



**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at AFBI Newforge
on 13 September 2018**

Present – Board Members

Mr Colm McKenna, Chair	Dr Michelle Costello-Smith	Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mr Colin Coffey, Deputy Chair	Mrs Fiona Hanna	Mrs Sharon Smyth
Ms Kate Burns	Dr Richard Horton	Mr Richard Solomon
Mr Ian Buchanan	Ms Joan Houston	

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Dr Stanley McDowell, Director of Veterinary Sciences Division
Mrs Josephine Kelly, Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division
Dr Alistair Douglas, Acting Director of Veterinary Sciences Division

Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

AFBI Board Apprentice

Ms Nuala Kilmartin

1. Welcome and Introduction

ACTION

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming Dr Alistair Douglas, acting Director of Veterinary Sciences Division, and Ms Nuala Kilmartin, AFBI Board Apprentice to their first Board meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were noted from AFBI Board Members Mrs Roberta Brownlee and Ms Teresa Cullen and Dr Elizabeth Magowan, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division.

3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration

There were no conflicts of interest to be recorded.

4. Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Meeting held on 15 May 2018

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board meeting held on 15 May 2018 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

The Board noted the progress against actions as per the action sheet and that all had been completed or formed part of today's agenda.

In terms of matters arising from the minutes, the Board sought an update on the Day One Plan for Exiting the EU. The Executive confirmed that an assessment paper had been submitted to DAERA and that a watching brief is being maintained by the Executive given the number of unknown factors at this stage. It was agreed that a copy of the assessment paper would be circulated to Board members for their information.

JK/Sec

5. Chair's Remarks

In providing his remark the Chair reported on the following topics:-

- Annual Report and Accounts 2016/17 – The Board had met prior to the summer to consider a number of options and agreed to defer the finalisation of the accounts. An extraordinary meeting of the AFBI Board will be held on 26 September 2018.
- Annual Report and Accounts 2017/18 – The Chair informed the Board that assurances had been given to the Department that there would be no delay from AFBI regarding its commitments in relation to the Annual Report and Accounts 2017/18.
- DAERA Review of AFBI 2018 – The Chair welcomed the findings from the DAERA Review of AFBI and highlighted the importance of continuing to strengthen relationships with the Sponsoring Department. While the presentations given to staff by the DAERA Senior Reporting Officer had also been well received, the Chair was disappointed at the timeframe involved in organising the events as it clashed with his diary and one presentation had detracted from the CEO's first day. In acknowledging that the Board had been well briefed, and provided input to the review findings of the review, the Chair was also disappointed that the Board had not had the opportunity to comment on the report prior to finalisation.
- Joint DAERA/AFBI Board Meeting – The Chair hopes that a Joint Meeting of the DAERA/AFBI Board will be organised in the coming months but recognised that timing may be difficult given current workloads.

The Chair read out a letter received from the previous Board Apprentice, Ms Jennifer Ritchie in which she thanked the Board and Executive for their time and efforts during her apprenticeship, in particular her mentor Mr Colin Coffey. A copy of the letter was tabled at the meeting and her kind words were appreciated by Board members and the Executive.

The Chair informed the Board that Ms Kate Burns would take on the role of '*Board Buddy*' for the new Board Apprentice. At the request of the Chair Ms Kilmartin provided the Board with a summary of her background and current activities and said that she was excited to join the AFBI Board as the Board Apprentice and is looking forward to learning from Board members.

6. Executive Report

In presenting his first Executive Report as CEO, Dr McDowell highlighted a number of points including the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding as part of funding arrangements for the '*Living With Water Programme*', progress of the Animal Health Sciences Building (AHSB) Project at AFBI Stormont and a number of upcoming events. The CEO also took the opportunity to welcome Dr Douglas as acting Head of Veterinary Sciences Division.

The CEO also stated his belief that there are huge opportunities for the future of AFBI and its ability to play a key role in the agri-food industry needs around production, environmental impact and technological advancements. However, he also recognised a number of challenges within AFBI and advocated the need for a balanced approach to growing external income and capacity to effectively deliver on projects.

In the discussions that followed a number of points were noted including the following:

- The DAERA AHSB project had slipped but the project team had now been set up and was now moving forward. Given that completion is expected to take some time and in noting that the Expert Advisor had raised some concern regarding the overall budget, the Board requested that the Project team be invited to a future meeting of the Board.
- In terms of high containment facilities the Board was assured that the Department had been formally made aware of the current capacity and a decision will be required on how this is taken forward.
- Retention and recruitment of staff was noted as a key element of continuing to deliver scientific excellence. The CEO advised that a number of soft initiatives such as Directed Research Funded PhD studentships would be welcomed by staff.
- Following a lot of engagement with external stakeholders through the AFBI Peer Review process and the DAERA Review of AFBI, the Board encouraged the CEO to continue this momentum by considering adding an appropriate event to the corporate calendar for 2019.
- In response to a question on leading edge technologies, the CEO advised that AFBI's key area is in the delivery of translational science and knowledge transfer and where possible it will participate in leading edge technologies when it is in line with AFBI's strategic priorities.
- It was agreed that the subject of Risk Appetite will form part of a strategy workshop in early 2019.

Exec

7. Update on DAERA Review of AFBI

ACTION

The CEO highlighted a number of positive extracts from the final report on the DAERA Review of AFBI which highlighted the quality and relevance of the work undertaken by AFBI on behalf of the Department.

In terms of taking forward the recommendations of the review the following points were noted:

- Implementation Group has been established to action the recommendations from the Review;
- The AFBI CEO will represent AFBI on the DAERA Science Transformation Programme Board;
- The Executive will meet later this week to discuss the actions for AFBI. To aid the effective management of the recommendations the Chair suggested corraling the recommendations into smaller groups;
- The Executive will bring a progress report to the Board.

Exec

8. Progress on AFBI/QUB Discussions – Update

The CEO informed the Board that a workshop to take forward the governance in relation to the AFBI/QUB Alliance will be held on 26 September 2018. The CEO will also be shortly meeting with the Head of the Institute for Global Food Security.

The Board was keen that tangible benefits of the alliance be communicated at the earliest opportunity. It was noted that collaboration had commenced on a number of projects and it is anticipated that this momentum will continue to gather pace.

The Board asked that an update on the alliance be provided at the October 2018 AFBI Board Strategy Workshop.

Exec

9. Finance

9.1 AFBI Budget Monitor Report – Position at 31 July 2018

Mrs Kelly presented the AFBI Budget Monitor Report – Position at 31 July 2018 and summarised the financial analysis for 2018/19.

The Executive has committed to undertaking an exercise to determine the mid-year outturn. A detailed report will be presented to the Finance & Business Strategy Committee on 27 November 2018. Given the timeframe the Chair asked that a note on the financial position be provided to all Board members directly after the Committee meeting.

Exec

The Board also noted the current Capital position which had been updated following the October monitoring round. The Deputy-Chair informed the Board that the Finance & Business Strategy Committee was confident that a robust process is in place but highlighted the importance of full transparency with the Department at the earliest opportunity.

Mrs Kelly advised the Board that a further £620k of recurrent capital had been allocated since the production of this report. Should the capital budget be

underutilised in 2018/19, the Board asked the Executive to be able to clearly communicate the reasons for this including the impact of delays in the process that are outside AFBI's control.

ACTION

9.2 New Bids & Contracts (Quarterly Update)

The Board noted the report on New Bids and contracts for the period 1 April – 30 June 2018.

In response to a query on unsuccessful applications for funding, the Executive advised that lessons are learned from the process with a number of unsuccessful proposals often revised, reshaped and resubmitted to funding providers.

9.3 Finance & Corporate Affairs Division Structure

It was noted that the Board would discuss this item as part of the closed session at the conclusion of today's meeting.

10. Audit & Risk Assurance Committee

10.1 Minutes from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 8 May 2018

The Board noted the minutes from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 8 May 2018

10.2 Report and Draft Minutes from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 26 June 2018

The Board noted the minutes from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 26 June 2018.

10.3 Draft AFBI Annual Report & Statement of Accounts for year ended 31 March 2017

The Draft AFBI Annual Report & Statement of Accounts for year ended 31 March 2017 were noted.

The current version will be considered by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and, if content, approval will be sought at the extraordinary meeting of the AFBI Board. Both meetings are to be held on 26 September 2018.

11. Finance and Business Strategy Committee

11.1 Minutes from Finance and Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 4 May 2018

The Board noted the Minutes from Finance & Business Strategy Committee meeting held on 4 May 2018

11.2 Report and Draft Minutes from Finance and Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 24 August 2018 **ACTION**

In reporting on the Finance & Business Strategy Committee meeting held on 24 August 2018 Mr Coffey informed the Board of the following points:-

- Directed Research Fund (DRF) – The Committee noted that the Executive is on target to provide the annual DRF report to DAERA. The Committee also asked the Executive for a report forecasting future year commitments in relation to the DRF;
- Royalty Income – A slight decrease in royalty income was noted due to patent expiry in dependant territories. The Executive has been asked to provide further analysis in relation to this;
- Maintenance Costs – The Executive is to provide the Committee with detail on the additional maintenance costs associated with continuing to occupy the site at Newforge Lane over the medium term;
- Strategic Cost Model – An exercise to aggregate activity codes and improve linkages with DAERA Assigned Work Programme (AWP) costs is being undertaken.

12. AFBI Oversight & Governance Committee

12.1 Report and Draft Minutes from the AFBI Oversight & Governance Committee Meeting held on 28 June 2018

Mr Coffey summarised the key actions from the AFBI Oversight & Governance Committee Meeting held on 28 June 2018 including the agreement to extend the remit of the Committee to look at other projects within a specified criteria. A paper detailing the criteria and a revised Terms of Reference for the Committee will be presented at the next meeting on 2 October 2018.

The Board also noted that the minutes of the previous meeting around the set-up of the Committee, held on 30 April 2018, had been uploaded to Sharepoint for Board members information. It was agreed that any comments in relation to this meeting should be forwarded to the Deputy Chair and the Secretary.

Board

13. Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee

13.1 Minutes from the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 May 2018

The Board noted the Minutes from the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 May 2018.

13.2 Report from the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 September 2018 **ACTION**

Mrs Smyth reported on key issues discussed at the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 September 2018 which included the following:-

- The Service Level Agreement (SLA) in relation to Occupational Health Service (OHS) is expected to be signed-off in November 2018;
- Mr Conor McGimpsey attended the Committee meeting and provided an update on progression of Health & Safety recommendations;
- 82% of Performance Reviews have now been completed. The Chair asked that all be completed by the end of the next quarter and suggested that the Executive consider benchmarking absenteeism with similar institutes;
- Future headcount and recruitment mechanisms had been discussed including the need for the Executive to ensure that all future expansion is fully justified and recorded.

14. Science Strategy Committee

14.1 Minutes from the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 14 June 2018

The Board noted the Minutes from the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 14 June 2018.

14.2 Report and Draft Minutes from the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 15 August 2018

In reporting on the previous meetings of the Science Strategy Committee, Dr Costello-Smith summarised such topics as Horizon Scanning, Scientific Publications, Evidence & Innovation Projects, AFBI's Science Programmes, AFBI's Genomics Strategy, the DAERA Review of AFBI, and the Strategic paper regarding Exiting the EU.

Dr Costello-Smith also highlighted that in the discussions around matters relating to Health & Safety, the Committee had been assured that there is currently no impact on scientific deliverables. The importance of clearly communicating recent business successes, through a strategic communications plan was impressed upon the Executive.

The Board also touched on the Establishment of what is currently termed an '*Industry Advisory Group*'. The Deputy-Chair, who will sit on the Group, advised that a stakeholder map is being developed with AFBI's Corporate Communications and it is envisaged that engagement will commence in early 2019.

15. Presentation of Certificate to Long Service Staff

Due to commitments of the staff involved, it was noted that the presentation of long service awards would be deferred to a later meeting of the AFBI Board.

16. Governance Issues

ACTION

16.1 Risk Management

16.1.1 Reports of New or Emerging Risks

There were no new or emerging risks to report.

16.1.2 Draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register (June 2018)

The Board discussed the draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register – June 2018 including the need for the Executive to provide clear supporting narrative if matters are outside AFBI's direct control.

The Chair stated that the CEO will be given time to consider how to report on Risk Management and the Board approved the draft Corporate Risk Register.

16.2 Whistleblowing

16.2.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no reports of any new or ongoing cases of whistleblowing.

16.3 Fraud

16.3.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

The Board was made aware of one incident of potential fraud had now been resolved and will be reported to DAERA and the Northern Ireland Audit Office. It was confirmed that this incident did not result in any loss to the Institute and was picked up by AFBI's credit card provider.

17. Annual Review of Progress for the Equality Commission

In noting the Annual Progress Report 2017-18 submitted to the Equality Commission in August 2018, the Executive confirmed that the timescales for implementation of actions had been agreed with the Equality Commission.

18. Health & Safety

18.1 Reports of New or Emerging Issues

There were no reports of any new or emerging issues in relation to Health & Safety.

The Board requested that the report on Health and Safety, presented to the OD&HR Committee on 11 September 2018 be uploaded to Sharepoint for Board members.

JK/Sec

19. AFBI Business Plan 2018/19

ACTION

19.1 Update on Progress Against KPIs 2018/19 (Quarter 1)

In presenting the update on Progress Against KPIs 2018/19 at 30 September 2018, the Executive highlighted that KPI 19 '*Business Case for new Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) submitted for approval and specification agreed by March 2019*' had changed given that the Department have taken this project on board as part of the DAERA Science Transformation Programme (DSTP).

20. AFBI Board Annual Governance

20.1 Summary Report on AFBI Board Members Appraisals 2017/18

The Board noted the completion and outcome of the AFBI Board Members Appraisals 2017/18.

21. Any Other Business

There were no additional items of business.

22. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness

The Board felt that it had been an effective meeting.

23. Date of Next Meetings

Extraordinary Board Meeting – 26 September 2018, AFBI HQ, Newforge Lane
Board Workshop – 24 October 2018, Venue TBC
Board Meeting – 12 December 2018, Venue AFBI HQ, Newforge Lane

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____