

Response to Agriculture (Wales) White Paper Consultation

EU Exit offers a unique opportunity to meet the climate and nature crises head on, through policies that genuinely help us achieve net zero, support biodiversity and power the green recovery. This is the biggest change to rural policy in Wales in a generation and in order to realise the opportunities it presents we must support everyone working in land management to make the transition.

The benefits of trees and woodland are now well recognised. We know that our trees, woodlands and green spaces, not least those on our farms, have a vital role to play: in climate change mitigation but also flood alleviation, water quality, soil health, biodiversity, improved air quality, and better physical and mental health. Trees are essential strategic assets in our transition to sustainable places, businesses and communities.

What the Institute can offer

The [Institute of Chartered Foresters](#) is the Royal Chartered body for foresters and arboriculturists in the UK. We have 1,900 members who practice forestry, arboriculture and related disciplines in the private sector, central and local government, research councils and universities and colleges, with many advising farmers and land managers throughout the UK.

The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession. It provides support to its members, guidance to professionals in other sectors, information to the general public, and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers in the forestry and arboricultural industry. Chartered foresters, working with farmers across the country, are already demonstrably helping to improve delivery of society's goals, and we want to do more.

Our ambition is to influence policy for the benefit of the profession, the environment and society, through ongoing engagement with members, member representatives, stakeholders, policymakers and the public. The Institute is committed to working with Welsh Government in the design and implementation of a successful approach to land management, supporting a flourishing sector that delivers for climate, nature, people and economy.

Key messages from our response

1. **Integration.** We welcome the focus on trees and woodlands and want to work with Welsh Government and regulators to ensure its success. Part of this success will mean breaking down assumptions about farming and forestry. The devil will be in the detail, including crucially how the scheme will embed the UK Forestry Standard. There must be equivalence with farming, not just in language but in regulatory burden.
2. **Skills.** Government needs to recognise the expertise of the planners and managers who are vital to the woodland creation targets. These forestry professionals are already stretched well beyond capacity, so there must be join-up across government to ensure there is the expertise and capacity to meet its ambitious aims.

3. **Evidence.** It is imperative to build on what we know works and doesn't work, including learning lessons from Glastir, Environmental Land Management in England and other schemes across the UK.
4. **Culture.** We welcome the ambitious plans for overhauling agricultural practices and the scale of change needed. Government must recognise that this will require significant culture change and support for farmers to transition away from current practices and embed new practices like agroforestry that will benefit the environment and their businesses.
5. **Advice.** Absolute clarity and accessibility of advice is essential to maximise uptake and we agree it should be seen as an investment, not a burden. There is currently a critical lack of skills, resources and funding and much greater capacity is needed. There is a huge amount of learning in the sector about this that we could share from across the UK. We would strongly urge our involvement in the development of advisory services.
6. **Regulation.** Our members work in a diverse range of roles and there are diverging views on regulation. We appreciate the principle to be proportionate but members are concerned that the changes to felling licenses could obstruct necessary management work where there are already protections in place and the disparity in regulatory burden between woodland creation and farming. Much will depend on how the legislation is drafted and how regulators are accountable.
7. **Markets.** The critical factor is the development of sustainable business models including finance from beyond the public sector. We must find ways to make it financially attractive for the landowner, whether the outputs are ecosystem services, timber, renewable energy, improved farming or green infrastructure. If we create a strong marketplace for these, success will follow across woodland creation, management, tree protection, plant health, and supporting the land use sector to thrive.

We welcome further engagement with Welsh Government on the proposals, particularly as the detail is developed, and offer to convene an advisory group from our membership in Wales.