

GWCT

Strategic Plan 2024-2028

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Game & Wildlife
CONSERVATION TRUST

FOREWORD

SIGNING OFF GWCT'S STRATEGIC PLAN IS ALWAYS AN EXCITING MOMENT FOR ME AND OUR TRUSTEES.

Our starting point is to understand how well we have performed against the previous Strategic Plan. I am pleased to say that we have achieved most of the objectives we set ourselves. In Scotland, we developed the **'Best practice with proof'** programme using EpiCollect with great success, building a foundation for collecting practitioner evidence across the UK. Recognising the value of clear science, we have helped fill the evidence and knowledge gap for both the recovery of salmonid species and the dispersal of released gamebirds. Looking across national landscapes, we continued to support farmers through the new Environmental Farmers Group and the launch of our GWCT Natural Capital Advisory service, helping to deliver an array of environmental outcomes. Closer to home, we remained committed to our valued staff through our People Strategy and maintained our liP accreditation.

GWCT will be 100 years old in 2030 – quite a milestone. We have been preparing Strategic Plans on a four-year cycle since 2005. In each we have built on our strengths, confirmed our foundations, improved our fundraising, and delivered outcomes at a larger scale.

This Strategic Plan takes place at a time of considerable change in the world we operate in; in terms of environmental policy, attitudes to farming and game management, and to the economic framework within which our conservation community operates – farmers, gamekeepers, and other land managers.

I am, of course, talking about leaving the EU and the UK government taking responsibility for all of our environmental policy; a movement to natural capital markets which will effectively 'monetise' the environment; proactive political agendas against livestock farming and shooting in parts of the United Kingdom; and the removal of the Basic Payment Scheme by the end of 2027 which will create the biggest financial shock the farming and land management community has faced for decades.



The Rt Hon Sir James Paice PC DL

GWCT CHAIRMAN

We want a thriving countryside rich in biodiversity. Whilst food production is vital, we also want the countryside contributing its share to mitigate our twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Unlike many other charities we do not have nature reserves; our mission is to persuade and inspire those people who manage land and water to make it a better place for nature themselves. All our research is applied to that purpose. That means that as we evolve in terms of the scale of impact we aspire to, our research agenda will need to evolve too.

I am delighted to recommend this new Strategic Plan 2024 to 2028 to you. Although it is a four-year plan, it takes us to within a skip of our 100th anniversary. Science is the accumulation of knowledge, and in that respect, we all stand on the shoulders of giants who have gone before us.

Every single member of staff has contributed to our ideas for **Modernisation, Ambition**, and the **Proposition** that we want to put to practitioners, policymakers, and the public – our **MAP** for our future.

...our mission is to persuade and inspire those people who manage land and water to make it a better place for nature themselves. All our research is applied to that purpose.

A handwritten signature in white ink, likely belonging to Sir James Paice, set against a background of a green landscape.





Staying ahead of the game

We have a vision for a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife. Using our experience and reputation built over almost 100 years of working with people in the countryside, we are committed to developing the science that underpins game, wildlife, and fisheries management. We promote our work to conservationists, farmers, and landowners as well as to Government, so that Britain's countryside and its wildlife are enhanced for the public benefit.

Research and demonstration

The GWCT is clear that science should underpin conservation principles and our research is what differentiates us from most conservation NGOs that primarily manage nature reserves or lobby. Our scientific outputs are key to our organisational credibility and influence. The Research Department has a broad range of knowledge and skills spanning many habitats and taxa. Our work has evolved from a focus on the ecology of game species to improving sustainable game and wildlife management practices, applying game management principles to the recovery of species of conservation concern and to biodiversity generally, and increasing our understanding of the environmental outcomes of farming and other forms of land management, such as soil health and water quality.

Putting science into practice is key and happens at our two research and demonstration farms (The Allerton Project at Loddington and our Scottish Demonstration Farm at Auchnerran), our Salmon & Trout Research Centre on the Dorset river Frome, and across our Wales Farmer Network.

Conservation built on core values

The countryside faces many competing challenges: to deliver for biodiversity and the environment, to increase our national food security, and to provide a place of recreation for our people. We believe that good conservation can go hand-in-hand with economic land use, especially when sustainable conservation practice is underpinned by sound scientific research.

Within that, our work has shown that game and wildlife management can be an effective way to deliver good conservation, that shooting and fishing can contribute substantially to the conservation of landscape, habitat, and wildlife, and that intervention in our man-made landscapes is important to delivering balance.

Working with land managers to deliver positive change

We work with the heroes of our landscape, who we call **'working conservationists'**, to boost their impact and deliver for our countryside, its wildlife, and its people. Whether they are a gamekeeper, ghillie, land manager, farmer, river keeper, or forester, our research and advice can guide them to do the right thing to provide productive land for food, recreation and, most importantly, the wildlife and ecosystems that require it.

To support these goals, we not only answer the difficult questions with our research, but we bring those findings to policymakers who can shape the future of our landscape. Where science alone is not enough, we tell the real stories of our working conservationists – their trials and tribulations, success, and sacrifice.

OUR VALUES

Committed to conservation

We have a passion for biodiversity, wildlife, and the countryside.

Follow the science

We use research and evidence to inform our views and advice, finding solutions rather than simply identifying problems.

Collaborative at heart

We work in partnership with NGOs, government agencies, and educational institutions alike, also recognising the valuable contribution made and expertise offered by working conservationists when it comes to making the countryside a better place for nature.

Proud of our approach

We do the things that will work, rather than the things that are comfortable. We value practical and pragmatic solutions. We tackle complex problems.

People first

We are a team, we support each other, learn from our colleagues and collaborators, and celebrate our successes.



OUR CORE AIMS

Supporting farmers, riverkeepers, gamekeepers, and moorland managers to make the land they manage a better place for nature.



SPEAK OUT

to maximise our impact

We advocate for policy decisions based on peer-reviewed evidence rather than who shouts the loudest.

Our work must find as broad a home as possible, and by increasing our voice, we can ensure our research has a greater impact.

Many of our scientists already appear on national television, radio, and in the press, communicating their research in an accessible and interesting way and reaching thousands of people. Our Communications team have had great success in boosting this so far, and we want to further empower more of our scientists to become science communicators in the public eye.

In the past four years, our weekly email newsletter list has grown by 152%, with other newsletters delivering focused content to the farming, wildlife, and game management communities. We want to grow these audiences and expand our digital communications to increase both our reach and impact.

We also want our work to inform the big policy decisions affecting the future of our countryside and the people and wildlife within it. We will make our research accessible to all those who could benefit from it to help this happen.

Additionally, where misinformation exists, we will challenge it. Since 2019 we have run What The Science Says, a platform that fact-checks claims in the public domain. Easily accessible to the national press, political parties, and other conservation organisations, it informs the debate and presents an accurate picture of the research in our field.

STEP UP

to landscape-scale conservation

In 2010, Sir John Lawton's groundbreaking *Making Space for Nature* report suggested the solution for nature recovery was **'more, bigger, better and joined up'**. Our advisory work prides itself on **'better'**, and we have made it our mission to encourage farmers to come together, thereby delivering the other three objectives.

We started by inventing Farmer Clusters in 2013, bringing farmers together from the bottom up to restore wildlife habitats. We have seen amazing results – from lapwings breeding successfully in the Avon Valley, to butterflies, grey partridges, harvest mice, and barn owls increasing on Martin Down. We have supported them with monitoring, training, and essential conservation tools like owl boxes.

Building on that success, in 2022, we helped launch Environmental Farmers Groups (EFGs) taking the farmers' ambition to catchment scale. These groups are growing fast and have the potential to reach 1.6 million hectares by 2025. That's 15% of England. By joining EFGs, farmers and land managers can coordinate their environmental actions and decisions across whole catchments.

We have an ambition to expand Environmental Farmers Groups in Wales and Scotland, to build on our existing Wales Farmer Network and those farmers in Scotland who have started Farmer Clusters, albeit so far without government support. We will move forward with these plans once those countries further develop their transition from the Common Agricultural Policy to new domestic environmental and farm support policies.

GWCT's new Natural Capital Advisory service, helps deliver a wide range of environmental outcomes including biodiversity net gain, carbon sequestration, nutrient reduction, cleaner air and water, and improved soil quality.

We believe this is a game-changer for nature conservation, where the vision for a whole landscape is translated into reality on the ground. It is the opportunity we will seize in the next four years.



We have pioneered **practitioner evidence** for decades, starting with the National Gamebag Census, the Grey Partridge Count Scheme, and then the Big Farmland Bird Count. Data gathered by practitioners using apps allows us to expand into a myriad of other species and wildlife management practices.

We believe that working with the stewards of land is the best way to achieve our charitable objectives. They manage 72% of the UK's land, compared to only 8% managed by nature reserves. By bringing them together, they can be part of the solution and deliver even more for nature and people.

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STAND UP

for what works

With national biodiversity in decline and new government targets in place, we believe that the simplest way forward is to encourage what has been proven to work.

Nearly all our research into game management has informed practices which have yielded conservation gains for other wildlife. Indeed, GWCT's definition of sustainable game management is that it should yield a broader net biodiversity gain. For example, our game cover crop study in the 1990s informed agri-environment scheme measures in the 2000s and are now seen as best practice; our research into predation management is now adopted for species recovery especially vulnerable waders.

The UK's landscape faces many competing pressures. As we work to restore nature, land will need to be even more multifunctional. GWCT will work to solve those conflicts and trade-offs with practical, pragmatic, win-win solutions, using IUCN guidelines for both area-based conservation and human-wildlife conflict and coexistence.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE



1 GWCT is one of the few organisations in the UK that has continuous datasets going back decades

- The Sussex Study: 1968
- National Gamebag Census: 1961
- Salmon and trout populations on the Frome: 1970s
- Red grouse and other upland birds: 1980s
- The Allerton Project: 1992

THE CONSERVATION WORLD IS COLLECTIVELY TRYING TO TACKLE THE TWIN CRISES OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS AND CLIMATE CHANGE. GWCT has an important role to play because of the way in which we work with farmers, river keepers, game keepers, moorland managers, and others in England, Scotland, and Wales. By helping them work collaboratively at significant scale, putting our science into practice, GWCT has a big impact. In a nutshell, our aim is to achieve landscape-scale nature recovery to the point of resilience.

Over the next four years the key elements contributing to this will be:

1. An evolving research programme.

We will maintain game-related research, and continue to focus research on species recovery, long-term population resilience, and routes to net environmental gain at landscape-scale, also exploring opportunities for collaboration with international partners. Our Research team has already embraced new technologies from GPS tracking and drones to DNA analysis, employing AI to speed up data processing and novel statistical analysis to inform management. We see a continued need to invest in our data support team to ensure timely scientific outputs, increase data collection by practitioners, and to facilitate modelling of likely outcomes of policy options and land management scenarios.

We will extract new knowledge from long-term datasets which go back to the 1960s¹ whilst continuing to collect data and build the legacy of these projects. Almost every piece of our science over the years has made use of these datasets, but now their decades of data make them intrinsically valuable in their own right.

2. Expanding our use of practitioner evidence.

One of the first things we get asked by land managers is **'what monitoring can we do to know if we are succeeding?'**. GWCT is launching an expanded Practitioner Evidence Programme to deliver cost-effective farmland and moorland monitoring that farmers and gamekeepers can use to evidence biodiversity gains, licence applications, and track species recovery.

3. Using land manager collaboration to deliver biodiversity recovery at scale.

GWCT has always worked closely with land managers. Environmental Farmer Groups have an ambition to provide a reversal of biodiversity loss, clean water, and net carbon zero farming at river catchment scale. We know from discussions with EFG farmers that those targets are largely achievable; this is a replicable and scalable model to deliver against the nation's targets.

Over decades GWCT has earned the trust of hundreds of farmers and land managers up and down the country who now want to collaboratively contribute to solving the biodiversity and climate change crises.

4. Boosting our education and engagement programme.

GWCT's vision for a thriving countryside rich in game and wildlife needs those who live in, work in, and manage the countryside to be aware of our research and be open to adopting our advice. We will continue to deliver our sector-leading best practice courses for practitioners across England, Scotland, and Wales, designing future courses to meet the needs of changing environmental policy. Recognising the value of youth engagement, we will extend and develop our further and higher education engagement with colleges and universities, expanding our current work with the younger generation by providing educational content for secondary education (including the natural history GCSE) and engaging with primary audiences where appropriate. We also see a continued and growing need to continue raising awareness and educating the general public through our everyday interactions, utilising media channels and face-to-face encounters at conferences, events, and shows to help achieve this.

5. Embracing a new era of communications.

To effectively tackle the twin crises, it is vitally important that we can eloquently share our scientific knowledge and practical experience to help the general public, land managers, and policymakers understand both the issues we face, and how to solve them. We want to further embrace the tools available to us and continue empowering our existing audiences to do good, whilst also attracting and educating new ones. Maximising our use of targeted marketing and adopting well-focused, interdepartmental communication strategies will play a major role in this, as will improved use of high-impact engagement tools such as social media campaigns, videos and short films, and publications such as Think Pieces. The review and update of our offer to members and other supporters, a new CRM, and the development of a new website will be central to this, allowing us to be methodical and data-led in our approach.

By the end of this Strategic Plan, GWCT will have ensured that the rural community will be recognised as contributing to reversing biodiversity loss through combining food production and sustainable game and wildlife management, delivering excellent environmental outcomes. The people who manage 72% of the UK's land should be recognised as working conservationists and trusted to deliver in accordance with good science and best practice.

MODERNISATION & INNOVATION

Research & Advisory

2024



Further embrace technology to improve the scale and accuracy of research, and increase its commercial potential, e.g. GPS tracking, drone surveys of species and habitats, acoustic monitoring.



Build capacity and expertise in data modelling and statistical analysis techniques.



Support and learn from EFGs as our route to tackle twin crises of biodiversity and climate.

2025



Utilise innovative technology to release human capacity for scientific research.



Develop and implement practitioner evidence data hub.

2028



Develop wider recognition for the education, research, and policy value of 'Game & Wildlife Scottish Demonstration Farm', increasing its reputation as a centre of excellence.

Core Support Teams

2024



Increase the impact of our communications, better utilising video and other media to tell our story.

2025



Develop a training programme to better support wider staff in media and communications work.



Create a new website to act as a central tool for engagement and education.



Establish the Membership, Marketing, and Communications department as a central hub for marketing and design work, databases, raffles, events, GDPR, and more, centralising admin and quality control.



Review data storage and transfer appropriate applications and data to the Cloud rather than on local servers.



Implement a new CRM system that enables data-driven fundraising and delivers easy access to data on supporters, members, and related activities.

Organisation Development

2024



Launch and implement an apprenticeship scheme in 2024.



Add further training and office space to our project infrastructure.



Develop corporate partnerships delivering long-term income streams.



Start a programme of staff leadership development and talent management.

2026



Increase work on environmental services and develop better links with university and industry partners.



Begin building process for a new working space at Burgate Manor, delivering net zero impact and reducing running costs.

2027



Implement a youth development programme, supporting apprenticeships across the Trust.

2028



Make significant progress towards carbon neutrality across our operations.

AMBITION



Research & Advisory

2024



Further our credentials outside of game and shoot related areas.



Explore opportunities for international research partnerships.



Increase impact of publications by producing review articles and modelling land use scenarios.



Be at the forefront using the latest technology to deliver ecological science – e.g. drones, acoustics, meta barcoding, eDNA, AI.

2026



Increase number of PhD studentships across all research teams by 2026.



Develop a research project to examine the impact of wind turbines on the use of surrounding habitats by farmland birds at the Allerton Project.



Upgrade and develop our capacity and technology for analysing and accounting our soil Greenhouse Gases (GHG), soil carbon, and NUE at the Allerton Project.



Conclude review of National Gamebag Census and Partridge Count Scheme and roll out new process, aiming to double the number of participants by the end of 2026.

2025



Develop expertise in social science through staff training and recruitment.



Expand delivery of our advice on best practice game management initiatives to demonstrate effective sector self-regulation.



Develop refined collaborative mechanisms that better suit hill edge/upland and tenant farms.



Map the Allerton Project farm soil carbon and Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) within 24 months; repeated in five years to record trends.



Further develop the GWCT Hedgerow Carbon Code.

2027



Aim for 5,000 contributors to practitioner evidence hub by end 2027.



Establish a long-term managed *rewilding* project on unproductive agricultural land at the Allerton Project with partners.

2028



Increase publication rate to 45 papers per annum by 2028.

Core Support Teams

2024



Facilitate new accounting and reporting systems and processes for Environmental Farmers Groups and others.



Develop capacity for improved, detailed cashflow forecasting, allowing for more detailed financial monitoring and stronger involvement of finance in major projects.

2025



Establish a chapter of Game Conservancy USA in Texas, aim for first meeting in 2025.



Design a new hybrid fundraising event.



Review our legacy offer and income potential, improving storytelling and engagement with the scheme.

2026



Conclude review and implement an updated membership offer to build and diversify our supporter base.



Boost public engagement through a national radio marketing campaign.



Build upon proposition review to improve our relevance to, and engagement with, a broader audience.



Review and replace our financial accounting system by 2026 to allow individual managers and budget holders to access their own financial information, and manage Purchase Orders and expenses online.

2028



Implement an updated membership offer and develop a diverse supporter base.



Build our email subscriber base to 230,000 people by 2028.

Organisation Development

2024



Develop mechanism for supporting volunteers through schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.



Review and improve processes to boost workflow efficiency across teams to allow them to add more value to the organisation.



Explore potential for more collaborative working and identify department and staff interdependencies.



Implement a hybrid and flexible working culture to attract and support a more diverse range of talent.

2025



Begin process of redeveloping the farmyard at the Allerton Project, pesticide storage facilities and services.



Seek planning consent for a single large turbine at the Allerton Project.



Conclude a comprehensive review of staff policies and procedures to better enable innovation and success across the Trust.

2028



Achieve Investors in People (IiP) Platinum by 2028.

PROPOSITION



Research & Advisory

2024



Scottish Advisory to continue developing data capture systems working alongside land managers.



Make Natural Capital Advisory services available for farmers and land managers.



Increase our ability to provide technical and policy advice on game management issues to governments.



Form partnerships with European countries that share particular cultural practices and/or migratory species.



Continue to deliver tailored landscape-scale farmland conservation advice.



Develop a proactive vision for Scotland's land use, better articulating our policy and research.

2025



Ensure we have a credible offering in farmland ecology advisory, helping drive forward Scottish clusters.



Develop evidence of net biodiversity gain of game management practices.



We are not only academics; we are 'Prac-ademics' let's shout more about our practical applications.



Establish a collaborative farmer network in Wales.

Core Support Teams

2024



Promote science-based best practice advice and have a firmer stance on bad practice, also challenging misinformation and ineffective policy.



Continue developing and promoting the 'Working Conservation – Working for Wildlife' story.



Ensure better use of new media sources, including video, to better articulate policy and research work.



Improve our ability to connect with different audiences through a variety of communication styles.



Create the narrative around controversial management choices and methods.



Utilise film and other media to drive membership, income, and awareness for our policy work.

2025



Establish a European office to access European funding.

2028



Become a mainstream voice in solving Britain's biodiversity crisis and the improving resilience of our ecosystems.

SUPPORTING OUR PEOPLE



PEOPLE ARE THE LIFEBLOOD OF EVERY ORGANISATION – THEY ARE WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO AND ARE CRITICAL TO ENABLING ORGANISATIONS TO DELIVER THEIR MISSION, VISION, VALUES, AND OUTCOMES.

Our staff have great skills and abilities that need to be understood, brought to the fore, and then empowered to deliver their best outputs. The development of our staff is a key driver that underpins our future success, and identifying our strengths allows us to work as a team to deliver the organisational goals.

We have worked on the structures across the Trust in 2023 with further development planned in 2024 and beyond. The recruitment process has been developed, ensuring opportunities for all employees across the Trust with every new role being advertised in a single format to every employee. This openness and transparency encourages individuals and teams to grow and develop skills, capabilities and integrate processes to increase performance.

We have also launched a leadership development programme, focussing on individual skills, ambitions, capabilities, and goals initially, and looking to take it to team and leadership levels from 2026 onwards. This programme will enable Directors and managers to learn about themselves and their teams, allowing staff to better understand the skills, capabilities, and weaknesses of their colleagues and helping teams to focus the right resource in the right place to deliver empowered solutions for the Trust.

The GWCT wants to modernise and innovate, utilising technology to release human capacity for scientific research. We want our staff to be able to focus on utilising their skills and knowledge, and so are investing in systems and processes to release their time and developing new ways of working collaboratively.

Across this Strategic Plan we aim to:

 <p>Have regular team building 'away days' for leadership staff</p>	<p>DELIVER</p> <p>all staff briefings</p> <p>EVERY SIX WEEKS</p>	<p>Use technology</p>  <p>to release human capacity, utilising data analytics, CRM systems, scanning data sets, improving safety with new spot devices</p>
 <p>Boosting collaboration and inter-department working via weekly Director calls</p>	 <p>Improve role succession planning and leadership development</p>	 <p>Agree a Health and Safety training structure and implement it across the Trust</p>
 <p>Operate a standardised process for hiring staff, using a single job description format across the Trust, internally advertising all new roles, and announcing new arrivals and changes to job roles</p>	<p>REVIEW ALL</p> <p>Trust policies, procedures and processes</p>	<p>Launch and implement the</p> <p>Management Development programme</p> <p>with 360 degree reviews completed by 2026</p>
 <p>Provide regular 'Tool box safety talks' for staff</p>	 <p>Facilitate annual and interim appraisals online</p>	 <p>Review and improve our environmental impact, launching the</p>
 <p>Launch and implement a Learning and Development plan</p>	<p>Start a 'Finding the stars' programme to identify up and coming staff</p>	<p>'Green my team' programme and aiming to meet our targets by 2030</p>

Peer reviewed research
Effective policy
Sustainable farming, land,
and wildlife management

Fundraising
Research grants

Communications,
publications, and
social research

Administration and
support services



PERFORMANCE

We approach some key milestones in the history of the Trust.

After 20 years of dedicated service and growth we will soon have a new CEO. We will also have a new Chairman in 2025 and will be celebrating a key milestone of 100yrs of the Trust in 2030 by which point we aim to have an annual turnover of £15 million. We are at the forefront of landscape-scale environmental projects across the UK working with farmers, landowners, and the Government.

People – process – performance

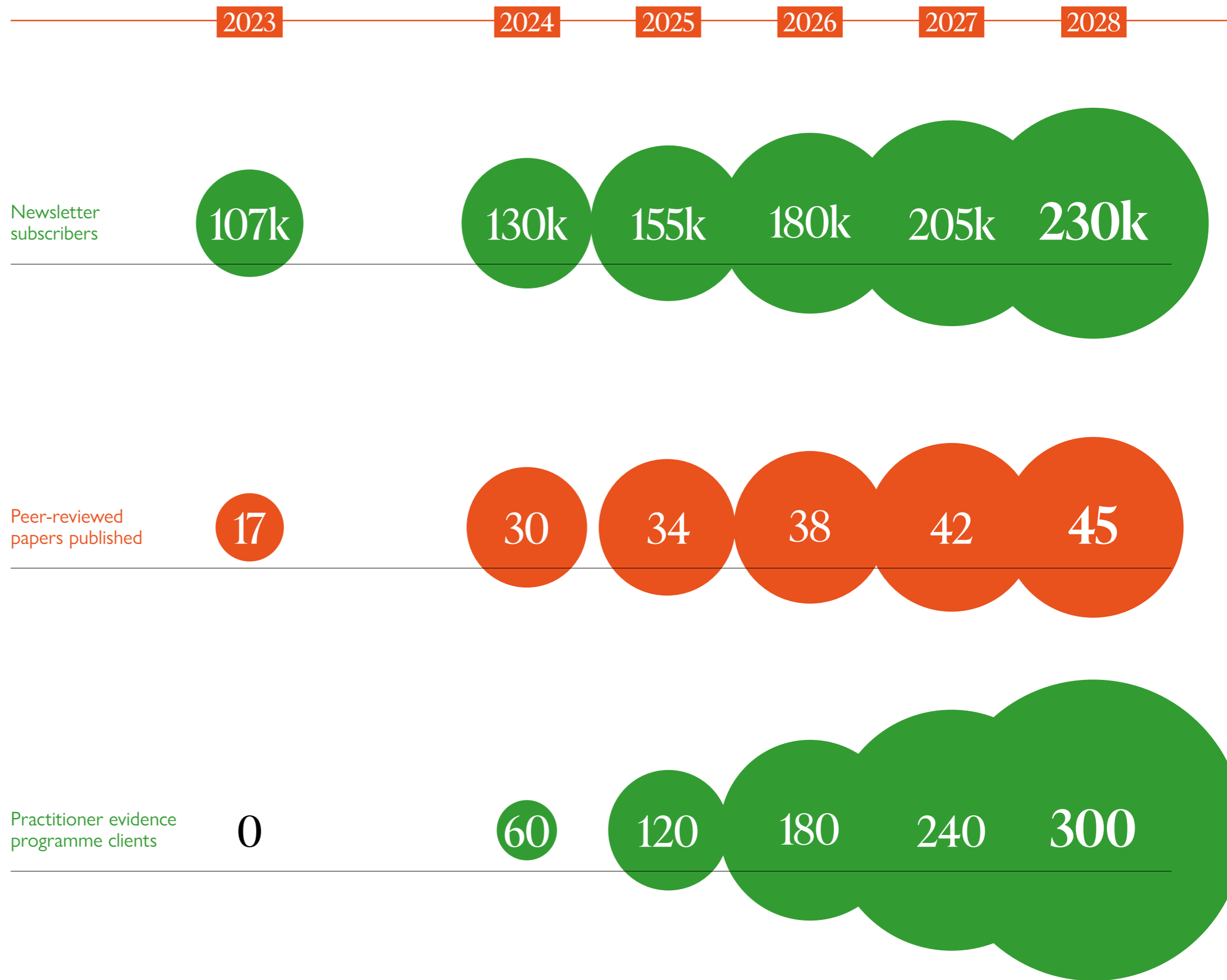
When you have the right **people** in the right structure with the right kit, equipment, systems, and you empower them to innovate and develop **processes**, the **performance** of the organisation develops quickly and robustly.

The leadership team have developed a considered financial forecast, with growth at 7% in most areas, taking into account the operational and financial position over the last 10 years, the opportunities ahead to 2030, and the desire to develop new services. The growth in our **online audience**, forecast at 12%, is seen as a significant opportunity to grow income from previously untapped sources and grow our scientific research interest to a wider family audience, growing the numbers and diversity of supporters. We aim to have **230,000** newsletter subscribers by **2028**, up from our 107,000 in 2023.

We are working on improving our tendering capability in wider markets, including European and international sectors with funding for scientific research. We are going to boost our output of **peer reviewed papers**, growing our student and apprenticeship employment to free up senior resources to write papers. We want to develop a Duke of Edinburgh Awards programme, enabling those completing the Bronze, Silver, and Gold awards to complete their volunteering within our organisation. We are also looking at utilising the apprenticeship programme to boost capacity and increase employee diversity.

We will continue to deliver strong growth by empowering and supporting our staff to be innovative, develop dynamic processes, and drive increased, sustainable financial and operational performance.

Progress Milestones





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