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

AFAG Training and Certification Project Group (A2)

Position Paper for AFAG Meeting: 19 April 2007

Issue

1. At the AFAG meeting on 16 August 2006, Members agreed that a 'consultation exercise' should be carried out to gauge the views of industry on the range of options identified by AFAG's Training and Certification (T&C) Project Group. This paper presents the results of that consultation. Members of the T&C Group have considered the responses and AFAG members are now invited to consider the issues raised by the consultation exercise and to discuss how these can best be taken forward.

Background

2. General background on the AFAG T&C Project Group can be found in a previous paper (AFAG 06/06) and in the AFAG Terms of Reference and Workplan 05-08 (as updated and, presented to this meeting in AFAG paper 07/01).

3. At the 4th meeting of the T&C Project Group on 25 July 2006 it was proposed that an industry-wide 'consultation exercise' should be carried out. This approach was agreed by AFAG members at the August 2006 meeting. It was agreed that the consultation should be far reaching, covering the forestry and arboricultural contracting sectors, both businesses and individuals,, the client side (including Local Authorities and large employers in the sector), as well as those 'peripheral' industry sectors that employ 'occasional operators' (eg farming and construction).

4. AFAG Members agreed that the range of issues and options identified by the Project Group should be presented to the industry but did not endorse or propose any specific way forward. AFAG Members also commented on the proposals on behalf of their organisations at the August AFAG Meeting. (These comments were taken into account and have been included in the collation and analysis of comments.)

5. Members wanted to encourage the frank and honest views of all those in the industry on the various options, and the Group was highly sensitive to the

fact that any radical change to the current system would need to be proposed and introduced with as much consultation and industry engagement and ownership as possible. The background note used to introduce the consultation exercise and present the options is attached as Appendix I.

6. The consultation exercise was launched by James Brown (AFAG representative on AIAC) and Roger Nourish (Chair of AFAG and Head of HSE's Agriculture and Food Sector) at the AFAG Seminar held at the APF Show in September 2006. This generated considerable interest and comment at the Show, and in the trade press. Respondents were encouraged to submit their comments through a new 'discussion forum' created specifically for this consultation exercise on HSE's AFAG webpage, but written contributions were also accepted. The consultation process was widely publicised across the range of forestry and arb industry trade press, newsletters and trade bodies.

7. The consultation exercise was 'closed' on 28 March 2007. The comments were considered by eleven members of the T&C Group who were available to participate in a telephone/video conference on 4 April 2007. This summary paper is also being sent to all members of the T&C Group for any further comment to the Project Leader (Simon Richmond), who will present a verbal update and explanation at the AFAG meeting on 19 April. All contributions have been collated and anonymised and are now freely available on the consultation website at

<http://webcommunities.hse.gov.uk/inovem/inovem.ti/AfaqconsultTandC/viewdocument?docid=130501>

(Hard copies can also be posted to members if required and will also be available at the meeting).

Results

8. A total of 87 people registered as members of the 'AFAG - Training and Certification in Tree Work' Web Communities consultation site. Seven written contributions were also received, in addition to the comments from AFAG and T&C Group members at meetings. This was disappointing given the coverage the exercise had received in the trade press. However, those contributing included a range of employers, operators and consultants from across the tree work sector.

General Conclusions

9. Members of the T&C Group have read through the compendium of comments to ensure that all those who took the time to contribute to the consultation have had their views considered and reflected. However, Members will appreciate the difficulty in trying to present a single viewpoint or conclusion from the range of comments and discussions received from the wide range of interests within the various industries.

10. A brief summary and overview of the general consensus of views expressed by consultees is presented below (para 14 et seq), based on the structure and options listed in the background paper used to inform the consultation (Appendix 1).

11. Other issues were raised by some respondents that did not relate to any specific option or proposal. For example, some contributors doubted that an overarching tree work based approach was practicable, and strong comments were made that arboriculture was a very different industry from forestry – with different training needs and requirements.

12. Many contributors, particularly the self-employed, highlighted the extremely poor economic conditions associated with tree work across the sector and the financial constraints on them and their businesses. Many noted that any additional costs involved with a new approach to Training and Certification in Tree Work could be catastrophic.

13. Questions were also raised as to the motives of those involved in the Training and Certification Project Group, AFAG, HSE, Awarding and Certification bodies, and of Training Providers in general. There appears to be widespread confusion (and scepticism) about the roles of Lantra (Sector Skills Council), Lantra Awards and NPTC.

14. The nature of the comments received indicate that bringing the process of Government policy forward and explaining its structure to businesses and individual operators is a significant challenge. It must be interpreted and presented in language which is familiar or easily understood by the industry. To penetrate and attract those in the industry to respond to future consultation exercises, it is recognised that it will be important to clearly explain the practical (and financial) implications (where possible) and the pros and cons for individuals and businesses, preferably by putting options into a context to which they can relate.

15. A number of other issues raised were out with the scope of either the consultation or HSE's role as a regulator. These will be addressed via e-mail or letter to individuals or collectively to all consultees as appropriate.

Overview of Comments on the Specified Options

Option 1 - Status quo

16. No comments were received in support of this option during the recent industry consultation. The majority of those addressing the issue of certificates of competence (CoC) were critical of how they were currently seen by industry and regulators i.e. as a primary measure to demonstrate the capability of an operator. Comments were made that the current range of certification was overcomplicated and that many units included training elements not required in specific industry sectors. The costs involved in both paying for the training and loss of productivity resulting from operators

attending training sessions were perceived as prohibitively high in relation to the benefit achieved through the certification.

17. The issue of ensuring that CoC's were accurate and had been awarded to the individual holding them was also raised. Comparisons were made to the 'Sentinel' system used in the rail industry and the AFAG T&C Group were encouraged to look at this system.

18. However, CoC's were seen by some to be of some value when considered alongside other factors such as experience and skill levels. In addition, some support for the status quo was put forward from within the T&C Project Group.

Option 2 - Certificates of competence time limited and requiring re-assessment every 5 years

19. No comments were received in support of this proposal. Compulsory re-assessment was generally unpopular and not seen to adequately address the issues in hand. Comments were also made that such re-assessment would not take into account progression of skills or be linked to demonstrating increasing competence. The costs of such re-assessment was also questioned, as was the competency of the assessor to judge the ability of a more experienced operator.

Option 3 - Certificates of competence time limited and requiring 'refresher training with integrated assessment (in which the trainer carries out the assessment)' every 5 years

20. Comments received reflected those for the previous option. However, the issue was raised as to why it was proposed that the trainer could carry out the re-assessment but not the initial assessment.

Option 4 - Record of time (hours) worked on specific machines / operations (logged per operator)

21. A significant number of comments from employees and operators supported this option. It was considered that experience was grossly undervalued in the tree work industry and that some type of system to record an operators skills and levels of experience would be beneficial to employers and employees/ self-employed.

22. However, any system would need to be easily implemented and extremely cost effective. One consultee suggested that AFAG produce a simple and flexible set of guidelines for 'logging' an employee's experience that could be adopted across the range of the tree work industry. However, the industry generally felt that any inflexible or externally administered scheme would not be practical or popular with the industry.

23. Recording activities/experience was also seen as important in relation to demonstrating competence and as an evidence base for a range of systems such as NVQs, Apprenticeships and Skill Levels.

Option 5 - Web-based health and safety test every five years

24. No supporting comments were received on this option.

Option 6 - Professional register, recording Continual Personal Development (CPD)

25. There was significant support for some type of CPD within the industry as previously noted. However, support was heavily biased towards the system being voluntary, flexible, easy to administer and cost effective.

Option 7 - Introduction of time limited certificates of competence for new entrants (i.e. excluding existing operators), with voluntary registration to a 'Register of Tree Work Operators' and gaining/recording CPD to maintain certification

26. There was a general consensus across the range of consultees that two major faults of the current system were that CoC's are held for life and that they did not recognise the progression of skills and competency an operator could build throughout their career. It was also noted that the importance of 'in-house' training and assessment should be highlighted. However, no comments were received to support the formation of a 'Register of Tree Work Operators'.

Conclusions and Recommendations

27. During the T&C Group discussion on 4/4/07 the following key points emerged:

- (i) Members of AFAG and the Project Group should unilaterally encourage the involvement and contribution of businesses to NPTC's review of the suite of Chain Saw Operators Certificates (to be completed by April 2008) and also to the Forest Machine Operator Certificates in the future, to ensure that the current complex framework is replaced by a simplified, cost-effective entry-level qualification structure, more suited to the industry's needs.
- (ii) To this end, it is recommended that all comments received as part of this consultation exercise should be made available to NPTC to inform their review of the CS CoC's.
- (iii) Another clear message from the comments received was the general support for some kind of 'CPD'/operator's log/recording of 'on the job' experience.

- (iv) The T&C Group propose to now identify and describe a range of possible methods to record work experience as well as training (formal and informal). Task Groups should then be set up to investigate the feasibility of applying these various 'models' to identify which (if any) are suitable for the different sub-sectors of the tree work industry.
- (v) To progress this matter further, more effective methods are needed to involve individuals and businesses in the consultation process and encourage them to respond to the detailed proposals that are to be distilled by the Group in the next phase of this project. The Group advise that no further action should be taken to implement any systems without more extensive consultation and feedback, necessary to ensure that the industry understand and are committed and support any proposals.
- (vi) The T&C Group consider that, for reasons of probity, as well as the inclusive nature of its membership and its status within the industry, AFAG is the most appropriate vehicle to facilitate the consultation process, through its constituent members and their various networks.

Action

28. AFAG members are invited to consider and discuss the above summary of the comments received and the conclusions and recommendations of the T&C Group (and also to refer to the relevant papers on the website should members wish to see the range of detailed comments received). This paper will be supplemented by a presentation to AFAG by the Project Leader.

29. In particular, AFAG members are asked to:

- (i) Consider how AFAG, its member bodies and other organisations can use their influence and networks to encourage those working in the industry to engage in the process to improve and provide a framework to recognise 'experience' and 'informal' training as well as 'formal' training and certification, that is appropriate to the industry and meets its needs for the foreseeable future.
- (ii) To suggest and endorse the next steps for the T&C Project Group, under the auspices of AFAG.

Simon Richmond
Chair, AFAG Training & Certification Project Group
5 April 2007

ARBORICULTURE AND FORESTRY ADVISORY GROUP (AFAG)**Training and Certification Project Group - Industry Consultation****Background Information**

This document provides background information on the work of the AFAG Training and Certification Project Group and an overview of the range of options discussed by the group.

In 2005, AFAG set up the Training and Certification Project Group with a wide range of representatives from across the tree work sector. The aim of the group was to discuss how the industry should react to current and future challenges in relation to training and certification. Much time and discussion has been devoted to exploring the range of training and certification registration schemes outwith forestry and arboriculture, particularly in relation to Local Authority contracting, and how other industries approach the issues that concern us.

At each meeting there has been some discussion regarding what kind of model might suit 'The Tree Work Industry', and it has become clear that this diverse range of workers have quite different needs. The spectrum of 'tree work operations' covers (in no particular order):

Forestry / Arboricultural establishment:

- Machine operation;
- Site clearance:
- Fencing;
- Planting, etc.

Forestry harvesting:

- Forest machine operation;
- Chainsaw operation, etc.

Arboriculture - Aerial tree work:

- Tree climbing / aerial rescue;
- Aerial use of chainsaws;
- Pruning, use of handsaws;
- Dismantling / rigging operations;
- Ground work.

General machinery operations:

- Ground-based chainsaw operation;
- Brushcutters / clearing saws;
- Wood chippers;

Stump grinders;
Tractor / winches;
Use of mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs).

Environmental awareness and knowledge.

Health and safety and risk assessment.

Increasingly, many machines traditionally used in the arboriculture and forestry sector are being used in other industries and by other professions. For example, a very large number of existing and future chainsaw and machinery operators will not always be involved in 'traditional tree work', but may carry out other less obvious areas of work, e.g: fencing contractors, construction workers and demolition contractors, tool hire companies, leisure/amenity maintenance, the Fire Service, MOD, etc.

The group have reviewed a range of options that could be available to all these worker groups, in order to develop a comprehensive, consistent and high quality training and certification structure that can be applied and accepted across industry sectors. The system would need to recognise the value of experience and consolidation of skills as an operator's career progresses. This could include the provision of refresher / update training both given 'in-house' or by a training provider. There is overall agreement in the group that any new structure must be:

- Credible to industry
- Effective in improving safety in the workplace
- Simple and cost effective to operate and access
- Clear and usable to employers
- Quality assured
- Industry endorsed and (ideally),
- regulated by the industry, and supported by effective enforcement by the Regulators (HSE and Local Authorities).

What are the options?

NB. The members of the Training and Certification (T&C) Project Group have considered a range of issues and options, but do not endorse or propose any specific way forward. The group wants the frank and honest views of all those in the sector on the various options outlined in this paper. The group is highly sensitive to the fact that any radical change to the current system would need to be proposed and

introduced with as much consultation and industry engagement and ownership as possible.

The following background information and observations are only given to inform those taking part in the consultation of the type of issues and options discussed by the T&C Group over the past year.

Lantra (the Sector Skills Council for land-based industries), Lantra Awards and NPTC have been involved with the representatives of the forestry and arboriculture industries in the discussions to date. It is relevant to note that:

- The current provision of NPTC Certificates of Competence for Chainsaw and Related Operations is due for review in 2007 and a revised scheme should be launched in 2008.
- It is accepted (by NPTC) that this revision may be radical and should aim to simplify the number and complexity of units.

1. Status quo - i.e. no change, apart from scheduled revision of the NPTC [chain saw operator certification scheme. This would reflect the current system based on a single initial assessment of the basic level of competence, with no capacity/facility to recognise progression with experience or to acknowledge 'employability' of individual operators.

2. Certificates of competence time limited and requiring re-assessment every 5 years – Group members recognise that this may be unpopular with the industry and would not address the issues adequately. A large proportion of the re-assessment would not be relevant to experienced operators and it is argued that this would not be cost effective.

3. Certificates of competence time limited and requiring 'refresher training with integrated assessment (in which the trainer carries out the assessment)' every 5 years. – Refresher training within 5 years is specified by HSE in guidance for professional operators and "2-3 years" for 'casual operators'. However, refresher training, with or without integrated assessment, needs to be targeted accurately to provide value for money.

4. Record of time (hours) worked on specific machines / operations (logged per operator) – This can be a useful source of information and is used by some companies. It also improves individual operators' 'employability'.

5. Web-based health and safety test every five years – This would reduce the cost and time commitment of individual operators and employers, and is in-line with the Government's objectives to provide services electronically through the internet/websites. Quite sophisticated IT/database systems are now available to facilitate this approach, but it could be open to abuse, without additional security and verification measures in place.

6. Professional register, recording Continual Personal Development (CPD)– The Group is aware of a range of web-based technology and systems which could easily be adapted to suit and support this purpose. The scope and specifications would need to be determined by industry, to suit all relevant applications/enterprises.

7. Introduction of time limited certificates of competence for new entrants (ie excluding existing operators), with voluntary registration to a 'Register of Tree Work Operators' and gaining/recording CPD to maintain certification –This may be more acceptable to the majority of the industry – at least those in favour of adopting good practice and promoting higher standards and competence within their own businesses and the industry generally.