



PAC-R-171

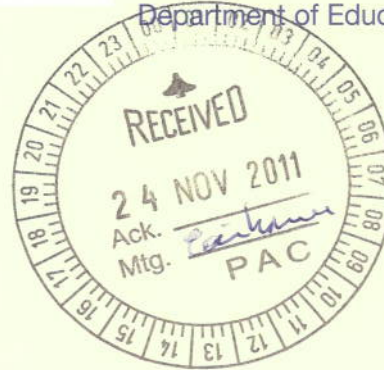


**Correspondence 3.2
Meeting – 01/12/2011**

Oifig an Ard-Rúnaí
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Office of the Secretary General
Department of Education and Skills

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



Our Ref: S1109330
PLEASE QUOTE REF NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE

24th November 2011

Dear Ms Lavelle,

I refer to your letter of 14th November 2011 in relation to Ms Ruth McNally's letter regarding the amalgamation of Laois and Offaly VECs.

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

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

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

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

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

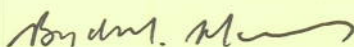
Last month, the Minister decided on the headquarter locations for the new Education and Training Boards. In arriving at his decision in relation to the location of headquarters of the merged VECs, the Minister considered a range of factors. These included the need to ensure that the location of a VEC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

In relation to the specific merger of Co. Offaly VEC with Co. Laois VEC, he decided that the headquarters of the Education and Training Board will be in Portlaoise.

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

The detail in relation to the disposal of existing property interests that may become surplus either in the context of this restructuring or the SOLAS developments along with any upgrading or refurbishment of accommodation that arises will be worked through by this Department in conjunction with the VECs involved and the Education and Training Board once established, and will be carried out on a cost effective basis.

Yours sincerely



Brigid McManus
Secretary General

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