kim Silkstone, Financial Services, Bangor asked members to fill in a short financial questionnaire over lunch-time. He reminded members that forthcoming PAYE coding-notices might cause some alarm in that, while most would confirm that the encumbent is paying the correct amount of tax, and some may even get a refund, some may find that the Inland Revenue is actually asking for money back. Kim asked members to look carefully at their coding-notices and perform some quick mathematical calculations. He offered to forward this material for calculating the total amount of tax payable for the year to Hon. Sec. for placement on the website.

Hon. Sec. thanked Kim for his advice and agreed to revamp one of the website pages to include a special section called "Advice from Kim Silkstone, Financial Solutions, Bangor" containing advice, recommendations and material which could be downloaded.

Valerie McKee, Dargan Press, Mallusk, was thanked for the invaluable work her company does in producing the AGM Report and was presented, in absentia, with a token of RTA appreciation.

AOB Hon. Secretary reported that there was no other business outstanding.

Chris Wilson At the invitation of the Executive Committee, Chris gave a very informative, light-hearted talk on the relationships among the Clogher Valley Railway, Carrickfergus Castle and Lough Neagh Gold. Chris Wilson accepted a cheque from the Executive Committee to further the work of Northern Ireland Charity the Ulster Cancer Foundation.

Announcements 2012 AGM was set for Wednesday, 17th October 2012, at the same venue, Corick House, Clogher. There being no further business, Chairman Des Rawlings duly closed the meeting at 12.55pm for lunch.

RETIRED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION NORTHERN IRELAND

www.rtani.co.uk

An extra-ordinary meeting of the Central Executive Committee and Branch Officers was held on Wednesday, 25th May 2011. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss our changing role as an association which has been in existence since 1943 and to try to draw up some recommendations which might impact on publicity, pensions, recruitment & retention.

Among the issues and points raised were:

1. A regular newsletter to all members outlining developments on state and second-pension issues;
2. Getting information on the RTA into schools so that teachers are aware of us before retirement;
3. Reporting to the local newspapers about RTA events (cost-free and used by North-Down Branch);
4. Providing links between Teaching Unions' websites and our own website;
5. Promoting branch activities by personal invitations and word-of-mouth (North-East Branch);
6. Opening up links with C2K for teachers who are thinking of retirement or are about to retire;
7. Supplying promotional material, like flyers, at the various Teaching Union Conferences;
8. Putting a limit on the time that a volunteer should work as a Branch Officer;
9. Informing members of statutory changes in the pensions system;
10. Looking at what we, as an association, offer compared to U3A/WEA etc;
11. How can we attract younger members to take on responsibilities, like Branch Secretary;
12. Confirmation that the annual fee of £5 is value-for-money in terms of representation for the retired;
13. What can we do to support the work of organisations like Public Service Pensioners' Council, Age Sector Platform etc;
14. How is the RTA perceived and why do retired teachers join or not join;
15. Should we try to amalgamate branches or venture to improve links between branches;
16. Since members are entitled to attend activities and meetings of any and all branches, Branch Secretaries should supply details of all branch activities to Hon. Secretary for inclusion on the association website to facilitate and encourage improved attendance and cross-branch relationships.

Please list 5 of the above issues in order of importance (from left to right) which you think are important for the well-being and development of the Retired Teachers' Association. An easy way to think of it would be "...these are 5 things which we want you to do something about..."

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Please feel free to add any personal comments on your selection...

The Education Sub-Committee

Shortly after my election to the Executive Committee at the 2010 AGM I suggested to the executive that a sub-Committee on Education be set up. This was agreed and the first meeting took place in February 2011. Representatives on the ESC included the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), The Retired Teachers Association of Northern Ireland (RTANI) The Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA), NIPSA and ICTU among others. The ESC agreed on a Mission Statement and discussed the concept of Lifelong Learning and three main categories of learning of relevance to Seniors.

Mission Statement

To lobby all agencies concerned with Lifelong Learning in the pursuance of affordable and accessible provision for Formal and non-formal Learning for Seniors.

Lifelong Learning

Life long learning is, as the name suggests, learning throughout life from the cradle to the grave. It is divided, for the sake of convenience, into three categories or types of learning - Formal, Non-formal and Informal.

What is Formal Learning?

Formal Learning usually takes place in an Educational Institution such as a School, College, University or Training Establishment. The learning is structured with clear objectives, times and support and an explicit intention to learn. It leads to some type of certification such as a Degree, Diploma or Certificate.

What is Non-Formal Learning?

It may or may not be provided by a formal education or training institution but it does not usually lead to certification. Non-Formal Learning generally consists of a structured programme of learning with clear objectives, times and support and an explicit intention to learn from the participant. For example, an in-company course to train staff on financial management procedures or an adult literacy course or a Yoga class or holiday French in an Educational Institution.

What is Informal Learning?

Informal Learning differs in that it is not generally structured and, in most cases, the learning is not directly intentional on the part of the learner, it is implicit and results from daily activities related to work, family life or leisure. For example, reading a book or newspaper, watching TV or listening to the radio or the acquisition of budget management skills through voluntary work as a treasurer of a society, or learning presentational skills through amateur theatre.

Two Issues

The ESC identified two main issues of immediate concern to Seniors in the two categories of Formal and Non-Formal Learning. These were the disappearance of Concessionary Fees in the Further Education Colleges and the rationalization of library services resulting in the closure of some Libraries.

Concessionary fees

Members of the ESC attended a meeting convened by the Acting Commissioner for Older people to discuss this issue. The problem resulted from a Directive on Equality from the European Commission. It has to be said that the Commission did not intend this result but the interpretation of the wording has led to the almost elimination of Concessionary Fees on the basis of age. Two remedies could be suggested: the first is to initiate local legislation; the second to ask the Commission to modify the wording.

A subsequent meeting of the ESC with the Director Of the Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) heard that the FE/HE colleges were more than willing to reintroduce Concessionary Fees but their hands were tied. Concessionary Fees are, of course, available for some essential "Skill Courses" and indeed many of these are free. However classes in Yoga, Flower arranging, Holiday Spanish and the like are full fee courses and many courses are termed accredited courses and include an examination fee. Seniors, for the most part, do not want to sit examinations.

The result of the elimination of so-called Leisure Classes has resulted in hundreds of older people not going to their local College. There is a consequent loss for both the senior and the college.

For the college there is the lack of the inter-generational mix with the gap between the generations becoming wider, a decrease in the number of teachers employed and a negation of the philosophy of lifelong learning.

For seniors there is a decrease in learning and social interaction. The benefits to general health documented in various international reports from the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) and other National and Local organizations all confirm the benefits of learning and social interaction in later life. Importantly too, they have quantified the benefits to countries particularly in the area of Social Capital.

Libraries Rationalisation

The ESC also met with the Head of Libraries NI. Issues relating to Library closure and the withdrawal of facilities for community groups meetings and costs for these were raised.

The ESC was assured that it was policy to restrict closures to a minimum and where these were located measures taken to provide mobile libraries. There would be an effort to maintain book stock (even given a three million pounds (£3m) reduction, in the budget last financial year), the request service was well received, reading and literacy services were important aspects of library provision as was the libraries' role in supporting education. The difficulties in bringing together five different organizations together, involving some 99 libraries, 28 mobile libraries and specialized libraries, were discussed. ESC felt that a more joined up partnership between libraries and the FE/HE colleges would be beneficial and that a meeting between stakeholders and the proposed Older Peoples Commissioner could perhaps result in a consensus that could be pursued further.

SLAC Card

The ESC has proposed the creation of a Senior Learning Account Card (SLAC). This would allow a Senior one hundred hours (100) tuition in any one Academic Year in any of the recognised Colleges of Further/ Higher Education, Colleges of Education, Agricultural Colleges or the Universities. Private Training organisations or similar organisations, not funded by the Taxpayer, would be excluded. There would be a Residence and an Age qualification and the card, which would have to be applied for, would employ Smart Card Recognition Technology, tenable at any of the Institutions mentioned. The Senior SLAC cardholder could use his/her credit allowance in more than one institution. Unused credit could not be carried over from one Academic Year to another.

The ESC is, of course, aware that in the current economic climate such a suggestion may be met with opposition. Nevertheless given the contribution to health and the wider aspects of Social Capital the Committee feels that this initiative would pay for itself in the longer term.

Clearly now with the appointment of an Older Peoples Commissioner the Age Sector Platform will now have a focus in its representation of senior issues many of which were raised in the Peoples Parliament. Education for Seniors will be one of these.

William Devlin represents the U3A (University of the Third Age) Region on Age Sector Platform and chairs the ASP's Education Sub-Committee.