

**MINUTES OF THE THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY THIRD MEETING OF THE
LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT 11.00 am
ON THURSDAY, 28 JANUARY 2010
IN THE AGENCY'S OFFICES, 2-8 GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

Present: Jim McCusker (Chair)
Peter Williamson
Neal Willis
Trevor Morrow
Patricia O'Farrell
Brenda Maitland
Sally McKee
Gordon Parkes

In Attendance: Bill Patterson (Chief Executive)
David McGrath (Director, Advisory Services)
Gerry O'Neill (Director, Corporate Services)
Penny Holloway (Director, Conciliation & Arbitration)
Anne Gunning (Minutes Secretary)

1. Apologies

Action

There was an apology from Lyn Fawcett.

The Chairman welcomed Bill Patterson to the meeting after a period of illness. The Chairman also welcomed newly appointed Board Members, Sally McKee and Gordon Parkes, to their first LRA Board Meeting.

Brenda Maitland was also congratulated by the Chairman on her re-appointment to serve a second term on the Board.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 18 December 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2009 were proposed by Peter Williamson, seconded by Neal Willis, and agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes not listed on this Agenda

It was noted that Alan Shannon, the new Permanent Secretary for DEL, will be meeting the Chairman and CEO on 10 March in the Agency. It is hoped that he will subsequently attend an LRA Board Meeting.

CEO

4. Chairman's Business

4.1 Declaration of Board Member Interests

No interests were declared by members.

4.2 Board Vacancies – Update

As referred to above, it was noted that two new Board Members had been appointed with effect from 1 January 2010. It was further noted that a new recruitment exercise would be necessary to fill the remaining vacancy which requires an independent appointee.

4.3 Board Appointments – Conflicts of Interest

It was agreed to include discussion on ‘5.3 Employment Bill’ at this point on the agenda.

The Chairman referred to recent correspondence he has had with June Ingram DEL. Discussion followed in regard to the Board’s view that the amendments to the Employment Bill could potentially adversely impact on LRA Board’s tri-partite composition.

Matters relating to conflicts of interest were then discussed.

Following discussions it was agreed that the Chairman and CEO would give further thought to the above matters with a view to undertaking further discussions with DEL.

Chairman/CEO

4.4 Joint LRA/LRC Board Meeting

It was noted that the CEO has written to Kieran Mulvey on 13 January. He has suggested that Board Members from both organisations could perhaps meet at the European Foundation Dublin.

It was agreed that a joint LRA/LRC meeting could be incorporated into the Board’s visit to the European Foundation. The CEO is to pursue this with Kieran Mulvey.

CEO

4.5 Annual Board Public Meeting

The Chairman referred to an invitation which he has sent to Ed Sweeney, Chairman of ACAS inviting him to be guest speaker at the next LRA Public Board Meeting in October 2010. It was noted that Ed Sweeney has replied accepting the offer. However, he finishes his term of office at the end of September 2010, and although he may be re-appointed, he has suggested that if he is not given the benefit of a further term, then he thinks it might be best if his successor was invited.

It was agreed that the Chairman confirm the acceptance of the offer given that Ed. Sweeney would be an acceptable speaker as a very recent

ex-Chairman of ACAS. It was also agreed to discuss the arrangements of the public meeting at the next Board meeting.

Chair

4.6 Joint LRA/Equality Commission Meeting

It was noted that the CEO had written to the CEO of the Equality Commission regarding a joint LRA/EC meeting to possibly take place in Spring 2010. The CEO had proposed ADR as the joint meeting topic. It was noted that CEO is awaiting a response.

CEO

4.7 Board Member Training – verbal evaluation reports

There was no Board Member training to report this month.

It was noted that Brenda Maitland is interested in Media Training. This is to be pursued by the Secretariat.

Secretariat

4.8 Conference Attendances 2010

After discussion it was agreed that the following Board Members would attend external conferences in 2010:

<i>CIPD</i> – venue Manchester, 9-11 Nov -	<i>Neal Willis</i>
<i>CIPD Ireland</i> – venue Dublin (possibly May)	<i>Brenda Maitland/Patricia O’Farrell</i>
<i>TUC</i> – 13-16 Sept – venue Manchester –	<i>Sally McKee</i>
<i>CBI</i> – venue London –	<i>Gordon Parkes</i>

International Conference – venue Washington DC – proposed date June 2010 – It was agreed that the *Chairman* attend on behalf of the Agency.

4.9 Proposed Department of Economy

The Chairman reported that a statement had been made in the NI Assembly recently regarding economic policy. One of the recommendations referred to the core functions of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment and the Department for Employment and Learning should be merged into a single Department of the Economy. It was noted that a paper had been issued to the Executive. The paper seeks the Executive’s agreement to consider the creation of a Department of the Economy.

The Chairman stressed that action on this proposal was not imminent. He was highlighting the recommendation as it raised the question of where employment relations and the Labour Relations Agency would reside if there was a Department of the Economy.

After discussion, the Board came to the preliminary view that it would

prefer employment relations to be a function of the Department of the Economy, but it was agreed to return to this topic at a future Board Meeting.

Chairman

5. Chief Executive's Business

5.1 Corporate Plan 2010-13

It was noted that this item was discussed informally with members prior to the Board meeting and would be taken forward by the SMT with the revised Corporate Plan 2010-13 and Business Plan 2010-11 being submitted at the next Board meeting.

CEO

5.2 DEL Review of the Agency

It was noted that the Chief Executive and Directors had met with KPMG earlier in the month. There was a meeting arranged between KPMG and the Chairman 2 February.

Chairman/CEO

It was also noted that the Chairman, CEO, DCS and Peter Williamson, Chair of the Audit Committee, will be meeting a panel from DEL and DFP in the near future. Brian Clerkin Head of the Agency's Internal Audit will also meet with the panel. The meetings are in relation to the DEL review of current sponsorship arrangements and relationships with ALBs (Arms Length Bodies).

**Chairman/CEO/
DCS/PW**

5.3 Employment Bill

This item was covered in 4.3 above.

5.4 LRA Conference 2010

It was agreed to hold an Agency Conference in the Autumn of 2010. It was also agreed that arrangements would need to begin immediately in order to secure venue and speaker bookings. It was decided to organise a small working group of Board Members to determine the themes of and speakers for the conference. It was agreed that the group comprise the Chairman, Brenda Maitland, Peter Williamson, Trevor Morrow and the CEO.

**CEO/
Secretariat**

5.5 European Foundation Visit

As discussed in item 4.4 above, it is proposed to combine the visit to the European Foundation with a joint LRA/LRC meeting, and possibly an overnight stay in Dublin. The CEO will be contacting Kieran Mulvey LRC with regard to the joint meeting. The Chairman agreed to inform the Board at the next Board meeting of the likely arrangements and agenda for the visit.

Chairman/CEO

5.6 Continuous Improvement

It was noted that completion of the mid-term performance appraisals is under way. **DCS**

It was also noted that a review of the current Appraisal system is to be carried out with a view to streamlining the process. Staff have been contacted in order to seek their views on the operation of the current appraisal system and the training evaluation process. **DCS**

It was noted that the DCS will provide a Training Report for the Board at the next Board Meeting. **DCS**

5.7 RPA

It was noted that there was nothing further to report.

5.8 Equal Pay Audit

The Chief Executive referred to a letter he had received from NIPSA in relation to the implications for the LRA of the NICS/NIPSA agreement on equal pay claims. It was noted that the CEO will be contacting DEL in respect of the scope of the NICS/NIPSA agreement. The CEO will also be meeting with NIPSA as requested. **CEO**

5.9 Review of Dispute Resolution in NI

It was noted that the CEO had met with Tom Evans, DEL on 19 January. The CEO awaited the issue of the proposals/recommendations stemming from the review. **CEO**

5.10 Monthly Management Report

DCS

Finance

It was reported that due to the unforeseen slippage of major projects, an excess of approximately £230,000 for the 2009/10 financial year may not be utilised before 31 March 2010. The SMT is to review the commitment of funds up to and beyond 31 March 2010 with a view to maximising the case for carryover into the 2010-11 financial year. **SMT**

DAS

PR

It was reported that the Agency had taken an exhibition stand at the Holiday World event in January. A lot of interest was expressed by members of the public attending the event.

It was noted that the extra PR activities in which the Agency has taken part in recent months has increased public awareness of the LRA and its services.

Copies of the new seminar programme for January-March 2010 produced by Advisory services were provided to Board Members. It was noted that 7,000 had been sent to organisations in Northern Ireland. The uptake to the programme as a result has been very good.

DCA

It was reported that the Agency held a series of meetings with the full time officials, or representatives of trade unions where there were no full time officials, in November 2009 which was highly successful. The Agency's services were highlighted, focussing in particular on mediation and pre claim conciliation. The intention is to undertake a similar exercise with employer organisations and representatives in the coming year.

It was noted that the NICS equal pay settlement applies to the civil service only and there are issues in respect of NDPBs which will need to be clarified.

6. Corporate Correspondence Received Relevant to Board

6.1 Letter from David McGowan, OFMDFM re Review of the Default Retirement Age

It was noted that a review of the default retirement age has been brought forward to 2010. OFMDFM is calling for organisations to submit evidence to the review.

6.2 CIPFA Training Bulletin January 2010

It was agreed that Board members advise the Board Secretary or Secretariat of their interest in attending courses/seminars and arrangements can be made for attendance.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Public Relations

Business Eye (Dec/Jan issue) – interview with Chairman – “Busy Times for LRA as Recession Bites Deeper”

Article noted.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board will be held on **Wednesday, 24 February 2010**, beginning at 10.30 am in the **Regional Office, Londonderry**. (Please note change of day and venue.)