

FOREST RESEARCH IN WALES

Purpose

1. To update the National Committee on developments in The Forest Research in Wales Unit since its formal launch in January 2009.

Current status

2. Hugh Evans took up the post of Head of Forest Research in Wales in early January 2009. He is based at the FC Wales National Office in Aberystwyth.
3. The first four months of the Unit have been devoted to scoping its future work, with particular emphasis on gaining a deeper understanding of the drivers for research and technology transfer within Wales. During this period Hugh Evans has had meetings and discussions with FC Wales staff, particularly in the Policy & Programme Development Team, and with staff from WAG, IBERS, Welsh School of Architecture, CIRRE, Bangor University, EA Wales, Environment Hub Wales, CCW, CEH, etc. These have been invaluable in establishing the 'baseline' for developing the Unit through its strategic plan.
4. Production of a research catalogue for forest and woodland related research carried out by Forest Research (FR) directly or by collaboration in Wales is underway. This will form the knowledge source to assess how well FR as a whole, and the Unit in Wales in particular, are responding to and delivering R&D to stakeholders and end users in Wales.

Forest Research in Wales Strategic Plan

5. Current focus is on preparation of a document describing the research strategy for Forest Research in Wales. The first draft of this document was presented to and discussed at the FR Executive Board (FREB) meeting on 20 April. Some changes to the content and emphases are being made arising from that meeting and a further draft is being prepared and will be discussed further by FREB during May. Following approval by FREB, the document will be made available to FC Wales, including the National Committee and Management Boards, and other interested parties.
6. The key features of the strategy for the immediate future are likely to include:
 - Production and regular updating of the research catalogue;

- Completion of a gap analysis to assess research needs against capacity to deliver the required R&D and technology transfer for Wales (with emphasis on the new Woodlands for Wales's strategy). This will involve FR as a whole and will have strong emphasis on collaborative research within Wales and elsewhere;
- Production and regular updating of FR in Wales web pages and research documentation (bilingual, as appropriate);
- Acting as a two-way conduit for the new three Centre FR research structure;
- Active assessment and bidding for research and dissemination funding to address research and technology transfer needs. This will be both specific to Wales and will also maximise the potential of FR as a whole to service the Welsh agenda;
- Recruitment of staff to the FR in Wales Unit in order to increase the number of project leaders and ancillary staff. This will ideally be in the Aberystwyth area, but is also likely to include a distributed network of staff at universities and other research establishments;
- Carry out a scoping exercise on a Research Forest/Natural Laboratory concept and produce a Business Plan for its delivery;
- Contribute to the development of both the next FC Science & Innovation Strategy and to the FR Science Strategy (this to be delivered during the current financial year).

Staffing

7. One of the key aims of the Unit is to increase staff in Wales. There is already a number of staff in the principality and new staff have been recruited since the Unit was formed in January. Including the staff at Talybont, and at Llanrwst as well as Hugh Evans and Chris Jones (Regional Liaison Officer, Wales), there are currently 15 FR staff in Wales. The latest recruits are Helen Cariss (joint post with FC Wales; part on Interreg FUTUREforest project and part climate change project staff member, (based in Aberystwyth), and Matthew Jollans (social researcher, based at Coed y Cymoedd). The aim is to increase this number, particularly for project leaders and ancillary staff.

New Funding Streams

8. Although subject to final details and signing of contracts, FR has just heard that it has been successful in the recent Interreg IVA (Ireland-Wales) round and is Lead Partner along with National University of Ireland (Maynooth) and Swansea University. Further details will be made available in the near future. The funding will provide for a PB5 Research Assistant to work with Hugh Evans.

Risks

9. The development of the FR in Wales Unit depends not only on interaction with stakeholders in Wales but also on building sufficient capacity to deliver research, development and technology transfer over a relatively short time frame. Funding is critical to this aim and it is essential that both FC and external sources of funds are obtained to deliver the aims of the Unit. The interactions with stakeholders and with the research community in Wales since the Unit was launched have

been good and the next phase is to convert this enthusiasm to tangible research topics, with appropriate funding. The Interreg IVA funding mentioned above is the first substantial contract to be won since the FR in Wales Unit was formed.

Recommendations

10. The NC is invited to note:

- the progress made since the Forest Research in Wales Unit was launched in January 2009;
- the Strategic Plan will be made available in the near future and comments on its content and delivery plans will be welcomed.

Hugh Evans
Head of Forest Research in Wales
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