



Martin O'Brien,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Louth Meath ETB,  
Abbey Road,  
Navan  
Co Meath

2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019

**Re: Aonad in Coláiste Chú Chulainn**

Dear Martin,

I refer to the difficulties experienced by the Aonad in Coláiste Chú Chulainn this year and your engagement with this Department as to how those difficulties could best be managed.

It might be useful at the outset if I outline the history of the establishment of the Aonadh and in particular its origins so as to avoid any confusion on this matter going forward. Coláiste Lú initially came into operation under the auspices and roll number of Bush Post Primary School in Co. Louth in 2013 and was not established as a standalone gaelcoláiste at any point.

In 2014, prior to the establishment of Coláiste Chú Chulainn under the patronage of Louth and Meath ETB (LMETB) to cater for increased post-primary enrolments in the Dundalk area, the Department formally sanctioned Coláiste Lú as an Aonad to operate as part of Coláiste Chú Chulainn. It has continued to operate in this fashion since 2014.

Where you have highlighted particular challenges in securing subject teachers who can teach through the medium of Irish for the Aonad we have set out below some options which we hope might assist you in finding solutions which are workable for LMETB, Coláiste Chú Chulainn and the Aonad.

**1. Increased teacher Allocation to Louth Meath ETB**

The Department is prepared to increase the allocation of teaching hours to LMETB immediately to help provide for the teaching of subjects through the medium of Irish in the Aonad.

You have indicated to us that there is currently a shortfall of 2.42 WTE to facilitate all subjects and options being available through Irish in the Aonad. While it is not the norm that all subjects and options would be available through the medium of Irish in an Aonad, in consideration of the circumstances in this case, the Department is willing to make this additional allocation available, in the short to medium term to alleviate these particular challenges.

This additional 'ring fenced' allocation would be provided by the Department to allow the Aonad to operate as it has in recent years for the students now enrolled. As the current cohort of students leave the school, the allocation would reduce accordingly over time, unless the enrolments in the Aonad grew to support that staffing allocation.

It would be the responsibility of the school and the ETB to make clear to future applicants what is provided by the Aonad before they enrol. This will allow for parents to make an informed decision in advance and align the Aonad with the normal operational practices of an Aonad in other parts of the country.

The Department is aware that LMETB has made a number of attempts to advertise for full time teaching posts without success so far and we recommend that you continue to advertise for these posts and to the widest possible audience to increase the prospect of a successful outcome.

## **2. Sourcing teachers who are capable of teaching through the medium of Irish from within the LMETB area**

While it is clear that attracting teachers to the Aonad is challenging, the option of the ETB transferring teachers from within the ETB to the Aonad should continue to be explored. This is perhaps one of the biggest benefits of having an Aonad located within the ETB structure as the funding and staffing to ETBs is for the ETB corporate entity and allows for certain flexibility of movement of staff, within Departmental norms, to the areas of greatest need in the ETB.

This option involves the backfilling of posts to the original school/education centre vacated by the teacher transferring to the Aonad. These posts may be more attractive to individual teachers for reasons of location etc and should continue to be explored.

## **3. Sourcing suitable teachers from those who have retired/other education provision**

It is acknowledged that you are in the process of following up with retired teachers for the purposes of seeking their willingness to teach in the Aonad and/or elsewhere in the ETB which may allow existing suitably qualified teachers to be re-deployed to the Aonad. This process including exploring suitable teaching staff from other education streams such as Further Education and Training should continue to be pursued.

#### **4. Engagement with Gael Choláistí in nearby areas for the purpose of supporting the Aonad.**

As you know the Department has been in contact with Cavan Monaghan (CMETB) to assess the potential of assistance in the circumstances and CMETB has indicated that they are willing to assist. Initially the Department proposed the release of suitably qualified teachers from CMETB to the Aonad and the back-filling of those posts to CMETB. However CMETB has indicated that they too experienced challenges in recruiting sufficient numbers of teachers for their school so it would negatively impact to a significant degree their capacity to deliver on education in that school if they were to release one or more teachers to the Aonad.

They have however advised that they would be willing to fully explore how video conferencing/ skype might assist as a short term solution. This may see children engage in lessons over VC facilities and arrangements would need to be made for practical subjects, marking of homework, course work for examinations etc. This again is a short term measure that can be implemented immediately and any arrangement would be expected to remain in place for the duration of this school year. LMETB should engage with CMETB as to how this arrangement might work.

The other Gael Choláiste in proximity to LMETB is Coláiste Ghlór na Mara, Balbriggan. This is under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta. An Foras Pátrúnachta has advised that they would be willing to explore with the ETB and the Department the kinds of supports they could provide, including if necessary teaching support and in the circumstances LMETB should engage with An Foras Pátrúnachta as to how these supports might work.

#### **5. Provision of bus services to Coláiste Oiriall**

It had been suggested to the Department that consideration could be given to providing school transport from Coláiste Chú Chulainn to Colasite Oiriall in Monaghan to facilitate a full Irish emersion.

You are aware that it was never intended that an Aonad would provide such level of immersion and the Department is very anxious to support the Aonad in its existing location by making available whatever supports we can, within our policy and funding parameters to allow it to operate effectively there. Therefore this is not an option which the Department would favour.

However we do acknowledge that this option may be something which parents may consider helpful, particularly for examination classes. LMETB should consider this option with parents for the examination classes and if this were something which parents of examination students were in favour of for the 2019/2020 school year the Department would be willing to engage further on the practicalities involved.

In addition, we can confirm we will continue to provide the additional teaching allocation for this year as outlined in our earlier paragraph to the Aonad, even if the examination classes were to travel to Coláiste Oiriall so that any remaining students had access to more classes through the medium of Irish.

This arrangement should not be seen to undermine in any way the long term sustainability of the Aonad. It is a possible short term measure for this school year which might help to support the teaching of students in examination classes.

## **Medium Term Supports**

### **6. The e-Teacher Role**

There is an e-Hub Pilot Project taking place in Galway between schools on the islands and a mainstream school to facilitate the teaching of a Leaving Certificate subject through Irish where it was not possible to secure a teacher on the island for this purpose. It is in its infancy and is designed to extend the range of subjects that Irish-medium schools, especially smaller schools in the Gaeltacht, will be able to make available to their students.

The first subject provided for in the e-Hub pilot for the 2019 – 2020 school year is Higher-Level Leaving Certificate Physics and we note that this subject is not currently provided by the Aonad but it is an example of the initiatives which may assist on teacher supply nationally in the medium term.

Realistically the earliest timeframe for a possible similar type or extension of the current e-Hub project to the Aonad would be the start of the next school year 2020/21. Lead-in time is required to allow for the development and adaptation of on-line materials including ensuring that the pupils in the Aonad and the teachers are prepared for teaching and learning through this medium.

In the meantime there may be opportunities to explore the capacity of teaching through other mediums such as skype as a short term measure for this school year (as outlined 4 above). However the e-Hub project has significant potential to address teacher shortfalls and provide for learning through the medium of Irish in the medium to long term. The Department is prepared to assist in any start-up costs involved.

You are advised to discuss this option with Galway Roscommon (GRETB) who are currently engaged with such a project for a number of schools including some on the islands, with a view to having some capacity in place for the start of the 2020/21 school year.

### **7. Upskilling teachers**

As you may know Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI) are currently planning for the development of a professional development programme to upskill teachers enabling them to teach their subject through Irish.

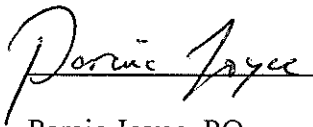
The programme will seek to assist in addressing the teacher-supply issue within Irish-medium education.

Following an extensive data-gathering exercise and consultation with the sector and relevant education partners, ETBI aims to roll out the programme to teachers in the ETB sector initially, on a pilot basis in September 2020.

You are advised to discuss with ETBI implementation of this programme to help provide solutions to the Aonad in the medium to longer term.

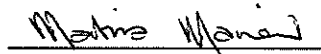
The options outlined above should assist LMETB in working through the current difficulties experienced by the Aonad. A number of these options have the potential to provide a solid basis for addressing future issues should they arise. They would also secure the long term future of the Aonad and reassure parents of the commitment of LMETB in this regard. The Department is happy to continue to engage with LMETB on these matters.

Yours sincerely,



Paraic Joyce, PO

Teacher Allocation Unit



Martina Mannion PO

ETB Financial Administrative and Personnel Unit