

SHOUT UNION

YOUR VOICE, YOUR UNION, YOUR FUTURE

JUNE 2026

NEW UTU PRESIDENT A VOICE FOR THE VULNERABLE

**JON BLEAKNEY TAKES
THE UNION HELM**

I BREAKING POVERTY'S CYCLE IN KENYA

I AI IN THE CLASSROOM

Supporting teachers, not replacing them

WORKLOAD REVIEW

Progress Is Possible

A Scottish voice on the workload challenge

PLUS 200 Years at Culcrow PS · Bonjour, Paris! · The People's Champ

TEACHING TODAY, INSPIRING TOMORROW - A MESSAGE FROM THE UTU EX-PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to our third edition of 'ShoUT Union'. I hope you enjoy the wide range of articles celebrating our schools, as well as showcasing the outstanding work and support provided to children and young people across the education community. As we approach the summer break, I want to take this opportunity to thank every member of the Ulster Teachers' Union for your commitment, professionalism and resilience throughout another demanding school year. I know this remains an especially busy time in schools, with sports days, report writing and all the many end-of-term responsibilities that fall to teachers and school leaders. Nevertheless, you continue to support children and young people with care, skill and determination.

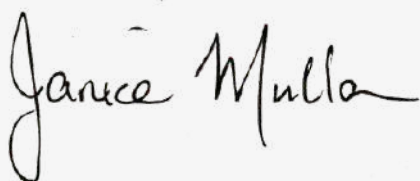
Our Conference theme of 'Teaching Today, Inspiring Tomorrow' is at the heart of our profession. Your work changes lives every day, and it is right that we pause to recognise the value of all that you do. Our UTU Conference was a great success, and the wide variety of resolutions has set the focus for the programme of work for the year ahead. The spellbinding performance from the choir of Macosquin Primary School was such a treat for everyone in attendance and we are also grateful to Chris Quinn, the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People and Rachel Hogan from the Children's Law Centre for sharing their knowledge and insight on such a range of topics.

It was also my great pleasure to announce Grace McCullough as the winner of the inaugural members' art competition. This year has again highlighted the pressures facing our profession. Workload, recruitment and retention, support for special educational needs, and the need for fair investment in education remain central concerns for members. UTU continues to make your voice heard clearly and consistently. We will continue to engage robustly and constructively on your behalf.

I offer my warmest congratulations to Jon Bleakney on his appointment as the 106th President of UTU. I am confident that he will provide strong and thoughtful leadership in the year ahead. There is still much to do, but there is also much to build on. UTU, under the leadership of Jon, will continue to champion the profession, defend the interests of members, and work for an education system that respects teachers and serves pupils well.

Thank you for your continued support of UTU and for the difference you make each day. Being your President has been such a privilege, and I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to stand alongside members, to listen to your concerns, and to celebrate the vital work you do each day.

I wish you and your loved ones a peaceful, restful and enjoyable summer.



Janice Mullan
Ex-President



Credit: Paul Smyth Photography

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Culcrow Primary School celebrates two centuries of learning and community spirit, marking the milestone with the wider school community while looking ahead to new investment and improvements.

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....AND MUCH MORE!

A WORD FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

COLLEAGUES,

We are reaching the end of another academic year, and I would like to commend you on the amazing work you have done for the children in your care — in what continue to be very difficult circumstances. Take time to reflect on what you have achieved, recognise it, and commend yourselves for it. Be assured that we in UTU see clearly what you have been doing, and remind management regularly of the facts of school life.

There continue to be many challenges. The absence of any budgetary decisions at Stormont is already impacting directly on the decision making process for schools next year; the state of the schools' estate is frankly unacceptable; and the erosion of other services within the public sector is adding to the growing burdens carried by teachers and school leaders.

The behind-the-scenes efforts on workload provided a beacon of light as the issues under the Heads of Agreement moved towards delivery. It was particularly helpful that the Independent Panel was tasked with overseeing this work, as that oversight hastened outcomes — and, in fact, the 26 are just about ready for delivery.

The publication of the Panel's report was heartening, and we expected it to signal the Minister's commitment to full delivery. However, the accompanying Action Plan fell somewhat short and, despite further engagement, we ended up in dispute. Ballots are now underway across the unions, and we encourage you to return yours as a matter of priority, to add voice and weight to the negotiations.

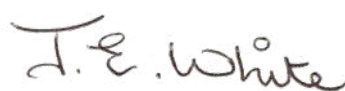
UTU remains fully committed to resolving this impasse through constructive dialogue.

The priority is delivering meaningful change in schools and classrooms, and we, alongside our sister unions, will be readily available over the summer to engage in any process offered with a view to reaching resolution. That change can only come if we have the time and space to deliver it - created by refocusing professional time towards teaching and learning, what we were trained to do, and away from repetition, duplication, unwieldy paperwork and tasks which are the responsibility of others. We need this addressed as promised, and to begin a new academic year with new priorities and in a new frame of mind as a system.

And yet, against this backdrop, the real work continues. This issue of ShoUTUnion gives merely a flavour of the brilliant work being carried out in schools and the experiences you continue to create for the children, alongside examples of the work going on behind the scenes on your behalf. We hope you enjoy it.

On behalf of all at UTU, I wish you a restful and rejuvenating summer with family and friends. The Officials will still be here if you need support, and we remain committed to delivering change for the new academic year.

Enjoy — you deserve it!



Jacquie White
GENERAL SECRETARY



***We cannot
deliver
transformation
unless we have
the time and
space to do so.***

***Reflect on what
you have
achieved —
recognise it, and
commend
yourselves for it.***



A VOICE FOR THE **VULNERABLE**: THE PRINCIPAL TAKING THE UNION HELM

After three decades teaching some of Northern Ireland's most at-risk young people, Armagh-born Jon Bleakney begins his year as President of the Ulster Teachers' Union with a clear mission — to put care-experienced pupils, and the system meant to support them, at the top of the agenda.

PROFILE • JON BLEAKNEY •



“In the past people only saw behaviour as the reason they ended up in care — today we look at the reasons behind their behaviour.

— JON BLEAKNEY

It is a story that has shaped a career, and now it will shape a year in office. Jon Bleakney has spent more than thirty years teaching children whose lives have been turned upside down — and he is determined that his Presidency of the Ulster Teachers' Union will give those young people, and the staff who teach them, a louder voice.

Born in Armagh and now living in North Down, the new President splits his working life between leading a special school for looked-after children and championing reform of a sector he believes is straining under the weight of unmet need.

"It's a huge thing for a young person to become 'Looked After'," he says, "but this time in their lives could mark a turning point — which is why it's so important to ensure the system works for them."

A SHIFTING STORY

The way we talk about young people in care, he argues, has been quietly transformed. Many of his pupils, he explains, are carrying developmental trauma rooted in adverse childhood experiences, and need intensive therapeutic support rather than discipline alone.

The picture in his school mirrors a wider pattern: rising numbers of children with special educational needs, neurodiverse profiles, mental-health difficulties and learning challenges. Yet earlier intervention, he warns, remains the missing piece.

Government, he says bluntly, "can be very short-sighted at times. They need to deal with what's causing the behaviour."

A SYSTEM UNDER PRESSURE

A graduate of Stranmillis, Mr Bleakney began his career at Rathgael Training School in Bangor — a conscious choice to work with vulnerable young people.

Sixteen years as a special school principal later, he fears the care sector now needs significant systemic reform.

Rising demand and increasingly complex trauma mean some young people are placed in residential settings in the Republic of Ireland or Great Britain, far from familiar faces. Professor Ray Jones's review of children's social care services made wide-ranging recommendations more than three years ago. "We can't afford for this to be yet another review commissioned by Stormont which lies unheeded," he says.

REASONS FOR HOPE

For all the challenges, he ends on optimism. One former pupil — through prison, addiction services and university — now works as a youth worker at the school. "To see that young man come full circle is amazing. His story shows young people here, as well as our staff and teachers in mainstream schools, that there is always hope."

PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE

A Scottish voice on Northern Ireland's teacher workload challenge—and the lessons we can learn from one another.

Larry Flanagan spent ten years as General Secretary of the EIS and thirty-three years as a classroom teacher in Glasgow. As the Teachers' Panel nominee on the Independent Review of Teacher Workload, he brought an outsider's eye to a system many feel is buckling under its own weight. Here he reflects on what he found — and where hope lies.

■ BY LARRY FLANAGAN ·



The invitation from the Teachers' Panel of the TNC to be its nominee to the Independent Review of Teacher Workload was both an honour and a challenge. As a classroom teacher for thirty-three years, primarily in Glasgow, and as General Secretary of the EIS for ten years, I considered myself well versed on the issue of excessive workload — but every jurisdiction has its own history and character, and there isn't always automaticity in transferring an approach from one system to another.

That said, excessive workload is a global issue. Education International, the global federation of teaching unions, reports it as the single biggest inducer of stress for teachers — with administrative burdens ranking highest as the detractor from the core task of teaching and learning.

A FRAGMENTED SYSTEM

Looking at your system from an outside perspective, I was struck by how fragmented it seemed. The Panel identified the TNC as the body carrying universal authority, and saw a critical role for an enhanced TNC to act as the driver of the changes necessary to deliver improvements in workload.

TRUST & PROFESSIONAL AGENCY

Many examples of good practice around consultation and agreement exist in Northern Ireland schools. The challenge was to find an approach which supports universal adoption of best practice, with teachers enabled and empowered to exercise professional agency over their working lives.

Collegiality, collaboration and collective leadership lie at the heart of such practice.

Teachers also need to be trusted.

The structures of social dialogue outlined in the report do not in themselves resolve disagreement, but they provide a mechanism for doing so. Meaningful dialogue is critical to democratising schools and ensuring teacher agency. Leadership is a vital factor, and the report recognised the importance of school leaders being better supported in the challenges they face.

A SCOTTISH PRECEDENT

In Scotland, the EIS has successfully forced the Scottish Government and COSLA — the local government employers' body — to agree to a phased reduction in class contact time, from 22.5 hours per week to 21, with the extra ninety minutes added to preparation and correction time. It took the spectre of industrial action to deliver the change, but agreement was reached.

Progress is possible. I sincerely hope the final report of the Independent Panel, with its twenty-seven recommendations, assists to that end. My thanks to the TNC for allowing me to participate in the review.

Teachers make a positive difference in the lives of children every day — **thank you for that.**

“

Ultimately, excessive workload only stops when teachers say 'No'.

— LARRY FLANAGAN

85.8%

OF NI TEACHERS REPORT
UNMANAGEABLE WORKLOADS

27

RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE
INDEPENDENT PANEL'S REPORT

22.5 → 21

CLASS CONTACT HOURS PER WEEK
WON BY EIS IN SCOTLAND

DELIVER THE GOOD JOBS BILL NOW!



Heather Milligan - South Eastern AA



Matthew Robinson - FIT



Gillian Dunlop - South Eastern AA



Stephen McCord - DGS

106TH

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

TEACHING TODAY INSPIRING TOMORROW



Jacquie White - General Secretary



Lynelle Fenton - Past President



Paul Smith - Belfast Branch and AA



Jill Johnston - CEC
Carrick Abbey & Larne Branch



David Thompson - Hon. Treasurer



Jill Ravey CEC / Orchard County Branch



Jon Bleakney takes office as the new president of the Ulster Teachers' Union.



Janice Mullan hands over the President's chain to Jon Bleakney as he steps into his new role.



Pauline Hurst, of the Western Area Association, following her installation as vice-president of the Ulster Teachers' Union.



Matthew Robinson - CEC Observer



Rebekka Gilpin - Field Officer



Estelle McCord - CEC



Top Table staff



Charlene Trolan addresses delegates during the morning session.



Aaron Davis makes his contribution from the floor at Roe Park Resort.



Pauline Hurst of the Western Association speaks to her motion.



Delegates gather for the opening of conference.



Members from across the associations settle in ahead of the day's business.



Alison Steen puts her point to conference.



David Kearney makes an impassioned case during the debate.



Delegates in attendance for a productive day of discussion and networking.



Jacquie White takes to the floor to second the motion.



Stephen McCord - Deputy General Secretary.



Stranmillis College Students Union: Jessica Martin, President and John Nicholl, Vice-President.



Rachel Hogan CLC speaks during the afternoon session



Delegates enjoy the proceedings.



CJ Fallon Exhibition stand



Winner of the inaugural Art Competition for members, Grace McCullough with UTU President



Lexie Scott, Sally McKee and Lewis Love



CEC Member, Lynn Robinson



Jennifer Sturgeon Causeway Branch



The amazing Macosquin Primary School Choir



Conference Prize Winners



CEC Member / Past President, Alison Steen



Delegates enjoy the day's proceedings.



Delegates enjoy the day's proceedings.



Delegates enjoy the day's proceedings.



Members enjoy the proceedings at the Roe Park Resort.



All ears as the debate gets under way.



Members from across the associations settle in for conference.



Steve Sinnott Foundation



Learning Space



Creative Activity



Membership Plus



CJ Fallon



Middletown Centre of Autism



Pure Filtration



Delegates chats with the team at the Childrens Law Centre stand.



Marty Lavery - INTO



Conference brings members together from every corner of the province.



UTU welcomes colleagues from INTO to this year's conference.



All ears as the debate gets under way.



We all experience challenges.

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- Rapid access to therapeutic support provided locally by qualified, empathetic and experienced counsellors.
- Structured counselling delivered face-to-face, by telephone, or by video.
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Tel: 0808 800 0002

Email: support@lenabyinspire.com



Scan the QR code to access Lena's digital Support Hub or visit: lenasupporthub.com

Your unique registration PIN for the hub is: [EAHUB](#)



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REUSABLE PERIOD
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Do you teach RSE to post-primary aged pupils in a special school in NI?

We would like to hear from you!

What's the study about?

We are conducting a study to explore the views and experiences of special school teachers in NI working with post-primary aged pupils on the topic of RSE. We aim to understand how post-primary teachers in special schools feel about the subject and how the delivery of RSE could be improved.

Why should I participate?

- Your voice matters!
- The research may lead to recommendations to the NI RSE curriculum planning and resources for special school settings.
- The research could bring changes to teacher training and preparedness to deliver RSE.
- Your information will remain completely anonymous and confidential.

Can I participate?

You need to answer 'yes' to all of the following:

- Are you a teacher in a special school in NI?
- Do you teach post-primary aged pupils?
- Do you have experience in delivering RSE?

What do I have to do?

- Participate in survey (link below)
- Optional participation in a further chat with the researcher, online via MS Teams, audio recorded only (cameras will be turned off)
- You will be able to share your views on RSE in more detail, answering a few open-ended questions.

Interested?

Email Hannah Brown

hbrown31@qub.ac.uk



#ResearchStudy #RSE #Education #RSEHub



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EXPERT ADVICE HELPS MEMBERS PLAN FOR A STRONGER FINANCIAL FUTURE

Members of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO NI) and the Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU) attended a financial planning seminar, delivered by Platinum Financial Planning Ltd. The event provided teachers with an opportunity to gain expert advice on managing their finances, helping to build confidence and support long-term financial decision-making. Attendees heard practical guidance aimed at strengthening financial awareness and planning for the future. Independent financial planners Philip Andrews and Johanna Rooney led the session, sharing their expertise and taking time to engage with members on key financial issues. The seminar highlighted the importance of forward planning, reinforcing the message that taking control of finances today can lead to greater security and stability in the years ahead.



Pauline Hurst (Vice President) and Jacquie White (General Secretary)



FERMANAGH TRADE UNIONISTS MARK INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY IN ENNISKILLEN

Trade unionists gathered in Enniskillen to mark International Workers' Memorial Day, in a solemn event organised by the Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions.

The annual commemoration honoured workers who have lost their lives due to workplace incidents or occupational illness, bringing together representatives from across the trade union movement. Banners from a range of unions reflected a shared commitment to worker safety and solidarity. *Jacquie White*, Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, addressed the gathering, highlighting the importance of remembrance and the responsibility to protect workers. She reminded attendees that behind every statistic is a life lost, a grieving family, and an affected community, stressing the need for vigilance and stronger protections to ensure workers return home safely. A wreath-laying ceremony formed a central part of the event, with a moment of reflection for those who never came home, underlining the human cost of workplace accidents.

Among those present was *Pauline Hurst*, Vice-President of the Ulster Teachers' Union and a member of the Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions. The commemoration served as both remembrance and a call to action, ending with a clear message: **Remember the Dead, and Fight for the Living.**



NORTHERN IRELAND REPRESENTED AT GLOBAL TEACHING SUMMIT IN ESTONIA

Northern Ireland was represented on the global stage as Jacquie White, General Secretary, attended the International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) in Tallinn, Estonia. Representing the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC), she participated alongside Minister of Education Paul Givan in high-level discussions focused on the future of teaching and learning.

The ISTP Summit brings together education ministers, union leaders and teaching professionals from some of the world's highest-performing and most rapidly improving education systems. The event provides a platform to share best practice, strengthen the teaching profession, and explore ways to improve outcomes for students.

Discussions at the summit centred on key challenges facing education systems globally, including teacher recruitment and retention, professional development, and the evolving role of educators in a changing world.

Participation in the summit ensures that Northern Ireland remains engaged in international dialogue, learning from global experience while contributing its own perspectives on education policy and practice. Further information on the summit is available at: <https://istp2026.ee>



AI IN EDUCATION: SUPPORTING TEACHERS, NOT REPLACING THEM

Delegates at this year's UTU Annual Conference heard a timely and thought-provoking presentation from CEC observer Matthew Robinson on the growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education.

In a profession already facing significant workload pressures, the session explored how AI—particularly generative tools—can be used in a practical, measured way to support teachers in their day-to-day work.

A TOOL TO SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The presentation emphasised a clear and important message: AI is not a replacement for teachers. Rather, it should be understood as a tool that can assist with planning, administration, and resource creation.

AI can function as:

- **A rapid drafting tool**
- **A source of ideas and lesson structure**
- **A means of reducing repetitive administrative tasks**

However, delegates were reminded that AI-generated content is not always accurate and must always be checked and professionally refined.

Concerns were also raised regarding the potential impact on pupils' independent thinking and the need to ensure AI is used in a way that supports, rather than diminishes, learning.

ETHICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Delegates also heard about wider considerations surrounding AI use, including:

- **Data protection and safeguarding responsibilities**
- **The risk of misinformation**
- **The environmental cost associated with large-scale AI systems**

These factors highlight the need for clear guidance and responsible use within the profession.

A BALANCED APPROACH

The overall message to conference was one of balance. AI represents an emerging development with the potential to support teachers, particularly in reducing workload. However, its use must be informed, cautious, and always guided by professional judgement.

As the education landscape continues to evolve, the UTU will continue to engage with these developments, ensuring that the interests of teachers and pupils remain at the forefront.



[How Schools Are Using AI In 2026: 7 Practical Use Cases From School Leaders](#)

CLICK
HERE



ADDRESSING WORKLOAD PRESSURES

A key focus of the session was the potential for AI to alleviate workload—an issue consistently raised by members.

Examples shared included:

- **Producing lesson outlines aligned with curriculum requirements**
- **Creating differentiated materials for pupils with additional needs**
- **Simplifying complex texts for accessibility**
- **Generating marking criteria and report comments**
- **Drafting routine communications with parents**

Used appropriately, such tools can reduce time spent on administrative tasks and allow teachers to focus on teaching and learning.

PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT REMAINS CENTRAL

While acknowledging the benefits, the presentation also underlined the importance of maintaining professional autonomy.

Teachers must remain in control of all materials used in the classroom. AI outputs require careful review to ensure accuracy, appropriateness, and alignment with curriculum and safeguarding requirements.



OVAR-DRESSED DAY BRINGS COLOUR, COMMUNITY AND £1,246 FOR CHARITY

Victoria College Belfast marked the end of term on Friday 27 March 2026 with a vibrant and purposeful “Ovar-Dressed Day” in support of Target Ovarian Cancer, as part of Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month.

Staff and pupils across both campuses embraced the non-uniform fundraiser with enthusiasm, replacing traditional school dress with an array of creative and colourful outfits. From imaginative fancy dress to simple but playful additions, the day struck a balance between fun and inclusivity, with a clear emphasis on participation without pressure to purchase new items.

The event not only provided a welcome boost of energy at the end of a busy term but also reinforced the school's commitment to community engagement and charitable action. By encouraging pupils to take part in an accessible and light-hearted way, the initiative highlighted how schools can successfully combine wellbeing, creativity and social awareness.

A total of £1,246 was raised for Target Ovarian Cancer, contributing to the charity's work in promoting early diagnosis, advancing research and supporting those affected by ovarian cancer across the UK.

Each year, around 7,400 women in the UK are diagnosed with ovarian cancer. A central aim of Target Ovarian Cancer is to raise awareness of the main symptoms so that more cases can be identified earlier. These key symptoms include persistent bloating, feeling full quickly or loss of appetite, abdominal or pelvic pain, and needing to urinate more frequently or urgently than usual. The charity emphasises that these symptoms are typically new, frequent and persistent, and should always be checked by a GP.

Beyond symptom awareness, Target Ovarian Cancer provides vital information and support to those affected by the disease. This includes guidance on diagnosis, treatment options and access to clinical trials, as well as specialist nurse support for individuals and families navigating what can be a challenging time.

Events such as Ovar-Dressed Day play an important role in supporting this work, not only by raising essential funds but also by helping to spread awareness within the wider community. The generosity and enthusiasm shown by pupils and staff at Victoria College Belfast highlight the positive impact that school-led initiatives can have.

The day provided a fitting and uplifting conclusion to the term, demonstrating the strength of the school community and its commitment to making a meaningful difference.



Do you know the symptoms of ovarian cancer?

BLOATED TUMMY

ALWAYS FEELING FULL

NEEDING TO WEE MORE

TUMMY PAIN



Early diagnosis saves lives



For many families living in Kenya's slums, poverty is a generational cycle shaped by limited access to education, healthcare, and employment. Jengana, a Northern Ireland charity working year-round in Kenya, is helping break that cycle through education and community support.

Jengana funds school fees for children and young people from primary school through to university, ensuring long-term educational support. Many of those supported come from Kibera and Mukuru, where overcrowding, poor sanitation, hunger, and unemployment make daily life extremely difficult.

The charity identifies children with potential and helps provide safer living conditions, regular schooling, and proper nutrition. At the Nifikie School in Mukuru, Jengana's feeding programme provides many children with their only daily meal, improving attendance, concentration, and wellbeing.

Jengana also works with a rehabilitation centre supporting former street children through education and vocational training. Two young men who once lived on the streets are now completing college and vocational courses through Jengana sponsorship.

At Kipepeo Children's Home, 18 children receive care, education, meals, and emotional support in a safe and stable environment. In rural Mara Silalei, Jengana supports wider community development projects, including classroom repairs and educational resources.

This July, pupils and staff from schools across Northern Ireland will travel to Kenya to volunteer with Jengana, supporting schools, community projects, and Kipepeo Children's Home.



FROM POVERTY TO POSSIBILITY: HOW JENGANA IS TRANSFORMING YOUNG LIVES

Jengana
Building Each Other

One of the most inspiring examples of Jengana's impact is the story of a young girl who grew up in the slums of Nairobi. For her, life was a daily struggle, but Jengana stepped in and supported her through primary school and beyond. Today, she has graduated from university with a Diploma in Procurement and Logistics. She now has the qualifications, confidence, and opportunity to build a career that will lift her and her family out of poverty. Her story is not an exception; it illustrates what is possible when education is prioritised.

Jengana is also supporting two young people as they complete their teacher training, exemplifying the charity's long-term vision. These future educators will not only transform their own lives but also shape the lives of hundreds of children in their communities. It is a cycle of empowerment—education creating educators who will, in turn, create more opportunities for others.

Jengana extends its sincere thanks to the International Relations Committee for their ongoing support, encouragement, and commitment to this important work.





UTU REPRESENTATIVES ATTEND WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY AT STORMONT

On Monday 27 April, Jacquie White, Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, joined Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA, Minister for the Economy, at a Workers' Memorial Day wreath laying ceremony at Stormont Estate. The solemn event honoured workers who lost their lives at work or through work-related illness, acknowledging the profound grief experienced by their loved ones. Representing the Ulster Teachers' Union were Stephen McCord, Joseph Wyglendacz, and Janice Mullan, attending alongside trade union representatives, public figures, and campaigners dedicated to improving workplace safety and protecting workers' rights.

Workers' Memorial Day provides an important opportunity to reflect on the human cost of unsafe working conditions and to renew the commitment to safer, healthier workplaces for everyone. The ceremony also highlighted the importance of strong health and safety laws, effective enforcement, and collective action to prevent future tragedies and ensure no family endures such devastating loss.

Those attending observed a moment of reflection and paid heartfelt tribute to the families, friends, and colleagues affected by workplace deaths and their lasting impact on communities and workplaces across Northern Ireland.

Remember the dead, fight for the living.



A LIFETIME OF DEDICATION: ROBINA ATKINSON CELEBRATES 90TH BIRTHDAY AND 25 YEARS OF SERVICE TO RTANI

There were warm wishes and fond memories shared recently as Robina Atkinson (former Honorary Treasurer of Belfast Branch and Area Association) celebrated her 90th birthday. Pictured with Robina is Brendan McGlone (Hon. Secretary Retired Teachers' Association N.I.), presenting her with a crystal plaque in recognition of 25 years of service to the RTANI, along with a beautiful bouquet of flowers and a special birthday card to mark the occasion and honour her many years of dedication to education and to her colleagues.

Robina devoted much of her teaching career to working in and around Belfast, where she was greatly respected for her commitment, kindness, and professionalism. Alongside her work in the classroom, she also gave generously of her time to the Ulster Teachers' Union, serving faithfully as Belfast Branch and

Area Association Treasurer and supporting fellow teachers throughout the years. Her life and career also brought opportunities further afield, as she spent time living abroad at the start of her career, eventually settled back home. These experiences contributed to the rich and varied life she has enjoyed, while her strong connection to education has never faded.

Even today, Robina continues to take a keen interest in the teaching profession. Never afraid to share her thoughts on modern teaching techniques, she still follows developments in education closely and enjoys discussing the changes she has witnessed over the decades. Everyone at UTU wishes Robina continued good health, happiness, and many more wonderful celebrations in the years ahead.

MAY DAY | BELFAST | MONDAY 4TH MAY

STANDING TOGETHER



UTU members joined workers from across Northern Ireland in a powerful May Day display of solidarity, unity, and shared purpose in Belfast.

The annual event brought together trade union members, community organisations, and supporters from across the region—celebrating the achievements of workers while highlighting the continuing importance of collective action.

"We stand together in support of better conditions for all workers."

The event offered members a chance to reflect on the challenges currently facing working people — including pressures on public services, rising workloads, and the need for continued investment in education. Teachers from across the union marched with pride, reaffirming their commitment to securing a positive future for education.

Members stood alongside colleagues from other unions and sectors, demonstrating the strength that comes from working together in support of fairness, equality, and respect in the workplace. For many, the Belfast celebrations were not only a show of solidarity, but an opportunity to connect with fellow trade unionists and strengthen their shared commitment to defending workers' rights and public services.

May Day remains an important occasion in the trade union calendar, recognising the achievements and sacrifices of workers past and present while also focusing on the work that still lies ahead. UTU is proud to support events such as this, which continue to highlight the importance of unity, collective voice, and standing together in support of better conditions for all workers.

KEY THEMES

- Protecting workers' rights and public services
- Securing investment in education
- Fairness, equality, and workplace respect
- Unity across trade union sectors
- Honouring workers past and present

Why May Day Matters

May Day remains a cornerstone of the trade union calendar — recognising the achievements and sacrifices of workers while focusing on the road ahead.

ON THE GROUND

UTU teachers marched alongside colleagues from multiple unions and community groups, part of a broad coalition representing working people across Northern Ireland.



ON THE ROAD FOR OUR YOUNG ARTISTS

UTU President Janice Mullan has criss-crossed the province visiting primary schools to personally honour the winners and commended entrants of this year's International Relations and Global Solidarity art competition.



UTU President Janice Mullan embarked on an extensive tour of primary schools across Northern Ireland this term, personally delivering Certificates of Achievement to young artists who entered — and won — the Union's International Relations and Global Solidarity annual art competition.

The competition invited pupils from Special and Foundation Stage through to key stage 1 and 2 to illustrate their vision of community, connection and celebration — many choosing the theme 'My Favourite Christmas' as their creative lens.

"Every single child who entered showed real creativity and flair. These visits have been an absolute privilege." From Aughnacloy to Irvinestown, Dromore to Mullaglass, the President's schedule took her the length and breadth of the country — a journey she embraced wholeheartedly.

At each school the President was warmly welcomed by staff and pupils alike. In several schools she also took time to read to younger classes, bringing an extra layer of connection to her visits beyond the formal prize-giving. Older pupils at one school were thrilled to try on the presidential chain of office.

"Every single child who entered showed real imagination and creativity. These visits have been an absolute privilege."

JANICE MULLAN · UTU PRESIDENT

Competition Winners

First Prize

Hope Johnston
Robyn Whiteside
Naomi Tate
Samira Kar

Winners

Jayden
Tommy Olive
Nika
Emily Orr
Bella Noble
Lola Gray
Amy Alexander
Cheryl Mushayakarara
Adam Wilson-O'Neill
Jacob Adefulvon
Orestas Smetona

Highly Commended

Amara
Krisha Manabat

Painting from the Heart

How one teacher's award-winning swan study reflects the quiet strength of our union

"The union looks so very composed on the surface—just like the swan — but underneath, they're working like crazy."

Our lovely president asked me to write a little bit about myself after a piece of my work became the winner of the first teachers' Art and Design competition this year. Firstly, I would like to thank Janice and the foresight she had in setting this competition up. We all know how busy teaching has become and how demanding it is of our time and energy, but it did make me think I need to try and make time for myself and doing something I love. Sometimes it is good to focus on ourselves and our own personal creativity as teaching my subject often drains me as I constantly give ideas, energy and thoughts to the pupils.

I have been teaching since 1989 and still love working with the pupils who are as passionate about all aspects of Art and Design as I am. Whether it's a year 8 who suddenly clicks with tone and value or a year 14 who has a "Monet moment" I love the journey and the healing powers of my subject.

When Janice asked what inspires me, I have to say it is the beauty that surrounds us all that we are often too busy to notice. As Wordsworth said, "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers, little we see in nature that is ours."

The study I completed of the swan looking so elegant floating and preening on the surface of rippling water reminded me of the work of the union. Our union looks so very composed on the surface just like the swan, but as we know, they and the swan are working like crazy underneath.

Take my advice and make time next year to produce a piece of work and enter this wonderful competition.



Grace McCullough receives her Certificate of Achievement from UTU President Janice Mullan

Building Inclusive Workplaces

A recent joint training session brought INTO, NEU and UTU members together to explore practical ways of supporting autistic colleagues and pupils, highlighting the power of collaboration in creating more inclusive workplaces.

There was a strong spirit of collaboration at the recent joint INTO, NEU and UTU training session, **"Supporting Autistic People in the Workplace."** The event was a welcome reminder of what can be achieved when our unions come together, share expertise and work towards a common purpose.

Bringing three organisations around the same table is no small achievement, and the enthusiasm in the room showed the clear appetite among members for practical, compassionate guidance on creating workplaces where everyone can thrive.

Our sincere thanks go to Sarah Long from Autism NI, who facilitated and delivered an engaging, informative and thought-provoking session. Sarah brought expertise, warmth and clarity to the discussion, combining lived experience with practical advice that delegates could take back into their own schools and workplaces.

The session explored how small, thoughtful adjustments can make a significant difference to autistic colleagues and pupils. Changes in communication, routine, expectations and the physical environment can all help to create spaces that are more inclusive, supportive and accessible.

Thanks must also go to everyone who attended and contributed so openly to the discussion. It was encouraging to hear members share their own experiences and reflect on how we can all play a part in building more understanding workplaces. Sessions like this remind us that inclusion is not simply a policy or a box to be ticked. It is an ongoing, shared responsibility that grows stronger when we listen to and learn from one another.

The partnership between INTO, NEU and UTU provides a positive model for future collaboration, and we hope to build on this work in the months ahead.

Members who would like to see similar training delivered in their school or branch are encouraged to contact their union representative. By continuing to widen understanding and share good practice, we can help ensure that inclusive and supportive workplaces become the norm in every staffroom.



Alexander Bowman

THE WORKING MAN WHO CARRIED BELFAST TO WESTMINSTER

A new Ulster History Circle Blue Plaque honours the founding secretary of the Belfast Trades Council — a flaxdresser, orator and trade union pioneer whose fight for the vote and fair wages still echoes through the movement today.

FROM THE ADDRESS BY JACQUIE WHITE, GENERAL SECRETARY, ULSTER TEACHERS' UNION

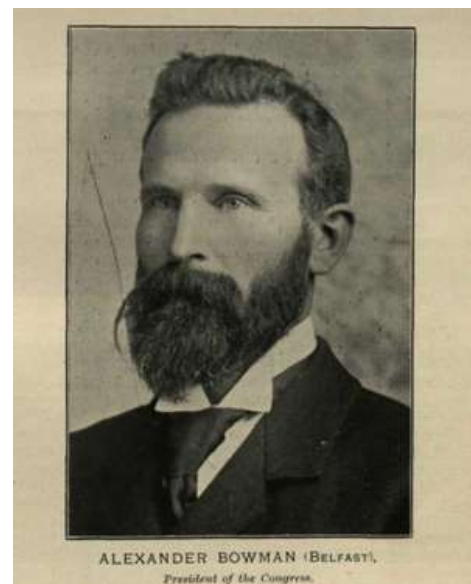
It gives me great pleasure to be involved with the unveiling of the latest Blue Plaque from the Ulster History Circle — a tribute to the trade union and labour work of Alexander Bowman, known to history as the People's Champion. The plaque now stands at 45–47 Lower Donegall Street, home of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, fittingly chosen for its deep trade union connection.

Bowman was a pioneering trade unionist, prominent in the labour movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Recognising that a single union could do little against an implacable employer, he was central to the creation of the Belfast Trades Council and served as its Secretary from its foundation in 1881.

A VOICE FOR THE VOTE

A brilliant orator, Bowman was sought as a speaker by labour bodies across Britain. Addressing a meeting of Liberals, he argued that Irish householders deserved the same voting rights as those in England, Scotland and Wales, noting that of 50,000 householders in Belfast, only 30,000 held the vote.

Two months later the franchise was extended to Ireland, and Belfast's parliamentary seats rose from two to four.



ALEXANDER BOWMAN (BELFAST) — President of the Congress. The People's Champion, founding Secretary of the Belfast Trades Council.

A LIFE IN BRIEF

- **1881** — Founding Secretary of the Belfast Trades Council
- **1885** — First working-class Irishman to stand for Westminster (North Belfast)
- **1888** — His campaign delivers Belfast Central Library
- **1897** — Tops the poll in Duncairn; leads six Labour councillors onto Belfast Corporation
- **1901** — Elected President of the Irish Trade Union Congress, Sligo
- **1924** — Dies; buried at Victoria Cemetery, Carrickfergus

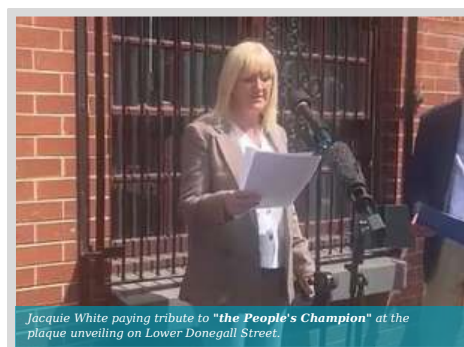


FIRST TO STAND FOR THE WORKING MAN

Bowman made history as the first working-class Irishman to seek a seat at Westminster. When the general election was called in October 1885, a deputation arrived at his Berlin Street home asking him to stand in North Belfast. He stood as an Independent — the first time a representative of working people contested a Belfast seat — losing to the Conservative MP and linen magnate William Ewart, who was also his employer.

Undeterred, Bowman and his colleagues found success in 1897. Selected for Duncairn on a manifesto demanding direct labour and fair wages, he topped the poll and led six Labour councillors onto Belfast Corporation. In May 1901 he was unanimously elected President of the Irish Trade Union Congress at Sligo.

Born a Catholic and raised a Presbyterian, Bowman's outlook was forged early — a flaxdresser's apprentice at ten, sacked at twenty for joining a workers' delegation. His later years were quieter, but his legacy endures.



Jacqui White paying tribute to "the People's Champion" at the plaque unveiling on Lower Donegall Street.



Culcrow Primary School Celebrates 200 Years of Learning and Community Spirit

Culcrow Primary School recently celebrated a remarkable milestone as pupils, staff, families, friends and members of the wider school community gathered at Aghadowey Presbyterian Church to mark the school's 200th Anniversary. The occasion was made even more special by the attendance of Richard Pengelly, Education Authority Chief Executive, and Mervyn Storey, Education Authority Chairperson, who joined the celebrations in honouring two centuries of learning, service, community spirit and achievement.

As the school reflects with pride on its rich history and the generations of children who have passed through its doors, it also looks forward with confidence and ambition. Recent investment from the Education Authority will support the development of a new modular canteen facility, alongside continued improvements to outdoor spaces and teaching areas. These important enhancements further reinforce the school's ongoing commitment to providing the very best possible environment for pupils to learn, grow, thrive and flourish for many generations to come. Also pictured in the photograph are Principal Mr David Kearney and Chairperson of the Board of Governors Mr Ryan Pollock.



Jim Quinn Book Honours Teachers' Fight for Fairness and Respect

As part of this year's May Day celebrations, Fermanagh Trades Council held a special event to launch *Red Flags and Rising Voices*, a new book by local trade union activist Jim Quinn. The book explores Fermanagh's labour history from 1930 to 1979, highlighting the role of ordinary workers in shaping the county.

One chapter focuses on schools and those who worked in them, showing how teachers in often poorly resourced rural settings united to seek change. It covers campaigns on pay, the raising of the school-leaving age to 15, concerns over inspection, and the return of free school milk in the 1970s. Quinn places particular emphasis on cooperation between members of the Ulster Teachers' Union and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, who worked together despite belonging to different unions.

The book is a strong tribute to worker solidarity in Fermanagh, while the schools chapter underlines teachers' long tradition of campaigning for fairness, better conditions and professional respect.

Be Positive. Be the Light.

*Adam Watson's legacy, lighting the way
for children facing cancer*

WHO WE ARE

Inspired by courage, driven by compassion

BPositive is a Northern Ireland-based children's cancer charity inspired by the courage and compassion of Adam Watson from Banbridge. Adam was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia in 2019 at the age of seven.

While undergoing treatment, he and his parents, Sara and David, established B Positive to help other children and families facing the realities of childhood cancer. Adam became known for his bravery, positivity and determination to think of others even during his own illness.

"Even if you brought nothing, you brought enough"

— ADAM WATSON, 30TH MAY 2022

His story touched people across Northern Ireland and helped build a wider community of support known as "Adam's Army". Adam sadly passed away on 3 August 2022, aged nine, but his legacy continues through the charity's work and the commitment of his family and supporters.



Adam with parents Sara and David — a family united in love and purpose

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Each year, around 70 to 80 children in Northern Ireland are diagnosed with cancer, and the impact on families can be overwhelming. B Positive aims to ensure no family feels alone by offering support, understanding and hope during incredibly difficult times.

WHAT WE DO

Practical support, rooted in lived experience

BPositive works to improve the experience and outcomes for families affected by childhood cancer.

- Providing practical and emotional support to families during treatment and recovery
- Funding equipment, resources and comfort items that make long hospital stays more manageable
- Offering bespoke hospital support cases with everyday essentials for children and carers
- Supporting research and initiatives that aim to improve treatment and care
- Raising awareness of childhood cancer and advocating for better support services
- Bringing moments of joy and normality through special experiences, vouchers and family support



70–80

CHILDREN DIAGNOSED WITH
CANCER IN NI EACH YEAR

£506

RAISED BY IVEAGH PRIMARY
SCHOOL ALONE



Iveagh Primary School presents £506.78 — one of many community acts of generosity

OUR VISION & GET INVOLVED

To honour Adam Watson's legacy by improving the lives of children diagnosed with cancer, supporting their families, and contributing to better outcomes through awareness, practical help and collaboration.

We are grateful to every school, teacher and community member who helps us carry this work forward. To learn more or get involved, visit www.b-positive.co or follow us online.



ANNUAL

GOLF TOURNAMENT

WEDNESDAY
1 JULY 2026

9.30AM

**ROE VALLEY
RESORT**

ENTRY FEE

£50.00

Includes meal at
Fratellis

OPEN TO

**MEMBERS &
FRIENDS**

INCLUDES

**SNACKS &
MEAL
PROVIDED**

**SCAN
ME! >>**



GENERAL SECRETARY ON TOUR

FOUR DAYS IN YORKSHIRE WITH DRUMRANE PRIMARY SCHOOL

When the Year 6 and 7 pupils of Drumrane Primary School invited General Secretary Jacquie White to join their residential trip to Kettlewell, she said yes — bin bags, ferry crossings, pony trekking and all!



DRUMRANE PRIMARY SCHOOL — ON TOUR, MAY 2026

It was with great pleasure and delight that the General Secretary accepted the invitation to join the Year 6 and 7 pupils on their residential trip to Kettlewell in Yorkshire — and what a few days it turned out to be.

The trip took place during the second week of May, with the group setting off at 5.30am on the Tuesday morning to catch the ferry. There was great anticipation and excitement in the air — from children and parents alike — as the early start did nothing to dampen the spirits of a group ready for adventure.

Four packed days followed, and the itinerary barely paused for breath. There was go-karting, slides and much more at Dalscone Farm; the Water Park and Pleasure Beach in Blackpool; and a step back in time at Beamish Museum, explored the proper way — aboard its old-fashioned buses and trams.

Add in pony trekking, fishing, football and a well-earned spot of retail therapy at the Outlet Centre in Gretna Green — and much, much more besides — and it is fair to say a wonderful time was had by all. Through it all, children and teachers alike played their part in making the trip such a resounding success.



ROYAL DUTIES • No job too big or too small — the General Secretary carried out her bin-bag duties with great aplomb and pride!

POSTCARDS FROM KETTLEWELL

From a Victorian schoolroom to the top of a water slide — four days, a hundred memories.



BEAMISH BY TRAM



GONE FISHING



PLEASURE BEACH



SCHOOL, 1900S STYLE



NEW SHERIFFS IN TOWN



SPLASHDOWN, BLACKPOOL



PONY TREKKING



BASE CAMP, KETTLEWELL



SETTING SAIL

WITH HEARTFELT THANKS

The General Secretary would like to record her sincere thanks to **Drumrane Primary School** for the chance to take part with such an amazing group of children, and to the parents for placing their confidence in her over the course of the trip.

Thanks, too, to the teachers — **Mrs Steen, Mrs Glass and Miss Jones** — for their warmth and friendship, for the seamless organisation behind the scenes, and for making sure she didn't get lost along the way!

It was a privilege to share in so many memorable moments, and a reminder of exactly why these residential experiences matter so much to young people.



Safe hands: the Drumrane staff team keeping everyone (including the GS) on track.

And to the children, the General Secretary has just one word to say

SHAKIRA!!



YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE — THANK YOU FOR A TRIP TO REMEMBER.

A Memorable Evening with Michael D Higgins

By Janice Mullan



Guests gather for the Irish National Teachers' Organisation dinner, with former President Michael D Higgins and his wife, Sabina, seated front and centre.

The General Secretary and I were honoured to attend a recent dinner hosted by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation as fraternal guests, and were especially pleased to do so in the company of former President Michael D Higgins and his wife, Sabina. It was a gracious and memorable occasion, marked by warmth, courtesy and a strong sense of shared purpose.

Occasions of this nature carry significance well beyond the social event itself. They serve as a reminder of the enduring bonds between sister unions and of the importance of sustaining relationships grounded in mutual respect, shared values and collective purpose. Throughout the evening, I was deeply conscious that I was present on behalf of UTU and its members.

It was a privilege to represent our union and to reflect the dedication and professionalism our members bring each day to schools and classrooms across Northern Ireland.

It was a pleasure to spend time with former President Higgins and his wife, Sabina. Former President Higgins is widely respected for his intellect, humanity and lifelong commitment to equality and social justice, while Sabina Higgins has made a distinguished contribution to public and cultural life. Among the more light-hearted moments of the evening was a conversation about former President Higgins's longstanding affection for Bernese Mountain dogs. That was a subject close to my heart, as my daughter has one of her own, Patch, whose playful nature includes an unfortunate enthusiasm for gobbling socks. It was an enjoyable exchange that added an extra note of warmth to an already memorable evening.

“

“SUCH OCCASIONS SERVE AS AN IMPORTANT REMINDER OF THE VALUE OF SOLIDARITY”

What remained with me most strongly was the sense of shared purpose that characterised the evening. At a time when education continues to face considerable pressures and teachers require a clear and credible voice, such occasions serve as an important reminder of the value of solidarity. Teachers' unions, north and south, have a vital role to play in supporting members, defending education and advocating for the interests of children and young people. The spirit of fellowship evident throughout the evening was a timely reflection of the work we continue to pursue together.

We left the dinner with a renewed sense of pride in having represented UTU and with sincere gratitude to INTO for their generous invitation and hospitality. Above all, the evening reinforced for me the strength of our union, the commitment of our members and the importance of continuing to ensure that teachers have a clear, principled and respected voice. It was a memorable occasion and one I was honoured to attend as President of UTU.

FARM TO FORK

FARM



Bringing the country to the classroom — a project that inspires pupils and community alike



Pupils at Dungannon Primary School are continuing to enjoy a unique and immersive learning experience through the school's Farm to Fork Project, which explores the origins of food and the vital role farming plays in both local communities and global sustainability.

THE STORY BEGINS

The project was inspired in November 2023, when Principal Mr D. Thompson returned to his farming roots to support his family. Following his younger brother Henry's diagnosis with leukaemia, Mr Thompson stepped in to assist his other brother, Ben, with the daily care of cattle at Aughafad Farm, Pomeroy. News of Mr Thompson's involvement quickly spread throughout the school, sparking curiosity among pupils and staff. Mrs Alexander, a Primary Six teacher, saw an opportunity to transform this real-life experience into a meaningful educational journey — developing classroom activities focused on agriculture and food production, and completing a Master's dissertation on the impact of Farm to Fork learning on pupil engagement.

MEET BETSY

A key highlight came in October 2024, when Mr Thompson and Mrs Alexander successfully bid on a young heifer at Granville Farmers' Market. The heifer, affectionately named Betsy, took up residence at Aughafad Farm.

Frequently pupils visited the farm to reconnect with Betsy and learn about seasonal farming routines. Ben explained how farmers care for livestock during the colder months and the steps taken to maintain animal health.

Pupils were thrilled to see Betsy thriving — she weighed an impressive **540 kg!** The project has also supported Literacy and Numeracy skills, with pupils creating graphs to track Betsy's growth.

THIS YEAR'S TOPICS

WHAT WE'RE EXPLORING

- Different types of farmer — beef, sheep, chicken and arable
- The journey of food from farm to fork
- Jobs in farming — Vets, Auctioneers and Sales Reps
- The food industry in the Dungannon area
- Healthy eating and nutrition



"This project has brought learning to life in a way that's deeply personal and rooted in our community. It's about more than farming — it's about compassion, curiosity, and making a difference"

— MR THOMPSON, PRINCIPAL



FANE VALLEY STEPS IN

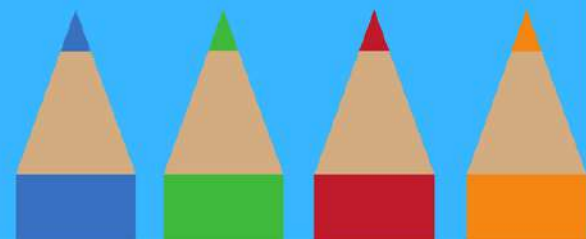
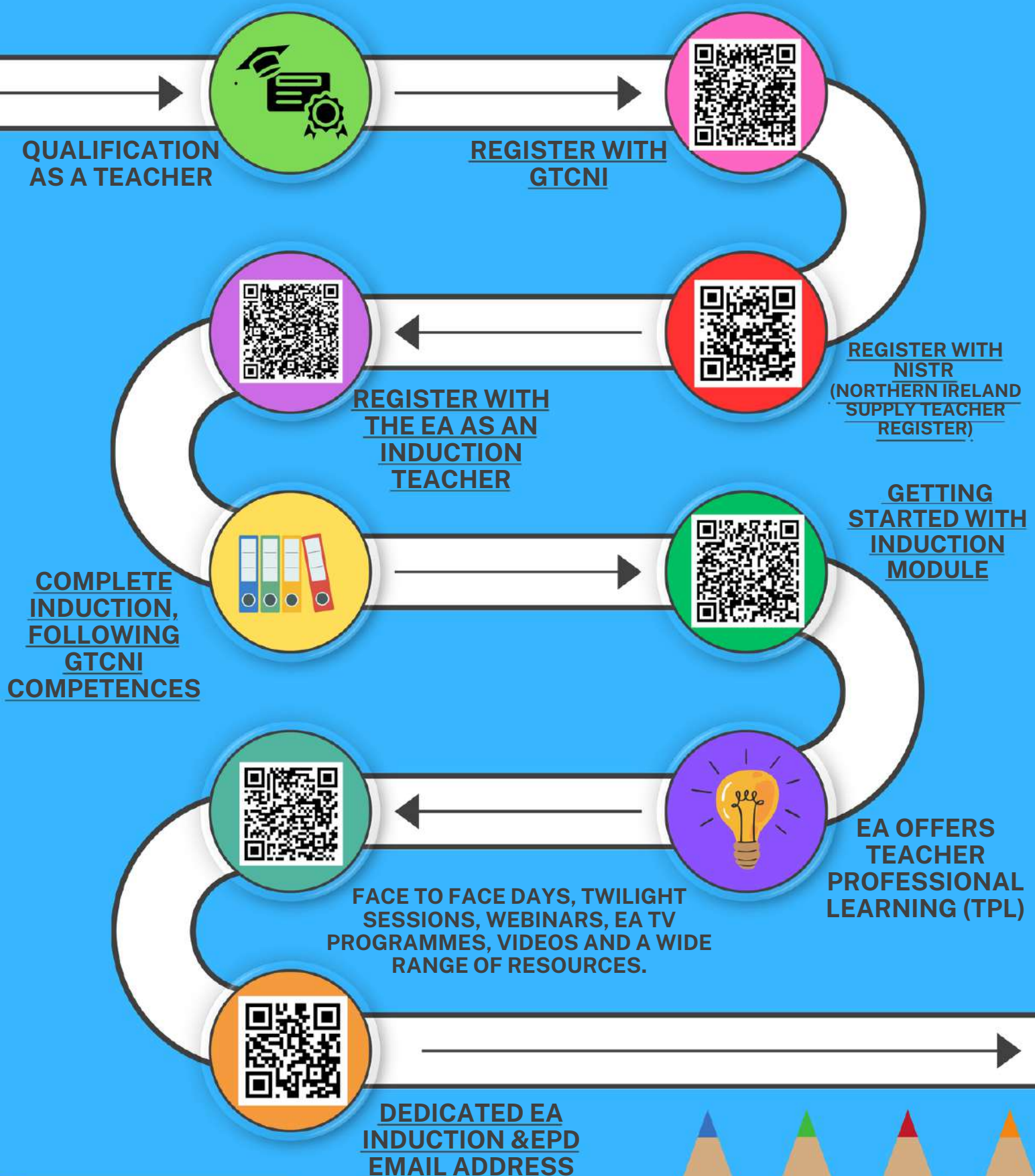
The school is especially grateful to **Fane Valley Store**, which supported the initiative by providing animal feed for Betsy — a wonderful example of local business supporting local schools and communities.

In a heartfelt conclusion to the project, **Betsy was sold at Granville Farmers' Mart for £3525 on Wednesday 17th September**, with all proceeds going to **Leukaemia and Lymphoma NI** — a charity very close to the school's heart.



Ben demonstrates seasonal feeding to an inquisitive class

For more information and updates on the Farm to Fork Project, please visit www.dungannonps.co.uk



Ballymoney Model lead the *way*

A ninth Green Flag — and an Ambassador Award — cap a remarkable run for **Ballymoney Model Integrated Primary School**, where sustainability has become part of the very fabric of school life.



THE ECO-SCHOOLS COMMITTEE & PUPILS CELEBRATE OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

AT THE CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS Eco-Schools Awards Ceremony, Ballymoney Model Integrated Primary School was presented with the Eco-Schools Green Flag Award for 2025–2028 — the internationally recognised standard for environmental excellence in schools.

Remarkably, it is the ninth Green Flag secured by the school's Eco-Schools Committee, working under the very able leadership of Mrs June Murphy — a long-time activist of the Ulster Teachers' Union. Mrs Murphy also led the school to the prestigious Ambassador Eco-Schools Award for 2025–2028, recognising sustained, whole-school commitment to sustainability and pupil-led environmental action that goes well beyond the classroom.

Her work was further honoured at the ceremony with the Eco-Teacher of the Year Award for 2025–2026 — a fitting tribute to years of dedication in embedding green thinking into everyday learning.

Congratulations go to Mrs Murphy and all the dedicated, hard-working members of the Committee for their excellent leadership in weaving sustainability into the school's ethos — and for inspiring the next generation to care for the world around them.



“Excellent leadership in embedding sustainability into the very ethos of the school.”

9th GREENFLAG AWARD
FOR THE SCHOOL



MRS JUNE MURPHY · ECO-SCHOOLS LEAD

THE HONOURS ROLL

- **Green Flag Award** — 2025–2028 (9th)
- **Ambassador Eco-Schools Award** — 2025–2028
- **Eco-Teacher of the Year** — Mrs June Murphy, 2025–2026



Bonjour, *Paris!* from Hardy Memorial PS

Three days of culture, crêpes and pure delight as our pupils swap the playground for the boulevards — and discover the famous “6–7 craze” has gone distinctly global.



SAY FROMAGE — Rooftops & sunsets from the Arc de Triomphe

During the recent trip to Paris, pupils from Hardy Memorial School shared their flight with UTU President, Janice Mullan. She was highly impressed by their politeness and excellent behaviour throughout the journey.

The pupils showed great excitement about the trip while remaining respectful and well-mannered, reflecting very positively on the school and their families. On her return, Mrs Mullan contacted the school to praise the pupils for being such outstanding ambassadors.

A BREATHTAKING START

Our recent school trip to Paris was an unforgettable adventure from start to finish. Excitement filled the air as we departed from Belfast International Airport, heading for Charles de Gaulle and a few days packed with culture, fun and plenty of laughter.

One of the highlights was our visit to the iconic Eiffel Tower. Seeing it up close was truly breathtaking, and it gave us the perfect start to our Paris experience. Later, we enjoyed a relaxing cruise along the River Seine, taking in the city's stunning landmarks from the water. It was during this cruise that, much to everyone's amusement, we realised the famous “6–7 craze” wasn't just a Richhill phenomenon — it had clearly gone global!

SUNSET & SPIRES

That evening brought another memorable moment: our visit to the Arc de Triomphe at sunset. Watching the city glow in the evening light was something we won't forget anytime soon. The following day was the one we had all been waiting for — Disneyland Paris! Although the weather wasn't exactly on our side, it didn't dampen our spirits.

We made the most of every minute, squeezing in as many exhilarating rides as possible before inevitably splashing the cash in the Disney store.

CRÊPES & KEEPSAKES

On our final day we visited Notre Dame Cathedral. Faced with a queue that seemed to stretch for miles, we wisely chose to explore the surrounding streets instead. This proved a hit — especially with the souvenir shop owners and crêpe makers, who were more than happy to welcome us. What's that saying about money burning a hole in your pocket?!

Overall, it was a trip filled with laughter, discovery and shared experiences. Without a doubt, these are memories that will last a lifetime. A huge thank you to all the staff who gave up their time to accompany us and make our adventure as memorable as possible.

**"Watching the city glow
in the evening light was
something we won't
forget anytime soon."**

— ON THE ARC DE TRIOMPHE
AT SUNSET



Balmoral Show

Janice Mullan reflects on school visits, family memories and the chance to speak up for teachers.

Balmoral Park - school visits, public engagement and the education community.

SCENES FROM THE SHOW



Students from Dungannon Primary School enjoying the buzz of Balmoral Show.

It was a pleasure to attend the Balmoral Show and to meet so many members enjoying the occasion with their families or accompanying pupils on school visits. Virtually every child I met carried at least one bag overflowing with free samples, hats, magazines and pencils harvested as treasured souvenirs from the various stands. Watching their excitement brought back fond memories of my own children returning home from the show with enough pens to last until next year. Those small tokens are often what children remember for years afterwards and are very much part of the unique atmosphere and tradition of the Balmoral Show experience. As the day turned colder, I was glad of a free woolly hat myself!

The show continues to hold a special place in the lives of many children and their families from both urban and rural communities across Northern Ireland, myself included as I am married to a dairy farmer. The show offers valuable opportunities for young people to connect with agriculture, food production and countryside life beyond the classroom.

Throughout the event, I also had the opportunity to meet with politicians, who themselves recognised the significance of the show as an important gathering within Northern Ireland life while engaging with the public. I took this opportunity to raise ongoing issues of workload and the growing number of assaults on teachers, amongst other pressures facing the profession.

It was equally encouraging to peruse the prize-winning livestock, admire the skill of the Young Farmers' Tractor Handling finalists as they reversed a tractor with a roller on behind, as well as visit the many stands offering educational resources and support for schools and young people. This highlights the strong links between education, community and industry that the Balmoral Show continues to foster each year.



UTU President Janice Mullan with Deputy First Minister, Emma Little-Pengelly.



UTU President Janice Mullan discussed teacher workload and classroom pressures with UUP representatives Diana Armstrong and Jon Burrows.

The show offers valuable opportunities for young people to connect with agriculture, food production and countryside life beyond the classroom.

APPLICATIONS OPEN THIS SEPTEMBER

Bringing the Farm **into** the Classroom

Teachers across Northern Ireland are being encouraged to start identifying potential Year 11 teams now, ahead of September's launch of the 2026–2027 ABP Angus Youth Challenge – an award-winning programme connecting young people with food, farming and a thriving industry.



Engaging the next generation: the ABP Angus Youth Challenge showcases agri-food careers to pupils from every kind of school.

Delivered by ABP and Certified Irish Angus, the ABP Angus Youth Challenge gives students a practical opportunity to learn about farming, food production, sustainability and the broad range of careers within the agri-food sector – Northern Ireland's largest private-sector employer. Now in its seventh year, the programme bridges the gap between school and industry, giving students an immersive, real-world experience of how the supply chain works from farm to fork.

“An innovative way of engaging young people in the community and educating them on the important role of sustainable agriculture.”

ANDREW MUIR — AGRICULTURE MINISTER

— HOW THE CHALLENGE WORKS

Open to Year 11 students, pupils apply as school teams. Shortlisted teams present their project ideas at a showcase each October at the Eikon Exhibition Centre, Balmoral Park. After independent judging by agriculture and education experts, four finalist teams join a year-long programme.

Finalists complete a research project on a key industry theme and receive five Aberdeen Angus calves to rear. Past projects have explored biodiversity, carbon reduction, succession planning and animal welfare – all aligned with pupils' GCSE subjects to link classroom learning with real industry experience.



237

SCHOOLS ENTERED

819

STUDENTS TAKING PART

7

YEARS RUNNING

5

CALVES PER FINALIST
TEAM

— LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

The programme opens up industry contacts, farm visits and practical examples that strengthen teaching across Agriculture, Science, Business Studies, Home Economics, LLW, English and Maths. Pupils gain experience in animal management, nutrition, sustainability and business decision-making – treating the project as a business by weighing feed costs, animal prices and supply-chain impacts before selling their animals to ABP and sharing the proceeds.

Importantly, students need not come from a farming background. Calves can be reared on a family farm, a teacher's farm, or a host farm arranged by ABP and Certified Irish Angus – keeping the opportunity open to rural and urban schools alike.

“Our pupils are from mostly city backgrounds, which has meant few links to rural life. This competition has shattered that barrier. We are having new conversations about agriculture.”

- Teacher from a Belfast school

— SUPPORT & MENTORING

Each finalist team is paired with a specialist CAFRE mentor for expert guidance. Teams also receive professional communication and interview training – including media training with Cool FM and Downtown Radio, and interview preparation from Business in the Community's LifeSkills trainers – building confidence and employability skills.

Finalists are regularly invited to industry events, forging links between schools and employers.



This year's teams attended the Ulster Farmers' Union Family Farm NI event at Stormont, alongside Open Farm Weekend, NI Beef Week and the Balmoral Show.

— STUDY VISITS & CAREERS

A highlight is the annual study trip, this year taking in ABP, CAFRE Greenmount and Loughry, and farms in Fermanagh and Monaghan before travelling to England to visit Harper Adams University and ABP's Demonstration Farm.

The long-term impact shows in career choices. By 2023, 45% of finalists were studying agriculture or food-related courses at CAFRE, while 70% were pursuing agri-food or veterinary qualifications or actively farming. Female participation among finalists now stands at 46%.

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY IMPACT

Newtownhamilton High School's team raised £7,000 for Air Ambulance and earned a Civic Award from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Aughnacloy College created a storybook on sustainable farming – illustrated with 12 local primary schools – later shared at the European Parliament.

In 2021–22, Castle Tower became the first special school to reach the final, with pupils gaining Lantra-accredited training through weekly farm sessions.



Preparing for September

Early planning gives pupils time to shape stronger ideas – and gives schools the best shot at a place in the 2027 final. The summer is the ideal moment to spark thinking about entry videos and project themes around sustainability and food production.

Full details and entry at abpangusyouthchallenge.com

Contact **Orlaith McLaughlin**, Education Manager, Certified Irish Angus — schools@certifiedirishangus.ie

- ✓ Identify a potential Year 11 team
- ✓ Discuss possible project themes and ideas
- ✓ Encourage pupils to plan an entry video over the summer
- ✓ Register your interest ahead of September applications

WHAT HAPPENS **WHEN WE LISTEN**

What happens when a school chooses to listen? Educators from across Northern Ireland came to Riverside School in Antrim to find out — and went home with practical tools to make it everyday practice.

RIVERSIDE SCHOOL · MARCH 2026



Keynote: Michelle Stowe, Connect RP

The Riverside Conference set out to explore the power of active listening, communication and restorative practice in schools. Built around the prompt **“What Happens When We Listen,”** the day brought together teachers, school leaders and policymakers to rethink how we approach pupil engagement, emotional wellbeing and the wider life of a school community.

Delegates left with practical, usable approaches for building calmer, more inclusive and listening-focused classrooms — and a renewed sense that meaningful change often begins with the simplest of acts.

A VENUE BUILT FOR EVERYONE

Hosting the event at Riverside School in the Antrim and Newtownabbey district was itself part of the message. The venue was organised with inclusivity at its heart: full physical and digital accessibility for delegates, adaptive learning resources, and a welcoming layout designed to ensure every voice had space to be heard.

KEYNOTE: MICHELLE STOWE

At the centre of the day was an address by Michelle Stowe, educator, restorative practice specialist and director of Connect RP. Using puppets and the now-familiar language of the “crocodile” and “giraffe” to illustrate how we communicate under stress, Stowe challenged delegates to look again at the everyday language of the classroom.

Her keynote moved through empathy-led leadership and the shift from punitive sanctions towards restorative connection; the relational dynamics that shape the teacher-pupil bond through intentional listening; and how a culture rooted in listening can heal and strengthen a whole school.

“Listening isn’t passive — it’s an active, brave choice. Michelle’s insights completely reframed how I approach conflict.”

POST-PRIMARY EDUCATOR · DELEGATE



Hands-on breakout sessions gave delegates frameworks to take straight back to their own staff rooms.

Four breakout sessions, led by Riverside's own staff, turned the day's themes into classroom-ready practice.

The **SPACE Framework**, developed by the Middletown Centre for Autism and used daily at Riverside, helped delegates audit and adapt their routines to make them genuinely neuro-affirming for every pupil.

The Learning Support Hub, a strength-based programme built around pupils' own interests, drew on Lundy's Model of Participation to show how a child's right to be heard can become a lived, everyday reality.

Social, Behavioural & Emotional Wellbeing recognised that emotional need touches everyone in a school at some point, and explored the TAKE 5 Steps to Wellbeing as a way of building resilience in staff and pupils alike.

Restorative Practice in Special Education set out how the Social Discipline Model can be applied in special educational settings to build community rather than compliance.

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

The conference also heard from Alan Wood, director and co-founder of Evidence for Learning, who made the case for measuring the difference these approaches make. Drawing on data from schools already embedding listening-led practice, he argued that wellbeing and attainment are partners, not competing priorities.

CHANGE BEGINS THE MOMENT WE *CHOOSE TO LISTEN*.

By bringing policy makers, including the Department of Education, together with classroom practitioners, Riverside bridged the gap between policy and practice — and set out a clear direction for the future of education in Northern Ireland.



Alan Wood, Evidence for Learning, on turning listening into measurable impact.

IN THE EXHIBITION SPACE

- **Muir Toys & Diverse Minds** — specialist resources and neurodiversity advocacy.
- **Learning Space & Outside the Box** — evidence-based toolkits, sensory products and CPD training.

Delegates praised the exhibitors for offering practical toolkits rather than theory alone, and singled out the day's accessibility as exemplary.

"This conference didn't just talk about listening — it modelled it. Every delegate felt valued, accommodated and heard."

EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT · DELEGATE

IN MEMORIAM • DIANE CUSICK • 1960–2026

A Life Given in Service



It is with deep sadness that we pay tribute to our friend and global mission worker, Diane Cusick, who died peacefully on Easter Sunday, 5 April 2026, at the Marie Curie Hospice, Belfast. As a union, we were pleased to support Diane's work with children in Africa.

Diane grew up on a farm in Bunshanacloney, Armoy, actively involved in Armoy Presbyterian Church from an early age. Determined yet fun-loving, creative in arts, crafts and photography, a gifted cook and talented musician, she later served as organist and youth fellowship leader at Bushvale Presbyterian.

As a child, Diane told her mother she would one day work with children in Africa – a calling that never left her. After studying at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, and Belfast Bible College, she was commissioned in 1995 as a missionary teacher in Malawi.

In 2006 she became Early Childhood Coordinator for the CCAP Livingstonia Synod; in 2010 the Government of Malawi recognised her outstanding contribution. In 2016 she moved to Lusaka as Early Childhood Development Coordinator for the Zambia Synod.

"For more than 30 years, Diane enriched the lives of countless children and their families through her dedicated service."

To her siblings David, Maureen, Dick and Lorna, and to her wider family, friends and colleagues in Ireland, Malawi and Zambia, we extend our deepest sympathy.



ULSTER TEACHERS' UNION

SHOUT UNION

EDITORIAL TEAM

01 EDITOR

Janice Mullan

02 GENERAL SECRETARY

Jacquie White

03 DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY

Stephen McCord

04 DESIGN

Tony McCabe

CONTRIBUTE

Shout Union is shaped by the voices of our members. If you have an article, story, or topic you'd like to see featured in a future issue, we'd love to hear from you.

EDITOR: Janice Mullan

EMAIL: office@utu.edu

TELEPHONE: 02890 662216



EST. 1919

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A LIFELINE SINCE 1919

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