

User Engagement Survey 2013

Results and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

- The Forestry Commission (FC) produces official statistics on a variety of forestry-related topics. A user engagement survey is run every two years in order to better understand and document the use made of forestry statistics and the experience of users. The results are used (i) to evaluate current statistical outputs, (ii) in forthcoming statistical planning processes and, (iii) in deciding how unmet needs might be addressed.
- The 2013 user engagement survey was designed and administered through the online tool, SurveyMonkey. It was designed to gauge how forestry statistics are used, and the quality of users' experiences in accessing and employing the relevant statistics. Of the 148 stakeholders contacted, 48 successfully responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 32%. Most responses came from the public sector and the private forestry sector.
- The results of the 2013 user engagement survey are similar to those of the 2011 survey. Topic areas of most interest to FC statistical users include woodland area and planting, UK timber, and imports and exports. The most frequently requested additional information was on the economic benefits of forestry, including employment, beyond the forestry sector itself.
- The quality and reliability of FC statistics continue to be highly rated by respondents. Accessibility of the statistics on the FC website however remains an issue. The best rated outputs, Forestry Statistics and Forestry Facts and Figures, are also the most used.
- In total, 96% of respondents to the 2013 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.

Introduction

The Forestry Commission (FC) is the government department responsible for forestry matters in England, Scotland and (until March 2013) Wales. The FC produces official statistics on a wide range of topics related to forestry including woodland area & planting, timber, trade, UK forests & 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*. They can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/statistics.

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 provides a statement of good practice to be applied to official statistics in the UK (www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk). It 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 for users.

The FC engages with users through meetings with the Expert Groups on Timber and Trade Statistics (www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-5rabj3), consultation with key users, and by inviting comments on statistical products and work plans through the user engagement section on its website at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-7zejnv. Since 2011, it has also carried out a biennial User Engagement Survey, 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. A set of recommendations is formulated based the survey results, and the actions taken are documented in the implementation plan available on the FC statistics website.

This report presents the results of the 2013 User Engagement Survey.

Detailed data for the 2011 and 2013 surveys is available in Excel format at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-7zejnv.

Survey Method

During October and November 2013, 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.

In order 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. For comparability, the 2013 questionnaire (see Annex 1) is nearly identical to the questionnaire used in the 2011 survey. In designing the 2011 survey, the FC consulted with the Expert Group on Timber & Trade Statistics, as well as a number of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) statisticians.

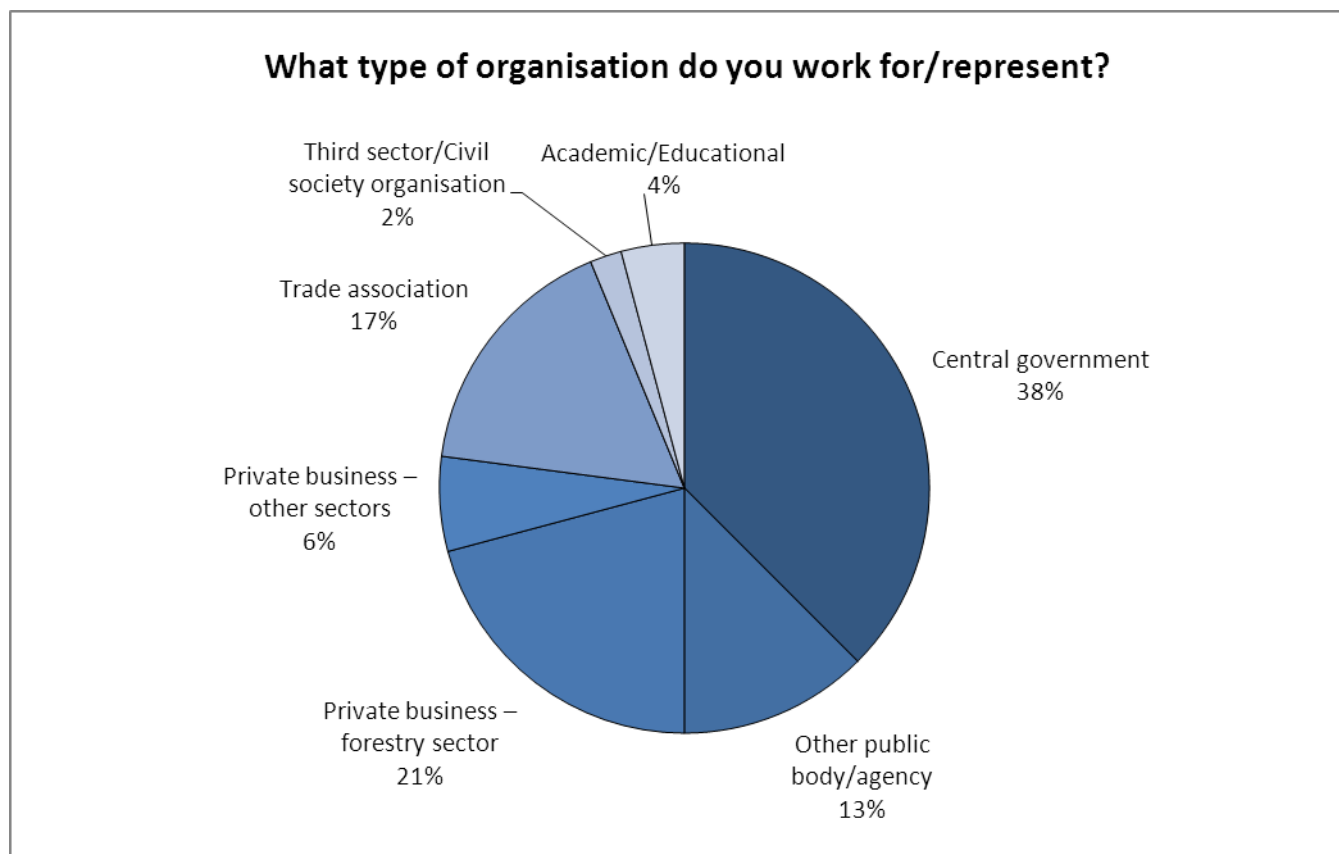
The survey was circulated via e-mail to 148 stakeholders from across the UK identified as key statistical users. Representatives from trade associations, public bodies, private businesses, and other known users were invited to participate. Of the 148 stakeholders contacted, 48 successfully responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 32%. Although the response rate is lower in 2013 than in 2011 (56%), the absolute number of responses is slightly higher as more stakeholders were contacted in 2013.

Survey Results

(i) Survey response profile

The response profile to the 2013 survey (Figure 1) is similar to that of the 2011 survey. Of the 48 responses to the user 2013 survey, one half came from the public sector. Approximately one quarter came from the private sector, predominantly from forestry-related businesses. Users from trade associations represented 17% of respondents. The few remaining responses derived from academic institutions and the third sector. In total, 29% of responses represented an organised and consolidated response from their organisation. These responses derived predominantly from private businesses.

Figure 1. Response to the 2013 user engagement survey by user group

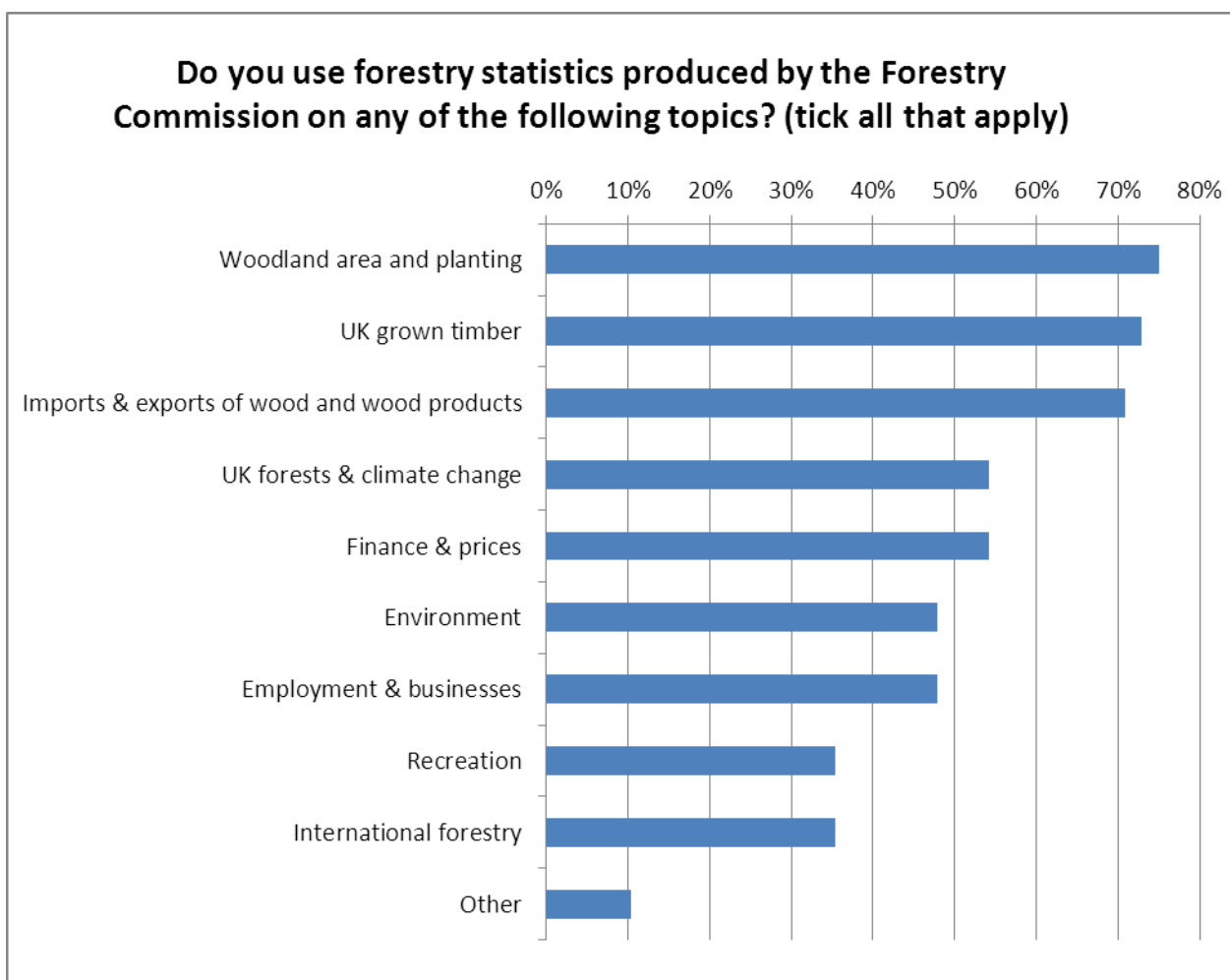


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(ii) Statistical areas of interest and uses of data

All topic areas covered by FC statistics were used by a large number of respondents (Figure 2). The most widely used statistical products were concerned with woodland area and planting (used by 75% of respondents), UK timber (73%), and imports and exports (71%). These were also the top three subject areas in 2011, in the same order. FC statistics on the areas international forestry and recreation, on the other hand, were the least used (each by 35% of respondents). Other topic areas of interest listed by FC statistical users included renewable energy, equality monitoring and land ownership.

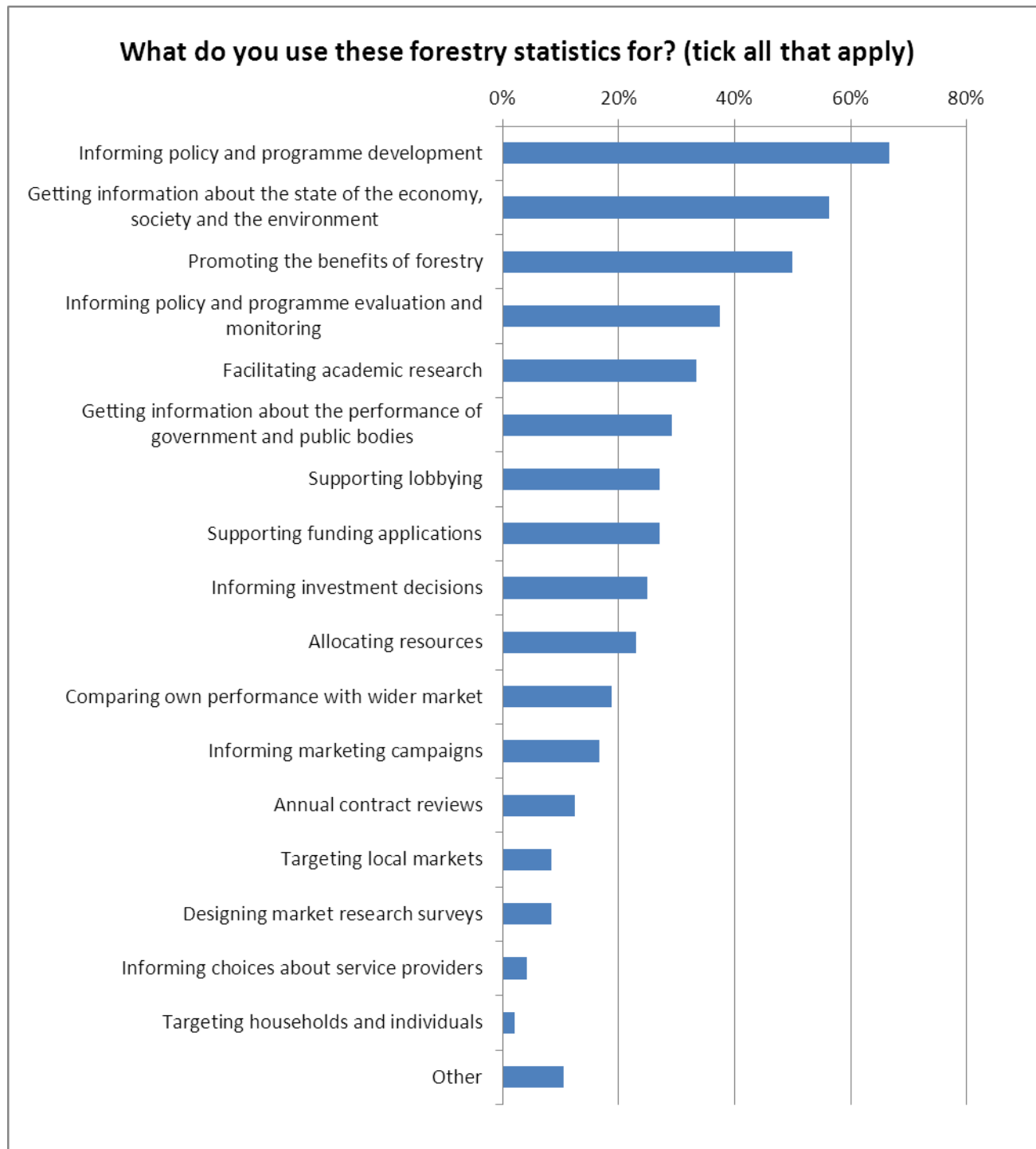
Figure 2. Topic areas of interest to FC statistical users



When asked what FC statistics were used for, two-thirds of respondents (67%) claimed that they used them to inform policy and programme development (Figure 4). Other prominent uses include gaining information about the economy, society and the environment (recorded by 56% of respondents), promoting the benefits of forestry (50%). The top four uses were the same as in 2011.

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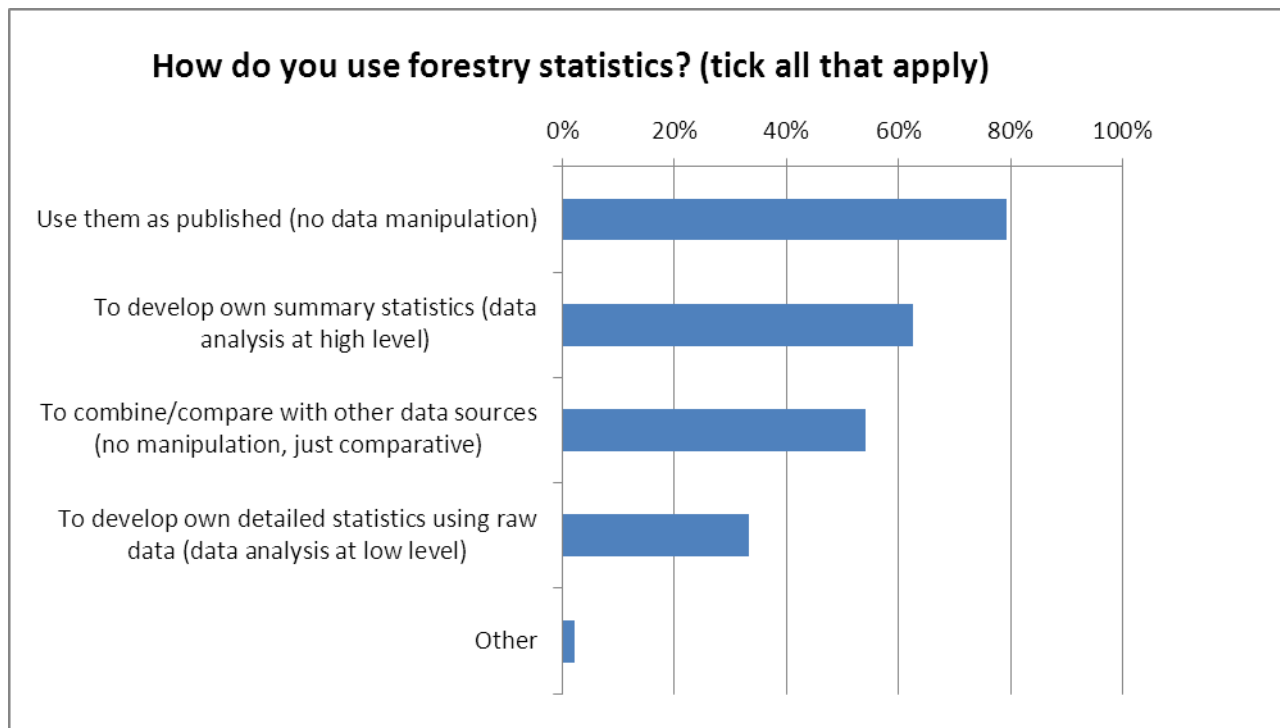
Figure 3. Uses of FC statistics



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Around 80% of respondents use FC statistics as they are published (with no additional data manipulation) (Figure 5). In comparison, one-third of respondents use the data for in-depth analysis to develop their own statistics. Over 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. These results are similar to those of the 2011 survey.

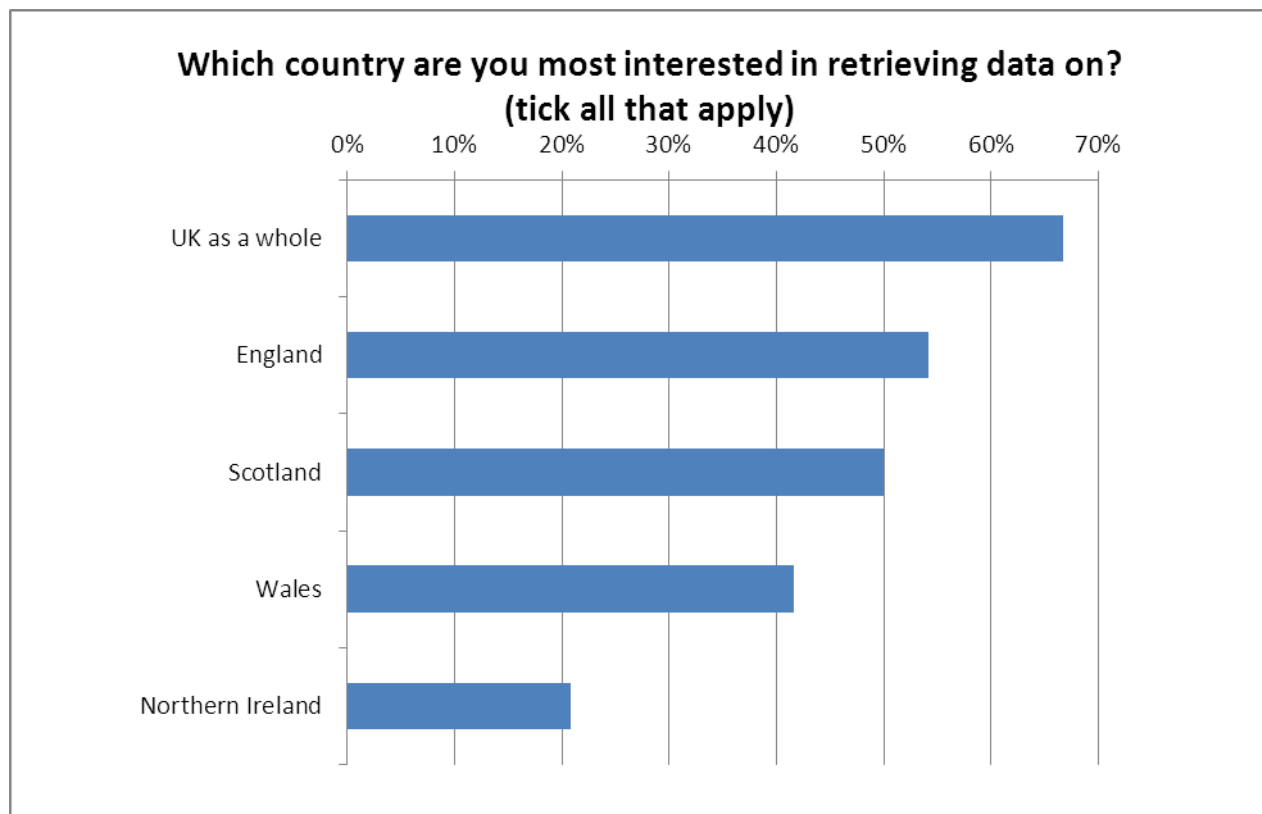
Figure 4. The ways in which FC statistics are used



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Two-thirds of respondents (67%) are interested in retrieving data on the UK as a whole, and 40% of all respondents retrieve datasets on more than one country (Figure 3).

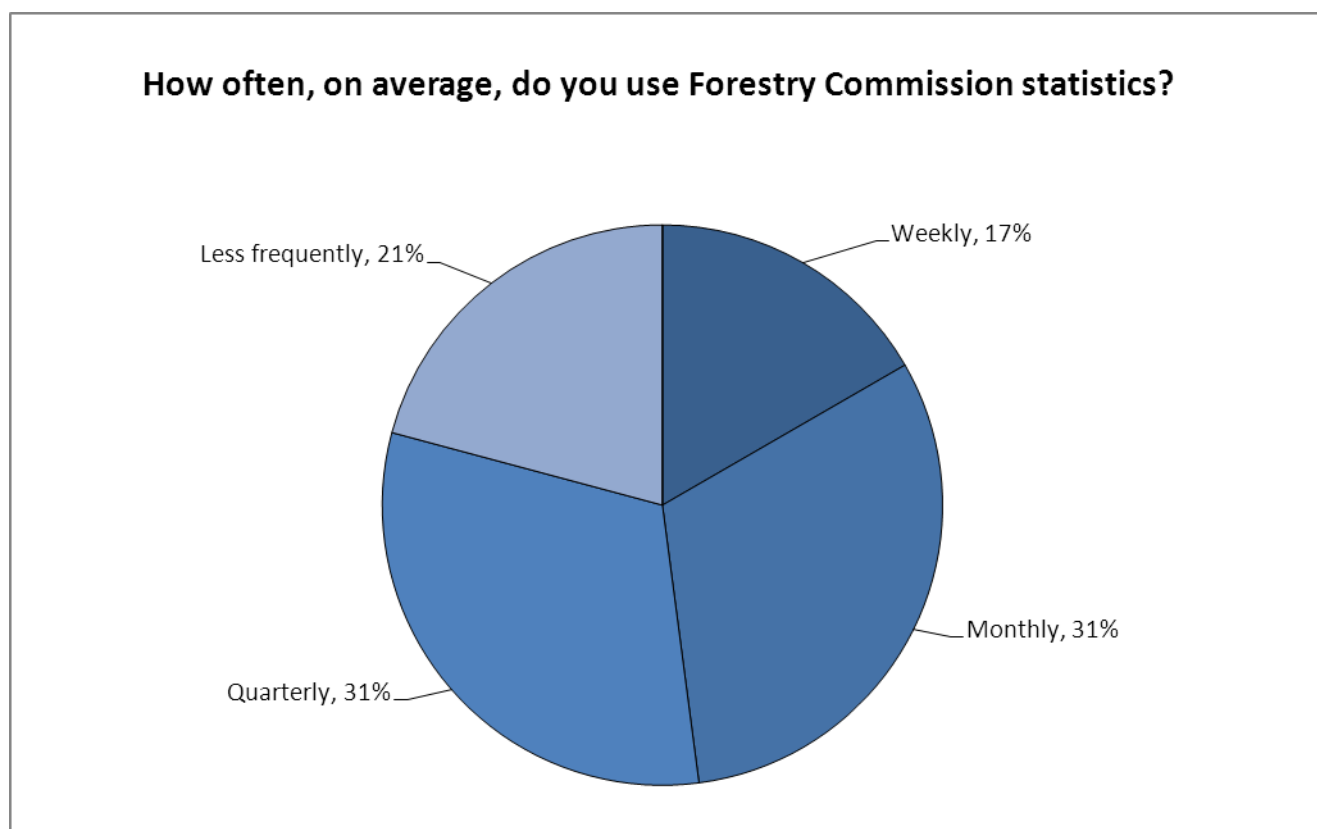
Figure 5. Country datasets of interest to FC statistical users



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When asked about the frequency of use of FC statistics, only 17% of respondents reported using FC statistics on a weekly basis, the remainder all use FC statistics less frequently with around one half of all respondents using FC statistics quarterly or less often (Figure 6). The most common frequency of use was either monthly or quarterly (31% each). The frequency of use had a similar profile in 2011.

Figure 6. Frequency of use of FC statistics



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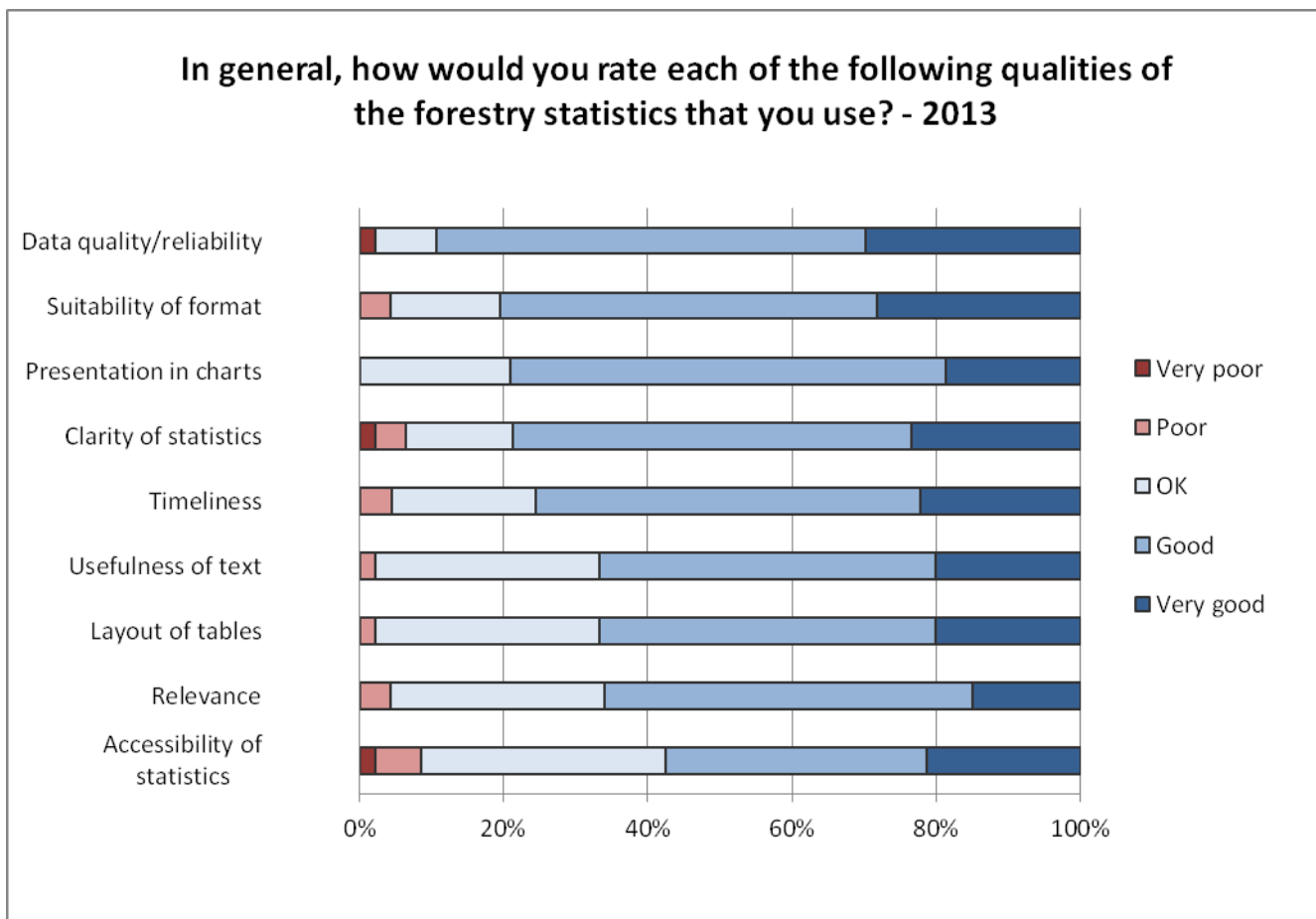
(iii) Users' experiences

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. Each of these aspects was rated as good or very good by the majority of respondents who expressed an opinion (Figure 7). As in 2011, the most highly rated aspect was data quality and reliability (89% of respondents rating them as good or very good). This was followed by suitability of format of the data (80%), presentation in charts (79%) and clarity of statistics (79%).

Timeliness, usefulness of text, layout of tables and relevance were rated as good or very good by 66% to 76% or respondents.

The accessibility of statistics received the worse ratings, with only 57% of good or very good ratings. This aspect received the second to worst rating in 2011.

Figure 7. Respondents' ratings of the quality of FC statistical outputs



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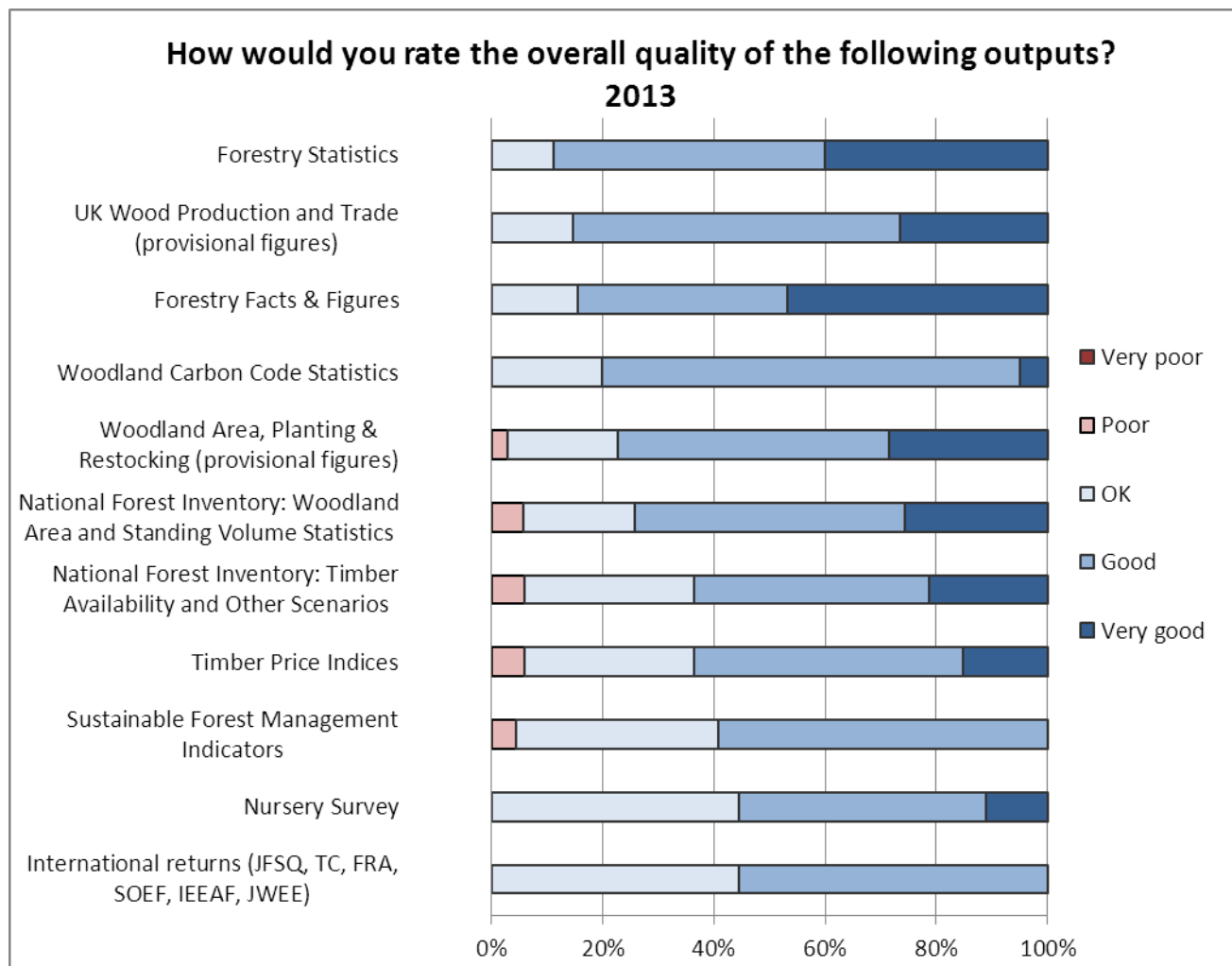
Respondents were also asked if they have any preferences for the format in which the statistics are published. Of those who responded, 83% stated that they preferred Excel spreadsheets, 21% preferred PDF files, 8% hardcopies, 4% CSV files and 4% shapefiles.

Respondents were further asked to rate the quality of particular statistical outputs from very good to very poor (Figure 8). Every output was rated as good or very good by the majority of respondents who expressed an opinion¹. As in 2011, the most highly rated output was Forestry Statistics (with 89% of respondents rating it as good or very good). This was followed by UK Wood Production and Trade (provisional figures) (85%) and Forestry Facts and Figures (84%). The most highly rated outputs, Forestry Statistics and Forestry Facts and Figures, were also the most widely used (see detailed data).

¹ The number of respondents rating each publication was: Forestry Statistics: 45, UK Wood Production and Trade (provisional figures): 35, Forestry Facts & Figures: 46, Woodland Carbon Code Statistics: 20, Woodland Area, Planting & Restocking (provisional figures): 36, National Forest Inventory: Woodland Area and Standing Volume Statistics: 35, National Forest Inventory: Timber Availability and Other Scenarios: 33, Timber Price Indices: 34, Sustainable Forest Management Indicators: 22, Nursery Survey: 9, International returns: 18.

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Figure 8. Respondents' ratings of FC statistical outputs



As in 2011, the outputs with the lowest proportion of good or very good ratings are the Nursery Survey (56%), the International returns (56%) and the Sustainable Forest Management Indicators (59%). These outputs are also the least used (see detailed data).

The National Forest Inventory outputs are widely used, some users commented that:

"The NFI stats can take a bit of time to digest and understand because of the number of different breakdowns provided."

"Not easy to access inventory data or know how reliable it is."

"NFI reports are not well written."

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Respondents were asked if there were any other pieces of information that they would like to see the FC provide. Suggestions were made on a variety of topics (see Annex 2). The most frequently recurring topic was related to the economic benefits of forestry, including employment, beyond the forestry sector itself:

"Desperately need more detailed and up to date economic data on employment, sector value, investment in sector, economic benefits, GVA etc."

"Much more on social and public benefits of forestry."

"More information on the economic benefits of forestry to sectors other than the forestry sector itself."

"Wider sectoral employment data - including employment in recreation and related forest activities. Disaggregated GVA data for devolved administrations."

As in 2011, there are also requests for domestic wood fuel statistics:

"[...] informal sourcing of wood from non-forests and domestic consumption of fuelwood."

"More details statistics on domestic wood use"

Respondents were also asked if they have any suggestions for improving the usability of FC statistics. As in 2011, several of the responses centred around improving the accessibility of the statistics on the FC website, for example;

"I have found the FC website very slow in the past and this has hindered my searching for forestry related statistics."

"I sometimes struggle to find things on the web site, even when I know it is there, but there is a lot to search from."

"Make your compendium of stats easier to find on the FC site."

"Better link from FC front page"

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Other comments for improving FC statistical outputs related to the availability of different breakdowns of the data:

"The country breakdowns are vital."

"More breakdowns at a country e.g. Scotland level."

"Tab tool? To allow users to tabulate their own breakdowns of the stats."

In total, 96% 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, similar to the 2011 level. 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;

"A very useful and reliable service."

"FC statistical publications continue to be highly regarded across the industry."

"FC statistics and statistical publications continue to be well regarded and an invaluable source of reliable information."

"The statistical services of the Forestry Commission are a jewel in the crown of the valued services provided by the FC. Long may they continue, and hopefully expand."

"Keep up the generally good work, thanks."

Conclusions and Recommendations

Comparison with the 2011 survey

The results of the 2013 user engagement survey are similar to those of the 2011 survey. This could be explained in part by the fact that many of the stakeholders contacted were the same in both surveys. Given the small number of responses, it is unlikely that the relatively small differences between the results of the 2011 and 2013 surveys represent actual changes.

Statistical areas of interest and uses of data

All topic areas covered by FC statistics are used by between one third and two-thirds of respondents. Those of most interest are woodland area and planting, UK timber, and imports and exports.

The most frequently requested additional information was on the economic benefits of forestry, including employment, beyond the forestry sector itself.

Recommendation: Investigate whether additional information on the economic benefits of forestry, including employment, beyond the forestry sector itself could be produced.

Two respondents requested statistics on domestic wood fuel use, a request that had already been made in 2011.

Recommendation: Continue on-going work on improving and expanding wood fuel statistics.

Two respondents also requested better data on woodland loss.

Recommendation: Improve and expand deforestation statistics.

The FC releases summary statistics as well as more detailed data, and respondents reported that they use both. The formats in which the data is released (PDF and Excel) also meet the needs of the vast majority of respondents.

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Users' experiences - general

The quality and reliability of FC statistics continue to be highly rated. However accessibility, which was identified as an issue in 2011, remains of concern in 2013.

Recommendation: Seek to improve the accessibility of statistics on the FC website.

Users' experiences – individual outputs

The best rated outputs, Forestry Statistics, UK Wood Production and Trade, and Forestry Facts and Figures, are also the most used.

The National Forest Inventory outputs are also widely used, but tend to have relatively lower ratings. This may be partly due to the large quantity of information provided in these reports.

The three outputs with the lowest ratings, Sustainable Forest Management Indicators, International returns and the Nursery Survey, are of less interest to the majority of users. It is unclear whether improving the quality of these publications would lead to increased readership.

The next lowest rated output, Timber Price Indices, only covers FC timber sales, which intrinsically limits its usefulness to many users.

Next steps

A new implementation plan will be produced based on the recommendations identified in this report, to replace the version produced from the 2011 survey results.

Annex 1 - Questionnaire

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. More information on how we engage with users of our statistics, including the results of the 2011 survey and the actions taken since, can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7zejnv

The questionnaire is completely anonymous and should take no more than 10 minutes. We would be grateful if you could complete the survey by Monday November 25th.

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

- Central government
- Local authority
- Other public body/agency
- 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 your responses to these survey questions represent an organised and consolidated response from your organisation? (Yes/No)

Q3. If you wish, please specify the name of your organisation (please note that this information will not be published and will only be used for the purposes of internal analysis)

Q4. 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
- Other (please specify)

Q5. If you do not use forestry statistics produced by the Forestry Commission on any of the topics listed in Q4, 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)

Q6. What do you use these forestry statistics for? (tick all that apply):

- Promoting the benefits of forestry
- Getting information about the state of the economy, society and the environment
- Getting information about the performance of government and public bodies
- Informing policy and programme development
- Informing policy and programme evaluation and monitoring
- Allocating resources
- Comparing own performance with wider market
- Informing marketing campaigns
- Informing investment decisions
- Supporting lobbying
- Supporting funding applications
- Facilitating academic research
- Informing choices about service providers
- Informing lifestyle choices
- Targeting local markets
- Targeting households and individuals
- Designing market research surveys
- Annual contract reviews
- I do not use them
- Other (please specify)

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Q7. 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)
- I do not use them
- Other (please specify)

Q8. Which country are you most interested in retrieving data on? (tick all that apply):

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- UK as a whole
- Not applicable

Q9. How often, on average do you use Forestry Commission statistics?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Less frequently
- Not applicable

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Q10. 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						

Q11. Are there any formats that you prefer to use when accessing statistics (e.g. PDF, excel spreadsheets, etc)?

Q12. Do you have any suggestions for improving the usability of our statistics?

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 text is in explaining and supporting the data

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Q13. 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 and Standing Volume Statistics						
National Forest Inventory: Timber Availability and Other Scenarios						
Woodland Carbon Code Statistics						
Sustainable Forest Management Indicators						
International returns (JFSQ, TC, FRA, SOEF, IEEAF, JWEE)						
Nursery Survey						

Q14. If you've rated anything less than OK, please tell us why

Q15. Are you able to use forestry statistics produced by the Forestry Commission in a confident and informed way? (Yes/No/I don't use them)

Q16. Is there any other information you would like to see us provide?

Q17. Any other comments?

Annex 2 – Responses to Open Survey Questions

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

- *"It would be helpful to have more up to date stats on timber price movements eg on a quarterly basis taking account of both state and private sector sales"*
- *"I suspect this is not within your control, but clearer data on forest ownership would be of great policy and research relevance"*
- *"Timeliness"*
- *"I have found the FC website very slow in the past and this has hindered my searching for forestry related statistics."*
- *"The country breakdowns are vital"*
- *"Perhaps (if possible) including more UK wide figures, such as for recreation, likely through using "expert opinion" for Northern Ireland."*
- *"Forestry Statistics should be available as a fully downloadable pdf again - the individual section printing option currently available is OK, but it would be more convenient to have the whole 'book' available in one go."*
- *"If possible better indexing to make them easier to find"*
- *"Longer time series with comparable data."*
- *"More breakdowns at a country e.g. Scotland level"*
- *"Raise awareness internally (within FC) about what statistics you have, how often they are collected and who to contact for more information. Coffee break talks would be good."*
- *"Easier access to raw data - aggregated data is rather bland."*
- *"Tab tool? To allow users to tabulate their own breakdowns of the stats."*
- *"Date range can be confusing - especially since our planting season goes 1 Sep - 31 Aug. What is and is not included - compensatory planting?"*
- *"I sometimes struggle to find things on the web site, even when I know it is there, but there is a lot to search from."*
- *"Produce country specific versions of Forestry Statistics"*
- *"Make your compendium of stats easier to find on the FC site. Include NI stats where possible so that UK data can be derived"*
- *"Better link from FC front page."*

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

- *"Timing does not reflect current position. Stats do not include private sector."*
- *"Scope of SFM indicators should include deforestation. Scope/nature of public opinion surveys could be improved. Employment figures strange compared with other studies, despite allowing for definitions."*
- *"Timber price indices - as has been mentioned in the past hardwood prices would be very useful to us (though I do realise the difficulties in this)."*
- *"Poor data on forest losses from natural hazards"*
- *"The NFI stats can take a bit of time to digest and understand because of the number of different breakdowns provided."*
- *"I don't believe the figures quoted - the increase in planted areas is not reflected in nursery volumes of production or sales."*
- *"Not easy to access inventory data or know how reliable it is."*
- *"NFI reports are not well written"*

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

- *"See above – deforestation"*
- *"Desperately need more detailed and up to date economic data on employment, sector value, investment in sector, economic benefits, GVA etc."*
- *"More accurate coppice info"*
- *"Already stated: average age of harvesting (or maximum mean annual increment for timber). An indication of the capacity for carbon storage within woodland (if possible)."*
- *"It would be very useful if the FICGB Handbook (yellow corrugated booklet) could be updated as we are still having to refer to some of the industry information in this publication for information like location of processors etc. I appreciate this would not be a small task!"*
- *"Restocking and new planting is separated into broadleaf and conifer. It would be useful to know the environmental content vs the commercial production content. Large areas are being planted with non productive hardwoods and native pinewoods. To a lay reader the statistics suggest that all is well but from a commercial point of view we need to know what is the likelihood of a commercial crop being harvested. So to split conifer between commercial and environmental would be useful."*
- *"Information on losses from natural hazards."*
- *"Much more on social and public benefits of forestry. Also on informal sourcing of wood from non-forests and domestic consumption of fuelwood."*
- *"More information on prices and costs would be useful. Also, there is an increasing demand for information about the broadleaved forest resource - but I know a forecast of broadleaved timber production is in preparation."*
- *"More information on the economic benefits of forestry to sectors other than the forestry sector itself."*
- *"Felling/Restocking by region where disease has caused felling."*
- *"Hedging."*
- *"New planting and Restocking split into the grant type e.g. productive conifer high cost, low cost, productive blv, native pinewood etc etc."*
- *"Timber prices for private sector sales"*
- *"More details statistics on domestic wood use"*
- *"Wider sectoral employment data - including employment in recreation and related forest activities."*
- *"Disaggregated GVA data for devolved administrations."*

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Any other comments?

- *"I used to receive timber price updates automatically, but haven't for some time."*
- *"A very useful and reliable service"*
- *"I personally do not use the stats. Our tutors have requested that all students attending our courses must have a hard copy within their course literature. Student backgrounds range from tree growers to end users, as well as Forestry Students and Apprentices."*
- *"FC statistical publications continue to be highly regarded across the industry."*
- *"The PDF Forestry Facts & Figures is much more difficult to use now it is only available in A3 fold up format"*
- *"It would be useful to know what assumptions are made for future production from restock and new planting. Obviously the next rotation will produce lower production....but is this in the figures?"*
- *"Keep up the good work! We love you!"*
- *"FC statistics and statistical publications continue to be well regarded and an invaluable source of reliable information."*
- *"All FC statistics must be used with very large caveats because we do not know how they were compiled, what is and is not included and the date range does not correspond to our desired date ranges."*
- *"The statistical services of the Forestry Commission are a jewel in the crown of the valued services provided by the FC. Long may they continue, and hopefully expand."*
- *"Keep up the generally good work, thanks."*