



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

**AFBI Newforge (Headquarters), Belfast  
on Wednesday 28 April 2010 at 10.00 am**

**Present – Board Members**

Mr Sean Hogan, Chairperson  
Mr Kieran Campbell  
Dr Michael Hollywood  
Mr James Noble  
Prof Stewart McNulty  
Mr Alan McKeown  
Mr Seamus McCaffrey  
Mrs Hilda Stewart  
Mr John Rankin

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Dr Seamus Kennedy, CEO (Acting)  
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**

**Action**

The Chair welcomed everyone present, particularly the new members of the Board.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Prof David McDowell, Prof Grace Mulcahy, Mr Michael Walker and Mr Trevor Hinds.

The Executive also submitted an apology on behalf of Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO.

**3. Conflict of Interests Declaration**

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

**4. Draft Minutes of the Previous Board Meeting held on 24 March 2010**

On a proposal from Mr Campbell, seconded by Dr Hollywood, the Board approved the draft minutes from the previous Board meeting held on 24 March 2010 without amendment.

**5. Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Board Meeting held on 24 March 2010** **Action**

The Chair proceeded on the basis that any matters arising or action points from the previous meeting held on 24 March 2010 had been resolved or would be addressed during the course of the meeting except for the following:

**5.1** HR Connect (Item 5.1 – Mins 24 03 10)

The Executive advised that AFBI now have representation on a number of working groups. However, a number of concerns still exist in relation to the shared services and AFBI have requested a further meeting with representatives of HR Connect.

Following further discussion in relation to the ongoing problems being encountered with both HR Connect and Account NI the Board gave its approval for the Executive's proposal to explore alternative systems.

**5.2** Payments to IAFLU (Item 5.2 – Mins 24 03 10)

The Executive confirmed that the issue of continuing payments being made to IAFLU had been raised during recent meetings with DARD and from the responses received the Executive were satisfied that this was a presentational matter and had no adverse effect on the AFBI Accounts or budget.

**5.3** Displaying of AFBI Corporate Objectives (Item 5.4 – Mins 24 03 10)

The Board acknowledged receipt of the sample designs provided by AFBI Corporate Communications and following discussion decided upon a suitable design.

It was also suggested and agreed that the AFBI Vision Statement should be displayed alongside the Corporate Objectives and the Secretariat was asked to make the necessary arrangements and have both items displayed in the AFBI Boardroom.

**Sec**

**5.4** Draft AFBI Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) (Item 9 – Mins 24 03 10)

The Executive advised that it had taken account of the comments that had been made by Board members following discussion at the previous meeting and had submitted these to AFBI Sponsor Branch (ASB) for consideration and clarity. The Executive is now waiting on a response from DARD which will be circulated to the Board for further consideration.

**Exec**

5.5	<u>AFBI Board Effectiveness Review (Item 14 – Mins 24 03 10)</u>	<b>Action</b>
	The Chair advised that this was still a matter of work in progress but he would hope to be in a position to present the Board with a paper in advance of the next Board meeting (26 May 2010).	<b>Chair</b>
6.	<b>Chairman's Business</b>	
	The Chair advised that all of the issues that he wished to report to the Board would be dealt with during the “ <i>closed session</i> ” at the end of today's meeting.	
7.	<b>Corporate Issues</b>	
7.1	<u>AFBI Risk Management</u>	
7.1.1	<i>Corporate Risk Register dated 28 April 2010</i>	
	The Executive presented an update of the AFBI Corporate Risk Register (CRR) dated 28 April 2010. In commenting on the updated document, the Executive advised that the AFBI Risk Management and Co-ordination Group had met on 25 March 2010 and that the changes highlighted in red represented the comments and decisions made during the meeting.	
	Overall, there had been no changes to any of the risk ratings since the last Board meeting and there were no reports of any new or emerging risks that needed to be recorded on the CRR.	
	In commenting, the Board indicated that it was content to note the changes and that it was very reassured by the work being carried out by the Executive to manage the various risks. The Board indicated that in the coming months, it would expect to see the Executive focusing on a reduction in the various Risk Ratings.	
	The Executive confirmed that the CRR would also be forwarded to the Audit Committee for consideration at its meeting on 11 May 2010 and indicated that it intended to refresh the CRR with a view to making it a more valuable tool in support of management. Internal Audit had been requested to input to this refresh process.	<b>Exec</b>
7.2	<u>Whistleblowing and Fraud</u>	
	The Executive confirmed that it would be presenting a report to the Audit Committee at its meeting on 11 May 2010 providing details of the procedures and actions taken by the Executive during the two most recent whistleblowing cases.	<b>Exec</b>
	The Executive reported that there were no reports of any new or emerging	

cases of whistleblowing or fraud.

**Action**

### **7.3 Health and Safety**

The Executive informed the Board that there were no Health and Safety incidents to report.

The Executive advised the Board that a meeting of the AFBI Health and Safety Advisory Group had taken place recently and there were no matters to report.

The Executive advised that it had been approached by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (Northern Ireland) with an offer to address the AFBI Board on Health and Safety matters. The Board signified that they would be willing to accept such an offer and the Executive agreed that it would make the necessary arrangements.

**Exec**

Further to the offer from the HSE(NI) the Executive also sought comments and approval from the Board in relation to Health and Safety training for AFBI Senior Managers and members of the AFBI Board. The Executive outlined its plan to hold this training over two separate days and to have a mix of both Board members and senior AFBI staff. This would also provide an opportunity for further interaction.

In response, the Chair and the Board acknowledged the benefits in the Executive's proposal and signified that it was content for the Executive to pursue on the basis that both training sessions could be timed to coincide with AFBI Board meetings.

## **8. AFBI Innovations**

The Executive provided the Board with a summary update regarding the activities of AFBI Innovations and highlighted a number of key items for the benefit of Board members.

- *AFBI 3-Year Marketing Strategy* – the competition has now been completed and a contract has been awarded to an external consultancy firm that will assist in taking the process forward.

Mr McKeown expressed a keen interest to become involved in the process and the Executive were content to accept his offer.

- *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.

- *Training and Commercial Awareness Raising* – AFBI Innovations held the first of their lunchtime seminars recently and feedback from AFBI staff has been very positive. AFBI Innovations have a number of ideas and suggestions in the pipeline and hope to build on this initial success. **Action**

In a follow-up to the initial report the Acting CEO provided the Board with a report on a recent business trip to the United States of America involving a number of AFBI staff. Overall, the trip had been a great success with a number of high profile meetings having taken place that may result in additional business and income to AFBI. Follow up contacts with the host organisations in the USA were ongoing.

Further to this visit, the Executive also informed the Board that the possibility of having a permanent AFBI presence in the US had been discussed. Both the Executive and the Board were of the opinion that this would provide AFBI with an excellent opportunity to exploit the US markets as well as increasing global awareness of the AFBI brand. The Board were content for the Executive to pursue the matter and keep it informed of developments. **Exec**

The Board were also informed that AFBI would be represented on an Invest NI mission to a biosciences event in Chicago and would report back at the next Board meeting. **Exec**

## **9. Finance**

### **9.1 Budget Monitoring Report for Financial Year Ending 31 March 2010**

The monthly budget monitoring report for the period ending March 2010 was presented to the Board for noting.

The Executive advised that based on the information to date AFBI is on target for a slight overspend of less than 0.5% of the overall budget. However it was noted that this figure is within the agreed budget parameters.

In commenting on the report the Executive made reference to an unexpected increase in the Salaries and Wages figures for the month of March. The Executive advised the Board that it was attempting to ascertain the reason behind this increase, but indicated that this was yet again another example of the difficulties faced by AFBI in not having timely access to information being provided by Account NI.

The Executive agreed that it would provide the Board with an update at the next Board meeting. **Exec**

### **9.2 Update on Strategic actions to meet reductions in the DARD Grant-in-Aid**

Further to the report presented by the Executive at last month's Board meeting, the Executive advised that a draft Contingency Plan to meet the

likely deficit in the 2010/11 budget had been sent to DARD for consideration and comment. The Executive are hopeful that this will now enable the draft AFBI Business Plan to be presented to the DARD Departmental Management Board in early May, for approval.

**Action**

In the discussion that followed the focus of attention centred on the Equal Pay Deal and despite the likelihood of a deficit, the Board reaffirmed its commitment to have this deal implemented in AFBI on the basis of strong legal advice.

The Chair thanked the Executive on behalf of the Board for the update provided and also for the work that has been carried out in relation to the Equal Pay Deal and asked to be kept fully informed of developments.

**Exec**

## **10. Pensions Issue**

The Executive informed the Board that the individual letters from the staff requesting transfer of their accrued pension benefits to the PCSPS(NI) have been forwarded to NILGOSC and AFBI have contacted the individuals concerned advising them of the current position.

The Executive also advised that the Acting CEO had presented Trade Union side with an update on the current position during the recent Annual General Meeting between TUS and AFBI Management and that TUS acknowledged that this had been a long and difficult process.

Issues surrounding any potential cessation payment remain to be resolved.

## **11. Progress Reports on the Implementation of AFBI Strategies**

### **11.1 HR Strategy**

A summary report of the findings from the Morale and Motivation Survey was circulated to the AFBI Board to note.

Commenting on the summary report, the Executive highlighted that the major area of concern was the apparent disconnection between AFBI staff and the AFBI Senior Management Team. However, since the findings had become known the Executive advised that the Senior Management Team have taken steps to redress this issue including the recent joint SMT/Board roadshows and holding SMT at various AFBI sites coupled with tours of each area.

The next step in the process will involve a meeting between the Executive and the Branch Heads and this meeting will focus on two key areas, the HR Strategy and the Business Management Process.

In response the Board acknowledged receipt of the summary report and while it acknowledged that there are issues they are not insurmountable

and it was pleased to note the steps that are being taken by the Executive to redress these.

**Action**

## **11.2**     Science and Business Strategy

The Board noted that developments under the Science and Business Strategy had already been reported during the course of the meeting and there was nothing further to add at this point.

## **11.3**     Assets Strategy

### **11.3.1**   *Draft AFBI Property Asset Strategy*

The Executive presented a draft AFBI Property Asset Strategy to the Board for noting and comment.

In presenting the paper to the Board the Executive advised that the original document had been completed at the end of December 2009 but since that date there have been a number of developments, the main one being that DARD would like to see the document converted into a Strategic Outline Business Case similar to that which had been prepared for the SAPO4 building.

The Board signified that it was content for the Executive to proceed along the lines proposed by DARD but made a number of suggestions that the Executive agreed to consider when taking the strategy forward.

**Exec**

## **12.**     **Any Other Business**

### **12.1**     Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Board Meetings

The Board noted that the Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Board Meetings had been updated and were content.

### **12.2**     Membership of AFBI Sub-Committees

The Chair reflected on the current membership of the AFBI Board Sub-Committees in light of the recent changes of membership of the Board.

**12.2.1**   *AFBI Audit Committee* – the Chair informed the Board that the DARD Minister, Michelle Gildernew MP MLA and the Commissioner for Public Appointments had given their approval for both Dr Michael Hollywood and Mr Kieran Campbell to remain on the Board for another year and would therefore retain their positions on the AFBI Audit Committee.

**12.2.2**   *AFBI Remuneration Committee* – with Dr Christine Kennedy having completed her term of office on 31 March 2010 a vacancy has been created on the Remuneration Committee. However, with the agreement

of the Board, the Chair proposed that this position be left vacant until Prof McDowell as Chair of the Remuneration Committee, has had time to consider matters

**Action  
Chair  
RC**

**12.3** Balmoral Show 12-14 May 2010

The Chair reminded Board members that the Executive would be providing the same arrangements as in previous years for those wishing to attend the Balmoral Show and encouraged those members attending to spend some time at the AFBI stand and help raise awareness of the organisation.

**12.4** Date of Next Meeting

The next AFBI Board meeting will take place on Wednesday 26 May 2010 and will be held at AFBI Loughgall at 10.00 am.

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

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