

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
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Ministerial Foreword - Forestry in Scotland is a sector that we can be justly proud of.

1 - Introduction and Rationale for Providing Grant Support for Forestry

1. Do you agree that grant support for forestry should continue to be improved and developed as a discrete scheme within the overall package of land support?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The Institute of Chartered Foresters is the Royal Chartered body for tree professionals in the UK. Its membership covers the full range of tree professionals, and this range of expertise is one of its greatest strengths. It has 2,000 members who practise forestry, arboriculture and other related disciplines in the private and third sectors, central and local government, research institutions, universities and colleges throughout the UK. The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession. It provides support to members, guidance to professionals in other sectors, information to the general public, and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers.

Our members want a grant scheme that is specific to forestry, but one that can be used across different land uses and provide additional support, such as public access across land management units. Funding for farm woodlands (creation, management, and agroforestry) needs to be managed by same body as agricultural grants, at least for the application process. However, the cumulative impact of planting schemes needs to be considered. Schemes should not be considered in isolation, as this could have an unintended collective impact on agriculture.

2. Are there any changes that would allow for better complementarity between the forestry and agriculture funding options?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Farming and forestry should be more equitable, with both parties needing to produce plans for public benefit, with conservation and business being managed across land management strategies and land uses. We need the barriers of engaging with forestry to be broken down within the agricultural sector. Our members suspect that the complexities of the SFGS are hindering agriculture engagement, particularly with small woodlands and the funding available not being adequate. Having a more accessible system may assist with bridging engagement between both sectors. We suggest that the farm woodland scheme currently applicable only to the Islands is duplicated on the mainland as our members are supportive of this and recognise this as an effective scheme.

2 - Forests Delivering for Scotland's Climate Change Plan

3. How can the support package for forestry evolve to help tackle the climate emergency, to achieve net zero, and to ensure that our woodlands and forests are resilient to the future climate?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There is evidence to suggest that our limited range of native species are increasingly unsustainable across their original ranges. Climatic change has resulted in conditions which do not (in some sites) favour strong growth and natural regeneration of often pioneer species. The Institute recognises that our members are being encouraged to use the Ecological Site Classification (ESC) in relation to climate adaptation when making a species choice. In some cases, this option forces the manager to select native provenance, where this may not be the right decision for the site. At present the grant scheme (and UKFS) makes a distinction between native species and non-native species but our members suggest a third category – natural species.

Secondly, improvements could be made to the support and funding for biodegradable tree shelters or enforcing the removal of non-biodegradable at the end of the establishment period. If no additional funding is available for removal, this can be as expensive as planting and establishment, thus counterproductive.

4. Private investment through natural capital and carbon schemes can make a valuable contribution to climate change. Do you agree that the grant support mechanism should have more flexibility to maximise the opportunities to blend private and public finance to support woodland creation,

No

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

As in all policy development there is a need for an integrated approach to delivery, and grant support should provide a foundation accessible to all. The carbon scheme is a developing and changing market. To make this fit for purpose, our members feel that the scheme needs to have a separation from other finance and regulatory work, as there is too much uncertainty and currently opposition is too great. Natural capital and carbon schemes should be

an additionality, to avoid the perceptions of green washing. The Institute would like to see natural capital proposals considered alongside and connected to other strategic goals and policies, including climate change mitigation, flood alleviation and 'levelling up'.

5. How could the current funding package be improved to stimulate woodland expansion and better management across a wide range of woodland types, including native and productive woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There is discussion amongst members and the wider sector that existing SFGS does not deliver for existing mixed woodlands, with greater financial support required for mixed conifer. Diversity is arguably key, but end markets are needed for these. We need to develop a round rural economy, although funding is needed for forest research and business development. Under the current system, it is difficult to make systems such as Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) viable, as currently options do not lend to either a conifer or broadleaf dominated mix.

We sense a political need to distinguish between commercial and native but would question whether this definition is still needed when it is a matter of silvicultural management.

6. Do you agree that it should be a requirement of grant support that woodlands are managed to ensure that they become more resilient to the impacts of climate change and pests and disease?

Yes

How can the grant scheme support this?:

Government needs to recognise economic resilience. Our members would like to see a scoring system that promotes mixed woodlands, as the current system encourages a default to Norway spruce and other productive species. Consideration needs to be given to the costs associated with diversifying species, both in the forest and at sawmills with technology and processing. Previous schemes have had a significant upsurge in native woodland expansion. There is concern within our membership over the continuity and quality of forests, amending the conifer only option would encourage planting of mixed commercial woodlands. The Institute recommends the government provides support for a wider variety of silvicultural systems, such as CCF to encourage diversity. This could then reduce the opportunities for applicants to manipulate the system and encourage bigger picture thinking.

3 - Integrating Woodlands on Farms and Crofts

7. Which of the following measures would help reduce the barriers for crofters and farmers wanting to include woodland as part of their farming business? Please select all that apply.

Better integration of support for woodland creation with farm support mechanisms, Knowing where to get reliable advice, Clearer guidance on grant options, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

8. Establishing small woodlands can have higher costs. What specific mechanisms would better support small scale woodlands and woodland ownership?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Under the current scheme, small scale woodlands and the associated native species grant is not reaching its potential, with upfront costs for surveys and agent costs often not covered. This paired with reporting and management time hinders making the application worthwhile. Our members suggest that small woodlands are managed on a sliding scale based on the size of the woodland, with a payment contribution towards the application time, relating more to economy of scale. Funding should also be considered for other economic activities, such as ecosystem service payments or infrastructure support to assist with access. Additionally, a cumulative approach is arguably needed. By allowing multiple threshold blocks on a single application, this has the potential to be more appealing on a farm scale, facilitating more planting and biodiversity benefits.

4 - Forests Delivering for People and Communities

9. How can forestry grants better support an increase in easily accessible, sustainably managed woodlands in urban and peri-urban areas?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

We suggest that the benefits for peri urban woodlands are generally underspent, through a complex system and under resourcing, with the current WIAT not working for urban forestry. We would encourage a simpler challenge fund model, which gives clear outcomes against which applications can be scored. Our membership felt that this worked well in the past and led to innovative and effective schemes in many urban areas. This could be delivered as separate options under Long Term Forest Plans.

10. How can grant support for forestry better enable rural communities to realise greater benefits from woodland to support community wealth building?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Government should consider an ability for local communities to benefit from carbon schemes, in the same way that it is for renewables. This may help break down some of the suspicion and anti-afforestation views that can rise where communities see big changes in their landscape with few perceived benefits. The Institute suggests that this, when paired with Question 9 is a topic for discussion outside of this consultation. This is a complex issue, where

grant support should be seen as facilitation, not the solution. However, there was some surprise among our members about the lack of reference to recreational opportunities which target socio-economic development. Expanding public access is key to opening conversations and education about the sector.

11. How can the forest regulatory and grant processes evolve to provide greater opportunities for communities to be involved in the development of forestry proposals?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

A recurring issue raised by the Institute's membership was the public register not currently being fit for purpose, particularly with creation schemes. Members feel that government could provide more support with public consultation, with publication of schemes in good time on the public register to help ensure that the public consultation meets the expected standards. The system should be easy to access and provide more detailed information including details of consultee responses. This would help with transparency.

12. How can the forestry regulatory and grant processes evolve to ensure that there is greater transparency about proposals and the decisions that have been made on them?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There is concern regarding the perceived lack of appropriate resources for delivery and enforcement, which could undermine the influence of the regulatory process. Maintaining and upholding professional standards is key to ensure that all applications are considered in equal measure and reduces the potential for the system to be used dishonestly. There needs to be an understanding of respondent deadlines for feedback, with mediated professionals who can make the informed decision that any objections have been mitigated in accordance with UKFS. Related to this, resourcing issues has led to a lack of trust between local authorities and the professionals' skills needed to assess woodland creation submissions.

13. Forestry grants have been used to stimulate rural forestry businesses by providing support with capital costs. Do you agree that this has been an effective measure to stimulate rural business?

Not sure

a. How could this approach be used to support further forestry businesses?:

We would like to see government raising awareness that grants can become support for continuous forest research into the benefits of non-timber products. Government should consider the role of socio-economic development within the forest sector and provide support for businesses to diversity into recreational facilities, outdoor education, for example arts and crafts or rural franchises, particularly within woodland estates. Opportunities and support should be provided to encourage organisations to develop initiatives that encourage stakeholder participation as a means of promoting green skills.

b. How could this approach be used to support further skills development?:

For grants to stimulate skills development, there needs to be greater connectivity between forestry and other arms of the Scottish Government. Business should be incentivised with money channelled through land enterprise, improving inclusivity of rural skills and networks. To help address the skills crisis, additional funding and support should be available for those businesses taking on trainees and apprentices. By encouraging more local people into forestry contracting for example, this could raise the accessibility and acceptability of forestry careers and recognise the value of green skills.

14. How could the FGS processes and rules be developed to encourage more companies and organisations to provide training positions within the forestry sector?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The Institute recommends that a condition is added that requires higher level grants to include work experience opportunities. Some previous CAP payments required outreach to be eligible for funding, we recommend government develops a similar process for the forestry sector. These could be in the form of open days, which would demonstrate the types of careers available and encourage people to realise that a career is there for them. We need to demonstrate the range of green jobs available and highlight transferable skills from other green industries. We encourage government to collaborate with other organisations, such as the Institute to make this happen.

5 - Forests Delivering for Biodiversity and the Environment

15. The primary purpose of FGS is to encourage forestry expansion and sustainable forest management, of which a key benefit is the realisation of environmental benefits. How can future grant support better help to address biodiversity loss in Scotland including the regeneration and expansion of native woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There needs to be a greater emphasis on management and restoration of existing woodlands including deer management and control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS). Our members would like to see INNS become less onerous to deliver as it can dissuade people from applying. For native woodland creation, there needs to be more prominence on outcomes (not just stems per hectare) and more incentives for minor species and habitats. Natural regeneration also needs to be encouraged, with less rigidity on timescales and stocking densities achieved.

Additionally, with the desire to increase management of small woodlands and provide support for diversifying silvicultural systems, the Institute

recommends that a maintenance grant is applicable for all woodland creation types to support the ongoing management of woodlands, to allow for them to reach their full potential. As mentioned in Question 3, our members suggest having an encompassing term natural species to reflect the provenance changes we are seeing with climate change.

16. Herbivore browsing and damage can have a significant impact on biodiversity loss and restrict regeneration. How could forestry grant support mechanisms evolve to ensure effective management of deer populations at:

Landscape scale?:

Our members are of the view that incentives need developing for better management of deer. Game licensing is perceived as counterproductive, as landowners need to pay for the lease amongst tax and other charges. There is the possibility that grants could constrain deer control for stalking and provide other issues in terms of access. Arguably, deer fencing is an issue, however, for new woodland creation a welcome addition would be combination deer fences, or indeed an increased rate for traditional fencing.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Consideration should be given to increasing planting grants to cover and include deer protection and encourage the use of protective enclosures, i.e., fencing, and biodegradable tree-shelters as appropriate. This may encourage more landowners to control deer.

If you wish to make any other relevant comments, please do so in the text box below.

Please add your comments here.:

Our members welcome the opportunity to comment on the future grant system in Scotland. We acknowledge that there are many issues that need addressing for the forestry sector to successfully deliver an inclusive grant system. However, the sector is broadly supportive of existing regulation – it just needs to work better. We have a duty to balance core sustainability principals of environmental, social and economic benefits, and this includes government needing to recognise timber production as one of the benefits of modern, sustainably managed woodlands. We strongly encourage Scottish Forestry to initiate a process for engaging meaningfully with the sector to explore the issues raised in all responses in this consultation process and come up with solutions. As an Institute we are well placed to act as partner and convener in this process and we would welcome further discussion with Scottish Forestry.

About you

What is your name?

Name:

[Redacted]

What is your email address?

Email:

[Redacted]

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Institute of Chartered Foresters

Scottish Forestry would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response only (without name)

We may share your response internally with other Scottish Forestry policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Forestry to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

I consent