

Atheist Ireland

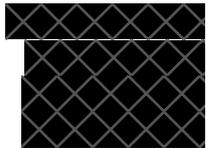
Promoting atheism, reason and ethical secularism

Web: atheist.ie

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c/o John Hamill



7th December 2018

Attn: Mr Stephen Rafferty
Senior Investigating Officer
Office of the Information Commissioner
18 Lower Lesson Street,
Dublin 2,
D02 HE97.

Re: 180072 – Review of PDST as a Public Body for the Purposes of the FoI Act

Dear Mr Rafferty,

I refer to your letter of 21st August 2018 (your reference 180072). I had asked you to undertake a review with respect to the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). This body had refused to answer a Freedom of Information request, as it claimed not to be a public body for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act, 2014. You concluded that you did not have evidence indicating that the PDST was established by a Government Minister, as described by Section 6.1(c) of the Act. I can now provide that evidence below.

Before the PDST was established by then Minister Batt O’Keeffe, continuous professional development was carried out by a number of functions within the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education. Among others, the main functions performing this work within the Department were the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) and the function for Leadership Development in Schools (LDS). During 2009, Minister O’Keeffe developed plans to instead create a new amalgamated service. As a cost-saving measure, the other functions would be merged into the SLSS, to create a new entity that would



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provide for a reduced overall headcount for the Department. For example, On 25th February 2009, Minister O’Keeffe informed the Dáil of his plans¹ as follows:

“My Department is currently reviewing the various supports offered to teachers in the context of the resources that are available to me. As part of this exercise, the SLSS is being restructured and other services are folding into its remit.”

By September 2009, much of the Minister’s planning had been finalised in terms of the number of positions that would be retained from across these functions. The attached spreadsheet indicates by how much the SLSS headcount would be reduced, as other functions were amalgamated into it. I obtained this spreadsheet through a Freedom of Information request to the Department, which asked for:

“All documents and communications from the period 19th February 2009 to 19th February 2010 within the Department of Education and Skills, which refer to both the Minister for Education and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).”

This spreadsheet is labelled as record number 2, within the results of my Freedom of Information request. By February 2010, the Department was in a position to inform the SLSS, the PPSD and the LDS of the Minister’s decision. I have also attached record number 36 from the same Freedom of Information request, which is a notice that was sent by the Teacher Education Section within the Department, to all personnel at the PPDS, the SLSS and the LDS functions. This notification describes how “consolidation and re-structuring” would see their roles amalgamated in order to establish:

“... a new generic and integrated cross-sectoral support service from September 2010 in the context of current restraints.”

Most of these roles are traditionally filled by teachers on secondment. Consequently, as a result of this cost-reduction decision by Minister Batt O’Keeffe, existing staff within the SLSS, PPSD and LDS were encouraged to “apply for one of the relevant positions” within the new body that he was establishing. While it was clear that not all of the existing staff would be retained, those that were appointed would comprise the new PDST from September 2010.

After this notice became public, the decision of Minister Batt O’Keeffe to amalgamate existing functions within the Department in order to create the PDST, became the subject of public debate. For example, in March of 2010 the *Irish Independent* reported², that the 250 teachers then seconded into professional development services would have to apply for only 150 positions within the new organisation. In response to criticism of this approach, Minister Batt O’Keeffe provided the following comment:

“My Department is currently making arrangements for a reduction in the number of teachers on secondment to the professional development support services in the context of reduced availability of public funding and the need to reduce the public sector pay bill.”

¹ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2009-02-25/194/>

² <https://www.independent.ie/life/family/learning/okeeffe-orders-cut-in-training-support-for-teachers-26641437.html>



The process of processing applications to join the new streamlined organisation created by the Minister, was then completed by September 2010, when the PDST came into being. This process by which the PDST was established by Minister Batt O’Keeffe, is in fact described on the PDST web site³ as follows:

“The PPDS, LDS, SLSS and a number of other primary and post-primary support services have now merged, to provide a cross-sectoral support service for schools and teachers, entitled the Professional Development Service for Teachers. The resources and materials on this website will continue to be available, both through this website (www.ppds.ie) and through the PDST website (www.pdst.ie).”

In summary, from the results of the Freedom of Information request that I submitted to the Department of Education, the following sequence of events are now clear in terms of the establishment of the PDST:

- i. Minister Batt O’Keeffe told the Dáil in February 2009, about his intention to establish what would become the PDST.
- ii. Minister Batt O’Keeffe’s Department of Education had internally defined and agreed the headcount for the new PDST by September 2009.
- iii. In February 2010, the Department of Education was able to invite applications for appointment to the new PDST, which was being established by Minister Batt O’Keeffe.
- iv. In March 2010, Minister Batt O’Keeffe was offering comment to national newspapers, taking personal responsibility for the establishment of the PDST.
- v. In September 2010, the PDST was established through the amalgamation of the PPDS, the SLSS and the LDS, exactly as instructed by Minister Batt O’Keeffe.

It is clear from the comments made to the Dáil, from the attached documents from the Department of Education, and from other public comments made by Minister Batt O’Keeffe, that the PDST was established by the Minister. As such, the PDST clearly falls within Section 6.1(c) of the Act and should be considered a public body for the purpose of the Act. Please don’t hesitate to contact me at 086 8563052, if you have any further questions about this review by your office. I will look forward to hearing your conclusions in the context of this new information.

Yours Sincerely,


John Hamill.

³ <http://ppds.pdst.ie>



Amalgamation of Post-primary Support Services September 2009

SLSS Director 1 SLSS Assistant Director 2

TY	LCA	SDPI	Generic	JCSP	Gaeilge	SPHE	PE	RE	Student Councils	Languages Group	Maths and Science Group	Tech. Group	Business and Enterprise Group	Cultural and Environmental Group
NCO	NCO	6 RCO	12 RDO	NCO ANCO 6 RDO	NCO 6 RDO	NCO ANCO 5 RDO	NCO	ANCO	ANCO	NCO	NCO	N/A	NCO	NCO

Current Numbers		SLSS Director 1		SLSS Assistant Director 1	
NCO	NCO	NCO	NCO	NCO	NCO
RDO	10 RCO	10 RDO	ANCO 6 RDO 7 RDO	ANCO 6 RDO	ANCO 10 RDO

Current numbers	71	T4 (-2), LDS (-5), Cool Schools (-3)	Project Maths	Overall Post -Primary reduction	Net Post-Primary reduction
Amalgamated numbers	52		Increase 13	Reduction 29	Reduction 16
Net reduction	19	Reduction 10			

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Sharkey, Olivia

From: Quinn, Bernadette
Sent: 18 February 2010 15:37
To: John Lucey; 'Mary McAuliffe'; Mary O'Flaherty; Michael Garvey; Patricia Shanahan; [REDACTED] Sinead Breathnach; walk tall
Cc: Fannin, Jill; Kirk, Treasa; OToole, Lynda; Ring, Emer; Wall, Alan; Walsh, David; Boggs, Maura; Considine, Mark; Heneghan, Tom; McClearn, Paul; Shortall, Kate
Subject: Notice of new arrangements for Professional Development Support and of Recruitment of Personnel



Letter services
draft 18.02.10...



Notice - Regional
Support Team...

Dear Director/Assistant Director/National Coordinator

Please find attached as promised notice of the new arrangements for Professional Development Support and of Recruitment of Personnel. Further details will follow in relation to the actual recruitment process in the coming days.

Should you wish to seek clarification in relation to anything please feel free to contact Teacher Education Section.

We would be very much obliged if you would provide each individual member of your service/programme with a copy of the attached letter and notification.

Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Alan Wall

Principal Officer

Teacher Education Section

Department of Education and Science



National Development Plan 2007 - 2013



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Rannóg Oideachais Múinteoirí
An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Cor na Madadh
Baile Átha Luain
Co. na hIarmhí

Teacher Education Section
Department of Education and Science
Cornamaddy
Athlone
Co. Westweath

Re: Notice of new arrangements for Professional Development Support and of Recruitment of Personnel

To all personnel working with Support Services and Programmes under the aegis of Teacher Education section.

I wish to advise you that Teacher Education Section has re-conceptualized its provision for school support and teacher professional development. This re-conceptualisation will see a move to a new generic and integrated cross-sectoral support service from September 2010 in the context of current constraints.

The new integrated and regionalised service will support a developing and evolving system in which schools are expected to take greater responsibility for planning, self-evolution and improvement. In close co-operation with the Education Centre Network, the new service will endeavour to respond to school identified needs including those arising from WSE or in relation to Section 24 of the Education Act 1998.

I hope you will apply for one of the relevant positions but wish to advise you that the development of this new regionalised service brings with it a reduction in the number of positions available. Mindful of this I would like to thank you most sincerely for your professional and personal commitment and contribution to the work of existing services. Teacher professional development in Ireland has advanced greatly in recent decades and the contribution of all service current and previous has been pivotal in this.

I trust that the information contained in the attached document will be of help to you in making a decision.

Yours sincerely

Alan Wall

Alan Wall, PO,
Teacher Education Section
18th February, 2010

☎ 090 6483600

☎ 090 6484222

🌐 www.education.ie

**Notice of new arrangements for Professional Development Support and of
Recruitment of Personnel**

National Director, Regional Coordinators and Regional Advisors

To personnel in: PPDS (including CAPP and SMPP), SLSS (including JCPE, SDPI, RE, LCA, TY, Student Council, Generic and Pillar areas) and LDS. Personnel in other Services/Programmes are referred to the note on page 4 of this document.

Since the first support services were established in the 1990s, the system of professional development support has grown incrementally to include support services established to address a variety of needs such as school leadership and development planning, curriculum change, education programmes and other areas of teaching and learning. In recent years there has been some consolidation and restructuring of the support service system.

This process will continue in 2010 (see also note on page 4 of this document) as Teacher Education Section (TES) has re-conceptualised its provision for school support and teacher professional development in the context of current constraints. This re-conceptualisation will see a move to a new generic and integrated cross-sectoral support service from September 2010. A National Director will be appointed who will lead and manage the development and work of the new service ensuring quality of provision and where appropriate consistency and cohesion.

Support will be provided regionally by multi-disciplinary teams who will work in close co-operation with the Education Centre Network to respond to needs identified by schools in the region. These regional teams will also respond to needs identified as part of WSE or in relation to Section 24 (of the Education Act 1998). The capacity of the teams will be augmented by local facilitators and associate trainers. Regional teams will also respond to current and future national system priorities ensuring that in relation to these there is cohesion and consistency at regional levels

A team will be selected for each of the 6 ATECI regions. Each team will consist of 1 Regional Coordinator and a number of Regional Advisors (see Table 1). Each Regional Coordinator will report to, and work under the direction of, a National Director. They may also have responsibilities nationally for initiatives or specific aspects of the overall provision. Further details in relation to this will be included in the job-specifications. Regional Advisors will report to the relevant Regional Coordinator and, in collaboration with him/her as well as the Education Centre Network, will assist schools and teachers in identifying their professional development and support needs and in planning a cohesive response at regional level.

The recruitment process will be confined to personnel currently seconded to any of the Support Services under the remit of Teacher Education Section and will involve the completion of an application form and attendance at interview. Applications for the posts of National Director and Regional Coordinators will be

Range of knowledge/skills required within the Regional Teams

- Knowledge of the principles of teacher professional development and experience of the development and provision of support for teaching and learning across a range of subject areas at both primary and post primary level.
- Knowledge of the Child Protection Guidance, the Stay Safe Programme, substance misuse prevention, etc. and experience of the provision of related teacher professional development
- Capacity to provide support to primary and post primary schools and teachers across a wide range of areas including:
 - School improvement
 - Educational leadership
 - School self-evaluation and development planning
 - Teaching and learning methodologies, including differentiation
 - Various DEIS initiatives (Ready Set Go Maths, First Steps, Maths Recovery and DEIS planning) at primary level
 - Learning support, with literacy and numeracy
 - EAL
 - Assessment
- Competence in, and ability to work through, Irish

Individual team members will not be expected to have experience in all of the above areas.

Applicants for the positions of Regional Coordinator and/or Regional Advisor should have:

- Proven and varied experience in the provision of teacher professional development including evidence of a capacity to mobilise and support teacher reflection, enquiry and classroom-based research
- Ability to pro-actively organise and coordinate the work of others
- Knowledge of the education system at primary and post primary levels
- In-depth knowledge of the curriculum at primary or post primary level, with a broad understanding of the curriculum at the other level
- Understanding of legislative requirements for schools (including Section 24)
- Proven ability to support whole school improvement
- Proven capacity to work independently and as part of a team
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills
- Excellent organisational, management and ICT skills
- In-depth knowledge and expertise in a particular area such as leadership, planning, curricular area, senior cycle programmes etc.
- Evidence of successful support for innovation in teaching and learning
- Capacity to work in specific and generic areas of support
- Capability to promote effective adoption of ICT as a teaching and learning resource
- Flexibility to meet the needs of the organisation, including a willingness to engage in travel and/or evening work as necessary
- An enterprising approach to tasks and the capability to undertake the innovative and challenging elements of the work