

**Speech by Mike Jennings, General Secretary, IFUT.**

**ANNUAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE**

**10 MAY 2014**

Colleagues, Delegates and Friends,

I am very pleased to formally propose and introduce our Annual Report for the 2013/2014 session. My colleague, the Deputy General Secretary, Joan Donegan, will join me in this task.

I have said in the General Introduction to the Report that the past year has been the busiest and most demanding of any year in our history. I believe that to be a fact. What, you may ask, is the reason for this? Why are we so busy and required to put in so much work on behalf of our members?

And when I say “we” in this context I am not simply referring to the Head Office staff. I am including all of our “frontline”

representatives who, unlike those of us privileged to be employees of this union, do all of the work that they do so well on behalf of their work colleagues on a totally voluntary basis without payment or time off in compensation.

Modern e-mails tell you one thing that an old fashioned letter never revealed unless the writer chose to divulge it. An e-mail tells you what time it was sent at. I am frequently amazed at the number of letters arriving in Head Office from our representatives which were despatched at 1:00am, 2:00am, 3:00am or even later. Clearly, an ability to cope without normal levels of sleep and rest is a recurrent characteristic of IFUT representatives.

So what is it that generates all this work that we do on behalf of members? Is it lodging pay claims? Are we getting more time off? Negotiating bonuses? Defending errant employees from justified disciplinary action? No, the answer is not to be found in any of the options above.

The simple, stark, depressing and dispiriting reality is that the people who see themselves as charged with controlling and directing us simply do not respect us.

The Department of Education does not respect Academics or Researchers. The HEA, which used to see its role as being a bridge between the civil servants of Marlborough Street and those working in academia has “gone native” and now sees its job as an enforcer of increasingly remotely conceived “solutions”. These “solutions” – such as the Initial Teacher Education Review Body Report – are frequently promulgated and enforced without anyone bothering to identify what the problem requiring a solution was in the first place!

Where, one may ask, is the evidence for this lack of respect for Academics and Researchers? Well, it is everywhere.

When was the last time you heard the Minister or the HEA express concern that the staff:student ratio in our colleges has gone from

1:18.7 in 2008/2009 to

1:20.9 in 2009/2010

1:24 in 2010/2011

And it has got even worse since then.

Such is the total cluelessness of those who make all the major decisions about our colleges that it appears that they actually believe that it is as easy to give a lecture to 50 students as to 100 or 150, and so, what's the problem? It can only be wilful and self-serving blindness that makes them not see that you cannot do 150 assessments in the same time or with the staff numbers as you did 50. You cannot do the same proportion of tutorials or small group teaching sessions. You cannot assist 150% more students experiencing educational and/or social or emotional difficulties. You cannot look out for the atypical student, the ones from abroad, of atypical age, or those from disadvantaged areas whose backgrounds give them no cultural familiarity with higher education.

And do they care – these people of such little insight? Sadly, the answer has to be “no, they don't”.

Because, if they did, they would come to the likes of IFUT and ask us and consult us from time to time. They would even listen to us, perhaps.

If they knew – and they should know because the scientific evidence has been there for years – that senior academics work

an average of 50 hours per week and junior academics work an average of 47 hours per week – would they (as in Haddington Road) ask us to work 78 hours more per year while at the same time proclaiming that no one who works 39 hours or more per week is expected to put in more time?

If they knew how much of our time is taken away from teaching students and doing research by the demands of senseless and mind-numbing form-filling, would they demand that every year we do more administration and more mindless and mind-bending paperwork?

If they knew what really goes on between a Lecturer and a Student when the spark of learning and scholarship is ignited would they really try to crudely measure the process with stopwatches and clipboards?

And then there is research!

Over and over and over again we hear Ministers, Junior Ministers and other worthies talking about our national priority – “the enhancement of research”.

Let me be frank. Let me use plain language. All this talk is pure bunkum.

It is worse, it is hypocritical bunkum. It is pure hypocrisy when you say you value research and you refuse to lift a finger when the staff in one of our finest Research Institutes are paid up to 30% less than their equivalent colleagues in UCC. It is hypocrisy when you say you value research when NUIG tells the Labour Court that not one single Researcher in Higher Education is entitled to the job security clause of the Haddington Road Agreement.

And it is bunkum when another university actually boasts that there is not one single fulltime Researcher on a permanent contract there.

Colleagues, in recent times we have seen speculation and rivalry about who should be first in the queue when restitution is made for the cuts imposed since our economy was destroyed by greedy people, not one of whom has heard the sound of cell door closing behind them (except of course for wilful contempt of Court).

Such a scramble may be regarded as a tad premature.

We in IFUT are no slouches in negotiations. When and if there are improvements on offer we will demand our fair share. But we are not holding our breath.

But let me say this. Respect costs nothing. Listening and hearing costs nothing.

IFUT members in our universities and colleges are telling us they are sick and tired of being controlled and directed by those who understand nothing about what they do and how they do it and yet believe they have the right to foist “solutions” upon us which make things worse not better.

It is time to shout “stop”.

I commend this report.

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