



Forestry Commission Apprenticeships

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Apprenticeships

Forestry Sector Skills Shortage

Level 6 – Professional Forester (Degree)

Level 3 – Forest Craftsperson

Level 4 – Forest Works Manager

Flexible Job Apprenticeship Agency

Q&A

Forestry skills crisis puts climate targets at risk



Institute of
Chartered
Foresters

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On Thursday 7 October we sent a position paper to Ministers across the UK detailing our serious concerns about the skills shortage in our sector, which we believe puts climate targets at risk. Read the executive summary below or [download the full document](#).

We have asked governments to commit to action and offered solutions; we have also made a number of commitments for what we, as the professional body, will do, and called on the private sector, third sector, public bodies, fellow professional bodies and our own members to help drive the necessary change.

We hope that the key message can be endorsed widely: the sector needs urgent action on skills if we are to deliver for the environment in this time of crisis. Your support in sharing this through your network would be much appreciated.

Challenge: There are significant challenges and ambitious targets to achieve. Projections from recent research indicate that the number of skilled people required to meet these targets – up to a 72% increase across the workforce – vastly outweigh both the current reality and the future trajectory of new entrants. Further and higher education providers are unable to provide the training and education under current resourcing models. We are simply not educating or developing enough people to the high standards needed to deliver what is required. Lack of awareness of forestry as a fantastic green career and poor accessibility of courses are major barriers to recruitment.

We are particularly concerned that there are not enough suitably qualified and experienced professionals to address the complexity of modern, sustainable forestry as the UK delivers its planned rapid expansion of woodlands of all types. Professionals bring the skills, knowledge and experience needed to deliver the policies of the government, meet the needs of industry, protect the environment and provide a return to owners. The small number of forestry professionals (fewer than a thousand) in a sector responsible for 13% of the UK's land mass emphasises the scale of the challenge.

Solution: We call on governments, public bodies, private and third sectors, higher and further education, and allied professions to commit to resourcing the sector's education, training and development needs, campaigning to raise the profile of forestry and arboriculture careers and creating new pathways into the industry to widen access. We suggest three quick wins:

1. Fund the development of a new Forestry Training Hub to foster higher education connections, employer networks, links between academia and business, good practice and online learning, and to act as a resource for businesses to engage with apprenticeships.
2. Mobilise a national recruitment campaign about working with trees to encourage more young people and career changers into training for careers that tackle the climate crisis.
3. Support the delivery of a leadership training programme to ensure strong, long-term, inspirational leadership for delivering on the climate change agenda.

Level 6 – Professional Forester Degree

- Working with the University of Cumbria (National School of Forestry) and the ICF (Institute of Chartered Foresters), the Forestry Commission has helped to develop the first degree-level apprenticeship for the forestry sector.
- Started in 2022, we are now in the process of recruiting our 5th cohort. Our first cohort graduated in November 2025 – 21 now employed in the sector.
- 2026 cohort – recruitment has now closed – the Forestry Commission is looking to employ 8 apprentices, and sifting is currently taking place. Assessment centre will run over 1 week in May. Successful applicants will start September.
- We want to continue to support this initiative, but we want the numbers of Forestry Commission apprentices to come down – and the number of externally employed apprentices to increase.
- Is a huge success with nearly 800 applications received this year for 8 posts.
- As of today – we have 75 apprentices working their way through the 3-year programme – of these over half are employed in non-Forestry Commission roles.
- People want to work in forestry!

2022 Cohort



Level 3 – Forest Craftsperson

- 2-year apprenticeship approved for delivery in 2022 which replaced the previous Level 2 Forest Operative apprenticeship.
- Currently there are only 2 further education colleges running this apprenticeship. We'd like to increase this number across England supporting min numbers of 8-12 apprentices each year in each college.
- 2 routes through the apprenticeship are available:
 - Establishment and Maintenance
 - Harvesting
- Myerscough College and Hereford, Ludlow and North Shropshire College are delivering this apprenticeship.
- The apprenticeship includes around £3000 worth of additional qualifications (chainsaw, spraying, first aid etc).
- This apprenticeship could provide up to 96 UCAS points allowing career progression to the Level 6 Professional Forester (Degree) apprenticeship.

Level 4 Forest Works Manager

- Newly developed – the Level 4 Forest Works Manager apprenticeship is being offered by the University of Cumbria.
- 18 month apprenticeship with a focus on those employed in roles in operational delivery of management activities and their safe implementation.
- This apprenticeship was only approved for delivery in 2025.
- This apprenticeship could provide up to 64 UCAS points ensuring there is an ability to progress upwards to the Level 6 Professional Forester (Degree) apprenticeship.
- There will also be an option for those already working in such roles to undertake the Experienced Worker route.

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Costs

- Salary
 - Apprentices can be paid £8/hour in their first year of their apprenticeship, although we would advocate for apprentices to be paid fairly in line with other employees. Once an apprentice has completed their first year of the apprenticeship they must receive no less than the national minimum wage based on their age.
- Travel and expenses for attending college are dependant on the employers contract with the apprentice. We would encourage employers to offer this as a benefit to the apprentice.
- If you are a Levy paying employer – you can pull down 95% of the costs from your Levy and the Government pay the other 5%.
- If you are non Levy paying employer, the Government will pay the 95% of the costs and you will be required to pay 5% this works out to:
 - Level 3 Forest Craftsperson - £700 for the 2 years
 - Level 4 Forest Works Manager - £400 for the 18 months
 - Level 6 Professional Forester (degree) - £1100 for the 3 years
- 20% of their working hours. Apprentices must receive 20% of their working hours for Off The Job Training. This can include the hours spent at college and will be logged by the apprentice and the college.

Benefits

- Apprenticeships are suitable for people at any age and any level so you can hire someone new or upskill an existing employee, allowing you to grow talent and develop a motivated, skilled and qualified workforce.
- They help you to:
 - Offer on-the-job training in a safe working environment
 - Build a culture of learning and development
 - Enjoy higher staff retention – boosts employee loyalty
 - Increase productivity - boosts employee motivation
- Reduced costs for equivalent training courses – the Level 3 apprenticeship includes around £3,000 worth of additional qualifications that you would expect any employee in the role to complete.
- Opportunity to access Forestry Commission enrichment training. This is not offered to the sector, but those on the Level 6 apprenticeship are offered this opportunity at cost price.

Flexible Job Apprenticeship Agency

Barriers faced by some forestry employers

- Small businesses with limited resources to manage HR and/or paperwork for apprenticeships.
- Limited work available (both in supporting 2-year apprenticeship or the range of duties required for apprentices).
- Employer liability.

Benefits of a Flexible Job Apprenticeship Agency

- The agency manages all HR and paperwork for the apprentice.
- The agency can arrange either short term (6 month) rotations between different businesses or can link with a single business for the duration of the apprenticeship.
- Takes on full employer liability.
- Able to access up to £1,000 towards travel & expenses for attendance at college.
- No costs for the apprenticeship – the agency pays these.

Note

- Businesses are required to agree and pay the salary of the apprentice whilst working for them. The Forestry Commission currently pay the administrative costs.

Contacts:

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Level 6 – Professional Forester (Degree) Apprenticeship
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Flexible Job Apprenticeship Agency
Supplytrain

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If you'd like to find out more on any of the above, please feel free to email me
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