



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
(AFBI) Board
held at**

**AFBI Loughgall, 4 Manor House, Levalleglish, Loughgall
on Wednesday 26 May 2010 at 10.00 am**

Present – Board Members

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

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Dr Seamus Kennedy, CEO (Acting)
Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO
Dr Arthur Gilmour, DCEO (Acting)
Dr David Bryson, DCEO (Acting)
Mr Joel Ferguson, Head of Corporate Services Division (Acting)
Mr Venkat Deshpande, Head of Finance
Mr Paul Brennan, Head of Human Resources
Mr Stephen Cousins, AFBI Secretariat

1. Welcome and Introduction

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The Chair welcomed everyone present to the meeting especially those who were visiting AFBI Loughgall for the first time as AFBI Board members.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank all those who had been involved in making the arrangements and stated that the Board were very much looking forward to the tour of the grass breeding programme that will be taking place following the conclusion of the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Mr Kieran Campbell and Mr Seamus McCaffrey.

3. Conflict of Interests Declaration

There were no “*Conflict of Interests*” declared.

4. Draft Minutes of the Previous Board Meeting held on 28 April 2010 **Action**

It was proposed by Mr Rankin and seconded by Mr Hinds that the draft minutes of the previous Board meeting be approved subject to the following amendment:

Item 8 – AFBI Innovations

Delete para “*Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme*” and replace with the following – **Sec**

“Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme – a meeting involving representatives of DARD, DFP and AFBI took place recently and the Executive reported that DFP have accepted the principle of a Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme within AFBI. However, there are a number of issues that require clarification, but the Executive are hopeful that these issues can be cleared via correspondence and would hope to be in a position to bring matters to an early conclusion.”

5. Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Board Meeting held on 28 April 2010

The Chair proceeded on the basis that any matters arising or action points from the previous Board meeting held on 28 April 2010 had been resolved or would be addressed during the course of the meeting except for the following:

5.1 Draft Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) (Item 5.4 – Mins 28 04 10)

The Executive are still waiting on a response from DARD and, at the request of the Board, agreed that it would issue a reminder. **Exec**

5.2 Health and Safety (Item 7.3 – Mins 28 04 10)

Health and Safety training focusing on the issue of corporate responsibilities will be held after the Board meetings in August and September 2010. These training sessions will involve AFBI Board members as well as members of SMT and Heads of Branch within the organisation.

5.3 AFBI Innovations – Development of an AFBI Contact in the United States of America (Item 8 – Mins 28 04 10)

The Executive provided an update on recent progress and advised the Board that it was waiting further information from the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington regarding a working model and job description for the post.

The Board were content to note the progress and the Executive agreed that, as soon as it receives the relevant papers from the Northern Ireland Bureau, it would circulate them to the Board for information.

**Action
Exec**

The Executive also advised that it had added the Northern Ireland Bureau to its list of organisations for receipt of AFBI press releases and, in turn, the Northern Ireland Bureau has agreed that it will screen these for items appropriate for issue in the USA.

5.3.1 *Attendance at Bio Event in Chicago, USA*

The Executive provided the Board with a report on its presence on the Invest NI exhibit attendance at the Bio event in Chicago, USA. The event presented AFBI with a number of networking opportunities that may lead to new business opportunities.

5.4 Budget Monitoring Report for Financial Year Ending 31 March 2010 (Item 9.1 – Mins 28 04 10)

The Board received an explanation from the Executive for the unexpected rise in the Salaries and Wages figure for March 2010 and noted that this was due to an over-calculation by HR Connect.

While the Board were content that the Executive had ascertained the reason, the Chair requested that the Executive issue a letter on behalf of the Board underlining the dissatisfaction with the service that HR Connect is providing to AFBI.

Exec

5.5 Membership of AFBI Board Sub-Committees – Remuneration Committee (Item 12.2.2 – Mins 28 04 10)

The Chair informed the Board that Mr Trevor Hinds has agreed to serve on the AFBI Remuneration Committee. In welcoming Mr Hinds' appointment, the Chair of the Remuneration Committee, Prof McDowell advised that he would be arranging a committee meeting shortly.

6. Chairman's Business

A group comprising members of the AFBI Board and others has been formed to consider the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer.

The group has already met and will be meeting again shortly to finalise the necessary paperwork associated with the position following which the Board will be brought up to speed.

7. Report from Audit Committee held on 11 May 2010

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Dr Hollywood presented the Board with a note on 16th Audit Committee meeting held on 11 May 2010 along with a draft minute of the proceedings.

In presenting the note, Dr Hollywood highlighted a number of issues including the forthcoming Northern Ireland Audit Office review of the 2009/10 Accounts, risk management and the Annual Statement of Assurance issued by DARD Internal Audit.

Overall, the Board were content with the note and the assurance that it provided.

8. Finance

8.1 AFBI Budget Monitoring Report at 30 April 2010

The Executive presented the monthly budget monitoring report for the period ending 30 April 2010 for the Board to note and consider.

The main focus of discussion was the implementation of the NICS Equal Pay deal and the likely impact this would have on the 2010/11 budget.

During discussion, the Executive advised that DARD had recently agreed to support a bid for funding for implementation of the deal to qualifying AFBI staff.

While the Board were content to note DARD's position, it took the opportunity once again to re-state its position on the matter and confirm that it is committed to honouring the terms of the Equal Pay Deal.

However, the Board and the Executive acknowledged that, while AFBI as a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) currently mirrors the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) terms and conditions in relation to pay and conditions of service, this may change at sometime in the future. The Board and the Executive agreed that any change would only be contemplated as part of an overall review of AFBI's terms and conditions of employment and would be subject to a carefully planned change-management programme involving key stakeholders.

8.2 Update on Strategic Actions (To meet reductions in the DARD Grant-in-aid)

A revised draft AFBI Business Plan/Contingency Plan for 2010/11 had been accepted by the DARD Departmental Board (DB) at its meeting on 10 May 2010.

As reported during previous discussions, concerning the 2010/11 budget, DARD DB have accepted that AFBI has a legal obligation to implement the terms of the NICS Equal Pay deal and will support a bid for the necessary funding. AFBI will now prepare a business case.

The Executive agreed that it would e-mail a copy of the revised draft AFBI Business Plan/Contingency Plan to the Board for comment and approval

Exec

prior to the next meeting. The Executive also agreed that it would re-issue the original draft that had been presented to the Board at the February Board meeting, so that members could compare the original and revised versions.

In the discussion that followed the Executive advised the Board that it was not aware of any further financial pressures at this time but could not rule out the possibility that further in-year savings may be required. The Executive acknowledged that the budget for 2010/11 was based on the fact that there is no decrease in the current DARD work programme. However, the Board suggested that it would be worthwhile making DARD aware at this stage that any future savings will inevitably result in changes to the DARD work programme.

9. Divisional Reports

The Executive provided the Board with an update on the work being carried out within the various Divisions and highlighted a number of key issues for the Board to note.

9.1 Corporate Services Division (including AFBI Innovations)

9.1.1 *Business Development and Marketing Strategy*

Consultants have now been appointed and the project is underway with the aim of having a draft Business Development and Marketing Strategy finalised by end of July 2010. A number of meetings involving members of the Board sub-team are being arranged. While the Executive acknowledge that this is an ambitious project, it is confident of success.

9.1.2 *Branch Business Plans*

Work is continuing on the development and introduction of the new Branch Business Plans which will be based on Branch financial sustainability. The Board were pleased to note that progress is being made as this will be fundamental to AFBI's long term financial sustainability.

9.2 Veterinary Sciences Division (VSD)

DARD's proposed TB Biosecurity project will be carried out by AFBI and have a large "*field*" component of approx 300-350 farms. The anticipated outcome of the study will be identification and quantification of risk factors for TB in cattle in NI which will be used to inform improved biosecurity advice to farmers.

AFBI's Veterinary Sciences Division was the first laboratory in Europe to detect the incursion of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza A virus into European pigs. A keynote paper by VSD staff describing epidemiological, virological and pathological findings in three outbreaks had recently been

published in the Veterinary Record. It was concluded that all three outbreaks had occurred independently, potentially as a result of transmission of the virus from humans to pigs.

A few cases of a recently emerged condition of unknown cause, termed bleeding calf syndrome, (bovine neonatal pancytopenia) have been submitted to AFBI for investigation under AFBI's remit to investigate new and emerging animal diseases.

VSD has recently carried out consultancy work with the government of Bangladesh, advising the authorities there on scientific issues related to chemical residues detection methods and food safety.

9.3 Applied Plant Science and Biometrics Division (APSBD)

APSBD are currently in the final stages of negotiating a new potato breeding contract.

They are also involved in the final phase of a 10-year project aimed at providing underpinning evidence to allow DARD to declare to the EU that all of Northern Ireland is free of potato wart disease. This declaration will undoubtedly assist the industry, particularly with exports.

The Plant Breeding Station at AFBI Crossnacreevy is preparing for its first EU Variety Registration Entrustment quality assurance inspection in June. Recent experience in achieving ISO9001 status, along with other R&D areas in AFBI, means that it is well placed for this inspection.

9.4 Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science Division (AFESD)

In light of the recent volcanic eruption in Iceland, AFESD has set up a fluoride analysis capability in case levels of fluoride in grasses would need to be analysed in the event of significant ash deposition. It appears that insufficient analytical capacity would be available in Great Britain.

A seabed mapping project leader was appointed in 2009 and this will enable AFBI to exploit science developments in that area. Work is also ongoing to underpin the Nitrates Directive Action Programme and to support the derogation in Northern Ireland.

A wide range of animal and nutritional strategies have been investigated by Agriculture Branch to reduce enteric methane emissions from dairy and beef cattle. This has led to models being developed to estimate methane emissions across the world. DARD funded research in the area of High Hydrostatic Pressure is ongoing, aiming to increase the use of this technology in the improvement the microbiological quality of a wide range of foods.

The Board were very appreciative of the Divisional reports and found them to be a useful addition to the agenda. The reports were helpful and

informative and provided the Board with a better understanding of the work that is being carried out by AFBI scientists. **Action**

10. Progress Report on the Implementation of AFBI Strategies

10.1 HR Strategy

An HR Strategy workshop on *Staff Engagement* was held on 29 April 2010 involving all staff at Grade 6 level and above. The workshop was centred around two key issues –

1. HR Strategy
2. Business Planning

This had proved to be a very valuable meeting and the consensus is that SMT and the Branch Heads should meet quarterly to six monthly.

The findings of the survey have now been published and a covering letter was issued by the Acting CEO to all staff.

There are no further developments to report on the pensions issue since the last date of meeting.

Following presentation of the HR Strategy progress report, the Board expressed a desire to receive a report/presentation on communication within the organisation that would outline how decisions taken at Board level and SMT filter down through the organisation, and similarly how information flows upwards.

The Executive stated that the HR Communication and Engagement team was due to issue a report on communication by 30 June and that AFBI's internal auditors would consider it as part of an advisory audit on communications. A report should be available for the August Board meeting. **Exec**

10.2 Science and Business Strategy

The main focus of the Science and Business Strategy is on the development and implementation of the Business Development and Marketing Strategy as mentioned previously under Item 9.1.

10.3 Assets Strategy

Having presented the AFBI Property Assets Strategy to the Board, the main aim of the Assets Strategy Project Team is to have a Strategic Outline Business Case finalised by the end of August 2010.

The Board indicated that it was content for the Executive to publish the Foreword and the Executive Summary from the AFBI Property Assets Strategy and make the paper available to staff. **Exec**

11. Monthly Strategic Item – Science and Business Strategy

The Executive made a presentation to the Board and tabled summary points on the Science and Business Strategy of the organisation and outlined a number of issues that required consideration by the Board and Executive.

The Board commended the Executive on the presentation and, in light of the comments made, agreed that it would be worthwhile investing further time at a future Board meeting for a more in-depth discussion on the points that had been raised.

It was agreed that the matter should be considered again as part of the agenda for the August Board meeting and the Board requested the Executive to provide a fuller discussion paper.

Exec

12. Governance Issues

12.1 AFBI Risk Management

There were no reports of any new or emerging risks to the organisation.

12.2 Whistleblowing and Fraud

The Board were informed that a staff member has raised concerns under the terms of the Research Misconduct Policy.

A review is being carried out and the Board will be kept informed of developments. It was also noted that the Audit Committee had been made aware.

12.3 Health and Safety

There were no reports of any major incidents occurring since the date of the last Board meeting.

The Board were made aware that several staff members had lodged legal claims pending in relation to accidents at work. The Executive indicated that it would oppose these claims. The Board expressed its support for the Executive in challenging such claims.

13. Health and Safety Policy Statement (2010) – Version 2

A revised version of the AFBI Health and Safety Policy Statement (2010) was presented to the Board for consideration and approval.

It was proposed by Mr Walker, and seconded by Prof McDowell that the Board approve the revised version.

14. Any Other Business

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14.1 Rolling Database of Issues raised at AFBI Board Meetings

The Board noted that the Rolling Database of issues raised at AFBI Board meetings had been updated to reflect the position following the previous Board meeting and signified that it was content.

14.2 Balmoral Show

The Board expressed disappointment with the location of the AFBI stand at the back of the government exhibits. The Executive agree and gave the Board an assurance that stand location would be kept under review in planning next year's event.

The Chair advised that he had taken the opportunity during the event to informally invite the President of Ireland, Mrs Mary McAleese to visit the Renewable Energy Centre at AFBI Hillsborough and would be issuing a formal invitation.

15. Date of next meeting

The next AFBI Board meeting will take place on Wednesday 23 June 2010 and will be held at AFBI Newforge.

Following the conclusion of business the AFBI Board were given an insight and tour of the grass breeding programme at AFBI Loughgall.

Since the 1980s the grass breeding programme has delivered a host of new forage grasses which are widely used on local farms.

The Board also noted the special arrangements which are in place to test AFBI-bred grasses throughout the British Isles and further afield and learnt something of the commercial partnership contract that is currently in place with a leading seed specialist company.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____