

## Accountability and Governance for Arm's Length Bodies

Accountability and governance are becoming increasingly important in the public sector, especially for public bodies working at arm's length from Ministers. Newly appointed board members and senior staff need to have an understanding of how arm's length bodies (ALBs) interact with government and have a full appreciation of their personal duties and responsibilities. This programme is designed to develop your knowledge of the rationale for ALBs and their interaction with sponsor government departments and will cover in some detail, their duties and their responsibilities. Attendees will also gain an improved insight into the proper conduct of public business, systems for the planning, controlling and accounting for public expenditure, and the landscape of central government including the different types of arm's length body.

### Aim

To provide participants with a clear understanding of:

1. Governance and accountability arrangements in government departments and arm's length public bodies including the board's relationship with the Accounting Officer
2. The landscape of central government, with particular reference to arm's length bodies (ALBs) and the relationship between ALBs and their sponsor department
3. The proper conduct of public business, including the stewardship of public funds, and concepts of regularity and propriety and key elements of public sector financial management and reporting

4. The duties and responsibilities of board members of public bodies
5. The responsibilities of ALB senior managers with regards to governance – and in particular supporting the Accounting Officer
6. Sources of guidance on governance and accountability matters
7. The scrutiny role of the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee

## Methodology

The training approach to be used, which governs the design and delivery of the training is based on the following principles:

- To actively involve the participants throughout the training
- To enable participants to share their thoughts and enquiries
- The training is designed based on the needs and expectations of the participants that are reflected in the pre-training questionnaire

## Workshop methods and tools

In order to achieve the objectives of the training, the following tools and methods will be utilised:

- **Presentations:** presentations will be used in order to provide the background of each subject and create discussion and questions.
- **Discussions:** throughout the training, participants will be encouraged to contribute to discussions and share their experiences and thoughts with the rest of the group. The discussions will be facilitated and coordinated by the facilitator in order to maintain the focus in the key areas of interest
- **Case studies:** case studies will be used so as to facilitate and trigger discussion, as well as allow external benchmarking so as to achieve competitiveness
- **Group work:** group work will be used in order to facilitate practical understanding of the issues and in order to enhance team working, team building and cooperation amongst participants

## Sample programme

### Agenda

**10.00 Welcome and Introductions**

**10.10 Arm's length body (ALB) status and constitutional framework**

- The rationale for ALBs, and the Coalition government's policy re ALBs.
- The status of NMDs, Executive Agencies, NDPBs and other bodies operating at arm's length from Ministers.
- The relationship with sponsoring department.
- Departmental responsibility for ALB governance oversight.
- Role of the Treasury and Cabinet Office in setting the constitutional and governance framework within which ALBs operate.
- 'Managing Public Money,' Corporate Governance Code for departments and other guidance relating to governance and accountability.

**11.30 Refreshment Break**

**11.45 Quick overview of Government Finance (including terminology)**

**12.00 Role of the Chief Executive as ALB Accounting Officer (AO)**

- Personal responsibilities of the ALB Accounting Officer.
- Relationship with Principal (departmental) Accountable Officer.
- AO's relationship with the ALB Board and Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.
- AO's responsibilities in relation to regularity and propriety.

- AO's responsibilities in relation to risk management and internal control.
- Financial management, Project Management and Procurement.
- Examples and case studies from the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to illustrate the personal responsibilities of the AO.

13.00 Lunch

**13.30 The proper conduct of public business**

- Regularity Propriety and Value for Money.
- Nolan principles: duty of board members and senior managers to set the tone and promote best practice.
- Stewardship of, and distinctive characteristics of, public funds.
- Importance of perceptions and the management of conflicts of interest.
- Sensitive areas of expenditure.
- Learning from the mistakes of others: further video extracts from the PAC.

**14.00 ALB governance and accountability: case studies for discussion**

**14.30 The roles and responsibilities of**

**a) ALB board members** including the role of the chair, and the duties and responsibilities of the board with reference to –

- Sources of guidance for boards.
- Board evaluation.
- Case examples illustrating shortcomings and failings in governance on the part of ALB boards.
- Role of the ALB audit and risk assurance committee.

**b) Senior Managers**

- Supporting the Accounting Officer (AO).

- Providing assurance to the AO and the board.
- Responsible financial and performance management.
- Promoting the highest standards of governance.
- Deputising for the AO.

15.00 Refreshment Break

**15.10 External Scrutiny**

- The respective roles of the National Audit Office and the Westminster and Public Accounts Committee.
- Scrutiny by the media.
- Extracts and pronouncements from recent PAC hearings.

**15.30 Current developments in ALB governance and accountability and 'open forum'**

16.00 Close