

An Executive Summary of the

Leader Funded Interventions in the Forestry Sector in Cumbria

On behalf of
Cumbria Woodlands

December 2013



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas



An Executive Summary of the Leader Funded Interventions In the Forestry Sector in Cumbria

Adam Wellings, Mark Reynolds &
Martin Glynn

Correspondence:

Beckfoot
Highbridge
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA5 7DS

T: 016974 76076

adam@awellings.com

www.awellings.co.uk

Contents

Introduction

Adam Wellings Consulting Limited was appointed in August 2013 to conduct the Final Evaluation of interventions in the forestry sector in Cumbria funded through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) via the Cumbria Fells and Dales and the Solway, Border and Eden Leader Groups.

Evaluation Aims and Objectives

The specific aim of the evaluation contract was to provide ‘a comprehensive analysis of all the outputs, outcomes and inter-relationships between interventions delivered through Leader supported interventions during the period 2010 to 2013’.

Scope of Evaluation

The project encompassed three main strands of support to the forestry and woodland sector and the evaluation considered each of these in turn as well as the linkages between all others. These strands were:

The Woodland Advisory Service – a programme of visits to woodland owners by qualified advisers in the sector, comprising of an initial one-day visit and report (called a Silver Birch Day) followed by up to a further three days of time (Oak Days) primarily concerned with providing tailored implementation advice to the woodland owner.

Skills for the Forest Programme - This was part of a wider Rural Skills Cumbria (RSC) initiative, funded by the two Leader Local Action Groups in Cumbria and delivered through a contract with the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC). Cumbria Woodlands was one of the SAC’s delivery partners and had been contracted by SAC to deliver the ‘Skills for the Forest’ element.

Capital Grants – these were grant funds provided by the Solway, Border and Eden and the Cumbria Fells and Dales Leader Groups to support the economic development measures identified through this programme and to support applicants from the sector.

The Woodland Advisory Scheme

Approximately 525 woodland owners applied for the woodland advisory programme and 439 received either a Silver Birch Day and/or one or more Oak Days. The balance of 86 applicants did not go ahead for a variety of reasons. The service has clearly had a significant impact on several of the advisers businesses – some reported that in excess of 50% of their turnover during the duration of the programme was a result of WAS, others reported that post WAS, their business had rebalanced at 25% above previous level. The latter reflected the number of new clients that advisers had retained post WAS.

The investment in the WAS element of the programme has been significant and resulted in circa 430 beneficiaries.

By analysing the take-up of EWGS in Cumbria during the WAS programme, and comparing that to the activity in other areas of the country, we could see if Cumbria is ‘bucking the trend’ i.e. the numbers of EWGS has increased at a rate above other areas? This would indicate that the intervention is resulting in increased activity in the sector and the logical finding is that it is the WAS programme.

We have obtained the following data from the Forestry Commission in support of these two questions:

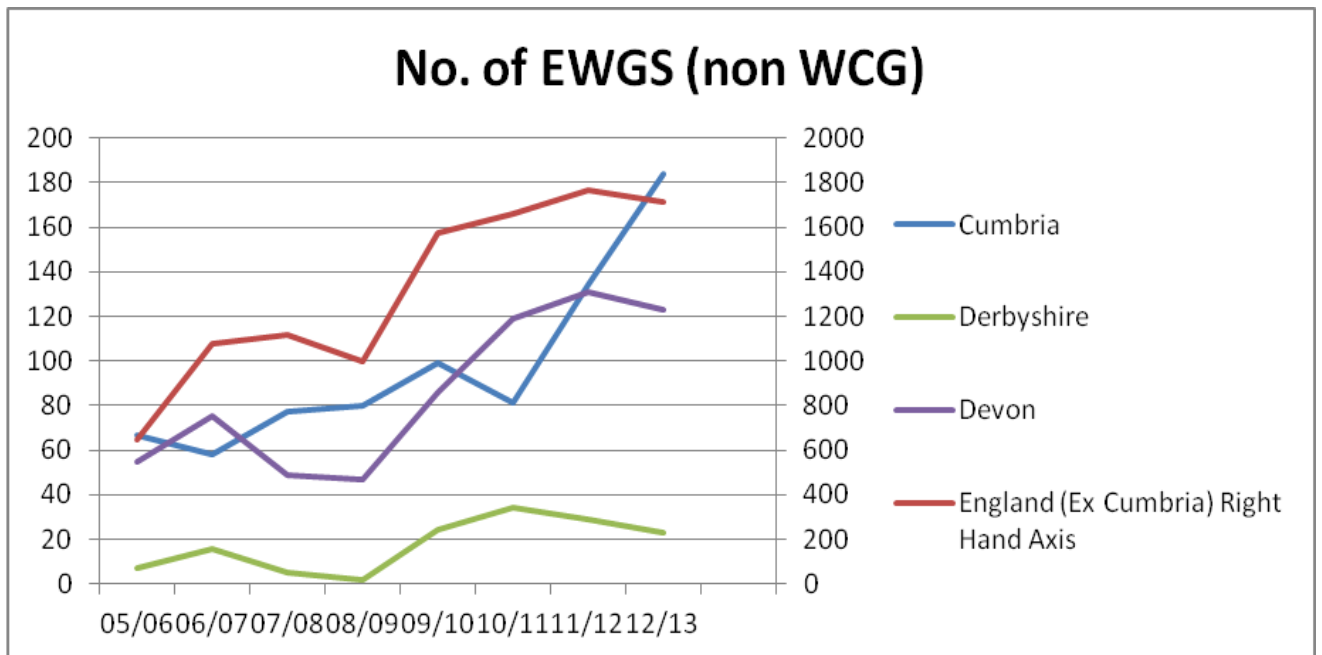


Figure 1: Number of EWGS (ex-WCG)

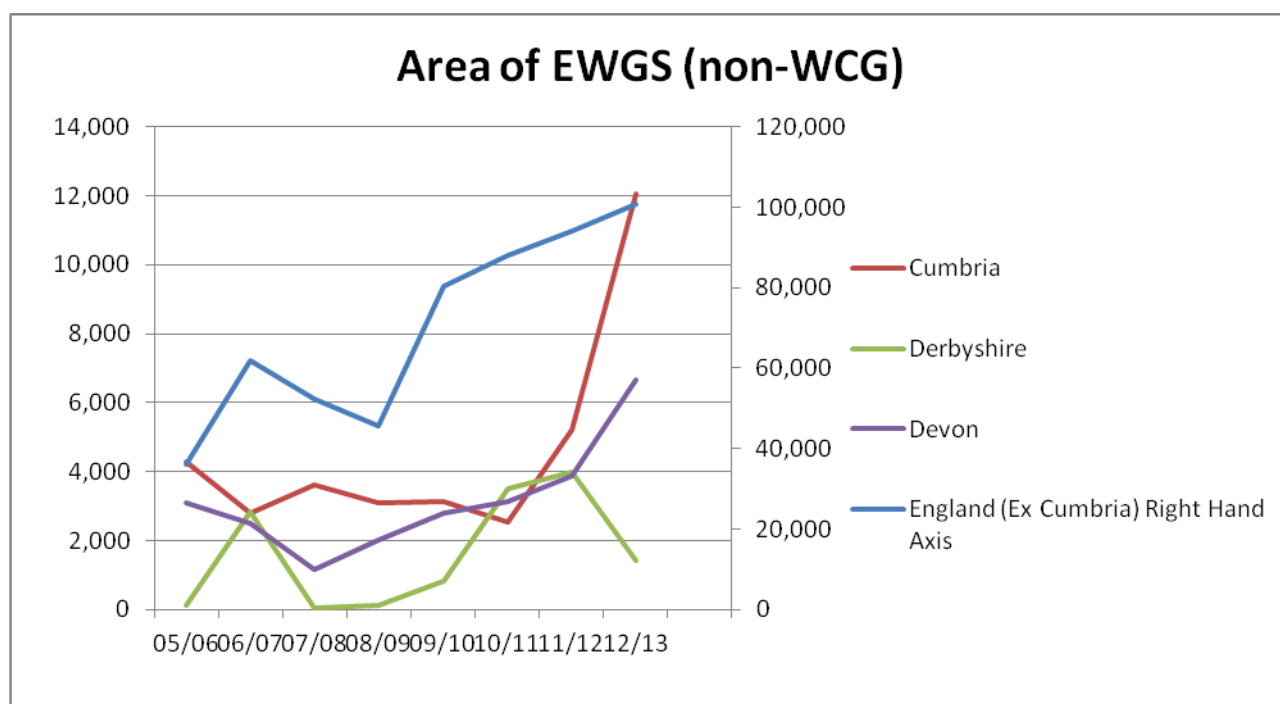


Figure 2: Area of EWGS (ex-WCG)

Figures 1 and 2 show the number and area of EWGS applications in Cumbria, comparable areas (Derbyshire and Devon) and England from 2005/06 to 2012/13 (13/14 has been excluded as it is only a part year) excluding applications for woodland creation (i.e. new planting). Derbyshire and Devon were selected on the basis that they both had similar factors that might affect woodland management to Cumbria in terms of farming types (predominantly pastoral), proportion of less Disadvantaged/Severely Disadvantaged Areas and National Parks and the presence of significant land based tourist industries, but neither had benefitted from integrated forest sector RDPE interventions under the current programme.

Cumbria Woodlands, supported by FC Woodland Officers has identified at least 185 (and the figure is likely to be higher) woodland owners that have entered into a EWGS and/or applied for a felling licence as a direct result of their intervention. Coupled with advisers own feedback on net additionality (4.3.2) indicating out of the 430 beneficiaries in Cumbria that 67% would not have acted without the programme; then this is strong evidence of a causal link between the programme and a significant proportion of the increase in area of EWGS in figures 1 and 2 above.

Of the woodland advisers we interviewed face to face, thirteen (representing at least 351 beneficiaries, or 81%, out of a total of 430 advised) provided us with their views of how many woodland owners would not have gone ahead without the intervention from Cumbria Woodlands. Views on net additionality varied, with the average calculated at 67% or 235 beneficiaries, who would not have acted if it had not been for the Advisory Scheme.

Capital Grant Scheme

Capital Grants were provided by Cumbria Fells and Dales and Solway, Border and Eden LAG's. A wide range of projects were supported, including timber extraction and processing machinery, wood fuel and firewood business creation and expansion, furniture manufacturers, and tourism and education.

Most applicants were new businesses and would have been unable to make the investments that they did without grant aid. A number said they may have gone ahead at a smaller scale or over a longer timeframe.

In total, £1,794,376 was invested in forestry and timber related capital projects (including applicants match funding).

33 FTE jobs were created as a result of the investments, and a further 10 safeguarded. The average cost to date per job created or safeguarded was £42,825 although given the time lag between spends and reporting of outputs this figure will likely be an overestimate.

Discussions with capital grant beneficiaries found a broadly similar experience of the application process. Most commented on the complexity of the process and difficulty in fully understanding the requirements of the scheme, but most had received significant support from business advisers and/or Leader Development Officers.

A feature of this evaluation has been the universally positive feedback on the quality of support provided, and the value of this to what have in the main been micro-businesses with owner operators struggling to find time to complete the necessary forms etc.

Direct links were found between the investments made and management of woodland, in some cases that of the applicant, in others woodland in the locality. A high proportion of investments were related to the firewood and wood fuel sectors, both of which have undergone strong growth in recent years, and applicants reported significant year on year increases in timber usage.

The Skills for the Forest Programme

Objectives

The principal contract documentation for the Skills for the Forest Programme was developed by the Northwest Development Agency (the former RDA that was responsible for the RDPE programme) and the two Cumbria LAGs, in relation to their contractual agreement with the Scottish Agricultural College. There are two contracts, one relating to each of the LAG areas. In the contracts, Cumbria Woodlands is referenced as an 'other delivery partner'. The principal contract has been subject to a number of reviews/amendments and we have been provided with statistical information by Centrifuge from 2012, which we understand is the current position in relation to expenditure and output targets for the SAC contract. Both we and Centrifuge have adopted this as the basis for both of the evaluation exercises.

Within the headline contract, the three stated objectives of the Rural Skills Cumbria programme are:

1. To promote the use of EU and Defra funds in the support of rural businesses and communities.
2. To have created and encouraged a CPD approach to training and Knowledge Transfer in the land based industries in Cumbria, delivering a legacy of improved attitudes to training and development, better targeted interventions and more highly skilled workforce.
3. To have, through presenting new opportunities for business diversification and enhancing competitiveness through increased skills levels, increased business confidence across participating enterprises.

These objectives provide the basis for the evaluation of this element of the programme, to establish the extent to which the investment has delivered against these target outcomes. The type of information we have sought to ascertain during the course of the evaluation has therefore included:

- Has the training provided to the beneficiaries been a 'one-off' or have they continued to improve their skills and knowledge, through attending other rural/forestry skills courses, as a result. And if so, what is the nature of the additional training they have attended? – This reflects point 2) above – has the programme encouraged a CPD approach.
- How have the skills that have been taught been used the rural economy. We are interested to know if the beneficiaries have set up a business, or have been able to enter employment as a direct result of the training provided - i.e. what is the beneficiary doing now and has the training/skills they received made a difference. This relates to the point 3) above – has the programme developed new business opportunities.

Funding and output apportionment

The funding for the Rural Skills Cumbria programme is allocated under Measure 111 and, based on the 2012 budget revisions, can be summarised as follows:

Output	Number	Funding
Number of beneficiaries	5,572	Solway, Border & Eden £597,593
Number of training days received	6,267	Cumbria Fells & Dales £584,674

Schedule 3 to the contract provides a breakdown of the individual components of the Rural Skills Programme, setting out the lead delivery partner and a range of other information. The element of the programme that Cumbria Woodlands is the lead delivery partner for (the Skills for the Forest programme) is summarised in the table below¹.

CW 'lead' projects	Description	SBE			CFD		
		No of ben'res	No of training days	RDPE Cost	No of ben'res	No of training days	RDPE Cost
Vocational training in Forestry (Theme 1)	A programme of vocational courses to provide new and refreshed skills in woodland and forestry management for farmers, foresters and land managers.	300	729	£74,739	300	729	£88,594
Forestry Demonstrations (Theme 2)	A programme of forestry demonstrations at shows, on farms, and with one Forestry Fair.	100	100	£52,725	100	100	£22,595
Woodfuel knowledge transfer – technical support (Theme 3.1)	A programme of mentoring and bespoke technical support for potential woodland users.	70	60	£27,337	70	60	£21,566

Service delivery

Service delivery schedules have been developed and agreed between SAC and Cumbria Woodlands, setting out the description of the activities to be undertaken and the outcomes required from the investment. These are summarised below.

Theme 1 -Vocational Training

The rationale for this intervention is that updated and new skills are required to bring small and undermanaged woodland into management. This will create the opportunity for new employment in the sector and enable expansion within the woodfuel supply chain, through accessibility to greater pool of skilled labour. It would also support the services delivered through the Woodland Advisory Service, providing training to facilitate enhanced activity in the sector.

¹ This is based on the spreadsheet titled '2012 Budget information' provided by Centrifuge which we understand is the latest position regarding expenditure and outputs in the current service delivery contract

The training programme was an opportunity for eligible businesses to improve on existing skills or develop new enterprises within their businesses, with the courses ranging from statutory requirements (pesticides, chainsaws etc) through to woodland management and woodfuel production. Theme 1 has been delivered by Cumbria woodlands through the use of contracted trainers to run the specialist courses.

Theme 2 Forestry Demonstrations

The focus of Theme 2 is to raise awareness of woodland management, harvesting techniques and the use of small-scale equipment in undermanaged small-scale woodlands, to develop the opportunities for bringing wood fuel to market. The interventions have concentrated on attending agricultural shows and fairs, running low-tech on-farm demonstrations, demonstrating machines in typical Cumbrian conditions and the running a forestry fair in 2013.

Theme 3.1 – Wood fuel knowledge transfer

The rationale for this intervention was to support woodland owners and forestry and timber processing businesses to expand their knowledge and skills in relation to the technology within the wood fuel sector, ultimately to improve understanding, enhance the supply chain and open up new opportunities for products and services. The intervention was seeking to create and integrate a firewood supply chain in Cumbria, based on Finnish Mottinetti project, and to enhance knowledge transfer from EU through an overseas study tour and UK delivered training by overseas experts. Realising the benefits of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI), through transferring knowledge and skills from other parts of the EU to Cumbria was also a key objective.

The outputs anticipated from the investment, in addition to those set out in table 4.2 above, included the greater availability of a wood fuel resource, stronger and better skilled businesses - with improved profitability and Gross Value Add (GVA), the increased uptake of wood fuel as a source of heat and an increased number of MCS trained and accredited installers.

Cumbria Woodlands has delivered Theme 3.1 through a contract let to 'Cumbria Action for Sustainability' (CAfS - supported by Danny Frost). This sub-sub contract to the main SAC Rural Skills Cumbria contract was awarded to CAfS to deliver the concept identified as the 'Wood fuel School'. The investment has included £12,000 for specialist mentoring time (based on 30 visits at £400/visit) and also the delivery of specific training events on key elements of the wood fuel sector.

Programme performance

Quantitative outputs

The recording of quantitative outputs is undertaken by Cumbria Woodlands and the information passed to the SAC for collation into a master performance monitoring framework. At this point in the delivery of the wider Rural Skills Cumbria programme, the final performance monitoring framework is not available, but we have been provided with the following:

- A Cumbria Woodlands spreadsheet titled 'Training Skills Programme 7th July 2013', which provides information on the current performance of the programme (as at July 2013), referencing actual and projected outputs.
- A performance monitoring framework (in the form of a spreadsheet) prepared by SAC and provided to us by the SBE LAG, which sets out the output targets and actual performance to date for all the elements of the Rural Skills Cumbria programme. This was prepared in November 2013.

- Information held by Cumbria Woodlands in relation to the delivery of Theme 3.1 by their sub-contractor CAfS, which includes outputs.

Analysis of this information indicates the following:

Theme 1

The data from Cumbria Woodlands (for the period 09/11 – 03/13) indicates there were 106 courses run, 620 beneficiaries and 933 training days. For the period 04/13-07/13, Cumbria Woodlands was projecting this to increase by 43, 372 and 203 respectively, to provide potential total outputs of 149 courses, 992 beneficiaries and 1,136 training days. Reflecting the output targets as set out in Table 4.2, this would indicate that beneficiary output achievement is 165% of target, but the number of training days achieved is only 78% of target.

The SAC performance monitoring framework (dated November 2013) indicates a similar level of beneficiaries, but an increased number of training days achieved of 1,505 which is 103% of target. This later analysis produced by SAC would suggest that Theme 1 has achieved its outputs targets although the spreadsheet does highlight that entries for the period of July-September 2013 (i.e. the Final Claims) are still to be confirmed and approved. We understand that Cumbria Woodlands is in the process of finalising the performance information for SAC.

Theme 2

Cumbria Woodlands has provided information on the beneficiaries of the six Forestry Demonstration events, which were held across the County in the period from August 2012 to March 2013². There were a total of 332 beneficiaries (people attending), which represents 166% of the target output. No data has been captured to reflect the 'training days' output from the demonstration events, but we can adopt reasonable assumptions to arrive at a figure, as follows:

- If we consider that each attendee stays for 4 hours, i.e. 50% of an accredited training day output measure;
- For 332 beneficiaries, that represents 166 training days – 83% of the contracted target of 200.

Theme 3.1

Cumbria Woodlands provided access to the contract documentation folders for the sub-contract with CAfS. This indicates that the training courses and the mentoring has supported 126 beneficiaries (against a target of 140) and delivered 81 training days (against a target of 120 days).

Overall output summary

Based on the information set out above, Table 4.3 summarises the output data currently available.

² Email from Edward Mills dated 25/11/13 with attachment xls 'RDPE Training – demos outputs'

Table 6.3: Output data for the Skills for the Forest programme

CW 'lead' projects	Target		Achieved	
	No of beneficiaries	No of training days	No of beneficiaries	No of training days
Vocational training in Forestry (Theme 1)	600	1,458	942	1,505
Forestry Demonstrations (Theme 2)	200	200	332	166
Wood fuel knowledge transfer (Theme 3.1)	140	120	126	81

Qualitative findings

The evaluation has captured qualitative beneficiary feedback from two sources:

- From the survey monkey electronic survey that has been designed with Centrifuge and distributed by Cumbria Woodlands. The survey has requested beneficiaries to set out the impact that the training has made on them, for example, if they were unemployed, have they now managed to find a job within the forestry sector in Cumbria? Or, if they were a business owner, has the training helped them to grow the business and by how much? A full copy of the survey is included as an Appendix to this report.
- A review of the qualitative feedback that beneficiaries of the training courses and the mentoring programme run under Theme 3.1 through the CAfS contract have provided.

Beneficiary survey findings

The online survey was distributed to 385 beneficiaries by Cumbria Woodlands and a further reminder was several days prior to the survey deadline. In total there were 45 responses, which represent 12% of those asked to participate. The level of response in quantitative terms is low and as evaluators we should not place significant emphasis on the findings, but they do raise some interesting responses in terms of the direct impact that attending a training event had. These are summarised below:

- The breakdown of beneficiary status included those that were already employed in the farming/forestry sector (33%), woodland owners (20%), leisure/personal (17%) and those that either ran a farm or a contracting business (15%).
- Five of the respondees were unemployed at the time of their training, but they did have experience in the farming and forestry sector. Of those five, two subsequently secured employment and three set up a business – as a direct result of the training received.
- Of those employed in farming/forestry, four stated that the training had enabled them to set up a business.
- For those who ran businesses, they all stated that the training had made no difference to the performance of the business.
- For the woodland owners, seven said their knowledge of woodland management had increased, two said that they now manage their woodlands whereas they hadn't before and five also said they had benefitted from the Woodland Advisory Service.

- For those that engaged as leisure/personal interest, eight said they have used the training to manage their woodland more effectively.
- In terms of the impact of the training on continued personal development, 48% have subsequently undertaken other training or personal development in the farming/forestry sectors, as a result of going on the course.
- There has been evidence of liked activity across the three strands of the programme with 26% of those that responded saying they had also accessed the Woodland Advisory Service and six had accessed support from other agencies as a result of going on the course.

Beneficiaries of Theme 3.1

Cumbria Woodlands provided 114 response forms that had been completed by beneficiaries of the Wood fuel School training events. As part of this evaluation, we have reviewed and collated these forms and the results can be summarised as follows:

- 76% said the course scored 8,9 or 10 in terms of 'usefulness' – with 10 being the max score.
- 21% said the course was 'inspirational' and 79% simply informative
- 34% said the course had 'greatly' increased their knowledge and understanding; and
- 88% said they wanted further information on the Training events run under Theme 1 and the Woodland Advisory Scheme.

We were also provided with feedback forms for nine individual beneficiaries that had benefitted from the 'mentoring' advice provided as part of the Woodfuel School. This included the following comments:

- Supported me with professional business planning – I learnt about cash flow.
- Big factor in us getting a grant – support with the application process.
- Useful external viewpoint on key objectives, options and ideas.
- Valuable advice on how to improve drying time for logs.
- Good contacts and networking opportunities provided.
- Helped us establish the business, secure £250,000 grant and create 7 FTEs.
- Very grateful and would not have applied for the LEADER grant without this, which has helped diversify the business.
- Brilliant – holistic approach from business skills to practical support.

Programme impact

In terms of impact, the target outputs of the three elements of the Skills for the Forest programme have been largely achieved or exceeded (subject to the final verification of the claims submitted by Cumbria Woodlands/SAC to the LAGs). The Wood fuel School (Theme 3.1) is likely to remain under-target, but, overall, the programme is likely to be close to delivering the required targets.

In terms of performance against the stated objectives, then the online survey has provided evidence of both continuing personal development (ongoing training – objective 2) and also economic benefits (objective 3) - with specific reference to the training leading to beneficiaries securing employment or setting up businesses. It is challenging to state this has been a core outcome from the programme (given the limited response to the survey) but from the sample that responded c10% secured employment or set up a business as a result of the training, then scaled up across the programme that would create a significantly positive outcome.

The online survey did ask those that ran a business to comment on the difference in monetary/turnover terms that the training had made – to see if we could establish any findings in relation to GVA. The limited overall response rate and the lack of response in relation to that particular question have meant that this has not been possible.

The feedback from the beneficiaries of the Wood fuel School has been positive, particularly the response to the mentoring programme. It was interesting to note that the CAfS as the delivery agent for this element of the programme requested in late 2012 that remaining budgets were utilised to deliver additional mentoring – as opposed to further training courses, recognising the difficulties they had encountered in attracting attendees to the training courses (as referenced in the underperforming ‘training day’ targets). Whilst this didn’t happen in this instance, it supports the findings that we have uncovered in evaluations of other business support programmes that effective business mentors are highly valued by beneficiaries and, based on the response forms we have seen, this appears to have been the case with the Wood fuel School programme.

Strategic Added Value

Stakeholder feedback to date has been universally supportive of the programme and of Cumbria Woodlands as a delivery organisation. During discussions it became clear that the programme was delivering directly against an identified un-met need and was a significant driver in terms of helping owners recognise the value of woodlands in the broadest sense and the need to provide active management. More importantly, the programme and Cumbria Woodlands was delivering a key service that the core government agencies (particularly the Forestry Commission) simply do not have the manpower to support. The ability for the Commission to pass enquiries onto Cumbria Woodlands has undoubtedly led to a greater level of woodland management in Cumbria than would otherwise have been the case. Cumbria Woodlands has therefore been a key agent in delivering the core objectives of the 2013 Government Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement and earlier strategies.

Cumbria Woodlands was recognised by stakeholders (and all woodland advisers) as the obvious lead for programmes of this type, being well known and trusted among woodland owners, advisers, statutory agencies, contractors and the general public. The organisation was seen as adding significant value to woodland management in Cumbria but that it suffered from the feast/famine dichotomy of funding – either being busy delivering, having to chase the next round of funding or waiting for new funding rounds to develop as in the next 2014/20 RDP.

Strategic Linkages

Although there is significant anecdotal evidence of cross fertilisation throughout the programme in terms, for example; of woodland advisers referring clients for wood fuel advice or advice service beneficiaries going on training programmes, there is no direct quantitative data that measures this effectively.

Determining the benefits of a comprehensive package of support to the forestry sector in Cumbria was a priority for the evaluation process. This has been undertaken by:

- discussing use of training/advisory/business support facilities with Capital Grant recipients and woodland advisers
- including a question in the training beneficiary survey
- reviewing beneficiary lists for each intervention type

The beneficiary information contained within the data for each element has varied e.g. by individual, business name, employee and so forth and this has restricted the ability to identify linkages other than through anecdotal evidence. Given the importance of this matter as a strategic intervention objective, this an area that we consider merits further attention and we refer to this further in the lessons learnt section.

Renewable Heat Incentive

We requested from OFGEM data on use of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) in Cumbria. The following data has been obtained.

Technology Type	Count	Payments	
		2013/14	2012/13
		£	£
Medium Solid Biomass Boiler	9	101,676	29,680
Small Solid Biomass Boiler	95	219,653	77,348
Ground Source Heat Pump (GSHP)*	4	12,368	512
Solar Thermal*	3	57	1
* provided for comparison		333,754	107,541

We needed to consider how to attribute a proportion of this data to the programme as this would provide direct evidence of beneficiaries moving away from traditional means of heating such as oil and gas to renewable sources with consequent savings to their business. One of the evaluation team met with a WAS beneficiary (a hotelier) at a networking event and identified that the advice received helped him to invest in a £400k biomass boiler for heating and hot water that was expected to pay back the investment in 3-4 years.

We have conducted a telephone survey of all the wood fuel advisory clients identified by Cumbria Woodlands (59 beneficiaries) and to date we have been able to establish data from 39 of these or 67%. Some further data is expected as some beneficiaries are currently unavailable.

What is most obviously apparent is the number of beneficiaries that at this stage have not proceeded with any form of biomass boiler; mainly due to factors such as the capital cost of boiler installation and/or fears that the cost of wood fuel will rise and render the installation uneconomic over its lifetime. Out of 39 respondents 20 (51%) have not gone ahead with an installation at this stage.

Of those 19 that have proceeded, we have been able to identify a collective annual RHI income of just over £85,000, with an estimated saving in fossil fuel monetary purchases of just over £46,000. In terms of biomass volume, these 19 estimate that they will consume 579 tonnes of wood fuel annually.

Cumbria Woodlands has therefore been instrumental in assisting close to 20% of the clients in Cumbria that OFGEM has identified as in receipt of RHI; although this number is likely to increase over the next two years as more clients commit. In terms of RHI payments, as a broad measure, Cumbria Woodlands have assisted clients to achieve in the region of 38% of RHI payments for the county, calculated as an average across the years 2013/14 and 2012/13.

Benefits to Woodland Advisers

There has been some significant development of woodland advisor businesses as a result of the programme; particularly marked in terms of developing on-going client relationships and introducing clients to the benefits of advice and valuing it enough to pay full fees. To an extent this can be seen as a significant output to the programme.

Too often public sector support programmes when providing subsidised advice tend to 'fall off the cliff' unless they are replaced immediately by another similar programme. In this case there is strong evidence that this programme has introduced new clients to woodland advice and provided

significant value; enough to persuade beneficiaries to continue without support. Of course part of may be the motivation of a commercial return that beneficiaries have identified within their woodland, but this in turn means that their asset is now under more active management; a key outcome for the programme.

It is this evaluation finding that leads us to recommendations for future programmes such as tapering support as clients demand more advice, thereby weaning them off public sector support as they become more aware of the economic benefits of the advice in terms of woodland management.

Benefits to the Forestry Commission

As referred to earlier there is evidence of clear benefit to the Forestry Commission in the implementation of the various elements of the programme. In addition to the significant increase in take up of EWGS, which in turn contributes to the FC's Corporate Plan Indicator No. 2 (Improvement), Woodland Officers have reported tangible benefit in being able to refer woodland owners to Cumbria Woodlands for more detailed advice and support. The Forestry Commission, in common with many public sector agencies, does not have the resources to fully meet all requests for advice from woodland owners, many of whom express a preference, at least initially, for what they see to be impartial advice³.

Thus the ability to refer these owners to Cumbria Woodlands for initial guidance and onward referral to a WAS advisor has both enabled the enquiry to be met in a manner more likely to result in a positive outcome and for the Woodland Officer to focus on the processing of grant applications and other core business. In addition, Woodland Officers dealing with EWGS and Felling Licence applications have been able to refer the applicant to Cumbria Woodlands where they perceive there is a need for additional guidance, supplementing of skills or contact with appropriate contractors.

Supply Chain (Woodland Advisers & Contractors)

Although anecdotal, there is a strong base of evidence that suggests there are too few well qualified and experienced woodland advisers in place at present to support a much enlarged programme of support. Many advisers reported that they had to take themselves off the list, either temporarily or permanently, as they were being referred too many clients by the programme. Most are micro-businesses so are unable to readily expand by recruiting more staff, as the first employee would effectively double their work-force. In any event recruits able to operate at the same level are rare, either working for themselves or already employed by large forestry businesses.

In addition, advisers highlighted the lack of woodland and forestry contractors of appropriate size and expertise with the capacity to absorb the work they could refer; the good ones were already busy and often did not possess the staff or equipment to allow them to expand in a controlled manner. This is particularly the case for work such as judicious thinning of hardwoods, which is labour intensive and where processing and distribution is required to provide a reasonable market for this wood.

This fact is supported by the evaluation carried out earlier this year by Adam Wellings and Martin Glynn for Forestry Commission East and East Midlands. This found that contractors lacked good quality capital equipment able to cope with expansion and often lacked the cash resources to be able to expand. The Micro Enterprise Grant offered in this region, with grants starting at £2,500 at a 50% intervention rate allowed very small contractors to invest in equipment such as forwarders,

³ Analysis of the potential effects of various influences and interventions on woodland management and creation decisions, using a segmentation model to categorise sub-groups. Defra/FC 2013

cranes, low-ground pressure tractors and processors that in many cases gave them the spur to double the turnover of their businesses.

Estate Management

As previously mentioned, the programme has brought the woodland controlled by a number of large estates into management and in many cases this has encompassed the boundary between the support offered by the Forestry Commission and Natural England and a number have involved sensitive sites. Although there may be an assumption that estates are actively managed, it is apparent that a number that benefitted from the programme were family or charitable trusts and that ownership did not necessarily mean that the beneficiaries were in-situ. Management could therefore be left in the hands of others and tend to be more reactive.

The cost to the programme for these significant wins in terms of woodland management has been no more than four days of supported time (a Silver Birch and three Oak Days); the results however have been significant.

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

Our evaluation of the programme has been a uniformly positive experience. We have heard, observed and investigated many good accounts of how the investments made have led to increased woodland management, additional economic activity and wider benefits to Cumbria's environment and communities. The clear linkages between elements of the programme are what have made the programme unique in England and have led to many of these benefits. In addition, the quality of support and guidance offered by staff of all the agencies involved has enabled beneficiaries to focus on their businesses and overcome barriers to progress. It is against this background that we make the following observations and recommendations.

We suggest that in terms of good practise for the future that any new programme should include the following:

The development of a monitoring and evaluation framework at the start of the process;

A 'map' of the likely linkages that the programme will help to grow and foster;

An initial filter process to ensure the beneficiary 'status' and reason for requesting a WAS visit meets the primary objectives of WAS as set out in the contract;

A beneficiary financial contribution, which would have the effect of levering more advice for the same funding, weeding out those that were not serious; acclimatising client to paying the 'right fee for the right advice' and valuing the expertise of woodland advisers;

Marketing the service to estates of all types could provide an opportunity to capture significant areas of existing woodland as well as scope for woodland creation on a strategic scale;

That training surveys are carried out on a regular basis approximately 2-weeks following and that the questioning is framed in a way that data can be aggregated and that is aimed at outcomes and strategic linkages;

What has been made clear from this programme is that the starting point under the Woodland Advice Programme has been a fundamental question for the most owners; '*what do you wish to achieve from your woodland*' in the context of wider holding or interests? It is far more effective to determine, through the support of a mentor, what the appropriate course of action is and then seek to secure support for that approach.

Summary of Programme Impacts

The purpose of the programme, as set out in the evaluation brief, is *to grow the supply chain and bring woodlands into management*. In that context, in ‘headline’ terms the programme has had a significant impact – it has brought 430 woodland owners into a support programme and we estimate that in excess of two-thirds of these are net additional (i.e. they wouldn’t have become involved in the concept of woodland management without the programme).

It has also engaged with in excess of 1,400 beneficiaries on training and skill development and delivered circa 1,750 training days to those individuals. The feedback available from the training programme indicates high levels of satisfaction and also evidence of job creation and new business formation as a result.

Our discussions with the woodlands advisers have generated an estimate that the net additionality of the service is 67%. If this is compared to other public sector net additionality rates for investment at the sub-regional level, then this is a very positive finding. The research, which was undertaken through the analysis of the evaluations of mainstream RDA interventions, indicated that the average net additionality for a ‘programme’ intervention is 52.5% and specifically for enterprise support programmes is 43%.

In relation to the training interventions through the Skills for the Forest programme, the beneficiary survey did produce 45 responses and two of those responding did say that the training they went on directly enabled them to move from unemployment into a job within the sector. That represents 4.5% of the sample that responded and, if that was proportioned across the survey sample of 385, there could potentially be 17 jobs created as a result of the training interventions.

Given that there is evidence that the programme has also created a number of new businesses (seven from the survey sample of 45) then we would surmise that if a more extensive database of outputs from the beneficiaries was available, there is the prospect that the level of new employment and new businesses created represents an efficient use of public funds.