

**#1 Is there any point in joining if all my colleagues don't join?**

Even if you are the only one in your workplace at the moment, there are many reasons to join. Firstly, you will have solidarity, advice and support from the nearly 200 other teachers in our Unite ELT Branch. Secondly, even as an individual member, there are protections and advice to help members deal with issues with contracts and work demands, improper disciplinary actions, bullying, etc. The ELT Branch has its own professional union organiser and volunteer branch executive committee who are available too. That's a lot of support and advice.

**#2 I am a DOS. What could the union do for me?**

As a DOS, you probably know better than most of your teachers that your job is as precarious as theirs. Don't forget: we still haven't found a DOS who has retired in the job in Ireland. (Let us know if you have.) Managers in higher education institutions all over Ireland are in unions because of the protection that it affords them.

**#3 Can I join the union without my boss's permission? If they find out about my union membership, won't they cut my hours or fire me?**

Your right to union membership is actually protected under Article 40.6.1.3 of the Irish Constitution. Your employer can't interfere any more than they can tell you not to be married or gay or an atheist. If they fire you for union membership, it's against the law.

**#4 Aren't unions just about strikes?**

Striking is stressful, and unions themselves know it better than anyone else. There are a hundred ways to negotiate before that and it's only a last resort.

**#5 Isn't union membership expensive?**

It's €9.63 per month for part-time workers (less than 24 hours a week) and €18.61 for full time workers. And if you are unemployed for a period of time, let Unite know and your rate will drop to €2.60.

## Remembering Stephen Cullen

12th January 1946 – 17th November 2017

Last November saw the sudden passing of our dear friend and colleague Stephen Cullen. His death was a profound loss and his absence is still felt to this day.

Stephen was usually one of the first acquaintances you made upon starting work at The English Studio. He was keen to know you, get a sense of your politics and give you more than a sense of his. During breaks, the staffroom where Stephen held court was a jovial place where colleagues couldn't help forgetting that they were at work.

During his long career in education Stephen worked as both teacher and Deputy Principal at Loreto Balbriggan before moving on to the private ELT sector. Typical of his generation, Stephen understood the value of and the need for trade unions. Many have spoken of his dedication to UNITE and he was a constant vocal presence both at meetings and at protests. Indeed, the struggle we all face in this hostile economic climate is but another reason that I miss him. As we move forward, his memory guiding us, we do not say goodbye but rather in his own words, "hasta bananas".

**The Unite ELT branch will hold The Stephen Cullen Memorial Lecture at 6pm on Wednesday the 10th of October 2018 in The Teachers' Club, Dublin 1. All are welcome to attend. Please contact the branch for further details.**



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Not yet a member of Unite? Join Today!  
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#UniteELT



# UniteELT

The Union for English Language Teachers in Ireland  
A branch of Unite the Union, Ireland



## Victory for United Teachers!



Image from our successful protest against Bogus Self-Employment in October 2017. More inside.

I'd been working at my current school for a couple of years when the school was bought out by a language school chain at the beginning of 2017. Some core staff were made redundant and I felt very insecure about my position. Drips and drabs of information came through from the new owners, such as a planned change in timetabling that would result in me losing €360 per month or spending much longer hours in the school in order to come out with the same pay. Other problematic changes to the working conditions emerged bit by bit and none of us teachers knew where we stood. Eventually we started a private Whatsapp group, just for teachers, so that we could share information and discuss things freely without fear of prejudice from management.

We had about four or five teacher-only meetings outside of school hours, which was game-changing because we realised we had all been struggling with the same issues: the cost of living rising way beyond our pay, not making enough to save for the future, no pensions, job insecurity leading us to accept worse terms, conditions and pay than we knew we should, minor illnesses leading to financial crises due to no sickpay, etc. Once we realised we were all on the same page, we agreed to all join Unite the Union. We also began to communicate our concerns to management as a group, by letter printed on paper not by email. These letters were signed by everyone in alphabetical order and left on the manager's desk anonymously so that no individual teacher could be scapegoated.

Next we met with Roy Hassey, the ELT branch organiser, to find out about our employment rights. Roy told us where we stood regarding the law and gave us a lot of encouragement and moral support.

It turned out that during the buyout process, which took about a year, we actually had better employment protection than at other times and knowing this (thanks to Unite) gave us confidence in negotiations.

In the end, after weeks of management saying that they would not negotiate with us as a group and that we would only get zero hours contracts, they did of course negotiate. I have to say here that they did put on a lot of bluster to intimidate us, but we teachers stood together and in the end they gave us permanent contracts with fixed hours and five days' paid sick leave. I'm so glad that we stood up for ourselves. We still have to work on getting the school to recognise our union, but it is worth noting how much has been achieved even before union recognition. Even if it seems difficult, it's worthwhile getting organised!

# Lanlearn

Lanlearn, an English language school in Limerick, closed unexpectedly in late March. Since then, its students have either been refunded or placed in another institution.

However, there are few provisions in place to help the teachers. Ten teachers are owed up to €3,000 each in unpaid wages, but are unable to obtain assistance as part the Insolvency Payments Scheme (IPS) as the company has not been declared insolvent. Unite, which represents the teachers from this school, has therefore met with members of the Oireachtas and representations have been made on the teachers' behalf.

Unite's ELT branch also decided to organise a fundraiser to help our fellow teachers who were left with almost three weeks' unpaid wages. The sight of teachers gathering together to support fellow workers is exactly the point of our branch and of the union itself.

No other entity in the state solely represents the cause of our profession. We must create momentum in order to insist that, in the upcoming legislation on the International Education Mark, provisions must be in place to protect our livelihoods and remove the spectre of precariousness overhanging our profession. With a unionised workforce, we believe there will be no more incidents such as that which occurred in Lanlearn. Add your voice to the campaign by joining our branch.



**ENGLISH TEACHERS' TABLE QUIZ**

Teachers' Club  
35 Patrick Street  
WEDNESDAY MAY 2ND 8:00-9:30PM  
QUIZ 8:10 PM  
4 PLAYERS, 20 EURO PER TABLE

GREAT PRIZES

for LANLEARN

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## I can't afford to be sick



Elected Branch Chair Keith Murdiffe speaking with TASC on precarity and health

In April this year, the Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) published a report into precarious work, i.e. working in temporary, 'if and when' employment or on a self-employed basis.

The TASC report found that precarious work has a negative effect on mental health. Many workers described how their lack of job security caused anxiety, depression and social isolation. In response to a request from Unite

for English language teachers' experiences of accessing healthcare, Teacher A reported: "I took an academic role a few years ago. I was working 12-hour days at least 5 days/week. I developed a serious anxiety disorder: panic disorder. Luckily my home situation allowed for me to recover there. I requested a meeting with the director to discuss my ongoing treatment and the response I got back was legalistic and aggressive. I eventually left that position and went back to teaching full-time at the same school. I also discovered that two people had needed to take long breaks from work for the same reason."

The report also found that for many precarious workers, sickness was not an option and illness was a major financial burden, leading to sickness presenteeism. Teacher B told us: "During the snow, I slipped and twisted my ankle. It was in the middle of a tough month financially for me and I didn't have the money to go to the doctor. I also couldn't afford to take time off. I was in agony [at work the next day], couldn't concentrate on my classes and my foot kept swelling throughout the day. The next day my whole leg was swollen and in pain, so I had to call the school and explain that I couldn't work. I was treated as if I was at fault. The doctor cost €60, a taxi both ways cost another €20 and I had to take three days off work unpaid, as we don't have sick pay. When I returned the following week I was asked to present a doctor's cert, despite not being paid for the days I was absent. I had to borrow money to make ends meet [that] month."

With rising rents in Dublin and the lack of permanent contracts or regular hours in our profession, many teachers now rely on a network of people such as parents or other family for financial support. This creates a scenario described in the TASC report as 'forced infantilisation' and intergenerational dependency, where living an independent life is restricted by your precarious position.

The stories these teachers told us were shocking and troubling, but sadly familiar to anyone working in our sector. This is why we are launching GIMME 5, a national campaign demanding that all English Language schools give every teacher 5 days sick pay per year.

If you are not already a member, sign up with the Unite ELT branch today. With your help, we can take our campaign to every school in Ireland, to the staffrooms, to the classrooms, and if necessary, to the streets.



## Campaign Updates

Since the founding of the Unite English Language Teachers branch at the start of 2017, we have been active in a number of fields, with campaigns ranging from ending the practice of zero-hours contracts to obtaining better pay and conditions for our members.

**Improvements in Working Conditions:** As well as engaging in campaigns to improve conditions across the sector, we have seen significant improvements in individual schools, as members spoke with a united voice and with the support of their union to bring about real changes in their working conditions. These are changes such as the provision of permanent contracts and an increased number of sick days. In addition, in February of this year, a union recognition agreement was signed between Unite and the Academic Bridge English School in Dublin. We expect this to be the first of many schools to agree to union recognition.

**Meeting Members of the Oireachtas:** On October 24th 2017, the branch held a protest outside the Dáil to call on members of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills to meet with representatives from the Unite ELT branch. We were joined at the protest by TDs Joan Collins and Bríd Smith and there was significant media coverage of the event. Since then, we have met with several members of the committee, with other TDs and Senators, and with Minister of State for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O'Connor to highlight our concerns regarding labour abuses in our sector. We also re-iterated our view that the forthcoming Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill, which provides for an International Education Mark, should establish minimum employment standards for English Language Teachers. We have also requested that there be open hearings on the QQA bill.

**Campaign against Bogus Self-employment:** It came to the branch's attention last year that an increasing number of schools were engaging in bogus self-employment. This is the practice where a school obliges a teacher to invoice the

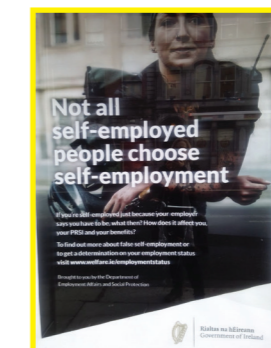
school for hours worked as if the teacher was a self-employed contractor. The revenue commissioners have made it clear that a teacher working in a school is not self-employed but is in fact an employee of the school. This bogus self-employment hurts teachers by depriving them of their rights as employees and also cheats the state of PRSI and PAYE payments. On the 18th October 2017, the 'Bogus Self-Employment Cheats Us All' protest was held by the branch in Dublin. In November 2017, Marketing English in Ireland (MEI), the marketing body that represents a majority of English language school owners in Ireland, released a statement that their schools were not to engage in bogus self-employment.

**Campaign for Decency:** In January 2018, Unite began taking its 'Campaign for Decency' to students' countries of origin. Unite members are focused not only on improving our own terms and conditions, but also on ensuring that Ireland's English Language Teaching sector provides a quality service to students. To this end, Unite is engaging with the embassies of our students' countries of origin, as well as the media in those countries, to ensure that prospective students have the information they need to make a well-informed choice.

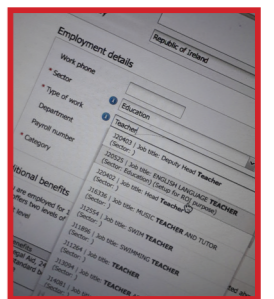
### The Future

We have come a long way in just over a year and we have plans to go even further as we continue to press for improved employment standards in a sector unfortunately characterised by high levels of precarious work, low pay, and even a lack of pay for some working hours.

Also pictured on page 1, our October protest (L) against bogus self-employment in front of a Dublin language school was followed by Marketing English in Ireland directing its members to end the practice in all its affiliated schools...



...and later this spring the Dept. of Employment Affairs followed suit with this awareness campaign spotted at Dublin bus stops. This raised awareness amongst non-union colleagues and our students, frequently in bad employment themselves.



It may seem small, but Unite has added ELT to its Join page just for ELT people like you joining our successful branch



We held a Dáil briefing. We met with TDs and the Minister Mitchell-O'Conner and held a rally on Kildare Street, too.