

**An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta**
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science



Ms. Éilis Fallon
Committee Secretariat
Committee of Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PAC Ref: S0488 PAC33

23rd September 2021

Dear Ms. Fallon,

I refer to correspondence from the Committee of Public Accounts dated 08th August 2021 requesting response from the Department in respect of

- correspondence from an individual dated 30 November 2020 in relation to value for money in contracts for chaplaincy services in the third level sector.
- a further item of correspondence from same individual dated 23 December 2020 in relation to certain procurements undertaken in the third level sector

Recurrent Funding in Higher Education Sector

This Department allocates funding to the Higher Education Authority for direct disbursement to HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allocates this funding as a block grant to the institutions. As autonomous bodies, the internal disbursement of this funding, including the funding of student services, is a matter for the individual institution in the first instance.

All institutions are required to put in place appropriate student services, which can fall under a number of headings, particularly 'Welfare and Guidance' which includes counselling services, health promotion, careers service, multi-faith, racial and ethnic cultural support. As part of their services to students, each Higher Education Institution needs to consider what is most appropriate in the particular context of its own institution and students, while also considering best practice models such as peer-led support programmes and seeking to liaise with external services to the fullest extent possible.

It is the responsibility of the Governing Body of each Institute of Technology and University to satisfy itself that the requirements for public procurement are adhered to. Each institute must confirm in its Annual Governance Statement to the HEA that it is compliant with public sector procurement requirements and that procedures are in place to detect any non-compliance. This requirement is in line with the Code of Governance for Institutes of Technology.

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Review 2016

The HEA conducted a survey of all Higher Education Institutions in October 2015 to determine existing chaplaincy arrangements across the sector.

The review did not find evidence of institutions breaching any legislation or failing to comply with relevant guidelines.

A report was prepared in 2016 based on the findings, and there was a number of recommendations, (as referred to in the correspondence) including ensuring value for money and monitoring the impact of the service from a student perspective, making support services available to students of all faiths and none, compliance with public sector appointments criteria and public procurement guidelines, and accountability in the delivery of services.

In order to ensure a consistent approach was taken across the sector the HEA subsequently circulated the report to higher education institutions in July 2016 drawing attention to the findings and recommendations of the report.

When writing to the Higher Education Institutions the HEA also asked all institutions to ensure that there is no discrimination between the appointment of lay and clerical chaplains.

It was stated that the HEA would monitor ongoing implementation in this regard and would request an update from each Higher Education Institutions in due course.

Officials in this department have queried the issues raised with the HEA. The HEA has advised that its correspondence to the Public Accounts Committee on the 9th of January 2020 correctly stated that:

"Those [institutions] that acknowledge legacy issues remain are taking steps to update their processes."

(as per follow up survey undertaken in 2018)

These institutions reported to the HEA that they have taken steps to update their processes, 75% are following public procurement guidelines/open tender, 25% are committed to public procurement guidelines when positions become vacant.

In addition, HEIs continue to work with the Office of Government Procurement and Education Procurement Services to ensure that procurement practices for all goods and services, including chaplaincy, follow public sector guidelines to ensure value for money is achieved.

The HEA routinely follows up on sectoral issues and specific issues such as this through a number of mechanisms including Strategic Dialogue, Rolling Reviews and Surveys.

Surveys such as the one referenced and indeed the follow-up survey in 2018 are part of the HEA's structured engagements with the sector. Such engagements will continue in 2021, looking at



efficiencies and value for money in the sector, and consideration is provided to all topics for review including the one raised.

Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT)

In relation to the specific example referred to in the correspondence the HEA has advised that LYIT provided the following update. LYIT advise that the assertion that it has had taken no action is incorrect.

Prior to going to tender in 2021, LYIT's chaplaincy services reflected the main religious profile of the region's population: Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Church of Ireland. The annual cost of chaplaincy services which were provided for on a contract for services basis, was €68,000 allocated as follows:

- Roman Catholic: €50,000
- Presbyterian: €9,000
- Church of Ireland: €9,000

Chaplains are not employed by LYIT. Chaplaincy appointments were made by the relevant service provider. Information on chaplains is posted on the LYIT website (www.lyit.ie), via the student handbook and is reported annually to Academic Council in the student services chapter of the report of the VP for Academic Affairs and Registrar.

Plans to tender for chaplaincy services in 2019/20 were delayed due to Institute restructuring, including the proposed establishment of a new Student Services department and the subsequent worldwide Covid 19 pandemic. Following the establishment of a new Student Services Department and appointment of a Student Services Manager in January 2021, a formal public tender process for Chaplaincy Services was undertaken by the Institute. This process was concluded in July 2021, with the successful tender being awarded to the Diocese of Raphoe.

If you have any questions or require any further information in relation to the foregoing, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Breslin
Secretary General