

Forest Research Executive Board Meeting (FREB)

Minutes of the meeting held at Alice Holt on 4 October 2004

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

(Mr Bob Selmes and Dr S Gregory attended for agenda item 10 which was taken first)

Copies to: Head of Internal Audit
Head of Technical Services Group
Head of Communications (to await arrival)
Director of Corporate & Forestry

Agenda Item 10

The New Structures in FR and FC Corporate and Forestry Services (CFS) New Science Strategy (2005) and future working

1. Bob Selmes and Steve Gregory attended for this item and Bob briefed the meeting on the structure and function of CFS.
2. Steve Gregory informed the meeting that a new Research Management Board had been established comprising of Scotland, England and Wales plus Northern Ireland. This is the vehicle set up to satisfy Ministers of the involvement of Countries in commissioning and overseeing research initiatives.

Two meetings have been held with FR involvement from which inputs have been produced which will be incorporated into a GB research strategy. The Countries have identified a need for better communication, more overt partnership working, more integration of FR research with land usage and more scientific publications. Additional resources may have to be put into the communication of research findings on a face-to-face basis. Sub-committees of the RMB will be set up to cover specific areas of research in more detail. PF-S commented that we have to make the RMB work and make it more explicitly apparent to the Countries what is being done. He felt the issue was tractable and that we could work to make the Countries more involved and more supportive.

3. There will be a meeting between Wilma Harper and the FREB in November where FR will be able to flag up key issues. **NOTED**

Agenda Item 1

Minutes of the last meeting

4. Secretary to ensure that the minutes appear on the Intranet/Internet. **Action: KC**

5. HoDs were requested to construct their reports to indicate future visits and purpose of visits to enable other members of staff to link in with these visits. Reports should also include financial progress and progress against targets.

Agenda Item 2

Matters Arising

6. Following the successful Tree Health presentation at the Royal Society all science divisions were given the opportunity to offer proposals for what FR might offer next year. EHS will lead a proposal for the 2005 Summer Science Exhibition with a deadline for submissions of November 2004. **Action: AM**
7. Consideration to be given to showing the Tree Health RSA exhibit at the Edinburgh Science Fair next March. Director of Communication to consider pros and cons and report to CE. **Action: XC**
8. Capital expenditure, this year, is progressing slowly. HoDs to ensure that allocated capital money is used against authorised acquisitions. **Action HoD**
9. KC to continue with proposals for training for senior management concentrating of financial management and leadership training. **Action: KC**
10. Attendance of senior staff at NRS. JL is planning to spend 7 days at Silvan House/NRS, w/c 25 October. PF-S has visited NRS twice in the past two weeks and is scheduled to visit three times in the next three weeks. **NOTED**
11. Advice has been sought from Staff Inspection about the likely grading of the Divisional administrative posts. Staff Inspection have asked for the % time spent on each of the major activities which is being supplied. **Action: KC**
12. CQ and BM are assessing NRS needs taking into account the requirement of the Head of Technical Services. **Action: CQ, BM**

Agenda Item No. 3

13. PF-S reported that he will give Janet Dutch guidance and will ask her to address the December FREB on the strategic issues, including accountability and the financial deficit, facing the TSU. BM felt that the flow of information from the TSU to HoDs needed to be on a more structured and reactive basis. TC said that first level reports (internal market) are already on-line and that a strategic view will be taken on developing IT (including MIS) as a strategy for the Agency at the FRIT Service Board meeting on 14 October. **Action: PF-S, TC**

Agenda Item No. 4

QA in FR

14. PF-S put forward a case for a dedicated QA manager to be appointed to take forward QA procedures in FR. The FREB agreed that Kate Fielding be transferred to this post reporting directly to PF-S. The period would be for 12 months with 10% to 20% of her time being made available to TSU. PF-S to draft job description. **Action: PF-S**

Agenda Item No. 5

Plant Production in Alice Holt Intensive Nursery

15. HE reported that the high alkalinity of the water at Alice Holt gives problems in the Nursery. It must be ensured that the watering of the plants doesn't compromise the plants themselves. The system should be examined to improve quality control and someone should be given the responsibility for this. The FREB agreed that Richard Jinks be asked to form a small group to examine the Nursery, consulting with the Nursery at NRS where appropriate, and to provide recommendations.

Action: PF-S

Agenda Item No. 6

Finance/Monthly Overtime

16. TC reported that the 03/04 accounts are being concluded with some minor amendments being received from the NAO. He is disappointed that Divisional forecasts have not been up-dated and urged HoDs to review their forecasts and consider where savings can be made to off-set our predicted £130K shortfall.

Action: HoDs

17. Our overtime bill is low at 1.6% but 67% of this is spent by the TSU. HoDs need to manage the transition from operational to non-operational pay for PB's 3 and 4 which is effective 1 October 2004. KC to draft a note to managers reminding them that overtime needs to be authorised in advance and that there are alternatives to paid overtime such as TOIL and annualised hours.

Action: KC

18. JL congratulated TC on his handling of the 03/04 end-of-year accounts.

NOTED

Agenda Item No. 7

Staffing

19. KC briefed the FREB on current staffing figures and projections to 31 March 2005.

Agenda Item No. 8

Training Statistics

20. KC reported that our training statistics had dropped from an average spend per capita of £491 and an average of 4.3 days provided (in 02/03) to £294 and 3.4 days of training in 03/04. This is a reversal of the trend in recent years. He put this down to two reasons:

- FTS changed the method of nominating staff for training and the new system was taking time to settle in.
- The number of centrally initiated courses such as New Horizons computer training and VPSC have reduced.

HoDs were asked to encourage their managers to include training when conducting their in-year PMS review.

Action: KC

21. KC will put a note out to FR staff encouraging them to consider what training might be appropriate for them and to discuss this with their managers.

Action: KC

22. SE considered that FR staff who wished to have a career within FR/FC should be encouraged to undertake training in people, project and financial management. Evidence of these skills should be looked for when considering a move to a post where these skills were necessary.

NOTED

Agenda Item No. 9

Accident Statistics

23. KC presented RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases & Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) statistics for 03/04. The FREB was pleased to note that no instances were recorded. **NOTED**
24. Accident Book statistics have fallen by 45% from last year. We have moved to the new style of accident book. A high proportion of accidents recorded were 'slips and trips' and strains arising from poor lifting techniques and cuts from hand held blades.
25. Martin Jukes and Colin McEvoy were thanked by the FREB for their activities in connection with Health & Safety in the Agency. **NOTED**

Agenda Item No. 11

Any Other Business

26. The FREB noted that centrally initiated training will be made available to cover our responsibilities with regard to the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. KC was asked to request that as much notice as possible be given as to when this training will take place. **Action: KC**
27. It was agreed that Divisions could give the Webmaster more than just the Programme Leader as a contact. **NOTED**
28. TC will review financial delegations now that we have Deputy Heads of Division. **Action: TC**
29. CQ asked that a calendar of key visits be built up by JL/PF-S's secretaries, in consultation with Madge Holmes at NRS, to be shared with HoDs. **Action JL, PF-S**
30. The question of 'Regional' or 'Local' status for Alice Holt and NRS Staff Councils is to be looked at with consideration being given to classifying these councils as 'local' and the joint FR Council as 'Regional'. **Action: KC**
31. The difference in the composition and terms of reference for the Alice Holt and NRS Facilities Committees to be examined to establish whether a commonality of purpose should exist between these two committees. **Action: PFS, CQ**

Date of Next Meeting: 1 November 2004 (Video Conference)