**IBTS publishes 2018 Annual Report - blood donations in 2018 down by just under 1,000 on previous year**

**vCJD deferral policy reversal comes into effect today**

The IBTS collected 129,589 blood donations in 2018, down by 977 on 2017. The slight drop is attributed to the impact of weather related events on collections. “The Blood Transfusion Service, like all public bodies was challenged early on in 2018 with dealing with the effects of Storm Emma and the Beast from the East. The organisation managed very well and it tested our contingency arrangements and how risk was managed. The staff response was excellent and ensured that hospitals and patients received blood and blood products when required. When we asked donors to donate post the storms to replenish the blood supply they responded magnificently and ensured that we could maintain the blood supply,” said Andy Kelly, IBTS Chief Executive.

“In my report for 2017 I raised the issue of the use of O negative blood. I am delighted to report that we have commenced a national dialogue on this issue and we are exploring ways in which the IBTS, prescribing clinicians and blood bank staff can collaborate on ensuring that O negative blood is used optimally. This is an issue that is causing concern for blood services worldwide and workable solutions need to be found to ensure that blood services do not call on O negative donors unnecessarily,” he added.

“Surveillance of possible new microbiological threats to the blood supply is an essential activity and this involves reviewing data from international agencies such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control as well as the weekly reports from the Irish Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPRC). The IBTS with the other European Blood Services participates in the monthly teleconference with the infectious diseases monitoring group. The IBTS also participates in the UK structures” said IBTS Medical & Scientific Director Dr Stephen Field

“The Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) held two special workshop meetings during 2018 to consider the measures in place to prevent the transmission of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. All the scientific evidence relating to the disease and its relationship with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy in cattle was reviewed. Further work was required before a final decision could be taken on the deferral criteria. This decision has come into effect today. The other special workshop was to review the methods of pathogen reduction in platelets. Again, this was a review of the current science in this field and this too will be considered again in 2019 along with a health economic analysis looking at the benefits of introducing this technology,” he added.

A new Chairperson was appointed to the Board of the IBTS in 2018 to replace outgoing Chairperson Professor Anthony Staines. Ms Linda Hickey was appointed Chairperson in October. “The IBTS is a unique organisation. While we can control how we process and distribute blood products we do not control the supply and are entirely dependent on the community spirit of people all around the country to attend at our centres and mobile clinics. They turn up in their numbers, day-in and day-out, because they know that the need for blood is a constant through the year, and we are hugely grateful for their generosity,” said IBTS Chairperson Linda Hickey.

**ENDS**