

England

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FCTU (ENGLAND) RESPONSE TO "RESHAPING FOREST SERVICES"

1a To what extent do you agree that the proposed model for the Admin Hubs is workable? (Likert – Strongly agree to strongly disagree + don't know / prefer not to say)

Strongly disagree

1b) How could the proposed model be improved?

Remerge the Admin Hub staff in to the local Area Admin teams, under the leadership of the current Area Directors. Maintain local support of the Forest Services' Area team, particularly the Woodland Officer (WO). All Hub admin staff undertake an important role in maintaining Area team delivery, liaising with the many customers we have on the 'front line'. Front line working is a role that never gets attributed to the Admin Officer (AO), but in many cases they are as knowledgeable in administration of our regulatory and incentives functions as the WOs are in silviculture and woodland management issues.

By using this approach, the FC retains a familiar, local and understanding point of contact for Forest Services customers, particularly when dealing with ongoing regulatory workloads. Restricting Forest Services regulatory administration contact to the south of England will result in the handling more regulatory cases and enquiries by fewer people (geographically divided or not), and will simply alienate any northern or Midlands' customers.

Improve overall management of both Forest Area and Administration Hub teams to address tensions between the two. In addition, any increase in workload caused by Countryside Stewardship grant schemes, such as an increase in felling licence applications and other aspects of the regulatory functions needs to be matched with greater resources, i.e. staff.

1c) Do you have any other comments on the proposed model?

The proposed outcomes from the FS consultation do not address the aspirations of the widely accepted recommendations of the Independent Panel (IP) on forestry report. This document recognised that FS staff, and from this I am including AO support teams, as being "customer-focused people, with rounded

knowledge and skills, provide all these functions appears to be effective and are especially valued".

The FCTU challenges the assertion that the creation of admin hubs has led to greater consistency and flexibility in how tasks are carried out across the country. To a degree each team has steered its own path.

The main issue has been the lack of consistency in terms of line management between transactional and technical teams (Woodland Officers and Admin), which has led to a complete lack of accountability. How can two hubs based in the South of England be easier for clients/ customers to understand?

When it is looked at in the context of admin staff, their numbers and their locations, this model creates a sense of inevitable centralisation. Private sector woodland owners and managing agents will rail against these proposals as they will undoubtedly end up dealing with displaced FS offices rather than individual FC members of staff ... and it will be a poorer service for it.

2a) To what extent do you agree that the proposed model for FS National Office is workable? (Likert – Strongly agree to strongly disagree + don't know / prefer not to say)

Strongly disagree

2b) How could the proposed model be improved?

Retain the Sustainable Forest Management Team. Repair the post SR10 disconnect between support and development for administering the forestry grant schemes.

The FCTU strongly believes that the migration from GLOS to the new CAP delivery programme is complex and unlikely to be delivered on time, as evidenced by the last "deep dive" project meeting held earlier this year.

2c) Do you have any other comments on the proposed model?

The FCTU is concerned that these posts have been underestimated in terms of the additional support which they provide to other National Office teams and staff working elsewhere in England. If GLOS stays as a separate legacy entity, it will need support. Currently the Sustainable Management Support Team has the ability to add value to each "Assyst" raised.

There will still be a need for development roles within Sustainable Development Team in future. Having more targeted and specific job roles for support of the development team and their developing systems would ensure that new systems are rolled out in a strategic way.

3a) To what extent do you agree that the following proposals for how Area teams could evolve are workable?

Retain current number and coverage of Area teams

Disagree

Better support frontline delivery

Agree

Better joint working with NE

Neither agree nor disagree

Utilising full range of tools

Agree

Change of job title from Field Manager to Woodland Technical Manager

Neither agree nor disagree

For each of the above: (Strongly agree to strongly disagree + don't know / prefer not to say)

3b) How could the proposals be improved?

Maintain localised support to WOs (and to a lesser extent Field Managers) in terms of their remote working and lone working practices, reversing the WOs increasing sense of isolation. We also need to look at the number and workload of WOs in future as we move towards the "licence to operate" for technical advice.

3d) Do you have any other comments on the proposals for Area teams?

Newly structured jobs need to be fully assessed (JEGS).

There has been much talk, from the IP Report and the Government's response to it, regarding the undermanaged resource within private sector woods and forests in England. Much of this resource is currently in the ownership of woodland owners either unwilling or unaware of the resource they hold and the contribution it can make across the forestry sector. WOs need to deliver a continuing regulatory role and to reach out to this untapped resource; effective Admin support is crucial to make this work.

As advocated by the IP, "smartly implemented regulation has a key role to play in meeting international and national commitments on sustainable forestry, biodiversity conservation and the landscape scale changes we are proposing". The proposed changes to reduce Admin support for this key function will greatly reduce FC's own aspiration of engaging with a far greater proportion woodland owners and managers.

4a) To what extent do you agree the proposals for how we improve our Ways of Working are workable?

- **Working better across FS and with Defra**

Strongly disagree

- **Plant health and the Woodland Health team**

Disagree

- **Evidenced based working**

Neither agree nor disagree

For each of the above: (Strongly agree to strongly disagree + don't know / prefer not to say)

4b) How could the proposals be improved?

Refer to comments we have made previously in this consultation response.

Within "Improving our Ways of Working" is the following paragraph ...

"A key principle is that we all work for one Forest Services. Whilst we are arranged into teams across FS, reflecting our geographic coverage (Area teams) and our functions (national specialist teams), we need to continue to build good working relationships between ourselves. We must all understand the business of FS as a whole."

This seems at odds with the proposal to perpetuate the split between Area teams and Hubs and at odds with the huge geographic areas, which would be covered by the proposed management structures.

4c) Do you have any other comments on these proposals for Ways of Working?

In terms of "to work well with DEFRA", the proposal does suggest that there would be clearer lines of sight. However, Forestry Commission staff have always been Government and DEFRA's experts when it comes to trees, woodland and forestry issues. This should be nothing new.

The FCTU strongly believes that there will be a willingness on the part of FC staff to improve joint working with NE, but that it will take a great deal of effort to reach front-line NE Advisors.

5) Do you have any final comments on any section of the document or any further suggestions?

The FCTU believe that the current structure of the FC comprising component parts of Forest Services, Forest Research and Forest Enterprise remains the best way forward to coordinate expertise, management, research and the testing and development of government policy initiatives.

The strength of the FC is in its integrated nature given the scale and scope of the work it undertakes and need to work across Whitehall departments. We do not believe that disbanding the current elements of the FC to a disparate number of bodies would strengthen the ability to deliver forestry and woodland policy. More that this requires an integrated whole with an overarching body to undertake the governance role required to manage the various sub-departments such as Forest Services, Research, Forest Enterprise and cross border functions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Holdsworth'.

Steve Holdsworth
FCTU England Chair