

## Minutes of the Authority meeting on 21 May 2025 held at 2 Redman Place, London

Members present	Julia Chain (Chair) Tim Child Frances Flinter Tom Fowler Zeynep Gurtin Graham James Alex Kafetz	Alison McTavish Geeta Nargund Catharine Seddon Rosamund Scott Anya Sizer Stephen Troup Christine Watson
Apologies	Steve Pugh, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) (online)	
Observers		
Staff in attendance	Peter Thompson (Chief Executive) Clare Ettinghausen (Director of Strategy & Corporate Affairs) Rachel Cutting (Director of Compliance & Information) Tom Skrinar (Director of Finance & Resources) Sophie Tuhey (Head of Planning and Governance) Kevin Hudson (PRISM Programme Manager) (item 6) Luke Reader (Phoenix Programme Manager) Shabbir Qureshi (Risk and Business Planning Manager) Alison Margrave (Board Governance Manager)	

### Members

There were 14 members at the meeting – 8 lay and 5 professional members.

## 1. Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

- 1.1.** The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming Authority members and HFEA staff to meeting.
- 1.2.** The Chair also welcomed observers and stated that the meeting was being recorded in line with previous meetings and for reasons of transparency. The recording would be made available on the HFEA website to allow members of the public to view it.
- 1.3.** Declarations of interest were made by:
  - Geeta Nargund (clinician at a licensed clinic)
  - Anya Sizer (freelance advisory work within the fertility sector)
  - Stephen Troup (consultancy work within the fertility sector)
  - Tim Child (consultancy work within the fertility sector overseas)

## 2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

- 2.1.** The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2025 were agreed as a true record of the meeting and could be signed by the Chair.

### Matters arising

- 2.2.** The Chair introduced the report and informed members that the items had been actioned as detailed in the report.
- 2.3.** Members noted the matters arising report.

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### 3. Chair and Chief Executive's report

- 3.1. The Chair gave an overview of her engagement with key stakeholders and her attendance at decision-making committees of the Authority.
- 3.2. The Chair informed members that together with the Chief Executive they attended meetings with Baroness Merron, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health, and the HFEA's sponsor minister, in March and April. The meetings were primarily to discuss the HFEA's proposals for law reform. The Chair informed members that Baroness Merron had thanked the HFEA for the work that it does, which is held in high regard.
- 3.3. The Chair informed members that she had sat on the interview panel to appoint a new member to the Scientific and Clinical Advances Advisory Committee (SCAAC).
- 3.4. The Chair thanked all the members for their participation in the year end appraisal process, these have now all been completed and will be submitted to the Department well in advance of the required deadline. She provided details of her appraisal, and the positive comments received about the work that the HFEA does.
- 3.5. The Chair informed members that she was working with the Board Governance Manager to refresh the periodic board effectiveness review, and this would be brought to the Authority away day in November.
- 3.6. The Chief Executive referred to the Authority's discussion on Stem Cell Based Embryo Models (SCBEM) in [January](#) and informed members that he had attended a number of events discussing the possible stages for establishing a regulatory framework for SCBEM.
- 3.7. The Chief Executive informed members that he had participated in the International Network for Delivery of Regulation (INDR) Roundtable conference 'Shaping the future of regulation' at Wolfson College in Oxford. The Chief Executive spoke about striking the balance between a robust regulatory framework whilst also supporting innovation.
- 3.8. The Chief Executive informed members that the Irish Parliament had recently passed the [Health \(Assisted Human Reproduction\) Bill 2023, which included measures](#) for the establishment of a regulatory body similar to the HFEA. Continuing, the Chief Executive said that he had recently spoken at workshop on this and related topics at Maynooth University.
- 3.9. The Chief Executive referred to the [Places for Growth](#) update provided by the Government and stated that at the moment there is no information regarding whether ALBs will be affected. The Chief Executive stated that 50% of the HFEA's workforce is already located outside London and the current office lease is in place until 2030. The Chief Executive undertook to keep the Authority and staff updated on the potential impact on the HFEA.

#### Decision

- 3.10. Members noted the Chair and Chief Executive's report.

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### 4. Committee Chairs' reports

- 4.1. The Chair introduced the report and invited Committee Chairs to add any other comments to the presented report.

- 4.2.** The Statutory Approvals Committee (SAC) Chair (Frances Flinter) referred to the summary of the monthly committee meetings contained in the paper and the range of conditions considered. The committee were turning around applications quickly and she expressed thanks to both the committee members and the staff for their work. The SAC Chair commented on the excellent review and advice received from the external SAC Advisors.
- 4.3.** The Audit and Governance Committee (AGC) Chair (Catharine Seddon) informed members that the AGC had held two exceptional meetings in April. The first meeting was to discuss proposals to impair the value of PRISM as currently included on the HFEA's balance sheet. The second meeting was to consider the recommendations to publish an Interim Choose a Fertility Clinic (CaFC) in May using the headline metrics proposed and suggested caveats; and verify the Full CaFC in one exercise, combining 2023 and 2024 data. The next AGC meeting is being held on 17 June.
- 4.4.** The Licence Committee Chair (Graham James) reminded members that the paper before them includes not only the decisions taken by the Licence Committee, but also the work of the Executive Licensing Panel and the Licensing Officer. The Licence Committee deals with the complex issues, and he remarked that it was pleasing to see the improvements made by clinics and this was reflected in the granting of their licences.
- 4.5.** The Chair thanked all Committee Chairs for the reports and expressed sincere thanks to the committee members and the staff who service the various committees for their hard work. The Chair stated that committee papers and minutes are published on the [HFEA](#) website.

## Decision

- 4.6.** Members noted the Committee Chairs' reports.

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## 5. Annual Performance report 2024-2025

- 5.1.** The Chair commented that the annual review of performance allows the Authority to review the performance over the past 12 months.
- 5.2.** The Chief Executive introduced the annual performance report for 2024-2025 and reminded members of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are used to measure performance.
- 5.3.** The Chief Executive stated that the HFEA's performance across all 19 KPIs had been consistently strong and improving throughout the year; where there was a particular drop it had only been temporary and for a valid reason. In March 2025, 13 indicators rated Green, three Amber, three Neutral and none were Red. The Chief Executive expressed his thanks to the staff for their continued hard work for the organisation.
- 5.4.** The Chief Executive referred to the HR KPIs and commented that staff sickness was generally below the 2.5% target.
- 5.5.** The staff turnover KPI is currently at 4% which is the lowest it has been for the past year. Given the pressures on public sector, this is a good result and the recent HR survey indicates that the HFEA staff are motivated and enjoy working for the HFEA.
- 5.6.** The Chair commented that at the last Chair and CEO DHSC ALB meeting she had attended it was clear that the HFEA's high staff engagement score and low turnover were not reflected

across all ALBs. She thanked the Chief Executive and leadership team for their skill and dedication in leading the HFEA.

### Compliance and Information

- 5.7.** The Director of Compliance and Information commented that the performance report shows a positive year and good performance with KPIs being met. As mentioned by the Chief Executive when there has been a delay in the inspection and licensing KPIs this is due to genuine reasons such as further engagement with PRs or the Compliance & Enforcement policy requiring management reviews.
- 5.8.** The inspection schedule has been planned for the forthcoming year, and it is a very busy schedule. Even with the busy inspection schedule the inspectors are engaging well with the Pheonix project.
- 5.9.** The Director of Compliance and Information stated that over the last twelve months 1,726 people had received information from the Opening the Register (OTR) service.
- 5.10.** The OTR team is fully staffed, and all are trained on the systems which has helped to reduce the waiting list to its lowest level, which is currently 738.
- 5.11.** The Director of Compliance and Information stated that the current average waiting time for OTR applications is just over eight months. There is currently a workstream to finish a lot of the oldest OTRs, which have been held up due to data complexities or clinic issues. When these are closed it is anticipated that the waiting time will reduce further.
- 5.12.** The Director of Compliance and Information informed members that over the past year the Register Team and IT Development Team had worked in close partnership to reduce the backlog of support tickets in PRISM. This collaborative work has brought the volume of outstanding queries down from over 1,000 in August 2024 to below 100 by 2 May 2025. This means that the team can now shift its focus from backlog clearance to efficient daily ticket handling, which is beneficial for the sector.
- 5.13.** The Chair commented that whilst the reduction in the OTR waiting list is encouraging an eight-month delay is still a considerable wait time and asked whether it would be possible to report in a future meeting what the forward trajectory for reducing this wait time might be.
- 5.14.** The Director of Compliance and Information responded that a clear trajectory on the waiting list reduction time would be possible towards the end of the calendar year.

### Strategy and Corporate Affairs

- 5.15.** The Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs thanked several members for speaking on behalf of the HFEA at [The Fertility Show](#) and the British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA) Annual Conference.
- 5.16.** The Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs stated that performance has been good across the strategy and corporate affairs KPIs for the past year. Information requests were dealt within the required timeframes and these included enquiries, Freedom of Information requests and responding to Parliamentary questions.
- 5.17.** Proactive media enquiries were largely focused around the publication of reports such as the [National Patient Survey](#), [Family formations in fertility treatment](#) and [State of the fertility sector](#). The Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs reported that there were over 260 pieces media for

the National Patient Survey even though it was published on the same day at the Government's Spring statement.

- 5.18.** It was reported that social media engagement is increasing with continued growth for Instagram and LinkedIn. There has been an increase of 80,000 users for the HFEA's website, which correlates with the results of the patient survey that the HFEA's website is seen as a reliable source of information about treatment.
- 5.19.** The Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs referred to the Licensing KPIs and stated that over 200 individual items have been considered by Executive Licensing Panel, Licensing Committee and Statutory Approvals Committee. The volume of work in managing these items was explained and thanks were given to the Licensing Team, especially the Committee Officers for their work in supporting the committees.
- 5.20.** Members were informed that in addition to the items mentioned above the Licensing Officer had considered over 200 items and the work of the Licensing Team in managing these was acknowledged.
- 5.21.** The work of the Policy Team in leading on the scientific development work, patient protection safety items, proposed law reform and implementation of the [changes in law](#) relating to screening in fertility treatment was acknowledged.
- 5.22.** The Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs informed members that since the last Authority meeting [the Professional Stakeholder Group \(PSG\)](#), and [the Patient Organisation Stakeholder Group \(POSG\)](#) had met. The next round of stakeholder meetings will be in the Autumn.
- 5.23.** The Chair acknowledged the media coverage obtained and commented that the work of the Authority is very relevant.

### Finance, Planning and Technology

- 5.24.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology informed members that the new Head of Planning and Governance has settled well into the team. The team has been finalising the business plan and ensuring that teams across the HFEA have service delivery plans in place for 2025-26.
- 5.25.** A new Strategic Risk Register is being prepared to reflect the new strategy, which was recently adopted, and this will be presented to the AGC in June.
- 5.26.** The Governance team has been working on annual tasks such as updating biographies and declared conflicts of interest on the website and ensuring members have completed their mandatory training. Advance work is also taking place with the Licensing team for the recruitment of external members to committees that will be required in the next couple of years.
- 5.27.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology stated that the IT team has been very busy with a number of complex tasks, including supporting the IT development project, which will be discussed under agenda item seven.
- 5.28.** Members were informed that a penetration test on the HFEA's website will be carried out before the end of the month. The team is working with an external consultant to help strengthen its approach to business continuity and a test exercise is planned for the all-staff event in July.
- 5.29.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology informed members of the work that the IT and Information Governance teams have undertaken to support the new Cyber Assessment

Framework (CAF) aligned DSPT requirements. This audit commenced that week and the HFEA must submit its formal return by 30 June. It is anticipated that this year's assessment will be tough and the HFEA will need to build on the recommendations arising from the audit. The CAF will be discussed with the AGC during their June meeting.

- 5.30.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology stated that it had been a busy time for the small finance team in preparing to finalise the year's accounts with the auditors. Members were reminded about the issues relating to duplicate activity returns submitted to PRISM in error by clinics over the past few years. The Finance and PRISM teams are working closely with the NAO to ensure that they have the evidence they need to confirm that the refunds are all present and correct. The current, pre-audit financial position for 2024/25 is a surplus of £133k, although there are likely to be some accounting and other changes as the audit position is finalised.
- 5.31.** Regarding the 2025/26 finances the main cost to be managed is the IT project. For the HFEA this is a high-cost project and whilst there is some contingency available the HFEA needs to manage costs and prioritise any additional investments as the project progresses.
- 5.32.** A member commented that with the recent high profile cyber attacks which had taken place it was reassuring to see the lessons learnt exercise and mitigations which the HFEA had put in place.
- 5.33.** A member congratulated the team for the consistently very good performance across all the KPIs and questioned, whether in the spirit of continuous improvement more periodic reviews of the KPIs is needed to ensure that the organisation is being stretched. The Chief Executive stated that the leadership team will reflect on this challenge.

## Decision

- 5.34.** Members noted the annual performance report 2024-2025 and recorded thanks to the staff for their continued good work.

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## 6. Choose a Fertility Clinic: next steps

- 6.1.** The Chair introduced this agenda item and stated that the Authority has a duty to provide information, and the Choose a Fertility Clinic (CaFC) function provides verified information on all UK licensed fertility clinics. CaFC incorporates both how the HFEA inspectors rate the clinics and how patients rate the clinic.
- 6.2.** Due to the migration of the HFEA's register data to a new database and the introduction of the new data submission system, PRISM, CaFC has not been updated with new data for some time and the Authority had previously agreed that a suitable caveat should accompany the data.
- 6.3.** The data in CaFC will be updated in two stages during the current year, the Interim CaFC will provide headline success metrics for birth rates for 2022. The Full CaFC which will conclude later in the year will provide both headline success metrics and detailed statistics on pregnancies to 2024 and birth rates to 2023.
- 6.4.** The Chief Executive introduced the paper and stated that the CaFC function provides a suite of information which provides patients with a starting point to measure success and orientate information. Each clinic has a dedicated website page with the following information (as relevant):
- how HFEA inspectors rate the clinic

- how patients rate the clinic
- pregnancy and birth rates from different fertility treatments
- multiple birth rates
- waiting times for donated eggs, sperm or embryos (clinic inputted)
- details of the treatments offered, staffing and facilities at each clinic (clinic inputted)

- 6.5.** The Chief Executive informed members that the work on the Interim CaFC began in mid-February, with clinics being issued with a calculation sheet that they were asked to verify. The Interim CaFC will be based on publishing three headline rates (the 'composite' headline rate, the 'fresh only' headline rate and the multiple birth rate). This will also include caveats that various practices can affect success rates such as the proportion of donor egg treatments or PGT-A cycles carried out by clinics. In addition, for clinics where the number of donor egg treatments and/or PGT-A cycles is above the national average, a note will be added advising patients that this can make it more difficult to compare that clinic's rate against the UK average and those of other individual clinics.
- 6.6.** The Chief Executive spoke of the work required for the Full CaFC and that clinics will be asked to verify 2023 birth rates and 2024 pregnancies in one single sign off sheet that will be issued to clinics in June.
- 6.7.** The Chief Executive informed members that there have been regular communications with clinics about the updating of CaFC, including a short survey which was described in the letter dated 7 May to PRs.
- 6.8.** The Chief Executive informed members that the headline metrics for CaFC were agreed in 2016-17 and that since then the balance of treatment activity in the sector and multiple birth practices have both changed significantly.
- 6.9.** The Director of Compliance and Information spoke of the changes within the sector noting that the balance of fresh and frozen cycles has changed. In 2012 20% of IVF cycles used frozen embryos and in 2022 that had increased to around 45% of cycles.
- 6.10.** The Director of Compliance and Information stated that due to the success of the One at a Time campaign, elective single embryo transfer has become commonplace in the sector with multiple births decreasing from 17% in 2012 to around 4% today.
- 6.11.** Members were informed that the use of donor treatments has increased from 11% in 2012 to around 16% of IVF cycles in 2022. The use of donor eggs to increase the likelihood of success was discussed.
- 6.12.** The Director of Compliance and Information explained how the growth in the number of cycles which use PGT-A, sometimes alongside 'batching cycles' may elevate the rate based on per embryo transferred and risks undermining the effectiveness of births per embryo transferred as a fair measure of clinic performance.
- 6.13.** Whilst fresh or frozen cycles with own eggs is still the most common treatment, the Director of Compliance and Information commented that the HFEA's current headline metrics could be reviewed to inform patient choice.
- 6.14.** The Chief Executive spoke about the short, focused consultation which would be undertaken with regard to the headline metrics used and then the longer-term work which could be undertaken in

2026 to review the HFEA's different information sources and consider whether they can be brought together in a more unified or different way.

- 6.15.** Members discussed the importance of having an authoritative source of data to help inform choice and how patients find it useful to compare clinic data in the same way. Members noted the work being undertaken to ensure CaFC was updated.
- 6.16.** Patients' reasons for sourcing this data were discussed and it was stressed that the HFEA data is not a predictive model and cannot answer patients' question of what their chances of having a baby are.
- 6.17.** Members discussed the increased use of PGT-A even though this is rated red as an add-on on the HFEA's website for most patients. Given the increase in use of PGT-A members discussed the benefits of considering publishing data on cycles started rather than embryos transferred.
- 6.18.** Members discussed the importance of the decrease in multiple births and how the One at a Time campaign had impacted behaviour within the sector. Given that multiple births are the single greatest health risk of fertility treatment members did not want to see a change in behaviour and an increase in multiple births if this metric was no longer published.
- 6.19.** A member spoke about The Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology ([SART](#)) in the United States of America and the way that they report birth outcome data from its member clinics. The use of their five-headline metrics was explained.
- 6.20.** Members discussed that the metrics used need to be a fair measure of clinic performance and that they need to be the most useful ones to inform patients and the public. The ability of PRISM being able to provide cumulative success rates was seen as a benefit for patients.
- 6.21.** A member spoke about how patients are accessing data and the increasing use of the NHS app was highlighted as a shift in how the public access health information.
- 6.22.** Members felt that a consultation on the metrics used as detailed in paragraph 3.5 of the report before the Authority, and a longer term look at how this information might be presented was timely. Members noted the focused nature of the proposed consultation on headline metrics, involving clinic staff, stakeholder groups and the patient engagement forum. Some members raised the desirability of ensuring a wide range of voices are heard such as patients from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The option of having a free text response in the consultation was raised, while recognising that this might not be possible in the focused consultation and may form part of the wider work scheduled for 2026 and beyond.

## Decision

- 6.23.** Members noted:
  - the progress made on updating CaFC this year and the work planned to the end of 2025.
  - the merits of undertaking a wider review, beginning in 2026, of how the HFEA various data sources might be unified or presented differently in future.

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## 7. Phoenix Programme

- 7.1.** The Chair introduced the agenda item and spoke of the importance of having robust IT infrastructure that supports the work of the Authority.

- 7.2.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology introduced the paper and explained that the over-riding aim of the Phoenix programme is to replace aging systems with modern, cloud-based solutions that will be resilient and efficient, and provide the HFEA with options to innovate more easily, for example through the use of AI.
- 7.3.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology explained the scoping and procurement process undertaken and the involvement of the DHSC commercial team in managing the procurement process. Following the tender process Ceox were awarded the contract which covers the replacement of the three systems and 12 months of initial support.
- 7.4.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology spoke of the governance structure and risk management of the Phoenix Programme and how the HFEA has continued to engage with other organisations to learn from their experiences in implementing major IT change programmes and risk. He stated that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have published a lessons-learned report into their own IT Transformation Project which had significant challenges: [Independent IT review: executive summary - Care Quality Commission](#). The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology explained the pro-active approach the HFEA had taken to minimise the risk areas highlighted in the CQC report.
- 7.5.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology explained the reporting structure with a monthly Programme Board meeting, a monthly verbal report to the Corporate Management Group (CMG), a weekly update email issued to all relevant HFEA and Ceox staff and quarterly written report to the Audit and Governance Committee (AGC).
- 7.6.** The Director of Finance, Planning and Technology concluded his presentation by stating this is a complex and challenging change programme, but it has a significant opportunity for success. He spoke of the clear focus from senior managers and the positive engagement of staff generally. As the programme progress the programme team will focus on maintaining this positive level of engagement to ensure that the HFEA can foster the right mix of pragmatism and innovation to deliver the IT improvements.
- 7.7.** Members congratulated the HFEA for a clear paper which sets out the programme in detail, members were pleased to see the lessons learnt from other ALB IT projects and the steps that the HFEA had put in place to ensure success of their project.
- 7.8.** Members were appreciative of the clear governance and reporting for this project and noted that the AGC will have oversight of the programme on behalf of the Authority.
- 7.9.** In response to a question the Phoenix Programme Manager confirmed that there could be further benefits realised through the programme such as SharePoint supporting a much better search function than the current CM system; replacing Epicentre will mean that it will be easier and quicker for the HFEA to train new staff on the system.
- 7.10.** In response to a question the Phoenix Programme Manager confirmed that the level of cyber security will be increased by using industry-standard platforms such as Microsoft Dynamics.
- 7.11.** The Chair drew the discussions to a conclusion stating that this was a wonderful start to the project which will greatly improve the HFEA's use of data. The Chair stated that monitoring oversight of this project was delegated to the AGC who will ensure that the Authority is informed of any slippages to the project timeline.

## Decision

**7.12.** Members noted:

- the case for change to replace historic HFEA IT systems
- the funding and commercial decisions that led to the appointment of the HFEA's IT development partner
- progress and timescales for the project, including governance and risk management.

**7.13.** Members agreed that oversight of the programme would be carried out by the AGC

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## **8. Any other business**

**8.1.** The Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs informed members that the Law Commission had published a [letter from Baroness Merron](#) which stated that the Government is unable to prioritise surrogacy reform and do not intend to put forward these legislative proposals at the current time. The HFEA had a place holder in its Business Plan since 2023 for any work arising from surrogacy reform. Members noted the release of this place holder for the HFEA Business Plan.

**8.2.** The Chair thanked everyone for their active participation in the meeting, there being no further items of any other business the Chair closed the meeting and reminded members that the next Authority meeting will be held on 9 July 2025.

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## **Chair's signature**

I confirm this is a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Signature

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Julia Chain', written in a cursive style.

**Chair:** Julia Chain

**Date:** 9 July 2025