



PAC-R-361

**Correspondence 3.1
Meeting – 15/03/2012**



Oifig an Ard-Rúnaí
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Office of the Secretary General
Department of Education and Skills

Ms. Eimear Lavelle,
Secretariat to the
Committee of Public Accounts,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2



Our reference S1109368

6 March 2012

Supply of follow-on information arising from PAC Hearing of 9 February 2012

Dear Eimear,

I refer to your letter of 15th February 2012 concerning information the former Secretary-General Brigid Mc Manus undertook to supply to the Committee during the course of the hearing on 9th February 2012.

• **European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (point 1 of letter)**

I attach at appendix one a table setting out the European Globalisation Fund programme allocations and related information.

• **VEC Rationalisation (points 2, 3 and 5)**

Your letter raised the issue of VEC rationalisation in three separate areas within the correspondence, specifically at point two, which sought details regarding rationalisation across each of the VECs, point three, which sought details of the rationalisation submissions for the Waterford and Wexford Vocational Educational Committees, and point five, which sought a copy of submissions, including the notes made by the Minister concerning the Headquarters location of the amalgamated Waterford and Wexford VECs in Wexford. The information sought for all three topics are addressed within the same memoranda. Accordingly the three queries from the Committee have been subsumed into this single response.

In this regard I attach at appendix two a submission to Minister Ruairi Quinn from Assistant Secretary General Martin Hanevy dated 29 June 2011, together with handwritten annotations to that document made by the Minister on the same date. Appendix three is a further submission to the Minister from Mr Hanevy dated 23 September 2011, again showing handwritten annotations made by the Minister. Appendix four is a note from the Minister to Mr. Hanevy dated 3 October 2011, while Appendix five is a further memorandum from Mr. Hanevy to the Minister dated 4 October 2011, specifically regarding the HQ location for the Louth/Meath

VEC Headquarters, and which included a copy of a letter to the Minister from the CEO of Louth VEC dated 26 September 2011.

- **Technological Universities (point 4)**

I attach at appendix six a copy of the HEA publication 'Towards a Higher Education Landscape', appendix A of which sets out the process and criteria for designation as a Technological University.

- **Computers - ICT Infrastructure in schools (point 6)**

The Department does not hold information regarding the current number of computers in schools. However, the following is some information regarding the ICT infrastructure in schools.

Through the 'ICT in Schools Programme', and in line with best practice internationally, the Department provides strategic investment across the four key interconnected issues which need to be addressed in order to systematically integrate ICT into teaching and learning:

- Internet access for schools (broadband since 2005);
- Teacher professional development in ICT;
- ICT infrastructure deployment in schools;
- Deployment of digital content for use in the classroom.

As the Committee may be aware, the operational management of schools, including the procurement of goods and services, is a matter for school authorities themselves. In this context, the practice has been to provide devolved ICT infrastructure grants in line with available resources. Under the ICT in Schools Programme, the most recent investment was the "ICT Infrastructure Grant Scheme", which involved distribution of some €92 million between November 2009 and December 2010¹. Within this scheme, schools were asked to prioritise the deployment of a teaching computer, digital projector, wireless keyboard and mouse in each classroom, following which they can spend any remaining grant balance on other ICT equipment (including classroom computers) and software. This expenditure is a strategic undertaking for the schools themselves, requiring careful planning. While many schools have completed their expenditures, not all have done so. The Department is in regular contact with schools in this regard and continues to collate expenditure return information.

The Department does not maintain a central repository of ICT assets procured and managed by schools themselves. While periodic national statistical surveys have been carried out, the most recent took place in 2005 and no longer provides useful data. The latest relevant data in the context of the Committee's query is provided in an international research report published in June 2011 by the Eurydice Network, under the title "Key Data on Learning and Innovation through ICT at school in Europe". This report indicates that the ratio of 15-year-old pupils per computer in Irish schools (2.08) compares favourably with the EU median value

¹ Infrastructure grants for new school construction projects are met within the school building programme itself.

(2.15). (This might also be compared favourably with the results of the 2005 Irish survey, which indicated pupil-computer ratios of 9.1 and 7.0 at primary and post-primary level respectively at the time, within a total computer stock estimated at 97,709). It is understood that the pupil-to-computer statistics in the Eurydice report are based on information collected before the recent €92 million investment referred to above, which has led to further substantial improvements in the Irish position.

The Department expects that additional information with a comparative international focus will become available in the coming months through the ESSIE survey (European Survey of Schools: ICT in Education) commissioned by the European Commission last year. It is also intended to commission a new national study over the course of 2012/2013, once schools have substantially completed their expenditures and taking account of the latest data from the ESSIE study.

- **NEPS Assessments (point 7)**

A briefing note regarding the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is attached at appendix seven to this document, containing general briefing on NEPS, in addition to details on the number of assessments and other information sought by the Committee.

- **School Completion Programme (point 8)**

A detailed note regarding the School Completion Programme (SCP) is contained in appendix eight to this letter.

The note deals, inter alia, with the issue of the transfer of certain functions, including those of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) from this Department to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs with effect from 10 May 2011. It clarifies that there was no loss of expertise arising from this transfer, as local personnel in the SCP and the NEWB were not affected by the move.

- **Public Private Partnerships (point 9)**

To date 15 schools and 2 higher education institutions have been procured via Public Private Partnership and are now operational. A further 8 schools are currently in procurement. As part of the Jobs Initiative it is planned that a further 2 Bundles of schools would be procured via PPP.

PPP Schools currently in operation are:

(i) Pilot Schools

- St. Caimins, Shannon, Co. Clare
- Largy College, Clones, Co. Monaghan
- Maria Immaculata Community College, Dunmanway, Co. Cork
- Ballincollig Community School, Co. Cork.
- St. Attracta's Tubbercurry, Co. Clare

(ii) Schools Bundle 1

- Banagher College-Coláiste na Sionna, Co. Offaly
- Gallen Community School, Ferbane, Co. Offaly
- Scoil Chríost Rí, Portlaoise, Co. Laois
- St Mary's CBS, Portlaoise. Co. Laois

(iii) Schools Bundle 2

- Bantry Community College and Gaelscoil Bheanntairi, Co. Cork,
- Kildare Town Community School,
- Abbeyfeale Community College, Co. Limerick
- Athboy Community School, Co. Meath
- Wicklow Town Community College

(iv) Schools Bundle 3 - in procurement

- Coláiste Ailigh, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal,
- Ballinamore C.S. Co. Leitrim,
- Doughiska Post Primary and Doughiska Primary school, Co. Galway,
- Post Primary School in Gorey, Co. Wexford,
- Tramore S.S. Co. Waterford,
- Doon Post Primary, Co. Limerick,
- Athlone Community College, Co. Westmeath

The total anticipated cost of Unitary Payments in 2012 is €50 million, broken down as €33 million for schools and €17 million for Higher Education institutions. This is estimated to rise to €61 million for schools by 2018 (this figure is estimated as it includes unitary payments in respect the 3rd and 4th Bundle of Schools).

Within the Department's Vote, the cost of unitary payments for the Pilot Schools and Schools Bundles 1 & 2 will be accounted for from the Department's Current allocation.

In compliance with direction from the Department of Finance of May 2010 the costs of Schools Bundle 3 and any future Bundles will be accounted for from the Department's Capital allocation.

- **Longford VEC (point 10)**

I attach at appendix nine a briefing note concerning the sums spent renovating the VEC headquarters in Longford

- **VEC Rationalisation (point 11)**

I attach at appendix ten a briefing note regarding VEC leases in respect of Headquarters buildings, together with a tabular listing of these lease obligations.

Further Information - Oversight of VEC expenditure

The former Secretary General, in the context of discussion at the committee of the issue of oversight of VEC expenditure, advised that the Department will examine whether there are actions that can be taken to ensure better oversight of these expenditures. The Department will revert to the committee regarding the outcome of this examination.

Correction of Factual Inaccuracies at Hearing on 09 February 2012

I would also like to take the opportunity to correct the record of the hearing of the 9th February in respect of a number of factually inaccurate comments that were made at the hearing. The following are clarifications provided to correct the inaccurate statements.

Correction One - Page 16 – speaker Ms Brigid Mc Manus “We made leaflets and information available in every employment service and social welfare office”

While the former Secretary General advised that leaflets and information were made available in every employment service and social welfare office, this was not done in relation to the EGF construction programmes. It was done specifically in the Dell EGF programme when the EGF Managing Authority Unit resided in the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Innovation (DETI). In addition, FÁS Employment Services managers and Regional Directors were given an overview of EGF programmes and advised that eligible redundant workers were to be supported. The local offices where any such person presented could then contact the central EGF coordination unit for verification and further information as required.

A Department of Social Protection representative sat on the EGF Steering Committee and two other DSP staff members were designated EGF contacts on the Waterford Crystal programme. Relevant course information was circulated to the DSP representative on the Steering Committee for information and onward circulation.

A dedicated contact point was set up for eligible redundant workers in both the relevant FAS Employment Services office (Swords) and social welfare office (Baldoye) in relation to the S R Technics EGF programme. Two public information meetings were held in 2009 and 2010 for the redundant workers to advise them of services, entitlements etc. The EGF Managing Authority unit was transferred from DETI to the Department of Education & Skills with effect from 1 May 2010.

In the case of the EGF construction programmes a specifically tailored career planning course is being offered by all Vocational Education Committees following the signing of a Service Level Agreement with the Department of Education & Skills.

The seven person EGF Construction Contact Centre is located in Limerick City and is staffed by seconded FÁS administrative and employment service personnel as well as a number of externally recruited guidance experts who assess and refer callers to relevant agencies and bodies for particular services.

Employment services personnel nationally were briefed by both the manager of the EGF Construction Contact Centre on a number of occasions and by their own senior management on the EGF programmes to ensure, in turn, that their front line staff were fully briefed.

The Department of Social Protection was represented on an inter-Departmental working group set up to discuss and implement measures under the EGF construction programmes and was fully briefed on all relevant aspects of same.

In addition, the notification of relevant EGF services individually by letter to all eligible redundant workers and the opportunity to access the dedicated EGF website provided a significant amount of information to this cohort.

Correction 2 - Page 16 – speaker Ms Brigid Mc Manus - “WRC Social and Economic Consultants Ltd, which did work for us in respect of Waterford Glass”

This reference by the former Secretary General concerning WRC Social and Economic Consultants Ltd, having carried out work in respect of the Waterford Glass programme was erroneous and should instead have referred to the SR Technics EGF programme. The consultants in question are contracted by the Department of Education & Skills under a framework contract concluded in June 2011 to provide certain technical and administrative services to EGF programmes. To date specific contracts have been signed with the Department of Education & Skills for services in relation to the closure of the SR Technics EGF Programme (June 2011) and in respect of the three EGF construction programmes concluded in December 2011. However, the consultants were available to be consulted by, or to offer advice upon request to, the FAS EGF coordination unit in relation to the Dell and Waterford Crystal EGF programmes. It is understood no specific advices were duly requested.

Correction 3 - Page 16 – speaker Ms Brigid Mc Manus - “While the Department managed it, we had steering committees for the Dell, Waterford Crystal and S R Technics cases”

While the former Secretary General said that steering committees were in place for the Dell, Waterford Crystal and SR Technics programmes, steering committees were established in the first two programmes – Dell and Waterford Crystal. There was no formal steering committee for the SR Technics programme. Steering Committees for the Dell and Waterford Crystal EGF programmes were established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and reported to it prior to the transfer of policy responsibility for the EGF to the Department of Education and Skills from 1 May 2010. Instead, a number of public information sessions were held for the SR Technics redundant workers organised by the EGF Managing Authority, which body is now located in the Department of Education and Skills but which was formerly a business unit (Employment Training and Strategy Unit) within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment prior to 1 May 2010. At these public information sessions service providers showcased the services on offer under the EGF programme and advice and information was provided. The EGF Managing Authority also met representatives of a cohort of the redundant workers on a number of occasions and

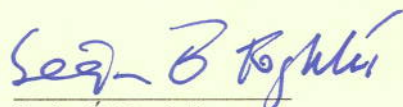
had an ongoing interaction with them with particular reference to the pursuance of certain third level opportunities.

Correction 4 - Page 33 speaker -Mr Matthew Ryan – “Six staff work under me full time on the VEC Sector”

In relation to the issue of staff working in the Department of Education and Skills with a specific role in relation to VECs, I wish to clarify that the figure of six staff mentioned at the PAC Hearing of 9 February refers to administrative staff only. It does not include a professional accountant whose remit includes VEC accounting and financial matters and who works full-time in that area. In respect of the six administrative staff of the Department only two staff, a Higher Executive Officer and an Executive Officer work full-time on VEC accounting matters, with an Assistant Principal Officer and a Clerical Officer working part of their time on this area of work. The remaining two staff, a Higher Executive Officer and an Executive Officer, work full-time on other VEC matters (relating to VEC staffing other than teachers and SNAs, superannuation, monitoring of Employment Control Frameworks, and public service numbers returns etc). The APO and CO also work the balance of their time in that work area.

I would be grateful if this follow-on information and clarifications may be brought to the attention of the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Seán Ó Foghlú
Secretary General

Appendices to travel to PAC

1. Appendix One - EGF Programme Document
2. Appendix Two - VEC Rationalisation note – submission from Martin Hanevy to Minister dated 29 June 2011
3. Appendix Three - VEC Rationalisation note – submission from Martin Hanevy to Minister dated 23 September 2011
4. Appendix four - VEC Rationalisation note – Note from Minister to Martin Hanevy dated 03 October 2011
5. Appendix five - memorandum from Martin Hanevy to Minister dated 4 October concerning HQ for Louth/Meath
6. Appendix six - HEA publication (Tab six in briefing folder) in PDF document
7. Appendix seven - NEPS briefing note
8. Appendix eight - concerning transfer of school completion
9. Appendix nine - Concerning renovations of Longford HQ
10. Appendix ten - concerning VEC leases

Table setting out EGF programme allocations and related information

EGF Programme	DELL	Waterford Crystal	SR Technics	NACE 41 construction buildings	NACE 43 specialised construction	NACE 71 architectural services	Total
Affected population	2,840	653	1,135	4,866	3382	841	13,717
Date Application *	19/06/09	7/8/09 + 25/9/09	9/10/09 + 17/5/2010	09/06/2010 + 22/2/11	09/06/2010 + 22/2/11	09/06/10 + 22/2/11	
Implementation Period **	03/02/09 to 28/6/11	11/03/09 to 6/8/11	25/03/09 to 9/10/11	01/07/09 to 9/6/12	01/07/09 to 9/6/12	01/07/09 to 9/6/12	
Date approved by European Commission	30/09/09	06/05/10	21/09/10	05/10/11	05/10/11	05/10/11	
Date approved by European Council and Parliament	25/11/09	16/6/10	24/11/10	16/11/11	16/11/11	16/11/11	
Date funding receipt from EU	04/03/10	30/07/10	22/12/10	29/12/11	29/12/11	29/12/11	
EGF programme allocation	22,817,000	3,955,159	11,455,174	19,522,829	33,329,459	2,135,107	93,214,729
EGF Receipt final (65%)	14,831,040	2,570,843	7,445,863	12,689,838	21,664,148	1,387,819	60,589,551
National (35%)	7,985,950	1,384,306	4,009,311	6,832,991	11,665,311	747,288	32,625,157
Date Final report sent	23/12/11	6/2/12	Due 9/4/12	Due 9/12/12	Due 9/12/12	Due 9/12/12	
Spend (€)	13,619,598 (59.7%)	3,089,633 (78.1%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Underspend (€)	9,197,402 (40.3%)	865,526 (21.9%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	

* First date indicated is official registered date of application. Second dates, where indicated, represent dates revised/complete data was provided to European Commission.

** period generally 24 months (official period) but may be up to 35 months where sectoral application and supports commence immediately for first workers made redundant e.g. NACE 41, 43, 71

To: Minister ✓

From: Martin Haney

Re: Issues and Options around designating HQ locations in the revised VEC configuration.

Date: 29 June 2011

Context

I am not seeking a decision on these matters at this point. The information provided is to enable you consider and reflect on the issues and options relating to designating certain VEC HQ locations.

The designation of the HQ locations will be required as soon as we finalise the redeployment agreement and to enable the commencement of the CEO redeployment process. This is because the redeployment scheme in negotiation provides that the HQ locations will be determined in advance of its operation since the HQ location is the centre point for the application of the 45km radius criterion in the Croke Park agreement.

In the consultation process that was conducted earlier this year the relevant parties were requested to provide a view on the location of HQs (based on the Government decision that was in place at that time). We provided the following guidance to VECs and IVEA on the issue:

"While a number of considerations may come into play a fundamental requirement will be the need to ensure that the location of a VEC headquarters will, to the greatest extent possible, facilitate the distance requirements under which staff to be redeployed to that location can be redeployed under a redeployment scheme, allied to the need to operate at lowest cost having regard to the accommodation available in existing locations."

It should come as no surprise that VECs responded either by expressing no opinion, favouring a headquarters location in their own county or an administrative presence in more than one county (without volunteering to be the sub-office).

I see little point in triggering a fresh consultation based on the revised configuration because on the basis of the first process it is virtually certain to be an exercise that adds little value.

While we had publicly identified *"the need to operate at lowest cost having regard to the accommodation available in existing locations"* as an important criterion, in reality I think we must take a pragmatic approach on this matter. The Department of Finance may take a view that we should push immediately for one location in all instances on the basis that it should be more cost effective and yield immediate savings. However the analysis

I have indicated my preliminary preference. Come back to me if you have any queries RB

29/6/11

(below) on the individual mergers demonstrates that the Croke Park 45 km stipulation in relation to redeployment does not facilitate such a policy.

Property rationalisation

There are other reasons why we should have a more medium to long term game plan in relation to property rationalisation:

1. The property market is quite flat and until it improves securing new premises to house all staff could prove cost increasing.
2. Property rationalisation may in fact be easier to bring about if it is pursued and decided by the new entity once established, rather than any perception that it is driven by this Department or the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
3. When it comes to the detailed implementation of this project it moves from being one project to 13 individual merger projects. We will be relying on the CEOs of those 13 new bodies to determine the most economically advantageous position on accommodation, to work through the details and deal with all related legalities.
4. The Department's funding allocation and approval role along with the legal provision that requires Ministerial approval for disposal of property means that we can ultimately police what is done locally in terms of cost effective accommodation solutions and the pace at which they can be achieved.
5. Payroll savings will not be prejudiced by maintaining multiple offices as the ECF will be the key driver of savings with the exception of the CEO positions.

In summary there is little risk in making property rationalisation a post amalgamation action and taking a more medium to long term view. In point of fact it may have a beneficial effect in dampening local opposition to the actual mergers and make the task of the CEOs to embed change easier.

In terms of HQ location the 16 new bodies are best looked at in three groupings:

- No change
- Single office location not viable
- Single office location viable

(Viable means relocation of staff should be possible having regard to the Croke Park 45km criterion)

Group 1 - no change

City of Dublin, Co. Donegal, Co. Kerry

There is no merger involved in relation to these VECs and consequently designation of a HQ does not arise.

The current HQ locations are Ballsbridge, Letterkenny and Tralee respectively.

Group 2 - single location not viable

Tipperary NR/Tipperary SR

Both towns are 90km apart which means that it would not be possible to redeploy staff from one location to the other.

In the context of redeployment, for full integration, we could look at a new HQ in Thurles which is 36.5km from Nenagh and 53km from Clonmel. At a push the Clonmel to Thurles distance could be argued with the unions to be marginally above the 45km criterion and permit redeployment. It would however add additional complexity to managing the consolidation and in the short term is likely to create additional cost having regard to the state of the property market.

Tipperary NR VEC owns its building in Nenagh while the building in Clonmel has approximately 9 years remaining on its lease. This tilts the balance somewhat in favour of having the Head Office in Nenagh with a sub office in Clonmel and the question of whether the new entity should consolidate its offices to be treated as a longer term issue.

Indicative Location of new HQ: Nenagh (currently Tipperary N/R VEC) with a sub office in Clonmel

Meath/Louth

Both VECs own their buildings. The existing Co. Meath VEC building in Navan can currently hold up to 80 staff and has an extra 1 acre available for expansion. The building in Navan is also better positioned geographically. Both towns are 57km apart which means that it would probably not be possible to redeploy staff from one location to the other. This will necessitate a sub office at Dundalk for some time.

Indicative Location of new HQ - Navan (Currently Co. Meath VEC) with a sub office at Dundalk

Kildare/Wicklow

Both buildings are leased. The building at Naas has some 6 years remaining on its lease while the HQ at Wicklow has two leases, with 8 and 4 years remaining respectively. Geographically, Naas is probably the most favourable location for the HQ.

Because the buildings are 76km apart, it will not be possible to transfer staff from one location to the other under the Croke Park Agreement. Consequently, a sub office at Wicklow will be necessary for some time.

Indicative Location of new HQ: Naas (current HQ of Co. Kildare VEC) with a sub office in Wicklow ✓

Mayo/Sligo/Leitrim

All three VECs own their buildings. However Co. Mayo VEC has significant space to use for expansion, making it the most favourable location for the HQ. The distance between any two of the three offices is in excess of the 45km range set out in the Croke Park agreement. This will necessitate a sub office at both Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon, for some time.

Indicative Location of new HQ: Castlebar (Currently Co. Mayo VEC) with two sub offices – one in Sligo and one in Carrick-on-Shannon ✓

City of Galway/Co. Galway/Co. Roscommon

Co. Galway VEC owns the building at Athenry and it has potential for expansion in contrast to the premises occupied by the City of Galway VEC where the lease will expire in six years. Co. Roscommon VEC also owns its building and has area available for expansion. However, it is over 79km distant from Galway VEC and it would not be possible under the Croke Park agreement to redeploy staff employed in either City or Co. Galway VECs to Roscommon or vice versa. Pragmatically, this will necessitate a sub-office in Roscommon for some time. While both of the Galway locations are within 45kms of each other, the Co. Galway building at Athenry is the best location geographically and is within the Galway City commuter belt.

Indicative Location of new HQ: Athenry (currently Co. Galway VEC) with a sub office in Roscommon ✓

City of Waterford/Co. Waterford/Co. Wexford

The 60km distance between Waterford and Wexford will preclude redeployment of staff currently employed in Wexford to either Waterford or Dungarvan. Because of this a HQ and sub-office will be required.

All three VECs lease their buildings, however City of Waterford and Co. Wexford have only 5 years and 6 years remaining on their leases respectively. Co. Waterford's HQ at Dungarvan has 17.5 years remaining on its lease. Waterford City is 46.5km distant from Dungarvan and 60km distant from Wexford. This means that it should be possible to redeploy staff from Dungarvan to Waterford.

As the city in the area, Waterford might be considered as the logical location for a HQ. However, because, in any event, one of the offices will have to be in Wexford, and the building in Dungarvan has the longest term remaining on its lease, a case can also reasonably be made for location of the HQ in either Wexford or Waterford, with a sub office in the location that is not selected as the HQ. Designating Wexford as the HQ may better define the new VEC as serving the entire South East. A Waterford HQ with a Wexford sub-office might suggest a Waterford City location for the HQ notwithstanding the longer lease position re Dungarvan.

In summary the HQ location for this entity is a finely balanced question and the choices would appear to be:

HQ in Wexford with one sub-office in Dungarvan. ✓

HQ in the environs of Waterford City with a sub-office in Wexford.

Group 3 - single location viable

City/Co. Cork ✓

The current HQs are in the city centre and in Ballincollig and are approximately 9km apart. From a staff redeployment perspective, either location for HQ will suit. Since under the earlier Government decision the VECs were not being merged we had not included them in our analysis of property arrangements. After announcement of yesterday's decision we can engage with them to consider the relative merits of Ballincollig and the city accommodation.

Dublin/Dun Laoghaire ✓

There are no redeployment issues in relation to centralisation of HQ location for this entity since both HQs are well within the 45km distance from each other set out in the Croke Park agreement. Both buildings are leased with 12 years to run on the Dun Laoghaire lease and 15 years to run on the Tallaght lease. However, because a larger number of existing staff are located in Tallaght than in Dunlaoghaire, location of the HQ at the Tallaght office would minimise disruption.

Indicative location of new HQ: Tallaght (currently Co. Dublin VEC) ✓

City of Limerick/Co. Limerick/Co. Clare

City of Limerick VEC and Co. Clare VEC own their buildings. Co. Limerick VEC has 19 years remaining on the lease of its building which is situated approximately 3kms from City of Limerick VEC HQ. All three VEC buildings are within 45km of each other so it should be possible to redeploy staff under the Croke Park agreement.

Indicative Location of new HQ: Existing Co. Limerick premises. ✓

Cavan/Monaghan

Both VECs lease their buildings, however the lease on the Cavan building has 34 years remaining and there are only 14 years remaining on the Monaghan lease. The building at Cavan is better positioned geographically within its region. Both buildings are 47.8km apart. Since this is only marginally above the 45km set out in the Croke Park agreement, it should be possible to redeploy staff from Monaghan to Cavan. However, it may suit to have a sub-office in Monaghan for the duration of the lease on that premises.

Monaghan

Indicative Location of new HQ: Cavan (currently Co. Cavan VEC) with a sub office in Monaghan

Longford/Westmeath

The HQ location for this entity is a finely balanced question. Mullingar is the most centrally situated related to the urban areas in both counties. There are 14 years remaining on the lease on the building in Mullingar. The building leased by Co. Longford VEC has 21 years remaining and is being leased from the State. Both buildings are situated in towns which are 45km apart. Consequently, it should be possible to transfer staff from one location to the other under the Croke Park Agreement. Marginally, because of its centrality within the geographical area, Mullingar is recommended for the HQ location for this entity.

Indicative Location of new HQ: Mullingar (currently Co. Westmeath VEC) ✓

Laois/Offaly

Co. Laois VEC owns its building, while the Co. Offaly building is leased with 16 years remaining on its lease. The distance between locations is 33km. Co. Laois VEC has potential for expansion and its HQ is more centrally located in this entity.

Indicative Location of new HQ: Portlaoise (currently Co. Laois VEC) ✓

Carlow/Kilkenny

This is another finely balanced decision. Co. Carlow VEC owns its building, while Co. Kilkenny VEC leases its buildings. However, Kilkenny is a hub identified by the National Spatial Strategy and is more centrally located within its region. Both VEC locations are suitable for the redeployment of staff (within 45kms of each other).

Indicative Location of new HQ: Carlow (currently Co. Carlow VEC)

SUMMARY

VEC

	Indicative HQ location
City of Dublin	No change (Ballsbridge) ✓ ✓ ✓
City/Co. Cork	Cork (within greater city area) ✓ ✓ ✓
Co. Dublin/Dunlaoghaire	Tallaght ✓
Limerick/Clare	Limerick (within greater city area) ✓ ✓
Co. Donegal	No Change (Letterkenny) ✓ ✓
Co. Kerry	No Change (Tralee) ✓ ✓
Co. Tipperary	Nenagh (Sub office in Clonmel) ✓ ✓ <i>Adam Kelly</i>
Wexford/Waterford	Wexford (sub office in Waterford) ✓ ✓
City/Co. Galway/Roscommon	Athenry (sub office in Roscommon) ✓ ✓
Mayo/Sligo/Leitrim	Castlebar (sub offices in Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon) ✓ ✓
Cavan/Monaghan	Cavan(sub office in Monaghan) ✓ ✓ <i>MONAGHAN</i>
Meath/Louth	Navan (sub office in Dundalk) ✓
Longford/Westmeath	Mullingar ✓ ✓
Laois/Offaly	Portlaoise ✓ ✓
Carlow/Kilkenny	Carlow <i>Kilkenny</i> ?
Kildare/Wicklow	Naas (sub office in Wicklow) ✓ ✓

To: Minister

From: Martin Hanevy

Re: Designating HQ locations for the 16 Education and Training Boards.

Date: 23 September 2011.

The list that follows differs in one respect only from the list (on file) submitted to you in June last on an "indicative" basis. The location for the HQ of the Carlow/Kilkenny merger is now shown as Kilkenny to reflect your notation on the indicative list.

In the interim there have been a number of unsolicited items of correspondence both to you and to Department officials which have advocated particular HQ solutions. There is nothing in the correspondence received that warrants any alteration to the reference framework against which a final decision might be made, with the primary focus remaining on the redeployment and property arrangements as set out in my earlier submission. As stated previously in a number of locations the matter is quite finely balanced .

STATUS QUO

There are 3 locations where there will be no change simply because there are no mergers

Donegal,

Kerry

Dublin City.

GROUP 2 - 45km consideration dominant

There is a second group of mergers where sub-offices will be necessary for the foreseeable future because of the 45km redeployment restriction. i.e. Group 2 in the June submission.

These are:

Tipperary North/South

Meath/Louth

Kildare/Wicklow

Mayo/Sligo/Leitrim

Galway City and County /Roscommon (note sub-office necessary in Roscommon only)

(i.e. Galway City office needed short term only)

Waterford City and County/Wexford (Sub-offices in Dungarvan and Waterford City but new board to look at consolidation into one Waterford location)

GROUP 3

A third group (Group 3 in the June submission) concerns those where the 45km restriction is not a difficulty or is only marginally exceeded.

In my view in these locations we should designate the HQ location and indicate that the expectation is that the staff will all move to the HQ location as soon as feasible but that sub offices will be maintained in the short term.

City and County Cork

Dublin/Dun Loaghaire

City and Co. Limerick/Clare

Cavan/Monaghan

Longford/Westmeath

Laois/Offaly

Carlow/Kilkenny

In the case of Cork and Limerick if the HQ locations are in the City I suggest that it is not necessary for you to determine between the centre of Cork City and Ballincollig or Limerick city centre and Dooradoyle. It can be a matter for the new board to ultimately accommodate itself within the city and its environs (which would be taken to include Ballincollig in the Cork situation). Likewise in Limerick you would only determine that the final accommodation solution would be in the city of its immediate hinterland.

Accordingly the list following is presented for your final determination of the HQ locations:

City of Dublin	No change (Ballsbridge)
City/Co. Cork	Cork (within greater city area)
Co. Dublin/Dunlaoghaire	Tallaght
Limerick/Clare	Limerick (within greater city area)
Co. Donegal	No Change (Letterkenny)
Co. Kerry	No Change (Tralee)
Co. Tipperary	Nenagh (Sub office in Clonmel)
Wexford/Waterford	Wexford (sub offices in Waterford and Dungarvan)
City/Co. Galway/Roscommon	Athenry (sub office in Roscommon)
Mayo/Sligo/Leitrim	Castlebar (sub offices in Sligo and Carrick- on-Shannon)
Cavan/Monaghan	Cavan MONAGHAN (sub office in Monaghan)
Meath/Louth	Navan (sub office in Dundalk) / PLSHEM
Longford/Westmeath	Mullingar
Laois/Offaly	Portlaoise
Carlow/Kilkenny	Kilkenny
Kildare/Wicklow	Naas (sub office in Wicklow)



23/9/11

To: Martin Hanevy

From: Minister

Paul Givan 3/9/11

Re: HQ locations for 16 Education and Training Boards

Date: 3rd Oct 2011

Please note there are three changes to your memo of 23rd September 2011. These are highlighted in bold below.

City of Dublin:	No change (Ballsbridge)
Cork City/Co.:	Cork (greater city area)
Co. Dublin / Dun Laoghaire:	Tallaght
Co. Donegal:	No change (Letterkenny)
Co. Kerry:	No change (Tralee)
Co. Tipperary:	Nenagh (sub-office in Clonmel)
Wexford / Waterford:	Wexford (sub-offices in Waterford & Dungarvan)
City/Co. Galway / Roscommon:	Athenry (sub-office in Roscommon)
Mayo / Sligo / Leitrim: Carrick)	Castlebar (sub-offices in Sligo,
Cavan / Monaghan:	Monaghan (sub-office in Cavan)
Meath / Louth:	Drogheda (no sub-office required)
Longford / Westmeath:	Mullingar
Laois / Offaly:	Portlaoise
Carlow / Kilkenny:	Carlow
Kildare / Wicklow:	Naas (sub-office in Wicklow)

From: Hanevy, Martin
Sent: 04 October 2011 15:38
To: Ryan, Ronnie
Cc: Fox, Frank; Ryan, Matt; OMara, Ian; Walshe, John; Ward, Neil
Subject: FW: Louth VEC

Attachments: SKMBT_C28011100415080.pdf

Ronnie

As discussed please provide my memo below along with the copy of the letter from Louth VEC to the Minister.

To : Minister

From : Martin Hanevy

Date: 4/10/11

Re: HQ Location for Louth/Meath - additional information.

To see please the attached correspondence from Co. Louth VEC that was not to hand when I sent my most recent submission to you on HQ locations.

In relation to the potential location of the HQ for Louth/Meath our existing information is as follows :

Navan - current number of staff 22 / Dundalk current no is 20. Total to be accommodated if in one location = max 40.(allowing for reduction in numbers under ECF)

Co. Meath VEC owns the premises in Navan. It has an area of 4,000sq meters and is situated on a 2.7 acre site with car parking for 50 cars and the accommodation can hold 80 staff.

Co Louth VEC owns the current HQ building in Dundalk. It has an area of 840sq meters and is situated on a half acre site with some availability for expansion.

The VEC in fact owns two buildings in Dundalk and also rents part of another building "the ESB building" which is currently being used to deliver Adult literacy, VTOS, a Youth Centre and a traveller centre which is scheduled to close next year. The VEC is in negotiations with Planning and Building Unit for the purchase of the full ESB building. The three buildings are adjoining and could accommodate all of the Admin staff of an amalgamated VEC together with the programmes currently being run from the ESB building. The HQ building in Dundalk has a modern IT infrastructure. There is car parking for 33 cars and the accommodation can hold "comfortably up to 36 (and a few more with a squeeze)"

The following information was obtained today by Frank Fox from Dr. Kirk CEO , Louth VEC and provides some clarification on the position regarding the Drogheda premises:

The building in Drogheda is an old school in the centre of the town which is currently used to deliver VTOS, Youthreach and Adult Literacy. If the HQ of the amalgamated building were located here, new accommodation would have to be sourced for these classes. Dr Kirk estimates that the building could probably hold up to 40 people (the combined HQ staff of both VECs) but this would be tight and there are only about 20 car parking spaces. In addition, the IT infrastructure etc would probably need to be upgraded here.

In summary there is no perfect solution in relation to the Louth/Meath HQ location. A positive in relation to Drogheda as a HQ location is that it would permit movement of staff under the 45km Croke Park limit and therefore would eliminate the requirement for a sub-office in either Navan or Dundalk. However the premises in Drogheda will be challenging in terms of accommodating all of the staff and the limited number of parking spaces is likely to be a subject of grievance given that staff will be required to relocate there from both Navan and Dundalk.

with

From: Ryan, Mary
Sent: 04 October 2011 15:10
To: Hanevy, Martin
Subject: Louth VEC

Martin

Attached scan - letter from Louth VEC

Mary

From: mac_scanner@education.gov.ie [mailto:mac_scanner@education.gov.ie]
Sent: 04 October 2011 16:08
To: Ryan, Mary
Subject: Message from KMBT_C280



SKMBT_C28011100
415080.pdf (152...



Coiste County Louth
Gairmoideachais Vocational Education
Chontae Lú Committee

Origi an Choiste
Sáid an tSeipéil
Dún Dealgan
Contae Lú
Éire

Committee's Offices
Chapel Street
Dundalk
County Louth
Ireland

Tel: 042 9334047
Fax: 042 933412
Email: admin@louthvec.ie
Web: www.louthvec.ie

Our ref.: PK/PC

26 September 2011

Mr. Ruairí Quinn, T.D.
Minister for Education and Skills
Department of Education & Skills
Marlborough Street
DUBLIN 1

MINISTERS OFFICE

27 SEP 2011

Department of Education & Skills

Dear Minister Quinn

I refer to a letter from Mr. Ronnie Ryan dated 18th August 2011 regarding the headquarter locations of amalgamated VEC's. In this letter it states that you are receiving representations from VEC's and public representatives on the matter.

I wish to inform you that, at its meeting on 8th September 2011, Co. Louth VEC asked me to convey to you their preference that the headquarters for the amalgamated Co. Louth and Co. Meath VEC's would be Dundalk. The following are some of the reasons as to why Dundalk is ideally suited to host the headquarters:-

1. Co. Louth VEC currently have two large premises at Chapel Street, Dundalk which have the capacity to accommodate an amalgamated administrative staff. These offices are currently well serviced in terms of their IT capacity and meeting/conference room facilities, etc. The main headquarters building was constructed in 1906 under renowned architects James Gaskin Esq. C.E. and Maurice Sellars Esq. C.E. and is an excellent example of an early twentieth-century school building which is of immense historical importance in Co. Louth.
2. Co. Louth VEC owns all of its premises at the Dundalk site.
3. As per IDA definition, Dundalk is the administrative capital of County Louth and is the conduit of the busiest economic corridor in Ireland - between Dublin and Belfast with an excellent road, rail and sea infrastructure
4. Co. Louth is a border county, and Dundalk is a border town, which facilitates North/South links.
5. Dundalk also hosts the only third level institution in the North East, Dundalk Institute of Technology. By locating the headquarters of the amalgamated entity in Dundalk it would facilitate the continuation of the close relations between the VEC sector and the Institute.
6. The current headquarters has ample car parking facilities to accommodate the possible future staffing needs of the amalgamated entity.

.../Contd.

Dr. Pádraig Kirk
Príomhoifigeach Feidhmeach
Chief Executive Officer

Ráiteas Míen: Tá sé mar aidhm ag Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Lú bheith ar thór cadhráilochta mar shláithríor oideachas agus seirbhís ar aréirghdeán do mhuintir Chontae Lú agus don chúilríoch trí bhainistú agus soláthar a dhéanamh ar réimse éagsúil cúl ar féidir teacht orthu a bheith forásech agus a bheith ag freagairt don éileamh

Mission Statement: County Louth Vocational Education Committee aims to be the leading provider of quality education and services for the people of County Louth and its hinterland through the management and delivery of a diverse range of accessible, progressive and responsive programmes



Coiste Gairmoideachais
Chontae Lú

County Louth
Vocational Education
Committee

Dlíghian Chóiste
Sáidán Seibéil
Dún Dealgan
Contae Lú
Éire

Committee's Offices
Chapel Street
Dundalk
County Louth
Ireland

Tel: 042 9334127
Fax: 042 9339412
Email: admin@louthvce.ie
Web: www.louthvce.ie

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I also wish to make you aware that in the event that Dundalk is not chosen as the location for the headquarters of the amalgamated entity, the Committee have suggested using their premises at King Street in Drogheda. While geographically Drogheda is well placed in terms of its equidistance between Navan and Dundalk, coupled with its location on the Louth Meath border, if it were chosen it would mean having to relocate certain programmes, including staff and students, from the current premises.

I enclose some photographs of our Chapel Street and King Street premises for your perusal.

Yours sincerely


Dr. Pádraig Kirk
Chief Executive Officer

Enc.

Dr. Pádraig Kirk
Príomhoifigeirí Feidhmiúcháin
Chief Executive Officer

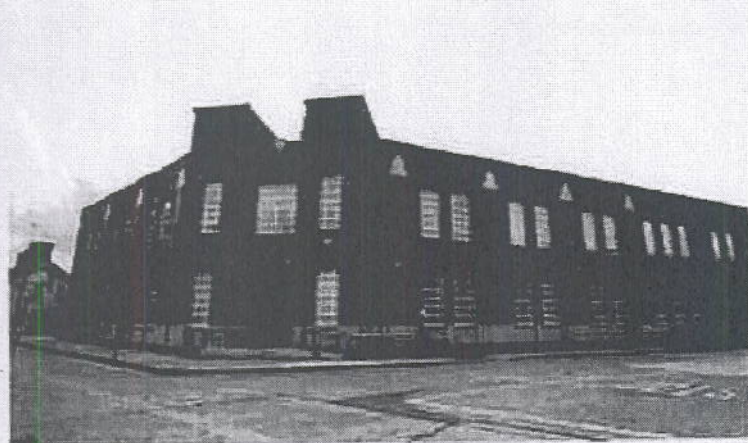
Mísleáir: Tá sé mar aidhm ag Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Lú bheith ar thús cadhnaithe mair sholáthraí oideachais agus seirbhísí ar ardchaighdeán do mhuintir Chontae Lú agus don chultúir trí bhainistiú agus soláthar a dhéanamh ar réimse éagsúil clár ar féidir leacht ornu, a bheith forasach agus a bheith ag freagairt don éileamh.

Mission Statement: County Louth Vocational Education Committee aims to be the leading provider of quality education and services for the people of County Louth and its hinterland through the management and delivery of a diverse range of accessible, progressive and responsive programmes.



Building 1

Co. Louth VEC Office,
Chapel Street, Dundalk.



Building 2

Co. Louth VEC Office,
Chapel Street, Dundalk.



Building 3

Co. Louth VEC Office,
King Street, Drogheda.

Towards a Future
Higher Education Landscape

13th February 2012

1. Introduction

The publication of the National Strategy for Higher Education marked a further step in the development of the Irish higher education sector. The publication of the strategy presents an opportunity to bring a nationally coherent and co-ordinated approach to the development of the sector while respecting institutional autonomy. But while the strategy, *inter alia*, sets out the broad objectives and direction to 2030, it did not set out to provide in detail how these were to be achieved. This document proposes a route to bridging the gap between the necessarily high level strategy and what is needed in terms of the structure, or landscape, of the higher education system to meet the objectives of the strategy and address its recommendations. In particular this document aims to assist institutions to set out a medium term (approximately 5 years) strategy that builds on institutional strengths and contributes to national needs.

2. Our starting point

Ireland has achieved a remarkable expansion of higher education opportunities over recent decades which resulted in a steady improvement in the educational profile of our workforce relative to international benchmarks. Our younger workforce is among the most educated in the OECD but the educational attainment levels of older workers are poor by international standards. Our output of qualifications at NFQ Levels 6 & 7 is a strength, but we are average in terms of the overall attainment at Levels 8-10 and below average in terms of the output of PhDs.¹ The disciplinary profile of Irish higher education corresponds closely with international norms, while the Irish higher education system is ranked highly internationally.² However, since the collapse of Irish public finances, the perception of the quality of Irish higher education internationally has suffered.

¹ In terms of the attainment of tertiary qualifications, our improvement is reflected in the fact that while we rank 18th-19th (out of approximately 35 countries) in the OECD in respect of adults aged 45 to 64, Ireland now ranks 4th in the OECD in terms of the tertiary qualifications of younger adults aged 25 to 34. Ireland's strong position in terms of overall tertiary attainment is boosted by a strong output of qualifications at sub-degree levels (NFQ levels 6 & 7) where we rank 6th overall in terms of workforce qualifications. Our performance is closer to OECD average levels in terms of the attainment of qualifications at degree level and above (NFQ levels 8-10).¹ At PhD (NFQ level 10), Ireland is below EU and OECD average graduation rates. See OECD (2011) *Education at a Glance 2011* - Table A1.3a. Population with tertiary education (2009) & Table A3.3 Graduation rates at different tertiary levels (2009).

² Recent research carried out by ECOFIN, on behalf of Ministers for Finance in EU countries, found that Ireland came first out of 28 countries in terms of the number of graduates per 1,000 inhabitants. It scored second out of 27 countries in terms of graduates per academic staff member. It ranked first in terms of how employers rate our graduates, and found that Irish universities are one of three countries where the highest excellence rating is given by academics in other EU countries. See St. Aubyn, M., Pina, A., Garcia, F. & Pais, J. (2009) *Study on the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending on tertiary education*, European Economy, Economics Papers 390, November 2009, ECOFIN, European Commission, p.66.
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/publication16267_en.pdf

Ireland has a sound legislative framework for higher education, which provides a good basis for the governance of higher education and which accommodates a diverse spectrum of education institutions providing choice of discipline and level. In the international literature, institutional autonomy is positively correlated with high quality and performance and, in this regard, a recent EUA study has found that Ireland operates one of the most autonomous systems of higher education in Europe in relation to academic decision making.

Ireland's commitment to investment in education has been critical in generating the supply of skilled graduates that underpinned the significant increases in productivity and export-oriented growth achieved from the mid-1990s to the early years of the current century. Notwithstanding the significant overall increases in investment in higher education, per capita expenditure remained modest by international standards throughout the period of growth and has significantly decreased since 2009. As a consequence, staff-student ratios which were close to international norms have worsened.³

The State's policies of responding to the growing demand for higher education opportunities was, and is, reflected in a funding model largely determined by student numbers which implicitly incentivises growth. The national policy of broadly distributing provision to facilitate regional access took precedence over the creation of focussed centres of excellence, as evidenced in the wide distribution of programmes such as nursing, apprenticeship and teacher education. Together, these policies have resulted in a crowded and unstructured landscape. At present, 44 institutions offer under-graduate programmes through the CAO and 27 institutions offer research programmes at level 9 and/or 10. A further consequence of the promotion of growth has been both a proliferation of under-graduate programmes within many institutions, resulting in fragmentation of offerings and a loss of focus on core missions and strengths.

In terms of research activity, the frameworks established by funding programmes, particularly PRTL, together with the much more competitive international environment for research, has led to greater institutional research specialisation. This is critical; Ireland is a small player in the world of research in higher education institutions and we must be focussed and strategic to maximise our return from research investment and to fully engage in international research activity such as the EU framework programmes. While there is evident differentiation of research activity and intensity between universities and institutes, research missions need to be supported and differentiated through funding mechanisms. A greater emphasis on the prioritisation and the impact of our research investment is needed in future together with closer links between the research, knowledge transfer and innovation agendas.

³ See HEA (2011) *Sustainability Report* p 10, available at www.heai.ie

3. Drivers of change

Irish higher education operates in a complex and changing environment, but there are two essential drivers of change - quality and participation. There is a significant tension between these two objectives which needs to be managed in a sustainable way.

The provision of education and research by Irish HEIs must meet or exceed international standards for quality of outcomes, and this must be done in a transparent manner. If we are to ensure that those who enter our higher education system have a rich and personally fulfilling experience, then the teaching and learning environment must be of the highest standards. Economic renewal depends on our ability to maintain and develop a workforce with a high level of skills and on an education and research system that is relevant and responsive to societal needs, capable of sustaining a base for high quality research and innovation. This necessitates a response based on a diversity of institutions, programmes and research provision, all underpinned by a commitment to excellence. The achievement of excellence requires a core of well qualified and motivated staff, capable of teaching to the highest standard, pursuing opportunities for scholarship and conducting research. However, there are concerns relating to quality which include the rapid expansion of undergraduate programmes with a narrow focus, the academic preparedness of students entering higher education with low levels of prior achievement and the small scale of some recent PhD provision. Underpinning all these challenges is the need to manage quality within an increasingly difficult financial environment.⁴

Higher education operates in the global arena and this is the context in which academic outputs, standards and quality are benchmarked and referenced. Ireland needs a system consisting of strong, internationally significant institutions working within a cohesive framework to create the knowledge, economic capital and innovation ecosystem required for our recovery and development. The HE system must not just follow but must play a lead role in the creation, fostering and growth of potential new spheres of economic activity and social innovation.

In terms of participation, the National Strategy states that the further expansion of higher education is inevitable and essential if we are to fulfil our aspirations as a knowledge-based economy. Policy and practice in respect of participation in higher education should support access by those who can and wish to benefit from higher education, as well as supporting the skills needed in the economy. In economic terms, higher education of high quality plays a major part in the creation of human capital and in equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills and competencies to participate in the economy. The national skills strategy demonstrated the need for ongoing upskilling of the existing work force, while recent demographic projections show that the numbers of school leavers will continue to grow into the coming decades. The prediction of national skills demands is a difficult and challenging activity and there

⁴ See A Hyland for HEA and NCCA (2011) *Entry to Higher Education in Ireland in the 21st Century* Discussion Paper, available at www.heai.ie

are limits to our capacity to predict where skills needs will arise. However, it is clear our HE system must strengthen its alignment with the evolving economic needs, and its integration within the education and training system as a whole.

4. Our objectives

In shaping the landscape, a first priority is to take account of national objectives for higher education in the coming years. While these objectives can be grouped in different ways, three main objectives are identified here:

i. Improve student experience

Access should be provided for all those students who are capable of benefiting from higher education. Particular regard is needed for those without a family tradition of participation. Students must have access to different pathways into higher education, and pathways between higher education institutions. Students should have a dynamic and vibrant learning experience, drawing on best practice in pedagogy and learning technologies. Different modes of learning should be available to facilitate the work-life balance of students.

ii. Improve impact on society and economy

Through the education and training of graduates, and the creation and distribution of knowledge, higher education should contribute to the development of a dynamic, fair, productive and creative society. Higher education should provide graduates with a breadth of knowledge, skills and competencies to meet the needs spectrum of private enterprise, public purpose and social innovation. Higher education should meet the requirements of the national research, innovation and enterprise agenda with an appropriate prioritisation of investment to achieve optimal social and commercial impact. Higher education should be regionally and community-engaged, as one means of ensuring the currency of the teaching and research underway, and of enabling competitive regional development.

iii. Improve international recognition of the quality of Irish HE outcomes.

Higher education is an international activity. Our system and the individual institutions must compete for scarce financial resources, as well as staff and students. Our higher education system is also an important component of Ireland's overall international reputation. The quality of our graduates and research is an important consideration in decisions by international firms as to whether to invest in Ireland. For these reasons it is essential that our system is internationally recognised as one of high quality.

5. A system-level approach

The National Strategy identified the need to move beyond a simplistic binary notion of a higher education system, towards a system of coherent, diverse, and well co-ordinated HEIs, capable of meeting the social and economic needs of the country. Such a system requires *distinctiveness* of missions at the institutional level, and

diversity of missions at system level. This means having a range of institutional types with clearly differentiated missions and clear strategic orientations. These institutions should provide a complementary range of all the academic disciplines needed by individuals, by society and by the labour market. In turn, high levels of inter-institutional collaboration are required so that specialisation at institutional level does not lead to diminished opportunities and choices for students at regional and national levels. Achieving such a co-ordinated system will be dependent on successful engagement processes at both system level and institutional level.

In order for a system-level approach to work, each institution must understand where, by playing to its strengths, it can make the biggest impact and benefit both for itself and for Irish society. This in turn requires that broad outlines of the system should be clear so as to allow each institution to make strategic choices. It is the purpose of this document to set out the principles which will underpin reform of the structure of Irish higher education in the immediate future, and that will assist institutions in developing a set of inter-relationships that will best serve the achievement of national objectives. Informed by these principles, institutions will make strategic choices. These will be the subject of review by the HEA through a process of engagement at system level, leading to a blueprint for the whole of the HE landscape.

6. The future higher education landscape

In considering the growth and development of the higher education sector, it is clear that a variety of policy instruments, types of institutions and configurations of institutions will be needed to achieve the objective of a coherent system of higher education, which meets a diversity of needs. Ireland already has a variety of institutional types; this is a strength from which to build. But the evolution and development of missions, in particular over the past decade, has caused the distinctions between types of institutions to become blurred. We need to revisit and revise missions to match 21st century needs, and ensure clarity and diversity. This means conserving all of the best aspects of the binary system, that have served us well, such as the differentiated emphasis in different parts of the system on regional engagement, research intensity, part-time provision and labour market orientation. But we must also respond to the demands for new types of provision and performance enhancement through more sophisticated mission differentiation.

Ireland has a well-developed National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) that, in conjunction with its outcomes oriented approach to learning, emphasising the development of knowledge, skills and competencies, allows us to build a range of opportunities for creating rich and diverse student pathways into and through our higher education system. No higher education institution can or should attempt to provide the full range of entrance and pathway opportunities for the full range of general, specialist, or labour market oriented programmes of study. This institutional range and diversity will help ensure that the whole of the system is greater than the sum of the individual institutions. The future system will be characterised by differentiation based on important features such as NFQ level, discipline

specialisation, programme orientation, regional engagement, student profile, mode of provision, research intensity and specialisation.

Diversity of mission

Ireland's complex, modern, open economy and society increasingly requires a range of educational opportunities for new and returning students. This will include full and short-cycle undergraduate and post-graduate programmes, including those which deepen and those which broaden the knowledge base of students at different levels. Currently, much of the provision of short and full cycle programmes at Levels 6 and 7, most of which is career and labour market oriented, is provided by the institutes of technology. It is intended that this pattern of provision will remain. However, close collaboration between institutions operating in the same region will be a feature of the future system. Levels 6 and 7 will be key entry points for people in the workforce seeking part-time and flexible opportunities for up-skilling or re-skilling. This will continue to be an important area of focus for institutes of technology.

There has been some concern about the blurring of missions at Levels 8 and 9. But it is not helpful to differentiate overly between the types of Level 8 and 9 taught programmes that should be offered by different types of institutions. Crude distinctions between 'market ready graduates' and graduates of 'academic' programmes, for example, mask the richness and diversity of provision and outcomes that exist and that the HEA wishes to encourage. The learning outcomes approach facilitated by the NFQ allows for differentiation of programmes, on the basis of the balance attained between outcomes in the areas of knowledge, skills and competencies of graduates.

In order to create and sustain a diverse yet coherent system, it will be essential that all institutions have a clear perspective on their particular mission and role within the overall system. In particular, it will be essential that institutions ensure that their programmes continue to be reflective of, and appropriate to, their mission.

In a more diverse HE landscape, this would lead to greater differentiation based on field specialisation, programme orientation and mode of delivery, again reflective of the mission and orientation of each institution. The suite of programmes offered by an institution is a key expression of the distinctiveness of its mission and of the differentiation of an institution within its "family" of like-minded institutions.

It is anticipated that while all institutions will develop more blended learning programmes to meet student demand for more flexibility, open and distance learning (ODL) is expected to become a much more significant element in the programme delivery of some institutions.

Considerable progress has been made in expanding the provision of research degrees at Levels 9 and 10. However, as in other countries where the enhancement of PhD provision and quality is a strategic priority, there is an on-going need for Irish HE to position and market itself as an provider of excellent PhD education. Accordingly, it

will be essential that any provider demonstrates both a capacity to deliver high quality PhD training, benchmarked against international standards, as well as a coherent demand for PhD output.

PhD provision is but one element of Level 10 education and training, and a growth in alternate means of Level 10 provision such as industrial/ professional doctorates is expected to be reflected in the missions of some institutions and appropriately supported through research funding instruments.

Collaboration & consolidation

From the viewpoint of the structures in HE, the National Strategy saw collaboration, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally as being key to system development. Inter-institutional collaborations will be required across a range of activities such as programme design and provision, access, transfer and progression, research, knowledge transfer and shared support services. An immediate priority is to enhance the quality and cost-effectiveness of provision through shared collaborative provision at under-graduate and post-graduate levels, particularly in high cost programmes, such as medicine, engineering and architecture, or programmes with limited student demand. Collaborations and alliances may also lead over time to consolidation, where this can bring academic and other benefits to the HEIs involved and the wider system.

In relation to regional clusters, there is already evidence of nascent clusters (i.e. the Dublin Regional Higher Education Alliance, the Lónra alliance of institutions within the BMW region, the Shannon Consortium in the South West, and in the South and South East different collaborations between UCC and CIT, and WIT and Carlow IT).

Building on this progress, regional clusters will be created in a formal and systemic way to address the full range of higher education needs of a region and to advance regional development. All higher education institutions will actively participate in regional clusters. Collaborative arrangements between institutes and universities that enhance the quality and effectiveness of their activities are expected, and indeed will in many instances form the nucleus of regional clusters. The clusters will also facilitate extensive engagement with other education providers at all levels, as well as with enterprise, business and community stakeholders.

While not specifically addressed in the National Strategy, further education is a key component of post-secondary education. In the interests of meeting the broader needs of learners and the economy, it is important that new and more effective links are created between further and higher education. Regional clusters will be an important mechanism to bridge the gap between further and higher education, through better student pathways, and recognition of learning outcomes.

In addition to regional clusters, collaborations that are not constrained by geography will be vital. These include mission-based clusters to guarantee the continuing provision of labour-market oriented and practice-led specialist provision in areas such as culinary arts, art and design, policing and army, tourism, agriculture, theatre/drama.

Collaboration that transcends national boundaries will become increasingly important to enhance the international connectedness and reputation of individual institutions and of the system as a whole.

At present Ireland has a significant number of small higher education institutions that are in receipt of public funding. The national strategy is clear in its recommendation that these should be consolidated, where appropriate, to promote coherence and sustainability. It is expected that such institutions will be consolidated through incorporation into or merger with existing universities, institutes of technology or into technological universities. Public funding of these small institutions will not be continued except in circumstances where there are significant reasons of a strategic kind for continuing funding as separate institutions. Where appropriate, there will also be consolidation of institutions in the institute of technology sector, dictated by the requirements of sustainability and quality, leading to a smaller number of multi-campus institutions.

High quality private sector institutions will continue to be a feature of the system, and could have an expanded role where they meet particular economic or other demands. The role that such institutions can play in augmenting publicly funded provision will be the subject of further consultation. In line with best international practice, the question of regulation of private (for-profit and not-for-profit) providers will be addressed as part of overall system development and regulation.

Elimination of unnecessary duplication

Competition between institutions, both public and private, is an essential feature of any higher education system. But care needs to be taken that competition does not create unnecessary and wasteful duplication. Elimination of unnecessary duplication of provision, while maintaining capacity to meet future student demand, will be an important part of the HEA's system co-ordination role. The HEA will facilitate and co-ordinate analysis by the relevant institutions of programme and disciplinary offerings to explore on a system basis where unnecessary duplication arises and how rationalisation can be achieved. Regional clusters provide an ideal platform to ensure coherence and comprehensiveness of provision locally and regionally.

Progress on this issue is critical. The preferred option is that higher education providers within a region (and where appropriate nationally) will proactively come together to examine the scope for rationalisation of programmes and the effectiveness of the regional use of current and capital resources and, where relevant, to demonstrate that they have formal regional collaborative arrangements in place. HEIs will be expected to show that they have reviewed programme provision in the light of demand, that they have taken account of relevant findings of quality processes, particularity in relation to critical mass, that they have reviewed the use of resources on a regional basis, and that they are acting on the findings. The HEA will provide details of its data analysis of student numbers to support institutions in addressing this issue. The HEA will work closely with the QQAI in this regard.

Technological university.

The National Strategy provides for the establishment of technological universities. Such an institution, must satisfy the requirements that there is a clear need for it and that it meets the criteria set out in the document “Process and criteria for designation as a technological university” attached.

7. Achieving these outcomes

The development of a co-ordinated system of higher education that incorporates the elements outlined above will not occur in an “organic” way. While change driven by the institutions themselves, jointly or alone, will continue to play an important part in achieving a system outcome (bottom-up approach), a top-down element (based on shared vision and direction) will also be necessary. The role of the HEA is to provide this top-down element, through the process of engagement. This process will be a dynamic one so as to ensure on-going focus on mission-relevant activity in the HEIs and performance to agreed outcomes. Regulatory systems, many already in place, will also support the process. Central to the set of inter-relationships that will characterise the Irish HE system will be a close and mutually supportive relationship between the QQAI and the HEA. This will be vital in ensuring that funding, quality and the attainment of excellence are mutually reinforcing. In carrying out its role, the HEA will be informed by research into the development of higher education, high quality data and expert advice and support as required. The funding allocation process now in place is under review and will be reformed as necessary to support our objectives.

The National Strategy acknowledges that one of the key strengths of our higher education system has been, and should remain, institutional autonomy. There is, in developing a system approach to higher education as now intended, a risk that such autonomy will be weakened to an extent that outweighs the benefits that can arise from a system approach. To manage that risk, the HEA will adopt an approach of progressive implementation of this process of engagement and the new funding relationship over a period of 3 years. In that period the HEA intends to keep under close review with the HEIs what will be a work in progress. By the end of 2014 a fully functioning system approach will be in place, including performance monitoring and performance related funding at institutional level.

An important first step towards developing a co-ordinated HE system is to agree on the architecture of that system. This document provides the basis for that work. The following outlines the process by which the HEA proposes to develop that architecture.

The appendices to this document contain -

- Process and criteria for designation as a technological university (Appendix 1).
- Guidelines on regional clusters (Appendix 2).

Additionally, recognising that consolidation will be a feature of the development of the higher education system, the HEA will provide guidance on best practice on this question where appropriate and when required.

Each HEI is now asked to respond, within a period of six months from the date of issue of this document, regarding where and how it proposes to position itself within the Irish higher education system as outlined in this document. Such proposals should provide high level strategic plans with regard to mission, institutional alliances and clusters.

Strategic plans could result in:

- Proposal to merge with another HEI(s)
- Proposal to apply for designation as a technological university
- Proposal to establish a specialist institution..

Proposals in relation to the establishment of regional clusters are also sought.

In parallel with the work undertaken by the institutions, the HEA will commission a study with the objective of providing an objective view of the future structure of our higher education system. This will address issues including the number of institutions, the range of missions and the alliances and relationships which have the potential to strengthen the system. The study will also have regard to issues such as social and economic needs, regionally and nationally, feedback from employer surveys, financial considerations and demographic trends.

Proposals received from the institutions will be discussed with them individually, or in groups where appropriate, during early autumn 2012. All proposals will be considered by the HEA in the round. The HEA will be informed by the proposals received and by discussions with the institutions, and by the study referred to above. The HEA will then advise the Minister on an outline blueprint for the higher education system, including numbers, types and locations of higher education institutions that will be required in the system over the next 10-20 years. At this stage, taking a system strategic view, the HEA will also advise on any proposal for a new type of institution. It is intended that this blueprint will be published by the end of 2012.

The Minister for Education and Skills will continue to determine policy for the sector, with advice from the HEA. The Minister and the Government will also continue to determine the overall funding provided to the sector. The Minister will set objectives for the HE sector, and the HEA will be held accountable by the Minister and the Department for the achievement of those objectives.

This document has not addressed the issue of sustainability, but it is acknowledged that it is a key underpinning element to success. Sustainability is not just an issue of resources but how resources are applied and the structures within and between institutions for delivery of their mission.

APPENDIX 1

Process and Criteria for Designation as a Technological University

Introduction

The National Strategy for Higher Education provides for the establishment of a new type of university – a technological university. A technological university will have a systematic focus on the preparation of graduates for complex professional roles in a changing technological world. It will advance knowledge through research and scholarship and disseminate this knowledge to meet the needs of society and enterprise. It shall have particular regard to the needs of the region in which the university is located.

For the purposes of determining whether an application for designation as a technological university should be approved, the HEA shall appoint international panels of experts (referred to as “Expert Panels”) to advise the Authority in respect of Stages 3 and 4 of the designation process outlined in this memorandum. In conducting their evaluation, the Expert Panels will carry out such site visits and reviews and be given access to information from the applicant institution as they consider appropriate.

The designation process will consist of four stages as follows –

- an expression of interest,
- the preparation of a plan to meet the criteria,
- an evaluation of the plan, and
- an application for designation.

Stage 1 - Expression of Interest

Higher education institutions in Ireland wishing to apply for designation as a technological university must submit an expression of interest to the Higher Education Authority. The expression of interest must state, *inter alia*, how the transition from the institutions’ current status to final designation will be financed. The expression of interest will be considered by the HEA in the context of a system wide analysis of Ireland’s higher education needs and the strategic implications arising from the establishment of a new university. The HEA will, having considered the system level implications of the proposal, advise, within a reasonable period (no longer than six months), as to whether or not the proposal may proceed to the next stage.

Stage 2 - Preparation of Plan to Meet Criteria

At this stage a plan will be prepared by the applicant, addressing how it is proposed to meet the criteria for a technological university and the process requirements and related timelines.

The establishment of a technological university requires the consolidation of two or more institutions. Accordingly, the plan must be based on a legally binding memorandum of understanding between a consortium of existing institutions describing their consolidation into a new single institution, which has been approved by the Governing Body of each institution.

The plan must demonstrate that legally binding academic and administrative arrangements are in place to ensure that national and regional needs for graduates at higher education Levels 6 and 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications are met.

Stage 3 - Evaluation of Plan

The plan will be assessed by an Expert Panel which will have regard to -

- the capacity of the proposed consortium to achieve the objectives of consolidation in terms of academic rationale, scale, the degree of integration through alliances and membership of clusters and the extent to which workplace practices have been developed to bring them into line with those of a modern university, and
- the existing position of the proposed consortium in relation to each of the technological university designation criteria (Appendix 1) and its capacity, based on its developmental trajectory, to meet these criteria within a reasonable timeframe.

A decision will be provided by the HEA to the applicant within six months of receipt of the plan. If, in the opinion of this Expert Panel, the proposal is not likely to meet the criteria for designation as a technological university within the proposed timeframe the application will not proceed further. In that case, a further application will not be accepted for a period of five years. If the Panel is of the view that the plan presented represents a credible and realisable proposal, the Panel may provide advice to the applicant or the HEA on any matter relating to its implementation.

Stage 4 - Application for Designation as a Technological University

Where a legal consolidation has been achieved and the applicant considers that all other requirements for designation have been met, the applicant may apply for designation as a technological university. The application for designation will be evaluated by an Expert Panel. In carrying out that evaluation, this Panel will have regard to the criteria set out in Appendix A, the legal and administrative requirements applying to universities in Ireland, the configuration of institutions within the Irish higher education system, the characteristics of technological universities internationally, detailed statistical profile data on Irish higher education institutions and the overall merits of the application.

This Expert Panel will report its recommendation to the HEA which will consider the report and advise the Minister for Education and Skills.

Appendix A

Criteria for a Technological University

1 Mission

- 1.1 A technological university will have a systematic focus on the preparation of graduates for complex professional roles in a changing technological world. It will advance knowledge through research and scholarship and disseminate this knowledge to meet the needs of society and enterprise. It will have particular regard to the needs of the region in which the university is located.
- 1.2 Having regard to the mission of a technological university, these criteria set out the requirements that are to be met by an applicant before designation can be made.

2 Institutional Profile

- 2.1 The university will –
- be characterised by the breadth of its programme provision across higher education Levels 6 to 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications.
 - have programmes of study that are vocationally/professionally oriented, with a strong focus on science and technology.
 - have programmes of study that incorporate structured work placement.
 - have programmes that address the social and economic needs of the region in which the university is located.
 - have sufficient resources and critical mass to ensure appropriate pedagogical and research quality and depth of faculty expertise to meet the mission of the institution.
 - have sufficient critical mass to support effective and efficient governance and administration and to provide an appropriate level of student services.
 - maintain an active research policy primarily focused on applied, problem oriented research and discovery, with effective knowledge transfer alongside the provision of consulting/problem solving services that are particularly relevant to the region.
 - support intensive and broad-based links with regional business, enterprise, professions and related stakeholders that inform curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment and research.

3 Student Profile

- 3.1 The student profile of the university will match its stated mission. Specifically, the university will provide programmes at higher education Levels 6 to 10 to meet local, regional and national demand and to meet the university's responsibilities in respect of educational opportunities at these levels.

- 3.2 At the time of application for designation as a technological university –
- enrolment in the applicant institution in research programmes at Levels 9-10 will not be less than 4% of FTE enrolments at levels 8 to 10. In addition, the application must evidence a developmental trajectory, showing that the institution will raise these enrolments to 7% within a period of ten years from the date of designation. Level 10 provision will be concentrated in a small number of fields/departments which have the capacity and credibility to offer this level of study and training to the level set by the national PhD standard;
 - a combined minimum of 30% of all students in the applicant institution will be lifelong learning students enrolled on professional focused programmes and industry up-skilling, including part-time, work-related programmes and work-study programmes and/or mature learners.
- 3.3 Where the institutions that consolidate to comprise a technological university have been providing, prior to consolidation, non-higher education programmes (as defined by the National Framework of Qualifications) the university will, if necessary to meet local, regional and national demand, ensure this activity continues, either directly or indirectly, through appropriate administrative and academic arrangements that allow for the sharing of academic facilities and the progression of students.

4 Staff Profile

- 4.1 A technological university will in the appointment, management and progression/promotion of academic staff to and within the university have in place contractual and appointment procedures that, *inter alia*, -
- give weight to professional practice and institutional engagement activities and
 - provide existing staff members with a balance between teaching, research, engagement activities and academic administration that is appropriate to their subject area and their academic experience.
- 4.2 At the time of application for designation –
- 90% of full time, academic staff engaged in delivering higher education programmes in the applicant institution will hold a Level 9 qualification or higher.
 - at least 45% per cent of full time, higher education, academic staff, will hold a Level 10 qualification or the equivalence in professional experience, combined with a terminal degree appropriate to their profession. The proportion of such staff that hold an equivalence in professional experience shall not exceed 10% of full time, higher education, academic staff. There

will be demonstrable evidence of a developmental trajectory that shows the capacity, including staff with equivalence in professional experience as referred to, to increase and reach levels consistent with other Irish universities but not less than 65% within ten years of designation. These staff will not only hold Level 10 qualifications or equivalent in professional experience, but also be able to demonstrate sustained activity in relevant areas of research and development.

- in the fields of knowledge/study in which doctoral level training and research is on-going, the proportion of staff holding Level 10 qualifications will be in excess of 80%. As a general principle, only those with Level 10 qualifications will be engaged in the delivery and supervision of Level 9 programmes. Only those with Level 10 qualifications and with a sustained record of research publications and mission-appropriate research outputs will be engaged in the delivery and supervision of Level 10 programmes.

5 Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Development

5.1 A technological university will have the curriculum and the teaching, learning and assessment processes to support its core mission to develop graduates who have a focus on the world of work. The full opportunities provided by the National Framework of Qualifications for enhanced teaching, learning and curriculum development will be incorporated, with a particular focus on-

- Curriculum development focused on knowledge, skills and competencies developed in conjunction with business, professional organisations and, workforce, student and occupational organisations;
- Curricula that embed the full range of generic attributes linked to employability and citizenship;
- Curricula that embed engagement in the workplace as part of its programmes;
- Research-informed and practice-led teaching, learning and assessment that uses problem-oriented, practice-based and is community engaged.

6 Research

6.1 The research dimension of a technological university will-

- Focus on applied, problem-oriented research and social and technological development and innovation, with direct social and economic impacts and public and private benefits in the region in which the university is located;
- Support and sustain research activity among its staff that can be compared to appropriate international benchmarks. Such benchmarks will include *inter alia* evidence of cooperative research groups of a viable scale, success in winning competitive research funding nationally and internationally and inter-institutional research collaboration;

- In linking research to teaching, demonstrate methodological approaches to the formation of level 10 knowledge, skills and competencies that are appropriate to the institution's research mission and meet national PhD level standards. This will be through the integration of practice-led, professional, and industrial doctorate structures alongside more traditional PI-led approaches, all within the context of national policy for structured PhD provision.

6.2 An applicant institution will, at the time of application, –

- have existing research capacity to support on-going programmes, projects and doctoral training in at least three fields of knowledge/study as defined by ISCED fields of study at the 2-digit level (ISCED2 – “Narrow fields”);⁵ and
- demonstrate a developmental trajectory showing that the institution can extend research and doctoral activity to sufficient capacity to support two further fields, as defined by ISCED2 within five years of designation as a technological university.

7 International Profile

7.1 The international engagement of a technological university will specifically reflect its mission and orientation.

7.2 At the time of application, an applicant will demonstrate a developmental trajectory for the enhancement of internationalisation related to teaching and learning, research and staff development and a sustainable range of international collaborations such as joint projects, student and staff exchanges including the collaborative provision of academic and training programmes.

8 Leadership, Management and Governance

8.1 The leadership management and governance arrangements in place will be fully reflective of and in line with the stated mission of the institution. In practice this will mean –

- governance structures that reflect the external orientation of the institution and the engagement focus of its programmes of study;
- an integrated academic governance structure that gives coherence to multiple units, with consolidation of previously autonomous institutions where these existed, within the framework of the institution's mission.
- a leadership team that combines strong academic credentials and experience with experience in enterprise and professions relevant to the institution's mission.
- effective institutional-level academic governance with the authority, processes and competence to ensure the quality of programmes of study and the quality and integrity of other academic matters;

⁵ ISCED codes are outlined on the HEA website at <http://www.hea.ie/files/files/file/statistics/SRS%20User%20Files/EurostatISCED.pdf>

- workplace practices and employment contracts are reflective of a modern university including, *inter alia*, such matters as the flexible delivery of programmes for diverse learner groups, the length and structure of the academic year, the efficient utilisation of the institution's physical resources and other infrastructure.

APPENDIX 2

Guidelines on Regional Clusters

The future landscape of Irish higher education will require a coherent framework comprised of a variety of institutions of different kinds, with distinct well-defined roles, responsibilities and inter-relationships. The building of regional collaborative clusters of such distinct institutions is key to the delivery of many of the most important objectives of the National Strategy and to the delivery of the overarching objective of achieving a more coherent, higher quality and more efficient higher education system. Clusters will allow programmes of teaching and learning to be better planned and co-ordinated, resources to be used more efficiently, more flexible student pathways and better progression opportunities to be put in place, and better and more coordinated services to enterprise and society to be provided at a regional level.

This Paper sets out guidelines for the development of clusters of higher education institutions that would operate as collaborative partners to deliver on jointly agreed strategic objectives within a region. Clusters will not change the basic legal status of existing institutions as mergers might. Instead clusters are agreements between groups of autonomous, independent institutions to co-ordinate activities and integrate planning to provide better, higher quality services to students and regions and to advance the capacity, performance and contribution of the higher education system as a whole

The National Strategy requires that the diversity of mission that has served Ireland well to date should be maintained and that the potential be realised for clusters of diverse higher education institutions to influence national and regional competitiveness, through interaction with local authorities, local enterprise, development agencies, further education providers; to play a key role in the development of industry clusters and networks, and to provide clearer and better regional education pathways. Performance targets for HEIs will be stretched to encompass the standards that could be achieved in collaborative cluster arrangements, rather than in isolation.

In addition to geographic regional clusters, collaborations that are not constrained by geography are also important. These include mission-based clusters to guarantee the continuing provision of labour-market oriented and practice-led specialist areas. Also collaborations that transcend national boundaries will become increasingly important to enhance the international connectedness and reputation of individual institutions and the system as a whole. While the Irish HE system has traditionally operated as a set of autonomous institutions, there has also been a tradition of collaboration between those institutions. The institute of technology sector has for example always had close links in areas such as recognition of awards and student progression. In recent years

collaboration has extended further across the whole system, particularly but not exclusively in the research sphere. Examples such as the Shannon Consortium and the Dublin Regional Higher Education Alliance are already beginning to develop new approaches to cross-institutional issues.

Objectives of Regional Clusters

While there is a very broad range of possible objectives for regional clusters the five core objectives are -

1. **Co-ordinated regional engagement.** Regional clusters will provide a means to co-ordinate engagement with business and community and to support small and medium sized enterprises, ensuring that enterprise and the wider community have access to the full range of supports which the education system can offer, including knowledge transfer, business incubation services throughout the region and facilitating the emergence of a genuine 'no wrong door' approach by the clusters to their interaction with the wider community.
2. **Student pathways.** Regional clusters will increase the range of access, transfer and progression pathways into and through the institutions in the cluster, and provide opportunities for pathways between further education and higher education.
3. **Improved quality through opportunities for centres of excellence.** There remains significant scope to improve quality by achieving the necessary critical academic mass in particular disciplines. This can be addressed by developing undergraduate and postgraduate centres of excellence. A feature of regional clusters could be the development of systems to allow for the transfer/sharing of staff and other resources between programmes to facilitate this. This could be especially valuable in advanced research programmes, where an institution may not be able to justify a full time staff member, but could valuably use a portion of the time of such a staff member from a larger or more specialised institution. Within the cluster students should have access to the highest standard of tuition and facilities within real and virtual centres of excellence, which would create the conditions for the development of new and innovative fields of study and research. The opportunities afforded by clusters go significantly beyond programme offerings and offer scope for the development of better student support units, improved staff development, teaching and learning units, and better access to IT infrastructure.
4. **Co-ordinated programme provision.** Regional clusters should ensure regional access to comprehensive provision, elimination of unnecessary duplication, allowing for a broad range of differentiated offerings. It is expected that higher

education providers within a region would come together and examine the scope for rationalisation of programmes and the effectiveness of the regional use of current and capital resources. Opportunities to streamline aspects of provision through appropriate specialisation in particular institutions should be progressed. The development of clusters is also relevant to the recommendation of the Strategy for an increased emphasis on enhancing the quality of Irish PhD education and training by rigorously examining the locations where PhD training takes place. In the event that some locations are inadequate in any significant respect, membership of a cluster, which includes other PhD awarding bodies, may offer an alternative to students seeking PhD qualification in that region.

5. **Shared services.** Regional clusters have demonstrated that they are an ideal vehicle to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, a model of shared services is adopted so that learners have access to the highest quality support services possible within the cluster and unnecessary duplication of administrative support services is eliminated. In the future, the development of clusters may also offer a more sustainable basis for the targeting of new infrastructure investment into institutions. Rather than institution-specific plans, which may not exploit economies of scale, future acquisition of land, creation of new premises, purchase of equipment, development of ICT infrastructure and other plans can be more formally considered in the context of the needs of a cluster of institutions. This should not deter institutions from maximising the regional use of existing capital facilities through collaborative arrangements.

Principles and best practice to underpin regional clusters

1. **Mutual Benefit**
All institutions should benefit from their inclusion in the cluster.
2. **Stakeholder Benefit**
The creation of the clusters should improve the way in which institutions communicate with and provide services to the stakeholders of the institutions
3. **Transparency**
The development and operation of the clusters should take place in a transparent manner.
4. **Evolution and Organic**
The development of the clusters should be seen as both evolutionary and organic. Different clusters will develop at different paces and in different ways according to institutional and regional needs. The precise nature of the arrangements or the areas of co-operation is less important than the trajectory for improved collaboration over time. The oversight arrangements that are put in place need to be able to capture this.

5. Formal Agreements

Regional Clusters should have transparent written agreements approved by the governing authorities of the participating institutions, setting out the objectives of the cluster, how the members will work together and take decisions, how effectiveness in meeting objectives will be monitored and mechanisms to review or terminate the agreements

6. Best Practice

There is a now wealth of relevant international experience around successful existing clusters that demonstrate best practice to underpin clusters (See for example, the UK collaborative association, Universities for the North East, at <http://www.unis4ne.ac.uk/>, or the Scottish universities collaborative organisation, Interface, to provide access for industry and business <http://www.interface-online.org.uk/3> .) The purpose of Clusters is not to suppress institutional identity and in the monitoring of progress the maintenance of institutional diversity should be supported.

Risks to be managed

1. Loss of Diversity

A major risk that needs to be managed and mitigated will be that the different missions of the institutions within the cluster could, over time, lose their distinctiveness and particular types of provision would be lost from the region. It will be essential that this does not take place and that the systems for review and evaluation pay particular regard to this.

2. Creation of Excessive Bureaucracy

A further risk could be the creation of new layers of bureaucracy – both within the clusters, and within the HEA in reviewing clusters development, without any particular benefits arising.

It seems inevitable that some new forms of process, perhaps some elements of shared organisational or governance arrangement might have to arise within the participating institutions in order to make the clusters proposal work. Equally in order to ensure that the process is effective there will need to be some oversight from the HEA or other body. Every effort must be made to ensure that while any new processes are clear and accountable, they are at the same time minimised and streamlined with other existing processes.

Barriers to Achievement of Clusters

1. Upfront costs

It should be recognised that given the limitations on Exchequer funding it is unlikely that any new funding will be provided to support the establishment of regional clusters. However, the HEA retains the option of top-slicing small amounts from the main grant for this purpose and of allocating this subject to institutional compliance with certain criteria (e.g. agreed outcomes, and processes, timeframes accountability and transparency of process etc).

2. Perceived Threats to Institutional Identity

There is now a wealth of international experience around successful existing clusters that demonstrates that such impacts need not arise. The purpose of Clusters is not to suppress institutional identity and in the monitoring of progress the maintenance of institutional diversity should be supported.

3. Regional Mismatches

Institutions may find that they have no natural geographic match in terms of another higher education institution with which to collaborate, or that for reasons of history, competition, etc. they do not wish to become engaged with their natural geographic matches. Equally institutions with good existing relations may not welcome collaboration with institutions that would, on a geographic basis, be naturally associated with them.

Should some institutions not be included in their obvious regional or any other cluster, the HEA will engage with the institutions concerned, and if necessary arbitrate over any difficult issues. The formation of regional clusters should not in any way hinder institutions from continuing to engage in other collaborative clusters such as national clusters based on academic disciplines, clusters based around the operation in a region of a significant private corporation etc. and of course international collaborations.

Alignment of Clusters with Agenda for Institutional Consolidation in Institute of Technology Sector

The development of clusters will happen simultaneously with the possible consolidation of higher education institutions. Institutions will be required to plan for their future development on an academically and financially sustainable basis and to consider whether they wish to proceed on a stand-alone basis.

The necessary development of regional clusters should not be impeded by any consolidation process. Ultimately, mergers may or may not take place but regional clusters must develop. Mergers should only happen after a careful case has been made, based on an academic plan, and after consideration of cost

benefit has taken place. Where such mergers can be justified, the creation of a new and stronger institution should enhance, rather than detract from, the regional cluster.

How will Clusters Emerge

As part of the reform of its funding models the HEA will set out how it will use funding allocations to support the development of the clusters, and in the longer term, to align funding with the success of the clusters in meeting national objectives.

Any funding that might be available should not be directed at the clusters *per se*, but should go to the separate institutions based on their achievement of the agreed objectives for the cluster. The use of clusters should be one of the means by which they achieve these goals; as such it is the outcomes achieved as a result of membership of a cluster that will attract public funding. However, in the early years progress by higher education institutions in the process of establishing and/or participating in clusters will be reviewed by the HEA in addition to outcomes.

The role of the HEIs themselves will be of particular importance. It will be their role to put in place the clusters and to manage and operate them. In line with the principle of organic and evolutionary development, different sets of institutions will have to put in place the arrangements that best meet their needs and the needs of their stakeholders while taking account of their capabilities and state of development.

Check List for Higher Education Institutions

In reviewing and assessing the stage of development of clusters, the higher education institutions themselves in the first instance should review the extent to which -

1. there is a range of bilateral and multilateral formal agreements providing for the establishment of centres of academic excellence at under and postgraduate levels,
2. there is a range of bilateral and multilateral and formalised arrangements for progression and transfer between institutions, bi and multilateral formal arrangements exist between higher education and second level and further education institutions in the region covering learner access arrangements including specified transition-to-higher education programmes,
3. a wide range of pedagogical policies and practises (covering APL) exist and are in use to recognise and credentialise learning that takes place outside traditional formal structures,
4. there is a wide range of pedagogical policies and practises that encourage and promote work based learning and cooperative education,

5. bilateral and multilateral and formalised arrangements exist between higher education and second level and further education institutions to promote access to laboratories and specialist teaching facilities and to support the use of VLE's and other specialist learner support services,
6. shared learner support services (careers, access supports, counselling, tutoring, discipline specific supports (e.g. mathematics) are formally in place between institutions,
7. shared administrative support services (Admissions, HR, IT, finance etc) are formally in place,
8. there is shared, critical infrastructure, e.g. research and business incubation space, specialist libraries and sports facilities,
9. shared and networked responsibility for the brokerage of high level skills provision and labour market support and development arrangements are in place,
10. support services for enterprise development are formally shared and networked between institutions covering access to RDI facilities, IP, business planning and support and laboratory test and development facilities

Indicative regions and clusters

The following is one possible configuration of the set of regional clusters that might emerge and which institutions are asked to consider in the first instance:

- a. East/North East - UCD, DIT, TCD, DCU, St. Pat's Drumcondra, Mater Dei, IT Blanchardstown, IT Tallaght, IT Dundalk, NUI Maynooth, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art & Design, National College of Art and Design
- b. South East – Waterford IT, Carlow IT
- c. South/Mid West - UCC, CIT, UL, IT Tralee, MIC, LIT (incl. Tipp Institute),
- d. Border/Midlands/West – NUIG, GMIT, IT Sligo, St. Angela's, Athlone IT, Letterkenny IT

31 January 2012

Appendix 7

NEPS Assessments

Background

The National Educational Psychological Service is a division within the Department of Education & Skills and was established in 1999 to support the personal, social and educational development of all children in Primary and Post-Primary schools through the application of psychological theory and practice, having particular regard for children with special educational needs. It is a constituent Section of the DES.

All primary and post primary schools have access to psychological assessments either directly through the assigned NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), administered by NEPS who provide for the cost of assessments supplied by a panel of private practitioners.

NEPS currently has a psychologist staffing complement of 173 and is structured upon 8 regional divisions, with 21 local offices catering for schools in their respective locales. The Head Office is situated in Frederick Court in Dublin. NEPS psychologists are assigned schools based on a weighting process which takes into account school size, DEIS status, gender mix and geographical spread and equating roughly to a 5,000 : 1 pupil to psychologist ratio. In 2010/11 NEPS assigned psychologists to some 83% of Primary and Post-Primary schools, representing some 88% of pupils in the system.

SCPA

The SCPA was established in 2002 to provide psychological service (assessments) to schools in advance of the recruitment of sufficient NEPS psychologists. Under the scheme schools are entitled to commission assessments annually to a maximum of 1 per 50 pupils enrolled. A panel of private practitioners is maintained by NEPS and is accessed by schools as necessary and upon successful completion of the assessment a fee of €304 is paid by NEPS to the psychologist involved. Access to school to the SCPA process is granted where no NEPS psychologist is available to assign to the school or where the assigned psychologist is unavailable for extended period of time due to for example maternity or sick leave.

NEPS Model of Service

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution focused consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial

assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention. This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention. This process has been embedded by NEPS psychologists in the Primary sector with the production by the Department of *Special Educational Needs – A Continuum of Support* guidance and resource materials which has been distributed to all schools since 2007/8. In late 2010 similar support documentation was produced in relation to Emotional and Behavioural difficulties in the Primary sector and in relation to a formal Post-Primary Continuum process.

The continua described above all involve a graduated problem solving model of assessment and intervention in schools processes which moves from basic classroom based interventions to more specialised and individual interventions and comprise three distinct school based phases characterised as follows:

1. Classroom Support – is an intervention which is co-ordinated by the Class Teacher and is carried out in the regular classroom,
2. School Support - is an assessment and intervention process which is usually co-ordinated by the learning support/resource teacher working alongside the class teacher. Interventions at this stage will be additional to those provided through classroom support.
3. School Support Plus – is generally characterised by the school requesting the involvement by the relevant external service (predominantly NEPS) in more detailed assessment and development of intervention programmes . This level of intervention is for children with complex and/or enduring needs and whose progress is considered inadequate, despite carefully planned interventions at previous levels.

The staged model recognises that pupils present with a wide range of issues and difficulties and allows for their amelioration and intervention at the level most appropriate to the particular need. The continuum approach ensures that pupils presenting within this range are dealt with quickly and at the appropriate level without the establishment of a waiting list for formal assessment.

By way of further clarification the NEPS Model of Service divides the work of the psychologist into two areas:

- A. Casework
- B. Support and Development Work

A. Casework

The approach to **casework** is based on a staged approach to assessment and intervention explained above. It involves working with individual pupils with significant needs and with their teachers to help overcome their learning, behavioural, social or emotional difficulties.

This can include:

- The assessment of named pupil's particular needs through consultation with everyone involved with them, including the pupil if age appropriate.
- Drawing up a targeted plan to address these needs
- Helping teachers, pupils and parents to review progress of pupils constructively

B. Support and Development Work

This work is carried out with teachers (and, less often, with parents) to help them develop and use strategies that will help overcome pupil difficulties at varying degree of severity.

In order to do this, the NEPS psychologist works with schools at a number of different levels:

- a) Working with teachers to increase their capacity to meet the needs of pupils who have learning, behavioural, social or emotional difficulties. This can include work such as:
 - Giving a presentation to a whole school staff on strategies they can use, for example, to reduce "low level" but persistent disruptive behaviour by pupils in class and on the corridors.
 - Working with a specific group of teachers to help them address difficulties arising for a lot, or a small number of pupils.
 - Consultations with class teachers or specialist teachers (e.g. Learning Support/Resource teachers) regarding un-named pupils for whom they have concerns.

Other Elements of NEPS Work

NEPS psychologists also support schools in the case of Critical Incidents (such as bereavement or suicide) and guidelines and resource documentation have been distributed to all schools as part of that work. NEPS responds to queries in relation to individual children from other sections of the Department and from specialist agencies. NEPS psychologists also recommendations on individual applications for Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations (RACE) for the State Examinations Commission. This involves assessment of students in sixth year who apply for accommodations in the Leaving Certificate such as a reader or a waiver from assessment of spelling and grammar on the basis of a Specific Learning Disability or dyslexia.

Number of Assessments 2010/11

During the above academic year some **7,902** named pupils were referred to NEPS psychologists for assessment. The age profile of the pupils concerned were as follows:

Age	No. Referrals	Age	No. Referrals
5	128	13	1247
6	442	14	652
7	638	15	365
8	803	16	237
9	839	17	161
10	690	18	171
11	629	19	62
12	838		

Additionally in the period an additional **2,635** pupils received assessments under the SCPA scheme.

It is further estimated, from survey data, that NEPS psychologists provided consultation advise and assistance in respect of at least **10,000** un-named pupils. No age breakdown would be available for this cohort of children / pupils

NEPS psychologists provided some **4,100** recommendations to the State Examinations Commission in respect of pupils undertaking the Leaving Certificate in 2011 under the RACE scheme and provided direct support, at schools request, to staff and pupils in **98** critical incidents.

Early Childhood Education

Children under 5 years of age, including those attending at Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE), can access a range of assessment services under the Disability Act which are provided by the relevant local HSE services. In preparation for entry into Primary school the NCSE, at the behest of the HSE services, may request the input of the NEPS psychologist to review a child's assessment of need in relation to providing appropriate placement advice to parents. Upon entry into the formal education system the child's needs are catered for, at the appropriate level, within the continuum process previously described.

School Completion Programme (SCP)

➤ Background

The School Completion Programme (SCP), introduced in 2002, brought together and assimilated two schemes - the 8-15 Early School Leaver Initiative and the Stay in School Retention Initiative. The decision to incorporate the two programmes was based on the grounds that the two schemes shared the same objectives and targeted similar young people. The programme is based on the project model with an integrated approach involving primary and post primary schools, parents and relevant statutory, voluntary and community agencies and is focussed on young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years.

SCP entails targeting individual young people of school-going age, both in and out-of-school, and arranging supports to address inequalities in education access, participation and outcomes. The programme is funded on a multi-annual basis under the National Development Plan (NDP) and up to 2007, with assistance from the European Social Fund (ESF).

82 sites were initially selected for participation in the programme on the basis of a detailed analysis of pupil retention rates at second level using the Department's Post Primary Pupil Database.

In 2006 / 2007, the School Completion Programme was extended to all urban/town primary schools and second-level schools participating in the School Support Programme, under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan for educational inclusion.

➤ The Service and Management Structure

There are currently 124 School Completion projects in operation nationwide, encompassing 473 primary schools and 223 post-primary schools and targeting approx. 37,500 young people. Local Management Committees were set up in each project and have put together a collaborative programme of in-school and out-of-school actions (Retention Plan) that will support and meet the needs of children and young people at risk of early school leaving in their area. A range of associated smaller programmes, formerly funded under the Local Drugs Task Force, and other grant programmes have been integrated with the SCP.

A National Coordination Team, that comprises three Regional Co-ordinators, supports the School Completion Programme (The National Co-ordinator retired on 31 August 2010 and, due to the moratorium on public service numbers, has not been replaced). A Programme Research and Development Officer provides research and administrative support for the development, delivery and evaluation of the School Completion Programme.

It is the task of the National Coordination Team to advise on and monitor SCP Projects. In-career development for Local Coordinators and Project Workers is provided at regional and national level by the national Co-ordination Team.

Regional in-service is offered in the regions three times a year. National in-service is provided annually. Planning and review meetings are held in each region at the end of the academic year.

The National Coordination is still managed directly by the NEWB as has been the case since the integration of education services to the Board in 2009.

➤ **Staffing**

The SCP projects employ some 250 fulltime and 3,000 part-time/sessional workers. The workers are not regarded as public servants and are exempt from the general terms of the recruitment moratorium. The Projects are administered by a range of agencies engaged to act as employer and to administer the projects on behalf of the Local Management Committees. There has been no change to staffing following the transfer of the Programme to the Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs as local project staff are not employed directly by the Department of Education and Skills.

Home School Community Liaison

The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) is a major mainstream preventative strategy targeted at pupils at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of background characteristics which tend to affect adversely pupil attainment and school retention. Teachers are deployed from within the staff of a school participating in HSCL as a Local HSCL coordinator to act as a link between home and school, encouraging parents to become more involved in their children's education.

A National team of (currently 2 posts filled from 5) Regional Coordinators provide advice on and support the development of the Scheme at local level in both primary and post primary schools.

HSCL Coordinators are teachers and continue to be paid through the Department of Education and Skills' teachers' payroll, whilst management and the strategic direction of the service remains with the National Educational Welfare Board, and following from the integration of services which took place in 2009.

Integration of Services and Transfer of Functions

➤ **Integration of Services**

In May 2009, the Department of Education and Skills extended the remit of the National Educational Welfare Board which brought together the Home School Community Liaison Service (HSCL), the School Completion Programme (SCP), the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers (VTST), as well as the National Educational Welfare Service (EWS) under one common management team thereby providing for a

single, more focussed, strategic direction at local, regional and national levels, reflecting equally the nature and strength of each of the services.

The NEWB is charged with developing a single, strategic approach to attendance, participation and retention in school to meet the needs of children who are at risk of early school leaving or of developing attendance problems. A core part of the new strategy will be an integrated child and family centred education support service drawing on the skills, expertise and knowledge of all the services.

By combining the skills and strengths of staff from the services, along with those of teachers and other school-based personnel, the new integrated approach provides for better targeting of children who are not benefiting from education and aims to ensure that these children are properly supported to maximise their educational potential.

➤ **Consultation**

Consultation is currently taking place with staff in the three services (Education Welfare Service, Home School Community Liaison & School Completion Programme), Principals and staff in DEIS and non-DEIS schools with SCP and other interested parties. As part of the consultation process a questionnaire was compiled to gather views from all key stakeholder groups about where the opportunities lie for building on and strengthening the collaboration and teamwork between the three services to support the achievement of the best educational outcomes for students in DEIS schools and the best ways of supporting the work of the schools. A report on the consultation is in progress and the findings will be used to inform the design of the integrated service.

➤ **Transfer of Functions**

The functions under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, including the National Educational Welfare Board(NEWB) and the integrated services under the remit of the Board, transferred from the Minister of Education and Skills to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Transfer of Functions were effected by an order under Section 6 (1) (c) and (d) of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 1939 and signed 10th May 2011.

Some legislative amendments to the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 are likely to be required to ensure synchronicity between the respective Departmental functions and to reflect the new policy framework which will be necessary consequent on the creation of the new Department.

While provision has been made for the transfer of the majority of functions, certain functions under the Act which are intrinsic to the role of the Minister for Education and Skills are being retained, for example, functions relating to school enrolments which are linked to provisions of the Education Act 1998.

➤ **Funding**

- Following the Transfer of Functions order, the Dept. of Finance directed that the full 2011 allocation for the School Completion Programme (SCP) -

€30.256m - and National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) - €9.731m - transfer to the vote of D/CYA, effective from 1st January 2011.

- Arising from the change in stewardship of functions between Departments, and to ensure payments continued to be made until the new Department of Children and Youth Affairs could deal with the administration of the schemes, the sanction of the Department of Finance was received to operate Agency Suspense Accounts to ensure payment of relevant sums due on an agency basis as required during 2011, in line with existing payment practices.

➤ **Linkage**

As the School Completion Programme and Home School Liaison Service are targeted at schools with educational disadvantage and linked to other school supports under the Department's DEIS programme, ongoing links between the Department of Education and Skills and Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs are being maintained.

In this regard a Working Group has been established with officials from the two Departments in order to progress issues of joint concern.

The Working Group has agreed that:-

- (1) Formal consultative structures between the two Departments are developed and maintained to ensure that the educational interests of children at risk are maximised in the context of the development of the integrated service
- (2) DES continue to have direct links with the NEWB on operational matters of joint concern
- (3) DES should continue to have representation on the Board of the NEWB. (Amendment of the legislation will be required in terms of this representation and also for other Departments where responsibilities have transferred since the enactment of the Education (Welfare) Act)
- (4) Bi-monthly meetings to progress matters of joint concern to be established in early 2012. First date of meeting is yet to be decided (*awaiting date from the Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs*).

Transfer Staff

One Assistant Principal Officer, one Higher Executive Officer and one Executive Officer as well as one CO post (filled subsequently by redeployment) transferred to the Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs from the Dept. of Education and Skills to support the transfer of functions and administration of the schemes.

No expertise was lost in the transfer of functions as local personnel in the School Completion Programme and National Educational Welfare Board were not affected by the move.

Appendix 9

Note on spending on renovation of the VEC Headquarters in Longford

On 5th December 2011 a letter, signed by both the Acting CEO and the Chairperson of County Longford VEC, was sent to the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee regarding the Headquarter location of the Longford and Westmeath new VEC configuration.

This letter indicated that the Department of Education & Skills had invested almost €2m on the campus in Longford in recent years.

At a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee on 9th February 2012, the Chairperson of the PAC raised the question of whether €2m was spent on upgrading the property in Longford. The Secretary General undertook to provide details for the Committee.

Having checked the Departmental records and consulted with staff in Co. Longford VEC, the following relevant facts have been established:

Administrative Office Building

The administrative office building of Co. Longford VEC was leased from the OPW in 1932 under a 99 year lease at a nominal annual rent.

In 2004 and 2005, the VEC made proposals to the Department for the overall refurbishment of this building. In June 2006, the Department indicated its willingness to provide funding for this refurbishment. At that time, the cost estimated by the VEC was €286,913.

Between then and September 2008, the VEC contacted the Department on three occasions advising that the estimated contract costs for the project had increased. The latest estimate, received by the Department on 25th September 2008, estimated that the contract cost would be €383,000.

In February 2009, the Department agreed to contribute funding of €300,000 to the project on the basis of the estimated cost.

The refurbishment went ahead in 2009 and the Department paid a total of €300,000 in two tranches - €210,000 in August 2009 and €90,000 in October 2009. The VEC has advised me that the total cost of this renovation was €472,509. The balance of funding was provided by the VEC from its own resources.

Connolly Barracks Site

In 2009, Co. Longford VEC purchased a portion of Connolly Barracks from the Department of Defence. These premises adjoin its administrative offices site. Because this premises was purchased for the extension of the Adult Education Centre and VTOS, the Department's Planning and Building Unit provided funding of €950,000 for the purchase of the land along with €200,000 for alterations/refurbishment of premises, €20,000 for palisade fencing and €7,101.20 for legal fees.

In April 2010, further Grant Aid of €308,400 was approved by the Department's Planning and Building Unit for the refurbishment of the mechanical and electrical systems including independent fire detection and emergency lighting systems in a portion of the Army Barracks.

This additional grant was provided to allow for the transfer of the Adult Education Services to the Barracks.

In total an amount of €1,485,501.20 was provided to the VEC for the purchase and refurbishment of the Connolly Barracks premises. In the provision of this funding, the question of this building's use as part of a headquarters didn't arise.

The VEC has advised that as of 20th February 2012 some €60,000 of this has not yet been spent, because some work is still in progress. However, a significant portion of these funds have been committed in respect of work underway or already carried out.

Statement of lease obligations for VEC headquarters

The table below sets out the position as advised by the relevant VECs, on foot of the enquiry from the Public Accounts Committee. As the focus of the meeting of the PAC was related to VEC headquarters, the table below relates to buildings leased for headquarters only. VECs lease other buildings for educational purposes, for example in the provision of further and adult education, VTOS, Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres. Up to date data in relation to the buildings leased by VECs which are not used as headquarter premises is not readily available within the Department, but it can be requested from the VECs, if required by the PAC.

No breakdown is available at this stage of the cost of renovating buildings for merged VECs. This will be worked through by the Department in conjunction with the relevant VECs and the new merged body when established.

Name of VEC	Year of lease expiry	Annual cost of lease	Cost of leased HQ buildings which are currently vacant
Co. Wexford VEC	2026	€167,000	€66,000
Co. Wicklow VEC (2 Leases)	2015 annual Roll-over	€78,650 €58,100	Nil
Co. Kilkenny VEC	2027	€80,000	Nil
Co. Kildare VEC	2021	€142,000	Nil
Dunlaoghaire VEC	2022**	€212,500	Nil
Co. Dublin VEC	2025	€465,000	Nil
City of Galway VEC	2017	€111,020	Nil
Co. Longford VEC	2031	€13	Nil
Co. Limerick VEC (2 leases)	2030 2014	€88,500 €26,876	Nil Nil
Co. Kerry VEC	2015	€167,280	Nil
Co. Waterford VEC	2028	€89,888	Nil
South Tipperary VEC	2019	€35,650	Nil
Co. Offaly VEC	2027	€122,700	Nil
Co. Westmeath VEC	2025	€118,300	Nil

Co. Cavan VEC	2044	€289,050	Nil
Co. Monaghan VEC	2024	€83,440	Nil
City of Cork VEC	2031	€248,820	Nil
City of Dublin VEC	(4 leases)		Nil
Merrion Road	*	Nil	
1 Pembroke Place	2027	€44,450	
2 Pembroke Place	2028	€68,500	
Camden Row	*	Nil	

*Details of duration of lease not available.

**Possible break in lease in December 2012.