

Forest Research Executive Board Meeting – 26 July 2005

Present: Prof. Jim Lynch
Prof. Peter Freer-Smith
Prof. Sam Evans
Mr Bill Mason
Dr Andy Moffat
Dr Chris Quine
Mr Tony Cornwell
Dr Xanthe Christophers
Mr Ken Charles
Dr Nigel Straw (representing Dr Hugh Evans)
Dr Janet Dutch

Apologies: Dr Hugh Evans

Copies To: Head of Internal Audit
Director of Corporate & Forestry Services

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the last meeting

1. Accepted with the following two amendments: to para. 11c, “although there is no additional funding for the two Research Liaison Officer posts they are adequately funded this FY” and to para. 31, change “access” to assess”.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising

2. KC is awaiting some HoDs supplying a list of their staff with reporting/confirming officers shown against each name. **Action: SE, TC, XC, HE, JD**
3. PF-S is currently preparing a draft advertisement to replace up to two members of the Advisory Committee on Forest Research. These will be formally advertised. HoDs were invited to let PF-S have nominations. **Action: PF-S, HoDs**
4. FREB agreed that following the retirement of Jane Smyth, TC would take over responsibility for FR’s Risk Register. **Action: TC**
5. TC has sent out an up-dated Risk Register and will be contacting HoDs regarding the risks identified in their area. HoDs will be required by the CEO to formally certify that they are carrying out risk assessments for the risks relevant to their area of responsibility. **Action: TC, HoDs**
6. KC will present measures which could be used to assess the effectiveness of the recent organisational changes within FR to the next FREB for discussion. FREB members were invited to give their views to KC on measures that could be used prior to this meeting. **Action: KC, FREB**
7. KC will present a draft paper to the next FREB for discussion on changes to the Research Promotion procedures. **Action: KC**

Agenda Item 3 - Reports

8. XC to review the way HoD reports are constructed and the relevance of their content as information for the FREB and FR's Newsletter and how this could be improved. **Action: XC**
9. XC to organise psychometric testing/profiling for FREB members. **Action: XC**
10. XC to arrange for Ed Jenner (Chairman of Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Science and Innovation Strategy Board (SISB). Member of NERC Executive Board) to deliver a seminar following a FREB meeting. **Action: XC**
11. BM to invite the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Sustainable Forestry and Forest Products to visit NRS, to keep JL informed and to notify Secretariat and Communications, FC Scotland (John Cummings) so the Minister can be informed, when the invitation is sent. **Action: BM**
12. BM met with Prof. John Oldham, Research Director of Scottish Agricultural College to discuss research areas and related issues of mutual interest. One area thought worthy of further investigation was a generic approach to sustainability in land management, especially the linkage between quantitative and qualitative measures of sustainability. BM proposed a meeting SAC/MLURI/FR with representation from Ecology/EHS/FMD (and possibly other Divisions). HoDs are invited to give BM feedback before he proceeds. **Action: HoDs**
13. CQ raised the lack of response/action to areas of concern brought up in Health & Safety inspections. KC had similar concerns and had intended to raise this matter at the September FREB when he will present the annual statement of accident statistics. **Action: KC**

Agenda Item 4 – FR input to Commissioners meeting, Sept. 2005

14. The September meeting of the Commissioners will be a strategy meeting with the focus on Research. JL invited HoDs to give comments by mid-August on his paper to Commissioners which summarises FR's plans to deliver research and innovation to help ensure that UK forestry achieves its full potential. The following are thought to be areas of opportunity where FR could make a bigger impact by giving staff greater flexibility to earn income from other sources:

Climate change
Pest & disease forecasting
Brownfield land utilisation
Biodiversity
Sustainable forest management
Social sciences

A paper will also be presented by CFS which will be a prelude to the review of FR's Framework Document which will ask for a steer on how the Commissioners see the role of FR. HoDs felt that the uniqueness of our contribution should be stressed while emphasising that what the FC is getting from FR is professionalism. JL is meeting with the DG late August to finalise his paper and will involve HoDs in subsequent drafts. **Action: HoDs**

16. Concern was registered that maintaining FR's current status and developing the Agency within the recently established framework is not listed as an option in the CFS paper. **Action: JL**

Agenda Item 5 – Technical Support Unit update

17. PF-S and JD presented their paper for the restructuring of the TSU. It was agreed that:
- (a) TC will confirm costs and will establish savings. **Action: TC**
 - (b) Staff to be informed of likely locations for restructuring. **Action: JD**
 - (c) Discussions to be opened with TUS regarding the avoidance of redundancies. **Action: JD, KC**
 - (d) Paper to be drafted to GB EB in August/September seeking agreement, in principle, to meeting possible costs. **Action: JD, TC**
 - (e) The management of the restructuring to be handled by JD and PF-S with input from TC and KC. **Action: JD, PF-S**
 - (f) JD to consider retraining a member of A/H TSU to replace the post about to be vacated in the workshop. **Action: JD**
 - (g) Final report on Nursery Services to be presented to FREB in September. **Action: BM**
 - (h) Science Divisions to improve their planning and work commissioning procedures with TSU and identify representatives for the TSU Service Board. **Action: HoDs**

Agenda Item 6 – Communications update

18. XC gave a verbal update:
- (a) Most important is buy-in from senior managers and their engagement/willpower to show by example, make changes and encourage staff to engage with communication activities.
 - (b) New Research Liaison Officer for Scotland has been appointed. Kate Fielding will take up post on 1 October 2005. Remit of role is to improve communication between FR, end users and FC Scotland.
 - (c) Joint FR/FC "Technical Publication Group" first meeting on 26 September 2005. TORs and membership of group and the draft agenda will all be available on Intranet by the end of August. Minutes will be uploaded after each meeting. **Action: XC**
 - (d) New FC Communications Media Manager has been recruited. Charlton Clark will be spending a minimum of one day per week on FR material. His induction will include a refresher on the work of FR. Start date to be confirmed. **Action: XC**
 - (e) Discussion took place around need for improvements in internal communications and ensuring linkages between sites and field stations. **Action: HoDs**

- (f) Internet site is the major route for external stakeholders to assess the vibrancy of FR and its staff. A comprehensive website will enhance recruitment, contact with stakeholders and reputation. However, currently FR's site has very significant gaps in the work of certain Divisions and Heads of Division were strongly encouraged to remedy this. **Action: HoDs**
- (g) Taking part in peer conferences and events and particularly making presentations demonstrates that FR staff are leaders in their fields. To publicise this, staff must pass on details of all events and their involvement to the Webmaster. **Action: HoDs**

Additional Agenda Item – Business Improvement Programme – Forest Information

19. In general terms, the Business Improvement Programme (BIP) is a programme of work initiated by the DG and Director, HR with the objective of:
- Clarifying the corporate body post FDR
 - Defining FC activity and purpose
 - Reducing business process duplication
 - Making us more efficient and effective.
20. Alan Mitchell joined the meeting at this point and briefed the FREB on the Business Improvement Programme as it related to Forest Information.
21. JL nominated SE as the FR representative for this programme. **Action: SE**

Agenda Item 7 – Update on QA

22. A paper from Kate Fielding updated the FREB with regard to QA Joint Code Implementation, Experimental Survey Plans, SOPs, notebooks and ROAME statements. **Noted**
23. Forest Research went 'live' with QA in April 2005, covering Experimental Work and Social, Spatial and Attribute Surveys. Attention should now be focussed in two main areas:
- Active support of staff for the implementation of systems already in place (Experiment and Surveys)
 - Development of new QA systems to support areas of FR work not covered to date (Modelling and Software Development, Production, Advisory, Testing, Final Outputs). **Noted**
24. Kate is now moving to another post, formal thanks were recorded to Kate from the FREB for the progress to date. A case to replace Kate will be made in due course. **Action: PF-S**
25. The FREB felt a common-sense approach was needed to satisfy the requirements of the Joint Code and that should it be decided, later, to progress to ISO this should only be after specific discussion and decision and not by default. **Noted**

Agenda Item 8 - Overseas travel & subsistence

26. TC gave a verbal report on the above and identified money spent on T&S.
- 4 years ago £60K was spent by FR on foreign travel, 36% was recoverable
 - Now, £85K is spent of which only 11% is identified as recoverable from non-FC sources on Appendix 'A's.
 - We spend £500K on T&S which is a third of FC total.
27. JL expects FR staff to take part in GB and international travel but he is concerned at multiple attendance at the same meetings/conferences when the same money could be spent increasing our visibility at other, relevant, meetings in order to get the best return for our investment. **Noted**
28. Following an overseas trip, HoDs may choose to call for a report from the participant. **Noted**
29. TC/Finance staff to clarify that the recovery of costs from non-FC sources is always shown on Appendix 'A's. **Action: TC**

Agenda Item 9 - Finance

30. TC reported that the FC Audit Committee cleared the accounts for 2004/05 and the external audit has been satisfactorily completed. **Noted**
31. Final results for the year is a cost recovery of 99.8% against target, representing a net deficit of £27K. In view of the projected deficit at the turn of the year, this result is considered to be satisfactory. **Noted**
32. Capital expenditure has been released on priority and urgent matters and a provision made for IT replacements throughout the year. **Noted**

Agenda Item 10 - Staffing

33. KC reported that current staffing was 279.3 FTEs against a Corporate Plan figure of 278. This figure shows indications of falling over coming months as summer placements leave. **Noted**

Agenda Item 11 – Homeworking

34. KC presented his paper on "Homeworking" and quoted from Staff Notice No. 4 (FC Guidance on Homeworking) and Staff Notice No. 2 (Flexible Working). The following recommendations were accepted;
- (a) The decision where a post shall be located is taken prior to the recruitment exercise with the location stated in the recruitment details.
 - (b) Homeworking can be considered for established posts. Where a Head of Division decides that there is merit in the suggestion, a recommendation should be made to the Chief Executive giving the advantages to the organisation. The case should include costs/benefits.
 - (c) If a Head of Division decides that no case exists, the decision lies at that level.

35. HoDs to note. **Action: HoDs**

Agenda Item 12 – Payment of fees to individuals

36. KC presented his paper on the above and the following policy was agreed;
- All opportunities to earn external income must first be offered to FR by discussing the matter with HoD.
 - Where it is not desirable for this work to be considered during official time, HoD can approve, provided that there is no conflict of business interest, that a member of staff does this in his/her own time and receives payment direct from the commissioning body.
 - In giving approval the HoD should be mindful that if carrying out the work requires annual leave to be taken that provision of annual leave to staff is meant to provide rest and relaxation and the extent of the private work should not impact unreasonably on this.
 - The individual must be reminded of their obligation to declare such income for taxation purposes.
 - That no work should be undertaken either officially or privately which is contrary to British Government policy, with countries with whom the British Government does not have cordial relationships or where there is a possible conflict of interest between the nature of the proposed work and either Government policy or the officer's official duties.
 - No use to be made of Forest Research resources (resources can include; 'phone, e-mail address, logo, stationery, accommodation, advice).
 - An acknowledgement to be signed by the staff member concerned that as the work is being conducted completely independent of FR and that it is outside of FR's 'insurance' cover. The member of staff undertaking consultancy/advice work must have in place professional indemnity and public liability insurance where appropriate with a reputable insurance company with a minimum cover of £2m.
 - Staff who peer review papers, lecture, author books or assess students need not have formal insurance in place.
 - A waiver is required to be signed by the client recognising that FR's non-involvement in the activity, recognising that FR's professional and 'insurance' cover does not extend to the activity, that Forest Research is not liable for any acts or omissions of the consultant (including employees, agents or sub-contractors of the consultant) and that the consultant will indemnify Forest Research on a continuing basis against all liabilities resulting or arising at any time from any such acts or omissions.
 - In the case where the opportunity is given to a HoD, the above will apply with approval being considered by Director Research.

37. HoDs to note the above. KC to notify staff.

Action: HoDs, KC

Agenda Item 13 – Contract register

38. TC reported that a recent audit review of FR's competitive tendering activities has identified potential weaknesses in the monitoring and control procedures and recommended that a register of contracts be set up and maintained centrally.

39. FREB agreed these proposals, TC to issues an instruction to all FR staff. **Action: TC**

Agenda Item 14 – AOB

40. A report on a meeting (Defra EU Research Network) attended by Alison Melvin was tabled. **Noted**

41. Claire Holmes to canvas FREB member and set dates for future meetings.

Action: CH

Date of next meeting 5 September (pm), 6 September (am) @ NRS