



Ms. Sarah Cremin,
Committee Secretariat,
Committee of Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2

15 November 2021

Dear Ms. Cremin,

I am writing in response to your letter of 4 November, 2021, which refers to correspondence from Deputy Seán Sherlock to the Committee of Public Accounts in relation to the use of public funds by An Taisce.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has provided funding to An Taisce since 2012 for the Green Schools' Global Citizenship initiative, which targets 955 primary schools across the country. This funding is drawn from our Development Education Grant Scheme, administered by the Development Cooperation and Africa Division of this Department, which implements the Irish Aid international development programme.

With respect to the Department's oversight of An Taisce and how we satisfy ourselves that grant funding is used for its intended purpose, there are a number of strands to the relevant due diligence procedures.

In the case of this and other applications for grant funding, the applicant is required to submit a proposal, which includes a narrative, budget and results framework. This is appraised internally, and also externally by an independent consultant. Once an application is deemed to be of the necessary standard it is considered by a Grants Committee, which is chaired at Principal Officer-level within the Department of Foreign Affairs and attended by officials from the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. A recommendation is then made via the Director General of the Development Cooperation and Africa Division, to the Minister of State for Overseas Development and Diaspora, who ultimately approves the grant.

In the particular case of support for An Taisce and the Green Schools programme, the Grants Committee most-recently considered an application in February 2021, when it recommended two- year funding of €120,000 per year. This was subsequently approved by Minister of State, Colm Brophy TD.

When considering any grant application, finance and governance issues are key to the appraisal process, including a review of the most recently conducted audit. In the case of An Taisce's most-recent application, as the 2019 audit was not yet complete, the 2018 audit was reviewed. The committee agreed that final approval of the application should await reception of a satisfactory audit report for 2019. Consequently, disbursement of the Year One payment did not take place until this condition had been fulfilled, in May 2021.



With respect to whether this Department was aware of the restatement to the 2018 figures within An Taisce's 2019 financial statements, officials followed up on a number of occasions with An Taisce in relation to the delays in the finalisation of its 2019 audit. Letters were received from An Taisce on 10 February and 28 May 2021 providing updates. The letter received on 28 May included references to adjustments made to the 2019 accounts. Once received, the 2019 audited accounts were reviewed in line with our procedures. Given that the audit was unqualified and the amounts in question in the 'prior year adjustment' did not constitute a significant proportion of overall income, we did not consider there was any additional material risk to our funding. As a results, no further enquires were made on this particular issue.

Once the Department has entered into a funding agreement with a partner organisation, we require the submission of Annual Reports setting out results achieved and expenditure incurred, These are reviewed and appraised by Departmental staff, as are audits, which are also submitted annually.

Compliance with the Charities Code is another important factor within the governance arrangements around our grant funding. In the case of An Taisce's most-recent application, it was noted during the appraisal process that the organisation was still in the process of complying with the Code of Governance. It was informed that an update on its progress in this area would be required as part of the Annual Report against its first year of funding, due in June 2022.

In addition to the measures outlined above, officials from this Department meet periodically with An Taisce and have attended a number of Green Schools events. These include their summer course for teachers, an annual on-line awards ceremony, and a Green Schools' on-line event attended by children in both Ireland and Kenya. These events were an important opportunity to observe and monitor the work of the Green Schools programme at first hand.

With respect to whether this Department has a Service Level Agreement with An Taisce, the Department of Foreign Affairs has a two-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with An Taisce regarding the provision of this grant support, for the period 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2023. In addition, we have a one-year contract with An Taisce for the first year of this MoU, which entered into force in on 1 June 2021.

I hope that this letter satisfactorily covers the issues raised in your letter.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Hackett
Secretary General