

Forest Research Executive Board Meeting – 17/18 January 2006 – Alice Holt

17 January 2006

Present: Prof J M Lynch (Chair) Prof S Evans
Prof P H Freer-Smith Dr H F Evans
Dr W L Mason Mr T Cornwell
Dr A J Moffat (AJM) Dr X Christophers
Dr C Quine Mr K N Charles

Ms K Lardge, FC HR Director attended for item 13

Mr A Mitchell, Head of Business Services and
Mrs R Nicholson, Business Services attended for item 15.

Mrs A Melvin (AM), Business Development Manager attended for item 12.

Copies to: Head of Internal Audit
Director of Corporate & Forestry Support
Ros Bull

Agenda Item 1 – Introduction to purpose/format of meeting

1. JL outlined the purpose and content of the meeting.

Agenda Item 2 – Minutes of last meeting

2. Accepted with one amendment to item 39, "Coillte" should read "Coford"

Agenda Item 3 - Matters arising.

3. HoDs to consider who might be accorded the honour of 'Fellow of Forest Research' and to let JL know. **Action: HoDs**
4. HE to speak to member of staff associated with the above and to let KC know when this has been done. **Action: HE**
5. JL will be taking forward our contact/status with NERC **Action: JL**
6. Paper to be produced by HE with options to improve FRs standing and networking in Wales. **Action HE**
7. Written details of steps taken and progress made to date on the Staff Survey to be sent to JL by FREB members and Janet Dutch by 16 February. This will be an agenda item for February FREB meeting. **Action: HoDs, CH**
8. KC is putting together a paper on senior staff roles which will be placed on our intranet. XC & TC to provide a synopsis of their roles. **Action: XC, TC**

Agenda Item 4 - Feedback from GB EB meeting.

9. JL gave feedback from the GB EB including;
 - HR issues, the appointment of non-executive Commissioners was discussed,
 - HR business partners will be discussed at FREB on 18th January.

- FC have commissioned a preliminary report on climate change.
 - The FC 'brand' is being reviewed.
10. Other Issues;
- The visits to Alice Holt by SEEDA on 16th January went very well and the FR Presentations were well received.
 - SEEDA is looking at a proposal to create a sustainability institute and Alice Holt is a possible site.
 - The FR bid for PSRE funding has succeeded. Staff will be informed by e-mail after the embargo is lifted on 19th January. **Action: XC**

Agenda Item 5 – Finance

11. 2004/05 accounts have been signed and cleared by NAO with a clean audit certificate. **Noted**
12. Forecast shortfall is predicted at £52k [99.7% cost recovery] which is an improvement from last month. TC would like all HoDs to take positive action to redress the remaining deficit. HoDs to review their forecasts by end of January. **Action: HoDs**
13. TC didn't anticipate a need to impose general restrictions on GPC use, travel etc.
14. Following a high level of internal market activity, TSU forecast is currently a net loss of £232k.
15. Capital expenditure has been released on priority and urgent project related requirements with a small provision made for IT replacements throughout the year.
16. TC reminded HoDs that FREB set mid-February as the deadline for completion of Business Plans so these can be presented to the March FREB in detail for discussion. Particular attention needs to be paid to the level of real and prospective external income. Overall Agency plan is for £2.35m.
17. The plan for 2006/07 includes provision for TSU restructuring which will be funded from our own resources.

Agenda Item 6 – Staffing

18. KC reported a current staff figure of 271.4 (FTEs) with projected figures to 31 March, 274.9. Corporate Plan figure for year is 278. **Noted**
19. Standards meetings have been arranged with separate meetings being held for staff reporting on PBs 3 & 4 and PBs 5, 6a/b and 7. Meetings at NRS on 31 March and at Alice Holt on 6 February and 7 February. KC will draft letter to staff for CQ and P F-S and will attend all meetings. JL will start the process tomorrow with a standards meeting for those staff reporting on PB2s. **Action: KC**
20. Louise Tharnthong, HR Business Studies Sandwich Student, has completed the interview stage of assessing the knowledge base of PB5 scientists with regard to people, finance and project management experience/knowledge and will be moving to the next stage of identifying training opportunities for staff in these areas. She will present her findings to the FREB. **Noted**

21. Discussion took place regarding the problems of attracting applicants of sufficient quality and numbers to vacancies in high cost areas such as the south of England and the Edinburgh area.
22. PF-S will announce to staff the names of the successful candidates for the Advisory Committee on Forest Research once these have been approved by GB EB.

Action: PF-S

Agenda Item 7 – FR input to Programme Advisory Groups and related strategy

23. Paper has been circulated to HoDs, HoDs to let PF-S have their comments which will be passed on to Steve Gregory. **Action: PF-S**
24. CQ asked whether Table 2 programmes [programmes primarily directed elsewhere but which contribute significantly to the topic under consideration] are feasible when Table 1 programmes already have a primary focus on the topic? The reality is that there are some programmes directly relevant to some Boards and other programmes where Boards will have an interest. It was felt that in view of possible difficulties, with countries finding it difficult to service their parts of the system, that a meeting be arranged between JL/PF-S and Wilma Harper/Steve Gregory [CFS] to discuss possible difficulties as a constructive way forward to ensure the success of the proposals. **Action: JL, PF-S**
25. CQ suggested that FR's representation might include someone to accompany the nominated 'Expert' in given fields especially where there might be a connection with a matter contained in Table 2. HoDs to let P F-S have their comments [by adding a third name to the proposals]. **Action: HoDs**
26. Some concerns were raised about the 06/07 FR programme budgets. JL/P F-S will discuss this separately with Wilma Harper/Steve Gregory on an informal basis. **Action: JL, P F-S**
27. JL asked TC to establish how much of the CFS spend with FR was being spent externally by us. **Action: TC**

Agenda Item 8 – Research Promotion Procedures

28. A draft had been circulated prior to the meeting and two changes were agreed; [para. 5] 'External Scientist' changed to 'External Professional' and [para. 6b to read, 'the individual displays the general competencies *and characteristics* required to operate over a wide range of posts at the higher grade'. P F-S was asked to amend one sentence in his covering note. It was agreed that HoDs had a further three weeks to let P F-S have any final amendments before it went to the TUS. **Action HoDs**

Agenda Item 9 – Divisional Reports

29. CQ asked that consideration be given to changing the Research Director's formal review away from a pure information flow to a forum where groups concerned with a topic could be reviewed. P F-S will consider this and other alternatives.

18 January 2006

Agenda Item 11 – Introduction to purpose of meeting

30. Mrs A Melvin (AM) joined for agenda item 12. Ms K Lardge, FC HR Director joined the meeting for agenda item 13. Mr A Mitchell, Head of Business Services and Mrs R Nicholson later joined for agenda item 15.
31. KC to draft a letter from FREB congratulating Professor Roland Clift [a member of the Advisory Committee on Forest Research] on his recent honour.

Action: KC

Agenda Item 12 – Business Development

32. FREB recorded its appreciation for AM's efforts in spearheading our successful PSRE application. **Noted**
33. AM up-dated the FREB with progress regarding business development and her strategy for its future conduct. Business development is now being viewed as an integral part of our core remit rather than an add-on to keep us financially afloat.
34. The PSRE bid is to help build capacity in Public Service Research Establishments. 200 establishments were eligible, FR is one of 29 successful applications and has been awarded £495k by OST [over three years] with an additional £225k from the FC. An announcement of this will be made by Press Release on 19th January.
35. FR intends to use the money in four ways;
 - Hire professional IP management resource and researcher scouts
 - Researcher training
 - Innovation consortia workshops and communications
 - Proof of concept funding for R&D.
36. AM intends to arrange further meetings with Kew [to explore the potential to hire shared professional resources], SEEDA and Scottish Executive [to explore potential to expand PoC funding] and FC HR Department [to agree best approach for introducing a 'Reward to Investors' scheme].
37. AM will be contacting HoDs to discuss the way forward. HoDs' initial briefing of staff will be followed by AM giving more detailed briefing to staff by way of seminars.

Action: AM

Agenda Item 13 – HR Strategy/Non-Cost Benefits

38. HR Strategy - Ms Lardge addressed this item and gave her thoughts on an HR Strategy Framework introducing the concept of an 'HR Business Partner' which provides an HR link to the Business Strategy. She saw the HR business partnership as value adding and being customer focussed.
39. Discussion followed the presentation which the following points were made;
 - FR is fully signed up to the development of a new, improved, FC HR strategy
 - It was felt that the strategy which was presented needs further discussion

- It was agreed that Ms Lardge would circulate the power-point presentation to FREB members for written comments and it will be discussed at future FREB meetings. **Action: KL**
- The FC, HR strategy itself needs to acknowledge the specific and somewhat different needs of a Research Agency within the FC e.g. issues like parity exchange of scientific staff with those in other research institutes.
- In addition to work on the strategy itself, work is needed on the timeframe and how the strategy will be implemented in FR.

40. Further comments on the strategy to be directed to JL or Ms Lardge direct.

Action: P F-S, HoDs

41. Non-cost Benefits – Ms Lardge outlined benefits which this package will bring to staff including Childcare Vouchers, the purchase of computers and bicycles [all with preferential tax and NIC implications], preferential rates for travel insurance, discounts at leading stores. The effective date for implementation will be 1 July 2006. The scheme will be publicised to staff by way of site meetings. Ms Lardge asked for the support of HoDs in giving a positive view of this initiative when giving feedback to their Divisions. **Action: HoDs**

Agenda Item 15 – IT Strategy & Communications

Information Technology, Effectively Controlled

42. Alan Mitchell presented his strategy paper which set out how the FC will exploit ICT effectively to support and advance its business. The strategy will exert control to provide best value from ICT expenditure and will be enforced throughout the organisation. The IT Director will specify the equipment, services and consumables required to provide the IT service throughout the FC including the corporate desktop. Local systems should not require more than five days of effort to specify, design, build, test and document with a recognition of the business risk by managers of dependence on systems which become unmaintainable when key staff move. Some flexibility may be allowed but if FR's deployment of a non-standard model led to feedback into the FC systems then the basic model should be used.

WAN replacement

43. Alan Mitchell introduced this item. An analysis of all FC sites has been done and sites allocated into three site standards according to the size and use of each site. The new bandwidth will be at least double and up to eight times the current bandwidth. Installation and configuration has commenced, main roll-out began on 9th January and will continue for 10 weeks. Alice Holt and NRS will have 4Mb links [double current bandwidth]. NRS will be connected w/c 9th February.

44. Telephony: Rosemary Nicholson introduced this item. There hasn't been an FC strategy to date for the provision of telephony with no standard approach across the FC. FC telephony has been transferred to Global Crossing who will make a total charge for infrastructure, all telephone calls [including overseas] at a fixed rate of £200 per extension. [There is an opportunity for decreasing the overall amount charged by eliminating unnecessary extensions]. The FC currently spends £632k on telephony which is expected to reduce to £510k using this new contract. There were a number of options available the choice of which would depend on present trunking, in the longer-term voice-over IP will be available [using the internet for

calls]. There is a need for a site-specific specification to be agreed with Global Crossing. Rosemary will meet with SE, TC, KC and Mike Wheeler tomorrow to discuss the detail.

Action: SE, TC, KC

45. Alan Mitchell will re-visit in 2 to 3 months time to give FREB a progress report.

Action: A Mitchell

Agenda Item 10 – Any Other Business

46. XC questioned the cost effectiveness of maintaining the Information Asset Register [data-set register]. Very few requests have been received. Carl Foster, QA Manager, to examine the need for this to be maintained.

Action: CF

47. XC reported that our website was getting lots of 'hits' and its 'Google' position was No. 1. There will be a request to HoDs to provide information/staff web profiles with our prominent scientists being asked to provide/up-date their entries in the first instance. Co-operation of HoDs was requested.

Action: HoDs

48. XC requested that staff should have email 'signatures' indicating address, web-site etc.

Action: HoDs

49. Should members of staff have contact with a high-level person in another organisation that that organisation's web address be passed to David Georgiou for consideration of cross-linking between web-sites.

Action: HoDs

50. TC has circulated the FR Risk Register and needs a date from HoDs to discuss matters in the register affecting them. JL stressed the importance of this.

Action: HoDs

51. Andy Hall and Ian Tubby to be invited to the March FREB to up-date FREB on the Woodfuel Centre.

Action: CH

Date of next meeting: 23 February 2006 @ NRS