

**MINUTES OF THE 405th MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY
BOARD HELD AT 10.00 am ON THURSDAY, 26 MARCH 2015
IN THE AGENCY'S OFFICES, GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

Present: Marie Mallon (Chair)
Deirdre Fitzpatrick
Sally McKee
Albert Mills
Jill Minne
Daire Murphy
Pauline Shepherd

In Attendance: Tom Evans (Chief Executive)
Penny Holloway (Director, Conciliation & Arbitration)
David McGrath (Director, Advisory Services)
Gerry O’Neill (Director, Corporate Services)
Alison Wolfe (Minutes Secretary)

Action

<p>1. Apologies</p> <p>Apologies were received from Gordon Parkes, Alison Millar and Gary McMichael.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Tom Evans to his first formal meeting as CEO of the Agency.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that she had received a card from Bill Patterson, former CEO, thanking the Board for their gift and the opportunity to work with them, and wishing the Board well for the future.</p>	
<p>2. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 26 February 2015</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2015 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>3. Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes not listed on this Agenda</p> <p><i>Item 3 - 6 6.2 Meeting held on 4 December 2014</i></p> <p>The CEO advised that he will have an early meeting with the NI Certification Officer to discuss lines of accountability. The CEO will also raise the issue at the next accountability meeting with DEL scheduled for the end of April.</p> <p>It was noted that quarterly governance meetings are held between the</p>	<p>CEO</p>

CEO, DCS and representatives from DEL. Annual meetings also take place with the DEL Minister involving the Agency Chair and CEO and with DEL’s Permanent Secretary involving the CEO and DCS. The Chair asked whether the Chair should attend the meeting with the Permanent Secretary. CEO to explore this option with DEL. CEO also confirmed that he is required to provide DEL with mid and year end assurance statements as part of the governance arrangements.

CEO

It was noted that the governance relationships may change following the reconfiguration of government departments post the 2016 Assembly Elections.

Item 4.1 NI Water Dispute

It was noted that there was nothing further to report.

Secretary

Item 5.3 ACAS Research Paper – “Researching the Current and Potential Reach of ACAS Services”

As agreed at the February Board meeting the McClure Watters report had been circulated to members for information. It was noted that the report contained a substantial amount of quantitative data which may be useful to the Agency. The CEO and DAS to prepare a scoping paper for the May Board meeting setting out the range of support the Agency offers SMEs and how this could be enhanced by the McClure Watters report.

CEO/DAS

Item 5.4 ACAS – Workplace Trends 2015

Following a suggestion at the February meeting that the Agency contact NISRA to establish what employment relations data was held by them, arrangements will be made for the CEO & DAS to meet initially with DEL’s Analytical Services to explore what NI workplace relations data is available to the Agency.

CEO/DAS

Item 5.5 Staff Survey Report for 2014/15 (Paper 4/15)

It was noted that the SMT participated in a one-day overview of coaching training which was recently undertaken by 22 managers in the Agency. The training represented a considerable amount of investment in terms of staff time/commitment and feedback from staff who attended was very positive. The CEO advised that the SMT will engage with staff to explore how best to embed coaching into the management practices within the organisation.

SMT

It was noted that this initiative would contribute positively to our IiP assessment. The CEO will be meeting the IiP assessor in the near future to discuss the Agency’s assessment for IiP Silver status. Should the Agency be successful in achieving silver status it was anticipated that a new HR Strategy would be developed later this year based on the IiP report and action plan. The CEO agreed to report back to the Board on

<p>it was agreed that there was a need to examine the value and usefulness of membership if a membership fee was introduced. Some Board members expressed the view that the Agency’s role will be significantly impacted by the structural economic issues facing Northern Ireland such as the loss of jobs in the public sector and the growth of the private sector. It was agreed that the Agency, in facilitating the Roundtable Forum, needed to bring forward agendas which were not divisive; for example, skills, research and the development/promotion of best practice.</p> <p>It was agreed that the CEO should prepare a paper for the Board reviewing the Agency’s current stakeholder strategy and a draft discussion paper that the Chair could use to structure a workshop on the future role of the Roundtable.</p> <p>The CEO confirmed that he will be meeting with individual members in advance of preparing the discussion paper.</p> <p>Arrangements were also being made for the Chair, CEO and members of the SMT to visit Acas and other key stakeholders.</p>	<p>Chair/CEO</p> <p>Secretary</p>
<p>4.4 Board Away Day – feedback/actions</p> <p>The CEO tabled a Board Priorities paper highlighting a number of action points under four generic themes (strategic direction, Board effectiveness, engagement and governance) which had been identified at the Board’s recent planning session. Following discussion it was agreed that the SMT would progress relevant time critical issues such as the preparation of the 15/16 Business Plan and the stakeholder engagement process. The Board Priorities paper to be discussed at the May Board meeting.</p>	<p>SMT</p>
<p>4.5 Board Meeting Schedule for 2015/16 (Paper 6/15)</p> <p>The Board approved the proposed schedule of meetings with some minor adjustments.</p> <p>It was agreed that the SMT would propose workshop topics. Suggestions from Board members would also be welcome.</p>	<p>DCS</p> <p>SMT/Board</p>
<p>4.6 Board Composition of Sub-Committees (Paper 7/15)</p> <p>Board members discussed the paper noting that the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee was required as part of the governance structures.</p> <p>The DAS provided the background to the research function of the Agency and the role of the Research Committee. He explained that due to a lack of funding it had become difficult to either fund or encourage research which also had an impact on the sustainability of the Research Committee. It was agreed that the CEO/DAS should meet with relevant stakeholders within the research community and then prepare a paper</p>	

<p>which establishes whether the Agency has a statutory remit in respect of research and also identifies the potential areas that the Research Committee could usefully explore. An update to be provided at the May meeting.</p> <p>Board members then considered the current terms of reference for the Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee. Some members felt it was very important and useful in considering certain corporate issues in greater detail. However it was also agreed that the Board needed to avoid becoming involved in operational management and that any sub-committee should not duplicate the role of the Board. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed that the CEO/DCS should contact CIPFA in relation to best practice and prepare a paper to inform discussion at the May Board meeting.</p>	<p>CEO/DAS</p> <p>CEO/DCA</p>
<p>4.7 Board Self-Assessment 2014/15 - feedback</p> <p>Following receipt of any outstanding self-assessment forms the DCS will prepare an analysis of the returns which would be emailed to Board members for approval and inclusion in the draft governance statement required by the Auditors at the end of April. The Board would then formally approve the analysis at its meeting on 21 May 2015.</p>	<p>DCS</p>
<p>5. Chief Executive's Business</p> <p>5.1 Budget Position (verbal report by CEO)</p> <p>The CEO confirmed that there should be around £33K (less than 1%) underspend for 2014/15, which may be reduced further by some accruals.</p> <p>The CEO referred to DEL's letter to the Chair confirming that the 2015/16 budget will remain at the 2011/12 allocated level of £3,545m. While recognising that this is a good settlement, the CEO highlighted the inherent pressures arising from annual pay and price increases. The CEO also emphasised the need for any bids for additional resources to introduce early conciliation and other initiatives to be evidenced and robust.</p> <p>The SMT are to prepare a paper forecasting how the budget will be spent over the 2015/16 period, informed by what is proposed in the draft 2015/16 Business Plan.</p>	<p>DCS</p> <p>CEO/DCS</p> <p>SMT</p>
<p>5.2 Business Plan 2015/16 (verbal update)</p> <p>The SMT are to prepare a draft Business Plan 2015/16 for consideration at the Board meeting on 21 May 2015.</p> <p>DEL will be informed of the timescales for submission of the Business Plan 2015/16 at the next DEL/LRA governance meeting.</p>	<p>SMT</p> <p>CEO/DCS</p>

<p>5.3 <i>Bi-Monthly Management Report – 1 April 2014-28 February 2015 (Paper 8/15)</i></p> <p>The CEO provided an overview of the Agency’s performance against the strategic objectives. Individual Directors responded to queries from the Board on the operational performance statistics. The Board discussed how to progress those objectives which had not been fully met in the 2014/15 year and agreed that where appropriate these should be rolled forward into the 2015/16 Business Plan.</p>	<p>SMT</p>
<p>5.4 <i>Employment Law Update</i></p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the table.</p>	<p>DAS/MMcA</p>
<p>6. Corporate Correspondence Received Relevant to Board</p> <p>It was noted that the Agency had received correspondence from DEL regarding the public sector early exit scheme which is now available to ALBs. The Board endorsed SMT’S decision not to utilise the scheme at this point in time but to keep it under review. The CEO confirmed that he intended to brief TUS on this issue.</p>	<p>CEO</p>
<p>7. Any Other Business</p> <p>Appreciation was expressed to the DAS for his recent presentation to the Independent Health & Care Providers organisation on trade union recognition and the services provided by the Agency.</p> <p>It was noted that the DCS had issued an information email to Board members summarising the expenses policy applicable to Board members.</p>	
<p>8. Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The next meeting of the Agency Board will take place on Thursday, 21 May 2015 at 10.00 am in Room 5, Gordon Street.</p> <p>A meeting of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee will take place on Thursday, 4 June 2015 commencing at 10.00 am in Room 5, Gordon Street, Belfast.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Secretariat</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DCS</p>