

MINUTES OF WACCBIP INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

VENUE: Peduase Valley Resort, Aburi

DATE: Saturday, July 8, 2017

1.0 BACKGROUND

The second WACCBIP International Advisory Board meeting was held on Saturday, July 8, 2017 from 10:05 am to 2:55 pm at the Peduase Valley Resort, Aburi in Ghana. There were 19 attendees, comprising Advisory Board members, the WACCBIP Director, members of the WACCBIP Management Committee and WACCBIP Secretarial Staff.

2.0 ATTENDANCE

Members Present

| NO. | NAME | INSTITUTION | E-MAIL |
|-----|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. | Keith Gull | University of Oxford | keith.gull@path.ox.ac.uk |
| 2. | Kwadwo A. Koram | NMIMR, UG | kkoram@noguchi.ug.edu.gh |
| 3. | Patrick Arthur | BCMB/WACCBIP | parthur14@gmail.com |
| 4. | Abraham Hodgson | Ghana Health Service | abraham.hodgson@ghsmail.org |
| 5. | Francis Dodoo | ORID, UG | fdodoo@ug.edu.gh |
| 6. | Alex Asiedu | STANLIB | emmanuel.asiedu@gmail.com |
| 7. | Deborah Mawuse Agyemfra | Legal Practitioner | magyemfra@heritagebank.com.gh |
| 8. | Mahamadou Diakite | MRTC | mdiakite@icermali.org |
| 9. | Mark Carrington | University of Cambridge | mc115@cam.ac.uk |
| 10. | Kwaku Tano-Debrah | University of Ghana | ktano-debrah@ug.edu.gh |
| 11. | Douglas J. Perkins | University of New Mexico | dperkins@salvd.unm.edu |

In Attendance:

| NO. | NAME | INSTITUTION | E-MAIL |
|-----|------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 12. | Gordon Awandare | WACCBIP | gawandare@ug.edu.gh |
| 13. | Lydia Mosi | WACCBIP | lmosi@ug.edu.gh |
| 14. | Theresa Manful Gwira | WACCBIP | tmanful@ug.edu.gh |
| 15. | Michael Somuah Nkansah | WACCBIP | waccbipadmin@ug.edu.gh |
| 16. | Emmanuel Ghartey | WACCBIP | eoghartey@ug.edu.gh |
| 17. | Sika Menka | WACCBIP | smenka@ug.edu.gh |
| 18. | Emefa Adzadu | WACCBIP | emefaadzadu@gmail.com |
| 19. | Vincent Appiah | WACCBIP | appiahv@rocketmail.com |

Absent

| NO. | NAME | INSTITUTION |
|-----|------------------------|---|
| 1. | Daniel K. Asiedu | Provost, CBAS, UG |
| 2. | Matilda Steiner-Asiedu | Dean, School of Biological Sciences, UG |
| 3. | Ama de-Graft Aikins* | Dean, International Programmes, UG |
| 4. | Kirk Deitsch* | University of Cornell |

*Absent with apologies

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3.0 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, AND OPENING REMARKS

The board Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 10.05 am and made his introductory remarks. This was followed by formal introduction of all board and management committee members present. Absent board members were noted. Prof Awandare informed the board that some of the seats on the board were dependent on the occupancy of various positions in the University of Ghana, hence there were a few new members namely; Professors Francis Doodoo, Daniel Asiedu and Kwaku Tano-Debrah. The Chair stated that the Centre was now well established but the present underpinning grants would end in soon and hence the future sustainability of the Centre should be a constant focus of the Board's attention during this meeting.

4.0 REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on July 17, 2016 were accepted as true and accurate for the record and would be uploaded on the WACCBIP website.

5.0 MATTERS ARISING

- The ambiguity surrounding the PhD Comprehensive examination was clarified by Prof Tano-Debrah, the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. He noted that the University of Ghana PhD handbook stated that all individual components (the written proposal, the oral examination and written exam) must be passed with at least 60%. However, a student who obtained at least 50% in the written exam but obtained an overall mean mark of 60% or more could be passed by the PhD examination committee.
- Prof Awandare informed the board that WACCBIP had drafted a standard acknowledgement statement which had been circulated to all fellows to include in their publications. He also mentioned that the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESA) also sent their acknowledgement statement which has been merged with WACCBIP's. The Chair emphasized that the use of the acknowledgement statements will enable funders find publications from awarded grants online. The board was informed that all manuscripts and abstracts must be approved before submission for conferences and publication to ensure they are of top quality and include the standard acknowledgement statement.
- Prof Diakite suggested that WACCBIP draft a handbook containing all relevant information from the University. Other suggestions were to include WACCBIP rules and deadlines students were to adhere to in the handbook. Templates will be sent from the University of Oxford and Cambridge to serve as a guide.

Action: Draft a WACCBIP handbook for graduate students - Head of Training and Research and WACCBIP secretariat

- The Chair stated that he followed up with the Royal Society of Biology board after the first advisory board meeting which helped propel them to expedite the processing of the Advanced International Accreditation for WACCBIP's graduate programmes.

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6.0 REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF THE WACCBIP ANNUAL REPORT

I. Implementation Status - Governance

- On the subject of recruitment, Prof. Awandare informed the board that the Centre advertised the position of a Project Manager, and after interviewing shortlisted candidates, Mr. Michael Somuah Nkansah was employed to manage the Centre's projects. He also mentioned that the best and enthusiastic MPhil students who had submitted their thesis and were awaiting graduation were given short term contracts as Research Assistants at WACCBIP to continue their research and generate sufficient data for publication. Prof. Yeboah-Manu was appointed as Postdoctoral Programme Coordinator. Mr. Vincent Appiah, who has a bioinformatics background and was initially employed as a Research Assistant, was reassigned as ICT officer after the resignation of the former ICT officer. The board was also informed that the Centre had employed three (3) security guards to provide round-the-clock security at the premises. The board enquired about option of obtaining a CCTV system instead of paying 3 security personnel to which Prof Awandare responded that WACCBIP was in the process of installing a CCTV system to complement work of the security personnel. The possibility of the security men patrolling the premises and clocking in at various vantage points to ensure that they were actually monitoring activities at the building was also discussed.

Action: Ensure installation of CCTV system - WACCBIP Director/Secretariat

- Prof Awandare notified the board that the procurement contract of about \$400,000 for the WACCBIP Building (Biochemistry Annex) was awarded and ground-breaking ceremony took place in October 2016. The initial building schedule was delayed as the site had a number of buried cables and pipes which needed to be diverted before the commencement of the building project. The new building is meant to provide additional office space, conferencing facility, lecture rooms, a student resource Centre, bioinformatics lab, and a cold room. The completion date will be by November 2017 and the building should be occupied latest by January 2018. The Centre will work on identifying fittings for the building to prevent delays moving in. The Chair thanked the University of Ghana for their immense support in this regard.

Action: Identify fittings needed for the new building to be occupied - WACCBIP Director/Management Committee Members/Secretariat

II. Implementation Status - Academic

- The Chair stated that the 2017 WACCBIP research conference was a terrific symposium with superb speakers and the African focus of the conference was exemplary.
- Prof. Awandare stated the International Advanced Degree Accreditation received from the Royal Society of Biology (RSB), UK for graduate programmes in Molecular Cell Biology of Infectious Diseases at WACCBIP, was one of the greatest achievements for the Centre in the past year. These programmes are the first in Africa to receive international accreditation from the RSB. The Director thanked the Head of Training and Research, Dr Patrick Arthur for the hard work he put in to help the Centre achieve this feat. He also thanked the board Chair for the role he played with the RSB.

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- Prof Awandare highlighted the enrolment figures for Masters, PhD and postdoctoral fellows for the 2016/17 academic year. He informed the board that WACCBIP had exceeded its PhD enrolment target for the ACE project but there was still a challenge with enrolling regional master's students. To mitigate this, the Centre had decided to offer fellowships to 4 regional students from the first year. Prof Awandare informed the board that there was affirmative action to ensure that females are given equal opportunity.
- An overview was provided of the DELTAS PhD and postdoctoral applicants and selected fellows. The Chair enquired if the Centre knew the data funders will require in the final report. Prof. Awandare informed the board that both the ACE and DELTAS programmes had elaborate reporting templates which were submitted regularly.
- Prof Tano-Debrah enquired about the possibility of students submitting their final thesis by the end of March to ensure their graduation in July of the same year. Prof Awandare answered that due to the nature of the research projects, this would not be possible. The Director complained that though theses were supposed to be examined within 6 weeks, examiners often did not adhere to this deadline. The board suggested that external examiners be sent to WACCBIP for a short period to grade theses. The board was informed that the Centre's recruitment process was efficient and WACCBIP had attracted top quality fellows with the exception of few instances where MPhil students were advised to downgrade to MSc.

Action: Ensure all submitted theses are graded on time and consider that a small set of external examiners visit Accra and work on the theses over a 3 day period, with some vivas, may give a more satisfactory and timely outcome. – WACCBIP Director

- An overview was provided of the short courses/workshops held throughout the year. The Director stated that the next Bioethics workshop led by Prof Diakite will be held in Mali. He also mentioned that the 2017 WACCBIP-ASCB workshop was massively supported by Prof. Gull's group from the University of Oxford. The Sanger workshop was hosted by WACCBIP, which was the first time it was held in Africa.

III. Finances

- The Director informed the board that at the recently held DELTAS and ACE project meetings, WACCBIP was the Centre with the best utilization of funds. He stated that funds are disbursed directly to the UK partners from the Wellcome Trust while funds for African partners are disbursed from the University of Ghana on a quarterly basis. The board was assured that the student funding will be effectively distributed as fellowships have been offered early in the project implementation.
- The Chair noted that most of the funds of both projects have been spent on fellowships and equipment. He expressed concern about the maintenance of all equipment purchased. Prof Awandare informed him that the Centre had hired a Laboratory Technologist to assist in the basic maintenance of equipment to improve their longevity, and service contracts have been signed for the major equipment. The board advised that all new grant applications should include service charges for all major equipment at the

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Centre. They also advised the Director to ensure that all equipment purchased have extended warranties. The Chair stated that in addition to the equipment log, there should be an equipment maintenance plan and budget included. The board enquired about the possibility of generating income from access charges to which the Director answered that there was not much interest from external users to generate enough revenue from access charges at the moment. The board advised the Centre to ensure there was a clear guide in transferring knowledge of equipment maintenance.

[Action: Provide a guide on the equipment maintenance process - WACCBIP laboratory technologist/Logistics Coordinator/WACCBIP Director](#)

IV. Improving the teaching and research environment

- Visiting faculty who taught various courses throughout the year and the visiting scientists who presented various keynote seminars were highlighted. The board was informed that Master's fellowships are awarded in the second year after the students have passed their coursework and are ready to start their research. However, a few scholarships are awarded to brilliant but needy students from the first year. The Chair felt there may be a selection bias as it may be difficult for students outside Accra to move to the University of Ghana.
- Prof Awandare said that though there were few publications from the first cohort of Master's fellows and some PhD fellows, and a number of manuscripts had been drafted for publication and reiterated that it was incumbent on faculty to ensure that the drafted manuscripts get published. He also informed the board of the WACCBIP publication bonus of one hundred US dollars multiplied by the impact factor of the journal.

[Action point: Ensure all drafted manuscripts are published - WACCBIP/BCMB faculty](#)

- The grants won by faculty were discussed extensively. Most of the grants are collaborative awards from the Global Challenges Research Fund with faculty from the University of Cambridge and one with Prof Mark Woolhouse of the University of Edinburgh.

7.0 DISCUSSION OF CHALLENGES

- The chair highlighted 3 main issues which were: the workload on a few faculty members, the succession plan and sustainability of the Centre. He enquired if the University could support the Centre/DBCMB with new faculty since the programme was growing. The board also enquired about the possibility of starting an endowment fund for the Centre to sustain it or if there will be second phase of funding for the current ACE and DELTAS projects.
- Prof. Awandare also outlined some challenges faced in implementing and managing the project. He complained that in addition to the long and cumbersome procurement processes which slowed down work at the Centre, the new government's directive that insisted the University paid all customs duties and apply for a reimbursement later had aggravated issues.

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8.0 PLAN OF ACTION FOR 2017/2018 ACADEMIC YEAR

The Director outlined his action plan for the upcoming academic year which included:

1. Appointment of Dr. Lydia Mosi as new HoD for Biochemistry department, which takes effect from August 1, 2017
2. Enrol fourth cohort (second cohort of DELTAS PhD) of students
3. Replace one DELTAS postdoc who was awarded the fellowship but recently declined due to problems relocating his family. The Centre needed to build capacity for HIV research so the possibility to head hunt for an HIV researcher will be explored
4. Line-up current postdocs to compete for the Crick Africa Network fellowships. There will be grant writing workshops to help candidates fine tune their research proposals for submission
5. Complete construction of WACCBIP building (Biochemistry Annex) plus furnishing by end of 2017. The building should be available for use by January 2018
6. Install high performance computing (HPC) system
7. Purchase one major piece of equipment, a confocal microscope by August to help with protein interaction work. This highly specialized equipment will be managed by a postdoc
8. Work with Noguchi to operationalize MiSeq next generation sequencer.
9. Run DELTAS bioethics workshop possibly in Bamako with participants from the partner institutions
10. Recruit fifth cohort of Masters and PhD fellows with funding from ACE III if the Centre was successful in its application. The Tackling Infections to Benefit Africa (TIBA) grant will also support a few fellows
11. Get more ACE partnerships engaged for joint research and for enrolment of regional students
12. Recruit third batch of Graduate Interns
13. Run the WACCBIP-Oxford-ASCB workshop from Jan 15-26, 2018
14. Submit grant applications by faculty including ACE III, Fogarty and Wellcome Trust grants
15. Encourage students to apply for fellowships
16. Strengthen staff at the secretariat by recruiting a Public Engagement and/or Communications officer
17. Upgrade the flow cytometer to 18 colours (add one laser)

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18. Pursue integration of the postdocs into the UG faculty system and explore the possibility of engaging visiting research fellows
19. Appoint adjunct faculty for teaching, supervision, and joint grant applications
20. Engage corporate organizations to offer fellowships and support research projects

9.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- The sustainability of the Centre was discussed extensively. The Director informed the board that both the ACE and DELTAS grants were renewable but the African continent needed to assist in sustaining Centres of Excellence. He expressed concern about government's willingness to sign a new loan agreement for the ACE III project. Suggestions were also made to link up with biotechnology companies for product development and to exploit the collaboration with Noguchi to form a regional Centre for Diseases Control for biosurveillance risk mitigation which will enable the Centre get governmental support.

Action: Board members to explore opportunities through their connections. Dr. Hodgson will set up a meeting with the Director of the Ghana Health Service and Prof Gull and Carrington will organize a meeting or reception with the British Ambassador to Ghana during their next visit to Ghana.

- Dr. Arthur suggested that WACCBIP could identify opportunities to initiate a Biotechnology enterprise as a way of translating research output since such companies are not present in Ghana. The board stated that such enterprises were capital intensive however, the knowledge of patenting should be taught and internship opportunities should be provided for students at various industries.
- Dr Arthur also enquired about the procurement of a mass spectrometer which is a key part of the Centre's plan of establishing a core-facility. The board advised that due to the running costs of the equipment it will be advisable to continue to send samples to Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, University of Oxford for analysis.
- The board stated that though they were not financial experts, they had seen the equipment procured and students enrolled at the Centre so they were satisfied with the financial disbursements being made

10.0 NEXT MEETING

With no further business, the Chair congratulated WACCBIP on an extraordinary year and adjourned the meeting at 14.40 pm. Information about the next Advisory Board Meeting will be disseminated in due course.