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Trees and forests

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Letters

Liberate tree experts to save our forests

Forestry professionals are being hampered by bad planning and a baffling grants process, warns **Prof Edward Wilson**



An oak sapling grows in protected woodland in the Cairngorms National Park. Photograph: Alamy

The recent report highlighting the UK's failure to plant enough trees is not a surprise to professional foresters (**Less than half of annual tree-planting target in England met, say MPs, 19 July**).

Tree planting is a central plank in Britain's net zero strategy. An inability to get new woodland established means the UK will almost certainly not meet carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation targets. Too often the focus is on the establishment of woodlands and not their long-term, active management, thus increasing the risk that we are investing in projects with a high risk of failure.

The environmental audit committee report identifies several failings and bottlenecks to progress with woodland creation. Chief among these is the number of overlapping and disjointed strategies, and a labyrinthine application and grants process. One way of reducing complexity would be to give greater autonomy to tree and woodland professionals.

The Institute of Chartered Foresters is a highly respected body that has strong internal governance and promotes high standards in professional practice. Giving chartered arboriculturists and chartered foresters greater independence, supported with a simpler funding model (perhaps through a type of trusted trader scheme), could help incentivise and liberate tree and woodland professionals to do what they do best, which is create and manage the UK's valuable woodlands for both people and nature.

**Prof Edward Wilson**  
Institute of Forestry and *Conservation*, University of Toronto

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