

28 September 2017

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF FOREST RESEARCH SCIENCE

1. Purpose

1.1. To seek Commissioners' views on what their desired objectives are for the forthcoming independent review of Forest Research science.

2. Background

2.1. Under Cabinet Office guidance issued in 2000, Government Departments have been required to conduct regular and challenging reviews of the public bodies for which they are responsible, every five years. This Quinquennial Review programme was a key part of the modernising government programme aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of public services. The commitment to a five yearly review is also set out in the Science and Innovation Strategy for Forestry in Great Britain (SIS).

2.2. The purpose of these reviews is to ensure that the science being delivered is of a high standard and robust enough to withstand external, or internal, challenge when policies are based on its conclusions.

2.3. Forest Research science has been reviewed at regular intervals by independent groups with the last review undertaken in 2011/12. The report and an accompanying action plan were presented to Commissioners in 2012, and FC responses to the report were published on the FC website. Most of the recommendations addressed in the action plan were delivered during the drafting and delivery of the current SIS.

3. 2017 review

3.1. One of the recommendations of the 2012 review was to reconvene the External Advisory Committee, to include social science representation. This was done with the establishment of the Expert Committee on Forest Science¹. The 2017 review will be conducted by the Expert Committee.

3.2. The terms of reference for the review are at Annex 1, and the review will include all research undertaken by FR², both for the FC and for other parties.

¹ <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-9cbgyn>

² Unless there are commercial sensitivities involved.

3.3. The review will take place between 6th November and 9th November at the Northern Research Station. The programme for the review is at Annex 2, and includes all of FR's research programmes including Inventory Forecasting and Operational Support, Statistics, and Technical Support.

3.4. Defra is currently undertaking a similar review of all of its science agencies, and we have agreed with Defra's Chief Scientific Advisor Ian Boyd that this FC review will serve its requirements with regard to Forest Research.

3.5. As Peter Freer-Smith has now retired, Roger Coppock will manage the review process to ensure it runs smoothly, and is conducted in a fair and professional way.

4. Review Group

4.1. The members of the Expert Committee on Forest Science possess a wide range of expertise across the whole spectrum of Forest Research delivery - See Annex 3. The group, having been in existence since 2013 and selected through a competitive process, has a thorough understanding of the research agency and the work it undertakes, and members are fully cognisant with the SIS. They are all independent members, who are widely respected within their own organisations and fields of research and practice. They will, thus, provide a thorough and searching examination of Forest Research's science.

5. Commissioners' priorities

5.1. Jean Lindsay as Corporate Owner on behalf of the Commissioners and Roger Coppock the Corporate Customer, will meet the review group at the start of the review to discuss the context and objectives of the review. It is important that this discussion reflects the views of the Commissioners. For the last review, the context was centred on the SIS, and the quality of the science provided in delivering it. As there are significant changes currently taking place within the UK, the FC and potentially FR, Commissioners may wish to consider how these might be reflected in this review.

6. Conclusions

6.1. A regular independent review of science quality is essential to ensure that a research agency is delivering science which is better than, or at least as good as, that available from other providers. This will provide the Commissioners with a valuable perspective on how to judge the agency's performance. It will also provide the customer base with clarity on how their objectives and research needs are being met. In the context of devolution, it is an important exercise at this time.

7. Resource Implications

7.1. All costs of the review have been budgeted for in existing business plans. With the retirement of Professor Freer-Smith, Roger Coppock will manage the review process.

8. Risk Assessment

8.1. The review is important in the context of the conclusions above, and undertaking it will identify if there are any risks to science provision for the FC.

9. Communications Issues

9.1. The review conclusions and any actions that are required to address them will be made available after the review on the FC website. Commissioners will receive an update following the review.

10. Recommendations

10.1. Commissioners are invited to discuss the paper and provide a clear steer on the objectives they wish the review to deliver.

Roger Coppock
Head of Corporate and Forestry Support
September 2017

Annex 1- Terms of reference for the 2017 Independent review of Forest Research Science

1. To review the research, advice, inventory and scientific services being provided by FR.
2. Based on its ongoing interaction with FR and on a visit in Autumn 2017, the Committee is asked to assess and report on the work being done by FR. The evaluation should consider all of FR's work except any contracts and grants which are commercially sensitive or confidential and where consortium agreements mean that FR does not have the authority to disclose information. There should be a strong focus on the seven FC funded research programmes and work of IFOS for which specifications were agreed in 2014 to deliver the Science and Innovation Strategy.
3. To make recommendations as necessary:
 - a. to improve fitness for purpose and science quality,
 - b. on new research opportunities and future priorities bearing in mind the likely future needs for policy development and implementation to meet the emerging challenges to Britain's forests and woodlands.
 - c. and to improve on knowledge exchange and delivery.

Written report and dissemination of the Review Group's findings

4. The External Committee on Forest Science is asked to meet at NRS to undertake the above review and to provide a written report within one month of the visit. The report should provide commentary, recommendations, and overall comments as necessary.

The report will be presented by the chair of the Expert Committee to the Forestry Commission's Executive Board (FC EB). Once accepted by FC EB the report is presented to the FC's Research Strategy Management Board by the FC Chief Scientist and will be made available to CFS and FR for implementation.

Annex 2 – Review programme

EXTERNAL REVIEW OF FOREST RESEARCH – NOVEMBER 2017

Monday 6th November

AM travel to Northern Research Station, Roslin.

- 12.30 Lunch with ECFS members, Jean Lindsay, James Pendlebury, Peter Freer-Smith, Helen McKay, Chris Quine and Peter Weston.
- 13.30 ECFS meeting with Roger Coppock/Jean Lindsay
Context and objectives of the review – FC SIS
- 14.30 ECFS meeting James Pendlebury and Peter Freer-Smith
Discuss FR objectives & organisation (2017/18 Corporate Plan, organograms and budgets)
- 15.30 Tea
- 16.00 Meeting with Helen McKay, Chris Quine, and Peter Weston
- 17.00 Meeting of the ECFS excluding Peter Freer-Smith & Roger Coppock (who will be available if required).
- c. 18.00 Depart for hotel, dinner, etc.

Tuesday 7th November

9.00 – 11.00

Programme 6 – Forest resource assessment, GHG balance & modelling

Chris Vials, some of the programme team and Science Group Leaders for those SGs contributing.

Andrew Watkinson, Jaboury Ghazoul & Julian Evans

Programme 2 – Understanding tree health and threats to resilience

Sarah Green, some of the programme team and Science Group Leaders for those SGs contributing.

Monique Simmonds, Clive Potter & Peter Whitfield

11.00 – 13.00

Programme 3 – Delivering resilient forests in a changing climate

Ian Willoughby, some of the programme team and Science Group Leaders for those SGs contributing.

Julian Evans, Peter Whitfield & Jaboury Ghazoul

Programme 4 – Valuing ecosystem services, forest governance and influencing behaviour Liz O'Brien, some of the programme team and Science Group Leaders for those SGs contributing.

Clive Potter, Andrew Watkinson & Monique Simmonds

13.00 Lunch

14.00 – 16.00

Programme 5 – Tree breeding & developing sustainable markets, forest products and services Steve Lee, some of the programme team and Science Group Leaders for those SGs contributing.

Peter Whitfield, Julian Evans & Andrew Watkinson

Programme 1 – Assessing resilience & sustainability of urban trees, woodlands and forests Bruce Nicoll, some of the programme team and Science Group Leaders for those SGs contributing.

Jaboury Ghazoul, Clive Potter & Monique Simmonds

16.00 Tea and full meeting of ECFS (excluding PFS and RG or both available if required.)

17.00 onwards

Return to hotel.

Wednesday 8th November 2017

9.00 – 11.00

Programme 7 – Integrating research for policy & practice to deliver resilient forests

David Edwards, some of the programme team and Science Group Leaders for those SGs contributing.

Clive Potter, Monique Simmonds & Andrew Watkinson

Technical Support Services – Hugh Williams, Head of Comms and Head of Business Development

Julian Evans, Peter Whitfield & Jaboury Ghazoul

11.00 – 13.00

Inventory & Forecasting Ben Ditchburn and some of the team

Julian Evans, Peter Whitfield & Monique Simmonds

Mapping & Geodata Ian Macleod and some of the team
Andrew Watkinson, Clive Potter & Jaboury Ghazoul

13.00 Lunch

14.00 – 16.00

Operational Support Morag Hawkins and some of the team
Julian Evans, Peter Whitfield & Monique Simmonds

Official Statistics Sheila Ward and some of the team
Andrew Watkinson, Clive Potter & Jaboury Ghazoul

16.00 Tea and full meeting of ECFS.

17.00 onwards
Return to hotel.

Thursday 9th November 2017

9.00–11.00 ECFS discussion and drafting meeting.

11.00–12.00 Wrap up meeting with Roger Coppock, James Pendlebury & Peter Freer-Smith

12.30 Lunch

pm Homeward travel.

Annex 3 – Expert Committee on Forest Science members



Professor Julian Evans (Chair), Professor of Forestry Imperial College London. Past President of the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) and former Chief Research Officer (S) for the Forestry Commission at Alice Holt

Roger Coppock, Head of Corporate and Forestry Support

Vacant, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Forestry Commission



Professor Jaboury Ghazoul, Chair of Ecosystem Management at ETH Zurich, and Prince Bernhard Chair of International Nature Conservation, Utrecht University with WWF Netherlands



Professor Monique Simmonds, Deputy Director of Science at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and Director of the Innovation Unit at Kew



Professor Andrew Watkinson, Emeritus Professor of Environmental Sciences and a Non-Executive Director of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science where he chairs the Science Advisory Committee. Former Director of the Living With Environmental Change research partnership



Peter Whitfield, Timber Operations Director at UPM Tilhill. Senior Forestry professional at board level with 39 years experience in both UK and Swaziland. Broad range of experience in forestry, harvesting, biomass, general management, people management, business development, and logistics.



Professor Clive Potter, Professor of Environmental Policy and environmental social scientist at the Imperial College London. Member of the biosecurity taskforce.