

Forest Research Executive Board Meeting [FREB]

Minutes of the [informal] video conference meeting held on 11 January 2005

Present: Prof. Jim Lynch
Dr Peter Freer-Smith
Dr Hugh Evans
Prof. Sam Evans
Mr Bill Mason
Dr Andy Moffat
Dr Chris Quine
Mr Tony Cornwell
Mr Ken Charles

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 with one amendment to item 19, 'TC to provide up-dated guidance on the allocation of time to the different categories in the Time Summary form. **Action: TC**
2. Andy Moffat was congratulated on his award of a DSc from Reading University.

Agenda Item 2

Matters Arising

3. JL is drafting a paper, in conjunction with Wilma Harper, to be presented to the DG addressing the strategic direction, supervision and monitoring of our research. **Noted**
4. The arrangements for the proposed FR/GBEB meeting are in a state of flux at the moment. An internal FC/FR meeting will be held at the Barony to arrange a meeting in June with 'Climate Change' as the likely topic. Wilma Harper is developing FC's stance on climate change. However, there is a conference being arranged at University of Surrey by Mark Broadmeadow with the topic, 'Trees and a Changing Climate'. Minister, Elliot Morley is giving the opening address. JL to liaise with Wilma Harper to look at the possibility of combining the internal briefing for the GBEB with the University of Surrey meeting. **Action: JL**
5. BM is awaiting the outcome of the publication of the SEERAD strategy before arranging the meeting between FR and senior staff at the Macaulay institute. He will keep FREB informed of the implications of the new SEERAD science strategy [to be published shortly]. **Action: BM**
6. KC will review major agenda items on FREB timetable and put out a definitive list to FREB members and the organising Secretary. The February meeting of FREB will discuss Technical Services Unit. Janet Dutch will attend. **Action: KC, JD**

7. TC is finalising dates for financial awareness seminars for NRS. TC agreed to include risk management in the seminars and to hold them, as well, at Alice Holt.
Action: TC
8. Following the review of FC publication processes, XC to ensure that if the responsibility for publications is passed to FR, that the resource to carry out the function is transferred as well.
Action: XC
9. KC to draft a note to staff indicating the senior management roles within FR and the functions of HoDs, Research Director and Chief Executive.
Action: KC
10. As the February meeting, FREB will discuss the TSU, PF-S asked HoDs to let him have details of their proposed TSU spend/usage for 2005/06 by 10th January so that account can be taken of this during discussions.
Action: HoDs
11. HoDs to respond to KC's paper about the direction and type of HR strategies that need to be taken forward to support our business needs/workforce strategy.
Action: HoDs

Agenda Item 3

Reports

12. BM reported initial success in bidding for the EU, EFORWOOD contract. This has passed the preliminary examination with a full contract proposal being invited by the EU. The contract will involve EHS and Biometrics.
13. FREB noted the award of PhD to Alexis Achim and recorded its congratulations.
14. AM reported that EHS is taking forward the recommendations of the Visiting Group and that a number of RELU bids are proceeding to the next round.
15. HE reported a very enthusiastic response by FDMs to the application of nematodes to spruce in Wales.
16. PF-S hopes to see tangible progress on QA now that Kate Fielding has been appointed.
17. HoDs have seen the most recent edition of the Science Strategy draft. FC Research Strategy Management Board meet again on 19 January. PF-S agreed to circulate the top draft of the strategy prior to this meeting and invited HoDs to comment on it.
Action: PF-S, HoDs
18. PF-S reported that the next three years of expenditure by CFS with FR are set out by theme in the draft strategy.
Noted
19. SE is moving forward a number of funding opportunities.

Agenda Item 4

Feedback from GB Executive Board

20. The importance of GIS systems was emphasised at GBEB and Director Personnel has been asked to look at GIS staffing implications.

21. Research Strategy will be submitted to FCAP in January, GBEB in February and FC Commissioners in March. GBEB will consider scientific issues more regularly with 'away-days' being arranged [first will be on Climate Change].
22. JL is presenting a paper to the next GBEB to establish the future responsibilities for development of science policy within FC.
23. JL is Head of Science Profession within FC.
24. JL attended a DEFRA open meeting where steers were welcome with regard to the development of DEFRA's science policy. Views were listened to and where these would not be acted upon, the decision not to act was defended by DEFRA. JL has arranged to meet with Office of Science and Technology [OST] Directors and feels that as OST will be reviewing DEFRA's science policy it may not be too long before they also review our policy. Prior to this, we need to review and re-write our science policy. JL welcomes HoD's views. **Action: HoDs**
25. JL reported that FR has attained partial academic analogue status which will allow us to go forward in partnerships with universities and other institutes. He attended a very informative address at University of Surrey about how to win contract applications and has invited the two speakers to address FR.

Agenda Item 5
Divisional Meetings

26. TC discussed his paper detailing the differences in costs of the various recent Divisional meetings. This aroused much heated debate! It was agreed that these meetings had an important role to play especially this year with the emerging Divisions. JL acknowledged the need and purpose of these meetings but we must look critically at cost. **Noted**
27. BM mentioned a concern that had been raised at NRS. There is much conjecture about the position with regard to FC finances. He wondered if the DG might be prepared to put out an authoritative statement. JL said that the DG had already put out a statement when he announced the start of the Business Improvement Programme. JL emphasised that although FR is in a stronger position organisationally we should not be excluded from this process and should play our part. He undertook to speak to the DG to see if anything else could be put out to staff. **Action: JL**

Agenda Item 6
Finance

28. There is a central initiative for an electronic ordering system with the abolishment of the B1 order form. TC considers this might be costly and may not be to the advantage of FR. He will monitor the situation. **Noted**
29. HoDs were invited to note that the timing for the publication of FC corporate Annual Reports is being brought forward. The 2004/05 reports will be published in September. **Noted**
30. TC asked that HoDs look at their budgets and identify, quickly, any cash that could be surrendered. A range of measures had been put in place by JL to improve our financial position. These include;

An embargo on non-essential spending
Restriction on new appointments this FY
Overtime ban
Suspension on the use of the GPC other than for essential T&S
No new capital authorizations
Delay, where possible, authorized works with payments to be made after 1 April
Priority to be given to completion of reports/contracts where payment is due this FY.

Action: HoDs

31. PF-S asked if HE could enquire of Corporate Forestry Services for a further contribution towards *P. ramorum*.

Agenda Item 7

Staffing

32. KC asked the FREB to endorse a change in our advertising policy. With the cost of national newspaper/New Scientist advertisements reaching £4500. It was agreed that we would use a smaller display advertisement which would give the bare minimum of information while referring potential candidates to a/our web-site for fuller information. Where HoDs were aware of suitable, specific web-sites then these could be used as well. **Noted**
33. It was noted that the ban on recruitment this FY [see 30 above] may have little impact on new posts given the time it will take to go through appointment procedures. However, this would not be the case with 'casual' appointments. FREB agreed that HoDs would vet applications for 'casual' appointments and only pass on those they endorsed as 'essential'. **Action: HoDs**
34. 42 candidates had applied for the 3 Divisional administrative posts. The sift is taking place this week with interviews on 2 and 4 February. **Noted**
35. HoDs were asked to let KC have suggestions for External Members of the Research Promotion Boards by end of work today. It is expected that the Boards will be held mid-April.

Agenda Item 8

AOB

36. It was agreed that the papers produced for discussion by SE will require more time than is available today. Claire Holmes to put them on the agenda for February's FREB.
- a. Information Systems & Change Management
 - b. Review of FR Monitoring.
- Action: CH**

Date of next week – 8 February 2005 Alice Holt