

Minutes of the Forest Research Executive Board meeting held via video conference on 10 October 2008

Present:

At NRS	At Alice Holt
Janet Dutch	Ken Charles
Wilma Harper	Peter Freer-Smith
Bill Mason	Alison Melvin (AKM)
Helen McKay	Andy Moffat
James Pendlebury (chair)	Sandra Smith
Chris Quine	Joan Webber
	Hugh Williams

Apologies: Xanthe Christophers, Hugh Evans

In attendance: Helena Ladbury (minute secretary), Kate Fielding attended for part of agenda item 5.

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

JP welcomed Joan Webber to the meeting, deputising for Hugh Evans who was attending a meeting in Wales.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

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

Matters arising

2. Para 3
 - Equality & Diversity and Succession Planning

KC advised that FR will have to bear in mind scientific expertise when considering succession planning. FR has 5 places available up to end FY for Management Development training and KC will write to HoDs when his allocation is confirmed. The programme overall was felt to be worthwhile and HoDs were asked to make nominations (of PB 3 / 4 staff) for places. FREB were asked to pass these to KC by 7 November. If there were more nominations than places available they would be discussed at a future FREB, or by correspondence. Further places will be available next FY.

Action: FREB

- Chainsaw use

A list of certificated users within FR had been circulated to FREB. JP felt that the number of certificated users needs to be substantially reduced and stressed that the DG really wants to eliminate use by FC staff entirely if at all possible. It was agreed that in order to effect this reduction FREB needed to be clear about why staff were using chainsaws. KC would go back to the individuals named on the list to ascertain how, why and how often they use chainsaws and when they last attended a 3-day refresher course (WH – this

should be annually). KC to clarify details of the refresher course, including legal minimum frequency of attendance, with Emily Ramsay. This information would then be presented to the November FREB for decisions to be made. **Action: KC**

- Corporate manslaughter

WH advised that this was new legislation and that as yet there was no case law. The law can hold organisations responsible, although not individuals. It was therefore important to ensure that our H&S procedures were up to date. FR should not encounter any problems if it does all it should with regard to H&S. An OGB on the subject is due to be published very soon. It was also important to disseminate information down to front line supervisor level.

Para 4

Progress is being made on re-establishment of connections between FR and the private sector.

Para 6

Overtime – to be discussed under AOB.

Para 13

- Recommendation 4

AKM reported that Jim Dewar is currently focused on C&FS procurement of research from external suppliers. Jim Dewar has been invited to the November FREB to feedback.

- Recommendation 10

AKM has now received a response from NERC who are keen to work with public sector bodies and are open to offers if the FC wants to co-fund.

Para 17

- EqlA

It was noted that Kirsten Hutchison had not yet received EqlA training.

Para 21

JP, HW & SS need to look at FR's Corporate Plan first preferably in early November. **Action: JP/HW/SS**

Agenda Item 2 – Update from James Pendlebury

3. JP advised that he had written a specification for the new position of Operations Director which was now with KC for comment. This will be a pay band 1 position and initially it will be trawled (appearing on the Civil Service Vacancies website as well). The interview board for this post will be JP, Jean Lindsay and Les Bryson of FC Scotland. A specification for the Head of the Centre for Forest Resource Management will also be drawn up. This post will also be trawled and advertised on the CS Vacs site. The nature and possible allocation of roles and personnel to the revised EB was discussed, including the effect of the new Centres on the existing budgetary responsibility of the current Heads of Divisions.
4. JP will issue an all-FR email announcing the new EB as soon as possible.

- Action: JP**
5. Staff were waiting for details of where they might fit in the new system and this would be discussed at the next EB. This would also fit with the planning timetable for FR's next Corporate Plan; WH and JP to discuss appropriate KPIs for next year. **Action: WH/JP**
 6. The new EB would start to discuss science and business. The DG is aware of the changes being made and by December JP will flesh out the details underpinning the new set-up. An announcement of the changes envisaged will be made in a couple of weeks with indications to staff early in the New Year regarding which centres they will fit into. This will flow from the report of the Efficiency & Deliver Review in November and also from which programmes will be funded next year. It was noted that the RSMB would endorse the PAG round at their next meeting.
 7. This represents a huge culture change for staff and also for the new EB which will focus more on corporate responsibility.

Agenda Item 3 – Finance

8. SS reported that progress with the new time recording system had not been as quick as had been hoped for due to finance staff absence. This highlighted a need for more training for finance staff. Once all data has been entered it can be transferred to EEMS. SS wished to record her thanks to divisional admin staff.
9. C&FS funding for FR was confirmed last month and FR will input the journal for this and also for OSU funding. SS will advise Keith Gliddon and copy Wilma Harper and Jim Galloway once transactions have been entered and give Divisions their figures as soon as possible. **Action: SS**
10. WH advised that she had looked at C&FS expenditure and was able to make a special payment of £200k to FR for the 08/09 financial year.
11. It was agreed that SS will issue a report on Monday 3 November which will include C&FS and OSU income and October salaries and TRS data. The current level of external income received was also queried and whilst a reasonable level of confidence was expressed, it was agreed that SS would expedite receipt of EU income still awaited from previous financial years. This will reduce considerably FR's current cash deficit. **Action: SS**
12. It was advised that some recent contracts only show a lump sum and Divisions therefore need to provide to finance information on due dates for receipt of money. **Action: HoDs**
13. Cash expenditure and forecast and spending on Materials & Supplies and Travel & Subsistence will continue to be closely monitored.

Agenda Item 4 – Division reports

14. Biometrics

HM advised FREB of the following

- That Una McAvoy will be transferring to IS at the end of November, date to be agreed.
- That with the formation of the new Department of Energy & Climate Change the funding arrangements for SRF may change. The budget was not in jeopardy but it was not yet clear whether the money would be routed via FCE or would come straight to FR.
- A reduction in income of c. £85k from the IFOS Unit has been agreed for the next Financial Year to assist the new unit to meet its funding shortfall. HM would advise SS whether this was C&FS or OSU income. **Action: HM**
- There was some discussion around the subject of recognition and reward of extra staff performance and KC advised FREB of GN 10 – Recognition and Reward, available on the intranet.

15. Ecology

- It was asked whether the FC or FR can seek to influence the work of the Ecosystem Services Framework – is there a steering group, for example? FR is currently maintaining dialogue with MacAulay in this respect.
- Duncan Ray had produced a good report following his visit to China.

16. Head of Station NRS

CQ reported

- That the educational outing went well and had been appreciated.
- There was broad support for celebration of the 40th anniversary of NRS in 2010.
- A new member of staff (Dr Nadeem Shah) had joined EHS division.

17. Head of Station AH

- The Alice Holt Computer Users' group needs to be reconvened and a new chair appointed to provide input into the FR ICT steering group. Currently HE fills that role and PF-S agreed to ask him to reconvene the group and find a replacement.

18. EHS

- There was some discussion around the subject of the publication process. The following points were made.
- The publications referee system has highlighted a need for training in technical writing.
- As FR moves to a Centre-based organisation QA will be incorporated and this increase in workload may slow things down.
- Variable quality and scientific rigour exist and there is a need to speed up the process.
- The Authors' Manual is perceived as cumbersome and does not address certain issues faced by its intended audience. HW to review the Authors' Manual and suggest any improvements.

- The quality of first-line refereeing varies significantly and an informal course on refereeing would be helpful.
 - It has been noted that some papers reach HoDs without any statistical checking having taken place.
 - An in-house editorial board was suggested – a team of first-line reviewers could be trained by senior staff and it could also act as a source of advice and review. This could be a development opportunity for PB5 staff with PhDs.
 - A lack of time to mentor staff writing papers was reported.
 - A comments page for referees was suggested.
 - In conclusion, it was agreed that any suggestions for improvement of the review process or Authors' Manual should be passed to HW who would then discuss with PF-S and produce a paper for FREB. **Action: HW**
19. FMD
- It had been noticed that poorer written PAG proposals had had more difficulty being accepted during the PAG round. There was a need for better engagement with C&FS customers; this would be discussed under AOB.
 - It was reported that FR is part of the EFI Atlantic project centre, led by Jean-Michel Carnus of INRA.
20. THD
- The division has been joined by a fully-funded Italian scientist, based in Sardinia, working on Phytophthoras causing dieback in sweet chestnut.
 - Thanks were recorded to Anna Brown, Roddie Burgess & Hugh Evans for their paper on red band needle blight. There is currently an embargo on the movement of pine from FC nurseries with infected plants and surrounding areas will be surveyed. A formal, decision-making project board approach will be recommended to the FC EB with regard to further action on this subject. Private sector input to this process will be necessary.
21. RD
- PF-S reported that
- The PAG process will be discussed under AOB. There could be problems with underfunding which will be discussed at the research planning meeting on 22 October.
 - The ACFR want to do some horizon scanning. It was asked whether this part of the meeting be open to others. PF-S & WH will discuss. **Action: PF-S/WH**
 - The draft charge-out rates recently circulated may affect the costs of programmes, particularly those with large field work elements – these may increase dramatically.
22. TSU
- Ben Griffin's departure in mid-November will create a problem for the survey workload for Wales.
 - TSU are working with Ecology Division to put in a bid to SNH.
23. BD
- The RRSP has produced its first new consultancy.
 - A very good RIPSS report was produced – AKM to circulate to HoDs.

24. Comms

HW reported that

- There has been a lot of goodwill on recent activities.
- Proposed changes to the Newsletter will require support.
- The next ICF newsletter will be focusing on research, HoDs were asked to provide as much help as may be required to produce a significant input to this.
- It was felt that output of peer-reviewed papers is slowing. Given that there are very few scientists spending 210 days on income generation, there should be spare capacity in the system. Comms division will gather information on publications, monitor and report back to FREB at a future date. **Action: HW**
- It was also felt that the Connect bulletin was not the appropriate platform for internal staff news. HW agreed to look into alternative forms of dissemination. **Action: HW**

Agenda Item 5 – Staffing

25. Kate Fielding joined the meeting to give FREB an overview of the Equality Impact Assessment process.

- The FC is not a very diverse organisation and needs to make positive moves to attract more diverse applications [for jobs]; although it is noted that FR is more diverse than other parts of the FC.
- Policies, functions and / or services must be equality assessed to evaluate their impact on people – will there be any differential impact with regard to race, gender, sexuality, disability, faith or age? Policy which affects people needs an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA). EqIAs are a legal requirement.
- It is important to think about EqIA at the beginning of processes, in terms of the way people operate or access services. There is a Guidance Note on the intranet and forms to guide through the 6 strands and 3-stage process.
- Staff at SH will be responsible for assessing staff policy affecting all of the FC, any local issues for example redundancy, relocation, budget cuts and training FR will need to do.
- It is the impact of the action on people rather than its application that is important.
- An EqIA can be conducted on an entire research programme for the year. The exception to this will be the SERG and any other research projects that specifically relate to people.
- It may be appropriate to build into SOPs.
- Tendering and partnership working needs EqIA.
- In terms of recruitment, consider where adverts are placed.
- Succession planning will need to have an EqIA to make sure one of the 6 strands is not adversely affected.
- Diversity should be on the Risk Register.
- Presentations, posters and publications will need thought – identify target customers and offer translations.
- Training and assistance is available if needed from SH. Feedback would also be welcome.

- The detail of how to conduct an EqIA is part of level 4 diversity training.
 - SH Comms are looking at the FC's websites and all OGBs will be changed. An Events booklet will be produced and Kate Fielding will contact FR for input.
 - HW and Kirsten Hutchison to receive support after their Level 4 training from Kate Fielding and other members of the HR Diversity Team.
 - All FR policies should be listed and a decision taken as to which, if any, need EqIA – a programme should be set up to do this.
 - An EqIA of The Delivery Plan for England's Woods and Trees is available to view on the FC England intranet as an example.
 - Contracts with University partners should be diversity compliant.
26. It is noted that staff numbers are decreasing, but staff costs are increasing. SS and JP to investigate. **Action: SS/JP**
27. It has been brought to JP's attention that some staff have not been having PMS reviews, some meetings are cursory and some are not properly managed. Some staff do not have FJPs. FREB was reminded that the PMS process needs to be taken seriously and JP will issue a memo to this effect. **Action: JP**
28. Thought needs to be given to setting up next year's Research Promotion Boards.
29. KC reported that the skills analysis was in progress.
30. It was felt that a better system needed to be in place for the communication of staff moves. More co-ordination was also required.

Agenda Item 6 – Update on the Efficiency & Delivery Review

31. PF-S reported that the Review was on-track to report to JP at the end of November. Some significant issues have been raised; the review group now needs to formulate its views – its next meeting is on Monday 13 October. The question of how to capture the views of those staff who have not been able to attend their Unit meetings with PF-S and the views of those who are unwilling to voice them in group meetings was raised. The TUS have been invited to attend meetings of the Review Group and have attended one in an observational capacity. Nothing has been received yet in writing from the TUS regarding future attendance/participation.
32. Savings of £750k need to be made to break even during the current financial year and organisational capacity to assist FR is declining. Thus the Review needs to find that level of savings both this year and in future years.
33. It was pointed out that some staff have been working very long hours for years in order to generate income for FR. This needs to be recognised and also needs to change.

Agenda Item 7 – AOB

34. Lease of land, NRS

- Edinburgh University have advised that they wish to take back land at the west of the site in order to develop a vet school. FREB therefore needs to consider what NRS needs on this site in the medium term. An experimental ground close to station could be still available from the university. There was also the possibility of a joint development of the site with the university and possibly Napier and the Centre for Timber Engineering – should this be pursued?
 - It was suggested that it would be helpful to carry out an analysis of potential development of particular areas in the locality. JP has spoken to Laurie Tyson (FC's Country Land Agent for Scotland) and felt that a strategic investment plan would be helpful. It was agreed to create a small group to investigate FR's estate holdings at both NRS and AH and also the field stations.
Action: JP
 - The question of how these landholdings are valued on our books was raised. SS to investigate and report back.
Action: SS
35. TSU overtime
It was agreed that overtime would be discussed by the Efficiency and Delivery Review Group.
36. Proposed chargeout rates
JD notes that there is a significantly higher percentage increase in the lower pay bands and is concerned that the TSU will no longer be commissioned by FC customers because of this. It was pointed out that if FR continues with its current rates there will be a £1.2m deficit next year. Any comments from FREB members should be emailed to SS by 17 October.
Action: FREB
37. FE Scotland has approached FR about Newton field station. They are happy to work with FR on upgrading staff facilities.
38. PAGs
- It was agreed that an FR view of priorities was needed before the RSMB meeting later this month.
 - FREB were reminded that the DG, the PAGs and the RSMB want a change of emphasis and that the process of change may be difficult and will mean fewer contracts. A clear steer from C&FS is also needed. Pragmatism will be needed in the prioritisation process. It was important to focus on the management of the process and excellence in science. Policy requirements have changed and FR has been asked to lift its effort on climate change. FR will need to pressure FC to provide resources if they are needed. It will also be important to know which programmes are business-critical and which are nice-to-haves for the countries. FR needs to show that it is embracing change but also providing what the countries want.
 - WH advised that the way in which the new focus on climate change research relates to the Science and Innovation Strategy is being looked at.

Next meeting: Tuesday 18 November, at NRS.