

**Tha Board O Ulster-Scotch
101st Board Meeting
1st October 2010, 10.30am
Ulster Scots Agency, Belfast**

Present:	Mr John Hunter (Chair)
	Ms Jacqui Reed
	Mr Tony Crooks
	Mrs Hilary Singleton
	Dr Ian Adamson
	Mr Michael McLoone
	Mr William Leathem (joined meeting 10.50am)
Apologies:	Mrs Angela Graham (Vice-Chair)
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 thanked the Board for agreeing to meet earlier than planned due to the re-scheduling of the Audit & Risk Sub-Committee meeting and reported on a number of issues:

Meetings

- The Chair and CEO met with Minister McCausland at the end of August, the Minister indicated that the proposed budget reduction of 3%pa was the starting point. The Chair stated that the result of the UK comprehensive spending review and the budget in Republic of Ireland will determine budget available to the Agency in early 2011.
- The Minister also indicated that budget constraints suggest it is unlikely that tuition to communities could extend beyond 20 weeks. The Minister noted the Agency's development of strategies and policies in respect of the Community Workers Scheme and the Agency's participation in planning for various events and commemorations.
- The Chair reiterated the need for strategic direction from the Department and a framework within which the Agency will work with other stakeholders such as the proposed academy. The Minister confirmed that the preparation of Business Cases for the Academy and regional cultural centres was a top priority.
- Minister McCausland noted the findings of the review into core funding and reiterated the importance of re-establishing the Forum of stakeholder groups.
- Minister McCausland also expressed interest in emerging proposals for a W F Marshall Winter School.
- The Chair reported on a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) at the end of September. Key issues relate to the development of Corporate and Business Plans and the review of the St. Andrew's Agreement. The review, led by the two Governments, and due for completion by the end of October will consider efficiency, value for money and the need for new/ modified bodies. The Agency may be asked to contribute to the review in due course.
- Following attendance at the opening of Ulster History Foundation premises, the Chair and CEO met with the group. The group propose developing tourist products in partnership

with local authorities and are advancing work with Ards and North Down which may serve as a model for similar work elsewhere. The Chair agreed regular on-going meetings with the group.

Correspondence

- The Chair wrote to the Ulster Scots Community Network (USCN) seeking an update on plans to manage the CEO vacancy. The group have subsequently advised that their Management Committee will consider shortly and the Agency shall be kept apprised.
- The Chair wrote to the Ulster Scots Language Society (USLS) to note outstanding administrative issues. The Chair commended USLS for the content of the recent edition of "Ullans" while expressing disappointment at the tone of the editorial and recommending that issues with the Agency are in future raised outside of the public domain.
- Minister McCausland has written to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's Arms Length Bodies to encourage a strategic, partnership approach to planning activities to mark a number of forthcoming anniversaries. Bodies are asked to consider how proposals from communities can be encouraged and supported and integrate planned activity into Corporate and Business Plans. Ms Reed and Dr Adamson indicated that Minister for Communities, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs may have an interest. Mr Crooks stated that some work was underway within the Department of the Taoiseach. Various anniversaries were discussed and Mrs Reed stated that the community should be consulted, Mr McLoone offered to investigate any plans agreed in the Republic of Ireland. Mr Leathem indicated that the potentially lengthy "lead-in" times required for some events may require activity in the very short term if forthcoming anniversaries are to be appropriately marked.

2. Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Mrs. Angela Graham.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting of the Board on 18th August 2010 were agreed without amendment
- 3.2 ***Proposed and Agreed: that the minute be accepted.***

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 Mrs Singleton asked for confirmation that the draft consultation document on Festivals would be presented to the next Board meeting, this was provided.

5. Audit & Risk Sub-Committee - Verbal Report

- 5.1 The Board were informed that the Audit and Risk Sub-committee meeting was postponed due to difficulties in securing a quorum, the Sub-committee will convene on the 18th October 2010.

6. Interim Chief Executive Officer's Report

- 6.1 The CEO stated that the 2010 budget has been agreed at 94% of 2009 baseline pending ratification from the NSMC. The Agency is projecting an under-spend due to savings in quarters 1 and 2. Delay in submission of claims from community groups is also impacting on profiled spend. Correspondence from DCAL has confirmed requirements to plan for a 3%pa reduction in 2011-2013 budgets, limited opportunity for savings/ efficiencies in administration costs may result in reductions to funding for programmes. The CEO stated that a series of meetings to inform communities about changes to programmes in 2011 and to consult on further changes in 2012 will commence on 4th October.
- 6.2 The CEO stated that the member of staff on long-term sick leave has returned to work in the Grants Team. The appointment of a temporary worker will continue to address the current back-log in claims and support the forthcoming assessment of applications.
- 6.3 Finalisation of 2007 Annual Reports and Accounts is progressing and the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) have completed work, the consolidation is underway led by Foras ns Gaeilge. NIAO are conducting fieldwork on 2008 and 2009 accounts.
- 6.4 Miss Campbell informed the Board that the partnership project with Evergreen Media to produce a one hour documentary on the Plantation is progressing. There has been some delay however the project should be delivered to facilitate screening in 2010.
- 6.5 Miss Campbell reported on the partnership project to develop interpretative information at the 1st Derry Presbyterian Church. Consultants have developed a range of options which are under consideration.
- 6.6 Miss Campbell reported on a meeting with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and representatives from Ards and North Down Councils on proposals to develop Ulster-Scots themed tourism products. Miss Campbell stated that applications for funding from the Councils may be advanced early in the New Year.
- 6.7 Miss Campbell indicated that the Agency has agreed 25% funding for a feasibility study on the proposed cultural centres in North Antrim and Belfast. DCAL has approved the expenditure. The Chair indicated that the study should consider relationships with local groups.
- 6.8 Miss Campbell stated that Minister McCausland's request to re-establish the Forum by end of September had not been achieved due to time constraints however a request for nominations from the USCN has issued and a reply is awaited. The Chair invited any interested Board Member to attend the Forum's meetings.
- 6.9 The Chair stated that the Department of Education has issued a consultation on Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education and are seeking responses by end of October. The Chair suggested this as an agenda item for the Forum. The Agency will, time permitting, develop a draft response for presentation to the next Board meeting. In the event that the deadline for responses earlier than the next planned meeting the submission will be advanced as a draft. Final response will issue following Board approval.

- 6.10 Miss Campbell provided an update on difficulties related to grant to the USLS. Further guidance from DCAL has been sought. The Board noted the various problems in the administration of the grant and agreed that the Agency was exposed. While the Board acknowledged challenges created by staffing issues within USLS it decided that an appropriate letter should issue to the group notifying them that core funding will be withdrawn in December 2010. This should provide for proper periods of notice to staff. The Agency will consult DCAL prior to issue of the letter.
- 6.11 Mr Leathem queried why proposals for delivery of tuition in 2011 had been amended, as reported at paragraph 2.1 of the Interim Chief Executive Officer's report, to restrict tuition to 20 weeks. The Chair informed the Board that the change reflected budgetary constraints and was amended following the meeting with Minister McCausland.
- 6.12 Mr Leathem noted his dissatisfaction that the amendment, contrary to the Board's agreed approach which, directly impacts on front-line service provision had been advanced without consultation. Ms Reed and Dr Adamson expressed concern that neither the Department nor the Agency's Executive was taking the Board's advice into account, Mrs Singleton noted the potential impact on groups seeking to deliver accreditation. The Chair stated that after consultation with the Executive he agreed the change due to concern about raising unrealistic expectations within communities.

7. Review of Core Funded Groups

- 7.1 The Chair reported that Minister McCausland accessed the draft report of the independent review into the Agency's core funding of various groups via his Special Advisor who is a member of the project steering group. Minister McCausland has asked that the Board postpones consideration of the findings until he receives a presentation from the consultants. The Chair indicated that he had not had an opportunity to discuss the matter with the Minister since the request was issued.
- 7.2 Mr. Hunter indicated that while withdrawal of the paper would not facilitate detailed discussion there was nonetheless a need to decide what advice should be provided to groups in respect of 2011 onwards. The Chair indicated that normally requests for annual Business Plans would have issued at this stage in the year and stated that in the absence of further guidance the Agency had a duty to proceed and proposed that the Agency immediately requests submission of 2011 Business Plans and issues an invitation to groups to attend governance training. The recommendation was ***Proposed and Agreed.***
- 7.3 The Board agreed the need for governance training and expressed concern about the level and nature of the Minister's intervention. The Board agreed that a letter to Minister should issue seeking clarification on governance including the demarcation of the Minister's and Agency's roles, expressing concern about the intervention and the potential cost to the public purse if issues identified within the review were not properly addressed. The Chair proposed writing to the Minister to register concern about the intervention, particularly in the context of the Agency's investment in the work (c. £16,000) and its importance in tackling duplication, governance and value for money issues with core funded groups. A response would be requested in advance of the next Board meeting. The recommendation was ***Proposed and Agreed.***
- 7.4 ***Action:*** Interim CEO

- 7.5 Ms. Reed reiterated her dissatisfaction that finalising the report was delaying consideration of an application from the Monreagh Ulster-Scots Heritage & Education Centre, the application was submitted to the Agency over 12 months ago. The Chair indicated that future funding would be dependent the approval of Business Plans and Cases. Miss Campbell confirmed that where Letters of Offer are in place they extend to end December 2010. The Chair confirmed that plans to move away from a core funding model would take some time and there is a need for measures to support transition to new arrangements. The Chair confirmed that any funding would require approval of a Business Case.

8. Draft Corporate Plan

- 8.1 Miss Campbell explained that the Board's comment on the Draft Corporate Plan have, where possible, been integrated to the Plan which is in line with guidance from Sponsor Departments. The draft 2011 Business Plan prioritises actions. The guidance received from DCAL does not clarify roles in respect of education and language which are dependent on the outcome of proposals to develop an academy and regional cultural centres.
- 8.2 Mrs Singleton stated that clarification of roles, including that of the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA), was essential to enable the Agency to develop an appropriate strategy to mainstream learning about Ulster-Scots. Mrs Singleton informed the Board that the Royal School, Armagh have introduced a module on Gaelic Studies, with no corresponding offering in Ulster-Scots language or culture.
- 8.3 Mr. Millar informed the Board of work the Agency had engaged in over many years to engage with Sponsor Departments, the Department of Education and the CCEA. The Academy Implementation Group has, by choice, advanced separate discussions. Mrs Singleton stated that this reinforced the need for strategic direction from Sponsor Departments and expressed concern about the potentially nugatory value of Agency work completed to date. Mrs Singleton requested that relevant sections of the Plan (2.8, 5.1, 5.5, 9.5, 9.9) are aligned with Department of Education plans and reflect and the Agency's aim of mainstreaming provision.
- 8.4 Ms Reed asked that priorities are reviewed to ensure that it is clear that initiatives extend to border counties (para. 9.4). Clarification was sought on the inclusion of support for centres of excellence, Mr Millar indicated that priorities would be refined following decisions about the proposed academy and regional hubs. Mr Millar indicated that 2011 was a transitional year for many of the programmes operated under the Financial Assistance Scheme and confirmed that proposals for changes to be introduced in 2012 would revert to the Board for approval following public consultation.
- 8.5 Mr McLoone commended Agency staff efforts in producing the Corporate Plan and noted the challenges in setting priorities in an uncertain policy context and operating environment. Mr McLoone stressed the importance of realism in the plan and the need to set activity and outcome targets appropriate to the staff resource. The Chair indicated that once Sponsor Department's have been consulted the Plan is presented to the NSMC for approval. The next NSMC is scheduled on 3rd November 2010. Miss Campbell stated that the Business Plan will cascade from the Corporate Plan and will be tailored to meet budgets, plans may be subject to review from Finance Departments. Discussion on the allocation across Agency activity reinforced the on-going requirement for capacity building within communities and

the need to address potential resource constraints. The Chair will reflect issues raised by the Board in the Foreword to the Plan. The Plan was ***Proposed and Agreed***.

8.6 **Action:** Interim CEO

8.7 Miss Campbell introduced the draft 2011 Business Plan stating that while the plan is ambitious, including a number of operational targets, it remained dependant on budget and would be revisited and refined as clarification was obtained on the budget position and Government/ Departmental policies. The Chair restated the difficulties presented by publication of the Plan before budgets and Programmes for Government are determined and indicated that objectives may be subject to significant change.

8.8 Miss Campbell explained that while effort has been made to protect funding for front-line services there remains a need to more closely manage resources to ensure timely claims from grant recipients. The timing of claims for various projects will impact on the 2011 budget. Miss Campbell indicated that the Development Team will encourage prompt submission of claims for the remainder of 2010 and reiterated there may be a need to introduce stricter controls in 2011.

8.9 Mr Leathem expressed concern about the proposed allocation of resources which reduced grant under "Serving the Community" programmes particularly for music and dance tuition. Miss Campbell stated that the decline in the overall budget required a focus on strategic and partnership work. Resources have been reallocated across programmes to support the extension of the Community Worker Scheme and the peripatetic tutor programme. Miss Campbell stated that the planned consultation would enable the Agency to introduce simplified procedures and effect further efficiencies. Mr Leathem queried the profiled budget which provides for an increase in the marketing budget and requested that proposals for use of this budget reflected the needs of the community and delivered historic and cultural value. Mr Leathem, Dr Adamson, Mrs Singleton and Ms Reed expressed concern and advised caution in reducing allocation to front-line services to communities. Mr Crooks stated that the profile may need to be revisited in the context of revised budgets. The Plan was ***Proposed and Agreed***.

8.10 **Action:** Interim CEO

9. Review of Community Worker Scheme

9.1 The Chair stated the preliminary findings of the review were largely subjective due to the data available. Mr Leathem sought clarification on the requirement for groups to engage in at least 40 weeks of activity in the context of proposed changes to the Agency's tuition programme. Mr. Millar stated that applicant groups are required to deliver a programme of Ulster-Scots events/ activities. Groups can apply for grant for an administrative officer for up to 25 hours per week, awards are granted at different levels. In 2011 groups will be asked to set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and time-bound) targets for the worker, derived from the approved business, these will be monitored via the Development Team and reports to the Agency.

9.2 Ms Reed reported that she has been advised that one group in receipt of support is not operating and that the group's Board is not aware of an application for an administrative worker. The Chair asked for the issue to be investigated immediately. Mrs Singleton asked

if groups were provided with contracts of employment, Mr Millar stated that successful applicants received training and signposting to advice and resources and that all Community Workers have contracts in place.

9.3 The Board made the following comments on the draft:

Para 5.4 Mechanisms for monitoring and reporting performance and addressing any capacity issues.

Para 5.4 Proposed introduction on 01/01/11 may be unrealistic and may have budgetary impacts due to late appointments.

Para 7.1 Assurance that there is capacity and demand to extend the Scheme, Mr Millar confirmed that reports from Development Officers have confirmed demand amongst some groups for an administrative worker.

9.4 Miss Campbell reiterated the need to improve management of the programme, Mrs Singleton asked that monthly progress reports from the Development Team are submitted to the Board. Miss Reed noted the unsatisfactory performance of the Schomberg Group. Mr Millar informed the Board that the Agency has taken steps to address the issue. The Chair noted that groups require notice about the availability of grant in 2011; Mr Crooks stated that the Board need to form a exit strategy for the programme post year-3. The Chair proposed that the Board noted the findings and agreed the approach to awards in 2011, approved the interim measures and delay extending the programme pending the outcome of investigations. A paper on the proposed management of the programme will be developed for the November Board meeting. This was **Agreed**.

9.5 **Action:** Mr Millar

10. Peripatetic Tutor Programme

10.1 Mr Millar provided background to the proposal and confirmed that the Agency has Sponsor Department approval to appoint up to 6 peripatetic tutors. The proposal would provide for the recruitment of one music tutor to increase the number of tutors to 4 (piping, fiddle, fife/whistle, Lambeg drumming, highland dance). Mrs Singleton asked how demand for a piper was determined, Mr Millar confirmed that requests to the Development Team and reports from Tutors were used to assess demand for services. The Chair asked about management controls, Mr Millar explained that tutors, who are self-employed, are managed by the Development Team.

10.2 Ms Reed stated that a transparent recruitment process would be required to provide sufficient assurance to the Agency and the community that a suitably qualified and experienced candidate was selected. Mr Millar confirmed that the selection criteria would be developed with support from an expert, who would also participate in a properly constituted interview panel.

10.3 Mr McLoone asked if the outcomes of investment in the programme are properly record and track participant's progression. Mr Millar explained that the programme has been delivered in over 100 schools and communities reaching an estimated 500,000 participants. The tutors have been proactive in monitoring and evaluating activity and have made a useful contribution to the Agency's demonstration of quality learning indicators agreed by DCAL and assessed by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) within the Department of

Education. A report on the Agency's Summer Schemes will be received from ETI; a review of the peripatetic tutor programme will commence in 2011. The proposal was **Proposed and Agreed**.

10.4 **Action:** Mr Millar

11. Proposal for W F Marshall Winter School 2011

11.1 The Board noted the proposal for a school to mark the 50th anniversary of W F Marshall's death. Dr Adamson stated that while the Rev. Marshall did not write in Ulster-Scots language he is a substantial Ulster-Scot literary figure. Ms Reed stated that further information on the cost of the project would be required and proposed that all future awards are accompanied by budget information. Miss Campbell stated that further work was required on the budget and that an agreement in principle was required at this stage. This would enable applicants to fully cost proposals, these would revert to the Board for approval.

11.2 Mr McCullough indicated that the proposal is being developed by the Ulster-Scot Community Network in partnership with the Arts Council NI. Mr McLoone queried if the proposal was in line with the USCN Business Plan and Mr Crooks stressed the importance of governance and of ensuring that the plans are aligned with other stakeholder's plans. Mr McCullough confirmed that the USCN received a grant of £300,000 but have declared and returned a surplus of £30,000 in 2010. The application for £7,000 is in addition to the original allocation. The proposal was **Proposed and Agreed in Principle**.

11.3 **Action:** Mr McCullough

12. Proposal for Plantation Booklet

12.1 An opportunity to develop a booklet has been identified by the Ulster Historical Foundation, the proposal to produce a booklet for dissemination across Ulster would provide a useful cultural and educational resource. Mr Millar indicated that learning about the Plantation was elective within the current curriculum and there were few learning resources for use in educational institutions or communities. Ms Reed and Dr Adamson confirmed strong interest and take-up of quality publications amongst Ulster-Scots communities. The Chair acknowledged that the absence of a policy framework and an educational strategy resulted in the development of a cohesive set of learning materials. The proposal was **Proposed and Agreed**.

12.2 **Action:** Mr McCullough

13. Draft Policies for Approval

13.1 The Board reviewed the draft policies. Mrs Singleton advised that issues related to discipline, grievances and harassment could be addressed in a single document which may be easier for staff to understand.

- 13.2 The role of the Board in respect of appeals procedures requires clarification. Mr McLoone and Mr Crooks recommended that where possible Appeals are delegated to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chair agreed. Miss Campbell advised that the Board might consider constituting sub-committees to deal with specific issues such as remuneration and human resource issues. Mr Crooks outlined a number of options, issues could be referred to: a nominated member of the Board (with appeal to another delegated Board member), a panel of the Board (with appeal to the full Board) or appeal to the full Board (with no further formal appeal available).
- 13.3 The Board stated that the model should minimise Board assurance while providing assurance that a full and fair hearing was provided. An amended policy document with options for alternative appeal process will be provided to the November board. Policies on Health and Safety, Expenditure Approval and Fire Evacuation were **Proposed and Agreed**.
- 13.4 **Action:** Mrs Martin

14. Finance Report

- 14.1 Mr McCullough confirmed that the 2010 budget has been confirmed at 94% of 2009 Budget. Mr McCullough indicated that community under-spend and delays in the claim process may result in re-profiling of the Budget prior to year end. Unclaimed grant in 2010 will impact on budgets in 2011, the Agency aims to minimise commitments to under £100,000. The finance report was considered on an exception basis. Mr McCullough confirmed funding to Core Funded groups would correspond with allocation once provision for rent/ rates etc. had been accounted for in response to Mr Leathem's queries. Mr McCullough also confirmed that the Marketing budget would be spent by year end and that the float had been disposed of in 2009 and costs related to last quarter storage.
- 14.2 **Action:** Mr. McCullough

15. Marketing Report

- 15.1 Mr McCullough updated the Board on the successful marketing initiatives at the 2010 National Ploughing Championships, Athy. An update on the Agency's work in Milwalkie, USA will be presented to the November Board. Mr McCullough informed the Board that following the Agency's participation in the Stone Mountain event in 2009 and Milwaukee 2010, Tourism Ireland are supporting the participation of Ulster-Scots groups and lecturers in the 2010 Stone mountain and Norris Homecoming events.
- 15.2 The Board were advised that the drama series developed by the Agency in partnership with the Lyric Theatre would tour venues across Ulster. An invitation to attend was extended to the Board. Board members should notify the Director of Corporate Services of interest. The Hospitality and Gifts register will be updated by Agency staff as required. The report on marketing activity was noted by the Board.

- 15.3**Action:** Mr McCullough

16. Update on Business Plan Targets

16.1 The Interim CEO indicated continued slippage on strategic activity due to the absence of strategic direction from Sponsor Departments and capacity issues within the Agency. It was noted that operational targets are generally on track however planned reductions in running costs are unlikely to be achieved due to additional staff costs which have off-set efficiencies.

17. Review of Senior Management Structure

17.1 The item was deferred until the end of meeting.

18. AOB & Date and Venue of Next Meeting

18.1 Mr Leathem reported to the Board that community groups progressing application to the Agency on 2011 forms have advised that requirements to allow the Agency to consult applicant's bank may be illegal. Miss Campbell agreed to investigate further and issue amendment to guidance if necessary. Miss Campbell stressed the need for proper certification from applicants and highlighted the various suspected frauds currently under investigation. The Agency is working to decrease the Agency's exposure to risk, Miss Campbell stated that the removal of provisions for groups to make cash payments. Discussions are on-going with the Sponsor Department to enable payment of up to 90% of grant on receipt of original invoices.

18.2 **Action:** Miss Campbell

18.3 The Chair reported that relevant Development Officer has confirmed that the Derry & Raphoe Action Group have met quarterly: in March at Newtownstewart, in June at Monreagh, the group are scheduled to meet again at end October. The Community Worker has been in attendance. Ms Reed stated that to her knowledge there was no meeting at Monreagh in June. Miss Campbell agreed to investigate the matter further.

18.4 The next Board meeting will take place on Friday 12th November 2010 at 10.30 am at the Ulster-Scots Heritage & Education Centre, Monreagh, Carrigans, Co. Donegal. Agency staff located in Donegal will be asked to attend lunch with the Board to provide an update of local work undertaken by the Agency.

Signed:.....

Date:.....