



FOREST RESEARCH NATIONAL ORGANISING COMMITTEE MEETING 9TH APRIL 2008

Present: AH	Edward Shephard (ES)	FR NOC Chair
	Robert Matthews (RM)	Staff Council Chair / Prospect
	Ian Tubby (IT)	Prospect
	Nick Fielding (NF)	Prospect
	Shirley Stephens (SS)	PCS
	Steve Coventry (SC)	Unite
	Mark Oram (MO)	PCS
	Jamie Awdry (JA)	Unite
Present: NRS	Dave Watterson (DW)	PCS
	Glenn Brearley (GB)	Prospect
	Steve Osborne (OS)	PCS
Minute Secretary:	Lorraine Adams (LA)	Prospect (NOC secretary)
Apologies:	Joan Webber	Prospect
	Norman Dandy	Prospect
	Vicki Lawrence	Unite
	Mike Perks	Prospect

1. Introduction

Edward introduced the agenda and everyone introduced themselves so that everyone could put faces with names.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Norman Dandy, Vicki Lawrence, Joan Webber and Mike Perks. Congratulations were sent to Norman and his wife Sarah on the birth of their baby girl.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held December 18th 2007 were agreed.

A letter was drafted and sent to Peter Freer Smith and Ken Charles regarding clarity over the Trade Union situation as set out in December's meeting. They have agreed this new format (the amalgamation of the staff councils) and it has been confirmed that their single point contact is Lorraine Adams.

4. Matters Arising

a) Inventory and Forecasting Feedback

Edward opened the floor to Robert to give a summation of where we are now with Inventory and Forecasting.

The I&F review is progressing under a Prince 2 project format and the recommendations of the review are particularly far reaching. 3 scenarios naming members of staff currently working within inventory and forecasting remits, these were termed slim, narrow and wide. The wide scenario was published but not put out for consultation, it was decided by the project board that comments would be sought from stakeholders regarding the 2 smaller options. FR insisted on the inclusion of the slim scenario as this idea leaves FR less disadvantageously placed. The consultation period was extremely short and came at a time when members of staff through the FC were at their busiest with deliverables.

The TU team that formed requested more time and an extension was given. A strong response was sent to James Ogilvie in time for it to be read by Project Board staff before their meeting on the 11th April. There is a concern that the Project board will say “thank you” for the response and go ahead with their planned action by presenting it to the Executive board at the end of April. The preponderance of opinion (as reported via the grapevine) is that the narrow scenario is the preferred option and that the meeting on the 11th would include much discussion to refine this idea. Individual staff members have in fact already been approached as to their general opinion on entering the new I&F unit and their desire / ability to relocate further north. Concern is also felt that some members of the Project board have a vested interest in the outcome and perhaps could be giving a less than impartial input to discussions. As yet a detailed risk and cost benefit analysis has not been done and we are of the opinion that something as important as this analysis is well overdue.

The meeting was opened up to receive comments and for suggestions as to how the TU group should move forward from this point.

The narrow scenario presented problems to field station managers and questions need to be asked as to whether named staff would have the ability to swap between units as workload and demand depended on the time of year. It also raises the question of location of these people because the equipment currently used to complete I&F tasks has been purchased by the field stations. The process so far has just left so many questions unanswered that it is impossible to move forward. As such, will there be a second consultation exercise regarding the consequences of the decision that is finally taken? Questions were raised about the funding for the unit and how this would in turn affect district level budgets or could the current budgets be ring fenced out with I&F.

It is believed by many that if Ian Forshaw were still with us that this process would not have escalated this far; his ideas from the initial review were good and have been taken up, but the resulting plan that has been produced is flawed.

The previous Chief Executive had been told that non-delivery on I&F was not an option but the scenarios proposed have agency wide consequences. However, we must be mindful that the effects of any new unit will be felt FC wide, certainly the feed back to MGUI and OSU questions gave the impression that under the narrow scenario all the work in their remit would be transferred in to this new unit.

This in itself could have advantages by not dividing the current team, and has been mooted that an all in or all out approach would certainly be less divisive and could yield less problems than splitting teams.

The general consensus of opinion was that there was little more that could be done until the outcome of the Project board meeting on the 11th April was known however it was felt that it might be a good idea to send the TU response to the Executive board with a covering letter so that our members genuine concerns and requests for information and feedback were less likely to be forgotten. Regardless, it is important that the project board illustrate and justify how they have assessed the stakeholder responses.

AP: TU response to be sent to EB with covering letter before end April.

Moving on:

FC staff are all affected and it would be best to look at any response by the project board/EB and decide whether we are happy with the process and the justifications for the outcome. A special FC staff council meeting may be the way forward to fully engage with FC senior management and to be able to guide the process through to a second consultation phase in line with the feedback, implementation and any impact analysis that is planned.

It is also noted that we ended up being very reactionary to the process and it would be much better in future to be proactive. Help is needed from members to give us the information that they hear that concerns them so that we can have a running start and be better able to help and negotiate for them.

b) FR Workload Survey

The FR NOC would like to thank Sue Gillingwater for all her hard work on the survey and figure crunching and to Norman Dandy for analysing the free text comments.

Edward and Lorraine met with Peter Freer Smith and Ken Charles before the meeting to discuss the format of the FR NOC as we now are organised and to go over some of the points made in the survey. They indicated that this was very much a preliminary meeting and that there was a wish to discuss this in depth. It was noted that a lot of the workload issues were related to pressures on funding demands met by CFS with their reducing financial inputs, loss of staff in general linked with re-employment time and a marked loss of support staff availability. This felt a very positive start to discussions about this issue.

The NOC meeting noted that we are all being asked to accommodate “incremental extra stuff” within our day to day jobs that falls outside of forward job plans examples of this are items such as weighing rubbish and complying with the Greenerways initiatives and QA. This “incremental extra stuff” is work that none of us are paid to do specifically but that has to be funded and just because all staff are now subject to these increments of work does not mean that they should just be squashed in.

Staff have also found that they are doing greater quantities of their own administration work because the remit of the pay band 6A admin staff does not include jobs for individuals as much any more. Running of projects also requires more project administration for which there is no support, or even the idea that this support could be given. Management do not seem to have recognised this

change in admin support and there is no impression that they care either.

Jobs have changed over the years and the undetectable “trimming of the fat” over the years have left us very lean with no capacity for absorbing any more even slight increases in commitments and workloads. It was pointed out that jobs used to be fun, there was time enough to enjoy our work and work place, this is not the case any more.

A lot of the over burden is exacerbated by the funding cuts by CFS with little or no decrease in their purchasing expectations, to complete the CFS “wish lists” may take £400k but then only £100k is provided, however when asked to cut back on their requirements there is little ability to prioritise or cut items. Overall the relationship between FR and CFS is a Thatcherite service - customer regime and perhaps now is the time to address this directly with Wilma Harper and the Director General. Other government departments have moved on from these systems but FR/FC have not and it is essential to look forward to a more mature relationship between FC and FR, a less hard nosed, bureaucratic approach. It was questioned whether our agency status hindered or helped and that it was essential now that the FC and FR work jointly to provide a cohesive direction that works for all staff and research purchasers.

Despite the responsibility of management to manage this from outside it is also fundamental that staff manage this situation too by stating that some demands are unreasonable. We must start being completely honest about the time that is spent working both in the workplace and at home. There is to be a new time recording system in place at the end of April, this is an ideal time to start being totally honest about how much time is worked by staff. Only with true figures/information and honesty from staff will this situation be properly rectified, and only if it is our true desire to have a positive work life balance.

AP: Workload survey results to be sent to Wilma Harper.

5. Green Card Vehicle Familiarisation

Currently this process is being carried out by Jamie Awdry at Alice Holt and by xxxxxx xxxxxx at NRS and driving safety is covered by field station managers using the Operational Guide Book (OGB) checklist. The green card test, as it has always been known, it is a valuable insight into how vehicles are used within FR. However, there has been a recent influx of foreign students who are being sent to Jamie for this familiarisation process who have not driven in England before and has found himself explaining the rules of the road on a busy roundabout! It is suggested that all new staff who either haven't driving since passing their test and people who haven't driven in this country must has an official driving lesson with a qualified instructor before being submitted for a green card. Everyone was in agreement that this is a good idea.

Although a Health and Safety Forum could discuss this issue we do not have an FR wide H&S forum therefore this issue will be raised as an agenda item at the Staff Council on May 9th.

AP: Place on SC Agenda.

6. Staff council agenda items – this item have been reordered and placed at the end.

7. NOC Elections

Nominations have come from local sources and from PCS and Prospect central. The list of people nominated as voting members and those co-opted in is shown in Appendix 1. This appendix will also be advertised on FR local notice boards. Should any member of staff wish to become involved then they hopefully will approach any of the current members and can become co-opted. Edward agreed to stay on as Chair for another year, Lorraine will continue as Secretary. Robert is continuing as Staff Council Chair, Glenn Brearley will continue as FCTU representative and Steve Osborne has become the NOC Health and Safety Rep.

Ian Tubby has decided to step down from the NOC due to other time commitments but the NOC committee would like to thank him for all his hard work over the years, especially during some difficult periods with high level negotiations with management.

8. Promotion Procedures

The Promotion boards have again taken place regardless that the negotiations were never satisfactorily concluded between management and TU. Both rounds of boards, since discussions broke down, appear to have deviated from the guidance in different ways. This year the system seems to have devolved into something similar to that which was in place before the pay and grading system was set up. Criteria seem to have been applied arbitrarily and reasons for non-selection that have been given to staff have appeared inappropriate. The impasse cannot continue and this agenda item has been brought forward so as to focus minds before continuing discussion with the Chief Executive once they are in post.

This issue will be raised at the staff council with the aim to achieving a formal review process. Once this is in place members will be canvassed for information.

AP: Place on SC Agenda.

9. Distribution lists and Communication

Lorraine was concerned that the NOC be able reach all union members with our communications regarding the NOC, Prospect members are covered easily by access to the Prospect FR mailing list, however this still leaves PCS and Unite to accommodate. Shirley Stephens had already given her local PCS member list to Lorraine, Steve Osborne to provide details of NRS PCS members and Steve Coventry to liaise regarding Unite members.

AP: Shared contacts distribution list to be created for FR members.

10. Bullying and Harassment Advisors

The NOC stated that thanks must be given to Tony Cornwall for his role in recent years as an FR bullying and Harassment advisor. However the appointment of the 2 new north and south advisors has been met with disappointment. It is unclear why it was felt that an advisor had to be of such a senior level and whether those selected had any training regarding such issues. This role has previously been one of mentoring advice and care giving before official channels are then explored. Whilst Tony was a senior grade he was seen to be outwith the FR management hierarchy making him completely approachable.

It is thought, as a minimum, that if not already trained these new advisors will be given training in counselling and mentoring. The Unions do have local advisors in the form of Shirley Stephens and Sue Benham so members and non-members alike should feel free to approach them with any concerns.

AP: Place on SC Agenda.

6. Staff Council Agenda Items

- 1.) Inventory and Forecasting Review
- 2.) FR Workload Survey
- 3.) Green Card Familiarisation
- 4.) FR Promotion Procedures
- 5.) Bullying and Harassment advisors
- 6.) Alice Holt building and maintenance
- 7.) Effectiveness of FR Organisational Structure
- 8.) FC/FR's relationship
- 9.) Chief Executive's Advertisement

11. Date of Next Meeting

NOC to be held 1 month before next Joint Staff Council meeting LA to organise a date and video conferencing facilities once the staff council date is fixed.

Staff Council to be confirmed