

# Report from the Financial Support Services Unit (FSSU) 2019



## Introduction:

Under Department of Education & Skills Circular 02/2018, the Financial Support Service Unit introduced services to school management and personnel involved in the finance function of Community & Comprehensive schools in January 2018.

The Circular defined the objectives of the Unit as set out below:

1. Provision of advice and support to schools on financial governance matters including compliance with the requirements of this circular.
2. Development of templates for use by schools in relation to financial matters including a standardised national template for annual school accounts.
3. Acting as a central repository for receipt of annual school accounts prepared by an external accountant/auditor registered with a recognised accountancy body in the State.
4. Carrying out such audits as may be required.
5. Preparation of an annual report for the Department.
6. Liaison with the Department in relation to financial matters pertaining to schools.
7. Submission of financial information to the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) which will also satisfy the financial reporting obligations placed on schools by the Charities Act 2009.
8. Provision of statistical information to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in relation to its requirements for financial information in respect of the school system.

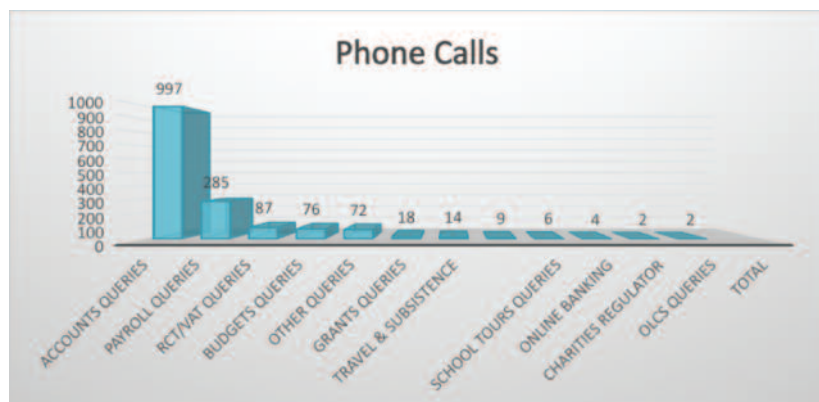
## 1. Provision of advice and support to schools on financial governance matters including compliance with the requirements of the circular.

One of the most important aspects of the work of the Unit is to ensure that any person working in or with a school has a contact person in the Unit to provide answers to queries as they arise. The Team answers queries through email, telephone, directly on site or through remote access. [www.FSSU.ie](http://www.FSSU.ie) provides information and documentation on all aspects of school's finances and issues specific to each school sector are clearly identifiable.

Below is a breakdown of the support the Unit has given to Community & Comprehensive schools over 2019:

### Phone Calls:

The FSSU received 1,572 telephone queries from Community and Comprehensive schools. In 2019 there was a significant increase in accounts queries due to the introduction of Surf Accounts.



Queries	2019	2018
Payroll	285	171
Accounts	997	30
Selection Committee Payments	9	19
Other	72	10
Charities Regulator	2	10
RCT/VAT	87	12
Online banking	4	9
Travel/Expenses	14	9
Budgets	76	4
Grants	18	4
OLCS	2	3
School Tours	6	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1572</b>	<b>282</b>

### School Visits:

The FSSU have visited 73 Community & Comprehensive schools. A small number of schools were visited at the request of the Department and the remaining schools were visited at the request of school management or Clerical Officers. The FSSU is available to help with the implementation of recommendations identified.

### Financial Guidelines:

Resulting from Circulars issued by the Department, common queries raised by Clerical Officers, and/or FSSU information needed by schools, the Unit issues Financial Guidelines to support school personnel to implement required changes or operate day to day financial functions. Below are the Financial Guidelines issued by the Unit relevant to Community & Comprehensive schools:

Guidelines issued from August 2018 - December 2019	
02 – 2019/2020	Revised salary rates applicable from 1st September 2019
03 – 2019/2020	Application of additional increments awarded in relation to New Entrants under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2020
05 – 2019/2020	Annual VAT Return of Trading Details (RTD)
06 – 2019/2020	School Excellence Fund – DEIS
07 – 2019/2020	Important Dates for the School Year 2019/2020
08 – 2019/2020	Repeat of Leaving Certificate Course Fees
09 – 2019/2020	Updated Travel and Subsistence Expenses Rates for Members of Board of Management, School Principal and other School Personnel
10 – 2019/2020	Financial Period-End 31st August 2019 on Surf Accounts
12 – 2019/2020	Finance Sub-Committee – Terms of Reference and Reports
14 – 2019/2020	Entering the budget on Surf Accounts for the year ended 31 August 2020
15 – 2019/2020	Taxation of Part Time Teachers/Trainers/Tutors/Lecturers
16 – 2019/2020	Adult Education
17 – 2019/2020	Approval and Procedures for Use of a School Credit Card

## Guidelines issued from August 2018 - December 2019 cont'd

18 – 2019/2020	Registration with the Charities Regulator and updating Board of Management Members details
19 – 2019/2020	Supervision and Substitution payments to schools during the school year 2019/2020 & hourly rates of pay for Supervision and Substitution duties
20 – 2019/2020	PAYE Modernisation Changes: Changes to myAccount on Revenue website applicable to employees
21 – 2019/2020	VAT Compensation Scheme for Charities
22 – 2019/2020	Expense Payments to Volunteers
23 – 2019/2020	Electronic Banking
25 – 2019/2020	Revised salary rates applicable from 1st January 2020
26 – 2019/2020	Government Budget Summary 2020

### Training:

Unit personnel have organised training for Clerical Officers around the Surf accounting package. Training has been given through workshops and remote access. Three sessions on the new system and the new reporting structure were delivered to boards of management. Three budget workshops and financial updates were also delivered by the Unit.

## 2. Development of templates for use by schools in relation to financial matters including a standardised national template for annual school accounts.

Unit personnel have used information gathered from school visits and other interactions to develop a standardised template for annual financial reporting. This will ensure that school management is in compliance with Section 18 of the Education Act:

*18.—(1) Except in the case of a school established or maintained by a vocational education committee, a board shall keep all proper and usual accounts and records of all monies received by it or expenditure of such monies incurred by it and shall ensure that in each year all such accounts are properly audited or certified in accordance with best accounting practice. (2) Accounts kept in pursuance of this section shall be made available by the school concerned for inspection by the Minister and by parents of students in the school, in so far as those accounts relate to monies provided in accordance with section 12.*

The Unit has also developed templates for use internally by schools for monitoring monthly income and expenditure versus budgeted figures. Full training on all templates is available. The introduction of a new computerised accounts package called Surf Accounts will enable all monthly and year end required reporting to be facilitated easily from the system. A standardised national template for the submission to the FSSU of annual school accounts, prepared by an external accountant/auditor registered with a prescribed accountancy body in the state, has been developed. The national template is the standardised method for accountants/auditors to prepare annual school accounts in accordance with the requirements of Section 18 of the Education Act, 1998. Full training has been provided by the Unit to all external accountants working with schools.

A standard template report for use when providing summary financial information to parents is also available as part of the standardised national template for annual school accounts.

## 3. Acting as a central repository for receipt of annual school accounts prepared by an external accountant/auditor registered with a recognised accountancy body in the State.

It is the responsibility of the board of management to ensure financial accounts are submitted to the FSSU by its external accountant/auditor. This satisfies the requirement under Section 18 of the Education Act 1998 for schools to make available their accounts for inspection by the Minister.

The date for submission of the annual accounts to the FSSU remains 28th February following the end of the financial year. The Unit has issued guidance to school management in relation to the appointment of an external accountant. The accounts submitted will give school management and the Department assurance as to all monies coming into and going out of the school. The new accounts package will ensure that the accounts are prepared in the format required for submission to the FSSU.

Boards of management of Community and Comprehensive schools will be required to submit accounts to the FSSU in respect of the 2019/20 school year by February 28th, 2021 and annually thereafter in the prescribed format and by the relevant deadline. All school personnel involved in the preparation of school finances will be fully trained and supported on an ongoing basis to ensure this compliance.

#### **4. Carrying out such audits as may be required.**

Where requested by the Department, the Unit has carried out specific audits in schools and reported on findings to the Department and the board of management.

#### **5. Preparation of an annual report for the Department.**

The Unit will submit a report annually to the Department outlining all activities across the Community & Comprehensive, primary and voluntary secondary sectors.

#### **6. Liaison with the Department in relation to financial matters pertaining to schools.**

Where issues relating to school finance arise, the Unit communicates with the Department. For example, the Unit liaises with the Department in relation to developments from the Revenue Commissioners and the Charities Regulator.

#### **7. Submission of financial information to the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) which will also satisfy the financial reporting obligations placed on schools by the Charities Act 2009.**

Use of the new accounts package will allow external accountants to submit the required financial data to the Unit in a format that will allow the Unit to in turn extract the relevant information legally required by the CRA.

#### **8. Provision of statistical information to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in relation to its requirements for financial information in respect of the school system.**

Use of the new accounts package will allow external accountants to submit the required financial data to the Unit in a format that will allow the Unit to in turn extract the relevant information legally required by the CSO.

### **Developments for 2019/2020:**

#### **1. Introduction of new accounts software package – Surf Accounts**

From September 2019, all schools in the Community & Comprehensive sector will use a new accounts software package called Surf Accounts.

The package was selected as it can provide the required internal and external reports that have been approved by the Department to ensure good financial governance and transparency for the board of management and the Department. Full training is consistently offered to all those dealing with school's accounts each month at various locations. This is the minimum training that will be offered, training will always be available as required. Surf personnel and FSSU personnel will provide full support for the use of this package on an ongoing basis.

#### **2. Budgeting for school finances**

The FSSU has developed a template for development of school budgets. As part of the new reporting requirements, it will be possible for the board of management to review the actual income and expenditure versus budgeted figures on a monthly basis. The template will fulfil the budgeting requirements of the Department. Training on the budget template for 2020/2021 will be available in March 2020 and will be open to all school personnel and management involved in school finances.

The level of engagement from Community & Comprehensive schools has increased substantially and Unit personnel are seeing the progress that is being made with the new system. We continue to endeavour to provide a positive experience for everyone who looks for advice and support. We appreciate the continued support and engagement from the ACCS which has greatly helped in supporting school personnel through these compliance changes.

*Ms. Louise McNamara,  
Director, Financial Support Services Unit.*