



Forestry Contracting Association

Chairman's Report to the AGM of the Forestry Contracting Association, 2024.

As an industry, we still expect the vast majority of the work to be done by Contractors who are seldom paid enough for what they do. Lack of respect from clients is another thing some experience. Being taken for granted does not inspire enthusiasm, nor effort or loyalty, unless of course you are getting really well paid. Last time I looked, the bulk of us aren't enjoying much in the way of financial reward. The rates of payment for forestry work is falling even further behind the rising costs of doing business and we will see the inevitable continue to happen; Contractors leaving the sector, or at least withdrawing from carrying out certain activities or not working for certain clients.

Little wonder that we continue to have a problem encouraging new entrants into the sector. This doesn't just apply to workers, it also applies to Contractors. Once the storybook image of working in the woods is stripped away, the hard realities of the work kick in. Word starts to get around and suddenly all that early promise is gone; off to somewhere where there is more pay for less effort. The only people who don't seem to hear all of this are those who are responsible for making it better.

It is impossible to keep up with the number of committees that exist to look at the problems of the sector, and we attend lots. What we find is not encouraging at all. The bulk of the people there do not have a forestry background, and they aren't prepared to listen to those who do. It's not an exaggeration to say that many know absolutely nothing about forestry at all. So why should we be surprised when all their deliberations come to nothing?

You only have to look at the shambles that purports to be forestry training. At the highest level in forestry, it is now agreed that the training provided to the sector is unfit for purpose. Yet, despite acknowledging it as substandard, our industry continues to insist that every worker submits to a never ending conveyor belt of high cost, low grade training. It should be obvious to everyone that those who work in the industry must be able to access the high quality and affordable training necessary to ensure they can be both safe and productive, two fundamentals that any employer will look for in staff.

The industry's solution was to set up its own training hub. I use the term 'set up' very loosely because after nearly two years, it doesn't really exist. Is it all a figment of someone's imagination? Or is it a sign that the industry hierarchy doesn't really care about it. Yet in the case of the industry's training hub, it seems that the blockage lies at Confor. They should know what the fundamentals are, so why is this all proving so difficult? Again I pose the question 'Does anyone in the industry really care?' We must find out quickly before things get any worse.

Looking at the fundamentals of the FCA 'business', the finances are quite stable yet our membership numbers continue to drop. Profit is up over £586 to £6119 but membership numbers have slipped by 36 to 324.

To improve our offering to members the FCA has partnered with health and safety consultants Spot On Safety to help ensure that you have compliant paperwork that will satisfy the most demanding of clients. Together, we will be able to offer members a whole new range of documents and guides, and the best part is that much of it will be free to members.

The FCA also continues to represent our members who have become embroiled in disputes with clients. This can range from simply providing an ear that listens and offering simple advice. It can be much more significant, like testifying in court; to help one of our members get a judgement over a non-paying client. This particular benefit is one that we hope you never have to call upon but those who have, usually find it worthwhile. What have you got to lose by running things by us? You don't have to take heed of a single word that we say. We believe that many disputes can be nipped in the bud by having suitable paperwork in place at the outset, and we continue to work on further model contract documentation that we hope to release soon.

Apart from a final call for those overdue subscriptions, I'd also like to remind members that we have vacancies on the policy committees and we are in desperate need of capable and committed volunteers.

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