

Do people grow on trees?

Guidance for employers in the
Scottish forest and timber industries



NAPIER UNIVERSITY
EDINBURGH

This report was prepared as part of the Forest Industries Recruitment and Retention (FIRRS) project at Napier University by Sue Bond, Emily Thomson and Suzi Macpherson from the Employment Research Institute, and Dan Ridley-Ellis from the Centre for Timber Engineering.

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Centre for Timber Engineering
Napier University
10 Colinton Road
Edinburgh EH10 5DT
Tel: 0131 455 2819
Email: cte@napier.ac.uk

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Recruitment & Retention in the Forest & Timber Industries

Forests and their products are hugely important to the economic and environmental sustainability of Scotland's economy and influence many aspects of Scottish society. However, the forest and timber industries in Scotland face significant problems in workforce recruitment and associated skills shortages. These challenges will become more acute as the population ages and the aspirations of workers continue to change.

This guidance document highlights the challenges facing the forest and timber industries and provides advice on how these can be overcome in order for the sector to remain competitive in the future.

Why is there a problem?

- A workforce with a high average age means many employees in the industry will be reaching retirement in the near future.
- An aging population means a smaller pool of young people to recruit from.
- With fewer working age young people entering the labour market, these people will, in the future, have more choice about the types of work that they do.
- Limited public understanding of the forest and timber industries means fewer people are considering them as a career option.
- Aspirations of the workforce are changing, with more people wanting better work-life balance.
- Social trends are towards men and women taking more equal roles in the household and requiring flexibility of work for childcare and caring for elderly parents.
- Skills needs within the industry are changing as the work changes.
- Many of the traditional routes into the industry are diminishing.
- There is forecast to be population movement from rural areas into the larger cities.

“Employers are facing a double challenge – changing demographics are signalling the demise of the fit white male as the worker norm, bringing the need to adapt strategies to recruit more widely. At the same time, the new generation of workers expect a very different relationship with work from the 9 to 5... that typified work for their parents.”

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2007) Enter the Timelords: Transforming work to meet the future^[1]

The future workforce?

Target groups for future recruitment include:

- **young people**
- **women**
- **career changers**

“Women are a huge and largely untapped labour market for forestry work”

A Survey of People in the Forest Industries in South Scotland (2007) published by Barfill Management Centre^[2]

Recruiting from a wider pool of potential workers will enable companies to meet the future challenges facing the industry. By doing so:

- There is a much better chance of filling vacancies created by retirements.
- Companies can draw on more a varied skills base and work experience.
- Companies will become more competitive in general, but particularly in relation to contracts with the public sector framed by the Gender Equality Duty.

The **Gender Equality Duty of Public Authorities** means these bodies have a requirement to incorporate gender equality requirements into the obligations of contractors.

“A contractors’ gender equality track record is...a relevant indicator of their ability to deliver the specified goods, works or services effectively, efficiently and to a high standard”

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2007) Gender Equality Duty of Public Authorities - Procurement Guidance^[3]

What can be done?

Companies and industry groups can think about ways to:

- Promote a positive image of the industry so more people choose this as a career.
- Examine how education and training providers can effectively meet the changing skills requirements of the industry.
- Adopt work-life balance and flexible working policies to support the current and future workforce.

The Forest & Timber Industries in Scotland

Forests are hugely important to the economic and environmental sustainability of Scotland's economy and influence many aspects of Scottish society both directly and indirectly. The support they provide for employment, tourism, recreation and biodiversity is underpinned by an industry that is invisible to many ordinary people, but that touches their lives through forest products fundamental to everyday life.

Almost half the forested land in the UK is in Scotland where forestry and wood processing provide the equivalent of approximately 11,000 full time jobs [4]. They support many more - not least in the building sector where a booming timber frame sector now produces around three quarters of all new homes^[5].

For some time now it has been recognised that many of the risks and opportunities affecting the sector relate to the people who make it what it is. Without enough of the right people, the industry would be not be able to grow or innovate. Without growth and innovation its demise in the face of international competition would be inevitable.

In a 2005 survey of business health by the Forestry Commission, 'employing and retaining' staff was identified as the second biggest issue facing Scottish businesses (after 'the economic environment')^[6]

The sector now faces the twin challenges of not being able to recruit and train fast enough to keep pace with business opportunities and of losing valuable trained staff to other sectors. Rather than being issues affecting the 'long term strategy' for the sector, these are real threats that will have to be tackled now for the industry to stay competitive in the medium to long term. Demographic trends in Scotland mean that there will be an inexorable squeeze on the working age population, even allowing for net economic migration into Scotland. This is will soon be compounded by the retirement of a significant proportion of the current workforce and significant population movement away from traditional forestry locations. The timescale for these changes is measured in years, not decades.

"Forestry is a long-term activity, but is also relevant today to people from all walks of life. As that recognition grows, we can enhance Scotland's forests, woodlands and trees as a valued resource in which we can all take great pride."

Rhona Brankin
Depute Minister for Environment and Rural Development
Preface to the Scottish Forestry Strategy 2006^[7]

This briefing document is intended to:

- Help employers understand the issues around recruitment and retention of staff in the sector.
- Within an increasingly competitive job market, assist companies to be more attractive to potential employees.
- Assist employers effectiveness in recruiting new staff from a wider pool of potential workers.
- Help employers to stay competitive nationally and internationally.

“The best way to guarantee a steady stream of new ideas is to make sure that each person in your organization is as different as possible from the others. Under these conditions, and only these conditions, will people maintain varied perspectives and demonstrate their knowledge in different ways.”

Nicholas Negroponte, Co-founder of MIT Media Laboratory

The Recruitment and Retention Problem

An Aging Population and Workforce

Forest and timber industry employees have an older age profile than many other sectors. Employees commonly fall into the 45 to 55 age bracket, whereas employees for the whole environmental and land-based sector are more commonly aged between 25 and 34^[8]. Even if there is no expansion within the forest and timber industries, there is a need to improve recruitment as a large proportion of the current workforce moves towards retirement.

Crucially, this is set against a backdrop of trends in Scotland's population as a whole. Increased life expectancy and falling fertility rates mean that the composition of the population will change, having proportionally more people over retirement age and proportionally fewer people of working age. On top of this there are population movements within Scotland and across its borders.

By 2031 government forecasts of population^[9] suggest an 81% increase in the number of people over 75 and a 7% decrease in the number of people aged between 16 and 29 with the overall number of people of working age staying more or less the same. However there are regional differences that make the situation worse for the wood chain industries.

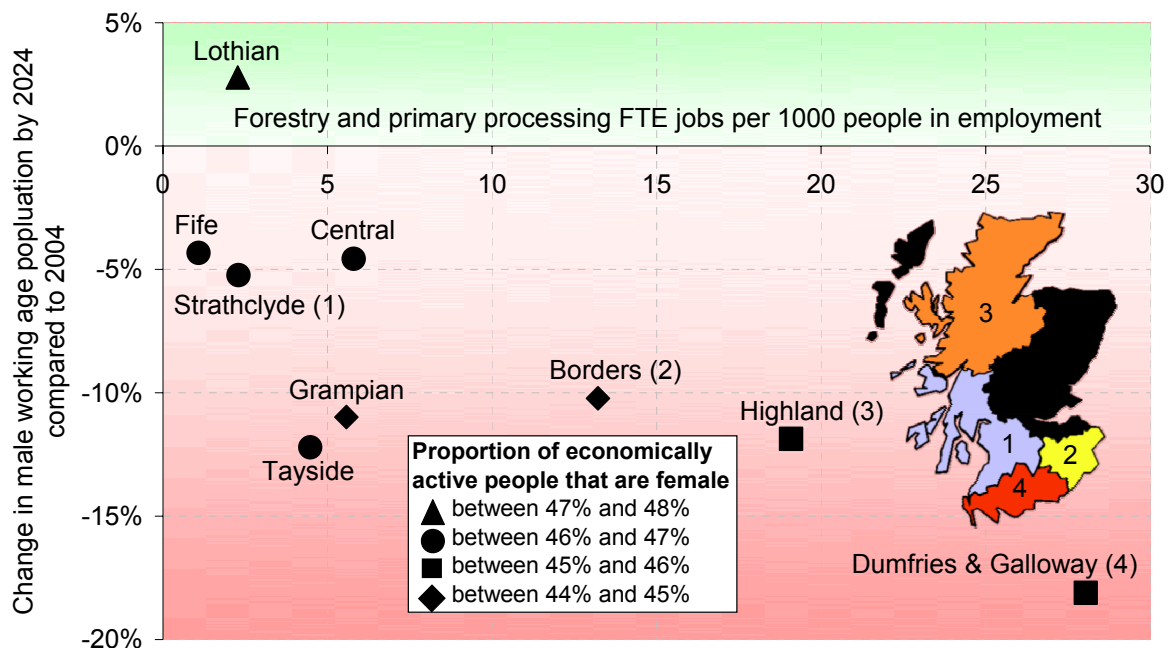


Figure 1: Forestry and primary processing jobs in the regions of Scotland and forecast changes in the male working age population^[4,9]

Because the vast majority of people currently working in the wood chain are male, it is most useful to look at the forecast changes in the male working age population. Figure 1 shows the predicted change from 2004 levels as well as the proportion of forestry and primary processing jobs as measured by the last substantial survey (1998/9). The three areas where forestry and processing employ the highest proportion of people (Dumfries and Galloway, Highland and the Scottish Borders) are also those that are

expected to experience the largest drop in male working age population (between 10 and 20%, Figure 2). Grampian and Tayside are also forecast to see a large fall.

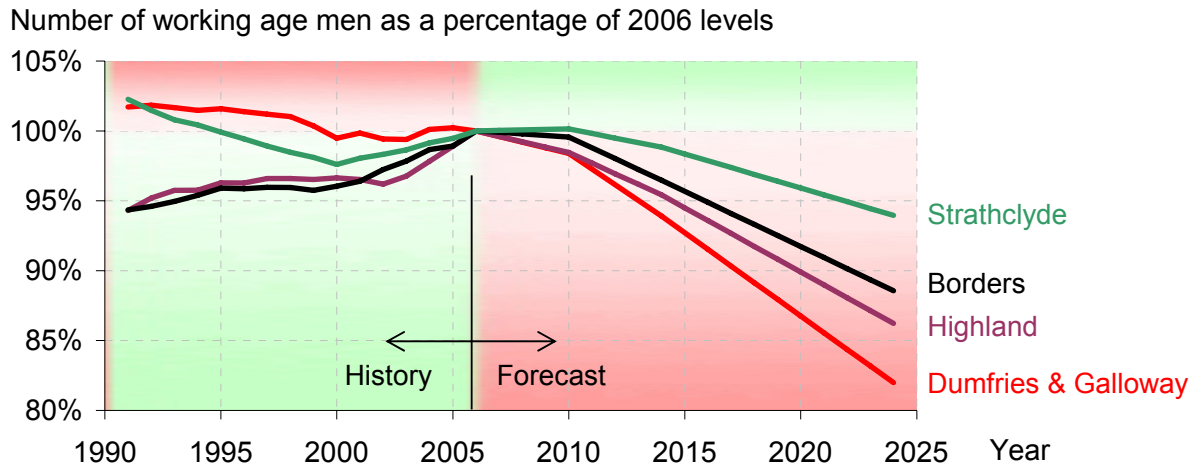
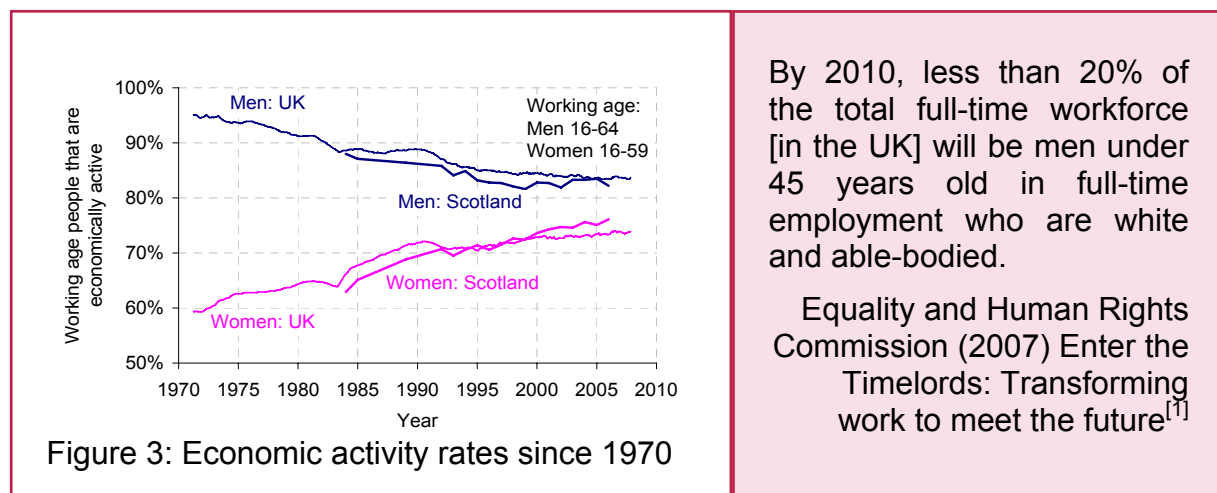


Figure 2: Numbers of working age men by year in the Strathclyde, Borders, Highland Dumfries and Galloway regions compared to the 2006 level.^[9]

The aging population and migration away from traditional forestry areas will mean a diminishing pool of people to recruit from and more competition, particularly for those under 30 who are less likely to be established into another career. With fewer working age young people entering the labour market, this group of people will, in the future, have more choice about the types of work that they do. Their expectations of working conditions, and social pressures, will become a more important factor in determining which employers are most successful.

Scotland's total population has remained largely constant for the last 50 years and the growth in its workforce has been due largely to women becoming more economically active (either in work or looking for work)^[10]. Women currently represent 48.2% of the working age population in Scotland and 48.0% of people in jobs. At the same time, there has been a steady decrease in the proportion of men who are economically active (Figure 3). If they continue, these trends would mean a decline in the working male population over the next 20 years in the region of 5%, over and above the fall due to demographic changes and population movement.



By 2010, less than 20% of the total full-time workforce [in the UK] will be men under 45 years old in full-time employment who are white and able-bodied.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2007) Enter the Timelords: Transforming work to meet the future^[11]

Changing Aspirations of the Workforce

Mothers remain the main child-carers in the household, but the evidence is that both parents want to spend more time with their children. Studies indicate that 70% of fathers would like to be more involved in childcare than they currently are^[11] and UK employment law now includes more provision for paternity and parental leave.

As well as responsibilities for children, working age people are more involved now in caring for their own parents as they enter old age. This trend is expected to rise further as people have children at an older age, and live longer. By 2030 there are expected to be 80% more people over 75 in Scotland being supported by the same number of working age people as there are now^[9].

The modern workforce are demanding a new relationship with work; one that allows them to deal with caring responsibilities and does not demand that they sacrifice their social and home life in order to achieve a successful career. More people (52% of men and 48% of women) would like to work more flexible hours^[12]. This trend is even more apparent among younger people, with 90% of young people wanting a job that would enable them to effectively combine work and family life^[13].

On the whole, employers are not always in tune with what employees want, with a recent report^[14] finding that employees and employers had different ideas about what made an attractive place to work. While employees said their priorities were firstly, location of work, secondly, holiday entitlement, and thirdly, flexible work and bonus, employers thought that the key priorities were, firstly, company reputation, secondly, quality of the workplace culture/environment and thirdly, staff development initiatives.

Twenty years ago, people were willing to accept traditional work arrangements dictated by the employer in return for the pay cheque at the end of the week or month. Now, increasingly, the desire for satisfying jobs and a life outside work are driving work expectations and fuelling demands for new types of organisation and new ways of working.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2007) Enter the Timelords: Transforming work to meet the future^[1]

Changing needs in the industry

The skills needed by the forest and timber industries are changing^[15,16,17].

- Potential changes in world trade mean increasingly volatility in prices and an increased need for competitiveness and restructuring.
- Increased competition places more emphasis on high quality products and services and better marketing, management and customer service.
- Increased concerns with safety, traceability, quality and environmental protection mean that employers will have to provide training to employees to better meet these demands.
- Technology changes mean employees will need to be kept up-to-date with the latest techniques and equipment in order to maximise returns (such as practical training for technicians and machine operators).
- As a result of new technology, there will be less need for lower skilled (and lower paid) jobs, and advanced skills and specific training will be increasingly important.
- IT competencies will grow in importance to the industry.
- Business management skills (including customer relations, communication, planning and organisation) are growing in importance as routes to maintaining and improving the performance and competitiveness of forest and timber industry businesses.

The Sector Skills Agreement for Trees and Timber identified three critical skills shortage areas^[15]:

- *Young recruits to all occupations*
- *Managers with practical/ technical experience*
- *Craft workers including tree climbers, planting teams, chainsaw and machine operatives*

The sectors that will do well in Scotland's future economy are likely those that will be able to use Information and Communication Technology to mitigate against lack of population growth and the restrictions of geographic location. As such, the forest and timber industries face particular challenges – both in terms of competition for staff, and in terms of maintaining their position within the political landscape.

Loss of Traditional Routes into the Wood Chain

A recent report^[2] examining people in the forest industries in South Scotland suggests that some of the critical factors that have historically supported recruitment in the forest and timber industries will not be as effective in the future:

Family Connections: In the past, many young people would follow their parents and relatives into the forest and timber industries, but this is no longer happening. In fact, (probably because of low morale in some parts of the wood chain) some workers actively discourage younger family members from following in their footsteps.

On the Job Experience: Because of age regulations introduced in recent years that govern the operation of machinery it has not been possible to give young people informal practical experience in machine operations as freely as it used to be. This was a traditional way in which young people entered the forest and timber industries and so restrictions will have a negative impact on recruitment.

Direct Forestry Connections: In the past, most households in communities near large woodlands would have had one or more family members working in the wood chain. However, as the people living in these communities change, these connections are reducing.

Agricultural Connections: Traditionally, forest and timber industries relied on recruiting workers from the farming community. As the agricultural sector has declined, so has the potential pool of labour from this source.

As a result, there is a widespread lack of knowledge of the range of jobs in the forest industries, with many people having a narrow idea of what is involved. When asked if they would consider a career in the timber industry, just 7% of children asked said they might^[18]. A quarter of children under 15 seem to be already discounting a possible career in the industry because they consider it to be too dirty, dangerous, bad for the environment or for men only (Figure 4). Many children regarded it as boring, largely because of an inaccurate idea of what it involved.

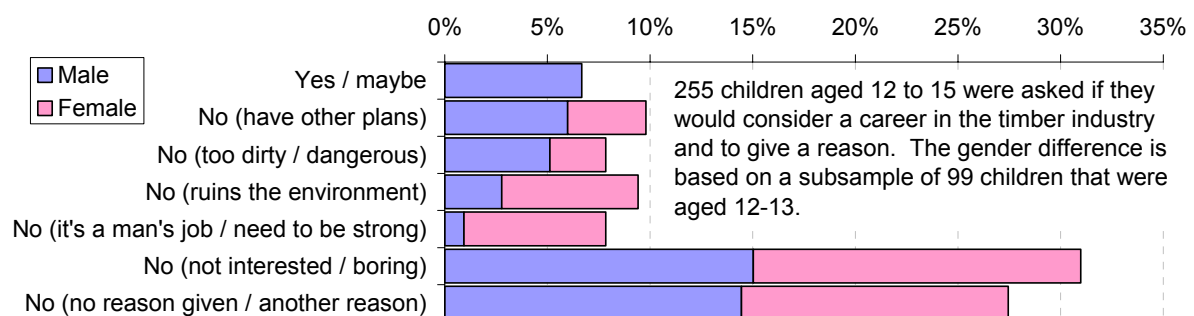


Figure 4: A survey asking children if they would consider a career in the timber industry

The Education and Training Needs of the Wood Chain

“All sectors of forest-based industries report the lack of new entrants and aging workforce as an issue that will effect business sustainability.”

Glaister, C. (2006) Capturing and Accessing Training and Skills Information in the Forest-Based Industries published by Rural Development Initiatives Ltd^[16]

There are a range of different kinds of training available to meet the needs of the forest and timber industries, including provision of formal further and higher education qualifications, Scottish Modern Apprenticeships and a range of short term, specific courses delivered by private providers. However, the availability of individuals qualified to technician level and beyond (at least SVQ4/HND) is not currently meeting employer demand^[15].

Specifically, there are issues around the limited practical skills of employees and the lack of work-based and work-related content of accredited courses. Those recruiting graduates report some having poor communication and practical skills.

Employers are often seeking ‘work ready’ employees and new entrants are falling short of this requirement. Given the financial constraints on colleges and universities, and the difficulties in giving students on courses opportunities for practical experience, there may be unreasonable expectations on educators working within the classroom setting. Nonetheless, these are issues that must be addressed to ensure that the workforce leaving education are equipped and ready to participate in the industry^[2].

The Solution – A Wider Pool of Workers

White, adult male workers have predominated in forest and timber industries jobs in the past, but this group of workers will reduce in supply the future. Some employers are currently responding the skills and labour shortages by recruiting **migrant workers**. However, the supply of these workers is limited and cannot be guaranteed in the longer term.

The forest and timber industries will always want to attract **young people**. However, with young people in increasingly short supply. The forest and timber industries as a whole will need to proactively promote a more positive image of the work, as well as offer a range of flexible working practices and training and development opportunities, in order to effectively compete for this group.

Given these constraints, employers will need to look to other groups of workers in order to ensure an effective recruitment strategy is maintained. For instance, **women** are currently a large and untapped pool of potential labour and will become even more important in forestry areas into the future (Figure 5). However, given that women generally still maintain the largest share of childrearing responsibility, women planning their careers and planning a return to work after having children tend to select employment that gives access to flexible working options. Increasingly, **fathers** also want to play a greater role in the upbringing of their children so are likely to start making more demands for flexible working from their employers in the future. Being proactive about developing flexible working packages and open to new ways of delivering on company goals will be important to recruiting and retaining many future workers.

People seeking to **change careers** may find some jobs in the wood chain attractive either through providing convenient local employment or as a means of tying in hobbies and interests with work. Accurate information on the nature of available jobs and incentives such as flexible working practices and training and development opportunities could be effective in recruiting from this group.

The Benefits of Drawing on a Wider Pool of Workers

Competition for all workers is likely to increase in the future. Employing from a wider pool of potential labour will enable companies to meet future workforce needs. In doing so:

- There is a much better chance of filling vacancies left by an ageing workforce
- Employers can draw on a wider range of skills and work experience
- Employers will be more competitive, and able to work more effectively with public authorities, who are required to work within the Gender Equality Duty^[3]

The **Gender Equality Duty of Public Authorities** means these organisations (such as government bodies and councils) have a requirement to incorporate gender equality requirements into the obligations of contractors. This means that the gender equality record of a company bidding for a public authority contract can be taken into account in decisions about awards. When procuring goods, works or services, public authorities must generally ensure that ‘when public money is spent it supports the promotion of gender equality’.

“A contractors’ gender equality track record is...a relevant indicator of their ability to deliver the specified goods, works or services effectively, efficiently and to a high standard”

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2007) Gender Equality Duty of Public Authorities - Procurement Guidance^[3]

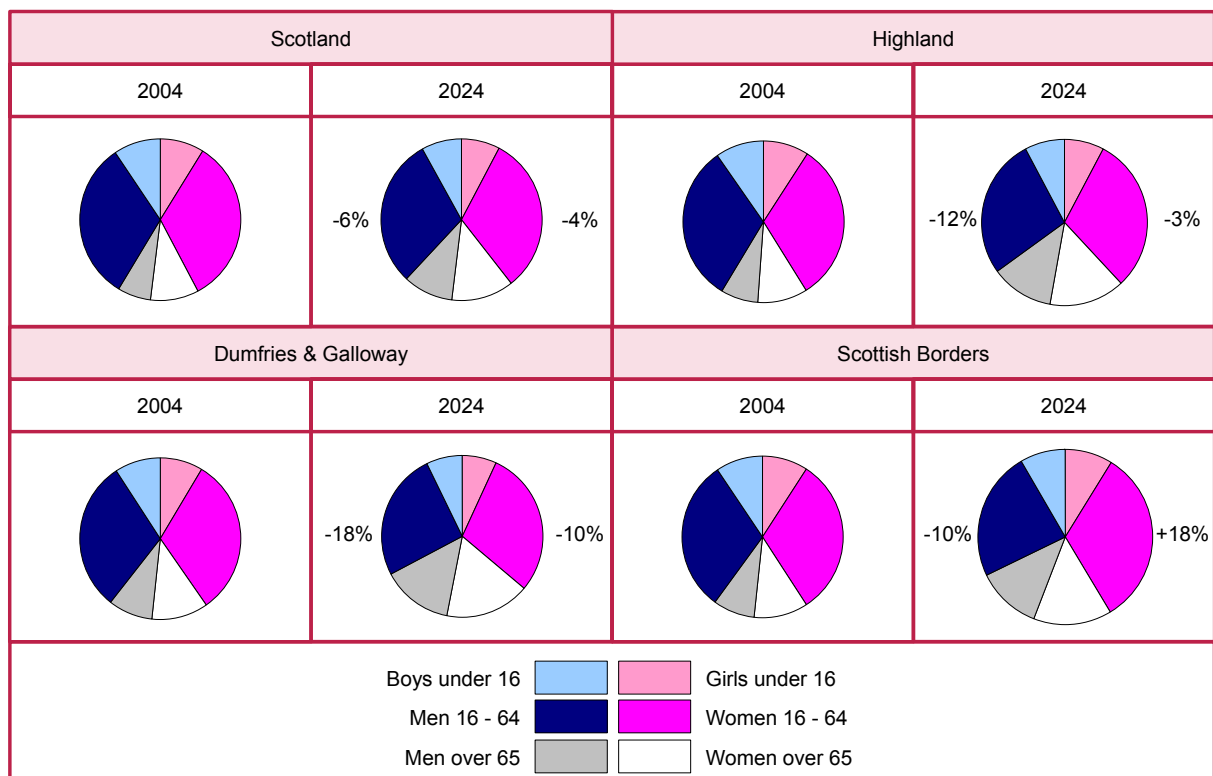


Figure 5: Population by gender in key forestry areas (2004 to 2024)^[9]

How to Improve Recruitment and Retention

The suggestions outlined below are designed to help you become a more attractive employer so that you can better fill vacancies and remain competitive.

Positive Career Choices

There is a widespread lack of knowledge of the range of jobs in the forest and timber industries, with many people having a narrow idea of what is involved. The industry has been rapidly changing, creating many more interesting opportunities in new areas of work, such as conservation and working with the public. There are also, for employees, positive aspects of working in the industry (which have contributed to the current high retention rates), including:

- Being outdoors
- The variety of job opportunities and different types of work
- For some, a high level of freedom and control over their own work

There is a pervasive impression that work in the timber and forest industries is 'male' work. While there are significantly more men working in the industry than women, there is no reason why this should remain the case. Indeed, as highlighted above, there are important reasons for encouraging women to move into this industry. Often, however, young women do not see this as an opportunity for them.

There is significant evidence that assumptions about which jobs are suitable for both men and women start at a very young age. Young people largely conform to these assumptions in their choices of jobs and careers^[19]. Stereotypes exist about both the nature of jobs themselves and about who should perform them.

Young people make assumptions about skills and attributes needed for certain jobs (e.g. physical strength) which underpin their opinions about the gender most suited to perform them^[20]. Often these assumptions do not represent the true nature of a given occupation or describe only one aspect of a multi-faceted job.

For example, when asked, young people often cite the caring and communication skills associated with nursing jobs but do not consider that the job can be physically strenuous, for instance, lifting patients. Most young people have an even poorer understanding of the occupations available within the timber and forest industries, with which they have little direct contact that appear much less frequently in television drama.

Employers can take positive action to address gender stereotyping by:

- *Ensuring career services are aware of the full range of jobs available in the forest industries and the different facets of each of these jobs. Recent skills mapping exercises for National Occupational Standards can inform this, but this information needs to be translated into a digestible form.*
- *Ensuring that materials portraying the forest industries show images of female, as well as male, employees to provide role models for young women and girls. The temptation to play to stereotypes and traditional images of the industry should be resisted to avoid reinforcing misconceptions.*
- *Providing 'taster' sessions or work experience to allow women and girls to experience the forest industries in a comfortable environment.*

The mechanisms already exist to achieve this. The Forest Education Initiative works with schools and the Timber Trade Federation's "The Doorway" and Lantra provide sources of careers information. However, these organisations need more than just financial support to be effective. They also need information and practical help. It will not be sufficient to rely on the current general activities, more work needs to be done and it needs to be targeted at specific audiences with gender as a key consideration^[21].

Work-Life Balance and Flexible Working Policies

Working practices can have a big impact on recruiting and retaining employees. In particular, long working hours and long periods of time spent away from home are becoming increasingly unattractive to some existing and potential employees. Increasingly more people (including women/mothers, fathers and younger people generally) are seeking a balance between their employment and life outside work.

Research shows that around 40% of mothers and 10% of fathers have either given up or turned down a job because of difficulties combining it with their caring responsibilities^[22].

Flexible working practices are an important way in which work-life balance can be achieved for employees and there are proven business benefits that may accrue from having such policies.

Positive outcomes of flexible working practices have been identified as^[23,24]:

- Improved recruitment and retention
- Reduced casual sickness absence
- Improved productivity
- Improved staff morale and commitment

Research has also shown that the human resource benefits translate directly into improved financial performance^[25], especially in private sector organisations^[26], with the introduction of these types of policy having little or no set-up costs^[22].

A better balance between work and non-work time can be achieved through a number of measures including^[24]:

- *Reduced hours (e.g. part time work, job share)*
- *Being flexible about when hours are worked (e.g. compressed working week, flexi-time, term-time working); and/or*
- *Being flexible about where hours are worked (e.g. home-working).*

Flexibility can also help improve women's chances of moving into managerial positions, where they are currently under-represented, particularly in male dominated industries^[27]. Developing strategies to recruit or retain female workers first requires an understanding of the determinants of women's career progression, as distinct from men's. The barriers to women's participation in management are characterised as relating to 'glass ceilings' or 'sticky floors'.

'Glass ceiling' issues prevent women's progression up the career ladder, often via direct discrimination or lack of access to social networks, which are important in terms of promotion. 'Sticky floor' issues mean women not being able to progress past the entry level jobs which are easiest to combine with caring responsibilities.

Evidence from the construction industry indicates that male managers act as 'gatekeepers' to successful careers, which can limit women's acceptance and progression in male dominated industries^[27]. This may be underpinned by a view that 'management' is in itself the preserve of men, requiring 'masculine' characteristics. There is, however, evidence that this view is now changing^[28].

Increasing the number of women in managerial positions is a 'bottom-line' issue for organisations wishing to benefit from the advantages that can emerge from this, including^[29]:

- Extending the portfolio of skills at the top of the organisation
- Providing female role models for younger high potential women workers
- Ensuring the organisation looks attractive to potential female applicants
- Given the organisation a better understanding of female customers

As with flexible working, organisations with more women in management positions, especially at the most senior levels^[31], have demonstrably better financial performance^[30] which is reason enough to give serious consideration to the career development needs of female employees.

Employers in the forest industries can take positive action to enhance flexibility and women's career progression by:

- Being more open to flexible working requests wherever possible
- Recognising women's non-linear career paths when considering potential promotions
- Establishing mentoring systems for women with the potential to advance to managerial roles
- Providing support mechanisms for women returning to work after maternity leave or other caring responsibilities

Recommendations

The forest and timber industry faces real challenges in relation to recruitment both now and in the future. Promoting positive careers will be by no means easy, but it is necessary and will pay dividends to businesses in the longer term. Opening up opportunities for women to enter and stay in the sector is one route by which to respond to anticipated recruitment shortfalls in the future. To be effective, this requires developments on a range of issues. Some examples include:

- Providing opportunities through school activities to learn about forests and timber can be an effective way to both teach children (both boys and girls) about what happens in the modern wood chain and, for those with cognate interests (e.g. the outdoors, environment, technology) to recognise that they can potentially combine their interests with employment in adult life.
- Advertising for posts should be done in ways that both reach and engage women. This includes being explicit about what flexible working packages are available, and ensuring that the focus in recruitment is on the skills needed for the job. Adverts should actively encourage people with a wide range of suitable skills and experiences to apply for available posts.
- Staff at all management levels (including senior) should be regularly trained on human resources issues. Greater awareness of current 'diversity and equality' policy and practice will help ensure that those who are recruiting and managing staff are able to recognise the particular issues that affect men and women in relation to employment (e.g. combining caring and employment effectively).
- It should be ensured that opportunities are open to women, and that, in particular, skilled workers from within the forest and timber industry are given opportunities to return after having children. Losing skilled workers is costly to businesses. Offering opportunities for women to return to the industry after a period of absence, with training, flexible working packages and diversification of roles to suit the needs of the employer and employee can pay dividends in ensuring that skills are not lost.
- By promoting positive images of women who are working in the industry in a range of roles, it can be illustrated to other women that this industry is one that they can positively participate in.

Responding to future workforce needs means recognising that more workers (both women and men with various roles and interests outside employment) are looking for more opportunities to work flexibly to find a suitable work-life balance. This is an important agenda for employers to engage with in order to encourage potential employees to come into and stay in the forest and timber industry. There are sound business reasons to engage with this issue; and the sooner that these are considered and implemented by businesses, the quicker they will be ready to meet the current and future workforce challenges that they face.

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Further Information

Centre for Timber Engineering

<http://www.cte.napier.ac.uk>

An independent research unit based at Napier University in Edinburgh.

CONFOR

<http://www.confor.org.uk>

The Confederation of Forest Industries is the representative body for the forest-based industries

Employers for Work Life Balance

www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk

Employers for Work Life Balance (EaWLB) aims to help all UK organisations implement and continuously improve sustainable work-life strategies which meet customer needs, corporate goals and enhance the quality of life for individuals. EaWLB is a one-stop work-life resource for both large and small to medium sized organizations.

Equality and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Provides practical information for businesses and organisations on how to meet their duties on equality and promote fairness and dignity in their respective areas of work.

Lantra

www.lantra.co.uk

www.lantra.co.uk/businesses/trees-and-timber/

The Sector Skills Council for the environmental and land-based sector provides information for businesses in the trees and timber sector.

Scottish Forest Industries Cluster

<http://www.forestryscotland.com>

Provides topical information for companies, organisations and industries involved with the planting, management and harvesting of forests, through sawmilling, pulp, paper and board production to the production of higher value manufactured goods. It incorporates input from the chemicals and machinery sectors, as well as from business support and education institutions.