

**Forest Research Executive Board Meeting – 2 September 2008
at NRS**

Present:

Ken Charles	Alison Melvin (AKM)
Janet Dutch	Andy Moffat (AM)
Hugh Evans	Chris Quine
Peter Freer-Smith	James Pendlebury (Chair)
Wilma Harper	Sandra Smith
Bill Mason	Hugh Williams
Helen McKay	

Apologies: Xanthe Christophers

In attendance: Helena Ladbury, minute secretary, David Felstead (Head of Information Services) attended for agenda item 7 and Lori Douglas (L&D) attended for agenda item 8.

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

JP welcomed Hugh Williams (deputising for XC) to the meeting and advised that XC may be absent for some time.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

1. Due to the timing of the August and September meetings it was not possible to incorporate amendments to the August minutes prior to the September meeting and they were therefore issued in draft form. Amendments have now been received and incorporated and final minutes issued.

Matters Arising

2. Item 2.3.24
The exact title of the Urban Regeneration and Greening Centre and its launch date were still to be arranged.

Item 2.24

SS reported that work on external income projections was in hand and that the latest provisional figure for the current financial year was £2.3m.

Item 2.39

It was noted that the current situation regarding FTAs was affecting some Divisions disproportionately more than others.

Item 2.51

The issue of FC websites is currently being looked at on a fundamental level. FREB will be kept updated of developments.

Item 6

Discussions between JP and Directors Scotland and Wales regarding their arrangements with FR have been postponed until after FREB has been reorganised.

Item 10

SS advised that Keith Gliddon and Jim Galloway had suggested adding another summary level, similar to England's, to future Finance reports to FREB.

Item 12

SS advised that transfer budgets had been discussed with KC, computer costs were still to be investigated and salary costs were detailed in her financial report.

Item 30

AKM and JP to discuss and refine the Business Development paper which AKM had written. This could then be circulated.

Item 34

Datasets and Information Sharing paper – HMCK asked for models to be included in the revised paper to be discussed at a future FREB.

Item 36

AKM advised that no date had yet been set for the meeting of the RRSP with the Local Authorities' Research Council.

Item 37

Research Planning Proposals – SS advised HoDs to identify staff grades when preparing proposals, an indicative cost could be given to PAGs at this stage and accurate chargeout rates could be added when available. It was noted that there will be significant changes from the current standard charge per grade. Several inconsistencies in regard to chargeable days are occurring across the organisation. SS will discuss these with JP and HoDs – averages are 160 days in the science Divisions, 138 days TSU. Current average chargeable days are

79	PB1
156	PB2
157	PB3
164	PB4
183	PB5
154	PB6a
116	PB6b

therefore no-one is hitting the target at the moment. 30-40 productive days more per year need to be charged. Overheads need to be better understood and charged for if appropriate. There are some cases of large disparity, for example, some PB2s have significant staff reporting responsibilities, some have none.

SS advised that rates used for bids last year had not increased sufficiently from previous years'. SS to analyse and discuss with JP. New rates could then be issued, but with caveats.

Agenda Item 2 – Update from James Pendlebury

3. JP advised FREB of the following

- That FC Executive Board papers will be added to the intranet in due course
- Pay negotiations with the Unions should be starting soon
- Equality & Diversity and Succession Planning were discussed – this is something which FR should also embark on in the next few months.

Action: KC/JP

- In her Health & Safety report to the EB Emily Ramsay advised that the majority of reported accidents relate to the use of chainsaws. It is therefore important to minimise chainsaw use within the FC and to use only very skilled operatives, whether they are contractors or staff. A database of FR users and their training status needs to be drawn up. FR needs to articulate its needs [for chainsaw use] very clearly. It was agreed that it would be better to have very few but expert regular users rather than occasional users, risks to be addressed through risk assessments. It was noted that CCF policy requires more chainsaw use than harvester use. Divisional plans may need to be amended in light of the above. KC will send HoDs a list of their staff certified to use chain saws. Depending on the degree of usage, a decision will be taken as to whether these staff continue to be certified once database established.

Action: KC

- FC's solicitors, Tods Murray, have produced a briefing note on corporate manslaughter. An advisory meeting will be held which H&S reps will attend – Martin Jukes to be FR's representative for this.

Action: KC

- No issues were raised with FR's Progress Report. With regard to FR's KPIs, the external income target is being revised, the DG is content with current progress on climate change proposals, progress is being made in regard to FC Wales.
- Red Band needle blight will be raised with Commissioners following a good report from Anna Brown.

4. FR needs to re-establish its connection with the private sector – it is important to maintain dialogue with Bob Stubbs (Director of the Scottish Forestry Trust) and CONFOR (GB-wide in terms of research needs). JP will try to create a regular forum with the private sector. C&FS should be involved in this process – HW and AKM to set up a high level meeting and invite C&FS to attend. **Action: HW/AKM**

Agenda Item 3 – Finance

5. SS advised that no finance spreadsheet was available this month because of the timing of the meeting.
6. JD and KC to discuss overtime and agree circumstances when it can be paid, the importance of consistency was stressed. JP, KC and JD to discuss annualised hours and come back to October FREB with a proposal. **Action: JP/KC/JD**
7. SS will be looking at agreements with the countries and will go back to FC with information on work that FR has done for the countries but not been paid for. Country Directors have indicated willingness to help FR if the expenditure can be justified.

8. SS reported that following her meeting with Keith Gliddon and Jim Galloway, KG had agreed to provide the cost drivers for SLAs, and that budgets provided earlier are the ones to work with.
9. It was noted that SLAs reflect what service boards have agreed, with the exception of the HR Service Board which does not give approval to expenditure – this is approved at FC EB level. JP would like more detail on SLAs to show exactly what FR gets for the money – transparency is needed. The question of a control mechanism should things not go according to plan was raised. The FC is aiming to put 09/10 business plan proposals to the FC EB on 11 December. SS questioned whether this is a realistic deadline for FR to provide information to Keith Gliddon.
10. FR's £10.2m budget had still not been finalised but FREB was advised to work to this.
11. Time Recording System – SS advised that there was no interface to enable excel spreadsheets to be entered directly into the system and that clearing the backlog of timesheets could be done in a number of ways Typing staff at AH, divisional admin staff and finance staff can all do some data input. A Division clearing day is also suitable. Heads of Divisions to come to an agreed decision with SS as to how they will proceed.

Agenda Item 4 – PhD Investment

12. AM introduced his paper advising that JP had asked for this information when in his previous job with C&FS.
13. Following much discussion around the subject, all 10 recommendations were agreed and accepted with action points agreed as follows.

Recommendation 1

RD and C&FS to explore the potential benefit of Strategic Partnerships with relevant research councils in order to maximise leverage of FC resources applied to PhD research purchase. CQ to investigate possibilities specific to Scotland.

Action: AM/PF-S/CQ/Jim Dewar

Recommendation 4

The FR Contract documents are updated. A copy of proposed changes related to this issue is included as Appendix 2. Broader changes are required in respect of Intellectual Property.

Action: AKM/Jim Dewar

Recommendation 10

Alternative forms of investment, for example Fellowships co-financed with Research Councils or Royal Society Industrial Fellowships, are explored.

Action: AKM

14. A caveat was added to recommendation 7 that a delay of two months may be necessary before lodging documents in the FC/FR library if there are IP issues

involved.

15. The following were points of note arising from the discussion.

- There is no system for the control of outputs in current contract documents, a system is therefore required. More commitment to promulgation is also needed.
- It was felt that a more consistent process is needed and that HoDs should have autonomy to decide on the expenditure.
- It was suggested that FR could have an open day for prospective PhD students and ask them to give a 10 minute presentation.
- PhD studentships could be considered in more detail once FR Science Strategy themes have been developed and could also be discussed at PAG meetings.
- It was noted that some PhDs and MScs are commissioned by the countries.
- It was felt that more could be done to communicate to universities that this [a PhD sponsorship from/by? FR] is a route to communication with policymakers.
- It was pointed out that IP resources can only be committed if PjDs are known about in advance.
- It was agreed that integrating PhD students into research teams can be a very helpful approach and noted that there is very little FR contact with some CASE students.
- The question of whether FR might wish to use American universities' models was asked.
- It was pointed out that only two of the current PhD students are FR staff – the possibility of increasing this number was suggested.
- The possibility of reviewing PhDs in progress was raised.
- It was felt that the strategic use of PhD students needs discussion – should there be a pot of money to employ them for 2 months to write up pragmatic versions of their theses for example? This could be regarded as transitional funding and should be part of their contract.
- The question of FR funding of MScs was raised, as was the question of how many post-doctoral students FR has, and how such students can be attracted to FR.

16. AM welcomed all comments and suggested that a formal process to understand investment [in PhDs] is needed and that a forum for FREB to discuss this would be useful. A decision on how to take this forward and who will be responsible for leading on it will be discussed at the October FREB.

Agenda Item 5 – Staffing

17. KC presented his report and tabled two papers – (i) A Framework for Equality Impact Assessment in FR and (ii) a minute from Stephen Bennett on Equality and Diversity Responsible Officers. The following points from all three were noted.
- EqIA forms are currently with consultant for verification. The main impact of these will be in the Social Science group. All work must be assessed even if not applicable – it should be noted as such and assessment needs to be at

the beginning of processes. FREB needs to consider the resourcing implications of this.

- KC advised that HR at Silvan House could provide a checklist for EqIA purposes.
- KC agreed to arrange an EqIA briefing session for the October FREB meeting.
Action: KC
- It was suggested that Kirsten Hutchison be appointed as FR's Equality and Diversity Responsible Officer and it was agreed that HW would ask her.
Action: HW
- It was noted that David Georghiou has done quite a bit of work on accessibility issues in regard to FR's website.
- KC asked FREB to note the new protocol signed by the Cabinet Office which requires all external vacancies to be advertised for 10 days on the Civil Service Recruitment website prior to external advertising taking place. However, in certain cases exemptions can apply – HR at Silvan House can advise on individual cases.
- The question of an anomaly in notice periods for PB3s was raised. The FC requires one month's notice, whereas three months' is more usual in the scientific civil service. KC agreed to investigate.
Action: KC
- XC's absence on long-term sick leave has created a vacancy for a bullying and harassment officer. SS volunteered, and it was noted that training would be required.
Action: KC

Agenda Item 6 – Division Reports

18. BSSD

- The future of general FR support from the GIS unit post transfer to I&F unit needs discussion – a Service Level Agreement is probably the best way forward.
- Rolling funding from Defra may be forthcoming but is not guaranteed.

19. ED

- CQ reported that Dave Robson had been appointed as the new Head of Forestry at Newton Rigg and that this was an opportunity for FR to develop links with the college.

20. EHSD

- AM reported that the FUTMON project would use subsets from NIWT plots and that the PAG process will underpin match funding.
- FREB wished to record congratulations to Anna Lawrence on her appointment as a Visiting Professor at Wageningen University.

21. FMD

- BM suggested reviving the group looking at decision support systems. CQ suggested that HW takes this forward via video conference and involve Peter Weston and Bruce Nicholl in addition to JP, WH, CQ, AKM and BM or nominee.
Action: HW

22. THD

HE reported that

- Red Band Needle Blight is now a very serious issue.
- Defra needs to approve FR as a contractor in relation to the Defra-led hedgerow study tender. There are also issues to resolve relating to the survey data to be used.
- Regarding the workshop being organised on the implications of climate change for impacts of pests and pathogens, it was suggested that it would be appropriate to hold one in each country, or make sure that all countries are represented if the meeting is held at Alice Holt. **Action: HE**

23. TSU

- JD advised a need to identify skills and competencies within TSU quite quickly.

24. BD

- RIPSS – AKM, JP, J Dewar to discuss the financial stability of the organisation tomorrow and disseminate what is relevant.
- AKM suggested training a small core of people in bidding skills.

25. CEO & RD

- It was requested that a commentary be added to these reports for communication purposes.

Agenda Item 7 – Information Services

26. FREB welcomed David Felstead to the meeting. He advised that since joining the FC in April he has been familiarising himself with BSD and the FC and attending management board meetings to present his view of the future direction of BSD. He sees this as more of a business partner role and acknowledges that there is a need to rebuild the relationship of BSD with the rest of the business. An email would be issued in early October outlining future plans for BSD.

- Data management needs to be streamlined and there needs to be better strategic management of data. In this way BSD can add value.
- FREB was advised that the computer suite at Silvan House is running at absolute full capacity.
- It was acknowledged that the relationship with Global Crossing needs to change.
- It was suggested that a formal staff exchange of FR software engineers with BSD for some projects would be helpful.
- The lack of understanding of the diverse software needs of researchers was raised as was the poor quality of some video conferencing facilities.
- David's preference for Wayne Blackburn to work upfront on strategy was noted.

27. FREB was supportive of the new direction and ethos intended for BSD and welcomed David's willingness to engage with FR and thanked him for his offer to attend FREB meetings as often as required.

Agenda Item 8 – FC Competency Framework

28. Lori Douglas gave a presentation to FREB and advised that she would be happy to visit for dissemination if requested. The presentation is available on the intranet.
29. The Competency Framework addresses behaviours – ‘how’ is as important as ‘what’ you do, it offers a common language to address any problems.
 - PMS reviews should shift to be more forward looking and a development aspect is needed.
 - The framework offers several efficiencies.
 - It allows use of lessons learnt by current best practice being used by some.
 - There is a time saving on recruitment because descriptors are available on the intranet. It can be used as a starting point and can be refined to make relevant to users.
 - It can be used for career management.
 - It will make any process to which it is applied less subjective and therefore minimise any problems of consistency or interpretation.
 - Competency Framework is also needed to engage with Professional Skills in Government.

Agenda Item 9 – Update on the Efficiency & Delivery Review

30. PF-S updated FREB on progress since August. Main workstream meetings have all been held and PF-S is now meeting with units’ staff to gain their views. The next meeting of the review team is on 9 September. Data has now been gathered and discussions can take place to see where savings can be made. It is clear that FR is significantly overstaffed for the financial resource [but not the workload] which is available which suggests a need for re-organisation and improved job costing. It would be important to get staff thoughts on paper from their unit meetings – rapporteurs will be required.
 - The question of how and when to engage with the TUS was raised.
 - It was reported that some staff felt that there was a tension between management coming to views on intuition rather than evidence.
 - Some efficiencies will need to be postponed until the new time recording system is in place and reports generated from it.
 - FR could make better use of existing FC systems. FCs business planning, EEMs and vehicles systems need to be looked at.
 - FR needs a key vision for the future to communicate to other organisations and a positive and longer term view.
 - Flexibility is key and creative solutions are needed.

Agenda Item 10 – Business Development Plan – prepare for PAG round

31. PF-S reminded HoDs that draft proposals must be ready for the meeting being held on 8 September and that there was no new money available. It was important to increase existing programmes’ budgets by 5% and to decide on which programmes are priorities. The climate change budget may increase but other

programmes unlikely to do so.

32. FR business planning – bear in mind the need to report to FC EB in December.

33. JP, HW and AKM to look at the timetable for reports, corporate plan etc.

Action: JP/HW/AKM

Agenda Item 11 – AOB

34. Science Strategy

- Action on developing this will begin in November, younger scientists to be involved.
- Horizon scanning to be considered at the next ACFR meeting.
- Logically, a Development Strategy will follow on from the Science Strategy. HW & JP to develop a forward business plan once work on the Science Strategy has begun. FR's only constraint is the Forestry Act.
- FR's advice/advisory role could be increased.

35. Risk register

- SS is meeting Liz Holmes and John Scotney on Friday. She advised that there will probably be a cost to bring FR's Risk Register and Business Continuity Plan in line with that of the FC.

36. EB re-organisation

- JP outlined his plans for re-organisation of both FR and FREB.
- This subject would be discussed in greater detail at the October FREB meeting when a vision for the future could also be discussed.
- JP & HW to liaise over dissemination of this item to staff, Commissioners, ACFR, and the press.

37. JP advised that FR has an opportunity to co-locate [only in Scotland] with other parties if it wished to do so. JP and JD to discuss further since field staff may get better facilities.

38. KC advised that a building surveyor is to be appointed for AH.

39. WH advised that Elizabeth McArthur had circulated [to FREB members] a PID regarding arboreta.

40. An MoU has been signed with RBG Kew.

Next meeting: 10 October via v/c, based at NRS.