

SOLAS – Further Education and Training Authority
Ordinary Board Meeting No. 069
Tuesday, 14th September 2021
Note of Board meeting

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
Mr. D.J. Loftus
Ms. Y. McNulty
Ms. C. Munro
Ms. N. O’Reilly
Ms. C. Sheridan.

Mr. C.J. Dunne - SOLAS
Dr. M-L Trant - SOLAS
Ms. N White - SOLAS
Ms. M. Walshe - Secretary
Ms. T. Dunne - Board Secretariat

In attendance: Mr. G. Bissett - SOLAS
Mr. G. Gasparro - SOLAS
Mr. P. Kivlehan - SOLAS
Mr. J. Roe - SOLAS
Ms. M. Lyons - SOLAS
Ms. C. Ni Fhlionn - SOLAS
Ms. N. Fitzpatrick - SOLAS
Mr. A. McGrath - SOLAS
Ms. M. Walsh - SOLAS
Ms. C. Jones - SOLAS
Ms. R. Patten - SOLAS
Mr. J. Sinnott - SOLAS.

Conflict of Interest

There were no conflict of interests arising.

1. Minutes

(i) Draft Minutes – No. 068– Tuesday, 13th July 2021

The Board approved the draft Minutes of Board meeting No. 068 held on Tuesday, 13th July 2021, subject to minor textual amendments.

(ii) Draft Meeting Note (for publication) - No. 068 – Tuesday, 13th July 2021

The Board approved the draft meeting note for Meeting No. 068 held on Tuesday, 13th July 2021, for publication on the SOLAS website.

2. Matters Arising

Decision Items – Approvals by Written Procedure for Emergency Health and Safety Works (EHSW) in Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

(1) (August 2021) - Approval of capital investment for EHSW in two ETBs

(i) Louth-Meath ETB + (ii) City of Dublin ETB

It was confirmed that, following circulation of a Board paper by email, the Board approved capital investment of €143,355.50 for Emergency Health and Safety works in two Education and Training Boards (ETBs) namely: (i) Louth-Meath ETB €93,820.75 (ii) City of Dublin ETB €49,534.75 on 3rd August 2021.

(2) (August 2021) - Approval of capital investment for EHSW in four ETBs:

(i) Kerry ETB, (ii) Dublin-Dun Laoghaire ETB [x 2], (iii) Galway-Roscommon ETB and (iv) Mayo-Sligo-Leitrim ETB

It was confirmed that, following circulation of a Board paper by email, the Board approved capital investment of €1,011,759.88 for Emergency Health and Safety works in four Education and Training Boards (ETBs) namely: (i) Kerry ETB €716,578.55 (ii) Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB [x2] - €46,036.73 + €64,250.00, Galway Roscommon ETB €15,780.00 and Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB €32,114.60 on 1st September 2021,

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 the Castleforbes House in line with Government guidelines and details of engagement with staff on return to office protocols.

- Agreement on the full return of onsite FET provision which will be critical in starting the journey to return FET activity to pre-Covid levels and re-engaging learners.
- Plans now in place to address the backlog in off-the-job training for craft apprenticeships.
- A progress update on plans to have FET and apprenticeships options visible and accessible via the CAO.
- Developments in the area of recruitment to fill key positions including a Director of Construction, Green Skills and Quality and a Director of System funding, an administrative assistant and a Business Partner in the CEOs office and a new Communications Manager. The Board was also advised that a campaign to recruit project managers for the new Transformation Project Management Office was nearing completion.
- The Board was also updated on plans to hire apprentices on the SOLAS IT & Digital and People teams.
- An update on the progress of the tender to deliver Safe Pass training online with sanction to proceed with the tender received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
- An overview of the SOLAS Complaints Report 2020 with 82 complaints, predominantly relating to apprenticeship and construction courses received that year which was a modest increase on the previous year.
- Details of communications activity since the last Board meeting including the launch of the 10-year Adult Literacy for Life Strategy by Minister Simon Harris, a campaign to promote FET options to coincide with the issuing of Leaving Certificate results and CAO offers and the promotion of the call for applications to the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund.

Progress on Delivery of 2021 SOLAS Business Plan

An update was provided on progress against the 2021 Business Plan and Balanced Scorecard with details of Key Performance Indicators achieved across the five business objectives. The Board noted that SOLAS was on course to deliver on its key objectives in 2021.

Positive outcomes included a significant increase in apprenticeship registrations, plans to reduce the apprenticeship backlog and progress in the area of SOLAS as a learning organisation with a range of core learning opportunities being rolled out.

The Board was advised that two on-going 'red flag' areas: - 'widening participation' and 'reforming apprenticeship' are being monitored and addressed.

An update on progress in all areas will be made at the 2nd November Board meeting.

4. SOLAS Budget 2021
(i) Forecast Outturn 2021

Proposal

The Board was asked to note the Forecast Outturn for 2021 of €954.71m compared with the approved budget of €992.5m, resulting in saving of €37.79m.

Overview and Discussion

The Board was provided with details of the Forecast Outturn noting that SOLAS related expenditure is expected to be at a balanced position at year end.

The Board was advised that SOLAS will discuss the implications of savings with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The Board noted the update.

Board Decision

The Board noted the forecast outturn for 2021 resulting in savings of €37.790m and further savings amounting to €62.210m related to 2020 to be recovered in 2021.

(ii) SOLAS Capital Funding Applications and Capital Funding Threshold

Proposal

- The Board was asked to approve the allocation of capital funding to Galway-Roscommon ETB (GRETB) for the acquisition of a building at Mervue Business Park, Mervue, Galway.
- The Board was asked to approve funding required for a change of use of Louth-Meath ETB's Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Training Centre of Excellence (AMTCC) facility from a manufacturing facility to a training centre and the appointment of a design team to scope and design modifications.
- The Board was asked to approve authorisation by the CEO of capital funding through the Emergency Health & Safety Works funding stream in line with SOLAS financial authorisation levels in relation to FET grants.
- The Board was asked to note the increase in the capital threshold for equipment from €1,000 inclusive of VAT to €1,000 exclusive of VAT.

Overview and Discussion

The Board was provided with an overview of both the Galway-Roscommon ETB

(GRETB) and the Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) applications for capital funding. In response to a query on the fit-out costs of the GRETB project, the Board was advised that all such expenditure is governed by the Public Spending Code and the indicative fit out costs are in line with norms.

The Board was provided with an update on the Emergency Health and Safety Works (EHSW) Capital Funding Stream with funding of €3,194,525.58 approved to date in 2021. Given the emergency nature of EHSW requests, the Board was advised that the Executive was seeking approval to authorise the CEO to approve capital funding through the Emergency Health & Safety Works funding stream in line with SOLAS financial authorisation levels in relation to FET grants. All such requests approved by the CEO will be advised to the Board. The Board noted and approved the request.

The Board was also asked to note that the threshold for capital expenditure for equipment will be increased from €1,000 including VAT to €1,000 excluding VAT.

The Board sought assurances that large scale projects are future proofed and, in the event that a facility is no longer viable, that proposals for its alternative use for Further Education and Training (FET) provision are brought back to the Board.

Following discussion on the area of capital expenditure the Board was advised that a review of capital stock is nearing completion. The Board was also provided with an update on the €10m capital funding allocation to address the backlog in off-the-job training for craft apprenticeships.

Board Decision

The Board approved the allocation of capital funding to Galway-Roscommon ETB (GRETB) for the acquisition of a building at Mervue Business Park, Mervue, Galway.

The Board approved funding required for a change of use of Louth-Meath ETB's Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Training Centre of Excellence (AMTCC) facility from a manufacturing facility to a training centre and the appointment of a design team to scope and design modifications.

The Board approved authorisation by the CEO of capital funding through the Emergency Health & Safety Works funding stream in line with SOLAS financial authorisation levels in relation to FET grants.

The Board noted the increase in the capital threshold for equipment from €1,000 inclusive of VAT to €1,000 exclusive of VAT.

**5. Further Education and Training (FET) Services Plan
Mid-Year Provision and Funding Review**

Proposal

The Board was asked to: -

- Approve additional funding allocations to three ETBs totalling €3,926,012.
- Approve funding to the Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (VSCCS) sector for safe reopening of facilities.
- Note the progress of the delivery of the 2021 Services Plan outlined in the Board paper and at Appendix 1, 2 and 3.
- Note that the SOLAS Executive will continue to meet with ETBs to review their plans and allocate funding where necessary.

Overview and Discussion

The Board was provided with an overview of the paper which summarised the mid-year position (to end June 2021) with regard to FET funding and provision and which proposed a number of adjustments to funding allocations. The Board was advised that despite a challenging year where FET facilities remained closed the forecasted outturn for 2021, at mid-term stage, suggests that FET will support 91% (296,627) of the initial projected beneficiaries by year end.

Items in the paper and highlighted on the day included:

Skills to Compete (STC)

The Skills to Compete (STC) initiative was developed to assist those who had lost their job as a result of Covid-19 attracted funding via the Government's July 2020 Stimulus Package and additional funding was allocated to the programme for 2021. As a result of on-going restrictions, demand for large scale full-time provision has not yet been felt. However, the commitment to Skills to Compete as a concept has remained, with €69m set aside in the 2021 budget for its further roll-out.

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC)

At its July 2021 meeting, the Board noted that circa €19m was withheld from 2021 PLC funding allocations arising from shortfall following the transfer of funding from DES to SOLAS in 2020. Since then and following further engagement between SOLAS/ETBs/DFHERIS, funding previously withheld in line with the revised projections will be released.

Covid-19 Funding

In July 2021, DFHERIS allocated an additional €14m funding to the FET sector to address specific COVID-19 related issues and re-opening of facilities. It was noted that SOLAS is awaiting formal confirmation of this allocation from the Department.

The Mid-Year Position

In April 2021, the Board approved funding of €880.9m for distribution to ETBs and other providers. An additional €14m Covid-19 funding brings the potential revised budget to €894.9m. The Board was advised that funding of €22.7m had not yet been allocated. This funding related to a contingency plan for unexpected Covid-19 costs, the €10m Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) and scope for additional skills provision in line with funding priorities. As a result, €12.7m remains to be deployed across the system.

Additional Funding for three ETBs

The Board was asked to approve additional funding for three ETBs including:

- 1) €2,325,856 by Kerry ETB for Covid-19 related costs to support provision of employment related FET.
- 2) €820,000 by Waterford-Wexford ETB for Covid related costs and additional apprenticeship instructors.
- 3) €780,156 by Limerick-Clare ETB for the support and provision of Traineeships and Specific Skills Training, through contracted training.

Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (VSCCS) Funding

In 2020, SOLAS engaged with DFHERIS and agreed a fair system of allocating funding of approximately €550,000 to ensure that VSCCS schools could deliver Further Education and Training (FET) provision within relevant Covid-19 guidelines. For 2021, SOLAS will arrange to distribute funding for this purpose to VSCCS Schools and Colleges during September.

FET Service Provision at the end of June 2021

The Board was advised that for the period to June 2021, 52.5% of the year's revised expected beneficiary activity for all providers had been achieved. ETBs expect to deliver FET to 247,873 beneficiaries in 2021 which is 24,021 (8.8%) less than originally planned.

Board Decision

The Board: -

- Approved additional funding allocations to three ETBs totalling €3,926,012.
- Approved funding to the Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (VSCCS) sector for safe reopening of facilities.
- Noted the progress of the delivery of the 2021 Services Plan outlined in the Board paper and at Appendix 1, 2 and 3.
- Noted that the SOLAS Executive will continue to meet with ETBs to review their plans and allocate funding where necessary.

6. Additional expenditure under Media Buying Contract and Communications Activity Update

Proposal

The Board was asked to approve additional expenditure under the service contract with Havas Media for media buying services. The Board was also asked to note the update on current and planned communications activity.

Overview and Discussion

Following recent discussions by the Board on the area of communications, the Board was advised that a number of campaigns, presented at the meeting, were planned up to the end of September 2022 with a request for an increase in expenditure on the current media buying contract.

An overview of the proposal was provided, including details of campaigns run under the contract to date, and planned campaigns in the areas of Apprenticeship, Adult Literacy for Life, FET on the CAO and Skills to Advance and outlined the rationale for the increased expenditure.

The Board was advised that the Executive was seeking Board approval to further increase expenditure under this contract for on-going activity as well as new promotional activity as outlined at the meeting. A breakdown of the estimated costs (excluding VAT) for media buying was detailed in the Board Paper.

The Board welcomed the update and highlighted the need to ensure that communications activity cascades down to a local level in Education and Training Boards and other providers to ensure the effective delivery of the Further Education and Training (FET) strategy. Following discussion of the proposed communications campaigns and associated media spend, the Board was advised that impact and effectiveness would be measured in a number of ways including social media engagement, media sentiment and research. In response to a query raised, the Board was advised that SOLAS was in the third of a possible four-year contract with Havas Media and that a review of the contract would take place at the end of the third year.

Board Decision

The Board approved additional expenditure under the service contract with Havas Media for media buying services and noted that the total approved expenditure under the contract over a period of three years.

The Board also noted the update on current and planned communications activity.

7. Risk Management Policy

Proposal

The Board was asked to approve the review and updated Risk Management Policy.

Overview

The Board was advised that in compliance with the requirements of the Risk process, the Risk Management Policy and Risk Appetite Statement, are reviewed by the Executive Leadership Team, the Senior Leadership Team and the Audit & Risk Committee and proposed to the Board for approval.

The Board was advised that a single amendment had been made to the Risk Management Policy which was to “reduce the minimum number of risk workshops from at least three per annum to at least two per annum”.

No amendments were made to the risk appetite statement.

Board Decision

The Board approved the review and updated Risk Management Policy for immediate implementation.

8. Additional expenditure - Framework for Internal Audit, Corporate Governance and Risk Management.

Proposal

The Board was asked to approve additional expenditure under the current framework agreement for Internal Audit, Corporate Governance & Risk Management Services.

Overview and discussion

The Board was provided with an overview of the proposal and advised that in October 2018, following completion of a tendering process, the Board approved expenditure on a Framework, comprising two Lots for Internal Audit, Corporate Governance and Risk Management Services over a period of up to four years (1 December 2018 to 30 November 2022).

Lot 1 of the Framework covers the Head of Internal Audit Service, including advice on corporate governance and risk management. Lot 2 comprises four companies from which SOLAS seeks proposals to carry out internal audit reviews as identified in the annual SOLAS internal audit plan approved by the Audit and Risk Committee.

In addition, the Framework is used to complete additional audits required under the European Social Fund (ESF) cascade arrangement requested by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The Board was advised that SOLAS has limited control over the level and timing of ESF reviews and that the level of ESF auditing had exceeded expected costs over the four-year period of the Framework. As a result of this additional expenditure, at the end of August 2021, actual expenditure and commitments under this Framework were just below the amount approved.

The Board was advised that the Executive was seeking approval of additional expenditure to allow completion of the balance of the 2021 and 2022 internal audit plans and ensure sufficient funding to meet demands for additional ESF reviews up to the end of November 2022.

The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) advised that the Committee had discussed this proposal at its most recent meeting and had expressed its satisfaction with the high level of compliance evidenced from the results of audits and ESF reviews undertaken to date with very few issues arising. It was noted that the ARC was recommending approval of the proposal for additional expenditure.

Board Decision

The Board approved additional expenditure under the current framework agreement for Internal Audit, Corporate Governance & Risk Management Services.

9. Approval of Four Sole Supplier Purchases to support eCollege and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) within Further Education and Training (FET)

Proposal

The Board was asked to approve the purchase of certification products from four sole suppliers during the period 2021 – 2022 to support eCollege and technology enhanced learning in Further Education and Training as follows:

- 1) National FET Certification Licence Agreement for Certiport (Prodigy Learning Ltd.) fixed fee pre-payment for January 2022 - December 2022
- 2) International Computer Driving License (ICDL) certifications (ECDL Ireland Ltd, t/a ICS Skills), drawn down in four tranches, for September 2021 – August 2022
- 3) Contingency CompTIA certifications (CompTIA), pre-payment, for September 2021 – December 2021
- 4) Contingency Digital Marketing Institute certifications (DMI Ltd), pre-payment to cover period September 2021 – December 2021.

Overview and discussion

The Board was provided with an overview of the proposal and noted that the proposed sole supplier purchases were fully compliant with both SOLAS procurement and due diligence regulations.

An update was provided on the competency and expertise of each of the four service providers, including value for money considerations and highlighted key aspects of each of the four sole supplier service.

The Board noted the rationale set out in the Board paper to support the awarding of contracts to four sole suppliers.

In response to a query, the Board was advised that course proctors ensured the integrity of the examination process and mitigated against cheating or any potential dishonest engagement with the process.

Board Decision

The Board approved the purchase from four Sole Suppliers as follows:

- 1) National FET Certification Licence Agreement for Certiport (Prodigy Learning Ltd.), fixed fee pre-payment, for January 2022 - December 2022
- 2) International Computer Driving License (ICDL) certifications (ECDL Ireland Ltd, t/a ICS Skills), pre-payment drawn down in four tranches, for September 2021 – August 2022
- 3) Contingency CompTIA certifications (CompTIA), pre-payment, for September 2021 – December 2021
- 4) Contingency Digital Marketing Institute certifications (DMI Ltd), pre-payment to cover period September 2021 – December 2021

The 2021 expenditure portion of these certification costs was included in the 2021 approved budget. Purchase is based on confirmation of sole supplier status and is in line with SOLAS procurement procedures.

10. [Resumed Discussion]

Update on Skills to Advance Supports for Enterprise, Employees and Skills

Proposal

The Board was asked to discuss the update on the implementation of the Skills to Advance (STA) policy initiative and the proposed strategic actions for 2021-2022.

Overview and Discussion

The Board was provided an update on the background, implementation supports, performance targets and employee profile and outlined initiatives underway to increase the scale and impact of Skills to Advance which included an overview of strategic actions planned for 2021-2022.

The Board was advised that the 'Skills to Advance' initiative was launched in September 2018 and rolled out by the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The policy provides supports to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to invest in and future proof their workforce by anticipating and

responding to changes in their work due to technology advances, changing work practices and market diversification.

An update was provided on a number of strategic initiatives which had been rolled out since Autumn 2020 to expand scale and achieve greater impact with employers. It was noted that in 2020, 921 unique STA courses, out of a total of 1,323 courses, were delivered with high demand in healthcare support, management, early childhood care and education, training and development, and business administration. Of the 6,030 (68%) employees who completed training, almost two-thirds, 3,849 (64%), achieved accreditation and 707 (12%) learners were awaiting results. 2,268 (26%) employees were still on a course, while 460 (5%) employees finished early.

Details were provided on strategic initiatives aimed at positioning Skills to Advance as a key component of FET services for employees and employers as well as strategic actions for the period 2021-2022 which will target enterprise needs, enhance the agility of Further Education and Training (FET) to anticipate and respond to employee development needs and to stimulate innovation to achieve real impact for employees and employers.

Board Decision

The Board noted and discussed the update on implementation of the Skills to Advance policy initiative and the proposed strategic actions for 2021-2022.

11. Update on Apprenticeship

Proposal

The Board was asked to note the update on Apprenticeship

Overview and Discussion

The Board was provided with an update on the ongoing expansion of apprenticeship with 21,500 current apprentices across 62 apprenticeship programmes and new registrations increasing when compared to 2020 and 2019.

An update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Apprenticeship was provided. It was noted that whilst the move to remote learning had limited impact on newer apprenticeship programmes, it had a more significant impact on training delivery for craft programmes where the system had been operating at 50-60% capacity. Despite this, 4,500 apprentices received training in the period March-August 2021 and circa 3,000 apprentices commenced training in September 2021.

An update was provided on the efforts to address the backlog in the craft apprenticeship area and noted that, at the end of July, 11,859 apprentices were delayed in training with circa 6,700 at Phase 2. Details of measures to address the situation were provided and included the implementation of an emergency response, supported by a €20m investment in capacity provision of

accelerated training in the three largest craft programmes – Electrical, Plumbing and Carpentry/Joinery and the allocation of significant additional resources to assist ETBs to implement the emergency plan.

The Board was advised that an Oversight Group comprising ETB personnel, staff representatives and assisted by technical teams, met regularly over recent months discuss and devise a system for delivery of accelerated training. This includes 16–18 week blocks of core training for the three larger apprenticeship programmes and allowing for a third intake of apprenticeships per year to increase training by up to 50%.

Further supports detailed included the extension of 35 Instructor contracts, approval of an additional 105 positions and the securing of approximately €6m additional funding for 2022.

The Board welcomed the update and discussed the need for clear communication with apprentices and employers affected by the backlog.

Board Decision

The Board noted the update on Apprenticeship.

12. SOLAS Finance Report For the seven-month period to 30th July 2021

Proposal

The Board was asked to note the SOLAS Finance Report for the seven-month period to 30th July 2021.

Overview and Discussion

The Board paper set out the monthly update on expenditure compared with income for the seven-month period to 30th July 2021.

Total expenditure for the period was €597.356m compared with a budget of €608.815m resulting in an underspend of €10.458m or 1.7%.

Other Updates included:

- Apprenticeship Incentivisation Grants underspent by €8.1m against a year-to-date budget of €12.0m and difficult at this stage to gauge employer take up of the grant as the expansion of apprenticeship continues.
- Four phases of Non-Capital Grants to ETBs amounting to €545.369m have been paid to date. 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 €1.1m on an overall basis partly due to staff not being back in the office yet. Operational Costs were under budget by €1.1m.

Board Decision

The Board noted the Finance Report for the seven-month period to 30th July 2021.

13. Financial Authority Levels

Clarification regarding Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) Approval Levels.

Proposal

The Board was asked to note a clarification with regard to the Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) approval level included in the Financial Authority Levels & Procurement Procedures document and the payments to the Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

Overview

In December 2019, the Board approved Financial Authority levels for Electronic Fund Transfers (EFT) to accommodate the bi-monthly ETB tranche disbursements, below the €15 million threshold, which were detailed in the Board paper.

The Board was advised that following the transfer of funding of the PLC programme from the Department to SOLAS, the value of bi-monthly Electronic Fund Transfers to ETBs increased, with some ETBs receiving in excess of €15m. As a result, the bands have increased, and the Board was notified of the following changes.

Approval of Electronic Fund Transfers (EFT) including Grant payments to ETBs	
Payment Value	Approval Level
EFTs to ETBs: Over €25m All Others: Over €15m	Chief Executive Officer or Executive Director <u>jointly</u> with the Chairperson
EFTs to ETBs: €15m- €25m All Others: €7.5m- €15m	Chief Executive Officer or Executive Director <u>jointly</u> with a Panel Member
€800,000 - €7.5m	Director jointly with a Panel Member

Board Decision

The Board noted the clarification with regard to the Electronic Funds Transfer approval levels included in the Financial Authority Levels & Procurement Procedures document and the payments to Education and Training Boards.

14. [Resumed Discussion]

2020 Staff Engagement Survey Results and Action Plans

Proposal

The Board was asked to note an update on the outcomes from the 2020 Staff Engagement Survey, together with an overview of proposed actions for the remainder of 2021.

Overview and Discussion

The Board was advised that SOLAS Values, comprising the acronym “TRIBE” (Transparent; Respectful; Innovative; Brave and Effective) are defined and include a series of associated standards of behaviour to identify expectations of each staff member.

An update was provided to the Board on the results of the annual SOLAS staff engagement survey which identified areas of strength and areas for development. Participation levels by staff in the 2020 survey showed an increase from 68% in 2019 to 71% in 2020.

The survey assessed behaviours at a whole of organisation and divisional levels and showed an improvement for each of the five values. A number of key opportunities identified for development include:

- Relationship building and communication across teams.
- Identifying root causes of problems and developing solutions to remedy them.
- Reflection and innovation.

The Board was advised that the results provide a benchmark and data to develop the culture and improved global staff experience and engagement. Each business unit will work on their Action Plan to improve their scores during the year.

Board Decision

The Board noted the update on the 2020 Staff Engagement Survey Results and Action Plans for the remainder of 2021.

15. Board Committees and Advisory Committee

(1) Committee & Advisory Committee - Update from Chairpersons

Audit and Risk Committee

The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Committee referred to the Committee’s 13th April 2021 meeting and provided an update on areas discussed including approval of the Governance Statement and Financial Statements for 2021 which had also been signed off by the C&AG.

The Chairperson on their own behalf and on behalf of the ARC, thanked an outgoing Board and ARC member, for his contribution to the work of the Committee during his term of office.

On the matter of vacancies on the Committee, the Board was advised that SOLAS, through the Department, is anticipating the advertising of vacancies on the SOLAS Board to be advertised on www.stateboards.ie in the coming weeks.

Strategic Planning Committee

The Chairperson, referred to the minutes of the Committee's 29th June 2021 meeting and reported on discussions at the last Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) meeting held on 29th June 2021.

At that meeting, the Committee discussed the new 10 Year Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy, the implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy and the SOLAS Corporate Plan 2021-2023.

Workforce and Organisational Development Committee

The Chairperson advised that the Workforce and Organisational Development Committee, at its meeting on 16th June 2021, discussed a range of issues including staff development, coaching, and succession planning.

National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee

The Chairperson advised that the Advisory Committee at its last meeting discussed a range of issues including the off-the-job training backlog in craft apprenticeship and a need to consider a cap on the number of apprentices in certain trades.

(2) Committee & Advisory Committee - Minutes

(i) Audit and Risk Committee

Minutes – Tuesday, 13th April 2021

The Board noted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on Tuesday, 13th April 2021.

(ii) Workforce & Organisation Development Committee

Minutes – Wednesday, 16th June 2021

The Board was advised that minutes of the Workforce and Organisation Development Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 16th June 2021 will be available for the next Board meeting on 2nd November 2021.

(iii) National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee

Minutes – Tuesday, 8th June 2021

The Board noted the minutes of the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee meeting held on Tuesday, 8th June 2021.

16. Any Other Business

Conclusion of Term of Office – Board Member.

The Chairperson on his own behalf and on behalf of the Board thanked an outgoing Board member and member of the Audit and Risk Committee for their contribution to the work of the Board and the Committee during their two terms of office, which will conclude on 26th October 2021, and wished them well for the future.

17. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 2nd November 2021.

Part 2 Private Session

APPENDIX 1



Time: Part 1 – 9.00am – 12.30pm (incl. Break)
Part 2 – 12.30pm – 2.30pm (including private session)

Venue: via MS Teams

Board of SOLAS Meeting

A G E N D A

Part 1

Note: Declaration of Conflict of Interest

- * 1. Minutes
 - (i) Draft Minutes – No. 068 – Tuesday, 13th July, 2021
 - (ii) Draft Meeting Note (for publication) No. 068 Tuesday, 13th July, 2021

- 2. Matters Arising
 - Decision Item(s) – Approval(s) by Written Procedure
 - (1) (July, 2021)
Approval of capital investment for EHSW in two ETBs
 - (i) Louth-Meath ETB + (ii) City of Dublin ETB

 - (2) (August, 2021)
Approval of capital investment for EHSW in four ETBs:
 - (i) Kerry ETB, (ii) Dublin-Dun Laoighre ETB [x 2], (iii) Galway-Roscommon ETB and (iv) Mayo-Sligo-Leitrim ETB

- * 3. Report from Chief Executive Officer

DECISION ITEMS

- * 4. SOLAS Budget 2021
 - (i) Forecast Outturn 2021
 - (ii) SOLAS Capital Funding Applications and Capital Funding Threshold

- * 5. Further Education and Training (FET) Services Plan
Mid-Year Provision and Funding Review
DECISION ITEMS – Cont'd
- * 6. Additional expenditure under Media Buying Contract and Communications Activity Update
- * 7. Risk Management Policy
- * 8. Additional expenditure - Framework for Internal Audit, Corporate Governance and Risk
- * 9. Approval of Four Sole Supplier Purchases to support eCollege and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) within Further Education and Training (Further Education and Training (FET))

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- * 10. [Resumed Discussion]
Update on Skills to Advance Supports for Enterprise, Employees and Skills
- 11. Update on Apprenticeship

INFORMATION ITEMS

- * 12. SOLAS Finance Report
For the seven-month period to 30th July 2021
- * 13. Financial Authority Levels
Clarification regarding Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) Approval Levels.
- * 14. [Resumed Discussion]
2020 Staff Engagement Survey Results and Action Plans
- * 15. Board Committees and Advisory Committee
 - (1) Committee & Advisory Committee - Update from Chairpersons
 - (2) Committee & Advisory Committee - Minutes
 - (i) Audit and Risk Committee
Minutes – Tuesday, 13th April 2021
 - (ii) Workforce & Organisation Development Committee
Minutes – Wednesday, 16th June 2021
 - (iii) National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee
Minutes – Tuesday, 8th June 2021
- 16. Any Other Business
- * 17. Date of Next Meeting

Part 2 Private Session

* (Denotes Paper)