

EI WORLD CONFERENCE

July 2015

"IFUT was represented at the recent 7th World Conference of Education International by the President, Michael Delargey, the General Secretary, Mike Jennings and the Deputy General Secretary, Joan Donegan. It is fair to say that our delegation made an impression on this massive event (1500 delegates plus 700/800 observers, guest etc) way above their numerical size.

At the Higher Education mini conference which preceded the main event the General Secretary made a speech in which he spoke about the need for HE unions to keep a clear focus on the big and idealistic issues which confront us. While we are constantly forced to deal with industrial relations issues on behalf of our members, and this is as it should be, nevertheless we must never lose sight of the big issues such as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, academic freedom and universal access to publicly funded education.

Later, at a special session dealing with precarious employment, Mike also spelled out the situation in Ireland and the challenges we face regarding fixed term and part time employment.

An extremely useful caucus meeting on insecure employment contracts in HE was also organised by our sister union the Canadian Association of University Teachers. Both Michael Delargey and Mike Jennings spoke at this event. They both talked about the precarious employment of researchers and other academic staff. Referring to the Tyndall dispute, Michael stressed the need to achieve fair pay and a career structure for our researchers.

The main conference was also preceded by a full day special conference dedicated to Womens' rights. We were very honoured by the fact that Joan was asked by Education International to convene and chair one of the main sessions concerning 'Gender and Education in the New Sustainable Development Framework.' Joan shared with delegates IFUT's experiences and priorities in relation to this topic. She explained how it is particularly difficult to bring forward equal pay cases and spoke about the need to strengthen the position of complainants in these cases.

She advised delegates that this difficulty has been recognized by the European Commission in a Recommendation to Member States in March 2015 in relation to equal pay.

Member states including Ireland have to report to the European Commission by the end of this year on the actions they have taken on foot of this recommendation. Joan urged European delegates to bring pressure to bear on their respective governments to adhere positively to this request.

Mike was also elected as the European representative on the Credentials Committee for the main conference.

Mike also acted as the Delegation Leader for the 10 Irish and British unions present regarding elections and 7 of the 9 candidates for the World Executive Board proposed by IFUT and endorsed by this group were elected.

During the main conference both Michael and Mike delivered speeches which were very well received. In a debate about public research and scientific and academic freedom, Michael spoke about the lack of funding for pure and blue skies research in many of our disciplines which is a consequence of the growing dependence by universities on external funding based on short term perspectives. He cited the example of UCC's first Professor of Mathematics, George Boole whose ground breaking work in this, "the queen of sciences", was seen to have enormously important practical applicability in computer science only years after his death. Funded pure research done today can become useful and applied research in tomorrow's world but our academics must be allowed to pursue their chosen research interests in their individual disciplines. In his speech Mike spoke in favour of a successful resolution in opposition to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)."

After much heated debate and a very close vote, researchers were included as a distinct category of education worker in a resolution aimed at achieving quality terms and conditions of employment and the campaign for decent work.

Mike