

# GENDER & DIVERSITY IN FORESTRY IN SCOTLAND

By Dr Eleanor Harris





**Top: Women's Timber Corps during World War Two**

**Above (left to right): Amanda Bryan, Chair of Forestry Commission Scotland National Committee; Dr Aileen McLeod, Environment Minister; Jo O'Hara, Head of Forestry Commission Scotland; and Bridget Campbell, Director of Scottish Government's Environment and Forestry Directorate**

**Front cover: The Lumberjill Statue located at the David Marshall Lodge Visitor Centre near Aberfoyle**

*All images courtesy of the Forestry Commission Scotland photo library, except image on Page 8 by Andrew Heald*

# Introduction

There is an apparent paradox around diversity in the forestry sector in Scotland. It is a sector that offers much for both genders, and indeed for people from many different backgrounds, but it is often viewed as “pale, male and stale” because of the lack of diversity of participants.

Several of the most significant posts in the sector are held by women. The Minister responsible for Forestry is Dr Aileen McLeod, while Bridget Campbell is the Director of Environment & Forestry at the Scottish Government. Jo O’Hara is Head of Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Amanda Bryan is the current Chair of the FCS National Committee.

This article ‘Women are branching out in forestry’ interviewed one woman in the forestry sector and seemed to sum up the paradox described above: “Despite women’s strong heritage within the industry – think of the Lumber Jills during both World Wars – today forestry remains a largely male dominated industry. However, women considering a career in forestry should not be swayed either by statistics or stereotypes. The fact remains that forestry provides excellent career opportunities for both men and women in Scotland.”

Confor was keen to gauge perceptions around diversity – and this apparent paradox. An academic from outside the sector, Dr Eleanor Harris (an Edinburgh historian, novelist and founder of Wild Reekie, who runs the Scottish Parliament Species Champions Initiative) was asked to conduct a literature review and a series of

interviews to gather some thoughts around diversity issues – with a view to producing a qualitative report as the basis for future work.

Dr Harris interviewed five men and five women in the forestry sector in January 2016. They were asked the same questions, first about their own experiences in forestry, and secondly about their wider impressions of gender in the industry.

It is interesting to note that the interviewees were in broad agreement that the sector is improving in terms of its inclusion of women, but that the greater challenges are perhaps around diversity more generally and how to reconnect young people with the outdoors.

The recommendations made by Dr Harris are intended to open up further discussion within the forestry sector, rather than lay down a specific blueprint for action. Her report has been presented to both Dr Aileen McLeod and Forestry Commission Scotland and Confor looks forward to further research and discussion on the subject.



Stuart Goodall, Chief Executive,  
Confor: promoting forestry and wood

# Men and Women

A binary approach to gender prevails in the numerous reports on gender in the global forestry industry. Yet it quickly became apparent that the binary gender approach was limited and problematic.

Both men and women struggled to give sensible answers to the research questions of whether and why there should be more women in forestry. Two women and two men said: **“I don’t see any reason why not”**: if men and women are equal, one would expect equal numbers unless there are barriers. Sometimes this was accompanied by an optimistic faith in progress towards gender equality: **“something I expected to happen, just like, you know, every other industry”** said one man, while two women reported that their companies employed more women now than in the past.

For some, a belief in the equality of men and women, that “women aren’t going to bring anything necessarily beneficial to the industry but you’d just expect a gender balance to happen over time”, translated into challenging the question:

**“I think the answer to that is no. Why should there be more women in forestry?” (Man)**

**“You might say, there should be more men as lawyers or there should be more men as vets” (Man)**

**“I don’t think it should really matter if you’re a man or a woman. Personally I don’t agree with say, looking at a board of executives and saying, Oh we need to have fifty per cent women, and putting women there just because they’re women” (Woman)**

**“I don’t know that it’s a matter of ought to be: I think it’s a very varied and rewarding career and I don’t know why there aren’t more in it [...] I’ve never encountered any sexism in my workplace and it’s never prevented me or any other women I know working their way to senior levels, there’s plenty of senior women in forestry, particularly in Scotland.” (Woman)**

Others felt that women did “bring something”, but struggled to express what it was without losing coherence or falling into stereotypes. One man suggested:

**“What women bring is an extra compassionate side, which blokes tend not to have and blokes tend to do things by force of personality rather than, um, guile and cunning if you like.”**

One woman tried to tread a fine line between apologising for being a woman and accusing men of being incapable in certain areas:

**“Communication is a really strong element, important element of what you’re doing in the job, I think ladies can do the job in a different way, but I don’t see why they can’t do it at all”.**

This research project was too short to challenge the binary gender approach given in the remit, although the problems with it quickly became apparent from the literature review. It was the interviewees themselves, both male and female, who challenged the narrow scope of the study, which suggests that well-designed initiatives to promote diversity in forestry would be welcomed.

It is well established in gender studies that it is far more productive to pursue a ‘rainbow’ approach to gender diversity, beyond simple categories like male/ female, in which as many authentic identities are possible as there are individuals. It appears from the literature review that initiatives around diversity in industry (for example the journal *Gender in Management*, or Women in STEM), have almost all focused on a binary view of gender. The tech industry, which is outstanding both in its growth and in its diversity problem, has developed a far more advanced discussion, but it is unusual. Forestry is not behind other industries; yet within Scottish society as a whole, discourse on diversity is highly progressive, and to restrict the discussion to within a paradigm that staff themselves find outdated is to set out to fail.

A curious angle to the discussion in the case of forestry is brought by the fact of it being a genuinely global industry. Much of the debate about gender and forestry has taken place in the context of the developing world and a wealth of studies have been published on this subject.



**“80% of unpaid firewood collection is done by women. Where forests are degraded, this takes up a huge amount of time [...] Many women have highly specialized knowledge of trees and forests. Women are aware of the food and medicinal values of forest products, which are particularly important during food crises.”<sup>1</sup>**

**“Men are more interested in commercial forestry. [...] There’s often the misconception that men are the principal, or only, decision-makers with regards to tree planting, management and their use. Women often have a greater awareness and knowledge about trees, shrubs and grasses than men, because they devote more time than men to collecting forest produce to meet family needs. However, women are not always given an equal opportunity to apply this knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>**

Clearly, these descriptions of gender roles have little to do with forestry in a historically urbanised, highly developed country like Scotland. Collecting firewood or medicinal plants plays no part in the culture or identity of a Scottish woman.

The disappearance of “traditional forest culture” whether amongst men and women is perhaps more marked in Scotland, which was historically almost completely deforested, than almost any country with a forest industry. How Scotland fits culturally into the global forestry industry — and specifically into the gender discussions worldwide — is not an easy question. Yet the Scottish forestry industry is strongly connected to the global industry, perhaps in a way that public sector forestry is not, and it is important that opportunities are taken to engage with this debate.

# Productive diversity

Both male and female interviewees gave confident, coherent answers when they took the question beyond gender, into diversity more widely:

**“I’m always very nervous of organisations where people are just clones of each other: eventually the ship runs aground because nobody realised the current had changed direction.. if you’ve got a bit of diversity on board, somebody might say ‘Hang on a minute, I think the tide’s turned, we need to be going this way.’ I don’t think we want to necessarily say we’re seeing it in gender terms, because in a way I find that slightly sexist. Whereas I like to feel that I’m not sexist, and that I’m looking for diversity in teams.” (Man)**

**“I think basically diversity, the more people you’ve got of different backgrounds, bring more to your work and the value of work is greater I would say, the output definitely more resilient to anything that can happen, because people bring different views from different backgrounds.” (Woman)**

Several men and women discussed the diversity of boards. Whereas the woman quoted above objected to **“token women”**, one man believed, **“the next step for women in forestry would be to see a woman on the board of one of the larger companies. They’ve penetrated into the Forestry Commission far better. [...] We’ve got the typical “five men in their fifties” type board.”** Yet again the most satisfactory answers were not about women, but about diversity: in the Forestry Commission **“as a performance indicator diversity is reported to the board, and that’s not just gender, that’s sexuality, gender, race and disability”**. One woman saw the problem with boards that they were **“white middle-class male”**, a diversity issue far more complex than gender.

Within the sample of interviewees, the difference in how men and women answered the same questions was observable, but far from straightforward. For example, when discussing the personal qualities important for someone working forestry, four out of five of both genders said communication was one of the most important, but the way they said it was different. Women more often named communication straight off:

**“You definitely need to be a good communicator, that’s probably the first thing.”**

**“The biggest asset I’ve had all the way through is good communication skills.”**

**“Definitely good communication is fairly basic. [...] You’d think forestry is about trees, but really it’s more about dealing with people”.**

Men more often named a non-people skill first, then said communication was more important:

**“Capacity for hard work. The ability to communicate. I think that’s the number one thing.”**

**“Enjoying working outdoors [...] being able to get on with other workers and all the major forestry companies so being able to communicate.”**

**“You need to know your basic silviculture, you need actually to be able to get on with a wide range of people [...] it’s actually probably using your communication skills [...] more often than [...] your core silviculture skills”.**

What does this suggest? It is well known that people tend to have a natural preference for working with ‘people’ ‘information’ or ‘things’. One way to ensure diversity in a team is to ensure each of these preferences is represented. On average, more women may have a preference for ‘people’, so ensuring that all styles are represented in all teams may result in a greater representation of women, without any need to imagine that all women are ‘people people’, or that men are poor communicators, or that teams must contain ‘token women’.

The question of personality-type was discussed by one male respondent to explain why there are not more women in forestry:

**“What I think you’ll end up identifying is the type of person who goes into forestry, and that type of person tends to be more likely to be a bloke than a woman. In [company] we did one of those Myers Briggs personality tests and of six people, we were all heavily clustered to one type.”**



Policies designed to promote fairness in the public sector were, in this interviewee's opinion, setting up a situation of class discrimination in which the university-gained literary skill of drafting a good application was valued over experience and reputation. Although one woman cited the "white middle-class male" formula, several interviewees valued the army-style classless hierarchy of forestry:

**"The one thing the industry does do is reward merit. You know it's quite, it's very classless, it's very egalitarian, and if you're good and work hard, and if you get stuck in, you are rewarded."** (Man)

**"Forestry is quite comfortable with hierarchy, [...] because it's very operational, knowing who the chain of command is, and who's in charge, and who isn't, [...] because you're in quite a dangerous and high-risk environment."** (Woman)

**"If you work hard you will be recognised for that"** (Woman)

**"I've always worked in the private sector and I think talented and capable people generally get on."** (Man)

**"Yes there is or has been a career structure and you can get your way up, yes."** (Man)

**"I can obviously only speak from my experience in it and yeah I think it is [meritocratic]."** (Woman)

In the light of the current shift from a policy framework of giving everyone a university education, to a framework of developing a variety of routes from school to work including those focused on more practical skills, it is particularly important to ensure that recruitment policies do not exclude a large sector of the workforce who may in fact be the best qualified. It is important, in implementing diversity policies, to exercise care that new barriers are not erected.

Again, this suggests that the lack of diversity in forestry has not really been about men and women, but about a tendency to self-select a narrow range of personality-types.

Is the Forestry Commission, with its diversity reporting and targets, the ideal model which should be replicated in the private sector? Not according to one interviewee:

**"If somebody comes along and happens to be better at writing an answer to a letter, like a university graduate who has dropped into forestry later in life can write a better answer than somebody who went into forestry at 15, the way the system works at the moment that puts them at a disadvantage in the Commission. Whereas in the private sector you'll be hired on your merits."**

# Environmental awareness

Whereas attempts to identify feminine character-traits ran into difficulties, several of the interviewees noted that, from the same starting-points of biology and the outdoors, men tended to become foresters and women environmentalists:

**“When I did ecology [...] there was a good smattering of girls on our course all of whom probably went into one of the environmental sciences - I can't think of any that went specifically into forestry at that stage.” (Woman)**

**“When I was at university there were a couple of girls on the course that went off into forestry [...] The other part of the degree was the environmental part, the part that was producing the SNH-type employees, and [...] the forestry side was heavily male dominated and it was much more even-stevens in the environmental side.” (Man)**

One male interviewee suggested that masculine cultures in forestry that put off women went hand in hand with a lack of environmental awareness:

**“One thing that's always slightly intrigued me is that I see women coming into commercial**

**forestry [...] and then drifting out [...] they end up in the more, condescendingly called fluffy forestry, rather than commercial forestry [...] A lot of commercial forestry, particularly if you speak to people involved in the harvesting side, they're all a bit bloody brutal [...] I find it boringly macho; and a lot of the people are appallingly unconnected with the woodland and the ecology and what-have-you: they're just production people. And that mindset I don't think I ever see in women.”**

If commercial forestry has a gender image problem, it has a far bigger environmental image problem. The public perception of insensitive monoculture plantations and clearfelling devastation has proved hard to shift despite actual improvements in environmental regulation. The current climate of enthusiasm for large-scale tree-planting for carbon capture and flood mitigation represents a huge opportunity for the forestry industry. The fact that the majority of people whose starting-point is an interest in environmental issues are women, suggests that the lack of women is a ‘litmus paper’ indicator that commercial forestry is not seen as an environmental career-choice, so in addressing the more urgent problem of environmental image, the issue of gender balance may begin to resolve itself.

**“I started with studying environmental protection, which I've always thought about working for an environmental sector.” (Woman)**

However, while it may be beneficial to tap in to the cultural trend in our society which results in environmentalism being female-dominated, it is also vital to challenge any perception that such gender divisions are natural or inevitable. Naturalists, as opposed to environmentalists, are predominantly male.

While women may be ‘expected’ to have a compassionate concern for environmental ‘issues’ and love of animals, they are less expected to be interested in science and fieldwork, the techniques of identification and conservation. Forestry, with its practical outdoor work and strong environmental remit, is strongly placed to put women in role-model positions where they can challenge this perception.





# Inspiring children

Some interviewees commented that the problem was not attracting women to forestry, but young people in general:

“It’s a very varied and rewarding career and I don’t know why there aren’t more in it, but forestry isn’t attracting girls or boys into it at the minute: numbers going in to forestry are declining.” (Woman)

Two interviewees who ostensibly had very different attitudes to the gender issue reached the same conclusion:

“All three leading political parties in Scotland are led by women, the head of the Forestry Commission is a woman, the head of the Chartered Foresters is a woman, you begin to wonder, how far do we go on this? How are they possibly disadvantaged: they’re running everything. [...] One of the issues might be right back at the beginning at school: you could

say well, do we give 8 year old girls enough information to think forestry’s an option, which I think is a rather different question.” (Man)

“The key stage at which people choose their first career is when they choose their options [...] when they’re thirteen [...] and it’s at the same point as people are trying to work out who they are. [...] Most of the girls I’ve come across of that age are nowhere near there yet and they’re looking out and saying “what are women like? What does it mean to be a woman?” [...] It’s about the caring industries, or it’s about business, that sharp suit and all the rest of it, so I think some of the stuff that’s going on with STEM [...] it’s fantastic stuff and forestry should be absolutely part of that, because I think if you can get people engaged at thirteen in doing technical and engineering and scientific type subjects, then their minds will be opened to the sort of things that forestry can deliver.” — Woman



# Inspiring children

So what childhood experiences or paths led the interviewees into forestry?

“One of the reasons I thought about forestry to begin with was [...] a great stocky Aberdeenshire man full of wit and sparkle, and that was quite a formative meeting, when I was probably about 8. Goes back a long way.” (Man)

“From childhood holidays I took an interest in what the Forestry Commission was doing initially, with just basically going on Forestry Commission forest walks and that.” (Man)

“I started wanting to be outside rather than inside, so I changed my degree from physiology to ecology, and focused on forestry during that degree, and have never done anything other than forestry.” (Man)

“An interest in things biological, and outdoors, and a love of being in the woods, and I realised I could possibly make a career out of this.” (Man)

“I knew at quite an early age I wanted to do something to do with the outdoors, and channelled all of that into trying to become a vet, and then didn't get the grades.” (Woman)

“I started with studying environmental protection, I've always thought about working for an environmental sector. The real first thing was when I gained my chainsaw certificate, that was when I was volunteering with Scottish Wildlife Trust.” (Woman)

“I studied biology originally, [...] I met a few people who worked in forestry and [...] the practical side appealed to me, that you get to work outdoors [...] and the business side of it appealed to me as well.” (Woman)

“What do I really want to get out of life, do I want to get out the rat race? So I explored options of what I could go and study as a mature student, and [...] found a course called agroforestry.” (Woman)



The overwhelming theme of these responses is a love of the outdoors. The disconnection of children from nature is widely regarded as a serious social and environmental issue, but it is also a likely reason why forestry recruits have fallen. Scotland is a highly urbanised society, so if forestry only recruits from rural communities it is drawing on a very small pool of talent.

The responses suggest that a love of the outdoors translated to forestry as a career more easily for the boys than for the girls, whose original passion was to be a vet or environmentalist. It is therefore perhaps particularly important that female foresters should get involved in projects to engage young people.

Forestry, then, is not quite the same as STEM. Science, technology, engineering and maths suit women who like working with objects and numbers. Forestry requires these skills too, but the primary reason people are drawn to it is a love of nature and the outdoors.

Forestry has the locations and the skills to introduce young people to the outdoors, and in doing so to give them both the passion and the information to pursue forestry as a career.

# Wielding a chainsaw

There was some sense amongst both men and women interviewees that, while women could work in all kinds of ways in forestry, they were less likely than men to perform physical forestry tasks:

**“I think for some women, and that would be true for some men of course, that there are some jobs in forestry that are not suitable for them. [...] It’s a bit like choosing people for the army I guess. It’s still a physical job, you still have to climb hills, walk over muddy stuff and all the rest of it, so as long as you’ve got those attributes I don’t think it matters whether you’re male or female.” (Man)**

One woman felt that her gender gave her an excuse for not having to ‘wield a chainsaw’, but simultaneously that she was letting women down by not doing so:

**“I wasn’t going to go and wield a chainsaw, but I reckoned there was something else I could offer**

**the industry [...] We were the only two ladies at the time on that course, and she said “Oh, another lady! Brilliant! You must keep going!” Then sometimes I thought, Oh gosh I must have been such a disappointment to her.”**

One man felt his own lack of self-confidence stemmed from not having ‘come up from the tools’, and therefore he could understand why women, as a group, might feel the same:

**“Working for the contractors and having practical experience of getting cold and wet is... strongly valued. So you don’t get expert administrators going into senior management and I think that’s a gendered issue. You end up with a lot of people particularly in the private sector who spent two or three years running their own business and will spend their weekend doing ruffy-tuffy mechanical hobbies.”**

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Women working for the Forestry Commission near Lochaline, Argyll 1962



# Wielding a chainsaw

Another man put the same point but this time based on his own confidence:

**“Well if I think of how I got into forestry, I actually worked as a woodman for nine months... digging holes and trenches, and planting things and lugging large bits of wood about the place, and I know for a fact that that’s a job that doesn’t seem to appeal to very many women, for better or worse. And you know that re-confirmed I definitely wanted to be in forestry, and then I went off to university. So maybe if I hadn’t had — if I’d been a woman, and hadn’t done that job, I might have gone down a different route, I don’t know. So that kind of physicality is arguably a bit of a barrier. But my job isn’t particularly physical, so once you’ve got your degree and become a manager you don’t really need that stuff — but if you’ve actually done things, then it helps.”**

These interviewees suggested that the value of having managers who had started out ‘wielding a chainsaw’ was largely cultural, and struggled to pin down a good reason why this culture which tended to exclude women should be perpetuated. None of the men denied that women could do physical forestry work, especially now that machines had largely replaced physical strength:

**“It’s surprising when someone drops down out of a timber wagon and they’re female, but it happens.”**

The general feeling amongst the men was that the gender issue was the need to see women in high-status managerial and executive positions, rather than support posts such as administration, human resources or marketing. This was the view taken by the 2006 United Nations report, *Time for Action: Changing the Gender Situation in Forestry*:

**“Women in the forestry sector are primarily employed in administrative and support roles, with “professional” women foresters tending to have specialist roles (i.e. research), or first-line junior management positions. [...] Examples of good practices, however, have been emerging, which proves that concerted and sustained**

**commitment and planning at the most senior organisational level can result in quantifiable improvements in the number of professional women foresters employed and the level of seniority they can attain.”<sup>4</sup>**

If there is a narrow focus on the need to ensure women gain equal status and pay within the company as a whole, it seems perverse to expend effort encouraging women to work in labouring positions, at the very bottom of the forestry hierarchy. However, one man thought graduate managers without enough practical experience genuinely struggled with the work:

**“The problem is they want everything done out of the book whereas the one who’d come up through the ranks you can stand and have a discussion about what’s going to work. If they’re all about regulations, it’s harder to explain to them why something might not work or might not be practical.”**

Whereas the other men thought the way to attract women into the sector was to challenge the value placed on physical work, this interviewee thought there was no reason why young women shouldn’t be recruited to it — and might find it more appealing than young men:

**“It would be nice to see more women actually out and about. I do know some women who are into chainsaws but it’s few and far between.”**

This was not just theory: he was accustomed to employing female workers, but not British ones:

**“We do have Canadians who come over to do planting work and some of the female planters are a lot better than some of the British male planters.”**

The Forestry Commission has recently begun to address this issue: in June 2015 they allocated £300,000 to “a skills programme that includes hands-on forestry training for young women”.<sup>5</sup> The news coverage of this announcement quoted Lesley Stalker, a former beautician now working in a community woodland in Easterhouse, Glasgow:

# Job applications

**“Working in the outdoors and carrying out all these practical tasks is ideal for me and to be honest I don’t understand why there aren’t any more women involved in forestry.”<sup>6</sup>**

In competing for future recruits, it will be important that the private sector keeps pace with these public sector initiatives.

What about the women themselves? Here is how one of the younger women described her route into forestry:

**“The real first thing was when I gained my chainsaw certificate, that was when I was volunteering [...] So that was the first entry route to then follow up with getting a job.”**

In her opinion, the only reason women have penetrated into management but not contractor posts is

**“just the way it’s portrayed and advertised. I think definitely this should be addressed. [...] I don’t feel there should be any reasons why women wouldn’t work in those positions.”**

For the interviewee who employed the Canadian women, the difference went back to childhood experience:

**“Their parents had them planting kind of like a paper round, whereas in the UK with health and safety you aren’t allowed to take anyone under 16.”**

It does seem likely that the initiatives described above, such as offering Duke of Edinburgh or holiday activities for children, is likely to benefit more privileged young people, who will also have a wide range of career options other than forestry. It would therefore seem beneficial to explore possibilities of how children under 16 could have opportunities for paid work in forestry, perhaps on a ‘cadet corps’ model.

The lack of entrants into commercial forestry of both genders has already been noted. One interviewee attempted to analyse why this might be:

**“The Forestry Commission attracts huge numbers of graduates [...] 900 applicants for three jobs apparently [...] Whereas [companies] complain that they can’t get enough of the right kind of person that they want. They’re quite specific about the kind of person that they want. [...] Commission will take on all sorts of people, whether they’ve got any, you know — obviously if you’ve got some practical skills you’ll get further in the application process [...] whereas [company] want bright young people with a background and understanding of conservation, forestry, farming, geography, environmental stuff somewhere. [...] What I’ve heard the guys from [company] say is, we want what everyone else wants, which is practical self-starters, get on with people, make decisions, got a bit of experience, keen to learn, keen to get on and do stuff, [...] we’ll teach silviculture.”**

What emerges from this contradictory account is mystification at why the Forestry Commission is attracting so many more good candidates than the commercial sector, and is able to pick and choose. It would be interesting to compare the person-descriptions for posts such as graduate traineeships in the public and private sector. With reference to women in particular, it is known that, on average, women are more likely to apply only for jobs for which they meet 100 per cent of the person-specification, whereas men will apply if they meet around 60 per cent of the specification — not necessarily because women lack confidence in their ability to do the job but because they believe the employer is likely to hire on the basis of the listed qualities.<sup>3</sup>

As this quotation suggests, if the private sector is ‘quite specific about the kind of person that they want’, when in reality they want ‘bright young people’ and ‘we’ll teach silviculture’, it is likely that they are putting off many potential applicants, and particularly women, before they even apply.

# Authenticity

The interviewees were asked if they felt they had to adapt their behaviour or who they were to fit into the forestry industry. All five of the male interviewees were quite clear they didn't:

**“It's not as if I go to work and think, Oh, I've got to put my work hat on.”**

This was true of some of the women as well, but others had more complex stories. One had left the industry after her first attempt, coming back to make a successful career later in life:

**“If somebody can't see my talents, why am I bashing my head off a brick wall? So actually I walked away from it.”**

Another felt that as a young woman she had felt a need to adapt which was self-inflicted rather than a real cultural pressure from the industry:

**“What was going on in my head was I was thinking, I actually don't want people to notice that I'm female, and anything to do with being feminine or female probably wasn't the sort of thing that was going to tick the boxes at work, so -- but I don't know how much of this was kind of coming from me internally, and I suspect a lot of people around me would have been appalled if I'd said this.”**

What changed her perception?

**“I did a couple of non-forestry things [...] and talked about influencing people and all the rest of it, and got that whole, you know, being your authentic self [...] recognising [...] one of your strengths can be your gender. And it's like ‘Oh, right, oh OK, yep, so that's acceptable is it?’”**

For both women, it required experiences outside the industry to give them confidence to be themselves inside it. This was not the case for the men, who fitted in more naturally. It is striking that the challenges the women faced meant that they had a far greater awareness of the importance of authenticity than the men: they brought a certain wisdom not because they were women, but because they were different, which again highlights the importance of diversity.

Several of the men thought that the industry had improved over their career in terms of accommodating women, and this is borne out by the younger women who reported none of the difficulties the older women had faced:

**“I'm quite an outdoorsy person, so I feel quite at home out in the forest [...] I was a bit concerned going out onto site to meet operators as a young female [...] They've got a lot of experience, so rather than telling them what to do I tried my best to learn from them and be quite respectful. So maybe that's why I found it relatively easy.”**

One of the older women noted the difference between herself and the younger women coming into forestry:

**“Maybe just because they're young, they do seem a lot more confident I think.”**

All the evidence suggests that women in forestry now are valued and supported well once they are in the industry: the difficulties are at the recruitment stage. Yet the insights gained by the older women about authenticity should not be lost.

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## FOOTNOTES

1 *Women in forestry: Challenges and Opportunities*, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2014, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3924e.pdf> p.2

2 Kate Holt, *Forest Management and Gender*, WWF Social Development Briefing, 2012, [http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/women\\_conservation\\_forests\\_2012.pdf](http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/women_conservation_forests_2012.pdf)

3 Gun Lidestav et al, *Time for Action: changing the gender situation in forestry*, Report of the UNECE/ FAO team of specialists on gender and forestry, 2006, p.11.

4 Forestry Commission, *Women in Forestry*, 22 June 2015, <http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/news/1201-women-in-forestry>

5 Elizabeth Quigley, 'Women encouraged into Scottish forestry jobs', *BBC Scotland News*, 19 June 2015 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-33185012>

6 Tara Sophia Mohr, "Why women don't apply for jobs unless they're 100% qualified", *Harvard Business Review*, 25 August 2014, <https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified>

# Further study and recommendations

This study was discursive rather than quantitative; however, the need for statistics became apparent at various points. Several interviewees had the impression that forestry had become more diverse over time, and asked whether figures were available. To understand

whether women fail to apply for forestry jobs, apply but fail to be appointed, are appointed but leave, or stay but fail to be promoted, requires statistical data which would form the basis of targeted strategic action.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Broaden the scope of discussions from “women in forestry” to “diversity in forestry”.
- 2 Consider setting diversity targets not only for boards but for all teams, and ensure managers are aware of these when recruiting.
- 3 Ensure that in describing roles such as forest manager, environmental requirements such as planting mixed woodland, protecting rivers and encouraging biodiversity, are portrayed positively rather than as complying with legislation.
- 4 Forest managers named communication with a wide range of groups as one of their core skills. With their knowledge of the forest they are well-placed to have an educational role leading activities, similar to that of a countryside ranger.
- 5 Encourage female foresters to take part in events for young people, to provide role models for girls.
- 6 Regard projects such as forest walks, mountain bike facilities, wildlife leaflets and recreational signage, not just as marketing or meeting environmental obligations, but as a key tool for recruiting the next generation of foresters, and design them accordingly by, for example, describing the role of the local forest manager.
- 7 Review recruitment processes, in particular person-specifications, in comparison with the public sector and best practice in other industries, to attract potentially valuable applicants and particularly women.
- 8 Ensure promotional material demonstrates that women in forestry can work as contractors as well as in management or administrative roles.
- 9 Collect data on men and women applying, being recruited, leaving, and being promoted, in forestry companies, ideally going back some years to enable trends to be established, to prioritise action on the other recommendations.
- 10 Distribute this report for use as a discussion document around the industry, and collate responses on the importance and feasibility of its recommendations.

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