



**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board  
held at AFBI Loughgall  
on Friday 3 June 2016 at 10.00am**

**Present – Board Members**

Mr Colm McKenna, Chair	Mrs Fiona Hanna	Prof Patrick Murphy
Prof William McKelvey, Deputy Chair	Dr Richard Horton	Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mr Ian Buchanan	Ms Joan Houston	Dr Cecil McMurray
Mr Colin Coffey	Mr David Lindsay	Mrs Sharon Smyth
Dr Michelle Costello-Smith	Mr Ken Millar	Mr Richard Solomon
Ms Theresa Cullen		

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Prof Elaine Watson, Chief Executive Officer  
Ms Mary Jackson, Interim Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division  
Dr Stanley McDowell, Director of Veterinary Sciences Division  
Dr Sinclair Mayne, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division

Mrs Lynsey Cooper, AFBI Secretariat

**Visitors**

Prof Jim McAdam, Head of Grassland and Plant Science Branch  
Mr David Johnston, Principal Scientific Officer, Grassland and Plant Science Branch

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**ACTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at the AFBI Loughgall site, noting that this was the first AFBI Board meeting attended by Professor Elaine Watson, AFBI CEO and Ms Mary Jackson, Interim Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division (FCAD).

The Chair thanked the Board members for their attendance at the AFBI Open Meeting the previous day at AFBI Hillsborough. The Board congratulated all AFBI staff involved for holding a successful meeting.

**2. Apologies**

An apology was received on behalf of AFBI Board Member Mrs Sarah Havlin.

**3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration**

There were no new conflicts of interest declared, nor any changes to be made to

#### **4. Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Meeting held on 5 May 2016**

The draft minutes from the previous AFBI Board meeting held on 5 May 2016 were approved without amendment.

##### **4.1 Action Sheet from AFBI Board Meeting held on 5 May 2016**

Progress against actions was noted as per the action sheet, subject to the following:

###### Item 6. Chair's remarks

Regarding a query on the proposed review of science requirements for the new Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Chair reported that he had raised this with both the Permanent Secretary and Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO). The Chair was informed that the review is at a very early stage and he advised the Board that David Lindsay, Chair of the AFBI Science Strategy Committee, has written to the CVO separately to advise of AFBI's willingness to contribute if required.

#### **5. Chair's Remarks**

After reiterating his welcome to Prof Watson and Ms Jackson, the Chair informed the Board that he and the CEO had met with the new DAERA Minister prior to the AFBI Open Meeting. He stated the stakeholder event had been a useful experience allowing the CEO to develop relationships with industry representatives at an early opportunity.

#### **6. Executive Report & CEO's Remarks**

##### **6.1 Executive Report**

The Board accepted the Executive Report for May 2016, with the following points being highlighted during discussions -

- Professor John Davis (Agricultural & Food Economics Branch) has recently published/edited two special issues of the journal EuroChoices on the topical items below:
  - (i) "Coexistence of Genetically Modified Organisms". The issue reviews the multitude of attitudes and policies towards GM coexistence across Europe and the measures to ensure safe coexistence of GM and non-GM crops.
  - (ii) "Brexit: The Implications for UK Agri-Food of the UK leaving the EU". This aims to make a major contribution to informed debate at UK level of the implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector. A link to the journal has been circulated to Board members.
- The Board considered that, following on from the talks given at the AFBI Open Meeting yesterday, it was important to enhance the communication of AFBI's message to farmers, highlighting the importance of press articles

written by AFBI staff and the weekly GrassCheck bulletin produced by the Agriculture Branch.

**ACTION**

## 6.2 CEO's Remarks

Prof Watson thanked the Board for her warm welcome, indicating her pleasure at taking up her appointment on 1 June 2016.

The CEO informed the Board that she would be working closely with AFBI's Corporate Communications Team to set up a number of consultation meetings and events with a variety of AFBI staff and key stakeholders. She stated her intention to focus on international business and forging external links and stipulated that the Executive Report will reflect high level business outcomes in the future.

## 7. **Finance**

### 7.1 AFBI Budget Monitor Report – Position at 30 April 2016

In presenting the budget monitor for the period ending 30 April 2016, Ms Johnston reported that the 2016/17 forecast outturn showed an income deficit of £1.4m. The CEO acknowledged the need for additional revenue to be identified in year while also reducing costs to close the gap.

Discussion followed regarding proposed changes to the AFBI charging model and the Chair requested that this be taken forward through the Finance and Business Strategy Committee who are due to meet on 21 June 2016.

Ms Johnston explained that the Finance Branch are focused on both the 2016/17 budgets and the capital programme for 2017-2021 with DAERA. She reported that a significant change from 2017 onwards will be the funding of capitalised research and development (R&D) costs. This will move funding for R&D projects out of the resource budget into the capital budget and will include the royalty income streams. The Board recognised the very significant risk to AFBI's R&D capability associated with potential cessation of royalties in the future and the Chair stated that the Department was fully aware of the patent expiration dates.

### 7.2 Quarterly report on new bids and contracts

Dr Mayne presented the "*Quarterly report on new bids and contracts*" showing the number of new bid applications approved during the period 13 February 2016 to 9 May 2016 and reasons behind those applications which were not successful during 1 April 2015 and 12 February 2016. Following discussions, the Board requested that the Executive focus on developing an improved method of reporting on business development, with emphasis on new opportunities.

**Exec**

### 7.3 Vaccine Royalties Update

Dr McDowell reported that there was no further update on AFBI's position with regards to future royalty income received from pig circovirus and salmonid alphavirus global vaccine sales.

**8. Draft Minutes from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) Meeting held on 10 May 2016** **ACTION**

Ms Houston, ARAC Chair, presented the draft minutes, reporting that the internal audit plan had been approved and would commence during the summer. The Chair agreed to a request from Mrs Hanna to receive a copy of the plan for her information.

**Sec**

**9. Governance Issues**

**9.1 Risk Management**

**9.1.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Risks***

Dr Mayne advised that the Executive was not aware of any new or emerging risks to the organisation.

**9.2 Whistleblowing and Fraud**

**9.2.1 *Reports of New or Ongoing Cases***

Dr Mayne advised that there were no new or emerging cases of Whistleblowing or Fraud to be reported.

**10. Update on relocation of DUS testing of Herbage Varieties**

Dr Mayne presented a paper updating the Board on the proposal for relocating the Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability (DUS) testing of all new grass and clover varieties currently carried out at Crossnacreevy. DAERA has requested a full business case evaluation of all feasible options and the Board noted that this was due for completion later this month.

**11. Draft AFBI Site Security Policy**

In presenting an updated version of the AFBI Site Security Policy, Ms Johnston highlighted the minor changes which included the addition of protocols for visiting workers and students. The Board requested that the policy be returned following minor amendments and assurance that it meets with required standards. Ms Johnston agreed to be a contact point for any comments in the interim.

**Exec/LJ**

**12. Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan**

The Board noted and robustly discussed the “*Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan*” paper which fulfils AFBI’s commitment under its Equality Scheme 2013-2018 to assess compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Board requested that the Executive take the action plan forward in consultation with the Equality Commission.

**Exec**

**13. Mid-Year Review of AFBI's Delivery of the 2015/16 Assigned Work Programme (AWP) ACTION**

The Board noted the "*Mid-year review of AFBI's delivery of the 2015/16 AWP*" paper and it was agreed that the Board would be provided with an Executive Summary of the End of Year review for 2015/16 which is expected from AFBI Sponsor Branch in due course.

In response to a suggestion, the Chair agreed that senior representatives of AFBI Sponsor Branch would be invited to meet AFBI Board members later in the year.

**Chair**

**14. Any Other Business**

**14.1 Resignation of AFBI Head of Human Resources**

The Chair informed the Board that Mrs Catherine Sweeney, AFBI Head of HR, had submitted her resignation. An offer of employment has been accepted by a reserve candidate who is expected to take up their post during the summer.

**15. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness**

The Board was satisfied that it had held an effective meeting.

**16. Date of Next AFBI Board Meeting – 7 July 2016**

The next AFBI Board meeting will be held on Thursday 7 July 2016 at AFBI Newforge.

**17. Presentation – "Overview of AFBI Loughgall"**

Prior to a tour of the facilities, Dr Mayne gave a presentation to the Board on the importance of grassland in Northern Ireland and AFBI's future research strategy to improve grassland production and utilisation which would be facilitated by the establishment of the proposed new Grassland and Plant Science Centre at Loughgall.

Professor McAdam followed with a presentation on the vision for the future of Plant Sciences in AFBI, outlining the key objectives of the recently formed Grassland and Plant Science Branch. During a question and answer session, the Board were advised of the unique resources available at the AFBI Loughgall site to facilitate the achievement of these goals.