

22 March 2017

## Science and Innovation Strategy for Forestry in Great Britain - update

### 1. Purpose

To provide an update for Commissioners on progress towards delivering the Science and Innovation Strategy for Forestry in Great Britain (SIS).

### 2. Background/Introduction

The SIS 2015-2019 is the key document which sets out areas where there is an agreed collaborative approach to science and evidence across the four countries of the UK. The resources for its delivery are part of the Forestry Commission's Westminster cross-border funding. The strategy has now been in operation for two years, and significant numbers of deliverables are now being produced. Forest Research (FR) is responsible for delivering around 92% of the research, with the remainder commissioned from other providers. The full details of the FR research programmes can be found at [www.forestry.gov.uk/research](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/research).

### 3. Details

Overall, the strategic outcomes set out in the strategy are being met. These are:

- Provide the evidence base for the delivery of healthy and resilient forest and wider ecosystems to provide benefits for society.
- Provide the knowledge to deliver woodland management and expansion, as a component of sustainable land-use change.
- Provide the evidence base to allow the forestry sector to deliver a wide range of benefits from trees and woodlands to support sustainable economic growth in Britain.
- Result in changes to policy and practice through implementation by informed and engaged stakeholders, provide access to a high quality skill base of forest researchers, and be effectively leveraged to provide additional resources to increase the evidence base.

Some important headlines towards meeting these outcomes are detailed below.

- All of the programmes are mainly on track, though some work packages have been delayed due to staff unavailability.
- With the release of ForestYield during the year, and papers setting out the levels of quality assurance underpinning our models, the FC is now at a position where a new modelling strategy for the future can be developed. Work is ongoing on this, and is due to be presented to the Research Strategy Management Board in April.

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- As well as the research commissioned with FR, there is a separate programme of externally commissioned research. External research work has focussed on a wide range of areas. 38 projects have been funded, at a cost of £529,000. Key areas include plant health, ecosystem services and new finance mechanisms, and wood and timber properties. As a consequence of budget reductions in the last few years external research money has also been used fund other areas of FR work, such as emerging species and permanent sample plots.
- The external research budget supports the cost of membership of wider groups, such as IUFRO<sup>1</sup>, EUFORGEN<sup>2</sup>, LWEC<sup>3</sup>, and UKEOF<sup>4</sup> which provide network and collaboration opportunities for leveraging FC resources.
- The level of leverage achieved across the whole research programme in 2016/17 was 69%, much of which was contributed through plant health and wood and timber properties work. This leverage, equating to £6.5m on top of a budget of £9.7m helps to maintain research delivery at a time of challenging budget reductions.
- The Science and Innovation Strategy has now become embedded in Defra's natural environment evidence planning, and is increasingly being viewed by the Defra group as having key cross cutting impact.
- A contract to evaluate the impact of the SIS is due to be completed at the end of March. This is part of the triennial evaluation of the strategy, and is being undertaken by the team which did the evaluation of the previous strategy. This will provide a useful external measure of progress, and should also be influential in the development of the next strategy.
- The Expert Committee on Forest Science has had two meetings in the last year. One new member, Dr. Clive Potter from Imperial College, has joined the committee. The Committee has looked at a wide range of issues during the year. These include FR use of social media, recent work on evaluation of ecosystem services, mobilisation of research funding from the UK forestry, social science research, and implications of devolution and Brexit. The Committee has also been preparing to undertake the quinquennial review of Forest Research science in November this year.

## 4. Resource Implications

With declining resources, we have been working to encourage greater engagement by the forestry sector in research, with the aim of introducing new funding streams. More details on this work are provided in the other research paper being presented today.

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<sup>1</sup> International Union of Forest Research organisations [www.iufro.org/](http://www.iufro.org/)

<sup>2</sup> EU Forest Genetics Programme [www.euforgen.org/](http://www.euforgen.org/)

<sup>3</sup> Living with Environmental Change <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/partnerships/lwec/>

<sup>4</sup> UK Environmental Observation Framework [www.ukeof.org.uk/](http://www.ukeof.org.uk/)

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## 5. Risk Assessment

The devolution of CFS functions presents some level of risk for the future management of forestry research. The main risks will be around how the arrangements for future research commissioning are made, and ensuring that funding continuity from each country is agreed. Discussions on these issues are currently underway under the auspices of the Forestry Governance Project Board.

## 6. Communications Issues

We continue to work closely with Defra and devolved administration colleagues to communicate how the FC research programmes are delivering against their strategic agendas. Not only on forestry, but also on climate change, flood mitigation, ecosystem services, air quality and other priorities.

Mapping work has been undertaken during the year to illustrate how the work packages within the research programmes relate to key country objectives. This work has been wrapped up in an excel-based research impact tool, which has been circulated to country colleagues to allow them to see quickly how the FC research is aiding them in achieving their objectives.

Recent stocktakes of the two largest programmes, 'Assessing resilience' and 'Delivering resilient forests', have found that they have delivered, since 2015:

- 45 peer reviewed papers
- 12 pieces of grey literature
- 12 FC publications
- 28 PhDs supported
- 89 face to face engagements with stakeholders
- A wide range of other outputs

It is expected that the other programmes will have similar levels of output proportionate to their size, and stocktakes of these will be followed up also.

## 7. Implementation and Evaluation

There are no implementation and evaluation issues at present.

## 8. Recommendation

The Board is asked to:

- note and discuss the progress towards delivering the SIS.

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