

FCTU Response to FR Refresh Proposals: Executive Summary

Introduction

The FCTU welcomes the opportunity for consultation on the proposals to create a refreshed FR. Given the gravity of the proposals, FCTU has made considerable efforts to seek views from affected union members in the Forestry Commission and in Forest Research.

This paper serves as an Executive Summary of the full complete response from the FCTU, and focusses on collective points of concern highlighted by union members, and recommendations to management that flow from these. The underlying discussion and assessment of members' responses that has led to the recommendations can be found in the associated full submission offered by the FCTU.

Collective points of high-level concern

The FCTU notes that the formal consultation asks for FCTU views on two specific points:

1. The introduction of a new Vision and set of Objectives for FR
2. The transfer of a number of functions that are currently delivered by CFS over to FR.

Views are offered on these points as part of the FCTU response, but these are incorporated into the discussion of six points of high-level concern raised by union members, which are:

1. Successful integration of existing and new functions will require significant cultural change
2. Costs need to be identified, quantified and addressed
3. The issue of how CFS/SIS procurement will be managed needs to be resolved
4. Deliberations over possible future business models for FR need to be more transparent and inclusive
5. Greater efforts need to be made to develop proposals for the future of staff left out of the FR refresh
6. The success of the FR refresh needs to be reviewed.

These points are discussed further below. It is important to stress that the terms of the FR refresh consultation do not include consideration of either the CSR 2015 or the Forestry Governance Project, and it has not been possible to take account of these processes as part of the FCTU response, even though these will have significant impacts on a refreshed FR. As a consequence, the position the FCTU needs to take on behalf of union members is very likely to evolve.

The FCTU must also express strong disappointment that staff and union members are being consulted about the implementation of a single option for reorganisation, which has already been decided upon. This is not in the spirit of open and inclusive management, and has been the subject of critical comments from a number of union members.

1. Successful integration of existing and new functions will require significant cultural change

This is the biggest and most complex set of concerns that the FCTU needs to express on behalf of union members. It is complex because "culture" for the refreshed FR is being referred to here in a very broad sense, covering:

1. The physical organisation of the refreshed FR
2. Ways of working within the refreshed FR
3. The valuing and developing of staff in the refreshed FR
4. The need to reflect these points in the vision and objectives of the refreshed FR.

Complexity arises because these points, and relevant concerns raised by members, are intimately interlinked.

Recommendations on composition and organisational structure

The FCTU offers two recommendations on the composition and on the development of the organisational structure of the refreshed FR.

Recommendation 1: In taking forward the implementation of the refreshed FR between now and April 2016, the proposals for the organisational structure of the refreshed FR are revisited and revised, with the aims of:

- Better reflecting the job roles and functions of staff and groups potentially joining the refreshed FR, ensuring that the existing role and focus of jobs are not lost
- Supporting existing interdisciplinary working between groups potentially joining FR, and also between these groups and those already based in FR
- Starting to grow opportunities for, and eliminating any barriers to, new interdisciplinary working between the various individuals and groups that will comprise the refreshed FR
- Ensuring that the organisational structure of the refreshed FR fully reflects the Agency's expanded remit, roles, functions and outputs.

The FCTU is willing to work with management to gain a fuller understanding of the job roles and responsibilities of staff joining the refreshed FR, and already in FR, and to provide input to further shaping the organisational structure of the refreshed FR, based on the views and insights of union members.

In this respect, the FCTU notes that one example option for an alternative organisational structure has been proposed in a response received from members, based on the three pillars of:

1. Science and research
2. Evidence and analysis
3. Corporate services.

Further discussion may be found in the full response offered by the FCTU. However, it must be stressed that the FCTU has not had the opportunity in the time provided to consult adequately with union members to arrive at a collective position on their behalf on options for improving organisational structure. Consequently, further engagement between the FCTU and members is needed before the FCTU can offer a definite position on this matter. What is clear at this point is that management would

be well advised to give further thought to the question of an organisational structure that is truly fit for the purposes of the refreshed FR.

Recommendation 2: As a matter of urgency, the proposals to transfer certain staff groups/job roles to the refreshed FR should be reviewed more closely, to more definitely establish:

- That the full range of job roles and functions is suitable for transferring to the refreshed FR
- Whether or not particular staff groups/job roles should in fact transfer to the refreshed FR, rather than remaining part of a government department.

The FCTU considers that this is particularly necessary in the case of statistical roles, currently residing in CFS, which are proposed for transfer to the refreshed FR. Responses from affected union members give a strong indication that the full roles and functions of these jobs would be compromised by moving to the refreshed FR.

The FCTU also draws management's attention to similar concerns expressed by union members currently in Publications and Technical Communications and in IFOS.

The FCTU is willing to work with management to gain a better understanding of relevant job roles and functions, and the extent of their suitability for transfer to the refreshed FR.

Recommendations on ways of working

The FCTU offers one recommendation on the development, or perhaps clarification, of intended ways of working in the refreshed FR.

Recommendation 3: In taking forward the implementation of the refreshed FR between now and April 2016, efforts should be made to clarify the intended approaches to ways of working by the various staff groups comprising the refreshed FR, with the aims of providing assurances to staff that:

- Critical job roles currently undertaken by staff groups joining the refreshed FR are not dissipated or completely lost
- Staff are not expected to take on new roles or functions that represent an unreasonable change from their current jobs and responsibilities
- The workloads of staff are not expanded to an unsustainable extent
- Existing effective working relationships between the various groups joining the refreshed FR, and existing groups in FR, continue to be supported and strengthened
- Ensuring that opportunities for growing and improving positive working relationships between the staff groups comprising the refreshed FR are supported and encouraged.

The FCTU is willing to work with management to develop approaches to managing ways of working in the refreshed FR to address the above aims and the concerns of union members.

Recommendations on valuing and developing staff

The FCTU offers one recommendation on the subject of valuing and developing staff in the refreshed FR.

Recommendation 4: In taking forward the implementation of the refreshed FR between now and April 2016, efforts should be made to develop holistic policy and practices towards the development and grading of staff groups in the various job roles and functions comprising the refreshed FR, with the aims of:

- Ensuring fair and equitable treatment and opportunities for all staff groups in the refreshed FR
- Getting the best out of the different staff groups and job roles in the refreshed FR, in support of the business need, recognising the expanded scope and remit of the refreshed FR
- Clarifying the application of the FR Science Promotions Procedure and general grading systems to the various staff groups comprising the refreshed FR, including those categorised as “scientists”
- Mitigating potential risks of pay inequalities amongst individuals and staff groups comprising the refreshed FR.

The FCTU is willing to work with management to identify and address gaps and inconsistencies in existing policies, systems and procedures, to address the concerns of union members, whilst acknowledging legitimate business requirements.

Recommendations on vision and objectives

The FCTU notes that the proposals for the vision and objectives of the refreshed FR have drawn some critical comments from all sides represented by union members (i.e. scientists commenting that scientific research is downplayed, whilst professional and technical staff have commented that policy informing and evidence provision are downplayed). As such, this could be seen as the mark of a successful compromise. Nevertheless, the FCTU offers one recommendation on the vision and objectives of the refreshed FR.

Recommendation 5: In taking forward the implementation of the refreshed FR between now and April 2016, the proposed stated vision and objectives of the refreshed FR should be revisited and possibly revised, with the aims of:

- Taking account of the outcomes of the actions taken in response to Recommendations 1 to 4
- To the extent possible, sharpening the messages projected by the vision and objectives to potential clients and stakeholders.

The FCTU is willing to work with management to advise on the views and aspirations of union members, to inform any further development of the refreshed FR’s statement of vision and objectives.

2. Costs need to be identified, quantified and addressed

Union members and the FCTU are very surprised at the suggestion made as part of the proposals for the refreshed FR that changes can be implemented on a cost neutral basis. The FCTU contends that financial costs associated with the formation of the refreshed FR are likely to be significant. Accordingly, the FCTU offers four recommendations on the issue of costs associated with the formation of the proposed refreshed FR.

Recommendation 6: As a matter of urgency, efforts should be made to identify and quantify financial costs associated with the formation of the refreshed FR, likely to be incurred in the short term, medium term and ongoing.

Recommendation 7: Based on the findings of the actions taken in response to Recommendation 6, efforts should be made to develop a financial plan that will address the increased costs associated with forming and running the refreshed FR.

Recommendation 8: In the event that the assessments undertaken in response to Recommendations 6 and 7 reveal that there are significant short-term costs involved with the migration from existing structures to those that will be constituted following the formation of the refreshed FR, management is urged to consider the option of seeking an appropriate level of contingency funding to cover these transitional costs.

Recommendation 9: Given the extent of changes taking place in the Forestry Commission and in Devolved Administrations, efforts should be made to obtain assurances that funding for FR currently administered by CFS is safeguarded and that there is a sustainable body for budget-holding and procurement of outputs and services from the refreshed FR.

The FCTU is willing to work with management to identify and quantify costs associated with the creation of the refreshed FR and associated changes.

3. The issue of how CFS/SIS procurement will be managed needs to be resolved

This issue has already been raised in Recommendation 9. In addition, union members and the FCTU are aware that the creation of the proposed refreshed FR, along with implementation of the outcomes of other reviews for Central/Shared Services, will leave behind a very significantly diminished central FC body. In particular, the transfer of IFOS to the refreshed FR, and any reorganisation of the CFS Policy Analyst team, will have significant impacts on the processes of managing and procuring outputs and services from the refreshed FR. Accordingly, the FCTU offers one recommendation on the issue of costs associated with the formation of the proposed refreshed FR.

Recommendation 10: As a matter of urgency, arrangements need to be clarified for the holding of budgets and the procurement and management of outputs and services from the refreshed FR, as part of implementation of the FR refresh.

4. Deliberations over possible future business models for FR need to be more transparent and inclusive

Although the subject is not strictly within the scope of the proposals for creating a refreshed FR, union members and the FCTU are very concerned that options for a change in the business model for the refreshed FR appear to be already under consideration, and could have significant impacts. Accordingly, the FCTU offers one recommendation on any deliberations undertaken on the question of a future business model for the proposed refreshed FR.

Recommendation 11: As part of any reviews of possible future business models the proposed refreshed FR, management must make all possible efforts on behalf of staff to ensure that the review process is transparent and allows for the views and aspirations of affected staff to be taken into account. This should include consultation with staff on a set of possible options for business model, rather than a "done deal" of a preferred option.

5. Greater efforts need to be made to develop proposals for the future of staff left out of the FR refresh

The FCTU notes that those functions not transferring to the proposed refreshed FR will be considered as part of the wider change programme to develop new corporate service arrangements and for the meantime will remain part of CFS.

Those functions not transferring to the proposed refreshed FR include:

- Economics
- Research commissioning.
- International and support for UKFS.
- Plant health
- The remaining parts of CFS Corporate Services.

Union members and the FCTU are conscious that more information is needed on the functions not transferring to the refreshed FR, and what the constitution will be of the remaining parts of Central/Shared Services that are not transferred to the countries. There are only cursory remarks on those functions that should not move to the refreshed FR and staff are concerned about this lack of information. Furthermore, union members have expressed concerns that effective team relationships are being broken up under proposals to move some groups to the refreshed FR, some to the countries, whilst retaining others in some sort of central body. Particular concerns have been expressed with regard to the functions of Plant Health and Forest Reproductive Material. Further discussion of these points is provided in the full FCTU response. Accordingly, the FCTU offers two recommendations on the subject of functions not transferring to the proposed refreshed FR.

Recommendation 12: As a matter of urgency, management should bring forward clear and credible proposals for the futures of those job roles and functions not proposed for transfer to the refreshed FR, demonstrating a rational case for transfer to countries or retention in a central body. Proposals are also urgently required for the constitution of the remaining central body.

Recommendation 13: In responding to Recommendations 2 and 12, management should also consider existing working relationships between those staff groups/job roles proposed for transferring to the refreshed FR, and those proposed not to transfer, to ensure that essential working relationships and functions are not disrupted by the breaking up of existing teams and working arrangements.

The FCTU is willing to work with management to gain a better understanding of relevant job roles and functions, and the extent of their suitability for transfer or retention as coherent teams.

6. The success of the FR refresh needs to be reviewed

A strong message from union members has been a sense of frustration at having witnessed many proposals for significant change in parts of the Forestry Commission and its successor bodies, which are subsequently implemented, but never properly reviewed to determine whether the changes have been effective and have met objectives. Accordingly, the FCTU offers one recommendation on the subject of the need for a review of the outcome of proposals for a refreshed FR, assuming these are implemented.

Recommendation 14: Should proposals for a refreshed FR be implemented, then, following a suitable interval, management should commit to undertaking a review of the effectiveness of the organisational changes involved, and whether these have been successful in meeting objectives and sustaining relevant job roles and functions.