

Minister Neil Gray MSP, Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

Minister Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport

Minister Jim Fairlie MSP, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

Dear Ministers

Following our most recent Gardening and Horticulture CPG visits and meeting we are writing to you to both highlight the importance of environmental horticulture to health and to call for more to be done to utilise flora and gardening in health settings to benefit both patients and professionals.

On Tuesday, 12 March, the charity Trellis and the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) arranged for politicians and their staff to visit organisations that demonstrate how therapeutic horticulture can deliver health and wellbeing benefits to vulnerable people and their communities. Further information can be found here: <https://hta.org.uk/news/scottish-parliament-sees-first-hand-the-importance-of-gardens-for-health-and-wellbeing>

As a Cross-Party Group, we believe that there is an opportunity to use horticulture and gardening as a policy solution to improve the recovery and mental health of patients, as well as the welfare of nurses, care workers and doctors.

Trellis Scotland have brought together research on this important policy area, which highlights a potential return on investment for the Scottish Government. A growing body of research continues to highlight that contact with nature has a positive effect on our well-being, and conversely, deprivation of time in natural surroundings can be linked to poor health (Seers et al, 2022). Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH) provided by skilled practitioners, has a large part to play in supporting the positive impacts of this connection, and the additional positive impacts of time spent gardening and in high quality outdoor spaces with others.

In addition to the social, health, and wellbeing benefits of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture, research now highlights the economic benefits of STH projects, for example, from reduced A&E and GP visits (the attached paper

states that the net present economic benefits per person from reduced public service use are £830–£31,520 (after 1 year) and £6450–£11,980 (after 10 years)) (Pretty and Barton, 2020).

Visits to green spaces have also been associated with reduced medication use (psychotropic, antihypertensive and asthma medications) (Turunen *et al*, 2022) which also has well-being and economic benefits.

Trellis is currently working with 2 colleges to develop the first accredited course in Scotland in Social and Therapeutic Horticulture: 'Developing Professional Practice in Therapeutic Horticulture', a Professional Development Award at SCQF 7. There is a significant and growing demand for accredited qualifications in this area and no other route for existing and aspiring practitioners, indeed no accredited qualification in the UK, so this will be a UK first.

Trellis is also working (with Thrive), to create the UK Association for Social and Therapeutic Horticulture. This unique work, led from Scotland, will provide the vital support and quality standards for STH, through provision of a Code of Ethics, Standards, and a practitioner register. No professional body exists for STH and creating one has long been Trellis' ambition.

The costs of developing the course and association are higher than Trellis' current budget, including development time, the creation of a website and database, consultation with practitioners, and payment to the Professional Standards Authority to accredit the new practitioner register. Without the course and association, there is a risk that services provided are not of a high enough standard to provide the mentioned health and economic benefits.

In 2023, Trellis founded World Therapeutic Horticulture Day and we had huge worldwide engagement. Please join us to highlight the benefits of STH to health, wellbeing and communities for the second #WTHD on 18th May 2024 with activities in the week preceding this.

We very much appreciate the support of the Scottish Government in progressing this work through continued support of Trellis. However, core funding is at risk of being axed this year and Trellis won't be able to provide the support to continue all this work without it. We very much hope crucial Scottish Government funding support can be maintained and increased to meet demand. We are sure that ministers will want to recognise how important it is for those who require care and support to have access to therapeutic outdoor spaces and Social and Therapeutic Horticulture services.

We attach further evidence and information with this letter for your reference. As a CPG, we would very much welcome your engagement with us on this matter and invite you to join us at our next meeting in Holyrood in mid-November.

We look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely

Gardening and Horticulture Cross Party Group.

Rachael Hamilton MSP, Convener

Christine Grahame MSP, Deputy Convener

Annabelle Ewing MSP, Deputy Convener

Sharon Dowey MSP

Tim Eagle MSP

David Lydiat, Horticultural Trades Association, Secretariat

Stan Green, Horticultural Trades Association and Growforth Limited

Fiona Thackery CEO & Emma Martindale, Trellis Scotland

Marcus Potter CEO & Liz Baron-Majerik, Lantra Scotland

Helen MacDonald, Merryhatton Garden Centre

Ruth Vichos, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)

Simon Fraser, Ben Reid Nursery

Jimmy Gilchrist, GP Plantscape

Juliette Camburn, Keep Scotland Beautiful

Anne Webster, Ashbrook Nursery

Brian Cunningham, Head Gardener, Scone Palace

Kevin Frediani, Botanic Garden & Head of Grounds, University of Dundee

Liz Stewart CEO, Scotland's Gardens Scheme

Magdalena Blazusiak, Scottish Ecological Design Association (SEDA)