

Mairi Gougeon MSP  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

13 April 2023

Dear Ms Gougeon,

Congratulations on your appointment as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, including the responsibility of forestry and woodlands – I hope you are enjoying your new role.

I am writing to introduce the Institute of Chartered Foresters, the professional body for people working with trees and forests in the UK. We have over 2,000 members employed in private, public and third sectors, working in universities and research centres, in consultancy and forestry management (both rural and urban). The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession, supports its members, provides guidance to professionals in other sectors and offers educational advice and training. We work hard to foster greater public and political awareness and understanding of forestry, and we are the only UK body to offer the titles Chartered Forester and Chartered Arboriculturist.

Scotland has led the way on forestry policy and empowered the sector to deliver the multiple benefits that trees and woodlands provide. However, there are significant challenges to face. As the professional body representing all those working with trees, we are the impartial voice of the sector, acting as partner and convener to governments and stakeholders within and outwith the sector. The Institute's diverse membership is one of its greatest strengths and by working in partnership with others we can dispel some of the current unhelpful polarisation within woodland creation discussions.

We all know how important a role forestry will play, not only in the climate and nature crises but the future of the rural economy. Our national conference later this month – [Connecting Trees, Farmers and Foresters](#) – seeks to break down barriers between these two sectors that too often find

themselves at loggerheads, and instead find ways to build trust, promote knowledge exchange and boost skills development.

Addressing the skills shortage is key, and this starts with education. It is also a great way of capitalising on the passion many young people have for the environment, equipping them with the skills they need to be effective land managers. Our [position paper on the forestry skills crisis](#) concisely sets out the multiple challenges – and, as we know, these are cross-UK issues.

We particularly welcome your encouragement of more young women into the sector. This year the Institute is running a leadership development programme for emerging leaders in the sector (with 10 places going to Scottish foresters and 17 to women), and after the successful launch of the degree apprenticeship in England we are working with your colleagues on a similar endeavour in Scotland, with strong positive relationships with your team in Scottish Forestry.

I look forward to working with you and would welcome a discussion about how we can support you and your team.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Simpson  
Executive Director