

Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust



“To advance and encourage business understanding of the Assembly and the Assembly Members’ understanding of business.”

Issue 3: Summer 2009



L-R: Sean Neeson MLA,
Minister for Enterprise Arlene Foster,
Rt Hon Lord Peter Mandelson,
The Speaker of the NI Assembly
William Hay MLA

Mandelson Back to Belfast to Talk to Local Businesses

The Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, as President of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust, hosted the annual Speaker’s Dinner in Parliament Buildings, showing his continued support for the work of the Trust. A wide cross-section of the business community and MLAs attended the event, giving an excellent opportunity for engagement between Parliament and businesses.

Sean Neeson MLA highlighted the recent activities of the Trust and thanked the Speaker before turning the lectern over to the Rt Hon Lord Peter Mandelson, former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and current Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Lord Mandelson took a moment in his speech to reminisce about his happy times as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland before turning to the more serious topic of the difficulties facing businesses in the current tough economic climate. He stressed the important role that the Assembly and Business Trust has in educating Parliamentarians about the problems facing businesses in these turbulent times.

Arlene Foster MLA, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, also took time to speak at the event, thanking Lord Mandelson for visiting, and speaking of her own experiences of dealing with businesses.

Although some very serious issues were addressed, the Speaker’s dinner proved to be a very enjoyable evening providing business people and parliamentarians with an excellent opportunity to network and get a feel for the work of the NIABT.

NIABT—Fellowship Programmes

Building Better Relations Between Businesses and MLAs

As part of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust’s Fellowship Programme, Declan O’Loan MLA spent a day at Mivan Ltd., specialists in bespoke interiors, property development and contracting.

The aim of the Fellowship Programmes is to give MLAs the opportunity to see how a business is run, from the factory floor to senior management.

Mivan is an Antrim based company that is renowned worldwide for its quality craftsmanship. Declan gained an insight into business development within the company, project and site operations, commercial and financial services as well as a tour of the factory itself.

Declan found the experience to be very worthwhile, commenting that ‘It gave [him] an excellent insight into a very successful company at the high end of the construction industry’. Declan has expressed an interest in undertaking further Fellowship schemes.

‘The experience was excellent in every way and I am very appreciative of how much Mivan put into it’



Contents

1. Speaker’s Dinner 2009/ Fellowships
2. New Trustees / Education Programmes
3. NIABT in Europe
4. Current NIABT Membership/ Diary Dates / Chairman’s thoughts



James Devlin,
BT NI

Two New Directors to the Board of Trustees

The Trust is delighted to welcome two members who have recently been co-opted onto the NIABT Board of Trustees – James Devlin from BT NI and John O’Farrell from NI-ICTU

James Devlin is Head of Business Sales for BT Northern Ireland and replaces Tom Carson on the Board of Trustees. His team supports Business customers both large and small, helping them to address business issues and growth opportunities.

John O’Farrell is Communications Officer for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in Northern Ireland and replaces Patricia McKeown on the NIABT Board of Trustees



John O’Farrell,
NI-ICTU

Parliamentary and Business Study Programmes

Becoming and Remaining a Business Success

MLAs visited Norbrook Laboratories for an education programme hosted by Lord Ballyedmond. The day gave Members the opportunity to learn about work in the global pharmaceutical market. The visit ended with a tour of the Research Laboratories, giving a flavour of how the business operates on a practical day-to-day basis and the position of businesses in Northern Ireland in the worldwide Business Industry.

L-R: Lord Ballyedmond, Sean Neeson MLA,
William Irwin MLA, Leslie Cree MLA



‘Dealing with Trauma’ for Assembly Members and Support Staff

James Brown Funeral Services NI sponsored an education event entitled ‘Dealing with Trauma’ to which MLAs, party support and constituency staff were welcomed. Peter McBride from Carecall (a new member of the NIABT) led the seminar which aimed to provide a better understanding of problems that may face constituents and how they could best assist in sensitive or traumatic issues. The seminar was judged to be excellent and future programmes are in development based on feedback from this event.



Peter McBride - Carecall Ltd

The Assembly and Business Trust in Europe

Pilot Study Visit to Brussels

The Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust travelled to Brussels on an educational visit to establish the potential for future European engagement. The Leuven Institute provided a wide-ranging programme taking in both the European Parliament and the Flemish Parliament giving MLAs and business members an insight into Northern Ireland's context in Europe. This also included meetings with Northern Ireland MEPs. General presentations focused amongst other things on the workings of EU institutions and challenges facing small businesses.

A presentation on the Barroso Task Force, which seeks to identify European initiatives and programmes that can be mobilised in support of the region's economy was also provided. Following the success of this presentation, the Trust plans to host a meeting with the Barroso Task Force in Northern Ireland, which would be open to business members and MLAs.

This was a successful pilot visit and an attendee commented on the insight gained into the workings of the European Parliament, highlighting that Northern Ireland is only a small part of Europe and that it is important that good communication with Europe exists to make sure that Northern Ireland businesses can have input into decisions that are made at this level.

It is hoped that the Trust will be able to arrange future visits to Europe, following from and building upon the success of this initial visit to Brussels.



L-R: Glyn Roberts (NIIRTA), Dawn Purvis MLA, Jim Nicholson MEP, Robin Newton MLA

Business Trust goes online

The Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust website is now up and running. You can visit www.niabt.org.uk to keep abreast of both past and forthcoming events, find out about our current members and download an application form if you are interested in joining the Trust. Alternatively, the Trust can be contacted by email (niabt@niassembly.gov.uk) for any questions or suggestions.

Hans Gert Pöttering – A Dialogue with Europe



L-R: Hans Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament
William Hay MLA, Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Sean Neeson MLA, Chairman of the NIABT

In November 2008 the President of the European Parliament visited Northern Ireland to speak to MLAs, meet the First Minister and deputy First Minister, as well as visiting schools and an interface group. Prof Dr. Pöttering was able to find time out in this busy and wide-ranging visit to meet with the NIABT. Prof. Pöttering was keen to meet with the Trust as he is patron of the European Business and Parliament Scheme (EBPS), a neutral scheme aimed at educating all parties in Europe on business matters. There was a chance for business members to discuss the importance of Europe to their own companies and the importance of EU structural funds was also considered. He was impressed by the NIABT's potential as a forum for communication between businesses and parliamentarians and stressed the importance of dialogue.

Business Members

Andras House Limited
 As it is Consulting
 Belfast International Airport
 Bombardier Aerospace
 BT NI
 Davidson and Cockcroft
 Enterprise Equity Fund
 Federation of Small Businesses
 NI - ICTU
 James Brown Funeral Services NI
 Londonderry Chamber of Commerce
 Mallusk Enterprise Park
 MCE Public Relations
 Mesh Technology
 Mivan Ltd
 NI Independent Retail
 Trade Association
 Norbrook Laboratories
 Rooney Fish
 Royal Mail
 Sandycove Holiday Homes
 Stratagem
 Wrightbus Ltd

New Members

Anglo North Irish Fish Producers'
 Organisation
 Carecall Ltd
 Deloitte
 Lagan Holdings Ltd
 Firmus Energy
 Law Society of Northern Ireland
 Paul McAlister Architects
 Next Level Impact
 NI Chamber of Commerce
 NI Manufacturing
 O'Kane Poultry

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Upcoming Events

Event and Venue	When?	Aimed at...
Education Visit to Rooney Fish in Kilkeel	18th September 2009	Parliamentarians
Lunch for new members of the Trust in Parliament Buildings	22nd September 2009	NIABT Members
IABP conference in Parliament Buildings	25th September 2009	NIABT Members
Seminar on 'The Digital Age' to be presented by BT NI	30th September 2009	Businesses and Parliamentarians
Presentation on Barosso Taskforce (tbc)	tbc	Members of the NIABT
Education Programmes	tbc (ongoing)	Businesses and Parliamentarians

Chairman's Thoughts



The Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust continues to carry out excellent work in promoting an active and productive relationship between businesses and MLAs – a relationship that must be encouraged, particularly in the current economic climate. This point was expressed at meetings of the Trust and was highlighted by Lord Mandelson at the Speaker's Dinner.

The Business Trust recognises the importance of engagement with Europe with regards to business affairs. Meetings with Northern Ireland MEPs, culminating in a pilot study to Brussels has started this proactive relationship, and I hope that there will be future opportunities for the Trust to expand and grow upon these initial seeds of engagement.

Education Programmes and Fellowship Schemes are particularly important to assist business and parliament in engagement at a grass roots level. I am pleased that the Trust continues to organise these activities that are integral to MLAs' appreciation of the realities of running a business on a day-to-day basis. I also look forward to the development of a series of education programmes that are set to benefit both businesses and parliamentarians.