

The Horticulturist



The changing horticultural workforce

PLUS Future gardeners | A life without horticulture | Percy Thrower Travel Bursary report | AGM 2023 | YHoY Grand Final

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Cover Protected cropping of strawberries has developed with additional technological inputs, such as raised gutter systems. Despite the benefits of ease of harvest, growers still find difficulties in attracting suitable and sufficient staff for these roles. (CAFRE).

FROM THE PRESIDENT

I would firstly like to thank Susan Nicholas for her work during her presidency. Sue has steered the Institute through what has felt like a couple of very turbulent years. The impact of Covid upon all our lives has been profound but for CIH some positive things have happened. We learned how to work together whilst being remote, we created the Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Early Careers Groups, re-focused on Education and have represented the industry in Parliament.

The importance of what we do can't be overstated and this was confirmed at the end of June when I had the pleasure of hosting the CIH Council and Branch Chairs at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) HQ in Maidenhead. It was wonderful to be 'back in the room' with fellow professionals. Despite all we achieve 'online' meeting colleagues and friends face-to-face is important and necessary.

I invited four of my Chartered Horticulturist colleagues at CWGC to join the discussions and we took the opportunity to share aspects of our work and the global challenges which we face. We are dealing with global climate change as we work in over 150 countries. For a relatively traditional organisation we are making significant changes to how we do things including largely eliminating the use of chemicals, greatly reducing water consumption for irrigation, improving biodiversity at our sites worldwide, changing mowing regimes and plantings. Horticulturists are playing a vital part in this transformational work, and the networks and access to specialists has for me has been one of the tangible benefits of being part of CIH and the amazing range of community and expertise that this encompasses.

During our meeting there was open and constructive conversation about how we continue to promote and develop our profession. We will be working through the discussions and coming up with some concise action. Be assured that there was consensus on the need to make sure that horticulturists are visible and our work in the Institute continues to be relevant. We will continue to focus on what makes membership worthwhile (and also an essential part of your CV and continuing development), that we speak to and on behalf of the whole horticultural industry and use our influence and our expert members to inform decision-making.

Our ability to deliver and influence continues to need members to be involved, so a very big thank you to all of you who continue to work behind the scenes, making it all happen, please continue to get involved and encourage new members to join – this growing profession is a great place to be.

David Richardson CHort FCIHort, President
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Write for *The Horticulturist*

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You will notice that *The Horticulturist* is printed on 100% recycled paper. This is the second phase of our efforts to protect our environment and complements the recent introduction of the compostable sleeve.



WORKFORCE For an assessment on a learning module for Applied Business Management Ireland student **Colleen O’Kane** evaluated how recent economic and political events have impacted the various factors affecting recruitment, training and retention in horticulture and offered suggestions of ways to alleviate the situation.

The changing horticultural workforce

The UK horticultural sector, which is worth over £5 billion per year and employs over 50,000 people in fruit and vegetable production alone,¹ is in a state of emergency. Food shortages currently seen in supermarkets are described as the ‘tip of the iceberg’ by the National Farmers Union (NFU),² and the need to address the structural problems of the industry have never been greater, given that rising energy costs have been particularly painful in the horticultural sector. This article examines the factors affecting recruitment, training and retention in horticulture.

A 2017 survey of business in Northern Ireland³ identified that almost 60% of respondents found

recruitment an increasing problem, and one which is a major barrier to growth, demonstrating that recruitment issues are not unique to horticulture.

The sector traditionally relies on seasonal workers, and these workers tend to come from overseas. A 2020 report from the House of Commons Environmental Food and Rural Affairs Committee stated that EU workers accounted for as much as 99% of seasonal labour within the edible horticultural sector,⁴ much higher than any other sector. This means that businesses are, or should be, constantly recruiting from outside of the UK to fill roles. To make this more difficult, international factors, including Covid, Brexit and the

war in Ukraine, have impacted the potential attractiveness of the UK to EU workers in recent times.

Comparable industries such as tourism and hospitality, despite also relying heavily on seasonal workers, still manage to recruit a higher proportion of UK-based workers, arguably keeping these industries more resilient and sustainable.

Given this task of constant recruitment, many horticultural enterprises will sub-contract their hiring processes out to specialist employment agencies. To their credit, these agencies have been quick to adapt to the changes in Europe and switched recruitment focus to outside of Europe, namely to Asia. These companies operate to