




# HTA Annual Review 2023



# Introductions from President, Chairman and CEO

# President's Statement

As I approach my one-year anniversary as HTA President, it has been a great time to reflect on the year and all that I have learnt. The main focus for my first year as HTA President has been to visit as many member businesses as possible as I believe that it is vital that I hear things first hand from members. I have been blown away by the quality, standards, innovation, support and community engagement I have seen from everyone, and I feel proud to represent you all as your President. I have really appreciated the openness and honesty shown on these visits and I have ensured that all feedback has been followed up.

I have also seen first hand the work that HTA and our members are working on together and it is really powerful to see the impact and change we can make when we join together as one team and one voice. I have taken over the mantle of chairing both the HTA Board and Council meetings and it is through these forums that we debate and review what matters most to our members and hold ourselves accountable for delivering value for both our members and the industry.

We may still have challenging times ahead of us but I do believe we have strong foundations to build from and I look forward to continuing to represent you all in the best way I can as your HTA President.

Alan Down  
HTA President





# Chairman's Statement

At our conference in October last year, I referred to this somewhat dated but appropriately relevant concept of the VUCA world we live in. A world where Volatility-Uncertainty-Complexity-Ambiguity abound – a world of constant unpredictable change.

Again, I think this has indeed been a good descriptor for what we have all had to face into. Whether that be the macro-economic environment both nationally and internationally, whether that be a function of Brexit, Covid or the new geopolitical environment we find ourselves in or all three. Perhaps all exacerbated by the climate change and technological revolutions referred to in previous reports. Whilst I don't envy any government in dealing with such circumstances, I can't help but feel that all four of those VUCA words can be applied in a lot of cases as result of a self-inflicted legislative agenda from Government.

Change will always be there – the skill is in recognising its pace and scanning forward for its impacts.

Indeed, it has been a year of significant change for your trade association. Perhaps the most significant of which has been the recruitment of effectively a new senior leadership team. A process you could argue commenced two years ago with the recruitment of Jon Dixon as our Director of Gifting, the promotion of Dave Denny to Director of Insights and Research. Followed by the joining in September last year of Elia Johnston and Jennifer Pheasey as Director of Marketing and Director Policy and Public Affairs respectively. And latterly the recruitment of Fran Barnes as CEO. That said, all with the degree of essential continuity brought by Alex Vick our Finance Director.

This has allowed your organisation to start to do more. I will let Fran give you a detailed synopsis of achievements in her report suffice it to say.

Our profile across government is now substantially higher. Our presence at Westminster is now weekly and we continue to foster very positive engagement with devolved nations – Holyrood in particular.

Our communications strategy has, I believe, started to deliver more with additional briefings, technical workshops, webinars and a refreshed weekly update.

Our ability to collect and analyse data has gained momentum. Our monthly market review being the most widely read report we produce.

HTA events continue to attract larger audiences.

Our gifting proposition that you will know from previous reports underwrites two thirds of what we do. Successful contract negotiations ensured a positive future for the HTA, migrating all gift card sales from our legacy provider to our current gift card partner ePay. This is a key step towards the HTA achieving a single gifting operating model, something I know all our retail members will appreciate. In fact, it has allowed us to get closer to some of the issues and to extol some of the commercial advantages of gifting alongside positioning members to take advantage of the new digital technology that could revolutionise benefits for both customers and retailers.

Finally, I hope our ability to build strong working relationships with other groups and Associations will be seen to bear fruit whether that be our long-standing close relationship with the RHS; the NFU; through to the recently created HCP that will be so vital in managing future crop protection issues or the significant role I believe the HTA can play with regard to UK biosecurity and working alongside Plant Healthy Ltd.

All of these individual achievements I believe have combined to raise our profile and our reputation for standing up for our membership and the wider industry.

The more complex, uncertain and ambiguous the world is, the greater the need for really insightful assistance and even more so when so much of that comes from government itself. I hope our increased ability to not only shine a light on the complexities but to genuinely push back on some of the regulatory inconsistencies is where we can add huge value. The recent House of Lords Committee on Horticulture is a first in a generation and I believe will result in a further recognition of our sector's contribution to the UK economy and to society as a whole.

One of the key strategic challenges will be how we construct a broader sustainability plan for our sector building on what we have already achieved. Not only as a genuine practical guide for business improvement and benchmarking but something that gets us ahead of the game in terms of net zero and the plethora of other environmental ambitions that other institutions may wish to challenge us on.

Our new senior leadership team bring with them great insight and I am confident that, under the leadership of your new CEO Fran, we can look to a fresh strategic approach to our challenges and how we become even more professional in what we do to represent our members.

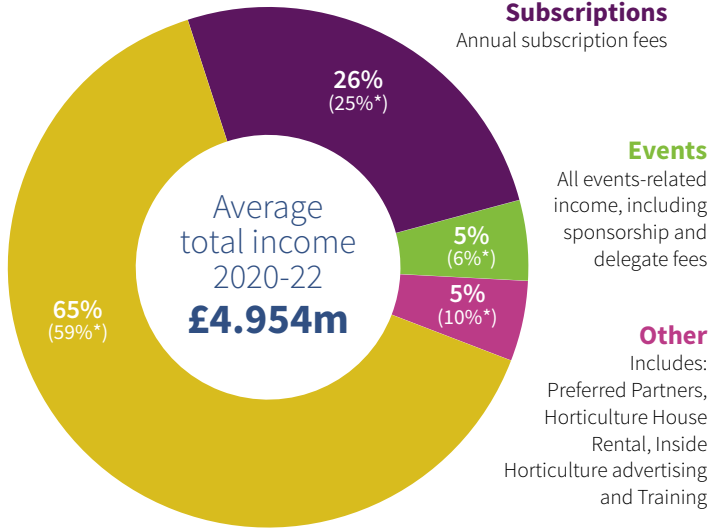
A thank you to all of you for again allowing us the time and the access to data sources that are so critical to achieving our ambitions particularly on the policy agenda – without data we have nothing.

And finally, a thank you to all HTA staff who have contributed so much over the past twelve months.

James Barnes  
HTA Chairman

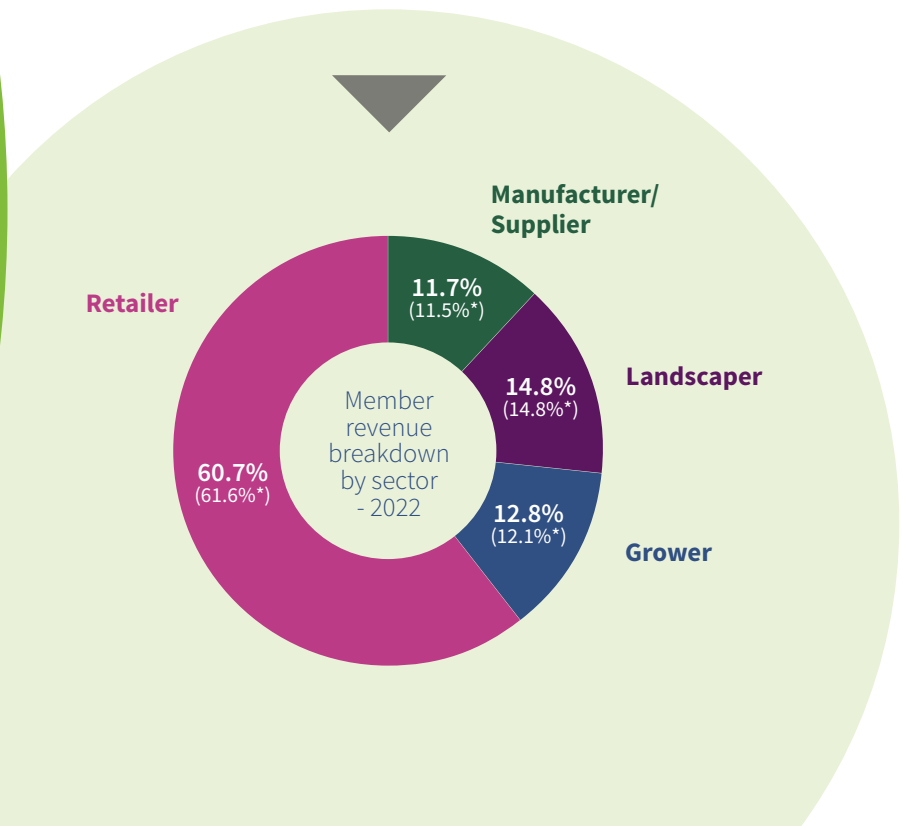
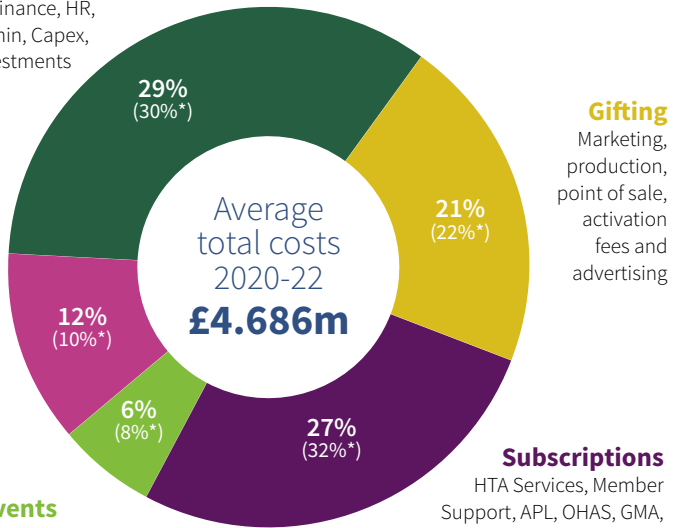


# Finance



## Central Costs

IT, Finance, HR, Admin, Capex, Investments



# CEO Statement

In a year of external challenges – whether political, climate, economic or global conflict the HTA has continued to deliver more for members and demonstrate the real value of trade association membership.

Since joining the HTA in January this year I have been continuously impressed by the skills, knowledge and commitment of the staff team, their passion for horticulture and desire to deliver the best for our members. At the same time the common theme coming from members I have spoken to is the understanding that horticulture is stronger as a result of HTA membership and a desire for us to do even more to represent and champion our sector publicly and politically. This year your organisation invested significantly in increasing our capability in providing insight, communications and lobbying with the addition of key members of the team, there is still potential to invest further in a way which will see benefits to all members.

Our media presence has been strengthened by investment in the communications and public affairs team resulting in our presence on BBC TV's Business Breakfast and inclusion on Radio 4's Today programme in late spring this year. We have a strong platform to enable us to champion and promote horticulture to the public and a media environment and are keen to do more in this area. Our presence at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Garden Press Event and a bigger-than-ever National Plant Show 2023, clearly demonstrates our desire to grow our public presence and cement ourselves as the go-to horticultural organisation.

Our political involvement has increased in scale and impact over the course of this year, and we now have a calendar in place to ensure that the HTA is intervening at the right level and the right times to influence legislation. We have written to the Chancellor ahead of the budget outlining the clear asks for horticulture to have a robust and sustainable future and we have a programme of ministerial meetings to press on specific issues as well as raising the profile of the HTA and our industry at Westminster events and the forthcoming party conferences. This year we have met Defra ministers on a regular basis and built strong relationships with the Shadow Defra team. We are very conscious that there could be a General Election at some point in the next 12 months and we will be launching a manifesto for Environmental Horticulture with clear asks which we see as essential for any future government to adopt.

I want to highlight a specific challenge which has been felt by almost everyone in horticulture and that is the government's announcement that their intention is to bring forward a ban on the professional use of peat from 2030 to 2026. I am fully aware from speaking to members who are on varying stages of the journey to peat free that for some this change of date may not be an issue. However, for many of our members this potential new date could be catastrophic, curtailing the growing seasons for trialling peat free from 7 to 3. We have pressed this point to Defra and it has been incredibly frustrating that government could not confirm to us whether this announcement was a firm decision or not. In fact we had to resort to legal action to force Defra to confirm this was not a definite decision and they would now carry out a proper Economic Impact Assessment of their proposed new date of 2026. We remain of the view that the use of peat should be phased out, but not in a way which has such damaging and long-lasting effects on horticultural businesses, if nothing else these businesses underpin the government's environment plan.

We will continue to press hard to ensure that any future decision on peat (or any other policy area impacting our members) is fair, proportionate and evidence based.

There are many other challenges we face in the next 12 months, border controls, sustainability, access to a workforce, water use and storage, of which you will hear more from us in the coming year.

In a volatile financial world, I am pleased to say that the HTA is in good financial health with opportunities next year to invest further in our representation and profile-raising of horticulture and potentially provide further services to our members.

It is true to say that both the wider global/national economic situation and the volatility it created in investment markets, together with our planned breakage agreement in moving to an alternative gift card service provider, have impacted our bottom line. 2022 saw a fall in net assets to £2.7m. This still provides more than adequate cover for future risk and to underwrite any further expansion in services. The HTA exists to represent and support our members and our finances are underpinned by our membership subscriptions and, crucially, our gifting scheme. Our gifting scheme remains resilient with sales consistent year on year. Our sales/redemption model demonstrates that retailer members who sell or redeem our gift cards see a significant financial benefit to their businesses. It's a critical way of allowing consumers to give the gift of horticulture but also enables us as an organisation to do more for you, our members. I look forward to seeing and working with more of you over the coming year as we continue to promote, champion, represent and support our environmental horticulture sector.

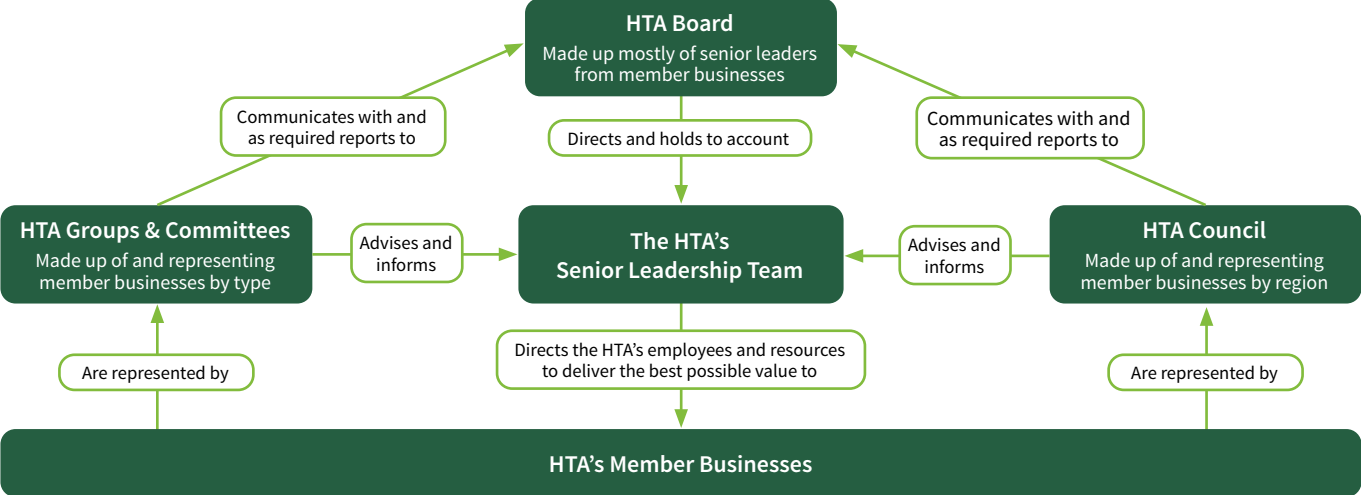
Fran Barnes  
HTA CEO





# Governance

As an association, we support and nurture our industry to ensure a robust and sustainable future. For over 120 years we have represented and supported our members on issues impacting the sector. We give our members a platform to promote their business and develop relationships with suppliers and customers. This is embedded in the association’s governance and leadership, which is summarised below.





# The HTA Board

The HTA Board is made up of HTA members, it directs our affairs and acts as the guardian of our members' interests. The Board holds the executive senior leadership team to account for delivering on the vision and mission of the HTA whilst providing strategic oversight to ensure the sound use of the association's financial resources. The board comprises the President, Immediate Past President, the Vice President, and other non-executive directors from member horticultural businesses. The CEO, Senior Executive Director and Chairman from the HTA's executive team sit on the board and are statutory directors of the HTA.

Our Non-Executive directors are passionate about seeing the industry succeed. They have the same general legal responsibilities as any other director of a company but work in a voluntary capacity. Appointments are made by the board following a review by the nominations committee. Appointments will be senior industry figures, usually working in businesses within the HTA membership. Our board includes directors from different sectors of membership, and has a good balance of skills, knowledge and experience from across the horticulture industry. Appointments are ratified at the HTA's AGM. The HTA is fully committed to the elimination of unlawful and unfair discrimination and promotes this through its Equal Opportunities policy.

HTA Board		
HTA President	Alan Down	
Immediate Past President	Boyd Douglas-Davies	The Boyd Partnership Ltd
Vice President	Will Armitage	Mulch Garden Ltd
HTA Chairman	James Barnes	
HTA Chief Executive Officer	Fran Barnes	
HTA Finance Director	Alex Vick	
	Adam Taylor	Taylor's Bulbs
	Brian Fraser	Oakover Nurseries
	Jane Lawler	Lawler Associates
	Matthew Bent	Bents Garden and Home
	Simon Fraser	Ben Reid Garden Centre
	Vicky Nuttall	The Garden Industry Manufacturer's Association (GIMA)
	Geoff Caesar	Allensmore Nurseries
	Neil Grant	Ferndale Garden Centre

# HTA Council

The HTA Council is a body of 14 regional representatives who voice the views of all sectors of our membership to the HTA Board. They provide guidance, advice, and constructive feedback to the executive teams at HTA and are a source of feedback from and input to the HTA's board from members.

Representatives are elected and work in a voluntary capacity, meeting three times a year; they are an enthusiastic group of industry experts. They regularly and honestly share their opinions, and that of their region, with the executive team. Without them, the quality of information flowing into the organisation would be reduced.

HTA Council Members		
Chair (HTA President)	Alan Down	Down to Earth
Devon & Cornwall	Sarah Daniel	Pengelly Plant Centre
Essex	Tristan Bourne	Perrywood Ltd
East Anglia	Chris Green	Chapel Cottage plants Ltd
East Midlands	Laura Jackson	Swarkestone Nursery Ltd
Scotland	Helen MacDonald	Merryhatton Garden Centre Ltd
South East	Mark Gilbert	Tates of Sussex Garden Centres
Thames Valley	Merlin Brooke-Little	Nicholsons Nurseries Ltd
North West	Adrian Cornelissen	Burleydam Garden Centre
North Home Counties & North London	Rebecca Grant	Joseph Rochford Gardens Ltd
Northern Ireland	John Shannon	Inver Garden Centre
West Midlands	Mollie Higginson	New Leaf Plants Ltd
Wales	Nicola Pugh	Pugh's Garden Centre
West of England	Andy Campbell	Andy Campbell Consulting



# Groups & Committees

There are a variety of committees in the association which ensure that the wants and needs of different types of member business are met; they act as a critical friends to the HTA team in planning and carrying out the HTA's activities for members.

## Ornamentals Management Committee (OMC)

**Chair:** Jonathan Whittemore, Johnsons of Whixley Nurseries

The OMC represents ornamental growers supplying both retail and amenity markets and meets three times a year but has convened several extraordinary meetings this year to discuss some of the key issues facing the sector and to feed into the HTA's policy work. Priorities have focused on the impact of peat reduction on the sector, proposed changes to plant import regulations, plant health, and the future R&D needs of the ornamentals sector. In addition, the future supply of quality seasonal labour has been highlighted as a potential limiting factor to the growth opportunities we have identified for UK ornamentals production.

## Ornamentals Technical Committee

**Chair:** Ed Holmes, J&A Growers

This committee, made up of growers and plant producers, provides input into the HTA to inform the information and advice on technical horticulture that we provide to members through our workshops and website. The group plays an active and increasing role in helping with knowledge transfer between R&D providers and the industry. The HTA sees that influencing and sharing the findings from scientific R&D will be key to ensuring improved productivity and sustainability among members into the future, and the committee plays a key role in this ambition.

## Association of Professional Landscapers

**Chair:** Holly Youde, Urban Landscape Design

Holly is the first UK female Chair of a Landscape association and during her tenure hopes to improve diversity in the industry, encouraging more females into the sector. Along with her vice chair David Strows, they are also very keen to promote sustainability, working closely with HTA objectives, and being part of a cross industry group. David has been the driving force behind the Construction Codes of Practice, as he seeks to raise awareness and standards within the domestic landscape sector. The APL plays a critical role in setting the professional standards which are a condition of APL membership, and providing input into the HTA on how best to support landscapers in the association.

## HTA Tree and Hedging Group

**Chair:** Ed Holmes, J&A Growers

The group has representatives from over 25 businesses, from the North of Scotland to the South of England, supplying field- and container-grown tree and hedging plants. The general membership is represented by a group of eight steering group members, who are active in terms of promoting and advancing all aspects of production for the benefit of both members and the wider sector.



Jonathan Whittemore



Holly Youde



Ed Holmes



# Member satisfaction

## Voice of the member – putting members at the heart of what we do

Every week we send a short satisfaction survey to one-tenth of our member contacts providing members with regular opportunity to guide HTA's focus or raise a specific issue. It gives us a snapshot of how members are feeling, and the responses are circulated to all HTA staff each week to reinforce a culture of putting the voice of the member at the heart of everything we do. Key themes or patterns in member satisfaction are reviewed at three-times-a-year Council meetings, with your regional officer representing the views of members in your area.

We also run more comprehensive surveys asking for specific input on HTA activities or to evidence our lobbying campaigns. Over the last year, thanks to the businesses that took part, we were able to set a baseline for improving our communications strategy, inform the support provided to members around Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), model the impacts of rising utility and input costs on industry profitability, evidence the devastating impacts of a 2026 ban on peat in professional growing media and more. The time and effort spent completing these surveys is fully appreciated, and we don't ask for something unless its invaluable in helping us to represent you.

Towards the end of 2022, we held a series of focus groups with different types of member businesses (retailers, growers and landscapers) to better understand the wants and needs across our diverse

membership. The research was presented to HTA staff internally and informed our objectives-setting process, with one key objective being to deliver a more segmented value proposition. We developed 'pen portraits' of our member segments, and these are used internally by the HTA teams to better understand your businesses. This is backed with encouragement for our staff to visit and spend time with member businesses.

To everyone who's given their feedback or taken part in a research study, thank you so much; it really does make a difference to improving and shaping what we do for you.



# Gifting

## Gifting Performance

National Garden Gift Voucher sales in 2022 exceeded the prior year's record high by almost £0.5m, which was a solid performance, especially given the broader macro-economic pressures of adverse inflation, costs, and negative consumer confidence experienced by our key sales channels.

The first half of the year experienced significant year on year growth which gave us a sound foundation for a slightly more challenging second half, bringing the year overall into a good position and ultimately locking in nearly £40m of consumer spend for future visits to HTA member garden centres. The second half of the year was a challenge for the programme and our membership given weaker consumer footfall and the macro conditions really coming into full force at this point.

The Gifting programme drives 2m visits into garden centres every year and HTA is committed to ensuring all activity supports locking customer spend into our industry and driving cash value for our members participating in the programme.



The UK Gift card market is worth

**£8bn**





The gifting market has been growing at **10%** year on year driven by digital growth

Drives **2m** customer visits into store

A National Garden Gift Voucher is given around **1 million** times a year

## Strategy and Outlook

2023 has started well for the programme and year to date performance is tracking ahead of last year and in line with budgets set. There are also lots of exciting initiatives that HTA is focussing on for future growth that will broaden the scope of the scheme and attract incremental footfall into garden centres.

HTA has launched a Gifting contribution model this year to give all participants clear visibility of the profitability of the programme for their business. This has been positively received by members and does showcase a positive cash position for all members whether just selling, just redeeming or doing both! This helps members to have confidence in the programme and know that whatever shape they are interacting with gifting they will still be adding a cash value into their business. The contribution model is available for all participating members so if you would like to see your model, please reach out to your Member Support Manager who will happily walk you through.

Paper voucher demand has fallen from approximately 50% of the scheme 3 years ago to less than 15% of the scheme in 2023. At the same time, e-gift cards have grown to 14% of the scheme with physical gift cards growing to 71% of the scheme. We expect this switch to cards and e-gift cards to continue and are accelerating the move to a fully card and e-gift card operating model through 2023.

To support the changing demands of consumers the HTA will continue to work on projects enabling our members and consumers to maximise card and e-gift card engagement. Current 2023 workstreams include storage of cards in mobile phone wallets and the redemption of cards at online retailer webstores.

HTA is committed to all aspects of the National Garden Gift Voucher programme and will ensure that the programme continues to be fit for the future across changing customer trends, technology advancements and most importantly ensuring our members receive a positive return from participating.

# Providing value for our members

## Market Research

Throughout 2022/23 we continued to develop our EPOS-based garden centre sales benchmarking system (the Garden Retail Monitor (GRM) and the data we mine from it. This includes the addition of garden centre product inflation analysis to our monthly Market Update reports, illustrating how the rising cost of doing business and the extent to which either price increases or demand are driving year-on-year sales comparisons. The Market Update continued to be a popular resource, downloaded by over 500 member businesses in 2022, and further additions to the report include the tracking of fertiliser prices, monitoring how input costs might be impacting the supply chain.

We produced and released our 'State of the Market' report, providing a comprehensive review of the macroeconomic factors impacting or set to impact our industry, and the key opportunities or threats emerging for member businesses as a result. This type of report helps members with anticipating disruptions ahead, longer-term business planning and to use in conversations with key stakeholders.

We also undertook a research project into the 'value of plants' in all senses – from contributions to health and wellbeing, the environment/climate change agenda, the UK economy, to the relative value and preference consumers have for different plant features. The latter part of this research will help members to identify where margins can be maintained/increased and plan marketing strategies, whilst putting figures to the contribution of plants to UK society will help in discussions with MPs or lenders about the importance of our sector. This report is due to be released around the time of the HTA Conference in October 2023.

## Grower Technical workshops

Following the success of the first programme of technical grower workshops which attracted over 200 delegates to seven nursery-based events through summer 2022 to spring 2023, a second programme of workshops is now in progress covering biological pest control, nutrition of field-grown hardy nursery stock and the management of growing environments within protected structures. To complement this, webpages are also being created to cover the identification of key pests, diseases and weeds of ornamental crops, methods for their control and information about product Extension of Authorisation for Minor Use (EAMUs) and how to request them.

## HTA eLearning

The Basic Principles in Ornamental Nursery Management (BPNM) elearning course consists of eight modules designed to support training, recruitment, and retention of staff.

Identifying the need within the industry to have a training programme able to give new starters basic and thorough training, the HTA has designed and developed BPNM with industry experts, to give their membership access to affordable, engaging, and comprehensive modules.

The eight modules are: Plant Physiology, Pest and Diseases, Growing Media and Potting, Propagation, Pruning, Nutrition and Feeding, Watering and Weeding.

“ Supporting our industry with the issues around recruitment and retention is at the forefront of our minds. We have developed a course consisting of eight modules which will give the user a basic comprehensive technical training in nursery management. We have spent 24 months developing this e-learning, ensuring we have something that will be of real benefit to our members.

Not only is it designed to solve a huge issue we have within our industry, but it is also unique to our industry. There is no other training out there that will cover this variety of topics and be so accessible.

We chose e-learning as it can be accessed anywhere on any smart device. You can pause your learning at any point. It has optional voiceover and is available in many languages. Once completed the learner will receive a certificate that can be used as part of ongoing personal development.

We are immensely proud of the course and hope it has a positive impact for our members.

Alexandra Jenkins,  
HTA Learning & Development Manager



This year's event also hosted the first ever live recording of our Hort Talk podcast. Hort Talk LIVE!



**5**  
episodes  
have been released  
in the last 12  
months

**Subjects covered include**  
The Cost of Doing Business, Apprenticeships, Women in Horticulture, The Complexities of Peat and An Education in Apprenticeships.

Hort-Talk has been downloaded over **2000 times** and has been listened to in over 35 countries worldwide.



## Hort-Talk podcast

The first ever live recording of our Hort Talk podcast. Hort Talk LIVE! Took place at this year's HTA National Plant Show, and focused on the importance of apprenticeships and education within the horticultural industry. Special guests included Senior Technical Training consultant Adam Blunt, Head of Horticulture at Pershore College. Josh Egan-Wyer, Assessor in Horticulture at Lackham college Victoria Fiander, and WCG's Sarah Ashmore.

Alex Jenkins said "We are so excited to share our first Hort-Talk LIVE at National Plant Show. Apprenticeships are key to recruitment and retention of staff in the horticultural industry, and I hope our fantastic panel in this episode will inspire some more employers to consider apprenticeships in the near future."

## Help with cost saving and business development with Preferred Partners

Our Preferred Partners offer business services which help HTA members save money whilst supporting them to grow. Lloyds / Cardnet has been an HTA Preferred Partner for card services provision since 2018 following rigorous checks across a number of providers.

against other providers, Lloyds offer significantly fewer added costs such as authorisation fees, non-secure payment fees and premium card fees. The HTA will continue to review rates with Lloyds Cardnet and compare with alternative providers so that members know the deal is always a quality and competitive offer.

We wanted a provider that had competitive rates, costs and easy-to-understand statements. As part of our ongoing checks



Average savings per member since launch is **£2,500**

**Over 250** member businesses are benefitting from Lloyds Cardnet rates.

Since 2018 there have been **no cost increases** and two rate reviews reducing the costs for all members using Lloyds and for HTA members joining the scheme.

# Demonstrating leadership and influence for our members

## Borders and Trade

Over the last 12 months HTA has continued to be actively engaged on ensuring border controls and processes are fit for the purpose of trading plants. We compiled a comprehensive response to the government's new border proposals (the Target Operating Model) identifying 8 key red line asks of government to ensure that the trade in plants is prioritised and not disadvantaged by any new requirements. We foster close ties with Defra, Cabinet Office and other government departments attending several forums on trade, plant health and borders, including meeting with Baroness Neville-

Rolfe who has responsibility in Cabinet Office for delivery borders. We achieved key wins on the attachment of Plant Passports in the EU and ensuring plants, seeds and bulbs were included in the Windsor Framework easements. We regularly convene a UK-EU forum between the HTA and relevant EU based associations to discuss issues affecting the sector across the EU, with the emphasis on trade into the UK. We also have excellent ties with the Dutch, French and German embassies maintain dialogue with our closest and largest trading partner.







Chapel Cottage Plants

## Member Advice Surgeries

We remain committed to keeping our members up to date by holding regular Trade Policy surgeries and Town Hall meetings, which have been attended by hundreds of members covering the pertinent subjects of the day while also providing advice to members on being border compliant. We welcome questions on any topic and have found it to be a useful forum for knowledge sharing and best practice. We have also held an international seminar on CITES arrangements, attended by over 100 participants including representatives from APHA, Kew, Defra and Border Force to clarify processes and mitigate the effects of border seizures on traded CITES species, and we continue pushing for solutions to ease the trade difficulties currently faced by traders importing CITES species.

## Labour and Skills

The HTA is approaching labour and skills improvements from two different angles: access to seasonal workers and access to permanent skilled workers, including the skills pipeline. We welcomed 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. Over the last year, the HTA has input into the Scottish Skills Delivery System review, the review of the Shortage Occupation List, the Low Pay Commission’s review of the predicted National Living Wage for 2024 and beyond as well as working alongside other industry stakeholders as part of the Education and Employment Subcommittee of the Environmental Horticulture Group. The need to recognise careers in horticulture as highly skilled and vital to green growth is a key pillar of our engagements with political stakeholders and policymakers.

## Drought

Water plays an essential role for our industry and the HTA has been championing more accessible water retention and re-use technology grants for our members in order to use water mains in their operation as little as possible. The HTA submitted letter responses to all five regional Water Resources Plans, our key messages were picked up and resulted in the HTA contributing to an article featured in Water Resources East’s newsletter. We continue to regularly engage with stakeholders through our position on the National Drought Group. Water security will be even more urgent in the years to come with peat-alternatives requiring more watering, and frequencies of drought projected to increase. The HTA has been lobbying to this effect and has also offered best practice advice for members and consumers.



## Lobbying and Briefings

HTA lobbying of key stakeholders is crucial to getting the voices of our members heard by regulators. We would like to thank those members who have hosted some of the many visits of MPs to their businesses which the HTA has arranged, and to members who have written to MPs on a range of issues impacting the Environmental Horticulture sector. This has proven invaluable to our efforts which has seen more mentions of horticulture and the HTA in Parliament than ever before. We have also been at the forefront of providing the House of Lords Committee for Horticulture with evidence during their year-long inquiry. We have had an extensive and constant range of engagements over the past year including hosting receptions in both Westminster and Holyrood this year which was well attended by MPs, Lords, MSPs and Ministers and have met Parliamentarians at Chelsea and the Garden Press Event to discuss the important issues for our members. A target list of MPs also receive monthly briefings from the HTA and we are approached by politicians ahead of debates for information. We also have representation at the political party conferences where meetings with key-decision makers have been obtained. Furthermore, the HTA has been engaging with the Welsh Government, officials and stakeholders from the Welsh Horticulture Alliance Group on issues such as peat, planning and grants.



The relaunch of the Cross Party Group (CPG) for Gardening and Horticulture

## Scottish and Westminster Receptions

In May, the HTA hosted a reception in the Scottish Parliament with Christine Grahame MSP for the entire industry to come together with MSPs and discuss the HTA's Environmental Horticulture Growth Strategy. Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs Mairi Gougeon was the guest speaker. Alongside Stan Green, lobbying efforts have been fruitful in Scotland, with a relaunch of the CPG for Gardening and Horticulture (with the HTA acting as the secretariat and Rachael Hamilton MSP Convenor) and working closely with Scot Govt officials to formulate strategy and input into policy documents and consultations. We also co-hosted a successful House of Lords Reception with guest speakers Alan Titchmarsh, Jim Carter, Minister Trudy Harrison, Baroness Fookes and Boyd Douglas-Davies. Director Jennifer Pheasey has also been a guest speaker at the Industry and Parliament Trust Dinner.



Environmental Horticulture Group (EHG) launch at the House of Lords, hosted by Alan Titchmarsh



Minister Mairi McAllan with David Lydiat and Stan Green





## Peat ban in horticulture

The proposed ban on peat (end of 2024 for retailers in bagged growing media, and end of 2026 for professional growers) continues to prove a complex issue. The HTA recognises the need to transition away from the use of peat, but believes 2026 is too soon for professional growers, with not enough alternatives available at the quality or quantity needed to supply the market or meet environmental targets. Moreover, the risk of an early ban risks up to 100 million trees and plants being grown in the UK. The HTA regularly meets with a range of stakeholders in Defra and the wider Parliaments across the UK. Our lobbying efforts have led to a raft of parliamentary questions and stakeholders being held to account on the issue. As well as offering guidance, knowledge and best practice sharing for our members. We continue to push for a more reasonable and achievable timeframe for the sector. The HTA also chairs the Growing Media Taskforce, helping to coordinate a cross-section of the industry on this subject including the NFU.

## Plant Healthy / OHAS

Options to create a series of Standard modules are currently being examined to make attaining OHAS certification more of a sequential experience. Modules which cover specific elements of the full Standard are being created and trialled on nurseries to examine if it makes the process of gaining certification easier in terms of time and resource demand, while maintaining the robustness of the original Standard content. Benchmarking to the GlobalGAP Flowers and Ornamentals Standard is currently underway.





## Media engagement

2023 has seen the HTA resetting its media function, building up the profile of the sector and seeking to shine a spotlight on the critical issues faced by our industry. Our objective has been to inform the public and policymakers, ultimately driving positive change on engagement and support for the sector. To achieve this, we have employed a multi-faceted approach. We leveraged data, member case-studies, clear policy asks and identified relevant hooks that enabled us to align our stories with current events. Members will have seen a step-change in press releases and associated social media.

In March, we took a significant step towards enhancing our media engagement capabilities by formally bringing the responsibility in-house. We appointed a Media Relations Manager within our Policy and Public Affairs team. This move has allowed us to cultivate new relationships with media professionals and establish a reliable point of contact specifically dedicated to press interactions.

Over the past few months, we have achieved some significant media coverage, including our CEO on prominent platforms like BBC Business, where we had the opportunity to discuss the profound value of horticulture during the RHS Chelsea preview. Furthermore, an article in the Financial Times shed light on the post-Brexit border checks and their impact on the gardening industry—an issue we were able to effectively address. It's important to note that these examples represent just a fraction of the continuous stream of stories we have generated, covering a wide range of activities and events conducted by the HTA on behalf of our members.

Overall, our media engagement efforts amplify our voice, raise awareness, and advocate for our industry's interests. We remain committed to maintaining this momentum and continuing to drive positive change through strategic media engagement in the future.



**FINANCIAL TIMES**

**Border controls**  
**Brexit checks will cut choice and raise costs, say gardeners**

**PETER POSTER** — PUBLIC POLICY EDITOR

Plant growers have warned that plans to introduce new post-Brexit border checks will hit the gardening industry, pushing up costs and reducing choice for customers.

The Horticultural Trades Association raised its concerns after the government announced last month it would introduce long-delayed customs checks on all goods coming from the EU into Britain, starting in October.

James Barnes, HTA chair, said ahead of the annual Chelsea Flower Show, the premier international gardening event which starts today, that the government's draft border plan would heap unwanted costs on plant nurseries, most of which were small businesses.

"The government's plan is not detailed enough, it's too late and has gaps that risk causing uncertainty and piling more costs on growers," he said. The introduction of border controls has been repeatedly delayed since the UK officially withdrew from the bloc on

January 31, 2020, because of concerns they would create unacceptable backlogs at Channel ports and put pressure on food supplies.

The Cabinet Office has said it is the "firm intention" of the government to

**The Observer**  
 April was crueller than ever. It's time to fill our gardens with hardy plants

Amid pleas for help, Royal Horticultural Society tells gardeners to plan for all extremes

**Rickie Harton**

Gardeners are being urged to consider plants that can cope with extreme weather. The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has issued a list of plants that are hardy in both the UK and the US.



# Communications

The HTA has created a new centralised Marketing and Communications function with the recruitment of a new Director of Marketing and specialist roles including a Digital Content Editor and Junior Designer. The team supports all areas of the association, creating improved and open communication about association and industry matters.

## Website

At the end of 2022 we undertook research into the HTA website user-experience to understand if members can find what they're looking for and if not, what we could do to improve. We are very grateful to all members who contributed to this feedback. The results have enabled us to develop a digital roadmap of improvements, moving towards a more easily navigable website with more personalised content.



## Inside Horticulture

Since its launch two years ago, *Inside Horticulture* quarterly magazine continues to be an asset to members, bringing together industry news, insights, reporting on new initiatives and sharing the news of our members.

# 72%

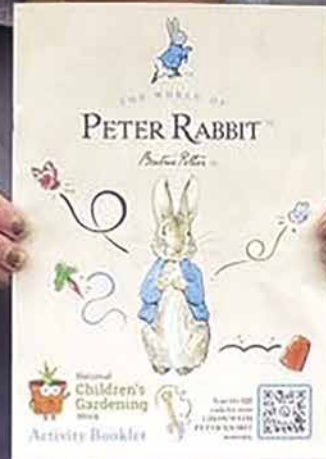
of members said that they read *Inside Horticulture*, and nearly all of those who did (96%) found the magazine useful.

(source HTA Member Voice survey Q4 2022)

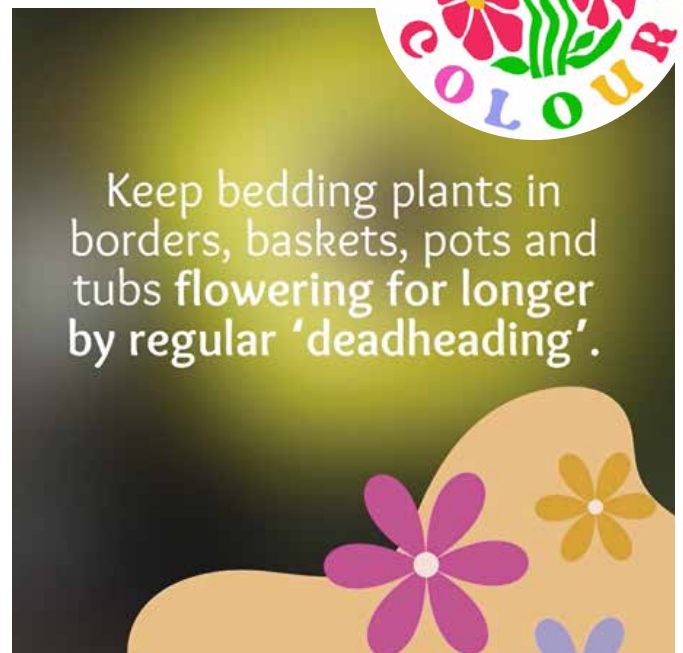


## Helping members engage with consumers

For May half term we teamed up with The World of Peter Rabbit, providing 30,000 limited edition activity booklets for members, helping them bring joy and mischief to their younger customers for National Children's Gardening Week 2023. 198 HTA member garden centres took part, with 1,976 users visiting the Peter Rabbit webpage to discover Children's Gardening Week events going on at their local garden centre. The campaign gained 120 pieces of media coverage.



Our 'Get Summer Colour' social media campaign launched in July, providing a full toolkit of content for members to share with their customers on their own social media channels. The aim of the campaign is to show that the growing season isn't over by summer, driving footfall into garden centres and celebrating the beautiful colours of plants all summer long.



# Events

## Successful Garden Press Event 2023 welcomes House of Lords committee members

Over 400 members of the garden press and media attended the Garden Press Event in February, for a one-day exhibition showcasing the entire supply chain of the environmental horticulture industry, organised by the HTA and Garden Industry Manufacturers Association (GIMA).



In a first for the sector, the HTA hosted members of the House of Lords special inquiry committee into horticulture at the event, held at the Business Design Centre in London. During their visit to the show, the group saw nearly 100 exhibitors including growers, retailers, manufacturers, and suppliers in an early opportunity for them to see the breadth and diversity of UK horticulture.

Lord Redesdale, who Chaired the visit and was joined by Baroness Willis and Lord Carter, commented: *“Visiting the event was an eye opener to see the success of the horticulture industry and understand the challenges UK businesses are facing, such as trade.*

*“The Lords committee will be launching an inquiry into the future of horticulture with a focus on technology and climate and we will be taking evidence from the industry. Speaking directly to many HTA members today was really helpful.”*



## Landscaping excellence celebrated at APL Awards

Hosted by TV presenter Diarmuid Gavin, the APL Awards 2023 event recognised and celebrated the outstanding landscaping carried out by members of the APL.

JJH Landscapes & Construction Ltd took home the top award for their project The Escarpment Garden, designed by Adam Vetere.

## Highlighting the value of the UK garden industry at RHS Chelsea Flower Show

We demonstrated the value of the UK horticultural sector to thousands of visitors attending the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, which took place 23-27 May 2023, at The Royal Hospital, Chelsea.

This was the first year the HTA had a trade stand at the show to talk about key issues within the industry, including sustainability and drought, as well as to promote the quality workmanship of the Association of Professional Landscapers (APL) and encourage more people into gardening with National Garden Gift Vouchers.







Profitplant BV's **Curcuma Skyline** was recognised as Best in Show at the New Plant Awards, sponsored by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS).



Allensmore's and Fairweathers Hilltop Nursery's **Agapanthus Black Jack** took home the Visitor Vote, sponsored by Floramedia. See the full list of new Plant Award winners here: <https://hta.org.uk/national-plant-show/show-features/new-plant-awards>

## HTA National Plant Show 2023

This year's HTA National Plant Show was bigger and better than ever before - we welcomed more than 1,100 visitors and saw over 220 stands presenting more than 150 companies' products across both halls. The event provided businesses with an opportunity to showcase everything from seeds, bulbs, house plants and a wide range of garden plants to labelling and product information, growing media, display benching and machinery.



More than  
**1,100**  
visitors

Over  
**220**  
stands

showcasing more than 150 companies' products across both halls

## Horticulture, The Conference

September 2022 saw the return of our annual member conference at the International Conference Centre in Birmingham. The theme for the day was 'what the horticulture industry will look like in 2030'.

Our annual conferences are a great opportunity for our industry to come together and we're looking forward to our next conference taking place on 5 October 2023. We're delighted to be hosting insightful speakers and panellists discussing a topical agenda under the theme Growing a Greener Future.





*Solar panels installed at Horticulture House in 2023*

## Environmental impact

In 2022 our CO<sub>2</sub>e per employee increased compared with 2021. However, this was driven entirely by the increase in our business travel to members as the removal of Covid restrictions gave us the chance to visit more of our members again. In most other areas of our environmental impact and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions fell. 2022 saw the HTA's Green team develop a much more ambitious and innovative plan to reduce our environmental impact, which included removing plastic wrapping from our gift cards, putting timer switches on electrical equipment in our offices, and installing solar panels at Horticulture House in July 2023.

This initiative is expected to provide up to a quarter of our electricity from 2023.

## Sustainability advice and guidance we've provided for our members:

- We have worked hard to get clarity from Defra around Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to help members understand complicated issues such as the reserve system under new EPR legislation.
- We ran a workshop with Planet Mark for members where Julie Murray from Notcutts, one of our sustainability reference sites, discussed their sustainability plan and enabled HTA members to learn from their peers.
- We've produced a guide for landscaper/APL members to give to their domestic customers in the event of a hosepipe temporary use ban (TUB).
- Work is ongoing with the Horticulture team to ensure that government funding pots, such as the Farm Equipment and Technology Fund (FETF) is applicable and useful to horticultural growers.



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