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**HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION
ARBORICULTURE AND FORESTRY ADVISORY GROUP**

AFAG Training and Certification Project Group (A2)

Update on Position Paper for AFAG Meeting: 2-3 April 2008

Issue

1. The forward progression of the work of the AFAG's Training and Certification (T&C) Project Group and the proposed Register of Tree Work Operatives

Background

2. Following the AFAG meeting on 25/26 September 2007 the attached position paper (Appendix1) was circulated to all AFAG's Training and Certification (T&C) Project Group Members and to UAG Members, for comment. 5 people have responded and their comments are summarised as follows:

- The proposed scheme would have a massive advantage if it could be made to happen, but cost will be the main barrier;
- There is a perceived duplication of effort and bureaucracy for larger employers;
- There is perceived poor association with VQs;
- Any perceived association with Lantra may lead to resistance and / or rejection from certain stakeholders.

Recommendations

3. AFAG Members are now invited to consider the following questions for discussion and progress at the meeting:

- Is the basic idea of a Register of Tree Work Operators worth pursuing?
- If so, how should we address the issues?
- Who is going to take responsibility for taking action forward?

Health and Safety Commission

Arboriculture and Forestry Advisory Group

AFAG Training and Certification Project Group (A2)

Proposal for register of tree work operatives

1. Summary

1.1 At the full AFAG meeting at Forestry Commission HQ, Edinburgh on 25th September 2007, a set of proposals was presented that aimed to draw together the principles that had been agreed to date. It was agreed that this should form the basis of the on-going development for the project group. The proposed structure presented below is not 'cast in stone' and is open to amendment and discussion. However, it was agreed that a positive, formulated structure should be presented to the industries concerned and that in order to prepare this, the project group members should explore the proposal's strengths and weaknesses in the full range of work scenarios covered by the group's representation.

2. Background

2.1 Following the close of the national consultation on Training and Certification, carried out through the HSE website over the winter of 2006/7, the Training and Certification Project Group met on 4th April 2007 and produced a report to AFAG at its last meeting on 19th April. The recommended actions from that report were endorsed by AIAC. The recommendations included carrying out further investigation into the ways in which CPD could be used in forming a nationally recognised, auditable and credible structure to acknowledge individual operators' training, certification and career progression.

2.2 Although many ideas and opinions have been aired in the process so far, and some consensus has been reached on the possible solutions, there had not, so far, been a fully agreed proposal to take forward.

3. Proposal

The proposal was presented as follows:

3.1 Register of Tree Work Operators (R.TWO) = "R2"

3.1.1 A comprehensive register database should be created to manage the requirements of the scheme. AFAG members felt that it is important at this stage not to associate the register with any particular organisation or Awarding Body. Rather, the Project Group should design the requirements of the system and then invite potential organisations to tender for the opportunity to offer the scheme.

3.2 Vocational Qualifications (VQ) in Health and Safety in Tree Work

3.2.1 The existing VQs in “Working Safely in Agriculture / Horticulture” at levels 2, 3 and 4 should form the basis for development of similar qualifications for the Tree Work Sector. This may include a generic Level 2 qualification for Tree Work and specific qualifications for Forestry and Arboriculture at levels 3 and 4.

3.3 New entrants

3.3.1 Anyone entering the industry would be expected to achieve basic qualifications at ‘entry level’, which would automatically register them into “R2” e.g:

- Level 2 VQ “Working Safely in Tree Work”
- Relevant initial training and certification in machinery use and aerial tree work (the existing structure of training and assessment offered by Lantra Awards and others, and the NPTC Certificates of Competence scheme)

3.3.2 All competency certification for new entrants would be time limited, subject to evidence of further CPD which would be recorded and listed in the R2 register.

3.4 Consolidation of experience and CPD

3.4.1 General working experience is recognised as valuable evidence of a worker’s ‘employability’. This therefore needs to be recorded as well as more conventional ‘CPD’.

- As workers gain experience they would keep a record or ‘log’ of work carried out which would be verified by employers and audited.
- As required, operators would attend refresher training for relevant tasks and machinery operation. Recognised events and certification would be automatically recorded in R2 and a combination of various CPD would accumulate points within R2, which would continually upgrade the individual’s listing.

3.4.2 Where operators belong to, or enter other, existing schemes, these would be mapped against, and where appropriate automatically recognised by, R2 (e.g. ISA Certified Arborist Scheme)

3.5 Career progression

3.5.1 The worker would be able to achieve different ‘levels’ within the register as they progress through a combination of consolidation of experience, refresher and additional training. For example:

- Logged work showing continuous employment within a sector of Tree Work
- Advanced climbing and rigging techniques training and certification
- Achievement of Level 3 or 4 VQ in Supervising or Managing Health and Safety in Tree Work
- Planning silvicultural or arboricultural operations – training and/or experience

3.5.2 Depending on the sector, this would provide recognised, auditable status, acknowledged by industry employers as appropriate and reliable evidence that an

individual can carry out, supervise and/or manage a specific set of tasks, operations or projects.

3.5.2 Every effort would be made to ensure the widest scope and acceptance of the scheme, so that, for example, chainsaw and other machine operators could take their transferable skills into other sectors such as construction, without the need for duplication of training, assessment or certification.

3.5.3 This information would tie in directly with the “Occupational Competence Framework” (OCF) currently under development by Lantra SSC.

3.6 Existing operators

3.6.1 Those operators in the industry who already hold existing certification and/or qualifications would not be adversely affected by the introduction of R2. Their existing, unlimited certification would remain valid, subject to existing requirements for refresher training etc under legislation in HSAWA 74, PUWER 98 and associated HSE guidance (INDG 317, AFAG 805).

3.6.2 However, to provide “buy in”, the scheme would offer attractive access into R2 for existing operators with minimal certification, which would allow operators to “top-up” with CPD over a period of time (possibly 3 years). This entry route would only be available for a limited period and after a cut-off point all operators would have to achieve a minimum number of ‘points’ to become registered. There is some risk to this strategy, in terms of credibility, and this would need to be evaluated carefully.

3.6.3 The primary benefit of joining the R2 register would be that it will become recognised as the industry accepted “passport to work” in the Tree Work industries, and wherever such tools and machinery are used.

3.6.4 Conversely, those operators that choose not to register would risk alienation from clients and contract providers.

3.7 Costs

3.7.1 It is recognised that one of the main barriers to the introduction of any such scheme will be cost, both in time and/or money. There is no doubt that a register capable of managing all the issues mentioned above, and very possibly many others that we have not yet identified, will be a costly exercise and it will present an interesting business challenge to any organisation bidding to take on the work. It is clear that there is no point in building a system that will not deliver a first class service, as credibility will fall very quickly if systems fail. However, there will be a limit as to what the industries can afford and this delicate balance presents a significant challenge.

4. Action required

4.1 It is proposed that individual members of the Project Group carry out focussed, desk-based research to test the principles outlined above, as applied in their

particular field of forestry, arboriculture and associated work. Such groups of workers could include:

- Public forestry (FE)
- Private forestry – estates
- Private forestry – large contractors
- Private forestry – self employed contractors
- Large amenity land owners (NT, Environment Agency etc)
- Local authority – as client
- Local Authority - employees
- Utility arboriculture contractors
- Amenity arboriculture contractors – large employers
- Amenity arboriculture contractors – small employers
- Amenity arboriculture contractors – self employed
- Amenity Horticulture contractors
- Landscaping contractors
- Term maintenance contractors
- Agricultural workers
- Specialist groups (Emergency services, armed forces, etc)

4.2 The specific questions that need to be addressed are:

1. What risks / barriers do you see to constructing the scheme as described?
2. Assuming that the scheme could be set up as described, what benefits do you see for your group of workers?
3. What disincentives are there?
4. What initial and/or annual cost do you think could be acceptable for operators, both new entrants and existing?
5. What specific training / certification / qualifications do you think will be relevant to include in the register for your group of workers?
6. What categories or ‘levels’ do you see emerging within the register structure, for your group of workers?
7. Are you able to provide information on any benefits (financial and/or others) to your business of recording training and competence and if so what system do you currently use?

5. Next steps

5.1 Once this initial information has been provided and compiled, it is proposed to convene a T&C Project Group meeting to discuss and explore the relevant issues and

progress the project to the next stage and further consultation.

Simon Richmond

AFAG Training & Certification Project Group Leader

27th September 2007