

## Forest Research Executive Board Meeting – 12 April 2005

**Present:** Prof. Jim Lynch  
Dr Peter Freer-Smith  
Dr Hugh Evans  
Dr Sam Evans  
Mr Bill Mason  
Dr Andy Moffat  
Dr Chris Quine  
Mr Tony Cornwell  
Mr Ken Charles  
Dr Janet Dutch  
Dr Xanthe Christophers  
Mr Richard Williamson (for item 8).

**Copies To:** Head of Internal Audit  
Head of Technical Services Unit  
Director of Communications  
Director of Corporate & Forestry Services

### **Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the last meeting**

1. Accepted.

### **Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising**

2. JL requested that there be a uniformity of style in the presentation of Board papers. A standard format should be adhered to with a consistency of nomenclature used in reports. Claire Holmes can advise. **Action FREB**

### **Agenda Item 3 – Reports**

3. BM has a (provisional) meeting with Ian Foreshaw/Simon Hodge on 28 April to discuss FCS/FR liaison issues. This meeting will be followed by a meeting with representatives of SEERAD's Agricultural and Biological Research Group and their Environmental Departments. **Noted**
4. JL/HE are attending a meeting at Silvan House on 16 April to discuss *Phytophthora* developments. **Noted**

### **Agenda Item 4 – Feedback from the Commissioners' Meeting**

5. FR's Corporate Plan was accepted by the Commissioners. XC will arrange for it to be put on the Intranet. **Action: XC**
6. The development of the Alice Holt site is still under discussion. **Noted**
7. The Forestry Commission has submitted the paperwork required for the Regulatory Modernisation Process, to modernise the Forestry Act to permit FR to enter into Joint Ventures. **Noted**

8. The FC's Science Strategy document met with some resistance from Commissioners who felt that they should be involved, to a greater extent, in the setting of policy. JL is liaising with the DG/CFS to resolve some of the issues. The current draft will be used as a working document and will form the basis of the FR/CFS meeting in May.

**Action JL**

#### **Agenda Item 5 – TSU Restructuring Proposal**

9. PFS and JD presented their paper. FREB discussed and agreed;
- (a) The core business of FR's TSU is:
- The provision of a service of field experiment implementation and maintenance to environmental and forest scientists.
  - The provision of a survey service to environmental and forest scientists, forest managers and policy makers.
  - The provision of a known 'link' between FR and the FE/FC, private landowners and the wider forestry sector at a local scale in support of the above.
- (b) Within the next 5 years, the TSU will reorganise to five field station units (2 in Scotland, 2 in England and 1 in Wales). FR's Corporate Plan confirms the strategic need for the TSU. The Unit will be maintained at least at this level for the period of the current Corporate Plan.
- (c) The TSU financial target for 05/06 is to break even. However, the FREB accepts that this is difficult to achieve and has agreed a planned net deficit of £322K. This deficit must not be exceeded and its acceptance by the FREB represents an agreement of the need to subsidise the TSU during 05/06 as has been necessary for the past two years (03/04 and 04/05) and in 01/02.
- (d) Where appropriate, TSU staff will undertake the Scottish Native Woodland Survey and NIWT II work (not just supervision and checking) where they are available and will provide the three new Research Liaison Officers (RLOs). RLOs are proposed in the FC's Science and Innovation Strategy (Section 2.2.2). These three FR staff will link researchers sponsored by the FC to end-users in Wales, England and Scotland helping to facilitate dissemination and country-generated research.
- (e) TSU management should reduce TSU costs so that it breaks even by 08/09. This will be with the help of FREB, FR Human Resources, Director Finance and the small group that has been set up as part of the examination of TSU core activities to review the role and functioning of the research nurseries. In order to break even it is considered that a reduction in staff numbers will be required. Negotiation and implementation of these changes will start in 05/06.
- (f) Along with these reductions in staff numbers, to provide some security, FR will develop more rigorous Business Plans which will allow the new proposed structure and staff numbers to be maintained over this period. The outcome will be a smaller, better supported, flexible unit, with the geographic spread and skills which reflect the requirements of science divisions.
- (g) Progress against the above should continue to be monitored regularly at the FREB.
10. KC will formally inform the Trade Union Side and invite their views before decisions are made.

**Action: KC**

### **Agenda Item 6 – Staff Survey**

11. The FREB agreed, after being assured that if 10 or more staff from a given location respond, that confidentiality would not be breached, the third Staff Survey will go down to Divisional/Branch level. **Action: KC**
12. JL will write to staff encouraging them to take the time to complete the form. **Action: JL**
13. HoDs/Branches will actively encourage their staff to complete the form and will make time available for staff to do so. Where forms are completed at home, up to 2 hours will be allowed for this. **FREB**

### **Agenda Item 7 – Finance**

14. TC reported that as year-end procedures are not yet finalised it is not possible to give a final report on our financial performance for 2004/05 but indications are that we are likely to end the year with a surplus of £24K. JL considered this was a sterling effort by all the staff in helping to achieve this. **Noted**
15. Provided the TSU can deliver its target of a net loss of £322K, our plan for 2005/06 indicates a projected net surplus of £27K. **Noted**
16. TC is setting up finance meetings with HoDs with priority being given to those not meeting their contribution targets. **Action: TC**
17. FREB agreed with TC's proposal that he discusses the capital bids for 2005/06 that are marked as 'high priority' (these amount to £182K) with JL and, if JL agrees, the allocation of this money can be made immediately. Bids with a lesser priority will be discussed at a later stage. **Action: TC**

### **Agenda Item 8 – HR Policy Development**

18. Richard Williamson (HR Silvan House) attended for this item to brief the FREB on HR Policy Development and how policies might be developed to complement FR's business priorities. **Noted**

### **Agenda Item 9 – Staffing <sup>(a)</sup>, Reporting Standards <sup>(b)</sup>**

- 19 (a) KC presented his paper on staffing which indicated an average staffing for 2004/05 of 278.3 (against the Corporate Plan figure of 278).
- 20 (b) The FREB agreed that Heads of Divisions/Branches will meet with their Reporting/Confirming Officers and hold Divisional Standards Meetings. There will be 'forward looking' Standards Meetings at Alice Holt and NRS chaired by Peter Freer-Smith and Chris Quine to cover reports on PB2, 3 and 4. Further meetings will be arranged to cover PB5 and 6. **Action: HoD/Branches**
21. HoDs to send details of staff in the science divisions and TSU who will be receiving a TP or NFE mark for 04/05 to PFS. TC and XC to send the same details to KC for Finance/IT and Communications. **Action: HoD/Branches**
22. KC to circulate FR's Annex to the FC's Grading Guidance to FREB members which will be considered for revision at the next FREB meeting. **Action: KC**

### **Agenda Item 10 – AOB**

23. TC submitted a paper, 'Submission of Travel and Subsistence Claims' in which he identified that during the last quarter of the year, Finance has received many T&S claims going back 3 months or more which must cause difficulty for Heads of Divisions in their financial planning and in ensuring that the expense has been properly incurred and authorised. HoDs were asked to impress on staff the importance of submitting claims regularly and to remind staff of the four principles contained in the paper. **Action: FREB**

**Date of next meeting: 7 June 2005 @ Alice Holt**