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Ymateb gan: Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)

Response from: Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)

Executive Summary

1. The HTA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on routes into post -16 education and training. The Welsh Government has an opportunity to change the perception of jobs in the horticulture sector and address critical gaps in employment and skill level. It is important to champion careers in horticulture as vital green growth jobs and green skills that can inspire future generations to pursue rewarding and diverse careers. Gardening and green space engagement in schools should be recognised as STEM subjects and integrated into compulsory education, from early years right through to post-16 education. Additionally, post-16 education whether that be in apprenticeships or higher-level qualifications in horticulture and green jobs should be greater supported by the Welsh government. Ensuring that the next generation of horticulturists in the UK have a secure future, this is essential to the industry's future prospects. It is also important to make it easier for employers to engage with post-16 education and training.
2. This submission will focus on the following themes:
 - a. Gardening and green space engagement in schools should be recognised as STEM subjects and be integrated into compulsory education.
 - b. The Welsh government support for greater access to horticultural careers.
 - c. Strengthen careers advice given in schools to reflect the huge variety of jobs available – both in urban and rural locations.

Introduction

3. The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) represents 85 member businesses in Wales and over 1200 members across the entire supply chain of the UK's environmental horticulture and gardening industry. This includes garden centres, tree and plant growers, landscapers, manufactures and service providers. Environmental horticulture is a sector of over 90% SMEs, many family-owned businesses, supporting 722,000 jobs, contributing £38 billion to GDP and delivering a near £8.4 billion in tax revenues. We are the original green industry and the gardens, green spaces and plants that we grow, nurture and maintain, underpin the UK's environmental targets, net-zero delivery and climate change mitigation.
4. In 2019, the environmental horticulture and landscaping industry in Wales supported contributions of £1.125 billion to UK GDP, £249 million in taxes to the exchequer and supported the employment of 31,168 people¹. There is huge potential to grow the sector, but to do this it is crucial to address the current shortcomings of the skills system and work with industry to establish the future skills needs of the sector.

Gardening and green space engagement in schools should be recognised as STEM subjects and be integrated into compulsory education

5. Recognition and perceptions of the value of environmental horticulture must be improved to meet sector needs on education and careers. Recognition of the economic, social and environmental value of the sector within the government is a key lever to increasing workforce numbers, inspiring the next generation of environmentally conscious horticulturalists and delivering environmental goals. This can be achieved through:
 - a. Careers in horticulture must be championed as vital green growth jobs (and green skills) – these jobs range from science-based growing, breeding and plant care to tree growers and the urban landscaping that is so vital for greening our cities.
 - b. An increased awareness amongst teachers of the careers that can come from their subject and improved careers advice at school level.
 - c. There is also a need to make stronger links between academic subjects and their applications for environmental horticulture.
6. It is important to champion careers in horticulture as vital green growth jobs and green skills that can inspire future generations to pursue rewarding and diverse careers. Gardening and green space engagement in schools should be recognised as STEM subjects and integrated into compulsory education. To increase awareness of careers in environmental horticulture amongst secondary school pupils there is a need to make stronger links between academic subjects and their applications for environmental horticulture. In order to facilitate this, government should work with industry to ensure that teachers are aware of careers in horticulture and how academic subjects are linked with a variety of roles within the sector. Improving interest in working in the sector is crucial to driving interest from students in horticultural apprenticeships.
7. The Welsh government increased awareness of horticulture can begin as early as primary schools and should be encouraged throughout the education system and in post-16 education. Our recent report, THE VALUE OF PLANTS: FROM NURSERY TO NATURE reports that “Exposure to the benefits of gardening and green spaces in early development in children can have real influence on their physical and mental wellbeing. Almost two thirds of primary school head and deputy headteachers agreed that school gardening benefitted pupils’ physical health and mental wellbeing; meanwhile 74% saw benefits to social skills, and 61% recognised benefit to behaviour”². The Department for Education and Skills should partner with businesses to promote gardening in schools, inspiring the next generation of horticulturalists, an outcome could include the introduction of a Statutory Requirement to ‘Grow Plants’ into the National Curriculum during Key Stages 1 and

2. There must also be collaboration with the industry to ensure teachers and career advisors are aware of horticultural careers and their links to academic subjects.
8. The industry is improving wages and conditions to change its historical perception of being poorly paid. Many businesses are reaching out to schools and colleges to showcase the career opportunities they offer. More businesses need to be encouraged to do the same and engage with local schools and colleges to raise awareness and help students make informed career decisions.

Support greater access to horticultural careers

9. Due to the geographical spread of learners and horticultural businesses across Wales, it is often too large a distance for students to commute to facilities that offer suitable apprenticeships for entering the sector.
10. The rural locations of many environmental horticulture businesses in Wales combined with limited public transport and high accommodation costs mean that for many who would want a career in horticulture, are unable to join the sector due to the costs associated with one makes it unviable. The issue of – transport, accommodation and rural location – also impact on students' abilities to attend colleges or complete apprenticeships and can act as a deterrent for career changers who will likely have to take a pay cut.
11. Options for apprenticeships in urban horticulture could also be explored. It is predicted that in Welsh cities “peak heat stress on people is expected to increase by 4.5 degrees Celsius by 2080, especially for urban areas exposed to direct sunlight. And the percentage of daytime hours without heat stress are expected to reduce significantly, from 30-80% in 2020 to 10–70% by 2080. The lowest values are paved areas with little shading from trees or surrounding buildings, and the highest values are areas with more shade, such as green spaces with trees or narrow alleys between tall buildings”³. There is significant scope to increase environmental horticulture education provision in the urban environment and challenge the notion that a career in horticulture is for those living in rural locations only.
12. Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is also being prioritised by many employers. ‘Access all Areas’ is the EDI initiative for the horticulture, arboriculture, landscaping, and garden media professions. The industry bodies have come together to commit to better EDI outcomes in the landscape, horticulture, and arboriculture sectors.
13. Signatories to the Charter confirm their commitment ‘to progress the breaking down of barriers in the industry and increasing access and progression for all. To work openly and respectfully with other chartered members’:
 - a. We **commit** to create an inclusive culture and measure how we engage and improve representation.

- b. **Support** the development of our industry from an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion perspective - regardless of area of specialism, through the sharing of work and good practice.
- c. To **recognise** and monitor Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion across the industry, using a set format to benchmark performance.
- d. **Provide** access to resources for educating and upskilling colleagues and members on diversity and inclusion.
- e. **Promote** the Industry as a fully inclusive and accessible environment with opportunities for lifelong rewarding careers.

Strengthen careers advice

14. The Welsh Government has an opportunity to change the perception of jobs in the horticulture sector and demonstrate that they are worthwhile and are good jobs. In doing so, this will help to address the critical challenges faced by the sector, such as the low levels of employment and skills gap. To combat this perception, government should approach this from two angles simultaneously. Firstly, rise awareness of the value of the careers in the environmental horticulture sector, for its green credentials and the environmental, social, and health benefits. Secondly, the support from government to interact with SMEs to engage with the apprenticeship system and help to develop the relevant qualifications needed for the sector. Engagement with business is vital to ensuring that future horticulturalists are trained and retained, ready for a green, sustainable future.
15. The information provided directly to learners through Careers Wales is limited when searching for 'Horticulture' in the search bar⁴. There are no results which will create confusion for both the prospective apprentice and the employer. Careers advice should be accessible, easy to find and provide the right information, without this interest in joining the horticultural sector will remain limited.
16. There is also a need to educate businesses and students on the behalf of horticultural apprenticeships, particularly in the context of SME employers, to which the over 90% of the sector is made up of. Apprenticeships are a huge opportunity for the sector but are not as widely used as they could be, SMEs who are facing skills shortages in vital sectors such as environmental horticulture must be supported and prioritised by the government. Further work needs to be done to champion starting an apprenticeship at a smaller business, particularly in a retail or catering setting. Given the size of the businesses listed on the Careers Wales website, how can an apprenticeship at a smaller business be made more attractive to learners?
17. We would welcome the opportunity to be consulted on this further, please email policy@hta.org.uk

References

¹Environmental Horticulture Growth Strategy: A vision for Wales (HTA, 2024)

<https://hta.org.uk/policy/wales>

² From Nursery to Nature: The Value of Plants Report <https://hta.org.uk/value-of-plants>

³New report predicts impact of future heatwaves in Welsh cities

<https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/news-and-blogs/news/new-report-predicts-impact-of-future-heatwaves-in-welsh-cities/?lang=en> (NRW, 2024)

⁴<https://careerswales.gov.wales/search/site?keys=horticulture>