

Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on

“Ensuring that Schools are open in a manner which is both safe and sustainable”



National Principals' Forum

Introduction:

The National Principals Forum is an entirely voluntary group of over 1,200 practising Irish primary school principal teachers, established in May 2018. We work to affect urgent changes needed to sustain school leaders, and affect much needed change to safeguard our education system.

The main objectives of our lobby group are:

- to raise awareness of the serious issues maligning our education system
- to highlight the severe pressures on school leaders
- to identify the systemic failures affecting our pupils educational access, experiences and learning outcomes, with a view to securing change and safeguarding education for ALL children.
- to strive for inclusion in the conversations that govern and shape educational policy so that the voices of school leaders, charged with leading and managing our schools on the ground, are heard.

We know our schools better than anyone. We know what is needed in our schools to keep them safe and ensure that they are effective and inclusive centres of learning and growth.

We have outlined these issues and our solutions to same in past submission and research documents. Many of the most critical challenges schools are currently facing pre-date Covid 19 and these must be addressed as they hinder efforts to provide a safe and sustainable environment in our school communities at this time. Any plan to protect from Covid 19, must start with protecting the staff and pupils in our schools.

In this submission we aim to:

- outline the key issues we identify as school leaders with ensuring our schools are open safely and sustainably
- outline the effective strategies we recommend to rectify these issues and prevent further erosion of our education system and workforce, particularly school leaders leading and managing our school communities, whose positions are becoming increasingly untenable due to workload and lack of supports

In addition to past research [Appendices 2 and 3], we recently conducted an online survey of Primary School Principals across the country. This survey was emailed to schools on the morning of Thursday 15th of October and closed at 9pm on Friday 16th of October 2020. In this time – approximately 530 principals responded to this survey. The results of this survey (*Appendix 1* attached), makes for shocking reading. Principals clearly articulated what needs to happen and what needs to change. School leaders want to work WITH those in authority to ensure a better future for education.

Safety and Sustainability:

Our main safety and sustainability issues are outlined in the table below – this list is not exhaustive but summarises the most pressing issues in need of action and remediation. We ask that the Minister for Education, Ms. Norma Foley TD., be brought before the Committee so that pertinent questions based on the points raised below could be put to her and that responses would be sought.

DES Re-Opening Guidance	
Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Guidance was too late coming – communication from the DES to schools was very poor throughout lockdown and the manner in which this information came to principals either through the media or in late Friday evening emails was abysmal, disrespectful and injurious to principals. ✓ Lack of consultation with school leaders ✓ Onerous responsibilities on school leaders and BOMs – many of us worked tirelessly and in relative isolation, in the absence of timely guidance. This created huge stress and mitigated against safe and timely summer school programmes so badly needed for SEN and DEIS pupils. ✓ Lack of respect from the DES has filtered into society and the level of media and public teacher bashing that ensued as a result of issues outside of our control was truly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Timely consultation with practising principals – we cannot be left high and dry waiting for guidance. 96% of principals surveyed said the guidance from the DES did not come in a timely or comprehensive manner. ✓ Timely and respectful communication –no more Friday evening emails and media leaks before informing schools and school leaders on crucial plans and information that directly impact on our work and schools. This is both unfair and isolating. ✓ Guidance to issue to school management BEFORE it is released to the media. ✓ Professional support and greater affirmation for the teaching profession. We have no one to advocate for us in the face of such vitriol, which takes a heavy toll when one is working so hard and getting such abuse in return. It is very damaging to the education system to allow myths and spin to reign at times when confidence in educators needs to be high. ✓ Directing school leaders to be on call 24/7 for HSE consultation is not reasonable. At the very least this responsibility needs to be shared and a school mobile work phone needs to be supplied and paid by DES. ✓ Acknowledge the difficulties school face in terms of school building limitations and propose realistic alternatives and guidance for principals when faced with such difficulties. Many teaching principals don't have an office space, many staffs have nowhere to eat their lunch and are not getting their breaks in school – this situation is unsustainable for any worker, in addition to being unlawful. ✓ Improve testing access and times for school staff and pupils. ✓ Greater transparency and timelier communication from HSE in relation to positive Covid cases in schools.

<p>awful, unwarranted, undefended and damaging the past number of months.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ BOM is comprised of volunteers, many of whom have their own work commitments ✓ Schools struggling to find physical space for Covid Isolation Room and personnel to man this room. ✓ No regard for Principal wellbeing or teacher wellbeing ✓ Lack of transparency with HSE and Covid cases in schools ✓ Lack of sufficient ICT supports and infrastructure in schools and homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Address the media blackout on Covid cases in schools. They are happening – see statistics in Appendix 1. 25% of principal respondents have had a positive case of Covid in their schools. ✓ 25% of schools report not having a suitable space for an isolation area. ✓ Acknowledge the overwhelming level of extra work being done. Remove unnecessary pressures and burdens where possible during this time. ✓ Deliver regular updates on numbers in schools to build trust. ✓ Central procurement of laptops/ ICT for those most in need
---	---

School Leader Burnout

Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Principals have not had any annual leave to speak of this year. Principals are genuinely exhausted and becoming ill. ✓ Contact time with staff for planning is compromised even further by Covid social distancing and increased workload and stress. ✓ The role of the Teaching Principal is entirely unsustainable without urgent action to support us in our dual role. We cannot lead and teach full time at the best of times. The additional workload and stress during this pandemic necessitates urgent action to ensure that we are supported in our extensive efforts to navigate our school communities through this time safely and effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 95% of Principals stated that they have not had any reasonable break since March 2020. Principal teachers need some breathing space and a break. Please do not issue any new directives or work before the mid-term break or on a Friday evening. ✓ If schools are to remain closed for a week after mid-term please allow us planning time with our staff for that week. They too need to recover from a very stressful half term and need professional space to collaborate and organise planning. We are already giving a huge amount of time to this outside of working hours and staff are too tired to engage meaningfully after hours having missed breaks during the day to cover unpaid yard supervision. ✓ A review of the criteria for allocating release time to teaching principals is long overdue. 61.5% of Principals state that one day a week is insufficient for meeting the demands of their dual role. Adequate release time for school leaders is absolutely necessary – one day per week was requested as a matter of urgency long before Covid. It did not suffice to meet both our leadership and teaching duties for a very long time, and certainly does not come close to the help, time and space we need to lead and teach during a pandemic. ✓ Grant administrative status to all principals in schools with 2 + special classes. Being a teaching principal in such settings is utterly impossible and utterly debilitating. ✓ Stop considering SET and special class teachers as ‘ex-quota’ for the purposed of allocating release time. It is disingenuous and wrongly profiles our schools and the demands on a principal teacher.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Special school principals are under inhumane pressure managing very large staffs, which is not recognised, supported or fairly remunerated by DES. They are on their last legs • Keeping afloat should not be the aspiration of a school leader • Onslaught of documents regarding Covid-19 (especially the poor timing of these) • Too many agencies bombarding us with demands and notices • Principal teachers have no robust representation and the recognised representative bodies refuse to engage or represent our serious issues to the DES • WellBeing is the buzz word- if we weren't overloaded and stressed our wellbeing would be fine ✓ Poorly laid out and maintained DES website 	<p>SNAs and ancillary staff need to be recognised for this purpose also, in addition to remuneration for ALL STAFF being managed in a school. This is crippling teaching principals and principals of special schools, in addition to putting immense pressure on administrative principals. No other manager is treated so shoddily in terms of HR management, terms of conditions of work and pay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Full-time trained secretarial support for schools is long overdue – paid directly by DES with fair terms and conditions of work. They are crucial to school administration and communications and their treatment by DES is an actual scandal ✓ Restore posts of responsibility to pre moratorium levels ✓ Release time for deputy principals needs to increase also. ✓ A contract for principal teachers safeguarding terms and conditions of work and safeguarding working time in line with EU working time regulations. The role of the principal has not been reviewed since 1973. The goodwill with which we have held our schools together is fast disappearing, as we are running on fumes. ✓ Work life balance is entirely impossible at present. We do not expect to not have extra work at this time, nor have we failed to rise to the huge challenges of the past number of months, but it is the level of expectancy and pressure that is problematic, with no reprieve at all in sight. ✓ Principals are working huge hours ever before Covid and are not remunerated for all this extra work and personnel management. The benchmarking award granted in 2008 is STILL OUTSTANDING and must be honoured. All teaching principals are paid less than deputy principals in larger schools. We are also paid far less than our secondary school counterparts, with no less work or responsibility. The sacrifices we make in our personal lives are not respected or reflected in our pay whatsoever. ✓ Create planning time for school staff within the school calendar year with substitute cover or school closure days to accommodate this. Good leaders engender and support team-work and delegate within their team. With full time teaching duties and the complications around meeting in school time with social distancing, this is increasingly hard to manage. We must protect our team work and the time needed for team planning. Staff morale is also very low and again the wellbeing regularly espoused by DES doesn't happen in a vacuum – it needs time and space. ✓ Increase support for Principal Teachers IMMEDIATELY. Proven trends in principal teacher stress, burnout and step down are escalating. We are losing the finest of school leaders due to unfair and unhealthy work conditions. There is not an endless pit of expertise to keep replacing these leaders. There is a disgraceful lack of regard and duty of care to principals. ✓ Pay outstanding pay award (2008) as a matter of professional respect and fair remuneration for an extremely difficult and pressurised position. The government cannot reengage on this agreement and need to rectify this matter now ✓ Allow a representative of NPF to sit on the DES Workload Forum to ensure the grassroots voice on the ground is heard
--	---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Remuneration for all staff managed – SNA, Caretaker, Secretary, Bus Escorts ✓ Provide a dignified step down facility for Principals which safeguards seniority in recognition of their years of service to school leadership. Too many school leaders are leaving this position due to stress and burnout, with no options available to them.
--	--

Health and Safety

Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Social distancing cannot be maintained withing current class contexts and classroom specifications. ✓ School staff are expected to work in conditions that are contrary to NPHET work place safety guidance in <u>all other workplaces.</u> We all want to remain open more than anything, but we must have a safe work place for both staff and pupils. Currently, despite our herculean efforts, we cannot ensure safe work places. There are too many variables not addressed in the DES guidance and outside of the control of school management ✓ The effectiveness of pods is a myth – in reality all pupils and staff in a classroom are close contacts and need to be recognised as such by Public Health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reduce class sizes – far greater provisions from those outlined in the budget need to be made to make this a reality. 49% of schools do not have adequate class space to ensure social distancing in their senior (3rd – 6th) classes. ✓ Devise a plan for blended learning that is timely, feasible and safer for all while Covid numbers remain so high. If we go to level 4 or 5 schools cannot be expected to operate as normal without serious investment, planning and support. ✓ Ensure that adequate PPE, sanitising and cleaning funding remains available to schools. ✓ Ensure that ALL schools have realistic access to a teacher supply panel to ensure substitutes are available for teacher absence, which are escalating with current Covid trends. ✓ Improve HSE transparency in relation to school Covid cases. NPF survey results show serious inconsistencies in HSE support for schools with positive Covid cases. 48.2% of Principals did not receive HSE guidance in relation to a positive case in their school for over 2 days after the case was first brought to their attention. 22.4% of principals did not receive HSE advice on a positive case in their school for over 4 days! ✓ ALL pupils and staff in a room with a positive Covid case need timely access to testing. They are all CLOSE CONTACTS, irrespective of PODS etc. They share toilet facilities and AIR, regardless of our stringent sanitation and careful Covid Response Plans. However, many are not considered so by the HSE and this leaves schools massively vulnerable or the transmission of Covid.

SEN (Special Education Needs) Supports

Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ This is a HUGE ISSUE and mitigates against fair and equitable education for our pupils. ✓ The NCSE supports allocated to schools in terms of both SET allocations and SNA allocations are grossly insufficient to meet the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 53.6% of Principals observed an increase in SEN since returning to school. 2.9% of them received additional supports to address these increased needs. ✓ 61.5% of Principals say their SET (Special Teacher Allocation) is insufficient to meet the SEN needs of their pupils. ✓ 51.7% of Principals say they have insufficient SNA access to meet the care needs of their SEN pupils. ✓ Only 37% of principals who submitted exceptional reviews to appeal for additional SNA supports were successful thus far. The

<p>ACTUAL needs of schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ There is no mechanism whereby a school can communicate its exact SEN profile to the NCSE and therefore some schools are continuously mis-profiled for the purposed of making these allocations ✓ Appealing NCSE decisions is extremely arduous and largely unsuccessful ✓ The procedure for applying for additional support is arduous with excessively repetitive and cumbersome paperwork and by and large most schools are unsuccessful in their applications – placing the pupils and staff under immense pressure to cope, never mind optional education and inclusion. We are fire fighting all the time. This is exponentially worse since Covid as we strive to meet pupils needs across various pods and bubbles. This loaves and fish provision will be further exacerbated by the proposed SIM Model and Total Inclusion models we justifiably fear are being implemented insidiously. See the Inclusion Illusion Report attached. ✓ The Cluster Games – the annual struggle to form clusters and cobble together bits of SET posts to form full posts between schools. Posts that can take no account of travel time between schools and can be ridiculously pedantic. All the while it is the SEN 	<p>paperwork involved is absolutely ridiculous and excessively time-consuming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Review NCSE policies and the processes in place for allocating resources to schools. There is very little transparency or NCSE accountability. No principals feel supported by NCSE – see survey Appendix 1. ✓ SET time needs to be protected. At present it is being eroded all the time with lack of substitute teachers, further injury to our SEN pupils and stress for school leaders. ✓ NCSE supports must match the ACTUAL NEEDS of a school. ✓ The ACTUAL SEN PROFILE of a school needs to be known by the NCSE. A mechanism for this can easily be incorporated into POD. ✓ Appeal mechanisms need to be far less difficult to navigate and more transparent. ✓ Applying for an SNA should not necessitate an <i>exceptional review</i>. It is not an exceptional circumstance that a school need additional SNA support. This process is littered with roadblocks and is largely futile in terms of positive outcomes. It should not be so difficult to get the support a child genuinely needs, which is proven by relevant paperwork ✓ True inclusion cannot happen in school where SEN supports cannot meet the level of need and schools are forced to focus on containment and fire-fighting, instead of education and progress. ✓ Fixed full time SET Posts or at the very most a post shared between two schools. ✓ Fixed Full time SNAs based on the actual proven need in a school and not the proposed SIM model which will not serve our pupils or schools best. ✓ Improve access to NEPs supports. ✓ Increase pupil assessments available to schools via NEPS and/or SCPA scheme
---	--

<p>children who continue to miss out over DES penny pinching.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Part-time SNAs – again this is hugely problematic for schools. Already we are spreading SNAs thinner and thinner with shared access between more and more pupils. A part-time SNA makes no practical sense in a school. Pupils cannot suspend their care needs for the part of the day that their SNA is not at work. This places immense pressure on the child, teacher, parents and other pupils. ✓ Access to NEPs is inconsistent around the country and HSE intervention teams have massive caseloads and cannot always give the support we need in terms of consultation services and plans for SEN pupils – OT, psychology, Speech and Language. ✓ Huge delays with AON (Assessment of Need) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reduce AON wait lists by increasing the number of Educational and Clinical psychologists available and expediate both assessment and access to intervention services at as early an opportunity as possible in a child’s development. The current delays severely impact pupils access to education and our ability to meet their individual needs or access NCSE supports. New admissions policy also severely hampers our abilities to access supports needed for incoming pupils. This is set to become a very serious problem and is a massive backward step for SEN pupils, while dressed in a progressive and inclusive disguise. ✓ No move towards a total inclusion model for SEN without ALL the supports necessary to implement and maintain such a system. Keep our current continuum of support SEN model and fund and resource this properly. It is an excellent model, but is currently not working well due to lack of personnel and supports. ✓ Access by all schools to an OT (like NEPS psychologist) Screen all children by OT (catch DCD). Same for Speech and Language Screening and Therapy.
---	---

Consultation and Communication

Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication from DES is abysmal and very disrespectful to school management and principals ✓ Principals, teachers, SNAs on the ground need to be part of the conversation about school policy and the voice of those on the ground needs to be heard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The vast majority of Principals found the DES communication during this pandemic to be very poor. ✓ Only 4% of principals found DES guidance to have come in a timely and comprehensive manner. ✓ It is bad enough to hear about new DES guidance and directives in the media first – it is another insult to have to search fruitlessly at times, to find these documents online – recent eg. The DES Remote Teaching Guidelines – September to December 2020 (the existence of which was discovered by principals on social media in OCTOBER 2020), but not emailed to schools nor easy to find on the DES website ✓ We are bombarded with emails and messages from too many stakeholders, none of which consult us very much, if at all. Too many representative agencies and organisations means that a coherent message is not getting through to the DES from the ground. This submission cuts through the middle layer of bureaucracy to give you the reality in our schools straight form the

	mouths of Principals – neither sugar-coated nor sensationalised, thus document presents the TRUTH.
Covid Response Plan	
Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of transparency from HSE and DES in terms of positive cases and communication in many schools • Delays in Covid testing for school personnel and suspected cases in many schools • Flu- Vaccine rollout for school personnel <p>Expectation that LWR does all the extra work for no remuneration like their post-primary counterpart</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Only 33% of Principals feel that their schools are very well equipped in terms of a Covid Response plan. This is not due to the plan itself, but the pre-covid factors mitigating against a safe plan. ✓ Greater transparency and timelier communication when positive case in school. Principals are being left in incredibly difficult situations, bound to confidentiality while there are long delays with HSE Communication and guidance. ✓ Fast track school testing ✓ All staff and pupils in a bubble are close contacts – pods do not protect people in a classroom for 5 hours per day from Covid transmission if there is a positive case in a room. Refusal to acknowledge this is causing huge anxiety in some schools. ✓ All school personnel to be given the option of a flu vaccine this Winter ✓ Pay LWR and Deputy LWR for their additional work and responsibility
Lack of Substitute Teachers	
Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay inequality has systematically eroded our workforce and impacted detrimentally on professional morale and collegiality. • There are not nearly enough Teacher Supply Panels to service the schools in each county 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 24% of respondents said their schools have NO ACCESS to supply panels. ✓ 28% of schools with access to supply panels say they are insufficient for their needs. ✓ Restore pay equality immediately. ✓ Ensure that ALL schools have adequate access to a teacher supply panel – across the country.
Staff Wellbeing	
Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff anxiety is high due to working conditions while Covid is such an active threat and our work places cannot follow NPHEH guidelines for all other workspace. • Morale is very low. • Persistent anti-teacher media narrative is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 70% of Principals are very worried about Covid cases in our schools. ✓ Only 7% of Principals feel supported by our union – the INTO. ✓ Only 3% of Principals feel supported by the DES, and the same figure applies to the NCSE. The two agencies we depend on MOST for support and guidance. ✓ Contingency plan is needed NOW for schools during Level 4 and 5. The DES has a duty of care to its workforce as well as its pupils. It is not honouring either while we continue to crowd into

<p>wearing and damaging our profession.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of lip service paid to ‘wellbeing’ without the supports to ensure it is safeguarded for staff. 	<p>small classrooms with no social distancing possible, while community transmission is so high.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Give some dedicated professional time and space to teachers and staff to plan together this year. There is no time or space for this in our working day or week. We can manage housekeeping matters and a very limited amount of school planning with Croke Park time, however remote plans and policy/curricular reviews require time we are not afforded professionally – and is necessary in these unprecedented times more than ever to have this space as a staff. There is no breathing space at present. This is not a good thing for staff who are working so hard and under a lot of stress and anxiety. ✓ This should be in school time with guaranteed substitute cover/or a school closure for staff planning. ✓ DES lead by example in showing respect to professionals in education. <p>Less of the out of hours online CPD – provide adequate cover for teachers to attend important training.</p>
<h3 style="background-color: #4a7ebb; color: white; padding: 5px;">ICT Infrastructure, Funding and Staff Training</h3>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Issues</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendations</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure broadband and school IT infrastructure is capable of supporting remote teaching when needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased and sustained ICT funding ✓ ICT Post holder in all schools/or access to a cluster ICT technician between schools. ✓ Laptop/Technology supplied to all teachers working from home ✓ Teacher CPD on platforms and programs to support remote learning

Executive Summary:

In order for our schools to remain safely open and effectively functioning the DES needs to address key areas of **systemic failures, working terms and conditions and health and safety** that pre date, but are greatly exacerbated by, Covid 19.

- **Protect and support school leaders** who are utterly at breaking point –we are not being consulted or respected and this has taken a grave toll on our wellbeing and capacity to do our jobs
- **Protect our workforce** – restore pay equality immediately, increase teacher supply panels, grant full secretarial support to schools and make wellness a possibility
- **Fast track school staff and pupil Covid testing** and radically improve the consistency and timeliness of HSE intervention and communication
- **Level 4 and 5 contingency plans for schools** – a blended learning approach with staggered school attendance for classes is necessary while Covid cases are so high and our capacity to implement social distancing in small classrooms with large class sizes is so impaired due to pre-existing issues in education
- **Timely and respectful consultation with school leaders on the ground.** The needs of schools have changed and grown exponentially in the past two decades, the support and provisions necessary to meet these needs have not grown in tandem.

- **Continue funding** for cleaning, PPE and sanitising purposes
- **Increase funding for ICT and grant an ICT post to ALL schools** – lessons have to be learned by the DES from Lockdown. The ICT infrastructures in schools are simply not up to scratch, good broadband, paid access to education platforms such as Aladdin, Seesaw and Zoom, needs to be standard in order to level the playing field and give equal opportunities to schools and pupils across the country. None of this can be coordinated without time, funding and personnel to assist with organisation and maintenance of these facilities for schools. Primary Schools should be provided with the service of Aladdin, or similar, by the Dept. ETBs have a shared IT Technician and post holders. Primary schools have mandated digital strategies and some grants, and yet no additional supports in place to plan or implement this.
- **Greater and timelier support for SEN pupils** in our schools. The NCSE must grant SET and SNA provisions that reflect the ACTUAL NEEDS in our schools. The Continuum of support is a good model and works very well when a school has sufficient personnel to meet the SEN supports in a school. We have highlighted the huge inequities in NCSE provisions time and again (See *The Inclusion Illusion* Research Document we previously sent to the Committee) and all pupils are disadvantaged by the deficiencies in SEN supports for schools.

Schools need to stay open as far as possible, but **this cannot come at any cost**. We suggest you start by supporting those of us who have made school re-opening possible, because it is we who need to be okay to continue – and we are currently not okay.

Attached are the following Appendices:

1. The *NPF Principal Survey October 2020 Results*. There are statistics here to support all points made in this submission – straight from practising primary school principals. Q 15-18 are extensive as they were long answers, however we summarized the main points made. It is honestly so important that this is read so that Committee Members understand our reality.
2. A copy of the *Proper School Re-Opening Guidance* we submitted to the DES in the absence of proper guidance in May 2020. We have highlighted the areas which were not addressed in the July DES School Re-opening Guidance. The recommendations and checklists here were devised collaboratively by principals across the country at that time, desperately seeking proper guidance and trying to expediate it by being pro-active and helpful to the DES.
3. Other relevant NPF research and data has already been submitted to the Committee and is available to view on our website www.principalsforum.org also.

Thank you for the opportunity to inform the Committee of our concerns and recommendations. We are happy to attest to any aspect of this submission and indeed would welcome the opportunity to do so.