

Minute of Meeting of the Scottish Forestry and Timber Technologies Skills Group

3rd September 2024 – 1 to 3 pm
Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Andy Leitch	Chair and Confor
Hugh Morris	SRUC
Keith Paterson	Forest & Land Scotland
Martin Birse	James Jones Ltd
Liz Barron Majerik	Lantra
Neil Cleland	UHI/SSF
Ros Wardman	Scottish Forestry
Rob Hawkins	ICF
Steve Fowkes	FC England
Stewart Christie	Rural Skills Scotland Ltd
Neil McKay	FISA
Dan Ridley-Ellis	Napier University
April Armstrong	Confor
Lancelot Robson	Coppicing

Apologies – Andrew Smith, Elaine Ellis, Gillian Clark, Davy McCracken, Mary Thomson, Helen McKay

Actions from Previous Meeting

Most were information sharing actions, however, there was one main outstanding point which was to create an implementation group for action plan. Any volunteers to contact Andy within the next week and can schedule a meeting to plan some activity over next 12 months.

Minute of previous meeting

Agreed as accurate.

New Training Funds

Ros and Liz updated on the continuation of the Women in Forestry Practical Training Fund which goes live on Friday 6th September. Additionally, there will be a new Future Foresters Training Fund (those entering the sector or new to the sector up to 5 years) going live on 6th September also. This was taken from meeting that took place in Perth looking at what can be done to help the sector and the education providers. One of the issues discussed that was, within the curriculum, students can be trained on certain pieces of equipment, but the cost of assessment is not included and that can be a barrier. The Future Foresters

Fund is open to both men and women. Scottish Forestry has reallocated a budget for both funds, however, the Future Foresters Fund could benefit from additional funding from elsewhere and hopefully out with public sector funding, and in the next 6 months Lantra are able to receive funding from other organisations to help bolster the fund. **ACTION 1** – Ros to discuss further with Helen, Andy & Liz about how this can be progressed. Currently there is £40k across the two funds, less administration costs. Liz advised that the funds will be administered via www.skillshub.scot. People can search for courses, browse the funds, and apply via the website. A requirement this year is that all training providers have declared they are Fair Work employers or exempt from the categories, if there has been no response from a training provider, their courses would not be badged. Ros added that each application is up to £500 towards the training and an applicant can apply up to two times before the end of the financial year. Priority will be given to first time applicants.

The fund has been over-subscribed with every round of funding made available. Case studies have been produced previously for some successful applicants and this will be promoted again for this round of funding. An evaluation survey was distributed for the previous Women in Forestry Funding and a report produced on the results of the survey and passed to the funders.

College updates

UHI – Neil Cleland – First week of the new courses last week so things are busy. There has been a change to delivery and this year UHI are running a Level 4 Introduction to Woodland Environment this year, not much uptake for Level 6 due to the transition so this was cancelled this year. There were twenty-six applicants for Level 4 so running two courses with potential of 2 Level 5 courses from January which should lead into at least one Level 6 the following year. Numbers are the best they have been for a while. HN had thirty-six applicants, twenty-seven turned up to date. Staffing – hoping FLS will help out with GIS input starting after the October break. BSc has had nine returners onto third year and eight full time plus twelve part time finishing off second year. Numbers getting better and industry are buying into the new programme, so things are looking good. Looking for Mentors for work-based approach degree and will make it easier for candidates to finish in less time. There are additional external groups, so space is getting tighter but discussions taking place with Estates on the potential of a new building. Liz asked how they plan to train mentors in the workplace as there is a training programme for pre-apprentice mentors and this could be extended to forestry. **ACTION 2** – Neil to contact Liz to discuss mentor training. Hugh asked Neil if the new degree programme was going to be a tertiary degree – Neil confirmed that the HNC is remaining as this is working well for industry. There is a BSc year 1 and they infill into HNC then year 2 BSc have the opportunity to jump out for the diploma. There is still flexibility.

SRUC Barony – Hugh Morris – There are five students progressing from HNC to HND and three part-time students. There are twelve students for HNC so far and a few uncertain, may be up to 14 (38 applied so not sure what happened to others, might be that SRUC was a second option, but this will be investigated). The Advanced Certificate in Arboriculture has eleven students, and the Advanced Certificate in Forestry has five students. Currently there is not a progression route for the arboriculture students. The Certificate in Forestry has twenty-nine students (53 applied). Trees & Timber Level 5 has eleven students, not currently delivering the Level 6 this year but aim to deliver it next year. The pre-Apprenticeship has eight students. SRUC has now got degree awarding powers. SRUC have been delivering a number of short courses including drones, wood decay and hazard assessment. Received funding from National Lottery for Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest and put together a suite of short courses for that in partnership with WCM.

Scottish Forestry Update – Ros Wardman

Already covered the update on the training funds. This weekend is the Logie timber Festival. The team visited Logie Sawmill in May last year and they talked about a timber festival which took place in 2019 and attracted 4k people. When they spoke about doing it again Scottish Forestry decided to put together an event programme with them so that speakers, workshops, and practical sessions could be delivered as a means of attracting people to the industry. Dan, Neil, April, Liz are all attending the event. The week after there is an Ash Rise exhibition which is a project with the Scottish Furniture Makers Association and its all about Ash Dieback and Ash Timber and is starting in Edinburgh from September to January then moves to Dumfries from January to March then Inverness from March to May. A film has been produced looking at the story of ash, ash dieback and all the interactions it has. Hoping that this will be a useful tool to use. Currently in a situation where, due to budget cuts, other projects are having to be paused.

Fair work – Liz Barron-Majerik

Liz highlighted that Lantra have provided some workshops on Fair Work to provide training to training providers who are on the Skills Hub website and are keen to run a training session more widely to the land-based sector. Also going to be undertaking a research project on the levels of Fair Work provided within the sector and comparing by industry and will ask questions on maternity leave/paternity leave and will be benchmarking against other industries. This is something within the Lantra Workplan. There will be a link distributed to the Skills Group to forward on to industry partners. There is good practice out there and we need to identify this. It is mandatory for training funds and will be mandatory for future funding.

England Skills Forum / FC Update – Steve Fowkes

In the process of revising the Skills Action Plan for England which is planned to be launched in December. The existing action plan is still delivering actions such as taster sessions for ex-military personnel, funding new things on the ICF website, able to fund National Coppice Federation coppice apprentices to help them into the industry, funding RFS for some outreach work in schools and with other groups etc. Apprenticeship – Forestry England who run the Forest Craftsperson Apprenticeship and who take largest cohort in England recently had a good Ofsted report. So far 100% of Forest Craftspeople who have undertaken the Level 3 Apprenticeship with Forestry England have been successful at the end point assessment and over half have achieved a distinction. Level 6 Apprenticeships – new cohort starting anytime now at the University of Cumbria. This year's Professional Forester intake will be up to eighty ish across the three cohorts. Also, this year Forestry Commission are taking fifteen professional foresters as Development Woodland Officers, this cohort will be the first cohort where other organisations, private sector, NGOs, and Estates outnumber Forestry Commission apprentices. The Level 4 Forestry Works Manager qualification is becoming closer to being a reality and there has been a good response rate to the in-person consultations and online consultations. Have compiled a good Occupational Standard and had positive talks with awarding organisations in terms of developing assessment. Aiming for October for submission to the Institute for Apprenticeships for formal approval. The Forestry and Arboriculture Training Fund went live recently and was allocated very quickly due to such high demand. Will share formal evaluation when that becomes available. The new Education Minister announced in Parliament that there will be a new body formed in England called Skills England and that body will be charged with more of a role as a sector skills council as Lantra are in Scotland. They will also be looking at flexibility within funding for apprenticeships and consider options for funding other things through the apprenticeship levy fund. Steve also mentioned the Timber in Construction roadmap for the National Woods Strategy, there are strands of this which also link with skills.

Other updates

ICF – Rob Hawkins – there are events & training coming up through Sept/Oct/Nov:-

<https://www.charteredforesters.org/forestry-arboriculture-events>

Have now launched and running the accredited UKFS Elearning modules – this has its own platform, and this will be expanded:-

<https://silvestor.org.uk/>

Neil McKay - FISA – There has been a review on how FISA should develop in the future. Decisions have still to be made but not expecting significant changes. Working groups are key to what is done within FISA – The chainsaw working group is seen as a priority as it has the highest fatality rate in the industry but quad fatalities not far behind. Other work of the chainsaw group is trying to clarify and simplify some guidance on ash dieback. The Worksite Management working group are introducing new guidance on CBM in relation to forestry – releasing that at the APF in the Confor tent. Neil chairs the electricity and utilities working group and have been running presentations on utility awareness. This presentation is available for anyone to use and ties in with the individual distribution network operators and run courses to date in Stirling with Scottish Power and in Penrith with Electricity Northwest – have dates in Wales and looking at further presentations in England and NI/Southern Ireland. Safety e-bulletin is distributed every week.

Liz updated that more schools are undertaking the Forestopia qualification and Liz has been asked to deliver an assembly with a forestry theme to S3s and to look at and judge entries. Four schools have now been in touch so Liz may look for support with this. Liz is keen to use the assistance of the Forestry STEM Ambassadors in the first instance.

Keith Paterson - FLS – Keith made an offer to Liz to provide support from his team for the schools work as they have been undertaking schools work on the west coast. Technical training - continuing to build on the foundation training and basic H&S, basic operations, site standards etc. Constructing a suite of harvesting modules – five modules at the moment and working on a sixth. There are currently 14 Trees & Timber apprentices, and they are on a basic harvesting course today. There are 3 Game and Wildlife apprentices. Hopefully supporting Neil with students coming from FLS and hopefully working closely to develop programmes going forward. Work ongoing on Chainsaw & Chainsaw Supervisors and developing a supervisors course and collaborating closely with operators and more experienced operators in house to look at how they develop their operators particularly as there are more challenging requirements for operators around halo thinning and the rainforest project, steep slopes etc. Also looking at Deer Management and sourcing training for Wildlife Managers and new Wildlife people within the organisation.

Dan Ridley-Ellis – Napier University – The University are hosting a conference in October for Wood Scientists. There are about 110 delegates from fifteen countries.

<https://blogs.napier.ac.uk/cwst/wse2024/>

It was decided to incorporate 2 elements into the conference - a training school for early stage researchers on engagement which will include engaging with young people, industry and policy makers etc and the other is trying to get them to write an abstract for their paper that would be understandable to a 16 year old.

Would like to do something useful with the abstracts. If people think this would be useful then please let Dan know. It is thought that a video may be produced featuring some of the speakers and young people can learn more about wood science, forestry, and the future of forestry.

Liz suggested that the “I’m a Scientist Get Me Out of Here” profile page is good to work through if doing a video – this features some of the questions the kids want the answer to.

Martin Birse – James Jones Ltd – working with DYW – had a successful grow your own future day. There were approximately sixty pupils on practical skills showing the best of land-based industries. It was so successful that plans are progressing for another event next year. Starting to get invitations to careers fayres so looking for materials and hands on things for primary and secondary schools so if anyone has anything to pass on that would be great. **ACTION 3** - Andy to get Richard Hunter to contact Martin. Liz to also send leaflets/flyers/postcards from Lantra.

Some additional resources put in the meeting chat:-

[Find a Resource – OWLS \(owlsotland.org\)](http://owlsotland.org)

[FENE Resource Hub - Royal Forestry Society \(rfs.org.uk\)](http://rfs.org.uk)

Andy provided an update from Helen where she advised that six pre-apprenticeship placements were found in the private sector.

Confor update – demand for wood products tend to run with the economy, construction, summertime etc. Sawmills, wood processing etc have flatlined and discussions at senior level in the sector is that harvesting and other operations are also flat therefore harvesting companies are starting to get rid of machines. There is a concern around this, but the market will rise at some point then we will have to get machine operators etc again. Skills activity – Richard Hunter undertakes careers events across the UK and is working with STEM. He was planning to do another taster event for the armed forces in Scotland, this is on hold at the moment as Scottish Forestry part fund this, it is hoped an event may take place in the spring. Forestry Training Service – the company has been set up and it is hoped to undertake a recruitment process early in the new year. Over the last year development of a training course for frontline staff to engage with stakeholder and have run a number of these courses and there are plans to run another set of courses in November/December. SEPA compiled a report after a number of visits to harvesting sites where people were not sticking to regulations, a forum is being created particularly in Argyll to bring industry practitioners together with SEPA and FLS and identify and share best practice.

Any Other Business

Liz highlighted that at UK level, prompted by accidents with ATV, Lantra are trying to get HSE to allow ATV training courses to be done with young people. There is currently tractor driving for 13-15 year olds and there is nothing for ATVs. FISA may wish to be involved. There has been one meeting at UK level with training providers to see what might be feasible. In Ireland ATV training is mandatory.

Date of Next Meeting

Doodle Poll to be distributed to the group.