

17 March 2016

Science and Innovation Strategy for Forestry in Great Britain - update

1. Purpose

To provide an update for Commissioners on progress towards delivering the Science and Innovation Strategy for Forestry in Great Britain (SIS).

2. Background/Introduction

The SIS is the key document which sets out areas where there is an agreed collaborative approach to science and evidence across the four countries of the UK. The resources for its delivery are part of the Forestry Commission's Westminster funding. Since the last update, a new series of research programmes has been developed, and these were formally commissioned at the start of April 2015. The new programmes and their relative sizes and values can be seen at Annex 1. The full details of the research programmes can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/research.

3. Details

The new programmes are now all underway. They are being managed within FR through a matrix management approach using seven programme managers, and ten science group leaders. This novel approach is now bedding down. The CFS analyst team continues to manage the programmes on behalf of our customers, and the team works closely with the FR programme managers and policy leads in the countries through a series of regular steering groups. Outputs for the first year are now being produced.

As well as the research commissioned with FR, there is a separate programme of externally commissioned research. This serves to provide a number of benefits:

- provision of research where it makes no sense to maintain standing capacity,
- short term market expertise,
- allows comparison between costs and delivery between external and in-house providers, and
- helps to ensure that capacity to deliver such work remains available.

In addition, the external budget also covers the cost of membership of wider groups, such as IUFRO¹, EUFORGEN², LWEC³, and UKEOF⁴ which provide network and collaboration

¹ International Union of Forest Research organisations www.iufro.org/

² EU Forest Genetics Programme www.euforgen.org/

³ Living with Environmental Change <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/partnerships/lwec/>

⁴ UK Environmental Observation Framework www.ukeof.org.uk/

opportunities for leveraging FC resources. The level of leverage achieved across the research programme in 2014/15 was 81%, much of which was contributed through plant health and wood and timber properties work. This leverage helps to maintain research delivery at a time of challenging budget reductions.

4. Resource Implications

As of the 1st April 2016, the CFS functions of Statistics and Publications will transfer to FR with the full resources to currently deliver them. In addition, CFS cash funding for the National Forest Inventory will move to FR. This will add eight staff, and £1.3m to FR's annual budget.

The Research Strategy Management Board has requested we secure additional funding for work on emerging species, and on maintaining the permanent sample plots. The cost of these two pieces of work will amount to £390,000 per year towards the end of the spending review period. The RSMB has agreed that the funding is found using a combination of money from the CFS external research budget and funding from the private sector. The amount will increase to the final figure between 2016/17 and 2018/19. This approach has been based on three key principles:

- Minimising disruption to other research programmes
- Finding a solution which is long term and sustainable
- Ensuring that engagement with and ownership of the work is as wide as possible.

If this partnership approach can be achieved for this work, it will provide a sound model for exploring further joint funding options for research which is of critical importance to the wider sector, as well as the public forest estate.

In summary, the plan is to secure an increased amount of resource for forestry research going forward to ensure that whichever arrangement is agreed for the future of Forest research under full devolution it is properly funded and viable.

5. Risk Assessment

There is a risk that additional funding for the new research work will not be forthcoming from the private sector. As discussions on this have yet to be initiated, it is not possible to quantify this risk. However, recent informal discussions with private sector colleagues have been cautiously optimistic. Should this fail, then we will have to be less ambitious about what can be achieved.

We are awaiting the final agreed SR15 settlement from Defra and FC England. This may require adjusting the plans to take account of any changes, but at this stage it is not believed that any changes will be of a magnitude which requires significant redevelopment of plans.

6. Communications Issues

The new research programmes have been published on the internet, and are available for all stakeholders to view.

We continue to work closely with Defra and devolved administration colleagues to communicate how the FC research programmes are delivering against their strategic

agendas. Not only on forestry, but also on climate change, flood mitigation, ecosystem services, air quality and other priorities.

A key part of our research is to provide the evidence base for the UK Forestry Standard. We have achieved agreement by the four UK ministers that we proceed with a 'light touch' review of the UKFS. This will ensure that it is brought up to date with current regulations and practice and it will provide a breathing space for the devolved administrations to consider how they will wish to take this forward at the time of the next review without CFS to lead the process. The review will be completed by the end of this calendar year.

We also intend to work closely with country colleagues during the next 12-18 months to ensure that mechanisms can be found to allow the continuation of a collaborative programme of research. However, this will be dependent on the outcomes of the Forestry Governance Programme Board.

7. Implementation and Evaluation Proposals

There are no implementation and evaluation proposals.

8. Recommendation

That Commissioners note and discuss the progress towards delivering the SIS.

Roger Coppock
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March 2016

Research programmes - relative size

