



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Review of Forestry Training: Continuous Professional Development and Post 16 Education

Presented to Welsh Government by **Arad Research**

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1. Introduction and methodology

1.1 Background and context

Arad Research was commissioned by Welsh Government to undertake a review of forestry training including continuing professional development (CPD) and post-16 education. The aim of the research was to assess the current provision of post-16 training in Wales and to provide a clearer understanding of the current forestry workforce by identifying existing skills levels, skills gaps and barriers to training.

This research was undertaken within the context of [Welsh Government's Timber Industrial Strategy – Making Wood Work for Wales](#) (Welsh Government, 2025a), which sets out a long-term vision to grow the forestry and timber sectors by increasing timber supply, boosting resilience, expanding the use of Welsh timber in sustainable construction, and strengthening supply chains.

This report is intended to provide insight and recommendations for policy officials within Welsh Government to inform future funding and delivery models.

1.2 Methodology

This review took a mixed methods approach. The findings are based on:

- A review of literature including sector data where available and published reports relating to skills needs in the forestry sector, drawing on evidence from Wales and other UK nations.
- Analysis of administrative data, including the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) dashboard relating to forestry and arboriculture courses.
- Mapping available training providers in Wales and border areas in England.
- Interviews were conducted virtually with 21 key stakeholders across the UK forestry sector, including further and higher education providers, training providers and sector experts. These explored current provision, gaps in training, and future skills needs.
- A short online survey for those working in the forestry and timber sector in Wales, for example business owners, training providers, apprentices and contractors. The survey included questions to understand the main current skills and training needs of the sector, and any barriers to accessing training. The survey received 16 responses.
- Follow-up interviews with five survey respondents (forestry sector employers) to explore survey responses in more depth and gather additional perspectives on sector needs in Wales.

2. Current and future skills needs of the sector

Forestry is fundamentally a skills-based rather than a qualification-focused industry requiring a highly skilled workforce (Wilson et al, 2017) who develop and maintain a broad set of technical, practical and professional competencies. The sector offers a wide range of roles in the workforce requiring both strategic and operational skills.

Despite this, there is a reported shortage of skilled workers in the sector in Wales, with concerns about both current capacity and the ability to meet future demand. Welsh Government's Timber Industrial Strategy (Welsh Government, 2025a) published in 2025 highlighted this gap and that the sector urgently needed to recruit and retain people with the required skills at all levels. Additionally, [The Welsh Government's Strategy for Woodlands and Trees](#) (Welsh Government, 2018) also set out a target to create new woodland areas to respond to the Environment (Wales) Act and that woodlands are managed to be more resilient to the effects of climate change; requiring a workforce with the sufficient skills to address this. The forestry sector in the UK has undergone significant change in recent years owing to environmental issues including the climate emergency and invasive pests and diseases which risk the sustainability of the sector (Welsh Government, 2025a), as well as social and economic issues (Wilson et al, 2017).

Drawing on key literature, interviews with stakeholders, survey responses and interviews with members of the forestry workforce in Wales, this section focuses on the skills required by the workforce in the forestry sector. It sets out areas with identified shortages while issues relating to accessing training to address these shortages and progression routes into the sector are discussed in a later chapter. An overview of what is known about the forestry workforce in Wales is included at the start of the section to provide contextual detail. The forestry sector in Wales faces a range of workforce-related skills challenges, shaped by an ageing workforce, ambitious national targets for woodland creation, and increasing demand for Welsh-grown timber. While this section focuses on the nature of these skills issues, Chapter 3 explores the pathways into the sector and the barriers that can restrict workforce growth.

2.1 Landscape of the forestry workforce in Wales

The UK forestry sector does not have a commonly agreed definition, and this review does not set out a definition of the sector. However, existing definitions and what is included within the forestry sector set out by different organisations have been considered. ICF Consulting recognised that there are several definitions of the forestry sector. As part of their [report into the UK forestry workforce and skills](#) (2024), the definition used aligns with the ONS Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) for forestry and logging which does not categorise forestry as an isolated area; there are four groups within this i) silviculture and other forestry activities, ii) logging, iii) gathering of wild growing non-wood products, and iv) support services to forestry. Lantra have emphasised that forestry is a broad sector with a diverse range of roles which includes arboriculturists, ecologists, machine operators and timber buyers/haulers (Lantra, 2022). [The Forestry Skills Forum's workforce research report](#) stated that the sector includes a "diverse range of businesses, from tree nurseries

and timber growers, through to harvesting companies and primary processing activities in sawmills, panel mills and a range of other timber users” (Forestry Skills Forum, 2021). Due to the lack of a commonly agreed definition of the forestry sector, this can create challenges for understanding the makeup of the forestry workforce. As part of the Timber Industrial Strategy for Wales (Giannelli, 2025), an annex was released which included information on employment within the forestry sector.

As part of the Timber Industrial Strategy for Wales, a data annex was published to provide context and supporting evidence for the strategy. The annex included data on employees by SIC code between 2015 and 2023 in Wales, business counts by SIC category between 2010 and 2024, and highlighted an expected increase in demand for labour in the forestry sector in Wales. The data shows that in 2023 there were 875 employees categorised under ‘Forestry and Logging’, 5,300 under ‘Manufacture of Wood Products (except furniture)’, and 4,650 under ‘Manufacture of Paper Products’. However, the annex also notes that there are discrepancies within the data that are not clearly explained.

In terms of businesses, in 2024 there were 370 businesses coded under ‘Forestry and Logging’, 470 under ‘Manufacture of Wood Products (except furniture)’ and 45 under ‘Manufacturing of Paper Products’. The author noted a lack of data on skills within the timber industry in Wales which required addressing (Giannelli, 2025). [England’s forestry sector skills plan 2025-2035](#) (ICF, 2025) set out a priority to improve forestry workforce data to be led by the Forestry Commission alongside Forestry Skills Forum; however, the action does not specify what will be done to meet this priority or when it will be completed by. For Wales, further work is planned to take place to gain a better understanding of the workforce numbers within the sector. Owing to the difficulty in obtaining coherent workforce data, the following section focuses on the nature of current skills needed within the workforce.

2.2 Nature of the current skills required

One of the key shortages identified throughout a review of the literature, interviews and survey is a lack of workers with entry-level skills, including in machinery and operations to undertake roles such as planting, harvesting and processing. Other areas with gaps include chainsaw and tree-felling skills. The availability of workers with these skillsets may play an important role in meeting the priorities of the Timber Industrial Strategy. Stakeholder interviews emphasised a need for workers in ‘lower-grade’ roles and there have been calls for ‘bottom-up’ apprenticeships which are more entry-level and operational. During one interview, a stakeholder emphasised that a lack of machine operators could become a “critical bottleneck” in the development of the forestry sector. A shortage of machine operators, planters and chainsaw operators has been previously identified as a challenge for the forestry workforce in England and Wales (Royal Forestry Society, 2017). The survey for those working in the forestry and timber sector in Wales included an open text response question to explore perceptions from the workforce of the key skills and training needs of the sector. Training needs highlighted in responses included a need for forestry first aid, environmental standards, roadside sign use and traffic management, thinning and “investment in steep ground harvesting work”. Having more qualified chainsaw operators was also highlighted as a workforce need here.

In addition to entry-level, operative skills, some stakeholders and survey respondents emphasised the need for silvicultural and managerial skills development. One interviewed employer felt that silvicultural knowledge was a key gap within the workforce and that these skills are not being taught within education/training courses and that knowledge from experienced foresters is not being passed on to younger members of the workforce. A lack of knowledge and skills around silviculture among new entrants to the sector has been raised previously by the Forestry Skills Forum which recommended more inclusion of this in forestry education (Forestry Skills Forum, 2021). Gaps at managerial and strategic levels included professional tree inspection, finance, planning and supervising operations “to understand from site diagnostics if operations are being carried out according to the prescribed method statements”.

“I would highly value staff undertaking some form of practical training relevant to their role, such as in managing harvesting - do staff have chainsaw experience and machine operator experience? This is a valuable skill that is being lost with a 'risk-based' approach to forest management as opposed to a 'hands-on' role as a Forester.” (Public sector employee)

2.3 Looking ahead

The UK Forestry Workforce & Skills Research report (ICF Consulting, 2024) detailed that the workforce forecast shows a possible evolution of roles within forestry, but it was difficult to be able to quantify the make-up of roles within the sector. The report additionally highlighted that evolved and new roles within the sector could include those which align with newer forestry purposes/needs, including environmental and community-focused roles. The sector has been described by stakeholders as ‘fast moving’ with training needs constantly evolving; one stakeholder who participated in an interview emphasised that the sector needed a “forward look at...what the industry workforce needs are going to look like in two to three years”. One employer emphasised that further training on tree health and biosecurity is important for the “next generation of foresters”. The workforce requires ongoing CPD in areas such as tree health, pests and diseases, though there can be issues in accessing these as they may not be financially viable for training providers to deliver without funding support. Wales has low numbers of forestry related apprenticeships as well as a low number of people undertaking full-time further education courses relating to the sector (progression routes into the sector are discussed further in Chapter 3).

Engagement with stakeholders in this review has identified a need for further workforce skills relating to wood production in Wales and an understanding of the links between forestry and forest products. The Strategy for Woodlands and Trees (Welsh Government, 2018) highlighted that woodlands provide business and economic opportunities which are enhanced by processing and the later Timber Industrial Strategy for Wales recognised the need for an improvement on how timber can be used as a low carbon material at every level of supply chains. Commitments in the strategy include supporting farmers and landowners on woodland management and providing education on harvesting timber sustainably and forest products (Welsh Government, 2025a). This point was highlighted by

a stakeholder who emphasised the need for more industry retention in Wales; “Wales is very good at growing and cutting down, but then we send stuff over the border for them to process it and then we buy it back”. There is a perceived need to understand the industry as a whole which includes supply chains and how the sector fits into Welsh Government’s net zero target and there was a suggestion that the sector should work with training providers to develop what learning is needed.

“So you could have, for example, a Wales Timber Alliance, where an apprentice, works up and down that supply chain, works a little bit in the manufacturing, the forestry, the husbandry, and there’s a much broader view of the industry as opposed to, forestry, wood processing, etc. And that’s where you get real benefits, isn’t it? Because you have individuals then who understand the whole supply chain.”
(Training stakeholder)

An interviewed training provider felt that it was important to consider the entire supply chain from forestry to wood processing and wood products and strongly advocated for the “linking of forestry into the whole forest products economic sector and the need for skills that span the two” (Training stakeholder), highlighting that there was a need to integrate the skills needs of forestry conservation and woodland management with the management of forests for wood production. This supports a commitment in the Timber Industrial Strategy for Wales for Welsh Government to work with further and higher education providers to develop an integrated approach to land and natural resources management including learning about product value chains (Welsh Government, 2025a).

2.4 Barriers to skills requirements

An ageing workforce presents challenges across the sector in terms of numbers within the workforce as well as the available skills. A UK Forestry Workforce and Skills report (ICF Consulting, 2024) emphasised replacing the retiring workforce requires more attention to ensure sufficient capacity in the workforce than creating additional jobs as part of developing the sector. There is some concern that knowledge is not being passed on in workplaces, where substantial learning can take place, to younger workers. It was noted by those consulted that many experienced forest managers and contractors are starting to retire, and their knowledge is not being passed on to the next generation, owing to issues with accessing knowledge transfer opportunities (as discussed in relation to Forestry Focused Future in Section 4.1.2). According to some stakeholders, this has contributed towards a perceived growing skills and knowledge deficit in the workforce, including soft skills, broader contextual skills and practical day-to-day woodland management knowledge. Upskilling younger members of the workforce alongside education/training programmes for career changers has been argued as important for the sector; but this requires an understanding of the skills requirements of the sector (Woodland Knowledge Wales, 2023).

The forestry sector is made up of a high number of sole traders and micro-enterprises. These employers can be reluctant to take on apprentices or untrained staff owing to the financial issues associated with this, therefore contributing to recruitment issues for the sector (Welsh Government, 2025a). In interviews, stakeholders reported that some

employers often struggle to find workers, particularly young people, with appropriate technical skills for roles; new entrants lack machinery operation skills. Additionally, small businesses may find it difficult to find time to release their staff to undertake training. Routes and pathways into employment in the sector are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

“It’s hard to attract people into the industry or bring in new people. This is partly due to the system of needing tickets¹ before coming on site, and partly because the ‘easy’ hand cutting jobs we used to have to build up experience are now done mechanically. Plus, training people to operate machines is a long and expensive process. In my opinion we need a better system for bringing people through [...]. Also support or weighting of contracts to allow for companies that are training people.” (Forestry sector employer in survey)

2.5 Summary

In summary, this review highlights the current and future skills needs of the sector and the associated challenges. The findings support previous reviews of the sector. Whilst there is a need for managerial level workers and skills relating to strategic woodland management, operational skills were highlighted as a key shortage. An ageing workforce is considered a key factor in contributing to the workforce’s capacity. There is a need for quality data on employers and workers within the sector and the extent to which there are shortages in certain skills. Supply chains and the environmental impact on woodlands were highlighted as key areas for future training needs for the sector. Ongoing and up-to-date in-work training and CPD are required to meet the needs of the sector and address Welsh Government priorities, and to respond to the challenges of an ageing workforce and rapidly changing skills requirements.

Recruitment practices within the sector also contribute to gaps in available data, which is discussed further in Chapter 3. Addressing the needs of the future workforce to align with, and achieve, targets set out by Welsh Government, including the Timber Industrial Strategy Making wood work for Wales, the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2026), the [Net Zero Strategic Plan](#) (Welsh Government, 2022) and the [Climate Adaption Strategy for Wales](#) (Welsh Government, 2024a) will require an understanding of the current and possible future gaps, and of investment in the sector.

The Welsh Government has recognised the need for a greater number of skilled workers to meet woodland creation targets and to increase the production of Welsh timber, particularly to contribute towards low-carbon timber-framed housing. In 2024, £280,000 was invested by Welsh Government in forestry-related skills and training (Welsh Government, 2024b) to help future-proof the workforce. More recently, leading businesses in the forestry and wood-processing sector in the UK have come together to establish a not-for-profit company, Forestry Training Service. The initiative aims to support the development of a UK-wide

¹ ‘Tickets’ or ‘tickets of competence’ are certificates of competence showing that a worker is qualified to operate machinery safely or perform specific tasks.

training service by working with existing providers to help meet sector needs, including the delivery of accredited qualifications as well as broader skills and knowledge.

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3. Progression routes and pathways into employment

Employment routes into the forestry industry do not always follow a traditional pathway of school, further or higher education, apprenticeship, and then employment. While many people do enter the sector this way, a significant proportion join later in life as career changers, moving into forestry from completely different industries.

3.1 Awareness of forestry career opportunities

Those consulted generally agreed that awareness of forestry as a career is low, particularly among young people. Stakeholders felt that schools and careers advisers rarely promote forestry as a career option and often have limited understanding of the range of roles available or the pathways into the sector. It was felt that more could be done within schools to include forestry within the curriculum to help raise awareness of forestry as a career, and raise awareness of the sector's contribution to the environment and the economy.

Some stakeholders also highlighted that the sector does not always promote itself effectively to attract new entrants. This included a perceived lack of public understanding of the wider benefits of forestry, such as flood prevention, climate mitigation and the role of the wood product life cycle, including the use of locally sourced timber. Evidence from the annual [Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2025: Wales Report](#) (Forest Research, 2025) shows that fewer than half of respondents identified the role of woodlands in removing carbon dioxide, and only a small proportion recognised their contribution to the local economy.

Perceptions of low pay, physically demanding work and early starts can also deter new entrants from entering the sector. Stakeholders highlighted the need to dispel some of these myths by showcasing the variety of roles available, and the longer-term career opportunities within the sector.

Some stakeholders consulted felt that the information on Careers Wales website regarding careers in the forestry sector, particularly salary information, can be 'off-putting' to new entrants as the data that is used to collate and present average salaries in the sector is drawn from published job vacancies, yet not all people in the sector are recruited in this way. As of April 2026, the Careers Wales website page for forest worker sets out a starting salary of £24,000 with an experienced level salary of £33,000 to £39,000 with a projected 19 jobs opening in the future where demand is "low compared to other jobs in Wales". However, from consulting with stakeholders, many who work in the sector are self-employed and do not always advertise vacancies online.

There are also issues relating to the level of detail in the job role categories used by the website to collate forestry sector employment data, and whether appropriate search terms are being applied. Similar issues affect the salary data presented on FE and HE websites, which may also act as a barrier for those considering entry to the sector.

The HE provider explained that they believe the data the government collates on destinations also does not accurately capture the number of graduates going on to degree level jobs in the sector after completing the course. The provider suspects that this may be something to do with how forestry jobs are coded – that they are being coded as a manual job. The data provided on destinations through the course website then tells those that may be interested in a career in forestry, that they are less likely to get a graduate level job after completing the degree than is the reality. The provider explained that this is a significant issue for them explained it is an area that the Institute of Chartered Foresters is trying to support improvement in. Another issue related to awareness of the sector noted by some stakeholders was the reduction in the number of forestry visitor centres in recent years which may have contributed to lower general visibility of the sector.

Examples of efforts to address awareness challenges were identified, including residential forestry camps run by Bangor University for under-represented groups, and outreach activity led by Confor to promote forestry careers to career changers, including military veterans (see also section 3.5). In addition, Qualifications Wales is introducing a Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education (VCSE) in Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry for 14–16-year-olds from September 2027, which may help increase early awareness of the sector among schools.

Summary

Overall, findings suggest that there is limited awareness of forestry as a career as well as issues with the accuracy of data on salary and the number of jobs available in the sector currently and in the future. This is potentially a constraint on the number of new entrants to the sector, including the diversity of entrants entering the workforce. Inaccurate or incomplete careers information may also play a role which reinforces reliance on family networks, informal contacts and later in life career changers. While there are some targeted efforts to support awareness raising of careers in the sector, these remain small-scale. In the absence of a more coordinated approach to raising awareness of the sector via the curriculum, careers information to school leavers and post 16 education, these small-scale efforts are unlikely to bring in many new entrants to the sector, which stakeholders consulted agree is what is needed to support the sector to grow.

3.2 Recruitment processes

Stakeholders noted that the recruitment approaches of many employers within the sector can place a limit on the number and diversity of those entering the sector. Larger employers were more likely to advertise vacancies, and organisations such as the Institute of Chartered Foresters and the Royal Forestry Society also promote roles through their websites. However, these opportunities tend to be concentrated at managerial or professional levels, rather than entry-level or operational roles.

It was noted however, that smaller contractors, smaller micro companies or sole traders, who make up a large proportion of the sector, do not widely advertise their job vacancies. Instead, they often rely on word of mouth, or information exchanged through existing personal connections as a means of recruiting. Those consulted were of the view that these

smaller employers were often cautious about who they take on as employees choosing to recruit individuals who they already know, or those who are recommended via industry connections. These recruitment approaches make it difficult to know the number of job vacancies available across the sector, limits the number of individuals applying for these jobs as well as the diversity of those entering the sector.

These 'hidden' operators within the sector which includes contractors, sole traders and micro businesses, means that it is also hard to understand what skill gaps there currently are or might be in the future as data available on these smaller operators is limited.

One forestry employer, who responded to the short survey sent to sector stakeholders, highlighted a lack of connection between contractors and training providers, suggesting that greater opportunities for workplace-based learning are needed. They emphasised the importance of enabling individuals to gain initial on-the-job experience before undertaking formal certification. Another employer also pointed to the lack of awareness of the sector by new entrants due to there no longer being an obvious entry-level role for the more operational positions.

Stakeholders suggested that more structured routes enabling individuals to gain workplace experience alongside training could help address these recruitment constraints.

Summary

Overall, the evidence suggests that current recruitment practices in the forestry sector limit who enters the workforce and makes it difficult to understand real levels of vacancies and demand for workers. Informal recruitment works for individual employers, particularly small contractors and sole traders, but it reduces the visibility of entry-level opportunities and restricts the diversity of new entrants. This hides vacancies and skills demand, limiting the ability of training providers and policy-makers to judge whether training provision matches labour market needs. Without efforts to support formalised recruitment practices, informal recruitment for many roles within the sector will continue to hamper new entrants' awareness of the sector as well as knowledge of the skills and training needs to support the sector to grow.

3.3 Wider barriers to employment

Some barriers to employment within the forestry sector have been outlined above. However, stakeholders also identified a number of additional practical and structural barriers affecting entry into the industry. Many referred to the fact that many forestry jobs are based in remote locations and as such getting to and from work often requires individuals to be able to drive and have access to a vehicle that can travel along relatively rough terrain. Access to these employment opportunities for anyone who cannot drive is therefore limited.

Even when new entrants have the certification required, stakeholders reported that they often lack the workplace experience needed to operate effectively and safely. As one employer noted – "they [new employees] may have a certificate to say they can use a

chainsaw, but they don't have the experience needed to operate heavy machinery, and we as employers don't have the time and the money to support them to gain this experience". As a result, many smaller contractors will only consider taking on experienced forestry operators.

These findings suggest that new entrants need more than just training that supports them to gain knowledge of the sector and industry ticket style certification. Training support is also required to ensure that new entrants are work ready and competent in undertaking tasks such as operating large machinery.

As noted above, gaining employment within a small forestry organisation can be challenging. An alternative entry route for new entrants—or even experienced workers—is to establish themselves as self-employed contractors. However, becoming a self-employed tree-cutting or harvesting contractor requires significant upfront investment in heavy plant and machinery. Securing the financial capital for this level of investment is extremely difficult for most individuals. Even where investment is possible, the reliance on short-term contracts with no guaranteed long-term income makes this a high-risk option. This suggests that training is not the only support required to address entry barriers into the industry.

3.4 Progression via further education

There are currently three further education colleges in Wales delivering forestry training: Coleg Cambria, Coleg Llandrillo and Black Mountains College. These providers generally offer full-time Level 2 and Level 3 courses, typically around 21 hours per week. Two are located in north Wales, with Black Mountains College located in mid Wales. Coleg Sir Gâr in south Wales previously offered forestry courses, but these are no longer available. Nearby, close to the Welsh border is also the Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College (Holme Lacey Campus).

Learners

The age profile of learners on these FE courses varies widely, ranging from 18 to over 50. Some FE institutions report difficulties attracting new entrants, while others note that their courses are oversubscribed. Cohorts typically include a mix of school leavers and adults seeking a career change. Learners on Level 2 courses may have few or no prior qualifications, whereas some Level 2 and Level 3 students—particularly career changers—may hold university degrees or postgraduate qualifications.

The concentration of forestry-delivering FE colleges in the northern half of Wales creates access challenges for potential learners in the south. Despite this, many colleges report attracting students from across Wales as well as students from outside the country.

Forestry courses delivered just on the other side of the Welsh border could be more geographically accessible to some learners located in Wales. However, it remains uncertain whether these learners can access any Welsh Government funding to access these courses.

Delivery of FE courses

Most FE forestry courses are full-time and campus-based, requiring daily attendance. Very limited on-site accommodation is available, meaning students who do not live locally must secure their own housing. This requirement can be a significant barrier to participation, particularly for younger learners (under 18 years old) who cannot easily relocate.

“If we were looking at just recruiting 16-year-olds out of school, then I think, we wouldn't have anything like the numbers.” (Training stakeholder)

Very few if any examples of distance learning were referred to by the FE colleges consulted. Some noted that this had been a requirement during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic lockdown – however, in their experience this had not worked very well as the courses include a high degree of hands-on practical application which cannot be delivered remotely.

“You can't really teach people how to use the chainsaw online.” (Training stakeholder)

One college reported that it is exploring the introduction of part-time forestry courses to improve accessibility. A part-time model would allow learners to undertake paid work and/or access benefits while studying, making participation more financially viable for those who find the actual or opportunity cost of full-time study challenging.

Several colleges also raised concerns about the future availability of qualified tutors and assessors, noting that many of their current staff are approaching retirement. Recruiting suitably experienced successors may become increasingly challenging as those with the forestry experience to teach the subject often work in the industry and therefore don't have time to teach.

Providers also described a number of practical issues affecting course delivery, including the ongoing need to secure suitable trees for chainsaw and tree-felling training, the requirement to find additional funding to cover students' ticket, and limited access to expensive machinery such as harvesters.

Another issue raised by some stakeholders was the issue of supply and demand in the sector. If new entrants cannot see any job opportunities in the sector of the courses that they are interested in within FE colleges, then they are less likely to take up these courses or shift to a course or module in another sector that has more demand and support from employers instead. Lack of demand from FE entrants also means that some courses are unable to run because there are not enough students taking up the course to warrant it being available.

Progression and destinations

FE representatives reported that they are currently in the process of improving how they collect destination data, so they were unable to provide a comprehensive picture of where learners progress after completing their courses. It was noted, however, that some Level 3 graduates continue their studies at Bangor University. One FE college indicated that although a proportion of learners move directly into forestry-related employment after

completing their course, these students are in the minority – most gain employment outside of forestry or continue with their education elsewhere. Some that complete their vocational courses at FE colleges are drawn towards arboriculture roles rather than forestry, while others transition into jobs outside the land-based sector altogether.

Some stakeholders highlighted that school leavers going on to complete FE courses may still face barriers to employment, particularly if they cannot drive, lack site experience, or have limited exposure to heavy machinery. One stakeholder highlighted that what has worked well in the past is the City and Guilds Level 3 extended diploma which the provider stated has been signed on and off many times due to no longer being funded. The stakeholder highlighted that this Level 3 extended diploma is what supports those completing the Level 2 forestry course to be retained and go on to gain the skills and experience they need to be employed and is very much needed in the sector to support those coming through the FE route.

A version of this pathway—the Tilhill Level 3 Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture, delivered with Coleg Llysfasi (part of Coleg Cambria)—was cited as an effective model. On completion of the Level 3 diploma, those who are high attaining can apply for the second stage of the diploma (The Tilhill Foundation Degree in Forestry and Woodland Management). These candidates are interviewed by Tilhill staff and if successful, receive training, mentoring technical input and support from Tilhill Forestry as well as bespoke training and work placements as part of the course and are supported to secure a job in the sector. Both stages of the Tilhill diploma are currently available to anyone depending on their qualifications and experience. Providers described how the advanced diploma has been very successful in terms of retention and supporting entrants in to the ‘forest operator’ role which providers have emphasised is a skill shortage area in the sector. Currently there are two cohorts per year consisting of four entrants who complete the advanced diploma, which provides training in chainsaws, brush cutters, woodchippers, sprayers, tractors, skidders and forwarders.

“It’s easily accessible and it feeds the right people into the right industry... it really has been a roaring success.” (Stakeholder)

Providers emphasised that careful selection of suitable candidates was key to success, particularly individuals used to outdoor, physically demanding work and frequent travel. Learners with backgrounds in agriculture were noted as being well represented and more likely to remain in the sector.

Noncompletion of courses

Most FE students complete the Level 2 and Level 3 forestry courses they enrol on. However, some leave early after securing employment in the forestry sector suggesting that employers often place greater value on the practical skills and competencies gained during FE training than on the final qualification itself. It was also observed that some learners enrol on Level 2 courses primarily to obtain the chainsaw and other ‘ticket-style’ certificates included within the course modules and then withdraw once these have been achieved. In response, some FE colleges have introduced a clawback clause requiring students who leave early after gaining their tickets to repay up to £1,000 to cover the commercial cost of the training.

Summary

Further education plays an important role in supporting entry into the forestry workforce, providing practical grounding that is valued by employers, particularly for operational roles. However low learner numbers, a full-time in FE model and the concentration of provision in north Wales limits accessibility. Without more local provision, stronger integration with employer pathways, FE alone is unlikely to meet future sector demand.

3.5 Progression via apprenticeships

Many stakeholders felt that apprenticeships could, in principle, offer a strong entry route into the forestry sector. Several stakeholders referred to structured apprenticeship-based progression routes that existed many years ago, which, in their view, provided a clear, structured career progression pathway not currently available. These were described as starting as an apprentice Craftsman; progressing from there to becoming a Forest Craftsman; then a Technical Supervisor; then eventually a Forest Operator/Forestry Works Manager.

Some training providers in Wales do currently deliver apprenticeship courses, for example the Level 2 Timbers and Trees apprenticeship qualification offered by Coleg Cambria. Medr noted that they are currently reviewing the Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeship frameworks for forestry to consider whether they remain relevant to industry needs – this work has not yet started. Those consulted emphasised that, while some forestry apprenticeships remain available, current apprenticeship routes are less visible, less coherent and more difficult to access than in the past and believed there should be more signposting of any opportunities particularly for entry-level and operational roles.

Despite interest in apprenticeships as a route into employment, stakeholders highlighted significant barriers to employer participation. The main challenge identified was encouraging and supporting employers to take on an apprentice. Some of the barriers cited were:

- Taking on an apprentice requires employers to take on additional human resources responsibilities which for most of the micro businesses that make up the sector in Wales feels like too much of an administration burden.
- Taking on a young apprentice (under 18 years old) is not a viable option for most employers in the forestry industry. Much of the work involves operating large, expensive machinery and driving to and from forestry sites—tasks that individuals under 18 are legally unable to undertake. As a result, employers often feel unable to offer apprenticeship opportunities to younger learners.
- Working on forestry sites is often dangerous work. Many employers fear the risk of injury to any inexperienced apprentice, which would not only be terrible for the apprentice but could also place the employer in a position where they could be held to account and possibly prosecuted.
- Many contractors and employers in the forestry sector operate on relatively short-term contracts. As a result, committing to an apprentice for two or more years – often beyond the duration of their existing work agreements - is not always a

viable option. This uncertainty makes it difficult for employers to commit to longer-term apprenticeship opportunities.

- Some stakeholders noted that prior to 2020 employers could receive an incentive payment of up to £3,000 to take on an apprentice. This did encourage some employers to employ an apprentice – however, this offer of an incentive payment has now been withdrawn.
- Apprenticeship courses delivered by the training providers do not necessarily include the ticket training (chainsaw handling etc) required to work in most areas of the industry. The cost of gaining these tickets will therefore either fall on the employer or the apprentice.

Alternative apprenticeship models are being considered in areas of England, for example a shared apprenticeship scheme whereby a central organisation or body will take on the role and responsibilities of the employer within individual businesses offering the apprentices work placement opportunities. This removes the administrative burden and risks associated with taking on an apprentice for two or more years. However, this approach does not remove all the challenges and barriers noted above.

Apprenticeships were also reported to pose challenges for potential apprentices themselves. Many of the individuals entering forestry do so later in life as career changers, often with existing financial and family commitments. For these individuals, undertaking a two-year apprenticeship on a wage below the standard minimum was described as financially unviable. Providers also noted that apprenticeship wages can deter school leavers, who may perceive alternative employment routes as offering quicker or higher earnings.

Degree-level apprenticeship

Currently the University of Cumbria in England is the only university in the UK offering a degree apprenticeship in forestry, offering the 'Professional Forester Degree Apprenticeship'. Designed with sector input and supported by employers, the programme is a mix of academic modules and practical training and supports apprentices to gain skills, knowledge and to progress into forest and management roles or postgraduate study. All apprentices must be interviewed, assessed and offered a position by an employer before being admitted to the apprenticeship programme. [A Forestry Commission blog](#) highlighted that in November 2025 the first cohort of 21 students graduated with 19 securing jobs in the sector (Forestry Commission, 2026). Providers noted that Wales does not currently offer a degree apprenticeship in Wales as it is not currently funded. Other potential barriers mentioned by providers included the challenge of balancing how to offer the practical elements with the academic elements without FE or HE providers joining up and also the lack of demand currently in Wales, where a provider noted that "...given that the nature of FE provision is predominantly vocational and apprenticeships are absolutely vocational, if employers are not recruiting or demanding provision, colleges are not going to put it on" (Stakeholder).

Summary

Apprenticeships could have more of a role to play to support more entrants with the right skills entering the sector. The number of apprenticeships available in the forestry sector are

currently limited and so are unlikely in the short term to contribute much to addressing any current workforce challenges in the sector. Currently apprenticeships are constrained by both suitability for employers, which reduces demand for take up through FE colleges as well as the attractiveness to new entrants compared to other better paid employment options. Without targeted action to address these issues such as support with the administrative and financial burden on employers, particularly micro and smaller organisations or more flexible delivery models, apprenticeships will continue to play a limited role. Stakeholders interviewed therefore emphasised the importance of having a range of entry routes to widen access to forestry careers.

3.6 Progression via higher education

Bangor University is currently the only university in Wales offering higher education courses in forestry related subject areas. It offers three undergraduate courses (BSc Forestry, BSc Woodland Management Conservation and BSc Conservation with Forestry) and four postgraduate courses (MSc Forestry, MSc Agroforestry, MSc Environmental Forestry and MSc Tropical Forestry).

HESA data and interviews with Bangor University show that Wales currently makes up a quarter (27%) of all entrants in the UK on 'Forest and Arboriculture' subject area higher education courses (undergraduate and postgraduate) for the academic year 2024/25 – with 45 entrants in Wales. This compares to 30% (50 entrants) in England and 42% in Scotland (70 entrants). There is an average of 190 entrants across the UK (Wales, Scotland and England) over the period 2020/21 to 2024/25 (HESA, 2026a).

Learners

The age profile of learners on Bangor University's forestry courses typically ranges from 18 to the early 30's. Students are predominantly male participants, with around a third being female across all the forestry courses combined that Bangor University offers each year. In some years the proportion of females across all courses has been closer to half.

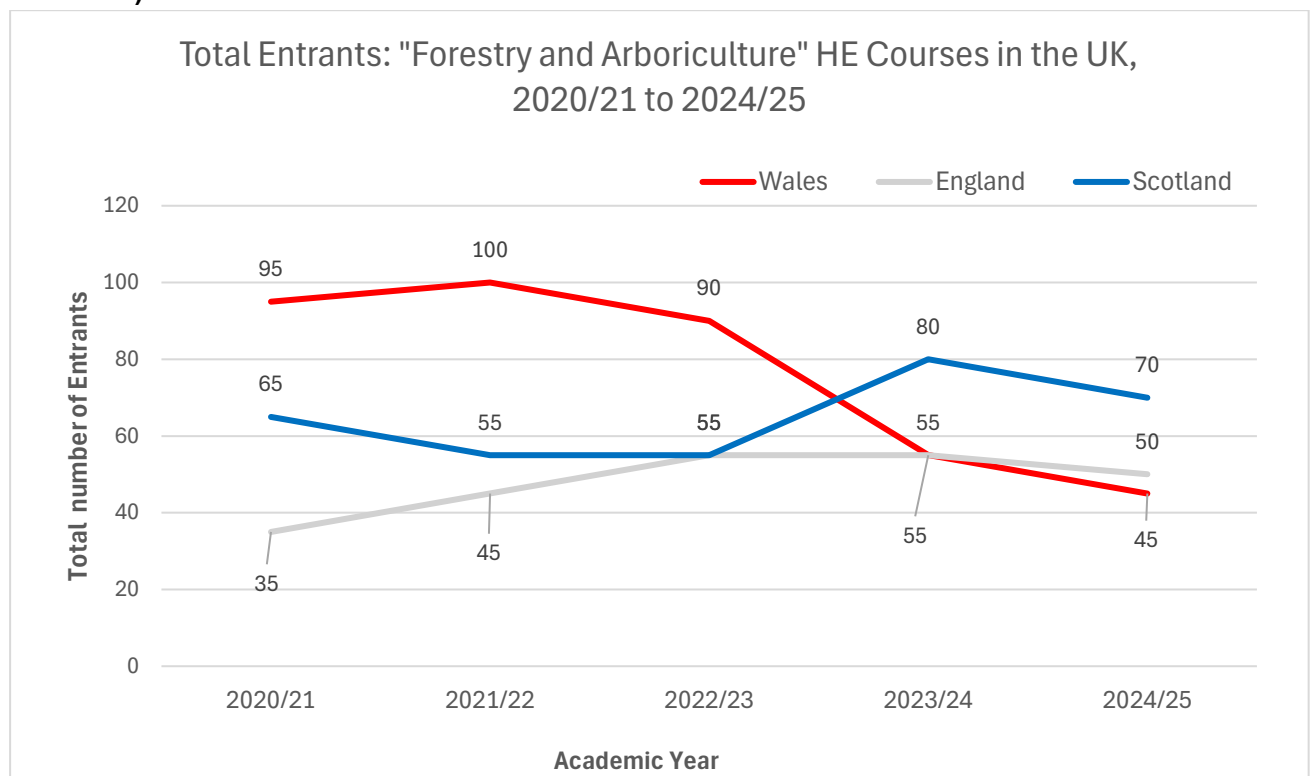
The provider noted that, in order to broaden the appeal of forestry-related courses, including attracting more women, the BSc Woodland Management and Conservation programme was developed at Bangor University, with the first cohort graduating in 2025. This course was designed in collaboration with the Woodland Trust with a view to diversify the students that came through. The provider reported that there were six women in the first cohort, while the current cohort now includes between 15 and 20 students, the majority of whom are female. The course is primarily aimed at students seeking to work for organisations such as the Woodland Trust, the National Trust, or other bodies focused on woodland management for habitat conservation.

HESA currently collects data on the number of enrolments, entrants and qualifiers of those on higher education courses in the UK. The most granular level of course data that is publicly available, related to forestry courses is at the subject area level or 'subject name'. Data on specific course names is not currently available. Forestry courses are currently grouped under the subject area- 'Forestry and Arboriculture' using the HECoS subject area

classification code 100520, which is defined as ‘The study of planting and caring for trees and the management of woods and forests for conservation purposes, commercial exploitation and recreational use’. Selecting ‘Forestry and Arboriculture’ as the subject name on the HESA UK HE subject dashboard (HESA, 2026a) for ‘Wales’, shows that demand for Bangor University’s undergraduate forestry courses has been relatively stable with entrant figures in Wales on to ‘Forestry and Arboriculture’ subject area undergraduate courses is in the region of 20 entrants each academic year from 2020, with 15 undergraduate entrants in the 2020/21 academic year compared to 20 entrants in the 2024/25 academic year.

In comparison, postgraduate ‘Forestry and Arboriculture’ subject area courses in Wales have seen a decline in students over that same period, with 80 postgraduate entrants in 2020/21 compared to just 20 entrants in the 2024/25 academic year. Due to the drop in the number of postgraduate entrants - the ‘total number of entrants’ (undergraduate and postgraduate) for Wales on ‘Forestry and Arboriculture’ subject area higher education courses shows a decline overall from 2021/22, which can be seen in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Total number of entrants (undergraduate and postgraduate) on “Forestry and Arboriculture” Higher Education courses by country (Wales, England and Scotland) 2020/21 to 2024/25



Source: HESA UK HE subject dashboard (HESA, 2026)

Uptake of postgraduate courses has declined in general in the UK with the latest report from HESA stating that “Postgraduate taught entrant enrolments decreased by 5% compared with the previous academic year, extending a decline that began in 2022/23” (HESA, 2026b). This reduction reflects a 10% drop in entrants with a non-European Union (non-EU) permanent address and an 8% decrease in European Union (EU) entrants, while

UK postgraduate taught entrant numbers remained broadly the same (0% change). The HE provider consulted also noted that the number of postgraduate entrants is influenced by current 'geopolitical and financial constraints' which may have contributed to a drop in the number of entrants to the postgraduate forestry courses offered by Bangor. 'Forestry and Arboriculture' subject area postgraduate entrant numbers have been relatively low in the other home nations with approximately 5 postgraduate entrants in Scotland and 15 in England in the academic year 2020/21, then no postgraduate students studying in 'Forestry and Arboriculture' subject areas in Scotland or England in the last three academic years from 2022/23-2024/25.

The HE provider explained that there is not usually much budget available to market forestry courses or careers to promote more awareness in schools, particularly as it is already an established course subject for Bangor University compared to other courses that do not attract as many students, however the provider emphasised that it is something they would like to do more of.

The undergraduate forestry courses Bangor University offers attracts a mix of entrants, including:

- **School leavers with A levels:** These entrants tend to have an A level in geography, biology or another science subject. There are also some entrants with no science A levels, which the provider does not view as a barrier.
- **Entrants without A levels:** Some of whom progress through the HE providers own foundation degrees. The provider noted, however, that these foundation routes may not continue to be offered in the future.
- **Students from FE colleges:** This usually includes a small number of entrants (around five each year) from FE colleges like Glynllifon College. These entrants have completed a Level 3 or Level 4 in an Arboriculture or Forestry programme who have a more practical background but are wanting to do a more academic programme.
- **Career changers:** A small number of entrants (around five each year) are people that want to start again, change career and do a second degree. These entrants also include those that have never been to university but have been working in areas such as tree surgery or another job in the sector for a little while and would like to do a degree.

Interviews with the HE provider highlighted that the postgraduate courses contain more international students with a few UK students, which the provider suggests is partly due to the scholarships that are available to come over. The postgraduate courses also offer distance learning making them more accessible to international students, something that is not currently offered on the undergraduate courses, but which has been highly successful for the masters offer. Interviews with the provider highlighted that not many of their own forestry undergraduates go straight into the master's level. Bangor University undergraduates that do take up the Forestry postgraduate options tend to be those that have done subjects such as geography or environmental science and then want to specialise in forestry more. The provider also highlighted how the vast majority of those that are UK based students on both the BSc and MSc courses are mostly from England.

Course content

The provider reported that forestry course content was revalidated three years ago to ensure it was up to date and relevant, following a period of around ten years with limited change. Sector engagement with bodies in Wales, the wider UK and internationally informed updates, including increased emphasis on forest science, forest economics, practical skills and employability.

The provider noted that the sector can be difficult to consult on course content, both because employers are hard to reach and because some hold unrealistic expectations about the skills new graduates should have, expecting individuals to be fully job-ready from day one. Engagement with industry therefore focused on identifying the core, non-negotiable elements of provision, while retaining a broader curriculum designed to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, strategic skills and adaptability. The provider emphasised that focusing solely on immediate skills needs would risk undermining the longer-term sustainability of the workforce.

Delivery of HE courses

Undergraduate forestry courses offered by Bangor University are three years long and can be completed either full-time or part-time. Entry requirements are tariff based with 88-120 tariff points from a Level 3 qualification required for the BSc in Forestry and BSc in Conservation with Forestry. BSc Woodland Management Conservation requires 104-128 tariff points from a Level 3 qualification. All the undergraduate and postgraduate forestry courses offered by Bangor University are accredited by the Institute of Chartered Foresters. Currently the undergraduate courses do not offer distance learning as an option and require learners to have some time on site in Bangor University.

Placement year

All three undergraduate courses offer a placement year, either in the UK or overseas which gives students the opportunity to spend a year working with a self-sourced professional organisation within the sector. Interviews with the provider highlighted how students are encouraged to take up the offer of a placement year which supports students to be more employable after the course and command a higher graduate salary after course completion, “often with a job to go straight in to” (HE provider) which provides the opportunity for the employer to “try before they buy” (HE provider). The provider noted that they felt placement years were a good alternative to an apprenticeship, highlighting that the students that are placed within smaller companies particularly “get a really diverse set of experiences” (HE provider) and get involved in lots of different aspects of the work, and that they are also well liked by the employer, because they combine the knowledge, scientific underpinning and economic knowledge that is needed for the role with the experience of doing a job within the sector. This includes learning how things are “actually done day-to-day in a job”, which the provider highlighted is like “gold dust for employers”. The provider emphasised how the students that come back from the placement year are ‘head and shoulders above the rest’ and think about the course differently because they have seen how things works on the ground and were noticeably improved particularly in management planning and communicating in more professional way compared to those that had not done a placement year.

A high proportion of undergraduate forestry students at Bangor University currently take up the placement year, and the university has explored whether this should be made compulsory, as is the case at Harper Adams University. However, concerns were raised that mandating a placement year could deter students who prefer to complete their degree sooner and move directly into employment. In addition, the additional tuition fees associated with a placement year, particularly for international placements, may present a financial barrier for some students.

Other barriers to the placement year include identifying employers able to provide the required 1,000 hours of structured paid work, alongside the need for employers to complete risk assessments and maintain appropriate insurance. The HE provider noted that targeted financial support for smaller companies could help encourage them to take on placement students, enabling access to valuable skills and experience that are not always readily available to learners.

Distance learning

The postgraduate forestry courses offered by Bangor University can also be completed either part-time or full-time across one, two or three years depending on the time available to the student. The postgraduate courses also offer the option of distance learning which has been available for some of the MSc courses since 2011. Students can choose the option of the course being 'all in person', 'all distance' or 'a blend of both'. There is also compulsory in-person 'study tour' for all MSc students, lasting one to two weeks which is completed in the first year, where students meet their lecturers, cohort and do practical skills. The provider emphasised the importance of the 'study tour' which fosters connections and brings people together; "We're out in the fields, within the trees, we're with people, we're doing it. And it means that we have really good communication for the following years because we've created that bond" (HE Provider). The HE provider also fosters other ways to encourage and maintain connections within the cohort of distance learners by having optional online discussion boards, tutor sessions and a cohort WhatsApp group which supports meeting up with other cohort members if they happen to be not that far away in person. The provider also employs the use of live streams to support teaching practical elements including videos for any field trips and also make use of a 360-degree camera to provide immersive experiences. Students can use VR headsets if they have them so they can "actually be in the field".

Course completion and destinations

The HESA UK HE subject dashboard's most recent data from January 2026 for 'Forest and Arboriculture' courses in Wales shows that 80-90% of entrants completed (qualifiers) their course from the 2020/21 academic year to 2024/25. The HE provider does not currently collect data on destinations of alumni from their forestry courses but are looking into ways of doing this. The provider emphasised that they were aware of the destinations of most of their alumni through keeping contact with them following the course and confirmed that most go on to work in the sector.

Those who complete the BSc in Forestry typically go to work for large organisations such as Natural Resources Wales and the Forestry Commission, managing woodlands in traditional forest management roles. Those that complete the BSc in Woodland

Management Conservation tend to go on to work for non-profit organisations such as the Woodland Trust or National Trust or other organisations that are managing woodlands for habitat conservation, also into forest management type roles. The BSc Conservation with Forestry is aimed at students who want to do further study such as a master's degree or PhD and who are more interested in how forests and woodlands function and how to conserve forest ecosystems, drawing on broader conservation modules.

Those that have taken up master's courses, either go on to do a PhD or in some cases use the master's to support either advancing their career within the sector or use it to enter the sector. The HE provider emphasized how a lot of the master's students are already working in the sector, or are career changers into the sector which benefits the cohort as it means there are usually a wide pool of people from a range of backgrounds on the course that are connected through the MSc programme which can support them to go into different jobs in the sector.

The HE provider also explained how some of the entrants to the MSc programmes include individuals moving from professional roles into careers in the outdoors. Many of the career changers have gone on to secure senior roles in the sector in Wales and England and 'have brought really important skills and experience into the sector from outside' (HE provider), which the HE Provider feels is a real benefit to the sector.

3.7 Entry in the forestry sector via career change

Findings from interviews with forestry sector stakeholders and review of relevant literature suggests that changing careers into forestry is increasingly common. Some individuals who enter a career in forestry either have prior work experience in a land-based role or are transitioning from a completely different profession. These career changers may enter a career in forestry through any of the routes outlined above. One stakeholder interviewed noted that the growing number of career changers is potentially outnumbering younger entrants into the sector. This stakeholder explained that they thought this was often the case when people are looking for meaningful, outdoor-based, sustainability focused work and to move away from a desk-based lifestyle.

Skills shortages within the forestry sector, as outlined in section 2, means there is a strong demand for new entrants. Therefore, in Wales work is being undertaken to promote careers in forestry to military veterans as they have been identified as a promising group for targeted recruitment. For example, Confor have delivered awareness raising events to military leavers aimed to expose them to the career opportunities in the forestry sector. Career changers face particular challenges when seeking a career in forestry. Some of the main challenges are financially related. For example, the costs involved in changing to a career in the forestry sector may make it difficult for career changers to afford to do this alongside their existing financial commitments (for example, paying mortgage, other family commitments etc.). These costs include training costs, travel costs to get to training locations and equipment. Furthermore, for career changers, entering into a career in forestry often involves a reduction in salary, particularly if entering the sector via the apprenticeship pathway (see section 3.2 above).

There are funding mechanisms in Wales to support individuals with the cost of training. One example of particular relevance to career changers is the fully funded Foresight Sustainable Forestry: Skills Training Programme delivered by Tilhill Forestry in partnership with Foresight Sustainable Forestry Company. The four-week programme covers chainsaw skills, tractor and quad bike handling, PA1 & PA6 spraying certifications, emergency first aid in forest settings and tree planting and establishment techniques. As the course is open to Wales-based applicants aged 18 and over, with no prior forestry experience, it is a suitable entrant's route for career changes.

Barriers to accessing training in the forestry sector

Those consulted agreed that there were many barriers to accessing training in the forestry sector. Barriers included the upfront cost of courses, including the overall costs, suitable courses either not being available or too far away, difficulty finding out what training is available and the loss of earnings while taking time out to train either themselves or others. Other barriers highlighted by those consulted included lack of assessors, training in the use of heavy or dangerous equipment which is particularly not suitable for younger learners as well as access to this equipment and the need for suitable sites where practical training could take place.

4. Lessons from Forestry Focused Future

Forestry Focused Future (FFF) was a skills development scheme that operated in Wales between 2019 and 2022, funded through the European Union Rural Development Programme. The scheme was delivered by Focus on Forestry First Ltd, a not-for-profit social enterprise established to design, administer and coordinate forestry training and skills support for the Welsh trees and timber sector. The findings presented in this section draw primarily on evidence from a series of six periodic evaluation reports (Resources for Change, 2021) produced during the lifetime of the Forestry Focused Future scheme.

During its operation, the FFF scheme provided industry-specific continuing professional development (CPD) and certification for individuals working across the forestry sector in Wales. Training supported through the scheme included chainsaw operations, forest machinery, pesticide application and management training. Under the Skills Development strand, the scheme typically covered 75% of eligible training costs, so reducing financial barriers for individuals and employers.

Its work was organised around five core strands.

1. Skills Development

- Provided subsidised operator and professional training
- Supported businesses and individuals to create tailored training plans
- Offered ongoing guidance to help learners identify appropriate courses
- Connected participants with training providers
- Paid subsidies directly to providers, reducing administrative burden
- Supported multi-year training pathways for long-term development

2. Knowledge Transfer

- Delivered short, non-accredited workshops on sector-driven topics
- Addressed skills gaps not covered by formal qualifications
- Facilitated peer-to-peer learning and technical updates
- Ensured that the training reflected real-world operational needs

3. Innovative Training

- Developed new training and revived legacy courses that had disappeared from the market
- Introduced training on emerging technologies and updated health and safety practices
- Ensured the sector had access to modern, relevant learning opportunities

4. Mentoring

- Offered business support and professional advice to new and growing enterprises
- Helped operators transition into employers and build sustainable businesses
- Provided guidance to support long-term development and resilience

5. Professional Pathways

- Initially linked Level 2 to 4 vocational qualifications, later expanding to Levels 6 and 7

- Supported apprenticeship routes through colleges
- Helped create coherent, structured progression pathways across the sector

FFF was funded through the European Union Rural Development Programme. When the programme period came to an end, funding was not continued, and the project came to an end. Since then, the availability of funded training for those working in the industry has been more limited.

4.1 Success and limitations of FFF

4.1.1 Successes

Personalised Support – FFF offered participants direct access to staff who understood forestry, its qualifications and its career routes. Support was also available to participants at different stages of their career, for example new entrants, career changers and self-employed operators. Participants were also offered tailored advice provided before, during and after training.

Administrative support – FFF streamlined application processes which increased training uptake. This reduced barriers for individuals who previously disengaged from funded training.

High Demand - FFF exceeded its original targets, supporting over a thousand businesses rather than the 400–500 initially anticipated. This demand is likely to reflect the level of trust the industry had in the programme. Post-COVID-19 pandemic career changers increased demand further.

Demand for Entry-level Skills – Evaluation evidence indicates that demand for entry-level skills training was a key driver of engagement with FFF. Training leading to industry-recognised certifications ('tickets' in chainsaw use or brushcutting) was particularly valued, as these are often required for employment. By reducing the financial risk of training, FFF enabled businesses to invest in new and inexperienced workers, supporting workforce development.

Engagement with Training Providers – the programme worked with every forestry training provider in Wales and sourced niche or specialist courses where required. It supported a wide range of training, including core health and safety, chainsaw and tree work, machinery operation and environmental topics.

Long-Term Legacy – FFF supported self-employed operators to grow into employing businesses. The programme also helped these businesses structure their staff development and progression.

4.1.2 Limitations

While FFF was highly effective in delivering practical skills training and knowledge transfer, mentoring and professional pathways were the least successful elements of the scheme, under-performing against original targets. Evaluation evidence indicates this reflected

limited demand for more involved professional development, time and cost pressures on businesses, and the impact of COVID-19, which shifted focus towards immediate operational needs. Evaluation evidence indicates that mentoring was more effective when embedded alongside practical training, and less successful when offered as a stand-alone intervention.

4.2 Training support post-FFF

Some funded training is still available to those working in the forestry sector in Wales through the Farming Connect programme. However, those consulted noted that only individuals with a Farming Connect holding number are eligible for this funding support and this does not apply to those working in the forestry sector. In addition, it was noted that less focus is now given to forestry related training through Farming Connect and therefore fewer training opportunities are available even to those who are eligible.

Funded training is also available through the Welsh Government's Flexible Skills Programme Funding (FSP) (Welsh Government, 2024) which offers up to 50% funding for eligible courses. However, training providers noted that very few of their training forestry participants access FSP to fund their course. They noted that in their view one of the main reasons why individuals do not access this funding is that there is no administrative support available to help individuals with the application process required to access it.

In order to access FSP funded training, applicants must:

- Find a suitable training course
- Apply for and book a training place
- Pay for the course in full
- Only after completing the course can applicants then claim back 50% of the cost

Some stakeholders noted that a relatively large proportion of those working in the sector are neurodiverse – many have conditions such as dyslexia. Processes that require considerable administrative processes are therefore often challenging for these individuals. The administrative requirements linked with the FSP is therefore a barrier that discourages many from applying for the funding support it offers. As a result, individuals considering taking up training either do not do the training or opt to pay the full amount themselves rather than apply for funding.

Not accessing the funding available has obvious additional cost implications for training participants. However, even for those who do apply for FSP support there is a cash flow implication, as in many cases the participant must pay all the fees upfront (often in excess of £1,000) and must then wait, possibly more than two months, before being able to claim 50% of this cost back.

The combined effect of the administrative burden and cost implications of accessing funded training through FSP is that fewer individuals take up the training opportunities available in comparison to the number who used to access FFF supported training. Furthermore, the training that is accessed is typically limited to the mandatory ticket style qualifications that workers must have to operate in the industry. Very few participate in training that focusses

on the wider skills and knowledge required to progress in the sector. New entrants to the sector are therefore missing broader contextual skills that used to be taught through workshops funded through FFF.

As a result, those consulted were of the view that the level of 'softer' skills including practical day-to-day woodland and forestry management knowledge, is slowly being diluted across the sector's workforce as older workers who have this knowledge and skills, gradually leave the industry and new entrants into the sector not having the opportunity to gain them. In the absence of training the emphasis is on employers to pass these skills on to their workers – but employers particularly small employers lack the time or expertise to provide this.

4.3 Other barriers to CPD training

Although funded training accompanied with administration support, similar to that delivered through FFF would address some of the main barriers to accessing CPD training within the sector, other barriers would remain. These barriers include:

- **Access to equipment** - In order to participate in practical training such as chainsaw handling, participants need to bring their own equipment to the training sessions. This can be a challenge for new entrants who may not yet have these or may not yet have started working in the industry and cannot access them from their employer.
- **Time** - Employers must release staff often for several days in order to participate in courses. This can be a challenge for many – especially self-employed individuals who must take unpaid leave to attend courses. Time away from work can often be more difficult to accommodate than the financial cost of the training.
- **Transport and access** - Much of the practical CPD training is delivered in quite remote locations near woodlands. Having access to transport to travel to and from the training venue is therefore essential. It was noted that many younger people (below the age of 17) must rely on others to give them a lift to and from the training site each day. The same is true for any training participant who do not have access to their own transport. A training provider referred to an example of an individual who had been made redundant and receiving support through the ReACT programme wanted to undertake some training in order to consider a career change into the forestry industry. However, they could not drive and as such could not access the training they needed.

4.4 The availability of CPD training courses

Those consulted noted that the training modules relating to the practical day-to-day woodland and forestry management skills, referred to above, do still exist even though take up of them is very low. As such, if a funded training programme similar to FFF were to be reintroduced, this training could be rolled out quite quickly.

Those consulted were of the view that a successor to FFF may not offer the same level of funding as was previously included in the programme. However, if such a successor removed administrative barriers and operated as an industry-focused programme, more people would take up the training available. A programme that highlights and signposts training opportunities—similar to Farming Connect—would increase uptake. This would help more forestry workers access training and reduce the growing skills gaps in the sector.

4.5 Conclusion

The number of forestry workers accessing CPD training appears to have declined since the availability of funded training available through the FFF programme came to an end.

Alternative funding mechanisms for CPD within the forestry sector are available—for example, support through the Flexible Skills Programme (FSP) fund or subsidised training delivered via Farming Connect. However, uptake among forestry professionals remains notably low.

In the case of the FSP, many individuals are put off accessing training via this funding route as they perceive the application process as administratively burdensome, while others find the requirement to pay training costs upfront and reclaim them later financially prohibitive.

Similarly, although Farming Connect offers funded training, forestry businesses often report that the scope of courses available is through the programme to be too limited to meet their needs.

CPD training that is accessed by forestry workers and employers usually focuses only on must-have ticket-style courses required as a minimum to work in the industry. As such there is a lack of investment in more generic knowledge-based skills that are essential to the future growth and sustainability of the industry in Wales.

The reintroduction of a programme similar to FFF would probably encourage more individuals to participate in CPD training – although other barriers such as access and time would remain. However, many of the knowledge-based training modules delivered by FFF still exist as does the provision available to deliver them.

It may not be possible to provide all the knowledge transfer and skills development required across the industry by CPD training alone. Other knowledge transfer schemes such as mentoring and advisory services may also be required. These were relatively underdeveloped within the FFF programme. As such any success of this programme will need to focus on including these services within its delivery options.

5. Benchmarking Welsh provision against other UK nations

The findings from the Timber Industrial Strategy Consultation (Welsh Government, 2025a) suggested a need to explore examples of approaches taken outside Wales to help inform the future direction of skills development and training support for the forestry sector in Wales. Therefore, as part of this research, a benchmarking exercise was conducted to identify provision available in other UK nations. This benchmarking exercise consisted of a light touch approach, rather than aiming to identify all provision available in other UK nations in depth. The benchmarking explored areas of provision identified by stakeholders interviewed and during the review of key documentation relating to the sector, such as UK nations' strategy documents.

5.1 England

5.1.1 Education and training pathways into the sector in England

Pathways into the forestry sector in England include apprenticeships, further education and higher education. These include T-Levels for 16–19-year-olds, further education at Levels 2 and 3, apprenticeships, and undergraduate and postgraduate forestry degrees.

T-Levels

In England, T-Levels were introduced in September 2020 as a two-year vocational qualification for 16–19-year-olds, combining classroom learning with industry placement. T-Levels in forestry-related subjects are delivered by a number of colleges across England. Stakeholders interviewed for this research referred to the English experience of T-Levels and shared some concerns, limited sector consultation during development, low take-up, and the breadth of the qualification, with only a small proportion of content specific to forestry. These views suggest that, in their current form, T-Levels have not been perceived as a good fit for the forestry sector.

Further education

A number of colleges in England offer Level 2 or 3 courses in forestry-related subjects.² Some of these colleges are located within reasonable travelling distance of the England–Wales border. For example, Holme Lacey College is located close to the border and may be a practical option for some Wales-based learners. As well as delivering the Level 3 Forestry apprenticeship, it also offers a Level 2 Introduction to Forestry and Arboriculture course.

Apprenticeships

In England, entry level apprenticeships, aimed at forestry worker roles, are offered by three further education colleges, including Askham Bryan College, which offers a Level 3 Forest

² Colleges that offer these courses include Askham Bryan College, Bridgewater and Taunton College, Capel Manor College, Cornwall College, East Durham College, Easton College, Holme Lacey College (part of Herefordshire and Ludlow College), Moulton College, Plumpton College, Sparsholt College, South Staffordshire College.

Craftsperson apprenticeship; Myerscough College, which also offers a Level 3 Forest Craftsperson apprenticeship and Holme Lacey (part of Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College), which offers a Level 3 Forestry apprenticeship.

Higher-level apprenticeships are offered by one university in England - the National School of Forestry, University of Cumbria, offers a BSc (Hons) Professional Forester Apprenticeship and Forestry Works Manager Apprenticeship. These apprenticeships support progression into forest management roles.

Stakeholders interviewed acknowledged that the Professional Forester Apprenticeship has been a success in England. Expressing positive views on the apprenticeship, one stakeholder noted that it has been “working brilliantly”, with high demand for take-up and good engagement and buy-in from the sector, particularly the Forestry Commission which has offered apprentices a Development Woodland Officer role through the apprenticeship programme. The stakeholder interviewed noted it was “one of the most transformational things that the sector has done.”

Higher education

There is one university offering forestry related courses in England at both undergraduate and post graduate levels. The National School of Forestry, University of Cumbria, delivers a number of courses, including BSc (Hons) Forestry (Top-Up), BSc (Hons) Forest Management, BSc (Hons) Forest Management (with sandwich year), MSc Forest Science.

5.1.2 Examples of funded initiatives for training in England

Up until 2024/25, the Forestry Commission in England operated the Forestry and Arboriculture Training Fund (FATF), which covered the costs of a wide range of short practical training courses for forestry and arboriculture. The fund ran for two years and during that time awarded £3.56 million to allow 3,293 individuals to undertake training courses. Over 5,900 course places were funded, including 1179 arboriculture courses, 889 plant and machinery courses and 588 deer management courses. These courses were delivered by 134 training providers across the country. More than half of successful applicants were new entrants to the sector when they applied to the fund (Forestry Commission, 2024). The FATF was withdrawn due to Government funding decisions. Commenting on the withdrawal decision, one stakeholder interviewed suggested that the fund was not sustainable in the long term, noting they thought it was an expensive initiative that attempted to boost sector skills capacity in the short term.

The Forestry Roots programme, launched in 2018 and delivered by the Royal Forestry Society (RFS), offers a years' paid placement, training, relocation expenses and mentoring for 18–30-year-olds. The programme is Funded by The ALA Green Charitable Trust and aims to provide opportunities for individuals who have faced barriers to gaining employment. The programme offers trainees 20 days of hands-on training worth up to £2,000, professional development and workplace experience resulting in a Level 2 Forestry qualification. Since it was introduced, the programme has had a positive impact on supporting new entrants into the forestry sector with around 50 participants entering a career in the sector across England and Wales following completion of the programme (Royal Forestry Society, 2025).

5.1.3 Skills development in England

[The Forestry Sector Skills Plan for England \(2025-2035\)](#) (ICF, 2025) was developed to support skills development in the forestry sector in England. The plan identifies constraints on skills development, including an ageing and fragmented workforce, high training costs, limited education provision, and low demand for specialist forestry courses. The plan outlines five priorities to support the sector.

A key priority within the plan is expanding and strengthening training and education pathways. This includes increasing provision across further and higher education, apprenticeships, work-based learning, and short technical courses. Key proposals include a postgraduate forestry conversion course to attract graduates from related disciplines, expanded Level 3 apprenticeship support for small employers, and the introduction of a new Forestry Works Manager qualification and apprenticeship to formalise supervisory skills.

The plan also places an emphasis on career-long skills development. It proposes a sector-wide competency framework defining required skills at all levels, supported by a digital training hub and a passport-style certification system to record competencies and qualifications. Short-course training, proven effective through over 6,000 funded places, will be expanded to address gaps in areas such as silviculture, agroforestry and green finance.

5.2 Scotland

5.2.1 Education pathways into the sector in Scotland

There are two education institutions in Scotland offering formal education qualifications in forestry. Scotland's Rural College offers a number of courses including Certificate Forestry, HNC Forestry, Advanced Certificate in Forestry (Forest Mechanisation), Advanced Certificate in Arboriculture. The Scottish School of Forestry (University of the Highlands and Islands – Inverness) delivers a number of courses at different levels, including:

- Introduction to the Woodland Environment SCQF Level 4
- Trees and Timber Modern Apprenticeship – SCQF Level 5
- General Woodland and Forestry Tree work Modern Apprenticeship – SCQF Level 6
- Forestry HNC SCQF Level 7
- Forestry and Urban Woodland Operations
- Forestry and Urban Woodland Operations (Advanced)
- Forestry HNC
- Forestry PDA
- BSc (Hons) Forestry and Treescaping Management

5.2.2 Examples of funded initiatives for training in Scotland

The Forestry Skills Programme, created by Future Woodlands Scotland and launched in December 2024, was designed to expand Scotland's forestry workforce and support communities, small businesses, and new entrants (Future Woodlands Scotland, 2026a). It

was funded by energy company bp and delivered with multiple training partners. The core aims of the programme were to address Scotland's shortage of trained forestry workers, support national woodland creation and restoration targets and provide accessible, practical training across the country. A feature of the programme has been supporting the reopening of the Scottish Forestry and Lantra Scotland's Women in Forestry Practical Training Fund and the Future Foresters Funds. The funds cover 100% costs of training or assessment for courses where fees are no more than £500 per course for a wide range of courses (Future Woodlands Scotland, 2026b). Applicants can apply for the funding more than once to allow for progression. Whilst there appears to be no publicly available data on the number of fund recipients or number of grants awarded, the funds have reopened multiple times due to high demand suggesting sustained interest in the scheme.

5.2.3 Skills development in Scotland

[Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029](#) (Scottish Government, 2019) was developed to support the future of the forestry sector in Scotland. It sets a long-term vision for expanding and sustainably managing forests. A key theme within the strategy is the need to strengthen the forestry workforce. The Strategy highlights that the sector is growing, diversifying, and facing skills shortages, noting that it has 'an ageing workforce' and difficulties attracting young people. To meet future demands, it emphasises developing the skills of existing workers, attracting new entrants from more diverse backgrounds, and ensuring access to appropriate qualifications and training. This includes technical forestry skills, biosecurity expertise, sustainable forest management, and capabilities linked to new technologies.

The Strategy highlights the importance of education and public understanding, with specific reference to outdoor learning for children, which supports long-term engagement with nature and future workforce development. It also calls for wider public awareness of sustainable forestry principles to build support for woodland expansion and responsible land-use decisions.

Research and innovation underpin the Strategy's ambitions, with commitments to continued investment in forest science, pest and disease management, climate resilience, and tree breeding. The Strategy acknowledges that these research activities help develop advanced technical skills and support a modern, adaptable forestry sector.

5.3 Northern Ireland

Publicly available evidence indicates that forestry training in Northern Ireland is limited in scale and largely embedded in wider land-based courses. A forestry or timber skills strategy was not identified through the review of publicly available sources. As such, it has not been explored further as a benchmark in this study.

5.4 Outside the UK

Stakeholders interviewed for this research also referred to examples of forestry skills development outside the UK, particularly in parts of mainland Europe. These references were typically general and anecdotal and not explored in detail as part of this review, they may be relevant for future consideration to explore any lessons for forestry skills development in Wales.

These perspectives are consistent with views expressed through the Welsh Government's Timber Industrial Strategy consultation (Welsh Government, 2025b), where a small number of respondents suggested that Wales could benefit from learning from approaches taken outside Wales and the wider UK. Respondents highlighted mainland Europe as a potential source of good practice, with countries such as Finland and Sweden referenced as examples of more established forestry skills systems.

5.5 Summary

The benchmarking exercise highlights that, across all areas of the UK, the forestry sector faces similar challenges, which include an ageing workforce, high training costs and difficulties attracting new entrants. England and Scotland both show approaches with joined-up pathways spanning entry-level training through to professional and management roles, underpinned by employer engagement and alignment with national forestry strategies. Evidence from England suggests that higher-level, work-based apprenticeships can be transformational where there is strong sector buy-in, while experiences with some short-course training funds illustrate both their effectiveness in rapidly increasing skills capacity and the risks associated with short-term or unsustainable funding models.

Scotland's approach highlights the importance of accessible, locally delivered practical training, and inclusive funding mechanisms. Taken together, these findings suggest that future skills development and training support for the forestry sector in Wales would benefit from a demand-led approach that prioritises clear progression routes, sustainable funding, and strong collaboration between government, education providers and industry.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The forestry and the timber industry in Wales already contributes a great deal to the Welsh economy and managing forestry sustainably helps reduce net carbon dioxide emissions. It also has the opportunity to further its economic and environmental contributions by increasing its yields of Welsh-grown timber and retaining more of the value-added timber supply line processes in Wales. In order to capitalise on these opportunities, the sector needs to attract more talented and suitably skilled individuals into the workforce.

The Welsh Government's Timber Industrial Strategy 2025 sets out six priorities to support the sector to grow the skilled workforce needed to 'scale up' the supply of timber in Wales. The findings of this report suggest that alongside these strategic priorities aimed at supporting the sector as a whole, many individual organisations and contractors operating within the sector also need to develop their own strategic priorities, particularly in relation to training and skills to enable their own businesses to grow and thrive.

6.1.1 Skills gaps and shortages

The findings of this study indicate that skill shortages exist across many job roles within the forestry industry including tree planting and establishment, harvesting, haulage and processing. While operational skills shortages were the most frequently cited challenge (particularly machinery operators, chainsaw handlers and tree fellers), some stakeholders also highlighted difficulties in recruiting and retaining workers at managerial level. The findings also indicate that the ageing workforce is accelerating the loss of critical skills and experience, within the sector and that more needs to be done to support knowledge transfer to new entrants.

Much of the continued learning for existing workers in forestry appears to take place informally within workplaces - access to structured knowledge-transfer opportunities appear to be limited. Stakeholders noted that this lack of knowledge transfer was leading to skills and knowledge gaps within the workforce in relation to practical, day-to-day knowledge required for effective woodland management in particular silviculture and business finance.

6.1.2 Take up of training places

This study confirms what has previously been noted in the Welsh Government's Timber Industrial Strategy that 'there are low numbers of trainees on full-time forestry-related further education courses, as well as low apprenticeship numbers in Wales'.

Access to full-time courses can be a challenge to some learners the institutions that deliver relevant FE and HE courses are based in mid and north Wales with no provision currently available in south Wales. Full-time, campus-based delivery of forestry courses with limited accommodation and the lack of viable distance-learning options create some further barriers to participation in FE courses.

Part-time delivery models are being considered to widen access, particularly for learners needing to work or claim benefits while studying, but such options are not yet widely available.

Some colleges reported that their future teaching workforce could be at risk with many tutors and assessors nearing retirement, and colleges facing difficulties recruiting replacements with sufficient industry experience.

The destination of learners completing FE courses is not fully known as colleges do not routinely collect this data, but anecdotal evidence suggests that only a minority of students move directly into forestry roles. Some progress to university, some move into arboriculture, while others move on to employment that is not related to forestry or any other land-based industry.

6.1.3 Apprenticeships

Current provision and take up of forestry apprenticeships in Wales is relatively low. Only one provider currently delivers the Level 2 apprenticeship course. This study has identified several barriers that prevent employers from taking on apprentices. These include administrative burdens for micro-businesses, legal restrictions on under-18s, safety concerns, short-term contracting cycles, the withdrawal of financial incentives, and the additional cost of essential 'ticket' training not included in apprenticeship programmes. Plans are underway to review the forestry apprenticeship frameworks in Wales to ensure they meet current industry requirements. This may ensure that the apprenticeship frameworks are more relevant, but this will not address the wider access barriers noted above.

Alternative models, such as shared apprenticeship schemes, may reduce some of the barriers noted above but they do not fully address the wider structural challenges faced by employers to taking on an apprentice.

The only UK degree apprenticeship in forestry is currently only available in England. This apprenticeship is reported to have good employment outcomes for participants; however equivalent provision is not currently available in Wales.

Apprenticeship courses are delivered by providers in England near the Welsh border. These courses may be more accessible in geographical terms to apprentices and employers located near the Welsh borders. However, it remains unclear at this stage whether these apprentices and employers would be eligible for any Welsh Government funding support to participate in these apprenticeship courses.

Overall, while apprenticeships have strong potential to support workforce development for the forestry industry in Wales, current models do not fully meet the needs of employers or learners.

However, addressing the skills and training needs of the forestry sector in Wales cannot be achieved by focussing only on ensuring sufficient provision of suitable training courses (i.e. the supply of provision). Those working within the sector also require support in identify

their skills development and training needs as well as support in accessing the provision that is available to them (i.e. generating demand).

6.1.4 Demand for skills and training

Findings outlined in this report indicate that many employers adopt a short-term reactive approach to training and upskilling their workforce, investing only in training, often mandatory, industry required training needed to work in the industry, and less in training to support the longer-term aims of their business. The cost of training has been identified as one of the main barriers to investing in workforce development training. Closure of the training previously delivered through the Forestry Focused Future (FFF) programme combined with limited opportunities reported by those operating in the forestry industry to access funded training through the Farming Connect programme, support claims of a lack of availability of training opportunities within the sector.

On the other hand, the Flexible Skills Programme (FSP) does offer funded training opportunities for business in Wales including forestry business. However, our study findings outline that the administrative process involved in accessing this training is often considered a significant barrier to those working in the forestry sector.

Some stakeholders were also of the view that employers may not invest in training because of uncertainties about the longer-term prospects of their business. The findings indicate that across the sector there is a reliance on short term delivery contracts which encourage many forestry businesses to assemble temporary teams of self-employed contractors to deliver the work as opposed to taking on permanent employees. This short-term approach creates some challenges for these businesses in terms of longer-term business and workforce development planning.

Findings indicate that many businesses could benefit from accessing additional business support, guidance or mentoring to enable them to develop clearer progression pathways for their business including an understanding of their future skills and training needs.

6.1.5 Routes into employment

New entrants to the forestry workforce in Wales range from newly qualified college and university graduates to career changers with no prior experience in the sector. They include young adults entering the labour market for the first time as well as individuals over 50 seeking a new career path. This range of new entrants demonstrates a broad interest in forestry work; however, several structural barriers limit their ability to access employment opportunities.

A key challenge arises from the sector's heavy reliance on self-employed contractors. This employment model restricts opportunities for new entrants seeking employment on an operational level, who may struggle to secure work without prior experience, certification and possibly tools and equipment.

The significant financial investment in heavy equipment and machinery required to become a self-employed contractor also places a barrier for individuals considering this as an entry or progression route within the sector. as a result, fewer individuals are considering this as

a career option which in turn has prompted some larger companies to purchase their own machinery and employ operators directly rather than rely on external contractors. If this trend continues, the sector may see a reduction in the number of small contracting businesses operating in the future.

Where job opportunities do exist—particularly within smaller organisations—they are often not publicly advertised. Stakeholders noted that employers frequently adopt a cautious approach to recruitment, relying on word of mouth or existing connections to identify individuals with the right attitude and work ethic for forestry contracting work. While these informal recruitment practices can help employers ensure reliability and trustworthiness, they also narrow the pool of potential applicants. This limits the sector's ability to attract new talent, particularly from under-represented or non-traditional backgrounds. It also reduces transparency around the number of vacancies available and limits the availability of data relating to how many new entrants are joining the workforce at an operational level each year.

Stakeholders highlighted that demand for forestry contractors in Wales is growing rapidly. As the sector expands, there is a need to encourage more individuals into operational roles. However, the limited availability of robust data—both on job opportunities and on new entrant uptake—makes it difficult to determine the scale and direction of support needed to support more individuals into the sector.

Training initiatives—such as the Foresight Sustainable Forestry: Skills Training Programme delivered by Tilhill, which recruits suitable candidates and provides training to prepare them for operational roles as well as matching them with employers—demonstrate a practical route for supporting new entrants into the sector. These initiatives help bridge the gap between individuals seeking to enter the industry and employers who require workers with the right skills, work readiness and understanding of operational demands.

Such models also offer a more structured and transparent entry pathway than the informal recruitment practices currently common in the sector. By actively identifying potential candidates, equipping them with relevant skills, and facilitating direct connections with employers, these programmes can widen access to forestry careers and reduce reliance on personal networks or word-of-mouth recruitment.

6.1.6 Awareness of career opportunities

The findings of this report indicate that the level of awareness of career opportunities in the forestry sector may be limited, and this may serve as a barrier to encouraging new entrants into the sector. This may be particular the case amongst secondary school learners as well as further and higher education students considering their career options.

Examples of initiatives aimed specifically at raising awareness of the forestry sector were outlined during the fieldwork of this study. These included efforts to raise awareness change of the employment opportunities that exist in forestry amongst military service men and women considering a career change, as well as residential camps aimed at immersing young people in a forestry environment to outline how trees and forest contribution to the environment and the economy. Overall, however, the consensus was that more awareness raising was needed in order to draw skilled workers into the industry.

6.1.7 The need for coordinated support

The Forestry Focused Future programme (FFF) delivered sector-specific training and a professional development programme for the forestry workforce in Wales. It provided funded training, guidance, mentoring, and supported employers to develop their own progression pathways. Since FFF ended, funded training opportunities have become more limited and less accessible across the sector. As a result, fewer individuals now access funded training, and participation is largely restricted to mandatory ticket-based qualifications.

The findings of this study indicate that the forestry sector in Wales requires coordinated support to encourage longer term strategic planning based on identifying training needs – including the provision of funding and administrative support to access the required training. Generally, the sector requires well-supported training model programme similar to that previously offered by FFF if it is to achieve the strategic ambitions set out in The Welsh Government's Timber Industrial Strategy.

6.2 Recommendations

Taken together, these findings suggest that the main challenge for forestry skills development in Wales is not a lack of available training, but how support is structured, accessed and coordinated. Low awareness of career opportunities, fragmented funding, administrative burdens and the geographic concentration of provision limit take-up, particularly for a workforce dominated by self-employed individuals and small businesses. As such, the following recommendations which reflect recommendations already outlined in the Welsh Government's 2025 Timber Industrial Strategy: Making wood work for Wales, focus on addressing these issues.

Recommendation 1: Develop a funded programme of training support

The forestry industry in Wales is largely made up of small or micro-businesses. These businesses could benefit from a funded programme of support and training tailored around strategic priorities outlined in the Timber Industrial Strategy and aimed at helping to drive the sector forward.

A new support initiative could replace the previous Forestry Focused Future (FFF) programme, which closed in 2022, and could extend beyond what that programme offered by providing technical advice and mentoring to encourage knowledge transfer alongside the development of technical skills. The initiative could be structured in a similar way to the current Farming Connect model but focused specifically on supporting the forestry sector to adapt to policy, economic and environmental changes.

Evidence indicates that the effectiveness of the FFF programme lay in its ability to reduce administrative burden, coordinate fragmented provision, support progression planning, and broker relationships between employers, learners and training providers. Stakeholders also emphasised the value of a 'one-stop shop' that could help those working in the sector access reliable, trusted training at the right level and at the right time.

Welsh Government is already committed to “co-ordinating a knowledge-exchange programme for forestry and timber stakeholders” (Welsh Government, 2025a). The 2025 Timber Industrial Strategy: Making wood work for Wales also highlights the need to strengthen communication and promote understanding across the supply chain, including between foresters, sawmills, trades, architects, planning officials, building inspectors and the construction sector. A support programme of this nature could help Welsh Government to deliver on this commitment.

Recommendation 2: Promote and develop forestry careers

A lack of awareness of potential career opportunities within the forestry sector serves as a barrier to encourage new workers into the industry. The Welsh Government should explore options as to how representatives from the forestry sector can increase engagement with schools, FE settings and the wider public to improve awareness of career opportunities within the sector to help attract new entrants and support diversity in the sector.

Welsh Governments existing commitments from the 2025 Timber Industrial Strategy: Making wood work for Wales outline how “Welsh Government will work with the sectors to promote the integration of forestry and timber knowledge at an early age (pre-16) across the curriculum”.

Welsh Government should also explore opportunities to support more formal recruitment practices within the sector to help raise awareness of the sector to new entrants and to support increased diversity within the sector.

Recommendation 3: Supporting routes into employment

This review has identified challenges in recruiting new entrants into the forestry workforce in Wales, particularly for entry-level and operational roles. Evidence indicates that informal recruitment approaches adopted by many smaller employers across the sector limits entry level employment opportunities for those not connected to the sector. It also makes it difficult to gather data relating to the number of job vacancies available in some parts of the sector.

Welsh Government should therefore explore ways to support clearer and more accessible routes into employment, building on existing post-16 education, apprenticeships and work-based learning provision. Employers, particularly smaller operational level contractors should be further supported with any recruitment needs they may have.

Consideration should also be given to expanding current efforts to support career changers into the industry by also matching individuals studying forestry at FE or HE level who have an interest in working in forestry at an operational level with potential employers. This could include the provision of funded work placements.

Recommendation 4: Support more work experience opportunities for new entrants.

The skills and experience required for many forestry roles—particularly to ensure work is carried out safely and competently—can only be developed gradually through practical, hands-on experience. However, many small employers cannot afford the time or financial

cost of taking on inexperienced staff and providing the 'on-the-job' learning needed for them to become competent foresters.

Welsh Government should explore opportunities to support funded work-experience placements for new entrants. This would enable individuals to develop the skills and knowledge they need to work safely and effectively in the industry while receiving an income. It would also allow employers to support new entrants to gain the practical experience required to develop these skills, without taking on additional financial risk.

These work experience placements could be offered to potential career changers as well as forestry course students in HE and FE.

Recommendation 5: Supporting more apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are considered by many of those consulted as part of this review as potentially good routes into employment within the forestry sector. However, few employers within the sector currently take on apprentices due to the longer-term commitment associated with them as well as the administrative burden involved and health and safety risks that may be created.

Welsh Government has already commitment to 'reviewing existing mechanisms of support for post-16 training, including apprenticeships, support needed for the development of off-site timber training, post-16 entry to forestry and the promotion of forestry to those with transferrable experience and skills' in its 2025 Timber Industrial Strategy: Making wood work for Wales.

In order to encourage more employers to take on apprentices, further work is required to ensure that:

- Current forestry apprenticeship frameworks match industry needs (Medr has already started this process).
- Welsh Government and Medr consider alternative apprenticeship delivery models such as a shared apprenticeship scheme.
- Welsh Government needs to work with the sector – possibly via the funded programme of training support suggested in Recommendation 1 to further identify and address other practical barriers to taking on an apprentice faced by employers.

Further investigation is also required in relation to current apprenticeship funding models to consider whether students who live and work in Wales could access apprenticeship courses that are not currently available in Wales that are delivered by providers located on the other side of the Welsh border.

Recommendation 6: Supporting CPD

Our findings outline that those working in the industry often adopt a short-term reactive approach to training. Focussing only on the minimum level of training required to work in the industry.

More support is needed to remove the administrative and funding barriers that currently limit those working in the industry to the take up training opportunities. As well as removing barriers to training focus is also required on offering and guiding industry workers to a wider range of training opportunities. Training aimed at ensuring that individuals not only have the necessary certification to work in the industry but also the skills to be competent foresters. This could include training aimed at increasing silviculture skills and knowledge as well as training to support business to plan and manage working in the changing economic and environmental climate.

Some training programmes relating to the above have already been developed but are currently dormant due to a lack of take up. Provision of these courses could therefore be made available relatively easily and the training could be delivered through the funded programme of training support suggested in Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 7: Supporting more business skills across the sector

Those consulted as part of this review noted that many small businesses operating within the sector lack key business skills—particularly in business finance—which are essential for developing longer-term business plans.

The Welsh Government should therefore consider providing additional business support to employers across the sector. This could also be delivered through the funded programme of training support recommended above. Support could be provided by recognised business-support organisations such as Business Wales and/or through mentoring schemes designed to facilitate peer-to-peer transfer of business skills and wider forestry knowledge.

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