

Minutes of the 207th Meeting of the Board of InterTradeIreland, the Trade and Business Development Body

Tuesday 29th September 2020 — via Zoom (09:30am – 11.15am)

Present via Zoom:

Board Members:

Mr Ken Nelson MBE	Chairman
Ms Florence Bayliss	
Mr Micheál Briody	
Mr Timothy Cairns	
Mr Paul Greenfield	
Ms Adrienne McGuinness	
Ms Ann Rudden	

Executive:

Mr Aidan Gough	Designated Officer
Ms Margaret Hearty	Assistant Designated Officer
Mr Martin Agnew	Corporate Services Director
Ms Alayne Kinver	Assistant Director of Strategy and Policy
Mr Alan Morrow	Assistant Director of Operations
Ms Orla McGlennon	Board Secretary

207.01 Apologies

An apology was received from Mr James Spratt.

207.02 Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting via Zoom. He advised that a brief private Board session would be held immediately after the meeting.

207.03 Conflict of Interest

The Chairman declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as CEO of LEDCOM, which is a member organisation of Enterprise Northern Ireland and is involved in the delivery of the Co-Innovate programme. Mr Greenfield declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as a member of the Peace IV Working Group. Mr Briody also declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as CEO of Silver Hill Foods, which is involved with the Co-Innovate programme. Ms Ann Rudden declared a potential conflict of interest arising from her position as founder and MD of Áine Hand Made Chocolates which is a participant on the Co-Innovate programme. No other conflicts were declared.

207.04 25th August 2020 Board Minutes

The minutes of the 25th August 2020 Board meeting were agreed as a true record of the meeting and were unanimously approved by the Board which would be signed and authorised by the Chairman at a later date.

207.05 Matters Arising

Mr Gough advised that Ms Hearty had addressed the matter arising from the last Board meeting.

207.06 Chairman's Business

The Chairman reported that he had written on behalf of the Board to the out-going DBEI Minister and to both the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste and was awaiting responses.

The Chairman informed the Board that he had attended a meeting with Invest N.I. along with Mr Gough and Ms Hearty to discuss the plans for a new regional Invest N.I. hub in Dublin. He advised that he had emphasised the importance of ensuring that there would be no unnecessary overlap or duplication with the work of the Body.

The Chairman reported that the issue of outstanding Board appointments has been raised with Departmental officials and the NSMC and it is anticipated that the matter would be resolved in November at an NSMC Sectoral meeting.

207.07 Designated Officer's Report

Mr Gough advised that the Body continue to deliver its supports and services whilst working remotely, in line with current Public Health Agency guidance. Although Phase 1 of the Return to Work plan remains, adaptations are being made in the office to prepare for a phased return to work when the Covid 19 situation improves.

Mr Gough reported that the Chairman, Margaret Hearty and himself met with INI officials to discuss their plans for an expanded Dublin Hub office. The Board agreed that duplication of our activities should be avoided.

Mr Gough advised that with the end of the Brexit transition period imminent, the Body is preparing for an intensive engagement campaign to assist companies navigate any new trading relationship. This will be a priority in the next few months. Although the N.I. Protocol gives us a degree of certainty that there will be no customs clearance controls on the movement of goods, in the absence of a trade agreement there still remains a lot of uncertainty on many issues such as supply chains, services, data transfer and the mutual recognition of qualifications. Mr Gough advised that research has shown that the business community is not prepared for the significant changes ahead and it is important that we support businesses at this crucial time. A new media campaign is currently under development that will focus on what businesses need to do now and over the coming months.

Mr Gough reported on the various meetings he had attended, including the DFA Brexit Stakeholder Forum and a photo opportunity to launch DfE Brexit services to business with Minister Dodds and Mr Kevin Holland, CEO of Invest NI. He advised that he had met with Mr Mark Hanniffy, Joint Secretary, NSMC and Mr Paul Sherlock, who is responsible for North South issues in DFA and raised concerns regarding Board appointments, the delay in the CEO appointment process, budgets and headcount. An NSMC sectoral meeting is scheduled for November when it is anticipated that some of these items will be addressed.

Mr Gough informed the Board that the Fintech Corridor initiative (which the Body is supporting through the Synergy programme) is being launched at a webinar tomorrow. The Board Secretary has sent details of the launch, should any Board member wish to attend.

The Board noted the Designated Officer's report and the Chairman thanked Mr Gough for his update.

207.08 Board Sub Committee Reports

Innovation Sub Committee Report

Ms McGuinness reported back from the Innovation Sub Committee meeting held via Zoom on 25th August 2020. Apologies for the meeting had been received from Mr Spratt and Ms Hearty. She advised that fourteen new Fusion applications and one deferred application were considered and all fifteen projects were approved. Twelve approvals were from ROI companies and three from N.I., of which thirteen projects are for an eighteen month period and two for a twelve month period.

The Board noted the Innovation Sub Committee report and the Chairman thanked Ms McGuinness for her update.

Trade Sub Committee Report

Mr Greenfield reported back from the online Trade Sub Committee meeting held via Zoom on 25th August 2020. He advised that fifteen new Acumen applications and two previous deferred applications were assessed and all were approved. Twelve projects were from ROI companies and fifteen from NI. A further nine projects would be assessed today by the Trade Sub Committee following the Board meeting.

The Board noted the Trade Sub Committee report and the Chairman thanked Mr Greenfield for his update.

207.09 For Consideration, Discussion and Noting.

Covid 19 Return to Office Plan

Mr Agnew reported that the Body's Phased Return to Office Plan was previously presented to the Board at the June 2020 meeting. The Body continue to work remotely, in line with Public Health Agency guidance. Acrylic screens are being installed between desks in the office to facilitate the move to the next Phase of our Covid-19 Return to Office Plan, which will see us continuing to encourage home working but being able to safely accommodate more staff in the office. The office has remained

open and some staff come into the office on an ad hoc basis. Mr Agnew advised that the IT systems and data controls are working well. Staff are being contacted on a regular basis and the importance of compliance with health and safety guidelines has been emphasised.

The Chairman asked if clients/companies have been impacted by remote working. Ms Hearty reported that we continue to deliver all of our services remotely and the demand for our programmes remains strong. Adaptations have been made to some of our services including an increase in the number of on-line and digital workshops, which has increased our outreach to companies. Feedback from companies on this approach has been very positive. Mr Gough reported that due to the current Covid-19 situation, digitisation of many of our programmes (as outlined in the new Corporate Plan) has been implemented at a faster rate than planned. The Board discussed and endorsed the Executive's approach and the phased return to office plan.

The Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his update.

Continuation of the Elevate Programme

Ms Alison Currie, Trade Programme Manager joined the Board meeting for this agenda item.

Ms Hearty introduced Ms Currie who manages the Body's Trade programmes.

Ms Currie provided a background to the Elevate programme. She reported that the programme, which includes both Elevate and Trade Accelerator Voucher (TAV), was ITI's only Export Sales Development Programme aimed directly at the microenterprise sector, to provide them with the capability to develop a structured approach to exporting on a cross-border basis with the potential to break into other markets off the island in the future. The Elevate voucher offers up to £5,000 (or euro equivalent) of financial assistance to companies to develop a strategic sales and marketing plan, conduct market research, provide advice on sales leads and negotiations and carry out an export readiness assessment. The TAV provides businesses with financial assistance of £1,000 (or €1,200) towards obtaining professional advice in relation to cross border export at early stage and would typically deliver an export readiness assessment, competitor analysis or market research.

Ms Currie reported that over 420 Elevate projects have been supported since the programme began in 2011, delivering 75 approved Elevate and 30 TAV projects annually. The programme is managed in-house by the ITI Trade team and supported by the services of a lead generation company, contracted to deliver across all trade programmes.

An independent review of the previous phase of Elevate found that:

- 97% of participants were First Time Exporters;
- On average, participants increased cross border sales revenue by over £20,000 per annum following Elevate;
- 40% of participants took on an additional employee as a result of involvement in Elevate and
- An extremely high satisfaction rating applied to management and delivery of the Elevate Programme by company participants.

Ms Currie informed the Board that the recent independent economic appraisal had recommended the following:

- Development of digitally accessible information and processes;
- Programme to help mitigate any potential impact of Brexit and Covid-19 and support participant businesses with their export development;
- Synergies which exist between Elevate and Acumen to be utilised – delivering escalator of support to drive export sales and
- Incorporation of supports delivered by E-Merge to be consider for inclusion in Elevate.

Ms Currie presented two very successful case studies –and she detailed the very positive outputs and outcomes that resulted from their participation on the Elevate programme.

Ms Currie outlined the preferred option, identified in the economic appraisal, including projected outputs:

- To support a minimum of 30 TAVs per annum;
- To achieve an average of 75 approved Elevate projects in each year of the programme;
- 75% of businesses assisted will be first time exporters.
- All participant businesses will report improved understanding of business opportunities in their cross border market;
- A minimum of 50% of participant businesses will achieve new export sales in the cross-border market;
- To achieve a minimum average of c£60,708 (equivalent to an average of £20,236 per annum) per Elevate project supported with an increase in net additional sales 3 years after programme completion
- Development & Implementation of digitised market information resource

Ms Currie also highlighted the non-quantitative benefits including increased confidence and potential for new approaches to sales and marketing for those programme participants.

The Board discussed the continuation of the Elevate programme. The Chairman noted the very positive feedback from companies and the case studies, which illustrate the significant benefits resulting from participation in the programme. Mr Greenfield advised that the programme is highly regarded by many businesses. He reported that many companies move directly onto the Acumen programme when they successfully complete their Elevate project. Mr Briody commended the success of the programme to date. He enquired if the budget included the costs for digitisation going forward. Ms Currie advised that costs included all marketing and digital development of the programme. Ms Hearty informed the Board that through Elevate, InterTradeIreland has the potential to accumulate substantial market information across many sectors in both jurisdictions which could be collated and digitised to provide a valuable generic market intelligence resource for many businesses on the island.

The Board unanimously approved the continuation of the Elevate programme for a three-year period.

The Chairman thanked Ms Currie for her excellent presentation.

Draft InterTradeIreland 2021 Business Plan and Budget

Mr Gough outlined the Business Plan process, which includes the necessity for Board approval, followed by Departmental and NSMC approval. The 2021 Business Plan and associated budget is due to be ratified at the NSMC Trade and Business Development Sectoral meeting in November. The plan includes a range of new activities and a change to the way some of our services are delivered, particularly in the area of digitisation. Mr Gough reported that although the economic landscape has changed significantly with the impact of Covid-19, our key areas remain the same. Facilitating and enabling recovery is now a key priority for the Body and job creation is a key performance metric that will drive the delivery of our supports.

Ms Kinver highlighted the key points and additional activities included in the 2021 Business Plan. Our digitalisation strategy has been greatly accelerated due to the impact of Covid-19 and this will be further developed in 2021 with the introduction of an expert team facilitated by the Strategic Investment Board. Cross border trade and innovation will remain the twin pillars of our supports.

The Board discussed the 2021 Business Plan and noted the additional activities. Given the adaptation of some programmes to online delivery, savings from some activities could be re-allocated to other areas which would involve an internal change control process.

The Board approved the 2021 draft Business Plan and associated budget.

The Chairman thanked Mr Gough and Ms Kinver for their work in this area.

All Island Innovation Programme Update

Mr Gough informed the Board that the All Island Innovation Programme had exceeded all targets. He reported that due to Covid-19, adjustments had been made to the programme including online webinars that have reached larger audiences than face-to-face events.

The Board noted the All Island Innovation Programme Update.

Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report

Ms Hearty presented the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report. She advised that staff continue to deliver services whilst working remotely. Demand for programmes and on-line services is high and all budgets and programme targets are on track. Ms Hearty acknowledged and commended the work of staff and Managing Agents in the current environment. Savings are being made from delivering services and events digitally. The 2020 All Island Seedcorn Competition Final and Awards will be delivered on-line this year. We plan to make the event as enjoyable and interactive as possible. Winning companies will be filmed and showcased at the event. Attendees will include finalists, stakeholders, Departmental officials, NSMC and other relevant agencies.

Ms Hearty informed the Board that the Covid crisis fast tracked aspects of our Digitalisation Plans. A meeting was recently held with three digital experts from the Strategic Investment Board to commence a corporate wide programme. This strategic approach will involve a review of our IT infrastructure, business processes and website. Recommendations will also be forthcoming for the new Trade Information Service.

Brexit voucher requests have increased significantly in the first two weeks of September with 105 applications for support. Plans are underway to have a Brexit marketing campaign ready to launch in October/November.

Ms Hearty advised that the competition to appoint a Managing Agent to deliver Phase 8 of the Go-To-Tender programme was not successful. A short term tender exercise for the delivery of workshops will be carried out.

The Board noted the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report and the Chairman asked that the Board's thanks be passed on to all staff.

Co-Innovate Programme Update

Mr Ryan, Co-Innovate Programme Director joined the Board meeting for this agenda item. He gave a brief update on the Co-Innovate Programme. Business projects with Academia (Strand 4) continues to be the most challenging strand of the programme, complicated by the current Covid-19 crisis. Mr Ryan reported that significant progress has been made in recent months particularly from ROI companies. Despite the good progress in Ireland, the Scottish partners are having lower success in this Strand.

Mr Ryan gave an update on Peace Plus and the team's involvement in the process.

The Chairman thanked Mr Ryan for his update and the Board noted the Co-Innovate Programme Report.

Governance and Financial Matters

Mr Agnew presented the Governance and Financial Matters report. He advised that as reported previously, the Body is continuing to follow government, public health and N.I Executive advice, with staff continuing to work remotely.

Mr Agnew advised that the fieldwork for the 2019 External audit has completed. The accounts are in the final stage of being certified by the C&AGs.

The internal auditors have now completed all fieldwork from the 2019/2020 Internal Audit Plan. Mr Agnew advised that the audit report on procurement will be considered at the Audit and Risk Assurance meeting being held after the Board meeting. The internal audit contract will complete at the end of September and the new contract will commence on 1st October 2020.

Mr Agnew advised that the issue of outstanding Board members appointments has been raised with Sponsoring Departments at an Oversight and Liaison meeting and it is hoped that appointments will be made by NSMC at the Sectoral meeting in November.

Mr Agnew advised that one of the banks used to make currency transfers have issued new terms of reference which require a signature and the passing of a Board resolution.

Mr Agnew provided an overview of the Body's financial out-turn to 31st August 2020 and funding arrangements. He informed the Board that expenditure commitments for all programmes continue to

be monitored very closely by Programme Managers and the Executive to ensure that any required re-profiling of budgets can be promptly actioned.

. Mr Agnew informed the Board that the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 Business Plans have yet to be approved. It is hoped that these will be approved at the next NSMC Sectoral meeting in November.

The Board noted the Governance and Financial Matters report. The Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his report.

Tenders and Variations to Letters of Offer/Appointment

Mr Agnew informed the Board that there were no permissions sought to go to tender or variations to letters of appointment at this time.

Communications Update

Mr Agnew provided a brief update on recent Communications activity including media relations, social media and website metrics. He advised that the Communications team completed work on phase two of the Covid-19 campaign.

The Board noted the Communications Report and the Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his update.

Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report

Ms Kinver presented the Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report and noted minor variances which are attributable to the impact of Covid 19. She highlighted the underspend on the Meet the Buyer programme which is due to the cancellation of events as a result of Covid-19.

The Chairman thanked Ms Kinver for her update and the Board noted the report.

207.10 AOB

The Chairman advised that the next Board meeting would be held via zoom given the current circumstances. He thanked the SLT and staff for their work in the current environment. The Chairman asked that the Board's best wishes be passed to Mr Aidan Monaghan, Performance Manager who is retiring after 19 years and hoping he will enjoy much happiness, success and good health. He also asked that the Board's best wishes be passed to Ms Karen McCallion, Innovation Strategist who is leaving the Body to take up a new employment.

.....Authorised by
Mr Ken Nelson
Chairman, InterTradeIreland

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