

14 September 2016

## FORESTRY APPRENTICESHIPS

### Purpose

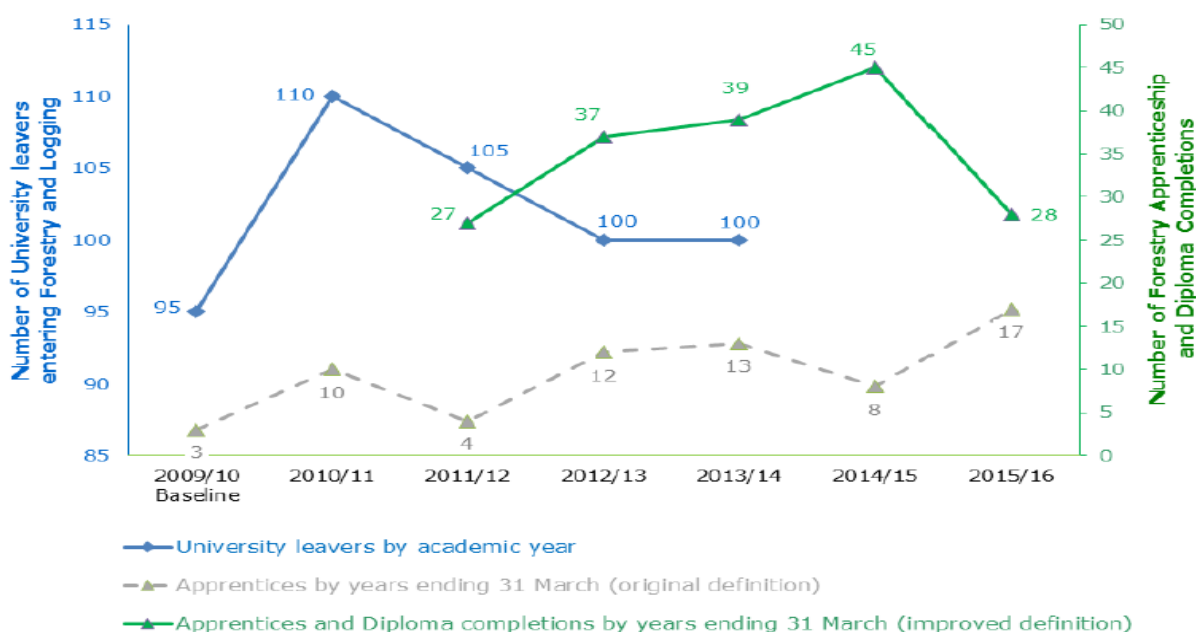
1. To inform the committee of:
  - Recent developments regarding forestry apprenticeships in the private sector.
  - Next steps being taken in regard to the FC’s own workforce.

### Background

#### Context

2. Forestry apprenticeship numbers are fairly low, with many training providers not able to achieve the economies of scale or critical mass required to offer the necessary training, and few businesses either financially or culturally able to employ an apprentice. A recent spike in numbers was directly attributable to the availability of additional funding support under FC England’s ‘Forestry Skills Initiative’. See below :

*Number of apprentices, those with work based diplomas, and university students entering forestry*



The Forestry Skills Initiative brought about a marked increase in completions of Forestry Work-Based Diploma and Apprenticeship completions between 2011/12 and 2014/15. The end of that funding initiative is reflected in a subsequent downturn in completions in 2015/16.

3. Forestry apprenticeships are currently delivered under the Trees and Timber Framework, which attracts Government funding to support businesses which employ apprentices. However, the existing Frameworks are being terminated in favour of the new 'Trailblazer' apprenticeship programme, which is a cornerstone of the Government's commitment to deliver 3 million new apprenticeships in the life of this parliament.

4. A working group of forestry businesses and other stakeholders has developed a new apprenticeship standard for forestry under the Trailblazer programme, viewable here: <http://bit.ly/1YF8cmG>.

5. The recently published proposals for funding the new apprenticeships (<http://bit.ly/2bFYctL>) suggest a relatively favourable offering for forestry businesses where the business is an SME and the apprentice is aged between 16-18 years old. Additional funding is being proposed to support apprentices achieve Level 2 in Maths and English and some other additional learning needs.

6. The working group that developed the new apprenticeship standard has just submitted the assessment plan and training specification which sit behind the standard, and which will allow training providers to make a decision on whether they can/will offer the new apprenticeship. Once the assessment plan has been approved by BEIS, the standard will 'go live' and the old Framework will no longer attract Government funding. All new apprenticeship funding will be under the new programme.

7. Training providers are under no obligation to offer the new standard, and until such time as the existing Framework ceases to attract funding are unlikely to do so.

## **Discussion**

8. Potential proposals for future FC involvement in apprenticeships include the following:

- Continued support for the Forestry Sub-Group which developed the apprenticeship standard, assessment plan and training specification.
- Opening and maintaining dialogue with training providers and awarding bodies to encourage delivery of the new apprenticeship standard.
- Working with the other stakeholders to develop other apprenticeship standards within forestry, e.g. degree-level apprenticeships.

## **FC's role as an employer**

9. In regard to our own workforce HR are working with the Director of Operations (FE) on career pathways which will include consideration of a range of apprentice programmes. A paper regarding career development/workforce planning is expected to be brought to the Committee at a future date.

10. The Government's Apprenticeship Levy, with effect from April 2017, will require all employers, with a paybill over £3m each year, to make an investment in apprenticeships. The financial implications of the Levy, which will be paid at 0.5% of paybill over £3m, less a £15k organisation wide levy allowance, via PAYE, will amount to around £300k and will need to be built into our forward planning.

11. As an employer FCE/CS will be able to access the Digital Apprenticeship Service to pay for training and assessment for apprenticeships commencing from April 2017 subject to eligibility criteria. Funds paid into the levy pot will, however, expire 18 months after they are paid unless used to pay for apprenticeship training within that timescale.

### **Resource implications**

12. Private sector support in FC staff time is included in Steve Fowkes' remit on learning and development and has an existing cash resource £2.5k 16/17, £5k 17/18, £5k 18/19, £2.5k 19/20.

### **Risk Assessment**

13. There is a danger that the existing frameworks will continue to be funded and this will impact on take-up of the new standard amongst training providers. This would reflect badly in FS Performance Indicator 17.

### **Communications**

14. FC Communications will be present at a forthcoming meeting (Sept 20th) of experts from some of the stakeholder organisations involved in developing the land-based apprenticeship standards under the Trailblazer programme. This meeting will begin the creation of a communications strategy.

### **Recommendations**

15. The Committee is invited to discuss and asked to endorse and advocate this work, subject to any comments it might have at this stage.

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