

**MINUTES OF THE 404th MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY
BOARD HELD AT 10.00 am ON THURSDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2015
IN THE AGENCY’S OFFICES, GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

Present: Marie Mallon (Chair)
Gary McMichael
Alison Millar
Jill Minne
Daire Murphy
Gordon Parkes
Pauline Shepherd

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






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| <p>1. Apologies</p> <p>Apologies were received from Sally McKee, Albert Mills and Deirdre Fitzpatrick.</p> <p>Alison Millar had indicated that she would be late arriving.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Tom Evans, CEO Designate [CEO (D)], to the meeting.</p> <p>The Chair indicated that this would be Bill Patterson’s last meeting as CEO of the Agency. The Board had marked Mr Patterson’s retirement at their recent away day. The Chair expressed her appreciation, and that of the Board, to Mr Patterson for his leadership and the work he had carried out over the years for the Agency. In reply Mr Patterson thanked the Chair and said he had attended almost 200 meetings over the past 19 years.</p> | |
| <p>2. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 29 January 2015</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2015 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p> | <p>Secretary</p> |

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| <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 Agency awaits a response from DEL regarding the proposal that accountability for the Certification Office should lie with the LRA CEO as Accounting Officer reporting to the Permanent Secretary DEL and not to the Board of the LRA.</p> <p>It was noted that this was an unusual situation which the incoming CEO was mindful of.</p> <p><i>Item 4.1 NI Water Dispute</i></p> <p>It was noted that the Agency continued to monitor progress in the NI Water dispute.</p> | <p>CEO</p> <p>CEO</p> <p>CEO/DCA</p> |
| <p>4. Chair's Business</p> <p><i>4.1 Conflicts of Interest</i></p> <p>There were no declarations/conflicts of interest expressed.</p> <p>With regard to Item 4.5 in the January 2015 minute, the CEO Designate indicated that following his expression of interest in the LRA CEO position, appropriate steps had been taken at a senior management level in DEL to avoid any conflict of interest arising.</p> | <p>CEO</p> |
| <p><i>4.2 Board Member Training</i></p> <p>It was agreed to circulate information regarding 'On Board' training to Board members for consideration. Any member wishing to attend the training was asked to contact the Secretariat.</p> | <p>Secretary</p> |
| <p><i>4.3 Update on Stakeholder meetings</i></p> <p>(a) <u>The Roundtable</u></p> <p>The Chair updated Board members on the current position with regard to the Roundtable. In discussion, it was noted that the Roundtable comprised a diverse group representing employers, employers' associations and trade unions. It has made progress on a number of issues, and now may be a good time for it to review its purpose and work programme in consultation with its constituents. The CEO is to prepare a paper for discussion by the group.</p> <p>The Board considered that, with the NI Executive's plan to reduce the number of government departments and pending any transfer of employment rights functions to a new department, the Roundtable could</p> | <p>CEO</p> |

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| <p>be a key influencer in relation to jobs and promoting the interests of all constituents.</p> <p>The Board noted the Agency had an ongoing role in facilitating the Roundtable in its aim in improving industrial relations more generally in NI. However, the Agency’s policy direction was independent of that of the Roundtable.</p> <p>It was agreed to keep this item on the agenda for the March 2015 Board meeting.</p> <p>(b) <u>Other Stakeholder Meetings</u></p> <p>It was noted that arrangements would be made in due course for the Chair and CEO to hold progress meetings with individual stakeholders.</p> <p>In particular, arrangements would be made for the Chair and CEO to meet informally with the Chair and CEO of the Equality Commission. A formal joint meeting of the Agency Board and the Board of the Equality Commission would also be arranged. Board members were asked to advise the CEO of any issues which they would like to raise at the joint meeting.</p> <p>The Chair reported that she would be attending the INTO Conference on Friday, 27 February 2015.</p> | <p>CEO</p> <p>Secretary</p> <p>Chair/CEO/Sec</p> <p>Chair/CEO/BMs</p> |
| <p>4.4 Board Away Day</p> <p>The Chair thanked Board members for their attendance, input, enthusiasm and focus at the recent Board away days. The notes prepared by the facilitator had been circulated to Board members. It was agreed to discuss these further at the March meeting, in particular the schedule of Board meetings which might in the future incorporate a majority of meetings run in accordance with a standing agenda but with some others configured as workshops. The schedule would refer to those workshop themes most likely to be of relevance to the Board.</p> <p>The CEO Designate indicated that he had found the event very useful. It was agreed the action points from the away days would be prioritised and expressed as objectives which would be achievable in the new financial year.</p> <p>The Chair agreed to contact the facilitator to seek her observations on how Board members worked as a team.</p> | <p>Chair/CEO</p> <p>Chair</p> |
| <p>4.5 Board Self-Assessment 2014/15 (Paper 3/15)</p> <p>The Board considered its mechanisms for annual self-assessment as a matter of good practice (noting that self-assessment was a pre-cursor to achieving the Mark of Excellence standard). It was agreed that the DCS</p> | |

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| <p>email the self-assessment form to members for completion and return. He would then provide a synopsis of the results for discussion at the March meeting.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">DCS</p> |
| <p>5. Chief Executive’s Business</p> <p>5.1 Budget Position (verbal report by CEO)</p> <p>The CEO advised Board members that, taking into account the implementation of a pay deal for staff, the Agency anticipated a small surplus at the year-end attributable to backdating of a rent review and committed purchases.</p> <p>To date there was no indication from DEL with regard to the 2015-16 budget allocation for the Agency. Board members were reminded that the Agency remained structurally underfunded.</p> <p>The priorities in the 2015-16 year would be the re-routing of claims and the impact this would have on Agency services and any future pay increases for staff. There was a need to communicate to DEL the potential costs surrounding any changes in employment law. In-year bids might have to be made for any exceptional costs such as ICMS and attendance at the International Agencies meeting. Successful bidding for additional funds would be contingent on the preparation of robust business cases.</p> <p>The Chair congratulated the Finance Section on their management and stewardship of the accounts.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">DCS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CEO</p> |
| <p>5.2 Business Plan 2015-16</p> <p>It was noted that the CEO has written to Colin Jack, DEL, indicating that, due to changes in senior personnel in the Agency, the Business Plan would not be submitted for approval in February.</p> <p>It was agreed that it was important to take account of outputs from the Board away day and incorporate these into the Business Plan. The CEO and Directors are to meet to discuss objectives for the 2015-16 year.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">CEO/Dirs</p> |
| <p>5.3 ACAS Research Paper – “Researching the Current and Potential Reach of ACAS Services”</p> <p>Board members were reassured that the report indicated that ACAS mirrored the Agency both in terms of client awareness and the employment relations problems dealt with. There was a need to communicate more effectively with young people who were less aware of the services provided by ACAS/LRA and had a greater dependence on social media and “apps”. It was noted that the 2015-16 Business Plan would evaluate resource and technical requirements in this area. One idea was to look at the possibility of a placement student to undertake</p> | |

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| <p>this work. Also, entering into partnership with other organisations was seen as a potentially beneficial approach.</p> <p>The relevance of the 2013 McClure Watters report was noted and it was agreed to circulate this to Board members for information.</p> | <p>CEO</p> <p>Sec</p> |
| <p>5.4 ACAS– Workplace Trends 2015</p> <p>It was noted that the five main priority areas highlighted by ACAS/CIPD in the Workplace Trends report were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Building Skills  Atypical Contracts  Conflict  Social Media  Flexible Working <p>Board members commented that the report highlighted the research capabilities of ACAS. The degree to which these trends were mirrored in the Northern Ireland context was uncertain due to a lack of local research information.</p> <p>The Board expressed concern at this lack of local research information given that this hampered its role in consultations and leading public debate on employment relations issues. It was noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency information systems might contain useful information for research if it could be extracted and presented effectively; • Working alongside partners might open up new opportunities for research; and, in particular • NISRA should be contacted to establish what employment relations related information was already held by them. | <p>CEO</p> |
| <p>5.5 Staff Survey Report for 2014/15 (Paper 4/15)</p> <p>The Board were advised that the Agency had carried out three surveys since 2011 along with a stress risk assessment every 3 to 4 years.</p> <p>The Board discussed the content of the report and noted the next step which was a briefing for the CEO of the relevant actions either underway or being planned. This would be reported to the Board in due course.</p> <p>Discussion between the Board and CEO considered how the survey might be improved in future years whilst at the same time recognising the risk that modifications to the survey might pose a risk in terms of identifying trends.</p> | <p>DCS/CEO</p> |

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| <p>5.6 Recruitment Decision in relation to Deputy Principal Officer Vacancy (Paper 5/15)</p> <p>The Board approved the permanent filling of a Deputy Principal post following the creation of a vacancy on the resignation of a member of staff in February 2015.</p> | <p>CEO/DCS</p> |
| <p>5.7 Employment Law Update</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>Letter from Tom Evans, DEL re Holiday Pay reflecting non-guaranteed overtime – the Board noted the contents of the letter which was submitted for information.</p> | |
| <p>7. Any Other Business</p> <p>None.</p> | |
| <p>8. Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The next meeting of the Agency Board will take place on Thursday, 26 March 2015 at 10.00 am in Room 5, Gordon Street.</p> | <p>Secretariat</p> |