

## AGM REPORT 2013

### FCTU ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 19<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2013, SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH.

Attending the meeting were:

Mick Hoban, FCTU Chair  
Allan MacKenzie, FCTU Secretary  
Sam Telford, Assistant FCTU Secretary  
Jim O'Neill, PCS  
Jim Henderson, Prospect  
Glenn Brearley, Prospect/FCTU Research  
John Stevenson, Unite  
Steve Holdsworth, FCTU England  
Helen Daniels, FCTU England  
Malcolm Crosby, FCTU Scotland  
Peter Fullarton, FCTU Scotland  
Alan Donald, FCTU Silvan House  
Graham McLaughlin, FCTU Silvan House

Apologies were received from Edwin Rowlands, Andrew Stewart, Jim Henderson, Joanne McAuley, Mark Oram, Alistair Gillies, Paul Grieve, Danny Williamson and Malcolm Currie.

Following an introduction from the Chair, the AGM heard verbal reports from the Departmental Committee, the Constituent Unions and Area Committees on the work carried out by the FCTU over the past year and current activities. It was felt reported many if not all of the changes discussed at the AGM in 2012 had moved forward significantly in the organisation, particularly with the removal of FC Wales into the new body, **Natural Resources Wales**. Up until the vesting date of the new organisation, the DC were reported to have been supporting FCTU Wales colleagues in ensuring they were getting a fair deal and that members did not suffer any detriment during that transition into the new body as best they could. The DC worked closely with FCTU Wales, the Staff Council and management in working to this aim, whilst also attempting to assess the impacts of the loss of Wales on the rest of the FC. The AGM discussed looking at re-engaging with former colleagues who had transferred into the new body to hear views on how they felt about the change and current issues.

The AGM had seen the continued efforts of the Westminster Government to bring about monumental change to Forestry Commission in England and Central Services and all that it delivers, most notably since the publication of the Government's Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement in response to the forestry panel's report. This led to the subsequent **Woodland Policy Enabling Programme** (WPEP) and its three main projects, of which FCTU had been pushing very hard to engage and consult with the FC on. Along the way they had been informing members both in England and Scotland of the threats involved whilst hearing their concerns at the many members' meeting across the organisation and with a mandate from members to push to protect the existing and already evolving FC, FCTU embarked on a [campaign](#) to secure its future with wide range of actions. On the recent WPEP consultation, FCTU submitted a response highlighting the many concerns with the programme and the drivers behind it, as well as the divergence from the panel recommendations and disparity between that and the policy the Government and FC were working to. The AGM awaited an overall response to that exercise from FC England.

FCTU England expressed thanks to the FCTU officers for their support to colleagues in England and the efforts put in to get around the whole organisation to meet with members face to face and it was said that those efforts were crucial in getting to the position where consultation was taking place and members were engaging with their unions. Whilst the AGM concurred, Allan MacKenzie stated that the FCTU have to react to the will of the members through the constituent members and that to get action on the ground it is local reps that are key to that process, adding his thanks to all those involved and everyone at the AGM for their continued support.

Many of the AGM attendees would be attending the [FCTU Summit](#) on 20<sup>th</sup> November at which the unions would review next steps in the campaign to retain the FC, looking at raising political and public awareness, and to have the national unions provide support needed to ensure that the mandate of union members in the FC was delivered.

In the final year of the **SR10** programme and although the majority of the associated cuts in budgets and staffing had taken place earlier in the process, the FCTU as informed by many members and various other union committees, were concerned particularly with the impacts on workloads for the staff who remained in the organisation. Cuts ranging from 10-25% were seen with no clear tangible evidence as to what areas of work would be dropped. To assess these impacts the unions had agreed to conduct an online survey on **Work-Life Balance & Workloads**, which had just been launched at the time of the last AGM in November 2012. Following this they took the overwhelming number of responses and evidence gathered from the results of that survey to HR, clearly highlighting a

number of serious issues around staff cuts resulting in unreasonable and unsustainable workloads; impacts on safety, health and wellbeing; pressures of work impinging on people's home life and relationships, excessive self-induced pressure and several issues around TOIL and annual leave accrual. Their concerns were heard and FCTU were assured that issues would be raised at each of the Staff Councils, with a view to looking at how best to take things forward in each area; how issues can be resolved locally and how to create an environment in which staff are able to have open and honest discussions on workloads and resources with managers. This was something the DC were continuing to oversee progress on but felt the Staff Councils should be given the opportunity to deal with the issues in a healthy and positive way, prior to any further engagement with Director HR on it. However, some areas and HR Business Partners linked to those Staff Councils appeared to have taken it more seriously and more proactively than others. Also related to SR10 in discussions was the use of JEGS on new posts resulting from the programme.\*

In line with HR's **People Strategy**, FCTU had gone through further reviews and consultations with HR on various policies and procedures, including Relocation Expenses, Discipline & Grievance, Learning & Development Strategy and then Performance Management and the Competency Framework, and Probation. A good working relationship with HR Policy remained and they still valued the unions' input into policies. It was reported however there was an issue around lack of consultation on the new Performance Management System and Competency Framework, however FCTU had finally entered a period of consultation on these after making a very strong case as to why they should be consulted despite it being a Civil Service policy.

Over the year the unions' had been discussing **pay**, working up a pay claim on behalf of members and taking their views and our arguments forward to the pay committee and negotiations meeting. It was said however that as expected, the FC were not able to move from the UK Government's Public Sector Pay Policy as outlined in the pay remit guidance – something the unions clearly could not accept but the offer was imposed, despite FC recognising that it was not an ideal situation but stated it was the only course of action appropriate at that time. The AGM discussed pay 2014 and the process for coming to a consensus for the next round of pay negotiations and challenges faced with a further 1% cap as dictated by the government, as well as an upcoming review on operational pay. The meeting heard that the current pay arrangement with the lack of progression was resulting in serious difficulties in recruiting staff in many cases.

**Health & Safety** was reported to be a key issue over the year with FCTU being particularly active with the new strategy launched by the FC, feeding in views from the unions along the way on what they felt were serious issues in need of addressing in that strategy and in the action that followed. Fulfilling the FCTU's

side of the bargain in obtaining new health and safety reps proved to be difficult however a plan to encourage reps on H&S committees to undergo the necessary training and take on the role of H&S rep was outlined.

The AGM attendees had been aware for some time of the central policy emerging from Cabinet Office on **facility time** and the FC's intention to invoke this 0.1% cap as a proportion of the pay bill on facility time. Ahead of this inevitability, the FCTU had been undergoing some exercises to ascertain exactly who all of the accredited reps in receipt of recorded facility time were, how much facility time was being used and eventually what the total cost was, instead of relying on whatever poorly gathered and inaccurate data that is being captured by management. FCTU intended to manage through the constituent unions the election and facility time capacity of our reps and would not allow the FC to dictate who should not be accredited reps. They had seen and would see a lot of processes involved in measuring facility time but we have not yet been offered any proposal on the content of a new agreement and when they would, meaningful consultation will be required by us to consider any new proposal or come to an agreement.

**PCS** provided an update particularly on action around the campaign to retain the FC - briefing members, engaging with MPs along with arranging a drop-in session in Parliament. It was said that PCS nationally were very much behind the aims of FCTU in the campaign and that internally, PCS were very much in line with the other unions.

**Prospect** were reported to be working in parallel with the other unions also on the campaign. They were also working on a final version of the pensions agreement, whilst gathering intelligence from other departments on pay deals elsewhere to make some comparisons and conclude what members wish to see in future pay arrangements with the FC. Prospect shared concerns on facility time and were carrying out similar exercises seeking information on agreements in other departments.

**Unite** also informed the AGM of their current action around the FC campaign, in particular on engaging with MPs and setting up various meetings for Unite and FCTU to put forward their arguments, as well as pushing to get support from national and local press.

Aside from WPEP, other issues being dealt with in **England** were with post-filling and interview panels where there were concerns with a lack of training for those sitting on panels and rules not being adhered to.

In **Scotland**, it was reported that members had welcomed the recent FCTU campaign meetings and shared the concerns with members elsewhere on the

breakup of the FC. FC Scotland management's communications road show was also reported to be well received by staff. Workloads and pressures were said to be significantly higher and of concern with the lack of action from management on addressing workload issues. Other issues being acted upon were JEGS, apprentices, home to office journeys and staff survey outcomes. The AGM discussed the scope of the **ENFOR review** however this had not yet been a cause for any concern for staff in Scotland and any merger with other Scottish departments did not appear to be being considered currently.

In **Silvan House** and **Forest Research**, WPEP deliberations were reported to be being dealt with via a temporary Central Services Staff Council and consultation would take place in phase 2 of the Cross-Border Functions strand of the programme.

Silvan House reps were concerned with the use of contractors in IS and the department continually being under complement in their staff numbers and permanent positions not being filled – this was being raised with the SH Staff Council.

The AGM discussed joint union **recruitment** and the process of talking to new entrants to encourage them to join a union. The meeting agreed that FCTU would review that process and the leaflet used to brief new staff on the work of the unions and how to join.\*

With the **Departmental Staff Council** being held on 25<sup>th</sup> November, the group discussed putting forward agenda items to be raised with management, including issues with Lyme Disease recording and guidance, and external communication and press coverage.

The Chair gave a summation of the AGM, thanking the group for an excellent meeting.

#### **Action Points**

\*FCTU Office to circulate New Entrants leaflet to unions.

\*FCTU to enquire on use of JEGS for SR10 posts.