

## Reshaping Forest Services Consultation – FCTU Update 5<sup>th</sup> February 2015

Many of you will by now have been informed or read about the final decision reached by the FS Board to reshape Forest Services following the internal consultation which was presented and rolled out to staff on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014. FCTU England provided a very considered response to the consultation in that it reflected the aspirations of union members and their mandate to retain a fully integrated Forestry Commission, including robust Cross-Border Functions and Shared Services that would deliver all that our nation demands; would meet the aspirations of the public, and satisfy those with an interest in public forestry that the FC is the best organisation to safeguard the assets held in trust for public benefit. The FCTU response provided FS with an alternative to the proposal being consulted on but after considering this they decided to follow the option set out in their decision paper. The Partnership Agreement between FCTU and the FC confirms that “the partners recognise that the basis for a constructive partnership is honest open communication and that the FC will consult with the FCTU on matters which significantly affect the working conditions of its employees. To facilitate meaningful consultation, the FC will ensure that the FCTU have the fullest information made available to them and sufficient time to properly consider”. FCTU are significantly reassured that the consultation on Reshaping FS was conducted as set out in the agreement.

Through a number of informal meetings with senior managers, FCTU have been able to obtain sight of and in confidence the proposed final decision after the consultation and FCTU England met on 28<sup>th</sup> January to discuss the outcomes and final decisions, which was embargoed until 5pm today.

Taken at face value, the FCTU responses throughout seem generally to be at odds with the majority of both individual and group returns for this consultation. However, following a further FCTU analysis (as can be seen in the attached report from FCTU England) it is clear that, in answering questions along the lines of “is ... workable?” respondents have been sincere, i.e. answered in agreement or with a neutral score despite their written comments suggesting major concerns.

There are many reasons for this apparent anomaly:

(i) As previously stated, both group and individual responses have been shaped by the wording of the questions. By asking if a preferred proposal is workable, management will not get a quantitative evaluation of staff content/discontent with the suggestions. Another limitation is that it cuts off any opportunity to quantitatively evaluate the alternatives, some of which seem to have been dismissed at a very early stage.

(ii) Individuals working for FS, particularly in administration grades, feel threatened and under pressure at this moment in time. They therefore may try to come across as adaptable and open to change in whatever form to try to protect their jobs within the Forestry Commission. For this reason they are almost bound to “Strongly Agree/ Agree” with questions along the lines of “is this workable”.

To redress this situation, the comments sections for the consultation must be given a more heightened status and attempts ought to be made to take these comments into

account whilst considering the Likert Scale closed questions. Management states that "The closed question offered a limited range of responses to choose from, and allowing us a basic level of quantitative analysis i.e. numbers and percentages of people who had chosen each option". Whilst it is important to understand that the "option" mentioned here relates to the Likert scale questions and not the different reshaping FS models, FCTU England is still very concerned about any conclusions being drawn from this interpretation.

Furthermore, it could be argued that 'Support' should be responses that have indicated 'Agree', and then in their comments go on to outline why they agree, i.e. why they think the proposition is a positive one. What we actually have is responses that give 'Agree', but with caveats, often powerfully argued raising very legitimate concerns born of deep experience and knowledge, and offering a shrewd analysis of the problems. The only 'Agrees' that are unequivocal are those in which there is no accompanying narrative, or where the narrative given is wholly supportive.

The danger is that the nuanced qualitative answers will be swept aside in the rush for bar charts and the supremacy of quantitative analysis indicating that enough FC folk are happy to achieve the required support for the proposals. As was discussed in the meeting, people's commitment to the FC and their wish to make this work may have meant people's responses were skewed towards the positive, when actually their commentary raised concerns about the proposals.

It is true to say that the FS Board are very aware of the concerns raised during the consultation but feel that the proposal and the steps that they are going to take in the future should ease those concerns. FCTU remain to be convinced that this will be sufficient at this time.

FCTU will now discuss this outcome with the Departmental Committee (DC) and seek advice from Full Time Officers of the constituent National unions. The DC will next meet on 18<sup>th</sup> February and we will provide you with further information on this issue after that date.

FCTU Secretary  
5<sup>th</sup> February 2015