

The FCTU Submission to the Forest Advisory Panel 2011

This submission is presented on behalf of Trade Union members, many of whom are very proud to work for an organisation such as the Forestry Commission, however some would rather their voice to be heard through this document. Most of us do not see ourselves as being Civil Servants working for the Government; we see ourselves as working for the Forestry Commission. For many their jobs are a vocation, spending years training to be the very best at what they do as well as keeping up to date with new ways of working, adapting to change and ensuring that all their customers' expectations are catered for. Remuneration for most is at best moderate yet they still choose to work for the FC; their income supporting many local and sometimes fragile businesses where they live.

The overarching priority is for our submission to be based on the protection of the service our members deliver and to concentrate on those areas of value that are unique to the Forestry Commission (FC), namely:

1. The professionalism of FC staff and,
2. The added value that the Forestry Commission brings.

What makes FC staff so professional?

They are:

- Formally qualified
- Highly trained
- Well motivated
- Dedicated
- Experienced
- Highly customer orientated
- Extremely skilled in working with others
- Renowned for their ability to work efficiently

What added value does the Forestry Commission bring?

The name it has come to represent and the unique services it provides:

- Climate change mitigation
- Consistent timber supply
- Protection of the environment
- Health and Learning opportunities
- International recognition

- Trusted Brand
- Economic stability

The first question asked by the Panel was “What do forests and woods mean to you?”

It's all about passion. It's a passion for the environment, especially the woodland environment, which holds a deep seated emotional bond for many members of staff, plus a dedication in ensuring that woods and forests are successful, healthy, well maintained and sustainable that sets apart Forestry Commission staff from many others in the Civil Service. The motivation is there for all to see, the results of their labours producing some of the most beautiful woods and forests anywhere in the world. The recognition shown by communities and the general public at large provides the assurance that the FC and its workforce must continue to deliver the needs demanded by today's society.

Visitors to the Public Forest Estate are continually looking for recreational pastimes and pursuits; this is catered for by dedicated staff for whom people are the most important aspect of their job. For them, the focus is solely on the needs of the customer no matter their age, ability or place in society. The Forestry Commission and its staff make no distinction and everybody is treated equally.

The spaces between the trees are also a haven for wildlife, some of which can cause damage if they are not controlled. Some of our members are responsible therefore for making sure that the forest environment is maintained and as such, have to exercise control over animal population densities as well as controlling well known pests. Often an emotive subject, our very professional Wildlife Rangers go about their business with the minimum of fuss, acting with extreme care and in a very humane manner. Such is their level of skill that meat from the forest is now part of the daily food chain, with supermarkets vying with each other to win contracts to market the meat from the FC.

Lifelong learning is something that we all strive to achieve. The FC provides this for everyone no matter what age they might be. It is amongst the young however that the FC really makes a huge difference, providing programmes that complement the national curriculum, helping primary teachers with environmental projects and creating some activities that just let kids (old and young) have fun in the forest. Across the unions in the FC are members who are committed to ensuring that children of all ages and abilities understand the importance of their woods and forests, the environment and their part in it so

that when they grow up they have a ready understanding of the value of our present and future woodlands and forests.

Lets not forget those members of staff who operate the systems that make sure people get paid, that new policies and procedures are agreed, that new legislation and guidelines are adhered to, and that the ever changing global landscape is recognised. They also make sure income is collected and that our accounts are balanced.

All across England there are unsung heroes who carry out maintenance to a vast range of vehicles and machinery, others who ensure that roads are built and maintained to appropriate specifications and dedicated scientists with their teams who provide the evidence for maintaining and improving the forest environment.

FC staff working in FC shops are very much customer focussed; they will always go that little bit further to make sure the shopper has a valuable experience and leaves the shop with not only a purchase but also a greater understanding of the forests, woods and trees they have just visited. Many gifts purchased are locally sourced, helping to provide retail outlets for small local craft businesses.

A large number of our members have worked in the FC for a long time; this is due to the fact that they enjoy working for the FC, who they see as a worthy employer. The job entails dealing with the natural environment and their ability to make sure that their contribution helps maintain and enhance that environment now and into the future. It is however, also true to say that some join the FC with no real intention of staying for more than a few years; somehow though they find themselves seduced into spending their entire working life with the FC.

Why is that? It cannot be for the financial reward because the average salary in the FC is currently £27,900. It has to be other factors that make people want to stay, one of them is definitely the FC's ability to get things done, which is primarily achieved through the 'can do' attitude of its staff. Budget controls are stringent but the FC possesses flexibility, with members of staff being encouraged to be innovative and enterprising so that the use of resources yields a greater return than the amount invested. The majority of successful partnership programmes owe their success to FC members of staff who bring a wide range of knowledge and expertise with them influencing the outcome towards a successful partnership.

Currently, just over 3000 members of staff work in the FC, 1100 of which work in a variety of locations all over England, from Northumberland through the Midlands, east to East Anglia, west to the Dean and south west into the New Forest and Cornwall. In each of these areas we have administrators, who are the 'constant' in how the FC operates so successfully. Each one provides such vital support for those colleagues who grow and look after the woods and forests, who educate others and those who buy the woodland and forest products. As a direct result of the FC implementation plan, 17 offices have been earmarked for closure. The FCTU is extremely concerned that the closures will result in a negative financial impact for each of the communities where the offices are located. Additionally, there is a very real concern that there may well be further negativity shown towards the FC as people see their local forest offices disappear finding that they have to travel further afield to see someone in person who is able to deal with their particular enquiry. There are even plans for some offices to remain but only as bases for out-stationed staff who will no longer have on-site administrative support. The fear here is that removing this vital support will weaken the ability of the FC to directly provide the good service at a local level that it has become renowned for.

FCTU would ask the Panel to consider the personal statements of what some of our members feel about the job they currently do, how they feel about working for an organisation like the Forestry Commission and why they feel that they should be the one to continue delivering that service to the British Public through the Public Forest Estate. The Panel will find these appended to this submission.

It would be useful if we were able to provide the Panel with a summary of how union members feel but as you can see from above their roles are very varied and stem across wide geographical areas. The general feeling however is one of doing an important job, getting a great deal of job satisfaction and feeling that they have something to offer into the future but they are concerned about all the changes that are currently being proposed.

FCTU are concerned that the Panel may not have access to the views of union members who work for the Forestry Commission and we believe that this submission will help you to gain a better understanding of how they contribute in the delivery of the objectives of the organisation, Government policy and the expectations of the public. Trade Union members expect a fully funded Forestry Commission, fully resourced and able to be managed sustainably into the future.

In question five the Panel asks “what do you see as the priorities and challenges for policy about England’s forests and woods?”

In this section of the submission, we intend to deal with the added value of the existence of the Forestry Commission and the PFE. For some perspective, the FCTU would like to draw the attention of the Panel to the Final Report of the Forestry Sub-Committee of the Reconstruction Committee from 1918. In the report it makes the point “the absence of well-managed State forests has proved a great drawback since the private owner has no ideal towards which to work”.

Much of what was being said in 1918 is still very current today, in the words of the then Lord Lovat, “it is not, however with the past but with the future that the nation is concerned, how to make a forest policy, how to carry it out and if the occasion arises, use the resources that the State has built up for the State’s best advantage?” Forestry has come a long way since those days but it is as a direct result of those decisions taken then that has provided the rich tapestry of public forests our society now enjoys.

The steady and consistent supply of timber to the market is a vital part in ensuring a sustainable and vibrant processing sector within the UK economy. Much of the work carried out by our members contributes to growing, managing and marketing timber to achieve the objective of maintaining the potential of this resource whilst diversifying the overall forest resource to achieve the other benefits required by today’s society. Timber is a marketed product and can be valued using market prices. The sale of timber from a specific forest can be variable since harvesting occurs at lengthy intervals from any specific area. The scale of the Public Forest Estate includes a wide distribution of age and yield classes and therefore can smooth out revenue fluctuations over time.

For many union members here in the FC, they continue to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of woodlands and help to support the conservation of priority habitats and species. Many threatened species find sanctuary in the Public Forest Estate not only in native trees species and open habitats but in conifer stands also. Our members look after our cultural heritage – ancient and industrial archaeological sites within the Public Forest Estate, as well as woodlands and trees that are themselves important historical or archaeological features. Woodlands and trees in designated landscapes and historic landscapes need the protection of appropriate woodland management, especially veteran trees. The ability to create more woodland today whether it is private or added to the Public Forest Estate will provide the opportunity to

create woodlands that could enhance the new landscapes of England in the years to come.

As the climate changes, the Public Forest Estate has allowed the UK to benchmark towards the Kyoto protocol. The total carbon in UK woods and forests has increased and the total stock is projected to continue to increase. The carbon in forest soils accounts for most (80%) of the total forest carbon, and most of the increase in the total figures for UK woods and forests is due to change in land-use.

It is important to create more diverse woodland in the future to increase their resilience. However more diverse and more native forests could, over time, offer a more favourable environment for deer and other potentially damaging species. Whilst considering and tackling these problems we need to continue to undertake forest research through our Forest Research Agency to better understand the future implications of the decisions we make today.

Traditional ideas about classroom teaching are giving way to new and exciting approaches like the use of woods for learning. Woodlands provide a unique environment for young people to learn about sustainable development and climate change. Woodlands are robust, seasonal outdoor spaces – cool in summer and providing shelter in winter. They can stimulate all the senses: touch, taste and smell as much as sight and sound. Woodland settings also provide a calm learning environment for those children with attention deficit issues or in need of additional learning support. Those of our members who work in these areas are working alongside education professionals and others with the aim of transforming the lives of young people by creating greater awareness and use of the opportunities and benefits of learning and teaching outdoors. The FCTU would like to see greater support for those who work with young people outdoors to facilitate the use the Public Forest Estate to a greater extent and with increased and properly resourced capacity from FC staff.

Britain's society like much of the rest of the western world experiences growing rates of avoidable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. We know with certainty that moderate physical activity, in fact something as simple as walking regularly, can prevent or delay the impact of many avoidable chronic diseases; however levels of physical activity are still too low in the UK. Trees, woods and forests can play a key role in helping to promote better physical and mental health for all by providing greenspace environments where people can be physically active and recover from the symptoms of stress. It is now widely acknowledged that there is more to health than simply the absence of illness and the role for all agencies including those in the environmental

sector is to support health improvement activities. Trees and woods bestow a sense of cover and seclusion that can enhance the experience of being outdoors. More people can be absorbed in a woodland environment than open space and the disturbance is less pronounced. Children engaged in woodland settings are more likely to interact and socialise as part of a group, as demonstrated by the Forest School research. The Public Forest Estate can support strategic objectives for a greener, safer, stronger and healthier society. We need to increase the awareness of and participation in health, promoting active use of trees woods and forest, which support the reduction in health inequalities. Here again we have union members who are on the front line of delivery of these benefits and again we would wish to see this maintained and fully resourced into the future.

Working with officials from other Government Departments, Forestry Commission members of staff contribute to the formulation of UK policy in relation to international and European negotiations and agreements on forests as well as advising on the implications of international and European obligations for the implementation of forest policy and practice domestically.

Internationally the UK's objectives are to ensure a balanced approach to sustainable forest management; a robust and equitable approach to tackling illegal logging; that UK businesses are not put at a competitive disadvantage and that other policy objectives concerning climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development are properly reflected.

The Forestry Commission also provides briefings to Ministers and other Government Departments on forest policy and practice in the UK for representation in negotiations in key European and global forums.

Many increasingly diverse ranges of social and economic benefits have become recognised within the whole of the forestry sector. Forestry is now seen to deliver against many agendas. The FC incurs additional costs to provide enhanced non-market benefits compared to a purely commercial approach to forestry. Non-market benefits in forestry can include biodiversity, conservation and aesthetic and recreational values. There are values associated with the advantage of single ownership/management, such as the ability to adopt a strategic approach to forest planning and risk management on a wider geographical scale. Forestry plays a significant role in the provision of employment; it can help retain and enhance local skills, especially among young people and help strengthen local economies.

There is also a significant value associated with the FC brand. Our logo is the combination of the two tree-symbol and name "Forestry Commission", and is a

valuable asset. It helps people recognise us and is used in all parts of the Forestry Commission.

The FC provide corporate clothing that members of staff want to wear, are proud of, and that support the image of a forward-looking organisation that delivers for government, local communities, the forestry industry and the general public.

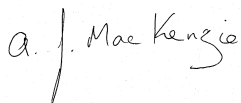
Signs are one of the most important and well-recognised aspects of our brand image. They are often the first and immediate symbol of the Forestry Commission that people encounter when they visit our forests and woodlands. We have a professional and consistent approach to signage across the whole organisation to promote the Forestry Commission, to enhance the experience of visitors to its sites, and to ensure the safety and well-being of its staff and the public.

The vehicle fleet is instantly recognisable as belonging to the Forestry Commission. The distinctive green and yellow livery is a very effective and economical way of exposing and advertising our work. Professionally designed and produced livery and graphics on well-maintained and well-driven vehicles contribute greatly to raising the profile of the staff and the FC – in towns and cities and especially in rural areas, where the Forestry Commission is a part of the community.

It is hoped that this submission will enlighten the Panel to some of the 'people' aspects surrounding this great debate and that the views of union members are counted alongside those others who would wish to bring influence to any decisions/recommendations that the Panel may consider.

It is sufficient to say that those who choose to work for the Forestry Commission do so for many reasons and that the individual testimonies attached will bring some of their reasons to your attention.

The Forestry Commission Trade Unions would like to thank the Panel for reading this submission.



Allan MacKenzie

Departmental Trade Union Secretary