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## **Unite ADI Union Opening Statement:**

Good Morning.

My name is Dominic Brophy and I am the Chairperson of Unite ADI Union Branch. Attending with me today is Darragh Dunne, our branch Secretary, and Aidan Jordan, our branch Learning Representative. We are all qualified and registered Approved Driving Instructors, and we today bring a combined experience of 57 years in road safety.

First of all, I would like to thank the Chair and the Transport Committee for this opportunity to share with you how Covid-19 has dramatically affected our businesses. Our vision and solutions on how we will continue to work safely alongside this deadly virus, and post Covid how we can all work together in a calm and constructive manner for the betterment of both driver education and road safety.

In early March 2020, we learned through the media that our country was entering our first lockdown and that the RSA had suspended all their services. This first lockdown was planned by the government to last six weeks and we were informed that we would all receive PUP payments. We understood and supported the need for this lockdown and initially the PUP was a great help to most Driving Instructors. However many ADIs come to our profession later in life, and if they have existing pension entitlements or indeed are at pensionable age they did not qualify for PUP payments.

For those of us that do receive PUP, although we are grateful for this help, this is only sustainable for our businesses for a short period of time. Our costs remain the same, we have car loans that run into thousands of euro each year, insurance payments, website fees, registration fees and accountancy fees. After a year out of business through repeated lockdowns, ADIs are really struggling financially and while some may have received the restart grant, most ADIs have received no business maintenance assistance grants, simply because our industry is mobile in nature and because we do not pay rates to local authorities. Arguably we pay an equivalent level of taxation through VAT and excise duty on fuel which is a massive cost, representing about 15% of our turnover.

On the 29th of June 2020, test centres re-opened and some ADIs returned to work. The RSA emailed every ADI in the country to inform us that they had no industry specific protocols to help us to protect ourselves and because we are self employed they would not be offering any in the future. They also informed us that facilities and shelter at test centres would be closed to us and went on to list their comprehensive expectations of ADIs and our cars before they would allow any RSA driving testers to enter.

I would ask everyone in this room today to imagine this scenario -

You have left your house during this pandemic to carry out a day's work as an essential worker. During your day you will have no access to a toilet, no access to hand hygiene, at certain times of your day you will be expected to clean your car comprehensively before RSA staff will enter, then stand in a car park for 1 hour in whatever weather and then clean your car comprehensively again on the return of your car, RSA staff do not clean on exit.

This horrible pandemic has brought many of us together, we have all seen many examples of kindness and solidarity but sadly this is not the way ADIs have been treated by either the RSA or the Department of Transport.

The RSA has informed us that they must keep their staff safe, correct they should do this, but not at the expense of ADIs who are a vital cog in driver education. Our response to complaints that we made about this to the RSA and Minister Hildegard Naughton have been exactly the same, I quote "No need for a driving instructor to attend a driving test centre with a test candidate or remain at the test centre" unquote. We do not know what this means and we do not know how this encourages learner drivers to adhere to the Clancy Amendment.

There has been a lot of discussion and talk over the past weeks and months about the huge backlog for both theory tests and driving tests, which have arisen because of this pandemic. 98,414 learners waiting for a driving test, 54,000 people waiting for a theory test. This is a big problem and a problem that needs to be solved properly and sensibly in conjunction with ADIs and their representatives.

The RSA has stated that they will have 40 additional testers in June and that they hope to receive clearance for a further 40 sometime after that. This would be a 58% increase in the driving tester work force.

The duration of a theory test is 45 minutes and the duration of a driving test is also 45 minutes. In between these 2 tests, from nervous beginner to a level of competency capable of passing a driving test and being safe on the road, takes at least 30 plus hours of driving instruction. These figures alone make it obvious why ADIs must be a part of the conversation and the solutions.

There are currently 1,761 approved driving instructors on the RSA register across all of the various categories of license. There is no record of how many of these instructors are full-time or part-time, but our own research shows that the cohort of part-time ADIs is significant. ADI numbers have decreased steadily from a high of 2,000 in 2011 to present day numbers, which is why the present plan of reducing the lists as quickly as possible is too one dimensional and only invites further problems in to the driver education system.

Unite ADI Union is willing and able to work with the RSA and the Department of Transport to solve present day problems and to improve and progress driver education in the future. We require proper and definite back to work grants and we require automatic permit renewal which would waive our registration fees.

We work in perilous conditions to provide an essential service to the state and for this we simply ask for meaningful dialogue and a significant say in our own industry.

Thank you for your time and please feel free to ask myself, Darragh and Aidan any questions that you may have.

- Dominic Brophy  
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