

Date: 18 October 2011

Our Ref:  
Your Ref:

To: SR10 Forest Enterprise  
Cc: Hannah Cockerill

England

---

**Steve Holdsworth**  
*Chair*

## SR10 FE – Consultation Response

FCTU England is pleased to be given the opportunity to respond to this consultation on these SR10 proposals for Forestry Commission England.

Following the all staff meetings, the presentation of “Shaping the Future” and the start of the Forestry Commission’s VE scheme, we have seen a great deal of interest from Trade Union members in how we are going to cope. Not only with change management and the pressures that can bring, but also how they personally can contribute within these new structures and enable the FC to remain fit for purpose.

It is our belief that the Forestry Commission provides an excellent, efficient service across the UK. If these staff cuts are implemented, this in itself will threaten the service we provide to the public.

### 1. Administration

The review team lacked expertise in one essential part of the review as it had no outstation Beat Manager/ Forester representation in the group. This has weakened the robustness of the findings of the review. SR10 proposals for Forest Services’ Admin Hubs highlight the importance of the Woodland Officer/ Administration Officer relationship. We see parallels between this and the situation often found within busy outstations in FE and that the joint working between Beat Manager/ Forester and FE Administration Officers is also vital in terms of business continuity.

1.1. Are the proposals workable? The simple answer is no. The reasons above detail why this is the case.

1.2. How could the preferred option be improved? The preferred option has an inequitable approach to the distribution of admin staff to sub offices. For example Central district has admin staff spread across 4 offices where as the West district has admin staff at only 2 offices leaving several sub offices without support. More work needs to be done on stream lining and dropping certain processes.

1.3. Are there additional factors that have been overlooked? Yes. The discrepancy between similar outstations and the AO resource proposals compared to Ludlow and Wyre is striking and there appear to be no consistency or rationale. There seems to be a definite bias, without any basis in facts or knowledge, in the West District against retaining AO resource in outstations, yet other Districts are recognising this need without any apparent difference in workload demand.

## 2. Retail

There is already an assumption, stated clearly in the brief for this review, that retail activity will where possible be transferred to non-FC providers. Given this premise it is difficult to engage in this part of the consultation process.

2.1. Are the proposals workable? No. They will leave most of our key centres without FC staff that can directly interact with our customers. Leisure and tourism is a growing part of our business and in some areas is a major income stream. To significantly reduce and in some cases completely stop direct customer contact will greatly reduce our ability to compete with other providers in an increasingly competitive market.

2.2. How could the preferred option be improved? We should be maintaining and increasing customer focused contact at our key visitor attraction sites if we wish to grow our leisure business. Business can not grow with out increased investment.

2.3. Are there additional factors that have been overlooked? Yes. FCTU England is extremely concerned about the FC's ability to ensure adequate health and safety provision. As our customer numbers increase, more and more are coming from sectors of society that do not have a history of visiting the countryside. These people are more reliant on staff support during their outing.

The concerns of FCTU England also revolve around the uncertainty of what challenges the existing teams may face during this SR10 period. We trust that staff affected will be offered the chance of redeployment within the FC wherever possible.

## 3. Wildlife Management

During the opening statement we are led to believe that wildlife rangers themselves, through "interest, motivation and expertise" took it upon themselves to digress into "wider topics" such as conservation and involvement with people. Following discussion with our members, it seems clear that Wildlife Rangers have been actively encouraged by successive line managers to adopt this work. In recent years FC policy has also supported this change in outlook.

3.1. Are the proposals workable? FCTU England is pleased to see that the review group came to the conclusion that, in the main the PFE will continue to be protected by FC Wildlife Ranger Managers and Wildlife Rangers. The commitment to additional training by management in order to maintain a professional, highly skilled workforce is also welcomed.

3.2. How could the preferred option be improved? The importance of Wildlife Rangers comments/ environmental assessments within District coupe/ Ops1 planning systems needs to be strengthened. FCTU England realises that the new SR10 structures now include a District Ecologist within the team, but does not see postholders being able to either cover the ground, or have the local knowledge required to make a meaningful contribution to these site based plans. We believe that the Beat Forester/ Wildlife Ranger partnership has served us well on several fronts...

- EPS
- BOP
- rideside management
- deadwood management
- badgers
- habitat restoration

... and that there is a business/ reputation risk if we withdraw some of this local resource.

3.3. Are there additional factors that have been overlooked? We may need to concede that some of the project work and specialist interests, which Rangers have been able to pursue over the years, might well need to be re-assessed. However, if we withdraw from this completely then we do risk jeopardising our reputation for delivery with partners. Recent examples within the North include Hen Harriers at Fourlaws, Ospreys in Kielder and the ongoing Red Squirrel work.

We think that teams have "got the message" regarding ongoing costly maintenance work in the forest and that in fact many of the improvements within both woodland and open space are the result of small changes to our normal silvicultural operations. Ride widening/ selective felling/ extraction work in riparian zones are all good examples of this. This consultation document mentions the need for further assessment. It would be helpful to know if there have been any recommendations following this work, which could be shared with us at this time.

The proposal makes no mention of the current wildlife rangers' role in managing Drag Hunt permission or the monitoring of pheasant shoots. In some areas these are significant pulls on the staff resource and there could be difficulty fitting this in with an increase in deer management duties. The paper makes no reference to the formal qualification that most rangers have; The Deer Management Qualification.

## 4. Learning

4.1. Are the proposals workable? No. Our major concern is that the recommendation of the Learning Review group, which reported to the board in September, was not the option set out in the 'Shaping the Future of the Forestry Commission England' proposal document.

We are concerned because there was not enough time to adequately brief and consult with education colleagues (many of whom are part time and working with school visits during the day) in order to respond to the proposal. The meeting to

fully explain the rationale behind the proposal was finally organised on Mon 10th Oct, with final deadline for consultation by Friday 14th October. This was simply not long enough, especially given that the Learning Review Panel had 5 months to come up with options. This very short timescale has added immense pressure to staff who are already very stressed.

4.2. How could the preferred option be improved? As above, implementation of the working group's preference, option A. The need to reduce costs more quickly, given the context of the FC's SR10 settlement has not been fully explained.

4.3. Are there additional factors that have been overlooked? Our understanding is that the job descriptions for the new Learning PB5 and PB6a posts are so different from the current posts (although we have been asked to respond to out of date job profiles during the consultation process) that existing staff will have to re-apply. Surely current postholders will be better qualified for revised posts than other PB5 or PB6a staff applying from elsewhere.

The Forest District's within the new structure create too large an area for the PB5 Learning co-ordinators to be effective. How can new contacts and partnerships be developed when staff resources are being reduced and work areas increased? We appreciate the desire for FC to have a more standard staff structure across the Districts, and the restructuring process currently in hand provides a good opportunity to do this. However, the present staff quota on many sites has developed according to local needs, and the 'one size fits all' approach may not be appropriate in all locations.

The preferred proposal leaves most Forest Districts without a learning resource that can meet customer demands. Turning customers away is going to significantly impact on the reputation of the organisation and lead to future generations that will not have access to an important part of the learning process. Learning in the outdoors is a key government objective and we should be growing this part of our business at this time. The Department of Education should be more involved at a strategic level in this work, which should include a funding commitment, given its importance.

I do need to take this opportunity to restate our position in terms of our national campaign. We believe that the Forestry Commission is extremely cost effective in terms of the resources it manages. Through the SR10 programme of cuts we risk losing all the benefits that the Forestry Commission bring to everyone in England. The Trade Union movement has offered the Government countless ways in which to seek out and implement alternatives to these cuts, which would allow them to meet the needs of the national deficit. The Government has chosen not to listen so far to these arguments and therefore the FCTU remains steadfastly opposed to any job cuts in the FC.

I hope you will be able to consider the reservations which have been raised within this letter and I look forward to your response in due course.

Yours sincerely

Steve Holdsworth  
*(via e-mail)*