

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
Thursday 02 July 2009
Boardroom, Adelaide House

Present: Dr. Aideen McGinley (Chair)
Mr. Greg McConnell
Mrs. Catherine Bell
Mr. Fred Gray
Dr. Brian Scott

In attendance: Mr. Trevor Connolly
Mr. John McKeown
Mrs. Nuala Kerr (for items 2.1 & 2.2)
Roger Arneill (Minutes)

Apologies: None

Dr. McGinley formally welcomed Dr. Scott to the Departmental Board.

1. Minutes and Summary Action Sheet of Board Meeting on 14 May 2009

- 1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.
- 1.2 The summary action sheet noted that a paper on FE Risks should be presented and discussed at this meeting. Mrs. Bell informed the Board that a decision was taken to postpone this until the Board meeting in September to enable the work on the lessons learned to be developed. This was agreed.

Action: Mary McIvor to present a paper to the September Board and attend for discussion.

2. Policy

2.1 Success through Skills

- 2.1.1 Mrs. Kerr introduced the paper which was presented to the Board and highlighted the key points.
- 2.1.2 The Board discussed Northern Ireland's position in relation to the rest of the UK. This discussion covered various areas including economic inactivity, essential skills, the brain drain and skills supply.
- 2.1.3 The Board discussed the report produced by Oxford Economics and Mrs. Kerr went through the key recommendations and illustrated how these would be addressed in the implementation plan.
- 2.1.4 Mrs. Bell highlighted that the Skills Strategy had drawn together several areas of the Department's work, this has been complemented by the appointment of the NI Adviser on Skills supported by the WDFs and the work of the Department's Economics Branch in publishing information which can be used internally and by various stakeholders to plan ahead.
- 2.1.5 Dr. Scott asked how, within the Department's budget, objectives can be delivered. Mrs. Kerr highlighted as an example the work which had been done with Invest NI to establish the Future Skills Action Group and the success of the action plan produced by this group. Mrs. Kerr added that there would be additional budget requirements going forward but examples such as the FSAG highlighted how the budget could be managed and focused to produce results.
- 2.1.6 Dr. Scott asked what measures were in place to address the skills levels of the economically inactive. Mrs. Kerr highlighted various programmes the Department offers from entry level through to graduate recruitment which is complemented by the work that the Department is doing with

business to ensure these programmes are targeted to skills needs. Mrs. Kerr also made the point that the strategy has maintained a focus on social inclusion and tackling the economic downturn through measures like programme led apprenticeships. Mrs. Bell emphasised this point stating that the Department's focus remained on ensuring that 16 and 17 year olds had the opportunities to gain skills and thus position them and the economy to take advantage when the economic climate improves.

2.1.7 Mr. Gray highlighted the ongoing problem of a low level of basic skills amongst school leavers that created a pressure for DEL.

2.1.8 Mrs. Bell highlighted work being done with DE to address this issue through the Careers Strategy, work on STEM subjects and 14 – 19 provision.

2.2 Managing the Downturn from the Skills Perspective

2.2.1 Mrs. Kerr referred to the paper presented which detailed the initiatives on the skills side which have been introduced to address the current problems caused by the economic downturn and to prepare for economic recovery.

2.2.2 Dr. McGinley thanked Mrs. Kerr and her team for their impressive performance in this area in a difficult context.

3. Finance and Corporate Services

3.1 Corporate Services Report

3.1.1 Absence Management – Mr. McKeown informed the Board that he expected last year's absence management figures to be confirmed in the next few weeks. He also stated that to date, this years figures were good. The Board discussed absence management strategy.

- 3.1.2 June Update – Mr. McKeown informed the Board that staff from personnel had met with an liP assessor recently, the indication was that progress to date is good.
- 3.1.3 Mrs. Bell asked if there was any spare capacity in the Regional Training Team. Mr. McKeown said he was meeting with the Team in the near future and would update Mrs. Bell subsequently.
- 3.1.4 All other papers were noted without further discussion.

Action: Mr. McKeown to liaise with Mrs. Bell following his meeting with the Regional Training Team

3.2 Audit Committee Update (Verbal – Mr. Gray)

- 3.2.1 Mr. Gray informed the Board that Internal Audit had provided an overall ‘satisfactory opinion’ regarding DEL’s Risk Management, Control and Governance processes for 2008/09. Internal Audit had also given approval to the proposed work plans for 2009/10.
- 3.2.2 Mr. Gray highlighted that the draft DEL Resource Accounts had been most recently considered by the Committee on 29 June. NIAO have submitted their Report to those charged with Governance Audit results which contains a number of recommendations, these will be considered by management over the coming weeks and the Audit Committee will review the responses.
- 3.2.3 Finally Mr. Gray noted the appointment of Mr. Gerry Lavery to the Audit Committee stating that it would strengthen it’s independence. He sought the Boards agreement to amend the Committee’s Terms of Reference to account for this appointment. This was agreed.

Action: Mr. Gray to update the Audit Committee’s Terms of Reference as agreed.

3.3 Finance Report

3.3.1 The Board discussed various items on the Risk Register. It was agreed that actions set out on the Register should be 'SMART' and that almost all items having an impact rating of 9 was unrealistic. While an issue possibly had an impact rating of 9 in a divisional sense, the Risk Register was intended to reflect the Corporate position and Directors should consider the rating in this regard.

Action: Mr. Connolly to communicate to all Directors that actions on the Risk Register should be set in line with SMART principles and ask them to update the Register to reflect this.

Action: Mr. Connolly to ask all Directors to review the Impact Rating given to each Risk ensuring a Corporate rather than a Divisional perspective.

Action: Mr. Gray to send Dr. Scott a copy of the Risk Toolkit

3.3.2 Issues Log – The Board noted the issue regarding HR Connect.

3.3.3 Update re PfG / PSA Performance 2008/09 – Mr. McConnell informed the Board that the OFMdfM / DFP Report on this will be published next week. There was some discussion regarding the content of the report.

3.3.4 June Monitoring – The Board discussed the June Monitoring position.

3.3.5 May Management Accounts – Various aspects of the Accounts were discussed in detail.

4. Formal Notings

4.1 The Economic and Labour Market Brief was noted without further discussion.

5. AoB

- 5.1 Dr. McGinley noted that this was Mr. McConnell's final Board meeting before retirement. She thanked him for his excellent contribution to the Board, the Department and the NICS as a whole. Dr. McGinley also gave personal thanks to Mr. McConnell as a valued colleague for his professional support and commitment.