

# The Role, Structure and Operation of the HDC Panels

## 1 Role and Purpose

The sector panels are at the centre of the HDC and are designed to ensure that all activities funded by the Board are prioritised and have relevance to, and the support of, the relevant growers and their crop associations. This is particularly important in an industry such as horticulture with so many different crops and size of business.

The functions of the sector panels are to:

- Develop, implement and update an R&D strategy within the framework of that agreed by the Board.
- Make recommendations for R&D funding to the HDC Board, with the ability to commission work rapidly in response to urgent needs within the industry.
- Monitor the progress of on-going projects and the success of completed R&D.
- Review and recommend communications activities undertaken by the HDC and others, to ensure that the benefits of R&D and knowledge transfer are effectively communicated and targeted towards levy payers.
- Ensure equitable attention is given to the interests of all growers.

### 1.1 Relationship to the Board

The Board delegates responsibility to the panels to ensure that projects recommended for funding are technically and economically sound. Individual panel Chairmen are also members of the Board and if necessary sponsor the need for particular project proposals to the Board. In finally sanctioning proposals recommended by panels the Board would only be expected to review or reject proposals on grounds of overall funding, strategy or programme balance.

## 2 Scope of Individual Panels

### 2.1 Background

Like any organisation, there are various ways in which the scope of individual panels could be shaped. For example, should protected ornamental and edible crops be considered in the same panel, separate panels or part of other panels, or should all ornamental crops belong to one panel, thereby offering a single interface to some interested parties? The Board, on the advice of executive staff, have reviewed the scope of the panels and have taken into consideration a wide range of issues including;

- Are Growers interests better served with panels shaped by function or crops, e.g. crop protection, fertilization etc vs. conventional crop groups?
- Grouping together specific technical needs e.g. energy for protected crops.
- The need to balance generic considerations and opportunities against addressing the specific needs of individual crops. The HDC serves over 30 crop associations and major crop groups.
- The existence and composition of the various crop associations.
- Workload and levy funds available for individual panels.
- Cost of servicing panels and availability of industry representation.

### 2.2 Scope of Individual Panels

Having reviewed the panel scope, the Board has concluded that the existing structure should be maintained, i.e.;

1. Bulbs and Outdoor Flowers
2. Field Vegetables
3. Hardy Nursery Stock
4. Mushrooms
5. Protected Crops (edibles and ornamentals)
6. Soft Fruit
7. Tree Fruit (including Stone Fruit)

### 2.3 Cross Panel Issues

The Board is responsible for stimulating and progressing cross panel projects with the assistance of individual technical and communication managers, lead by the Principal Technical Manager.

In many cases, projects will be of relevance to more than one panel but not all, e.g. energy issues may be relevant not only to the Protected Crops Panel but also to Soft Fruit Panel. All panel members are encouraged to consider the relevance of projects for other panels but the designated technical and communication managers are specifically responsible for encouraging cross-fertilisation and communication to take place wherever relevant.

## 3 Structure and Composition

### 3.1 General

Each panel is comprised of core members who directly represent the interest of growers together with a number of technical advisers who provide scientific and consultancy support to underpin the quality and scope of proposals brought to the panels for funding. In addition individuals may be invited to specific meetings for their knowledge of a particular crop/issue as required.

### 3.2 Chairman

The Chairman of each panel is also a member of the Board. This ensures consistency and smooth communications between the various groups recommending and approving projects for funding. Ministers appoint members of the Board and therefore defacto appoint Panel Chairmen.

Through the appointment process Ministers ensure that those appointed represent a broad cross-section of the industry thereby allowing a member who has knowledge of that sector to chair each crop sector panel.

The Panel Chairman is expected to ensure the smooth and efficient running of the panel, ensuring all relevant views are gathered leading to clear and timely decisions on project funding. This is a difficult task, made more complex by the wide array of crops and interest groups. Training in Chairmanship skills is offered to Panel Chairman to help them with this duty.

### 3.3 Vice Chairman

Each panel is asked to nominate a Vice Chairman who would stand in to cover the case of sudden non-availability of the Panel Chairman. In cases where the absence of the Panel Chairman is known well in advance, such as stepping down from the Board, then the Board Chairman will stand-in and chair the relevant panel meetings.

The Vice Chairman cannot deputise for the Panel Chairman at the Board meetings but may be invited to attend part or all of the meeting, to share the views of the Panel, at the Board's discretion.

### 3.4 Technical Manager

The relevant Technical Manager supports the Panel Chairman in the smooth operation of the panels. Specific duties in this respect include: -

- Ensuring all relevant papers are circulated to Panel Members at least 7 days before the meeting.

- Ensure that concise minutes, clearly highlighting decisions and actions are approved by the Chairman and circulated to all interested parties as set out in section 4.
- Prepare the panel agenda and discuss with the Chairman how sufficient time will be allocated for important decisions to be made without seriously overrunning the timing of the meeting.
- Invite ad-hoc attendees.
- Liaise speedily with contractors on panel decisions.
- Ensure all panel members are aware of their role and responsibilities and the code of conduct for panel members.

### 3.5 Panel Members

- 3.5.1 All panel members are required to abide by the code of practice, which is given to all new members.
- 3.5.2 Very often panel members are selected to represent and provide insight into the interests of growers of a particular crop type or region. However, it is important that the panel operates as a cohesive body on a higher plane than furthering narrow sectional interests. Panel members are therefore required to take a collective responsibility to ensure interests of all growers covered by the panel are considered. In this regard, it is particularly important that the needs of speciality growers, growers of small volume crops and small-scale growers are serviced. Panel members are elected on an individual basis and deputies are not permitted but see section 3.6.2 on invited members.
- 3.5.3 As Panel members are elected on an individual basis, if during their tenure Members change employment from the position where they were at the time of election they may remain on the panel until the next round of Panel elections with the agreement of the Panel Chairman.
- 3.5.4 An elected panel member may send comments on research papers to the chairman and technical manager prior to the meeting that they are unable to attend. Alternatively he may arrange for a deputy, who will not have any voting rights, to attend the panel meeting with the agreement of the panel chairman.
- 3.5.5 Panel members should take due regard of the views of relevant crop associations, who may well have invested considerable time and effort into reviewing and shaping particular projects which they believe are in the interests of their members (and our levy payers).
- 3.5.6 Business contact details of members and their responsibilities will be put on the HDC website with the consent of individual members. Otherwise individual members can be contacted through the relevant HDC Technical Manager.

### 3.6 Panel Composition

#### Elected Members

- 3.6.1 Panels should have between 6 and 15 members directly representing the interests of levy payers.

- 3.6.2 The composition of each panel is constructed to ensure that, as far as possible, main crop categories and, where relevant, geographical regions are covered. Specific representation for minor crops may be covered by inviting individual growers or crop associations on an 'as necessary' basis.
- 3.6.3 With the complex mix of crops, regions and different combinations of crop knowledge of individual growers, it is inappropriate to design a format for each panel, irrespective of the profile of individual members. Therefore the composition and number of members of each panel will be approved by the Board on the advice of the Panel Chairman and Technical Managers, in consultation with the Panel. This process will be undertaken at least biennially.
- 3.6.4 Having defined the profile of the new panel members, the positions will be advertised and subjected to a vote by all growers paying a levy relevant to that particular panel.
- 3.6.5 Non-levy paying members of the HDC (e.g. Voluntary, Corporate, consultant) are eligible to represent growers as an elected panel member provided they are sponsored by two or more relevant levy payers.
- 3.6.6 Elected member positions will run for a period of 3 years. During this period members elected to the panel must maintain membership of the HDC throughout their term as an elected panel member.

#### Technical Advisors

- 3.6.7 Technical Advisors are invited by the elected members to serve the panel in providing general scientific or business guidance and advise on the scope, relevance and quality of proposals put to the panel for funding recommendations. Each panel can have up to four Technical Advisors who are invited to serve for an initial period of three years. This time period can be extended by agreement between the panel and the individual Technical Advisor.

Technical Advisors must recognise that they are invited because of their personal knowledge, not as representatives of their employing organisation. Technical Advisors should familiarise themselves with the HDC Conflict of Interest Policy within the document 'Code of Practice For The Board members Of the Horticultural Development Council'

#### Invited Members

- 3.6.8 Courtesy Members

Representation from Defra, Seerad and relevant trade bodies (HTA and NFU) will be invited to attend all open panel meetings.

- 3.6.9 Other attendees

In addition, representatives of crop groups or individuals may be invited to specific meetings for their knowledge of a particular crop/issue as required.

## Board Chairman and Chief Executive

3.6.10 The Board Chairman and Chief Executive are ex-officio members of all panels.

### 3.7 Panel Attendance

The Board may disqualify a panel member after three consecutive absences if the panel recommends this course of action.

### 3.8 Election process

Elections to HDC Sector Panels will take place in October of each year, when vacancies for each Panel will be advertised in HDC News.

To be eligible to stand for election, candidates must be a current member of the HDC (any category of membership). Candidates may only be nominated and seconded by current levy payers.

If more than one person is nominated for a particular position then a postal ballot will be held with candidate receiving the most votes duly elected.

Levy payers who have allocated 25% or more of their levy to a particular sector will be entitled to vote in any elections for that sector.

Those elected will serve for 3 years from the following January.

## 4 Dissemination of Information

The Panel minutes will be prepared by the Technical Manager for review and approval by the Panel Chairman within 10 working days of the meeting. Following approval by the Chairman, minutes will be distributed to Panel Members for comment within 4 weeks of the Panel meeting.

If no substantive comments are received from Panel Members within 10 working days of distribution the Panel minutes will be published on the HDC website for all levy payers and scientists to view.

Co-opted members and Defra/trade body representatives are requested to ensure that the key issues are disseminated throughout their respective organisations.

## 5 Agendas for Panel Meetings

The HDC sector panels meet three or four times annually. It is important that the operation of panel meetings is planned and targeted such that the panels function effectively and efficiently.

## 5.1 Proposed Agenda for Panel Meetings

### 5.1.1 Elected Members Meeting

- Feedback and information on relevant Board decisions and strategy.
- Update on panel finances with detailed project budgets.
- Areas of concern such as late reports, contractors not delivering etc.
- Review of Panel membership (annually)

### 5.1.2 Open Panel Meetings

- Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting (update on actions).
- Report on on-going projects (by exception). It is proposed that the grower section for all annual project reports together with an audit sheet, would be sent to panel members by email. The panel meetings will provide an opportunity for members to comment on these reports, again by exception.
- The Technical and Communication Managers will jointly prepare a short and focused report on the completed objectives and technical deliverables, completed communications plans, potential financial benefits and exploitation of completed projects. The panel members will deliberate on these assessments and assist in the overall assessment of the success of the completed R&D.
- Assessment and evaluation of R&D project concept notes and project proposals against defined criteria.
- Appointment of Project-Co-ordinators
- Pesticide regulatory matters.
- Suggestions from growers and panel members for R&D.
- Communications activities (report by exception).

## 5.2 Annually

At the first meeting each calendar year;

- The Technical Managers will prepare and present an overview of the programme, providing guidance to the panel on the expenditure per R&D priority, crop category, etc. The panel will be advised on the focus of past expenditure versus future R&D expenditure.
- A summary of the technical and economic assessments of completed projects funded by the panel in the previous year would be presented.
- Review and evaluation of completed projects with an assessment of the deliverables, potential financial benefits, likely grower uptake and communication activities. (Information to be generated from completed Self Assessment Forms)
- Summary presentation of Defra and other externally funded work relevant to the panel sector with an update on relevant policy for R&D.

- General discussion with agreement on the updating of the panel strategy and specific plans for the forthcoming year.
- Review and assessment of communications strategy with discussion and agreement on specific plans for the forthcoming year.