

Embargo: 0001hrs, Friday 18 June 2020

Presidential 2020 AGM Speech Final Version

Good morning colleagues,

I hope I find you and your family well. Before I get into the substance of my speech, I want to welcome Heather on to the Senior Office bearer team, and to thank Alison for her support over the past two years and wish Carole the best of luck for what will be one of the most unusual years in the history of the EIS.

Also, on a personal note I must thank all the EIS staff for their support during my year of office. I would like also to note my thanks to the Local Associations whose hospitality I have enjoyed.

Colleagues, extraordinary times may demand an extraordinary speech. I cannot promise you that. Rather I hope to offer some food for thought, that you may want to throw into the mix when over the coming period we observe and consider how the delivery of Scottish Education will continue to evolve over the summer.

It is crucial you observe and consider closely this evolution. Whatever shape it takes because it will be this body, the Council of the Institute and its committees, that will be tasked with developing the EIS response as we move from lockdown to some sort of normality.

Colleagues, a Scottish teacher, or lecturer who joins the EIS does so with some expectations based upon our reputation. Doing the best to protect their conditions of service and even enhance them, protecting their income, and hopefully enhancing it too.

Some of those teachers, like those of us convened today are aware of our motto “The Promotion of Sound Learning” Some even, and I count myself in that number, are quite impressed by how apposite our motto is particularly as it was coined one hundred and seventy-three years ago.

I kept coming back to our motto again and again as I started to compose this speech. I also wondered, is the disruption to Scottish Education that we are going through unprecedented?

As a graduate of history and politics with an interest in military history, I asked myself Is it comparable to, say, the two world wars?

Of course, the scale of the grief that teachers, children, and parents endured during these years was much greater than today, though for some, today, at the personal level, grief for loss of a loved one or a friend is no less painful.

This is something I know you will bear in mind when you return to the classroom. However, in terms of disruption to the education system, at all levels, from early years, through to the financial situation in higher education. The level of disruption is profound, and it is unprecedented.

But before I start to comment on aspects of the disruption to come and the manner, if not the substance, of how we address that disruption, I must say a few words about how the Institute has responded so far

All in all, viewed from my position as President, it has been impressive. Our staff from the General Secretary down, have not only coped very well in an extraordinary period they have done that at an extraordinary pace All that, while at the same time, coping with the trials and tribulations of lock down and this deadly disease.

Likewise, our Local Association secretaries, and branch secretaries who have been dealing with an exponential rise in member queries and at times having to negotiate with managements who have sometimes been helpful but, also, on occasion quite delusional in their expectations.

Additionally, of course, many of you have been involved in the work of your Local Negotiating Committees or in your own educational establishments. All that valuable experience will stand you in good stead as you collectively start to consider how you shape the Institute's view of what sound learning should look like in the post Covid era.

That view will of course, be partly based on existing Institute policy. But only partly. Over the next period this council and its committees has an important role to play in looking to the future.

Reacting to the situation as it changes and scoping out what will be required to ensure that the EIS's vision of sound learning continues to evolve and continues to be promoted.

What will be the impact of the blended learning approach? On pupils of course, but also on teachers? What will its impact be on educational equity? What will be the legacy of this crisis on the wellbeing of the young people and students that we teach, in the short, in the medium and in the long term? What will be the legacy of the Covid crisis on funding of the public sector in general and education in particular?

What will be the impact of this crisis on the very nature of public discourse and how that impacts on teacher trade unionism and trade unionism more widely? We have already seen how Covid has impacted on the discourse around diversity, in all its iterations, what will be the impact on the wellbeing of teachers and lecturers?

All these matters and more will need to be viewed through the lens of teaching and learning as you develop an EIS post Covid vision of Sound Learning

However, colleagues as others are looking to shape the post Covid world some in progressive ways like the environmental movement, so must we.

At the beginning of this speech I noted a couple of key reasons why Scottish teachers and lecturers join the EIS, to have a satisfying professional career with a satisfactory level of remuneration.

So, in the post Covid context how do we defend these hard-won gains of recent years? As others consider and plan for the future now in Scotland, in the UK, and across the world.

So too must we plan for the future now particularly in the area of funding for public services. This should be overtaken by ourselves and in partnership with other affiliates of the Scottish Trade Union Congress, the Trade Union Congress and Education International the global teacher trade union organisation.

Absolutely central to that effort will be to see not the establishment, but the re-establishment of a model of funding that has a real, a verifiable and incontrovertible track record.

That has in the past not only delivered positive transformational change but crucially delivered that positive change in a post crisis context. A crisis context, not at all dissimilar in many ways to the crisis we are in now.

A model of revenue raising in which the economic levers of central banks were deployed in a range of countries with ideologically diverse governments.

This was done to regenerate the economies over the Western hemisphere as it came out of the crisis of the devastation of World War II.

These post-war regeneration strategies redefined what we throughout the developed world recognise as the public sector.

It is the model of funding that delivered a national health service. It is the model of funding that delivered a welfare state. It is the model of funding that a little later, as governments increasingly recognised the potential of the model, delivered a modern education system in the day school in further education and in higher education.

We are already being told that the post Covid world will be one of austerity.

Colleagues, it need not be, it *must* not be.

Instead, the post Covid world must be one of regeneration as it was in 1945 in Scotland, in the UK, in Europe, in North America and in some other countries across the world.

It is this 1945 economic legacy of positive transformational change that we and all other trade unions everywhere need to promote in 2020.

However, the immediate challenge is ensuring that our members are protected from unreasonable levels of workload that may arise from some of the approaches being suggested by Government at all levels.

The massive response to our recent survey in and of itself an unprecedented level of member engagement illustrates the many concerns our members have.

It is up to us colleagues, the decision-making body of the Institute for the foreseeable future to recognise and act upon our members' concerns as expressed in the survey.

Health and Safety concerns must remain the key focus of all recovery planning. Social Distancing presents a huge challenge that the EIS will not allow to be side lined. As our survey has revealed, blended learning has been found to be both challenging and time consuming with teachers working even longer hours than they would normally and many of them working well beyond 35 hours, working late into the night and over the weekend. Pre-Covid our workload campaign was a key focus. The advent of lockdown has presented new workload challenges.

That will make Working Time Agreement negotiations in schools and at and at LNCT level even more important than ever. Colleagues, the months ahead will be amongst the most crucial in the history of the Institute.

Each of you have an important part to play, here at future council meetings and on its committees. reviewing and developing EIS policies in changing circumstances, as well of course, implementing EIS policies in your workplaces and on LNCTs.

Colleagues, we, the EIS have promoted sound learning and protected Scottish education for over a century. We all must continue to do so.

We all must find the emotional strength, the intellectual vigour and the energy over the coming months to support our members to continue to protect Scottish Education and promote sound learning.

I know we will be able to do that.

Thank you, colleagues.

- **Bill Ramsay, EIS President 2019-2020**