



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute  
(AFBI) Board  
held at AFBI HQ Newforge  
on Wednesday 21 December 2011 at 10.00am**

**Present – Board Members**

Prof David McDowell, D/Chair  
Mr Trevor Hinds  
Mr Seamus McCaffrey  
Mr Bob McCann  
Mrs Hilary McCartan  
Prof Stewart McNulty  
Mr John Rankin  
Mrs Hilda Stewart  
Mr Michael Walker  
Mr James Noble  
Mr Alan McKeown

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Prof Seamus Kennedy, CEO  
Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO  
Dr David Bryson, DCEO (Acting)  
Dr Walter Crozier, DCEO (Acting)  
Mr Joel Ferguson, Head of Corporate Services Division (Acting)  
Mrs Venkat Deshpande, Head of AFBI Finance  
Mr Paul Brennan, Head of AFBI HR  
  
Mr Stephen Cousins, AFBI Secretariat

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**Action**

In the absence of the Chair, the Deputy Chair - Prof McDowell, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. A particular welcome was afforded to Dr Walter Crozier, Acting Head of Agri-Food and Environmental Science Division.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of the Chair, Mr Sean Hogan and Prof Grace Mulcahy.

**3. Conflict of Interests Declaration**

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

**4. Draft Minutes of the Previous Board Meeting held on 23 November 2011**

On a proposal from Mr Michael Walker; seconded by Mrs Hilda Stewart, the Board approved the draft minutes from the previous Board meeting held on 23 November 2011 subject to the following amendment:

**Sec**

Item 19.1 - Commercial Opportunity – third paragraph, delete the word “it” and replace with “AFBI”.

**5. Matters Arising/Action Points from Previous AFBI Board Meeting held on 23 November 2011**

**5.1 Item 4.1.1 – Review of AFBI’s Commercial Terms and Conditions**

The Executive informed the Board that a policy in support of “*non-solicitation*” and protection of AFBI Intellectual Property was still being developed and when complete will be presented to the Board at a future meeting.

Exec

**5.2 Item 5 – Draft Minutes of the AFBI Open Meeting held on 26 October 2011 at AFBI Hillsborough**

The Board noted the comments made by Mr Hogan during the previous Board meeting regarding the number of stakeholders who had expressed surprise at the depth of work undertaken by AFBI. While the Board accepted Mr Hogan’s suggestion that Board members consider ways in which AFBI could become known to a wider audience, the Board decided that this matter be left to a later date.

**5.3 Item 6.1 – AFBI Board/Senior Management Roadshows**

The Board noted that the latest series of AFBI Roadshows were now complete. Commenting on the events the Board agreed that it had been a very useful and worthwhile exercise for all concerned as it presented an opportunity for the Board and Executive to engage with staff at a local level.

Board members agreed and the Executive noted, that these events should continue.

**5.4 Item 6.2 – Joint DARD/AFBI Board Meeting**

The Executive reported that it had not yet had sight of any formal minutes from this meeting but would circulate them as soon as they become available.

Exec

**5.5 Item 7.3 – Business Development - AFBI Representation in the USA**

The Executive provided the Board with an update on this matter during which it was noted that February 2012 was now the likely date for interviews. The Board thanked the Executive for the update and expressed its desire to progress this matter as quickly as possible.

Exec

**5.6 Item 8.4 – EU Audit of Brucellosis Testing**

Following the report to the Board at the previous meeting, the Executive provided an update which indicated that two issues of concern had been identified. The first relates to staff salary costs and the second to the apportionment of overheads.

**Action**

During further discussion the Executive assured the Board that following conclusion of this matter the Executive would conduct a “*lessons learnt exercise*”. Meantime the Executive will continue to provide the Board with updates as and when further information becomes available.

**Exec**

In response to the report from the Executive, the Board expressed its satisfaction that the action taken by the Executive in respect of the allocation of overheads was in line with DARD’s policy and procedures.

**5.7** Item 9 – Report on the Contingency Laboratory at VSD

The Executive confirmed that it had contacted Dr Mark Browne, DARD Deputy Secretary, expressing AFBI’s concerns in respect of this building. A meeting involving AFBI and DARD has also been held since the date of the previous Board meeting, during which a request for a limited survey to be carried out was accepted.

The Executive thanked the Board for its support in this matter and agreed to keep the Board informed on progress.

**Exec**

**5.8** Item 10.2 – Litigation Cases

Following discussion the Board were content that the Executive proceed with these matters on a *case by case basis* taking into account the legal advice offered by AFBI’s solicitors. The Board noted a media report of NIAO criticism of another public body for its management of a legal case.

**Exec**

The Board also accepted a proposal from the Executive that it would provide updates by way of a quarterly report with effect from January 2012.

**5.9** Item 13 – Strategic Item: AFBI Overheads

The Executive informed the Board that there had been some discussion with DARD regarding this matter and were pleased to report that AFBI had received a positive response to its proposal to undertake a review of its overheads.

The Executive agreed that it would continue to meet with DARD and provide the Board with progress reports through the AFBI Board Finance Committee.

**Exec**

**5.10** Item 15 – Report from AFBI Board Strategy Committee meeting with DARD held on 26 October 2011

Secretary confirmed that a draft minute of the meeting had been forwarded to DARD for consideration and comment and AFBI are currently waiting on a response. However, the Secretary is hopeful that a reply will be received in time for the next AFBI Board Strategy Committee meeting in January 2012.

**Sec**

**5.11** Item 18 – Reports from AFBI Divisions (reference to AFBI Communications Strategy)

The Executive reported that the draft AFBI Communications Strategy had been presented to Trade Union Side (TUS) with no notable changes being requested. The document will now be presented to AFBI Senior Management Team following which it will be presented to the AFBI Board at its meeting in January 12.

**Exec****6. Chair's Business**

In the absence of the Chair, the Deputy Chair informed the Board that he had no significant issues to report.

**7. CEO's Report**

In presenting his report to the Board the CEO highlighted a number of items for the benefit of Board members.

Amongst the items mentioned were

- AFBI's representation at a number of events including a food seminar held in Co Antrim during which the CEO had made an invited presentation.
- Attendance at the RUAS Winter Fair where Applied Plant Science and Biometrics Division launched four new seed varieties – the first time that four different varieties had been launched together.
- A visit to the Moredun Institute in Edinburgh and the potential for future collaboration.

The Board thanked the CEO for a useful and positive report.

**8. Governance Issues****8.1** Risk Management

The Executive informed the Board that there were no new risks to report.

The Executive also informed the Board that the AFBI Risk Management and Business Planning Group had held a meeting on 20 December 2011 and will be following this up with a further meeting early in the New Year, after which the Executive should be in a position to update the AFBI Corporate Risk Register for presenting to the AFBI Audit Committee at its meeting on 31 January 2012.

**Exec****8.2** Whistleblowing and Fraud

There were no reports of any new or ongoing cases of whistleblowing or fraud to report

### 8.3 Health and Safety

The AFBI Board were made aware of an accident that had occurred at AFBI Newforge involving a member of staff. The matter is presently under investigation.

Exec

## 9. **AFBI Personnel**

### 9.1 AFBI Starters and Leavers Report

The Executive presented the Board with the latest *AFBI Starters and Leavers Report*.

In the discussion that followed, the Executive referred to the significant reduction in staff numbers that had occurred in AFBI over the past two years. The Board also acknowledged the Executive's comments that it still had some work to do in terms of AFBI's programme of redeployment and relocation of staff and the continued reduction in the use of agency personnel.

The Executive thanked the Board for its support and advised that the AFBI Senior Management Team would be holding a further workforce planning meeting early in the New Year when all of the issues raised during this discussion will be considered further.

## 10. **Report and draft Minutes of AFBI Board Finance Committee meeting held on 15 November 2011**

The Chair of the Finance Committee, Mrs Hilary McCartan presented the draft minutes from the AFBI Board Finance Committee meeting held on 15 November 2011 and highlighted a number of items for the benefit of Board members.

The Board were also informed that the Finance Committee meeting due to be held in early December 2011 had been deferred until January 2012 when the Finance Committee would consider the final Statement of Accounts for 2010/11.

## 11. **Finance**

### 11.1 Monthly Budget Monitoring Report

The Executive informed the Board that its bid for additional funding had been approved and at the request of the Executive, the Board agreed that the Executive prepare a revised Monthly Budget Monitoring Report and that a more detailed discussion on the latest developments be held at the forthcoming Finance Committee meeting in January 2012.

Exec

The Executive also informed the Board that meetings had been held with DARD with the aim of securing a more streamlined and transparent system of negotiating the Grant-in-Aid budget than that currently in

operation and further meetings are scheduled.

**Action**

Overall, the Executive reported that the projected deficit was now covered and assured the Board that it would monitor overhead expenditure including any costs associated with the introduction of the Carbon Reduction Programme.

The Board welcomed the positive report and were pleased to learn that the focus of attention for the Executive was now firmly fixed on future years.

## **12. Strategic Item – AFBI Risk Strategy**

The AFBI Risk Strategy document was presented to the Board for comments and endorsement. A number of changes were suggested and the Board agreed that it would take time to examine the paper in more detail and forward any additional comments or suggestions to the Secretary.

**Board**

Following initial consideration and a lengthy discussion the Board accepted the Executive's ratings on Risk Appetite classifications without change.

The Executive agreed that it would arrange for any changes to be made to the Strategy document and resubmit this for formal approval at the next meeting of the AFBI Board.

**Exec**

## **13. Proposed Scheme of Delegation and Standing Orders for AFBI Board**

A draft Scheme of Delegation and Standing Orders was presented to the Board for consideration and comment.

Following discussion the Board accepted the Executive's proposal to examine both papers outside the meeting and provide the Secretariat with comments or amendments via correspondence. A final draft will then be prepared and submitted for formal approval and implementation.

**Board**

## **14. Organisational Review of AFBI - Update on Progress**

The Executive informed the Board that the first stage of the Organisational Review was almost complete and a further meeting with the review team is due to be held in early January 2012 to close out on this initial stage.

The Deputy Chair and the CEO agreed that they would convey the importance that Board members have attached to this issue to the Chair and ask him to ensure that adequate time is permitted during forthcoming Board meetings to allow for an in-depth discussion to take place.

**Deputy  
Chair &  
CEO**

**15. Reports from Divisions**

**Action**

The Board received Divisional reports from each of the four AFBI Divisions highlighting some of the key developments that had taken place since the date of the previous meeting.

Commenting on the various Divisional Reports the Board stated how impressed it was with the close co-operation between AFBI and the agri-food industry which was particularly evident in the report from Agri-Food and Environmental Science Division in relation to the European Fisheries Fund.

**16. Dates for AFBI Board Meetings 2012**

The Executive advised the Board that some details relating to the *Calendar of Events for 2012* were still to be finalised and a paper was being prepared for circulation.

**Exec**

As agreed previously, Board members were reminded, that with effect from Tuesday 24 January 2012, meetings of the AFBI Board will now be held on the fourth Tuesday of each month.

**17. Any Other Business**

**17.1 Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Previous Board Meetings**

The Board were content to note the updates made to the Rolling Database since the date of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2011.

**18. Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of the AFBI Board will be held on Tuesday 24 January 2012 in the AFBI Boardroom, AFBI (HQ) Newforge at 10.00am.

**PRESENTATION**

*A presentation on Dairy Research was given by the Head of Agriculture Branch, Dr Alistair Carson and his AFBI colleague Dr Conrad Ferris. Amongst some of the issues mentioned were - a summary of the herd located at AFBI Hillsborough, reference to the research facilities, the main sources of funding, the key research areas and links to industry.*

*The Board were very impressed and encouraged by the work being carried out in this area.*

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Chairperson)

Date:

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