

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) IN IRELAND:  
IS IT A CAREER?**

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**M. Phil. in English Language Teaching**

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## Declaration

I declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and that it is entirely my own work.

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# English Language Teaching (ELT) in Ireland: Is it a Career?

Roy James Willoughby

## Abstract

Motivated by the researcher's six years of teaching in a privately-run ELT school in Dublin this paper endeavours to answer the question: English Language Teaching in Ireland, is it a Career? The Irish Government hopes that by 2020 the sector will be worth two billion euro to the Economy. The approach has been to investigate the question under three headings: job satisfaction, career longevity and general issues in the sector.

The research was carried out against the backdrop of two Dublin schools taking industrial action and the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) to examine working conditions in the sector. A review was conducted of the academic and other literature relating to the three research questions. It was noted that while there has been much written internationally there was a scarcity of works investigating the Irish ELT sector. Studies from the USA, Australia, Poland, Canada and France painted a picture of low pay and poor career prospects, precarious work, exploitation of passion and low levels of self-esteem. In the limited amount of works looking at the Irish sector similar issues were evident.

The main research tool was the 2019 Unite Survey of English language teachers. The researcher was granted exclusive access to the comment material of respondents. The information gleaned from this survey was combined with data from a government commissioned report into working conditions in the Irish sector, the King Report. The approach taken involved analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data from both sources.

With regard to the research questions, several key statistics are noteworthy from the Unite Survey: 76% of those surveyed were not happy with their rate of pay, 56% thought their work conditions were unfair, and significantly 55% did not see themselves staying in English language teaching as a career. Looking at the Australian sector, Stanley wrote about the "*extra mile expectation*", where teachers do extra work outside the classroom without pay. This scenario is replicated in Ireland as 83% of respondents said they were not paid for non-contact hours.

The conclusion of this paper suggests that the environment for teachers in the ELT sector in Ireland is one where teachers really love the classroom experience but that this passion is exploited. This would suggest that there is a high level of job satisfaction while teaching but a high level of dissatisfaction with the environment outside the classroom. Promotional opportunities are limited and there is a low sense of self-esteem. One option to combat this low self-image might be to offer undergraduate courses in ELT at Irish Universities. Many teachers are experiencing Dornyei's notion of "*futurelessness*". An increased level of advocacy and unionisation is needed for English language teachers and it is also suggested that the business model needs to be critically examined. Increased Government involvement in the sector was suggested.

Future research needs to be done on why so many teachers leave the sector, if (and why) teacher motivation declines over time and the reliance on English Language schools on agents to generate business.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACELS	Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland
CELT	Certificate in English Language Teaching
CELTA	Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults
DELTA	Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EEA	European Economic Area
ELE	English Language Education
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESOL	English to Speakers of Other Languages
ILEP	Interim List of Eligible Programmes
JLC	Joint Labour Committee
L2	A person's second language.
MEI	Marketing English in Ireland
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NUI	National University of Ireland
PRSA	Personal Retirement Savings Account
QQA	Qualifications and Quality Assurance
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*“Minister for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection Pat Breen TD, has formally accepted the recommendation of the Labour Court for the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee for the English language education sector. He made the announcement today together with Minister of State for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O’Connor TD. Giving effect to this recommendation, Minister Breen has signed an establishment order that shall come into effect on 2 December 2019.”*

*Department of Education and Skill, Press release, December 2019*

This recent announcement by the Irish Government establishing a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) comes following the recommendations of Mr Pat King, the mediator appointed by the Minister of State for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O’Connor in January 2019. Mr. King’s brief was to examine the issues causing problems in the Irish ELT Sector. JLCs provide *“a wage-setting mechanism that determines terms and conditions of employment, as well as setting minimum rates of pay for workers in certain sectors.”* (The Labour Court)

The King Report (2019) recommended that the JLC should:

*“address all aspects of the working conditions and pay of employees in English Language schools with a view to the issuing of an Employment Regulation Order (ERO) for the sector.” (p.1)*

The pertinent question to be asked is whether this development reflects a scenario of poor working conditions in the English Language Teaching (ELT) sector in Ireland. Further debate and research are required with regard to working conditions and career opportunities for the considerable cohort of people teaching English as a foreign language in Ireland.

### **1.1 The Size of the Sector**

As a result of the lack of strict regulation and the transient nature of the sector, it is difficult to calculate the exact number of English language teachers employed at any one time in Ireland. The estimated figure of 1354 is arrived at using the following method:

Marketing English in Ireland (MEI) is a privately-run association that represents 66 regulated English language schools and colleges in Ireland. According to their own calculations, the total number of teaching staff employed by MEI members in 2018 was “2,058 during peak months, and 1,119 during off-peak months.” (MEI submission to the Labour Court, 2019 p.2). All MEI schools are on the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP), (Department of Justice and Equality, December 2019), a register compiled by The Department of Justice listing the English language schools and courses that are eligible to enrol non-EEA nationals. Some of these courses are held in institutes of higher education. During the peak season, many MEI schools employ teachers from secondary schools and national schools :

*“teachers, on leave from Primary and Secondary schools, are recruited and are afforded an opportunity to supplement their income”*

(MEI submission to the Labour Court, 2019 p.11)

This scenario makes it very difficult to calculate how many people are exclusively English language teachers. The King Report acknowledges the existence of at least 22 other English language schools that are not members of MEI (pp.7-8). For the purpose of this paper it is estimated that the average number of English language teachers working in MEI schools in Ireland at any one time is approximately 1354. This figure is based on the assumption that the peak period lasts for three months of the year. The numbers working exclusively as language teachers may be significantly less. This figure does not include teachers from non-MEI schools.

MEI claims that 90% of English language students in Ireland study at one of their colleges and is *“showcasing Ireland as a high-quality destination for international language students.”* (MEI website)

*“Ireland is a wonderful country, rich in heritage, history and culture. As a nation of writers and storytellers, there is nowhere better for a student to learn English.....We are proud to promote Ireland abroad as the exciting, beautiful and welcoming country that it is. We believe in our work, we believe in our members and we believe in Ireland as a learning destination.”*

(MEI website)

The scale of the ELT sector and how important it is to the Irish Economy needs to be investigated. As a starting point, some key figures from the MEI are listed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Key Statistics relating to the ELT sector in Ireland.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In 2017, students from 118 countries came to study English in regulated English language schools and colleges.<sup>1</sup></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ireland had 8% growth in the ELT sector in 2017.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In 2017, 74% of students were from the EU or EEA (which is up 5% from the previous year).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In 2017, 129,000 students came to Ireland to learn English.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ireland is the number 5 destination in the world in terms of actual number of international English language students.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ireland is significantly ahead of UK, USA, Australia and Canada in terms of students per head of population.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The international education sector contributes €762 million per annum to the Irish economy according to figures contained in a report published by the Department of Education (International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016 – 2020).</li></ul>

Source: MEI website.

Table 1 highlights the fact that the ELT sector contributes considerably to the Irish economy. It would also be pertinent to gain further insight into the Irish Government's forecast for the growth of the ELT industry. Below is an excerpt from a report commissioned by the former Minister for Education, Richard Bruton T.D.

*“A growth target of 25% has been set for the ELT sector, which will result in an increase in ELT students from 106,000 in 2014/2015 to 132,500 by the end of 2019/2020 academic year. The aim is to increase the output value by approximately €200m from €760m to €960m during the lifetime of*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mei.ie/8-rise-in-international-english-language-students-studying-in-ireland-with-numbers-now-over-129000/>

*the strategy. In terms of the target output impact value, the value will increase from €1.58bn in 2014/2015 to €2.1bn by 2019/2020.”*

International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016 – 2020 (Department of Education and Skills) p.20.

According to the Central Statistics Office the total value of the Education sector (public and private) to the Irish economy in 2018 was €9 billion (preliminary figure). (Central Statistics Office, 2018) The target output impact value of the English Language Teaching (ELT) sector represents just under a quarter of the Education Sector's current contribution to the Irish economy. To put ELT's economic value into further perspective the relevant figures for Arts Entertainment and Recreation in 2018 was €2.7 billion and Agriculture Forestry and Fishing was almost €3 billion. The total *Gross Value Added (GVA)* of the Irish Economy was €194 billion.

## **1.2 The Research Questions**

The ELT sector in Ireland contributes significantly to the economy and therefore should be examined in further detail. Numerically speaking the main participants in the provision of English language teaching are the teachers themselves.

My research question is: **English Language Teaching in Ireland: is it a career?**

This will be examined under three headings:

1. Does English language teaching lead to job satisfaction?
2. Is ELT a long-term career?
3. What are the issues concerning teachers in the sector?

In asking this question it will also be necessary to define the concept of what constitutes a career. This will be done as part of Chapter 2 in The Literature Review.

### **1.3 Rationale and Motivation**

In 2012, after working in RTE (Radio Telefís Eireann), the national TV and radio broadcasting service, for 38 years (28 of which were as a Reporter/Presenter, Producer and Producer-in-Charge of RTE Radio Sport), I retired. This, after a 'career' in broadcasting that brought me to six Olympic Games, one soccer World Cup (USA '94) and numerous local, national and international sporting occasions. It also gave me the opportunity of producing and presenting many sports news bulletins and popular national broadcast programmes as well as administering a department of up to fifteen full-time employees and many freelancers. A year after I left RTE I did a Certificate in English Language teaching (CELTA) course in Swan English Language Training on Dublin's Grafton street and subsequently qualified as a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) teacher. Throughout the subsequent six years, I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of teaching in a general English classroom in The English Studio Dublin. In 2017, I decided to do a part-time Masters in the University of Dublin (Trinity College) with the aim of linking my practical experience with the world of academia. While I am enjoying the teaching experience, I have first-hand observations of what appears to be a fundamentally flawed system.

Two years after I started teaching, the owners sold the school to The Real Experience Group (part of the Irish multi-national, Lioncourt investment company) for €1million (Lioncourt 2014) after only starting up the business in 2010. (Custer S, 2016) This language school, like almost all of the English language schools in Ireland is a privately-run enterprise with the goal of generating profit.

## 1.4 Market Dynamic

From the researcher's experience it appears that most English language teachers love what they do and are passionate about their jobs. On the point concerning profit generation:

*“associating international students with income generation and the financial well-being of an institution has been so normal that many other attributes of this student population have been overlooked “*

(Chowdhury and Le Ha p.xiii)

*“the market continues to lead the way and international education is operated in a god-like manner”*

(ibid., p. 244)

These two quotes refer to the importance of international students to the University sector in Australia, in the Discussion Chapter (5) their relevance to the Irish ELT sector will be considered.

. The qualifications needed to teach in a recognised school in Ireland are a primary university degree and a recognised certificate in ELT.<sup>2</sup> In this paper the question will be asked whether the work opportunities and potential career paths are commensurate with these qualifications.

Apart from some peripheral mentions in several academic papers, (Silke 2019, McLaughlin 2016, Bacon 2009) there has been little academic research into the overall

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.acels.ie/acelsregulations> and <https://www.acels.ie/teachertraining>

plight of English language teachers in Ireland. However, in the last two years there have been two significant investigations into the area.

## **1.5 The Research tools**

### **(a) The Unite Survey**

At the beginning of 2019 the ELT branch of Unite the Union, carried out a survey amongst members and non-members about their working conditions. This researcher has been given access to the results of this survey as well as exclusive permission to use the respondents' comments. This data has not been published before and analysis of this material will play the major part in this paper.

### **(b) The King Report**

The King Report is a government-commissioned work that sheds additional light on the working conditions of English language teachers in Ireland. In December of 2018 yet another English language teaching school went out of business abruptly when The Grafton College closed its doors leaving 23 teachers and 470 students "*stranded*"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/hundreds-of-foreign-students-left-frustrated-and-confused-at-college-closure-1.3718333>



This prompted the Department of Education to announce the following in January 2019:

*“The Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O’Connor T.D., has today appointed the former General Secretary of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI), Mr Patrick King, to work with relevant stakeholders to explore the potential to address some of the employment related issues that have arisen in the English language education sector.*

*In appointing Mr. King, Minister Mitchell O’Connor stated, “My key objective is to ensure that Ireland has an English language sector that we can all have confidence in, and which provides a quality education to international students coming to Ireland to learn English. Teachers and staff are a central element in ensuring the quality of that educational provision”.*

(Department of Education website)

Mr King spoke to representatives of the major stakeholders in the sector, met or received written submissions from over one hundred teachers, and delivered his report to the Minister in June 2019. The findings of this report, (The King Report) together with further analysis of the comment material will be combined with the data from the Unite Survey in an attempt to answer the research questions.

As has been alluded to and will become empirically evident, all is not well in the world of private English language schools in Ireland. Poor working conditions and a general lack of job security are seen as concerns. The natural question to follow is whether conditions can be improved in an industry that the government hopes will soon have an impact value to the Irish economy of over two billion euro a year?

Surely this should be a sector providing worthwhile employment for Irish and International graduates? It should offer attractive career paths but, does it succeed in doing so?

## **1.6 Dissertation Structure**

Following this introduction, Chapter 2, the Literature Review, will contain a review of the academic and other literature relating to the three research questions. The international material will be compared with and related to the limited academic works on the Irish situation. Special attention will be paid to material written concerning the psychological factors influencing teachers' motivation.

The Methodology chapter will examine the advantages and disadvantages of online surveys, as well as the pros and cons of mixed method approaches. Details of the specific survey being used in this research will be described and the reasons for adopting this particular approach will be stated.

The data obtained from the Unite Survey and the King Report will then be presented and analysed in Chapter 4, the results section of this paper. Attention will be paid to the specific questions related to the research topic, some of the empirical data will be presented, and the comment material will be coded and summarised.

Chapter 5 will feature a general discussion on the results of the survey combined with further data from the King Report and how these relate to the literary works mentioned in Chapter 2. It will then present the conclusions of the paper and provide an answer to the question "English language Teaching in Ireland: is it a Career?"

The final chapter (6) will contain an overall summary of the paper which will be followed by a mention of the limitations of the research tools used and the possible influence of the researcher's own personal background. Finally, some areas of future research and action will be suggested.

## **1.7 Chapter Summary**

The experiences gained over six years of teaching English in a privately-run school in Dublin prompted this researcher to embark on a study of teachers' working conditions in the Irish ELT sector. The establishment of a JLC for the sector and the fact that two schools were, at the time of writing, involved in industrial action served as an ominous backdrop. It was estimated that over 1350 English language teachers are employed in Ireland any one time. This, in a sector that the Irish Government hopes will be worth over €2 billion to the economy in 2020. The research question is to be divided into three main headings: to examine job satisfaction, whether teachers see it as a long-term career and to discover the main issues concerning teachers in the sector. Before introducing the research instruments, the researcher gave a brief account of his own work history that saw him becoming an English language teacher after 38 years working with the national broadcaster RTE. The primary research tool was introduced, the 2019 Unite Survey into working conditions for English language teachers in Ireland. The results of this are to be combined with data taken from the King Report. This report was commissioned by the Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchel O'Connor in January of 2019 and was published in June 2019. The chapter finished with a brief outline of the paper's overall structure and content.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) have defined a good literature review as being one which “*evaluates, organizes and synthesizes what others have done*”. (p.70) They advocate an inverted pyramid approach which this literature review will be taking, focusing firstly on a broad-end worldwide experience and then tapering down to the Irish perspective relating to the three research questions. The tapering down is often obligatory because of the scarcity of academic works relating to the Irish ELT sector. The questions, relating to each of the headings already mentioned, are:

1. Does English language teaching in Ireland lead to job satisfaction?
2. Is ELT in Ireland a long-term career?
3. What are the issues concerning teachers in the Irish ELT Sector?

In this chapter each question will be addressed with reference to some of the relevant literature in the Irish context and the international context.

### **2.2 Job Satisfaction in ELT: The International Experience**

Job satisfaction is a somewhat complex and nebulous field and academics have had difficulty defining quantifiable factors to measure it as there are many influences both inside and outside the workplace. Nearly ninety years ago Hoppock (1935) defined job satisfaction as any combination of psychological, physiological and environmental circumstances that cause a person truthfully to say he/she is satisfied with his/her job.

Kaliski (2007) elaborated further by saying job satisfaction is a worker’s sense of achievement and success in the job, generally perceived to be directly linked to

productivity as well as to personal well-being. It implies doing a job one enjoys, doing it well and being rewarded for one's efforts. It is the key ingredient, he claims, that leads to "*recognition, income, promotion, and the achievement of other goals that lead to a feeling of fulfilment*" (p.446)

From a psychological perspective, how language teachers behave in and out of their classrooms and why they do so, has an important bearing on the analysis of their job satisfaction. To a large extent this hinges on the question of motivation. Based on the premise that a motivated teacher is more likely to be productive in the classroom and encourage enthusiasm amongst students (Dornyei 2001, Johnson 2001, Oni, Nwajiuba and Nwosu 2017 Sahakyan, Lamb and Chambers 2018), motivation is therefore a highly desirable quality. The following two studies are worth looking at in this context.

In what is predominantly a review of the literature on general and language-teacher motivation Hiver Kim and Kim (2018) state that in mainstream education many of the findings involved in research done on student motivation have been adapted to the study of teacher motivation. In asking what motivates language teachers to enter the profession they say that extrinsic and intrinsic factors are equally important. Intrinsic factors involve satisfaction of needs and interests, emotional payoffs, personal growth and intellectual fulfilment. Within language teaching these often refer to the "*love of the language and of teaching itself, both powerful drives for career choice as a language teacher*" (p.24)

Realising this potential for growth can provide inspiration and motivation. Previous experience of language learning can also be a big influence. If they enjoyed learning

it, they are likely to enjoy teaching it as well. There is also mention made of the desire to affect social change and help reduce social inequality.

With regard to extrinsic factors, they say pay, status and job security play a major part. They cite a Korean study where parents and other significant figures are seen to put pressure on young people to become L2 teachers because of the job security and social status that the job conveys in that country. In other more disadvantaged countries economic rewards such as guaranteed pay and pension plans play a big factor while in this globalised sector EFL teaching can imply a standard of English proficiency that confers a level of “*affluence and social savviness.*” (p.25)

In asking how language-teacher motivation is linked to teacher development and the dynamics of classroom practice Hiver Kim and Kim stress the importance of positive feedback in the early stages, particularly in training, where observations are done of performance in the classroom. If this process evolves in a supportive atmosphere it can lead to “*a vital boost in self-confidence and thus create motivation*” (p.25) and this, if continued, can have a positive effect on teachers remaining in the job and developing as a language teacher. They say that as teachers get more experienced, they get more enjoyment and become more autonomous and therefore more motivated. The more teachers see their students improve, the better they feel about teaching.

In a very important section, the authors focus on the influence of the school atmosphere and the potential effect it can have, both positive and negative, on teacher motivation. They specifically mention the effect of “*relationships with colleagues*” (p.26) as a potentially positive and negative influence on motivation while “*oppressive bureaucratic school structures*” (p.27) would be purely negative. The authors cite

instances where teachers are often expected to deal with “*excessive amounts of paperwork and to prepare extracurricular activities*”. (p.27) Over-exposure to these types of activity, they say, can have a negative effect on motivation and consequently on teaching standards.

They also deal with what they call two macro level factors. The feedback from society (from those outside the school), and the social status bestowed by these outsiders both play a big part. The greater the status the greater the teacher motivation. Teacher motivation consequently involves both micro and macro factors and cannot be thought of as “*an internal psychological state*”. (p.27)

Dornyei (2001) stresses the intrinsic factors that contribute to teacher motivation and, in what he describes as an almost perfect scenario, this intrinsic dimension is related to

*“the inherent joy of pursuing a meaningful activity related to one’s subject area in an autonomous manner within vivacious collegial community with self-efficacy and performance feedback being critical factors in modifying the level of effort and persistence”* (p.160).

There is, however, a long list of factors militating against teacher satisfaction and motivation. These include high stress levels, restrictions on autonomy, a fragile self-efficacy, the difficulties of coping with repetitiveness and the consequent lack of intellectual challenge and inadequate career structures. He also alludes to economic conditions that are “*normally worse than other service professions with comparable qualifications*” (p.175)

From their study of English language teachers in Armenia, Sahakyan et al. (2018), concluded that teachers tend to start off with high ideals but somewhere along the way they compromise and adapt a more pragmatic feasible approach. They adopted the psychological concept of “*possible selves*” (p.54) that are based on an individual’s hopes fantasies and fears. Everyone has selves they would like to become, feel they should become and ones they are afraid they will become. They found that teachers tended to start out with clear goals determined by their ideal, feared and ought-to selves. These initial targets became too difficult to achieve so teachers constructed “*feasible*” selves (p.63) which set new targets, ones that they could achieve within their work contexts and they took specific actions to achieve them. Despite the apparent compromise, this process, they claim led to more, not less, job satisfaction.

Remaining in the field of English language teaching, Pennington (1990) says that “*ESL practitioners are basically happy with their work though they express dissatisfactions with certain areas including promotion, pay, and some administrative aspects*” (p.59). She also concludes that the key to maintaining job satisfaction and positive work conditions is “*professional recognition*”. (p.82) Lack of professional recognition can lead to low self-esteem and, as will be seen in sections 2.3 and 2.5.1 from both Nunan and Thornbury, low self-esteem contributes negatively to the process of seeing language teaching as a fulfilling and satisfying career.

In an international survey of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) members Pennington and Riley (1991) found the respondents reported “*most satisfaction in the categories of moral values and social service aspects of their work*” and “*the least satisfaction obtaining in the categories of opportunities for*



*advancement, compensation for work performed, and administrative policies and practices". (p.37)*

They go on to conclude that TESOL Members are:

- Moderately satisfied with their jobs
- Unsatisfied with opportunities for advancement
- Unsatisfied with compensation for the work they do
- Less satisfied in the areas of administrative policies and practices, supervision, social status, working conditions, authority, job security, and professional recognition than in other aspects of their job
- Similar to teachers in other fields in the United States and in other countries in their general pattern of job satisfaction

Pennington and Riley also say their results are consistent with other international studies.

Traditionally there has been a lot of emphasis on the importance of ‘*Needs Analysis*’ when trying to create a favourable learning environment for ESL students. Consistent with Hiver, Kim and Kim’s reference to the “*extrinsic factors*” that affect job satisfaction, it would logically follow that the needs of teachers should form part of the equation.

*“... since the needs of the teachers, administrators, employers, institutions etc. also have some bearing on the language learning situation many other types of quantitative and qualitative information of both objective and subjective types must be considered...” (Brown 2006 p.102)*

Hiver Kim and Kim and Dornyei allude to the concept that teachers' needs include the right to good working conditions, decent wage scales, security of employment and the presence of an enlightened management structure that motivates and encourages teacher development.

Teachers should feel that they are meaningfully involved in structuring the environment of the school from course design and implementation to monitoring and assessment as exemplified by Inceçaya and Inceçaya (2010).

*".. teachers' needs should be taken into consideration as much as students' needs during the design and implementation process of the language teaching curriculum" (p.317)*

If these needs are not met what hope is there that teachers will experience job satisfaction, be fulfilled and that consequently best practice will evolve in the language teaching sector?

### **2.3 Job satisfaction: The Irish experience**

Pat King (2019), the Mediator appointed by Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, examined conditions in the Irish ELT sector and reported that *"Teachers in the schools state that low staff morale is commonplace, and some cite examples of high levels of stress and distress caused by their poor working environment."* (p.2). Comments such as *"teachers are struggling to pay bills", "not a financially rewarding profession," "I'm a negative on a balance sheet," "no pay scale, no increment."* ( PP17,18) further emphasis these points. Such conditions are not conducive to job satisfaction but are consistent with Pennington and Riley's findings of teacher dissatisfaction with financial compensation for work done. Here in

Ireland The Unite Survey (2019) highlighted that 76% of respondent teachers said they were not happy with their hourly pay rate. This following comment reflects the opinion of many of the respondents

*“I've put a lot of money and time into my teaching career, even getting my DELTA qualifications from the UK. I thought it would mean I would get paid more or get more hours, but this hasn't been the case. When I was looking for work, I found it very difficult; I think my DELTA has ruined my chances of moving schools because I'm now seen as too expensive. There is too much disparity in teacher pay. There seems to be no standard hourly rate. New teachers in my school get €12.90 and hour - the lowest I've ever heard for teaching in Dublin. It is disgusting.”*

Further examples of the teachers' remarks in both the King report and the Unite Survey will be presented in Chapter 4 where the results of the survey will be presented and analysed.

O'Keeffe (2001) pointed out that it was not possible to take TEFL as an undergraduate major at any Irish university and this remains the case in 2019.

*“This does point to a certain lack of esteem for TEFL within academia, which might be linked to the ‘walk-in-off-the-street’ TEFL teacher myth.”*

(p.5)

The “walk-in-off-the-street” remark refers to the theory that many people in Ireland think TEFL teachers require no qualification or experience to get a job. In Ireland this is not true, ILEP approved English language Schools require teachers to have a

minimum of both a primary degree and a recognised English Language Education (ELE) certificate:

*“The requirements for teaching English in the recognised English language teaching sector state that a teacher is required to hold an NFQ level 7 (ordinary bachelor degree or equivalent) and a recognised ELE award. The following are the awards recognised by ACELS:*

- *CELT*
- *CELTA*
- *Trinity ESOL*
- *NUI ELE Certificate*

*Please note that online ELE qualifications and one-to-one ELE qualifications are not recognised by ACELS for teaching English in the recognised ELE sector in Ireland.”*

(Accreditation and Co-Ordination of English Language Services {ACELS})

Despite these requirements, the prevalence of the view that teachers require little or no qualification contributes to an apparent low opinion of English language teachers in Ireland. The effects of this, both internationally and in Ireland, will be considered in sections 2.3 and 2.4 which will examine the long-term career prospects for English language teachers.

## 2.4 Is ELT a long- term career? The International Experience

Firstly, it is necessary to define what a career is for the purpose of answering this question. Using the online version of The Collins English Dictionary,<sup>4</sup> one of the most reputable online lexical resources, the following is found:

### **Career:**

1. countable noun

A **career** is the job or profession that someone does for a long period of their life.

*She is now concentrating on a career as a fashion designer.*

*Dennis had recently begun a successful career conducting opera.*

*...a career in journalism.*

*...a political career.*

**Synonyms:** occupation, calling, employment, pursuit

2. countable noun

Your **career** is the part of your life that you spend working.

*During his career, he wrote more than fifty plays.*

*She began her career as a teacher.*

.....

Some further example sentences incorporating “teaching” are given:

*Early in my **teaching career** I heard a huge noise in the next classroom.*

*During my **teaching career** education was far more than just subject skills.*

*The three best reasons for taking up a **teaching career**, so the joke goes, are: long, summer, holidays.*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/career>

The first definition will be used in this analysis. The question will address both the nature of the job/profession and whether it is something teachers do over a long period.

As has been referred to already in 2.2 above, Pennington (1990) stressed the importance that English language teachers attached to professional recognition or the lack of it. Nunan (2001) asked if language teaching was actually a profession. His answer was "*it depends where you look*". He took the view that to earn the label of a 'profession,' a paid employment needed to satisfy four criteria:

- *The existence of advanced education and training*
  - *The establishment of standards and practice and certification*
  - *An agreed disciplinary base*
  - *The work of individuals within the field to act as advocates for the profession*
- (ibid., pp. 4-5)

Nunan states that all around the world there are people teaching in language institutions with no qualification other than the fact that they are fluent speakers of English. There is plenty of evidence in the international literature (Thornbury 2001, Copley 2019, O'Keeffe 2001, and Stanley 2016) which suggests that this perception has led to people having a poor opinion of English language teaching. Nunan, while admitting that a fluent teacher can certainly be a good teacher, insists that training and further education can only lead to improvements. In relation to standards and certification, Nunan agrees there are great inconsistencies worldwide as to who sets and controls the standards and asks the very important question - "*Who has the right to grant or withhold a licence to any individual or group of individuals?*" (ibid., p.7).

He questions to what extent does the field itself have the right to act as a custodian of that field? He further asks if there is a danger of it becoming a “*closed shop*”?

In Ireland, two well respected professional bodies in charge of standards and qualifications in their areas are: The Medical Council and The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI). The majority of members on the Medical Council are not doctors (13 out of 25)<sup>5</sup> while the PSI also has a majority of non-pharmacists on its governing council (11 out of 21). (The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland, 2019) Should the same be true for English language schools where controlling bodies, like ACELS in Ireland, might have “outsiders” involved in regulation?

As for deciding what the agreed disciplinary base should be Nunan states that in all professions “*these questions are posed by those who challenge the traditional order of things*”. (p.7) He cites the arrival on the scene of “*the so-called ‘communicative’ revolution*” in the 1970’s, an approach branded by many at the time as heretical, but now considered the norm. In emphasising the role of advocacy Nunan gives the example of the appointment of an advocate for TESOL in the USA who, he claims, has had the effect of reducing the reliance on part-time positions in the sector. Nunan agrees it is a very difficult challenge to organise advocacy on the worldwide stage and admits that in general “*we as language educators are not very good at advocating for our profession and the clients it exists to serve*” (p.8)

Examining the career paths of private-sector English language teachers in accredited language schools in Australia, Stanley (2016) describes conditions of poor pay, lack of salary scales, precarity of employment and “*unwritten extra-mile expectation*” (p.11). She makes the further point that such conditions do not appear

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.medicalcouncil.ie/Professionalism/>

to hinder teacher recruitment. This occurs in an environment which she reports doesn't value "good teachers above cheap ones" (p.11) and pays graduate teachers less than "tram-drivers, bakers and real estate agents" (p.11). If managers changed this system, she says

*"...it would create a sense that language teaching is a viable career option rather than a semi-volunteer, pocket-money earning hobby to be enjoyed by those who do not need the money or whose stage of life allows them to live cheaply."* (ibid., p.11)

In a critical conclusion, she suggests the issues at stake in Australia are simply

*"unfair at a human level...Novice teachers' enthusiasm, expertise, flexibility, care for the students and goodwill are being exploited and squandered through ever higher expectations of minimally paid and marginally employed teachers. While the ELT industry offers some job satisfaction and a chance to work in an interesting and international milieu, it also seems to result in teachers struggling with the difficulty of getting and keeping ongoing work that provides a living wage. But they have not failed; the industry has failed them. This is the depressing reality of 'economy class' ELT".* (p.12)

In a study conducted in Poland, Bill Johnston (1997) came to a similar conclusion. Despite teachers acting conscientiously the prospects for making it a profession worth staying in were very bleak:

*"the socioeconomic conditions make it impossible (or at least extremely unwise) for them to make a long-term commitment to EFL teaching."* (p.706)



This creates a situation of rapid teacher turnover and a shortage of qualified teachers. Johnston bemoans the situation where teachers do not see the job as a long-term career and are tempted elsewhere for economic reasons:

*“To put it at its simplest, for many teachers in Poland, it is not in their own interests to remain teachers”* (p.706)

Uncertainty of employment in the worldwide ELT sector militates against making it a stable career. Walsh (2019) says that precarity is now a key concept in the world of the English language teacher. When a job is precarious it leads to a situation *“where people are trapped in uncertainty, floating and on stand-by, with all aspects of their lives, their personal ambitions and hopes for family formation, on hold.”* (p.1) Walsh cites a recent survey (Wickham 2015) of TESOL working conditions in France which found that *“64 per cent of those surveyed worried about economic issues and 30 per cent lived on or below the official minimum wage”* (ibid., p.2). Income insecurity was compounded by the pressure to accept zero-hour contracts or become ‘*auto entrepreneurs*’, both with reduced social protection. One respondent remarked *‘Feeling disheartened, having to work even harder now for virtually the same salary I was getting over 25 years ago,’* (Wickham p.10).

Looking at the situation in Canada, Breshears (2019) found the environment amongst English language teachers there produced *“a troubling image of an occupation that is permeated with job insecurity”* (p.42). She went on to point out that this employment uncertainty was not a simple phenomenon but was *“entangled in complex social processes, not the least of which is a climate in which work flexibilization is on the increase in industrialized nations.”* (p.42)

## 2.5 Is ELT a long-term career? The Irish Experience.

As stated previously there is a paucity of literature concerning teaching conditions let alone longevity of employment in the Irish ELT sector. Although already mentioned in 2.2 above, it should be repeated and emphasised here, that to work in an accredited school in Ireland, a teacher must have a primary degree and a recognised English Language Education certificate. The Irish experience does not reflect the opinion expressed by Nunan, Thornbury and Doble, who say that in some parts of the world there are virtually no entry barriers and that all that is needed is a fluency in English.

More analysis of the Pat King report and the Unite Survey will be done in Chapter 4, but one significant statistic from the Unite survey is worthy of mention here: 55% of those surveyed do not see themselves staying in English language teaching as a career.

*“Let’s face it, how many of you want to be TEFL teachers when you’re 30? 40? You’re really only doing this until you can get a proper job...TEFL isn’t a profession – it’s a long-term holiday! ... Qualification? Who the hell cares!”*

De Verdon Cooney, (2000, p.8)

The above quotation came from an article written by an English language teacher in the Forum for English Language Teaching in Ireland (FELT) Newsletter (now defunct but issues are still archived online). (The Forum for English Language Teachers in Ireland, 2002) The sentiments expressed by De Verdon Cooney reflected a perception of ELT that appears to be still prevalent in Ireland today. The qualifications are still not respected, and it is certainly not a long-term profession or career. In answering that

article in a later edition of the magazine, O’Keeffe (2001) concluded that if TEFL in Ireland wanted to acquire this professionalism the following would be obligatory:

*“greater commitment, not from teachers, but from language school owners, universities or whoever the employer may be, such a commitment would entail making available more permanent posts and more fixed term contracts”* (p.4)

Although this was written in 2001 it will be apparent from the data presented in chapter four that the sentiments are still valid in the current Irish ELT situation. What exactly are the issues concerning English language teachers in Ireland and in the rest of the world?

## **2.6 What are the issues in the global sector?**

### **2.6.1 Low self-esteem.**

Worldwide it appears that the ELT/TESOL/EFL sector suffers from low self-esteem. O’Keeffe says the problem of low self-esteem amongst English language teachers exists because academia and much of the public have a poor opinion of the qualifications needed to work in the area. Thornbury (2001), in a paper with a self-deprecating title, *The Unbearable Lightness of EFL*, reports that EFL has reacted to this poor self-image in two ways:

(a) By taking the high road of respectability of academia where restricted entry and a *“homogenous knowledge base”* are established. He cites Freire’s (1970,1993) concept of the *“banking”* concept of education where *“Knowledge is a gift bestowed on the knowledgeable upon those who they consider to know nothing.”* (p.53)

Thornbury agrees with Freire in that this system features a chain of commands, it issues communiqués and is “*anti-dialogue*.”

(b) By reacting inwardly with what he called a “*folksy*” and “*therapeutic pedagogy*,” where students are taught holistically to become responsible members of society.

Thornbury suggests a third mode of reacting. Teachers should, he says, adopt what he calls a “*dialogic*” model, where learning is a shared two-way process in which the students voices are affirmed, and they are encouraged to share their real-life experiences. There should be meaningful talk in the classroom.

Thornbury’s suggestion obviously has knock-on consequences for teacher training, and these will be discussed in Chapter 5. He does however end on an optimistic note:

*“Finally, as a profession we should worry less about what other people think about us and concern ourselves with what we are good at: being out there at the front, in the firing line, on the edge. Few jobs can offer as much. The Lightness of EFL is dizzying. But we need to guard against respectability-as Auden says, ‘The sense of danger must not disappear.’”*

(ibid., p.396)

On the other hand, there is the argument that ELT is simply a non-profession.

*‘Teachers are at the bottom of the professional heap and I wasn’t even a real teacher. The only remarkable thing about me was the fact that I was still doing a holiday job at the age of forty. I was another over-educated, under-motivated loser who had missed his chance and drifted into the Sargasso Sea of EFL work.’*

(Dibden, M. *Dirty Tricks*, {Novel} cited in Doble {1998} p.62)

Doble (1998), used this quotation from a novel to preface his address to the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) conference of 1997. He said his research told him that the sentiments expressed, although they came from a novel, were prevalent in the real world. He listed four areas that pointed to EFL being regarded as a non-profession. Firstly, his research unearthed a lack of “*commitment*” from teachers. They tend to drift in and out of the job. Professions, he says, require a high level of commitment from the outset. Secondly, he reckons that there is a lack of “*an adequate body of knowledge*”. Schools throughout the world can accept graduates and non-graduates and he expresses doubts as to whether even a four-week preparatory course is sufficient in terms of acquiring a knowledge base. Thirdly he says EFL teachers have a lack of “*autonomy*”. They seem to be just salaried workers. “*EFL teaching long ago sold its soul to the business ethic, so that teachers are left alone as long as their classes are profitable but are called to account the moment losses are made.*” (p.63). Finally, Doble, like Nunan in section 2.3 above, emphasises that EFL suffers from perceived poor status and prestige; they have got a “*bad press*”. EFL in many countries is viewed as “*one step above grape-picking*” and that “*TEFL has led them into a vocational cul-de-sac.*” His conclusions would suggest, again like Nunan, that EFL needs greater advocacy.

### 2.6.2 Passion Exploitation.

From the available literature it appears that most English language teachers love what they do, in many cases they are passionate about their jobs. Those teachers who are lucky enough to be passionate about their work apparently also self-exploit, grateful for the opportunity to do so. This behaviour is explained in a new study from a team at Duke University (Kay et al. 2019). The study concludes that people see it as acceptable to exploit those who are passionate about what they do. *Understanding Contemporary Forms of Exploitation: Attributes of Passion Serve to Legitimize the Poor Treatment of Workers*, could well have been written with the English language Teacher in mind.

*“The pursuit of passion in one’s work is touted in contemporary discourse. Although passion may indeed be beneficial in many ways, we suggest that the modern cultural emphasis may also serve to facilitate the legitimization of unfair and demeaning management practices, a phenomenon we term the legitimization of passion exploitation.”*

*..... these studies suggest that although passion may seem like a positive attribute to assume in others, it can also license poor and exploitative worker treatment.”* (Kay et al. p.1)

The authors cite other studies that find passion not only benefits individuals but that it is also in the interest of organisations to hire those driven by passion. Passionate workers tend to exhibit higher levels of proactivity, engagement, perseverance, and entrepreneurial motivation. Do the poor working conditions worldwide mentioned in 2.1 and 2.2 exist because passionate teachers accept them?

## 2.7 What are the Issues in the Irish ELT Sector?

Looking now at the Irish ELT sector it must be asked if low self-esteem and passion exploitation filter down to the teachers' experience in Ireland. As stated earlier, 76% of the Unite Survey respondents were unhappy with their hourly rate of pay and there will be more discussion on the reasons for this in Chapters 4 and 5. O'Keeffe has already mentioned low self-esteem as being a factor, but which is the cause, and which is the effect? Does low self-esteem exist because of poor working conditions or do poor working conditions exist because of low self-esteem?

Several dissertations about the Irish ELT experience have been sourced. Bacon (2018) compared teacher burnout rates in private ELT schools in South Korea (ROK) and Dublin in The Republic of Ireland (ROI). He found that two-thirds of the ROI respondents wanted to change careers, and they also indicated high dissatisfaction with class preparation time, work-life balance, and salary.

McLaughlin (2016) looked at Teacher Professional Development in Dublin ELT private schools. He identified some of the salient issues affecting teachers' motivation, such as low-salary, insecurity and low professional prospects. Successful school development is dependent upon successful teacher development, which supports career-long development, and this, he stated, is the joint responsibility of teachers, schools and the government.

Silke (2009) concludes that pay and conditions in the EFL industry in Ireland have been left to market forces and the sector "*shows all the hallmarks of a secondary labour market.*" (p.35) A secondary labour market is one where the conditions feature "*low wages, little chance for advancement or training and offer unstable and insecure employment*" (p.9). This, he says, is the main reason that teachers fail to remain in the field. Worryingly Silke also suggests that this transient nature of teachers has a

negative effect on the educational standards of the schools. Silke also claims that without regulation or the mass unionisation of EFL teachers, market forces will continue to create similar contractual conditions and he recommends that:

*“a strong regulatory body, concerned with issues such as pay and conditions as well as job security of teachers, is necessary to create a properly functioning and high-quality educational sector.” (p.35)*

From the evidence presented in these last three Irish-based papers it is evident that there are important issues to be resolved for teachers in Ireland. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, both advocacy and representation are growing. There is an increased level of unionisation in the workforce that has brought many of the issues into the public domain, such as the need for better and more permanent contracts, a standardised pay scale, the absence of sick pay and sometimes holiday pay, as well as the existence of bogus self-employment. The ELT branch of Unite the Union was formed in March 2017. These issues and several others are included in the latest Unite Charter listing the important matters that need to be dealt with in the Irish ELT sector.



**Figure 1: Unite Charter for English Language Teachers**

**Unite Charter for English Language Teachers**

- 1. Permanent employment contracts as standard for all English Language Teachers**  
The blanket use of Fixed Term contracts for teachers is an abuse of the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) 2003. Teachers should be given permanent contracts unless there is a specific, legitimate reason why this is not appropriate.
- 2. Fair application of the Employment Act 2018**  
Employers must abide by the Employment Act 2018. Within 5 days of beginning a new job, English language teachers should be provided with a written contract with their core terms and conditions of employment, including normal hours of work and rates of pay. English language teachers should not have their hours capped if they apply for banded hours. Reducing a teacher's overall hours if they apply for banded hours is a punitive measure against the spirit of the Employment Act.
- 3. An end to bogus self-employment**  
Bogus Self-Employment arrangements, where the worker is forced to be a sole trader or operate through a company in order to be hired, see a significant reduction in entitlements - including the right to holiday pay, sick pay, maternity pay, unemployment benefit and employer pension contributions. They may also lose their rights to employment protection legislation on issues including unfair dismissal. English language teachers by definition cannot be self-employed.
- 4. Recognition and pay for non-contact hours**  
A teacher's role goes beyond classroom contact hours. All hours worked in planning lessons, marking, preparation work and administration should be taken into account in the contractual rates of pay and, as is the case in other teaching contexts at primary, secondary and third level, remunerated accordingly.
- 5. Entitlement to sick and holiday pay**  
Although there is no legal obligation on an employer to pay sick pay to staff, it is a hallmark of an ethical employer who values their staff to do so.  
The Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 provides for basic annual paid leave entitlement of 4 weeks. You are also entitled to 9 paid public holidays a year.
- 6. Full entitlement to all leave guaranteed under employment legislation and an end to forced holiday layoffs**  
Teachers should be fully entitled to maternity, paternity, parental, adoptive, force majeure and carer's leave. Maternity/paternity leave should be supplemented by employers for the duration of the statutory entitlement period.  
Should a school close for an extended period, over Christmas or Easter for example, teachers should receive holiday pay for these enforced layoffs. No teacher should be forced to resort to social welfare due to school closures.
- 7. Equality of pay and opportunity for non-native speakers**  
The Unite English Language Teachers branch strongly condemns discrimination against Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) and stands shoulder to shoulder with all teachers as workers. The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 outlaw discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas. These include recruitment and promotion, equal pay, working conditions, training or experience, dismissal and harassment.
- 8. Full support from schools for continued professional development**  
It is in the interest of teachers, schools and students that professional development continues on an ongoing basis. Schools cannot place all the responsibility and cost of this onto teachers.
- 9. Union recognition and representation rights across all schools**  
You have the constitutional right to be a member of a trade union and under the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015, you cannot be dismissed or discriminated against for joining a union. Good, ethical employers recognise unions. The ELT branch fully supports the recommendation of the Patrick King report 'that it become part of a formal code of practice for all schools that trade union membership by employees is fully respected and facilitated.'
- 10. Standardised salary scales across the sector through the application of a Sectoral Employment Order/Employment Regulation Order**  
The Industrial Relations Acts provide for a system of Sectoral Employment Orders and Employment Regulation Orders. Under the Acts, an SEO/ERO may set out the minimum pay rates as well as pensions and sick pay schemes for an economic sector. A Joint Labour Committee (JLC) has been established to negotiate an ERO and Unite the Union will represent their members at this JLC. For an SEO to be achieved, a union must be genuinely representative of the sector in which it is applying. For an SEO to be obtained for ELTs, teachers must join a trade union.

**How to Join Unite**  
Unite the Union –  
55/56 Middle Abbey Street, Dublin 1

Contact: **Keith Murdiffe**  
Mobile: 086 785 4219 • Office Tel: 01 873 4577  
E-mail: keith.murdiffe@unite.theunion.org

**To join online please go to**  
[www.unite.theunion.org/join](http://www.unite.theunion.org/join)  
Branch website: [eltunite.com](http://eltunite.com)

@eltunite @unite\_union\_IRE unite.theunionROI

Are these targets realistic and achievable and if so, do they deal with the issues? Can they make English language teaching a satisfying and long-term career in Ireland? It is hoped that answers to some of these questions will be revealed in the course of this paper.

## 2.8 Chapter Summary:

When a review was carried out of the academic literature relating to the three research questions a research gap was discovered. This gap relates to the paucity of Irish literature compared to international works. There has been scarce research conducted about working conditions for English language teachers in Ireland. Studies from the USA, Australia, Poland, Canada and France provided evidence of poor pay and career prospects, precarious work, low levels of self-esteem and commitment and exploitation of passion. It was noted that much has been written about the psychological factors influencing teachers' motivation and the consequent effect of

teachers' desire to stay in the profession. Due to the lack of studies, more research is definitely required focusing on teachers' experiences in the Irish ELT sector.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

As has been mentioned in the opening chapters much use will be made of the data obtained from the Unite Survey, an online questionnaire about English language teacher's working conditions in Ireland. This data will be combined with information provided in the King Report as well as material taken from several academic works from the Irish ELT experience.

The following chapter will examine the fundamental tenets of online survey evaluation regarding the application of principles to provide robustness and reliability. The benefits of combining qualitative and quantitative methods will also be highlighted. Comparison will also be made between these concepts and the research undertaken in this instance.

### **3.2 Online Surveys**

If rigorous robust and reliable results are to be obtained from an online survey, there are established methodologies to be followed. These include Eyesenbach's (2004) *Checklist for Reporting Results of Internet E-Surveys* (CHERRIES). However, with the advent of so many online companies offering do-it-yourself surveys, some writers, including Ball (2019) have argued that the standard of such research has declined. Ball points particularly to the quality of sample choice and questionnaire design. Unwise use of these, she claims, can lead to bias and problems with validity. Ball lists the advantages of online survey as "*speed, reach, ease, cost, flexibility and automation*" (p.415). Additionally, there is the added advantage of anonymity because there is no interviewer present. This last factor reduces what's called the "*social*

*desirability*” bias. That is the tendency for respondents to give the answer they think the interviewer will expect. With online surveys, respondents can choose when they answer the questions, where they do it and how much time they spend.

On the negative side Ball cites the fact that because there is no interviewer present the possibility of follow-up questions is removed and that there is no scope for respondents to “*seek clarification of unfamiliar or ambiguous terms*” (p.414).

Lack of representation of certain groups among the respondents can lead to bias. Certain groups like the elderly and those with no internet access are difficult (but not impossible) to include (Andrews, Nonnecke and Preece 2010). They also stress the importance of the following methodological components “*survey design, participant privacy and confidentiality, sampling and participant selection, distribution and response management, and survey piloting*” (p.185).

The use of virtual internet communities, social media and email to distribute invitations to participate may also lead to sample bias (Alessi and Martin 2011) and in certain extreme cases to fraud. Bohannon (2016) writes about two former employees of a well-known market research firm in the U.S.A. who have accused that firm of data fabrication. They apparently designed a statistical test of data fabrication that found that 30% of that firm’s recent international studies failed the test.

Validity and reliability are both important pillars for the credibility of a survey. For a survey to be valid it must be based on a representative sample and questions should be unambiguous and extract the information they intend to extract. They should not be loaded pointing the respondents in a specific direction.

Random sampling online is difficult; random approaches can be made by email telephone and thereby requests can be made to individuals to participate online. Another method is to identify a defined population of interest, i.e. English language teachers in Ireland, and invite all members of this group to complete an online survey. This is the process used in the Unite Survey, where English language teachers in Ireland were invited to participate. These invitations were sent mainly by e-mail but were also posted on social media.

Kaye and Johnson (1999) created and posted a survey online to examine the uses of the internet for political information. The purpose of the article, however, was not to report on the political survey's findings but rather to look at the issues concerning online research and "*present recommendations for future online research, specifically in the areas of Web survey design, sampling, data collection and responses, and publicity.*" (p.323)

Their recommendations as to sampling techniques are of particular relevance (

1. *To increase representativeness, define samples as subsets of Web users based on specific characteristics.*
2. *Solicit respondents by linking the survey from key online sites and by posting announcements to discussion-type groups that are likely to be used by the targeted population.*
3. *The World Wide Web is truly worldwide, and individuals from any country can complete a questionnaire. Thus, clearly state the intended audience of respondents in the survey's introduction*

(p.332.)

Bennett et al. (2011) discovered that *“Fewer than 7% of medical journals provided guidance to authors on survey research, despite a majority having published survey-based studies in recent years”* (p.1). And they quoted the following worrying statistics:

*“Our own review of 117 published survey studies revealed that many items were poorly reported: few studies provided the survey or core questions (35%), reported the validity or reliability of the instrument (19%), defined the response rate (25%), discussed the representativeness of the sample (11%), or identified how missing data were handled (11%).”*

(Bennet et al. p.1)

### **3.3 Qualitative v Quantitative Research**

In using the Unite Survey there is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, and the analysis of the comments and conclusions in the King Report is mainly qualitative. However, in coding comments from both studies, a further empirical dimension is added. The argument has been made many times about the benefits of using a combination of both methods in doing research and that argument is put very succinctly by Smith (1986) when she begins by listing the usual criticisms of combining the two methods and then proceeds to counteract them:

*“Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches costs too much, pits paradigms against each other, requires skills that do not coalesce in many individuals and sometimes do not even reside hospitably on the same research team, and so on. But the merits outweigh the difficulties if the*

*evaluator is ingenious and eager to make the best of the kinds of circumstances described here.” (p.52.)*

Dornyei (2007) added his approval too *“I have also come to believe that in most cases a mixed methods approach can offer additional benefits for the understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p. 47).*

In taking Dornyei’s advice, there will be statistical presentations of the empirical data obtained from the Unite Survey. This will be done by a combination of charts and tables. Where relevant, comments will be included that are representative of the responses. From a qualitative and quantitative point of view there will be coding of the remarks and sentiments expressed in the comment boxes. This process will also be performed on the comments made in the King Report. As prescribed in the best practice of grounded theory research, the comments were viewed then reviewed. Repeated ideas and concepts became apparent and were then tagged with codes, which were extracted from the data. This piece of advice from Holton (2010) was noted:

*“Those inexperienced in grounded theory methodology may worry about missing something when they leave the rest of the data behind, but it is important to remember that grounded theory is about concepts that emerge from data, not the data per se.” (p.22)*

This process proved beneficial in examining the responses to the questions about the *negative* and *positive* aspects of the job and whether teachers saw the job as a *long-*

*term career*. Because of the richness of material in these comments, they are included in full within Appendices 2,3 and 4.

### **3.4 The Unite Survey of English Language Teachers**

For the purposes of this research, consent for the data usage was obtained from the holder (Unite). The inherent purpose of the study was for data review without direct intervention. Therefore, a research ethics application was not sought or obtained.

The Survey was carried out using the online survey company Survey Monkey and an invitation to participate, together with the web link<sup>6</sup>, was circulated amongst English language teachers in Ireland both to union and non-union members. 147 responses were received between February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019. This is a response rate of just over 10% of the estimated total number of English language teachers in Ireland. This researcher was given exclusive access to the comment material and it is worth pointing out at this stage that 42% of responses were from non-union members.

The entire questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 1. This covering note was on the first page:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/68G9YQB>



**Figure 2: Covering note for Unite Survey.**

*Welcome!*

*Thank you for taking part in this survey.*

*This survey was designed by the English Language Teachers Branch of Unite the Union.*

*It is aimed at English Language Teachers (ELTs) who are teaching in Ireland.*

*You are of course welcome to complete the survey if you are an ELT who is currently unemployed.*

*The results of this survey will be used to inform discussions on the Irish industry's working conditions. Your submission is entirely anonymous.*

*You can find out more about Unite the Union at <https://unitetheunion.org/>*

There were 25 questions to answer, most of them with multiple choice options. Some had comment boxes while a few were simply trying to elicit open ended responses i.e.

What are the positive aspects of being an English language teacher?

The following questions were included for analysis as they were the ones most relevant to the three research questions:

**(1) Does English Language Teaching lead to Job Satisfaction?**

**Relevant Survey Questions:**

Q.7	<i>What is your hourly rate?</i>
Q.8	<i>Are you happy with your hourly rate?</i>
Q.4	<i>How Many Contact Hours do you work per week?</i>
Q.5	<i>Do your hours change from week to week?</i>

Q.6	<i>Are you happy with these hours?</i>
Q.9	<i>How many hours per week do you spend preparing lessons and correcting students work.?</i>
Q.10	<i>Are you paid for these non-contact hours.?</i>
Q.16	<i>Do you think your working conditions are fair</i>

## **(2) Is ELT a long-term career?**

### **Relevant Survey Questions:**

Q.18	<i>Do you see yourself staying in this career?</i>
Q.1	<i>How many years have you been working as an English Language Teacher (ELT)?</i>
Q.17	<i>Why did you become and English Language Teacher?</i>
Q.11	<i>Does your school let you go in the winter and then re-hire you in Spring?</i>
Q.2	<i>What is your current employment status?</i>
Q.21	<i>What is your highest educational qualification?</i>
Q.13	<i>Do you receive any of the following benefits: sick pay, pension contributions PRSA contributions or other benefits from your employer?</i>
Q.15	<i>Do you have a contract with your current employer?</i>
Q.19	<i>What are the positive aspects of being an ELT?</i>

## **(3) What are the issues concerning English Language Teachers?**

### **Relevant question:**

Q.20	<i>What are the negative aspects of being an ELT?</i>
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Information gleaned from all the above questions will contribute to analysis of the issues involved.

### **3.5 Chapter Summary**

Against a background of limited research into the working conditions of English language teacher in Ireland, the richness of the empirical and comment data already available in the form of the Unite Survey and the King Report gave this mode of investigation preference over other possible methods. Case studies, focus groups, interviews and written questionnaires, were all possible options, however for practical and personal reasons these methods were deemed inappropriate at present but, as will be alluded to in the final chapter, some of them will be included amongst the suggestions for further research directions. The format of the Unite Survey was described in some detail and all the questions relevant to the research questions were presented.

The results of the Unite Survey and the data extracted from the King Report, will now be presented and analysed in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4: Data Presentation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will investigate the findings of the Unite Survey with respect to the main research question and the three sub-headings :

#### **English language teaching in Ireland: is it a career?**

1. Does English language teaching lead to job satisfaction?
2. Is ELT a long-term career?
3. What are the issues concerning teachers in the sector?

Further responses from the Pat King report will also be analysed.

To begin with, a brief picture of the survey respondents (147) will be presented regarding their length of teaching experience, educational qualifications, union membership/non-membership and their reasons for becoming English language teachers. Following the presentation of the results, brief reference will be made as to how they concur with the literature already referred to in Chapter 2. More detailed discussion on this will be undertaken in Chapter 5.

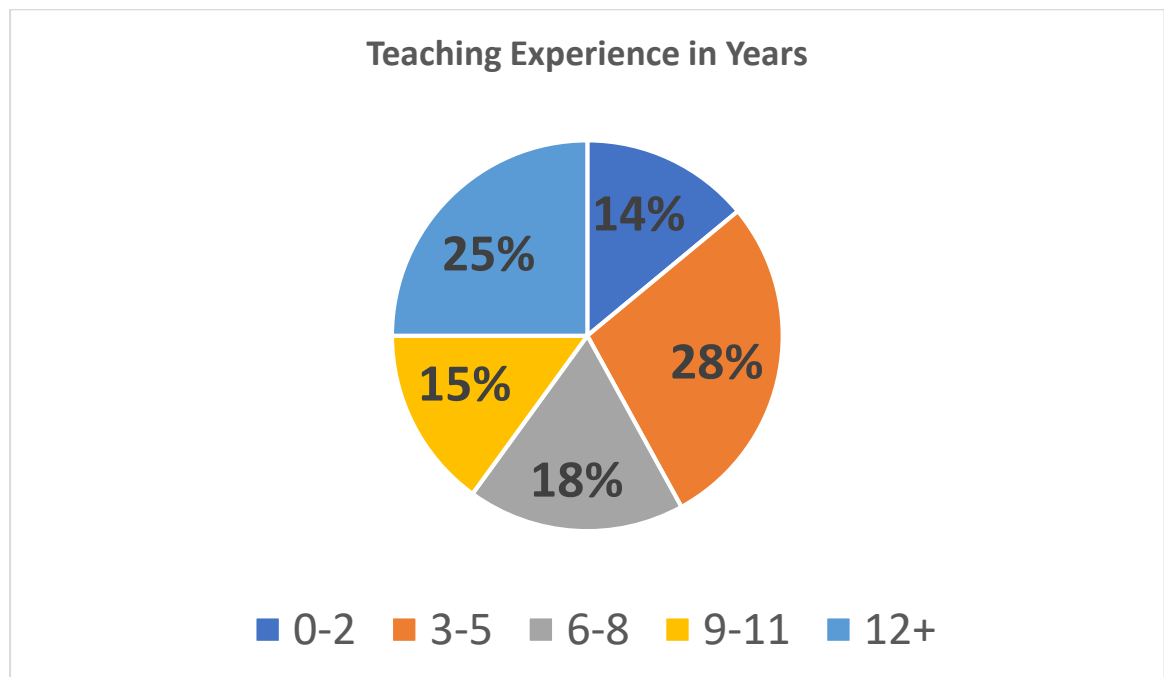
## 4.2 Results from Unite Survey

### 4.2.1 Background Data for the Group of Respondents.

#### (a) Length of service:

**Q.1: How many years have you been working as an English Language Teacher (ELT)?**

Figure 3: Teaching Experience

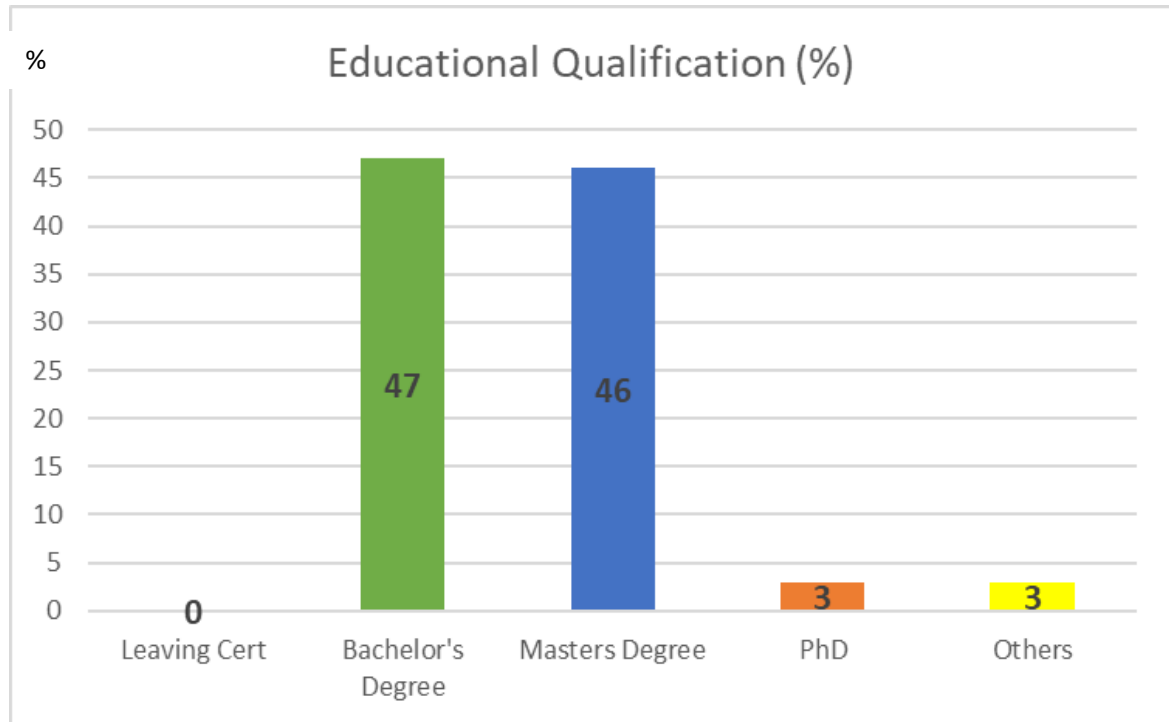


**NB: A quarter of respondents have been working longer than 12 years.**

**(b) Level of Education of the respondents:**

**Q. 21: *What is your highest Educational qualification?***

**Figure 4: Educational Qualifications**



**NB: Almost a half of the respondents have a Masters degree or higher.**

**(c) Union Membership:**

**Q.23: *Are you a member of a union?***

**Table 2 : Union Membership**

Yes	58%
No	42%

**N.B The views of 42% of respondents are from non-union members**

**(d) Reasons for becoming a Language Teacher:**

**Q.17: *Why did you become and English Language Teacher?***

This was an open-ended question and on examination of the comments certain patterns emerged reflecting some very positive attitudes. These deserved some coding, and a word-search for “*love*” in the comments, produced 62 matches, the word “*like*” produced 18 matches and “*enjoy*” produced 15. Most of these were combined with “*teaching*” or phrases like “*interacting with the students,*” “*helping students to develop*” and the “*international*” or “*varied*” aspect of the work. Travel was mentioned by 19 respondents.

From the above information, certain attributes emerged. The respondents appeared:

- Experienced. 58% have been teaching for over 6 years.
- Well-educated. Almost half have a Masters or higher qualification.
- Not all unionised. 42% non- union.
- Appear to have become teachers because they love doing the job.

Witness the frequency of the verbs ‘*love*’, ‘*like*’ and ‘*enjoy*’ describing why they became English teachers.

The characteristics of the group having been established, it is time now to look at just how the data produced by that group answered the three research questions.

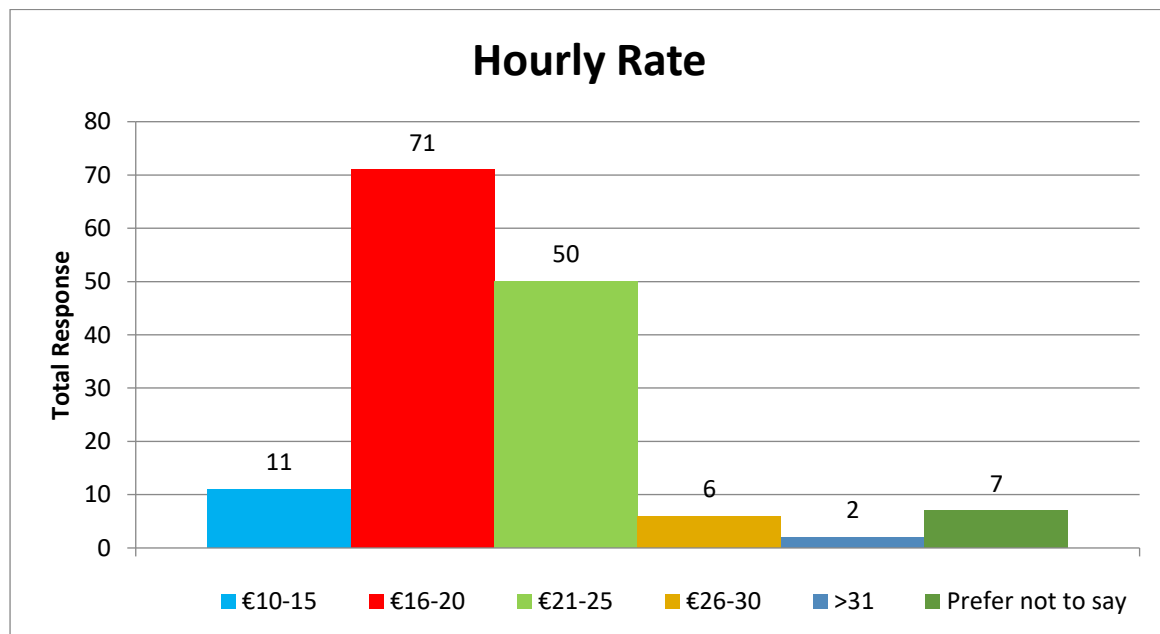
#### 4.2.2 Does English language teaching in Ireland lead to job satisfaction?

While this question was not asked directly several important determinants of job satisfaction were examined. Broadly speaking the findings are consistent with Pennington and Riley's' international findings that ESL teachers experience *“the least satisfaction obtaining in the categories of opportunities for advancement, compensation for work performed, and administrative policies and practices”* (p.37).

Further analysis needs to be done on the first two aspects that play a big part in job satisfaction, pay and working conditions.

**Q.7: “What is your hourly rate?”** The response to the various ranges offered are shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Hourly Rate of Pay**



**N.B 82% of respondents earn between €16 and €25 per hour.**



There was significant dissatisfaction expressed with the hourly rate in response to the next question - ***Are you happy with the rate? (Q.8): 76% said no.***

To put the ELT pay rates into perspective, the hourly rate for a qualified substitute secondary school teacher in the Republic of Ireland is €40.53, while the starting point for a new teacher on the pay scale is €36,953 which rises to a maximum of €69,400 after 27 years (Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland website, 2019).

These following comments reflect the overall dissatisfaction with pay rates:

*“More than a decade of experience, MA in TESOL, good feedback from students and still making less than returning summer staff in my school”*

*“Putting the same amount of work in as a national primary or secondary school teacher for far less salary and poorer conditions”*

Having established that pay rates are not favourably viewed it is relevant to find out just how much time English language teachers spend in the classroom each week.

**Q.4: How many contact hours do you work per week?**

**Table 3: Contact Hours Worked**

<b>ANSWER CHOICES (HOURS)</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
<5	5% (7)
5-10	3% (4)
11-15	10% (15)
16-20	23% (33)
21-25	23% (34)
26-30	27% (40)
>30	9% (13)
<b>TOTAL</b>	100% (146)

**NB: 73% work between 16 and 30 hours per week.**

Contact hours represent the time spent teaching students in the classroom. 64% are happy with the number of hours while the remainder are almost evenly divided between those who want more and those who want less. This reflects a fair amount of satisfaction with the hours available and since the number wanting more hours is virtually the same as those wanting less it seems to suggest that the hours required are dependent on the life situation of the teacher.

The next two questions addressed the issue of what Stanley referred to as the “*extra unwritten mile*” tasks. That is the extra, out-of-class work that often goes unpaid.

**Q. 9: How many hours per week do you spend preparing lessons and correcting students' work?**

**Table 4: Non-contact Hours Worked**

<b>ANSWER CHOICES (hours)</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
0-3	27% (40)
4-6	47 % (69)
7-10	20% (30)
>10	5% (8)
Total	100% (147)

**NB: 67% spend between 4 and 10 hours per week doing extra work.**

**Q.10: Are you paid for these non-contact hours?**

**Table 5: If Paid for Non-Contact Hours**

<b>ANSWER</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
Yes	17% (25)
No	83% (119)

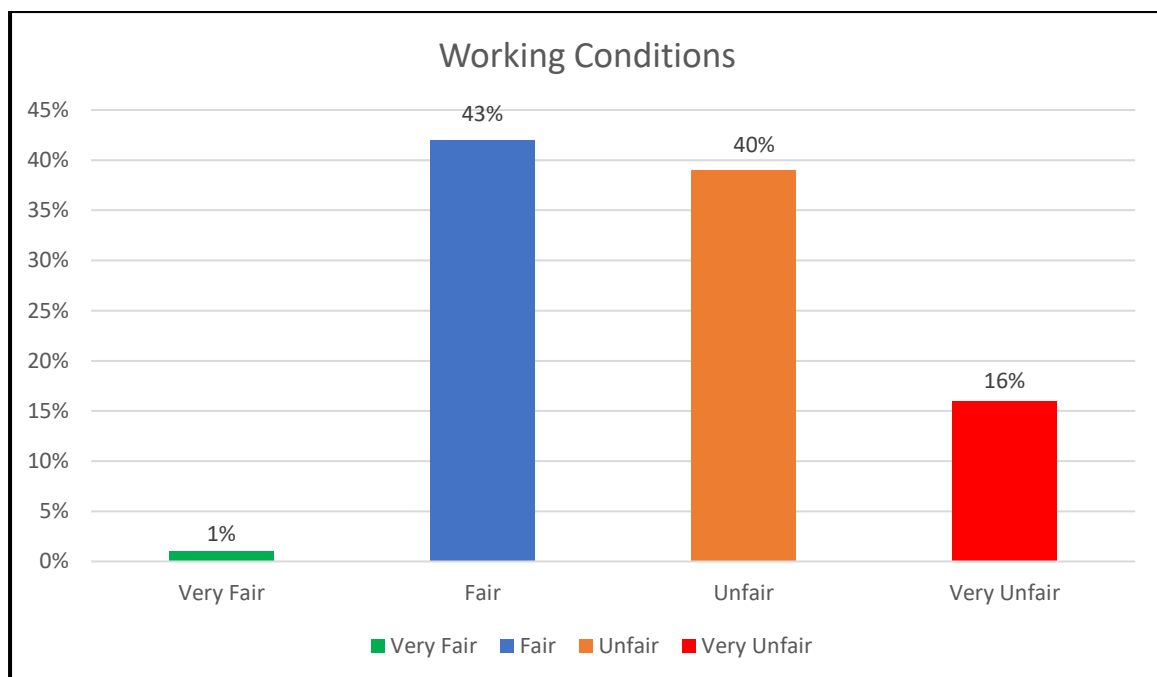
**NB: 83% of respondents said they were not paid for non-contact hours.**

Over 80% are not paid for non-contact hours which, as evidenced above, forms a considerable portion of their working week, that is time spent in performing duties such

as preparation and correction. The reasons teachers are prepared to carry out these duties unpaid will be examined in Chapter 5. It correlates with Stanley's (2016) Australian observation, quoted in Chapter 2, that language teachers are expected to operate under conditions where "unwritten extra-mile expectations" pervade. This was also reflected in the reaction to the survey question as to how fair respondents thought their working conditions were. Up to now the data presented pertaining to job satisfaction has been mainly quantitative (pay rates and hours worked) but the next two questions focus on the qualitative: teachers' opinions about their work situations.

**Q. 16: Do you think your working conditions are fair?**

**Figure 6: Opinion of Working Conditions**



**N.B: 56% of respondents think their working conditions are unfair or very unfair.**

70 people offered comments to back up their feelings and only three of them were of a positive nature. Once again, the most frequent criticism was of the poor pay rates while there were many complaints about those “*extra mile expectations*” that is, not being compensated for those non-contact hours. There were also a substantial number who mentioned the poor facilities in their schools and job insecurity.

Finally, to get a sense of what the satisfying elements of English language teaching might be, it is worth looking at what the respondents considered were the favourable aspects of the job.

#### **Q.19 *What are the positive aspects of being an ELT?***

This was an open-ended question and elicited 139 comments. Having examined the trends that were apparent in the data, once again some coding was appropriate.

A word count for “*students*” produced 58 occurrences (as in helping them progress, interacting with them, the multi-national element).

Similarly, “*people*” appeared 56 times (meeting new ones, working with interesting ones and generally helping people).

“*Teachers*” and “*colleagues*” elicited a combined total of 27 comments (as in working with interesting and supportive people in the workplace).

“*Job*” came up on twenty occasions, some respondents simply said “*the job*” but others used the following adjectives with it: *satisfying, rewarding, fulfilling, amazing, challenging, meaningful, enjoyable, interesting, engaging, easy, better than a desk-job, great.*

These sentiments appear to concur with Pennington and Riley's findings (1991) where most satisfaction was found in the areas of "*moral values and social service aspects*"

This comment from the Unite Survey exemplified the good and the bad:

*"The actual job itself is great, CPD opportunities, constantly learning new skills but I would love it to be closer to education standards in general. Being let go over Christmas and earning no money when it's not my fault the school is closed is very unfair"*

These are the most striking statistics to emerge relating to job satisfaction:

- 76% of those surveyed are not happy with their rate of pay.
- 56% think their work conditions are unfair or very unfair.
- 55% do not see themselves staying in English language teaching as a career.
- Over 80% are not paid for non-contact hours.

### 4.2.3 Is ELT in Ireland a long-term career?

The question in the survey most relevant to this was one directed about the teachers' own personal plans.

#### Q.18: *Do you see yourself staying in this career?*

Table 6: Numbers who see themselves staying in ELT as a career.

ANSWER	RESPONSES
Yes	45% (66)
No	55% (81)

**NB: 55% do not see themselves staying in English language teaching as a career.**

Why is there such a large group who want to leave the job? 110 respondents offered comments. Word-searches for “*pay*” “*salary*” and “*wages*” brought up a total of 28 comments all of which were negative.

Poor “*conditions*” elicited another 13 comments.

Poor job “*security*” appeared 14 times.

Despite these critical remarks there was still a significant presence of positive emotions with “*enjoy*” “*like*” and “*love*” getting a combined total of 20 mentions.

These comments cover many of the issues that surfaced:

*“Lack of access to mortgage, pay does not keep pace with inflation, lack of job security, absence of value attributed to you by top-brass, lack of career ladder within industry, feeling unable to stand over constant diminution of student conditions, even as teachers work tirelessly to ever improve teaching standards.”*

*“No. It's taken me a long time to acknowledge the fact that what goes on in ELT in Ireland is not okay. I have been underpaid, overworked and harassed by management in my school - and this happens because the industry is under-regulated. There are so many avenues for teachers to be judged in terms of value and quality, for instance with intense observations and appraisals, but very little is done to assess managers and their abilities to deal with teachers, conditions and pay. I'm thinking of reskilling completely.”*

*“I enjoy the job. Changing career, I don't think will make me a happier person. I would like to get a more secure job with more opportunities for professional career progression, perhaps in a college/VEC. I want to do a DELTA and would like to train novice/trainee English language teachers in the future. I may also be interested in management in the future”*

*“I'm in my forties and can't see myself doing anything else unless the conditions get even worse. I've got really good at teaching from 12 years of*



*experience, but the schools love to get fresh blood in from the courses they run because new teachers cost less and won't complain as much".*

*"I'm doing a PhD, I love teaching, this is my profession and career. I love what I do, but I might have to leave Ireland because of the conditions for teachers here even though I love Ireland and want to stay"*

Some 86% of respondents said they had a contract with their employers however information was also sought about certain other aspects of their conditions of employment. In response to reports of some schools shutting down temporarily when business was quiet (specifically over the Christmas period), the following question was included:

**Q.11: Does your school let you go in winter and then rehire you in the spring?**

**Table 7: Temporary Lay-offs in Winter.**

<b>ANSWER</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
Yes	24% (35)
No	76% (111)

**NB: Almost a quarter of respondents said they were let go temporarily during the winter.**

Continuing in the theme of extracting information about terms of employment this next question was asked concerning extra benefits:

**Q.13: Do you receive any of the following benefits: sick pay, pension contributions, PRSA contributions or other benefits from your employer?**

**Table 8: Benefits Received**

<b>ANSWER CHOICES</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
Sick Pay	38% (56)
Pension Contributions	3% (5)
PRSA Contributions	18% (27)
Other	0% 0
None of the above	(49%) 72

**NB: Almost a half of respondents said they got none of these, that is no sick pay, no pension contributions, and no PRSA contributions, while only 38% said they did receive sick pay.**

With so many respondents getting laid off temporarily and so many getting none of the benefits mentioned, the question must be asked if this is an environment that would encourage people to stay and make it a career. Further discussion on this will be carried out in Chapter 5, but meanwhile it is time to examine the final research question.

#### 4.2.4 What are the issues concerning English language teachers in Ireland?

Relevant survey question:

##### **Q.20: What are the negative aspects of being an ELT?**

This was another open-ended question and a word-search for some key issues, produced the following results:

**Table 9: Negative Aspects of ELT**

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Pay/ wages/salary	75
Lack of Security/Precarity	33
Poor management (bullying)	22 (4)
Lack of Respect/disrespect	20
Contracts	17
Career prospects/progression	15
Lack of benefits	12
Lack of recognition	8
Holiday related	8

These are some of the comments expressed:

*"I was working as a journalist but found it stressful and not very rewarding. I had friends who did TEFL and decided to look into it. When I did my CELTA, I felt the job was so important and I felt as if I was really helping people. I do love my job, but I'm not sure I can continue in this area if the*

*bad conditions continue. I won't be a martyr to schools and management that exploit me. I've never taught abroad and have no intention to. I didn't start my career in teaching with the intention of travelling the world. I want to be close to my family in Dublin".*

*"The wages, the atmosphere in the school and the lack of facilities both inside and outside the classroom. The fact that the school is run as a business rather than an educational establishment. The lack of a decent career path. Seeing your students knackered each day because they have to work so hard to earn money to survive in Dublin. Seeing them get sick as a result of this too"*

*"There are many positive aspects to this job, which is why so many of us stick with it despite the significant drawbacks. But employers need to rethink their business model and change their practices if the industry is to be sustainable and professional in this country."*

The precarity of employment which was evident in the international literature appears second only behind pay as the most frequently mentioned negative aspect of being an English language teacher.

### 4.3 The Pat King Report <sup>7</sup>

In an area where there is a dearth of investigation, this report stands as a significant qualitative review of lives of teachers in the sector. King states that over 100 teachers responded as individuals to answer his call for views on working conditions in the sector. He categorises eight pages (p.p.15-22) of teachers' comments under the following headings:

**Table 10: Comment Categories (King Report)**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Number of Comments</b>
1. Accreditation of Schools	10
2. Contracts /Hours	65
3. Pay	57
4. Communications with / treatment of Staff	54
5. Leave Arrangements	15
6. Employment Security	27
7. General Comments	60

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<sup>7</sup> The King Report is contained in Appendix 5.

The following is a summary of the sentiments expressed about each of the above seven categories:

1. Inspection and consequent accreditation needed to be reorganised into a consistent process.
2. Contracts were in general seen to be poor with lack of any contracts and precarity being quoted many times as were the facts that teachers were not being paid for non-contact hours and that hours varied from week to week.
3. A word search for just the word “pay” revealed 43 comments nearly all negative, with difficulties paying rent and getting a mortgage being cited by a good number. *“I know of no other sector where graduates are so badly paid” “We need a standard pay scale” “I get €20 per hour. Ten years ago I got €22 per hour”* PP16-17.
4. Communication in schools was generally seen to be viewed positively whereas treatment of staff was quite the opposite with managers being accused of aggression, bullying, intimidation and exploitation.
5. In the Leave Arrangements category there were a good few comments complaining about the lack, or small amount, of sick pay with several teachers saying they were afraid to go sick.

6. Under the heading 'Employment Security' there were no positive comments with many teachers living in fear of losing their jobs, having their hours cut or their school closing suddenly.
  
7. Under 'General' comments only fourteen were of a positive nature with the adjectives used: '*dedicated*' '*passionate*', '*stimulating*' and '*rewarding*.'

In what was deemed very relevant exercise to this paper, a word search for the term "career" reveals the following quotes:

- *"I can't make a career out of this anymore and it breaks my heart"*
- *"It's a very limited career"*
- *"It's not a viable long-term career"*
- *"It's a stop-gap, not a career"*
- *"ELT is an enjoyable, stimulating career"*
- *"I'd strongly discourage any young person to take up this as a career"*
- *"my career is like a cul-de-sac"* (pp.20,21,22)

Exploitation was mentioned on a number of occasions, *"we are passionate about what we do, schools exploit our good nature"* and *"I never felt as low as I did in this exploitative industry"*. These comments *reflected* the thoughts of this group .

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

In attempting to answer the three research questions regarding job satisfaction, career longevity and issues regarding teachers in ELT in Ireland, a combination of the data from the Unite Survey and The Pat King report was used. The method involved both quantitative and qualitative analysis while a certain amount of coding was done with the comment material from both studies.

If the data available from The Unite Survey is combined with that from the Pat King report, it would be reasonable to deduce that English language teaching in Ireland is not viewed favourably as a career worth pursuing. Further discussion on this will be embarked on in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 4, a brief look was taken at some of the characteristics of the respondents before the results of the survey were presented. They were experienced (almost 60% having been teaching for over six years), educated (almost half had a Masters or a higher qualification), 42% were not members of a union and many had become teachers because of the love of the job. Most appeared to be dedicated but many were becoming disillusioned.

It is evident that there are recurring themes between the two studies, the King Report and the Unite Survey, with pay, contracts, precarity and management styles criticised frequently. Just what does the data available from the Unite Survey tell us in terms of the research questions and how consistent is it with the literature referred to in Chapter 2?

This Chapter will firstly examine the factors affecting job satisfaction amongst English language teachers in Ireland. The question will then be asked if conditions are conducive to teachers remaining in the job. Secondly, there will be an examination of the general issues that exist in the sector. Some personal observations from the researcher about his own teaching experience will be included before the final conclusion of this paper is presented.

## 5.2 Comparison of the Irish Experience to the International Experience

### 5.2.1 Job Satisfaction

As stated in Chapter 2, Kaliski (2007) said that job satisfaction was the key ingredient that led to “*recognition, income, promotion, and the achievement of other goals that lead to a feeling of fulfilment*” (p.446). So how English language teachers in Ireland fare under these four categories?

#### (a) Recognition:

There is evidence in the data analysed that English language teachers in Ireland suffer from lack of recognition both inside and outside the school.

*“There is little or no respect for teachers, from most school owners, from the Department of Education, from MEI, or from the government. By extension, from people in general, who don't consider ELT a 'real' job”*

*“poor recognition externally as a 'career choice', little or no recognition from internal management for a job well done”*

O’Keeffe (2001) pointed out that it was not possible to take TEFL as an undergraduate major at any Irish university (p.5). This is something that is still true to the present day and contributes to the poor image of English language teachers.

Pennington (2009) agreed that lack of recognition can lead to low self-esteem amongst English language teachers and Nunan (2001) argued that further training and further education can only improve matters and that the existence of established standards and practice together with an agreed disciplinary base will all help to improve the professionalisation of English language teachers both in their own eyes

and those outside the ELT world. With a similar line of argument, Doble (1998) expressed doubts as to whether even the usual four-week preparatory course for English language teachers provided a sufficient grounding and knowledge base. As stated above there is a lack of any undergraduate courses in ELT in Ireland the same is not true of the United Kingdom. Bachelorsportal is a website that lists “*more than 100,000 Bachelor’s programmes at universities, colleges and schools worldwide*”.<sup>8</sup> A search of “*teaching English in the UK*” on the website brought up eleven universities that offered undergraduate BA courses lasting 3 or 4 years in TESOL, ELT or TEFL. These courses were offered either on their own, or combined with other language or linguistic subjects. This three-year course in Wolverhampton University offered a combination of two subjects:

*“The BA in Linguistics and Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Hons) at University of Wolverhampton seeks to equip you with the practical and theoretical knowledge and skills you need to work in the contemporary ESOL/EFL classroom.”*

Bachelorsportal website.

It is evident that that English language teachers in Ireland suffer from a three-way lack of recognition: from their own school management, from the world of academia and from the public at large. To combat this, changes need to be made in the training process both for teachers and managers. This, together with greater professional advocacy and representation, should lead to better recognition and respect all round.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bachelorsportal.com>

## **(b) Pay**

From the data in the survey English language teachers in Ireland are poorly paid both in their own eyes and compared objectively to secondary school teachers in Ireland. Almost half of the group were paid between €16 and €20 per hour while the next biggest group was in the €21-25 range which accounted for 35% of respondents. The significant figure relating to job satisfaction is that 76% were not happy with their hourly rate. In comparison, reference was made to the pay scales in secondary schools in Ireland where a substitute teacher gets €40.53 per hour. This is how one teacher described his/her dissatisfaction:

*“putting the same amount of work in as a national or secondary school teacher for far less salary and poorer conditions”*

There was considerable discontent from the 83% of respondents who were not paid for the hours spent outside the classroom doing things like lesson preparation and marking tests, these are called “*non-contact hours*”. This is particularly relevant because over two thirds said they spent between four and ten hours per week doing such tasks. Such conditions are consistent with Stanley’s (2016) findings in Australia where teachers were asked to go “*the unwritten extra mile*” for their employer and this was one of the most frequent reasons given by the 56% of respondents who thought their working conditions were “*unfair or very unfair*”. Pennington (1990) also concluded that while English language teachers were largely content with their work, they were unhappy with other aspects like pay, promotion and standards of administration (p.59).

Financial rewards play a big part in the level of job satisfaction experienced by workers in all sectors, consequently, if English language teachers’ level of job satisfaction is to be improved, they need to be paid more. The recently established

JLC to investigate the working conditions in the Irish ELT sector may well recommend just that.

### **(c) Promotion**

There also appear to be few promotional opportunities available for English language teachers in Ireland other than limited openings to become part of the management team. The following comments cover this point and a few other factors:

*“Extremely low pay lack of regulations. Abusive and incompetent management. Bullying. Lack of benefits. Very low or lack of income in December. Lack of respect towards employees. Unpaid holidays Difficulties getting time off work. Lack of professional development. No career progression”*

*“The lack of a decent career path”.*

*“There's no stability, no career progression, and no benefits”.*

*“It's very repetitive and has no career prospects”.*

In the aforementioned work already referenced in Chapter 2, Dornyei (2001) makes the point that an important aspect of teacher motivation is what he calls the *temporal axis dimension* which is an extended often lifelong process taking in career structures and promotion opportunities:

*“a career perspective highlights the temporal dimension of motivation in vocational engagements” (p.162).*

Dornyei also talks about the concept of career as a psychological construct and refers to Raynor's (1978) *contingent path theory* as being particularly relevant to teaching.

Here, career progression is seen as a step by step, stage by stage journey where individuals must succeed at one level before moving to the next:

*“if present achievements do not create future career steps this will have a marked negative impact on the individual’s work morale” (p.162)*

In contingent path theory there are two types of careers. Firstly, open path careers where there are many options to change jobs and progress; this leads to an increase in motivation over time. Secondly, there are closed path careers where there are few opportunities for change and advancement, this leads to individuals reaching a plateau and being less motivated. If teachers do not want to go into management, the job tends to offer a closed contingent path which leads to plateauing and no possibility of advancement. Dornyei concludes that

*“teachers with their high qualifications, ambitions and intrinsic job involvement find it particularly difficult to live with the notion of futurelessness” (p.169)*

English language teachers in Ireland have certainly a high level of academic qualification (49% of the respondents had a Masters or higher) but while describing their condition as one of *“futurelessness”* may be considered somewhat pessimistic, there is evidence to suggest that they are dissatisfied by the lack of promotional opportunities.

**(d) Achievement of other goals that lead to a feeling of fulfilment.**

It is under this heading that English language teachers may appear to get some satisfaction; the achievement of seeing their students progress, meeting and working with interesting people and generally enjoying the classroom experience. These were quoted many times when respondents were asked to list the positive aspects of the job and they fall into the category of what Pennington and Reilly label as “*moral values and social service aspects*” (p.37). These appear to be the main reasons offered by the 45% who say they will remain in ELT as a career.

*“I love helping students interact better with their environments outside of class”.*

*“The students! I love watching them progress in their language skills and seeing them achieve their goals. I also love collaborating with my fellow teachers”.*

*“Enjoy teaching, meeting young people from all over the world”.*

Most of the group sampled in the Unite Survey appeared to like their job but were critical of the out-of-class experience. When asked for the negative aspects of the job, pay related complaints topped the list but then came comments about the high level of precarity in the sector and the existence of poor management styles. (See Table 8 in Chapter 4.4). It is difficult to put either of these into one of Kaliski’s four categories, but it could be argued that they each have a negative effect on job satisfaction. Both will be discussed in the next section as factors in determining if English language teachers in Ireland want to stay in the sector.

### 5.2.2 Is ELT seen as a long-term career in Ireland?

The most important statistic arising from the survey was that 55% of respondents did not see themselves staying in the job as a career. Once again, the familiar issues of poor conditions and precarity were cited as reasons for leaving the job. Despite these critical remarks there was still a significant presence of positive emotions, from the 45% who said they saw themselves staying in the career, with the sentiments of “enjoying”, “loving” and “liking” the job getting a number of mentions.

*“I love what I do, and I know I'm good at it. My students tell me regularly that they enjoy my classes and I can see real progress in them”.*

But why do so many people want to leave a job in a sector that is economically so valuable to the country? Pay and conditions are high on the list of reasons.

*“I am currently resitting my Leaving Certificate in order to retrain as a primary school teacher as there is no security in my current position. I'm 30 and I live with my mother. My partner (a fellow ELT teacher) is 34 and is also living with his parents. We can't afford rent together as our hours are not secure enough nor do they pay enough. I need a pension. There is no possibility of renting or even buying a house. There is no paternity or maternity leave. It would not be possible to pay rent and childcare costs due to such insecurity and poor wages. There is not enough holidays to recuperate during the year”*

*“When you don't have guaranteed hours and a guaranteed salary from month to month it's very hard to live. Some months it literally comes down*



*to a choice between food or rent. I'm an adult with ten years' experience and a decent education. In a supposedly professional job, I shouldn't have to live like this"*

Almost half of the respondents said they got none of the following: Sick Pay, Pension Contributions or PRSA contributions, while precarity and poor management styles were also mentioned as important negative effects on teachers general will to stay in the job. Hiver Kim and Kim (2018) talk about the negative effects of *"oppressive bureaucratic school structures"* (p.27) and there is evidence of this in the following comments:

*"lack of benefits such as sickness pay, some rude managers and a culture of fear"*

*"Lack of communication or consultation from management about decisions which affect our working lives"*

*"Poor working conditions, terms of employment, job precarity/insecurity, lack of CPD, low pay, bad management"*.

55% is a significant proportion in such an economically important sector but it seems to reflect the situation in Australia described by Stanley where the ELT industry offers some satisfaction and the opportunity to work in an interesting sector, but it is a sector that sees teachers struggling to earn a living wage (p.12). The situation in Ireland also appears to be similar to what teachers experience in Poland, with Johnston reporting that the poor conditions made it virtually impossible for them to make a long-term commitment to the job (p.706).

The precarity that English language teachers experience in Ireland is also an issue in Canada (Breshears 2019), Australia (Stanley 2016), and in the French ELT sector where Walsh (2019) says it leads to a situation where people are stuck in an environment of uncertainty with all aspects of their life on hold. (p.1)

These are hardly career inspiring surroundings and there seems to be somewhat of a contradiction, where people who are generally unhappy with their working conditions are still attracted to teach because they love doing it and are passionate about it. This would be consistent with Kay Campbell Shepherd and Kim's conclusion (2019), that employers tend to exploit workers who exhibit a passion for their job (p.1).

### **5.2.3 What are the Issues in The ELT sector in Ireland?**

Most of the issues about to be discussed have already been mentioned in the context of job satisfaction and the desire to remain or leave the sector, but the fact that they keep recurring must surely give credence to their importance and relevance to the overall picture. McLaughlin (2016) identified low salary, job insecurity and limited professional prospects as being important factors in determining teacher motivation in Ireland, and when participants in the Unite Survey were asked to identify the negative aspects of English language teaching, these factors featured heavily. Over half the respondents (75) mentioned pay, wages and salary, followed by comments about precarity, poor management, lack of respect, contracts and poor career prospects.

The notion of general low self-esteem amongst English language teachers was prevalent amongst the respondents to the Irish survey this too has already been mentioned in the context of job satisfaction.

*“Lack of stability. The embarrassment as it is not respected as a real job or career option”*

*“stress; poor mental health; low self-esteem/image compared to other educators”*

On a worldwide stage Thornbury (2001) suggests a new way for teachers to deal with this poor self-image. They should, he says, adopt a different model of teaching that would gain greater societal respect. He calls it a *dialogic model* where learning is a two-way process and students are encouraged to share real life experiences from outside the classroom. Perhaps this is an issue for Irish teachers. Adopting a more respected approach to teaching English might well improve the image of the profession in Ireland. How this affects the training of teachers in the future will be discussed in the final chapter.

One other issue that deserves mention and further investigation is the reliance of English language schools on agents, operating in the countries of origin, to recruit new students from those countries. The commission rates alone provide a very strong incentive for agents to sell the courses<sup>9</sup>. Further research is needed to see if this takes the pressure off the schools to create a respected reputation. If this were true, language schools would have no need for devoted, long-serving teachers to create such a reputation. In such a scenario, schools could recruit newer freshly trained teachers at lower pay rates.

### **5.3 The Researcher’s Own Personal Experience**

Contrary to best academic practice I wish to relate a few relevant incidents that have happened to me during my period as an English language teacher. These types

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<sup>9</sup> <https://thepienews.com/news/commission-creep-elt-sector-concerns-rise-over-agent-costs/>

of occurrences are not unique to me and one of the reasons I decided to do the M.Phil. course in TCD was to try and find out why such incidents occur. They are real, they represent what Hiver Kim and Kim referred to as “*oppressive bureaucratic school structures*” and in my opinion, they reflect the issues that are out there facing English language teachers in Ireland.

### **5.3.1 Broken Promises**

Whether viewed subjectively or objectively, it is evident from this paper that English language teachers are paid poorly in an Irish context. My own experience is tainted by my first few weeks in my current school. In February of 2014 I was offered a starting wage of €18.00 an hour with the promise that, after a successful probation period, I would get an additional 50 cents per hour. At the end of that probationary period the Director of Studies told me that my probationary period had gone well, they were pleased with my teaching but that he had been told by the owners that they would not be paying the extra 50 cents. I was annoyed. I felt let down, but being new to the sector and keen to get experience, I agreed to continue without the promised increment. Was my passion for the job already being exploited? Two years later (2016), the school was sold for a million euro.

Almost three years ago I was responsible for the establishment of a fortnightly music session in the student lounge in our school. For this I was paid an administration rate of just over €12 per hour. When teaching contracts were introduced, I was informed by the Head of School that my payment would now be at the teaching rate (€21.60 per hour). However, despite this promise, the offer was withdrawn, and I was informed that I would only be paid at the administration rate. This, despite the fact that

I had arranged the long-term loan of an electric piano for the student lounge and had created a new social event for the school calendar that not only gave the students enjoyment but also, I am sure, helped improve their English in a fun situation. Alas, my *extra mile* was not adequately rewarded.

Finally, I would find it extremely difficult to live solely on my current teaching wage. After nearly six years of teaching, I receive €21.60 per hour. Why should my pension subsidise my English language teaching? Admittedly, I am in a somewhat privileged position but what hope is there for others starting off their working lives and trying to pay rent or a mortgage and meet all the other expenses of day to day living?

### **5.3.2. Teacher Loyalty**

A brief look at our school timetable for Monday morning, the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2018, sees 19 teachers scheduled to take classes. If the equivalent schedule is examined a year later, for Monday the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019, there are now 23 teachers scheduled but, of those original 19 teachers, 8 (42%), have left the school in the intervening 12 months. Several of them have not only left the school they have also left the sector. 42% is quite a significant proportion. For this group it appears that this particular school is not offering a worthwhile career to them.

## 5.4 Conclusion

These issues, discussed above, are represented empirically in the key findings of the Unite Survey:

Table 11: Key Findings of the Unite Survey

<b><i>76% of those surveyed are not happy with their rate of pay.</i></b>
<b><i>56% of those surveyed think their work conditions are unfair.</i></b>
<b><i>55% of those surveyed do not see themselves staying in English language teaching as a career</i></b>
<b><i>83% are not paid for non-contact hours.</i></b>

Doing something we love is a vital part of our wellbeing, but so too is having time to spend with our families and friends, being free of financial concerns, and being able to save money for the future. It appears that we teachers seem to have come to accept that doing something we love compensates for not being able to achieve the other aspects necessary to our general wellbeing. The consequent dissatisfaction with there being a lack of career path in Irish ELT is not only reflected in many of the comments from the Unite Survey, but also in Pat King's observation that low staff morale is "*commonplace*" (p.2)

The evidence presented, when coupled with the author's personal experiences and observations, concur with Dornyei's opinion about teachers in general. English language teachers also find it "*difficult to live with the notion of futurelessness*". Difficult it may be, but not impossible, because over 1350 English language teachers continue to work in English language schools in Ireland. This is a sector that is predominantly privatised, where schools tend to be run on a business model that, by and large, see teachers and students as marketable commodities. In Chapter 6 some suggestions will be offered as to how the situation might be changed.

## **Chapter 6: Summary Limitations and Future Directions**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This final chapter will contain a summary of the research undertaken - the background, the methodology and the outcomes of the study. It will note some limitations concerning the process and suggest some possible directions for future research and some actions to be taken at the coalface of the world of the English language teacher in Ireland.

### **6.2 Summary**

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background**

This dissertation was motivated by the researcher's six years of teaching in a privately-run ELT school in Dublin school where he found himself and colleagues to be generally enthusiastic about the actual teaching but also noticed an apparent underlying dissatisfaction with the general working conditions in the school. At the time of writing at least two schools in Dublin were involved in industrial action relating to poor working conditions and he wondered if poor conditions were reflective of the lives of Irish ELT teachers in general. At a governmental level, the Minister for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection (Mr. Pat Breen) had just decided to create a Joint Labour Committee for the ELT sector in Ireland.

The Irish Government say they hope the ELT sector will be worth two billion euro to the Irish economy by 2020. A sector worth so much in financial and reputational terms should provide worthwhile career opportunities to Irish and international graduates, but is this the case? In helping to establish whether English language

teaching in Ireland is a career, the three research questions addressed the aspects of teacher job-satisfaction, longevity of teaching careers and the key issues concerning English language teachers in Ireland:

1. Does English language teaching lead to job satisfaction?
2. Is English language teaching in Ireland a long-term career?
3. What are the issues in the sector?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

A review was conducted on the academic and other literature relating to the three research questions. Whereas there is a plentiful supply of international material, academic works on the Irish situation are much thinner on the ground. Studies from the USA, Australia, Poland, Canada and France painted a picture of poor pay and career prospects, exploitation of passion, precarious work, and low levels of self-esteem and commitment. Reference was also made to the psychological factors influencing teachers' motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic and the consequent effect of teachers' desire to stay in the profession. What is available in the Irish literature reflected similarities to the international research about the aforementioned issues. Due to insufficient studies, more research is required in the domestic setting.



### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

The 2019 Unite Survey of English language teachers provided the principal research tool. The researcher was granted exclusive access to the comment material of respondents. The information gleaned from this survey was combined with data from the King Report. The Unite survey was an online survey conducted by Unite the Union amongst members and non-members about teachers' working conditions. Exclusive access was granted to this researcher to the respondents' comment material. The King Report was written following the appointment of Mr. Pat King by Higher Education Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor to "*explore the potential to address some of the employment related issues that have arisen in the English language education sector*". The approach taken involved analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data plus use of further information acquired from several Irish academic works.

### **Chapter 4: Data Presentation**

On examination of the data from the Unite Survey, the following statistics stood out: 76% of those surveyed were not happy with their rate of pay, 56% thought their work conditions were unfair, and significantly 55% did not see themselves staying in English language teaching as a career. One pay-related aspect of dissatisfaction was with, what Stanley labelled, the "*extra-mile expectation*." 83% of teachers were not paid for non-contact hours, that is when doing lesson preparation, correcting homework or marking tests.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

In this discussion chapter the link was made between the survey data relevant to the three research questions and the existing academic literature. Job satisfaction was examined under Kaliski's headings of *"recognition, income, promotion, and the achievement of other goals that lead to a feeling of fulfilment"*. The themes of poor pay and working conditions and the precarity and uncertainty of employment in the Irish ELT world cropped up in answers to this question as well as to the other questions of career longevity and that of trying to determine what exactly the issues for English language teachers in Ireland are. The Irish experience was seen to be similar to results from other studies in Australia, Poland, Canada, France and the USA. Reference was made to the psychological aspects of teacher motivation with the prevalent conditions fuelling Dornyei's notion of a feeling of *"futurelessness"* existing amongst demotivated language teachers. The mixture of the good and bad in the Irish ELT environment is exemplified in these two comments:

*"I do love my job, but I'm not sure I can continue in this area if the bad conditions continue"*

*"There are many positive aspects to this job, but employers need to rethink their business model and change their practices if the industry is to be sustainable and professional in this country."*

The finding that many teachers were unhappy with the work conditions but still loved their job appears to reinforce the view of Kim et al. that people who appear to be passionate about their jobs end up being exploited.

The conclusion of this paper suggests that the environment for teachers in the ELT sector in Ireland is one where passion exploitation appears to be rampant and many teachers are experiencing Dornyei's notion of "*futurelessness*". The business model, that most language English language schools are based on, needs further critical examination.

### **6.3 Limitations**

#### **(a) The Researcher**

It is the opinion of this author that the general findings of this paper are sound, however it will have been evident that that he is emotionally involved in a sector that, as an English language teacher himself, he feels passionate about. He has, it should be stressed, always attempted to be objective. He has done so by revisiting the data, rechecking it to avoid misinterpretation, consulting regularly with his supervisor and other academics, and reflecting on the whole process. Time has also been a constraint as his part-time job of three hours teaching per-day continued throughout his two-year part-time Masters course except where he was given six weeks study leave to complete this dissertation.

#### **(b) The Research Tools**

Because of the paucity of research into the area of ELT in Ireland, and various other constraints, the two main sources presented data that was gathered under non-ideal circumstances. The voluntary nature of the Unite Survey together with its possible sample bias should be taken into account given the natural motivational triggers for people to respond. However, it was pointed out that 42% of respondents were non-union members. It should also be noted that those teachers who

communicated with Mr. Pat King also did so on a voluntary basis. In neither source was any attempt made to make their samples proportionately representative of any overall population properties (sex, age, geographical distribution etc.). This could possibly lead to some skewness, but all the respondents were real teachers with real experiences and real opinions.

## **6.4 Future Directions**

### **(a) Research.**

Clearly more scientific research needs to be done on the whole area of ELT in Ireland. Focus groups, interviews, case studies, and more scientifically driven questionnaire surveys are all options that might be pursued to paint a broader picture.

Specific topics of future research might include:

- The relationship between experience and pay/job satisfaction amongst English language teachers.
- Why do English language teachers leave the sector?
- Does teacher motivation decline over time?
- How does CPD (if available) contribute to teacher development?
- Has state involvement in the sector been effective internationally?
- The reliance on English language schools on agents to generate business.

There is a significant body of school owners and managers in Ireland and they were not part of this current study. Their hopes and plans for the development of the

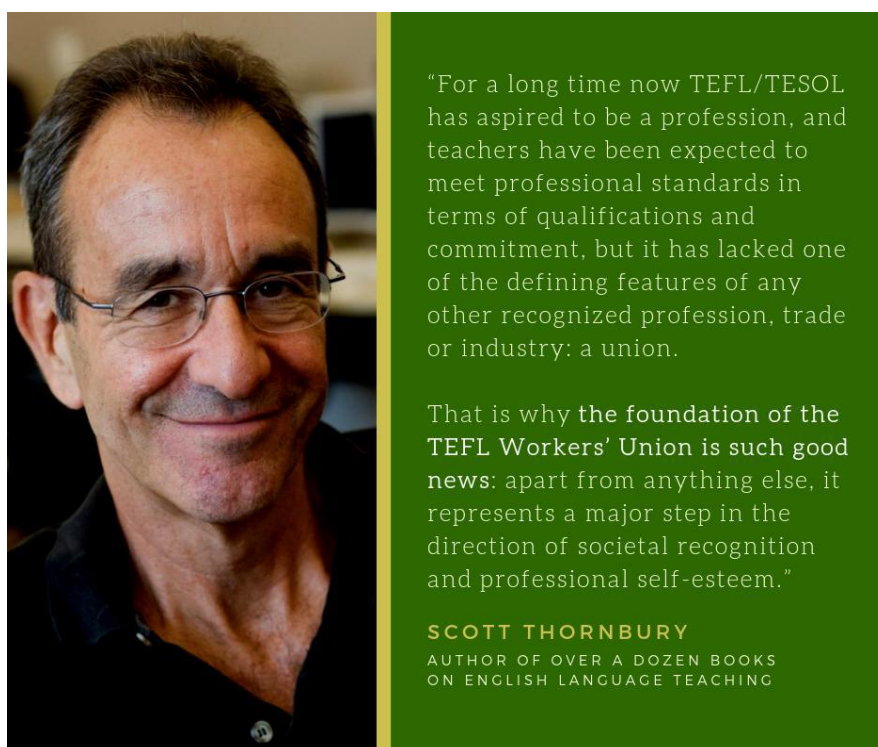
sector would be interesting to hear. Perhaps there are great plans afoot to improve the career prospects of English language teachers in Ireland.

It is the aspiration of this researcher to design a more specific research tool to examine the ELT sector in Ireland in greater detail. He also intends to offer the findings of this paper as a possible subject for a talk to be delivered to the annual ELT Ireland conference. ELT Ireland is a “*support network that fosters professional development in English language teaching by organising regular events held all over Ireland.*” (ELT Website). ELT Ireland also publishes articles written by teachers in an annual bulletin, this would be another possible avenue for further engagement with this research.

### **(b) Combatting Low Self-Esteem**

It was evident from this study that the low esteem held by academia and the general public about the status of English language teachers has a significant bearing on how teachers feel about themselves. More advocacy, as suggested by Nunan (2001), seems to be one of the possible options and this could involve an increased level of unionisation amongst the teachers. A good union should act as an advocate for its members both inside and outside the sector. On the international stage of ELT, Scott Thornbury, already cited in Chapter 2, is a highly respected author of many of the books recommended in English language teacher-training courses. He recently issued a statement encouraging English language teachers in the United Kingdom (UK) to unionise.

**Figure 7: Scott Thornbury encouraging English language teachers to unionise.<sup>10</sup>**



Meanwhile, in Ireland, the ELT branch of the Unite Union was founded in March 2017. Since its inception, several hundred teachers have joined and the branch has successfully advocated for a change in the QQA amendment Bill,<sup>11</sup> improved contracts for teachers and for the establishment of a JLC for the sector<sup>12</sup>.

The standard of qualifications necessary to work in the ELT sector has been a subject of much debate. One solution to the poor image of the teacher training might be the setting up of undergraduate ELT courses in Irish universities leading to a Bachelor degree in ELT/TEFL/TESOL. A number of such undergraduate courses exist in the UK but none in Ireland. If such courses were established, the curriculum

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.teachersasworkers.org/the-elt-worker-no-4/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://thepienews.com/news/long-awaited-international-education-mark-to-be-introduced/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://thepienews.com/news/ireland-elt-sector-jlc-established/>

designers might consider adopting Thornberry's "*dialogic model*" where teaching English would become much more of a two-way process between student and teacher. As stated in Chapter 5, adopting a more respected approach the training for teaching English might well improve the image of the profession in Ireland.

### **(c) Changing the Face of the Marketplace**

If the ELT sector is to remain in private hands then this model that creates an environment of poor pay, precarity of employment and lack of career prospects needs to be examined. It is the opinion of this researcher that this could be a sector that the government and Irish people could collectively embrace. The Irish Government plays a significant part in primary, secondary and third level education in this country. Considering the value of the sector to the Irish economy and its contribution to Ireland's international reputation both as an educational and tourist destination, why should the government not get involved? Such a partnership should, if managed properly, have the effect of improving conditions for teachers in the sector, while at the same time creating even more income and interest from abroad. Ultimately this sector could end up contributing even more to the country's national income while at the same time providing more favourable employment conditions.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Having reviewed the evidence presented here, the brief answer to the question "*English language teaching in Ireland: is it a career?*" must be "*not for the majority of teachers*". Most teachers love their jobs but are unhappy with their work conditions. There is an environment of passion exploitation and this passion should not be taken for granted. Low pay, poor working conditions, and precarity of employment will eventually take its toll and cause teachers to look elsewhere for employment that can

offer a career with prospects. The Irish Government want the sector to be worth two billion euro to the economy by 2020, perhaps it is time for them to get more involved in the running of the sector. The teachers have played their part in the expansion of the sector and they deserve their just reward. Meanwhile English language teachers in Ireland await the outcome of the Government's decision to create a Joint Labour Committee to examine working conditions in the sector.



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## Appendix 1:

### The Unite English Language Teaching Questionnaire

#### **Welcome!**

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

This survey was designed by the English Language Teachers Branch of Unite the Union. It is aimed at English Language Teachers (ELTs) who are teaching in Ireland. You are of course welcome to complete the survey if you are an ELT who is currently unemployed. The results of this survey will be used to inform discussions on the Irish industry's working conditions. Your submission is entirely anonymous.

You can find out more about Unite the Union at <https://unitetheunion.org/>

#### ***1. How many years have you been working as an English Language Teacher (ELT)?***

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-8
- 9-11
- 12+

#### ***2. What is your current employment status?***

- Permanent employee
- Temporary employee
- On a probationary period
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Other

Other (please specify)

**3. Is your school accredited by an external accreditation organisation, e.g. ACELS, EAQUALS, etc.?**

Yes

No

If 'Yes', which one(s)?

**4. How many contact hours do you work per week?  
[Contact hours is time spent teaching]**

<5

5-10

11-15

16-20

21-25

26-30

>30

**5. Do your hours change from week to week?**

Yes

No

Comment:

**6. Are you happy with these hours?**

I would prefer to work more hours per week

I would prefer to work fewer hours per week

I'm happy with the number of hours I work per week

Comments:

Question Title

***7. What is your hourly rate?***

Question Title

***8. Are you happy with your hourly rate?***

Yes

No

Comment:

***9. How many hours per week do you spend preparing lessons and correcting students' work?***

0-3

4-6

7-10

>10

***10. Are you paid for these non-contact hours?***

Yes

No

If you answered 'Yes', how many hours are you paid for and is it at the same rate as for teaching?

**11. Does your school let you go in winter and then rehire you in the spring?**

Yes

No

Comment:

**12. Are you paid for holidays and public holidays?**

Yes

No

If 'Yes', how is this pay calculated?

**13. Do you receive any of the following benefits: sick pay, pension contributions, PRSA contributions or other benefits from your employer?**

Sick Pay

Pension Contributions

PRSA Contributions

Other

None of the above

Other (please specify)

**14. How many days' sick pay are you entitled to?**

**15. Do you have a contract with your current employer?**

- Yes
- No

If 'Yes', what is the nature of this contract?

For example: permanent, temporary, zero-hours (i.e. no guaranteed hours), etc.

If 'No', has your employer given you a reason for this?

**16. Do you think your working conditions are fair?**

- Very Fair
- Fair
- Unfair
- Very Unfair

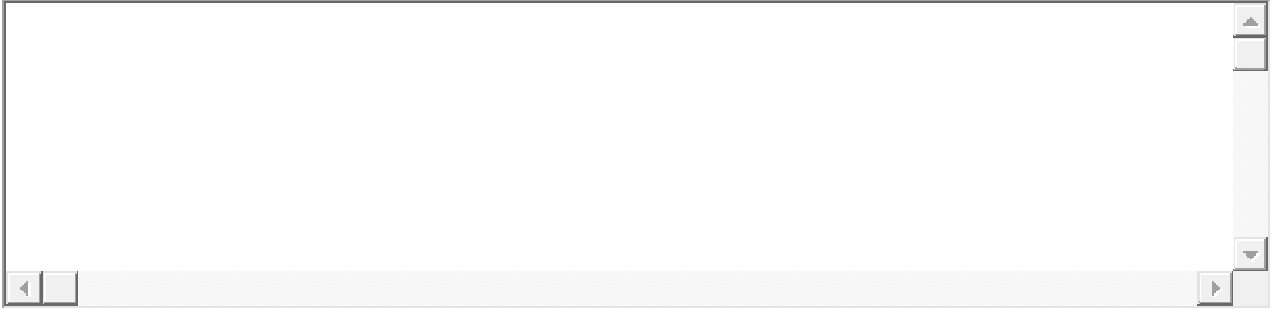
Comment:

**17. Why did you become an English Language Teacher?**

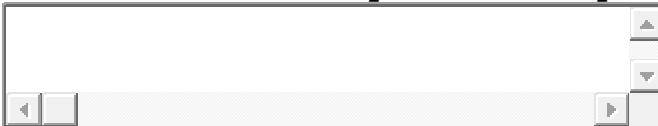
**18. Do you see yourself staying in this career?**

- Yes
- No

Please explain why or why not:

A large, empty rectangular text box with a thin black border. It has a vertical scrollbar on the right side and horizontal scrollbars at the top and bottom, indicating it is a scrollable area for text input.

**19. What are the positive aspects of being an ELT?**

A rectangular text box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to question 19. It includes a vertical scrollbar on the right and horizontal scrollbars at the top and bottom.

**20. What are the negative aspects of being an ELT?**

A rectangular text box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to question 20. It includes a vertical scrollbar on the right and horizontal scrollbars at the top and bottom.

**21. What is your highest educational qualification?**

- Leaving Certificate (or equivalent)
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD.
- Other
- Other (please specify)

A rectangular text box with a thin black border, intended for the user to specify their highest educational qualification if they selected 'Other'.

**22. What is your English language teaching qualification?**

- CELTA
- CELT
- CertTESOL
- DELTA
- DipTESOL
- Other

Other (please specify)

**23. Are you a member of a trade union?**

- Yes
- No

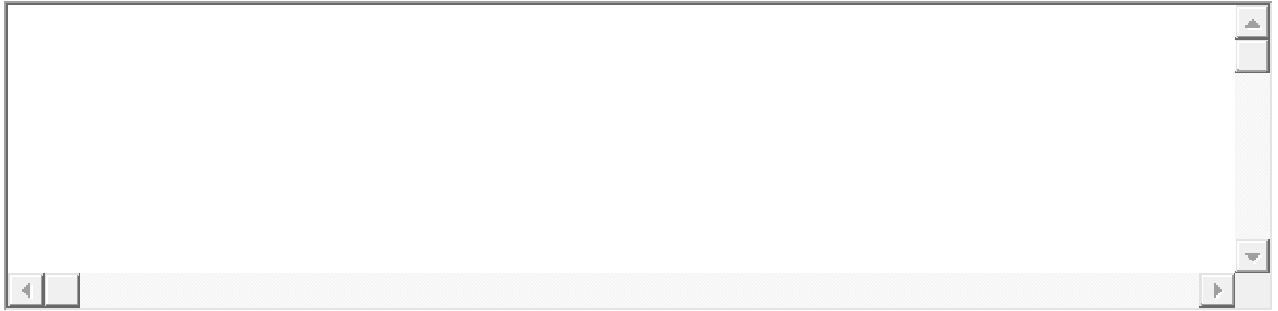
If 'Yes', which one?

**24. If you are not a member of a trade union, would you consider joining one?**

- Yes
- No



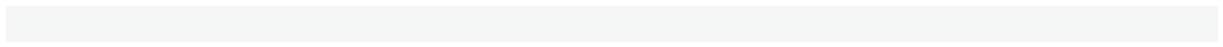
Please comment on why you would or wouldn't consider joining a trade union:



***25. Do you have any further comment(s) you would like to make about your experiences working as an ELT in Ireland?***



DONE



## Appendix 2:

### **Respondents' Comments to Q .19 : What are the positive aspects of being an ELT?**

Enjoy teaching, meeting young people from all over the world.

Teaching, creative freedom, meeting people.

I love English as a language, I love helping students interact better with their environments outside of class.

The students! I love watching them progress in their language skills and seeing them achieve their goals. I also love collaborating with my fellow teachers.

I love the interaction with the students, and I also love learning about the English language.

Flexibility.

When permanent it is stress-free and healthy.

The interactions with students.

People job. Rewarding.

Demands great input and imagination Educational through meeting lots of people with different backgrounds.

The cultural exchange between teachers and students is an absolute joy. I feel that my hard work is appreciated by students and their praises are gratifying. I get to work with a variety of topics and every day is a challenge. I often that I have a better sense of cultures and my own language through educating.

Meeting fascinating people from whey background and seeing people manage to access opportunities thanks in some way to acquiring a decent level of English.

The teaching staff are usually interesting and down to earth people.

Meeting students from around the world and learning about different cultures

The people.

Meeting interesting people. Job satisfaction when you see a change in people's ability. Teaching people who realise and value your work.

Learning about and interacting with lots of cultures. Language is a very interesting thing to get to think and talk about. Good calibre of chat in the teachers' room

Too many to list. New people from all over the world to learn from, varieties of topics to teach and learn about, exams to extend language knowledge, CPD events, internationally recognised and respected as an English teacher (to be honest, this really applies to outside Ireland and amongst learners who are non-native speakers).

Nature of the work - it's always different, meet new passionate people and it's an interesting challenge.

Colleagues.

Everything that happens in the classroom.

Students, options for creativity, opportunities to travel, People.

Meeting people from different places. A diverse range of work colleagues with lots of extra skills outside teaching. A focus on innovative teaching techniques.

The fellow teachers, the multinational students, the variety of the work, the flexibility of the hours and the amount of work available.  
Meet lots of people.  
Communicating with students from all over the world.  
Updating your knowledge to suit the novelties.  
Meeting students from around the world.  
Being able to work around my family's needs and schedule.  
Interesting/enjoyable and meaningful job. Teaching a practical skill which will be of use to people in their lives. Cosmopolitan atmosphere. Social opportunities.  
Intellectually interesting job and educational in itself.  
Teaching environment.  
Meeting students from all over the world and helping them to realise their dreams.  
Working with language. Constantly being challenged and learning new things.  
Developing my own skills.  
Travel, helping others, being creative, CPD, not having a desk job.  
I love the students and I love the language. I don't teach afternoons which lets me focus on other projects.  
Helping others to develop the important and useful skill of speaking today's lingua franca English. As a teacher I continue to learn about the English language at the same time.  
Flexibility, a lot of interaction, learning, variety, you're your own boss in the classroom.  
Seeing improvement in the students and helping them progress.  
The variety of the work.  
Meeting people from around the world. Interacting with people on a daily basis.  
Genuine respect for and from my students and colleagues.  
Hours and environment.  
Working directly with people (both students and fellow teachers), seeing students progress, teaching new skills to students as well as learning new skills as a teacher.  
I like how active the job is. I also appreciate the weekends and evenings off.  
Meeting new students.  
Students.  
Enjoying your job, meeting new people, working with great teachers, learning new things/ skills, teaching methods.  
Students, colleagues, teachers associations, CPD and teaching.  
Personally the flexibility in scheduling when an ELT doesn't work 30 contact hours by choice. Otherwise, a full 30 hour teaching schedule over the long term with prep is very tough and underpaid.  
The people.  
In Ireland? None.  
helping people and seeing the results.  
working with international languages and cultures.  
Mixing with different nationalities.  
We do important work that people want and need. And it's fun and different every day.  
Interesting and rewarding job.

Meeting people from around the world. Teaching something that is real. Most colleagues are good too.

Classroom time with students can be fun, but for me a little goes a long way (I'd prefer to work less hours). Also it pays well per hour in comparison with other low paid jobs.

Making connections with students from all over the world. It's a very social position. Relaxed and multicultural working environment. Fewer hours allows for flexibility to pursue other interests. Simply the reward that comes from teaching.

The students and the colleagues.

Teaching.

Nice work environment, interacting with people every day and how grateful some students are.

Easy job.

Constant creative and personal stimulus- especially from Advanced students.

My colleagues.

The ability to help other people.

The satisfaction of a job well done and seeing your students enjoying and learning from the teaching. Helping them with real world experiences.

Teacher to student ratio is far more favourable than in public secondary school education. New methodology constantly being introduced along with the freedom to put your own stamp on your teaching means it never gets boring.

The students!

Dealing with people, work is creative & challenging.

Fun classes, meeting good people, flexible hours.

Flexibility and informality of work environment. Also there can be (kinda only) a degree of independence of teaching style.

Relationship with the students, very little class management skill needed, multi-national environment. I'm 100% sure of my knowledge. Smaller classes than Secondary Schools.

Meeting a great variety of students. Working with grammar. Making difficult ideas and skills accessible to all kinds of people really gives me a buzz. Not having to work full time.

The job itself- I enjoy teaching. And the schools are generally nice working environments.

The class sizes are good. The students are motivation. There are a lot of good practices and ideas out there in every staff room.

Getting to help people progress in their lives through English.

1. meeting new people from different cultures - 2. no heavy lifting or outdoor work - 3. pleasant and interesting colleagues.

Very interesting and challenging. Flexible.

There's a lot of personal satisfaction seeing learners progress and making connections with people from around the world. There's a lot of room for growth as a teacher.

See student achieve their goals due to my efforts.

Helping others, sharing my passion about languages.

Creativity, flexibility (working hours), colleagues, meeting students, getting recognition from students for a job well done, opportunity to travel, being your own boss somewhat (as soon as the classroom door is closed).

Experience for the future higher pay.  
Negotiable hours. It's creative. Direct human contact. Rewarding.  
Students and co-workers  
The actual job itself is great, CPD opportunities, constantly learning new skills but I would love it to be closer to education standards in general. Being let go over Christmas and earning no money when it's not my fault the school is closed is very unfair.  
Interesting, students are generally engaged,  
I've explained that already too.  
Colleagues, friendships, meeting people from all over the world.  
Seeing students progress  
Making a difference.  
Amazing job getting to work with fantastic students and colleagues. I feel very lucky in that sense  
Creativity in lesson planning. Exposure to a variety of media for class use.  
Meeting new people, learning about cultures, facing new challenges every week  
Sociable working hours, meeting new people, seeing students progress, helping others.  
Learning about other cultures, working with people  
Working with interesting people (colleagues and students), working with language, having a skill you can travel the world with, creativity, some flexibility.  
Fulfilling job great colleagues.  
The students are the best part. It's great to see so many people want to come over to Ireland to learn and work and I feel I can help them on their journey to wherever they want to go. My teaching colleagues: there is camaraderie in every staffroom and I know the teachers in my school are there for me. Union support: I have never felt more empowered in what I do and this is because the union lets me talk about the very real issues that are rotten in this industry. ELT events like conferences.  
Enjoy helping international students is always a good experience. The two periods of holidays are also good even not getting paid for those weeks. Learning different languages and meet new people is always good.  
Creativity, nice students, not too many hours.  
Varied day Meeting a lot of people Teaching is enjoyable.  
Creativity. Versatility.  
Vibrant and cosmopolitan atmosphere at work. Good opportunities to enjoy using prior knowledge and experience. Relatively well structured working environment with autonomy in lesson planning.  
Teaching.  
The opportunity to learn new things every day.  
Contact with people, working hours.  
Meeting great teachers and students; every day is different and finding new challenges in the lessons and solutions to match.  
Engaging with students and seeing them making progress.  
Meeting students from across the world, sharing cultures, making learning enjoyable  
Working hours and being in contact with many different cultures.

People.

Chance to learn new things all the time. Opportunity to travel to conferences or move to other countries. Chance to take research (linguistic or SLA) and try to apply it in a particular context. The challenge of dealing with motivation and special educational needs.

It is great to see developing learners.

Dealing with a whole range of students and their backgrounds makes it interesting  
The students, my co-workers, and the fact that it gives me a minimum stable income while I do other work.

Less hours than office job. Little unpaid overtime. Opportunity to meet people  
The moment of understanding in students' faces. Appreciation. Making a meaningful difference to people's lives. Ease of taking a day or two off.

I enjoy teaching it. Camaraderie with other teachers - when it happens . . .

Not much in Ireland. Nice colleagues?

Opportunity to teach in multi-cultural environments. ELT pedagogy provides foundation to be a trainer too.

The hours, and when there are no dicks in your class teaching can be a very pleasure able and rewarding experience.

Good students ,friendly atmosphere, the social aspect of teaching rather than computer work .

Creativity.

The contact with lots of different people, how informal and fun the time can be, how rewarding it is to see students progress.

It's a challenging and engaging job that achieved what it sets out to do. You meet people from all over the world and make lifelong friends.

Contact with diverse cultures and students of all of different ages

The work environment -The staff (academic) - The students - A sense of having achieved something by helping people after each day ends.

Meet interesting people, travel opportunities, can be creative when you make time

The people you meet, both colleagues and students are amazing. ELTs are such a diverse group, with people from all walks of life and there's a real sense of camaraderie (because we're clearly in it for the love of it.) You also spend much of your working day with students from all over the world who, if you're lucky, give you some of the respect lacking from delve school management .

The people I work with inspire me and make me laugh on a daily basis. Feedback from students and making real connections with them also motivates me. Facing challenges in the classroom every day also pushes me to continue to learn and develop.

Work satisfaction. Students. Subject matter.

The students, the occasions to choose and direct the classes, the other teachers.

It is a great job once you close the door and get on with the business of teaching.

Helping people express themselves and make their voices heard. Planning and creating lessons. Learning from your students.

Meeting people from other cultures, learning about them, helping them to communicate.

Broadening horizons, meeting people from other cultures, thinking critically

I enjoy teaching and languages.

Job satisfaction.

### **Appendix 3:**

## **Respondents' comments to Q.20**

### **What are the negative aspects of being an ELT?**

Pay, support, recognition.

Shit pay and benefits.

Schools shutting down with zero notice, unpaid preparation.

Unstable industry for teachers. No protection, little administrative support. Only the other teachers and the directors of study appreciate what we do.

The lack of respect for what the teacher does and the complete lack of stability.

Legion.

Low pay and lack of respect.

Lack of job security, changeable hours, no progression.

Poor pay and conditions.

Very hard work. A lot is expected.

We are seen as mere service providers. We are simply a body to be placed in front of a class and our dedication is not rewarded. Our work is seen as disposable at times by management and we are questioned on dedication if we try to fight for certain rights. Or we are held accountable should issues arise outside of our control. Whereas management are never accountable for their errors.

The fear that wthey staff meeting might be the one when they tell you the hours are changing or you'll have to take a pay cut. The fact that we were more inspected than gardai or doctors despite the fact that no one's life was at risk.

Lack of stability. The embarrassment as it is not respected as a real job or career option.

Total insecurity Lack of any state regulation despite the massive amounts of money it creates Disregard for teachers who have no ability to pay rent/get mortgages/have children/ -pay childcare costs/ contribute to a pension.

No pension. Enough money to pay rent or save, but not both. People are being paid the same or less than when they started teaching.

Lack of job security, no payment for prep, limited opportunities for growth, lack of industry management and monitoring, imbalanced quality of offering and rates paid to teachers, to all actually.

Unregulated. It's unregulated. Anybody can start a school. The new ILEP document has rules, but everyone knows they're being breached by loads of providers.

Too long hours preparing for class Not as respected as other teachers Not secure work Not worth the long hours away from the classroom.

Management in elt is purely for profit. Teachers are dispensable

Everything that happens outside of the classroom.

Money, Job Security, Uncertainty, Stress, no power.

Less job security than other teachers. No extra pay for planning. Not being able to take holidays at busy times of year (most of the summer months).

Low pay, lack of benefits such as sickness pay, some rude managers and a culture of fear at one school I worked in, some students who aren't interested in learning and only there for visa purposes, lack of proper equipment at many schools (such as computers), expectations of unpaid work such as report-writing, most staff afraid to say the word "Union", much less join a union.

No sick pay. No guarantee for hours. No support. No respect. No time off

Low pay.

Low salaries.

It is seen a joke job.

Putting the same amount of work in as a national primary or secondary school teacher for far less salary and poorer conditions.

Insecure employment Temporary contracts No salaries No salary/wage scale Loyalty sometimes not rewarded. Some teachers are unprofessional and use ELT as a stop gap in their careers. You feel disposable by management/owners.

Unpredictable/cowboy industry.

Unpaid extra work.

Lack of respect and appropriate remuneration for our hard work and talents. Lack of communication or consultation from management about decisions which affect our working lives and also our teaching.

No job security in Ireland, often take work home with you, unrecognized for the work you do outside contact hours, DOSs asking you to "do your best" with difficult groups, little training or paid CPD.

Where do I start? It's the schools really and how the government lets them away with murder while allowing dept of immigration officials to come into school and treat teachers and students like criminals while the owners squire away cash offshore.

The fact that the essential part of teaching English: preparing your lessons is not taken seriously by the schools despite the fact that everybody in the industry knows how important it is.

A lot of preparation and test correction, unpaid.

It is a high-intensity, high-energy job that often leaves you very tired.

Social position. The attitudes of some schools (they feel they can offer short term contracts to their long-term employees as they can be easily replaced should they refuse what's offered).

Changing nature of business always in flux.

Lack of job security, unreliable schools, there is little support provided for teachers in many schools, not a lot of perks with regard to pension, sick pay, etc.

Job security.

No job security in Ireland.

Poor working conditions, terms of employment, job precarity/insecurity, lack of CPD, low pay, bad management.

Pay, contacts, security, low respect for us from owners and govt. We aren't treated as the professional educators we are.

The insecurity of the job. The hourly rates are generally lower than other teaching jobs. Cowboy schools that are in the business for the wrong reasons. Lack of benefits such as sick pay and pension contributions. A negative general perception towards the industry despite some first rate fantastic teachers working in it.

Working conditions. Low pay.

The money.

Unfair holiday and sick leave policies You never have enough to sustain living expenses Employers are not held accountable for the way they treat teachers. The premise in Ireland private institutes: if you won't do it for this rate, someone else will.

Bullying by academic managers, favouritism, racism. Most directors aren't appropriately knowledgeable for their role.

Temporary hours and no pay in holidays. Sometime hours are low.



Disrespect - from employers and managers, often arrogant and ill-trained/informed. Also from 'customers' - the students - teachers treated like shit regularly.

Too many to mention.

We are not considered real teachers, despite our often-extensive qualifications, and most of the problems in our industry stem from that.

Nepotism, bad pay, busiest period in the Summer if you work in Ireland. No security.

The low pay and conditions. Unpaid paperwork and planning.

It's very repetitive and has no career prospects - admittedly that's partially due to the nature of the work as there's only so much you can do with it.

Low pay. Usually extremely precarious work with poor (if any) contracts. Unreliable hours. Usually unpaid labour (correcting homework/essays/exams, lesson planning, etc.).

It is not a stable career and for that reason always feels temporary.

The pay, not being able to afford having a mortgage or children, schools keep closing down so we are constantly under stress and scared to lose our jobs.

Energy draining sometimes. Requires lots of preparation outside of working hours which is normally not paid.

Lack of rights.

We only recently started to receive sick pay, before that it was unpaid. Holiday hours are unfair and we don't get paid for the time the school is closed.

Can be boring.

Being palpably regarded as low value grist to the mill by cowboy owners in whose interest it continues to be to ignore calls to raise our status from skivvies to valued professionals.

Pay. Conditions eg no administration time.

Extremely low pay Lack of regulations Abusive and incompetent management Bullying Lack of benefits Very low or lack of income in December Lack of respect towards employees. Unpaid holidays Difficulties getting time off work Lack of professional development No career progression.

The wages, the atmosphere in the school and the lack of facilities both inside and outside the classroom . The fact that the school is run as a business rather than an educational establishment. The lack of a decent career path. Seeing your students knackered each day because they have to work so hard to earn money to survive in Dublin. Seeing them get sick as a result of this too.

Pay and conditions.

The instability and lack of benefits(e.g. sick pay) offered in more permanent jobs.

Everything else.

Lack of recognition that it is a 'real' job.

Poor pay. No benefits.

Security, lack of respect. Students coming on short term basis who throw toys out of pram when they don't get what they think they've paid for so your 10+ years of teaching experience counts for nothing. The pandering to the whims of students I guess. Of course they are the customer and pay a whack load of money but there is a way of managing these expectations without disrespecting teachers. No link up between people selling courses and this delivering. It's shocking really!

They expect graduates and for you to be professional, but in the end, you get paid per hour, there's little job security, you don't get paid for planning lessons.

Pot working conditions. Being poor myself. Having no pension. It's a very intense job and I'm sometimes horribly drained afterwards. You can end up very close to your students, spending more time with them, and in deep, personal conversations, than you do with friends or family. The turnover of students then becomes a draining aspect. Sometimes teaching English so much negatively affects my interactions with other non-native speakers in my day to day life. Sometimes it really pisses me off when a service worker, or anyone else for that matter, has poor English- I feel like I'm back at work but I'm not getting paid. I know That's not fair on the person, & I feel bad about it.

Low pay, no benefits, no permanent contract.

Low wages, no sick paid, short-term contracts.

The pay is shit and your skills and knowledge are undervalued by both the industry and the government / society.

1. general terms and conditions - 2. precariousness - 3. being ripped off by bogus school owners.

Poor pay and conditions. Lack of recognition for experience. No career path.

This sector is quite unstable. Pay could be better.

Employers.

In Ireland, the terrible working conditions. In general, how very few people take this as a serious job - anybody can do a CELTA course for a month and become a teacher - what kind of a standard is that?!!!

Poor pay, poor recognition externally as a 'career choice', little or no recognition from internal management for a job well done, over-critical appraisal systems (not nationalised or standardised-rewards or progression are at your boss' discretion, rather than formally legally set).

Uncertain contracts, if any given. No benefits if any and unpaid hours worked. Little to no support for newly qualified teachers. Inconsistent working conditions in other schools.

Low pay. Lack of morale among staff. Lack of support/understanding from admin on job satisfaction/ professional development.

Wages, lack of decent conditions or respect of professionalism of teachers.

.The pay and usually the work conditions.

.0 hour contracts, no support from the academic or business management, outdated materials and equipment, dodgy holiday pay systems, no room for progression, no disciplinary measures for students etc.

The people I work with. Especially Teachers. They are often the main obstacle to improving conditions. They report on Union members to management all the time. Most of them are cowards.

Exploitative conditions - in amount of working hours, hourly rate, unpaid prep times, unpaid sick leave when we see people 6 hours a day, not enough supplies, disrespectful treatment... The list goes on.

Pay. Working conditions. Uncertainty in the industry. General lack of respect by employers.

I'm a full-time employee but I'm paid by the hour. I'm not a salaried employee. I don't get sick pay like office staff do.

Stigma attached to the industry. No backing from the government. Used as a steppingstone for most.

It is not often seen as a career and many schools do not look after employees.

Student numbers and making more money are always the priority.

Low pay, bad working conditions.

Low pay, precarious job situation, not worth becoming more professional, school owners are mostly out to make money.

Unpaid hours.

It's hard to live and work in Dublin these days and pay in ELT is terrible. I wish there was a standard. I feel like I could be let go at any moment, for my union actions.

Even with a permanent contract. Nothing is really permanent or comfortable in this industry. Paperwork is expected for free. It is seen as bad if you're not 20 minutes early for work every day even though you don't get paid until 9.

Seems that there is no regulation about it. I saw teachers changing every 2 or 3 weeks, schools offering native teachers with non-English's accent employees.

Working without a contract seems normal in Ireland. I guess a lot of the teachers are getting paid in B. I was given myself of fake payslips without any record in the revenue system about me as a worker ever. Teachers without teaching studies. Bad salaries.

Low pay, no perks, no pension scheme

Lack of security Students in wrong level

No holiday in summer

Mobile phone use in class - I believe that I am being photographed and recorded in the majority of lessons. The lack of an academic calendar and universal curriculum. When students change levels or take annual leave, they can miss large swathes of the course. It is often necessary to revert to elementary topics because students lack the knowledge necessary to complete a particular unit. There is a lot of confusion over the different examination systems (TIE, Cambridge, IELTS and TOEFL). There should be more information about course content and desired outcomes available to students before they enrol. I have a student who wishes to pass IELTS, and I am not equipped to help her.

Planning, lack of stability, daily stress

The lack of facilities.

no sick pay hardly ever paid hols, unpaid paper work (lesson plans, record of work, corrections).

No Job security, unscrupulous bosses, bullying; low pay; poor contracts and vague Terms and Conditions of employment contracts; no sick pay; stress; poor mental health; low self-esteem/image compared to other educators.

Pay and contracts.

Bad pay, temporary contracts, no stability. Can't live like this.

Lack of permanent contracts and sick pay.

I put in the work and do my job, but other teachers don't. Variable standards (employment AND teaching) in schools across the city. Managers who are not trained to be managers (longest-serving teacher becomes DOS!). For many, at the mercy of the immigration policies of a right-wing government.

Financial issues Lessons are too long.

That there is little or no respect for teachers, from most school owners, from the Department of Education or from the government. By extension, from people in general, who don't consider ELT a 'real' job.

Lack of recognition, job security, professional development, and very difficult (and also not very lucrative) to move up to different levels.

There's no stability, no career progression, and no benefits.

Some students give attitude. No Flexi time. No sick pay. Little positive reinforcement

Lack of recognition.

Pay and conditions. A lot of bullying and abuse of power by admin and management staff.

No protection or benefits.

Low pay, discrimination at work, unpaid prep hours, inconsistent work, constant evaluation by managers, devalued.

No pension, no job security, no chance of getting a mortgage. And also the power that students have - it can feel like a personality/popularity competition, and when a paying student decides they don't like a teacher they can make their life hell, and possibly cost them their job. This "customer is always right" approach is a constantly recurring aspect of this job, and it causes serious confidence issues for teachers who are very qualified and very capable.

Pay It's a flawed system - we have students on Visa who don't want to (sometimes don't need to be in class) I understand this is the system however it creates an awful atmosphere at times.

Total lack of security. Low pay given the hours of prep that go in. Being banned from taking holidays in July and August because it's a busy period. And banned at other times that happen to be busy too. All in all the expectation that you will come up with good engaging classes/courses with little or no support. Being expected to perform without proper equipment or even at times basic things like a functioning cd player or the correct cd/coursebook. Those problems are always the teacher's problem.

Precarious employment. Terrible owners and managers. Poor rates of pay. Lack of contracts.

Pay. Insecurity. Poor management in many cases.

The pay - The lack of stability in the industry despite the fact that there is copious amounts of work and students in Dublin on a consistent basis. - The lack of a contract and basic worker's rights which are available in the majority of professional work environments in the modern day.

Low pay, no benefits, no respect from general public, long hours,

There is no respect for our industry in the wider world. Though we are expected to fill out masses of paperwork as though we did a "proper job" The industry is in total disrepute.

Not being seen as a teacher. Not being given the recognition we so absolutely deserve Not being seen as an asset to school owners and even the state.

Shit pay. Poor conditions. Low prestige.

Insecurity of hours, precarity, lack of respect from the organisation for your work, the underlying expectation that you must leave the profession.

The dreadful working terms and conditions. The lack of security. The lack of respect from owners, managers and those whose job it is to regulate the sector. No sick pay, no payment for non-contact hours, no pay progression, no permanency.

Poor pay, lack of respect, having students' frustrations taken out on you, having students who don't want to be there but have to for a visa.

Little to no regulation or job security, people look down on you as being "not a real teacher".

Pay, terms and conditions, lack of any benefits.

Precarious work, unpaid non-contact hours, no sick leave, contract issues, low pay.

I've been in these schools.

**Appendix 4:**  
**Respondents' comments to Q. 18**  
**Do you see yourself staying in this career?**

No security. Lack of basic employment rights, sick pay etc.

Sadly need to take a Job with security.

I love teaching English. However, I don't see this as a stable career for the long term.

Having no paid sick leave and no pension contribution schemes, I can't see myself staying in an industry that doesn't give back all I give to it.

Because there is no stability and no future prospects unless you get into management, which I am not interested in. I like teaching, not administration.

Could an actor go on stage 5 days a week to perform the same play (with minor changes to the script) with the same energy and commitment for years on end?

There is no security or progression in the job.

Instability and lack of progression, poor regulation.

The work is draining and the industry is exploitative. Teachers are not respected by owners or management. The wages are paltry and there is no security or payments towards a pension. Also procedures and practices are often changed without little reason or notice. Student's needs can be an afterthought. And regulation from the government or the current groups is farcical.

I left as I was offered a less interesting but much more stable pensionable civil service job. When the next recession hits my family will not be anywhere near as at risk as we were during the last one.

This is not a career.

I am currently resitting my Irish leaving certificate in order to retrain as a primary school teacher as there is no security in my current position. I'm 30 and I live with my mother. My partner (a fellow ELT teacher) is 34 and is also living with his parents. We can't afford rent together as our hours are not secure enough nor do they pay enough. I need a pension. My partner and I want to start a family but this is not possible if we both stay in TEFL. There is no possibility of renting or even buying a house. There is no paternity or maternity leave. It would not be possible to pay rent and childcare costs due to such insecurity and poor wages. There are not enough holidays to recuperate during the year.

I am setting up a school.

I left teaching and moved into operations management to have a secure role that still allowed me access to students and guiding. I'm still in ELT.

I love the actual teaching so much.

Too stressful, very undervalued job.

Too difficult to have as a career.

Maybe, I will see how things turn out.

It will remain a part time twenty-hour job as apart from aspiring to work in the administration side of the industry there is no pay increase for experienced teachers and not enough other benefits state teachers have.

Not at this rate of pay and with these conditions, I'm afraid.

I love the job but I can't see myself staying a teacher. I might try to move into management etc.

It doesn't provide enough professional satisfaction and you are not regarded as a professional employee.

I enjoy the job. Changing career I don't think will make me a happier person. I would like to get a more secure job with more opportunities for professional career progression, perhaps in a college/vec. I want to do a DELTA and would like to train novice/trainee English language teachers in the future. I may also be interested in management in the future.

In Dublin, you cannot survive long term.

I love the work itself and if the working conditions improve, I plan to continue doing it. I will continue with my education in teaching towards a PhD.

I'm in my forties and can't see myself doing anything else unless the conditions get even worse. I've got really good at teaching from 12 years of experience, but the schools love to get fresh blood in from the courses they run because new teachers cost less and won't complain as much.

I like teaching, it's rewarding. There's still a lot to be desired in the industry however. For now I accept the downsides.

Partly - I'd like to stay in education but not necessarily work as a teacher.

Even if my hours were low, I'd still try to stay in this career as I enjoy it so much. For now, it makes me happy, so I'll stick with it.

I think it is a great job however it's very unstable and there is a huge lack of job security so I can't imagine myself permanently staying in this career.

Because I enjoy it.

Languages are my passion.

No job security, low pay, poor conditions, workplace bullying, lack of regulation in the sector in general, bad management, unscrupulous school owners who apparently are not interested in education but more interested in profiteering. No access to pensions, no maternity/paternity leave. Lack of proper CPD and related pay scales. I'm doing a PhD, I love teaching, this is my profession and career. I love what I do, but I might have to leave Ireland because of the conditions for teachers here even though I love Ireland and want to stay.

For the near future. It enables me time flexibility to do other things.

I love what I do.

Invested in further studies.

Unregulated, dead-end industry.

It's my passion, it's a very worthwhile one which is massively underappreciated

Only if the industry becomes regulated and we are offered teaching council registration like all other teachers in state schools.

I am not sure. I have a son that I would like to spend the summers with when he is older so I was considering doing my special needs assistance certificate, but I think I would miss the job.

Because I don't enjoy it very much and it doesn't pay very well so for me it's basically the worst of both worlds.

It's hard to see these jobs even existing in 10 or 20 years' time. Everything is moving online or being automated. The only real reason to keep these English schools open would be as visa mills, and that won't be able to go on forever.

It is simply not a career (unless you get a DELTA), until then it is a job not a career and for that reason I wouldn't stay.

Especially not in Dublin with the cost of rent and I'd like to get a mortgage eventually.

I'm also worried about my pension.

Not for ever though.

Because it doesn't have the benefits of other jobs for when I want to start a family. It is good for now and I love it but in a few years I will have to change jobs.

I'll need to raise mortgage finance this year - impossible with a zero hours contract I struggle financially and the lack of regulations makes my job really stressful.

Ironically it's because I like the cut and thrust of the classroom but am not relying on the wages as my main source of income!

It is not stable enough. There are not enough permanent positions on offer and I would like a job that I am guaranteed hours year round instead of them dropping off in quiet times.

When you don't have guaranteed hours and a guaranteed salary from month to month it's very hard to live. Some months it's literally comes down to a choice between food or rent. I'm an adult with ten years' experience and a decent education. In a supposedly professional job, I shouldn't have to live like this.

I enjoy it more than any other jobs.

I have other interests, but it is also insecure and (as stated above) respect is lacking.

This is further underlined by the fact that I work in one of the better schools around.

God only knows what others are going through!

It suits me. Long term no, it's a dead-end job.

I really hope I can get out of TEFL, but I'm not sure where/how I could transfer my skills. I have my own creative business which I run alongside the teaching. The income from that is not enough to leave Tefl, so it's nice to have the safety net of tefl.

Am transitioning to a career in counselling

I enjoy teaching, I do not know what the future will bring but I do enjoy teaching in this industry.

Lack of access to mortgage, pay does not keep pace with inflation, lack of job security, absence of value attributed to you by top-brass, lack of career ladder within industry, feeling unable to stand over constant diminution of Student conditions, even as teachers work tirelessly to ever improve teaching standards.

Because I am nearly 50 and work part time.

Although my current work condition is fairly stable, this isn't necessarily guaranteed in future and the sector is so notoriously unstable, I find it difficult to imagine buying a house or raising a family and staying full time in this career.

I intend to become self-employed.

I've been doing this for over a decade and I don't see myself doing anything other than that. Sometimes I regret it, wish I was good with IT and get "a proper job", but at the end of the day, even the shitty (pardon my French) conditions of this industry in Ireland can't seem to make me want to do anything else.

I'm 35, going on 36. Have no savings, no security and little opportunity to progress, without getting into debt.

I wish I did. But the requirements in this area are more and more, while the benefits haven't been improved much. I consider being a teacher in this private sector is much harder than in a public school, from many points of view. Also, private schools bring in lots of money. Yet the teachers in this sector have far less benefits than the ones in state schools...

I hope to continue in this career, becoming a qualified teacher trainer or examiner. My company gives compensation for successful completion of DELTA courses in addition to a pay raise after this.

...or teaching in some capacity. It's compatible with my other job (musician)

Due to lack of wages and conditions, it is unfeasible in the long-term.



I really want to but based on hours, pay, lack of security, no pension, no maternity benefit and no other perks, it's hard to imagine being here in five years never mind even be able to buy a house on this wage.

I am good at it and if my pay conditions improve of course. But I am also considering other options in case my pay does not grow significantly.

I've already done that in my working conditions answer.

No, because the employers are not open to any kind of change that would benefit teachers. We are not recognized as full-time workers and there is no security whatsoever. The extra work is not paid, sick days are not available and we could lose our jobs without any warning. It lacks transparency in any possible way.

There is no future, no pension, no reward for loyalty.

I am on the verge of a severe burnout.

Not sustainable in the long term. Will need to have better earning potential eventually It's an industry with a future and I feel I'm good at it

I don't know yet.

For now, yes. However, working conditions HAVE to improve if I am to continue teaching. A good start would be holiday and sick pay, though eventually the possibility of a permanent contract, a pension and paid preparation time should at least be possible.

You are not rewarded for ability, experience, or qualifications. The pay is low and we are not seen as valuable by school owners.

No. As above. It's taken me a long time to acknowledge the fact that what goes on in ELT in Ireland is not okay. I have been underpaid, overworked and harassed by management in my school - and this happens because the industry is under-regulated. There are so many avenues for teachers to be judged in terms of value and quality, for instance with intense observations and appraisals, but very little is done to assess managers and their abilities to deal with teachers, conditions and pay. I'm thinking of reskilling completely.

This is the third school I know from inside. The system was always the same, trying to get ideas and students for free or at the minimum price possible. Translations from exotic languages for their websites for free or with a promise of having a commission after getting at least 3 students per month (So, in the end, working for free).

Unexperienced managers acting as if they were multinational bosses. Bad salaries, poor labour rights.

Maybe part time - no perspective, no pension scheme

Lack of prospects.

I want to stay involved in education but ELT is too precarious.

Hopefully I'll work my way up to having a full-time & stable teaching job...hopefully!

No pension, not much room for pay rises at present rates; not much room for promotion; poor working conditions and employment practices of employers in the sector. No job security.

I love what I do and I know I'm good at it. My students tell me regularly that they enjoy my classes and I can see real progress in them.

As it stands, the industry is too unstable and I don't see any career development avenues.

I enjoy the company of the students and watching people learn a language is fascinating. The people you meet are the best part of it - I'll probably never be rich

but I get great satisfaction from it and I'm reasonably well looked after in my company.

For as long as it is viable. I've put a lot into it, including doing Delta. I don't see any career change in the near future at least.

I say yes as I expect to remain loosely connected to the broader sector.

It suits my right now, but if my freelancing work doesn't become something bigger, I'll change paths.

Not much career growth opportunities.

Pay isn't good enough, unmortgageable, no benefits.

I am 62 years of age and retrained to do this after my sector, community development, was decimated. I hope I don't have to change track again! I have many years' experience as a teacher and trainer and feel I should be able to continue as a language teacher.

Bottom of the barrel job in Ireland. In my last posting abroad, I had health insurance, a settling-in allowance, an accommodation allowance, pension contributions, flight allowances, over 40 days holidays per year.....

I don't see any other career opportunities or progression for me.

Yes and no - at this stage I feel it's too late to get a "real job", and also this is what I'm qualified, experienced and good at. But I want a pension and a salary, so who knows, maybe it is time to start thinking about other options.

No security, poor pay, unrealistic expectations. It has highlighted the fact that it is an 'industry'... Some visa students don't want to be in class. It leaves the teacher in poor situation, teaching in atmospheres where people don't want to be there, working for people who have money as the pre-requisite.

## **Appendix 5:**

### **COMMERCIAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION SECTOR. REPORT OF MEDIATOR TO**

**MINISTER MARY MITCHELL O’CONNOR T.D.**

**Patrick King  
Mediator  
27 June 2019**

#### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION<sup>13</sup>**

*“Teachers in my school have no complaints”*. I do not doubt the sincerity of the English Language school provider who made this statement at the general meeting of English Language school providers and owners held in Dublin on 28 February 2019. However, as can be seen from Appendix 1 and 2 to this report, there are also school providers who believe that there are legitimate grounds for serious concerns about the manner in which some English Language schools operate and how employees in such schools are treated.

Appendix 2 contains an accurate reflection of the views of school employees. While there are a small number of positive comments from teachers about their experiences of working in this sector, the great majority are highly critical of the working conditions in English Language schools. Many thousands of students travel from all over the world to attend English Language courses in Ireland. This, to a great extent, is due to the excellent standing Ireland has as an education provider. However, this reputation is fragile and is damaged each time an English Language school closes at short notice. It is also damaged when there is evidence that school employees are poorly paid and have unfair working

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<sup>13</sup> The Appendices are not included in this version but are available at:  
<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/International-Education-Strategy-For-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf>

conditions. Teachers in the schools state that low staff morale is commonplace and some cite examples of high levels of stress and distress caused by their poor working environment.

Based on what providers/employers and employees have stated through the mediation process, it is essential that minimum employment standards are put in place for the sector. For such standards to be effective they must have a legislative basis. Adherence to such minimum standards should be a prerequisite for the awarding of, or indeed the retention of, the IEM quality mark envisaged in the QQA Bill currently before the Oireachtas. Statutorily based minimum employment standards would protect employees and would prevent schools from undercutting each other through the use of lower standards.

All of the employees who communicated during the course of this mediation process asked that minimum employment standards would be put in place. The ICTU and the two trade unions active in the English Language sector (UNITE and SIPTU) strongly support a process that would result in a ministerial employment order that would create minimum employment conditions with legal force. The preference for the trade unions is that this should take the form of a Statutory Employment Order (SEO).

At the general meetings of over ninety employers/providers held in Dublin, Cork and Galway there was little evidence of a desire for statutorily based minimum working conditions. However, there was a strong desire expressed by employers for a strict accreditation regime for schools with adherence to common standards being consistently applied to all schools. Progressive Colleges Network (PCN) who represent eight schools, engaged in the mediation process and agreed that minimum employment standards should exist for schools and that these should have a statutory basis through a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) or an Employment Regulation Order (ERO) arrived at via a Joint Labour Committee (JLC). Independent Language Schools Group (ILSG) which is an informal grouping of fourteen language schools, engaged in the mediation process and agreed that should a statutory process (e.g. SEO or JLC) be established they would engage with this. Marketing English Ireland (MEI) engaged in the process and stated that they are committed to supporting and working collaboratively with the Department of Education and Skills in exploring an appropriate method for enhancing employment terms across the sector. To this end, MEI is convening an EGM of its members in order to change its Constitution so that members can be balloted on engagement by MEI in a representative role in sectoral collective bargaining under the auspices of industrial relations legislation. MEI states that it is fully committed to an agreement on an appropriate method for enhancing employment terms across the sector.

I have been requested by the Minister to engage with employers and employees in English Language schools in order to explore the scope for a statutory agreement on minimum standards of employment in the sector. Having engaged extensively with the relevant stakeholders and noting their positions as set out above, I make the following recommendation:

### **Recommendation:**

*I recommend that the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation applies to the Labour Court to establish a Joint Labour Committee (JLC), in accordance with industrial relations legislation, to address all aspects of the working conditions and pay of employees in English Language schools with a view to the issuing of an Employment Regulation Order (ERO) for the sector.*

*I make this recommendation having noted:*

- the expressed wish of employees and their trade union representatives (ICTU, UNITE, SIPTU) that statutory minimum working conditions should be established for the sector,*
- that employer bodies PCN and ILSG support engagement in negotiations on statutory minimum working conditions*
- and that employer body MEI is convening an EGM of members with a view to facilitating a ballot on engagement in a statutory process leading to minimum employment conditions.*

*I further recommend that the stakeholders who participated in the mediation process (MEI, PCN, ILSG, ICTU, UNITE, SIPTU) be invited to participate in the JLC when it is established.*

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Language School Closure**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018 Grafton College Dublin, a private English Language school, closed without giving notice to either employees or students. More than twenty teachers and other employees of Grafton College became unemployed and were owed several weeks pay. Over 400 English language students were left without tuition although within weeks, most were placed in other MEI (Marketing English Ireland) affiliated schools. This school closure was the latest in a series of English Language school closures over the past two years.

### **Mediator**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018 Higher Education Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor TD advised Seanad Eireann that the problems facing teachers at Grafton College had exposed weaknesses in safeguarding fair and transparent pay and conditions of employment for staff in the English Language school sector generally. The Minister advised the Seanad that she intended appointing a mediator to meet with representatives of employers and employees in the sector to explore the potential for a registered employment agreement to be developed and registered with the Labour Court in order to regulate the pay and working conditions of employees in the sector.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> December I had a meeting with the Minister and on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019 the Minister announced my appointment as mediator.

The terms of reference of the mediator were defined as *'engaging with bodies representing providers/employers and employees in commercial English Language schools to explore whether there is scope for a set of minimum employment*

*standards to be agreed that could lead to a Registered Employment Agreement for the sector'. The Minister's key stated objective was 'to ensure that Ireland has an English Language Education sector that we can all have confidence in and which provides a quality education to international students coming to Ireland to learn English. Staff, not least teachers, are obviously a central element in ensuring the quality of that education provision'.*

### **Q.Q.A. Bill**

The appointment of a mediator took place in the context of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018 which was progressing through the Oireachtas. The Bill proposes new powers to regulate the English Language Education Sector and includes the awarding of an IEM (International Education Mark) for English Language and Higher Education providers. The Bill also proposes scrutiny of the corporate fitness of education providers. As the Bill progressed through Seanad Eireann, amendments were added linking the awarding of the IEM to standards of employment in English Language schools.

### **Minister's Letter to Schools and Stakeholders**

On 11<sup>th</sup> January the Minister wrote to 119 English Language Schools and to relevant stakeholders including ICTU, Unite the Union, SIPTU, IBEC, MEI (Marketing English Ireland) and PCN (Progressive Colleges Network). In her letter the Minister stated that she had appointed a mediator to explore the scope for a set of minimum employment standards to be agreed that could lead to a registered employment agreement for the sector. Recipients were invited to participate in the mediation process.

MEI responded to the Minister's letter on 16 January stating that they wished to make a submission and to engage with the mediator. Nine schools responded stating that they supported the initiative; one school responded stating that they were 'not interested' in the process. ICTU and Unite the Union had earlier written to the Minister seeking ministerial intervention in the sector.

## **EMPLOYEES**

### **Communication with Employees**

Throughout the mediation process I have received written communications from or met with, over 100 teachers who are employed in the English Language school sector. As it was not feasible to meet with teachers in their places of work, I arranged to visit the Annual Conference organised for teacher practitioners by English Language Teachers Ireland (ELT Ireland) held in Griffith College Dublin on 16 February. My role as mediator was explained to the attendees and I circulated a letter to them inviting individual submissions. I wish to express my thanks to the officers of ELT Ireland for facilitating this.

Appendix 2 to this report sets out the wide range of issues and concerns raised with me by the teachers. There were some positive comments from teachers about some employers and about some of the working conditions they experience. However, the overwhelming view of the teachers who communicated with me regarding their working conditions was negative and highly critical.

Most of the teachers expressed concerns about the precarious nature of their employment. As a large number of schools have closed in recent years, often giving little or no notice to staff, lack of employment security is a concern for many. Teachers also complained about the uncertainty of their teaching hours, inadequacy of their contracts, low pay, lack of payment for non-teaching work and absence of leave entitlements.

Many teachers referred to low morale amongst the staff of the schools. They referred to lack of appreciation for their work. Some complained about poor communications and high levels of stress. There were some who praised their employers and said that they had been treated with respect. However, in general, teachers felt they were not being treated as professionals who were providing a good service for their students.

## **ICTU**

Following the closure of Grafton College, Patricia King the General Secretary of ICTU wrote to the Minister raising concerns about the position of the Grafton ex-employees.

As Mediator, I met with Patricia King and ICTU senior official Liam Berney on 9 January. ICTU confirmed that they were happy to engage in the mediation process in the interests of all employees in English Language schools. They expressed concerns about the immediate problems being experienced by the Grafton College staff including loss of pay and loss of redundancy entitlements. ICTU stated that most employees in English Language schools were in precarious positions with poor working conditions; that there was no consistent regulation of the sector and no standards for employee treatment.

ICTU saw the ultimate solution for employees in the sector as the making of a Sectoral Employment Order (S.E.O.) covering pay, leave entitlements, pension etc. Such an order with minimum standards would prevent schools from undercutting each other. ICTU also stated that a levy/bond system if applied to all schools would guarantee some payment to all employees in redundancy situations.

On 25 February ICTU wrote formally to me as mediator repeating that many English Language School employees work in precarious positions. ICTU proposed that the Labour Court should be requested to conduct an investigation into the terms and conditions of the employees and that subsequently the Minister could make a Sectorial Employment Order on working conditions. At a further meeting held on 19 March ICTU reiterated its position in this regard.

## **SIPTU**

On 6 February a meeting was held with SIPTU senior officials Karl Byrne and Adrian Kane. They made clear SIPTU's ongoing concern about the lack of a standard accreditation model for English Language Schools. SIPTU's English Language School membership is mainly confined to University Language Schools

e.g. DCU English Language Services, however, SIPTU also has some members in the wider commercial English Language sector.

SIPTU stated that industry wide school accreditation would help to ensure better and more consistent employment standards. SIPTU's view was that employment standards throughout the sector are poor and that use of an SEO would be the most effective means of protecting the interests of employees.

On 13 February a meeting was held with a number of SIPTU members who had experience of English Language teaching in a number of schools. They stated that pay rates in the sector varied between 13euro and 24euro per hour. They were aware of many teachers who were planning to leave the sector because of the poor wages and working conditions. They gave examples of some schools not paying legally required holiday pay to employees. Redundancy was a threat for all English Language teachers. They also expressed concerns about the lack of consultation with teacher practitioners in the drafting of the QQA Bill.

On 11 March SIPTU formally wrote to the mediator confirming that an SEO would be the most desirable way of protecting English Language school employees.

SIPTU also stated that the current 'light touch' regulation of schools needs to be replaced by a robust and consistent regulation system. This position was confirmed at a further meeting with SIPTU held on 19 March.

## **UNITE**

UNITE initially wrote to the Minister for Education and Skills on 5 December 2018 to raise the issue of the closure of Grafton College without any prior notification to the staff employed there. UNITE stated that this was the second such school to close in 2018 and pointed out that the workers now faced extreme hardship.

Meetings were held with officers of UNITE English Language Branch on 4 January and with UNITE senior officials Brendan Ogle and Davy Kettyles on 11 January.

At these meetings UNITE raised a range of issues including the following:

- lack of professional recognition for English Language Teachers
- lack of employment security and certainty of teaching hours
- pay inconsistencies and lack of leave entitlements
- inconsistency and uncertainty of employees' contracts.

UNITE representatives stated that they were the trade union with the greatest number of members in English Language Schools although it was accepted that some teachers were not members of any trade union. They said that there had been cases of victimisation of employees because of their trade union membership.

UNITE stated that the English Language school sector was to a great extent unregulated and that the closure of so many schools was damaging the international reputation of the country. They said that strong Government intervention was now required to regulate language schools strictly and that the Minister should use powers to impose an Employment Regulation Order (ERO) to set minimum employee working standards.



On 20 February a meeting was held with six members of UNITE who were currently employed as teachers in English Language schools. They gave first hand examples of their employment experiences (some of which are contained in appendix 2 to this report). They stated that teachers in English Language schools are highly motivated and professional, and that the 'industry' has the potential to be highly successful. Employment security varies from school to school with some teachers employed in the same school for over 15 years whereas other schools have 'revolving doors' for teachers.

The teachers argued that the new IEM must enforce best practice with inspection of administration, ownership and finances included. They said that some schools were models of best practice with clear and transparent pay policies and scales.

However the great majority of teachers are unhappy with their pay rates and only a fifth of teachers are paid for non-teaching contact duties e.g. preparation time. Some schools provide limited paid sick leave entitlements and only about 5% arrange pension facilities for staff. They estimate that as a result of these conditions, half of the teachers intend leaving the sector.

A further meeting was held with UNITE senior officials on 1 April at which they reiterated their belief that a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) was the best mechanism for dealing with minimum employment conditions for the sector.

## **EMPLOYERS / PROVIDERS**

### **Meetings with Employers/Providers**

There is no single employer body which represents all English Language Schools in matters of industrial relations with employees. At a meeting on 6 February MEI (Marketing English Ireland) explained that it was not within the remit of MEI to deal with industrial relations issues as MEI's main role was in the development of the foreign language student market in Ireland. In the light of MEI's stated position and in order to open communications with employers, I decided that general meetings of English Language school owners/providers would be held in Dublin (26 February), Cork (4 March) and Galway (5 March). A total of 92 representatives of owners/providers from all parts of the country attended these meetings. Appendix 1 to this report includes a list of the issues raised and comments made at these three general meetings.

### **Progressive Colleges Network (PCN)**

Progressive Colleges Network is a representative body for private English Language colleges in Ireland. It has a membership of eight colleges.

On 11 January the Minister wrote to PCN with an invitation to participate in the mediation process. On 30 January PCN wrote to the mediator stating that its schools employed in excess of 350 staff and provided tuition for 3,000 students annually. On 1 February I wrote to PCN requesting a meeting and on 1 February PCN responded positively to this request. On 4 February I met with David Russell the chairperson of PCN. A further meeting was held with eleven representatives of PCN on 13 February.

At these meetings PCN representatives made clear their wish to participate in the

mediation process and to fully engage in any negotiations on the development of minimum standards of working conditions in English Language schools. PCN expressed concerns and frustrations about the current school accreditation and inspection regime. PCN also stated that they had problems with the proposed Protection of Enrolled Learners' Fund as set out in the current QQA Bill. As an alternative to this, PCN proposes a comprehensive insurance policy which would protect each individual learner. PCN also suggested that an income protection insurance policy could offer staff members protection in the event of school closure.

A further meeting was held with four PCN representatives on 2 April. At this meeting PCN were briefed on all developments thus far. I presented in specific detail the range of comments and submissions I had received both from employees and from employers (see appendix 1 and 2). I set out what I thought the ultimate destination of the mediation process might be i.e. an agreement on minimum employment standards that could take the form of a registered employment agreement. PCN confirmed its support for and ongoing commitment to, the mediation process.

On 21 May, in a letter to the mediator, PCN stated that it was fully committed to improving standards in the English language sector and that it had a strict set of guidelines which member institutions are expected to follow. PCN further confirmed on 17 June that it remained supportive of the mediation process in its efforts to seek agreement on statutory employment regulations i.e. through an SEO or JLC. PCN also advised that it is currently negotiating insurance cover for the protection of staff involved in any school closure situation.

### **Independent Language Schools Group (ILSG)**

At the general meetings of owners/providers of English Language schools held in Dublin, Cork and Galway, it emerged that there was a cohort of schools which were affiliated to neither MEI nor PCN. As it was important that all schools would be included in any ongoing communication relating to the mediation process, the unaffiliated schools who were in attendance at the Dublin, Cork and Galway meetings agreed to form an informal grouping which subsequently chose to identify itself as the Independent Language Schools Group (ILSG). This group designated Steven O'Dwyer to act on their behalf in mediation communications. There are now 14 schools represented by ILSG.

Immediately after each of the Dublin, Cork and Galway meetings, I met with the representatives of schools not affiliated to either MEI or PCN. These schools indicated their willingness to engage in the mediation process.

On 11 March I had a further meeting with four representatives of ILSG. At this meeting ILSG was briefed on all developments thus far. I presented in specific detail the range of comments and submissions I had received both from employers and from employees (see appendix 1 and 2). I set out what I thought the ultimate destination of the mediation process might be i.e. an agreement on minimum employment standards that could take the form of a registered employment agreement.

At that meeting ILSG stated that feedback they had received from their schools was that they should engage in the mediation process. A major concern for them was

the absence of an accessible accreditation system for all schools. They also pointed out that the language school industry was evolving with an increase in year-round schools as opposed to seasonal schools. An accreditation system must take account of this. One school made the point that while an employer/employee *“agreement would bring about more stability to the industry, all resources should be currently focusing on delivering the IEM”*.

In a submission sent on 22 March ILSG set out a list of their concerns:

- the ongoing inability of schools to apply for any form of national accreditation
- the absence of a national body for all schools in the industry
- the lack of insight that the Department of Education and Skills has into the industry
- the lack of clarity around the IEM and its role in the issue of employee contractual matters
- the lack of inspection of all schools.

On 22 March ILSG sent written confirmation that its schools were willing to proceed with the process of mediation in pursuit of agreement on minimum employment standards on condition that the other associations (MEI and PCN) also agree to proceed with the process.

### **Marketing English Ireland (MEI)**

MEI is a company limited by guarantee whose objects include the marketing of Ireland as a centre for the teaching of English as a foreign language and developing projects to foster this market. There are 66 English Language schools affiliated to Marketing English Ireland. MEI has company offices in Dublin 7 and has a full time CEO (David O'Grady).

On 16 January MEI wrote to the Minister stating that they wished to make a submission

to the mediator and to engage with him. On 30 January I rang the CEO in order to arrange a meeting. This proposed meeting was to be discussed at the MEI board meeting set for 31 January. On 5 February I rang the CEO who stated that he would meet with me provided that it did not constitute formal engagement by MEI in the mediation process.

I met with the CEO on 6 February. He stated that the MEI position was that its role does not include industrial relations and employment matters, and that MEI was therefore currently not engaging in the process. Following this meeting I wrote to MEI confirming my understanding that MEI was not engaging in the process and requesting MEI to reconsider this position. I also requested that MEI would use its good offices to encourage its constituent schools to engage in the process.

In the light of the decision of MEI not to participate in the mediation process, on 17 February I wrote to all schools inviting owners/providers to attend meetings with me to be organised in Dublin, Cork and Galway.

On 22 February MEI wrote to me regarding the mediation process regretting the fact

that *“as THE representative body for English language schools, MEI, was not given notice of this process prior to the public announcement”*. The letter further stated that MEI schools *“maintain the highest standards of professionalism, due diligence*

*and care for their students and staff alike..... MEI prides itself on the standards of our schools and our teachers and we value the work our teachers undertake to ensure student success”. The letter went on to refute the position expressed by the mediator in an earlier email to MEI that “working conditions have a major bearing on morale and thereby can have a clear impact on the quality of the service offered by the English Language schools”. Furthermore MEI refuted “any suggestions that there are concerns in relation to work and employment conditions”.*

In this letter of 22 February MEI went on to state that they would now accept the invitation of the mediator to participate in the mediation process and looked forward to contributing positively and constructively. I responded on 22 February offering dates for an early meeting with MEI Officers. On 12 March MEI wrote to me offering a meeting on 27 March.

On 25 February MEI sent a 'positioning document' to its schools “in anticipation of upcoming meetings between ELE providers and the state appointed mediator (Patrick King)”. Inter alia this document stated:

- *this is the first meeting of the process, members are primarily there to listen, nothing will be decided on the first day of the process.*
- *MEI colleges are rigorously tested and inspected and must adhere to protocol that calls on them to maintain the highest standards of professionalism, due diligence and care.*
- *All schools operate within the Law including all applicable national employment law and adhere to the Organisation of Working Time Act.*
- *Schools fully understand their duty of care to all staff and value their teachers.*

*Schools cannot operate without teachers so their reputation as employers is important.*

- *MEI strongly disagree that there are issues regarding pay and working conditions in the colleges.*
- *There is no staff morale issue within the colleges.*
- *Staff who join the Colleges to teach enjoy flexible arrangements that suit them.*
- *SEOs will not protect students or teachers from colleges closing.*
- *Changing the employment status and rights of our college employees would negatively impact the financial operations of colleges and threaten jobs in the sector.*

On 27 March I met with the MEI Chairperson (Padraig Hourigan), ex-Chairperson (Therese Dillon) and CEO. MEI were briefed on all aspects of the mediation process thus far, including the views expressed by employers and employees at the various meetings (see Appendix 1 and 2). MEI stated that they would now proceed to brief members on what they had heard. MEI raised a concern about the lack of control that would exist for schools that are not party to any negotiated agreement on working conditions. MEI noted the fact that all sides were emphasising the need for a robust IEM regime and stated that the early implementation of an IEM was a matter of urgency.

On 16 April MEI advised the mediator that consultations with member schools would continue until the end of May. MEI confirmed that they were happy to continue mediation discussions. In response to MEI questions, it was confirmed that should agreement be reached which resulted in a Sectoral Employment Order or a Joint Labour Committee, employment orders arising from these would apply to all schools in the sector and not just to schools that are party to the agreement. Further clarifications were given to MEI in correspondence sent on 10 and 16 May. At their AGM held in late May, MEI adopted a Charter of rights for employees in their 66 affiliated schools. A report on this decision was carried in the Sunday Business Post on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. Arising from this I received complaints from union representatives and on behalf of non-MEI schools that there had been no consultation with them about the Charter and that it constituted a deviation from the mediation process in which they were engaged in good faith.

I met with officers of MEI on the 5<sup>th</sup> June. MEI stated that consultations on the mediation process with member schools had been held throughout April and May and at their AGM. They stated that the Charter adopted at the AGM was a significant step in protecting employees' working conditions and was a genuine attempt to raise standards of employment.

MEI stated that they had been working on the development of the Charter for over 12 months and that the Charter was '*not at odds with and would be fully consistent with a Statutory Agreement arrived at through the mediation process*'.

At the meeting with MEI on 5<sup>th</sup> June I provided an update on the progress of the QQA Bill through the Oireachtas. I explained that the Minister had accepted amendments to the Bill which required adherence to employment standards as a condition for the awarding of the IEM (International Education Mark). I stated that the Bill would progress to Second Stage at Dail Eireann in the following week.

The meeting then discussed what might be contained in a Statutory Agreement as envisaged by the Minister when she set up the mediation process. I had earlier, in writing, set out for MEI how a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) or a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) and Employment Regulation Order (ERO) would operate and the stages of implementation of such employment orders. As an example, I quoted details from the recently issued (2019) SEO Statutory Instrument for Electrical Sector Employees in order to show what might be contained in a Statutory Agreement. I pointed out that this SEO deals with working hours, different pay rates, unsocial hours, pensions, death benefits, sick pay, dispute procedures etc. These details were set out by me as MEI had asked why existing legislation on minimum pay etc was not sufficient for the English Language Sector. At the meeting MEI confirmed the following:

- that they were fully supportive of including employment standards in the QQA Bill especially the insistence on adherence to those standards.

- that MEI has no objection in principle to a Statutory Agreement on Minimum Employment Standards.

that the MEI Charter is not at odds with and would be consistent with a Statutory Agreement on Minimum Employment Standards.

MEI further stated that the fact that not all employees were members of a trade union was an issue when it came to employee representation at a JLC. I agreed to

investigate how the Labour Court would deal with this issue. I stated that quite a number of the teachers who had written to me had stated that union membership was discouraged by their employers and some had alleged victimisation as a result of trade union activity including loss of teaching hours.

MEI also expressed concerns about the level of resources that would be provided for 'policing' adherence to the standards for schools set out in the Bill. I agreed to contact the Department in this regard as requested by MEI.

Immediately following the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> June I wrote to MEI confirming that it was my understanding that MEI *'had no objection in principle to a Statutory Agreement on Minimum*

*Employment Standards as envisaged by the Minister in the mediation process'*.

MEI responded on 7

June stating *"It is correct to say that MEI would have no objection to a Statutory Agreement on Minimum Employment Standards in line with pre-existing legislation. However we cannot agree to a Statutory Agreement 'as envisaged by the Minister' in circumstances where her expectations have not been articulated to us or detailed"*.

My response to MEI dated 10 June stated that it was my understanding that the MEI phrase 'pre-existing legislation' as used by MEI included the options of SEOs and JLCs. I also explained that I had set out the 'Minister's expectations' for a registered employment agreement at my three meetings with MEI and that the 'detail' in any statutory agreement would be formulated by the parties in the JLC. I furthermore explained the process whereby ICTU would be requested by the Labour Court to nominate employee representatives on the JLC.

On 14 June I was advised by MEI that they were now going to consult with their membership and immediately conduct a ballot on entering into an REA/SEO/JLC process. The result of the ballot was to be communicated by 21 June. The Department of Education and Skills wrote to MEI on 15 June requesting a meeting in order to ensure that MEI membership was fully apprised of the policy framework for the IEM as reflected in the QQA Bill and of the importance placed by the Minister on the success of the Mediation process in supporting the achievement of a high-quality English Language Education sector in Ireland. This Department /MEI meeting took place on 19 June.

On 25 June solicitors acting for MEI emailed advising that the ballot proposed for the previous week had not taken place. They stated that MEI's primary function was to engage in marketing English as a foreign language in Ireland and that MEI had not historically engaged in any representative capacity for the purposes of collective bargaining negotiation. In that light it was now legally necessary for MEI to convene an EGM of its members with a view to amending its constitution to allow it to undertake a representative role in sectoral collective bargaining under the auspices of industrial relations legislation. This constitutional amendment if approved would facilitate the holding of a ballot of members on the new representative role. This EGM will take place on 23 July.

The email from the MEI solicitors stated that MEI was *"fully committed to continue its efforts to improve professional development and standards and to not only maintain the fair and generous employment terms offered by the majority of its*

*members, but to explore agreeing an appropriate method for enhancing employment terms across the sector.”*

MEI emailed on 26 June confirming that the constitutional amendment being proposed at the EGM on 23 July was required if MEI was to be authorised to engage in collective bargaining.

## **FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Employer Engagement:**

In the course of the Mediation Process I was given full co-operation by the employer groups MEI and PCN, and by the ad hoc group ILSG. At the commencement of the process there was some uncertainty about whether it was within the remit of MEI to be involved in matters of industrial relations. There were a small number of objections to the mediation process from individual school providers who portrayed the process as an unhelpful intrusion by Government. A difficulty that emerged during the Mediation Process was the absence of a single employer organisation which could speak with experience and expertise in matters of industrial relations/contracts/ working conditions etc. Skills in such matters are dissipated among the over 100 schools. It would make sense and add efficiency if schools would pool resources and knowledge to create a single management representative organisation. Such an organisation would be in a better position to speak for and negotiate on behalf of schools. It could develop skills and expertise and would be well placed to advise individual schools on best practice on industrial relations and employment issues. It would mean that trade unions, the Department of Education and Skills and Government would have a body with which to negotiate on employment matters that affect and are common to all schools.

#### *Recommendation:*

*that schools and those employer organisations that already exist look at the feasibility of creating a representative organisation with appropriate professional expertise to represent and advise schools on matters of industrial relations and employment generally.*

### **Employee Engagement:**

Most of the staff of English Language schools who are unionised are members of UNITE and a smaller number are members of SIPTU. Both UNITE and SIPTU supported and engaged fully in the mediation process. The ICTU also engaged fully in the process on the basis that its remit includes the enhancement of the working conditions of all workers including those who are not unionised. In this context I note that some school authorities have invited trade unions to engage with their employees. The engagement of trade unions in the process meant that I could receive information and representations from a perspective that was broader than one based on individual experiences.

It was in this context that I was required to seek out and invite submissions from individual employees. In this I was greatly facilitated by ELT Ireland who arranged for my attendance at their Annual Conference for EL practitioners where my role was explained and individual submissions could be invited.

Over 100 individual written submissions were received and I also met with a number of individual teachers. It was not feasible to meet with individual teachers in their places of employment. Almost all the individuals who made submissions asked that their opinions would be treated with confidentiality. A number expressed fears that their careers would suffer if the views they expressed were to become known to their employers. A few stated that they knew of union activists who had lost teaching hours or employment because of their trade union activities. I am very grateful to those individuals who either met with me or made written submissions. Their views are reflected in appendix 2 to this report.

*Recommendation:*

*that it become part of a formal code of practice for all schools that trade union membership by employees is fully respected and facilitated.*

### **Co-ordination of Accountability**

Throughout the Mediation Process frustration was expressed by representatives of both employers and of employees that the English Language schools were accountable to a range of different State authorities. They said that this created confusion, inconsistency and duplication of work.

*Recommendation:*

*That all relevant authorities of the State coordinate and streamline their engagement with English Language schools; this includes the Department of Education and Skills, Department of Justice, Department of Finance (and Revenue Commissioners), an Garda Siochana (GNIB), QQI etc.*

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to thank English Language school employers, employer representatives (MEI, PCN, ILSG), employees, employee representatives (UNITE, SIPTU, ICTU, EL Advocacy) for their engagement and co-operation throughout the Mediation Process. My thanks also goes to the dedicated staff of the Department of Education and Skills (Higher Education Branch) for their support and advice. I also express my gratitude to Kevin Foley Chairman and Kevin Duffy ex-Chairman of the Labour Court and Anna Perry (WRC) for the technical information they provided.