



**Minutes of the Board meeting of the Health Research Board
held on Friday, 4 April 2025 held at the HRB Offices, Grattan House, Dublin 2.**

Present: Dr Tracy Cunningham (Chairperson)
Dr Sarah Barry
Dr Leonora Bishop
Prof Peter Doran
Prof Tom Fahey
Dr Julie Ling
Prof Mark Lawler
Dr Terry McWade (online via Zoom)
Dr Martina Ní Chúlain (online via Zoom)

Apologies: Dr Cliona Saidlear

In attendance: Dr Mairead O’Driscoll, Chief Executive Officer.
Ms Lorna Purcell, Board Secretary and Head of Governance.
Ms Mellisa Tierney, Governance and Compliance Officer.
Mr Martin Morgan, Director of Corporate Operations, attended for item 6.
Dr Anne Cody, RSF, attended for items 13.1 and 12.1.
Dr Annalisa Montesanti, RSF, attended for item 13.1.
Ms Oonagh Ward and Dr Fiona Manning attended for items 13.2 and 14.1.
Dr Aoife Cahill, RSF, attended for item 12.1.
Dr Caitriona Creely and Dr Catherine Gill, RSF, attended for item 12.2.
Dr Brian Galvin, HRB Evidence Centre, attended for item 14.2.
Dr Jean Long, HRB Evidence Centre, attended for item 15.1.
Mr Dara Murphy, Head of Finance, attended for items 8 & 9.

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1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr Cliona Saidlear.

2. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. Minutes of the previous meetings

The minutes of the meetings held on February 21 and March 13 2025 were approved.

4. Matters Arising and action points from previous meetings

Action points from the previous meetings were either addressed or appeared as an agenda item.

5. CEO's Report

The CEO reported to the Board on the following matters:

- Budget 2025
- Baggot St Funds
- Bequeathment
- HRB Engagement with the INFORM Project
- HRB asked to join two high level disability advisory groups
- LINK system can now report on HSE's new Health Region structures
- Paper published on psychosis
- Science Europe - assessing first impact on collaborations with USA research organisations
- Outcome of the Summer Student Scholarship 2025 scheme by random selection of all eligible applications
- Department of Health Implementation & Oversight Group for the National Mental Health Research Strategy
- Update from the HRB's Evidence Centre
- Updates from National Office and HRCDC
- HRB Media Coverage
- Awards made under delegated authority

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6. Strategy Development

The CEO provided an overview of the strategy development to date, including an update on the Values workshops which were attended by over 100 staff. Draft Values, Mission and Pillars will be developed by the end of April, with the Management Team having a dedicated meeting planned at the end of April to finalise the draft for the Board.

The reporting structure for KPIs is being developed to align with the reporting requirements of both the Dept of Health and the Board.

External stakeholder meetings are nearly finished, and the information gathered from these meetings may be especially useful in the implementation phase of the strategy.

Board members emphasised the importance of developing a strategy model that enable the HRB to be flexible over the five year period by including more detailed information into a rolling plan. There was a comment around values that a set of internally facing values and a set of externally facing values may be the most appropriate approach for the HRB.

It was agreed that a dedicated half day Strategy session for the Board in the second half of May would be useful, and this will be arranged.

13. Reviews, Evaluations, Outputs

1. Findings of the Strategic Review of the research careers portfolio

The Board noted the findings following a review of Research Career portfolio 2016-2024 and the outline proposed for future strategic investments in this area for 2026 -2030. The approach to skills development generated some discussion, with additional information being requested by the Board. This information will be incorporated into the Principles Paper.

2. Findings of the review of Clinical Trials Infrastructure

At the February Board meeting, the Board was asked to note findings following a review of HRB Clinical Trials Infrastructures 2021 – 2026. The Board requested additional information, and a separate Board meeting was held on March 13, where further information was provided.

The information provided by the team generated some discussion around how more robust data from clinical trials registries (for example, the number and types of trials being carried out) was required before a decision on future funding could be made by the Board. This information was presented to the Board and it was agreed that certain areas would be focussed on in the Principles Paper when it comes before the Board.

14. Other Research Funding Matters

1. Request to transfer CRF Manager access and support service provided by the National Clinical Trials Office (NCTO) to UCC-CRF

The Board approved additional funding of €118.2k and a Letter of Variation for UCC-CRF/C to manage the central CRF-Manager licence and support service and the ECRIN EuCo role, both of which were previously part of the NCTO grant (which ends on 30 April 2025).

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12. Approval to Issue Calls

1. PPI Ignite Network

The Board approved a call for the PPI Ignite Network 2026, at a cost to the HRB of up to €6.3M over five years. This will provide support for a National PPI Ignite Office and a PPI Ignite footprint for up to nine (HRB approved) Higher Education Institutions. It will leverage up to €2M funding from participating HEIS.

The Board also approved (at call announcement stage) an option for additional HEIs to apply to become a designated PPI Ignite site during the term of the grant (if they document their commitment to the Network and confirm matched funding for a PPI Ignite programme manager post). The cost to the HRB of this option would equal the pro-rata equivalent of €500,000 per HEI based on the timing of any request during the 5-year term.

The Board requested an adjustment to the weightings of the Assessment Criteria (to increase the emphasis on impact) which was agreed.

2. Evidence for Policy awards (Round 2)

The Board approved a call announcement for a second round of the Evidence for Policy (EfP) Programme, a collaborative initiative between the HRB and the DOH. The DOH have submitted four topics from policy units for this round. Should applications be submitted and successful for all four topics, the cost to the HRB would be in the region of €1.4M over 3 years, with dedicated funding “for Department research priorities” available as per the 2025 Letter of Allocation.

14.2 Addiction Research Network Ireland

The Board approved a proposal to commission an addiction research network, in collaboration with the Health Research Board, through a competitive procurement process. Funding of €150,000 pa for the network is being provided by the Department of Health.

15. Other HRB Publications

1. Effect of artificial community water fluoridation on dental health: An evidence review

The Board reviewed the process by which this revised evidence review was undertaken and approved that it can go forward for publication. The Board was satisfied that the feedback from all the peer reviewers was incorporated into the Evidence Review.

7. Programme of Work for the Board

The Board reviewed the Programme of Work for 2025. There was a request for additional items to be added to the Programme of Work (PoW):

- Clinical Trials Infrastructures: add to the PoW to appear on a quarterly basis.

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- Collaborative Research Networks: they should be added as an annual item to the PoW to ensure that learnings from establishing these networks are captured.
- AI: consideration should be given as how to best incorporate this into the PoW to ensure that it is incorporated into HRB activities not just as a governance / risk item but also as an opportunity and what can we do as leaders in health research in the area of AI.

8. HRB Budget & Deliverables Plan

The Board approved the HRB Budget for 2025, and reviewed and approved the HRB's draft Service Plan for 2025 as the programme of work to be conducted during year five of the HRB Strategy 2021-2025, Health research – making an impact.

9. Corporate Reporting

1. Draft Financial Statements 2024

The Board approved the following:

- a) the recommendation from the Audit & Risk Committee to approve the Governance Statement and Board Members' Report 2024, the Statement on Internal Control 2024 (Management Assurance Statement) and the draft Financial Statements 2024, subject to any adjustments that arise from the audit by the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General.
- b) that, on completion of the audit by the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General, these documents would be published as the HRB Annual Report 2024 – Part 2.
- c) 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.

2. System of Internal Control 2024 – Management Assurance Statement

The Board noted the System of Internal Controls (SIC) 2024 – Management Assurance Statement completed by the HRB's Executive Team which documents the outcome of the annual review of internal controls for 2024. The Assurance Statement was reviewed by the HRB's Audit & Risk Committee at its meeting on 28 February 2025.

3. Procurement Report

The Board noted the following:

- Between the period 01 November 2024 to 31 December 2024:
 - 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 2024 to 31 December 2024:
 - Supplier expenditure more than €25,000

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4. Contracts valued at in excess of €75,000

The Board approved the award of a four-year contract to [REDACTED] for the provision of an Annual Progress Reports reviewer service. The maximum value of this contract is €160,000 excluding VAT.

10. Other Governance Matters

1. Policies for review by the Board

The Board considered the policies for approval by the Board and approved the suggested change in approach to ensure that AI reporting is more explicitly referenced in the Terms of Reference of the ARC and also that Terms of Reference for the ET is amended to ensure that significant policies are brought to the Board for their approval.

2. Draft ARC minutes (Feb 28 meeting)

The Board reviewed the draft ARC minutes from the meeting on February 28 2025.

3. Annual Report from the ARC to the Board

The Board noted the Annual Report from the Audit & Risk Committee in respect of 2024.

Executive Session of the Board

Signed: _____
Signed by:  (Chairperson)
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