

iatse *Update*

Spring Update

Spring 2013

IATSE Annual Awards

As part of its commitment to support teachers working with students with special educational needs IATSE provides a number of initiatives each year. These include the organisation of regional seminars to supplement the annual conference and in more recent years the introduction of annual bursaries for innovative projects and awards for teachers completing SEN studies.

In November, to mark fifty years of the Special Education Department in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, IATSE inaugurated an annual award for the Graduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs course. The award is for the teacher who achieves the highest overall mark on the course. A testimonial and the award for the year 2011 - 12 were presented to Cathy Harmon at the graduation ceremony on 10th November last.

On 7 December the graduation ceremony for the Graduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs for year 2011 - 12 was held in UCD. Continuing the tradition initiated by Dr. Brendan Spelman a testimonial and award was presented to Kathleen Cahill on behalf of IATSE. Kathleen was given the award in recognition of particular excellence in the teaching of children with special educational needs while on the Graduate Diploma course. It was presented to her by Ann Jackson at the pre-graduation awards ceremony in Roebuck Castle.

Congratulations to Cathy and Kathleen on their achievements during their studies. We wish them both every success in their teaching careers in the future.



Above: Dr Daire Keogh, newly appointed President of St Patrick's College, and Dr Joe Travers, Director of Special Education, in the College quadrangle while the IATSE award is presented to Cathy Harmon by Ann Jackson



Right: Kathleen Cahill accepts her IATSE award from Ann Jackson at a pre-graduation ceremony in Roebuck Castle in UCD

Dr Páid McGee



The first Diploma for teachers working with pupils with special needs was established in 1961, on the instigation of Fr. Donal Cregan, the then President of St. Patrick's College. In 1967 the delivery of the course was moved to Drumcondra campus, the

Special Education Department was established, and Páid McGee became its first full-time director. As Páid himself said "The establishment of the course was quite a remarkable event in Irish history". It provided much-needed continuing professional development for teachers in special education as well as providing a forum for practicing teachers to share ideas and innovations, to see what was happening in other schools. It helped to alleviate the isolation and lack of support experienced by many teachers as they tried to provide suitable curricular and educational environments for pupils with special needs long before differentiation became a buzz word.

For seven years Páid was the only full-time member of staff in the Special Education Department. As well as organising the course he delivered up to half the lectures with the support of part-time staff. Soon he was involved in other programmes within the college and nominated for several committees – all very interesting but time consuming and onerous. Eventually he had two very able staff members - Anne O'Sullivan and Pat Lynch. Páid has always paid great homage to the skills and talents of both educators and it appears that they made a great team, with the ability to be creative, practical and hard working while facing expanding demands on their time and expertise.

The pattern of substantial work-load, both on and off campus continued, it seems, for Páid's time in the College. He eventually was able to appoint full-time staff but only as teacher numbers on the course increased, curricula on the course expanded and new developments in special education provision were occurring. Páid presided with calmness and dignity in the midst of so much upheaval and change.

A group from the class of 1968-1969 were, of course, the founders of IATSE. Páid gave these teachers his whole-hearted support in their endeavours at the time and

has continued to give advice and support during his time as Director on the course and into his retirement. In honour of his work in special education and his collaboration with, and his invaluable and ongoing assistance to, IATSE he was awarded Honorary Membership of the Association.

There were so many innovations and developments in the Special Education Department over the years of Páid's stewardship – new courses, changing curriculum, fluctuating numbers of students and staff, introduction of study visits abroad and links with other colleges abroad. All the while Páid attended conferences, delivered papers and wrote articles including a much referenced Country Briefing (1990) on Special Education in Ireland for the European Journal of Special Needs Education.

Páid retired in 2003 leaving a highly trained, very diverse, and hugely motivated staff and a well organised department to carry on the education and professional development of teaching working with pupils with special education needs teachers throughout Ireland. Writing in the recently published booklet "The Course" Páid very generously paid tribute to his colleagues in the "quite splendid Special Education Department of today". He wrote that the people who established the course in 1961 would be immensely proud of the people in, and the work of the Special Education Department. I think it is obvious that the founders must be extremely proud of and grateful to Páid for his almost four decades of dedication and commitment to special education in Ireland. He never lost sight of the end goal – quality effective education of pupils with special needs in schools all across Ireland.

At the recent celebration of 50 years of the Special Education Department so many teachers, retired or still teaching, had so many positive stories and anecdotes from their time on the "Course". Many told of the support and encouragement they got from Páid. Pat O'Keeffe sums it up when he says that "the totality and professionalism of Páid McGee" deserves to be enshrined in the history of Irish Education.

Paul O'Mahony commented that on his time on the course "Páid McGee seemed to be omnipresent", he "always seemed to be there". Paul sums it up by describing Páid as "the ultimate model of commitment and dedication" and as having "great humanity and generosity of spirit".

At Conferring Ceremonies in St. Patrick's College on Saturday, 10th November 2012, Páid was conferred with an Honorary Doctorate by DCU. The Doctorate was in recognition of his dedication and service to special education and his advocacy of high quality education for pupils with special needs in Ireland. Congratulations Páid from the CEC and membership of IATSE and good wishes for your future endeavours.

Seán Griffin



Although Seán Griffin noted that his introduction to Special Education was not an auspicious occasion, his contribution to, and participation in, IATSE has been of enormous value to the association and to its members.

Admitting to not knowing anything about Special Education

he began to teach in City Quay National School where Seosamh O'Drisceoil had done tremendous work with special classes. A colleague asked Seán if he was a member of "NATZEE". According to himself his initial response was of bemusement, wondering how German Fascism would enhance his teaching!

After doing the Special Education Course in St. Patrick's College (1985-1986) and while teaching in Scoil Chiaran, under the principalship of Eamonn O'Murchu, he joined NATSE. As a member of the CEC, he and other enthusiastic teachers on the committee went on to breathe new life into the organisation.

During his early days on committee and with his encouragement there were many positive developments for the organisation, including the revising of the Constitution, the introduction of the UPDATE journal and the change of name from NATSE to IATSE. Sean felt strongly that as a professional organisation IATSE should produce a journal which would chronicle special education development and research in Ireland and abroad and provide a forum for informed debate on current educational issues and innovations. Finally in 1987 Seán's dream was realised and the first issue of REACH was launched at the AGM. The twice yearly journal continues to flourish and has a deservedly high reputation among educationalists at home and internationally. Sean was the first editor and continued at the helm for many years before handing over responsibility to Pat Lynch, who in turn handed over to Mary Carrig, the current editor.

Pat Lynch summed up Seán's time on CEC by saying "he seemed to have a million ideas up his sleeve and plenty of energy to see them through". Seosamh O'Drisceoil

remarked that the publication of the journal REACH added a new status to the association as did the Annual Conference.

In the 1994 Silver Jubilee Booklet, Paid McGee, the Director of the Special Education Course, commented that IATSE should be particularly indebted to the group, which included Sean Griffin as they "rejuvenated and re-orientated it in the late 1980's". He felt that the two enduring achievements of that time were the launching of "a successful Annual Conference and a serious journal".

Sean recognised the value of the "Conference" as a means of professional development and enrichment for teachers. While on the Special Education course he realised that Irish special needs educators had so much expertise and potential that was not being recognised and shared. With little money and great enthusiasm Sean and the CEC of the day, including Pat Lynch and Noel Dillon, instigated that first Annual IATSE Conference in St. Patrick's College. It was a great success and continues to be a major event in the yearly calendar of IATSE events. It has led to co-operation and liaison with educational institutions at home and abroad – including North/South Co-operation programmes, IATSE participation in EASE (European Association of Special Education) and many other teacher/school links.

Although Seán left CEC in 1990 he devoted many subsequent years to the publication of REACH. He was a regular attendee at conferences and seminars and always made himself available to the committee for advice, support and ideas.

In 1992 Seán visited Latvia, funded by IATSE, at the invitation of a Latvian special school Principal who had attended the third annual conference. While there, he visited several special schools and held seminars for staff in the schools. Latvian educators were interested in setting up a professional support organisation similar to IATSE.

In 1994 Seán was conferred with Honorary Membership for his services to special education and the Association. He proudly wore his badge to all subsequent events and was very appreciative of the honour bestowed on him.

Seán has been a friend, ally, advisor and mentor to IATSE and its membership over several decades and many of the activities and achievements of the association owe their origins and success to Sean's innovation, far-sightedness and commitment. We will miss him at Conference 2013.

Sadly Seán died in October last year. Our sincere sympathies to his wife, Mary, and his daughter, Emma.

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The portals are updated very frequently and have a nice list of upcoming events also. In addition to the portals, the site has a huge library of guides, videos and presentations found in the Resources Section. It saves lots of time spent in searching for resources and it offers ideas and expert advice.

