

Labour and Skills

HTA Briefing

Introduction

Disruption to the labour market by EU-Exit and coronavirus, alongside the seasonal nature of some horticultural work, increasing pressures to raise wages and limited accessibility to rural premises, have horticulture businesses struggling to recruit and retain the necessary staff.

Labour and skills improvements need to be approached from two different angles: access to seasonal workers and access to permanent skilled workers, including the skills pipeline. There is a breadth of skilled permanent roles and career opportunities within the industry; including, but are not limited to; environmental, scientific, biodiversity, biosecurity, growers, species protectors and business owners.

Seasonal Labour and Automation

We welcome the increased allocation of visas for the 2023 [Seasonal Workers Scheme](#), and the recognition that certain sectors – daffodil growers for example – require access to labour far earlier in the season than others.

The independent Defra Report on [Automation in Horticulture](#) led by Professor Simon Pearson, states:

‘A long-term Seasonal Workers Scheme would help to stabilise workforce pressures in the sector, helping growers to better evaluate their labour needs over time and incentivising long-term capital investments in automation technology. While a new Seasonal Workers Visa Route has been announced for 2022 to 2024, the length of any future schemes should ideally match the period preceding the feasible mass-adoption of automation technology.’

The report also made clear that technology alone is not a solution. There is a need to provide the necessary infrastructure, funding, guidance, and regulations to support this sectoral revolution.

Key asks for Parliament & Policy Makers

- To champion the increased inclusion of horticultural positions in the upcoming review of the Shortage Occupation List.
- To ensure longer-term certainty for seasonal workers in horticulture. This will allow growers to evaluate labour needs more accurately over time, stabilise workforce pressures, and incentivise investment in automation technology.
- To improve communication and collaboration between Defra and the Home Office. A clear, formal definition of roles and responsibilities within each department relating to labour and immigration matters is crucial.
- To extend the length of visas for SAWS workers to 9 months to ensure that they are of value to the horticulture sector.
- To collaborate with industry and training providers to identify, co-ordinate, and share best practice in skills delivery for horticulture and landscaping.
- To support an audit of the training provision across the sector to assess gaps against skills needs.
- To ensure there is appropriate, funded skills provision, drive improvements, and look for opportunities to further develop training.
- Reform the Apprenticeships Levy to ensure it is a viable training option for SMEs in the horticulture industry.
- Raise awareness of T-levels amongst education providers and businesses and promote them as a valuable mechanism of entering the industry.
- To recognise careers in horticulture as green growth jobs which are vital to delivering environmental goals and promote them as such.

About us

The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) represents 1500 members in the Environmental Horticulture Sector including; garden centre retailers, tree and plant growers, goods manufacturers, landscapers,

and service providers. Our industry supports nearly 700,000 jobs, has a national GDP of £28.8 billion, mitigates climate change and benefits health and wellbeing for 30 million gardeners in the UK.

Further information

For further information contact the HTA Policy Team via email at policy@hta.org.uk and visit hta.org.uk/policy

What is the HTA position on permanent labour, skills and careers in horticulture?

Recent research from the Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group (OHRG) found that across the UK ornamental horticulture and landscaping sector, 10% of supervisor roles, 14% of skilled trade roles, and 11% of professional/technical roles remain open.

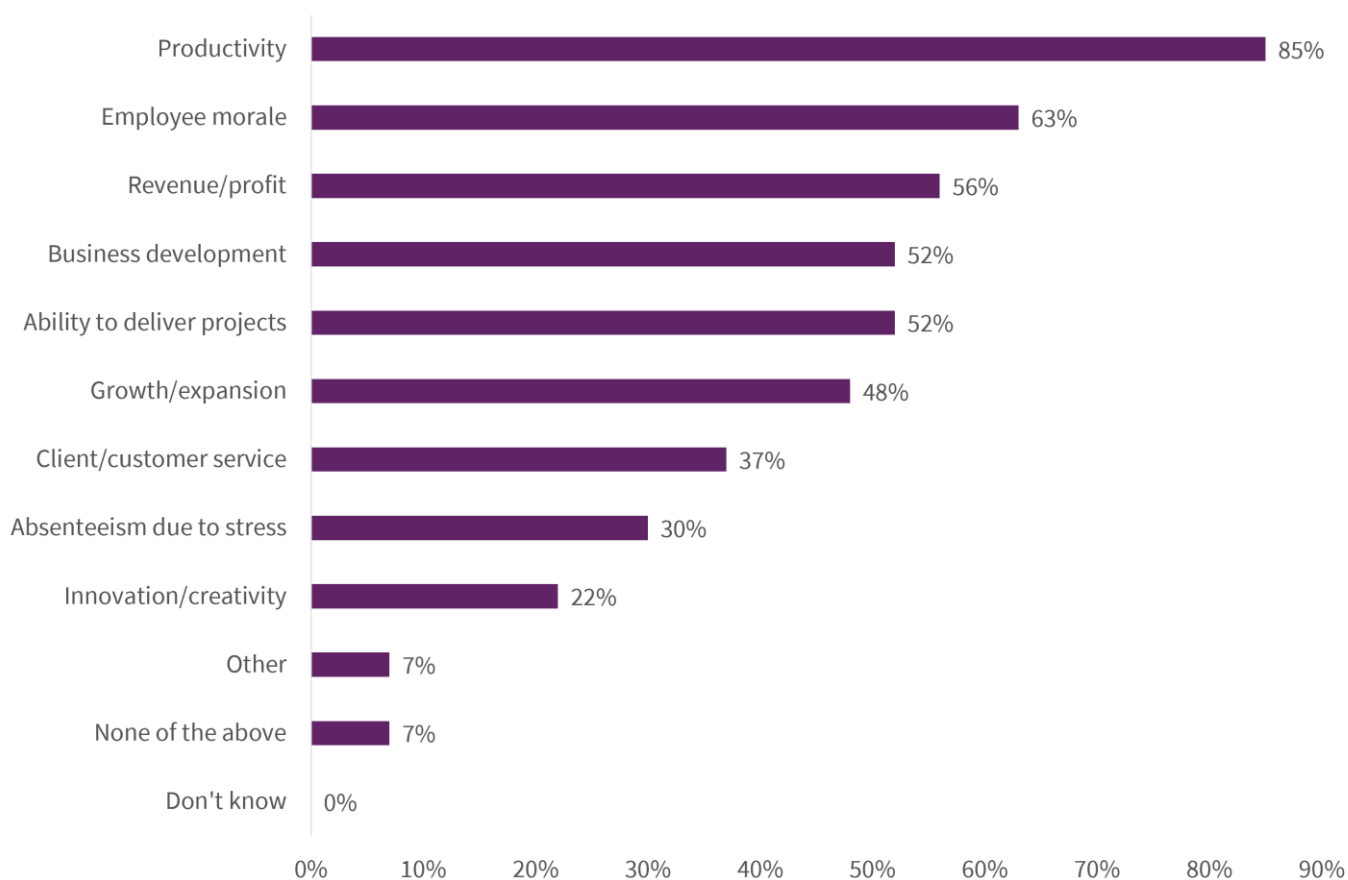
If these shortfalls remain, the cost to the UK's economy is projected to be £1.4 billion per year in lost direct GDP contributions by 2030.

Horticulture underwrites 50% of the 25-year Environmental Plan but to deliver this, careers advice and training opportunities must be improved to reflect the needs of the industry.

Information about pathways such as T-levels, apprenticeships, land-based courses and degree qualifications needs to be amended to reflect the range of jobs in the sector and their importance in delivering the green growth agenda.

Our sector, like many others, would welcome support to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within its workforce, with just 38% of workers being female and only 1% being from non-white backgrounds in 2019.

Impacts of labour shortages



Base: 27 ornamental growers who indicated a shortage of labour
HTA Wages & Labour Benchmarking survey 2021

January 2023

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