

## Retired Teachers' Association Northern Ireland

Minutes of 70<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting held at Corick House, Clogher, Co. Tyrone  
Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012 at 11.00am

*Welcome* Chairperson, Mary Marley welcomed guests and members, mentioning that the original date had been changed from its usual mid-October slot following Hon. Secretary's recent surgery and recuperation.  
Chair thanked Nichola Pearce, Adelaide Insurance, Belfast for the kind donation of £100 towards AGM costs. She also thanked the branches for their hospitality to her over the past year, adding that there are still two branches without a secretary, Mid-Antrim and North-West, but hoped that, even if through word-of-mouth alone, the association would continue to grow and continue to provide a worthwhile service to retired teachers.

*Apologies* Nichola Pearce, Adelaide Insurance + £100 partial sponsorship received.  
Estrina Large and Jacqueline Friel, Department of Education N.I.  
Valerie McKee, Dargan Press  
Renée McClelland  
Robert and Margaret Pinkerton  
Chris Wilson  
Anne Liggett  
Mary Kirkpatrick  
A. Flanagan  
Joan Patton  
Rosemary Rainey  
Joan Allen  
Mrs. V.L. Johnston  
Sam and Hazel Barron  
Mrs. P.K. McDermott  
Joan Doherty  
Frances Sands  
Margaret Flanagan  
Ms. G. Walker  
June Houston  
Marion Abernethy  
Mary Caniffe  
Mrs. C.M. Keenan  
Maureen McKeown  
Ann Gardiner  
Ms. D.M. Wilkinson  
Liam O'Doherty  
Rev. Sr. Anne McWilliams  
Joan and Harriet Little  
Nuala Cassidy  
Brendan Corrigan  
Tomas Brannigan  
Willie and Jeanette Doyle  
Flora Hardy  
Maureen Clements

*Guests Present* Diane Nugent, President, Ulster Teachers' Union  
Dr. Desmond Hamilton, National Association of Head Teachers  
Sandra Douglas, Association of Teachers and Lecturers  
Eddie McArdle, General Teaching Council Northern Ireland  
Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary, Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
Malcolm Duffey, Mid-Ulster Branch, "Black Velvet and other short stories"  
Robert Thompson, Past President, RTA

*Total present* 72

- Chair* Mary Marley stated that the items most pressing on today's agenda were the work of the Public Services Pensioners' Council and the motion to raise the Annual Subscription to £10, both of which would be covered in detail and discussed later.
- 2011 Minutes* The Minutes of the 69<sup>th</sup> AGM, held on Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2011, copied for each member, were taken as read, proposed as a correct record by Iris Clarke and seconded by Eugene Magill. No matters were arising.
- Executive* The Executive Report, contained in the 2012 Annual Report, was taken as read, proposed as correct by Ian Dixon, seconded by Colm Lambe and passed unanimously.
- Finances* From the 2012 Annual Report, Hon. Treasurer outlined our Current Account and Business Reserve Account. It was proposed as correct by Colm Lambe, seconded by Gerry O'Loan and passed unanimously.
- Secretary* Hon. Secretary stated that his biggest concern this year had simply been that we are unable to fulfill some of our obligations due to our financial situation. Our members, quite rightly, expect regular newsletters about teachers' pension issues, how Government legislation is going to affect teachers' pensions and what can be done about it. We would also like to take a more pro-active part in the proceedings and activities of the Public Services Pensioners' Council, Age Sector Platform and Age NI but our limited budget prevents this and many other involvements. Accordingly, we have motioned that the Annual Subscription, which has been £5 since 1997, despite rises in absolutely everything, especially the cost of postage, be raised to £10.  
Hon. Sec. also felt the need to organise RTA membership to assist pension-campaigns by writing to their respective MPs and MLAs, organising e-petitions etc. but, sadly again, the cost makes this unattainable. Otherwise, Hon. Sec. reported that membership continues to grow...64 new members this year (at £10 per head) and our total membership stands at just over 2500. The website is still an invaluable source of information for our association and is updated regularly.  
The Hon. Secretary's Report was proposed as correct by Isabel McKenna, seconded by Robina Atkinson and passed unanimously.
- Age N.I.* Hon. Sec. reported that, unfortunately, Renée McClelland was unable attend the AGM but that he would like to pay tribute to her and the work she undertakes on behalf of retired teachers through her work with Age N.I. on issues such as: Money matters; Health and well-being; Travel and our rights; Home and care; Work and learning; The digital age project and even the digital switch-over.  
Hon. Sec. reminded the meeting that, along with Sr. Anne McWilliams from the same branch, Renée is a member of the People's Parliament which consists of 100 people from all over the province who debate and vote on controversial issues.  
Hon. Secretary stated that he would post out a £100 cheque for 2012 - 2013 corporate membership of Age NI.  
Age N.I. Report was proposed by Eugene Magill, seconded by Gerry O'Loan and passed by the meeting.
- PSPC* Hon. Sec. stated that The Public Services Pensioners' Council continues to campaign vigorously on behalf of the Retired Teachers' Association N.I. and at present, is fighting three pensions issues for RTA:  
firstly, the switch from Retail Price Indexation of pensions (RPI) to Consumer Price Indexation (CPI) which will always be lower than RPI due to the formula-effect which is based on a *geometric* rather than an *arithmetic* mean; already, this year alone, this has meant a decrease in retired teachers' pensions of 1.4%  
secondly, fighting the Government's proposal to introduce a single-tier pension system (£140 per week) for future pensioners. While this appears attractive on the surface, PSPC firmly believes that existing pensioners will be subject to means-tested support. Also, the new system fails to extend the benefits of the single-tier pension arrangements to existing pensioners...us!  
thirdly, PSPC is fighting the Government's decision to freeze the Age-Related Personal Tax-Allowance, in direct contradiction to the promise given in the 2011 Budget Statement that this would be increased in line with RPI for the rest of this Parliament.  
This allowance was originally introduced by Sir Winston Churchill in recognition of the additional everyday costs faced by older people.  
The budget proposal to phase out the Age-Related Personal Tax-Allowance actually breaks the promise made in the 2011 budget to "...increase the Age-Related Personal Tax-Allowance by the Retail Price Index for the rest of this parliament."  
Sadly, while pensioners on incomes between £10k and £24k, will lose financially because of these measures in the 2012 Budget, those earning over £150k will see their tax-rates reduced from 50% to 45%.  
Adoption of the PSPC Report was proposed by Ian Dixon, seconded by Sandra Savage and passed by meeting.

*Age Sector* Robina Atkinson reported that she had attended so many meetings of Age Sector Platform N.I. that she had taken out annual membership (£12). These meetings were usually well-attended and older people were concerned with issues such as: fighting for the retention of the Winter Fuel Allowance; the official launch, last year, by OFMDFM, of the Pensioners' Parliament; equality of pay and conditions for post-retirement workers; changes in pensions and crime and safety. Members had lobbied Westminster and helped prevent a Government cut in pensions-funding. Another source of discontent was health and social care for the elderly, resulting in a paper "Dignity for the Elderly" which called an end to the horrendous treatment elderly people received in care-homes. Adoption of Robina's report was proposed by Eugene Magill, seconded by James Calderwood and passed.

*Adoption* Robina Atkinson proposed the adoption of all Reports. This was seconded by Colm Lambe and subsequently accepted unanimously by the Meeting.

*Hon. Auditor* Robert Thompson proposed and Iris Clarke seconded continuing with Patricia Halliday. Motion was passed.

*Elections* President, Iris Clarke, reminded members that all offices would be declared vacant and that there would consequently be two elections of Officers, that is, Chair and Vice-Chair.

The following nomination was accepted;

Chairman	Mary Marley	Proposed by Colm Lambe	
		Seconded by Eugene Magill	<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	<i>Continuing</i>
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Iris informed members that there would be no change in the four co-opted Executive Representatives; Robina Atkinson, Ian Dixon, Colm Lambe, Des Rawlings.

*Subscription* Hon. Secretary drew members' attention to the fact that the annual subscription had been £5 since 1997 and gave examples of some rises in costs since then; postage, the annual audit, a mail-shot (£1600), pro-active representation at the PSPC Meetings, subsidising branch activities, rewarding our hard-working branch secretaries, providing a value-for-money service to our members.

Recent Chairman, Des Rawlings, spoke of the Executive Committee's attempt to improve attendance at social events but added that, despite the heavy financing that followed this initiative, the results were not as anticipated. He also emphasised the importance of this rise at the present time which was necessary to avoid having a similar motion in a couple of years.

Eugene Magill, Belfast Branch Secretary, defended the motion adding that this year he had spent £230 on postage for the Christmas Lunch whereas it had been £170 last year.

Malcolm Duffey enquired how we were using members' e-mail addresses as a cost-free facility. Hon. Secretary replied that, following a motion, some time ago, from the Vice-Chair, Sandra Savage, that we incorporate e-mail addresses in our new-member campaigns, we now have 100 approx. e-mail addresses on file but with more than 2400 other members still depending on a mail-shot, we are obliged to continue being driven by this system.

*Guests* Diane Nugent, President Ulster Teachers' Union, commended the work of the Central Executive Committee and declared that the biggest change that she had noticed since taking office is the increasing concern teachers are showing regarding their pensions. Diane commented on the large number of retired teachers still actively involved in Life-Long-Learning and personal growth & development classes. She praised the courage, curiosity and communication skills of retired teachers, adding that, as a social grouping, retired teachers still possess these qualities which are of great value to their immediate and wider community.

Dr. Desmond Hamilton, National Association of Head Teachers, paid tribute to teachers, both active and retired, stating that they really do make a difference in people's lives and their contribution to society is incalculable. He drew attention to some changes he would make in education: the ratio of children to teachers, for example, a child of 5 years of age should be taught in a class numbering 10 maximum; teacher-training colleges should be moved physically closer to Q.U.B. to encourage joined-up learning and thinking; actual recognition by Government of the contribution made by teachers. He thanked retired teachers for continuing to make a contribution, finally adding that "...teachers never ever lose their class".

Sandra Douglas, Association of Teachers and Lecturers, offered the support and commitment of ATL to further the work of the Retired Teachers' Association. She added that, as she had just recently retired herself, she would down-loading an application form from our website to join RTA.

Eddie McArdle, General Teaching Council, Northern Ireland, commented on the growing number of people who, dabble in education without any background knowledge or professional experience, much to the annoyance of teachers. Everything in the modern world has changed, he argued, from when the majority of us were active in the classroom: the change from the simple to the complex; the change from predictability to uncertainty; the change from a concentric economy to an Asian Pacific-Ring economy and the change from autonomy to hyper-connectivity and immediacy as a result of the internet and the digital revolution. Eddie encouraged retired teachers to respond to consultations as we always have done and to continue to be involved in initiatives so that our voice is heard.

Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary Irish National Teachers' Organisation, suggested that the whole nature of educational success, both at the school-level and at a personal level, has changed and nowadays almost everything is driven by paperwork and examination success. While academic success is important, he added, creativity, confidence, appreciation of the needs of others along with many other qualities and skills form the basis of what we know as "educating the whole child". The notion has not been lost, though, he maintained, but has been obscured by an industrialisation of education. Gerry stated that the INTO is grateful for the support of retired teachers and offered to work with the Hon. Secretary in harnessing the wealth of experience that retired teachers still have. He requested Hon. Secretary to contact him regarding furthering these objectives.

Malcolm Duffey, Mid-Ulster Branch, had brought with him copies of his book "Black Velvet and other short stories" from which he treated members to readings from 'The Mask Slips' and 'Head Matters'. He informed meeting that he had retired as Principal of Aughnacloy High School twelve years ago, having taught for forty-two years. His love for literature had stemmed from William Carleton, born 1794, who was known as "The Clogher Valley Poet". Malcolm informed us that he had initially joined Cookstown Writing Group and encouraged retired teachers to try writing... simply by sitting down and writing up their thoughts.

Estrina Large, Department of Education, Teachers' Pensions Branch, was thanked for her invaluable work in facilitating the smooth running of our association and was presented, in absentia, with a token of appreciation.

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 appreciation.

*AOB*

Hon. Secretary reported that he had been requested to investigate the possibility of a more central venue for forthcoming Annual General Meetings. He confirmed that he would be looking into this, adding that, at the moment, Cookstown seemed to present a more central venue than Clogher and that he would be reporting back, without prejudice, to the Executive Committee with suggestions and recommendations which could be in place for the 2014 Annual General Meeting.

*Announcements*

The next AGM was set for Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013, at the same venue, Corick House, Clogher. There being no further business, Chairperson Mary Marley duly closed the meeting for lunch.