

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at AFBI Newforge
on Thursday 19 March 2020 at 10am**

Present – Board Members

Mr Colin Coffey, Chair	Dr Richard Horton	Ms Joan Houston
Mr Ian Buchanan	Mr Richard Solomon	Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mrs Roberta Brownlee	Mrs Sharon Smyth	

Present via conference call - Board Members

Ms Kate Burns	Ms Theresa Cullen
Dr Michelle Costello-Smith	Mrs Fiona Hanna

Present via conference call - AFBI Executive

Dr Stanley McDowell, Chief Executive Officer
Mrs Josephine Kelly, Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division

In Attendance

Mrs Lynsey Cooper, AFBI Secretariat

Mr Alan Wilson, AFBI Board Apprentice

1. Welcome and Introduction

ACTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting noting the circumstances in relation to the current Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, with the effect that a number of Board members and EMT were attending via conference call. He advised members that in the interests of reducing social contact, the meeting would focus on recording any concerns or issues arising from the provided papers and that the available time would be concentrated on a small number of key topics.

2. Apologies

An apology was received from Mr Ian Buchanan, Board member.

3.	Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration	ACTION
	There were no conflicts of interest declared.	
4.	Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Meeting held on 13 February 2020	
	Subject to one minor amendment, the draft minutes from the AFBI Board meeting held on 13 February 2020 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.	Sec
4.1	<u>Action Sheet from AFBI Board Meeting held on 13 February 2020</u>	
	The Board noted the progress against actions as per the action sheet and requested Items 8.4.1 and 12 to be carried forward to the next meeting.	Sec
5.	Chair's Remarks	
	<p>The Chair advised the Board of a number of stakeholder engagements carried out since the last Board meeting and congratulated the organisers of the AFBI Staff Science Conference; the CEO confirmed that going forward, the intention was to hold this event annually and to consider how to include greater numbers and grades of staff.</p> <p>The Chair reported on a very successful joint DAERA/AFBI Board meeting held on 5 March 2020 where emphasis had been placed on the importance of partnership working, AFBI's need to be more aspirational in the science it performs and DAERA's focus on "Green Growth" policies.</p> <p>The Board welcomed the constructive engagement from DAERA's leadership team and agreed that there were three important areas that needed active attention over the coming months; these were identified as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing appropriate leadership structures with enhanced capacity; • aligning AFBI's Science Strategy to that of DAERA's environmental goals; • improving AFBI's systems to support delivery. <p>The Chair will liaise with the Chairs of the Sub-Committees to consider the best way forward to support the Executive in focusing on these key strategic drivers.</p>	
		Chair

6. Executive Report

ACTION

The Board was content to note the report and discussed the following matters:

- The Executive reported that the Incident Management Team dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic are cognisant of AFBI staff who had been abroad recently and that all staff had safely returned to NI from international travel;
- Mrs Kelly reported that she would be meeting with DAERA in relation to the Directed Research Fund and agreed to update the Board on progress in due course;
- Two recent visits had taken place by the new DAERA Minister to AFBI Hillsborough and AFBI Loughgall;
- A twelve week pilot of a project management software was underway;
- Following a discussion with the Chair of CIEL, a settlement proposal was under consideration and if agreed, the business case was to be updated to reflect this; the Board urged this matter to be resolved by year end, but was content that any costs would be accrued if this was not achieved;
- Further work is required in relation to AFBI's Corporate Communications Strategy and the Executive agreed to provide an Action Plan to the Board in due course.

JK

Exec

7. Finance & Business

7.1 AFBI Finance Update Report – Position at 31 January 2020

The Board noted the content of the Finance Update Report and queried the significant amount of non-royalty accrued income outstanding to AFBI. The Executive advised that receipt of monies from a number of public research funders can take a significant length of time with some EU funding streams taking eighteen to twenty-four months but that these were closely monitored. The Board welcomed its increased oversight both directly and via the Finance and Business Strategy Committee and acknowledged that the Executive were putting improved ledger processes in place to ensure transparency and scrutiny.

7.2 Royalties Update

ACTION

Mrs Kelly advised the Board that this paper was to give foresight on the position at year end and a proposal on the accounting treatment to be used. The Chair acknowledged that this would be considered by the Finance & Business Strategy Sub-Committee and reported back to the Board in due course. Mr Solomon, as Chair of the Oversight and Governance Committee, requested that the issue also be included for review at its next meeting.

**RS/
Exec**

8. **Governance**

8.1 Risk Management

8.1.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Risks*

The Executive reported on steps taken to manage the response to the current SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (Covid-19 disease) pandemic. The Board was reassured that the Incident Management Team (IMT) was meeting several times a week to assess risks and make decisions on mitigating measures and thanked them for issuing communications keeping staff and the Board informed. The CEO reported that the numbers of staff on AFBI sites was being reduced, teams were being physically split up and meetings reduced or managed virtually. Approximately sixty additional laptops were being distributed to key staff to facilitate increased working from home and all staff had received updated NICS guidance the previous day.

The Executive, working closely with DAERA, has identified critical key areas of service delivery that need to be maintained and contingency measures are being put in place to ensure necessary staffing levels. The CEO reported that the acting Director of AFBI's Veterinary Sciences Division was in contact with the Department of Health regarding any support that AFBI could offer in terms of diagnostic testing. Mrs Kelly advised that AFBI had recently met with representatives from the Trade Union Side to keep them informed. The CEO reassured the Board that regular contact was being maintained with DAERA. The Board welcomed these measures and recommended planning be stepped up to manage significant disruption should the government advise of further restrictions at short notice.

Exec

The Board acknowledged the fast moving pace of the situation and commended the Executive for their handling of the circumstances to date.

8.2 Whistleblowing **ACTION**

8.2.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no new whistle-blowing cases reported. The Board noted the update provided on two previous cases which are now closed and that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee would review the handling of these.

JH

8.3 Fraud

8.3.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no new cases of fraud reported.

9. Health & Safety

9.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no reports of any new or ongoing risks.

9.2 AFBI Health & Safety Update

The Board noted the contents of the Health and Safety update paper.

10. Minutes of Board Sub-Committees

10.1 Draft Minutes from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 28 January 2020

The Board noted the draft minutes from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 28 January 2020 and recommended that the UK's Exit from the EU should be kept on future agendas.

JH/Exec

10.2 Draft Minutes from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Self-Assessment Meeting held on 28 January 2020

The Board noted the draft minutes from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Self-Assessment Meeting held on 28 January 2020 and the Chair agreed to contact AFBI Sponsor Branch regarding the need for AFBI's ARAC Chairman to meet with their counterpart in DAERA.

Chair

- 10.3** Draft Minutes from Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 25 February 2020 **ACTION**
- The Board noted the draft minutes from the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 25 February 2020 and was content that the Committee's Terms of Reference had been amended.
- 10.4** Draft Minutes from Oversight & Governance Committee Meeting held on 10 February 2020
- The Board noted the draft minutes from the Oversight & Governance Committee Meeting held on 10 February 2020 and requested that Mrs Kelly ensure that any actions taken on potential conflicts of interest related to CIEL matters are clearly documented. Following discussion on a grass-breeding royalty matter, the Board agreed that the Oversight and Governance Committee should review the external legal provision related to wider intellectual property matters. **JK**
RS
- 10.5** Report from Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 28 February 2020
- The Chair of the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee reported that the minutes were recently drafted and would be presented at the next meeting. **TC/Sec**
- 10.6** Draft Minutes from Finance & Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 6 March 2020
- The Board noted the draft minutes from the Finance & Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 6 March 2020 and was content that the new overhead rates had been ratified to discuss further with DAERA within the allocated timeframe.
- 11. Development of an AFBI Science Strategy**
- Due to an increase in Executive commitments in response to the current events, a presentation due to be given by Dr Magowan, Director of SASFD, was deferred to a future meeting. **Chair/EM**

12. AFBI Business Plan 2020/21

ACTION

The Board provided suggestions on minor changes to the AFBI Business Plan 2020/21 and Mrs Kelly advised that she would liaise with DAERA to ensure that standard business continuity wording was included if necessary to reflect any anticipated impact on service delivery by the current emergency situation.

JK

13. Any Other Business

13.1 Dates of Board and Sub Committee Meetings 2020-21

The Board agreed that the schedule for meetings should be adhered to where possible, but that all future meetings should be held online to maximise social distancing as advised by the UK Government and Public Health Agency. The Executive advised that it was looking at different options for facilitating virtual meetings, but that there may be a slight delay in the timing of the next meeting while necessary infrastructure was put in place. The Board was content to be guided by the Executive in terms of timings and agenda content.

14. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness

The Board was content that the meeting had been effective and worthwhile.

15. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the AFBI Board is scheduled to take place on 30 April 2020, but this may be subject to change.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____