

SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Membership

Church of Ireland

The Rev Katharine Poulton (Chairperson)

Mr Wilfred Baker

Ms Hazel Corrigan

Mr Roy Crowe

Ms Elizabeth Hassell

The Rev Robert Jones

Mrs Joyce Ryder

Ms Kara Turner

The Presbyterian Church

Vacant

Vacant

The Methodist Church

Mr Stuart Blythman

Mr David Lee

The Religious Society of Friends

Ms Aine Ennis

Vacant

Secretary to the Board and to the Company

Dr Ken Fennelly

SEC Manager

Dr Eimhin Walsh

Deputy SEC Manager

Ms Bridie McLaughlin

SEC Administrative Staff

Mr Alex Tobin

Ms Vivienne Rountree

Secondary Education Committee

The Secondary Education Committee (SEC) is a corporate body comprising representatives from the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Religious Society of Friends.

The Committee derives its authority from a resolution passed by the sponsoring Churches in 1965 and is elected at the SEC AGM, nominations to the AGM having been received from the sponsoring churches/faith communities on the basis that entities recognised by those churches or faith communities hold the patronage of Protestant secondary schools.

The functions of the SEC are twofold: The distribution of a Block Grant provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to ensure necessitous Protestant children may attend Protestant secondary schools and the representation of the interests of the member churches in the post-primary education system.

The Committee operates as a limited company thus allowing both the corporate body and the liability of individual members to be appropriately insured, with members of the committee being simultaneously directors of the company.

The SEC meets five times annually (or as necessary). The SEC also has a number of sub-committees which meet as necessary.

The SEC and the DES have a Memorandum of Agreement in place with regard to the operation of the SEC Block Grant scheme. This Agreement is reviewed regularly and funding to the SEC was reassured as recently as 2019.

Governance

In 2017, undertook a review of its corporate governance which, for various reasons, resulted in the majority of the SEC committee retiring from office at the 2018 AGM. Other members resigned from office prior to or at the 2019 AGM. The composition of the SEC committee is now entirely renewed. The new members of the SEC wish to express their thanks and appreciation to all their predecessors on the SEC and look forward to carrying on the important work of the SEC into the future.

The SEC adopted its own Code of Governance in 2018. A Governance sub-committee was established in 2018 and it has set about embarking on the 'journey' of complying with the Code of Governance for charities. It is intended to be in compliance with 'the Code' by 2020. The Governance sub-committee meets regularly and also has external membership. The SEC Code of Governance was supplied to the Department of Education and Skills and is a requirement for funding draw down.

Block Grant Scheme Figures

In the 2018/2019 school year the audited accounts showed the total amount received from the DES, was €6,750,000 (€6,750,000), the grant in aid of fees totalled €6,715,670 (€6,556,986). The net cost of administering the SEC scheme was €327,152 (€155,956).

The following numbers of grants were awarded in respect of the 2018/2019 school year: 950 day grants (1054), 663 boarding grants (683), in total 1,613 (1,737).

The grant amounts for the school year 2018/2019 ranged from €250 - €3,000 for day pupils and from €250 - €8000 for boarding pupils, dependent upon applicants' net reckonable income following the means test calculation.

Grant Administration

The SEC moved to an online application system for the 2018/2019 school year. This is a two stage process involving registration and application. While the system has proved successful in providing higher levels of data management and transparency than the previous paper-based system, the transition to the online system has proved a challenge for some applicants. The SEC has engaged with representatives of schools to gain their feedback on the operation of the scheme and to reflect further on how the application process can be improved and made more “user friendly” for future applicants.

Eligibility for the SEC scheme is dependent upon being a member of a recognised Protestant denomination. A sub-committee was established by the SEC in 2018 to review the list of recognised Protestant denominations. The list is published on the website: www.secgrant.ie. Where an applicant is a member of a religious denomination that is not listed, a new protocol has been put in place whereby the religious denomination itself must seek to be recognised by the SEC before any funding can be applied in respect of a member of that religious denomination.

Mr Johnny Honner was appointed to the post of SEC Administrator, in succession to Mr David Wynne, in July 2016. Mr Honner resigned his post in September 2018 having implemented a number of key changes to the operations of the SEC, including moving to the online application process. The SEC committee wish to express their sincere thanks to Ms Bridie McLaughlin, deputy administrator, who acted up for the period of the vacancy following Mr Honner’s resignation and oversaw the application process for 2019/20.

Following Mr Honner’s resignation, the committee took the opportunity to review the role of grants administrator. In April 2019, following a competitive interview process, Dr Eimhin Walsh was appointed to the expanded role of SEC Manager. Dr Walsh joins the SEC from previous funding, governance and development roles in DCU, Educate Together and St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin. Dr Walsh’s role will encompass both managing and implementing the annual grant administration process, assisting with the implementation of governance best practice and also a wider role in promoting the SEC through liaising with parents and stakeholders.

In addition, there are two support staff in the SEC office, Mr Alex Tobin and Ms Vivienne Rountree; augmented by seasonal personnel engaged during the busy grant processing period. The Committee is grateful for all the hard work they put in during the intense period after the closing date for receipt of applications. The Committee is also grateful for the advice and assistance it receives throughout the year from its auditors Deloitte.