



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION TRADE UNIONS' DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 MAY 2010, EAST BOARDROOM, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH

Present:	Robert Beaney	FCTU Chair
	Allan MacKenzie	FCTU Secretary
	Mary Irvine	PCS
	Audrey Campbell	Unite
	Lorraine Adams	Prospect
	Roy Laird	GMB
	Sue Gillingwater	FCTU Network Manager
	Jean Lindsay (item 8.1)	Director HR
Minute Secretary	Sam Telford	

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

Allan said that as part of a new Departmental Committee meeting format, the FCTU Chair, Secretary and elected reps held a discussion prior to the formal meeting, which included debate on a variety of subjects such as the new political landscape facing the unions, the 5.6% cut being imposed on DEFRA, managing discipline, pay and the post-filling cap. Allan added that Director HR would be joining the DC for a discussion on the recruitment freeze.

2. Minutes of 20 April 2010

The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Occupational Health & Safety Reps Training

Robert said that there was no substantial update as yet, however he had attended a Health & Safety Committee meeting in Wales, at which the draft structure for the course was discussed and well received. It was noted that the delivery of the course, in particular costs would be discussed with Colin Sobota, Head of L&D.

Action Required: Robert Beaney

3.2 Lyme Disease

Robert reported that the FC's Safety, Health & Environment team would be issuing an OGB on reporting work related illnesses; however the timing of its release was unknown. Robert said that he would contact Emily Ramsay to enquire.

Action Required: Robert Beaney

3.3 JEGS

Allan said that the process has altered and that HR would no longer seek advice on posts to evaluate from managers and the FCTU, however posts would still be submitted for evaluation on an ongoing basis.

3.4 Communication Strategy

It was noted that a full discussion on the document would be held at the next DC meeting on 29 June.

3.5 FCTU Branding

Allan said that following the agreement to look at altering the FCTU logo, draft designs had been created and these were presented to the DC. Following discussion, two of the designs were accepted as potentials and it was noted that Sue would work up colour alternatives and send them out to the group for consideration.

4. Staff Handbook Review

Lorraine raised concerns that within the Staff Handbook review, some guidance is being removed from the Intranet before the new version is available to publish. Lorraine said that whilst the guidance is being reviewed and consulted on, the old guidance should remain true and must be available on the Intranet for staff, managers and union reps to use. Furthermore, Lorraine said the guidance should not change until both agreed with FCTU and/or published.

Lorraine asked that the DC discuss this situation and approach HR as appropriate to explain the situation and reach a suitable agreement. Following discussion, it was agreed that the page on the Intranet and on the FCTU website should be clear as to what changes are being made on all HR guidance and Allan said that he would discuss the issue with HR and report back at the next meeting.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

5. Balancing FC & Internal Budgets

Lorraine said Prospect are concerned that the FC is losing its corporate overview on efficient deployment of its collective staff over the need to balance internal budgets and gave an example of a recent case in FR where outside contractors were appointed to do work that trained internal surplus staff were well able to complete. Lorraine said FR have always provided this function to the FC as a whole, and have been investing in these staff members to ensure that the FC remain talented in this area. Lorraine was concerned that the FC is in a situation where one part of the FC is paying outside contractors to do work that internal staff are well able to complete and another part is looking to lose these trained members of staff through redundancy and may need to repay redundancy settlements.

Lorraine said the FC and its senior managers are blindly balancing internal budgets whilst ignoring the larger picture of the collective FC budget and its skilled personal, and asked that this issue is raised and discussed at the highest level to ensure that internal politics and inefficiencies do not lead the FC down a route of self destruction particularly given the current Government's desire for efficiency savings in public funds.

It was agreed that Allan would discuss the issue to the Director General and Director HR and report back to the DC.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

6. Post Filling Consultation

Allan said that he would be analysing responses to the consultation and information that he had received from HR Business Partners and would report back at a later date.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

7. Gender Equality Scheme

Lorraine said that the Gender Equality Scheme document set out what the FC were doing to meet the legal requirements in being non bias towards gender. Lorraine reported that there were priorities for action and the FCTU were asked how they could support the process and be involved with the Diversity Forum in moving the priorities for action forward. The DC recognised that the Diversity team will be unable to meet many of their targets as a result of the recruitment freeze, however it was agreed that the FCTU would keep a watching brief on developments and Lorraine would continue to represent FCTU on the Diversity Forum.

8. AOB

8.1 Recruitment Freeze

The DC welcomed Jean Lindsay to the meeting. Jean said that as part of the revised

Partnership Agreement, HR would continue to communicate with the FCTU as early as possible on all matters affecting staff, often prior to any formal negotiations.

Jean advised that the EB agreed in April to take immediate steps to secure the jobs of current staff and place a cap on the number of posts to stop the organisation growing, which would put the FC in a better position when facing any cuts in the near future. Jean said that she was tasked with devising a set of principles, creating a robust process for staying within the agreed staff numbers and monitoring the situation across the whole of the organisation. Jean reported that the countries and agencies were currently agreeing on the wording of these principles. Jean advised that the draft principles being looked at were as follows:

- A cap on total staff numbers will be introduced – this is defined as the baseline.
- Each part of the FC – Countries, Forest Research, Business Units and Silvan House - will agree their baseline on a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) basis.
- Each part of the business will be expected to keep staff numbers at or below its baseline.
- No external recruitment will be approved unless the Director General or appropriate Country Director considers it to be business critical or a key frontline post.
- No new posts will be created unless there is an opportunity to amend the structure and give up a post elsewhere. This includes Fixed Term Appointments (FTAs) and programme and partnership funded posts.
- No vacancy will be filled automatically (including straight replacements) unless a clear business case for a replacement is made and approved. This includes examining the present structure to ensure there are no members of staff that can be re-deployed or a post will be given up elsewhere in the structure.
- Vacancies that are given approval will be dealt with initially by considering a management posting (this may include enforcing the use of the mobility clause) or internal trawl. Managers must check with the HR re-deployment unit for any suitable surplus staff before proceeding with a trawl.
- If there is uncertainty over whether the required skills/expertise for a key frontline post is available internally, managers may opt to issue an 'Expression of Interest'. Expressions of Interest will be issued through the HR Daily List.
- If the skills/expertise is not available internally, nor can we reasonably expect existing staff to acquire them, then recruiting from the Wider Civil Service is acceptable and encouraged.
- It is recognised that the need to fill vacancies from within will require a more robust approach to management postings with greater use of the mobility clause. HR will take on a more strategic role of supporting and placing surplus staff.
- Managers are expected to be more flexible in filling posts where staff do not have a perfect skills match, where with additional training and coaching, staff could develop the skills in a reasonable timeframe.

Allan asked what impact the cap would have on service delivery and work pressure. Jean responded advising that it is for business areas to identify how they deploy their resources most effectively to meet priorities, which may mean moving people around to more effectively align resources with priority areas and some activities may have to be scaled down or stop completely to allow for more urgent priorities. Jean said in practice this may mean that some areas will lose posts while others will gain posts, and that all staff will be expected to continue to work efficiently and effectively. Jean added that should there be a change in staffing levels in any particular unit, the manager will be expected to identify how they deploy their resources

most effectively to meet priorities.

In response to a question from Lorraine on FTAs, Jean said that the FC would aim to cut down the number of temporary staff and whether a FTA is considered temporary depends on that particular role and would be considered on a case by case basis. Jean confirmed that FTA contracts which extend beyond four years normally become permanent unless there is objective justification otherwise.

Jean said that consultants, agency workers and contractors (excluding forestry contractors) would also be monitored.

The DC thanked Jean for her time and looked forward to continuing the open and honest dialogue with HR in future.

8.2 Technical Training Review

Allan said that he would forward a copy of the review report and provided a copy of the FCTU response from Hazel MacLean.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

8.3 FCTU Website

Lorraine advised that there had been a problem in recruiting a non-member who felt they could gain some of the benefits through the FCTU website without joining. Lorraine said that she had a responsibility to Prospect members to ensure that they receive benefits which non-members do not. Lorraine said that this coupled with advice from the Prospect Full Time Officer meant that they would not provide Prospect related information and updates to the website, however a link to the Prospect e-branch page would be provided. It was noted that this would not affect joint unions content, which the majority of the website consisted of.

Robert said that the FCTU need to make clear what the benefits of being a member of a trade union are on the site and said that all unions must have input as that is what makes it a joint unions website. Allan added that they need to make clear that the website is there for the benefit of members in the FC and that non-members are missing out on the key factors of being a union member. Sam suggested that the DC re-thinks the list of '10 reasons to join a union'. Following discussion it was agreed that Sam would circulate Allan's original draft for consideration.

Action Required: Sam Telford

9. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 29 June.