



PAC-R-265

Correspondence 3.11
Meeting – 02/02/2012



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA

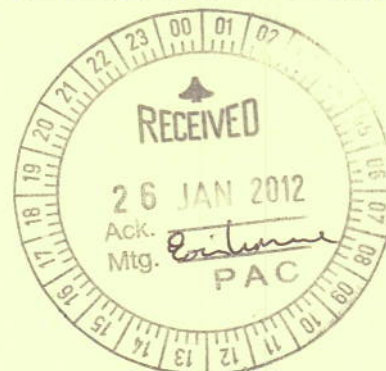
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS

Oifig an Ard-Rúnaí

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Office of the Secretary General
Department of Education and Skills

Ms Eimear Lavelle
Committee Secretariat
Committee on Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2



PLEASE QUOTE REF NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE.

Our Ref: S1209410

25 January 2012

Dear Ms Lavelle,

Thank you for your letter of 4th January 2012 in relation to *'headquarter locations for merging Vocational Education Committees'*

On 29th June last, the Government decided to reduce the overall number of VECs from 33 to 16, to merge particular VECs, including the VECs covering the counties of Longford and Westmeath, and to approve in principle the consolidation of the existing VEC legislation. The merged VECs will become Education and Training Boards.

At the core of this restructuring is the need to address the current low scale and size of operations in particular VECs in order to position the sector for future development. This major structural change in the sector fits with the Government's policy of reducing the number of agencies and is consistent with the strategic objectives of the transforming public service agenda through service delivery by a smaller number of agencies, each benefiting from efficiencies of greater scale.

This change will better position the sector for future development and for a broadening of its remit. For example, in July 2011, the Government decided that a new further education and training authority, to be called SOLAS, should be established. SOLAS will operate under the aegis of this Department and will co-ordinate and fund the wide range of further education and training programmes around the country. The new authority will initially take responsibility for all those FAS staff and premises not being transferred to the Department of Social Protection.

In time, FAS Training Centre staff and premises will be transferred to the new Education and Training Boards which will replace the VECs, (or, if deemed appropriate, the Institutes of Technology regarding apprentice instructors), so that they will be responsible for the delivery to the public of both further education and training services. This will ultimately mean that potential learners will access a form of 'one stop shop' as regards further education and training services, which will respond in an integrated way to their needs.

The restructuring will also facilitate the reductions that will be required in the number of administrative staff employed in the Education and Training Boards while protecting the services provided by VECs.

In October of last year, the Minister decided on the headquarter locations for the new Education and Training Boards. In arriving at his decision in relation to the location of headquarters of the merged VECs, the Minister considered a range of factors. These included the need to ensure that the location of a VEC headquarters will, to the greatest extent possible, facilitate staff redeployment under a redeployment scheme within the context of the Croke Park Agreement and the need to operate at lowest cost having regard to the accommodation available in existing locations.

In relation to the specific merger of Co. Longford with Co. Westmeath VEC, he decided that the headquarters of the Education and Training Board will be in Mullingar. In determining Mullingar as a headquarter location, the Minister was aware that although both Co. Westmeath and Co. Longford VECs are very closely matched, he is satisfied that geographically, Mullingar is the most favourable location for the HQ.

While redeployment of staff from Longford to Mullingar is possible under the Croke Park Agreement¹ it is expected that the office in Longford may remain in use for some time and that the approach to redeployment will be measured and considered.

It will be a matter for the CEO of the new Education and Training Board to work through and judge what the best approach is to ensure the optimum approach to service delivery. The establishment of SOLAS is also likely to have a bearing on the precise arrangements to be made.

I want to make clear that this Department will not be forcing any one size fits all approach to staff deployment and office accommodation by the new Education and Training Boards. We will be receptive to any reasonable and sensible arrangements that are the best fit for the needs of the areas served by the new board.

The detail in relation to the disposal of existing property interests that may become surplus either in the context of this restructuring or the SOLAS developments along with

¹ The Croke Park Agreement provides for the redeployment of staff to a location within a 45km radius of their current work location or of their home address, whichever is the shorter commute. In making such redeployment decisions regard will also be had to reasonable daily commute time.

any upgrading or refurbishment of accommodation that arises will be worked through by this Department in conjunction with the VECs involved and the Education and Training Board once established, and will be carried out on a cost effective basis.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Brigid M. McManus', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brigid McManus
Secretary General