



**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Forestry Knowledge Transfer Group Scheme 2019 Review



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**Forestry Division
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine**

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1 Background

- 1.1. As part of the Forestry Programme 2014-2020, the Department introduced some measures to target challenges to the forestry sector and to develop and promote a forestry culture in Ireland. One of these measures was to extend the Knowledge Transfer model to Forestry. A lack of forest management knowledge amongst a significant proportion of private forest owners was recognised as a substantial barrier to timber mobilisation. In 2017, the Department provided funding for a pilot Forestry Knowledge Transfer Scheme for 270 private forest owners in four groups. The pilot study was successfully completed in March 2018 and a national scheme was launched in May 2018, followed by another national scheme in 2019. Forestry Knowledge Transfer Group Schemes run for one year each.
- 1.2. This review of the 2019 Forestry Knowledge Transfer Group Scheme was conducted to evaluate the degree to which the objectives of the Scheme, set out in the Scheme's Terms and Conditions, were met and to identify areas of improvement for future Forestry Knowledge Transfer Group Schemes (FKTG Schemes).

2 Scheme Objectives

The aim of the Forestry Knowledge Transfer Group Scheme (FKTG Scheme) is to increase the level of forest management activities among participating forest owners. The scheme targets those that require additional knowledge to enable them to undertake one or more management activities in their forests. The FKTG Scheme will provide them with the knowledge they require to manage their own forest, thus mobilising their timber resource, securing a valuable income from the crop and releasing the resource onto the market.

3 Benefits (inter alia)

- Increase awareness among participants of the value of their forest;
- Inform owners how to actively manage their forest;
- Improve understanding of timber and biomass sales;
- Bring owner into contact with the forest industry;
- Better management of forests increasing productivity, incomes, etc.

4 Scheme Outline

- 4.1. Groups consist of up to 20 forest owners, meeting at seven learning events. A group is managed by an organiser with administrative assistance. The organiser engages a facilitator who leads the events, assists the organiser, manages the subjects and group discussions, provides information, and ensures that relevant documentation, such as participants' sheets, are completed and returned to the administrator. All facilitators are foresters with a recognised qualification in forestry. Participants are forest owners or one of joint owners. All forest owners are eligible to participate, irrespective of their forest currently being grant funded under the Forestry Programmes. All participants are recommended to have a nominee to attend in the participant's absence.

- 4.2. The group as a whole sets their own learning agenda, which includes mandatory subjects (see list in Appendix 1) along with whatever optional subjects they wish to cover. The group can decide to have up to three outdoor events, such as a trip to a site or a saw mill, out of the total of seven learning events.

5 Application Procedure

- 5.1. Organisers make an application to host a FKTG, providing requested information on their personal experience, experience of holding similar groups and what they are willing to offer the KTG. Once the application period is closed, the applications are assessed. Marks are allocated with a minimum requirement to achieve 60 marks out of 100, to be considered. Qualifying applications are considered on the basis of those that achieve the highest marks first and so on down the list. Once the initial awarding of marks is complete, groups are allocated, up to the budget allocation. This may result in some groups being allocated fewer groups than applied for. The 2019 scheme terms and conditions allowed for organisers to apply to host up to five groups.
- 5.2. Organisers must have a management committee and, once approved, allocate places to potential participants up to a maximum of 20 per group allocated. A co-ordination meeting is required to take place between the organiser, facilitator, administrator, the Department, and Teagasc before the first group meeting takes place. The allocation of participants to individual groups and the venue for the first group meeting are confirmed at this co-ordination meeting. At the first regular group meeting, participants agree on the FKTG schedule which includes the date, time, location and topics to be covered by the FKTG.

6 Payments

An organiser is paid a maximum of €6,500 per group. Participants receive €70 per meeting attended, to a maximum of seven meetings. Minimum attendance is four meetings for participants. The maximum participant payment is therefore €490. Participant payments are made at the end of the FKTG Scheme after all meetings have taken place and the organisers have returned the required supporting documentation. Organiser payments are only made once organisers have provided evidence of payment to participants.

7 Inspections

Every group can expect at least one inspection from a district inspector. In addition, administrative inspections are carried out on between 5%-10% of the groups, based on a risk assessment. The district inspectors have their own inspection SOP. An inspection report is completed following each inspection.

8 2019 Scheme Operation and Outcomes

- 8.1. The 2019 Scheme was launched at the end of May, with a deadline for receipt of applications by end June 2019. These were then assessed, and 37 groups were approved at the beginning of July. Meetings started from August and due to the requirement that all payments had to be made before the end of 2019, the last meeting for all groups was required to take place before 15th November. While the timeframe for organising meetings was longer than during the 2018 scheme, starting meetings from August with the requirement to have all meetings finished by mid-November provided a challenge for some groups. However, all groups managed to complete their meeting schedules in time and all participant and organiser payments, with the exception to 2 organiser payments, could be made by the end of 2019. At the end of 2019, 36 groups comprising 598 participants were eligible to be paid.
- 8.2. A requirement of the scheme is that the number of groups approved is divided equally between forestry companies and forest producer groups. The approval process of initial applications followed this principle. The actual take-up of groups shows that this equal distribution nearly carried through to the groups that were implemented. The actual take-up is outside the control of the Department.

9 2018 and 2019 Schemes Results

- 9.1. An evaluation of feedback from participants against scheme objectives (see section 1 above) has been carried out for both 2018 and 2019 FK TG schemes. As illustrated in table 1 below, in 2018, 96% of KTG participants reported that they would undertake activities as a result of having attended the group meetings. Over half of participants will apply the gained knowledge in their forests and approximately 60% will consider later clearfell as a direct result of the knowledge gained. In addition, 17% of participants have submitted an application for forestry licence or grant since having completed their KTG at the end of 2018.
- 9.2. This compares with 92% of participants in the 2019 KTGs having reported that they are planning to undertake activities in their forests as a result of the knowledge gained through the KTG in particular in relation to thinning and felling (50% of participants), as illustrated in table 3.
- 9.3. These results show that the FK TG schemes in both years 2018 and 2019 have led to an increase in the level of forest management activities among participating forest owners.

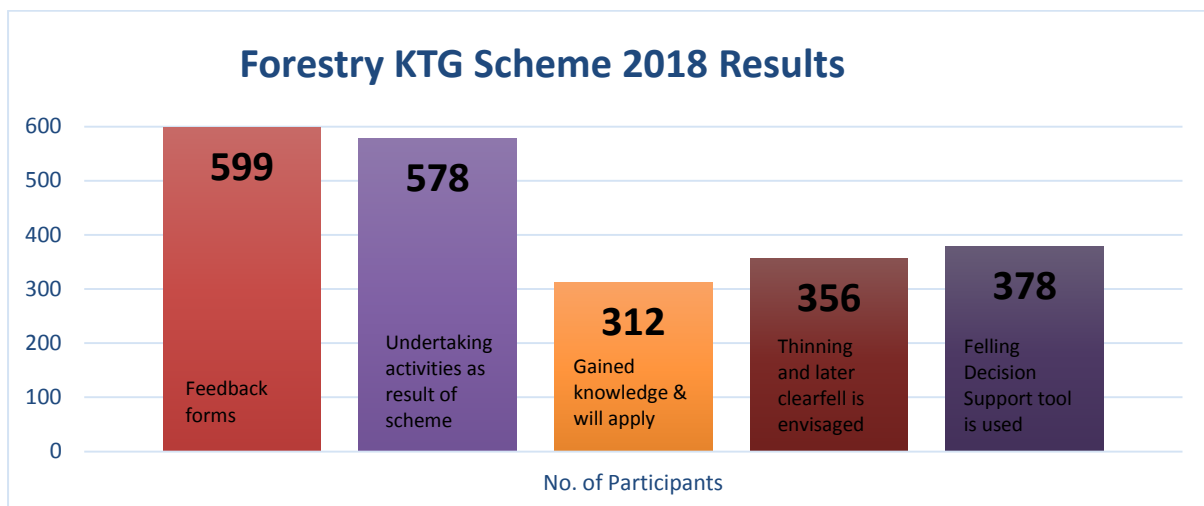


Table 1: Forestry KTG Scheme 2018 Results

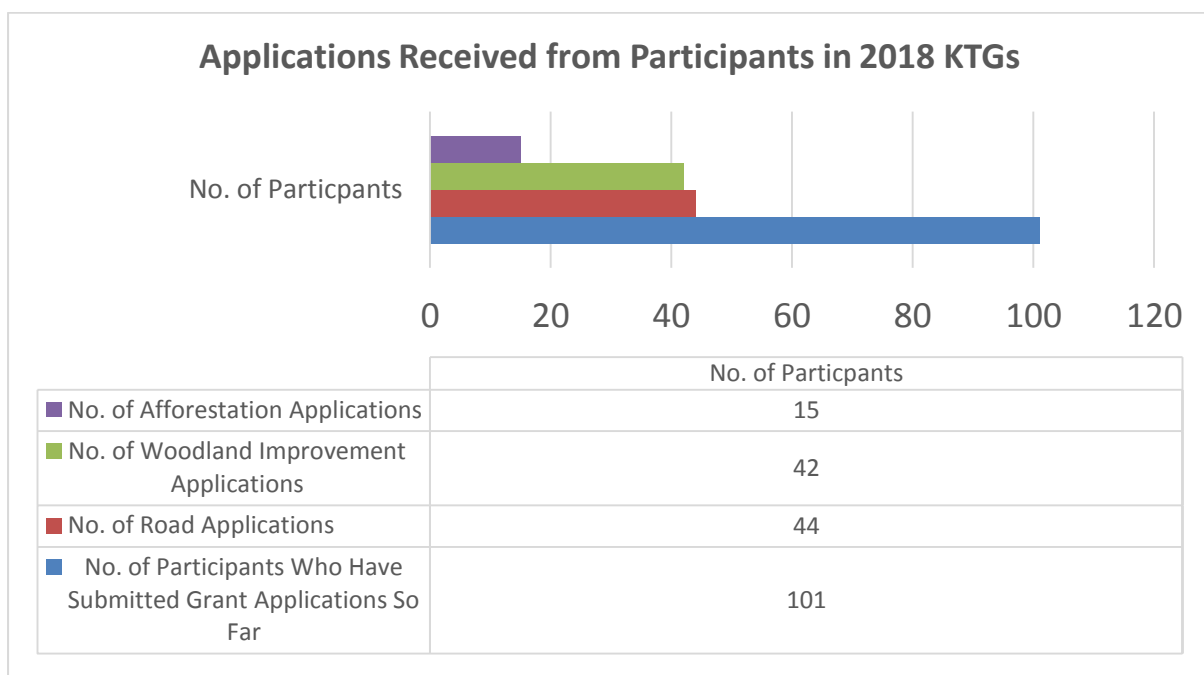


Table 2: Applications Received from Participants in 2018 KTGs

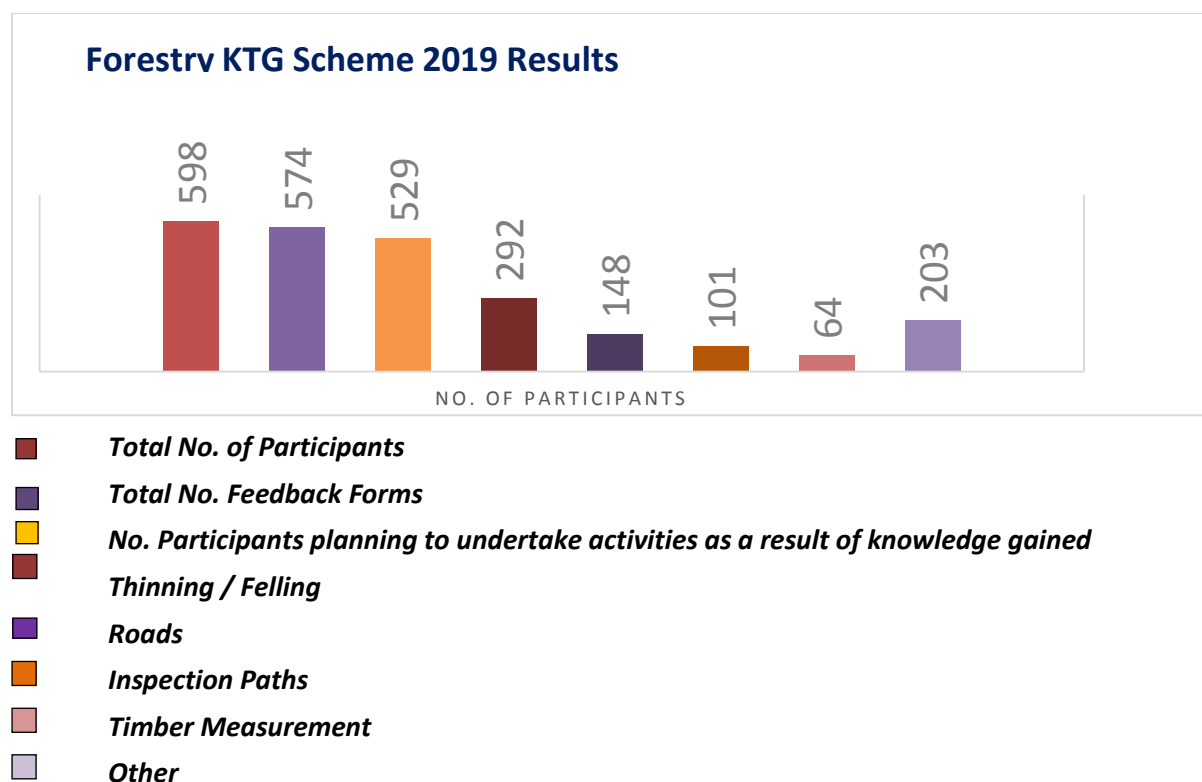


Table 3: Forestry KTG Scheme 2019 Results

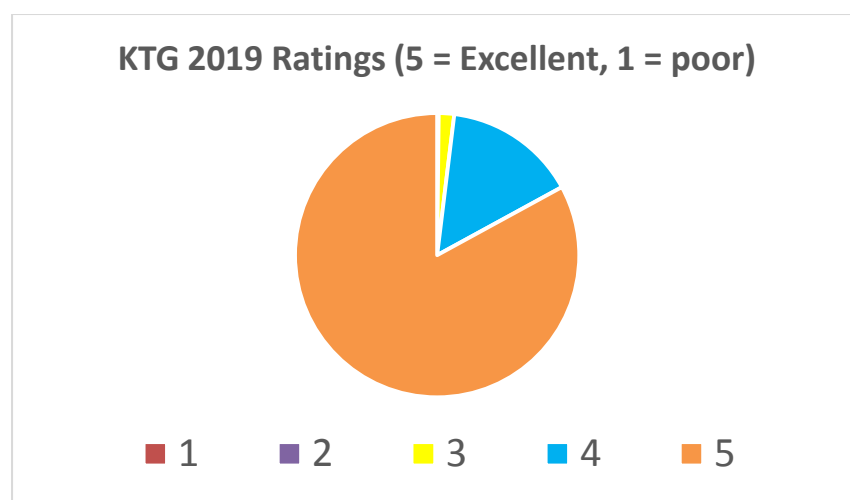


Table 4: KTG 2019 Ratings

10 2019 Scheme Feedback

Following the implementation of the 2019 FKTG Scheme, feedback was received from Scheme Organisers, Scheme Participants, Teagasc, as well as DAFM Inspections and Administrative Verifications. The main points raised by the different Scheme stakeholders are listed in the following.

10.1 Main Issues Identified

- Feedback received shows that little intervention in participants' forests had taken place before their participation in the Scheme, evidenced by the participants' lack of knowledge on basic forest principles, little to no knowledge of forest management or of the wider landscape of the forest industry. Most had not stood in their forests since they were first planted.
- The private forestry industry in Ireland is in the early stages of development.
- Participants feel that a lot of work needs to be done to assist private growers in relation to a wide variety of issues, including: timber security, a mechanism for volume/weight sales for private timber sales, and a forest certification system that is workable for private growers.
- Participants feel ill equipped to deal with the management of their forests on their own and require advisory and financial assistance to meet these challenges as first generation forest growers.
- Unlike traditional farming that has the marts and different farming outlets like agricultural shows, there has been no place for forest owners to meet and discuss forestry before the FKTG Scheme was put in place.
- Participants are of the opinion that as first-generation forest growers they have to install the permanent infrastructure in the forest i.e. roads, bridges, forest barriers as well as develop the skills to be decision makers to manage their plantations.
- Participants were largely unaware of the variety of forestry grants that are available to them.

10.2 FKTG main Outcomes

- Participants' forestry knowledge has increased through participation in the Scheme and they have started taking a more active role in their own forests.
- All participants have prepared a management plan for their forest during their FKTG attendance and the majority have already begun undertaking activities or plan to in the future in accordance with their plan. The usefulness and importance of the participants having to create forest management plans, including being able to use the felling decision support tool, was one of the main Scheme outcomes reported. In some cases, the FKTG organiser visited the participants' forests to help them formulate their management plans.
- As a result of the learning over the duration of the 7 FKTG meetings, most participants have submitted or have planned to submit applications for roads, thinning and felling licences.
- In general, meetings were well attended, well-structured and organised.

10.3 Scheme Specific Feedback

- Feedback showed that there was generally more engagement on the field trip than in the classroom environment. Participants were more forthcoming with their opinions and it became more of a conversation between owners than it did a presentation. The importance of field trips was highlighted as they take a hands-on approach where the participants are taught how to measure trees and determine if a plot is ready for thinning; discuss road

construction; forest paths; health and safety; see how the forest is managed after chalara or windblow. Field trips also gave owners of younger forests the opportunity to visualise the potential of what their forests could become in time with the right management.

- Input from Department Forestry Inspectors during inspection visits was considered very beneficial to both the inspectors and the participants. Forest owners could ask questions, get ideas and answers to issues from an Inspector's point of view.
- While the timeframe for the 7 meetings to be held was approximately 2 months longer than in 2018, many organisers found it a challenge to hold all 7 meetings within this timeframe. An earlier starting date in the year would facilitate meetings and forest visits being more spread out resulting in better thought-out and quality meetings and visits. However, this will need to be balanced with the many participants having expressed a strong preference for FKTG meetings to be run in the autumn.
- The importance of an efficient and easy to use FKTG monitoring system was highlighted.
- In some cases, the meeting facilities were not sufficient. It was reported that some meetings had taken place in too small, cold and ill-equipped venues.
- More specific guidelines should be given to the facilitators on points to be covered in relation to mandatory subjects. It was suggested that it would be useful to provide an additional framework for mandatory subjects by the Department.
- The success of the KTG is very dependent on having a good facilitator. There was significant inconsistency in the level of facilitation. In some cases, too much content was covered in the time allocated which resulted in a rushed and sometimes superficial addressing of issues.
- The level of class-room type delivery is excessive and does not lead to peer-to-peer learning. The majority of forest owners placed a much higher value on their interactive discussions as opposed to classroom-type learning. Classroom layout is not conducive to group interaction.
- The varying level of participant pre-KTG knowledge is a significant challenge to the facilitators.
- Teagasc & DAFM presence at the co-ordination/first meetings is considered very important to ensure that the content of meetings is focussed on owner priorities, with possible discussion areas fully scoped out and agreed with the participants.
- Broadleaves forest owners have at times expressed frustration that all the focus of the programme is on conifers management. More input on broadleaves management requirement might be welcome in some KTGs and a KTG focussing specifically on broadleaves may be more beneficial to these participants.

11 2019 FKTG Scheme Review Conclusions and Recommendations

- 11.1. The review of the 2019 FKTG Scheme has shown that the Forestry Knowledge Transfer Scheme is a success. The evaluation of 2018 and 2019 Schemes outcomes and results has demonstrated that the overall objective of the FKTG Schemes (to increase the level of forest management activities among participating forest owners) has been met to a great extent. It is therefore recommended to continue the Scheme in 2020 with the same overall structure and terms and conditions. Based on feedback received and as detailed in section 10 above, stakeholders identified some weaknesses and shortcomings with the current Scheme that should be taken into consideration for the development of future FKTG Schemes.
- 11.2. Based on feedback received, the following new and improved points are recommended to be included in the 2020 FKTG Scheme:

- The Forestry KT Scheme 2020 should open as early as possible in 2020 for a period up to end October 2020 to give organisers the option to either running throughout the year or in a more concentrated manner in the autumn.
- The scheme T&Cs should be amended allowing for 4 out of the 7 meetings to be outdoor sessions, with a minimum of 2 outdoor sessions to take place. In addition, 1 outdoor session should be allowed to take place on weekends.
- To date, a requirement of the scheme is that the number of groups approved is divided equally between forestry companies and forest producer groups. It is fortunate that this has happened in the two years the scheme has operated. However, if more applications are received from one cohort over the other, provided scheme criteria are met and enough budget is available, all groups should be approved entry.
- Further details on requirements for suitable venues for KTG meetings should be included in the scheme T&Cs, such as the layout of the room needs to permit for seating participants in a semi-circle, the rooms should be warm and sufficiently equipped.
- A breakdown of costs should be required from each organiser as part of the organiser payment claim, incl. costs for venues, marketing, administration and the facilitator.
- Organisers with more than 1 approved KTG should be allowed to focus at least one group exclusively on the management of broadleaf forests.
- The mandatory requirement for a nominee to be appointed by each participant should be replaced with a strong recommendation.
- The requirement to invite a Department representative to the co-ordination meeting and a Teagasc representative to the first KTG meeting should be stressed.
- A framework and specific guidelines on mandatory subjects should be provided to all organisers at the start of each KTG by DAFM. This could be in the form of the provision of a suite of links.
- At meetings that are subject to inspection, sufficient time should be foreseen to allow for the DAFM District Inspector make a presentation on the preparation of quality applications e.g. on Biodiversity maps and/ or on the Harvesting Plan.
- Teagasc is recommended to provide a specific training session for selected facilitators before the first KTG meetings take place.
- A revised monitoring system should be introduced that allows for a less time consuming and more efficient reporting of relevant KTG data to the Department by Organisers. In addition, some of the Forestry KT Scheme forms should be further simplified.

Appendix 1

Forestry KTG Scheme Mandatory Subjects

- Forest owner obligations with regard to Water Framework, Habitats and Birds Directives and the importance of these rules in relation to forest management.
- Wood mobilisation (including biomass), harvesting systems, markets/forest certification and potential value.
- Overview of Irish Timber Growers Association's Model Timber Sales Dispatch System for Private Timber Growers and Master Tree Sales Agreement.
- Health and Safety in forest management.
- Felling Decision support tool.
- The KTG must address sustainable forestry methods and/or technologies, the development of new business opportunities and new technologies, and on the improvement of forest resilience.
- Completion of a management action plan similar to forest management plan.