



Welcome to the 73rd Annual Congress of the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association.

Our focus this year has been putting pupils first and giving teachers time to teach. This single line summarises the aims of the Association, which are principally to advance education in Scotland and to safeguard and promote the interests of Scottish secondary teachers in all matters, especially those which affect salaries and conditions of service.

Founded in 1944, our Association has always been of the view that Secondary teaching is distinctively different from primary and tertiary education with its own unique concerns. There can be little doubt that the few years that people spend in Secondary school come at a time of great change and development in youngsters' lives, and yet it is also the time when success matters.

Through this time in youngsters' lives, often stormy and stressful, teachers have the challenge of encouraging pupils to be conscientious in their studies and open to learning in all its forms. It is the Secondary teacher's complex calling to stand as judge, witness and supporter of achievement.

While being bright helps with success, being conscientious, open and stable provide the conditions for successful learning to take place. When these conditions are right attainment rises. Secondary teachers desire success for their pupils and when the conditions aren't right teachers feel a responsibility, they feel a need to try and make the conditions right. The drive to encourage conscientiousness, to open young minds, to maintain good health, to get youngsters 'through' their exams often comes at a personal cost to teachers. Although exams should be an adjunct to all other learning taking place, formal assessment has grown out of control to take up an inordinate amount of time and effort. Giving youngsters the emotional stability they need to get through the endless measurement and assessment that takes place demands the right skills, patience and time.

How often do we hear people say, "If only we had the time, if only we had the staff, if only we had the resources?" While the broad approach to curriculum in Scotland has changed and generally improved, there has been a significant deterioration in time and resources. 'How Good Is Our School?' encourages teachers to reflect on how good they are at improving all learners' outcomes (including wellbeing, equality and inclusion), yet too often Secondary schools are still measured in terms of simple data eg exam success, leaver destinations. Harder to measure is the tremendous value that Secondary teachers add to life after school for young people growing up. Being resilient and ready to cope, collaborating successfully with others as part of a team, and learning from them critically and cooperatively are large parts of learning in schools and yet they are largely ignored in favour of formal tests. These are qualities which society needs in its formal and informal structures, they have played a large part in what has enabled humanity to succeed, and they can close attainment gaps.

Teachers are putting pupils first, but they need time to teach. They need time to nurture the fertile conditions that allow deep and sustained learning to take place, to develop strong learning relationships and bonds of trust.

As well as recruiting and retaining the right number of teachers, and offering them good prospects, in schools we need a rainbow range of adults with different roles and skills. We need enough money coming in regularly to allow for sustainable planning, rather than a flash of cash for a year or two. And we need to be properly paid for our efforts. Working together in union, the SSTA continues to push hard to improve learning conditions for everyone in Scottish Secondary schools.

I hope you enjoy Congress.

Euan Duncan