

BIFoR Advisory Group Meeting
Friday 29 January 2021, 09:00-11:00
Virtual meeting on Zoom

1. Chair's Introduction

Laura Green welcomed the BIFoR Advisory Group members and thanked them for their time. Many members had also attended the BIFoR annual meeting on the 27 and 28th January 2021.

2. Introductions from group members and notice of apologies

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| Present |
| Chaired by Laura Green, Head of College of Life and Environmental Sciences (LES) |
| Caroline Ayre, Confor |
| Alice Broome, Project Leader for Protected Species, Forest Research (joined by Skype) |
| Anna Brown, Head of Tree Health and Contingency, Forestry Commission England |
| Prof Christine Foyer - member of the BIFoR Science Committee |
| Jeanette Hall, Woodland Advisor, Scottish Natural Heritage |
| Robert Jackson, BIFoR Director and Chair in Tree Pathology |
| David Johnson, Chair in Microbial Ecology, University of Manchester |
| Estrella Luna-Diez, member of the BIFoR Science Committee |
| Rob MacKenzie, BIFoR Director |
| Robin May, BIFoR challenger and Director of Institute of Microbiology and Infection, UoB |
| Ghillean Prance, formerly Director of Royal Botanical Gardens KEW |
| Jeremy Pritchard, Director of Education and BIFoR (Education) |
| Nicola Spence, Chief Plant Health Officer, Defra and University of Birmingham |
| Sami Ullah, Member of the BIFoR Science Committee |
| Deanne Brettle – BIFoR Project Administrator and secretary to the Advisory Group |
| Apologies |
| Dr Clive Elphick, independent Director with the National Grid Gas Plc and National Grid Electricity Transmission Plc, on the Board of the Environment Agency |
| Jo Bradwell, Honorary Professor of Immunology University of Birmingham |
| Matt Elliott, Policy Advocate, Tree Health & Invasives, Woodland Trust |
| Prof Vincent Gauci - member of the BIFoR Science Committee |
| Richard Norby, Oakridge Laboratory, USA |
| Professor Malcolm Press, Vice Chancellor, University of Manchester |
| Dan Zastawny, University of Birmingham, Alumni Department |

1. Minutes and matter arising

The group welcomed Caroline Ayre, and Sami Ullah to their first meeting.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

DB did email the Advisory Group to ask if they are happy to ratify the terms of reference. A number of positive replies were received. The Terms of Reference were circulated again with the papers for this meeting. The Group members present ratified the Terms of Reference.

NS kindly gave the Advisory Group, an update on the EuExit in terms of Plant Health. The change has been fairly smooth running to date, however a lot of export / import took place before we left the EU and so the systems in place are yet to be pressure tested.

2. BIFoR Governance update – update on new members structure and themes

In 2020, a new BIFoR Management Group (BMG) was formed. The BMG is formed of four Directors Professors Rob Jackson, Rob Mackenzie, Jeremy Pritchard and Nicola Spence; the Science Committee, Dr Estrella Luna-Diez, Professors Christine Foyer, Vincent Gauci and Sami Ullah; BIFoR Operations Manager, Dr Kris Hart; and BIFoR Administrator Deanne Brettle. The aim of BMG is to enhance communications and management of a range of issues. The Science Committee have also provided invaluable support to institute colleagues for managing publications and grant applications.

RMK talked through the organisational chart. New members of staff are highlighted in red. Prior to the meeting RN had given some feedback that it would be good to highlight who is the lead for each of the areas, and if possible show where the links between the research themes are.

3. BIFoR annual report

The BIFoR Annual report is available [online](#) and was also circulated with the papers for the meeting. The report is one of our key communication tools for stakeholders and gives an overview of the Institute.

The Group talked about BIFoR Communications and highlighted that as the Institute grows it will be important to have in place a plan regarding knowledge sharing and knowledge exchange.

LG shared that in late 2021, the University of Birmingham will open “The Exchange” in central Birmingham, this is a new public engagement space, and BIFoR will be one of the first exhibitions.

CE shared that whilst the report is good to hear about what we’ve done, it would also be good to have a document detailing what our plans and vision are. This could be in the form of a 5 year business plan for example. The Directors shared that whilst information does exist, it hasn’t been brought together under one document as yet. CE offered to support the process as he is experienced in this area.

There was a discussion around forward planning of research being influenced by research council income. ELD reported that a more strategic approach to funding is being put in place since the development of the BMG.

Action 1: The BMG to consider BIFoR communications at next meeting

Action 2: The BIFoR Board to consider the idea of a BIFoR business plan

Education

The development of forest sciences teaching resources can be considered to have a three pronged approach

- Undergraduate teaching
- A level, GCSE and Key Stage 3
- Outreach

JP reported that BIFoR have not only developed teaching resources for GCSE Geography / A Level (working closely with UoB School), but plan to develop new resources, further to a joint BIFoR /Forestry Commission project to map where in the curriculum there are opportunities to use

trees/forests to support the learning. Current and new resources will be shared through the “Virtual BIFoR” platform. JP reported BIFoR are also trying to influence the (Biology) curriculum to include trees/forests and the education exam boards and providers such as AQA and University Press to include forest sciences resources / questions.

The group discussed whether there are options for BIFoR to look in to education in terms of industry stakeholders such as land managers. There are elements of this in place for example the Treescapes 2021 conference will bring industry and early career researchers together, and the Trees for the Future conference in November, is very much focussed on bringing stakeholders and scientists together clearly demonstrate the urgent need for a national policy on complex mixtures. The conference is likely to be a hybrid conference (a mix of face to face and virtual platform). There will be a related special interest journal of Food and Energy Security, and a policy document will be drafted. CA reported it will be advantageous to have someone from the industry on the planning committee for the conference.

CA reported that there is a wealth of tree related conferences at the moment and there has sometimes been overlap of key themes. The group discussed what themes for future conferences and research could be seen (minute 5)

4. BIFoR Annual Meeting – Advisory Group’s response & suggestions for 2022

The BIFoR Annual meeting took place on 27 and 28th January 2021. It was a virtual meeting and the sessions were shorter than usual (x3 hours). The theme was around tree health. The feedback from the Group members and feedback received from delegates was positive, in particular comments have been made on the organisation of the meeting – the group extended their thanks to DB. There were 326 registrations and the virtual platform enabled international delegates to join. There were 6 keynote speakers, including two established University of Birmingham academics; Prof Christine Foyer and Dr Scott Hayward. We are grateful to the invited key note speakers (Dr Ruth Mitchell, James Hutton Institute; Anthony Geddes, Confor; Prof Richard Buggs, Queen Mary University of London / Kew Gardens; Jon Drori, a Trustee and Ambassador with various botanical and science organisations and Hon. Prof with BIFoR) who without doubt helped us attract a large, diverse audience, and thus enabled us to also highlight the rising early career forest research stars who have been either attracted to join the University of Birmingham or have been nurtured by the University, particularly through the Leverhulme Trust funded Forest Edge Doctoral Scholarship. Our desire to show case the early career researchers meant there was not always cohesion between the topic of the key note and the proceeding early career researchers.

The “chat function” worked well, and perhaps next time we should allow more time for questions.

5. Global outlook and opportunities

The Group talked about future conferences and where the gaps appear to be currently. There was support that there needs to be attention brought to the area of “getting trees established” / “custodianship for trees” for example for farmers. This led to a discussion on agroforestry. The Advisory Group identified when talking about agroforestry it is important to clearly define what is meant, for example planting trees on farms and getting them established is different to the practice of agroforestry. CA identified that the [Dartington Trust](#) are leaders in the area of agroforestry, the RFS has a conference on the subject matter 2 years ago and the Soil Association have the seminal research and guidance in this area.

The group concluded it would be good for BIFoR to consider this line of enquiry regarding “establishing” treescapes, but should consider carefully where this fits in with research council funding and also consider introducing the theme into the November Trees for the Future conference.

Other opportunities discussed were:

- animals and forests particularly for temperate Treescapes (deer, squirrel, beavers) [note added after meeting: [Josh Larsen has been appointed to the independent scientific advisory panel of the UK Beaver Trust](#)]
- Long term vision of what can be done with the timber
- The approaching COP26, G7 and G8 meetings
- Riparian systems and flood risk

RMK gave an update on the global outlook of FACE facility's which was discussed at the last BIFoR Advisory Group meeting. Amazon FACE had made little progress in 2020 they are considering moving the site closer to a CO2 supply chain. RMK and SU have visited the Amazon FACE team in 2020. RMK and a prof from Exeter University, pitched the importance of a global network of FACE experiments in mature forests to Gideon Henderson, Chief Scientific Advisor at the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He was supportive and can ultimately see the value of the research but at this time is unable to find the right vehicle to help move things forward.

[note added after meeting: [As of February 2021, AmazonFACE remain in discussion with German funding bodies and are using data from BIFoR FACE to argue that the infrastructure controls are not required \(in order to reduce capital costs\). BIFoR FACE colleagues remain closely engaged with the AmazonFACE team.](#)]

Date of next meetings
Friday 28 January 2022