

Minutes of the Board meeting of the Health Research Board held on Friday, 22 September 2023 on Zoom

Present: Prof B Hannigan (Chairperson)
Dr S Barry
Dr L Bishop
Dr T Cunningham
Prof T Fahey
Dr T McWade
Prof C Normand
Dr C Saidlear

Apologies: Prof S Donnelly
Dr J Ling

In attendance: Dr M O'Driscoll, Chief Executive Officer
Ms C Cronin, Board Secretary and Head of Governance
Dr E Vereker, National Office for National Research Ethics Committees attended for item 5
Dr T Maguire, Director of Research Strategy and Funding, attended for items 7, 9 and 10
Ms O Ward, Research and Innovation Infrastructures, attended for items 7(b) and 9.
Dr Anne Cody, Dr A Cahill and Dr A Montessanti, Investigator Led Grants, Careers and Enablers, attended for items 9.
Mr D Murphy, Finance Manager, attended for items 10(b) and 11
Mr M Morgan, Director of Corporate Operations attended for items 11 and 12.

1. Conflict of Interest

Prof Normand had declared a conflict of interest on the matter of the Applied Programme Grants (APRO) 2023. Prof Fahey declared a conflict of interest on the matter of the Post-doctoral Fellowship awards 2023: Clinician Scientist Fellowships (CSF). Prof Normand and Prof Fahey left the meeting while the matters in which they were conflicted were discussed.

Both Dr Bishop and Dr Cunningham declared interests in the area of rare diseases. On the advice of the Chairperson these interests were deemed not to conflict with the work of the Board meeting.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 30 June 2023 were approved.

3. Action points from previous meetings and matters arising

It was noted that the action points from the previous meeting had been addressed.

4. CEO's Report

The CEO reported on

- Budget 2024
- Sale of 73 Lower Baggot Street
- Bequest update
- Visit by HERA Board
- DASSL event
- COARA Working Group
- Alcohol treatment data
- Advancing Alcohol Research Event
- Event on research ethics
- ICT Retention & Deletion Project
- Update on Horizon Europe Health Cluster
- Report of the Public Health Advisory Group
- National Research Classification System
- Update on TILDA
- HRB Media Coverage
- Awards made under delegated authority

5. Work of the National Office for National Research Ethics Committees

Dr Emily Vereker made a presentation to the Board on the work of the National Office for National Research Ethics Committees which included an explanation of the Irish legislative and European regulatory basis for the National Office, its vision, mission and strategic objectives, the Committee structure, review process, staffing and budget.

The Board thanked Dr Vereker for a very informative presentation.

6. Programme of Work for the Board 2023 and listed conflicts of Interest

The Board noted the programme of work for the remainder of 2023 and agreed to advise the Secretary of any changes required to the listed conflicts of interest.

7. New Scheme/ Call Principles

(a) Inclusion Health/Health Inequalities Research funded from the proceeds from the sale of 73 Lower Baggot Street

The Board considered a paper setting out the high-level principles of a proposed call/investment in inclusion health and health inequalities. The importance of funding the conduct of the research and setting out desired impacts from the research rather than emphasising the work of the proposed network was discussed. It was agreed that, **subject to consideration of the points raised by the Board, a more detailed business case should be developed for the Department of Health and permission sought to use the income from the sale of Baggot Street to support the call.**

(b) All Ireland NCI Cancer Consortium (AICC) Research and Innovation (R&I) awards

The Board considered the high-level principles of a new call for AICC R&I Awards. It was agreed that **a more detailed paper would be brought to the Board in December 2023 and that consideration be given to increasing the amount of funding available under the scheme.**

8. Review of terms of reference of the Audit & Risk Committee

The Board reviewed the terms of reference of the HRB's Audit & Risk Committee and **agreed with the recommendation from the Committee that no changes were required.**

9. Approval of Panel Recommendations on Awards

(a) Applied Programme Grants (APRO) 2023

The Board **approved the International Review Panel's recommendation to fund eight Applied Programme Grant awards at an anticipated cost of €19.9 Million over five years.**

(b) Post-doctoral Fellowship awards 2023: Clinician Scientist Fellowships (CSF) and Applying Research into Policy and Practice (ARPP)

The Board **approved the recommendations of two International Review Panels to make a total of 13 awards, seven Clinician Scientist Fellowships and six Applying Research into Policy and Practice Fellowships, at a combined cost of approximately €6.4 million over five years.**

(c) Rare Diseases Research and Innovation Catalyst Award (RDCat) 2023

The Board **approved the International Review Panel's recommendation to fund one RDCat 2023 award at an anticipated cost of €3 million over three years.**

10. Other research funding matters

(a) Collaboration to assess the evidence support system for health decision making in Ireland

The Board **approved a proposal for a collaborative project to conduct a rapid evidence-support system assessment (RESSA) for health decision making in Ireland at a cost of €150,000 - €200,000.**

It was noted that the duration of the project was estimated at a 9 –12 months commencing in October 2023 and that an Oversight Group would be convened, chaired by the HRB (CEO), with representation from the Evidence Commission, the Department of Health (CMO and R&D divisions) and ESI/Cochrane Ireland to finalise a project plan, to oversee implementation and to optimise knowledge translation of the findings.

(b) Increase to HRB PhD Stipend rate

The Board noted the recommendations of the Independent National Review of State Supports for PhD Researchers and **approved an increase to bring the baseline stipend for existing and new HRB-funded PhD candidates to €25,000 from October 2023 in line with report recommendations.**

11. Corporate and financial reporting

(a) HRB Service Plan 2023 – status report as at 30 June 2023

The Board noted the report on the status of the HRB's Service Plan for 2023 as at 30 June 2023 and **approved its submission to the Department of Health's Research Services and Policy Unit as the progress report on the Annual Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA) 2023.**

(b) HRB Management Accounts and Forecasted Year-end Outturn at 31 August 2023

The Board noted the HRB managements accounts for the period to 31 August 2023 and the revised forecasted outturn for the year.

(c) Procurement Activity Reports

The Board noted a report on the following procurement activity during the period 01 June 2023 to 31 July 2023

- Purchase Orders raised with a value more than €20,000
- Contracts awarded between €25,000 and €75,000 (ex VAT)
- Contracts approved by the Board more than €75,000 (ex VAT)
- Authorised exceptions to the competitive procurement guidelines

The Board also noted a table listing supplier expenditure exceeding €25,000 during the three months 1 June 2023 to 31 July 2023

(d) Contract valued at in excess of €75,000

The Board **approved the award of a four-year contract to Elsevier Limited, with an option to extend twice by three years up to a maximum of ten years for the provision of an IT Solution (Researchfish)** to enable the collection of longitudinal output, outcome and impact data from HRB's investment at a maximum value over the ten year period of €925,000 excluding VAT.

12. Other governance matters

(a) Board Annual Away Day 2023

Because of the impending vacancies on the Board, it was agreed not to hold the Board's annual away day in 2023.

(b) Dates for HRB Board Meetings in 2024

The Board **approved a schedule of dates for HRB Board and Committee meeting for 2024.**

(c) Decision taken since the last meeting of the Board

In the interval since the last meeting the Board took the following decision electronically:

Hosted integrated HR information system and payroll service

[REDACTED]

Votes received

In favour of this proposal (9):

Dr S Barry
Dr L Bishop
Dr T Cunningham
Prof S Donnelly
Prof B Hannigan
Dr J Ling
Dr T McWade
Prof C Normand
Dr C Saidlear

No votes were received against the proposal.

13. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting of the Board was set for Thursday 9th November 2023

14. Executive session of the Board

No decisions were taken during the executive session of the Board.