

Retired Teachers' Association Northern Ireland

Minutes of 71st Annual General Meeting held at Corick House, Clogher, Co. Tyrone
Wednesday, 16th October 2013 at 11.00am

- Welcome* Chairperson, Mary Marley welcomed guests and members.
Chair thanked Nichola Pearce, Adelaide Insurance, Belfast for the kind donation of £100 towards AGM costs. She also thanked the branches for their invitations to Branch Events and AGMs over the past year. Mary drew members' attention to the recent increase in the Annual Subscription to £10 which has resulted in some very positive feedback as a result of more frequent Pensions Updates.
Chair also was pleased to report that the venue for the October 2014 AGM would be in a more central venue, the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown although this was on the agenda for open discussion later.
- Apologies*
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| Nichola Pearce | Adelaide Insurance, Belfast |
| Estrina Large and Jacqueline Friel | Department of Education N.I. |
| Valerie McKee | Dargan Press |
| Heather Petticrew | Commercial Manager, Ulster Bank, Lisburn |
| Dr. Carmel Gallagher | Registrar, General Teaching Council Northern Ireland |
| Eddie Lynch | CEO, Age Sector Platform |
| Fern Turner & Dr. Des Hamilton | National Association of Head Teachers |
| Eddie McArdle | Past Registrar, General Teaching Council N.I. |
| John Martin | Retired Workers' Committee/Pensioners' Convention ICTU |
- Bridie McPeake, Peggy Pinkerton, Robert Pinkerton, Renée McClelland, Des & Helen Rawlings, Elizabeth Mercer, A. Flanagan, Olive Davidson, Dorothy McIlmoyle, Rosemary Rainey, John Stuart, Wesley Beasant, Ian Dixon, Isabel McNally, Sr. Anne McWilliams, Anne Liggett, Hazel Dunford, Margaret Rainey.
- Guests Present*
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| Carolyn Arnold MBE | Trustee, Age NI |
| Dr. Garrett Campbell | Global Schoolroom |
| Audrey Stewart | Ulster Teachers' Union |
| Rita Fox | Irish National Teachers' Organisation |
| Robert Thompson | Past President, RTA |
- 2012 Minutes* The Minutes of the 70th AGM, held on Wednesday, 21st November 2012, published in the Annual Report, were taken as read. No matters were arising.
- Executive* The Executive Report, published in the Annual Report, was taken as read. No matters were arising.
- Finances* The Financial Report, published in the Annual Report, was taken as read. No matters were arising.
- Hon. Secretary* The Hon. Secretary's Report, published in the Annual Report, was taken as read. No matters were arising.
- PSPC* Hon. Secretary stated that PSPC continues to represent the interests of retired teachers in Northern Ireland as well as more than 30 other groups of retired professionals throughout the UK. He mentioned that we should expect a pension increase of 2.7% in April 2014 based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) determined in September 2013. While this is to be welcomed, he stated, PSPC is lobbying for a return to Retail Price Indexation (RPI) which would have brought the pension increase up to 3.4%.

Hon. Sec. thanked the many members who responded to the RPI Action Day (April 2013) Campaign which contributed to PSPC reaching the target of over 100,000 e-petition signatures. As a direct result of this, a (forced) parliamentary debate has been scheduled to discuss the return to RPI.

Hon. Sec. affirmed that he had an update in the pipeline, with details of current PSPC campaigns and pensions information, to be posted out after Christmas.

Age Sector Robina Atkinson reported that she had attended many meetings of Age Sector Platform N.I. including the 7th AGM which was held in the Belfast Europa Hotel. ASP comprises around 35 organisations of some 200,000 retired people, including RTANI, and continues to represent the interests of their constituent members on issues such as paying bills, the rising cost of energy, maintaining the Winter Fuel Allowance, free bus-passes etc. in addition to issues involving health & safety in the home and in public. Robina also drew attention to the fact that some 40,000 older people have had to sell their homes to provide for their health care and also to the continuing increase in the age at which older people are entitled to claim state pension. Age Sector Platform is currently campaigning for a silver-saver discount for pensioners at large stores, for example, Tesco etc. Robina ended by stating that, with 7 local branches of the N.I. Pensioners' Parliament, local people now have an active voice.

All Reports 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 Eugene Magill seconded continuing with Patricia Halliday. Motion was passed.

Elections President, Iris Clarke, reminded members that, at this point in the AGM, all offices would now be declared vacant and that there would consequently be elections for the Offices of Chair and Vice-Chair.

The following nomination was accepted;

Chairman	Mary Marley	Proposed by Marion O'Hanlon	
		Seconded by Eugene Magill	<i>Elected</i>

The following nomination was accepted;

Vice-Chair	Sandra Savage	Proposed by Robina Atkinson	
		Seconded by Eugene Magill	<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 and Des Rawlings.

Branch Officers Chairperson, Mary Marley, outlined the position of the branches at present and the thoughts of the Executive Committee on the problem of replacing branch officers in the following verbatim report:

The RTA has always had a branch network with each branch run by its members and receiving financial support from the Central Executive Committee. Members have always had the freedom to join whichever branch they wished, some will have joined branches close to their previous work-place while others have chosen branches close to their homes. Members have also been able to join in the activities of other branches if they so wished. In recent years, some branches have been experiencing difficulties in recruiting officers.

I know that we are not the only organisation to have these problems. The story seems to be same in many other voluntary organisations.

We appear to have two types of branch.

On one hand, we have some branches that have large committees where the offices are rotated on a regular basis.

On the other hand, we have branches where one or two people are left as post-holders for years.

Obviously, the first model is the most successful because post-holders don't feel that they will be stuck in the job for ever. In the second model, when the post-holder retires, sometimes after many years, no-one else is willing to take up the position and this leads to branch closure.

The Mid-Antrim Branch is without a secretary at present. A meeting attempting to recruit a new secretary was organised by Brendan with the help of Eugene Magill, Secretary of the Belfast Branch, and the out-going Mid-Antrim Secretary, Peggy Pinkerton. Sadly, no-one attended.

I would like to add that Peggy has served in the Mid-Antrim Branch for 20 years and extend to her our thanks and appreciation for her service to this organisation.

The Craigavon Branch, at their recent AGM, was unable to fill any of the officers' posts so the branch intends to close after the Christmas Lunch. The North-West Branch has had no officers for a number of years now. There are other branches that are likely to face problems in the future.

This all means that many members receive only the information sent out by the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee discussed this situation at the last meeting and decided that members of defunct branches should be reminded that they have a choice of joining another branch or, they do not wish to do this, they could opt to receive only the information the Executive Committee send out. This may only be a short-term solution to enable all members to have access to branch-based social activities.

Many branches, however, would welcome additional attendance at their functions and outings as it can be difficult sometimes to find enough people to make these viable. We would be grateful if secretaries would notify Brendan in advance of any functions organised so that details can be posted on the association's website. This may encourage wider participation in these events.

In the hope of attracting potential branch secretaries, I would like to tell you about a new arrangement that makes the task of secretary not as time-consuming as it used to be. Brendan has organised a deal with *PostalSort* in Belfast. All the secretary has to do is to e-mail Brendan a copy of the letter they wish to be sent out and *PostalSort* will do the rest. So, no more time needs to be spent printing, filling envelopes or sticking on stamps. We hope that this might encourage a few people to look more favourably on the job of secretary.

The problem in the branches is likely to be on-going but the Executive Committee will continue to work to find a solution. As I have said at the beginning, the branch network has always been an important part of this organisation and the Executive Committee will work to strengthen and sustain it.

2014 AGM

Hon. Sec. explained that, following a review of several locations and venue facilities which would be deemed as more centrally based for all members of the association, the Glenavon House Hotel in Cookstown had been chosen as the venue for the 2014 AGM. This had been discussed at the last three Central Executive Committee Meetings and appeared to be the most suitable of all.

The venue offered accessibility, on-site parking, complimentary audio-visual facilities, theatre-style seating for the AGM, tea/coffee & scones from 10.00am, a served and plated lunch at dressed round-tables plus the convenience of conducting all of the day's business in the one suite. In addition, Hon. Sec. had negotiated waiving the (£200) room-hire charge as well as a choice of two-course lunch (chicken/beef and pavlova/cheese-cake, as at Corick House) and tea/coffee for only £14.50.

Hon. Sec. was hoping to be able to encourage a high-profile public dignitary to attend the AGM's new launch with the possibility of photographs by the *Ulster Tatler* magazine.

Past President of RTANI, Robert Thompson, stated his concern which was echoed by members from the west of the Province, that the move to Cookstown, while welcome and understandable, might be the first step towards a gradual move further east, even to Belfast.

Hon. Sec. welcomed Robert's concerns and allayed any fears he or members from the west might, rightly, have. He stated categorically that there was absolutely no way whatsoever that this was the first step towards a move further east and that he himself, having already been asked to consider holding the AGM in Belfast and discussed it thoroughly at Executive Committee Meetings, completely discounted this idea.

The venue for 2014 would remain in place, he stated, until the members decide otherwise!

Guests

Dr. Garrett Campbell, Global Schoolroom, distributed some brochures and flyers outlining the work of this body which is a charity set up by teachers in 2006 in North-East India with the purpose of sharing educational experiences, expertise and good practice and to build sustainable frameworks for high standards of teacher education. Members were encouraged to enter the on-line draw to win a free trip including all flights, transfers, accommodation, food and vaccinations, compliments of Adelaide Insurance, Belfast, to India to participate as a team-member in the July *Improving Teaching Standards* Programme.

Carolyn Arnold MBE, Trustee, Age NI, reminded meeting: that there are more than 350,000 older people in NI today (20% of the population); that there are more people over the age of 50 than under 19 in NI; that the number of people aged 85+ has increased by almost a quarter since 2002; that by 2033, those aged 85+ will account for 4% of the population (1 person in every 25) and that 93,400 people aged 60+ live on their own in NI.

Age NI Advice Service, she explained, deals with 14,000 calls every year, offers a free benefit check to older people, and deals with all calls in the strictest confidence. Older people, their families or carers, she advised, can contact Age NI on freephone 0808 808 7575, seven days a week, 365 days a year, from 8.00am to 7.00pm.

Chair, Mary Marley, thanked Carolyn for her address and presented Age NI with a cheque for £100 as a token of corporate membership.

Audrey Stewart, Field-Officer, Ulster Teachers' Union, outlined several issues which were being addressed at present. The workload attached to assessment was taking away so much actual classroom teaching time and is, in fact, the subject of an industrial dispute. The Area Planning Proposals have highlighted the vulnerability of small rural schools. Redeployment is being negotiated by UTU. The proposals to increase the pensions' qualifying age to 68 are too challenging and UTU is pushing for satisfactory arrangements but the debate is hot and heavy, she reported, as the Government is tying in actuary-reduced figures which could result in a 25% loss! Phased retirement, at the moment, would appear to be the most promising way forward as it has already been tried and found satisfactory.

Rita Fox, Chair of Northern Committee, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, stated that the two major driving forces in teaching were assessment and accountability. In the hope of being able to identify under-achieving children and schools and as a result of the continuous assessment of children at Primary School in particular, teachers were being forced to teach 'hard' academic subjects, often to the neglect of the softer skills necessary for a whole and complete education. This move is being reinforced by the ETI through the use of Educational Descriptors but the solution, she maintained, was more complex than a focus on literacy and numeracy. We have had decades of short-term fixes for long-term problems, she argued, and it is precisely this pre-occupation with data which has undermined and still continues to side-track the profession.

AOB

Eugene Magill, Secretary Belfast Branch requested that members of this branch should meet him immediately following the AGM to confirm an arrangement concerning the forthcoming Belfast Christmas Lunch.

Announcements

The next AGM was set for Wednesday, 15th October 2014, at the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown. There being no further business, Chairperson Mary Marley duly closed the meeting for lunch.