

# Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2014, Rugby Club, Portadown

**Chair:** Elaine Shaw

**Present:** Hamilton Loney, Sam MacNeice, Barbara Erwin, Thomas Gilpin, Shane Donnelly, Claire Woods, Paul Mooney, Patrick Taggart, Robin McKee, Doug Thomson, Roy Lyttle, Michael Moorhead, Eric Long, Elaine Chapman (minutes), Jonathan Blackburn

**Apologies:** Patricia Erwin, Peter Donnelly, Jason Podris, Barclay Bell, Philip Gass

## 1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

## 2. *Skilled Workforce* – update on YoungHort sponsorship, Paul Mooney

Paul thanked all the sponsors from the Horticulture Forum who provided support for Jonathan Blackburn (CAFRE horticulture student) to attend the Landscape Show and the YoungHort Conference. The YoungHort Initiative was set up to promote and showcase young people in the industry and also to help young people choose a career in horticulture. Jonathan gave a very professional presentation on his experiences at the Landscape Show and also the key messages he took from the speakers at the YoungHort event which was attended by some 300 young people directly involved with horticulture. Members greatly appreciated this input and commended Jonathan.

- **Horticulture Matters Report update**

Paul informed members that the *Horticulture Matters* report has been updated to highlight the achievements of the past year and outline areas of continued focus for 2015. Key priorities include improving the perception of careers in the sector, supporting schools in the delivery of horticulture qualifications and working with government to secure funding for plant science research. The updated Horticulture Matters 2014 is available on the RHS website [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk) **Elaine Chapman to get hard copies for Horticulture Forum members for them to consider.**

- **Horticulture Degree update**

Considerable work was undertaken to progress the provision of a Horticulture Degree at CAFRE. The application to the University of Ulster in April 2014 was successful. Unfortunately due to the significant budget constraints further work on the degree validation has been put on hold. This is very disappointing.

- **Charter for Institute of Horticulture**

The Institute of Horticulture (IOH) was awarded 'Chartered' status in July 2014. The IOH can now grant members the right to use the title 'Chartered Horticulturalist' with the designator letters C Hort. **Elaine Chapman to draft a letter on behalf of the Horticulture Forum to congratulate the IOH on achieving 'Chartered' status and wish them well for the future.**

- **CAFRE Awards**

Paul invited Horticulture Forum members to once again be guests at the CAFRE Greenmount Campus Awards Day on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015. **Forum members are encouraged to make suggestions on a possible Guest speaker to Elaine Chapman.**

- **Grow Careers initiative**

Pilot 'Grow Careers' day(s) is to be held at Greenmount campus in June 2015 (24<sup>th</sup> and /or 25<sup>th</sup> June). Schools will be invited to attend for a pre booked visit. While the number of horticulture students at CAFRE overall remains steady it is vitally important to pro-actively encourage able school leavers to consider a career in horticulture. **Paul to keep members informed of developments.**

Also a Careers Event is to be held at CAFRE Greenmount Campus in early March 2015, on the same day as the Growers NI Trolley Fair. Paul encouraged the Horticulture Forum to have a presence at this event to highlight its work, make links with industry present and as a method of communicating any vacancies / work experience opportunities. The forum agreed that participation was desirable. Paul informed members that there are currently 9 horticulture apprentices under the Apprenticeship Scheme. The current scheme is due to end in 2016 and its future is currently very uncertain.

### **3. *Strategic Investment Support* – Progress with RDP, Michael Moorhead, Head of Pillar II Programme Development, DARD**

Michael Moorhead briefed members on the proposals for both capital and non capital schemes within the new RDP 2014 – 2020. He has responsibility for Knowledge Transfer and Innovation, Farm Competitiveness and Food Chain. The main points arising were as follows:

- Proposals for RDP 2014 – 2020 have been submitted to the EU for approval. These proposals are available on the DARD website ([www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk)). It is hoped the RDP will be approved by June 2015.
- While up to £623m has been approved for the new RDP the current budget situation remains uncertain. Business cases will have to be developed for each of

the schemes proposed and legislation will have to be put in place once the programme has been approved by Brussels.

- The Horticulture Forum has already submitted detailed information on industry support required under the Business Improvement scheme. This information has been used in calculating the level of funding needed. Viability and additionality will have to be considered and all applications will be selected according to set scored selection criteria. The maximum amount anyone can get in grant aid under this scheme will be £250,000. All business applying will be required to have a 'proportionate' Business Plan. Templates are being drawn up.
- The Agri-food Processing Investment Scheme will be the continuation of the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme (PMG). Under the new scheme no company will get more than £1m in support at 40% grant.

#### **4. *Scientific Research* – Horticulture Forum participation in HDC, Doug Thomson**

The HDC have offered the Horticulture Forum a position at their sector panel meetings. This would provide an opportunity for HDC information to be brought back to NI. The Horticulture Forum would have to cover the costs of travel. Alternatively individual sectors could take the offer forward and be responsible for costs. **Horticulture Forum members to discuss this offer with their sectoral organisations. Elaine Chapman to inform members not at the meeting. Anyone interested in participating in HDC Panel meetings to contact Elaine Chapman by the end of 2014.**

Eric stressed this is an excellent opportunity to develop linkages with HDC and encouraged all members to consider participation carefully.

Concerns about potential cuts within AFBI were discussed. A letter to Minister O'Neill is to be forwarded stressing industry concerns about the impact of the loss of R&D on top fruit and mushrooms. The letter should also highlight that the Evidence and Innovation procedures don't work for smaller sectors such as horticulture. **Members were asked to send sectoral input to Elaine Chapman for collation in a letter to the Minister.** It was also suggested the letter should be copied to William Erwin and possibly followed up with a meeting.

#### **5. AOB – Bank Account**

Considerable difficulties have arisen in opening a Horticulture Forum bank account. **Elaine Shaw to investigate.**

#### **6. Date of next meeting**

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2015.