

**Minutes of the Forest Research Executive Board meeting held at Alice Holt on 17 December 2008**

**Present:** Peter Freer-Smith  
Wilma Harper  
Helen McKay  
Andy Moffat  
James Pendlebury (chair)  
Chris Quine

**In attendance:** Helena Ladbury (minute secretary), Sandra Smith for item 2, Ken Charles for items 3 & 4, Jane Devlin & Tony Hutchings for item 6.

**Copies to:** Liz Holmes, Head of Internal Audit, Ros Bull, secretary to the Chairman

**Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**

1. The minutes of the November meeting were accepted as a fair and accurate representation of the meeting with no amendments.

**Matters arising**

2. Para 1 - Appointments  
Chris Gilligan and Christine Cahalan were proposed as external members of the interview board for the Head of FRM Centre (only one external member required). It was agreed that in the first instance HL should invite Chris Gilligan. **Action: HL**  
**Update:** 13 January - Chris Gilligan has accepted.

Para 2 – Lease of Land at NRS

The University of Edinburgh is developing its Easter Bush campus, moving the veterinary school, then taking over the Bush nursery in a phased development which will take 10 years. Discussion took place regarding possibilities for joint venture with the University and it was agreed that a district heating system, although not campus-wide, might be one avenue to explore. It was considered worthwhile to continue strengthening working links between FR and the University and agreed that there was no harm in asking the University if they would be interested in pursuing a dialogue and if so, capital modernisation funds could be sought – grants may be available for heating applications. Vehicle sharing (e.g. 4WD) was also considered to be worth follow-up with neighbouring institutes such as CEH Bush. **Action: HM**

Para 3 – Staffing

Two names had been put forward as external members of the forthcoming Research Promotion Board; Brian Reynolds and Catharine

Ward-Thompson (only one external member required). PF-S will invite Brian Reynolds in the first instance. **Action: PF-S**

#### Para 3 - TSU

It was advised that SASA (formerly Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, now known as Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture) at Roddinglaw has new facilities and may have some spare capacity. JP will ask Janet Dutch to investigate opportunities for joint investment and/or collaboration with SASA and also with NIAB and SAC.

**Action: JP**

#### Para 3 – RD

With regard to the future role and membership of the ACFR, PF-S will present a paper at the January FREB meeting. It was agreed that whilst a Spring tour for the ACFR in 2009 would be a good way for committee members to remain in touch with FR, a decision on whether or not to hold one would be deferred until the January FREB meeting.

#### Para 4

Communication of FREB (and FRMB) decisions to staff was discussed. It was advised that once minutes of meetings are approved by FREB/FRMB they are posted on the intranet. It was agreed that, in addition, issuing memos from FREB to communicate action points and decisions may be a quicker way to communicate to staff.

### **Agenda Item 1a – FCEB feedback**

#### **3. IFOS**

FR should treat IFOS as a new client; IFOS will look at the income which FR currently receives from OSU and may amalgamate it into an SLA with C&FS. There is a clear process through the PAG system for research spend from C&FS. There may need to be some overlap between PAG funding and IFOS funding. Peter Weston and HM have agreed this is a workable solution. Operational work is covered, it is important not to lose research work. Dialogue will need to be maintained in order that nothing 'slips through the net'. Any group buying a service or research from FR needs to be aware that there are staffing implications to sudden withdrawal of funding and therefore indicative budgets for 2-3 years in advance will be requested.

#### **4. Staff Survey**

This has been delayed until later this year.

#### **5. Wood for Good**

The FC has reduced its funding; Scandinavian funding has also been reduced. If Wood for Good reconstitutes itself the FC may become involved again.

#### **6. Equality & Diversity**

Disability Discrimination Act compliance on the public estate is an issue for the FC which it is taking action to resolve. KC has data on FR estate.

7. **Finance**

Central finance at SH is now able to cover FR's predicted 08/09 budget deficit. There may also be some capital available, further investigation is taking place.

8. **GreenerWays**

Two FR staff will need to be trained as auditors; FR needs to have demonstrable systems in place and building upgrades. It was suggested that once appointed the new Head of Operations should be the FREB GreenerWays champion (the title Responsible Officer was mentioned). It was pointed out that Susanna Page based at the South East England Forest District office at Bucks Horn Oak can conduct any audits required at AH. Steve Lee will be approached for advice on who can cover NRS.

9. **SLAs/Service Boards**

The EB requires further information on these. It was suggested that heads of shared services hold annual discussions with Country Directors and CEO FR. Sometimes items agreed at service board level don't always filter up to management board level. The function of service boards will be looked at again – whether it is to steer the business or to be a community of users.

10. **Plant Health**

The DG has asked WH to look at funding for pests and diseases.

**Agenda Item 2 – Finance**

11. The following points were noted.

- FR is in a slightly better financial position than at the same time last year.
- Sandra Smith (SS) will investigate how software maintenance costs have been accounted for in previous years and will also contact MES to query fuel charge costs and will discuss with Keith Gliddon (KG) whether Service Board charges could be accounted for (i.e. posted to E-financials) monthly rather than quarterly.
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- SS is reasonably content that expenditure figures are accurate.
- Working budgets and forecasts will be needed from Divisions in January.
- EU auditors have visited recently – these visits went extremely well and the auditors were very impressed.

12. **TRS**

The transfer of TRS data to EFin is progressing slowly although no external (inc EU) income is showing yet. This should be available for the January FREB meeting. Lack of data is having an impact on invoice issuing. FR is now much closer to having a system that works. It was hoped that the backlog could be cleared by the end of December.

13. Reports are being developed and in January it should be possible to run draft reports – these are preset by project, by individual and by cost centre, but FR/FC finance team can look at developing customised reports in advance.

### **Agenda Item 3 – Next steps following Efficiency & Delivery Review**

14. JP accepted the report and requested further clarification on a number of issues.
15. The following points were noted.
  - Some short-term cash savings can be made.
  - Recruiting restrictions are not good for staff motivation and morale. This is a serious issue which needs to be addressed.
  - VME – SS will present a paper to the February FREB. **Action: SS**
  - Central charges are still increasing.
  - Business & science strategy – Alison Melvin’s paper refers and will be discussed under AOB.
  - Headroom is needed to win non-FC business – tackle in 09/10 business plan.
  - Moving from a 5-Division to a 3-Centre structure should reduce transactional costs.
  - No recommendations were made on facilities or capital equipment.
16. JP advised that the report would not be released to the TUS; however he had spoken to Ed Shephard and notified him of its recommendations.

### **Agenda Item 4 – Staffing and Centre development**

17. AM, HM & CQ circulated their visions for the three new Centres. Discussion then took place regarding staffing of the centres and it was agreed that
  - The Climate Change centre will comprise most staff currently in E&HS and all staff currently in Tree Health Division.
  - The Centre for Forest Resource Management will comprise most staff currently in Forest Management Division and most staff currently in Biometrics who are not transferring to the new IFOS unit.

- The Centre for Human and Ecological Sciences will comprise most staff from the current Ecology Division, most of the Social & Economic Research Group from the current Environmental & Human Sciences Division and the three statisticians.
18. Programme managers will need to be good scientists, good organisers, will be budget-holders responsible for managing their programme budgets and supervising, although not necessarily line-managing, programme staff.
  19. JP stressed that the new Centres will require a different way of working and thinking and that many programmes will be cross-disciplinary.
  20. JP and PF-S will collate the information provided by AM, HM & CQ and consolidate into one document. **Action: PF-S/JP**
  21. It was agreed that a further half-day meeting of FREB in early January, via v/c if necessary, was required in order to finalise the allocation of programmes and staff to the Centres. **Action: HL**
  22. Ideally the March PAG round should be based on the new FR structure, however, this may not be possible.
  23. A memo from FREB would be issued advising that the bulk of staff had now been allocated to Centres but a few details had still to be agreed. **Action: JP**
  24. In light of Hugh Evans' imminent move to Wales, FREB agreed that Joan Webber be appointed as acting Head of Tree Health Division with immediate effect until the existing Divisional structure was disbanded at the end of March. Ken Charles (KC) to announce. **Action: KC**
  25. JP advised that he had received a report from Angus Mackie of FE Scotland which proposed that all survey work for FES should be conducted in-house from some time next year. He and Janet Dutch will meet Angus Mackie to discuss its implications. **Action: JP**
  28. It was agreed that C&FS, FR and IFOS should collectively discuss the role of the TSU in light of the FES paper. **Action: JP/WH/Peter Weston**
  29. Centre Heads were asked to add any TSU staff who they specifically want for their programmes to their staffing plans.

#### **Agenda Item 5 – Corporate Plan**

30. It was agreed to defer this item to the January meeting.

#### **Agenda Item 6 – CCure**

31. Jane Devlin introduced the paper and acknowledged work which had already been done prior to her arrival.
32. Discussion of the proposal took place and it was agreed that
  - Keith Gliddon (KG) would need to see the proposal before the end of January.
  - Jane Devlin and Tony Hutchings would prepare a paper for submission to the February FC EB. **Action: Jane Devlin/Tony Hutchings**
  - JP, KG, Jane Devlin and Tony Hutchings would meet prior to the FC EB to discuss in more detail. **Action: Jane Devlin**
33. At this point WH left the meeting and advised that she would give her input to Alison Melvin's paper via email.

### **Agenda Item 7 – Governance and Risk Management**

34. It was agreed to defer this item to the January meeting.

### **Agenda Item 8 – AOB**

35. The following items were discussed.
36. Future role and membership of ACFR  
This item is deferred to January FREB meeting.
37. Administrative forms
  - It was decided that expense claims will eventually be processed through EEMS.
  - The process for appointment of casual staff was felt to be unnecessarily cumbersome. It was decided to look into this and also other administrative systems to see how they can be streamlined and improved – travel, contracts etc. and make recommendations to FREB. **Action: KC**
  - Secondly, business systems needs for the future require investigation. It was decided to ask Ian Willoughby to look into this and pull together a small team if necessary to help. **Action: HM**
38. External income paper
  - JP presented a paper written by Alison Melvin (AKM) which detailed various proposals to help researchers gain external income.
  - It was felt that the paper only partially addressed objectives and that other mechanisms could be considered. Of the options suggested, JP preferred C, but with some of the items suggested at A.
  - It was suggested that the corporate plan be used as an opportunity to engage staff with FR's future direction.
  - FR Finance will provide an active, accurate contract register, SS to ask Shirley Spencer to compile. **Action: SS**
  - External Income spreadsheet sent to Heads of Centre on 7 January by SS, in connection with 2009-10 Business Planning.

- PF-S will look at the FJPs for current centre heads, AKM and the new Head of Operations. **Action: PF-S**
39. The recommendations were discussed and it was agreed that
- Targeted intelligence from AKM was required and that parameters should be set, for example, £100k + matched funding.
  - AKM should write a paper for January/February FREB detailing how additional staff could help, what the link to any new member of staff would be and what exactly they would do. **Action: AKM**
  - It was suggested that Bill Mason be asked to find out what bid-writing support needs [of staff] are, what organisational blockages currently exist and whether there are any disincentives. It was further suggested that, as an experienced bid writer, he could mentor staff in this aspect of their work. **Action: JP/BM**
  - The typing pool staff could do basic filling of forms in respect of bid applications.
  - If necessary, external bid writers could be contracted.
40. Health & Safety
- Centre heads were asked to check who their reps will be and write Centre Health & Safety plans. **Action: CHs**
  - Ken Charles will be asked to refresh FR's Health & Safety policy. **Action: KC**
41. Other
- JP to discuss accrued annual leave with Ken Charles and Sandra Smith – it should be added to FR's risk register. **Action: JP/KC/SS**  
 SS - A point of interest - accruing for untaken annual leave is being considered as part of changes to accounts required with a move to new International Financial Reporting Standards for 2009-10.
42. JP advised that he and KC would arrange for all FREB members who haven't yet been assessed to undergo Myers Briggs analysis and follow this up with a formal feedback session to FREB as a whole. **Action: JP/KC**

**Next meeting: 9.30 Wednesday 21 January 2009, NRS**