

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM  
OIFIG AN AIRE DLÍ AGUS CIRT, COMHIONANNAIS AGUS ATHCHÓIRITHE DLÍ

Ms. Mary Maguire,  
Meetings Administrator,  
Corporate Services Department,  
South Dublin County Council,  
County Hall,  
Tallaght



Dear Ms. Maguire,

30 July, 2012

I am directed by the Minister for Justice and Equality, Mr. Alan Shatter, T.D., to refer to your letter of 17 July, 2012 enclosing a copy of the Motion passed at a meeting of South Dublin County Council on 9 July, 2012 concerning the system of accommodation for asylum seekers known as Direct Provision.

The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA), a functional unit of the Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (INIS) of this Department, is charged with responsibility for accommodation of asylum seekers while their applications for protection in the State are being processed. Currently, RIA accommodates over 5,000 asylum seekers in 37 centres throughout the State. All of these centres are managed by private companies under contract to RIA but in the case of seven of those centres, the land and buildings are owned by the State. Under the Direct Provision system, asylum seeker residents are provided with full board accommodation free of utility or other cost.

It needs to be emphasised that Direct Provision is not detention and residents are free to come and go and interact with the outside community. Indeed, if asylum seekers have their own resources or have friends or relatives in the community, they are not obliged to live in the Direct Provision system.

Details of centres currently under contract can be seen on RIA's website - [www.ria.gov.ie](http://www.ria.gov.ie). Of the current 37 asylum centres in RIA's portfolio, only 3 were specifically built for the sole purpose of accommodating asylum seekers i.e. were 'system built'. All other centres must operate within the physical limitations of the premises' original use e.g. hotel, college dormitory, hostel, etc. In terms of room capacities and facilities, RIA centres operate in compliance with relevant legislation. While all conform, at the very least, to minimum contractual and legislative standards, there are necessarily a range of facilities available in centres in the overall RIA portfolio, deriving from this original use.

RIA engages independent external assessors, with expertise in areas such as fire

safety and food preparation, to conduct comprehensive inspections of all centres at least once a year. These inspections are always unannounced. The inspectors look at all aspects of the accommodation centre in relation to the proprietor's obligations under the contract. Reception, staff cover, menus, food preparation, facilities being provided, maintenance of the property and fire and safety issues are subject to inspection.

Further to the above, RIA has an internal Inspections Unit which also conducts inspections which, resources allowing, are carried out on a twice yearly basis. These inspections are also unannounced. While inspectors (both internal and external) do not oversee the preparation of meals, they are obliged to sample either the mid-day or evening meal. External inspectors inspect the food preparation areas and report their observations in relation to hygiene and good practice to RIA.

RIA does not provide health services for residents in its centres: the HSE does. Asylum seekers generally qualify for medical cards and enjoy the same health service as is available to Irish citizens. The HSE also provide many on-site services targeted at childcare and child welfare provision such as Public Health Nursing, Area Medical Officer and Community Welfare officer clinics. Other supports, such as community welfare and education are provided through the relevant Departments in accordance with their statutory roles and Government policy.

In relation to children's activities, children of asylum seekers are linked to local schools in a like manner to the 'indigenous' population. It is often through their attendance at local schools that children establish links with community sports and recreation activities. There are local amenities such as parks and libraries of which asylum seeker families can avail. Homework clubs are also provided at some family centres for the school-going children.

Adult asylum seekers can access free English language classes run by the VEC and, in some cases, by NGO's.

RIA takes its responsibilities in relation to children seriously. RIA operates a Child Protection policy in line with the HSE Children First Guidelines to ensure the safety and welfare of children accommodated in its centres. Staff in RIA centres are subject to Garda Vetting.

Where on-site pre-school services are not available, the Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme, operated through the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, provides for free pre-school services to asylum seekers in direct provision accommodation on the same basis as Irish citizens which can be accessed in the community at pre-schools of the parent's choice. Even where on-site pre-school services have been set up, those services are dependent on sufficient take-up among the residents to make the service viable. In certain cases, a number of parents - as is their prerogative under the ECCE Scheme - have chosen to place their children in pre-schools in the community and this has impacted on the viability of the on-site services.

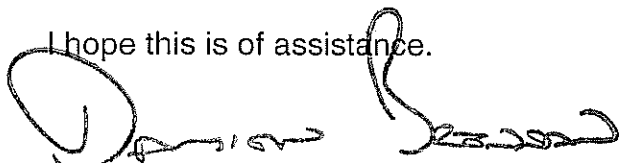
The direct provision system is a whole-of-Government affair. No system of this size and complexity can be expected to work without a significant degree of formal

cooperation between the various agencies involved. This cooperation is achieved in a number of ways: secondment of staff, interagency meetings, high level fora and so on.

In relation to the giving of a presentation to a meeting of South Dublin County Council on the system of Direct Provision, the Minister has passed this correspondence to the Principal Officer in charge of RIA, Mr. Noel Dowling, whose contact details are below. You can make direct contact with Mr. Dowling to arrange for such a presentation.

Email: [nmdowling@justice.ie](mailto:nmdowling@justice.ie):  
Phone (01) 4183203.

I hope this is of assistance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Dowling', written over a horizontal line.

Private Secretary