



**Minutes of the Board meeting of the Health Research Board
held on Friday, 12 April 2024 at Grattan House 67-72 Lower Mount Street, Dublin.**

Present: Dr Tracy Cunningham (Interim Chairperson)
Dr Sarah Barry
Dr Leonora Bishop
Prof Tom Fahey
Dr Julie Ling
Dr Terry McWade
Dr Cliona Saidlear

Apologies: Prof Seamas Donnelly

In attendance: Dr Mairead O'Driscoll, Chief Executive Officer.
Ms Lorna Purcell, Board Secretary and Head of Governance.
Mr Martin Morgan, Head of Corporate Operations, attended for Items 10(a) & 15 (a) (b) & (c).
Mr Dara Murphy, Head of Finance, attended for items 10(a) & 15 (a) (b) & (c).
Dr Teresa Maguire, Director of Research Strategy and Funding, attended for items 11(a), 12 (a) & 13(a).
Dr Caitriona Creely, International Cooperation, Evaluation and Targeted Programmes, attended for item 11(a).
Dr Catherine Gill, International Cooperation, Evaluation and Targeted Programmes, attended for item 11(a).
Ms Oonagh Ward, Research Strategy and Funding Directorate, attended for items 12(a) & 13(a).
Mr Gavin Lawler, Research Strategy and Funding Directorate, attended for item 12(a).
Ms Anne Doyle & Dr Jean Long, Health Information & Evidence Directorate, attended for Item 14(a).
Dr Fiona Manning, Research Strategy and Funding Directorate, attended for Item 13 (a).

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1. Apologies

Prof Seamas Donnelly sent apologies.

2. Appointment of a Chairperson for the meeting

It was agreed that Dr Tracy Cunningham would chair the meeting.

3. Role of the Chairperson between meetings

The Board was requested to agree whether the Chairperson appointed for this meeting should be:

- (a) authorised to arrange and prepare the agenda for the next Board meeting or,
- (b) conferred with the full role of the Chairperson set out in Section 4.2 of the Governance Handbook until the next meeting of the Board.

The Board decided that the interim Chairperson should carry out all of the responsibilities of the role of the Chairperson as set out in Section 4.2 of the Governance Handbook, until the next meeting of the Board.

4. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

5. Minutes of the previous meetings

The minutes of the meeting held on February 16, 2024 were approved, subject to one minor edit.

6. Matters Arising and action points from previous meetings

Action points from the previous meeting were either addressed or appear as an agenda item.

7. CEO's Report

The CEO reported to the Board on the following matters:

- Budget 2024
- Update on Bequest
- Update on the National Irish COVID-19 Biobank
- Establishment of the European Drugs Agency, and MOU between HRB and DoH
- HRB Data on the homeless population
- Building links with the HSE on its plans for the development of Electronic Health Records
- Mapping of Addiction Services

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- HRCDC Annual Report and National Office blog
- Science Communication conference
- Update on National Mental Health Strategy Development
- Submissions to Evidence for Policy Programme
- HRB a lead partner in the Healthdata@IE project
- Horizon Europe NCP Training
- Use of Generative AI in our peer review processes
- HRB Media Coverage
- Awards made under delegated authority

The CEO also provided a verbal update on the sanction for 20 new posts in the HRB, received from the Department of Health, which will bring the total headcount to 126. A more detailed report on this development will be brought to the May meeting.

8. Strategy development

The CEO presented a paper to the Board on opportunities, challenges, budget considerations and approaches in the context of strategy development, the aim being to stimulate discussion on the approach the Board may take to the development of the next HRB strategy. It summarised the main strategic challenges and opportunities facing the HRB over the next five years, as identified by the Executive and Management Teams, considerations relating to the budget, and an overview of past approaches taken by the HRB to strategy development.

The summary of strategic challenges included the following areas: reorganisation of national funding agencies, strategic autonomy, regionalisation in the health services, the capacity of the health service to manage and facilitate research, a sustainable approach to research infrastructure, health information and healthcare data landscape, cross Government focus on the use of evidence to support public policy, increased regulation of health research, gaps in legislation relevant to health research, and the attractiveness of research careers.

The paper generated a useful discussion among members regarding potential areas that the HRB could address in the next strategy, and requested that an item on strategy is included at every Board meeting for the remainder of the year.

9. Programme of Work for the Board

The Board reviewed and agreed the Programme of Work for the year.

10. (a) Final report on Service Plan 2023

The Board approved the HRB budget for 2024 and reviewed the HRB's draft Service Plan for 2024, and also approved the Service Plan for submission to the Department of Health as the

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programme of work to be conducted during year four of the HRB Strategy 2021-2025, *Health research – making an impact*.

11. Approval to Announce New Calls

(a) Collaborative Research Networks 2024: Dementia & Palliative Care

The Board approved an invitation to submit applications for further funding for existing Collaborative Research Networks in dementia and palliative care at a combined cost of €1.75M over 5 years. The Board also approved a pro-rata extension to the existing award to the Palliative Care Research Network until the end of 2024, to provide continuity should they be successful in an application for funding under this call at a cost of €22.5K in 2024.

12. Approval of Panel Recommendations on Awards

(a) Secondary Data Analysis Projects (SDAP) 2023 Cycle II Funding Recommendations

The Board approved the International Panel recommendations to fund eight Secondary Data Analysis Projects (SDAP) at a cost of approximately €1.65 million and also approved a reserve list of two ranked projects, and delegated authority to the Executive Team to action these as they deem appropriate, subject to availability of funds in this and subsequent years.

13. Other Research Funding Matters

(a) Request to cancel a DIFA award

Following a request by the PI to make changes to a DIFA award, and following an expedited review by independent experts, the Board approved the decision that funding for DIFA-2023-011 is discontinued.

14. Other HRB publications

(a) Alcohol availability, affordability, related harm, and policy in Ireland

The Board approved the publication of the report: 'Alcohol availability, affordability, related harm, and policy in Ireland'.

15. Other Governance Matters

(a) Draft Financial Statements 2023

The Board approved the recommendation from the Audit & Risk Committee to approve the Governance Statement and Board Members' Report 2023, the Statement on Internal Control 2023 (Management Assurance Statement) and the draft Financial Statements 2023, subject to any adjustments that arise from the audit by the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General.

The Board also approved the following:

that, on completion of the audit by the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General, these documents would be published as the HRB Annual Report 2023 – Part 2.

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that, on completion of the audit, the documents would be signed on behalf of the HRB by the persons then holding the positions of Chairperson of the Board and Chairperson of the Audit & Risk Committee.

(b) System of Internal Controls (SIC) 2023: Management Assurance Statement

The Board noted the 'System of Internal Controls (SIC) 2023 – Management Assurance Statement' completed by the HRB's Executive Team which documents the outcome of the annual review of internal controls for 2023. The Assurance Statement was reviewed by the HRB's Audit & Risk Committee at its meeting on 23 February 2024.

(c.) HRB Procurement Activity Report

The Board noted the following:

Between the period 01 November 2023 to 31 December 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

Between period 01 January 2023 to 31 December 2023

- Supplier expenditure more than €25,000

16. Other Governance Matters

(a) Governance Handbook

The Board reviewed and approved the updated Governance Handbook.

(b) Report on ARC meeting & draft ARC minutes

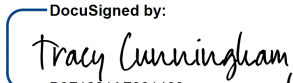
The Board received an update on the ARC meeting from the Chair of the ARC, Dr Terry McWade. Dr McWade also presented the minutes from the previous ARC meeting. The minutes will be brought back to the Board once the ARC have approved them at their June meeting.

(c) Annual Report from ARC to the Board 2023

The Board is requested to note the Annual Report from the Audit & Risk Committee in respect of 2023.

17. Executive Session of the Board

The Board requested a Progress Report on Management Team Training & Development and asked the Executive to consider how staff satisfaction levels might be measured on an ongoing basis.

Signed:  (Chairperson)
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