

User Engagement Survey

Executive Summary

- The Forestry Commission (FC) produces official statistics on a variety of forestry-related topics. This piece of work is an extension on FC's efforts to work and engage with its statistical users. The user engagement survey was designed to better understand and document the use made of forestry statistics and the experience of users. The results will be used (i) to evaluate current statistical outputs, (ii) in forthcoming statistical planning processes and, (iii) in deciding how unmet needs might be addressed.
- The user engagement survey was designed and administered through the online tool, SurveyMonkey. It was designed to gauge (i) how forestry statistics are used, and (ii) the quality of users' experiences in accessing and employing the relevant statistics. Of the 82 stakeholders contacted, 46 successfully responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 56%. Most responses came from the public sector and the private forestry sector.
- Topic areas of most interest to FC statistical users include woodland area and planting, UK timber, and imports and exports. Other datasets of interest include statistics on the use of wood/wood products for renewable energy. FC statistics play a predominant role in influencing and promoting, research and information gain, and financial resource allocation. Many statistical users employ the data as published, as well as conducting some level of independent analysis. FC statistics are most frequently used on a monthly basis.
- The results of the user engagement survey indicate that FC statistical users are happy with data content, quality and table presentation. However, efforts could be taken to improve the timeliness and accessibility of FC statistics. The most highly rated statistical outputs are the annual publication and its summary statement, Forestry Statistics and Forestry Facts and Figures. In total, 95% of respondents to the FC's user engagement survey claimed that they can use forestry statistics produced by the FC in a confident and informed way. The results demonstrate that FC statistics generally meet the needs of their users and user experiences are positive on the whole, although this exercise has identified a small number of areas where improvements could be made and these are addressed in the recommendations (based on survey responses) outlined at the end of this paper.

Background

The Forestry Commission (FC) is a non-ministerial government department working on behalf of the administrations of England, Wales and Scotland in the development and promotion of sustainable forest management¹. FC produces official statistics on a variety of forestry-related topics including woodland area & planting, timber, trade, UK forestry & climate change, environment, recreation, employment & businesses, finance & prices and international forestry. The main statistics are published in the annual publication, *Forestry Statistics*, and are summarised in *Forestry Facts and Figures*.

Official statistics, including those produced by the FC, are designed to facilitate and inform decision making both within and outside of government. For that means, the statistics must be first and foremost designed to meet the needs of users. The UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice was published in January 2009 and provides a statement of good practice to be applied to official statistics in the United Kingdom. The Code of Practice comprises a number of principals and protocols, a proportion of which place emphasis on strengthening user engagement and ensuring that official statistics meet the requirements and inform the decision making of government, public services, business, researchers and the public. Moreover, pressure on public finances makes it all the more important for statistical producers to have a clear understanding of the value of their statistics, to inform spending decisions and to get the best value from the raw product.

FC engages with users through meetings with expert groups, consultation with key users, and by inviting comments on statistical products and work plans through the user section on its website. This piece of work is an extension on FC's efforts to work with and engage with its statistical users. The user engagement survey was designed to better understand and document the use made of forestry statistics and the experience of users, including data quality, and the format and timing of reports. The results will be used (i) to evaluate current statistical outputs, (ii) in forthcoming statistical planning processes and, (iii) in deciding how unmet needs might be addressed.

¹ Northern Irish forest policy is the responsibility of the Forest Service of Northern Ireland, an agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

² In line with the UK Statistics Authority's 2010 Monitoring Brief, 'The Use Made of Official Statistics', the term 'user' of statistics refers to any organisation or person whose decisions or actions are influenced by official statistics; and similarly 'potential user' is anyone who might be so influenced.

Survey Method

During June and July 2011, a user engagement survey was designed and administered through the online tool, SurveyMonkey. It was designed to gauge (i) how forestry statistics are used, and (ii) the quality of users' experience in accessing and employing the relevant statistics.

To maximise response rates, the survey was designed to be minimal in its requirements and less than 10 minutes to complete. It was anonymous and respondents were permitted to complete it either as an individual or as an organisation. The survey comprised a selection of open and closed questions, including a number of Likert scale questions asking respondents to rate a number of statistical products and outputs. In designing the survey, the FC consulted with the Expert Group on Timber & Trade Statistics, as well as a number of Defra statisticians (see annex 1 for final questionnaire).

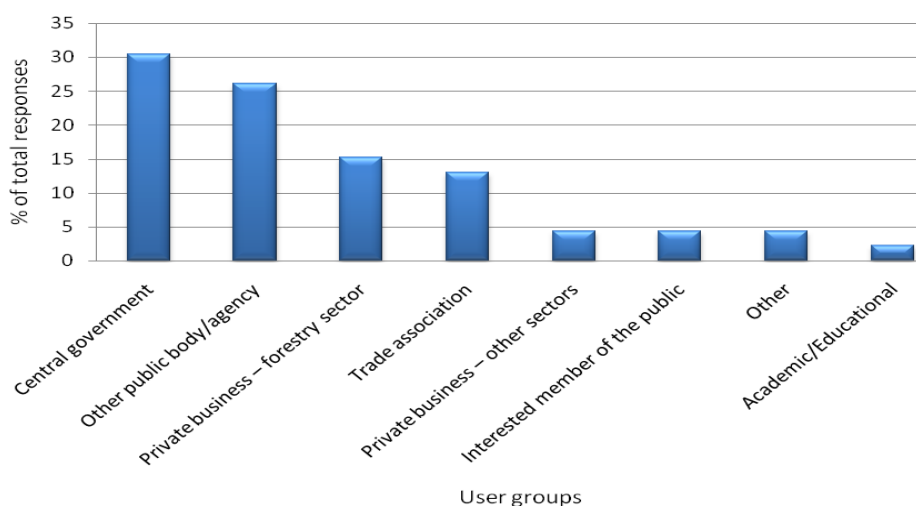
After piloting with experts both internal and external to the FC, the final survey was circulated via e-mail to 82 stakeholders from across the UK identified as key statistical users. Representatives from trade associations, public bodies, private businesses, and other known users were invited to participate. Of the 82 stakeholders contacted, 46 successfully responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 56 per cent.

Survey Results

(i) Survey response profile

Of the 46 responses to the user engagement survey, almost two-thirds derived from the public sector. Approximately 20% came from the private sector (predominantly from forestry-related businesses). Users from trade associations represented 13% of respondents. The few remaining responses derived from academic institutions, interested members of the public and international organisations (classified as 'other'). In total, 17% of responses represented an organised and consolidated response from their organisation. These responses derived predominantly from private businesses (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Response to the FC's user engagement survey by user group



(ii) Statistical areas of interest and uses of data

All topic areas covered by FC statistics were used by a considerable number of respondents, the most widely used statistical products however were concerned with woodland area and planting (used by 76% of respondents), UK timber (used by 70% of respondents), and imports and exports (used by 65% of respondents). FC statistics on the subject areas of environment and international forestry, on the other hand, were the least used (both used by 39% of respondents) (see figure 2). Other topic areas of interest listed by FC statistical users included energy and renewables, grant payments and equality monitoring. Almost two-thirds of respondents are interested in retrieving data on the UK as a whole, and approximately half of all respondents retrieve datasets on more than one country (see figure 3).

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Figure 2. Topic areas of interest to FC statistical users

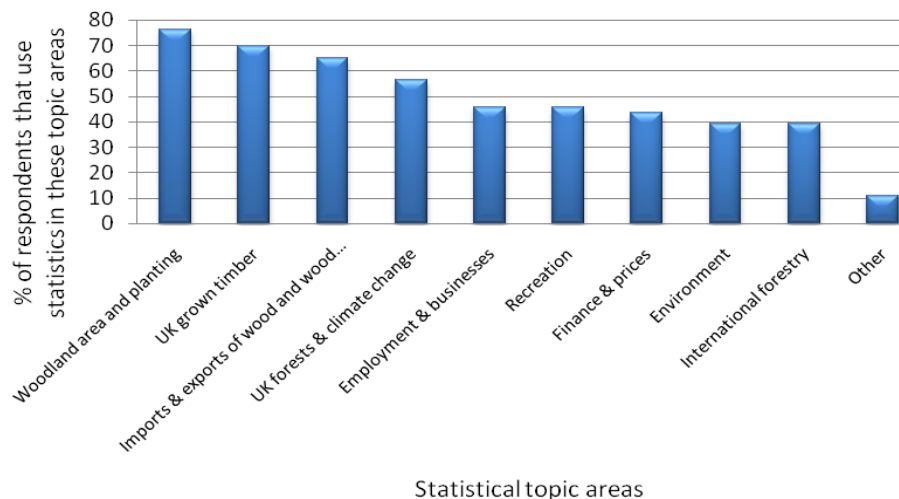
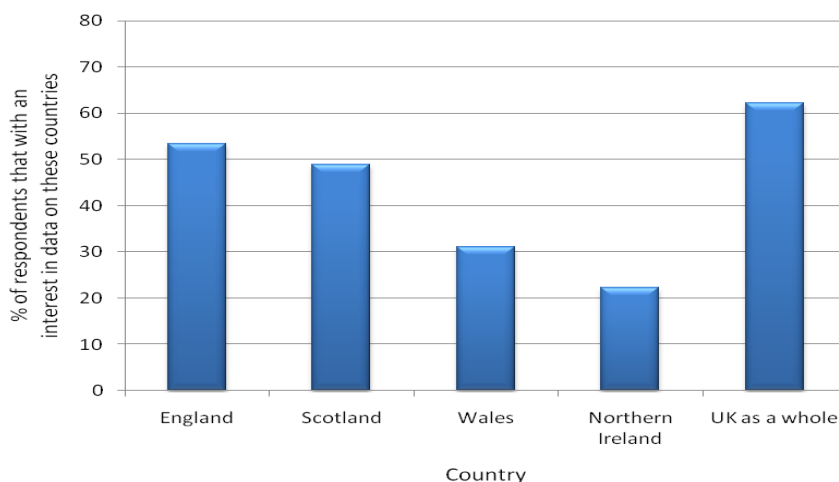


Figure 3. Country datasets of interest to FC statistical users

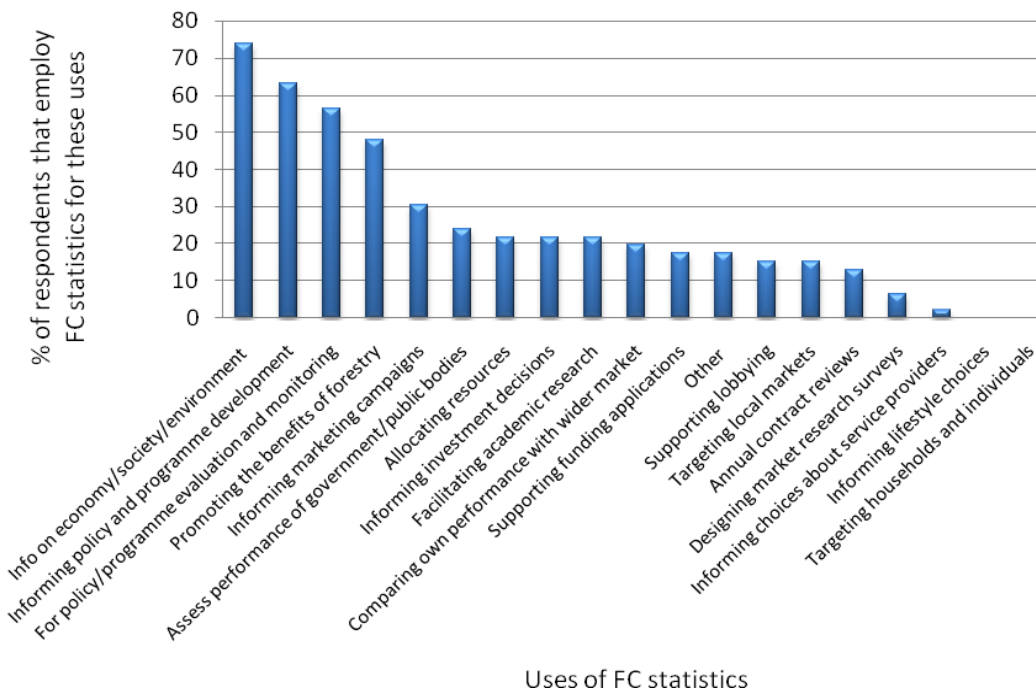


When asked what FC statistics were used for, over 70% of respondents claimed that they used them for gaining information about the economy, society and the environment. Other prominent uses include to inform policy and programme development (recorded by 63% of respondents), and to inform policy and programme monitoring and evaluation (recorded by 57% of respondents). Almost half of all respondents claimed to use FC statistics in promoting the benefits of forestry and 30% used the data to inform marketing campaigns (see figure 4). Other statistical uses include incorporation into environmental and carbon accounting, to compare with international data, to complete questionnaires, and to facilitate the dissemination of information. Thus FC statistics play a predominant role in influencing and promotion, and

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research and information gain. FC statistics are also used to an extent in facilitating financial decisions and resource allocation. FC statistics play a lesser role in wider decision making and monitoring.

Figure 4. Uses of FC statistics



Over 80% of respondents use FC statistics as they are published (with no additional data manipulation). In comparison, just over one-third of respondents use the data for in-depth analysis to develop their own statistics. Two-thirds of respondents used the statistics in more than one way, many using them as published, as well as conducting some level of analysis on the data (see figure 5).

When questioned about the frequency of use of FC statistics, only 13% of respondents use FC statistics on a weekly basis, the remainder all use FC statistics less frequently with over half of all respondents using FC statistics quarterly or less. The most common frequency of use was monthly, with over one-third of respondents reporting that they use FC datasets on a monthly basis (see figure6).

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Figure 5. The ways in which FC statistics are used

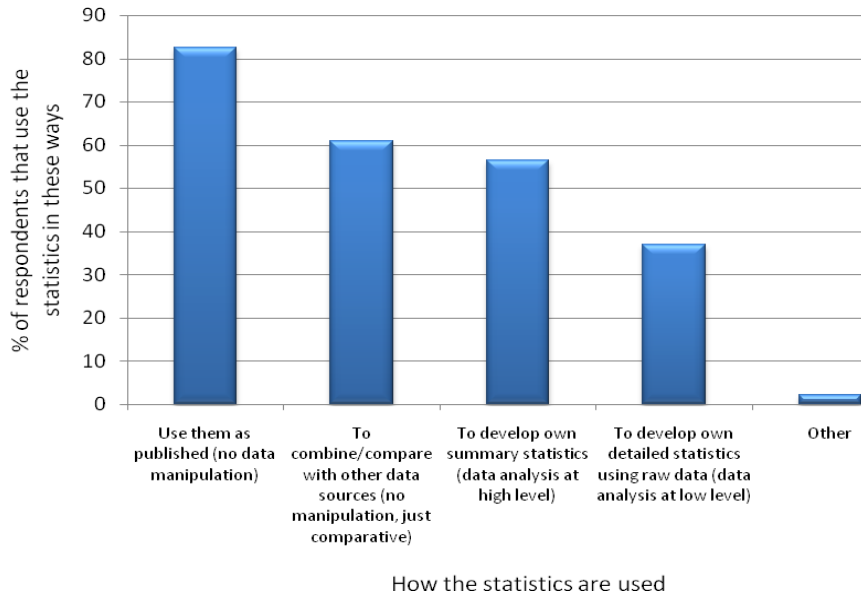
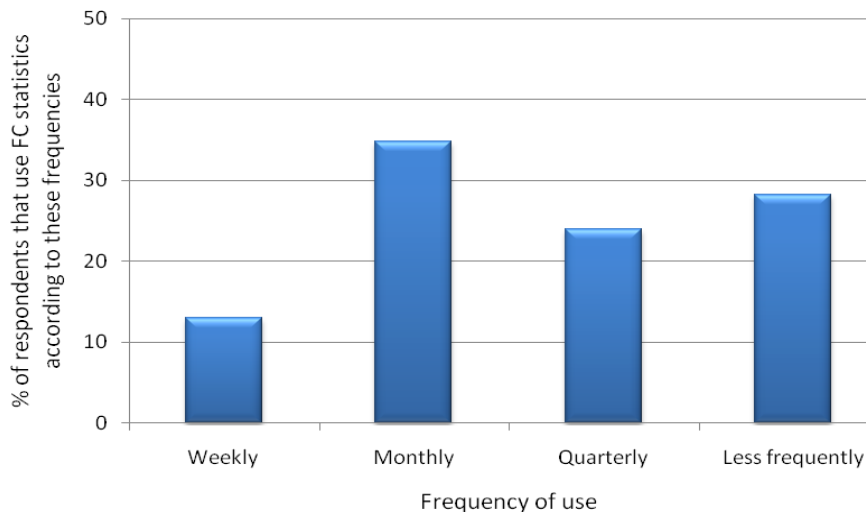


Figure 6. Frequency of use of FC statistics



(iii) Users' experiences

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of various aspects of the FC statistical products that they use, from data quality to presentation and timeliness. In total, 88% of respondents rated the data quality and reliability of FC statistics (defined as the extent to which the data is considered to be accurate and trustworthy) as very good or good, with more than half of all respondents rating the data as very good. Similarly, when questioned about the suitability of format of the data (defined as the appropriateness of the chosen presentation of the data), 86% of respondents rated FC statistics as very good or good. The clarity of FC statistics (defined as how clear and concise the statistics are) was rated as very good or good by 82% of respondents. In total, 79% of respondents considered the layout of tables presenting FC statistics (defined as the format in which tables of data are presented) as very good or good. In terms of relevance (defined as the degree to which the statistics meet user needs), 78% of respondents rated FC statistics as very good or good.

When asked to rate the usefulness of text used to support FC statistics (defined as the effectiveness of the text in explaining and supporting the data), 72% responded very good or good, and 26% responded OK. Similarly, when asked to rate the presentation of FC statistics in charts (defined as the format of charts and graphs, along with any supporting chart information), 71% responded very good or good, and 26% responded OK. The accessibility of statistics (defined as how easy it is for users to access the statistics) was rated very good or good by 69% of respondents, with 27% rating accessibility as OK and two respondents rating accessibility as poor or very poor. In total, 63% of respondents rated the timeliness of the release of FC statistics (defined as the appropriateness of the statistics that are published at the present time) as very good or good, with just over a third rating timeliness as OK. Respondents were asked if they have any preferences for the format in which the statistics are published. Of those that responded, 82% stated that they preferred Excel spreadsheets, 29% preferred PDF files, and 6% preferred CSV files.

Respondents were further asked to rate the quality of particular statistical outputs from very good to very poor. The most highly rated statistical outputs published by the FC are Forestry Statistics (with 39% of respondents rating it as very good, and 47% as good) and Forestry Facts and Figures (with 46% of respondents rating it as very good, and 38% as good), closely followed by Woodland Area, Planting and Restocking, and the National Forest Inventory (both with 71% of respondents rating these outputs as very good or good). Sustainable Forest Management Indicators, International returns and the Nursery Survey were rated as OK by the majority of respondents. Despite favourable responses from over 50% of respondents, the Timber Price Indices and the UK Wood Production and Trade publications were rated as poor by 12% and 7% of respondents respectively (see table 1).

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Table 1. Respondents' ratings of FC statistical outputs

	Forestry Statistics	Forestry Facts & Figures	Timber Price Indices	UK Wood Production and Trade	Woodland Area, Planting & Restocking	National Forest Inventory: Woodland Area Statistics	Sustainable Forest Management Indicators	International returns	Nursery Survey
Very good or good	87%	85%	56%	66%	71%	71%	45%	33%	25%
OK	13%	13%	32%	28%	29%	29%	55%	67%	75%
Poor	0%	3%	12%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Respondents were asked if there were any other pieces of information that they would like to see the FC provide. Several suggestions were made including more information on visitors to the FC estate and visitor surveys, climate change abatement, domestic wood use, and woodland loss (see annex 2 for comments in full). Respondents were also asked if they have any suggestions for improving the usability of FC statistics. Many of the responses centred around improving the accessibility and visibility of the statistics on the FC website, for example;

"Possibly reorganisation of website to make it easier to find what one is looking for."

"Very difficult to find data on your web site especially for timber prices and indices"

"A table of contents in Forestry Stats would help users to find what they are looking for."

"Finding them!"

Other comments for improving FC statistical outputs included the following;

"A lot of the statistics assume the audience has a high-degree of knowledge about forestry and the jargon used. More context and interpretation could be made available, adding real value to the raw data."

"A database of tables with variables and years to choose from would be useful."

"Clarification of differences between countries (e.g. planting data from different grant schemes)."

"Breakdown of end use of wood would be helpful."

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In total, 95% of respondents to the FC's user engagement survey claimed that they can use forestry statistics produced by the FC in a confident and informed way. Further comments on the use of FC statistical outputs provided by respondents frequently referred to the quality of service received from the FC statistical service, for example;

"We have always found FC colleagues to expert and helpful."

"Overall the service provided is very good."

"v. good reports made accessible to all. Good presentation of information."

"I can't use the data without help from the Stats Team, for which I am extremely grateful."

"The statistics team have always been very helpful when I've contacted them."

"Find staff very helpful when dealing with them."

Conclusions and Recommendations

The FC user engagement survey was designed to investigate and document how forestry statistics are used, in order to understand their relevance and value, including how well they meet the needs of statistical users. The research found that FC statistics are used by a variety of stakeholder groups both inside and outside of government, with most users situated in the public sector or private forestry sector. The most widely used statistics are concerned with woodland area management and the production and trade of wood/wood products. There is also interest in data on wood as a renewable energy source.

FC statistics on all countries are widely used primarily for influencing, information gain, and, to a lesser extent, financial resource allocation. However, the use of FC statistics as a tool in wider decision making and monitoring is limited. The results of this user engagement exercise demonstrate that FC statistics are widely used and analysed by a diverse range of user groups, so it is vital to ensure that FC statistics continue to be published in the most usable format, with a preference for Excel spreadsheets. Users also reported to most frequently downloading the data on a monthly basis, therefore the most widely read statistical outputs should ideally be published or updated on a monthly basis.

The results of the user engagement survey indicate that FC statistical users are happy with data content, quality and table presentation. Moreover, users are happy on the whole with the supporting text and the presentation of statistics in charts, although there is room for improvement in these areas. However, efforts to improve the timeliness of FC statistics should be considered, for instance by ensuring that data is published as early as possible, and improving the accessibility of statistics on the FC website.

The most highly rated statistical outputs are the annual publication and its summary statement, Forestry Statistics and Forestry Facts and Figures. However, the results indicate the need for efforts to improve two outputs that are of interest to FC statistical users, namely the Timber Price Indices and the UK Wood Production and Trade publications. Three other outputs were found to be of lower quality, but were also of less interest to the majority of users. These are Sustainable Forest Management Indicators, International returns and the Nursery Survey. It is unclear whether improving the quality of these publications would lead to increased readership. Further work would be needed to clarify this.

This user engagement exercise has demonstrated the wide interest in and use of FC statistics for multiple purposes. A great many stakeholders depend upon the publication of FC statistics for information gain and analysis above and beyond that provided by FC

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statisticians. The results demonstrate that FC statistics generally meet the needs of their users and user experiences are positive on the whole, although this exercise has identified a small number of areas where improvements could be made and these are referred to in the recommendations below. These recommendations, along with longer term efforts to engage users, will enable effective statistical planning both for current and future outputs, to ensure the needs of FC statistical users continue to be met.

Recommendations identified from the user survey responses

- Further work should be conducted either to promote FC statistics to other stakeholder groups or to increase their engagement with stakeholder consultation exercises.
- Release a new statistical output containing data on the use of wood and wood products as a renewable energy source.
- Further support the range of uses both inside and outside of government, and in particular promote the wider use of FC statistics in decision making and monitoring.
- Ensure FC statistics are published in the most usable format, preferably Excel spreadsheets wherever possible.
- Consider whether the most widely read statistical outputs could be published or updated on a monthly basis.
- Improve the timeliness of the release of FC statistics by ensuring that data is published as early as possible.
- Improve the accessibility of FC statistics on the FC website.
- Improve publications containing data on Timber Price Indices and UK Wood Production and Trade. Further work will be required to ensure that improvements address users' unmet needs.
- Continued systematic engagement to monitor shifting areas of interest, and stakeholder views and experiences.

Annex 1 - User Engagement Survey

Forestry Commission Statistics: User Consultation Survey

Final Questionnaire

Official statistics are designed to facilitate and inform decision making both within and outside of government. For that means, the statistics must be designed to meet the needs of users.

The Forestry Commission produces official statistics on a variety of forestry-related topics including woodland area & planting, timber, trade, UK forestry & climate change, environment, recreation, employment & businesses, finance & prices and international forestry.

This survey is designed to better understand the use made of forestry statistics and the experience of users, in order to inform future planning. For this reason, we are asking some key user groups to complete this brief survey and give us their views on our statistical outputs.

The questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes. The deadline for survey completion is **Friday 29th July**.

Please check this box if your responses to these survey questions represent an organised and consolidated response from your organisation

Q1. What type of organisation do you work for/represent for Forestry Commission purposes?

- Central government
- Local authority
- Other public body/agency (please specify)
- Private business – forestry sector
- Private business – other sectors
- Trade association
- Media
- Third sector/Civil society organisation
- Academic/Educational
- Interested member of the public
- Other (please specify)

Q2. Do you use forestry statistics produced by the Forestry Commission on any of the following topics? (tick all that apply):

- Woodland area and planting
- UK grown timber
- Imports & exports of wood and wood products
- UK forests & climate change
- Environment
- Recreation
- Employment & businesses
- Finance & prices
- International forestry
- None of the above

Q3. If you do not use forestry statistics produced by the Forestry Commission on any of the topics listed in Q1, why not? (tick all that apply):

- They are not relevant to my work/my life
- I was not aware that they existed
- They are not fit for purpose (please provide more detail)
- There are better alternatives available (please specify)
- Other (please specify)

Q4. What do you use these forestry statistics for? (tick all that apply):

- Promoting the benefits of forestry – *influencing/promoting*
- Getting information about the state of the economy, society and the environment – *research/information gain*
- Getting information about the performance of government and public bodies - *monitoring*
- Informing policy and programme development – *facilitate decision making*
- Informing policy and programme evaluation and monitoring - *monitoring*
- Allocating resources - *financial*
- Comparing own performance with wider market – *research/information gain*
- Informing marketing campaigns – *influencing/promoting*
- Informing investment decisions - *financial*
- Supporting lobbying – *influencing/promoting*
- Supporting funding applications - *financial*
- Facilitating academic research – *research/information gain*
- Informing choices about service providers – *facilitate decision making*
- Informing lifestyle choices – *facilitate decision making*
- Targeting local markets – *influencing/promoting*
- Targeting households and individuals – *influencing/promoting*
- Designing market research surveys – *research/information gain*
- Annual contract reviews - *financial*
- Other (please specify)

Q5. How do you use forestry statistics? (tick all that apply):

- Use them as published (no data manipulation)
- To combine/compare with other data sources (no manipulation, just comparative)
- To develop own summary statistics (data analysis at high level)
- To develop own detailed statistics using raw data (data analysis at low level)
- Other (please specify)

Q6. Which country are you most interested in retrieving data on? (tick all that apply):

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- UK as a whole

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Q7. How often, on average do you use Forestry Commission statistics?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Less frequently

Q8. In general, how would you rate each of the following qualities of the forestry statistics that you use?

	Very good	Good	OK	Poor	Very poor	Don't know/ No opinion
Data quality/reliability ⁴						
Suitability of format (e-book, PDF, time series data on website, etc) ⁵						
Timeliness ⁶						
Relevance ⁷						
Clarity of statistics ⁸						
Accessibility of statistics ⁹						
Layout of tables ¹⁰						
Presentation in charts ¹¹						
Usefulness of text ¹²						
Supporting information provided ¹³						

⁴ The extent to which you consider the data to be accurate and trustworthy

⁵ How appropriate is the chosen presentation of the data

⁶ The appropriateness of the statistics that are published at the present time

⁷ The degree to which the statistics meet user needs

⁸ How clear and concise are the statistics that you use

⁹ How easy it is for users to access the statistics

¹⁰ The format in which tables of data are presented

¹¹ The format of charts and graphs, along with any supporting chart information

¹² How effective the supporting text is in explaining and supporting the data

¹³ How appropriate is the supporting information provided and does it facilitate interpretation of the data

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Q9. How would you rate the overall quality of the following outputs?

	Very good	Good	OK	Poor	Very poor	Don't know/ don't use
Forestry Statistics						
Forestry Facts & Figures						
Timber Price Indices						
UK Wood Production and Trade (provisional figures)						
Woodland Area, Planting & Restocking (provisional figures)						
National Forest Inventory: Woodland Area Statistics						
Sustainable Forest Management Indicators						
International returns (JFSQ, TC, FRA, SOEF, IEEAF, JWEE)						
Nursery Survey						

Q10. If you've rated anything less than OK, please tell us why

Q11. Is there any other information you would like to see us provide?

Q12. Are you able to use forestry statistics produced by the Forestry Commission in a confident and informed way?

- Yes/No

Q13. Do you have any suggestions for improving the usability of our statistics?

Q14. Any other comments?

Annex 2 – Responses to Open Survey Questions

Do you have any suggestions for improving the usability of our statistics?

- *“Possibly reorganisation of website to make it easier to find what one is looking for”*
- *“A lot of the statistics assume the audience has a high-degree of knowledge about forestry and the jargon used. More context and interpretation could be made available, adding real value to the raw data.”*
- *“A database of tables with variables and years to choose from would be useful.”*
- *“Finding them!”*
- *“Very difficult to find data on your web site especially for timber prices and indices”*
- *“Wider dissemination.”*
- *“It is useful to have data broken down by categories such as demographic groups - deprivation, class, gender, age, ethnicity, etc.”*
- *“A table of contents in Forestry Stats would help users to find what they are looking for.”*
- *“Get customs to clean up the mess in their figures so the Forestry Commission can provide more accurate figures including where the wood comes from and the carbon cost of the transport to UK.”*
- *“Clarification of differences between countries (e.g. planting data from different grant schemes).”*
- *“Breakdown of end use of wood would be helpful.”*

If you've rated any FC statistical outputs less than OK, please tell us why

- *“The Timber Price Indices do not reflect the whole market and can be distorted by the effects of LTC sales and the emphasis that can be placed on FE timber when securing marginal volumes. The figures should be published more frequently (monthly) and some mechanism must be established for picking up the private sector traded prices.”*
- *“The trade figures are guesses as HMRC data contains so many errors and misclassification of softwood as hardwood and sawn timber as logs.”*

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Is there any other information you would like to see us provide?

- *"As part of our development programme, we are aiming to improve our natural resource accounts and will hoping to work closely with the FC to establish the best way to do this. We are aiming to compile physical and monetary accounts and ultimately value the ecosystem services provided by UK forests."*
- *"More visual presentation of stats."*
- *"No."*
- *"Better visitor to FC estate figures (recreation) by main demographic categories."*
- *"It would be good to make sure that all visitor surveys that have been carried out for FC sites are all available to download."*
- *"More data on climate change and forestry to show the abatement benefits that trees deliver."*
- *"Monthly production of softwood, hardwood, chipboard, OSB, MDF, monthly delivery of logs to mills by type."*
- *"Woodland loss statistics broken down by country and nature of conversion (habitat restoration vs. development/building)."*
- *"More detail information about domestic wood use."*

Any other comments?

- *"We have always found FC colleagues to expert and helpful."*
- *"Overall the service provided is very good."*
- *"V. good reports made accessible to all. Good presentation of information."*
- *"I can't use the data without help from the Stats Team, for which I am extremely grateful."*
- *"Public opinion of forestry questions do not seem to me to be realistic - too many assumptions. Most people don't recognise the difference between FC and other woodlands."*
- *"Ensure other providers to Forestry Commission statistics are producing accurater figures. For example lobby HMRC to clean up the mess in Timber Statistics so."*
- *"The Statistics team have always been very helpful when I've contacted them."*
- *"Find staff very helpful when dealing with them."*