

27th May 2021**Forests for Everyone: Ethnicity and Religion****1. Action**

The Forestry Commission Executive Board are asked to:

- Note the content of the Black, Asian and minority ethnic task and finish group report
- Consider the proposed action plan
- Agree next steps for the implementation and communication of the report and plan.

2. Purpose

To update and advise the Executive Board on the outcomes and recommendations of the Black, Asian and minority ethnic task and finish group commissioned in November 2020, to advise on the best approach to achieving three objectives:

- Increase the number and tenure of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff at the Forestry Commission
- See greater numbers of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff visitors to Forestry Commission land
- Significantly reduce the disparity in results of the Staff Survey between Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and White British staff in their experience of inappropriate behavior.

3. Background

The group has carried out its remit between November 2020 and April 2021, gathering information and consulting with staff, external stakeholders, and experts.

The evidence gathered suggests that despite good practice in many areas The Forestry Commission is not representative of the communities we work in, or serve, and that staff from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds do not feel included when compared to White British individuals.

This paper **duplicates the recommendations and action plan**, sections 2. And 7., of the attached Forests for Everyone: Ethnicity and Religion report that sets out our recommendations and the groups work in more detail.

There is a particular focus on Forestry England within our report, given the objective to consider visitors and also the proportionately higher number of staff within this area of the organisation. However, we believe all parts of the organisation have roles to play in making the Forestry Commission more inclusive.

The report summarises some of the information and experiences the group heard from both internal and external stakeholders and provides context to our findings, also outlining some of the good work that the Forestry Commission is already carrying out and that the report aims to build on.

3. Recommendations

Our overall aim is that our staff, visitors, members and volunteers are treated equally and are representative of the communities that we serve and work in, irrespective of their race or religion.

Our four and overarching recommendations, are that:

- A.** There needs to be a cultural shift within the Forestry Commission to enable increased inclusivity for all. We must build our confidence as an organisation to enable visitors, volunteers and staff, to be themselves irrespective of their culture, religion or ethnicity.
- B.** We improve the collection, analysis and reporting of ethnicity and religion data to support evidence-based decision making.
- C.** We build and develop a targeted portfolio of partnerships and outreach programmes, at both a national and local level, to encourage individuals from more diverse communities to engage with the nation's forests as visitors, volunteers, and Forestry Commission employees; recognising the importance of embedding these into core work areas to ensure their sustainability.
- D.** We improve Forestry Commission recruitment and retention processes, to remove inherent bias and barriers which prevent successful applications from candidates and support the retention and progression of ethnically diverse staff.

This work must be considered within the overall Diversity and Inclusion strategy and alongside the work of other Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) groups across the organisation, including the LGBTQ+ Steering Group and Women in Forestry. Improving diversity and inclusion within the Forestry Commission should be tackled with a joined-up approach encompassing all staff, visitors, members and volunteers as well as other people we interact with through our work, applying as much to someone of White British heritage as it does to those of Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds.

The Forestry Commission Executive Board should continue to take oversight of the Equality and Diversity strategy with Forest Research, Forest Services and Forestry England Boards taking ownership of relevant recommendations and actions. In our action plan we have set out where we consider actions to sit within the federated structure of the Forestry Commission. It is the task and finish groups view that all recommendations within this report and the accompanying action plan are actionable and achievable.

We recommend a diversity panel is created to support delivery of the Equality and Diversity Strategy and help ensure that intersectionality of issues are considered, ensuring that all aspects of diversity are represented and that there is a feedback mechanism from staff. This panel should consist of senior leadership allies (including Commissioners and Executive and Non-Executive Directors), wider staff representatives (potentially from LGBTQ+, Women in Forestry and Black and Ethnic Minority Allies groups), and equality and diversity leads from Forestry England, Forest Services, and Forest Research to give oversight of development within each organisation.

Finally, we recommend that the Forests for Everyone: Ethnicity and Religion report is made internally available to all Forestry Commission staff and shared widely across all parts of the organisation to share what the group has learnt and demonstrate our commitment to these important areas of diversity and inclusion.

In addition, although the group did not consider these to be core recommendations at this stage, Forest Research may wish to further increase collaboration with more diverse international institutions and Forest Services could explore the access to and impact of grants to more diverse communities.

4. Actions

Based on information and data collated within the initial listening phase, the group went on to develop a set of actions which form part of our wider recommendations. These actions have been refined and developed through collaborative working within the task and finish group and through consultation with the Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff Allies Network and other Forestry Commission staff.

Twelve actions proposed by the group are categorised into four overarching themes which determine the key area of focus for each set of actions. These four themes are:

- A. Culture**
- B. Monitoring and evaluation**
- C. Partnerships and projects**
- D. Recruitment and retention**

Below are the corresponding actions – additional information on resourcing and responsibility are suggested within the Forests for Everyone: Ethnicity and Religion action plan.

A. Culture

There needs to be a cultural shift within the Forestry Commission to enable increased inclusivity for all. We must build confidence as an organisation to enable visitors, volunteers and staff, to be themselves irrespective of their culture, religion or ethnicity.

With the key actions to:

A.1. Raise awareness and improve understanding of diverse cultures, religions, and ethnicities across the Forestry Commission.

A1.1. Roll out of Equally Yours training to all staff and develop reinforcement mechanism, ensuring training is more than a standalone session.

A1.2. Establish an inclusion ambassador in every team.

A1.3. Introduce reverse mentoring scheme for colleagues with senior leaders and managers.

A1.4. Develop and implement Ally training for senior managers across Forestry Commission.

A.2. Develop an internal communication and engagement plan(s) for all aspects of inclusion to increase the sharing of culture and experiences.

A.2.1. Formalise the role of the black, Asian and minority ethnic Inclusion Allies Network to champion, coordinate, communicate and consult on diversity with a senior leader as chair.

A.2.2. Develop a programme of Roots and Forest Research Intranet blogs and content focusing on positive role models and explaining different cultures and religions.

A.2.3. Develop a programme of 'Lunch and Learn' sessions for sharing diversity and inclusion content and experiences.

A.3. Make meetings and team events more inclusive.

A.3.1. Develop a toolkit for meetings to ensure diversity and inclusion is considered in relation to timing, catering and social aspects of meetings including diet and religious observance.

B. Monitoring and Evaluation

We must improve the collection, analysis and reporting of ethnicity and religion data to support evidence-based decision making.

With the key actions to:

B.1. Ensure consistent collection and analysis of recruitment and staff ethnicity and religion data across the Forestry Commission.

B.1.1. Commission, analyse and report GRS recruitment data on applicants, sifts, interviews and appointments to CEOs quarterly.

B.1.2. Investigate what ethnicity data can be reported from in-Trent to monitor staff retention and progression.

B.2. Create a diversity dashboard which will allow for the analysis of key diversity data sets from across the organisation to be reported to boards annually.

B.2.1. The diversity dashboard should clearly and concisely display ethnicity and religious data for FC recruitment statistics, staff survey data and any other initiatives and form part of the annual Equality and diversity report.

B.2.2. The Forestry England diversity dashboard should clearly and concisely display ethnicity and religious data for Forestry England visitors, members and volunteers.

B.3. Collect, analyse and use ethnicity and religion data on visitors, members and volunteers and for existing and new visitor development catchment areas.

B.3.1. Ensure that diversity data analysis is embedded within the Forestry England Commercial Modelling (CM) and the Portfolio Review (PR) projects.

B.3.2. Collect consistent and accurate diversity data for Forestry England visitors, members and volunteers, ensuring staff understand the importance and need for its collection and analysis.

B.3.3. Collate and analyse socio-economic population and ethnicity data within 1-hour drive time of 10 key visitor hubs in areas of higher ethnic diversity in the Midlands, North West, West and London fringe.

C. Partnerships and Projects

We build and develop a targeted portfolio of partnerships and outreach programmes, at both a national and local level, to encourage individuals from more diverse communities to engage with the nation's forests as visitors, volunteers, and Forestry Commission employees; recognising the importance of embedding these into core work areas to ensure their sustainability.

With the key actions to:

C.1 Establish partnerships with groups and individuals, from diverse ethnic and religious communities.

C.1.1 Develop programmes targeting areas of England that have higher ethnic and religious diversity close to the Nation's Forests and/or our larger team hubs. For example, in the Midlands; Greater Manchester and Merseyside; Bristol; and around London.

C.1.2 Work with national partnerships to help inform and deliver visitor, volunteer and staff and staff recruitment focused programmes.

C.2. Encourage people from more diverse communities to engage with the nation's forests as visitors or volunteers.

C.2.1. Continue to develop the Forestry England marketing strategy and digital content to engage and reflect more diverse communities.

C.2.2. Target the Forestry England arts and learning strategies to better represent the diversity of the nation's population and engage with more diverse communities.

C.3. Identify and address barriers to visiting the nations forests.

C.3.1. Commission research into barriers to accessing the countryside and the nation's forests.

C.3.2. Review the design and promotion of recreation hubs, exploring necessary adaptations to improve inclusivity.

D. Recruitment and Retention

We must improve Forestry Commission recruitment and retention processes, to remove inherent bias and barriers which prevent successful applications from candidates and support the retention and progression of ethnically diverse staff.

With the key actions to:

D.1. Increase the diversity of candidates applying for Forestry Commission jobs.

D.1.1. Reduce barriers within entry-level roles, recruiting on ability rather than specific qualifications and experience targeting graduate, apprenticeship, and trainee roles.

D.1.2. Advertise jobs more widely than the Civil Service Jobs website.

D.1.3. Improve diversity on external recruitment panels targeting graduate, apprenticeship and trainee roles and senior roles at PB2 or above.

D.1.4. Develop a community targeted recruitment plan for areas with greater numbers of staff and higher ethnic diversity.

D.2. Improve the retention rate and career progression of ethnically and religiously diverse staff.

D.2.1. Improve workplaces access and facilities to meet a wider range of needs including space for religious observance.

D.2.2. Increase the level of flexible location working within roles which do not require regular on-site presence, working in conjunction with the Changing the Way We Work (CWWW) project.

D.2.3. Develop and implement Ally training for senior managers across Forestry Commission *[NB also included within Culture theme]*.

D.3. Work in partnership with the forestry and environment sector and partnership organisations to increase awareness of jobs in our sector to diverse communities.

D.3.1 Develop communications campaign in partnership with Institute of Chartered Foresters, Royal Forestry Society, and CONFOR to promote diversity in the forestry sector.

D.3.2. Work with Defra Nature and People Diversity and Inclusion Lead to work with the environment sector to promote working and volunteering to diverse communities.

D.3.3. Review the Forestry England learning strategy to identify opportunities for outreach to schools in more diverse communities.

D.3.4. Engage with the Civil Service Summer Diversity (paid) Internship Programme.

5. Communications

The task and finish group were asked to propose a communications approach as part of this project. This can be broken down into the core workstreams of internal engagement, external communication and stakeholders:

6.1 Internal Engagement

We have observed the approach taken by the Women in Forestry Project, but due to the existing very low numbers of ethnically diverse staff this approach presents challenges for this area of work. We suggest that a broad Diversity and Inclusion internal engagement plan is the best approach for linking all aspects of diversity and recognising the linked nature of some issues. This plan should be multi-channelled, utilising Roots, the Forest Research intranet, 'Lunch and Learn' sessions, team meetings and formalising the Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff Allies Network as a periodic hub for discussion and consultation.

As mentioned above we also recommend that a diversity panel is created to support delivery of the Equality and Diversity Strategy and help ensure that intersectionality of issues are considered, that all aspects of diversity are represented and that there is a feedback mechanism from staff.

6.2 External Communication

This should be led by the Forestry England marketing team with a strong focus on the actions noted above to better target and reflect more diverse communities in all our external communications.

The Forestry England marketing team should develop an external communications plan to support the actions agreed as an outcome of this strategy. It will be important that this plan is

proportional to the actions and ambitions agreed and supports us in achieving our objectives. It will build on actions we have already agreed, such as incorporating our tone of voice guidance into all communications and considering diversity as part of every photoshoot or filming brief we commission, ensuring that material is more representative and natural rather than tokenistic. This communications plan will also support the delivery of the 5-year plan, echoing the messages it sets out.

6.3 Stakeholders

Each part of the organisation will have a particular focus. It is suggested that:

- Outreach managers are embedded in Forestry England with a national and geographical focus
- A small number of national external partners are identified for focused engagement and that communities in areas of higher ethnic diversity aligned with Forestry Commission staff numbers and/or Forestry England forests are prioritised.

Forest Services should consider the make-up of Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committees and the role of Partnership and Expertise Managers in reaching out to more diverse stakeholders.

Forest Research could consider building on links with European and Commonwealth scientific communities to extend the diversity of collaborations and staff.

For staff and stakeholders, a short presentation of our diversity and inclusion work would be helpful and we recommend the approach taken by the Wildlife Trust’s ‘Wild about Inclusion’ strategy.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Appendix I sets out a dashboard for monitoring and evaluating implementation of the proposed plan and actions.

7. Costs

The estimated cost to deliver the action plan are summarised in the table below.

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
£9.5k	£284.5k	£435k	£435k	£435k