

A Call for Evidence: Careers education, skills, training and development for agricultural, horticultural and forestry works.

The Confederation of Forest Industries (Confor) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to this consultation. Confor is a member-based organisation which represents the forestry sector from seed to sawn. Our members span the whole country and between them employ the majority of the approx. 88,000 people that work in the forest industry in the UK. We actively support an increase in the provision of training for woodland afforestation and management in Wales. We believe that our forestry industry needs to be a support mechanism as well as creating a good working relationship with the educational sector.

1. Key questions

a. How can the profile of agriculture as a career be improved?

A rebrand, the rural land sectors are increasingly merging due to policies with regards to the nature emergency and climate change. The silo thinking of I am a farmer, horticulturalist or forester needs to be challenged as we all need to work together to meet these challenges.

There is a concept that the land-based sector is not a career, or that its only for “hands on” people, this needs to be challenged as all land-based industries need new people to bring new ideas. It needs leaders to drive forward innovation and it needs to be seen as a worthwhile valued sector to enter.

b. What are the barriers and opportunities of entering the industry?

Awareness: there is a general lack of awareness in urban areas of the rural sector. More needs to be done to connect urban and rural opportunities at a younger age. Young people choose a career very early in life and if forestry is not seen at that time, it will lose out.

Accessibility: the location and accessibility of the colleges are limited in Wales. You either need to move away from cities to study this or be from remote areas in Wales. There is limited interest or knowledge of this sector in urban areas, and it is an industry that is hard to enter unless you know someone in it.

The opportunities offered by the rural sector especially forestry are wide ranging. Forestry is a modern and well-paid sector and includes a variety of different job roles. Modern forestry uses drones, satellite mapping, and custom-built machinery. It undertakes research to continually improve the knowledge and push best practice. These are elements that are rarely seen by non-foresters.

c. How is diversity within the industry to be improved?

By opening the opportunities up to communities that do not currently have access to this sector, this would be urban and peri-urban communities. Many of these communities do not currently access the outdoors for recreation and have low tree equity. If the woodland cycle was included in the school curriculum, then all children would have a better understanding of

why woodland management is important for the environment and economy which leads to greater interest in joining the sector.

d. What should a career progression plan within the agricultural, horticultural and forestry sectors look like? How is it to be measured?

A progression plan should be well sign posted and easy to find and understand. It should be accessible meaning:

- Skills: it should offer a range of entry points hosting practical, theory and evidence-based education
- Location: it should be accessible for learners all over Wales including rural and urban entrants
- Funding: financial barriers should be assessed and limited and provision of funding where appropriate to support learners
- CPD: continuing professional development is key to any progression and as such this information should be clearly available, both for technical and professional routes in the industry.

A pathway could be identified such as:

- L4 'land based' GCSE.
- L5 A level/BTEC – specialise in Agri/forestry/horticultural, already available at Llysfasi etc = contracting/contracting business
 - CPD – practical skills and development of technical skills for career development.
- L6 University development of L5 specialism = contracting/contractor business/ forest manager
 - CPD – technical and silvicultural skills for forest management and site supervision + practical skills if required
- L7 Masters development of L6 = forest manager/technical research/personal interest/career changers/research
- L7 = specialist researcher
- L8 PhD development of

All routes could be measured by standard grading metrics (short term) but also measured by increased uptake within the contractor availability and higher education (long term) to evidence the skill shortage versus uptake.

e. What skills and development opportunities are people looking for when choosing a career within or outside the agricultural, horticultural and forestry sectors?

People within the sector are looking for CPD options to develop their skills and keep up to date.

Depending on the aspirations of the student we have split this part into sections:

Contractors, this is hands on practical vocation courses where they gain their certificates in areas such as chainsaw, or forest machinery. Along with these skills, business skills need to be addressed as the skill of tender writing and media are also key skills when developing and progressing a business. Maintaining competence is a crucial part of modern forestry and having the ability to track, evidence and maintain work records in a comprehensive way is key to ensure a safe workforce.

Forest managers, need to have a greater understanding of silvicultural systems with a lot of this supported through education models, currently in Wales, Bangor University is the only place to do this, however the Forestry training service should offer FWM modules in due course.

Support after college and university. The world doesn't stay still, and additional modules are key in keeping the sector evidence based and up to date with the latest technological advances. This can include:

- Regular updates from Forest Research on disease and pathogens
- Technology such as drones, apps, AI, and new gadgets
- Knowledge retention such as soil science, good silvicultural practice,
- Opportunities for networking and collaboration to maintain a healthy well-connected sector in Wales

Forest Works Manager (FWM) CPD elements, currently there is a call to address this. The current model is focused on the legal roles of forest operations this includes the role of the landowner, forest works manager and the contractor and sub-contractor. It is clearly evident these lines blur when working with the public sector and this needs to change. Clear training and expectations need to be given on what knowledge the FWN needs, and this should include:

- Legal health and safety obligations
- Environmental obligations
- Silvicultural knowledge
- Understanding of the UKFS in practice and this includes the elements of the UKFS: forestry and: soils, people, biodiversity, climate change, historic environment, water and forestry practice.

- f. **What is needed in terms of skills, development and training to ensure the agricultural, horticultural and forestry sectors in Wales is progressive, innovative and forward-looking?**

- It needs to be well funded, as due to small numbers some courses may need to be subsidised, to ensure there is innovation for evidence-based practice and that research can be undertaken
- Collaboration between sectors, colleges and universities, the options for modules on forestry in other Welsh universities to tap into students who didn't know about forestry, having career events, videos and utilising STEM ambassadors in a coordinated way to facilitate greater inclusion and collaboration
- Innovative: working with forest research, hosting CPD events that are accessible to the sector and ensuring grants are available to trial, train and develop new working systems along with field days to learn from each others technological advances
- Forward looking, horizon scanning, Wales needs to step out of Wales and see what is occurring on the global forestry scene and take back what works well and what Wales can bring to other nations, what do we do well: greater collaboration with the international communities is needed especially as most of our timber comes from international forests. We have a duty of care to provide support where we can internationally, and in turn we need support ourselves here in Wales, in developing our timber industry to be more sustainable. An example of this is integrated pest management.

2. Skills

a. How valued are skills within the industry?

Skills are linked to competence, and this is a hot topic within the industry and HSE. Skills are highly valued within the industry as this ascertains how well you can manage this precious resource: forests and woodlands. Much of the work foresters do will not be seen in our lifetime as the rotations can be long especially for hardwoods and slower growing species. Unfortunately, some skills are under valued and underpaid such as chainsaw operators and planters and it can be hard to get into the sector. There is no financial support for probational periods when a student has finished college or just gained certification and is not quite proficient to be able to work along or to the speed required to be economically viable for the rates expected.

Much of the skill focus is on achieving certificates and not to maintain competency, evidenced based practice and maintaining a business. This includes writing effective paperwork and tenders. Subsequently many contractors do not get onto frameworks or start their own businesses, as they cannot win tenders or are not sure how to go about this with out large fees from business specialists that larger firms can afford.

b. What skills are required for workers within the agricultural, horticultural and forestry industries?

- Vocational qualifications
- Stakeholder negotiation
- Silvicultural knowledge
- Advocacy skills
- Health and safety knowledge: HSE, FISA, AFAG as applicable

- Understanding of UKFS, UKWAS, agroforestry
- Understanding of policy and its legal requirements
- An understanding of the above industries and stakeholders

c. What are the current skills levels within each industry and where are the gaps? If you have identified gaps, how do you think these could be filled?

Gaps:

- Collaboration between sectors with overarching modules to ensure there is a bridge of knowledge created along with mutual respect and understanding
- A clear expectation of what a minimal knowledge base is needed, then an expansion on this along with clear minimal pay awards for each level. This makes it clear and transparent for contractors to reach a fair level of pay appropriate to the skill needed to achieve that role.

England is currently working on a Higher Technical Qualification for Forest Works Manager; these are the people who manage operational forest sites day to day. They are above a craftsperson role but below a forester. This same gap is in Wales. Ideally the new England qualification could be adopted in Wales as forestry is border blind. Wales should acknowledge this qualification, accept and support it.

d. Should there be a minimum standard of skills set for all workers in these land-based sectors? If so, what characteristics would that minimum standard of skills have.

A model of levels should be considered. This could support a recognised scheme of roles and pay bands to ensure the roles are supported with education, development and pay appropriate to the skill level.

Forestry is a professional industry which is heavily audited by several agencies including the HSE and UKWAS. There are minimum standards for areas of work such as chainsaw use or machinery operations. It would be good to see other rural sectors work to this same audited level.

e. What skills are required by an agricultural worker to deliver against the new Sustainable Land Management framework?

If they are undertaking woodland management a farmer should have, chainsaw maintenance, crosscut, felling up to 380mm, felling over 380mm and a windblow qualification and for it to be in date. If using machinery there is an FMO unit for an agricultural base unit with a timber trailer. This would then put a farmer on par with the expectations and standards for those in forestry who do the same work.

This can be the same for establishment such as ATV and spraying; farmers may already have qualifications, there is opportunity for the standardisation of qualifications between sectors

and expectations. This is especially applicable with the proposed 10% tree cover on to the Sustainable Farming Scheme coming in 2025.

e.g.: If you are a farmer, you should have training, qualifications, and refreshers to include:

- Chainsaw refresher
- ATV steep ground working
- With trailer

f. What do you think is the best way to encourage the industry to understand the importance of Continuous Professional Development?

- Assign it to tender packs
- Make it readily available: time, access and finance wise
- Ensure the industry bodies: Confor, ICF, FCA buy into its support it for its members
- Could CPD help reduce insurance premiums?
- Ensure that CPD is seen as business building

g. It is suggested that it would be helpful for all workers in these land-based sectors to undertake a Personal Development Plan from time to time to This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version. Go to <https://www.gov.wales/careers-education-skills-training-and-development-agriculturalhorticultural-and-forestry-workers> for the latest version. Get information on copyright. identify the skills that they have but also the ones they need to develop. How do you think that Personal Development Plan should be conducted? Who is best placed to undertake such a Personal Development Plan?

This is about making farming more professional; this should be led by their sector such as the NFU. Many farmers are family businesses so do not need to have CPD. In forestry a PDP sounds ideal, but this should be linked to chainsaw competence levels or ICF with both technical or professional entry being applicable.

h. Are there skills which are developed within the industry that are of benefit for utilisation outside the industry and which contribute to the rural economy?

Ensuring forestry is shared into Wales's cultural landscape. Sharing the skills to help instigate community management of woodlands, community tree planting, cultural references of woodland and timber such as our heritage crafts which include:

- The Eisteddfod chair
- Coracle boats
- Love spoons
- hurdles

- Having a presence at:
 - The national botanical gardens of Wales
 - St Fagans rural life museum
 - The Eisteddfod
 - Royal Welsh Show (already do but maintain this and develop it)

There are opportunities for community wealth building, this includes forest skills that will benefit the rural economy e.g.: Civils: building forestry roads, machinery engineers, drivers: low loaders and timber hauliers, the venison and fencing market.

3. Training

a. Please provide evidence on the content, quality, delivery and availability of training offered at each of the stages outlined above in Wales for agricultural workers.

- MWMAC – high quality training on standard forestry equipment or bespoke training for custom kit
- Focus on forestry First
- Glynllifon college
- Llysfasi College – a Tilhill sponsored course.
- Bangor University

b. What are the barriers to undertaking training in these sectors in Wales?

- Knowledge of their existence to participants
- Funding support
- Accessibility: location and entry requirements
- Colleges and further education establishments supported in providing these training opportunities.

c. How do we attract and encourage employers to take on apprentices in these sectors?

- Financial incentives
- Having procurement opportunities in the public sector tenders to support apprenticeship workers: many tenders are prices per how many trees planted or volume to roadside which pushes apprenticeship opportunities out as it is not financially viable
- Long term contracts that last several years so employers know they can support the apprentice for the entire course.
- Support travel, getting from a rural place to another rural place is difficult

d. What are the methods of training and knowledge transfer that work the best within the sectors?

A combined approach:

- online training
- face to face training
- apps
- in the field practical training

e. Are there models for training which promote career progression in other sectors that we should be adopting?

Mentoring schemes that link current professionals with new entrants that are not associated by work hierarchy, this requires coordination and therefore financial support. This potentially could be through the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF). There are examples of inhouse mentoring within organisations but to be effective it needs to occur on a larger scale.

f. Is training sought from outside Wales for agricultural, horticultural and forestry workers? If so, what training and why?

The forestry hub Forestry Training Service UK is being developed by Confor and is planned to go live in 2024. It makes sense instead of duplicating work to work in partnership with this project. Courses such as forest machinery operation are high cost and low numbers so are difficult to run, the FTS UK should support this, where needed.

4. Development

a. Are there opportunities for agricultural workers to practice what they learn and to gain useful and relevant work experience and paid work placements?

- Natural Resources Wales do run a limited number of paid work placements for students in their second year of a BSc in a field to do with forestry and land management.
- Tilhill and Pryor & Ricket do a graduate scheme for recently graduated foresters and career changers.
- RFS forestry Roots
- Tilhill and SW graduate schemes

b. How is technology used to document and track development? Do you have suggestions of how technology could be used in this regard?

Forest Safe, the app developed by Calum Duffy is highly regarded within the industry as a good tool to monitor and document competence. This needs funding and support to help micro businesses within Wales to adapt this working practice.

The ICF have a system of logging CPD hours, as their technical membership goes live it would be ideal to work in collaboration with them to ensure there is no double up of documents or resources.

- c. **What are the best ways to accredit and verify development? Does the Agrisgop model of active learning work in agriculture? Would an Award This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version. Go to <https://www.gov.wales/careers-education-skills-training-and-development-agriculturalhorticultural-and-forestry-workers> for the latest version. Get information on copyright. model work in agriculture?**

As mentioned above the ICF professional and technical membership.

- d. **How do we link the different stages identified above in the journey of an agricultural, horticultural or forestry worker throughout their career? Do you have suggestions as to how these links may be improved?**

As mentioned above the ICF professional and technical membership.

- e. **What methods are utilised to personalise and professionalise development? Do you have suggestions of other methods that could be implemented?**

- The ICF technical membership and PME professional membership (working to a code a conduct)
- FWM competence system as recommended by FISA
- The Chainsaw competency safety system as recommended by FISA

- f. **What guidance is available, or do you think should be available to support a person's development within the industry in each of the stages highlighted above?**

ICF could potentially lead on this, this needs to be UK wide not Wales centric.

- g. **How can collaboration and coordination between different stakeholders within the industry be facilitated to support a worker's development journey?**

Stakeholders at a high strategic level:

- Institute of Chartered Foresters
- FISA
- Confor
- Natural Resources Wales, Forestry England, Forestry Land Scotland
- FCA

Implementation level:

- MWMAC
- Focus on forestry First
- Bangor university
- Glynllifon college

- Llysfasi College - a Tilhill sponsored course.
- Perspective colleges: Coleg Sir Gar, Black Mountains College, Aberystwyth University
- Wood knowledge Wales

5. Data

- a. Please refer to any reports and reviews that have been undertaken in the last 15 years that you deem relevant to the work of the Sub-Committee in relation to skills, development and training.**

Confor:

- Forestry workforce research report 2021
- Forestry skills study 2017 – in email

- b. If you refer to any reports, have the recommendations of these reports been actioned and implemented? Please give examples.**

Confor skills actions:

- STEM
- Support of Forestry Skills Fourm
- Hosting taster events for the last 3 years in haulage, forwarder, and general forestry
- Creating the FTS UK
- In partnership with others to improve online forestry presence and landing page for new entrants

- c. What data is or might be available in relation to agricultural, horticultural and forestry workers in Wales their skills, training being undertaken and career development? If so, where is this data available and how could that data be made available to the Sub-Committee?**

No, however this needs undertaking. The potential output of this consultation could be to commission that work.

- d. What data do you think would be useful in informing future work in this area?**

A forestry census such as the numbers of people, their qualifications, their plans, we should be asking what they want to achieve, retirement age, what training they want to undertake, what training they would be willing to provide such as mentoring etc.

There is no core data taken on the micro businesses and contractor base this needs to be documented and the industry needs to understand what their barriers are.

Anything else to add?

In summary it is important to add that the land sector is a part of STEM. There are a multitude of roles and responsibilities. It is important to remember that proper support and finance is needed to grow and develop this industry to make it fit for the future in delivering the government targets on Net Zero and this very clearly includes forestry.