



people spaces places

Midlands Parks Forum
Skills and Competencies Framework
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Midlands Parks Forum

Skills and Competencies Framework

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1 Introduction

The Midlands Park Forum (MPF) continually aims to support its members by providing opportunities and experience to gain skills and knowledge and increase their abilities to develop and manage green spaces and, ultimately, improve our parks and green spaces for the wider community.

The MPF ran a skills survey between December 2021 and January 2022 to gather information to help establish priorities for future learning. The skills survey was distributed to all members of the MPF, with 61 respondents completing the survey. Of the respondents, 25 did not specify which region they were from. One respondent was from London, 11 were from the East Midlands (18.0%), and 24 were from the West Midlands (39.3%).

The skills survey asked respondents about their current competency level and what level they are aiming to be at using a competency framework of 35 skills under six themes. The framework is outlined in the following section. Respondents were also asked about their current pay grade and what apprenticeships or training opportunities were available at their organisation.

1.1 The Midlands Parks Forum Skills and Competencies Framework

The MPF framework used six skill or competency themes based on the Landscape Institute and APSE's competency frameworks.

The Landscape Institute released an updated competency framework in 2020. The framework categorises competencies into three areas: (1) professional skills essential to all sectors, (2) core landscape skills unique to the landscape profession and (3) additional landscape skills required for specific fields of practice within the landscape profession. Prospective members must demonstrate competencies from each area as a pre-requisite to joining the Landscape Institute.

APSE developed a competency framework following research for the Parks Action Group in 2019, which explored what skills park managers in the 21st Century require to address changing economic, social, environmental and health and well-being priorities. APSE's framework was developed and refined following one-to-one interviews, focus groups and an online survey of 118 participants. It includes 35 roles and responsibilities under five categories: (1) People, (2) Operations, (3) Vision, Strategy, Policies, (4) Income & Performance and (5) Environment.

The MPF framework includes 35 skills in six areas: (1) People, (2) Income and Performance, (3) Operations, (4) Environmental Stewardship, (5) Vision, Strategy, Policies and (6) Professional Competencies. Respondents were asked to gauge their current understanding of each skill or competency and the level they are aiming to reach in future using the following scale (adapted from the Landscape Institute framework):

Understanding – you will recognise the terminology and have a broad understanding of the subject area. You will understand the basic concepts but have not put them into practice.

Able – you will have applied your knowledge in practice at a basic level, often with supervision.

Accomplished – you will be used to doing this activity with little or no supervision and will be able to deal with complex issues in this area.

Expert – you are a recognised authority in the field. You will direct strategic thinking and provide advice across and beyond your organisation.

Each competency level was designated a number as part of the analysis, where one is understanding, and four is expert. The average competency score was then calculated, and the current understanding level and level being aimed for each skill were plotted using a radar chart. The results are presented and discussed in the following sections.

2 Skills and Competencies Framework

2.1 People

Figure 1 below shows the average competency scores for skills under the category of People. These skills include those relevant to engaging and consulting with the local community or working with voluntary groups and partners to maintain and improve parks and green spaces. As well as ensuring equal access for all by creating safe and well-maintained sites and a positive user experience through the provision of activities and engagement.

There was little variation between the competency scores for each skill. Currently, respondents gauged their understanding of people skills between 2.39 and 2.71, equivalent to being “able” and indicating they can apply the skills with supervision. The average score was highest for stakeholder, volunteer or community engagement and lowest for play, events and sports.

On average, respondents were aiming to be “accomplished” in this area, equivalent to being able to use the skill with little or no supervision and being able to deal with complex issues. The skill in which respondents were aiming to increase their competency level the most was partnership development.

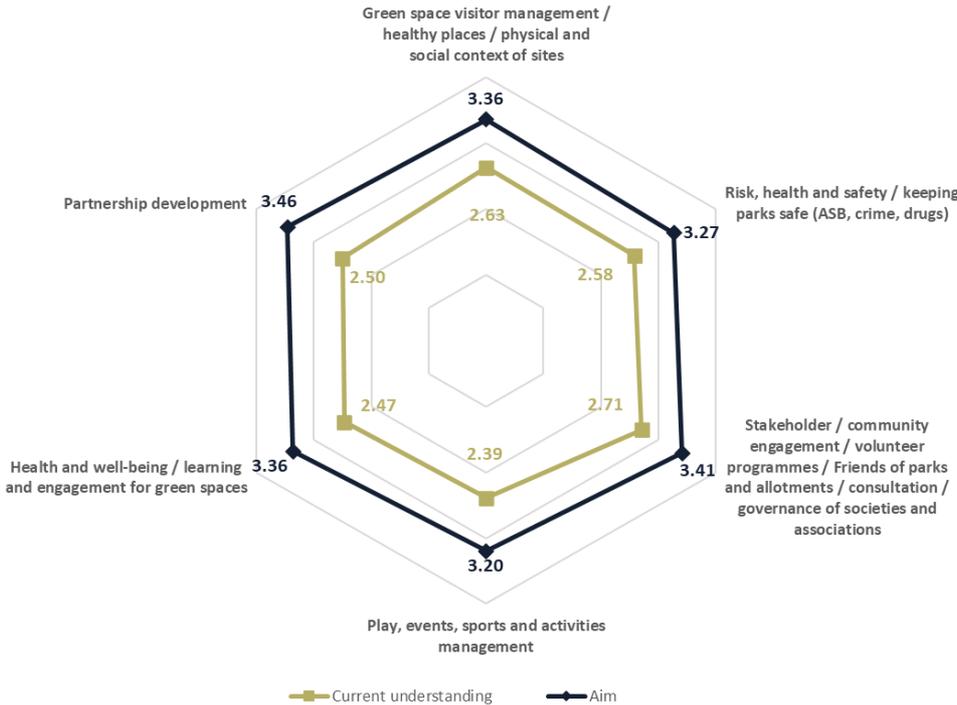


Figure 1 Average competency scores: people

2.2 Income and Performance

Figure 2 shows the average competency level of skills related to income and performance. Under this category, skills relate to securing income for parks and green spaces through income generation, marketing, and accessing alternative funding sources. It also includes skills related to benchmarking park and green space provision and quality and evaluation using performance management frameworks.

Respondents gauged their current competencies to be fairly low in this area; competencies ranged from 1.85 to 2.25, equivalent to being “understanding” or “able” with these skills. The skill with the lowest score was franchise and new facility development. This was the skill that respondents were aiming to improve the most, going from an average score of 1.85 to 2.96. Respondents were aiming to improve all other skills under this category to a level of “accomplished”.

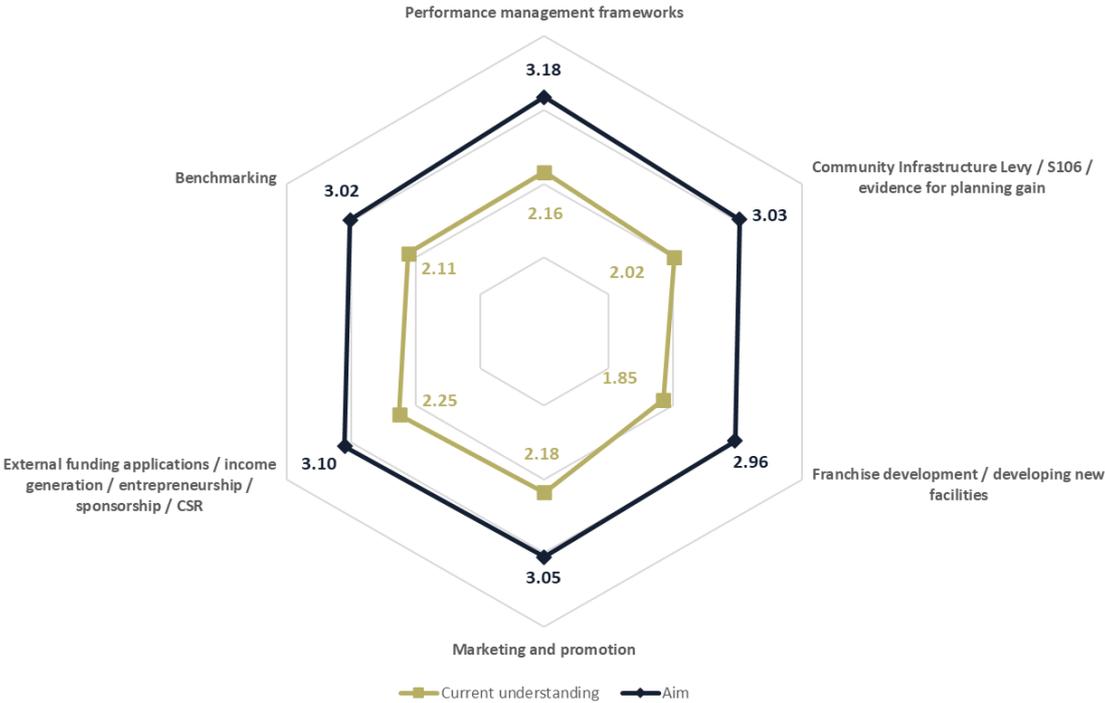


Figure 2 Average competency scores: income and performance

2.3 Operations

Skills under the operations category relate to the everyday management and running of parks and green spaces (Figure 3). This may include contract administration and work with contractors, managing budgets, working with operations teams and apprentices, and planning for the future through skills retention and succession planning.

Currently, respondents only gauge their competency level for apprenticeship/skills retention and succession planning as 1.76 and 1.98, respectively. This indicates they understand the skills but cannot apply them or are able to use them but require supervision. The skill with the most significant difference in current competency and what respondents are aiming for was apprentices/skills retention.

Respondents rated their competency levels as higher for the remaining three skills but would like to become “accomplished”, particularly in budget management and procurement, with 3.13 and 3.17, respectively.

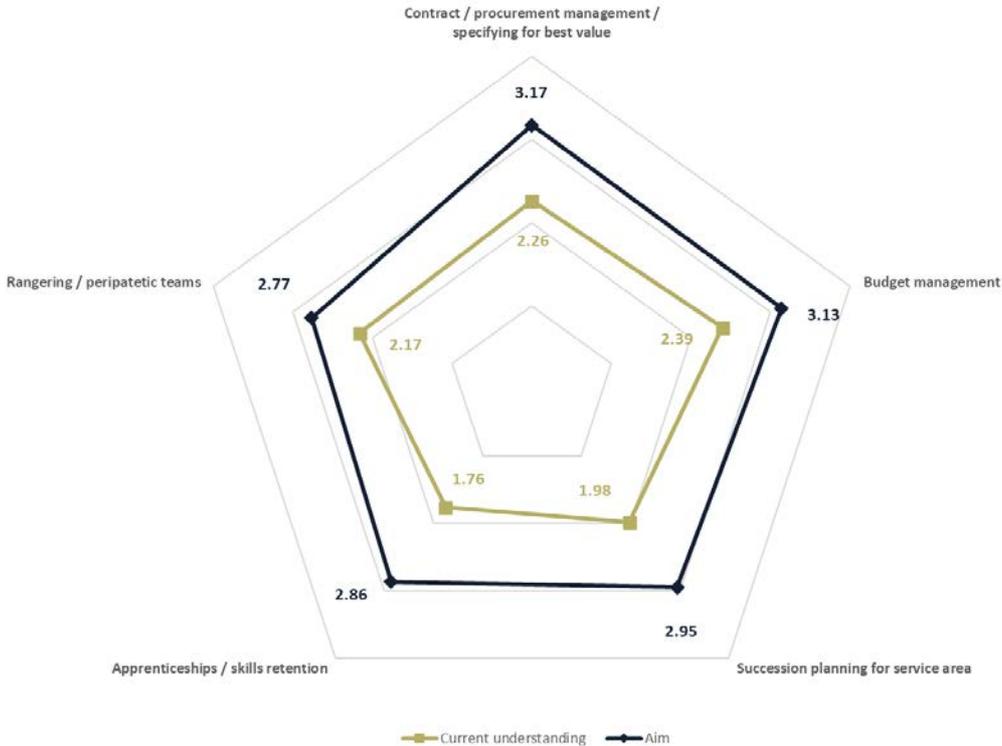


Figure 3 Average competency scores: operations

2.4 Environmental Stewardship

Skills under environmental stewardship refer to maintaining and improving the natural resources within parks and green spaces (Figure 4). This may include natural heritage and protected landscapes, biodiversity and habitat management or horticultural and arboricultural skills. Natural capital accounting, climate change resilience, and sports turf also fall under this category.

Except for sports turf, which was rated as 1.73 on average, equivalent to an “understanding”, respondents gauged their current competency level to be between 2.13 and 2.46 or able.

The skills in which respondents are aiming to improve their competency levels the most relate to natural capital/ecosystem services and climate change resilience, with respondents aiming to take this skill from 2.13 to 3.12 on average. This was followed by protected landscapes and heritage, in which respondents are aiming to increase their competency level from 2.21 to 3.05.

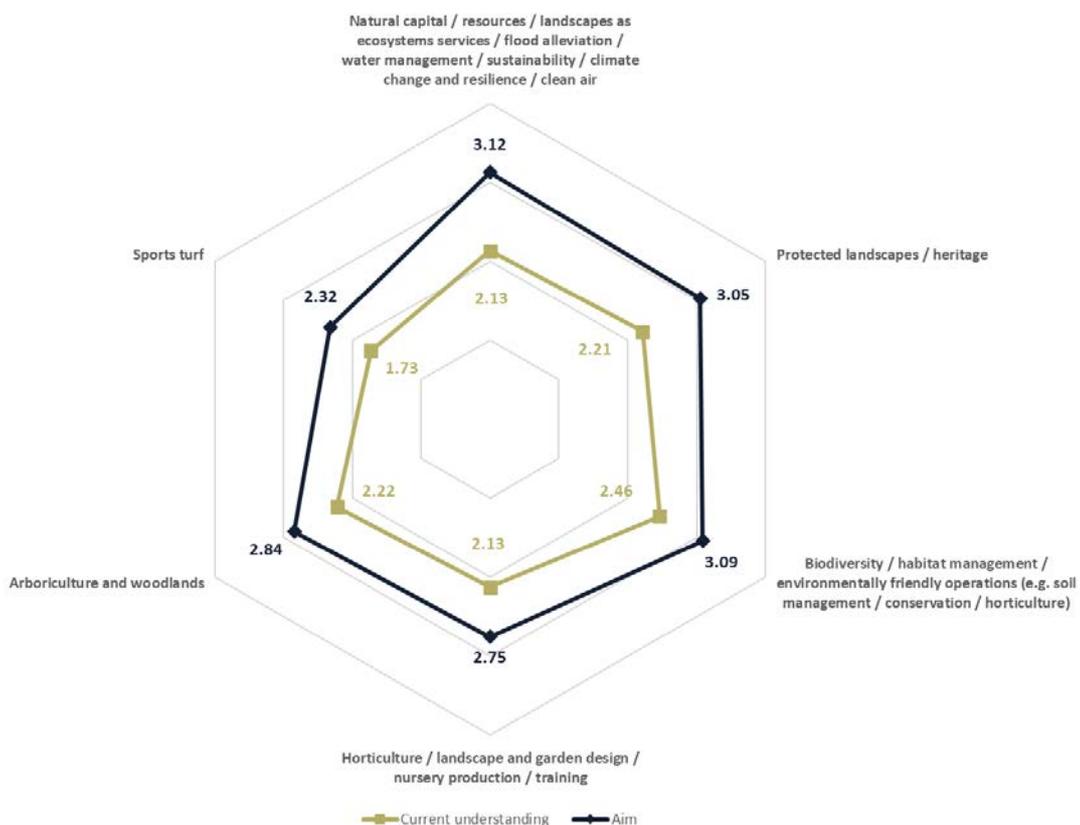


Figure 4 Average competency scores: environmental stewardship

2.5 Vision Strategy Policies

Figure 5 below shows skills relating to vision, strategy and policy development. These include the development of public health strategies, asset management strategies, leisure strategies, management plans and green space strategies. Other skills within this category relate to gathering evidence on the value of parks and green space and demonstrating it to the community and organisations.

Currently, respondents rate their skill competencies as the lowest regarding public health strategies, asset management, and leisure strategies. These were rated as 1.69, 1.63 and 1.61, respectively, equivalent to an “understanding” of these skills. However, the skills in which respondents aim to see the most significant increase in competency score were compiling evidence on the value of parks and green spaces and demonstrating the value.

On average, respondents gauged developing management plans for green space as the skill with the highest, with a competency level of 2.47.

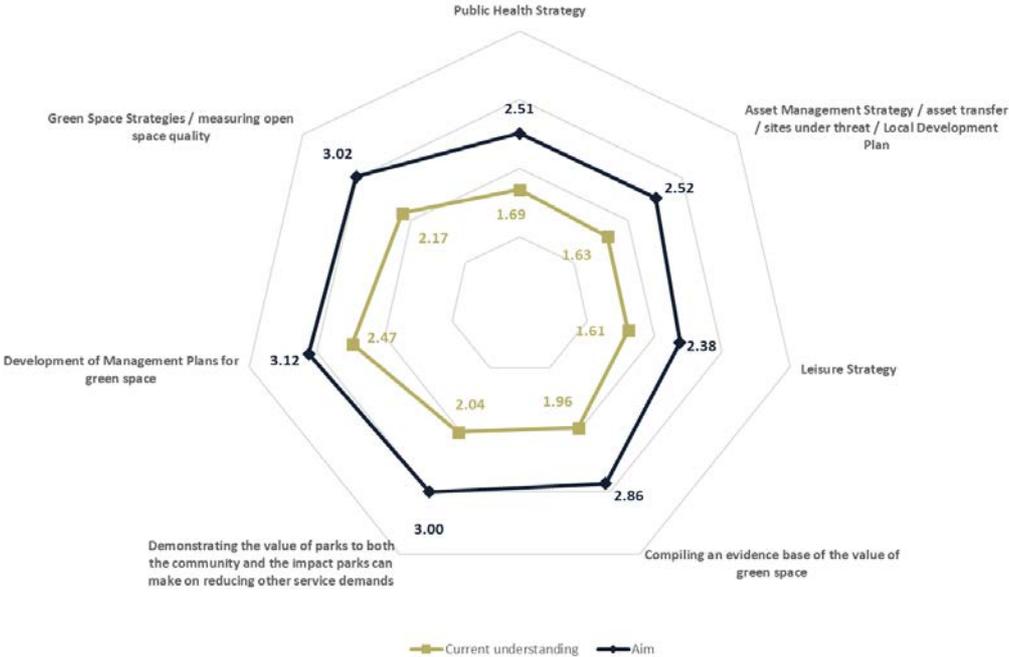


Figure 5 Average competency scores: vision, strategy, policies

2.6 Professional Competencies

Professional competencies are skills relevant to all sectors and include project management, staff management, negotiation skills, and equality and diversity (Figure 6). Digital practice may consist of digital tools for data analysis and presentation, communication and transfer of information.

On average, respondents rated their current competency levels as between 1.98 and 2.41. The skill with the lowest score was digital practice; this was also the skill in which respondents aimed to increase their competency level the most, becoming “able” in this skill and capable of applying it without supervision.

Respondents rated their current competency levels as higher regarding the other skills, all rated as “able” on average. Respondents were aiming to improve their competency level to “accomplished” in all these skill areas.

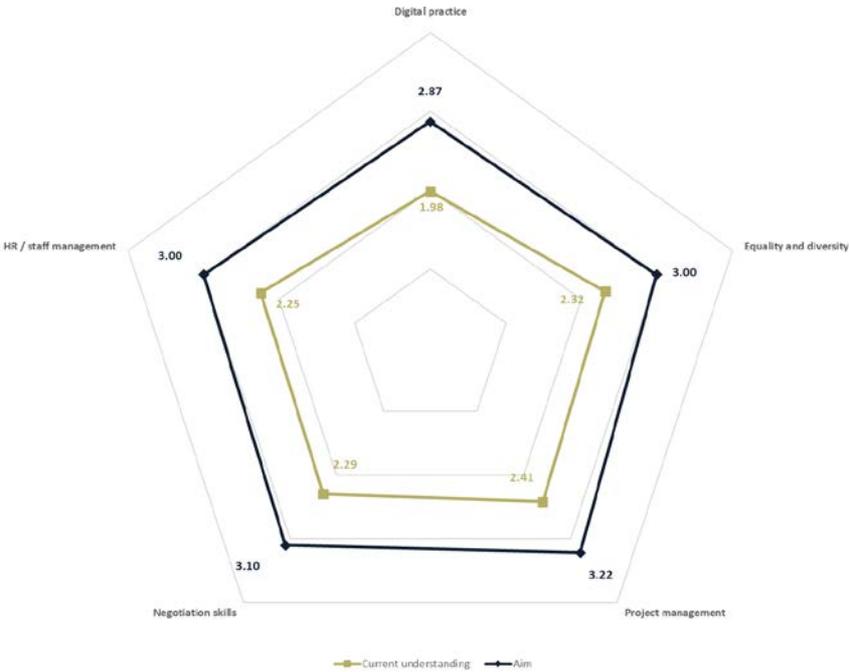


Figure 6 Average competency scores: professional competencies

2.7 Overall

Figure 7 below shows the average competency scores by category. On average, respondents rated their competency level highest regarding people skills, which is currently rated as 2.55. Vision, strategy and policy were rated as the lowest skill competency score with only 1.94. This indicates that respondents believe themselves to understand these skills but cannot apply them. Notably, this was not the skill area in which respondents aimed to improve the most. The area with the most significant difference in current competency level and level being aimed for was income and performance. Respondents aim to increase this from being “able” to apply these skills with supervision to being “accomplished” and capable of using them without supervision.

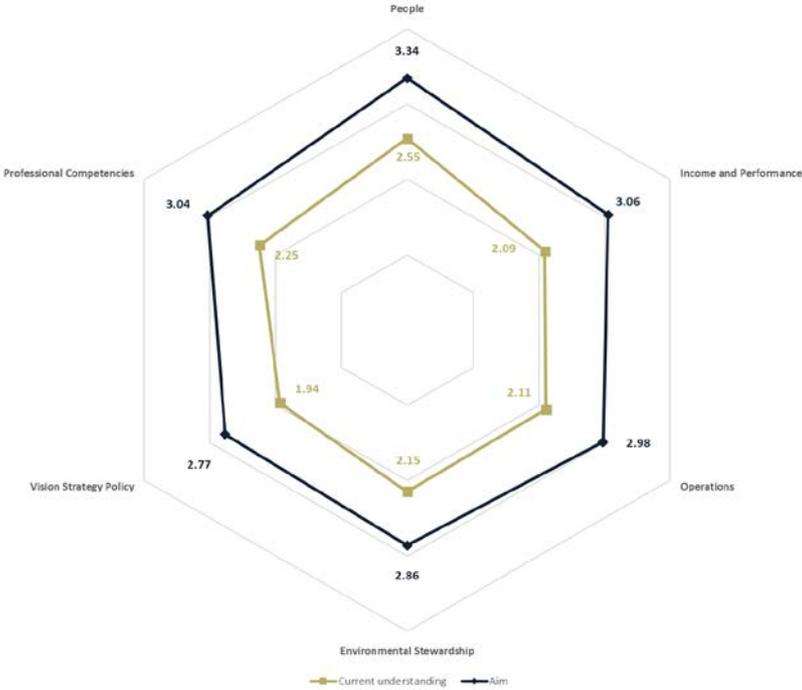


Figure 7 Overall skill competency scores by category

Comparing all the average skill competency scores, respondents rated their competencies in vision, strategy and policies as the lowest; leisure strategy, asset management and public health strategies were attributed the lowest competency scores overall. However, respondents did not rate all skills within this area as having a low competency level. The development of management plans for green space had one of the highest competency scores of all the skills.

Despite having the lowest-rated skills, competency, vision, strategy, and policies were not the skills respondents aimed to improve the most. Instead, respondents are aiming for the largest skill competency increase in:

- Franchise development / developing new facilities
- Apprenticeships / skills retention
- Community Infrastructure Levy / S106 / evidence for planning gain
- Performance management frameworks
- Natural capital / resources / landscapes as ecosystems services / flood alleviation / water management / sustainability / climate change and resilience / clean air

Of these five skill areas, three are categorised under income and performance, one as operations and one as environmental stewardship. These results indicate that these skills are the ones respondents feel need improving the most and are likely to be required in future.

Skills in which respondents have the smallest skill competency increase are primarily those categorised as environmental stewardship. With the exception of biodiversity and habitat management, none of the skills has particularly high current competency levels indicating that they are not considered priority skills required in the future instead of being skills respondents already excel in.

All skills are listed by current competency level, competency level being aimed for and difference in Appendix A.

3 Your Current Grade

As part of the survey, respondents were also asked about their current grades. As shown in Chart 1, the largest proportion of respondents were at G7 (18.0%), with most G9 or lower (59.0%). Under 'Other', two respondents specified they were above G12, and one commented they were a volunteer.

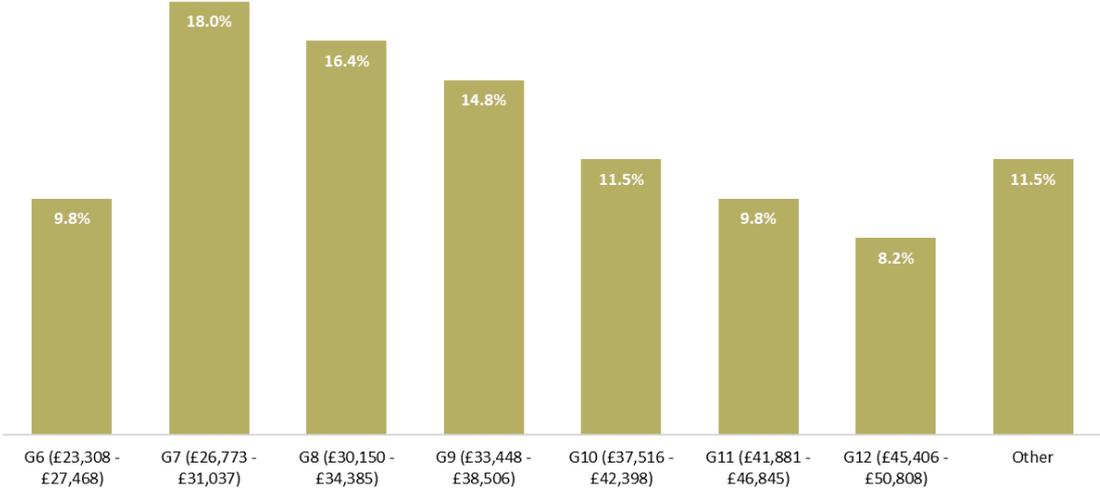


Chart 1 Current grade

4 Apprenticeships

Of the 61 respondents, 17 (27.9%) said they currently had apprentices or trainees in green space in their organisation. Respondents had between one and six apprentices or trainees, with a total of 30 between them.

Table 1 below lists the titles and levels of qualifications currently being undertaken at the organisations. Most are being undertaken in horticulture or countryside and environmental management. Levels of qualification varied from Entry level to Level 4, with most undertaking Level 2.

| Title of Qualification | Level of qualification |
|---|------------------------|
| BTEC (unspecified subject) | Levels 2 to 4 |
| City & Guilds work based environmental conservation | Level 2 |
| City guilds horticulture | N/K |
| Countryside Management | Level 2 |
| Countryside Ranger Apprenticeship | Level 4 |
| Horticulture | Level 2 |
| Horticulture | Levels 2 to 3 |
| Horticulture / Mechanic | Levels 2 to 3 |
| Kickstart Scheme | Entry |
| Kickstart Trainee Ranger | N/K |
| National diploma in environmental conservation | Level 3 |
| NVQ (unspecified subject) | Levels 1 to 2 |

Table 1 Qualifications currently being undertaken

5 Summary

The MPF skills survey has indicated where members currently sit within the competency framework and which skills they aim to develop further. These results can help the MPF prioritise and target what training opportunities and experiences they should offer their members in future. The skills with the largest gap in current competency level and the level being aimed for are those on which the MPF could focus their training:

- Franchise development / developing new facilities
- Apprenticeships / skills retention
- Community Infrastructure Levy / S106 / evidence for planning gain
- Performance management frameworks
- Natural capital / resources / landscapes as ecosystems services / flood alleviation / water management / sustainability / climate change and resilience / clean air

The skills survey also noted some interesting trends which may be worth taking into account when planning future training and learning opportunities:

- Skills in which respondents gauged their current competency level to be highest mostly related to people, notably community engagement, visitor management, health and safety and partnership management. This would indicate that these are viewed as key skills that are regularly used by park managers and should therefore also be considered areas for training, particularly partnership development, which respondents would like to become “accomplished” in.
- The skills in which respondents gauged their competency level to be the lowest currently primarily fell under vision, strategy and policy development. However, these were not the skills respondents aimed to improve the most.
- The number of respondents who identified contract and procurement as a skill they wanted to improve substantially may indicate that an increasing number of park managers rely on external consultants to carry out work or that procurement is equally becoming more complex and there are less council staff to support the process. This may be an area worth exploring in future training.
- Areas in which respondents aim to increase their skills were related to income generation through franchise development and accessing funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy and s106. However, respondents also identified demonstrating the value of parks and performance management frameworks as priorities, both of which

are skills likely to aid in the writing of funding bids and in justifying the need for budget increases within the organisation. Therefore, training in securing additional income to support parks and green spaces through both securing funding and income generation should be explored in future training.

- Except for natural capital, skills within the category of environmental stewardship were identified as the lowest priorities, with the smallest differences between the current competency level and the competency level being aimed for. However, when asked about what apprenticeships and traineeships their organisations currently offered, most were related to environmental management and horticulture. Apprenticeships and skills retention were identified as the second highest skill respondents are aiming to improve their competency level, implying respondents are aware of the importance of maintaining these skills within their organisations even if they are not the ones to possess them. This should also be a consideration for training and learning opportunities offered in future.

Appendix A All skills by current competency level, competency level being aimed for and difference

| Skill | Current understanding | Aim | Difference |
|---|-----------------------|------|------------|
| Franchise development / developing new facilities | 1.85 | 2.96 | 1.12 |
| Apprenticeships / skills retention | 1.76 | 2.86 | 1.11 |
| Community Infrastructure Levy / S106 / evidence for planning gain | 2.02 | 3.03 | 1.02 |
| Performance management frameworks | 2.16 | 3.18 | 1.01 |
| Natural capital / resources / landscapes as ecosystems services / flood alleviation / water management / sustainability / climate change and resilience / clean air | 2.13 | 3.12 | 0.99 |
| Succession planning for service area | 1.98 | 2.95 | 0.97 |
| Demonstrating the value of parks to both the community and the impact parks can make on reducing other service demands | 2.04 | 3.00 | 0.96 |
| Partnership development | 2.50 | 3.46 | 0.96 |
| Contract / procurement management / specifying for best value | 2.26 | 3.17 | 0.91 |
| Benchmarking | 2.11 | 3.02 | 0.91 |
| Compiling an evidence base of the value of green space | 1.96 | 2.86 | 0.90 |
| Health and well-being / learning and engagement for green spaces | 2.47 | 3.36 | 0.90 |
| Asset Management Strategy / asset transfer / sites under threat / Local Development Plan | 1.63 | 2.52 | 0.89 |
| Digital practice | 1.98 | 2.87 | 0.88 |
| Marketing and promotion | 2.18 | 3.05 | 0.88 |
| External funding applications / income generation / entrepreneurship / sponsorship / CSR | 2.25 | 3.10 | 0.85 |
| Green Space Strategies / measuring open space quality | 2.17 | 3.02 | 0.85 |
| Protected landscapes / heritage | 2.21 | 3.05 | 0.84 |
| Public Health Strategy | 1.69 | 2.51 | 0.82 |
| Negotiation skills | 2.29 | 3.10 | 0.81 |
| Play, events, sports and activities management | 2.39 | 3.20 | 0.81 |
| Project management | 2.41 | 3.22 | 0.80 |
| Leisure Strategy | 1.61 | 2.38 | 0.77 |
| HR / staff management | 2.25 | 3.00 | 0.75 |
| Budget management | 2.39 | 3.13 | 0.74 |
| Green space visitor management / healthy places / physical and social context of sites | 2.63 | 3.36 | 0.73 |
| Stakeholder / community engagement / volunteer programmes / Friends of parks and allotments / consultation / governance of societies and associations | 2.71 | 3.41 | 0.71 |
| Risk, health and safety / keeping parks safe (ASB, crime, drugs) | 2.58 | 3.27 | 0.68 |
| Equality and diversity | 2.32 | 3.00 | 0.68 |
| Development of Management Plans for green space | 2.47 | 3.12 | 0.64 |
| Horticulture / landscape and garten design / nursery production / training | 2.13 | 2.75 | 0.63 |
| Biodiversity / habitat management / environmentally friendly operations (e.g. soil management / conservation / horticulture) | 2.46 | 3.09 | 0.62 |
| Arboriculture and woodlands | 2.22 | 2.84 | 0.62 |
| Rangering / peripatetic teams | 2.17 | 2.77 | 0.60 |
| Sports turf | 1.73 | 2.32 | 0.59 |

KEY

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|---------------------------|
| People |
| Income and Performance |
| Operations |
| Environmental Stewardship |
| Vision Strategy Policies |
| Professional Competencies |