

What can forestry do for the people of Scotland?

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In 2005 the Forestry Commission Scotland undertook a review of the Scottish Forestry Strategy. This included consultation with a wide number of groups. However, following this consultation it became obvious that a number of social groups in Scotland were not represented in the results of this consultation. Therefore the Forestry Commission Scotland asked the OPENspace Research Centre at Edinburgh College of Art to undertake some research to find out what forestry could do for such groups. The target groups included adults living in remote economically disadvantaged rural area, young adults from urban economically deprived areas, disabled people – in this case visually impaired, physical disability and those with mental health problems and finally members of ethnic minorities. Apart from the remote rural areas all the other people sampled came from urban areas. The research method was solely qualitative, with five focus groups being held in Dumfries and Galloway (a remote part of southwest Scotland and in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The focus groups discussions were focussed around a standard set of questions that the Forestry Commission Scotland wanted answered but the discussions ranged more widely and uncovered many interesting aspects of the relationship between people, forests and the Forestry Commission, aspects which were often surprising but extremely valuable. The results were then fed into the next revision of the Scottish Forestry Strategy which, as a result, reflects more closely in its aims and programme, the widest possible set of perceptions.