National Coppice Federation
Supporting the Coppice Industry

ncfed.org.uk
enquiries@ncfed.org.uk
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Training and Apprenticeship Discussion Group
NCFed Gathering, 14th Oct 2023

Present: Mike Taylor, Fraser Fleming, Suz Williams, Kate Knott, Ben Neville, Chris Newton, Maurice C, L Robson, Twiggy, Kath Morgan, Tony Morgan, Rebecca Oaks, Ian Taylor, Shannon Berry, Steve Fowkes, Helen Clarke

Twiggy gave an introduction to BHMAT and the coppice apprenticeship. A three year apprenticeship based with a sponsor business with a mentor allocated to add guidance and support where needed. Based on sponsor businesses paying what they can afford, and a bursary offered to the apprentice - intended to be a backup only. The value being the training budget, tool allowance and a chance to train with a range of skilled workers and develop specialisms in a supportive environment. The outcome intended to be fully fledged self-employed coppice workers at the end of the 3 years. The vibrancy of the coppice scene in the NW a testament to the apprentice graduates that are now able to sponsor new apprentices.

Twiggy summed up the issues as:

- The need for more awareness of what was on offer
- The need for more training at a national level
- The need for more money to be fed into training for coppice workers.

Steve Fowkes then gave an update on how the Forestry Apprenticeships were working on a government funded apprenticeship scheme that is reliant on employers stepping forward to employ apprentices. These are offered through colleges and are on a day release basis with 4 days with employer and 1 day at college. It is a level 3 qualification, (BHMAT was deemed level 3) £14,000 to the colleges for this and the training varies from 12 to 24 months. Not easy to find coppice businesses able to engage with this. Talks are ongoing for Kendal College to offer the FA's and there is an invitation for someone from BHMAT to join the discussion.

BHMAT are an independent training body and accredit their own courses, the paperwork involved with becoming an accredited training provider would be too onerous and involves engagement with OFSTED. This is the only way that it would be possible to access government funding. Funding for BHMAT is largely private from charities such as Ernest Cook and Garfield Weston. This requires a lot of volunteer time to secure funds and manage the budgets.

Steve also flagged up the funding for training for Professional Forester degree-apprentices - a 3 year programme through the University of Cumbria aimed at training professional foresters, with the FC taking the core of a cohort as 'Development Woodland Officers' with almost guaranteed employment on qualifying.

The new T level qualifications are set to replace BTechs and are likely to be less valuable as a route into forestry. Nobody was present from Small Woods, but Suz Williamson is a graduate apprentice under the National Coppice Apprenticeship Scheme. Brian Williamson also has a new apprentice, Naomi Cantor. It is hoped that when SW have a new CEO, momentum can be found to push this provision higher up their list of priorities. BHMAT are very willing to engage with the mutual moderation of the coursework, as has happened in the past, and to sit on the Steering group, if it can be revived. There was appetite for apprentices in the Midlands but a lack of faith in SW to deliver.

The funding pot for Forestry Training from the FC had mixed reviews. This has to be applied for by individuals and was very much oversubscribed. People who were unlucky in the first round were prioritised for the second round

but that meant the money available was spent within 4 days. This did provide chainsaw training, deer control and coppicing amongst many more forestry skills. One criticism was that there needed to be more monitoring to see how this filtered down into active participation in forestry operations on the ground.

Funding is available in Scotland for start-ups for Social Enterprises and a question was raised as to whether this was a model that might work for coppice businesses. This would be more along the lines of community involvement, not for profit, skills share. There is a move afoot to form a Scottish Coppice Apprenticeship scheme backed by Reforesting Scotland and in partnership with Green Aspirations (Paul Cookson, a previous BHMAT sponsor already) BHMAT to engage in discussions about this.

There is a Forestry Skills Forum nationally and NCFed have been asked to attend the next meeting. This is a crucial way that NCFed can influence the provision of training in the future.

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