

Forestry Statistics 2024

Chapter 7: Employment & Businesses

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The Research Agency of the
Forestry Commission

Forestry Statistics 2024: Chapter 7 Employment & Businesses

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The Agency aims to support and enhance forestry and its role in sustainable development by providing innovative, high quality scientific research, data, technical support and consultancy services.

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Key findings.....	5
7.1 Employment: Business Register and Employment Survey	6
7.2 Employment in primary wood processing	8
7.3 Health and safety	10
7.4 Establishments in the primary wood processing industries	16
7.5 VAT and/or PAYE registered businesses	18

Introduction

This chapter contains information on:

- employment in forestry and wood processing;
- health and safety;
- and numbers of businesses.

All of the statistics presented in this chapter relate to UK totals. Further information on the data sources and methodology used to compile the figures is provided in Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Most of the statistics presented in this chapter have been previously released. Some of the figures in this chapter have been revised since Forestry Statistics 2023. For further details on revisions, see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

A copy of all Employment & Businesses tables can be accessed in spreadsheet format from the [Time Series page](#).

Key findings

The main findings are:

- The Business Register and Employment Survey (October 2023) reported average employment¹ in 2022 of 21 thousand in forestry.
- There was estimated to be a total of 7.2 thousand full-time equivalent staff employed by primary wood processors in the UK in 2023, a 4% decrease from the total for 2022.
- The latest major accident rates for Great Britain, covering 2022/23, show increases compared to 2021/22 rates for forestry and wood product sectors, and a slight decrease for the pulp, paper and paper sector.
- There were 188 establishments in the primary wood processing industries in the UK using UK-grown roundwood in 2023.

¹ There are a number of differences in the scope of the employment estimates provided by the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) and the full-time equivalent figures obtained from the annual surveys of the UK timber industry run by Forest Research (FR). In particular, the BRES figures cover employment by all businesses in the relevant sectors that pay VAT and/or PAYE. This will include businesses that do not use UK grown timber. The FR surveys include businesses below the VAT and PAYE thresholds but exclude businesses that do not use UK grown timber.

7.1 Employment: Business Register and Employment Survey

The Business Register and Employment Survey, carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), includes statistics on employment broken down by Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 2007). In wood processing, SIC 16 (wood products) and SIC 17 (pulp, paper and paper products) have a much wider scope than the data on employment in primary wood processing (Table 7.2a), as they include primary processing of imported material and also some secondary processing.

Employment in 2022 in the forestry sector was estimated at 21 thousand in forestry (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Number of staff employed in forestry and wood processing¹, UK, 2018 to 2022

	thousands				
Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)²	2018	2019	2020	2021⁴	2022⁴
Forestry	16	18	19	21	21
Pulp, paper and paper products ³	62	53	50	50	[c]
Total wood products	89	76	73	72	[c]
Sawmilling	10	7	8	8	[c]
Panels	6	5	5	5	[c]
Secondary products	73	63	60	59	[c]

Source: Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES), Office for National Statistics (ONS), October 2023.

Forestry Statistics 2024: Chapter 7 Employment & Businesses

Notes:

1. Excludes other wood-using industries.
2. Categories are based on the UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 2007) categories. Further details on the SIC codes used are provided in Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.
3. Pulp, paper and paper products breakdowns for all years have been suppressed in the figures released by ONS. Data produced by the Confederation of Paper Industries, presenting estimates on a different basis are provided in Table 7.2b.
4. [c] denotes data that is confidential.

7.2 Employment in primary wood processing

Information on employment in primary wood processing is obtained annually via the sources used to collect data on UK-grown timber (presented in Chapter 2).

There was estimated to be a total of 7.2 thousand full-time equivalent staff employed by primary wood processors in the UK in 2023 (Table 7.2a), a 4% decrease from the total for 2022.

57% of those employed in primary wood processing in 2023 worked in sawmills and over one quarter (29%) in wood-based panel mills.

Table 7.2a Employment in primary wood processing¹, UK, 2019 to 2023

Year	full-time equivalents				Total
	Sawmills	Pulp and paper	Wood-based panels	Fencing	
2019	4,105	663	2,075	397	7,240
2020	4,052	660	1,933	404	7,049
2021	4,288	635	2,106	414	7,443
2022	4,346	659	2,113	382	7,500
2023	4,074	660	2,081	352	7,167

Source: Industry surveys (Forest Research), industry associations.

Notes:

1. Some businesses operate sawmills and round fencing mills. Employment for such businesses may be recorded under sawmills, round fencing manufacturers or shared between the two categories.

Table 7.2b presents the estimated total number of direct employees at all UK paper and board mills. There were around 6.9 thousand employees in 2023, a 3% decrease from the previous year.

Table 7.2b Direct employment in paper and board mills^{1,2}, UK, 2019 to 2023

		number of employees
Year	Number of direct employees	
2019	8,010	
2020	8,016	
2021	7,693	
2022	7,121	
2023	6,893	

Source: Confederation of Paper Industries.

Notes:

1. Figures exclude contractors, self-employed and employees at ancillary sites.
2. Covers all mills producing paper in the UK. This differs from the employment data in table 7.2a, which is restricted to mills using UK-grown roundwood.

7.3 Health and safety

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) is the legal system, provided by the Health and Safety Executive, under which fatal and defined non-fatal injuries to workers and members of the public are reported by employers.

As of April 2012, a legislative change introduced the requirement to report injuries to workers that lead to absence from work or inability to do their usual job, for over seven days. Prior to this, reporting was required for absences of at least three days. From October 2013, legislative changes were introduced to simplify this reporting of workplace injuries. One key change was the introduction of 'specified' injuries, which replaced the previous 'major injury' category. We report on the total number and rate of accidents by Standard Industrial Classification (SIC), as well as major accidents – those occurring in the workplace and causing an absence or impingement on usual performance for 7 days or more.

The 2022/23 major accident rates for Great Britain show an increase for wood products compared to 2021/22 and a slight decrease for pulp, paper and paper products. Over the longer term, the rate for forestry has generally declined but the latest year has seen an increase. Injury rates in forestry have also increased in 2022/23, and have generally been higher compared to agriculture (Table 7.3, Figure 7.1a and Figure 7.1b).

Table 7.3 Accidents to employees¹ in forestry and wood processing², Great Britain, 2018/19 to 2022/23

number or rate of accidents

Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)^{3,7}	Number of major accidents⁴	Major accident rate per 1,000 employees⁴	Total number of reported accidents	Total accident rate per 1,000 employees
Forestry				
2018/19	38	2.5	100	6.7
2019/20	25	1.4	91	5.3
2020/21	25	1.7	83	5.6
2021/22	25	1.9	74	5.7
2022/23	32	2.7	80	6.7
Wood products				
2018/19	121	2.0	511	8.6
2019/20	106	2.0	473	9.0
2020/21	80	1.5	324	6.3
2021/22	113	1.9	447	7.5
2022/23	111	2.1	394	7.5
Pulp, paper and paper products				
2018/19	75	1.5	285	5.6
2019/20	77	1.6	281	5.9
2020/21	85	1.5	262	4.6
2021/22	84	1.8	284	6.1
2022/23	76	1.7	219	4.8

Forestry Statistics 2024: Chapter 7 Employment & Businesses

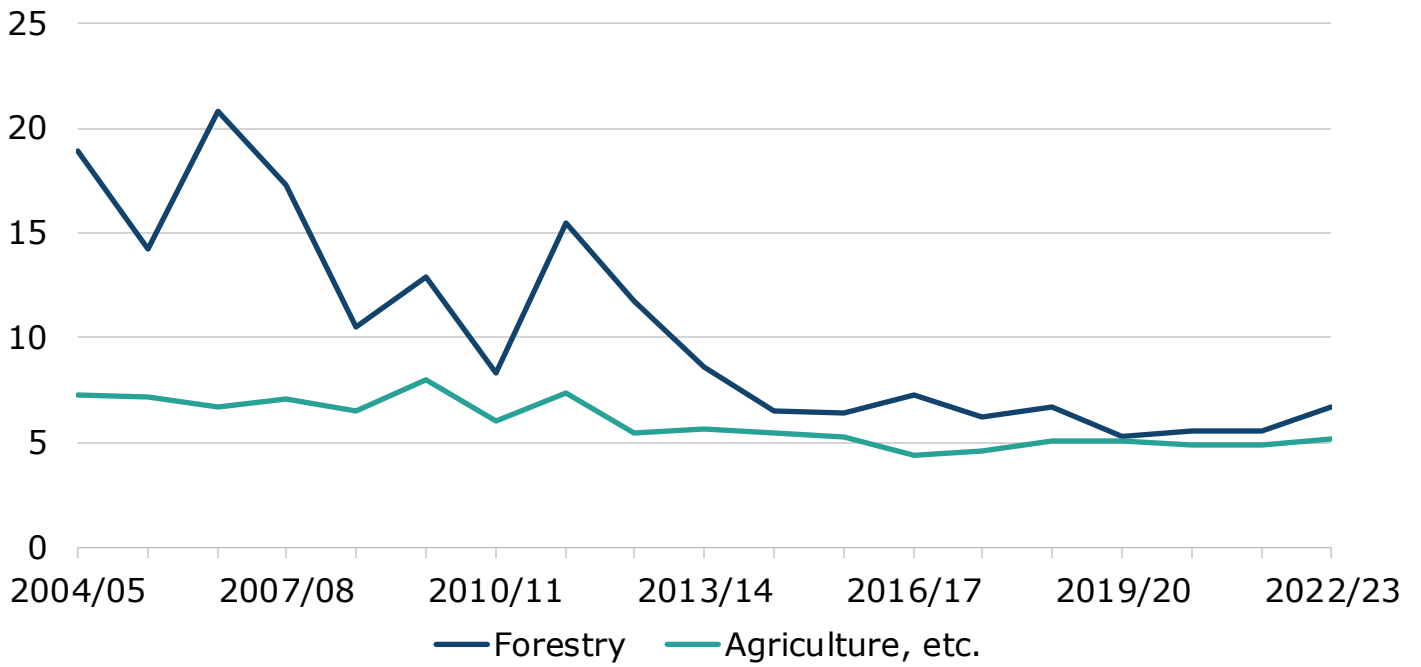
Source: Health and Safety Executive (reported fatal and non-fatal injuries in Great Britain by detailed industry, RIDDOR).

Note:

1. Employees only; excludes self-employed.
2. Excludes other wood-using industries.
3. Categories are based on the UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 2007) categories. Further details on the SIC codes used are provided in Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.
4. Data for previous years are susceptible to revision.
5. Numbers for 2020/21 and to a lesser extent 2021/22 are affected by the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. While 2019/20 falls largely outside of the pandemic period, disruption to data collection processes in early 2020 may be a contributory factor to changes in data in 2019/20. This should be considered when comparing across time periods.
6. The employment data used to calculate rates includes those temporarily absent from work. In 2020/21 and (to a lesser extent) in 2021/22 the number of such workers was higher than previous years due to temporary employment schemes (e.g. furlough) introduced during the coronavirus pandemic. This has contributed to a discontinuity in injury rates.
7. Estimates for the latest year are provisional and are revisions for the previous year.

7.1a Accidents to employees: Total reported accidents per 1,000 employees, Great Britain, 2004/05 to 2022/23

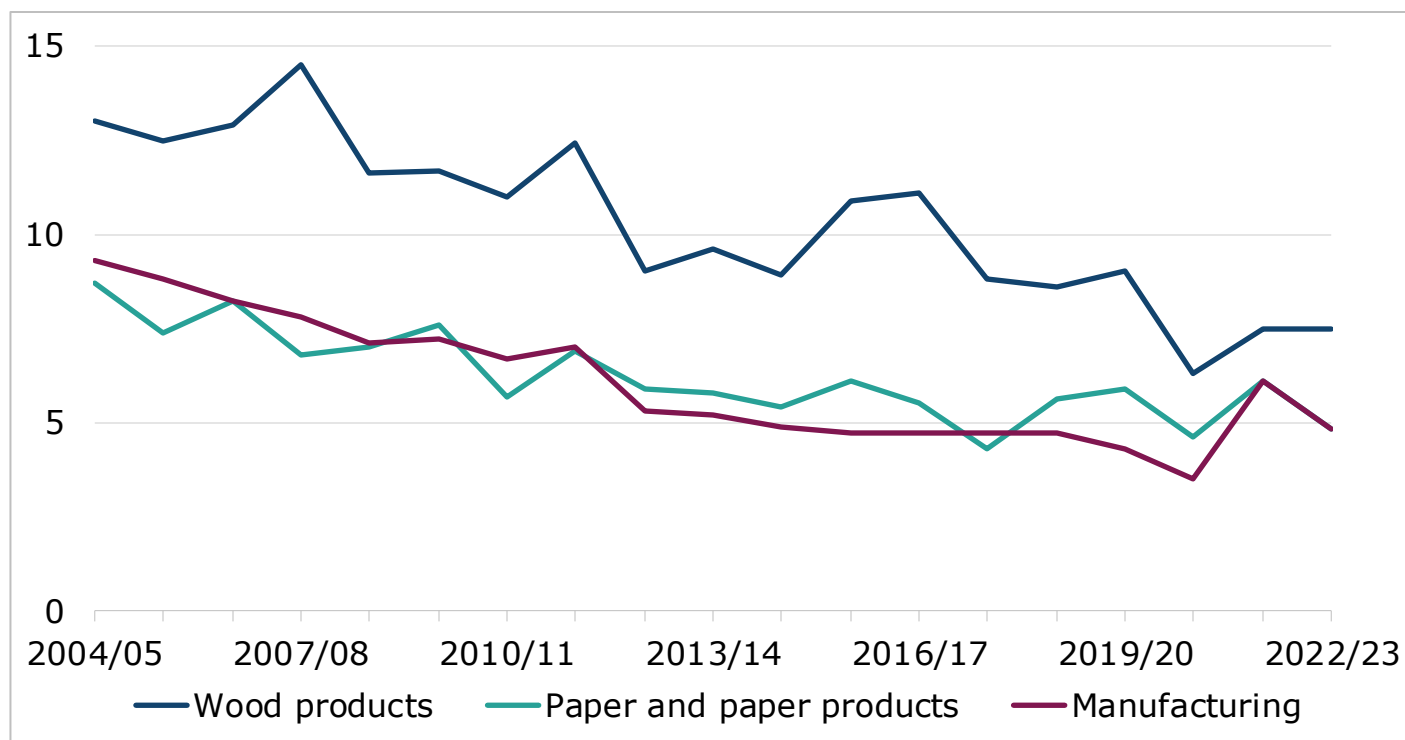
number of accidents per 1,000



See Figure 7.1b for information on sources and notes.

Figure 7.1b Accidents to employees: Total reported accidents per 1,000 employees, Great Britain, 2004/05 to 2022/23

number of accidents per 1,000



Source (Figure 7.1a and Figure 7.1b): Health and Safety Executive (reported fatal and non-fatal injuries in Great Britain by detailed industry, RIDDOR).

Note:

1. Employees only; excludes self-employed.
2. Categories are based on the UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 2007) categories. Further details on the SIC codes used are provided in Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.
3. As a result of a change in reporting requirements, data from 2012/13 is not directly comparable with previous years.

Forestry Statistics 2024: Chapter 7 Employment & Businesses

4. Numbers for 2020/21 and to a lesser extent 2021/22 are affected by the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. While 2019/20 falls largely outside of the pandemic period, disruption to data collection processes in early 2020 may be a contributory factor to changes in data in 2019/20. This should be considered when comparing across time periods.
5. The employment data used to calculate rates includes those temporarily absent from work. In 2020/21 and (to a lesser extent) in 2021/22 the number of such workers was higher than previous years due to temporary employment schemes (e.g. furlough) introduced during the coronavirus pandemic. This has contributed to a discontinuity in injury rates.

7.4 Establishments in the primary wood processing industries

Table 7.4 shows the number of primary wood processors, according to the sampling frames used for Forest Research surveys of establishments using UK timber.

The figures in Table 7.4 do not correspond with the VAT and PAYE registration information given in Table 7.5. The figures here count establishments (sites) rather than businesses and include those that do not need to register for VAT or PAYE. They also have a different basis for classification, so some businesses that are excluded from Table 7.5 because of their VAT/PAYE classification are included in this table (typically businesses where primary wood processing is a small part of their total activity), and some businesses included in Table 7.5 are excluded here (usually because they do not use UK-grown timber).

There were 188 establishments in the primary wood processing industries in the UK using UK-grown roundwood in 2023, a slight reduction on the previous year.

Table 7.4 Number of establishments in the primary wood processing industries using UK-grown roundwood, UK, 2014 to 2023

number of mills

Year	Sawmills	Pulp and paper mills	Wood-based panel mills	Round fencing manufacturers	Total ¹
2014	170	2	6	56	234
2015	168	2	6	50	226
2016	163	2	6	50	221
2017	160	2	6	49	217
2018	152	2	6	46	206
2019	147	2	6	46	201
2020	144	2	6	45	197
2021	141	2	6	45	194
2022	141	2	6	44	193
2023	139	2	6	41	188

Source: Industry surveys (Forest Research), industry associations.

Notes:

1. A single mill may be recorded twice, as a sawmill and a round fencing manufacturer.

7.5 VAT and/or PAYE registered businesses

Table 7.5 shows the number of VAT and/or PAYE registered businesses classified under forestry and primary wood processing. The headings shown potentially include businesses not traditionally regarded as forestry or primary wood processing, and some businesses traditionally included in forestry and primary wood processing are excluded as they are classified to other headings of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC).

A total of 4,775 forestry businesses, 510 sawmilling businesses, 155 wood-based panel businesses and 240 pulp and paper businesses were registered for VAT and/or PAYE purposes in the UK in 2023.

Table 7.5 Number¹ of VAT and/or PAYE registered businesses by Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)², UK, 2014 to 2023

number of businesses

Year	Forestry	Sawmilling	Panels	Pulp and paper
2014	3,685	555	130	230
2015	3,925	555	125	230
2016	4,050	550	125	225
2017	4,060	540	120	240
2018	4,150	540	130	240
2019	4,185	530	125	230
2020	4,270	510	135	220
2021	4,450	515	140	235
2022	4,735	515	150	245
2023	4,775	510	155	240

Source: [UK Business: Activity, Size and Location, Office for National Statistics \(ONS\), September 2023](#).

Notes:

1. All figures are rounded by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to the nearest multiple of 5.
2. Categories are based on the UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 2007) categories. Further details on the SIC codes used are provided in Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Forestry Statistics 2024: Chapter 7 Employment & Businesses

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