

Ground-breaking apprenticeship programme for the forestry sector to re-open

Building upon a successful intake of apprentices this year, the Forestry Commission has announced it will reopen its Woodland Officer programme in 2023, the first-of-its-kind apprenticeship initiative to foster a growing, highly skilled and diverse workforce within the forestry sector.

The Development Woodland Officer programme offers a three-year, paid development opportunity for passionate individuals from all backgrounds looking to kickstart their careers in forestry. It aims to grow and upskill the forestry sector workforce and is open to school leavers, graduates or anyone looking for a change in career direction. The programme supports jobs and opportunities in rural communities and helps increase capacity to meet tree planting and forest management needs to deliver the Government's tree planting and woodland creation ambitions over the coming years.

Following in the footsteps of the original cohort, Development Woodland Officers will benefit from academic studies in forestry management at the University of Cumbria, practical experience in Forestry Commission area teams across England, and nine months of wider sector placements to further build their skills and experience, enhancing future employment prospects.

Upon completion of the programme, successful graduates will earn a Professional Forester Apprenticeship (equivalent to Level 6), a BSc (Hons) in Forest Management and the potential to gain Chartered Forester status with the Institute of Chartered Foresters. Forestry Commission are also working with other employers in the sector to open up more opportunities for apprentices to join this programme

Forestry Commission Chief Executive, Richard Stanford said:

The Development Woodland Officer programme is an exciting career pathway into forestry in general and the Forestry Commission in particular. The programme offers a wide range of forestry and silvicultural experiences to build knowledge across the entire forestry sector.

I have seen first-hand the success of this programme, our current students are thriving though a unique mix of hands-on experience and academic studies as well as being in paid employment. I encourage people from all backgrounds and abilities interested in a rewarding career in forestry to apply.

Gareth Biggins, Development Woodland Officer Apprentice:

I joined the DWO programme in 2022, having worked in the rail industry for 15 years. I wanted to make a career change into forestry for some time and the programme offers a great way to achieve this while working to protect and expand our woodlands.

Since joining I have acquired new skills, knowledge and experience and have enjoyed the opportunity to work towards a degree level qualification alongside on the job training and interaction with colleagues from across the forestry sector.

Dr Helen Manns, Director, Institute of Science and Environment, University of Cumbria, said:

We are thrilled that our first forestry apprentices are immersing themselves in this trailblazing professional programme. As a university, it is our mission to address higher level and industry skills needs and we do this collaboratively with employers and partners, co-creating programmes like the Professional Forester degree-level apprenticeship, enabling us to help to grow, upskill and diversify the workforce of sectors including forestry.

We are delighted that we can help the Forestry Commission with an apprenticeship programme that supports their Development Woodland Officer Programme, working alongside them and other partners in our shared ambitions to expand the long-term capacity of the sector and to deliver national ambitions for a skilled workforce in the coming years.

Louise Simpson, Executive Director, Institute of Chartered Foresters, said:

The Development Woodland Officer apprenticeship is an exciting new route into the industry. The demand for the programme is a clear indication of how important a role degree level apprenticeship will play in bringing new people into the sector.

Today's announcement forms part of the England Trees Action Plan, which set out [plans to treble tree planting rates in England during this Parliament](#), funded through £650 million from the Nature for Climate Fund. It also forms part of wider Government action to create new green jobs across the country and boost the economy.

The first cohort of 19 Officers started in September this year. Up to 45 Development Woodland Officer positions will be created over the next three

years. In addition to these Officers, the programme will also train further students from the Woodland Trust and National Trust, who will join the Forestry Commission Programme to expand their knowledge and experience within the Forestry sector.

The Forestry Commission are also interested in working with partners within the sector to develop the offer on an ongoing basis. If you would like to find out more about the Development Woodland Officer programme or the Professional Forester Apprenticeship, are considering offering apprenticeship positions or would like to offer support with work placements, please contact: DW0enquiries@forestrycommission.gov.uk