

DAFM Training Needs Analysis on the Forestry Licencing Process

CIEEM Irish Section Response

We welcome the opportunity to input into this Training Needs Analysis and we look forward to inputting further on the survey questionnaire.

Please find below our views on the requested points:

The appropriateness of the training that is currently being provided

We have been made aware of concerns that the training currently being provided is not sufficient or adequate. In particular, foresters do not have sufficient ecological training to identify undesignated habitats of biodiversity value. We are also aware of recent examples of afforestation taking place on habitats of ecological importance due to the lack of knowledge of the importance of these sites.

- We acknowledge that DAFM training has taken place on identifying at least some habitats (such as fens), however this needs to be occurring more regularly and for a wider range of habitats.
- The level of basic ecological knowledge in other areas of the forestry sector is low and CIEEM would like to see more training, knowledge sharing and engagement on ecological issues in forestry.
- We also recognise the need for ecologists to be trained in forestry management systems and processes.

The design of training to provide clear guidance and shared understanding of processes involved as well as basic licensing requirements on the ground;

The level and depth of training required in the licensing process to ensure an appropriate understanding of the processes involved. Topics might include – Environmental requirements, Natura Impact Statement, biodiversity maps, appropriate assessment, relevant technical standards,

We acknowledge the resources needed to provide comprehensive training and the need for other sectors to support this.

- The ecological knowledge of recently graduated foresters is not sufficient, and we believe the introduction of more comprehensive environmental and ecological modules at third level are necessary to support this process.
- We do not believe DAFM should be providing training on how to conduct Appropriate Assessment (AA)/NIS. This should be undertaken by an ecological professional who has this knowledge and training.

Areas we would like to see training being provided:

- Training for ecologists on topics such as the forestry licensing process, standard operations and forestry management procedures.
- Information on how the forestry standards fit in with the AA process and wider training on the forestry AA process, e.g. the forms, information required, expected approach etc.
- Training for foresters on basic ecological knowledge. Providing training on basic identification of an ecologically important site, and when a professional ecologist is needed to assess further.
- Help build awareness in the sector of the legal requirements that ecologists have to meet before they can sign off. The complicated process required can sometimes be overlooked.

We suggest the following guidance is developed:

- Guidance on the process to be followed on a site that does not have EU designation but is still a site of ecological importance. This would include when the advice of an ecological professional is needed.
- Specific advice notes on how to navigate the forestry service licensing system. It is currently not clear what is required, we would be interested in seeing this from an ecological requirement point of view.

The types of training that will be most appropriate, e.g., face-to-face, on-site, online, e-learning and blended approaches, according to needs

We would recommend a blended approach to training. The online format is beneficial for convenience and providing a larger geographical/accessible reach of the training, however we would advocate the need for onsite training in habitat identification and forestry management topics.

The effectiveness of how DAFM communicate via guidance documents, circulars and the DAFM website and how this might be improved; and

The following are our key thoughts on DAFM communications:

- We note that DAFM guidance documents are of a good standard and are clear within the document.
 - We would highlight the need for the ecological guidance included in all DAFM guidance to be aligned. In some cases, advice on a topic can be contradicted in another guidance document. These need to be reviewed and aligned.
 - All guidance must provide advice for native woodland and amenity woods as well as commercial forestry.

- We are aware of circulars and they are produced to a good standard, however we would note that this might not be reaching a wide enough audience, as not all relevant parties might be aware or signed up to these, especially in the ecology sector.
 - CIEEM has in the past included notices in our newsletter and we would like to reiterate our willingness to continue this or to explore expanding our engagement with forestry communications.
- The Forestry section of the DAFM website is not fit for purpose. It is not clear, or easily navigable and the relevant information is hard to find.
 - CIEEM would suggest an overhaul of the website, with a consultation process like this one being undertaken and trial using non-expert subjects.

The potential of central platforms e.g. Zoom. YouTube for presentation and discussion for clarity of requirements in terms of technical forestry updates, new forest concepts, environmental and legal requirements.

We agree there is potential in using online platforms to encourage and support knowledge sharing. For example, the CIEEM Ireland Section organises monthly Lunchtime Chat events online, where we have a speaker on different topics and provide an opportunity for our members to engage and learn. One that may be of interest to the forestry sector is [Lunchtime Chats with Dr Fran Giaquinto: A focus on Invasive Fungal Tree Diseases](#) (We have included for your interest, but please contact us if you would like to circulate more widely). CIEEM would be happy to work with DAFM on creating content. For example, creating an event around the ecological considerations of forestry management, including clear-fell vs continuous cover systems.

We recommend these types of events and recordings are used in addition to a comprehensive training programme. We suggest these are used as a discussion platform and a way to increase awareness and cohesion of all sectors working in the forestry sector, rather than standalone content.