

Forestry Sector Skills Plan

(England) (2025-2035)



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Executive summary

Government has an ambitious statutory tree and woodland cover target which commits to increasing the tree canopy and woodland cover in England to 16.5% by 2050.

To meet this ambition, we need more people with the skills to plant and manage trees and woodlands, and people to make use of the forestry products they provide.

Through the Nature for Climate Fund and England Trees Action Plan, government is working with the forestry sector to increase labour supply and upskill the forestry workforce. We have made significant steps such as the combined government and forestry sector effort to establish the first Level 6 Professional Forester apprenticeship.

However, further collaboration between government and the forestry sector is needed to both address the existing skills and labour gaps, and create a forestry workforce that is prepared to meet long-term demand.



UK government has set a target to increase tree cover in England to at least 16.5% by 2050.



This document outlines the opportunities and barriers facing the forestry sector in England. We have centred them around 5 priority themes:

Promotion and development of forestry careers and career pathways

We need to raise the profile of forestry careers across all backgrounds and age groups, educating people about the diverse range of job roles and interesting career opportunities that exist in the forestry sector

Increasing provision of training and education within the forestry sector

We need to increase the capacity of training and education providers. This is to ensure people seeking to join the forestry sector or upskill have access to the right training at the right time during their forestry career.

Increasing equality, diversity and inclusion

To create woodlands that reach and meet the needs of diverse communities, we must recruit people from different backgrounds. This will enable a wider range of capabilities and viewpoints to shape how English woods and forests can positively impact lives.

Improving standards

Encouraging people to work to higher standards will help forestry become a more respected profession and strengthen the sense of pride within the sector. Membership of professional bodies and holding members to the standards expected, in addition to increasing uptake of relevant skills-based qualifications, will embed a culture of continuous development and reduce the risk of skills shortages.

Improving forestry workforce data

Improvements in labour market intelligence and provision intelligence is vital to making informed decisions on how to address the existing and future skills and labour shortages.



The steering team

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Introduction

The forestry sector faces a skills crisis.

An aging workforce combined with insufficient numbers of new people joining the sector means that to maintain current employment levels, approximately 600 people each year need to be entering the sector, with the focus on technical roles.

Additionally, to meet the government's legal targets, we need more people with the right skills to plan, plant and manage new woodlands and forests.



The sector has the following challenges which makes intervention difficult:

- **small size; 19,000 people have core forestry roles in England**
- **47% of people are self-employed creating a fragmented workforce**
- **forestry training is expensive and logistically challenging, requiring specialist equipment and access to woodland**
- **education provision is limited with only one university in England and two further education colleges offering apprenticeships**
 - **one employer training provider has put more apprentices through the level 3 Forest Craftsperson qualification than any further education college**
 - **courses are in low demand, which makes it difficult for institutions to continue provision**



Under Defra's Nature for Climate fund and led by the Forestry Commission, recent policy interventions have achieved progress. The Professional Forester Apprenticeship now (February 2025) has 78 people in three cohorts with 34 from private sector organisations. The Forestry and Arboriculture Training Fund has funded 6,195 places on short, technical forestry courses. Whilst these measures have had a positive impact, there remains a strong need for the sector to work together to address the workforce and skills challenges.

The steering team published a draft statement of the problem to outline the barriers which need to be addressed. This plan responds to these challenges and presents a comprehensive, long-term agenda for change.

Read about the background to this plan on the Institute of Chartered Foresters website [here](#).



Priority themes

The Sector Skills Plan has been divided into 5 priority themes which must be addressed to create a forestry workforce ready to meet future demand.

Themes have been identified by research carried out by government and the forestry sector, the reports considered include:

- Forestry Skills Plan 2019 – 2024 ⁽¹⁾
- Finding Forestry 2022 ⁽²⁾
- Forestry Workforce Research ⁽³⁾
- Forestry Skills Study Report for England and Wales 2017 ⁽⁴⁾

The priority themes are:

- 1 Promotion and development of forestry careers and career pathways**
- 2 Increasing provision of training and education within the forestry sector**
- 3 Increasing equality, diversity and inclusion**
- 4 Improving standards**
- 5 Improving forestry workforce data**

⁽¹⁾ forestry-skills-plan-2019-2024.pdf (confor.org.uk)

⁽²⁾ Finding-Forestry-2022-Final-Report.pdf (charteredforesters.org)

⁽³⁾ forestry-workforce-research-final-report-august-2021.pdf (confor.org.uk)

⁽⁴⁾ forestry-skills-study-report-for-england-and-wales-2017.pdf (rfs.org.uk)



Priority theme 1

Promotion and development of forestry careers and career pathways



Priority theme 1

Promotion and development of forestry careers and career pathways

To grow the capacity of the forestry workforce we need to attract new entrants and retain existing forestry workers.

Promotion of forestry and forestry careers is key to achieving this. We need to increase awareness of the diverse range of job roles and interesting pathways that exist in the forestry sector.

Promotion will highlight new careers, progression and specialisation, making it easier to enter and remain within the forestry sector. Targeted communication and careers campaigns will help to achieve this, aimed at allied sectors, military leavers, volunteers, learners and education institutions. The Forestry Commission and Defra will also work to promote forestry and forestry careers across other government departments to ensure forestry is included in key strategic documents and funding decisions.





Priority theme 1

Actions

Lead stakeholder	Number	Action
Forestry Commission	1.1	Increase demand for full-time forestry courses and apprenticeships through ongoing targeted communications.
Confor, Forestry Skills Forum	1.2	Targeted action to attract military leavers, volunteers, and people from allied sectors.
Forestry Skills Forum, Royal Forestry Society	1.3	Promote forestry in schools, linking existing work with a new STEM ambassadors project.
Defra	1.4	Engage with other government departments and regional structures to promote forestry and explore opportunities.
Defra, Forestry Commission	1.5	Work with the Timber in Construction Roadmap Implementation Group to align forestry and construction skills and training where possible.



Priority theme 2

Increasing provision of training and education within the forestry sector

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Increasing provision of training and education within the forestry sector

To establish a dependable stream of new talent entering the sector, and to create the opportunity for existing forestry workforce employees to upskill, we need to improve the quantity and quality of forestry training and education.

We will focus on providing accessible high-quality provision at technical, supervisory and professional levels. We will work in each core area, further and higher education, work-based learning and short-course technical training to provide fit for purpose training at every stage of a forestry worker's career.





Priority theme 2

Further and higher education

We will work to improve access for new entrants to the sector by creating a post graduate conversion course. This will enable those with a related qualification to enter the sector.

Work-based learning

Apprenticeships, T-levels, Skills Bootcamps, and career path development are all ways to develop new skills. We need to maximise the availability of these options to address the gaps in provision.

Actions will include the introduction of a package of support for smaller employers to employ apprentices at level 3. This could include help with recruitment processes, co-ordination of places, and bursary/salary support.

We will also introduce an occupational standard for the new Forest Works Manager Higher Technical Qualification and Apprenticeship. This will provide a pathway for recognition of this vital role and the framework for forestry training at a supervisory level, increasing knowledge and

expertise across the sector. There will also be support through the newly established Forestry Training Service to broker and co-ordinate training on large machinery including for the Forestry Works Manager qualification.

Career paths for many in the sector are unclear and the requirements for similar roles vary. To address this, we will develop a competency framework for forestry covering core roles at all levels. A competency framework will provide workers with the knowledge and skills they should be obtaining to work at each level in forestry. Forestry employers will also be able to have confidence that forestry workers at each level have the knowledge and skills needed.

The creation of a digital hub will enable bodies from across the sector to come together in one virtual place to provide training, information, and share resources.

We will also introduce a passport style certification system so forestry workers can show their competence, previously earned tickets, knowledge and skills.

Career professional development and short-course technical training

Short courses have been funded under the Nature for Climate Fund Forestry and Arboriculture Training Fund. The success of this has shown the high demand and need for this type of training. To meet the demand, we will create a career development pathway which is recognised by the sector and investigate how it could be funded. This will allow both existing forestry workers and new entrants to follow defined steps for gaining the right skills to move forward in their career.

We will work to address the gaps in the provision of short courses such as silviculture, agroforestry, and green finance. We will work to support the creation of these types of short courses by providing expertise and funding.



Priority theme 2

Actions

Lead stakeholder	Number	Action
Forestry Skills Forum	2.1	Develop a competency framework for forestry covering core roles at all levels. To allow co-ordination between different initiatives.
Institute of Chartered Foresters	2.2	Develop a comprehensive and accessible online offer to support career development, hosting training content and information and a long-term landing page for forestry.
Defra, Forestry Commission	2.3	Create a skills development fund to support development and roll out of training, focussing on technical skills and skills needed for the future.
Forestry Commission	2.4	Support small employers to employ apprentices at level 3 including help through processes, co-ordination of places and bursary/salary support.
Forestry Skills Forum Forestry Commission Confor	2.5	Promote, oversee and guide implementation of a new Forestry Works Manager qualification suite including facilitating a network of providers and assessors.
Confor	2.6	Develop a Forestry Training service to broker and co-ordinate training on large machinery and the new Forestry Works Manager qualification.
Forestry Commission	2.7	Build a conversion course pathway (for example, a Post Graduate Certificate in Forestry (PGCF)) focussed on practical forestry skills and knowledge to fast-track graduates from other disciplines into forestry.



Priority theme 3

Increasing equality, diversity and inclusion



Priority theme 3

Increasing equality, diversity and inclusion

Reports show the forestry sector is below the average across the economy in terms of gender and ethnic diversity.

If the forestry sector is to meet present and future challenges and opportunities, we must recruit people from diverse backgrounds, who bring different capabilities to fill new, emerging, and traditional roles. To attract a wider range of people, we need to do more to promote forestry as an inclusive place to work that offers varied and interesting career opportunities that can benefit nature and tackle the climate emergency.





Priority theme 3

Actions

Lead stakeholder	Number	Action
Royal Forestry Society	3.1	Develop a package of measures which will be customised to support the wellbeing of those working in forestry.
Institute of Chartered Foresters – with Forestry Skills Forum	3.2	Develop and deliver a plan to scope and spearhead work to increase the diversity of the forestry sector.



Priority theme 4

Improving standards

Priority theme 4

Improving standards

Promoting membership to professional bodies and providing members access to the support and training they provide is key to upskilling the forestry workforce and landowners.

Professionalising forestry jobs will also support efforts to attract new entrants to forestry. It will also help existing forestry workers in their career development whilst fostering a sense of pride.

The promotion of professional membership at technical and professional levels will support upskilling by creating channels of communication across the forestry sector, increasing CPD and sharing best practice. This will help prepare the sector for future challenges including climate change. Professionalising the sector will support the promotion of forestry and associated career pathways, by clearly displaying the highly skilled roles which are present.

Landowners have an important role in increasing tree planting rates. Their understanding of the forestry sector is central to managing and creating woodlands and forests. The creation of a course for landowners will help to provide clarity on the woodland creation and management processes.





Priority theme 4

Actions

Lead stakeholder	Number	Action
Institute for Chartered Foresters	4.1	Promote the membership of professional bodies within the sector and associated continuous professional development (CPD).
Royal Forestry Society	4.2	Establish a structured forestry training programme aimed at landowners.
Forestry Commission, Royal Forestry Society	4.3	Develop and promote a passport-style recognition of competence covering tickets of competence, experience and knowledge.



Priority theme 5

Improving forestry workforce data

Priority theme 5

Improving forestry workforce data

Improving labour market intelligence and provision intelligence on the forestry workforce is necessary if we are to take effective action to bolster labour capacity and address existing and future skills gaps. Working together we will improve the reliability and frequency of data on the forestry workforce.

Some workforce data is available including a Defra funded report published in October 2024. **Read the UK Forestry Workforce & Skills Research - KT0201 report [here](#).**

This highlights how the workforce is changing, its potential, and suggests actions to take to promote the growth and upskilling of the forestry workforce. However, there are significant limitations to existing data which excludes key data sources, and the impact is limited due to the irregular intervals they are produced at. For example, data on the barriers facing forestry micro-enterprises is often limited. By building a comprehensive understanding of the workforce and improving the reliability of the data, there will be stronger understanding of the challenges and opportunities. This will inform effective actions to upskill and support growth in workforce capacity.

Creating a regular flow of reliable data on the forestry workforce will provide a quicker and better understanding of how the workforce is changing, potential challenges and the impact of actions taken. This will underpin good policy decision-making.





Priority theme 5

Actions

Lead stakeholder	Number	Action
Forestry Commission with Forestry Skills Forum	5.1	Publish regular, sector specific data, analysis and insight from primary research on the forestry sector workforce.



Next steps

Collaboration and working carefully together with trust and transparency, has been key to getting to this point.

The steering team are committed to continue working in partnership with each other and the wider sector to deliver this plan.

Governance

- The steering team will oversee delivery of the plan.
- Lead organisations for each action (including the Forestry Skills Forum) will set up action groups as required.
- Responsibilities will include developing delivery plans, consulting the steering team for input on direction, and reporting on progress. Employers in the sector will be central to delivering the plan and represented in each action group.
- A part-time co-ordinator will support the steering team and lead organisations where appropriate.





Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs





