



**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board Strategy Workshop
held at Law Boardroom, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast
on Thursday 29 June 2017 at 9.00am**

Present – Board Members

Mr Colm McKenna, Chair	Ms Theresa Cullen	Ms Joan Houston
Prof William McKelvey, Deputy Chair	Mrs Fiona Hanna	Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mr Ian Buchanan	Dr Richard Horton	
Mr Colin Coffey		
Dr Michelle Costello-Smith		

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Dr Sinclair Mayne, Chief Executive Officer
Ms Lesley Johnston, (Acting) Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division
Dr Stanley McDowell, Director of Veterinary Sciences Division
Dr Elizabeth Magowan, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division

Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

Visitors

Mr Noel Lavery, DAERA Permanent Secretary (Item 6)
Prof Chris Elliott, Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor Medicine, Health and Life Sciences, (QUB) (Item 8)
Prof Nigel Scollan, Director of the Institute for Global Food Security (QUB) (Item 8)
Mrs Josephine Kelly

1. Welcome and Introduction

ACTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the AFBI Board Strategy Workshop, in particular Mrs Josephine Kelly who has been appointed as Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division and will take up her new position on Monday 7 August 2017.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of AFBI Board Members, Mrs Sharon Smyth and Mr Richard Solomon.

3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration

There were no conflicts of interest to be recorded.

4. Draft Minutes of AFBI Board Strategy Workshop held 25 April 2017

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board Strategy Workshop held on 25 April 2017 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

ACTION

5. Chairs Remarks

The Chair reported on the following matters:-

- The DAERA Permanent Secretary had attended the AFBI Stakeholder Open Day where, after the event, the Chair had a useful informal conversation with him on a number of AFBI matters;
- The Chair has had his annual appraisal and feedback indicated that AFBI is in a good position and needs to continue to maintain current performance;
- The project sponsor for the VSD main building project will be a DAERA appointment with AFBI feeding into the process at a programme board level. The Board was disappointed to note that the position is unlikely to be filled in the short-term;
- Difficulties remain in relation to two areas around the Implementation of PAC and related NIAO Recommendations. The Board recognised the level of work undertaken to date and the Chair informed attendees that he has requested a plan of action from the Executive that can be presented to the Permanent Secretary at their meeting scheduled for the end of July.

6. Presentation and Discussion with DAERA Permanent Secretary, Mr Noel Lavery

The DAERA Permanent Secretary, Mr Lavery thanked the AFBI Board and Executive for the invitation to attend today's workshop to discuss key issues influencing the strategic direction of the Department. In his introduction Mr Lavery recognised the financial pressures AFBI has had to absorb in recent years and commended the Executive on its leadership and management of the situation.

He felt that AFBI is currently in a good position and given the potential growth in the agri-food industry, there is a lot to be optimistic about going forward. In outlining DAERA's commitments in the programme for government, DAERA's strategic objectives under its 2024 Vision and the proposal for a new Industry Strategy entitled "*Economy 2030*" in which the role of AFBI is highlighted, it is clear that science will be at the forefront of future political discussions.

Mr Lavery then highlighted the UK exit from the EU as the key strategic issue affecting the Department and a number of sectors will face fundamental strategic challenges as a result. In discussing the implications the following was noted:-

- A broad rethink of our policy approach across the UK with critical policy choices needing to be made around future agricultural policy;
- NI Industry speaking as a single voice to highlight the key impacts on the NI agri-food industry;
- AFBI should have a vital role in providing evidence to help formulate new policies.

In terms of DAERA funding, Mr Lavery welcomed the proposed draft budget within the draft AFBI Business Plan 2017/18 as well as the projected increase in AFBI external income and advised that AFBI had been protected from resource cuts for

a second year. In terms of the DAERA Review of AFBI which is part of the wider DAERA Science Transformation Programme, Mr Lavery encouraged the Board and Executive to treat this as beneficial and encouraged positive responses be made on all sides.

ACTION

Following a lengthy question and answer session on key topics, the Board and Executive thanked Mr Lavery for his attendance and his efforts in enhancing the Department's relationship with AFBI. The Board and Executive also welcomed the Departmental objective to develop a data-based and science-driven Department with evidence based policy and decision making. AFBI will look forward to providing pivotal scientific services to assist in the delivery of such strategic objectives.

7. How to maximise opportunities for positive outcomes from DAERA Review of AFBI

The Executive advised the Board that it had provided its response to the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) in relation to DAERA's Review of AFBI. AFBI's views have been reflected in an updated ToR and a copy of the final document is awaited. A detailed list of information requirements has been received from DAERA and the Head of Governance & Performance will be co-ordinating the returns with the help of a temporary resource. The Board and Executive was also pleased to note the level of scientific representation on the review's steering group.

In noting that key industry stakeholders will have one to one meetings with the review panel, the CEO asked that Board members actively engage with stakeholders to highlight matters from the AFBI side. It was agreed that a list of AFBI's current corporate stakeholders will be circulated to Board members for reference.

CEO

In discussing how to maintain Board involvement in the process, it was noted that the matter will be discussed at the forthcoming Joint DAERA/AFBI Board meeting to be held on 2 August 2017. The Executive also agreed to provide a regular high level summary of the information requested by and provided to DAERA.

Exec

Mrs Kelly left the workshop

8. QUB Presentation

The Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences, Prof Chris Elliott commenced discussions by providing an overview of the direction of travel of the university and its commitment to deliver its 'Vision 2020' as part of the legacy of the late President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Patrick Johnston. The key element of 'Vision 2020' is to establish QUB as a world leading university that conducts cutting-edge education and research that is focused on the needs of society.

Prof Elliot outlined the university's recent success in competing for research funding on the world stage and in doing so there had been a recognition that it was not practical to aim to be leading experts in all fields. This approach can be evidenced through the establishment of four Global Research Institutes which focus on the areas of justice, electronics, health sciences and food security.

Prof Elliot also touched on the ongoing work within the QUB estate to support its global vision as well as its desire to be at the forefront in terms of the agri-food research and education. Prof Elliot also provided an example of how working with world leading institutes can have a direct local impact and that it is important to remain relevant to the local industry while competing on the world stage.

ACTION

The Director of the Institute for Global Food Security (IGFS), Prof Nigel Scollan, highlighted global challenges and how the IGFS is addressing major issues in food security and how agri-food is at the heart of such issues. In providing a schematic of the university's faculty structure, he outlined how the schools interact with the IGFS to ensure new technologies are reflected in undergraduate teaching. A number of industry outreach platforms have also been established including the Industrial Advisory Board which Prof Scollan described as an excellent vehicle for connecting with industry partners.

In concluding the presentation, Prof Scollan pointed out the future importance of establishing agricultural, animal and veterinary biosciences teaching and described any potential to work with AFBI as a step change and tremendous opportunity to deliver locally while working to impact internationally.

Prior to the commencement of an in depth question and answer session, the Chair took the opportunity to thank Prof Elliott and Prof Scollan for hosting the AFBI Board and on behalf of the Board and AFBI Executive offered sincerest condolences on the passing of President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Patrick Johnston.

9. Review of Workshop Discussions

Following a break for lunch, the Board recapped on earlier proceedings and held a thorough discussion on a number of strategic matters. The Board also discussed the DAERA correspondence received in relation to its preliminary paper on proposals to work more closely with the local university sector. It was noted that a response to DAERA on this paper will be provided by the CEO in due course.

CEO

10. Progress of AFBI Corporate Plan 2017/18 – 2020/21

As a draft of the AFBI Corporate Plan 2017/18 to 2020/21 will be presented to the September meeting of the AFBI Board, the Executive welcomed discussion or specific suggestions for inclusion. The Board agreed that the corporate plan should showcase AFBI's abilities and expertise and therefore focus on a finite number of scientific programmes in which AFBI can excel and make a real difference to the agri-food sector.

The Chair advised that the Health Trust had recently launched its new corporate plan and that he would circulate a copy to members for information.

Chair

11. Industry Engagement

Formalisation of AFBI's industry engagement including the establishment of an Industry Advisory Group (IAG) was discussed.

The CEO outlined the concept of the IAG which it is proposed would involve key stakeholders meeting with the Executive approximately three times a year to discuss the major issues. This will provide an opportunity to perform horizon scanning as well as enhance AFBI's public relations with industry stakeholders. It was recognised that selection of the most effective stakeholders would be key and the CEO confirmed that a paper on the matter will be brought to the September meeting of the AFBI Board for further discussion.

ACTION

Exec

In drawing the main agenda of the day to a close, the Chair stated that this had been a very positive day with good quality discussion on key matters. He also commended Board members and the Executive on the positive engagement with today's stakeholders which had proved very beneficial.

12. Any Other Business

12.1 Dairy Research Open Day

The CEO informed the Board that a Dairy Research Open Day will be held on Wednesday 6 September 2017 and Board members were encouraged to attend. Subject to biosecurity clearance, the venue will be held at AFBI Hillsborough.

The Chair advised that he had agreed a protocol with the Executive for future events. He will be provided with information on the events and will request the appropriate number of Board volunteers.

12.2 Joint DAERA / AFBI Board Meeting

The Chair advised that he will correspond with the chairpersons of the AFBI Board Sub-Committees prior to the next Joint DAERA / AFBI Board Meeting.

13. Date of Next AFBI Board Meeting

The next AFBI Board meeting will be held on Thursday 21 September 2017 at 10.00am in the Boardroom, AFBI Newforge.

The next AFBI Board workshop will be held on Thursday 19 October 2017. The Venue is to be confirmed.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____