

SOLAS – Further Education and Training Authority
Ordinary Board Meeting No. 070
Tuesday, 2nd November 2021
Meeting Note

- Present:
- Mr. S. Aylward - Chairperson
 - Mr. A. Brownlee - Chief Executive Officer
 - Mr. S. Burke
 - Ms. P. Carey
 - Ms. O. Coughlan
 - Mr. P. Cremmins
 - Mr. P. J. Dwyer
 - Ms. Y. McNulty
 - Ms. C. Munro
 - Ms. N. O'Reilly
 - Ms. C. Sheridan.
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- Mr. C.J. Dunne - SOLAS
 - Dr. M-L Trant - SOLAS
 - Ms. M. Walshe - Secretary
 - Ms. T. Dunne - Board Secretariat
 - Ms. F. Hyde - SOLAS
 - Ms. E. Craig - SOLAS
- Apologies:
- Ms. N. White - SOLAS Executive
- In attendance:
- Ms. F. Hyde - SOLAS
 - Ms. E. Craig - SOLAS
 - Mr. A. McGrath - SOLAS
 - Mr. A. Browne - SOLAS
 - Mr. G. Bissett - SOLAS
 - Mr. J. Lee - SOLAS
 - Ms. A. Walshe - SOLAS
 - Ms. S. Dunlop - SOLAS
 - Ms. S. Guerin - SOLAS
 - Ms. J. McNaboe - SOLAS
 - Ms. A. Dulee-Kinsolving - SOLAS
 - Ms. M. Byrne - SOLAS
 - Mr. P. Seery - SOLAS
 - Dr. F. Maloney - ETBI
 - Mr. R. Tierney - SOLAS

Part 1: Private Session

The Board met in private session.

Part 2: Ordinary Board meeting

Conflict of Interest

There were no conflict of interests arising.

1. Minutes

(i) Draft Minutes – No. 069 – Tuesday, 14th September 2021

The Board approved the draft Minutes of Board meeting No. 069 held on Tuesday, 14th September 2021.

(ii) Draft Meeting Note (for publication) No. 069 - 14th September 2021

The Board approved the draft meeting note for Meeting No. 069 held on Tuesday, 14th September 2021, for publication on the SOLAS website.

Amendments to Meeting Note – No. 068 – 13th July 2021 Board meeting

The Secretary advised that the amendments to the Meeting Note of the 13th July 2021 Board meeting, requested at the September Board meeting, had been made and that the meeting note would be published on the SOLAS website.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. Report from Chief Executive Officer

The Board noted the CEO Report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Items in the report and highlighted on the day included: -

- An update on the planned phased return of staff to Castleforbes House which had been paused pending further guidance from Government following the announcement on new public health measures on 19th October 2021.
- Details of continuing efforts to tackle apprenticeship waiting lists and an update on demand for full-time FET provision which is currently down at around 80% of pre-Covid 19 levels due to a range of factors.
- The welcome inclusion of significantly increased capital for FET in the National Development Plan.
- Details of key commitments for FET and apprenticeships in Budget 2022, including €34 million to support and develop apprenticeship.
- An update on work to progress the implementation of the apprenticeship action plan with three key objectives to be achieved by year end including:
 - the appointment of an initial director of the new National Apprenticeship Office.
 - agreement by the Boards of both SOLAS and the HEA of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on governance of the new office.

- arrangements for the appointment of the members of a new national Apprenticeship Alliance.
- An update on how SOLAS and Further Education and Training (FET) will support the supply of a skills pipeline for the construction industry to support the Government’s Housing for All Strategy.
- Details of communications activity since the last Board meeting.

Progress on Delivery of 2021 SOLAS Business Plan

The CEO reported on the SOLAS Senior Leadership Team’s review of the 2021 SOLAS Business Plan. The review highlighted a number of achievements to date and areas to be concluded by year end.

SOLAS Balanced Scorecard

The Board was advised that, a more comprehensive analysis across all areas in the balanced scorecard would accompany future CEO reports with the first of these reports, including RAG ratings for each of the indicators, circulated ahead of the meeting. It was noted that the ‘Reforming Apprenticeship’ indicator had been updated from red to amber while ‘Widening Participation’ currently ‘red’ continues to be monitored.

The Board welcomed the comprehensive CEO report and the significant progress achieved since the last meeting. Various aspects of the report were discussed including the current and on-going need for promotion of FET and apprenticeships, and the recruitment of new instructors and apprenticeship support staff. The Board welcomed progress in relation to addressing the backlog in craft apprenticeship training and progress in the rollout of the online delivery of Safe Pass training for renewals.

The Board also discussed the significant drop in full-time FET participation levels, and suggested engagement with the Department on the removal of barriers such as the inability of those in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP) to participate in full-time training. Other possible contributing factors discussed included the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and Leaving Certificate grade inflation.

4. Apprenticeship

Creation of new Industrial Training Order (ITO)

Industrial Training (Hospitality - Food and Beverage) Order 2021

Proposal

The Board was asked to approve the creation of a new Industrial Training Order (ITO) in the Hospitality – Food and Beverage area thereby enabling establishment of a new statutory apprenticeship.

Overview

The Board was advised that under Section 23 of the 1967 Industrial Training Act, SOLAS creates Industrial Training Orders (ITOs) to enable apprenticeships to be established on a statutory basis. With regard to the ITO for Hospitality – Food and Beverage industry, it was noted that eleven representative bodies were consulted. Two responses were received and duly considered. No modifications were required on the draft ITO following the consultation process.

Board Decision

The Board approved the new Industrial Training (Hospitality – Food and Beverage) Order 2021.

The Board authorised the Chairperson and the Chief Executive Officer, to execute the Industrial Training Orders (ITOs) on 2nd November 2021 and authorised the Chief Executive Officer to oversee any matters arising and the final steps of the process leading to enactment of the ITOs as statutory instruments.

5. SOLAS Commercial Cleaning Services Contract (2018) - Additional Budget

Proposal

The Board was asked to approve the allocation of additional budget to the SOLAS Commercial Cleaning Services Contract 2018.

Overview

The Board was advised that the SOLAS Commercial Cleaning Services Contract had been approved on 5th December 2017 for a maximum period of four years (48 months).

The four-year (48 month) contract commenced on the 1st of January 2018 and is due to expire on the 31st of December 2021.

The Board was advised that, during the period of the 2018 contract, additional costs were incurred. These costs related to wage inflation, consumable cost increases and additional costs associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Board approval was sought to allow the completion of this contract through the allocation of additional budget.

Board Decision

The Board approved the allocation of additional budget for the SOLAS Commercial Cleaning Services Contract 2018.

6. SOLAS Cleaning Contract Tender (2021)

Proposal

The Board was asked to approve the appointment of Grosvenor Cleaning Services to provide Commercial Cleaning Services to SOLAS, Castleforbes House, Dublin 1 for a maximum period of four years (48 months).

Overview and Discussion

The Board was advised that in August 2021, SOLAS commenced a tender process for the provision of Commercial Cleaning Services for Castleforbes House, Dublin 1 utilising the Office of Government Procurement Framework Agreement for the Provision of Commercial Cleaning Services and Window Cleaning Services.

It was noted that the nine tenders submitted by commercial cleaning companies were evaluated by a tender review panel using the Most Economically Advantageous Tender process. Board approval was sought to award a contract to Grosvenor Cleaning Services, the successful bidder.

Board Decision

The Board approved the appointment of Grosvenor Cleaning Services to provide Commercial Cleaning Services to SOLAS at Castleforbes House for a maximum period of four years (48 months).

7. Further Education and Training (FET) Service Plan High Level Update on 3rd Quarter Review and other Updates

Proposal

As detailed in the paper circulated ahead of the meeting, the Board was asked to:

- Note the update on 2021 ETB funding (Table 1).
- Approve 2016+ Apprenticeship 2021 additional allocations (Table 2).
- Note initial funding discharged to the Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (VSCCS) sector for safe reopening of facilities (Table 3).
- Approve additional funding in the amount of €31,500 to Further Education Support Unit (FESU) to ensure that the VSCCS schools / colleges it supports re-engage successfully with QQI.
- Note that an update on the third quarter review paper will be delivered at the December Board meeting.

Overview and Discussion

The Board was provided with a high-level summary setting out the third quarter position with regard to FET funding and provision and advised that a more detailed update would be provided at the December Board meeting.

It was noted that the anticipated increase in demand for FET provision in September was below expectations due to a number of contributing factors relating to the impact of Covid-19 and that ETBs were reporting a lower than expected take up of courses. At its September meeting, the Board was advised of an anticipated

underspend of *circa* 2.5% with an estimated 91% of initial projected beneficiaries supported by the FET Budget at year end. It was noted that, based on submissions from ETBs and ongoing interaction with the sector, a further downturn in projected spend and activity had been highlighted and was being brought to their attention.

The Board was advised that the third quarter review indicated an underspend in excess of €43.5m and that €12.7m in unallocated spending which was approved by the SOLAS Board, will ultimately not be required by the ETBs.

2016+ Apprenticeship Allocations

At the April 2021 Board meeting, a total of €2,529,645 was approved for 2016+ apprenticeship. The Board was advised that outstanding payments from 2020 of €432,398 (approved by the Board but not discharged), had not been provided for in the 2021 allocations.

As a result, Board approval was requested to make these 2020 payments from the 2021 Budget.

Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (VSCCS) Funding

At its September meeting, the Board approved funding to the Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (VSCCS) sector for safe reopening of facilities. The Board was advised that following engagement with DFHERIS, initial funding of €89,856 was being allocated as detailed in the Board paper.

Quality Assurance Support

In April 2021, the Board approved funding of €172,182 to the Further Education Support Unit (FESU). Board approval was sought for an additional amount of €31,500 to support the re-engagement of the four largest VSCCS schools / colleges with QQI by Q1 2022 and remaining VSCCS providers by Q3 2022.

Board Decision

The Board: -

- Noted the update on 2021 ETB funding (Table 1).
- Approved 2016+ apprenticeship 2021 additional allocations (Table 2).
- Noted initial funding discharged to the Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (VSCCS) sector for safe reopening of facilities (Table 3).
- Approved additional funding in the amount of €31,500 to Further Education Support Unit (FESU) to ensure that the VSCCS schools / colleges it supports re-engage successfully with QQI.
- Noted that an update on the third quarter review paper will be delivered at the December 2021 Board meeting.

**8. Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) 2021
Initial Funding Allocations**

Proposal

The Board was asked to note the background and approach to the allocation of the Mitigating Against Education Disadvantage Fund 2021 and approve initial funding of €5,191,089 to fifteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

The Board was also requested to approve the Executive to allocate additional funding to ETBs for eligible projected proposals received by SOLAS in Round Two.

Overview and Discussion

The Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF), announced in October 2021, provides funding to support educationally disadvantaged learners to access and participate in community education particularly in light of Covid-19. Applications are submitted by local Community Education providers through their local Education and Training Boards and, in 2020, over 500 projects were funded totalling €5.8m.

In April, the Board approved the 2021 funding allocations including €10m for the MAED fund. The Board was advised that the call for applications, covering four funding categories, issued on 30th July 2021 with a closing date of 24th September 2021 had resulted in 516 requests for 856 different projects. Board approval was sought to allocate funding in amount of €5,191,089 to ETBs for these projects.

With regard to remaining funding, the Board was advised that following engagement with ETBs, a second call for applications issued on Monday 18th October with a closing date of Friday 5th November 2021. The Executive requested approval to allocate funding to approved projects arising from the second call with an update on final total allocations to be provided at the December Board meeting.

The Board welcomed the update and noted the need to ensure funding was accessible for those providers engaging with the most disadvantaged groups. A query was raised in relation to whether funds, not spent in 2021, could be carried over to 2022 which the Executive agreed to follow up on.

Board Decision

The Board approved the allocation of funding to Education and Training Boards for Round One to a total of €5,191,089 as outlined in Table 1 of the Board paper.

The Board also approved the allocation of funds to ETBs for eligible projected proposals received by SOLAS in Round Two of the project.

9. Proposed Schedule – SOLAS Board Meetings 2022

Proposal

The Board was asked to discuss and agree the proposed schedule of SOLAS Board Meetings for 2022. Subject to any amendments, a final schedule would be presented for approval at the December 2021 Board meeting.

Discussion

The Board noted the proposed schedule and suggested some changes which the Secretary agreed to review. It was agreed that a revised schedule would be considered and approved at the December Board meeting.

Board Decision

The Board deferred approval. A revised schedule of Board meetings for 2022 will be presented for approval at the December 2021 Board meeting.

10. Strategic Performance Agreements (2022-2024)

Proposal

The Board was asked to note the proposed approach and timeline for the development of the next round of Strategic Performance Agreements between SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) for the period of 2022-2024, further to the positive and informed engagement with the Strategic Planning Committee and the SOLAS Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

Overview and Discussion

The background to the inaugural Strategic Performance Agreements (SPAs) between SOLAS and 16 Education and Training Boards 2018-2020 and achievements on overall targets and system outcomes were discussed. It was noted that the new SPA agreements (2022-2024) will be in line with the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy and the Transforming Learning agenda and will take into account learning from the inaugural agreements, proposed national targets (as set out in the draft SOLAS Corporate Plan), elements from the initial agreements to be retained, and exploration within the themes of expansion and innovation for the period 2022-2024.

The Board was provided with an update on the consultation period to date which will continue until early December 2021. The Board was advised that a Framework for Strategic Performance Agreements (2022-2024) will be presented for approval shortly thereafter and following engagement with the Strategic Planning Committee.

It was noted that a strategic dialogue process with each of the ETBs is proposed for early 2022, with the SPAs finalised in April and a formal launch in May 2022. An external independent expert panel will support the development and oversight of the new agreements and inform and provide independent views and commentary for consideration by SOLAS.

The Board welcomed the update and discussed a number of areas for consideration including achievement of targets and how to ensure full engagement with the

process. The Board was advised that individual ETBs would be consulted on their individual achievements rates as part of the planned strategic dialogue process.

Board Decision

The Board noted the proposed approach to the development of the Strategic Performance Agreements for the period 2022-2024.

11. Innovation and Updates on SOLAS Data and Research

Proposal

The Board was asked to note further ongoing innovation in the areas of SOLAS research and data analytics and the role of the internal teams, in both supporting and driving the SOLAS agenda, as well as in wider social and economic areas including Brexit. The update provided further detail and analysis following the information presented to the Board in June 2021.

Overview and Discussion

The Board was advised that SOLAS, through its Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) and the Data Analytics team (DA), supports the FET system and wider stakeholders in terms of further education and training provision and the national economic and skills landscape.

An overview of recent developments was provided including:

- Publication of the National Skills Bulletin 2021 in October with analysis from the Bulletin to inform the new Strategic Performance Agreements.
- The launch of a joint Department of Social Protection and SOLAS paper on the employment exposures to Brexit which is being utilised across the wider skills and welfare infrastructure.
- Details of how the Data Analytics team continues to support the agenda for transformation across SOLAS and the FET system by building on work to date in relation to publication of reports into outcomes of FET learners.

The Board welcomed the comprehensive presentation and requested to share this information externally with relevant groups to highlight the important work being produced by the SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit and Data Analytics Teams.

Board Decision

The Board noted the ongoing activities and innovation within the areas of research and data analytics in SOLAS.

12. Further Education and Training (FET) and Apprenticeship on the Central Applications Office (CAO) Website

Proposal

The Board was asked to note and discuss an update on the approach to having Further Education and Training (FET) and apprenticeship options on the Central Applications Office (CAO) website.

Overview and Discussion

The Board was advised that the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science has set out a priority to enhance the visibility of further education and training (FET) and apprenticeship options for school leavers, by building on the existing CAO process to support greater choices at CAO decision time. This policy objective is a key component of the Pathways pillar within the FET Strategy 2020-2024 Future FET: Transforming Learning and is also a consideration set out in the 2020 Departmental paper on FET to HE reform.

In early 2021, a Working Group comprising representatives from SOLAS, the CAO, ETBI and ETBs agreed an approach to advance the inclusion of FET and apprenticeships options on the CAO website. Members from the Working Group provided an overview of the project and how enhanced visibility and functionality would be made available for 2021/22 CAO applicants including :-

- an 'equal value' identification of HE, FET and Apprenticeship on the CAO website through redevelopment of aspects of the site;
- an application resource for FET and information on apprenticeship which can be accessed from the CAO site.
- the launching of smartchoices.ie which is an interactive tool to inform career choices
- a comprehensive communications and promotions plan to promote the new links.

The Board welcomed the comprehensive presentation and congratulated the CEO and Executive on progress on such a transformative initiative which would provide additional options and career choices for school leavers and all learners. It was noted that this would be a significant step towards the parity of esteem for different learning pathways. In response to queries, the Board was advised that the initial phase of the promotional campaign would commence in November with the overall campaign running to August next year and, that consideration would be given to consolidating the number of websites currently available that list courses and career choice options.

Board Decision

The Board noted and discussed the progress made in relation to having Further Education and Training (FET) and apprenticeship options on the CAO website.

**13. SOLAS Finance Report
For the nine-month period to 24th September 2021**

Proposal

The Board was asked to note the SOLAS Finance Report for the nine-month period to 24th September 2021.

Overview and Discussion

The Board paper set out the monthly update on expenditure compared with income for the nine-month period to 24th September 2021.

Total expenditure for the period was €749.118m compared with a budget of €760.232m resulting in an underspend of €11.114m or 1.5% most of which related to the Apprenticeship Incentivisation Scheme.

Other Updates included:

- Apprenticeship Incentivisation Grants underspent by €8.7m against a year-to-date budget of €14.000m.
- Five phases of Non-Capital Grants to Education and Training Boards amounting to €687.338m paid to date. The 5th Phase payment in September 2021. The first phase of Devolved Capital Grants amounting to €7.070m was paid to the ETBs in June 2021.
- SOLAS actual direct costs were under the year-to-date budget by €0.6m on an overall basis and Operational Costs were under budget by €1.5m.
- An amount of €0.5m is included as part of the SOLAS budget and a further €32.5m is included in the Grants to ETBs of €892.900m, in respect of capital.

The Board was advised that a review of the current underspend was underway, and a further update will be provided at the December 2021 Board meeting.

Board Decision

The Board noted the Finance Report for the nine-month period to 24th September 2021.

14. Board Committees and Advisory Committees

(1) Committee & Advisory Committee - Update from Chairpersons

Audit and Risk Committee

The Chairperson reported on recent discussions by the Committee, which included risk management, a discussion on the new National Apprenticeship Office and recently completed reviews including succession planning and construction skills certification scheme.

Strategic Planning Committee

The Chairperson departed the meeting early however the Secretary provided an update on recent discussions on their behalf including updates on FET Strategy Implementation and Strategic Performance Agreements.

Workforce and Organisational Development Committee

The Chairperson provided an update on items discussed at their most recent meeting including HR policy reviews, gender pay gap reporting and workforce planning.

National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee

The Chairperson, reported on progress in advance of the Committee's next scheduled meeting including an update on recent meetings with key stakeholders involving the CIF, and mechanical and electrical contractors, to discuss their skill needs.

(2) Committee & Advisory Committee - Minutes

(i) Strategic Planning Committee

Minutes – (Extraordinary Meeting) Tuesday, 29th June 2021

The Board noted the minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee (Extraordinary Meeting) held on Tuesday, 29th June 2021.

(ii) Workforce & Organisation Development Committee

Minutes – Wednesday, 16th June 2021

The Board noted the minute of the Workforce and Organisational Development Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 16th June 2021.

15. Any Other Business

December Board meeting – Stakeholder Engagement - Presentation from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

It was noted that the CEO, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) will attend the first part of the December 2021 Board meeting as part of an agreed arrangement where the Board periodically engages with SOLAS stakeholders. The SOLAS CEO is due to attend a QQI Board meeting in November.

Director – System Funding and Performance

The Chairperson welcomed the recently appointed Director – System Funding and Performance and thanked the Acting Director for their work during the acting period.

There was no other business conducted.

16. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 7th December 2021.

APPENDIX 1



Time: 1.30pm – 5.00pm
Venue: MS Teams

Board of SOLAS Meeting

A G E N D A

Note: Declaration of Conflict of Interest

- * 1. Minutes
 - (i) Draft Minutes – No. 069 – Tuesday, 14th September, 2021
 - (ii) Draft Meeting Note (for publication) No. 069 - 14th September, 2021
- 2. Matters Arising
- * 3. Report from Chief Executive Officer

DECISION ITEMS

- * 4. Apprenticeship
Creation of new Industrial Training Order (ITO)
Industrial Training (Hospitality - Food and Beverage) Order 2021
- * 5. SOLAS Commercial Cleaning Services Contract (2018)
- Additional Budget
- * 6. SOLAS Cleaning Contract Tender (2021)
- * 7. Further Education and Training (FET) Service Plan
High Level Update on 3rd Quarter Review and other Updates
- * 8. Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) 2021
Initial Funding Allocations
- * 9. Proposed Schedule – SOLAS Board Meetings 2022

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- * 10. Strategic Performance Agreements (2022-2024)
- * 11. Innovation and Updates on SOLAS Data and Research
- * 12. Further Education and Training (FET) and Apprenticeship on the Central Applications Office (CAO) Website

INFORMATION ITEMS

- * 13. SOLAS Finance Report
For the nine-month period to 24th September, 2021
- * 14. Board Committees and Advisory Committees
 - (1) Committee & Advisory Committee - Update from Chairpersons
 - (2) Committee & Advisory Committee - Minutes
 - (i) Strategic Planning Committee
Minutes – (Extraordinary Meeting) Tuesday, 29th June, 2021
 - (ii) Workforce & Organisation Development Committee
Minutes – Wednesday, 16th June, 2021
- 15. Any Other Business
- 16. Date of Next Meeting

* (Denotes Paper)