



# Large Company Annual Report 2023

# Securing a workforce for the future

The sector has wrestled with the challenge of workforce shortages and increasing the productivity of the current workforce for many years.

In 2023, Confor:

- Worked with members and public sector partners to prepare a 5-year business plan for a not-for-profit training company that will address market failure in certain areas of technical training, machine operators, advanced chainsaw and forest works managers. The next step is to obtain written commitment from those companies/organisations who wish to be involved in this new company, then we can set-up the new company and agree a funding profile;
- With funding support from the public sector we targeted career changers, in particular from the armed forces and ran 'taster days' for forest machinery and road haulage. Member companies have participated in the armed forces days with very positive feedback;
- Worked with Industry Skills Groups in England, Scotland and Wales to support relevant Skills/Recruitment Action plans;
- Expanded our engagement with schools through STEM ambassadors and school STEM clubs.



# Securing future wood supply for further investment

Confidence in future wood availability is a key underpinning for investment in the industry. The lack of proper consultation with industry on the change to the maximum single species percentage in the UKFS highlights the need for industry to step up its political advocacy, especially at a time when government funding for planting is under pressure and levels of new planting are flat.



In 2023, Confor:

- Set out in the National Wood Strategy for England an ambition for future wood availability (softwood and hardwood) that encompasses the existing resource and new planting;
- Secured agreement from Scottish Forestry that it will work with Confor to establish a similar shared ambition;
- Developed a spreadsheet that enables countries to identify how much new productive planting is required to secure a future availability of softwood, and which accounts for changes to the existing resource;
- Secured agreement from the four nations to produce a 50-year softwood availability forecast in 2024.



# Increasing the use of home-grown wood in construction

Construction, especially house building in England, is a market with scope for growth in consumption of home-grown wood, from sawn timber to panel products. Worryingly, domestic C16 has been losing market share in recent years, reducing market options for UK sawn timber and aggravating the impact of current weak demand across traditional markets for UK timber.

In 2023, Confor:

- Worked with the UK Government to develop and launch a Timber in Construction Roadmap to increase the use of wood in construction, including home-grown – this will be implemented in 2024;
- Led the development and launch of a National Wood Strategy for England which highlights the need for sustained and increased conifer feedstock for the wood industries in England;
- Worked with members that produce graded carcassing to begin to develop an effective programme of work to increase the use of homegrown graded C16 sawnwood in the UK construction supply chain;
- Worked with Scottish Forestry and Scottish Government officials on an initiative to shorten the construction supply chain by introducing more homegrown wood products into the supply chain;
- Worked with the Welsh Government on its Timber Industrial Strategy and Welsh Wood for Welsh Homes strategy.

# Addressing opposition to planting and harvesting

Good stakeholder engagement is key for new planting and increasingly for other operations.

In 2023, Confor:

- Developed a training course on stakeholder engagement for members and began to roll it out, starting in Scotland;
- Drafted good practice guidance on stakeholder engagement which will be launched in 2024;
- Commissioned a report on community benefits from new planting that will be discussed with members before action is agreed and taken;
- Through the NWS process, FC has now publicly declared that at least 30% of future new planting will be productive conifer.



# Developing and representing the industry

Confor undertakes a range of activities to help the industry be more productive and competitive. These embrace:

- Tackling regulation and red tape;
- Supporting members in networking through various technical and regional groups and championing members' concerns with the regulators;
- Timber transport;
- Securing public funding for ad-hoc grants like the Woodlands into Management Forestry Innovation Funds;
- Commissioning the Wood fibre availability and Demand report 2022-2046 which is on the Confor website;
- Facilitating for the the R. Grandis breeding programme to control the spread of Dendroctonus Micans;
- Representing members on certification matters, tree health, the Wood Safety Group and much more.

If you are not already participating in our regional groups and technical committees, or would simply like to know more about our work please get in touch with Eliza Hibbins-Cline at [eliza@confor.org.uk](mailto:eliza@confor.org.uk)

