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FORESTRY SKILLS FORUM

**2021  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**

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# INTRODUCTION

## About the Forestry Skills Forum

The purpose of the Forestry Skills Forum (FSF) is to:

- Agree actions across the forestry sector on priority skills and education issues
- Share information and resources among members
- Advocate and promote education, learning and development in English and Welsh forestry.

The primary objectives of the Forestry Skills Forum are to:

- Support the development and delivery of a skills action plan
- Challenge and encourage the industry and employers to take the lead with the skills and learning agenda
- Inform and influence qualification development and professional/educational interaction
- Represent the sector on education, learning and development issues.

The members of the FSF knew they could achieve more by collaborating than working in isolation, and to this end The Forestry Skills Plan was published in 2019 to address identified challenges. The plan aimed to:

- facilitate a long term, coordinated and targeted approach to tackle skills issues that are difficult to address
- help Forum members prioritise activity, work more efficiently and take ownership of the skills agenda.



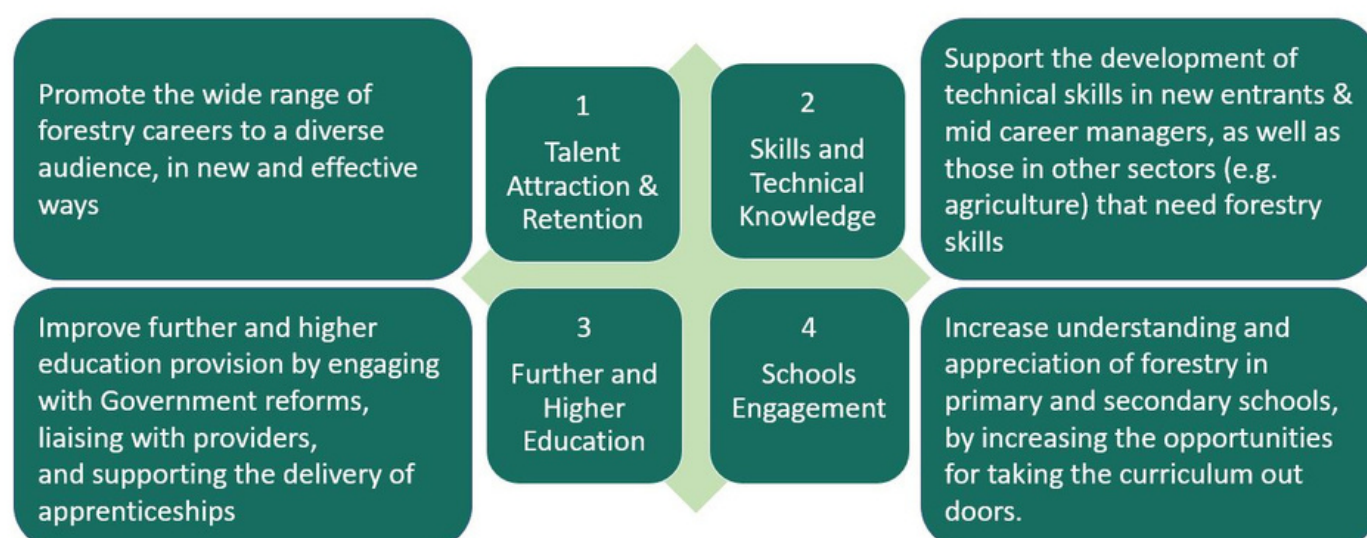
**The Forestry Skills Forum (FSF) is dedicated to promoting education, skills, learning and development across the forestry sector in England and Wales.**

# WHAT'S CHANGED?

When the Forestry Skills Plan<sup>1</sup> was published in 2019, the forestry industry was anticipating the impacts of EU Exit and Government policy was moving towards increased woodland creation and establishment, hence the plan was designed to evolve as these and other factors developed. However, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic further highlighted the importance of the forest industry as a primary resource producer underpinning critical supply chains. In addition it placed unprecedented emphasis on the importance of forestry as a social resource provider - for recreation, wellbeing and health - as more people than ever before accessed their local woodlands.

Against this backdrop, the announcement of the Government's Nature for Climate Fund in 2020 signalled a dramatic increase in formal targets for woodland creation and establishment, and in funding to make it happen. These factors are combining to drive growth in the UK forestry sector on a scale unparalleled in modern times. Given these seismic shifts in the forestry landscape, the Forestry Skills Forum commissioned an updated Forestry Workforce Research<sup>2</sup> to gain a better understanding of the actions required to seize the opportunities presented by this rapid expansion. The refreshed Skills Plan represents the intentions of the Forum members toward helping to deliver the skilled and motivated workforce required to maximise UK forestry's potential as a provider of economic, social and environmental resilience.

## Revised Themes of the Forestry Skills Plan

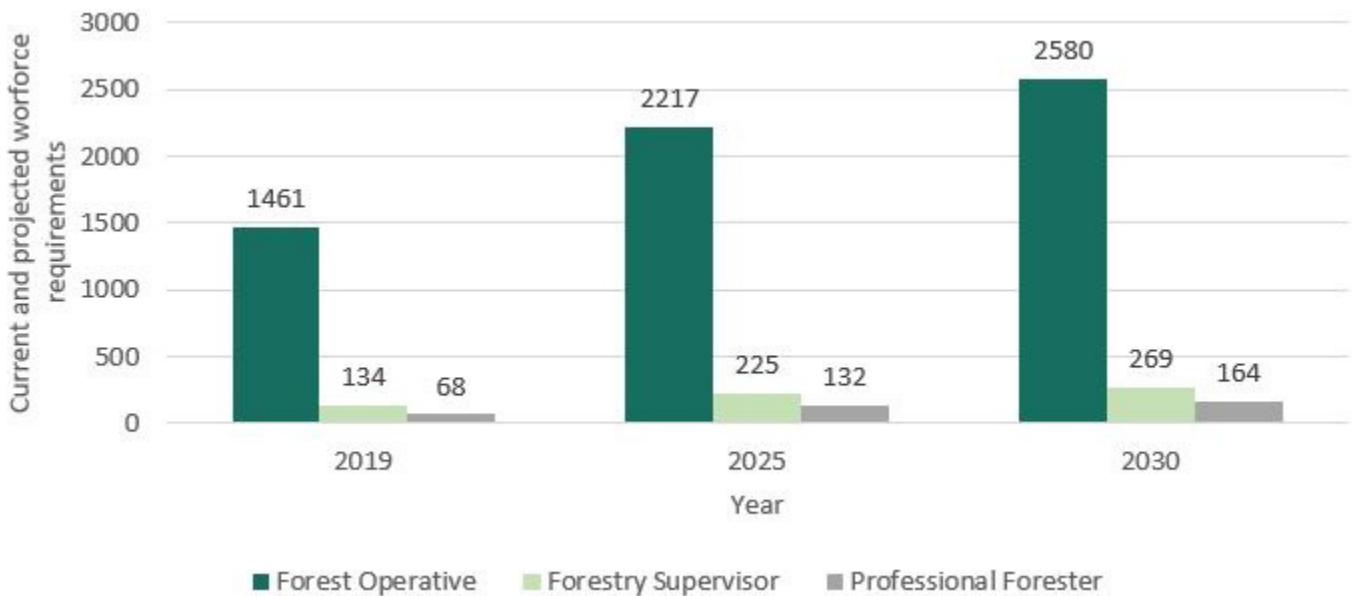


1. Forestry Skills Forum (2019) Forestry Skills Plan 2019-2024 <https://www.lantra.co.uk/forestry-skills-forum>

2. Forestry Skills Forum (2021) Forestry Workforce Research <https://www.lantra.co.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/Forestry%20Workforce%20Research%20Final%20Report%2013.08.21.pdf>



The Forestry Workforce Research<sup>1</sup> projected future workforce needs for the industry in 2025 and 2030. The priority for the FSF going forwards is to take actions to meet these needs, working within the framework provided by the Forestry Skills Plan, but adapting and developing activities for the current context.



**Current and projected forestry work force needs for England and Wales (including additional need due to attrition). Forestry Workforce Research, 2021<sup>1</sup>**

Work will continue in the areas of talent attraction and engagement, skills and technical knowledge, further and higher education and schools engagement. One organisation will take ownership of each area, working together with partners to coordinate activity.



1. Forestry Skills Forum (2021) Forestry Workforce Research <https://www.lantra.co.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/Forestry%20Workforce%20Research%20Final%20Report%2013.08.21.pdf>



# ATTRACTION AND RETENTION OF TALENT

**Owner:** Lantra

**Actions:**

- Produce promotional resources for forestry under the 'forestry careers' banner
- Improve appeal and reach to a more diverse audience
- Coordination of careers event activity

## Promotional resources

It was clear at the time of the last FSF report, that the forestry sector in England and Wales was experiencing a shortage of new recruits and that the diversity of the workforce was narrow. As a result the subgroup investigated the production of a promotional video, but after some initial discussions and investigation it was felt that this would be resource heavy both in terms of consultation on the content and delivery of a high quality product. Unfortunately, the Careers Roadshow was also delayed, in this case due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Next steps

The subgroup will work with an external expert, who will support the partners to develop clarity on the message they want to convey, how to best communicate them and to support the collaborative development of a promotional campaign.



## More diverse audiences

- The Forestry Careers website hosted by the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) was updated, including case studies, videos and mobile compatibility.
- A new national careers lead for Lantra has been appointed to increase the scope of their UK wide careers engagement.
- Minecraft was explored as a potential engagement tool, but was not taken forwards. It was felt post-lockdown the focus should be on encouraging teaching to be carried out in the woodland environment.

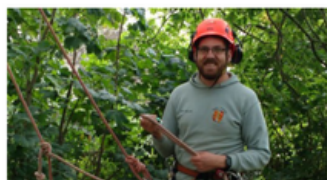
## Next steps

Lantra to update their online careers information.





## Careers in Forestry



[Why work in forestry?](#)

[Read more](#) →



[What sorts of jobs are available?](#)

[Read more](#) →

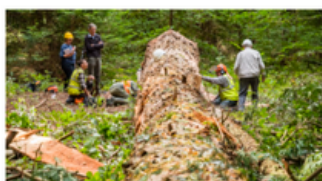


[What types of courses could I do?](#)

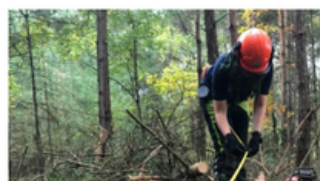
[Read more](#) →



[Choosing GCSE and A Level Options](#)



[Considering a Career Change?](#)



[RFS Certifications](#)

### Coordination of careers event activity

- Lantra have created a forestry scheme within the STEM ambassadors programme enabling Ambassadors working in forestry to be requested by teachers and community groups. The scheme will enable communication and support of STEM forestry ambassadors.
- Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) and Lantra have undertaken promotional activities to recruit STEM ambassadors including a breakfast and members hour.

### Next steps

Increase resources for STEM ambassadors to support their work with schools and run the RFS Careers Roadshow in March 2022.

Increase the number of STEM ambassadors through promotional engagement and outreach activities.

## Goals

- Work on campaign to promote forestry careers with external expert
- Create support materials for STEM Ambassadors and new entrants
- Develop new Lantra UK careers pages and cross reference to RFS
- Deliver RFS Careers Roadshow and teachers conference



# SKILLS & TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

**Owner:** Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF)

**Actions:**

- Establish a way forward for Forest Machine Operator (FMO) training in England and Wales
- Increase continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities & ensure cohesion of content & delivery with partners (Mid-career focus)
- Deliver technical training courses
- Promote distance learning options to increase accessibility
- Establish technical membership route of the ICF
- Increase work experience opportunities
- Develop and deliver UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) training
- Forestry for non-foresters training

## Forest Machine Operator Training

There are issues with machine availability, cost and volumes in addition to gaining agreement on the way forward. Confor are trialling approaches in Scotland to support recruitment of forest machine operators and timber hauliers funded by the Scottish Government National Transition Training Fund.

### Next steps

If the trial in Scotland is effective, the model can then be replicated in England and / or Wales and alternative funding sought.





### **Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Opportunities (Mid Career)**

- The RFS tested compiling a list of CPD opportunities for forestry. There was little demand for the list which was resource heavy to compile and update. It was decided that this was not a good use of resources.
- Despite COVID-19 restrictions the RFS managed to provide a number of in person training events. The ICF's provision of CPD training increased by utilising online platforms, over 120 hours of CPD video content is now available to members.
- Professional assessed and certificated training on veteran tree management (VETree and VETcert training) delivered to 144 people face to face.

#### Next steps

FSF CPD providers to meet and carry out a gap analysis on provision and overlap to increase efficiency of delivery.

**'Very good introduction to the foundations on which GIS systems are built..'**

**RFS Training Attendee**

### **Technical Training Courses**

Technical training is normally delivered in person due to the nature of the subject. This has been much more difficult due to the pandemic. Training providers are reporting strong numbers of courses currently being delivered.

#### Next steps

Continue to monitor and, where necessary, promote technical training provision.

### **Distance learning options**

- RFS online training was first trialled in 2020 and has been expanded in 2021 including: agroforestry, fungi and oak trees, Introduction to GIS, Treescapes conference and more.
- ICF CPD events, including the national conferences, all moved online due to COVID-19.
- Praise has been received from across the sector on how this has made them more accessible and sustainable. Analysis shows a wider audience is now able to attend events due removing barriers like the need to travel.
- Woodland Trust with Cumbria Woodlands delivered CPD training online with 380 enrolments. An additional Higher Education student version had 243 enrolments with promotional support from other organisations such as the ICF.

#### Next steps

- The ICF will continue to offer both online and in-person events, with some hybrid delivery starting with the National Conference in April 2022.



### **Establish Technical Membership route**

The ICF Technical membership was approved in May 2021 and the Technical Membership Subgroup is leading on development of the detail and content.

#### Next steps

Launch ICF Technical Membership in spring 2022.

### **Work experience opportunities**

- The Heart of England Forest, supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, have coordinated a programme which support access to the industry including work experience, structured volunteering, apprenticeships and internships. This includes training for 12 new green jobs, 58 training opportunities and the safeguarding of 12 jobs.
- The RFS Forestry Roots funded employers to provide a year's paid employment and training to recent college leavers and graduates, particularly supporting those who have faced barriers to education or employment. The scheme has been expanded from 4 to 7 placements in 2021 due to high demand. Each participant receives mentoring from the RFS as well as up to £2,000 of training.
- 3 short internships were delivered at RFS HQ Banbury giving young people from outside the sector an insight into our work.
- Bangor University increased their paid undergraduate placements, but do not have enough students to fill them. They are considering widening remit to part time students or to reduce the length from a year to a shorter summer placement.



#### Next Steps

Modify the ICF website to host and develop work experience / placement materials.

The RFS will offer supported internships again in 2022 (Leighton Redwoods) to provide a unique experience to forestry undergraduates.

Work with Colleges and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) to expand opportunities for site visits and practical research projects.

### **UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) training**

- The ICF and Forestry Commission have worked together to develop a series of nine online training webinars. Over 1000 bookings have been taken so far with sessions running from Nov 2021 into Feb 2022.

#### Next steps


Following the next update of UKFS guidance, apply for grant funding to allow the development of certified training. Partners will develop critical forestry skills and leadership among foresters, community woodland staff, allied land use professionals and green recovery career changers. A leadership programme, which offers more strategic skills, will benefit promising early career professionals from a range of backgrounds including policy officers and staff in community forests.

### **Forestry for non-foresters training**

- The RFS have been supported by the Forestry Commission Innovation Fund to deliver this training in partnership with Penfold Woodland Management. Forty-eight participants have attended 2 days of training and will be receiving a year of mentoring through the RFS. This offers basic forestry training for those who are responsible for woodland to improve standards of management.
- The Woodland Trust Ancient Woodland Restoration Demonstration Programme has delivered 7 events with 157 attendees. This aimed to educate ancient woodland owners and the professionals working within them on effective management.
- Ancient Tree Inventory online training for volunteers who verify submissions, 81 people trained.

#### Next Steps

Forestry for non-foresters will run twice in 2022 aiming to reach 48 participants.



## Goals

- **Develop further UKFS and leadership programme**
- **Support development of non-foresters who manage woodland through tailored training**
- **Improve opportunities for visits to sites and increase promotion for HEI and college courses**
- **Promote opportunities for short research projects**



# EDUCATION PROVISION

**Owner:** Forestry Commission

**Actions:**

- Understand skills funding landscape for forestry and communicate opportunities to stakeholders and businesses
- Monitor Government higher and further education reforms and publicise and or coordinate responses to engagement opportunities
- Increase availability of the Forest Operative apprenticeship (England)
- Promote the apprenticeships to employers
- Monitor implementation of the apprenticeships
- Develop a Level 6 Professional Forester apprenticeship (England)
- Quantify higher and further education provision in England and Wales
- Engage with T Level development
- Refresh Forestry Commission Apprenticeship Strategy

**Skills Funding**

- Exploratory meetings held with Department for Education (DfE) regarding the potential for a 'Bootcamp' for woodland management.
- E-Alert highlighting Government skills funding opportunities was compiled and circulated by Defra policy colleagues.

Next steps

- Follow up with DfE colleagues to determine next steps for the Woodland Management 'Bootcamp'.

**Government further and higher education reforms**

- Consultations promoted and / or responded to include: Route Review, level 2 & 3 further education funding, T Level outline content, flexi apprenticeships and degree level apprenticeships consultation.

Next steps

Ongoing monitoring of Government skills consultations with response and promotion as and when required.

### Increase availability of the Forest Operative apprenticeship

#### Promote the apprenticeship to employers

- There was an increase from two training providers in 2019-20 for the Forest Operative apprenticeship to four in 2020-21.
- Several models of support for providers in order to establish a viable cohort of apprentices have been explored. These included providing speakers and promotion for 'open days' and encouraging local initiatives to develop economically viable cohorts.
- COVID-19 restrictions and 'Route Review' revisions meant that promotional activity was limited in 2021.
- Fundamental problems with availability of the apprenticeship were highlighted in Forestry Workforce Research 2021 which has initiated a Forestry Learning Mechanism scoping study.

#### Next Steps

Forestry England are exploring the potential to be 'Main Provider' for Forest Operative/Craftsperson if a small cohort from the private sector can be assembled. This coupled with increased attractiveness of the higher level Forest Craftsperson standard should boost uptake once Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) approval has been achieved in 2022.

Further research into potential new forestry learning mechanisms to be undertaken.



'I liked all aspects, diverse range of careers, great support system, team spirit, passionate people...'

Forest Operative Apprentice



### Monitor implementation of the apprenticeships

- The number of forest operative apprentice starts have increased from 7 in 2018-19 and 8 in 2019-20 to 23 in 2020-21.
- First four apprentices successfully achieved the apprenticeship in 2021.
- The IFATE review of the Agriculture, Animal Care and Environment route was supported and in 2021 findings were shared with the apprenticeship group. It was requested by IFATE that the apprenticeship be reviewed.
- A survey was held in May with 21 responses from employers, apprentices and providers. Feedback was sought on the the content of the apprenticeship as well as barriers to attainment and completion.
- Survey results were used to revise the content of the apprenticeship and the end point assessment plan, with considerable support and input from employers, training providers and assessment organisations.
- Review of the level 2 Forest Operative apprenticeship is complete and upgraded to Forest Craftsperson at level 3.

#### Next steps

Submit the revised Forest Craftsperson apprenticeship into the IFATE approvals process and take actions required to support delivery and assessment.

Continue to monitor delivery and uptake of forestry apprenticeships.

**'I think the standard is a great craftsperson level starting point for a career in forestry...'**

**Forest Operative Employer**

### Develop a Level 6 (degree) apprenticeship

- A Professional Forester degree apprenticeship was submitted into the IFATE approvals process in January 2021.
- A low funding band (£16,000) was allocated, though after discussions with IFATE the funding band allocation was re-run resulting in £18,000.
- The Professional Forester apprenticeship was formally approved in August 2021.
- The Forestry Commission and the University of Cumbria have collaborated on the delivery model for the first cohort of Professional Foresters. This will be based on a group of Forestry Commission Development Woodland Officers and others from the sector.
- An IFATE rule change for End Point Assessment Organisations prevented the ICF from offering the end test. The Professional Forester apprenticeship has been revised to resolve this issue changing it from a non-integrated degree to an integrated degree ready for submission into the IFATE approvals process.

## 'An excellent step forward for the industry' Forestry Employer (in relation to Professional Forester)

### Next Steps

Submit the revised Professional Forester apprenticeship to IFATE in January 2022.

Prepare for the first cohort to start in September 2022.

Refresh the Forestry Commission Apprenticeship Strategy.



### **Quantify further and higher education provision for forestry in England & Wales**

- Funding was sourced for this work and the research was published in August 2021.
- Each subgroup's priorities for the coming year have been informed by this work, and are aligned with its recommendations.

### **T Levels**

- Engaged with IFATE on the development of outline content of the Trees and Woodland specialism in the Agriculture, Land Management and Production T Level.
- Support provided to City & Guilds, who won the contract to develop the T Level.

### Next Steps

Work with Forestry England and others to identify opportunities to engage with T Level delivery.

Incorporate T Levels into Forestry Commission apprenticeship strategy.

Support City & Guilds with proposed revisions of the T Level to facilitate delivery.

## Goals

- Inform the sector about funding opportunities
- Deliver of the Professional Forester apprenticeship
- Revise the Forest Craftsperson apprenticeship
- Explore delivery models for Forest Craftsperson
- Engage sector with Government reforms
- Support T Level development



# SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

**Owner:** The Royal Forestry Society as chair of Forest Education Network England (FENE)

**Actions:**

- Engage children in person and through promotion.
- Equip Professionals, both to increase forestry content in general provision and to deliver specialist forestry sessions such as forest schools.
- Advocate to encourage more outdoor learning.

## Engage Children

- Over 5,000 children took part in face-to-face forest education with the RFS in 2021, despite Covid restrictions.
- A new edition of the RFS Junior Forester Award was launched in partnership with the Queen's Green Canopy.
- The Forest School Association (FSA) commenced work with The Children's Forest and Earthwatch, two organisations championing the planting of forests by children and for children.

## Next Steps

Increase the number of children taking part in forest education in 2022 to at least levels before COVID-19.

Increase the proportion of children taking part in forest education who are from the communities least likely to visit the natural environment with their families.



'5 star! It will help the children embed their classroom learning.'  
Teacher, Northamptonshire

'Best day ever!'  
Teacher, Herefordshire

### Equip Educational Professionals

- Continuation of Forest School and Outdoor Learning training to equip practitioners to take groups of children out into the woods.
- FSA Conference inspired and challenged over 200 practitioners from across the country.
- Forestry England produced resources for schools on climate change, carbon emissions and tree pests and diseases.
- The Woodland Trust released a new set of resources for young people aged 11 - 14 linked to their Green Tree Schools Award.
- Three webinars were delivered during 2021 on the themes of climate change, woodland creation and woodland management within education settings.
- FSA working with DEFRA through the Community Forests and Woodland Outreach project.

### Next Steps

FENE will return to holding an in person conference in 2022 thanks to generous funding from the Forestry Commission to underwrite the event. This conference will bring together people from across the Forest Education sector to look at practical ways to engage young people in woodland management and inspire them to pursue a career in forestry.

Forestry England will create a forest curriculum, consulting with peers in the industry, teachers, young people and internally with Forestry Commission staff. They hope to have by spring 2023:

- Framework - for children and young people's educational forest experiences which will describe knowledge and skills they should learn and experiences they should have in order to become 'forest literate'.

Competency framework including the skills required for delivery (staff, teachers, third party providers). This will be developed after the curriculum has been drafted.



'We are regularly asked for qualifications that young people in Key Stage 3 & 4 might engage with, as a development of their skills and motivation for learning engendered at Forest School. This qualification would provide a direct route for ecologically-minded students, with practical dispositions into Forestry.'

S Lawfull, FSA Chair





### Forestry Education in Secondary Schools

- Consulted, scoped content and established need for a qualification that can be used in secondary schools.

#### Next steps

Develop an Ofqual registered Level 1 Award in Forestry in the Community suitable for delivery in mainstream schools without the need for specialist staff or equipment. This will be piloted during 2022 with the hope of a much wider roll out from September 2022 onwards. This Award is intended to be a way of introducing young people to the opportunities available to them and inspiring them to go on to study forestry at post-16 level.

### Advocacy

- FENE supported the Nature Premium campaign, which is led by the FSA and advocates for regular nature experiences for all children.

#### Next Steps

Continue to support the campaign to embed the Nature Premium into school funding.

## Goals

- Develop a curriculum for children and young peoples' forest experiences
- Develop a competency framework that identifies the skills needed to deliver the curriculum
- Hold an in-person conference in 2022
- Develop an Ofqual registered Level 1 Award in Forestry in the Community
- Pilot the new award in 2022