

Annual Equality Monitoring Report

1 April 2024 to
31 March 2025



Forestry Commission



Contents

- 4 Foreword
- 6 Introduction
- 9 Our people: in numbers
- 10 Strategy and oversight
- 12 Training and development
- 14 Supporting and growing our staff networks
- 18 Partnership working and sharing good practice
- 20 Case studies
- 25 Appendix: recruitment data

Foreword

This year's Annual Equality Monitoring Report reflects the Forestry Commission's continued commitment to building a more inclusive, representative and equitable organisation. It charts the progress we've made—and the work still ahead—as we strive to ensure that everyone, regardless of background, feels welcome in our workforce and in our forests.

We are proud to report that 46% of our senior leadership roles are now held by women, including the appointment of Dr. Bianca Ambrose-Oji as Forest Research's first-ever woman Chief Scientist. This milestone reflects our sustained efforts to support gender equality and leadership development across the organisation.

We've also seen encouraging improvements in workforce diversity. The proportion of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds has increased to 9% and the percentage of employees declaring a disability has risen to 8%. These gains are supported by targeted recruitment, inclusive training and the success of programmes such as our internal Professional Manager Programme (PMP) and Senior Leadership Programme (SLP). Our people have also benefitted from the Civil Service Crossing Thresholds programme, the Stepping Up diversity leadership programme and the Defra Aspire career development scheme.

Our staff engagement survey shows that more colleagues feel respected, included and able to report concerns without fear of negative consequences. These results are a testament to the work of our staff networks, the rollout of inclusive training and initiatives like the Inclusive Meetings Toolkit which is helping to embed equity into everyday working practices.

We've also been recognised as a Disability Confident Committed Employer and continue to build on this foundation to ensure accessibility and support for all.

Beyond our internal progress, we are working to make our forests more welcoming to everyone. In 2024, 18.3% of our visitors were from ethnic minority backgrounds — exactly mirroring the proportion recorded in the 2021 England and Wales Census.

The proportion of our visitors with disabilities is even greater at 23.1%, exceeding the 2021 England and Wales Census figure of 17.7%. There's no doubt that initiatives like the Defra-funded 'Access for All' programme have played a major role in this progress, with 70 projects delivered across 34 forest locations over the past three years.

Other initiatives like Pride in the Forest and the Inter Faith Week gathering at Wendover Woods are helping to break down barriers and invite underrepresented communities to connect with nature.

We know there is more to do to encourage visitors from more diverse backgrounds to our sites and to the countryside more broadly and we are committed to that goal. This report is not just a reflection of where we are, it's a call to action for where we need to go. I want to thank all our staff, networks and partners for their dedication to this work. Together, we are building a Forestry Commission that truly reflects and serves the diverse communities of Britain. We are helping to tackle some of society's biggest challenges with thriving trees, woods and forests.

Richard Stanford,
Forestry Commission CEO



Introduction

At the Forestry Commission, we are committed to building a workforce that reflects the rich diversity of the communities we serve across Britain. We believe that embracing inclusion and diversity not only strengthens our organisation but also enhances our ability to deliver for the public.

We recognise and value the individuality of every employee, and we are dedicated to creating an environment where everyone feels respected, supported and empowered to thrive.

This report is part of our ongoing responsibility to publish workforce data in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and the Equality Act 2010. It provides a breakdown of our workforce by relevant protected characteristics and demonstrates how we are meeting our obligations to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different protected characteristics
- foster good relations between people from different protected characteristics

Beyond meeting our legal duties, this report also showcases the steps we are taking to embed equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the Forestry Commission.





Our people: in numbers

This report is based on our workforce figures across Forestry England, Forest Services, Forest Research and the Commissioners' Office for 31 March 2025. The report does not include casual staff.

The data shows positive progress in several areas since 2024, particularly in the recruitment and retention of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds.

As of 31 March 2025, the Forestry Commission had 2375 employees of which:



53% are male



47% are female



9% are from an ethnic minority background (+2%) of which 4% are other than white minorities



88% of staff identified as white British (3% did not disclose)



8% told us they have a disability



57% of employees are over 40 years old



46% of those in senior management positions are female



54% of those in senior management positions are male



The middle female salary is equal to the middle male salary



The average (mean) hourly rate for males is 2.96% higher than females



5.7% of successful applicants following interview were from an ethnic minority background



9.9% of successful applicants following interview had a disability

Strategy and oversight

Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024

Our **Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategy** has guided our work and brought together our mission to make the Forestry Commission inclusive to all.

Our strategy is focused on five memorable actions:

- 1. Develop a more inclusive culture:**
To create working environments and recreational spaces where people are valued and respected for being themselves.
- 2. Grow a more representative workforce:**
To have a workforce that better represents all the communities we serve.
- 3. Listen using diverse insights:**
For all programmes, policies and services to be inclusive to all.
- 4. Learn, growing in capability and confidence:**
To be an organisation where equality, diversity and inclusion is everyone's responsibility.
- 5. Share our experiences and learning:**
Raise awareness, share best practice and celebrate success.

These actions are now embedded into the Forestry Commission Corporate Plan, which will enable us to achieve our Strategic Goals as laid out in our strategy:

Thriving for the Future.

All the work carried out over the past three years has no doubt helped to improve the diversity and inclusion scores in the latest staff engagement survey (2024) compared to the results of 2022.

This includes the number of participants of the survey agreeing that:

- their business area has a culture where discriminatory treatment, harassment and bullying are not tolerated: **77% (+4)**
- they can report discrimination/bullying/harassment without worrying it would have a negative impact on them: **71% (+5)**
- they are treated fairly at work: **85% (+4)**
- their business area respects individual differences: **82% (+4)**
- their business area makes them feel included: **76% (+3)**

Everyone Belongs Board

The Everyone Belongs Board is in its third year and has established its role in providing oversight, assurance and co-ordination of the Forestry Commission's programmes of work relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. The steering group has senior representatives from across the organisation and its divisions, who will continue to champion a culture where everyone is welcome and included.



Training and development

Equality, diversity and inclusion training

Over 250 people have now received the Creating an inclusive workplace training, which delves into the Equality Act 2010 and explores themes such as micro-aggressions, bullying, harassment and discrimination, unconscious bias, allyship and much more.

Webinars

We organised the following webinars which are available to view on our Forestry Commission Diversity & Wellbeing YouTube channel, or via the links below.

- 30 May: **Hear me out: Deaf awareness** by Wellity Global.
- 16 July: **Discrimination, disability and making a difference** by Wellity Global.
- 23 July: **Webinar: Working across generations** a talk by author Steve Butler on how to harness the different skills, experiences and aspirations of the multigenerational workplace.
- 31 July: **Male allyship** A talk on the role of men in promoting gender equity in the workplace by Wali Rahman on behalf of the FC Women's staff network.
- 19 November: International Men's Day webinar on **positive masculinity** by Chris Larsen MBA.

These events received great feedback and were open to all Civil Service colleagues, with over 40 government departments being represented.

Defra Aspire career development programme

The Forestry Commission took part in Aspire, a six-month career development programme open to colleagues of ethnic minority backgrounds to gain the experience and leadership skills they require to progress their career within Defra group. It is aimed at Civil Service grades AA-EO equivalent, which for Forestry Commission staff includes pay bands 7, 6b and 6a.

In line with Future Defra ambitions under the 'Thriving people' pillar, the Aspire programme runs across Defra group with around 70 staff being selected to participate via a competitive application process. For the first cohort, starting in February 2025, two Forestry Commission staff members were given places.

Participants take part in various panel sessions, workshops, action learning sets and mentor meetings totalling approximately 60 hours over the course of six months.



Supporting and growing our staff networks

The Forestry Commission has four staff networks. These are:

- Rainbow Canopy (LGBTQ+)
- Disability, Neurodiversity and Carers
- Women's
- REACH (Race Equality and Cultural Heritage)

The networks contribute to important policy and guidance conversations, organise events and knowledge sharing sessions, and use blogs and news stories to highlight awareness days and share personal experiences.

The Forestry Commission Diversity and Wellbeing Manager and the Chair of Rainbow Canopy attended the inaugural Staff Networks Day Conference on 8 May 2024.

The conference was attended by passionate network leaders, advocates and allies from all over the country to celebrate staff networks and their achievements. It was also an opportunity to learn from the variety of speakers – as well as peers – about how networks can add more value to their organisations by aligning with business objectives, and how they often start important work that then becomes embedded within the organisation.

It was acknowledged that network leaders and members often do so much on top of their day jobs and in their own time, which should be recognised and supported by their employer.

Out in the forest for Pride 2024 by Mark Kourie, Chair of Rainbow Canopy

During Pride 2024 Rainbow Canopy, supported by the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), Active Forests, and Forests for Everyone, reached out to the LGBTQ+ community to come together and celebrate their identities 'out in the forest'.

What better way?

Through our journey with MERL so far, we've discovered that there are some barriers that the LGBTQ+ community face in being represented in the archives of rural history, not least within the countryside. Part of the Further Afield project's aim is to bring marginalised communities in the countryside to light. What better way to do this, we thought, than invite the community to the forest to share their stories, connect with each other, and find out what the countryside means to them by being there, in it?

Our brilliant site staff and Active Forest Coordinators (AFCs) at seven sites – Salcey, Cannock Chase, Whinlatter, Hicks Lodge, Bedebury, Alice Holt, and Westonbirt – all

volunteered to welcome local LGBTQ+ folks to the forest and guide them on a gentle experience through the woods. We then set about partnering with local and national LGBTQ+ groups to set up the days, with MERL partnership funding complimentary meals for our guests, as well as transport or other costs that posed barriers to access for the community if they arose.

A summer of site visits

The result was a series of five visits to our forest sites, with groups from the Gay Outdoors Club, Notts LGBT, the Rother and Hyde Rainbow Alliance, and Rainbow Canopy all visiting a forest site over the summer.

Visits included guided wellbeing walks, disc golf, forest bathing, and all involved some form of connecting between members of the community with the forest and with each other over a meal. Each day ended with an activity where participants wrote down their thoughts and feelings about the countryside on cards provided by the MERL. The MERL will assemble these cards like a puzzle to reveal a picture of a tree set against a background of coloured text mimicking the colours of the rainbow as a symbol of LGBTQ+ pride.



The Women’s staff network continues to grow and thrive

The Forestry Commission’s Women’s staff network continues to champion gender equality and support women across the organisation. Open to all staff, including allies, the network fosters inclusive dialogue through regular themed sessions and discussions as well as through shared access to a supportive MS Teams Channel, through which colleagues can share tips, resources, and start important discussions.

In March, the Forestry Commission (including Forestry England, Forest Services, Commissioners’ Office and Forest Research), celebrated International Women’s Day (IWD). Colleagues from across the network featured in an internal blog, shared information on events happening around the world, and made pledges for the year’s IWD theme, **Accelerate Action**.

The network hosted other events on topics such as caring responsibilities, neurodivergence, women in leadership and menopause. Initiatives such as

parents and caregivers’ talking circles, a crafting activity session for ‘No Tech Tuesday’ and a social event for ‘Brew Monday’ (a positive wellbeing movement aimed to counter ‘Blue Monday’ in January) all helped further promote positive mental health and a supportive workplace community.

The network also contributed to policy development on menopause, welfare, and pregnancy loss this year, and held a menstrual health and wellbeing workshop in January with period coach Katherine Glyde and TOTM’s Sophie William.

Showing that the Women’s staff network isn’t just for women, other inclusive activities led by the network included a session that brought over 130 men and women together with a talk about male allyship in July and a talk for Men’s Health Month in November.

Through its activities, the network continues to enhance workplace wellbeing for everyone and ensure women’s voices are heard and valued.



Partnership working and sharing good practice

The Forestry Commission Diversity and Wellbeing Manager was invited to take part in several events across government and the private sector.

This included being invited as a guest speaker at The Women Empowering Defence annual conference on 18 June 2024 as part of a panel discussing male allyship, alongside panel members from Amazon, the RAF and Janes.

A recording of this session is available to [watch online](#).

Disability Confident

In July 2024 the Forestry Commission became registered as a Disability Confident Committed Employer (Level 1). We will continue to work to achieve level 2 and beyond over the next couple of years.



Responding to the racist riots of summer 2024

In the wake of the summer riots of 2024, following the Southport murders, the Forestry Commission shared a response reinforcing our values of respect, communication and professionalism, alongside guidance and support to all staff.

This was followed by two support sessions which were held by the Diversity and Wellbeing Manager on behalf of the Forestry Commission REACH (Race Equality and Cultural Heritage) Staff Network.

These sessions were open to the whole of the Civil Service and were attended by around 70 Civil Servants from various government departments – some of whom said they felt unsupported by their own departments and welcomed the opportunity and safe space provided by the Forestry Commission.

In addition, support materials in relation to the riots were shared to our network of 145 Mental Health First Aiders and 35+ Wellbeing Champions and 'Race and Mental Health' training was provided to enable them to better support staff from ethnic minority groups.

After the riots, JAAQ—a mental health platform offering expert-led video support—invited the Forestry Commission Diversity and Wellbeing Manager to film Q&As on race, faith and workplace inclusion.

The videos can be viewed on the [JAAQ at Work platform](#).

Celebrating diversity

A [Diversity and Inclusion calendar](#) has been published for 2025, which has helped to inform our communications plan for internal and external engagement. It also raises awareness of key dates affecting our stakeholders and wider society.

The Forestry Commission gender pay gap continues to improve

The Forestry Commission gender pay gap for 2023-24 was 2.96% (mean) and 0% (median).

The median gender pay gap remains at 0%, meaning that the middle female salary is equivalent to the middle male salary. However, the mean pay gap has slightly increased from 2.84% to 2.96%, reflecting broader workforce shifts. We have continuously made significant efforts to reduce the gender pay gap. We are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all our employees and continue to reduce the gender pay gap.

The proportion of female employees has increased to 47%, up 1.7% from last year, with more women moving into middle pay quartiles. While operational forestry roles have historically attracted more male candidates, ongoing efforts are helping to balance representation.

There are several programmes underway to further improve inclusivity and equality at the Forestry Commission. Key initiatives include the growth of the Forestry Commission Women's staff network and strengthening leadership development for women. We have also updated policies in response to the Worker Protection Act 2023 and enhanced our Diversity & Inclusion training.

These efforts are driving positive change, with the 2024 staff engagement survey showing increased satisfaction among female employees.

Read the full [Forestry Commission gender pay gap report](#) for more details.



Case studies

These case studies give you a glimpse into just some of the projects and programmes we run at the Forestry Commission; welcoming everyone into our forests and growing an environment where equality, diversity and inclusion benefits all our employees and citizens across the UK.

Fostering collaboration, compassion and inclusivity in every meeting

In January 2025, a new Inclusive Meetings Toolkit was launched to help everyone in the Forestry Commission plan and deliver meetings, training and work gatherings that are compassionate, collaborative and equitable. This resource aims to support a positive workplace culture where everyone feels heard, empowered, and included.

The toolkit was created by the Workplace Practices working group, which included members from the Disability, Neurodivergence and Carers (DNC) network, HR and other staff. It was also shared with staff networks' steering groups and the Forestry Commission Trade Unions (FCTU) for consultation, ensuring it reflects a wide range of perspectives.

Why inclusive meetings matter

Meetings are one of the most important practices in our organisation – enabling teams to connect and collaborate.

By focusing on meeting equity (equal experiences for all participants) we can help everyone to feel heard and empowered; this will increase participation and contribution. The ways in which we interact with each other are how an inclusive workplace culture begins.

Colleagues may have varying needs that impact their work life, including disabilities, neurodivergence, mental health challenges, cultural or religious obligations and personal circumstances. Inclusive meetings can make a significant difference by thoughtfully addressing these needs, opening the door to everyone's full potential.

What's in the toolkit?

The toolkit provides actionable steps to make inclusive meetings a standard practice. It is divided into four key sections:

1. Knowing your attendees – Understand the needs of your participants.
2. Before the meeting – Plan with inclusivity in mind.
3. At the meeting – Foster an equitable and engaging environment.
4. After the meeting – Ensure follow-up is inclusive and accessible.

Celebrating Inter Faith Week at Wendover Woods by David Rose, Forests for Everyone Community Programme Manager

In November 2024, Forestry England hosted a remarkable interfaith gathering at Wendover Woods during Inter Faith Week. This event brought together delegates from various faiths, including Hindu, Muslim, Church of England, Catholic, and Baptist communities, for a meaningful discussion on the intersection of faith, climate, and forests. The discussion was led by Shameer Shah from [Nature Kicks](#), who guided a forest walk with insight and passion.

A day of unity and reflection

The serene setting of Wendover Woods provided the perfect backdrop for this gathering. As participants walked among the trees and breathed in the fresh woodland air, they were reminded of the profound connection between nature and spirituality.

Delegates shared the sacred connections between woodlands and their faiths, with the following examples:

- **Hinduism** sees forests as sacred spaces—homes to deities and places for renewal, meditation, and spiritual growth.
- **Islam** teaches that nature is a divine trust. Forests are essential to preserving the balance of creation, as guided by the Qur'an.

- **Christianity** (including Anglican and Catholic traditions) celebrates the beauty of God's creation, with forests symbolising life, growth, and divine presence.
- **Baptist** teachings emphasise caring for the Earth, encouraging believers to protect nature for future generations.

The gathering was not just a celebration of faith and nature but also a call to action and a powerful reminder of the shared values that unite different faiths in the quest to protect our planet. Delegates discussed practical steps their communities could take to combat climate change and protect forests. From tree planting initiatives to educational programmes, the event inspired a collective commitment to environmental stewardship.

As we move forward, the hope is to draw inspiration from this event and work together to preserve the beauty and sanctity of our woodlands for generations to come.



Forest Research appoints new Chief Scientist

In March 2025, Forest Research appointed its first-ever woman Chief Scientist/Director of Research.

Dr Bianca Ambrose-Oji, previously Forest Research's Head of the Society and Environment Research Group, succeeds Professor Chris Quine FRSE as Chief Scientist.

Having joined Forest Research in October 2008, Dr Ambrose-Oji's career spans more than 30 years as a social forester, action researcher, consultant, practitioner, professional trainer and university lecturer, working in the UK, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Professor James Pendlebury, Forest Research Chief Executive, said:

"While Bianca is a qualified forester with considerable international experience, she's probably best known for her research in the field of social science.

"She has an impressive publication record and international reputation for her work and was recently a visiting professor at the University of Wageningen.

"Bianca brings passion, energy and a focus on science quality to this new role which will be pivotal in helping us meet forestry's future challenges successfully."

Dr Bianca Ambrose-Oji said:

"I'm excited to take up the post of Chief Scientist at Forest Research. It's a real honour, and it feels like a call-to-action.

"Action to support our ongoing remit to provide the applied science that can mitigate some of the threats facing our forests, woodlands and treescapes.

"Action to support individual scientists, science groups and research services to navigate the potential, as well as the challenges, associated with new technologies, Artificial Intelligence, smart data and other innovations, that are now driving change across the full range of forest sciences that we undertake."





Appendix

Recruitment data

The information below includes employment data collected between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 for Forestry Commission employees. As of 31 March 2025, the Forestry Commission had 2,375 employees (up from 2,149 in 2024).

Disability

- Total applicants who have a disability: 10.0%
- Total applicants who do not have a disability: 84.7%
- Total applicants who prefer not to say whether they have a disability: 5.3%
- Interviewed applicants who have disability: 9.4%
- Interviewed applicants who do not have a disability: 85.6%
- Interviewed applicants who prefer not to say whether they have a disability: 5.0%
- Successful applicants who have disability: 9.9%
- Successful applicants who do not have a disability: 85.4%
- Successful applicants who prefer not to say whether they have a disability: 4.7%

Ethnicity

- Total non-white minority ethnic applicants: 24.0%
- Total white applicants: 70.8%
- Total applicants who prefer not to say their ethnicity: 5.2%
- Interviewed non-white minority ethnic applicants: 15.5%
- Interviewed white applicants: 80.5%
- Interviewed applicants who prefer not to say their ethnicity: 4.0%
- Successful non-white minority ethnic applicants: 5.7%

- Successful white applicants: 89.5%
- Successful applicants who prefer not to say their ethnicity: 4.0%

Gender

- Total male applicants: 57.6%
- Total female applicants: 38.4%
- Total applicants who prefer not to say their gender: 3.4%
- Interviewed male applicants: 54.5%
- Interviewed female applicants: 42.2%
- Interviewed applicants who prefer not to say their gender: 2.8%
- Successful male applicants: 49.0%
- Successful female applicants: 58.6%
- Successful applicants who prefer not to say their gender: 2.4%

Age

- Total applicants who are aged 44 or below: 79.0%
- Total applicants who are aged 45 or over: 17.8%
- Total applicants who prefer not to say their age: 3.2%
- Interviewed applicants who are aged 44 or below: 73.4%
- Interviewed applicants who are aged 45 or over: 24.0%
- Interviewed applicants who prefer not to say their age: 2.6%
- Successful applicants who are aged 44 or below: 73.3%
- Successful applicants who are aged 45 or over: 23.9%
- Successful applicants who prefer not to say their age: 2.8%

