Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to report that yesterday’s enterprise bargaining negotiations resulted in considerable advancement towards the settlement of both the employer’s claim and the employee’s claim.

The need for parties engaged in any negotiation to re-assess their positions as negotiations progress is recognised. We acknowledge the constructive nature of the discussions held yesterday. Employers had given significant further consideration to concerns raised by Union representatives prior to yesterday’s meeting to provide every opportunity to progress towards agreement.

In particular, employers have reflected on concerns raised by employees around key claim items and have proposed to amend the claim for 18 hours to six hours of additional professional development time. This concession is provided on the basis that the employee claim Resourcing the expanding role of Teachers is amended to only require the establishment of joint working parties at the Diocesan level. It is envisaged that these working parties would work on strategies to enhance the flexibility of the delivery of non-contact time in primary schools and preparation and correction time in secondary schools.

While Catholic school employers believe there are significant professional benefits to be gained through the additional allocation of structured PD time, they also recognise the importance of flexibility for staff and appreciate the existing high levels of commitment to their school communities. The claim of six hours relates directly to the changes in Easter school vacation that provides a minimum of two additional days for teachers and re-directs six hours of this time to professional development.

Union representatives have said they will consider this proposal and advise employers of their position at the next single bargaining unit meeting.

This proposal relates to two of the more significant claim items addressed during these negotiations and it is by no means the only concession that has been made by Catholic school employers. To date, over 25 employee claim matters have received in-principle agreement from Catholic school employers.

These concessions demonstrate the commitment of Catholic school employers to finalise these negotiations prior to 19 October 2012 and ensure employees are guaranteed to receive back pay for the wage increase.

Further discussion was also held around the wage increase offer of 2.7% per annum. This quantum is fair and responsible given the current economic climate, continued uncertainty over levels of future funding, and in the context of the overall package being offered.

The right of employees to voice their concerns in a responsible way is acknowledged. However, it is disappointing that protected action is being considered whilst negotiations are continuing in a constructive fashion. Employers have demonstrated a willingness to re-assess positions on key claim items and provide in-principle agreement to many others.

These negotiations continue to progress well and we are confident that agreement can be achieved prior to 19 October 2012.

I will continue to provide you with further details as these negotiations progress.

The next Single Bargaining Unit meeting for Diocesan schools will be held on 21 August 2012.