

**Tha Board O Ulst r-Scotch
100th Board Meeting
18th August 2010, 10.30am
Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

Present:	Mr John Hunter
	Mrs Angela Graham
	Ms Jacqui Reed
	Mr Tony Crooks
	Mrs Hilary Singleton
	Dr Ian Adamson
	Mr Michael McLoone
	Mr William Leathem (joined meeting 10.50am)
In attendance:	Mr Jim Millar
	Miss Hazel Campbell
	Mr Michael McCullough
Recording Secretary:	Mrs Catherine Martin

1. Welcome from the Chairperson

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Board, on behalf of Minister McCausland, to Parliament Buildings for the 100th meeting of Tha Board O Ulst r-Scotch. The Chair also welcomed two new members, Mr Michael McLoone and Mrs Hilary Singleton to the Board and thanked Mr Crooks for interrupting his holiday to attend. The Chair indicated that lunch would be served at 12.30pm and apologies had been received from Minister Carey, Rosalie Flanagan and Lord Laird.

1.2 The Chair reported on a number of issues:

- A letter issued to Mr Patton with a copy of the report prepared by Mr Campton – no further correspondence has been received.
- A meeting at the end of June with the Chair and CEO of Foras Na Gaeilge enabled the 2006 Consolidated Accounts to be signed off.
- The Chair and CEO represented the Agency at the opening of the new office of the Ulster Historical Foundation and agreed with the Chair of the Foundation, Sir Dennis Desmond to explore opportunities for working together.
- A review into the senior staffing structure of the Agency has been commissioned and will support the appointment of a CEO, making recommendations on grading, job description, and personal specification for advertising the post. This will require approval from the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC).

2. Apologies

- 2.1 No apologies were received.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting of the Board on 22nd June 2010 were agreed with one amendment (the inclusion of the Border Counties Band Association as a consultee in respect of proposals for music and dance tuition.)
- 3.2 ***Proposed and Agreed: that the minute be accepted.***
- 3.3 The Board noted the draft Audit and Risk Sub-committee minutes of the 22 June meeting.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 The issue of a joint Agency/ Foras Na Gaeilge letter to Ministers about the finalisation of 2010 budgets has been postponed as Departments have provided assurances that the issue will be resolved in early September.

5. Interim Chief Executive Officer's Report

- 5.1 Mr Drennan of the Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra (USFO) declined a meeting with the Chair and CEO of the Agency, and instead requested a meeting with the full Board. As the Board has considered the matter at previous two meetings and agreed the recommendations of the independent review conducted by auditors the Board decided not to re-open the issue. Miss Campbell advised that briefing on the issue has been provided to the NI Assembly Committee of Culture, Arts and Leisure and to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) via Northern Ireland Audit Office. The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure has also corresponded with USFO on the matter.
- 5.2 The Chair had issued a letter to the Institute of Ulster Scots Studies noting the end of the funding agreement, communicating the Agency's appreciation of work completed on the project and looking forward to opportunities to work in partnership in the future. Ms Reed indicated that the letter was well received.
- 5.3 Priority is being given to the finalisation of Annual Reports and Accounts which are behind schedule. The Consolidated Accounts for the Language Body for 2005 and 2006 have been signed off. The Agency's 2007 accounts have been completed and are with the Comptrollers and Auditors General. The Northern Ireland Audit Office is conducting fieldwork on 2008 and 2009 accounts. A recent NI PAC report on North/South Bodies noted the delay in preparation of the Language Body's accounts and as a consequence the Departments of Finance are now monitoring progress.

- 5.4 Miss Campbell informed the Board of on-going staffing issues and the potential impact on grant payment processing times. The vacancy created by the secondment of an EO2 to OFMDFM has not been filled and the long-term absence of an EO2 within the grants team due to work related stress is on-going. Some support has been requested from DCAL. Dr. Adamson congratulated the Agency for maintaining delivery of services despite staffing constraints.

Miss Campbell notified the Board that a series of training/ information sessions have commenced for Agency staff beginning with Managing Attendance and Fraud Awareness and Prevention.

- 5.5 Miss Campbell reported on changes to the management of statutory equality duties which will require an “audit of inequalities”, a revision of the Language Body’s equality scheme and the preparation of action plans. Miss Campbell indicated that the Agency has engaged with DCAL statisticians to agree an approach to necessary information gathering.
- 5.6 Miss Campbell reported on the strong take up of Summer Schools and Festivals. Minister McCausland attended the Castle Gardens Summer School at Newtownards which attracted some television coverage. The Castle Gardens Scheme has been identified as a case study model for evaluation by the Education and Training Inspectorate which should inform other groups on the development of Summer Schools.
- 5.7 Miss Campbell attended the European Pipe Band Championships, supported by the Agency, at Stormont and reported that the event was professionally delivered and well attended.
- 5.8 Miss Campbell confirmed to Mr McLoone that the review of the senior management structure will not consider the overall workload of the Agency largely due to time constraints in getting the CEO appointment progressed. Fieldwork has commenced and the draft report will be presented at the end of September. This would not preclude a follow up review of the rest of the organisation if that was considered necessary.

6. Music and Dance Tuition – Preliminary Consultation

- 6.1 Mr Millar indicated that the preliminary consultation has identified a range of issues which will require substantial change to the tuition programme and the Financial Assistance Scheme. The Executive recommended that an interim model is introduced in 2011 to allow sufficient time to develop and consult on a new funding model.
- 6.2 The consultation with representative bodies revealed the following points:
- Agency supported tuition is primarily aimed at introductory level and there is little use of the scheme to support progression towards accreditation.
 - There is limited demand for a 40 week programme.
 - The rates provided to tutors is considered generous.
 - The effective monitoring and evaluation of the programme requires specialist skills.

- 6.3 Mr Millar explained the time pressures on determining the programme for 2011. Information on the criteria for funding and the application process will be required by groups in October. Commenting on the proposed interim measures Mrs Graham indicated that removal of funding for hall rental might impact on smaller groups and she wished to see this retained. Mr Leathem suggested that an extension to the proposed 20 week programme should be provided for some groups with capacity to deliver. Miss Campbell explained that a 40 week programme was no longer affordable given budgetary constraints.
- 6.4 Mrs Singleton indicated that some groups, particularly those working towards accreditation, will require more than 20 weeks. Mrs. Singleton also identified the reduction in rates for tutors as a potential issue for smaller groups as they may be required to meet the short-fall. Mrs Singleton also indicated that Scottish Country dance lessons can be successfully delivered to young children. Miss Campbell agreed that groups delivering tuition leading to accreditation (more akin to a centre of excellence model) required different support and this can be supported under the Financial Assistance Scheme. She also advised that as per Government guidelines funding will not exceed 75% of total project costs. Mr. Leathem asked if other developments such as DCAL's review of the band sector would be taken into consideration. Miss Campbell confirmed that this work would inform the development of the Scheme for 2012. The review and amendment of the programme will address administration issues related to assessment, monitoring and verification.
- 6.5 Following further discussion, as an interim measure the Board agreed:
- Applications for one 20 week programme with the option of an extension for a further 10 weeks subject to satisfactory completion of the initial programme and if the necessary budget is available.
 - For dance tuition applications for one 30 week programme will be accepted.
 - Grant will be capped at 75% of total eligible project costs – a maximum of £30.00 will be available for hall rental and a maximum of £20.00 per hour available for tutors.

- 6.6 The interim measures were ***Proposed and Agreed.***

The Board requested a critical path mapping the proposed development process for the 2012 programme for the October Board meeting.

- 6.7 **Action:** Mr. Jim Millar

7. Festivals Consultation Paper

- 7.1 Miss Campbell outlined the proposal to stream the funding programme to support larger grants to Flagship Ulster-Scots Festivals and small grants to support Ulster-Scots community festivals and other festivals wishing to incorporate an Ulster-Scots showcase within a wider programme of events. A detailed application using the criteria outlined would be applied to

Flagship applications while a simpler process would be developed for small grants, the focus would be on quality with the highest scoring applications receiving support. Board members requested further information on disallowed costs within the proposed ineligible expenditure areas and the definition of festivals under each stream. Clarification on the process for managing appeals is also required.

- 7.2 Mr. Millar indicated that the current “one size fits all” approach was unsustainable as larger events such as the Maiden City Festival required a different level of support than smaller events. The aim would be to deliver quality and sustainable larger events while reducing administrative burdens on smaller events. Mr. McLoone indicated that the criteria provided for the promotion of Ulster-Scots culture while capturing wider economic and social benefits delivered by festivals was sound and proposed that the Board agree the criteria in principle. A timeline and revised consultation paper was requested for the next Board meeting.

The recommendation was ***Proposed and Agreed***.

- 7.3 **Action:** Mr Jim Millar

- 7.4 Mr. Leathem reported on his attendance at the Maiden City Festival and commended organisers for the delivery of a high quality, high impact event which demonstrated the potential of Flagship festivals.

8. Review of Core Funded Groups

- 8.1 The Chairman explained that the draft final report was circulated to members but that some further work was required on the sections relating to value for money and governance and accountability. He stated that the project Steering Group would raise these with the consultants. The Chairman also felt that the conclusions and recommendations required a sharper focus. Discussion on the report content was undertaken at strategic level to avoid potential conflict of interest issues.
- 8.2 The strategic framework within which the groups operate was discussed and it was agreed direction should be cascaded from the Agency following guidance from Governments and Sponsor Departments. Targets should relate to outcomes of programmes and policies and should address any potential duplication. Miss Campbell confirmed that future expenditure would be supported by a Business Case including an economic appraisal.
- 8.3 The Chair indicated that the forthcoming language strategy from DCAL and the proposed Ulster-Scots Academy would influence planning. Mr. Crooks stated that the Agency’s corporate plan would provide an ideal starting point through which groups could demonstrate how they contribute to the achievement of the Agency’s objectives. Mr. Crooks stated that funding on a multi-annual basis would provide some certainty for groups and enable them to effectively manage staff and financial resources. Mr. Crooks indicated that

the plan should take account of developments in both jurisdictions and should reflect the cross-border nature of the Agency's remit.

- 8.4 Mrs. Singleton stated that the review should reflect the objectives of the Agency, the budget, the proposed restructure of the Agency's Executive and the proposed role of groups in receipt of core funding. Guidance from Ministers was required to enable strategic planning and to ensure each group contributes to the achievement of the Governments and Agency's aims.
- 8.5 Mr. McLoone recognised the difficulties in setting the strategic context. Mr. McLoone proposed an incremental approach where issues related to the governance, operational controls and management could be addressed by clarifying the framework within which public funds are managed and agreeing a process with groups for supporting activity which adds value to the Agency's work.
- 8.6 The Chair highlighted concerns related to the groups internal processes in respect of internal audit arrangements, management of conflicts of interest and financial reporting systems and reminded Board members that the NI Audit Office are empowered to examine records of organisations in receipt of public money. Mr Crooks echoed the concern and suggested that workshops could be arranged with the groups to explain the governance requirements. Mr. Crooks stated that recommendations should be provided to the Audit and Risk Sub-committee.
- 8.7 The Chair indicated that the Board would need to decide how to disseminate the findings. The timing of decisions regarding future funding and the potential impact on the various organisations employees was discussed. Mr. McLoone suggested writing to the groups to request information on how their objectives align with the Agency and what activities are proposed over the next 12 months. The Chair will consider these issues further with the CEO and the Department before referring the recommendations to the next meeting of the Agency Board.
- 8.8 **Action:** Chair/CEO.

9. Draft Corporate Plan

- 9.1 Miss Campbell explained that the Draft Corporate Plan had been prepared in line with guidance reviewed from Sponsor Departments and is required for submission by 31st August 2010. A draft Business Plan for 2011 will also be required. She also explained that references to the core funded groups were not explicit in the plan as the outcome of the review and approval of Business Cases would be required to determine the nature and extent of any potential future support.
- 9.2 The Board made the following comments on the draft:

- 9.2.1 Section 3 – Ms Reed requested that references to legislation are checked, for accuracy.
- 9.2.2 Section 4 – The organisational structure may require updating following the review into the Agency’s senior management structure.
- 9.2.3 Section 5 – Should be extended to reflect policy developments and the roles of various organisations in both jurisdictions.
- 9.2.4 Section 6 – The overview should specifically refer to raising quality standards and sustainability. References to the plantation should be clarified.
- 9.2.5 Section 8 – The Agency’s vision and mission should appear earlier in the document. Mr. Leathem confirmed that the mission had been reviewed and agreed by the Board approximately 18 months ago and was still relevant and appropriate. The themes were discussed; Miss Campbell explained that partnership working was not set out separately as it applied across all of the strategic themes identified.
- 9.2.6 The Agency’s role in education was discussed and the Board agreed that activity connected to curriculum development will need to align with the emerging Government policy and that the Agency should explore this with Sponsor Departments taking account of capacity issues within the Agency.
- 9.2.7 The Section should also reflect work required to address audit issues. Mr. McLoone suggested the development of a financial procedures manual for groups in receipt of funding from the Agency for dissemination to groups to coincide with the introduction of new funding models in 2012.
- 9.2.8 Section 9 – Mr. Crooks recommended that references to partnership working should be included within the organisational development/ customer service section of the Plan. Mr. McLoone stated that linking outputs and outcomes to the inputs/resources available may concentrate attention on what can be achieved. He added that it would be helpful if the targets could be prioritised.
- 9.2.9 Section 10 – The Board agreed the section on values and noted that the budget is illustrative only and will be refined and re-profiled as guidance emerges from Departments and reviews are finalised.
- 9.3 Mr. McLoone felt that the plan was ambitious given the current budget scenario and mapping difficulties within the Agency. He felt that there needed to be some references to this and flexibility to re-prioritise limited resources to help manage expectations within communities. Miss Campbell indicated that this approach may be necessary as the Agency may not have the capacity to deliver everything set out in the plan.

- 9.4 It was ***Proposed and Agreed*** that the draft will be updated and provided to Departmental officials as a “work in progress” for their initial views.
- 9.5 A revised draft will be presented at the next Board meeting, together with a draft Business Plan for 2011.
- 9.6 **Action:** Miss Campbell.

10. Grant Application from Mid-Armagh Community Network

- 10.1 Mrs. Singleton left the meeting while the application from Mid-Armagh Community Network was considered by the Board. Mr. Millar presented the proposal and confirmed that a Business Case has been prepared and referred to DCAL for approval. Dr Adamson proposed the funding and Mr Leathem seconded, the funding of £23,199.60 was agreed.

11. Finance Report

- 11.1 The finance report was considered on an exception basis. The difficulties in managing the business while the budget remained unconfirmed were reiterated. Mr McCullough explained that the Budget required some re-profiling to reflect actual vs projected expenditure and cost reduction measures including projected under-spend amongst core funded groups. A re-profiled budget will be prepared for the October Board meeting.
- 11.2 **Action:** Mr. McCullough

12. Marketing Report

- 12.1 The report on marketing activity was noted by the Board.

13. Update on Business Plan Targets

- 13.1 The Chairman noted some slippage on strategic activity due to capacity issues within the Agency. It was noted that operational targets are generally on track. The Board accepted that the targets were ambitious and have been impacted by staffing issues. The Chairman stated that while some targets may not be achieved at year end the Agency could demonstrate considerable progress overall.
- 13.2 Mrs Graham noted that the marketing campaign to mark the Plantation of Ulster remained at planning stage. Miss Campbell informed the Board that DCAL have established a group to consider anniversaries/ commemorations and the Agency will be involved in those discussions. Miss Campbell said that the Agency has invested in the production of a

television programme on the Plantation which will be broadcast on Ulster Television in October/ November 2010. She was hopeful that other projects would emerge, preferably in collaboration with others.

14. AOB

14.1 Miss. Campbell informed new Board members that "On Board" governance training would be available on 20th October at Malone House, Belfast. Mr. McLoone confirmed his availability; Mrs. Singleton requested that alternative dates are sought.

14.2 **Action:** Miss Campbell

15. Date and Venue of Next Meeting

15.1 The next Board meeting will take place in the morning of 1st October 2010 at 11.30 am following a meeting of the Audit & Risk Sub-committee which will commence at 10.00am at the Agency's Belfast office.

Signed:.....

Date:.....