



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute  
(AFBI) Board  
held at  
AFBI (HQ) Newforge  
on Tuesday 25 January 2011 at 10.00 am**

**Present – Board Members**

Mr Sean Hogan, Chairperson  
Prof David McDowell, Deputy  
Chairperson  
Mr Kieran Campbell  
Mr Trevor Hinds  
Dr Michael Hollywood  
Prof Grace Mulcahy  
Mr Seamus McCaffrey  
Mr Alan McKeown  
Prof Stewart McNulty  
Mr James Noble  
Mr John Rankin  
Mrs Hilda Stewart  
Mr Michael Walker

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Dr Seamus Kennedy, CEO  
Dr Arthur Gilmour, DCEO (Acting)  
Mr Paul Brennan, Head of Human Resources  
Mr Venkat Deshpande, Head of Finance  
Mr Stephen Cousins, AFBI Secretariat

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**Action**

The Chair opened the meeting with a word of welcome to all present and remarked on this being the first meeting of 2011.

**2. Apologies**

The Executive offered apologies on behalf of Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO, Dr Bryson, DCEO (Acting) and Mr Joel Ferguson, Head of Corporate Services Division (Acting).

The CEO informed the Board of the passing of Dr Bryson's mother and the Chair asked that the sympathy and condolences of the Board be conveyed to Dr Bryson.

**Exec**

**3. Conflict of Interests Declaration**

There were no "*Conflict of Interests*" declared.

**4. Chairman's Business** **Action**

**4.1** Appointment of New CEO

The Chair acknowledged the appointment of Dr Seamus Kennedy as Chief Executive Officer of AFBI and the Board marked the occasion with a round of applause. The Chair and the Board wished Dr Kennedy every success and stated how much they were looking forward to working with him and the Executive in the challenging days ahead.

In response, Dr Kennedy thanked the Chair and the Board for their comments and stated that he also was looking forward to working with the Board in addressing the challenges and exploiting the opportunities that lie ahead.

Following a suggestion from the Board, the Chair agreed that he would explore PR opportunities with the CEO regarding his appointment.

**Chair**

**4.2** Shared Services

The Chair informed the Board that a meeting had been held with Mr Paul Wickens, Chief Executive, Enterprise Shared Services during which he had made him aware that AFBI intended to withdraw from Account NI for new financial transactions from 1 April 2011. It would be necessary to remain with Account NI until the NIAO had completed its audit of the 2010/11 accounts.

During the meeting discussions also focused on the ongoing problems with HRConnect. In response, HR Connect asked for an opportunity to address the issues and the Executive agreed to work with them in an attempt to find a resolution.

**5. Draft Minutes of the Previous Board Meeting held on 15 December 2010**

On a proposal from Mr Walker, seconded by Mr Rankin, the Board approved the draft minutes of the previous Board meeting held on 15 December 2010 subject to the following amendment:

Item 9.2 – delete the title and replace with “*Proposed Requisition of Alternative to Account NI – Options Paper*”.

**6. Matters Arising/Action Points from Previous Board Meeting held on 15 December 2010**

The Chair proceeded on the basis that any Matters Arising or Action Points from the previous AFBI Board meeting (held on 15 December 2010) had been resolved or would be addressed during the course of the meeting.

## Corporate Governance Issues

### 7.1 Risk Management

There were no reports of any new risks to the institute.

### 7.2 Review of AFBI's Risk Management Processes

The AFBI Internal Audit Review of AFBI Risk Management Processes is still ongoing and the Executive are hopeful of achieving completion by 31 March 2011.

### 7.3 Whistleblowing and Fraud

There were no new cases to report.

### 7.4 Health and Safety

There were no accidents or near misses to report.

### 7.5 Impact on AFBI due to Severe Weather

The Board was informed that the recent period of severe weather had resulted in some burst pipes and consequent water damage to some laboratories and equipment. There had also been a loss of some fish at Bushmills. However, due to the diligence and excellent work carried out by staff across all business areas of the institute, the overall damage had been minimised.

In recognition of the excellent work carried out by AFBI staff before, during and after the holiday period, the Board agreed that the Chair issue a note of appreciation to all staff.

Chair

As a follow-up to the work and repairs that have already taken place the Executive are also conducting a "*lessons learnt*" exercise for future reference.

## 8. Personnel Issues

### 8.1 AFBI HR – Starters and Leavers Report

An AFBI "*Starters and Leavers*" report for 2010/11 was presented by the Executive for the Board to note and discuss.

The Executive also outlined the criteria now existing within AFBI by which future appointments or filling of vacancies would be assessed.

In response to the report, the Board informed the Executive that it would also be keen to see information relating to agency staff and seasonal

Exec

workers and asked the Executive to add these details to future reports.

**Action**

## **8.2**     Senior Civil Service Pay Award

Following confirmation of the 2009/10 Senior Civil Service Pay Award, the Chair of the Remuneration Committee, Prof McDowell informed the Board that the Remuneration Committee will begin a pay award review for the current year 2010/11.

As part of this review the Remuneration Committee will meet with Mr Hogan and consider the development of a more meaningful appraisal system for AFBI Senior Management and Board Members than that currently in operation. However, Prof McDowell acknowledged that this may take time during which the Board will be kept apprised of developments.

## **9. Finance**

### **9.1**     AFBI Budget Monitoring Report

The Board noted the figures contained in the AFBI Budget Monitoring Report for the period ending 31 December 2010.

In analysing the details of the report, the Board's only concern was in relation to a possible under-spend on capital funding. In response, the CEO informed the Board that there had been delays in the procurement service provided by the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) which had resulted in delays in tendering a number of higher priced items.

The Board suggested, and the Executive accepted, that there may be some merit in highlighting this issue at a high level within the Northern Ireland Civil Service and a note from the Board to the DARD Permanent Secretary may also be helpful. The CEO indicated that the DARD Permanent Secretary had already been made aware of delays by CPD, and had offered to assist.

**Chair**

The Board agreed that the format of the new budget monitoring report was easier to read and understand. The Chair of the Audit Committee expressed his contentment and accepted that it was an evolving document.

It was noted that the previous version of the Budget Monitoring Report contained end-of-year projections and the Board asked that these also be included in the new reporting format.

**Exec**

### **9.2**     Cashflow Report 2010/11 – Period Ending 31 December 2010

The Board noted the content of the Cashflow Report and again commented on how useful it was and easy to understand.

**9.3**      Northern Ireland Audit Office Review of 2009/10 AFBI Accounts      **Action**

The pensions issue remains the one outstanding item in the NIAO review. A meeting involving AFBI, DARD, and the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) and DOE is scheduled for Friday (28 January 2011) and the Executive are hopeful that all parties can agree a way forward that will help satisfy the NIAO and allow them to provide an unqualified opinion on the 2010/11 accounts.

*(Mr McKeown entered the meeting).*

**10.      Proposed Alternative Financial Management System to Account NI**

The Chair confirmed that following the December Board meeting, the Options Paper presented by the Executive had been re-issued to the Board and a number of comments had been received. The Executive had responded to these comments and the Board accepted the recommendation of the Executive.

Work has now commenced on upgrading an existing in-house system with a view to using it for all new accounting transactions from 1 April 2011. It would be necessary to continue to use Account NI until the review of the 2010/11 accounts had been completed by the NIAO.

As requested at the previous Board meeting, the Executive presented an implementation plan to the Board for approval.

The Board accepted that migration from Account NI was a major operational issue but were content to proceed on the basis of the assurances given by the Executive and on the condition that the Executive keep the Board informed of progress and highlight any major issues as soon as they became apparent.

**Exec**

On a proposal from Mr Walker, seconded by Prof McNulty, the Board approved the implementation plan with a "go-live" date of 1 April 2011.

There was also further discussion regarding a business case and, while the Board were content to let DARD have sight of a business case, it did not accept the view that this required DARD approval.

**11.      Strategic Item – AFBI People Strategy**

The Executive provided the Board with an update on the AFBI People Strategy highlighting the progress made to date as well as future plans. The Board were reassured by the amount of work taking place in relation to staff development.

**12. Update on Strategic Actions to Meet Savings in the DARD Grant-in-aid Action**

The Executive provided the Board with an update on the ongoing work relating to the 2011/12 AFBI budget and informed the Board that the predicted shortfall could be in the region of £3m.

The Executive informed the Board that a meeting had taken place with the DARD Permanent Secretary and that several options for bridging the shortfall, including the potential for obtaining increased amounts of EU competitive R&D funding, had been discussed.

The Executive reported that a workshop had been held to take forward the development of the 2011/12 AFBI Business Plan and the 2011/12 to 2014/15 AFBI Corporate Plan. The Executive assured the Chair that it would engage fully with the Board in the development of both plans and hoped to have drafts available for the Board in either February or March 2011.

**Exec**

**13. AFBI Representation in the USA**

The Executive presented for the Board's consideration, a draft job outline, prepared by Mr Aidan Cassidy of the Northern Ireland Bureau (NIB) in Washington DC, in respect of a potential post for an AFBI representative in the United States. It was proposed that employment of this representative be based on a model currently used by DEL in that the NIB would provide office accommodation and local line management on behalf of AFBI.

The Board were supportive of AFBI having a representative in the USA as it represented a large potential market for AFBI. It was of the view that the post and lines of reporting should align with the AFBI Marketing and Business Strategy.

The Board also suggested that the term of appointment should be eighteen months with the opportunity for extension if the appointment proved to be a success in terms of business generated.

The Board had indicated its support in principle for such a post in April 2010 following the animal health mission to the USA that had been led by the Acting CEO. It was now content for the Executive to take forward the recruitment of an AFBI representative in Washington DC with a remit to market the broad range of work carried out across AFBI.

**Exec**

**14. AFBI Open Meeting**

The Board agreed to hold the Open Meeting after the Northern Ireland Audit Office Review of the 2009/10 AFBI Accounts has been completed and the 2009/10 AFBI Annual Report published.

**15. Any Other Business**

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

The updates to the Rolling Database of Issues were noted.

**15.2 AFBI Board Strategy Group**

Mr Walker, Chair of the AFBI Board Science Strategy Group confirmed that the Group would be holding a meeting in the afternoon (following the Board meeting) and will provide a report at the next AFBI Board meeting (23 February 2011).

**MW**

**16. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the AFBI Board is due to be held on Wednesday 23 February 2011 at AFBI Hillsborough.

*Mr Hogan left the meeting and handed the Chair to his Deputy, Prof McDowell to conduct the remainder of the business.*

**Presentation**

*A presentation on current issues and changes in legislation that would affect AFBI was given by the Police Service of Northern Ireland Counter-Terrorism Security Adviser.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_