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Mr. Batt O’Keeffe
Minister
Dept. of Education and Science
Marlborough St.
Dublin 1

2nd March 2009

Proposed Changes to Second Level Support Service (SLSS)

Dear Minister

The Institute of Physics in Ireland* views with considerable alarm proposed changes to the Second Level Support Service. Currently there are six national co-ordinators providing individual support in the six areas of:

Physics
Chemistry
Biology
Maths
Junior Science
Home Economics

At present there is no co-ordinator in place for Applied Maths or Agricultural Science.

The teacher education section of the Department of Education and Science is now proposing that from the academic year 2009/2010 all of the above subjects will be amalgamated, i.e. eight in total, and just one co-ordinator will be appointed to be responsible for all continuing professional development. The actual proposed reduction in personnel in this group is from 6 to 1.

The Institute of Physics has worked closely with the SLSS over many years helping to provide practical support for the teaching of physics in the classroom. The IOP has put considerable resources into this area eg developing curriculum resources, such as DVDs, booklets, web supports, lectures, demonstrations and much more.

Since 2003, the Institute has employed 2 part-time teacher network co-ordinators in Ireland whose activities have been closely in step with the SLSS – eg distribution of Science on Stage demonstration booklets to all schools, organisation of lectures/meetings/seminars, practical demonstrations of lab experiments etc. A full list of IOPI/SLSS events for just the period Sept 08-Feb 09 is enclosed which gives a flavour of the extent, both geographical and in content, of this work. These courses have invariably met with widespread appreciation from teachers.

If the single SLSS physics co-ordinator is replaced by one person covering physics plus 7 other subjects it is clearly impossible to continue delivering a high quality specialist service to teachers. This is particularly so given the changes in the physics curriculum which are due to be made and will lead inevitably to a greater need for teacher support.

The Institute certainly appreciates the difficulty of the current financial climate. However the small potential savings that are being suggested need to be weighed against the imperative to increase the numbers of students taking science both at school and continuing with it into third level.

Government strategy over the past number of years has clearly sought to establish Ireland as a knowledge economy. Student school experience is a critical element in encouraging uptake of science. Cutting back on the essential elements of teaching support for science is undoubtedly counter-productive.

Coupled with the autumn announcement of cutbacks in the grants to schools for the teaching of physics and chemistry, this latest proposal will do serious damage to the strength of this subject and ultimately to Ireland's economy.

The Institute strongly urges you to reconsider this proposal and we would welcome an opportunity to meet with you or your departmental colleagues to explain further what a serious impact we think this change would have.

Yours sincerely



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Policy Officer
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Prof. Peter Main
Director Education and Science
Institute of Physics

*The Institute of Physics in Ireland (IOPI) is the professional organisation for physics in Ireland, both Northern Ireland and the Republic. It is a key educational and research stakeholder and regularly produces reports and recommendations on many aspects of physics. It has over 1800 members in Ireland and is a branch of the UK based Institute of Physics, which has an extensive world-wide membership (currently over 34,000) and is a leading

communicator of physics with all audiences from specialists through government to the general public. Its publishing company, IOP Publishing, is a world leader in scientific publishing and the electronic dissemination of physics.

SLSS/Institute of Physics Collaboration

The SLSS-Physics has worked closely with IOPI Teachers Network since the appointment of the first IOPI co-ordinator in 2003.

The SLSS Newsletter has carried many articles about IOPI activities. See <http://physics.slss.ie/newsletter.html>

SLSS Physics have been invaluable with helping to distribute all three Physics and Science on Stage booklets. Also heavily involved with training and distribution of IoP Supporting Physics Teaching 11-14

The following is a list of collaborated events with SLSS since Sept 08

Sept 15 SLSS Assessment For Learning meeting Athlone

Sept 16 Physics Papers Review, Drumcondra Education Centre, Dublin

Sept 24 Physics Papers Review, Blackrock Education Centre, Dublin

Sept 26-28 Frontiers of Physics Teachers conference UCD Dublin

-Including financial support to help with teachers travel

Sept 30 IOP and SLSS Course for Physics Teachers,

UCD Part 1 Mechanics & Optics

Oct 7 IOP and SLSS Course for Physics Teachers,

UCD Part 2 Heat- Temperature & Waves & Sound & VPL

Oct 14 IOP and SLSS Course for Physics Teachers,

UCD Part 3 Electricity & ICT in Physics

Oct 21 IOP and SLSS Course for Physics Teachers,

UCD Part 4 Modern Physics & Science on Stage

Oct 17 SLSS meeting Athlone

Nov 11 SLSS ICT Wexford Education Centre Day 1

Dec 2 "A Night of Sound" Blackrock Education Centre with SLSS

Dec 3 VPL Monaghan Education Centre

Jan 22 SLSS ICT Wexford Education Centre Day 2

Feb 25 VPL session at Ista and SLSS HDip Evening -Sandford Park School

Planning for joint training on Transition Year medical physics module

Typical feedback comments from participants

"One of the most useful and helpful sessions I have ever attended"

"I really enjoyed talking to other physics teachers. As the only physics teacher in my school, It is a great comfort to know that such support and help is available"

"Saturday was a wonderful day in UCD at the Frontiers of Physics Conference - great lectures, demonstrations, and the opportunity to meet so many Physics teachers in

one place. Sincere thanks to the organisers who did a marvellous job. I look forward to Waterford next year."