

# AFAG805

## Training and certification

AFAG is the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) national Arboriculture and Forestry Advisory Group, consisting of representatives from leading organisations involved in the 'tree work' industry. It exists to agree and produce guidance describing good practice for the tree-work industry.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance as illustrating good practice.

### Introduction

This leaflet is intended to help employers and the self-employed identify the training and, where necessary, the assessment requirements for tree-work operatives. Although it is focused on the tree-work industry, the principles described can be used for other associated industries where the same operations are carried out. It will also help clients ensure that their contractors are suitably qualified.

It includes AFAG advice on entry-level qualifications, the need to consolidate training, and recording career progression.

Tree work can be a high-risk activity and workers are often required to operate in remote areas with difficult terrain and in all weathers. Effective training is an essential requirement for ensuring this work is carried out both safely and efficiently.

AFAG leaflets contain advice on a number of specific machines and processes related to the tree-work industry and those relevant to the intended work activity should be read in conjunction with this leaflet.

### Terminology

This guidance on training and certification includes terms such as 'certificate of competence' and 'integrated training and assessment' that are widely known and used within the industry. However, they may differ from those terms used in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). To prevent confusion these terms are retained in this guidance but, where used, they apply to the appropriate training and assessment units awarded under QCF.

# Legal requirements

1 Workers must be adequately trained and competent to carry out their job safely. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 places general duties on employers and the self-employed to provide health and safety training and information (see INDG345 *Health and safety training*).

2 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to provide health and safety training for workers, when:

- they first start work, ie induction training;
- they are exposed to new or increased risks;
- they require refresher training – this is recommended at specific intervals for certain high-risk activities, eg operating machinery, including chainsaws; and
- a supervisor identifies specific weaknesses in an operator's abilities.

3 Employers must provide this training during working hours and employees must not have to pay for it.

4 Managers and supervisors must:

- accept they have a responsibility to manage health and safety;
- recognise that health and safety is part of effective management, good for business; and
- take action to ensure high standards of health and safety.

5 A number of regulations, including the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) and the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 (COPR), also require users of equipment to receive adequate training.

6 Generally, the responsibility for providing relevant training rests with the employer or self-employed person. However, the responsibility for deciding the level of training and competencies required for certain worksites falls to the person commissioning the work (eg on a large forestry worksite, the forestry work manager (FWM) would take on this role; on a local authority site, the commissioning council employee or agent).

# Provision of training

## Planning

7 To ensure that operators have received appropriate training, identify:

- the work activities to be carried out;
- the equipment to be used; and
- any future changes, new contract requirements, and business activities.

8 Identify:

- the individual's existing competencies and experience; and
- the evidence you have to support this.

9 Record operator competencies and experience to:

- help identify future training needs;
- help with work planning and the allocation of operators to given work operations; and
- show clients the range of available skilled operators, and work activities you can complete.

## Delivery

10 Ensure that the training provided:

- is adequate and appropriate to the level of complexity of the work involved; and
- covers the information, instruction and guidance needed to work safely and productively, in the given working environment.

11 Identify whether assessment following training is required, who can deliver the training and, where required, who can assess the operator's ability.

12 Assess the competency of any person nominated to provide training, using either an internal or external resource as appropriate. Ensure the individual has sufficient technical and theoretical knowledge and practical skills relevant to:

- the operational activity, equipment, subject area;
- any applicable good practice guidance, relevant legislation, Approved Code of Practice (ACOP), and contract standards; and

has the communication skills to be able to impart the necessary information in a manner appropriate to the individual learners, and in a range of learning styles/methods.

13 External sources that may be able to provide appropriate training include independent training providers, instructors and colleges.

14 Familiarisation/induction training describes very basic introductory training, often delivered by machinery dealers or suppliers. While these introductions have value and may be used as evidence of operator training, they should not be regarded as adequate to show an operator's competence on their own.

## Assessment

15 It is important to assess an individual's level of competence to confirm the adequacy of training, eg by observing them carrying out an activity, within a set time, to a recognised and appropriate standard.

16 The tree-work industry represented on AFAG has expressed a preference for independent assessments of operator competence, ie separated from any training, to ensure impartiality for certain higher risk tasks.

## Records

17 Record employees' training (and assessment where relevant), competencies and experience ie continuing professional development (CPD). Unless training is recorded, and records are accessible, an operator's skill, knowledge and experience (proficiency) can be difficult to evidence. Clients often ask for proof of operator competence before awarding contracts.

18 AFAG recommends that records are kept of the content of any briefings, instruction, guidance and assessment.

## Experience

19 Experience may be gained in many ways, eg by:

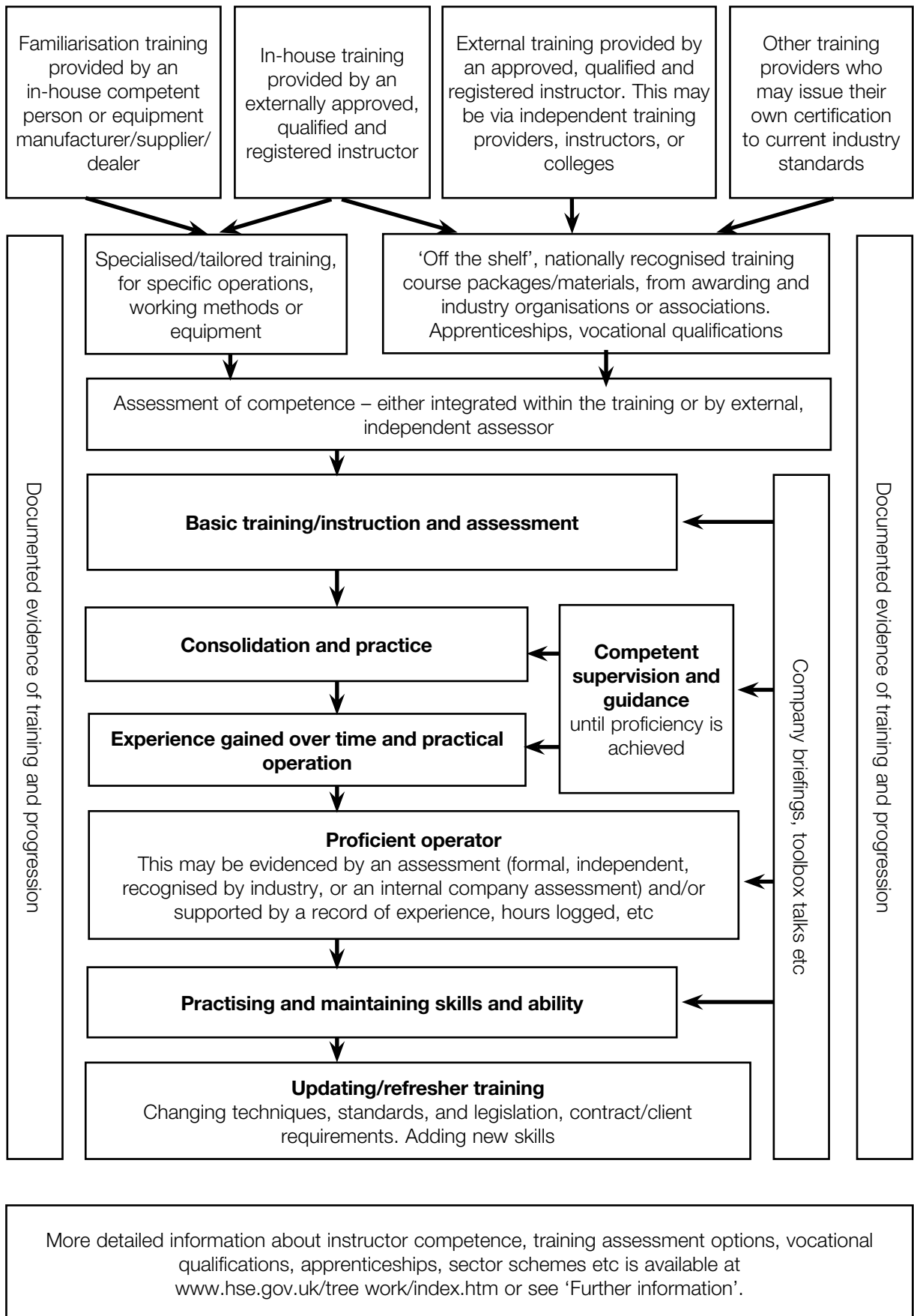
- practising the operational skills over time;
- completing both basic and more advanced training; and
- learning from personal trial, observations, work colleagues and supervisors.

20 Appropriate and skilled supervision is required during learning periods. A record of supervision should be kept, for example by completing the relevant AFAG checklist. (See 'Further reading' at the end of this guide.)

## Competence and proficiency

21 Competence can be described in two main ways and it is important that these are not confused:

- **Basic competence:** The ability, skills and knowledge required to enable an individual to complete simple tasks safely, within a set time frame and to a number of agreed and recognised criteria or standards, eg certificates of competence. Holders of such certificates do not generally require close supervision; however, ongoing monitoring of operating standards by the employer will be required, and should be recorded. It is unrealistic to expect operators who have passed certificates of competence to achieve full output (proficiency) until they have consolidated the skills learned.
- **Proficiency:** Includes the above and follows a period of practical experience (defined by the employer). It shows the ability of an individual to maintain their own safety and the safety of others during the completion of more complex activities, to a high standard and in an efficient manner. Minimal but ongoing monitoring of operating standards by the employer will be required, and should be recorded, eg by completion of AFAG checklists (see also paragraph 20: 'Experience' and paragraph 32: 'Consolidation of training').



**Figure 1** Training, instruction, assessment and progression (this information should be taken into consideration when planning operator training)

22 AFAG recognises that in practice, operator training is likely to involve a combination of in-house, college-based or specialist training, including nationally recognised courses.

23 Due to the high-risk nature of many forestry and arboriculture operations it is strongly recommended that specialist instructors carry out the training for these activities.

24 In-house, college or independent training should provide training that is mapped to National Occupational Standards (NOS) approved by industry. This means that detailed records need to be kept to show who provided the training (including their level of competence), what the training consisted of, its duration and how it was carried out. Training providers will need post-course monitoring of competence and a system of quality assurance to verify that adequate standards are maintained.

25 For certain forestry and arboriculture operations, eg use of chainsaws and forest machine operation, independent assessment is recommended to confirm that **the minimum level of training** has been completed, fully understood and the appropriate skills developed.

### Chainsaws and aerial tree work

26 For professional chainsaw operators working in forestry and arboriculture, AFAG recommends that the minimum level of adequacy of training for chainsaw operations – including aerial tree work, pruning and dismantling – be confirmed by an independent assessment, leading to a recognised certificate of competence in the relevant activities. This is also a common requirement in contracts of service.

27 AFAG recommends that chainsaw operators working outside forestry and arboriculture at a basic level (defined as ‘occasional users’) attend an integrated training and assessment (ITA) course. This applies to the operations of chainsaw maintenance, basic cross-cutting, and felling material up to 200 mm diameter. This will be recognised as meeting the requirements of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998.

28 AFAG recommends that occasional users wishing to fell material over 200 mm diameter hold a regulated certificate of competence in the relevant activities.

### Other operations

29 The level of risk should always be assessed in each situation. For certain machinery operations, such as using brush cutters, chippers, stump grinders and mobile elevated work platforms (MEWPs), AFAG recommends that operators choose between either an ITA course or an independently assessed training course.

### Status of non-UK training and certification

30 Employers of workers from outside the UK should ensure that their level of training and competence meets the standard as described above. Where employers are not able to do this themselves AFAG recommends that independent assessment will provide this assurance.

# Consolidation of training

31 AFAG recognises that gaining basic training and a certificate of competence should only be seen as an entry into the tree-work industry; the training and development process lasts throughout an entire career. The initial step following entry-level training is consolidation of the training, which is usually in the form of a probationary period operating under supervision among qualified and experienced colleagues.

32 Only when newly qualified tree workers have demonstrated their ability and experience over a length of time should they be considered as fully proficient and qualified. The length of this period will vary according to the individual, but AFAG's advice is that six months is likely to be a minimum. A record should be kept of their work and tasks completed. It is the responsibility of the tree worker and their employer to keep this record (for example by the use of AFAG checklists) to demonstrate their experience and developing levels of proficiency.

# Update or refresher training

33 There is a risk that when tree workers spend time on other tasks, their proficiency can lapse. This, along with the introduction of new techniques, brings with it a need for refresher and update training at various stages in the tree worker's career. This occasional further training should add value to the tree worker's growing skills and experience and provide a structure for staff development.

34 In general, proficient tree workers who regularly practise their skills in the presence of colleagues and employers will require training less often. However, advances in technology may justify specific update training, and certain trained skills such as first aid and aerial rescue will need specific, regular practice and updating. For chainsaws, INDG317 *Chainsaws at work* recommends that refresher/update training takes place every three to five years. This can often be incorporated as part of training for more advanced skills. It is important to record and plan for refresher/update training and the employer must record the structure of the training received by the tree worker based on the type of work undertaken.

35 For most machinery operations, including chainsaw and aerial tree work, AFAG recommends that recorded refresher/update training should take place at least every five years. However, where a supervisor identifies specific weaknesses in an operator's abilities, this will need to be addressed, irrespective of the date of previous training.

# Further information

Further advice on training and certification can be obtained from a number of sources including colleges and the following organisations:

- City & Guilds Land Based Services (formerly NPTC) is a nationally recognised awarding organisation, providing certificates of competence [www.nptc.org.uk](http://www.nptc.org.uk)
- Lantra Awards is a nationally recognised awarding organisation providing training and qualifications in the land based and environmental sector [www.lantra-awards.co.uk](http://www.lantra-awards.co.uk)

## Sources of funds for training and certification

The system for funding training is complex and changing. Lantra Sector Skills Council, your local agricultural college, or your training provider can advise whether you might be eligible to access funds. Funding advice organisations include:

- Lantra Sector Skills Council [www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)
- National Apprenticeship Service [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)
- Skills Funding Agency <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk>
- Business Link [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

## Evaluation of foreign certificates

National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (NARIC)  
[www.naric.org.uk](http://www.naric.org.uk)

## General information

Arboricultural Association [www.trees.org.uk](http://www.trees.org.uk)  
Confederation of Forest Industries (ConFor) [www.confor.org.uk](http://www.confor.org.uk)  
Forestry Commission [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)  
Forestry Contracting Association [www.fcuk.com](http://www.fcuk.com)  
Institute of Chartered Foresters [www.charteredforesters.org](http://www.charteredforesters.org)

## Further reading

Leaflets in the AFAG series, covering a wide range of practical operations:  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/forindex.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/forindex.htm)

(Please note that each AFAG Guide is designed to be used as a checklist of good practice for operators on site and completed checklists can provide an excellent record of operator monitoring.)

*First aid at work: Your questions answered* Leaflet INDG214(rev1) HSE Books 2009 (priced packs of 15 ISBN 978 0 7176 6372 9) [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg214.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg214.pdf)

*Managing health and safety in forestry* Leaflet INDG294(rev1) HSE Books 2003 (priced packs of 5 ISBN 978 0 7176 2717 2) [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg294.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg294.pdf)

*Chainsaws at work* Leaflet INDG317(rev1) HSE Books 2006 (priced packs of 15 ISBN 978 0 7176 6187 9) [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg317.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg317.pdf)



*Health and safety training: What you need to know* Leaflet INDG345 HSE Books 2001 (priced packs of 15 ISBN 978 0 7176 2137 8) [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.pdf)

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