

Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting

Monday 30 January 2017, 7:30 pm, Portadown Rugby Club

Chair: Keith Crawford

Present: Peter Donnelly, Patricia Erwin, Hamilton Loney, Adrian Magowan, Robin McKee, Paul Mooney, Patrick Taggart, Doug Thomson,

1. Apologies

Barclay Bell, Kieran Hughes, Roy Lyttle

2. Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the meetings held on 21 November 2016 and 12 January 2017 were agreed.

21 November 2016, 10. AOB

Patrick to request Dr Simmon's' Powerpoint presentation again.

12 January 2017, 3. Brexit priorities

Patrick reported that the agreed Brexit priorities have been shared with the DAERA Brexit Team.

3. Reception at Parliament Buildings

Keith gave an overview of the preparatory work done for the reception and explained how, because of the political situation, attendance by MLAs may be low (at best). It was agreed to postpone the reception until stable devolution is restored (aiming for autumn 2017).

Patrick to advise Private Office and Stormont of the decision to postpone.

Patrick to cancel meeting with Howard Hastings.

Elaine Shaw to arrange to pay Fresh Graphics for leaflet design.

4. DAERA Knowledge Framework consultation

It was agreed that the Forum should make a response. Members were somewhat reassured that the consultation document makes some explicit references to horticulture.

Discussion centred mainly on consultation questions 3 and 6.

Question 3 asks about attitudes to the Framework's Objective. Suggestions were made that the Objective should:

- Make explicit reference to profitability;
- Reconsider the use of words like “sustainability” whose meaning can be rather vague;
- Perhaps accept some responsibility for educating the wider public (not just the industry);
- Be sufficiently flexible to allow an educational role for the marketing body proposed by Going for Growth;
- Take account of industry’s objectives (rather than solely DAERA’s objectives); and
- Change “Investing only where there is evidence. . .” to “Investing primarily where there is evidence. . .”

Question 6 asks about the proposal that heads of commercial horticultural businesses should have at least a Level 3 relevant qualification. Concerns raised included:

- A perceived lack of clarity about the meaning of the proposed requirement (e.g. in terms of breadth of qualification, what is meant by “relevant” and how recent qualifications should be);
- An absence of acknowledgement of the need for transition arrangements (e.g. grandfather rights);
- The perception of DAERA “moving goalposts” after the recent drive to get young farmers qualified to Level 2; and
- The fear that qualifications would become a pre-requisite for access to support of various forms.

Details of the consultation can be found here: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/daera-knowledge-framework-education-strategy>.

Members to forward contributions to the Forum’s response to Patrick by 10 February.

Patrick to circulate draft response to members by 17 February.

Members to send Patrick comments on the draft response by 22 February.

Patrick to submit Forum’s response in time to meet deadline of 27 February.

5. Balmoral Show

Following the meeting on 12 January, at which David Laidlaw (RUAS) outlined the option of an integrated horticulture exhibition, potentially involving the Horticulture Forum, UFU, CAFRE, the NI Stakeholder Potato Promotion Group, Jilly Dougan (Sow, Grow, Munch) and the Ulster Beekeepers Association, members agreed to take part. It is hoped that by collaborating it will be possible to overcome the potential difficulty of finding enough people to man the exhibit. Patrick explained that there

would be a meeting between CAFRE, Supply Chain Development Branch, RUAS and Jilly Dougan on 31 January to further explore the possibilities. Selling plants would be an option but some members expressed concern that this would increase staffing needs to unrealistic levels. MLAs (if there are any) could be invited to the exhibit, where Forum members could impress upon them the importance of the industry.

Patrick to keep members informed of developments.

6. Farm Innovation Visits

Paul outlined the Farm Innovation Scheme, which is part of the NI Rural Development Scheme. A summary of the scheme was emailed to Forum members on 16 January. Although Scheme rules are not yet finalised, members welcomed the suggestion that membership of Business Development Groups and Category 1 Business Reference Numbers may not be pre-requisites for participation. Questions raised included:

- Will it be possible for external consultants to be funded where their participation in a visit is deemed valuable or essential?
- Will non-technical visits (e.g. to learn more about producer organisations) be eligible?
- Will visits organised by external organisations (e.g. AHDB-Horticulture) be eligible for funding if CAFRE staff also participate?

Several themes for study visits were proposed:

- Soft fruit propagation in Netherlands or Belgium;
- Rootstocks for top fruit;
- Experience of producer organisations in various sectors.

Paul to arrange for Horticulture Development Advisers to consult with members on an individual basis.

Members to send their opinions to Patrick, by 9 February, using the form he emailed to them on 16 January.

7. NI Regional Food Programme (NIRFP)

Patrick outlined the NIRFP, which is currently open for new applications. The Programme aims to raise the profile of quality regional food and increase its consumption within NI, RoI and GB. Although there is no guarantee of success, the Forum would be eligible to apply to the Programme for financial assistance with projects like the Stormont reception and Balmoral Show. Only the food aspects of the Forum's activities would be eligible. Support would be at a maximum of 40% of costs with an additional 10% as a management fee. The deadline for receipt of

applications is noon on 14 February 2017. Patrick explained that, as a member of DAERA staff, he is unable to submit an application on behalf of the Forum.

Keith to approach Ian Duff about the possibility of him accepting the role of project manager and submitting an application on behalf of the Forum.

8. AOB

Website

Patrick to find out how much traffic the website is attracting.

Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS)

Patricia explained that the CEVAS course will be held at CAFRE Greenmount on 7-8 March 2017. The course may be of benefit to businesses that host educational visits. Details are available here: <http://www.visitmyfarm.org/cevas-farmer-training>.

9. Date of next meeting

To be confirmed.