

**MINUTES OF THE THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIFTH MEETING OF THE
LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT 10.00 AM
ON THURSDAY, 22 MAY 2008
IN THE AGENCY'S OFFICES, 2-8 GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

Present: Jim McCusker (Chair)
Boyd Black
Julie Anne Clarke
Norma Heaton
Roden Ward
Brenda Maitland

In Attendance:
William Patterson (Chief Executive)
David McGrath (Director, Advisory Services)
Gerry O'Neill (Director, Corporate Services)
Anne Gunning (Minutes Secretary)

1. Apologies

Action

There were apologies from Peter Williamson, Gordon Milligan and Patricia O'Farrell.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 25 April 2008

5.3 Research – DEL Response 19 March 2008

It was noted that the Research Committee had not been consulted about the LRA Business Case for a Research Proposal. The DCS explained that after the Board Meeting on 31 January, the previous Chairman had instructed him to forward the Business Case to the Department that day, which gave no opportunity for consultation.

It was agreed that the above paragraph would be included in the 25 April Minutes.

Secretariat

Subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2008 were then proposed by Boyd Black, seconded by Norma Heaton, and agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Secretariat

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

3.1 LRA/LRC Joint Working Meeting

It was noted that the Chief Executive had received a positive reply from Kevin Foley, Labour Relations Commission on the proposed joint working agenda. This matter would now be taken forward.

CEO/DAS

3.2 JNCC Away Day – 12 May 2008

It was noted that the day had been fruitful and positive. A joint action plan had been agreed. A joint statement had been signed on behalf of Management Side and Trade Union Side. The CEO outlined the action plan as follows:

SMT

1. A vision which reflects the intentions of both management and trade union side for the improvement of employment relations in the Agency will be included in the new version of the Recognition and Procedural Agreement.
2. Meetings of the Management Side and Trade Union Side Secretaries will be held monthly. From this the Secretaries will set out an action list which will be issued to staff. They will endeavour to ensure that the bulletin will reflect their progress.
3. There is an outstanding list of policies and procedures which are currently on the JNCC agenda. The Secretaries will tabulate this list indicating for each policy/procedure its status within the consultation process. This table will be considered at the June 2008 JNCC and an action plan will be developed to move this work forward.
4. Any resourcing difficulties which might arise associated with expediting 3 above will be discussed as part of the June JNCC agenda.
5. An update for staff will be provided on Continuous Improvement. This is expected in May/June and will be repeated periodically as various milestones are approached or reached.
6. The ideas emanating from the Staff Conference held 7th March 2008 will be reviewed. These will be reported to the June 2008 JNCC and discussed with a view to carrying them forward.
7. An additional (half day) JNCC will be scheduled for 13 November 2008 to review progress and evaluate the impact on employment relations.

It was agreed that the action plan referred to at point 3 above would be tabled at the next Board meeting.

5.6 Attendance at Staff Conference

The CEO gave details of the numbers who had not attended the staff conference, with a breakdown by department which included reasons for absence. There was a suggestion that, in future, the conference might be divided into two separate days in order to give all staff the opportunity to attend. It was agreed that the number of staff required for office cover would be reviewed and that the CEO would discuss with Directors the arrangements for optimum staff participation.

SMT

5.7 PR Services

As agreed at the last Board Meeting, the CEO tabled a specification on media management and promotional services for the Agency. It was noted that the specification did not include political lobbying which is to be dealt with as a separate item. Members are to forward any comments on the brief to the CEO.

Members

It was noted that a PR strategy would be developed for the Agency.

CEO/DCS

Members were of the opinion that any adverse publicity or media coverage that challenged the Agency's role should be appropriately countered.

CEO/DIRS

4. Chairman's Business

4.1 LRA Board Vacancies

It was noted that the Department has now confirmed that the Chairman will be included as a member of the recruitment panel for new Board Members. However there is a problem with the proposed date for the interviews as the Chairman will be on annual leave. The Department is to confirm if the interview date can be changed or whether a Board Member can substitute for the Chairman.

Chairman

4.2 Chairman/CEO Stakeholder Meetings

It was noted that the Chairman and CEO had meetings with each of the Institute of Directors, Federation of Small Businesses and the Equality Commission. Discussions included the value of the Agency's services, co-operation with employment relations research particularly regarding best practice in the EU. The future of dispute resolution in NI was also discussed. Interest had been shown in the three dispute resolution models put to the Department by the Agency. The organisations were very positive about the Agency Helpline. Interest had also been shown in developments in employment rights legislation.

Meetings have also been arranged with the LRC, OITFET, ACAS, NI Chamber of Commerce, CBI and NIC ICTU.

Chair/CEO

4.3 Joint LRA/Equality Commission NI Meeting – October 2008

It was noted that the Equality Commission had suggested that the LRA/EC annual meeting of the Board should be held to coincide with anti-racism week which is scheduled for the second week in November possibly the w/c 10 November 2008. Migrant Workers had been suggested as the theme of the meeting. This was agreed by Board Members.

CEO/DCS

5. Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee

5.1 Minutes of the Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee Meeting held on 16 January 2008

It was agreed that the absence figures for the Agency will need to be closely monitored in light of the rise in Public Sector figures highlighted in May.

DCS

It was noted that in light of the significant amount of work currently being carried out by Corporate Services Department, it would be appropriate to review its staffing requirements.

Following further discussion the minutes of the Finance & Personnel meeting held on 16 January 2008 were ratified by the Board.

6. Research Committee Meeting held on 13 May 2008

It was noted that a number of proposals had been discussed including research relating to the Agency helpline, economic impact indicators for agency services, the LRC/LRA areas of joint co-operation, including the Information and Consultation Directive, working time regulations in RoI and NI and migrant workers. A report on workplace employment relations in the West Midlands was also discussed.

It was noted that evaluation work is being carried out through a customer survey on small firms. The results will be the subject of a future Board paper.

CEO/DAS

The letter from the Department which rejected the LRA business case for the Agency's submitted research proposal was also discussed. It was agreed to discuss the proposal further when the research budget is confirmed.

CEO

7. Audit Committee

7.1 Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on 5 March 2008

The minutes of the meeting were ratified by the Board.

7.2 Meeting held on 14 May 2008

Roden Ward gave a report on the meeting on 14 May highlighting the following points:

- It was noted that the Management Statement/Financial Memorandum is now in place.
- The cheque payment system has been simplified.
- The Agency Credit Card is no longer in use.
- The Agency Annual Report and Accounts will be put to Assembly before the summer recess.
- Internal Audit –
 - The appraisal process has been revised. The revised documentation is being implemented on a pilot basis.
 - Corporate Services Department – with the pending development of an IS/IT strategy and the demands on HR, corporate governance and legal compliance it was agreed that Corporate Services resources need to be reviewed.

Board Members discussed the increase in work in Corporate Services. It was noted that some key areas were not being fully attended to owing to limited resources. It was agreed that the CEO would look at structures and resources in Corporate Services.

CEO

It was also noted that the Chairman and CEO would be meeting with June Ingram DEL, who has replaced David McAuley. At this meeting Agency resources would be raised.

8. Chief Executive's Business

8.1 DEL Review of Dispute Resolution

It was noted that the CEO will be attending a meeting of the DEL Dispute Resolution Review Steering Group, chaired by Tom Evans DEL, on 28 May 2008.

CEO

The CEO circulated an ACAS Draft Code of Practice on Discipline and Grievance for information.

8.2 Attendance at Conferences 2008

The Board discussed various external conferences which are held annually, and whether or not representatives from the Agency should

attend.

It was noted that the Chairman had attended the NIC ICTU Conference in Portrush in April.

It was agreed that this year the Chairman and CEO would attend the biennial FMCS Labour Management Conference in Washington 9-11 June.

It was suggested that attendance at an equivalent Canadian conference may be of more benefit in the future.

It was also agreed that either the Chairman or CEO would attend the International Conference in Capetown South Africa in October.

TUC Conference - 8-11 September in Brighton. It was agreed that Brenda Maitland is to attend with one Director.

CIPD Conference –16-18 September Harrogate – It was agreed that Roden Ward and staff member/s, as determined by the CEO, are to attend.

CBI Conference - It was agreed that the Agency would not be represented this year.

CIPD Ireland Conference – It was agreed that two Board Members and staff member/s, as determined by the CEO, should attend next year 2009.

It was agreed that there would be further discussion in December/January on the benefits and cost effectiveness of attendance at 2009 conferences.

CEO

8.3 Monthly Management Report

Chief Executive

CEO referred to the meeting which he and DAS had recently with Tim Devine, DEL, when it was agreed that the Agency should contribute to a skills agenda. The DAS is following this up with ACAS.

DAS

IiP

The CEO reported that Eric Jenkinson had recommended that although a lot of work has now been carried out for IiP, the Agency should postpone its submission until October, after the half yearly review. This was agreed. It was also agreed that a meeting should be held with Eric Jenkinson at the next Finance & Personnel meeting on 19 June. Gordon Milligan and/or Roden Ward are also to attend the meeting.

CEO

Director (Advisory Services)

It was noted that the website is experiencing heavy usage. The results of the user survey were very positive. It was noted that the Agency is looking at further improvements to services.

Director (Corporate Services)

It was noted that the recruitment exercises for CO and CA posts had been completed and were at offer stage.

With regard to absence figures, the overall rate for April is 4.7%. This figure is inclusive of long term sickness. The DCS is to report further on the management of absence.

DCS

8.4 Quarterly Performance Report

Following discussion, it was agreed that due to the fact that this was the quarterly report which reflected the end of year performance, the colour coding should be reviewed to show objectives achieved/not achieved. It was noted that the Chairman and CEO would be reviewing the format of reporting on the annual Business Plan objectives following which the CEO will report to the Board.

CEO

Following further discussion the Quarterly Performance Report was approved.

9. Corporate Correspondence Received Relevant to Board

No correspondence received.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 Audit Committee Accounts

It was noted that Roden Ward, Chair of the Audit Committee, would not be at the next Board Meeting. It was agreed that Julie Anne Clarke would deliver the verbal report from the Audit Committee meeting 18 June 2008.

**Julie Anne
Clarke**

10.2 Presentation to Alison Wolfe

The Chairman made a presentation to Alison Wolfe for completing 25 years service with the LRA. He catalogued her career in the Agency from Typist through to Senior Personal Secretary, and thanked her for her hard work over the years. Alison replied that she found it hard to believe how quickly the time had gone and said that she had enjoyed the last 25 years.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board will take place on **Thursday, 26 June**

2008 at 10.00 am in the Agency's offices, Gordon Street.