

STUC Committee Report

The 2016 STUC congress was a fruitful one for education motions. Over the 3 days in Dundee the SSTA was well represented by staff and members. Emergency motions relating to PFI/PPP contracts, the West Dunbartonshire dispute, the Glasgow Janitors' strike, highlighted rising discontent in the education sector. In addition wider concerns such as zero hours contracts, cuts to FE college budgets, developing modern apprenticeships, including ones suitable for the disabled, challenging gender dress codes, Trade Union legislation and pension reform, exemplify the range of issues tackled. This being a Scottish parliament election year the conference was addressed by Kezia Dugdale on the challenge of austerity and by Nicola Sturgeon on the opportunities that would follow from new powers for the Scottish parliament. Of particular note on the education front was the visible cooperation between teaching unions' positive support was for their respective motions.

The SSTA proposed 2 motions. Seamus highlighted the importance of protecting funding for education. Even deeper cost cutting exercises endangered educational provision. facultization, with the stripping out of subject specialist managers, combined with short term and temporary contracts, significant reductions in support staff, directly impacted upon children and young people. Since 2010 there has been a 33% cut in support staff, 25% cut in librarians and 10% cut to staff supporting children with ASN's, despite there being a significant increase in such numbers. Such staff enrich the educational experience of children and are essential. On the issue of facultization Euan Duncan seconded an emergency EIS motion on the West Dunbartonshire dispute.

The second SSTA motion, proposed by Euan, dealt with the neglect of vulnerable children and young people. Verbal aggression, physical violence and classroom disruption have simply become facts of school life, 'inclusion' becoming a euphemism for doing nothing. Focus on testing and results undermine the development of well rounded, creative and socially engaged children. On a related issue Wade McCormick also spoke in support of a NASUWT motion on violence in the workplace. Ward highlighted the fact any stress related absence that ensued from such incidents, if it was recorded through violence and aggression forms or HSE returns, imposed a statutory duty on employers to publish such incidents and, in addition, any ensuing related absence did not count against general sickness absence.

One other interesting issue was brought to light at the pensioners' forum fringe meeting on the issue of TTIP's. Whilst the implications of these proposed trade agreements, and related CETA's and TISA's, are not widely known about in Scotland, they have certainly provoked much opposition in Germany within the last month. Countries do have the right to opt out essential services from such agreements. However, educational services in Britain have no such protection. Multinationals bidding for such contracts could undermine local contractors, monopolise service provision, with the ensuing consequences for costs and educational development. We watch with interest future developments.