

Irish Federation of University Teachers

PROCEEDINGS

OF

ANNUAL DELEGATE

CONFERENCE

2020

Cónaidhm Éireannach na Múinteoirí Ollscoile

PROCEEDINGS OF 2020 ADC

1 OPENING

The President opened the **54th Annual Delegate Conference** of the Irish Federation of University Teachers at 11:00 on **Saturday 19 September 2020** by warmly welcoming all Delegates to the virtual platform.

2 GENERAL SECRETARY WELCOME ADDRESS

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to this the 54th Annual Delegate Conference of the Irish Federation of University Teachers.

The words “unique” and “unprecedented” aptly describe this Conference today.

If you are lucky enough you may have an office at home but it is just as likely that you are in “the spare room” or the kitchen or some other room which will have to be re-purposed for regular use as soon as you click the ‘close’ key on your computer or laptop at the end of Conference!

So these are not merely “strange times” they are hugely demanding times, unprecedented times.

So thank you for letting us invade your homes today.

We are keeping today’s business to a minimum for obvious reasons. But we decided that we absolutely must hold our annual conference, not just because our rulebook demands it but also because we need it.

We need this time to pause, to consider and to reflect.

3 STANDING ORDERS REPORT

The President advised Conference that the Outgoing President had been nominated by the Executive Committee as the Chair of Standing Orders and any queries or questions in relation to Standing Orders should be addressed to him in the first instance.

The Chair of Standing Orders then addressed Conference on the Standing Orders Report, as Outgoing President it was a particularly poignant occasion for him. He drew ADC’s attention to Section 3.2 and reminded Delegates when speaking to identify themselves and their Branch, and also Section 3.3 in relation to timing of speeches. He highlighted the unusual circumstances of the current meeting and the importance of adhering to this particular Rule.

Proposer for adoption: Michael Delargey, UCC

Secunder for adoption: Anthony Harvey, RIA

The Standing Orders Report was adopted.

4 ELECTION OF TELLERS

The President announced that the Executive Committee had nominated Emma Sokell, UCD, and John Walsh, TCD, as Tellers.

Proposed by: Kate O'Malley, RIA

Seconded by: Celeste Golden, RCSI

The nominations were agreed.

5 PROCEEDINGS OF 2019 ADC

The Proceedings of the 2019 Annual Delegate Conference were tabled for approval.

Proposed by: John Walsh, TCD

Seconded by: Alastair McKinstry, NUIG

The ADC Proceedings of 2019 were adopted.

6 VIDEO ADDRESS BY SIMON HARRIS, MINISTER FOR FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

The General Secretary advised ADC that the video will be available on the IFUT website. On behalf of IFUT she expressed her appreciation to the Minister for providing the video for our ADC.

The General Secretary then read a statement received from Niall Collins, the Minister of State, with responsibility for Skills and Further Education. This statement is attached at Appendix II.

7 PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The Presidential Address was delivered by Dr Angela Flynn of UCC, the text of this address is attached at Appendix III.

8 ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The President invited the General Secretary, to present the Annual Report for 2019/20. The text of the General Secretary's speech introducing the Report is attached as Appendix IV.

The President asked the ADC to approve the 2019/20 Annual Report.

Proposed by: Michael Delargey, UCC

Seconded by: John Walsh, TCD

The report was adopted.

9 FINANCIAL REPORT

The Financial Report for the year ended 31 December 2019 was presented to the ADC by the Vice President-Finance, Alastair McKinstry, NUIG.

The Vice President-Finance reported that the Accounts, as audited by Mazars, are a true record, with nothing to report in terms of inconsistencies or misstatements. These have been signed off by the Trustees.

First to note is that 2019 was a good year financially, which saw an income growth from €767,420 to €854,012, principally due to two elements: a rise of €32,094 in subscriptions to €768,784, and an unrealised gain in investment to €95,661 from a slight loss the previous year of €26,183. Due to the re-investment of our investment fund there had been an income of €63,080 last year, while this is only €1,997 this year. There was a small increase in charges, to €12,430 vs €6,167 the previous year.

Against this income rise of €85,592, there was a rise of expenditure of €72,096.

The largest part of this has been a rise in personnel costs from €395,273 to €442,627. This is part of a long-term body of work within IFUT and the Executive to formalise the staff roles, rates of pay, and bring more onto payroll as necessary for the increased workload.

Rents and Rates have increased slightly by €4,695 to €53,765, while equipment and leasing has fallen by €3,875 to €20,237.

Growth in regular expenses have been kept under a tight rein: a fall in costs of Executive and IFUT committees by €3,000, while one-off conference costs rose by €11,000. Consultancy costs rose by €7,800 to €77,000, with legal charges of €6,428.

In investments, our investment bond is in year 1, so there are no proceeds or payments for bonds compared to 2019. There is an unrealised gain of €95,661, compared to a loss of €26,183 the year before.

The total of cash and equivalents is €636,220 broadly in line with 2018 of €640,179.

The accumulated fund now stands at €1.5m, with a rise in surplus of income over expenditure by €14,000 to €95,855.

Overall, it has been a good, steady year, financially at IFUT, with income and expenditure rising in line with membership numbers. Unusually, as ADC was postponed until the autumn, we have also in hand our first-half 2020 results, which will be saved for presentation next year, but continue this good progress with a rise in membership. The Vice President-Finance congratulated the General Secretary and staff of IFUT, and commended the report to the floor.

Proposed by: Liam Morrison, NUIG

Seconded by: Catherine Swift, MICTL

The report was adopted.

10 APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

The General Secretary advised the ADC that the Trustees had decided to reappoint Mazars as IFUT's Auditors for the coming year.

11 ELECTION OF TRUSTEES

The General Secretary advised ADC that the current term of office had come to an end for Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, TCD. She expressed her appreciation for all his hard work during his term as Trustee stating that Cormac was always so conscientious, diligent and thorough in identifying areas requiring clarification or amendment. She said he was a wonderful colleague and a gentleman!

Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, TCD, in response said it was a pleasure to work with the General Secretary and everyone in Head Office, and advised ADC that the same care and amazing workload that goes in to the representation of our members also prevails in the financial sphere.

The President advised that Peter Murray, MU, and Finian O'Shea, DCU, have been re-nominated, and John Dunnion, UCD, has been nominated as Trustees. No other nominations were received so the President declared these nominees elected.

Proposed by: Hugh Gibbons, TCD

Seconded by: Alastair McKinistry, NUIG

12 DEBATE ON MOTIONS

The President drew the attention of ADC to Rule 17.

Motion A Preamble:

The IFUT Rules Sub-Committee was originally set up to consider changes to the Rules of IFUT, as a consequence of operational changes in Head Office and GDPR obligations. IFUT is required to ensure that the Rules are up to date and that they provide protection for the future sustainability of the organisation. The Rules Sub-Committee included one representative from UCD (Executive member), two representatives from MU (one Executive and one Council member), one representative from the RIA (Council member), the GS, DGS, and the IRO.

We wish to acknowledge the work of the IFUT Rules-Sub-Committee and, in particular, the work of the UCD representative who gave so much of her time to this project.

Motion A:

The Executive Committee urges ADC to endorse the proposed changes to the IFUT Rules in order to safeguard the future operational function of IFUT as an organisation and to protect the interests of each IFUT member.

Proposer: Executive Committee

Emma Sokell, UCD, and Chair of the IFUT Rules Sub-committee, proposed the motion saying that the IFUT Rules Sub-committee was established with a view to bringing changes to the Rules to the 2019 ADC. However, the Rules relating to motions to change the Rules must be received by the General Secretary no less than 12 weeks before the date of the ADC, which did not happen in 2019. As a result further work was done and a more thorough review conducted. This was prepared in time for the motion to change the Rules to be brought to the ADC planned for May 2020, pre-COVID and what now seems a long time ago. The proposed Rule changes were brought to Council in February 2020. IFUT are now in line with the Rules. The Rules Sub-committee consisted of Rose Malone, Una Crowley, Anthony Harvey, Fiona Lee, Frank Jones and the Chair, Emma Sokell.

The documentation relating to this motion was circulated on 3 September 2020, and so the Proposer did not go through all the changes, many of which are stylistic in nature and/or reflected the practice of the Federation. The changes are summarised in the accompanying document to the Motion which lists 20 changes. The Proposer then highlighted in summary:

- References to practices that IFUT do not do, times have changed, bring the Rules up to date.
- The removal of Honorary members (No. 2), and Divisions (No. 7) which IFUT do not have.
- Change of time frames (No. 8) {chart + simplified organisation for Head Office} for ADC, which are all included in the proposal. The rationale is for the simplified organisation for Head Office and timelines for ADC.
- Removal of Contingency Fund (No. 11) as IFUT do not have one.
- General Secretary as Delegate for ADC (No. 14). The proposal is that all members of Head Office are non-voting attendees at ADC.

The Proposer then went briefly through the text of the background document accompanying the Motion and drew Delegate's attention to the existing Rule No. 18 which requires any substantive amendments to the Rules be received by the General Secretary 28 days prior to ADC (none have been received).

The President thanked the Proposer for the enormous amount of work carried out on the proposed amendments.

Aidan Seery, TCD, speaking in support of the motion, drew Delegates' particular attention to the paragraph which acknowledged IFUT's work and that of the UCD representative, Emma Sokell, UCD, the time spent on this work was extraordinary for a volunteer of an organization, extraordinary care right down to the last comma. He reiterated that IFUT's objects should not be interpreted narrowly.

Proposed by: Emma Sokell, UCD and Chair of IFUT Rules Sub-Committee

Seconded by: Aidan Seery, TCD

Michael Delargey, UCC, fully in support of the motion, queried if there is a right of appeal if a motion is submitted and is ruled out of order.

The Proposer responded, thanked everyone on the Committee, and advised, in the same way as motions are dealt with currently by the Executive, there is no formal appeal mechanism in the Rules.

The General Secretary clarified that IFUT try to be as accommodating as possible, taking any further relevant information into account. Great care is taken by the Executive in the best interests of IFUT. This is a good Rule for IFUT.

The Proposer responded, understood the concern, which is already covered under Rule 17(b) vii, which is in effect not a change, just a restatement on how to manage divisive motions.

Anthony Harvey, RIA, as a member of the Rules sub-committee, repeated the thanks expressed to Emma Sokell for her extraordinary work.

The Chair of Standing Orders advised Conference of a special set of procedures for voting at the Virtual ADC.

The General Secretary advised Conference that as the Motions before them (including a Rule change) are of critical importance, each Delegate will receive a ballot paper by e-mail, to be completed and returned to IFUTADC@ifut.ie. A show of hands would be difficult to conduct virtually and the safest way to vote would be to send a ballot to each Delegate. The Chair of Standing Orders concurred with this view expressing the Executive's concern about the transparency and security of the ballot and the need to have a written record of the voting process.

MOTION B:

In light of the major changes to work practices due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IFUT calls on government and higher education management to engage in meaningful consultation with academic staff and their representatives in order to find sustainable and mutually agreeable solutions that safeguard the principles of accessible, high-quality publicly-funded higher education. Moreover, we commit to redoubling our efforts to defend precarious, casual and contract staff, both researchers and teaching staff, throughout this process.

Proposer: UCC Branch

Edward Lahiff, UCC, proposed the motion and said that we are all too familiar with the origins and unfolding of the latest crisis in Higher Education, which we must acknowledge is part of a much wider crisis facing our society and economy, and which continues to unfold even as we speak. The pandemic has seen a variety of responses by Higher Education Institutions, and extraordinary efforts by individual academics and researchers. It has also, however, exposed some fundamental weaknesses in our sector, particularly around funding and employment conditions, which demand attention by all sides.

In drafting this motion many months ago, our focus in UCC, as elsewhere, was on ensuring meaningful engagement with management to address our common and urgent concerns. What we are seeing since is a mixed record of consultation, generally good in terms of health and safety, less so perhaps in terms of academic matters such as alternative examinations, setting of semester dates and, of course, preparation for online or blended teaching. Particularly concerning has been the largely unacknowledged additional workload on staff working from home, and its associated stress. This has been particularly acute for those with caring responsibilities and a difficult home working environment, something that has disproportionately affected women.

As we face into what will inevitably be a very difficult teaching term for both staff and students, we call on institutions to continue to engage meaningfully with staff and their Unions and to provide all necessary support for home working and remote teaching. Higher Education Institutions must work closely with academic staff in the planning and delivery of a blended curriculum: to avoid over-promising to students; to provide the necessary training and ongoing support to staff in the new teaching environment; and to redirect resources to online teaching, despite the cut-backs – in other words, university funding needs to ‘pivot’ too.

In this context, clarity around intellectual property rights of lecturers and GDPR rights of staff and students are of greater importance than ever, and urgently need to be addressed.

IFUT must stand firm in insisting that changes in working practices brought about by the current crisis - such as the move to online teaching and the recording of lectures - are strictly temporary in nature and cannot be used as a precedent in the future.

Colleagues – as we all well know, COVID-19 has magnified the funding crisis that has been building up in our sector, largely ignored to date by successive governments. While we welcome the creation of a new Department of Further and Higher Education, and the emergency funding provided to the sector, the problem is set to get worse, exacerbated by the expected collapse in non-EU student fees and non-core commercial activities, on which

our sector has become dangerously dependent. The universities, as well as the staff and student unions, must now engage robustly with government and other stakeholders around a sustainable funding model, starting with the arguments set out in the Cassells report, if both the quality of third-level education and the working conditions of our members are to be maintained and, hopefully, improved further.

We are all aware that far too many of our colleagues are on short-term, hourly, or other precarious contracts, but nonetheless play a vital role in both research and teaching. The rush to terminate such contracts in the face of a funding shortfall is disgraceful, as well as being counter-productive. The core business of the universities – teaching and research – will inevitably suffer, as will the student experience. Remaining staff, already faced with multiple new challenges, will be expected to take on significantly increased workloads. We call on IFUT to redouble its efforts to achieve decent working conditions for all staff, to vigorously defend the principles of high-quality, publicly-funded education, accessible to all sections of the community.

I hereby move this motion in the name of the UCC branch and urge you to give it your support.

John Walsh, TCD, seconded the motion and said that Teaching and learning has to be safe for staff and students – Higher Education should not be exempt from government guidance and any in-person teaching must be conditional on strict safety protocols and requirements. As a member from Dublin, we recognize the restrictions that need to be enforced, for Level 3 to be enforced, it must apply equally to third level – the reality is that Higher Education is different from primary and second level education and to be blunt, the risk of contamination and illness is greater with large concentrations of students than with smaller, more tightly controlled educational establishments.

Concerns about the need for funding, student fees or recruiting international students cannot trump Health and Safety and the lives and health of staff and students.

There must be strong and sustained institutional and government support for online learning, as this will be the main mode of teaching and learning this semester.

This is not a ‘new normal’ in relation to terms and conditions – employers need to understand that contracts are still binding and local and national agreements still apply.

The casualisation of the academic workforce is detrimental to individuals and affects all academics potentially. Improving the position of employees on precarious contracts remains a key issue for IFUT locally and nationally and is even more important during the pandemic. We work closely with representatives of postdoctoral researchers – Union membership and representation for researchers is crucial to secure critical mass.

Clear message that we as a Union will stand with lecturers and researchers to ensure that any changes during this crisis occur only by negotiation and agreement; that the crisis is not resolved on the back of our members and that our voice is heard clearly both by colleges and government.

Anthony Harvey, RIA, thanked Jeneen Naji, Chair of the MU Branch, for arranging meetings of representatives from all Branches to respond to constantly fluctuating guidance. He commended Jeneen for convening this group and Edward Lahiff as Deputy Convenor. IFUT's primary responsibility is to its members. Even though IFUT is very concerned for the welfare of students in institutions, our primary responsibility is to IFUT members and will continue to be so. IFUT should not take responsibility for what is the University management's duty to safeguard students. IFUT will safeguard our members.

The President advised ADC that Jeneen Naji's initiative had been critically important during the summer to hear what was happening in different Branches.

Cathy Swift, MICL, advised ADC that it is very understandable that colleges are working to improve the digital skills of their academic staff in the new blended/online world. She said that "in many cases (certainly mine), it is bringing tangible benefits to me in this field. However, it should also be said that digital skills are politically valued, partly because of the economic clout of the larger globalised countries who bring employment to Ireland."

"In addition, I have noticed that some of my digital training has been designed to make the learning process as easy as possible for our students and I worry that some of that has spilled over to reducing the quality of the educational experience. As examples, there has been a push to create videos and embed URLs so that students do not have to look up material for themselves. It seems to me that some of this is institutionally directed by management systems which are worried about student fees and are more concerned with dispelling any possible student complaint rather than with academic standards."

"I believe that IFUT is the strongest advocate we have for defending academic standards and the quality of the education we give our students. I do not believe that we should be prioritising expertise in various digital techniques at the expense of the quality of education in our own fields. In many cases, I believe, one can teach one's subject with less gizmos and more old-fashioned methods that put less stress on broadband access and high-end laptops and that would keep the focus more firmly on the standards in the field that we're supposed to be teaching. I worry that the proponents of monetised online teaching systems are being facilitated by some of the decisions being made at managerial level and that this is not in the best medium and long term interests of Irish students, Irish academia and Irish education."

Jacqui O'Riordan, UCC, endorsed the sentiments expressed and said it is very important that IFUT supports precarious and hourly-paid staff, in particular. UCC are concerned with financial issues at the moment as they are €20m in debt in one year. She also spoke about upskilling to digital systems and the impact on workload and additional teaching.

Des Carswell, MICL, expressed concern regarding IP and GDPR, personal data and the right to be forgotten. Measures were taken in an emergency to facilitate approaches in teaching including the interaction with IP and GDPR. IFUT need to consider these aspects and watch this space incredibly closely.

Brendan Palmer, UCC, expressed the following concerns;

“I agree with the previous speaker that the primary function of the union is to defend our members interests. That is why I call on IFUT to go further and redouble efforts to recruit precarious, casual and contract staff, both researchers and teaching staff.

We have seen the effects within the takeaway and meat-packing industries in recent times, where the lack of formal union representation has led to exploitation of the workers. Now is the time for IFUT to engage in an active recruitment drive, to grow the membership, to listen to their concerns and to react when required.”

Edward Lahiff, UCC, in response, thanked everyone for their input, which will shape the work of IFUT for the year ahead.

The Motion covered a lot of the ground in discussion including wider funding issues.

The main issues are:

1) The staff voice needs to be part of the decision making process and if IFUT are not in, IFUT are not part of the solution.

2) The core of IFUT’s mission is the protection and interests of our members.

13 CLOSING OF CONFERENCE

The President thanked everyone for attending and for their patience with the unusual online Conference format. She said it is an ADC like no other, during very challenging and very difficult times. At this time solidarity is exactly what is needed.

The General Secretary thanked everyone for attending a virtual ADC on a Saturday morning. Travelling to an ADC might have been tiresome and tiring. But having the ADC invade your home is a huge sacrifice too. So, from my heart I want to thank each one of you not just today but almost every single day since mid-March. If, as I say in my report, the staff in Head Office have had to work harder than ever before (and I am so grateful to them for that) then it is also true that the representatives of IFUT, the unpaid heroes of our union, have had to work also harder than ever dealing with the huge challenges facing our members while also delivering first quality education and research for the benefit of our country.

Thanks were attributed by the General Secretary to Angela Flynn (President), Aidan Seery (Chair of Standing Orders), Alastair McKinstry (Vice President-Finance), the Executive Committee, Council, Trustees, Tellers, Branch Committees, John Gallagher (Media

Consultant), Seán Couch (Financial Consultant), Dave Murphy (Webmaster), Mike Jennings, Úna Crowley, and the Delegates.

Our final word of thanks has to go to Noel Jackson for all the support in assisting us with this Conference

Thank you.

The conference then concluded.

19 September 2020

APPENDIX I

DELEGATES 2020 ADC

TCD

Immaculada Arnedillo Sanchez, Computer Science
Gobnait Byrne, Nursing & Midwifery
Elizabeth Culleton-Quinn, Physiotherapy
Darren Fayne, Biochemistry & Immunology
Enrica Ferrara, Languages, Cultures & Linguistics
Hugh Gibbons, Computer Science & Statistics
Paula Hicks, Computer Science & Statistics
Seán Hughes, Library
Andrew Loxley, Education
Dónall MacDónaill, Ceimic
Rachel Moss, History of Art & Architecture
Conor O'Kelly, Film Studies
Nicole Seabrook, Library
Aidan Seery, Cultures, Academic Value & Education
Mary Sharp, Computer Science
Florence Signorini, CLCS – French
John Walsh, Education
Jason Wyse, Computer Science & Statistics

UCD

Brett Becker, Computer Science
Sarah Donnelly, Social Policy & Social Work
Kelly Fitzgerald, Irish, Celtic Studies & Folklore
Tina Hickey, Psychology
Donncha Kavanagh, Business
Noel McGrath, Law
Kerron Ó Luain, History
Emma Sokell, Physics
Patrick Paul Walsh, SPIRE

UCC

Jenny Butler, Religions
Aileen Burton, Nursing & Midwifery
Virginia Conrick, Library
James Cuffe, Sociology
Michael Delargey, Education
John Doran, Accountancy
Finola Doyle-O'Neill, History
Mike Fitzgibbon, Food Business & Development
Angela Flynn, Nursing & Midwifery
Declan Jordan, Economics
Peter Kelly, Nursing & Midwifery
Edward Lahiff, Food, Business & Development
Dave Murphy, Computer Science
Mike Murphy, Applied Psychology
Féilim O'hAdhmaill, Applied Social Studies

Jacqui O’Riordan, Applied Social Studies
Brendan Palmer, Epidemiology & Public Health
Eoin Sheehan, Tyndall National Institute

NUIG

Liam Morrison, Earth & Ocean Sciences
Alastair McKinstry, ICHEC

MU

Patricia (Patty) Abozaglo, Conflict Intervention
Mercedes Carbayo-Abengozar, Modern Languages
Robert Galavan, Business and Law
Susan Giblin, Teaching and Learning
Mary Gilmartin, Geography
Sinéad Kennedy, English
Liam MacAmhlaigh, Froebel
Jeneen Naji, Media Studies
Catherine O’Connell, Edward Kennedy Institute
Philipp Rosemann, Philosophy

RCSI

Celeste Golden, Admissions & Student Recruitment
Theresa Keane, Institute of Leadership
Ben Ryan, Pharmacy

DCU

Michael Hinds, English
Noel Jackson, IT Services
Sue Miller, Library
Ruth McManus, History/Geography

ERC

Emer Delaney
Caitriona Fitzgerald

MICL

Des Carswell, Education
Darach Sanfey, French
Catherine Swift, Irish Studies

Central Branch

Anthony Harvey, DMLCS, RIA
Alan Jacob, IT, RIA
Kate O’Malley, DIFP, RIA

Trustees

Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, TCD
Peter Murray, MU
Finín Ó Seaghdha, DCU

Staff

Joan Donegan, General Secretary
Frank Jones, Deputy General Secretary
Úna Crowley, Assistant General Secretary
Fiona Lee, Industrial Relations & Data Protection Officer

Consultants

Mike Jennings, ex-General Secretary
John Gallagher, Media Consultant

APPENDIX II

MESSAGE TO CONFERENCE

MR NIALL COLLINS, MINISTER OF STATE

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION,
INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

'As Minister of State in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, I extend best wishes for a successful Conference to Angela Flynn, President, Joan Donegan, General Secretary and to all delegates at the 2020 Virtual Conference of Irish Federation of University Teachers.'

I wish to strongly acknowledge the effort and commitment of academic staff to ensure completion of courses and examinations in the last academic year, in the midst of the Covid pandemic.

I know that IFUT has been working closely with officials in the new Department and with individual colleges to deliver a safe and sustainable reopening of higher education this Autumn.

The unpredictable nature of the pandemic means we may face unanticipated challenges in the weeks and months ahead. Continuing to work together in a spirit of consultation and collaboration will help to address any challenges that do arise.

I assure you of my continued support, working with my colleagues in government, to progressing the commitments in the Programme for Government, to 'develop a long term sustainable model for higher-level education.'

Kind regards,



APPENDIX III

IFUT PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2020

DR ANGELA FLYNN, UCC

Pivoted and Pivotal

Colleagues, Delegates, IFUT Friends, welcome to the 2020 IFUT ADC. This online slimmed down delegates' conference is like none that have gone before! The impact of COVID19 on all of our lives has been unprecedented and the pandemic has disrupted lives, work, businesses, schools and colleges all over the world. Every aspect of our lives has been affected. However, we have had to push on, to hold firm, to stand together and to pivot.

Those in the world of business, entrepreneurship and industry might have been very familiar with the concept of pivoting, but many of us in higher education and research might not have been so prepared for the dramatic transformation to our work practices that were suddenly found necessary.

In March lecturers everywhere had to rapidly transform their remaining teaching delivery for an online format. Almost simultaneously, we had to come up with alternative assessment strategies that avoided gathering hundreds of students in exam halls, but still assessed the learning objectives of our modules. All of this while concerned to maintain a high-quality teaching and learning experience **and** looking out for the wellbeing of our students. Exam boards went online, further supplemental examinations were prepared, all the while with one eye towards the 2020/21 academic year, which we could see then would be like no other.

Many of us found ourselves on an extremely steep learning curve that involved online lectures, MS Teams, Zoom, lecture capture, creating synchronous learning packages, break out rooms ... the list goes on. Those colleagues of ours already familiar with online teaching and learning found themselves on speed-dial for problem-solving as the rest of us sought to catch up.

All of this work continued throughout the summer as we recognised that AY2020/21 was going to be very different and challenging. Universities were reluctant to declare an intention to go "fully online" for fear of frightening off student applicants, both domestic and international. Some broke ranks and declared an online intent early - at least staff in these institutions knew what was happening and could begin to plan and prepare accordingly.

But we weren't the only ones working all summer. Anyone driving past any secondary or primary schools in Ireland throughout July and August would have seen a number of cars parked outside as Principals and teachers worked hard to prepare their schools, often with little guidance and fewer resources. I want to acknowledge our colleagues in the other teacher unions of the TUI, the ASTI and the INTO, as they dealt so well with reopening their schools to the children of Ireland while focusing on their safety. Their work paved the way for the reopening of many other sectors including our own.

Colleagues, the measures being put in place to prevent the spread of COVID19 are, by necessity, **evidence-based** and they are informed by the expert opinions clinicians, microbiologists, virologists and public health leaders. Let's take this opportunity to remember from where all of this evidence and expertise has come. It has come from academic work, from scholarship and from high quality research. Every graduate on the NPHE went to a university or college, many of whom are represented here today at this ADC. Every study showing risk of transmission or treatment possibilities has been carried out by academics and clinicians in our sector. The vaccine will come from researchers in our sector.

It has never been more glaringly obvious that the third level sector is so pivotal to wider social and global wellbeing. In 2019 Indecon's *Independent Assessment of the Economic and Social Impact of Irish Universities* demonstrated that Irish universities contributed almost €9 billion to the Irish economy per year. It is critical that a sustainable funding model for Higher Education is urgently secured. I welcome the establishment of the new *Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science*, and I welcome the commitment that Minister Harris has made through his engagement with the ICTU *Education Futures* group. At a recent webinar organised by *Education Futures* the Minister committed to give due regard to the (now ageing) Cassells report, a motion on which was passed at last year's ADC.

The fiscal situation for Ireland is grim, but the work that Higher Education and Research has done in meeting the challenge of COVID19 has demonstrated that we simply cannot afford not to invest in it. As the saying goes, "if you think education is expensive, you should see the cost of ignorance". In this time of alleged fake news and evidence deniers, we cannot afford this cost.

COVID19 has not just laid bare the centrality of quality higher education and research to all our lives, it has also exposed the deep **inequalities** within it. Casually employed, part time, hourly and precarious lecturers and researchers have found themselves in even more vulnerable positions. The drastically poor financial situation that our colleges and universities find themselves in has resulted from an over-reliance on high fee-paying international students - a strategy about which we have warned for many years. In an effort to make savings, universities are going for the "low-hanging fruit", issuing redundancies to temporary staff, and not renewing contracts. Valuable, skilled and highly educated people are being lost from our sector, just at the time when we need all hands on deck. And aside from the devastating personal, financial and career impacts for these individuals, those of us lucky to have security in our roles, will somehow be expected to take on their workloads, their teaching and their pastoral support of students. This, Conference, should be a concern for all of us as staff, students, parents and taxpayers.

Another inequality laid bare by COVID19 is that of the digital divide. Learning online will only be effective if everyone is equipped with adequate equipment and connectivity to allow for meaningful engagement. I welcome that Government has announced some funding in this area and I commend the strong lobbying and campaigning by the Union of Students of Ireland on this important issue.

Finally, Conference, as a nurse myself, I want to pay tribute to our health and social care colleagues and friends up and down the country. Many IFUT members in nursing, midwifery, medicine, public health, speech, language & occupational therapies, and others, stepped up during the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis and have been involved in contact tracing, COVID testing, and have worked to support an already over-stretched health service. Some of us even found ourselves in full PPE back at the bedside of patients, after many years out of clinical practice! We salute all our colleagues at the front line of the health and social care services during this pandemic.

I want to thank all of you who have taken time out of your Saturday to "attend" our unusual virtual ADC. We are sorry we can't have the usual very enjoyable opportunity to meet, chat, discuss and debate. But that time will come again.

As a penultimate note, I want to thank our superb head office staff who have been keeping the show on the road throughout lockdown. IFUT has never been so busy and we are tremendously privileged to have the amazing team of Ms Phyllis Russell the office manager, Fiona Lee our unflappable Industrial Relations Officer, the superb Frank Jones our Deputy General Secretary, and of course, our indomitable General Secretary, Joan Donegan. Those of us on the National Executive are acutely aware of the massive amount of work and care you put into all your work to support and help our members and our sector.

At this final point I should also like to give a very warm thank you to all of the National Executive members who, along with their branch committees, tirelessly (but voluntarily) continue to work, meet with management, draft documents, negotiate and represent members in each and every branch of our superb and growing union. At this time more than ever we value this model of solidarity.

We may have pivoted and we remain pivotal.

Thank you, Conference.

APPENDIX IV

SPEECH BY MS JOAN DONEGAN, GENERAL SECRETARY

19 September 2020

Dear Delegates,

A) This is an Annual Conference like no other.

Our members, our students, our educational institutions are facing an unprecedented challenge and change that could not have been even imagined at the time of our last Conference, in May 2019.

Our thoughts too must also be with those who became ill and to those who lost loved ones during this difficult time.

B) The past is a different country.

In many ways the present is a different educational planet, from that in which we worked, even at the beginning of this year.

The upheaval caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has altered how we teach, how we engage with students, how we assess their work.

It altered where and how **we** work, promoted an 'always on' availability and imposed new requirements and demands in the use of technology.

Not to mention the impact of sudden home working on our mental health well-being, on our families and relationships.

C) The necessary change in the date of our Annual Conference, due to Covid-19, is an ideal date on which to take stock of yesterday's government announcement.

At a meeting with Simon Harris yesterday the Minister stated that enhanced measures include the full range of health measures which will minimise the unnecessary congregation and movement of staff and students.

Later in a press statement he wrote;

“Additional protections are now being introduced which will see a more gradual reopening of higher and further education facilities in Dublin as well as a shift to more learning online and less on-site.”

“The reopening of facilities outside Dublin will proceed as planned, based upon a model of blended learning and full adherence to public health advice.”

So we now see that UCD has imposed a Level 4 Covid-19 restriction while Trinity College, DCU and TU Dublin have announced that all teaching and learning will be online except for practical workshop and lab-based tuition that cannot be done remotely.

D) Over the summer months IFUT, both nationally and at local level, worked with both government and local HR departments, to address the many, many issues that now confront higher education.

I am glad to report that, in the main, there has been a genuine commitment by all concerned to overcome the many new challenges presented by the pandemic. The new Minister and officials in the newly established Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science have engaged positively with IFUT in conjunction with the other higher education unions.

At local HR level also, IFUT branches have put in the hard and long hours to work through the many, often unexpected and unanticipated issues that the pandemic has thrown up. I want to particularly acknowledge our members who have shouldered such a heavy burden so successfully in this regard.

We are very conscious of the fact that in some areas particularly regarding the 2m V 1m issue, there was much confusion which primarily emanated from the Guidelines for Public Health Measures in Higher Education document.

In our discussions with the Government officials last July, IFUT was to the fore in highlighting these difficulties and registered the names of the Colleges who sought to ignore the spirit of the agreement.

E) Delegates, IFUT’s priority is to protect the health, safety and well-being of our members

Irrespective of any guideline document **the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005**

supersedes any other instruction.

This Act sets out the broad framework of obligations and responsibilities imposed on employers and employees in the workplace in Ireland.

This Act obliges employers to do everything reasonably practicable to ensure the safety, welfare and health of their employees.

Delegates, IFUT will support any member who believes that their health and safety is at risk

Delegates, IFUT will stand with our members to ensure that any changes during this crisis occur only by negotiation and agreement.

Therefore we would encourage members to contact their local IFUT Branch or Lead Worker Representative immediately if they experience any difficulty on campus.

F) A number of key issues will also need to be kept under close review as we approach the new academic year:

- Ongoing discussion on college physical attendance
- Continued monitoring on social distancing
- Refining and clarifying protocols for online class delivery, including student contact and mentoring, tutorial participation, etc.
- and restoring work-life balance.

A range of issues related to working conditions need to be addressed.

These include

- working from home arrangements including family and childcare commitments
- irregular hours, 'always available' demands
- the absence of and provision of appropriate equipment
- as well as necessary training and mentoring in new technology

G) As we are aware, an additional 2,000 college places have been created in our Universities.

Yet we are aware of the equally significant cancellation of temporary and short-term lecturing contracts, as college administrations seek to balance the books at any cost.

The Workplace Relations Commission has been inundated with case referrals as IFUT awaits dates for a number of hearings lodged.

The impact of all the above issues on education standards, the threat to the value of 'Covid degrees' and the pressure on lecturing, tutorial and mentoring delivery must also be the subject of close and continued consultation.

We must ensure that education delivered and received under altered or online teaching and assessment arrangements is sufficiently robust to withstand future academic and professional scrutiny.

H) We are very close to one of the most important Budgets presented by any Irish government.

Despite the pressure from many sources for investment, higher education must not suffer yet again when funding announcements are made. Our sector suffered from a full decade of underfunding following the 2008 crash.

The stimulus package of 168 million delivered by Minister Harris and his new Department was a very welcome and no doubt hard fought gain.

Yet it addressed only a portion of the loss in higher education income arising from Covid-19.

The Budget, therefore, must pay particular attention to the crisis facing higher education (which existed before) and which is totally separate, from Covid-19.

IFUT will strongly support the Minister and the new Department in proposals to obtain a long overdue Exchequer funding for our sector.

I) The pandemic unleashed a huge level of national solidarity throughout society, health care workers (devoting immense levels of extra commitment, community and volunteering endeavour), supporting the most vulnerable and, in our case, college lecturers and administrations devising novel means to ensure courses and examinations proceed.

In terms of future pay talks, IFUT strongly believes that this great national effort must not be rewarded with another decade of austerity.

To adapt the thoughts of Oscar Wilde, to have to pay for one recession may be unfortunate, to accept paying for a second would be carelessness.

J) The Irish, the EU and international governments have pumped investment into the economy to address the impact of Covid-19.

Similar levels of imagination must be utilised to revive our economy post Covid-19. The financial beatings cannot continue until the economy improves.

In this regard, IFUT is concerned that the most vulnerable and precarious staff in higher education are having contracts terminated or not renewed following Covid-19.

Underfunding of the past decade has led universities to develop a precarious employment model and the departure of these staff now threatens the viability of many courses.

IFUT is seeking a reversal of this policy, including dedicated supports by government to enable necessary staffing requirements to be maintained.

K) The issue of equality, discrimination and harassment in our sector is also one that hasn't gone away.

This is an area that IFUT intends to continue to lead on and to work assiduously to deliver solutions.

We know that university managements and government are committed to this issue and we will work closely with them to deliver further progress.

L) The initial Guidance Document for re-opening of higher education rightly clarified that the initial response to Covid-19 involved 'a rapid move to emergency remote teaching and assessment of programmes, without impacting on the integrity of qualifications.'

Delegates, if there is any one single message that should go out from our Conference today... it is that 'emergency mode' **must not** and cannot become the new normal.

It simply will not be possible to sustain 'emergency' mode working for a full academic year. Staff and students cannot be expected, physically or intellectually to operate on crisis mode.

In particular, we must avoid over-ambitious claims in any area of higher education life.

M) One of the pluses of the pandemic was the development of closer working relationships between all stakeholders in higher education. IFUT will continue to work closely with government,

with other higher education unions, with the Union of Students in Ireland, the Irish Universities Association and others, in working for a brighter future for higher education.

The past six months has, for all of us, been among the most stressful period in our academic lives. Many challenges and uncertainties remain.

As the leading voice of academics in Ireland, IFUT has an important role to play.

IFUT is confident that, with continued openness and consultation by all concerned, the coming academic year could deliver increased certainty for our work and students.

The record of our work and achievements as set out in our report today proves our capacity in this regard.

Please Stay Healthy and Safe!

I commend the report to you for adoption.