

Questionnaire on the role and value of ‘Forest Guidelines’:

Summary of the responses received

Background:

There are currently eight ‘Forestry Guidelines’ covering a range of subjects, which have been produced over a number of years. Whereas ‘Forests and Water’ Guidelines have been update on a regular basis, most of the others have not and are now quite out of date.

Forests & Water	Forests and Soil Conservation	Forest Landscape Design	Community Woodland Design	Lowland Landscape Design	Forest Recreation	Forests & Archaeology	Forest Nature Conservation
First issued: 1988	First issued: 1998	First issued: 1988	First issued: 1991	First issued: 1992	First issued: 1992	First issued: 1995	First issued: 1990
Revised: 1991 and 2000. A further revision is at an advanced stage.		Revised: 1994					

The ‘UK Forestry Standard’ was published in 1998 after most of the Guidelines had been produced. The ‘Standard’ implies compliance with the Guidelines if sustainable forestry is to be achieved. The UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS) was published in 2000. It emphasises at a very early stage that ‘compliance with the spirit of any relevant codes of practice, guidelines or agreements’ is implicit if UKWAS certification is to be achieved.

The issue of practising sustainable forestry is now core to all forestry operations in the UK. The idea is that Guidelines help managers achieve sustainable forestry, comply with the UK Forestry Standard and perhaps UKWAS certification.

But since most of the Guidelines are so old, do they fulfil this perceived role adequately? And do the existing Guidelines cover all the relevant subject matters? Are they too detailed? Should they have a standard format? Do we still need them at all given that we now have a large number of Practise Guides? And what about the issues of Devolution – should Guidelines still be UK based or country based?

It was decided to seek the opinions of practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders at a country and UK level to find out what they think of the Guidelines.

Method:

A web-based questionnaire was composed. A link to access this web-site was included via an e-mail distributed to 244 key people or organisations in the first week of December 2003. The web-site remained 'live' until the end of January 2004. The questionnaire and the data received from it were designed to enable analysis at a country-based level or an organisation-based level. The decision to make the questionnaire web-based only was on the perception that more people would take the time to reply.

Results:

A total of 93 returns were submitted to the web-site or 38% of those distributed.

A summary of the responses to the various questions follows:

1. The Guidelines are important documents. They give a framework to sustainable forestry and demonstrate the high forestry standards required in the UK.
2. We should retain Guidelines at a UK level although each country should produce their own country-specific documents if they wish.
3. There *is* a need to review the purpose, objectives and details of the Guidelines since most of them are way out of date.
4. The Guidelines are recognised as an integral part of the UK Forestry Standard, they remain an important tool in assisting managers meet the requirements of sustainable forestry and UKWAS certification. But Guidelines should illustrate *how* they interact with each other and *how* they relate to the UK Forestry Standard and the UK Indicators of Sustainable Forestry.
5. Guidelines should be statements of principle and *not* how to do it documents. As much as possible, they should have a common format stating scope, purpose and legislative framework.
6. The opinion of how 'good' the existing Guidelines are, can be group as follows:

	Guideline Grouping	Scored 'Good' 1 + 2 (on a 1 – 5 scale; 5 = poor)	Never read
1.	Forest and Water	80%	4%
2.	Forest Landscape Design Forests and Archaeology'	60% 63%	5% 12%
3.	Forest and Soil Conservation Forests and Nature Conservation	50% 52%	15% 9%
4.	Community Woodland Design Lowland Landscape Design Forest Recreation	41% 37% 34%	23% 26% 15%

7. Most people thought some changes are needed to the current suite of Guidelines. Opinions of proposed new Guidelines were:

Proposed new Guideline	Agreed	Disagreed
Forestry and Social Inclusion	63%	26%
Forests as a Workplace	67%	17%
Woodlands on Brownfield Sites	63%	13%
Forest Productivity	55%	24%

8. There were a large number of different Guideline-merger combinations proposed by respondents. The more popular ones were:
 - i. The three Guidelines covering Landscape and Community Woodland design (69 returns);

- ii. 'Forest and Water' with 'Forests and Soil Conservation' (27 returns);
- iii. 'Forest Recreation' with 'Forest and Social Inclusion' (8 returns);
- iv. 'Forest Archaeology' with 'Forests and Nature Conservation' (7 returns).

11. Opinions on which Guidelines to drop were:

Forests & Water	Forests and Soil Conservation	Any on Forest Landscape	Forest Recreation	Forests & Archaeology	Forest Nature Conservation
2 returns	3 returns	9 returns	9 returns	5 returns	6 returns

12. Q4 was analysed at an organisation within country level. No statistical differences were found between countries or organisational groups. This was taken as typical for the whole questionnaire.

Some comments made by respondents:

i. The purpose of the Guidelines:

'They identify the factors to be considered to ensure environmental protection and also the means by which these can be achieved. It should however be made clearer that, while they identify requirements and possible prescriptions, they do not go so far as to a) assist with evaluation of competing environmental protection requirements (or other management objectives and constraints) or b) identify specific operational solutions or standards'

'They provide a concise practical guide, summarising more complex issues'

'They set the minimum standards necessary'

'The guidelines should be about the Government's expectations of forests managed to meet the spirit of the forest principles agreed at Rio. They are to do with the management of the physical, landed resource and also concern the people who have a direct interest in it. They are not intended to be formulas to enable idiots to manage forests, nor are they codification of forest management to be followed by rote. Forest management is a skilled profession and it is reasonable to expect a) that practitioners have a good understanding of forestry and b) they know how to get information to do their job. The guidelines do not need to be comprehensive - if for example there is a good literature on health and safety then it is not necessary to duplicate it. Another purpose of the guidelines is to reassure stakeholders outside the sector - they are signalling devices. In this respect it doesn't matter at all if there is some overlap between them. The proliferation of standards, guidelines, guidance notes and practice notes is stupid. No one understands the rationale.'

ii. UK wide Guidelines?

'Ref. Q4 country aspects - the guidelines should be UK wide but the country issues may best be addressed by specific reference to any country issues /differences in appendices within the documents rather than suggestion that each country could produce something if they wish.'

ii. Structure:

' It can become confusing if, for some principles, solutions are given but for others none are given. It may be considered better to refer to operational practice guides where these are available. Where they are not, the need for one should be considered'

'I favour only three. The physical environment (soils and water), Conservation (Nature and Heritage) and People use (including recreation)'

'They are a bit Janet and John in style. Cut the waffle in a more succinct hard-hitting version for day to day users. They should be nuts and bolts for foresters, not glossies for the general public'

'Guidelines should concentrate on WHAT are the requirements with as little as possible on WHY or HOW to meet them - so as to keep them as short as possible'

'I don't tend to get involved with them. They seem more appropriate for large corporate forests. I tend to have my own guidelines based on my forestry education, reading, experience and feeling.'

iii. Specific Guidelines:

Forests and nature conservation –

'There needs to be a complete overhaul of the current Forest and Nature Conservation Guidelines as a framework document for biodiversity planning on a site scale that gives principles, explains the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) process; national, regional and local BAPs and how to incorporate these into site planning and management. They must include planning and management for UK and EU nature conservation designations - SSSI, NNR, SAC and SPA'

'OK, but needs reviewing. Needs more focus on value & conservation of AW including PAWS'

Landscape Design Guidelines -

'The Landscape Design Guides are out of date and need to cover a much broader range of UKWAS related design issues/requirements'

Water Guidelines –

'Could split into guidelines and a 'How to do it' practice guide, but as it has recently been updated, this may not be a high priority'.

Forest Productivity –

'The reason why I have chosen not to select a new guideline on Forest Productivity is not that the issue is unimportant but due to the fact that I am unsure as to what would be included. A guideline should be able to be used across the UK to demonstrate a minimum standard. Timber productivity may be an issue which is best considered at a Country Level in another form of document unless it intends to focus on minimum silvicultural standards to support SFM.'

iv. Access to Guidelines:

'Need to be available on web site'.

Discussion:

It is always possible that the people or organisations that respond to a questionnaire are not fully representative of all the people and organisations to which the questionnaire was sent; but at least they bothered to reply. Also, it is easy to criticise the questions posed in a questionnaire as being 'biased' or 'loaded'. They need to be 'open', but a balance has to be found such that data collected can actually be analysed. This questionnaire was scrutinised by statistics section of Forestry Group prior to distribution, as well as representatives in all four countries, a small sample of practitioners, and the FC Executive Board.

There is never just one answer to a question posed in such a questionnaire. A majority may have a consensus, but minority of comments may still be valid and worthy of consideration in order to meet more fittingly an objective in a well-rounded manner. Of course there are always 'off the wall comments' which should not be automatically dismissed; they usually contain an element of truth and that lone respondent may be successfully exposing an 'Emperor's clothes' mentality on behalf of others who remained silent.

From the questions posed in this questionnaire, and the replies received it would seem fair to conclude that: the Guidelines are valued; they should be retained but updated; they should be published at a UK level on the web; hardcopy and CD versions should also be available.

It needs to be more clear how the suite of Guidelines, the UK Forestry Standard and UKWAS all inter-relate with each other. The Guidelines should be fairly short in length and should refer to Practice Guides for further detail. Additional Practice Guides may be required. A holistic approach is required.

There should be some changes to the suite of Guidelines:

i. The three Landscape Guidelines should be condensed into one;

- ii. Consideration should be given to combining 'Forest and Water' with 'Forests and Soil Conservation'.
- iii. 'Social Inclusion' should be a new Guideline;
- iv. 'Forests as a workplace' should be a new Guideline;
- v. 'Forest Recreation' should be updated;
- vi. 'Forest Archaeology' should be updated;
- vii. 'Nature Conservation' should be updated

There is perhaps not a strong case for a 'Forest Productivity' Guideline but there could be other publications giving advice on how non-timber resources in woodlands could be managed in a productive and sustainable manner.

There is clearly a desire from a body of respondents to have better Guidelines on 'Brownfield' sites but perhaps these problems could be addressed as special cases under most of the other Guidelines given above. Whether the existing suite of Practice Guides is adequate for the problems associated with 'Brownfield' sites would also have to be visited.

Conclusion:

Forest Guidelines should be continued at a UK level. They assist forest managers in achieving sustainable forestry, how not to have an adverse effect on the environment and demonstrate to others the high standards required of forestry in Britain. How the Guidelines relate to other documents pertaining to sustainable forestry (UKWAS, UKFS) needs to be improved. Guidelines should be short and should refer to Practice Guides for details of best practice. A new suite of Guidelines may be 7 in number; containing some new Guidelines and some old ones combined together.