

# New Forest Apprenticeship Scheme

Securing the future skills of the woodland industry



6 local people have been trained through on-the-job apprenticeships in the land management skills necessary to maintain and enhance special qualities of the New Forest National Park, an iconic part of England's most wooded region. Forestry contractors are vital for the delivery of sustainable woodland management and are therefore fundamental to the sector's health. However, the industry faces significant recruitment and retention problems, which are widely recognised as barriers to growth.

The Forestry Commission, National Trust and Sparsholt College came together to equip apprentices with background knowledge of the constraints and opportunities that go with working within the Forest. The apprentices also gained NVQ Level 2 in Forestry Management. This project was a pilot ahead of the development of forestry Modern Apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships present a great opportunity to 'earn while you learn', working alongside experienced staff, without burden of debt associated with full-time study. The apprentices are successfully moving on to further employment and study.

## objectives

- Training of 6 new apprentice forest workers to NVQ level 2 in forest management.
- Encourage the development of a new generation of local forest workers or contractors for the sustainable management of the iconic New Forest.
- Pilot the apprentice approach to training and employment in this day and age.

## actions

Strong partnership between two local employers (Forestry Commission, who manage the Crown Lands and the National Trust, who manage significant areas of common land) the Local land based college (Sparsholt – nationally recognised for the provision of countryside management skills, which advised the other partner organisations and the trainee) and LEADER+ Team leading to:

- Training of apprentices through on-the-job activities – training plans developed in first two weeks, taking into account any existing skills and the trainees own aspirations.
- Specific training courses for skills such as chainsaw use.
- Assessment of apprentices for NVQ at local training college.

## achievements

### Whole Project

- 6 apprentices trained to NVQ level 2 in forest management. This includes harvesting, restocking and silvicultural operations. However their actual work training is more wide ranging, targeting broader environmental land management, recreation and conservation work.
- Apprentices mainly based with the Forestry Commission, but two placements with the National Trust allowed them to gain different skills and gain an insight into a different organisation.
- 2 apprentices successfully gained posts with the Forestry Commission locally through open competition. 1 apprentice will go on to further training. 1 apprentice will be setting up his own contracting business. Part of the scheme will allow support to successful apprentices through negotiated contracts when they start up their own business. 2 apprentices still have another year on the scheme.



## background context and details

Over recent years there has been a significant reduction in workforce numbers within the land-based sector. Employers within both the forestry and environmental conservation sectors report difficulties in recruiting skilled and unskilled staff. The sector workforce has an older profile, with currently over 40% of the workforce having no formal qualification equivalent to the lowest NVQ level. However it is predicted that in future a more skilled workforce will be required with 80% of the land based workforce required to have skill levels at NVQ level 3. There are also few young people moving into the forestry sector, which is leading to a future skills shortage. Yet the New Forest's special characteristics come from the history of land management and commoning, so there is a need to ensure continuity of these skills in the area.

The apprenticeships were advertised locally and each year there were 10-20 applications, with 6 people interviewed and 2 places each year. The apprentices had to be at least 17 years old as they needed to undertake chainsaw training. They also required 2 GCSE D and above and a practical aptitude. They had to get themselves to their reporting point each day. Most importantly they had to demonstrate desire and enthusiasm to work in the countryside.

The LEADER+ team were key players in securing match funding from the Regional Development Agency (SEEDA). The funding covered wages, training tools and equipment. The in kind contribution from the Forestry Commission and National Trust included time with the field staff who were training the apprentices on the job, administration and management.

This model works well with larger employers. However it may be more challenging for smaller businesses, though they could perhaps work in partnership with a range of businesses to cover the skill areas required.

## quotes - from the apprentices

"It has been really useful to work alongside experienced staff so that we can learn how to do the job efficiently. We wouldn't have learnt that just from a short training course"

"It is good to be involved in the management of the New Forest as I've lived close to it all my life."

## partners

Employer: Forestry Commission (New Forest)  
Supplementary placement: National Trust  
Training College: Sparsholt College

## funding

Project cost: £220,262  
New Forest LEADER + (Forest Friendly Farming)  
SEEDA matched funding  
Forestry Commission in kind contribution  
National Trust in kind

## lessons learnt

There needs to be enough time allowed to support the apprentices with the portfolio of evidence. Without this time the apprentices could be very skilled practically but without evidence to show this. The portfolio development requires support from their line manager, the college, a system to record evidence and time for apprentices to complete it