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(Dublin, 2).

I 39/16/68

23 Feabhra, 1979.

To the Chief Executive Officer
of each Vocational Education
Committee.

CIRCULAR LETTER NO. 7/79.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

1. I am directed by the Minister for Education to inform you that discussions have taken place between representatives of religious authorities, the Irish Vocational Education Association, the Chief Executive Officers' Association, the Teachers' Union of Ireland and the Department in the matter of appropriate arrangements for the provision of religious instruction in Vocational Schools.
2. I am now to enclose for the information and guidance of your committee a statement of the arrangements, agreed between the authorities and interests concerned, which the Minister is prepared to authorise for this purpose.

D. Ó LAOGHAIRE,
Rúnaí.

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RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

1. Introduction: Section 30(a) of the Vocational Education Act, 1930, provides that it shall be the duty of every vocational education committee

"to establish and maintain in accordance with this Act a suitable system of continuation education in its area and to provide for the progressive development of such system."

1.1 The expression "continuation education" is defined in Section 3 of the Act as meaning "education to continue and supplement education provided in elementary schools".

1.2 As religious instruction is a fundamental part of the programme in National schools, it follows that it should also, with due regard to the rights of parents, form an equally important part of the programme in vocational schools. Vocational Education Committees should, therefore, provide facilities for religious instruction and incorporate it in the general class time-table of all continuation courses. Such arrangements would, of course, be without prejudice to the rights of parents to request in writing that their children be withdrawn from classes in religious instruction. It is suggested that the time given to such instruction should in general be of the order of two hours per week.

1.3 For purposes of the recruitment of the services of teachers to cater for the provision of religious instruction accordingly, the Minister for Education is prepared, after consultation with the appropriate authorities and interests concerned, to authorise the following arrangements.

Teachers of religion, lay or religious, who are appointed, would continue to be recruited as before within the annual allocation of teachers for the Vocational Education Committee's Scheme.

2.2 Depending on circumstances and requirements, teachers of religion may be appointed in a permanent whole-time, temporary whole-time or part-time capacity.

3. Permanent whole-time appointments.

3.1 For purposes of the appointment of a teacher of religion on a permanent whole-time basis, the same procedures would apply as apply to the permanent whole-time appointment of a teacher of any other subject. The post would be advertised in the public press, the applications would be considered by a duly constituted Selection Board, the Selection Board would make a recommendation to the Vocational Education Committee concerned, and the Vocational Education Committee would submit the proposed appointment for the formal approval of the Minister.

3.2 For purposes of satisfying the Selection Board, the Vocational Education Committee and the Minister that the selected candidate for appointment would be acceptable to the appropriate religious authority, confirmation of the candidate's suitability would be provided by the catechetical inspectorate.

3.3 The selected candidate would not be permitted to take up the duties of the post until the Minister's formal approval of the appointment had been communicated in writing to the Vocational Education Committee.

3.4 Subject to the normal membership of the Selection Board not being exceeded, a representative nominated by the appropriate religious authority would be a full voting member of the Board for purposes of the selection of a candidate for appointment to a permanent whole-time post as teacher of religion.

Teacher of religion (whole-time or part-time)
Teacher - In the event that at any time a part-time teacher of religion, lay or religious, should cease to be regarded as suitable for that purpose by the catechetical inspectorate, then, subject to the legal status of the teacher as a local officer being appreciated by all concerned, the Vocational Education Committee will take steps to transfer the teacher to other teaching duties for which he/she is qualified. It will then be the responsibility of the Vocational Education Committee to make alternative arrangements for religious instruction in consultation with the catechetical inspectorate. It is envisaged, however, that such transfers should occur only in the exceptional circumstances provided for in this paragraph.

4. Temporary whole-time and part-time appointments.

4.1 Recognition as temporary whole-time or part-time teachers of religion may be accorded to priests and to any other persons, lay or religious, who are suitably qualified for the purpose. Vocational Education Committees would be authorised to make such appointments, with the formal approval of the Minister on the nomination of the appropriate religious authority, and to terminate them, if and when necessary, in accordance with the wishes of that authority.

4.2 A temporary whole-time teacher of religion, lay or religious, would be eligible for the award of annual increments of salary for continued service. A part-time teacher of religion would be remunerated on the same basis as part-time vocational teachers generally i.e. at an authorised rate per hour of actual instruction.

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teacher of religion appointed on a temporary full-time basis only for the reason that he/she does not hold the requisite qualification in Irish for a permanent post, may be employed in that capacity for a period of not more than two academic years. At the close of the second academic year, or earlier at the discretion of the Vocational Education Committee, the permanent position must be re-advertised in the ordinary way unless the teacher has meanwhile obtained the Irish qualification, in which case, and subject to satisfactory reports from the catechetical inspectorate, the teacher may be appointed to the permanent post subject to the usual requirements in such cases.

4.4. As indicated in paragraph 2.2 of this statement, the basis on which teachers of religion are appointed will largely be determined by particular circumstances and requirements. It is expected, however, that Vocational Education Committees will recognise the extent to which the making of permanent appointments, in so far as such appointments are feasible, will accord a desirable standing to the teaching of religion in their schools. Towards this end it is envisaged that Vocational Education Committees will wish to establish a suitable balance between permanent appointments and appointments made on any other basis.

5. Recognised qualifications for teachers of religion.

5.1 The qualifications recognised by the Minister for teachers of religion are:-

- (a) The Diploma in Religious Education of the later Dei Institute following the completion of a three-year course,

or

(b) The Diploma in Religious Education of the Institute of Religious Education, Mount Cliver, Dundalk, obtained following the completion of a three-year course in theology at a recognised theological centre,

or

(c) the B.D. degree of a recognised degree-awarding authority,

or

(d) A qualification deemed to be the equivalent of (a), (b) or (c),

and

for permanent whole-time appointment

(e) in acceptable qualification in another subject of the school programme,

and

(f) in Ceard Feastas Gaeilge of the Department of Education.

5.2. As indicated in paragraph 3.2 above the possession of such qualifications for a permanent whole-time post would require to be supplemented in the case of a selected candidate by confirmation from the catechetical inspectorate of the candidate's suitability for appointment accordingly.

6. Qualifications in other subjects.

6.1 It is proposed to bring to the notice of institutions which award recognised qualifications for the teaching of religion, the desirability of introducing facilities for the acquisition, as an integral part of the course for such qualifications or in some other acceptable manner, of a qualification in a secular subject or subjects which would be acceptable to the Minister.

For existing teachers of religion employed on a whole-time basis under Schemes of Vocational Education, it is proposed to introduce arrangements under which it will be possible for them to acquire competence in the teaching of a secular subject or subjects of a standard acceptable to the Minister by way of suitable in-service courses. Appropriate arrangements will be authorised for the employment of substitutes for teachers attending such courses to whatever extent may be necessary.

7. Inspection of the teaching of religion:- Inspection of the teaching of religion in Vocational schools would be the responsibility of the catechetical inspectorate. Such inspection would be carried out in consultation with the Vocational Education Committees and would be conducted in accordance with procedures to be agreed between the appropriate religious authorities, the I.V.E.A., and the T.U.I.

January, 1979.