A STRATEGY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NEW SOUTH EAST AREA BIOLOGY TEAM ACROSS A DUAL LOCATION FOLLOWING RESTRUCTURING

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Thames Region

April 1998

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A STRATEGY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NEW SOUTH EAST AREA BIOLOGY TEAM ACROSS A DUAL LOCATION FOLLOWING RESTRUCTURING

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the Certificate in Management

The Open College

April 1998

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Team Leader Ecology

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is submitted as part of the Certificate of Management which has been funded by the Environment Agency, and has provided me with a good basic grounding with which to commence my first managerial role as a team leader.

I would like to thank all those staff who have taken the time to provide information, support and advice to me throughout this course, in particular my previous line manager David Willis who originally enabled me to do this course, my new line manager Alan Butterworth, and my new team who have been consulted in gaining much of the information necessary to complete this project.

1.0 SUMMARY

Prior to the recent 'Next Steps' restructuring in the Environment Agency, biology staff in Thames region were managed from the regional office. As part of the restructuring process, biologists have now moved out of region to the three areas in Thames region, to form part of the Fisheries and Ecology (F&E) departments, with fisheries and conservation staff. In SE Area, staff are also going through the process of co-location, from several small offices to one main office at Frimley, and a second office at Crossness where tideway staff will be based.

Members of the new SE Area biology team are currently located at offices at Reading and Hatfield outside of SE area, and are isolated both from each other, and from other SE Area staff. Relocation is planned for June following completion of the laboratories, when the team leader and two freshwater biologists will move to Frimley, and the two estuarine biologists will locate to Crossness on the tideway.

The scope of this project is to produce a strategy for the effective management of the team across the dual location following relocation, with focus on the following areas: individual and team development, effective communication within the team and with other groups, quality of work and cost effectiveness. Information required to produce a development strategy was gained through questionairres, team meetings, structured meetings, and informal discussions.

The main problems affecting team development have been identified as: the current isolation of the team, the problem of operating across two offices following relocation, and the need to clarify regional/area biology roles and objectives.

Areas requiring significant development include: achieving clear objectives and goals, sound working and decision making procedures, cooperation and conflict, and creating sound intergroup relations. The team is already strong in the following areas: openness and confrontation, support and trust, regular review, and individual development.

Some areas eg. training needs are dependent upon available funding, however most of the proposals for team development and effective management are dependent on sufficient time being available to implement them. Although it may appear to others that too much time is being devoted to these issues in light of other work objectives, this is a very short term view. The long term benefits of this process should start to show within a few months, and progress will be reviewed on a regular basis to identify whether changes need to be made.

Failure to address these problems will result in the team not performing to its full potential, with the needs of customers failing to be met and poor communication within the team and with other groups.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to produce a strategy for the effective management of the SE Area biology team across a dual location in the Environment Agency Thames Region following restructuring.

It is not possible to discuss all aspects of team management in detail within the scope of this report, therefore a number of important issues have been selected as a main focus, with reference to other areas made during this report. Terms of reference for the project are described as follows.

2.2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

A strategy for the effective management of the new SE Area Biology team across a dual location following restructuring in Environment Agency (Agency) Thames region.

Specific terms of reference:

- Strategy for the development of the team and individual team members.
- Ensuring effective communication both within the team, and with staff in closely related areas of work.
- Maintaining quality of work and cost effectiveness following restructuring.
- Produce final report by April 16th 1998.

2.3 BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

2.3.1 Creation of the Environment Agency and restructuring

The Environment Agency was formed on the 1st April 1996, following the merger of the National Rivers Authority (NRA), Waste Regulation Authorities (WRA's) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution (HMIP). This led to a period of internal restructuring ('Next Steps'), in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation. The restructuring has resulted in significant changes to the structure of a number of departments within the organisation, including biology.

2.3.2 Impact of restructuring on biology

Previously the biology staff in Thames Region were managed from the Regional office (Reading), and located at two offices in Reading and Hatfield. As part of restructuring, the biologists have moved out of region into the area offices, where they now form part of the new Fisheries and Ecology department in each area (Appendix 1). The Fisheries and Ecology department is therefore now comprised of fisheries, conservation and biology staff, with the latter two now being referred to as ecologists, although there are still distinct areas of responsibility (For the purposes of this report the biology staff will be identified as biologists to avoid confusion with the conservation staff). Some staff have also been retained at region, as regional biologists within the department of Water Management (along with Fisheries, Conservation and Landscape Architects).

Prior to restructuring, different members of biology staff were responsible for particular areas of work across the whole region according to their specialist skills. Now the smaller area teams are responsible for all biological work in their area, with some support provided by regional staff.

2.3.3 SE Area Co-location

In addition to managing the freshwater river Thames east of Reading, the SE Area of Thames Region also has responsibility for the Thames estuary, thus covering a large geographical area, including London (Appendix 2). Until recently, staff in SE Area were based at a number of offices spread throughout the area, however staff are currently going through the process of co-location to bring them together, and improve work effectiveness and communication.

There will now only be two main offices in SE Area (Appendix 2): the headquarters at Frimley, and an office at Crossness where staff working on the tideway are based. It would be impractical for the tideway staff to be based at Frimley given the distance and time it would take to travel to the tideway on a frequent basis.

2.3.4 Structure of the new SE Area biology team

The SE Area Biology team came into official existence on 1st October 1997 as part of 'Next Steps' restructuring, although at this time it had not been identified which staff would be joining the team. Staff were confirmed by

December 1997, and the team is now comprised of the following staff:-

Team Leader:	Lindsey Richardson (LR)
Team Members:	
Freshwater biologists:	Janet Moore (JM) Claire Gladdy (CG)
Estuarine biologists:	Sarah White (SW) Clare Dale (CD),(Part time)

Further details about the circumstances of how these staff came to be in the SE Area biology team are given in Appendix 3.

2.3.5 Location of the SE Area biology team

Prior to restructuring, three members of the team were based at the Hatfield office (NE Area office), and two were based at Reading. Following restructuring, all of these staff will shortly relocate to new offices, with the estuarine biologists moving to Crossness, and the freshwater biologists moving to Frimley with the biology team leader (Appendix 1). This geographical split is necessary in order that team members are based with other staff whose work is focused on either the tideway or freshwater issues, and also for practical reasons.

3.0 CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 STRUCTURE OF THE TEAM

The SE Area biology team is considered to operate as one team within the structure of the department, however the freshwater and estuarine team members have separate areas of responsibility and work objectives, requiring different training and skills. The tideway and freshwater biologists will also be based at separate locations, therefore they are effectively operating as separate units in terms of undertaking operational work.

In terms of the management of the team it is important to identify when the team leader should manage the team as a whole unit, and when the estuarine and freshwater biologists should be managed as separate units, so that the most effective use is made of staff time, whilst maximising team performance.

3.2 CURRENT LOCATION OF TEAM MEMBERS

Team members are still currently based at offices in Reading (LR,GG) and Hatfield (JM,SW,CD), prior to the moves to separate locations at Frimley (LR, CG, JM) and Crossness (SW,CD). These moves are programmed to be completed by the end of June following the fit out of the laboratories, and successful relocation of staff having to move house (JM,SW,CD).

In his book 'Thriving on Chaos' (1989) Tom Peters describes co-location and refers to the problems caused when team members are not situated together:

'Numerous studies chronicle the astonishing exponential decrease in communication that ensues when even thin walls or a few dozen feet of segregation are introduced. Hence all team members must 'live' together'.

The effective management of the estuarine biologists by the team leader based at a different location is therefore a difficult but extremely important problem to overcome, especially in terms of achieving effective communication.

3.3 IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS FACED BY THE TEAM

Although the transition phase between the formation of the team and relocation of team members to offices in SE Area is undesirable, it has provided an opportunity to identify and address the problems faced by a completely new team operating across a split location, and to plan a strategy for effective performance of the team across the two offices following relocation.

Successful management of this change is dependant upon careful planning, and consultation with relevant staff in order to identify and gain ownership of the problems, and produce a strategy for future effective team performance.

3.3.1 Collection of information

3.3.1.1 Information required

Information was collected in order to analyse the current performance of the team, and plan for improved team effectiveness across the dual location

following staff moves, with respect to the following areas of team performance:-

- Current team performance and development, including team characteristics and individual roles within the team.
- Individual development and training needs.
- Communication within the team and with other groups.
- Quality of work and cost effectiveness.

3.3.1.2 Methods of data collection

Information was collected using the following methods:-

Questionnaires:

Completed by all members of the team in their own time.

- Effective teams building blocks questionnaire (CoM Teamwork, workbook 1).
- Belbin Team Roles Questionnaire (CoM Teamwork, workbook 1).

Team Meetings:

Used to discuss current stage of team development, format of future team meetings, general communication issues.

Individual structured meetings:

Held between the team leader and each team member, using a standard set of questions. Details of the structure of these meetings are given in Appendix 4.

Informal Discussions with F&E Manager and other staff:

Views of the F& E manager and other team leaders in a similar position were gained through informal discussions.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 CURRENT STAGE OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

In his book 'Effective Teamworking' John Adair identified four stages of team development: Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing (Descriptions of each stage are given in Appendix 5). All members of the SE Area biology team agree that the team is currently somewhere between the Forming and Storming stage, with team members anxious about the current situation, and forming relationships with other team members with whom they have not previously worked.

There are still considerable doubts and uncertainties about both team objectives (the roles of area and regional biologists have not yet been finalised), individual responsibilities, and about how the team will operate effectively in the long term, although members are beginning to understand what is expected of them and questioning the validity and feasibility of tasks.

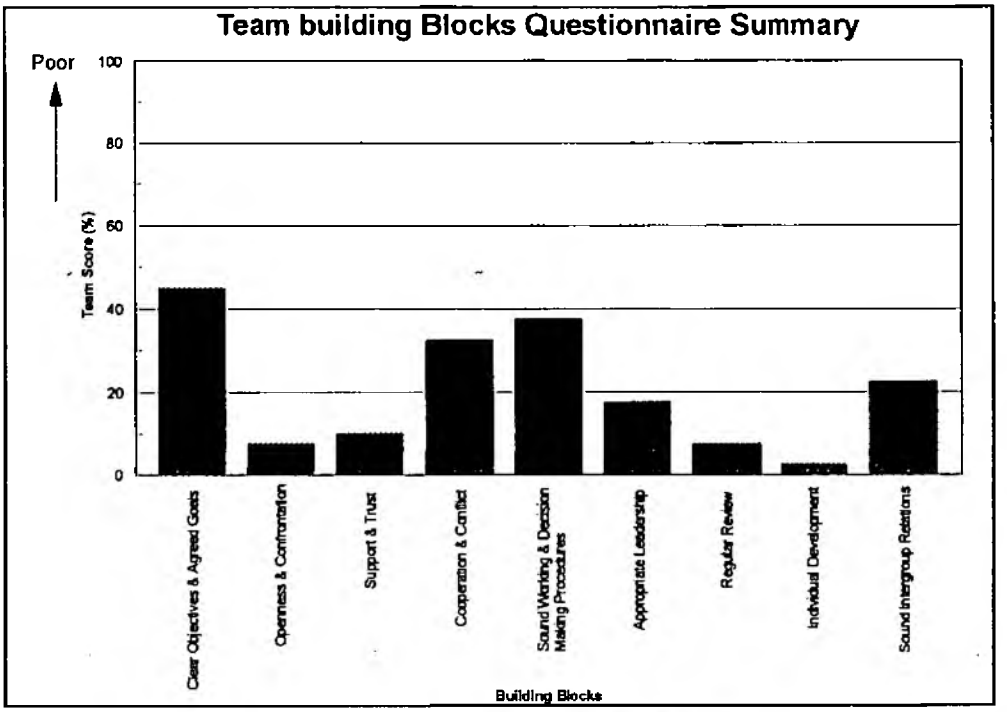
A SWOT analysis summarising the current situation facing the SE Area biology team in terms of development is shown below:-

Strengths	Weaknesses
*Starting afresh. *Attitudes of staff positive in spite of difficult circumstances. *Team ownership over planning and implementing change. *Currently good working relationships developing between all team members.	*Time necessary to form good working relationships within team. *Time necessary for team to develop. *Split of team across a dual location. *Low morale/frustration due to delays in relocation. * Current geographical isolation of team members. *Training and development needs
Opportunities	**Threats**
*Chance to develop working relationships and individual responsibilities. *All members can contribute to how the team works and develops. *Potential to dovetail work with Fisheries & Conservation.	*Problems with individual terms and conditions, and relocation. *Risk of low morale and deterioration of current goodwill if team do not relocate quickly. *Problems of communication over split location. *Insufficient resources to meet customer requirements..

4.2 CURRENT TEAM CHARACTERISTICS

Nine 'building blocks' have been identified by Mike Woodcock in his 'Team Development manual' as contributing to team effectiveness. In order to assess where the team is now in relation to these 'building blocks', all team members completed a questionnaire (CoM Teamwork workbook 1). The

findings are summarised in Appendix 6 and below.



The main categories requiring development are highlighted as:

- Achieving clear objectives and agreed goals
- Sound working and decision making procedures
- Cooperation and conflict
- Creating sound intergroup relations.

Some development is also required in the area of appropriate leadership.

In spite of the short time the team has been together it is felt that it is already strong in the following areas:

- Openness and confrontation
- Support and trust

- regular review
- Individual development.

4.3 TEAM ROLES

Dominant team roles displayed by team members assessed using the Belbin self perception inventory are shown in the table below.

Belbin Self Perception Inventory

	LR	JM	CG	CD	SW
Company Worker	**22**	**27**	**16**	**20**	11
Chairman	5	0	4	8	5
Shaper	**12**	0	1	4	**16**
Plant	4	4	4	6	**15**
Resource Investigator	8	0	2	4	7
Monitor/Evaluator	8	0	13	5	5
Team Worker	9	**23**	**17**	9	4
Completer/Finisher	2	16	13	**14**	7

Four members of the team gained high scores in the 'company worker' role (the highest score for 3 team members). This could result in an imbalance within the team, ie 'too few roles and some tasks do not get done'

(R.M.Belbin, Management Teams, 1981), however other roles were also strongly exhibited by team members including 'team worker' (2 members), 'shaper' (2 members), 'plant' (1 member), and 'completer/finisher' (3 members).

In the context of separate freshwater and estuarine teams (with the team leader belonging to both), roles not exhibited strongly include the following:

Freshwater team: chairman, plant, resource investigator.

Estuarine team: chairman, resource investigator, monitor evaluator.

The whole team is poor in the roles of resource investigator and chairman.

4.4 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING NEEDS

A number of development and training needs were identified for individual members of the team as a result of restucturing, and are shown in Appendix 7.

4.5 TEAM DEVELOPMENT

4.5.1 Team away day

All team members thought an away day would be a good idea as part of the process of team development, as it would enable team members to get to know each other better in informal surroundings, and find out more about each others work, interests etc. There was common consensus that the day should be work related, but away from the work place. Ideas included visits

to the London aquarium, Thames Barrier, boat trip along tideway. The objectives of the day still need to be discussed and planned.

4.5.2 Communication

4.5.2.1 Team meetings

All members agreed that it would be necessary to have two forms of team meeting for the team to operate effectively. These include:

- **Meetings of the whole team:** to be held monthly, and include issues relevant to all members of the team, eg. Agency and staff issues. Meetings should follow formal CASCADE briefings given by the F&E manager, alternating between Frimley and Crossness. The F&E manager has agreed to attend the meetings on a quarterly basis in order gain better familiarity with work issues relating to the biology team, and provide an opportunity for direct communication with the team members.

- **Sub team meetings:** Separate meetings of the team leader with the estuarine and freshwater biologists should be held weekly to discuss operational issues not relevant to the whole team. These meetings will occur at the office where the respective team members are located, and are planned to last less than 1 hour unless specific issues need to be discussed in detail.

Further details of the agreed format for each type of meeting are given in Appendix 8.

4.5.2.2 Other forms of communication

Regular verbal contact by telephone (at least every second day) should be made between the team leader and team members on days when staff are not in the same office. This will ensure that staff are aware what other members are doing, and enable any new issues or problems to be discussed.

Team members in the same office should see each other on a regular basis, and ensure that they know each others movements in order that there is no overlap in the work they are undertaking. Contact with the biologists in the other office between the monthly meetings is not essential, since they have separate areas of operational responsibility, however if team members make the effort to speak to the other biologists, they will maintain good team relations and keep up to date on the work they are doing.

Other useful forms of communication include e-mail across the offices, both within the team and with other staff, memos, letters and mobile telephones (essential for contacting staff in the field).

4.6 EXPECTATIONS OF TEAM LEADER

- **Presence in same office as team members:** Team members expect

the team leader to be in the office at least 1 day a week, preferably more.

- **Team leader involvement in technical operational work:** This is difficult to identify until workload is clearer. All agree that the team leader should have a good understanding of all technical work, and be able to provide operational support when the workload was heavy (although this will depend on the other commitments and responsibilities of the team leader).

- **Areas of operational work for team leader to undertake:** Other than providing general support to team members it is too early to identify specific operational activities that the team leader should undertake, as the workload is not yet clear.

- **Level of responsibility and amount of delegated work:** All agreed that they wanted to be delegated work with a fairly high level of responsibility. The amount of delegated work which would be appropriate in terms of workload is not yet clear.

- **Areas of work team leader could improve:** Clarify areas of responsibility better.

Other issues with Estuarine Biologists

Communication with team leader on days not in office

Estuarine biologists agreed that verbal communication should occur at least every second day when not in the same office.

Daily requirements in absence of team leader

Need procedures for signing orders, expenses etc. Need to be able to ensure contact with team leader or F&E manager for urgent situations.

Option for Fisheries team leader at Crossness to deal with daily requirements of estuarine biologists.

The estuarine biologists did not think this would be effective as it could lead to confusion, especially if conflicting messages were given by the fisheries and biology team leaders.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 CURRENT SITUATION

The SE Area biology team was recently formed as a result of restructuring in the Agency, and has been operating as a full team for four months. The team is currently based across two offices located outside the SE Area, and is due to relocate to new offices with other SE Area staff as part of the co-location process. The team consists of two estuarine biologists who will relocate to the Crossness office, and two freshwater biologists and the team leader who will move to the Frimley office.

In terms of operational work the freshwater and estuarine biologists work as two separate teams, reporting to the same team leader. However, with respect to areas common to the whole team, eg. CASCADE briefings, Agency and staff issues, and the budget, the team will operate as a single unit.

The scope of this project is to assess the current performance of the team, and plan a strategy for the future effective management of the team across the two offices. Information in relation to these objectives was gathered by means of questionnaires, team meetings, structured individual meetings with team members and discussions with other staff including the F&E manager.

5.2 CURRENT STAGE OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

In relation to the 4 stages of team development (John Adair, 1986), the team

is currently somewhere between the Forming and Storming stage. Progress has been restricted by the current isolation of team members from each other, and from other SE Area staff prior to relocation to Frimley and Crossness offices, and will continue to be a problem until these moves are complete (planned for June 1998).

Although undesirable, the current situation has enabled the team to identify current problems, and develop plans for effective team performance following relocation.

5.3 TEAM PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The team is currently unclear on it's purpose and objectives following restructuring. The roles of the regional and area biology teams still need to be finalised, although in most areas of work this has already been clarified. The team purpose and objectives will be derived from the department's business plan, which feeds into the Agency Corporate Plan. The SE Area biology business plan for 1998/99 is currently being finalised, and is dependent on identification of customer requirements (internal and external), available resources (financial and staff eg. students, contractors etc.), and prioritisation of work.

Following this process the team leader will produce a written statement of the team purpose and objectives (short and long term). This will help focus the team on what it's role is, and also help other functions and departments to

understand the teams purpose.

5.4 INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

Individual objectives and responsibilities are currently being reviewed by team members and the team leader, although these cannot be finalised until the 1998/99 business plan has been completed, and resources are confirmed. Objectives will be set for all team members prior to the end of June as part of the Agency's formal appraisal system (Self Development, EA internal booklet), which also enables individual performance to be reviewed and discussed.

In terms of delegated tasks, all team members currently take on responsibility for work delegated by the team leader. They are all keen to maintain a high level of responsibility, however work delegated by the team leader needs to be more clearly defined and communicated, therefore this is an area where the team leader needs to develop the role of appropriate leadership.

5.5 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

The Agency encourages personal development plans, with development needs based on requirements of the job and the competencies required, with regular reviews through the appraisal process.

The change in the structure of biology has resulted in biologists who previously specialised in certain areas of work, now required to undertake

more general areas of work to cover the remit of the smaller area based teams. This has resulted in a number of training and development needs being identified for team members.

The effective teams building blocks questionnaire indicated that all members of the team felt that individual development is currently a strong characteristic of the team. Current training and development needs for each team member were assessed through individual discussions with the team leader and are described in Appendix 7.

The annual job performance review for all staff will take place by June, and individual development plans will be formalised during this process, although attendance of external training courses is also dependent on resources controlled by the personnel department. Further training requirements will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis through team meetings and individual reviews.

5.6 OPERATION OF THE TEAM

All members of the team agreed that the team would operate most effectively if the freshwater and estuarine biologists are managed as two separate teams by the team leader, since there is no interdependence between these two groups of staff in achieving work objectives. Using this method of operation will help create sound working and decision making procedures within the team, and make best use of available time.

The team leader will spend at least one day a week in the office with team members, although ideally they will see each other more regularly. This is less of a problem at Frimley where the team leader will be based, however the advantage of trips to Crossness must be balanced against the time and cost of travel (average 4 hours/160 miles return journey).

Although the team leader will not be based with the estuarine biologists, it was agreed that providing good communication was maintained, there would be no requirement for the fisheries team leader at Crossness to become involved in their day to day running, as this could lead to confusion if the team leaders were relaying different messages to team members.

It was also agreed that it would be beneficial for the overall team to meet on a monthly basis to coincide with CASCADE briefings, in order to discuss general organisational issues relevant to all team members, and for each team member to provide a brief overview of what work they undertook over the previous month, and plans for the next month, for the interest of other team members.

5.7 COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE TEAM

In spite of the current circumstances, the team is already strong in certain characteristics including 'openness and confrontation', 'support and trust', and 'regular review', (as well as 'self development'). This is partially due to the individual personalities and nature of people within the team, but also because

team members are making efforts to communicate with each other on a regular basis, through meetings, e-mail and telephone calls.

It was also identified however, that communication will be more effective following relocation when the team is settled, and the freshwater team members are both at the same office. The team has discussed methods of ensuring effective communication, and this will include regular team meetings, operational days in the field with each other, e-mail and telephone communication.

A strategy for the format of regular team meetings was planned, including monthly team meetings for all members of the team relating to general Agency, staff and team issues; and weekly subteam meetings with the team leader to discuss operational issues relating to freshwater or estuarine operational work. Details of the format of these meetings, including location, length of meeting and agenda items are described in Appendix 8.

The success of these meetings will be reviewed regularly, in order to identify where improvements may need to be made. The F&E manager has agreed to attend the whole team meetings on a quarterly basis in order to enable direct communication between himself and team members, and to become more familiar with the work and issues relating to the team.

5.8 INTERGROUP RELATIONS

'Creating sound intergroup relations' was also identified as a current weakness within the team. Intergroup relations are currently adversely affected by the current isolation of the team from other SE area staff, including those within the same department. The restructuring has also resulted in significant changes to the structure of departments, and the staff working within them. This situation will improve following the completion of co-location, and communication will become much easier.

Relations with other departments

Relations with other departments are in the process of continual development, as staff familiarise themselves with the new structures and staff in other departments with whom they deal. This process is helped by meetings and site visits with departments such as Environmental protection, Water resources, Planning liaison etc. who regularly seek advise and information from biology, fisheries and conservation staff.

Relations with staff within the F&E department

Intergroup relations between the biology team and other members of the F&E department (ie. fisheries and conservation staff), are currently distant. This will be improved by being in the same location, however some work needs to be done in understanding each others roles, and identifying areas where there is overlap in work undertaken.

Ideas for improving intergroup relations within the F&E department have come from all staff, and include an awayday where staff from each section give presentations on the work they do, field days and site visits with other groups, circulation of monthly team leader reports (currently done), team leader meetings (currently once a fortnight), and also social events including nights out, fishing trips etc.

Relations with other biology staff

There are currently good relations between most of the biology staff within Thames region due to the previous structure. It is important that these are maintained following restructuring, especially because of the specialist skills of different staff.

Processes to ensure good communication include the biology technical group meeting (Area and Region team leaders), training and development courses (all staff), work related issues requiring specialist skills, conferences, and social events. There are also national technical groups, R&D projects, conferences and a discussion group on e-mail providing communication with biologists on a national basis.

The role of resource investigator was identified as a weakness within the SE Area biology team, and efforts by all team members to develop this role will also result in increased communication with other staff in order to gain new contacts, ideas and developments within the team.

5.9 TEAM DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Analysis of the current performance of the SE Area biology team, and identification of problems relating to team performance, has enabled a team development plan to be produced for the future effective management of the team.

Team Development Plan

Date	Development area	Staff responsible
April '98	~ Publish team business plan. ~ Produce team development plan (CoM project). ~ Prepare and plan for relocation. ~ Review progress with current objectives, and prioritise.	Biology team leader/ F&E manager. Biology team leader (BTL). BTL. All Biology Team (BT)
May '98	~ Produce team purpose and objectives. ~ Plan individual objectives for 98'99. ~ Review and progress training and development requirements with F&E manager and personnel. ~ Clarify current work delegated by team leader. ~ F&E awayday?	(BTL) (BT) (BTL) (BT) F&E department
June '98	~ Annual job performance review, objective setting, individual development plans. ~ Relocate to new offices. ~ Implement new team meeting format. ~ Team leader spend at least 1 day a week at Crossness office.	Team leader, team members. F&E staff. (BTL)

July '98	~ review development of team. ~ Team away day.	(BT) (BT)
Sept. '98	~ Quarterly review of individual objectives. ~ Review team development.	BTL & Team members BT
Dec. '98	~ Quarterly review of individual objectives. ~ Review team development.	BTL & team members BT
Mar. '99	~ Quarterly review of individual objectives. ~ Review team development. ~ Preliminary performance ratings for team members to F&E manager. ~ Produce business plan for 1999/2000.	BTL & team members. BT BTL. BTL.

Continuous development:

- F&E team leader meetings (fortnightly)
- SE Area biology team meetings (monthly), with F&E manager attendance (quarterly).
- SE Area biology sub team meetings (weekly).
- Biology team leader to ensure minimum of 1 day a week is spent in office with team members.
- Biology team leader and team members to ensure verbal contact at least every second day when not in office together.
- Biology technical group meetings (monthly)
- Individual development and training courses as appropriate.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

1. The team is currently in an early stage of team development (Forming/Storming), with progress being restricted prior to the team relocating to SE Area offices, due to the difficulties of effective communication. It is therefore crucial that staff move to the offices at Frimley and Crossness at the earliest possible opportunity.

2. Following relocation, the estuarine and freshwater biologists will be managed as separate units in relation to operational work objectives, and as a single unit in terms of the budget, Agency and staff issues.

3. The team purpose and objectives are currently unclear, and need to be clarified as a priority. This cannot be achieved until regional/area roles are agreed, and the 1998/99 business plan has been finalised with a view to meeting customer needs.

4. Following clarification of the team objectives, individual objectives can be set, as part of the formal appraisal process. These will include a number of training and development objectives to enable team members to undertake all aspects of area work (necessary for a small team), as well as maintaining their specialist skills.

Setting of objectives, clear delegation and effective communication will

help to contribute towards developing sound working and decision making procedures, and cooperation and conflict, which are also currently weak team characteristics.

5. Effective communication between the team leader and team members at both offices will be critical to the successful performance of the team following relocation. This will be more difficult with the estuarine biologists who will be located at a different office to the team leader. Strategies for overcoming this problem, including team meetings, office and field days, telephone and e-mail contact were discussed and agreed within the team. The success of these will be reviewed on a regular basis.

6. Creating sound intergroup relations is another area in which the team requires significant development. This should become easier following co-location, when the team is located with other staff in the F&E department and SE Area. However individual and team effort from all staff concerned will need to occur in order to create effective intergroup relations.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is important that members of the SE Area biology team relocate to offices at Frimley and Crossness at the earliest opportunity following completion of the laboratories (planned for June) in order to be with other SE Area staff.

2. Team aims and purpose need to be clarified and produced in a written version by the team leader by May 1998 when the business plan has been finalised. From this individual objectives and responsibilities can be confirmed through the formal appraisal and objective setting process in June.

3. Individual development and training needs which have been identified and prioritised, will be written into personal development plans and agreed with Personnel who hold the training budget.

4. Communication between team members at different offices will be improved through regular structured team meetings, verbal contact (every second day) when not in office, and frequent use of e-mail facilities. A team away day is also planned for July in order to develop the currently good team relations and gain a better understanding of the work undertaken by different members of the group.

5. Intergroup relations with other biologists, members of the SE Area F&E department and other SE Area staff need to continue to develop, through current processes, co-location of SE Area, awaydays, social events etc.

6. The team development plan must be reviewed regularly, through team meetings, and quarterly reviews, in order to identify problems or further opportunities to improve team performance.

8.0 STATEMENT OF COSTS AND BENEFITS

Because of the nature of this project it is impossible to quantify the costs and benefits in monetary terms alone.

COSTS	BENEFITS
Costs of training courses	Essential for team members to undertake all aspects of biological work within the SE Area (currently specialists who cannot deal with all areas of work).
Costs of petrol required for team leader to travel regularly between the two offices.	Essential requirement for team leader to manage team based at two office locations.
Time (the most significant cost affecting all members of the team, particularly the team leader)	Although will appear to be at the expense of meeting customer requirements in the short term, the long term benefit will be effective team performance.
Cost of team awayday	Will help team bond, and members to learn more about each other and the work they undertake.

9.0 REFERENCES

Adair, J (1986), Effective Teambuilding, Pan Books

Environment Agency, Self development guide (Internal booklet)

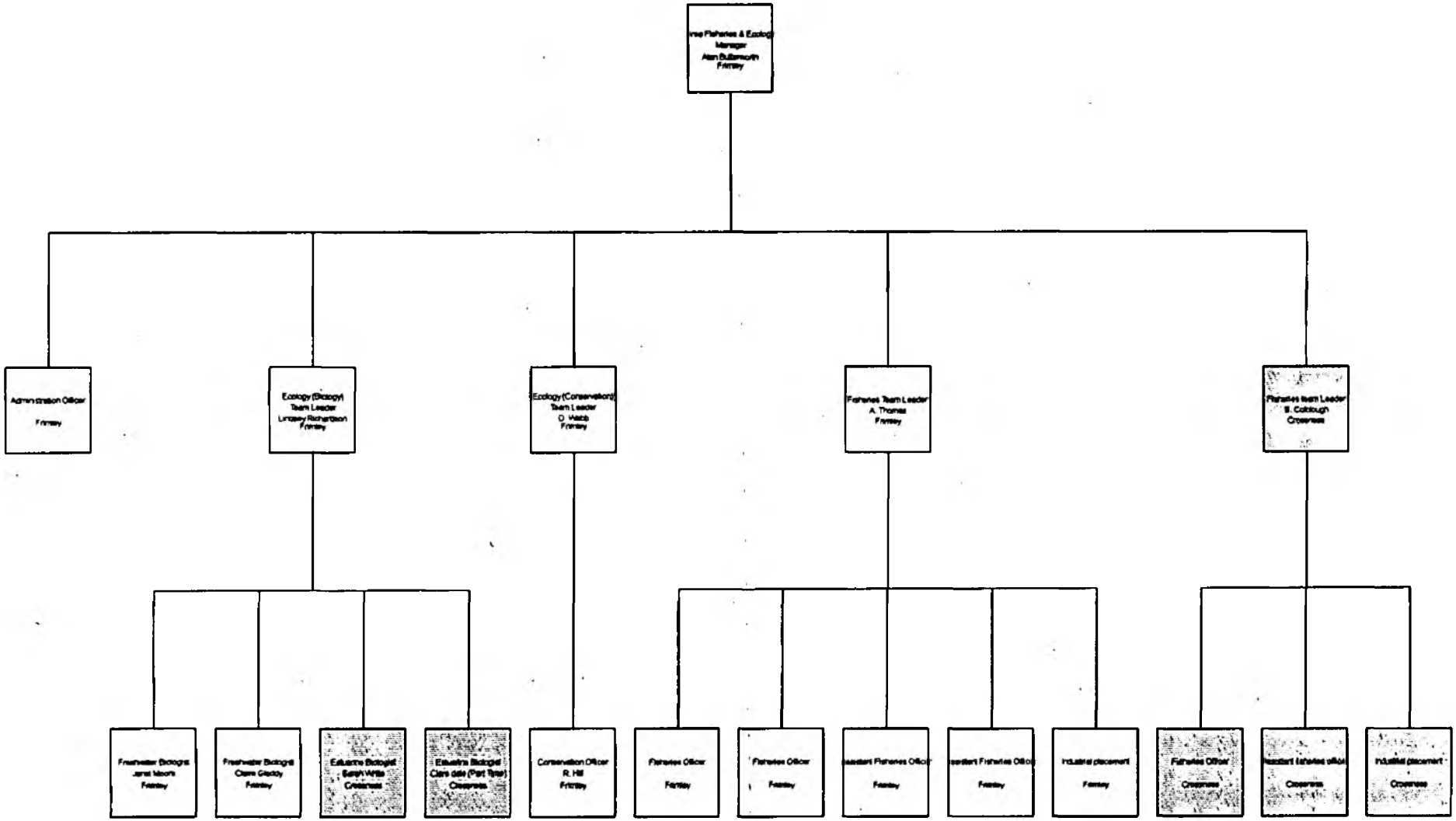
Handy, C (1993), Understanding organisations

Open College (1996), Teamwork workbooks

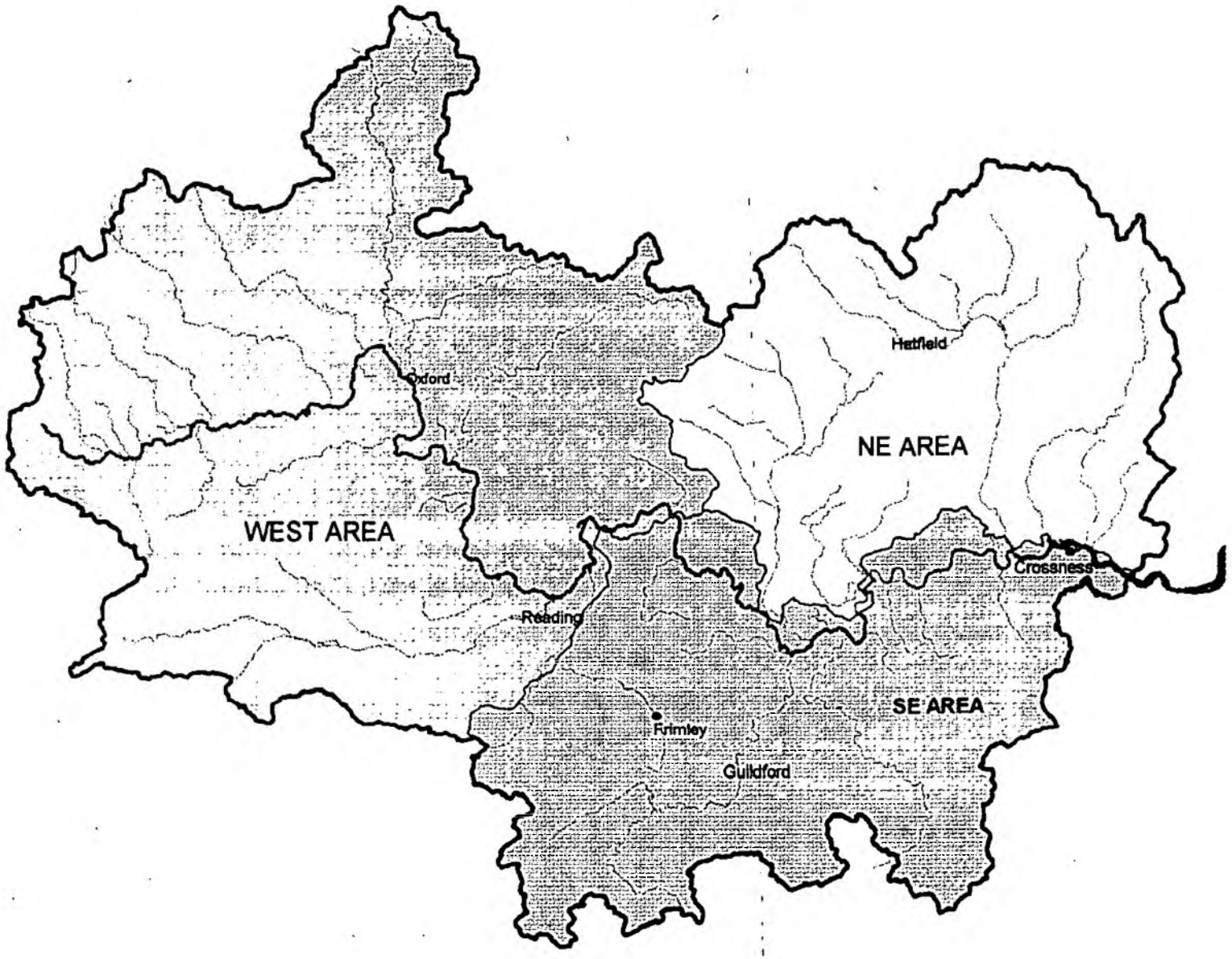
Peters,T (1989), Thriving on Chaos, Pan Books

10.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Structure of the SE Area Fisheries and Ecology Department



Appendix 2 **Environment Agency Thames Region, showing location of SE Area offices**



Appendix 3 A brief history of how staff joined the SE Area biology team

Job	Name	Grade	Current Location	New Location	Moving House	Nature of Move
Team Leader	Lindsey Richardson	5	Reading	Frimley	no	Applied for job (not filled by biologists)
Freshwater Biologist	Janet Moore	4*	Hatfield	Frimley	yes	Not Voluntary (would have preferred to remain at Hatfield in NE Area)
Freshwater Biologist	Claire Gladdy	3*	Reading	Frimley	no	Moved voluntarily to SE Area.
Tideway Biologist	Sarah White	4*	Hatfield	Crossness	yes	Automatically slotted to SE Area (responsible for tideway). Not a voluntary move to Crossness
Tideway Biologist	Clare Dale (part time)	4*	Hatfield	Crossness	yes	Automatically slotted to SE Area (responsible for tideway). Not a voluntary move to Crossness

* Team member posts are currently being regraded based on the new job descriptions, all are expected to be on Grade 4 following regrading.

Appendix 4

Questions used for individual structured meetings with team members

The questions were preceded by an informal chat about how team members felt they were settling into the team, and discuss in general what was going well, as well as concerns about current problems. The team leader then explained what the categories of questions were, and why the questions were important. At the end of the questions team members were given the opportunity to ask any further questions, and discuss any further issues relating to the team development.

It is realised by the team leader that it may have been difficult for team members to provide completely open answers to some of these questions, particularly those about how they regarded the team leader. However it was felt that this did provide an opportunity for team members to say what their expectations of the team leader were, and if they thought there were any problems at an early stage. It was also hoped that by having these individual meetings, and regular discussions, the team members would be reassured that they were being consulted by the team leader regarding how the team should be managed effectively, and would gain ownership of the future team development.

Individual development

1. Are there any training requirements that you have identified for yourself over the next year and what order of priority do you see them

as having?

2. Do you currently have a specialist area/s of work that you would like to develop further, or any areas of particular interest that you would like to specialise in the future?

3. Would you like to become involved in the freshwater/estuarine biological work that you currently do not undertake? (a: no, b: assist with fieldwork occasionally, c: other (describe)).

4. Would you like some involvement on a more multi functional basis with fisheries and conservation? (a: no, b: assist with fieldwork occasionally, c: other (describe).

Team Development

5. Do you think a 'team away day' would be a good idea, and if so, do you have any suggestions what to do.

Team Meetings

6. How often do you think we should meet as a whole team (ie. freshwater and estuarine biologists)?

7. What regular items do you think we should include on the agenda?

8. How long do you think the meeting should aim to last?

9. Where should it be held?

10. Should the F&E manager attend any of these meetings, and if so how often?

Sub Team Meetings

11. Should we hold sub team meetings in addition to or instead of whole team meetings?

IF YES:

12. How often should sub team meetings occur (ie. freshwater or estuarine)?
13. What regular agenda items should be included?
14. How long should we aim to make the meeting last for?

Expectations of team leader

15. How regularly should the team leader be in the office with team members?
16. What level of technical/operational work do you think the team leader should undertake?
17. what areas of operational work do you think the team leader should undertake?
18. Do you think the team leader currently delegates too much/ too little or the correct amount of work and level of responsibility?
19. How could the team leader delegate differently?
20. Do you feel that there is anything that the team leader should be doing but currently is not?
21. Do you think there is anything that the team leader is not currently doing well, and how could this be changed?

Other issues with estuarine biologists

22. How often do you think it is important that the team leader and yourself talk on the telephone when you are not both in the office?

23. Are there any daily requirements which will become problems if the team leader is absent from the same office, if so how could they be solved?

24. Do you think another team leader at Crossness (eg. Fisheries team leader) should be involved in your daily requirements on days when the biology team leader is absent?

APPENDIX 5

Leading a group through the stages of team development

In forming a new team, ideally:

- each member must determine the priority he or she attaches to participating in the team's activities, and assess the personal importance of these activities
- the members must share their expectations about working on the team
- members must clarify the team's goals and objectives; they must agree to a core mission for the team
- the team must formulate operating guidelines about the process of decision-making , basic work methods, the extent and nature of member participation in discussion, and how to change non-productive activities.

	Task orientation	*Group processes*	*Possible ways of assisting groups through process*
Stage 1 **Forming**	• What is task? • Grumbles about setting • Intellectualising irrelevant issues • Attempts at defining the situation • Mutual exchange of information • Suspicion / little work	• Considerable anxiety • Testing relationships • Dependency on the leader • Hesitant participation • Will they let me join?	• Clear introductions "safe" starters • Visibility of the leader • Opportunity for group members to contribute
Stage 2 **Storming**	• Resisting the validity of the task • People react emotionally towards the task demands • Hostility where high personal commitment is required	• Conflict emerges between sub-groups • Ambivalence to leader • Fighting / flighting • Defensiveness, competition, jealousy	• Open recognition of anger / conflict • Opportunity to express ideas that are values by leader if not by whole group • Allow members to challenge in a constructive, not destructive way
Stage 3 **Norming**	• Asking and giving opinions • Ability to express feelings to help the task • Plans are made and work	• Group cohesion develops • Norms emerge • Authority problems resolved • Members identity with group	• Allow time for members to begin to work, talk, draw up plans, make preliminary decisions
Stage 4 **Performing**	• Strong goal orientation • Insight and understanding	• Clear but flexible roles • Pragmatism in support of task • Satisfaction in achievement	• Let them do it and join in if appropriate
Stage 5 **Mourning or Dorming**	• Seek extra things to do, looking for further tasks • Evaluating the effectiveness of the group	• Wanting to meet again • Not recognising that the group's life may be over • Members may show extra enthusiasm or energy for the group • Members may want to make a rapid exit	• Recognise that the group is coming to an end • Summarise what has been achieved, agreed and where to go from here • Allow time to "say goodbye"

Appendix 6 Current team characteristics

	LR	JM	CG*	CD	SW	Total
Clear Objectives & Agreed Goals	6	5	0	6	1	18 (45%)
Openness & Confrontation	0	0	0	2	1	3 (7.5%)
Support & Trust	0	0	0	3	1	4 (10%)
Cooperation & Conflict	3	3	0	1	6	13 (32.5%)
Sound Working & Decision Making Procedures	5	3	0	4	3	15 (37.5%)
Appropriate Leadership	1	1	0	2	3	7 (17.5%)
Regular Review	1	1	0	1	0	3 (7.5%)
Individual Development	0	0	0	0	1	1 (2.5%)
Sound Intergroup Relations	4	2	0	3	0	9 (22.5%)

* CG scored 0 for all categories, and confirmed that she did not agree with any of the questions in the questionnaire.

Appendix 7

Training and development needs of team members

Training Requirements

Training Required	LR	CG	JM	SW	CD
Mean Trophic Ranking (1)*	yes	yes	yes	-	-
New computer Packages:(1)					
Word	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Excel	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Graphics	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Access	-	-	yes	-	yes
RYA day skipper (2)	-	-	-	yes (98/99)	-
Species level identification IDQ (2) (Natural History Museum)	-	yes (1999)	yes (1999)	-	-
Presentation skills course (2)	-	yes	-	-	-
River habitat survey (in house) (2)	yes	yes	yes	-	-
freshwater invertebrate family level id (in house) (1)	yes	-	-	-	-

* Priority 1 or 2 allocated to each training requirement depending on how essential it is to the job and available resources.

Development needs

These were identified from individual specialist skills which staff wish to develop further; areas of particular interest which are also important to the

job, and areas of work essential to the job which staff are currently not proficient in.

Team member	Development need
LR (Team leader)	- Management skills (continue to develop through courses, experience and research). - Technical knowledge/understanding of biological work (learn from other biologists, field days, research etc). - Statistical analysis (reading, training courses). - Days out with conservation staff to gain better understanding of work they do.
CG (freshwater biologist)	- New areas of responsibility, eg. enhancement & flood defence schemes, planning applications, land drainage consents, abstraction & discharge consents (learn from other biologists). -Species level identification (experience, training). -PR/presentation skills in relation to schools education (experience, training). - Occasionally assist with estuarine field work to gain an understanding of estuary work. - Spend occasional day with fisheries & conservation staff to gain better understanding of what they do.
JM (freshwater biologist)	- Continue to maintain and develop specialist skills in algology, bacteriology and pollution incidents. - New areas of responsibility, eg. enhancement & flood defence schemes, planning applications, land drainage consents, abstraction & discharge consents (learn from other biologists). - Occasionally assist with estuarine field work to gain an understanding of estuary work. - Spend occasional day with fisheries & conservation staff to gain better understanding of what they do.

SW (estuarine biologist)	- Continue to develop specialist skills in benthic ecology, survey design & sampling techniques. - New areas of responsibility eg. planning applications, flood defence/capital schemes (coaching from biologist who previously dealt with these). - Occasionally assist with freshwater field work to gain an understanding of freshwater work. - Spend occasional day with fisheries & conservation staff to gain better understanding of what they do.
CD (estuarine biologist)	- Continue to develop specialist skills in invertebrate taxonomy, sampling methodology. - Occasionally assist with freshwater field work to gain an understanding of freshwater work. - Spend occasional day with fisheries & conservation staff to gain better understanding of what they do.

Appendix 8 Planned format of team meetings

Meetings of the whole team

- **Aim:** All team members agreed that although the team operates as two units with respect to the work programme, it is important that the whole team meets as a single unit with respect to common issues, and to keep up to date on what other related work is being undertaken. The format of these meetings was agreed as follows:
- **Frequency of meetings:** monthly, on same day as CASCADE briefings by F&E manager if possible.
- **Agenda:** the following regular agenda items should be included:-

1. CASCADE briefings: including feedback from and to other groups such as technical group, team leader, Area management team, group leader meetings etc.
2. Review of previous month, including monthly statistics for work accomplished.
3. Look forward to next month, ie. areas of work planned to be undertaken.
4. Particular team/staff issues or problems (to be identified prior to meeting).
5. Staff development.
6. Any other business.
7. Date and location of next meeting.

- **Length of meetings**: to last between 1 and 2 hours depending on agenda items.
- **Location of meetings**: alternate between Frimley and Crossness.
- **Attendance of F&E manager:** The F&E manager should attend meetings at least on a quarterly basis, in order to gain familiarity with the work of the biologist, and provide an opportunity for direct communication between the team members and the F&E manager. Since the F&E manager should be presenting the CASCADE briefings to all staff, the team meeting could follow on directly from this.

Sub team meetings

- **Aim:** All staff agreed that these should be held in addition to the monthly meetings of the whole team, in order to provide an opportunity to discuss specific operational issues not relevant to all members of the team.
- **Regularity of meetings:** All staff agreed that these should occur on a weekly basis, with the sub teams (ie. freshwater or estuarine biologists meeting with their team leader).
- **Agenda items**: The following regular agenda items should be included:

1. Important feedback from other meetings held between monthly meetings.
2. Review of previous week.
3. Plan for the week ahead (ie. what work staff plan to do each day).
4. Specific technical issues/problems, identified in advance (if large issue

appropriate time will be added to end of meeting).

5. AOB.

6. Date and time of next meeting (location will be where relevant team members are located.

- **Length of meeting:** All staff thought the meeting should last up to 1 hour if there were no large issues to discuss.

- **Chairing the meeting:** initially the team leader will chair all team meetings, however team members will be given this opportunity once the effectiveness of meetings has been reviewed. The role of chairman was identified as a weakness in all members of the team (Belbin, team roles), and so should be developed by all team members.

- **Minute taking:** Minute taking, and actions will be rotated around members of the team for both types of team meeting.