

## AGM REPORT 2011

### FCTU ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 22<sup>ND</sup> & 23<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER 2011, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH.

Attending the meeting were:

Robert Beaney, FCTU Chair  
Sam Telford, Assistant FCTU Secretary  
Mary Irvine, PCS  
Joanne McAuley, PCS  
Lorraine Adams, Prospect (22<sup>nd</sup>)  
Alistair Gillies, GMB  
Cath Speight, Unite FTO (23<sup>rd</sup>)  
Bruce Hamilton, FCTU Business Units  
Helen Daniels, FCTU England (22<sup>nd</sup>)  
Malcolm Crosby, FCTU Scotland  
Peter Fullarton, FCTU Scotland  
Antony Griffiths, FCTU Wales  
Rhian Evans, FCTU Wales  
Chris Tucker, Unite / FCTU Wales  
Jim Henderson, FCTU Silvan House  
Glenn Brearley, FCTU Research / Prospect  
Mark Oram, FCTU Research

Apologies were received from Allan MacKenzie, Roy Laird, Steve Holdsworth, Danny Williamson, Malcolm Currie and Andrew Stewart.

Following a brief introduction from the Chair, members of the Departmental Committee provided a verbal report on the work carried out at FCTU GB level over the past year, including the hugely successful and well organised joint union campaigning against the Government's attempts to sell off the PFE in England and opposition of the forestry clauses in the Public Bodies Bill; whilst also giving [evidence](#) to the Science & Technology Committee enquiring into Forest Research and responding to Independent Forestry Panel's call for views in England. Internally, it was reported that members of the DC had much to deal with on the rollout of [SR10](#), supporting Area Committees and giving valuable feedback on the consultations and implementation plans, opposing the unnecessary budget cuts in the FC; as well as having input on the Business Units Review; proposals on

environment delivery options for Wales to create a Single Environment Body; consulting on the Voluntary Exit Scheme and observing the selection panel's assessments.

Despite a great deal of campaigning work, it was still business as usual in 2011 with pay "negotiations", changes to Travel and Expenses procedures to consult on and many HR policies and procedures under review including Stress Management and the current consultations on Performance Improvement, Sickness Absence and Learning & Development Policy; whilst maintaining a presence on the Diversity Forum and giving input to the Staff Survey and initial Employee Assistant Programme survey.

The Constituent Unions provided an update on activity over the past year - on work contributing to the wider FCTU campaigns, activity around conferences and organising across GB. The Industrial Action on the **Pensions Dispute** will see PCS, Prospect and GMB members in the FC out on strike against the cuts to public sector pensions on 30 November. Several of the FC offices, in particular Silvan House and Alice Holt will have picket lines formed of cross-union members getting their message across. The unions are currently working very hard and are holding branch meetings to ensure members have the latest information regarding the action. The group felt this will be a great opportunity to recruit new members and discussed ways of demonstrating the need to join now, and will have membership forms and pens at the ready. *Unite members in the FC were not balloted therefore are not able to take strike on 30 November. This unfortunate situation is explained [here](#).*

Area Committee reps reported on the year's events, in particular their successes and challenges. In Wales, although communication with management remained strong, the uncertainty around the **Welsh Government's Single Environment Body** plans had taken up a considerable amount of union time and resources and currently continued to do so, and the move of FCW into the SEB will be the biggest single challenge for FCTU Wales, should the Minister choose to include FCW. This would also clearly have far reaching outcomes and impacts for FC GB, further devolving the organisation. An in depth discussion was held around the SEB and although the FCTU do not oppose the creation of a new environment body, without clear concise evidence demonstrating improved delivery of forestry in Wales, they remain to be convinced that the inclusion of FCW within the SEB would bring further significant benefits. It was felt that the Business Case is extremely weak in this regard and also overlooks key elements of forestry in Wales, such as the funding of Forest Research. With the Minister making a decision imminently, the FCTU have been pushing to ensure their concerns are heard, with Labour Assembly Members being briefed on the situation, of which they appeared to be very unaware of, and keeping ongoing communication with the Forestry Commissioner for Wales and FCW management.

In England, the **Independent Panel**'s final report with their recommendations will appear in spring 2012. As well as [responding to the call for views](#), the FCTU have met with several of the panel's members including the Bishop of Liverpool who appeared to be very supportive and understanding of the FCTU's case. The committee's focus since the Government's U-turn on the PFE consultation has largely been on the **SR10** implementation, which has now reached a highly personal phase where individuals are being directly affected by the cuts, through many leaving the organisation on VE and with the remaining staff being uncertain about what areas of work would cease as a result of the reduced workforce, and Assimilation Panels looking at the process for assimilating posts into the remaining business areas - new Forest Districts and Forest Services areas which had been established as part of the consultation. It was felt there may be an increase of grievances and personal cases as new managers implement these changes in working practices.

With SR10 affecting **Forest Research** also, the committee [responded](#) to the consultation and although the implementation plan seemed to take on some of the comments the unions were aware of, there are still some concerns on how the changes will be implemented; on workloads and a potential increase in stress. Another concern among members is on the future of the Alice Holt site, which was still unclear as the SR10 consultation and implementation plan were remarkably vague on its status. The FR Promotions Procedure is another area of work the committee have been working on, which after some time progress was finally being made.

SR10's impact on Westminster funded functions meant involvement of **FCTU Silvan House** in the consultation, with a [response](#) being submitted along with good engagement with members in Silvan House and the management side of the Staff Council, working through and adopting many of the points put forward. The first phase of the VE scheme has seen many staff departing, meaning that most of the staff reduction targets, particularly in IS had already been met, raising concerns on delivery and recruitment options which the FCTU were already looking into.

**FCTU Business Units** have been dealing with the difficult situation of the BU Review and resulting MES Integration into the countries, possible outsourcing of functions and concerns on the future of the workshops. The committee are awaiting decisions from the Executive Board on MES outsourcing on 7 December, whilst the situation on PSSB and sundry items is still unclear. The VE scheme again has had an impact on staffing levels however some of the key reps on the committee have applied and left also.

**FCTU Scotland** reported that a 10% target reduction in staff had already been met, mostly through VE leavers. FC Scotland's business plan was said to be stable and budget situation relatively relaxed with timber prices being maintained, however they were closely observing the Welsh Government's SEB plans and work of the Independent Panel in England, with a commitment in the Scottish Government's manifesto for attaining full responsibility for all forestry issues in Scotland. The committee have been revisiting the admin review with management, which was coming to a somewhat positive conclusion with some additional resource being allocated to admin which has been welcomed by many members across Scotland.

Wilma Harper provided an update to the FCTU on the **FC Governance Project**, which is to ensure that the organisation is best placed to provide advice to Ministers in the event that they wish to change or review the devolution and administrative arrangements as they apply to Forestry in GB, considering the consequences of decisions that might be made by any of the three administrations. We were told this is all very much dependant on the current potential drivers to change to the FC, namely the SEB possibility in Wales; again the Scottish Government's manifesto looking for full responsibility for forestry and the work of the Independent Panel in England. The outcome of this project being that the FC will be able to provide Ministers with evidence-based and costed advice for further changes to delivery and understand the processes and resources necessary to implement Ministers' wishes in an efficient and orderly manner. Wilma heard our concerns, particularly on the SEB issue.

Helen Paterson and Alison Leith from HR gave us a presentation on the **Redeployment** Process, explaining how and when it would be applied and gave examples of how it when been used thus far. They were able to answer our many questions on the process and take on board our comments regarding inconsistencies, not with the procedure itself but with its application by managers.

With the **Departmental Staff Council** being held on 6 December, the group discussed potential agenda items to raise with management, noting that the DC were currently drafting up and agreeing papers to put forward.

The Chair gave a summation of the AGM, thanking the group for an excellent meeting and listed the action points\* to be taken forward.

\*

- Employee Assistance Programme – seeking details of issues with the service.
- VE scheme – look into setting up a survey to capture the reasons for people leaving on VE.
- Use of FTAs, TRAs and issues of compliance of HR Policy across the FC – raise with Director HR.
- Union Learning Reps – set up a meeting between L&D and the ULRs to establish a joint up approach to learning.

