

Cultivating skills

in historic and botanic gardens



**Highlights of a report mapping careers and skills needs
of the botanic and historic gardens sector**

The need to grow skills

Over twenty seven million people visit Britain's 1,800 gardens, parks and historic properties every year¹ - a number equivalent to around half of the population. These same historic and botanic garden sites also attract 20% of all overseas tourist visits.

Perhaps even more important than the overall contribution of the sector to the UK's £30bn tourist income is its contribution to two extremely vital targets of Government policy - the rural economy generally and in particular relatively deprived areas. By its very nature, the historic and botanic garden sector is particularly effective at promoting economic development in rural areas. In Cornwall, the Eden Project now brings over 1.5 million visitors and a contribution of no less than £111m each year to the local economy². In some local areas, historic and botanic organisations can employ up to 40% of the working population.

The sector includes public gardens, domestic gardens, botanic gardens and parks, nursery trades, market gardens and historic properties that employ over 200,000 people in horticulture alone.

But, leaving aside its vital economic contribution, the sector is the beating heart of a healthy society. It is a cultural and social nexus, providing intellectual stimulation, physical relaxation and mental re-invigoration for millions. In displaying and preserving heritage and species it enriches our lives beyond calculation³.

Recent research⁴ shows that this great industry is now at severe risk from an increasing shortage of vital skills; a danger that is exacerbated by an aging workforce and problems centred around the difficulties of finding and helping to fund training.

“There's a skills problem across the board, whether it's finding someone to work in your back garden or to tend historic and botanical gardens. Borders and flower beds in our finest parks and gardens could be grassed over unless we encourage the next generation of gardeners and managers.”

Andrew Colquhoun, Director General,
Royal Horticultural Society.
The Times, May 26th 2005

First Steps

In response to this skills crisis, English Heritage has taken the lead in establishing a partnership of prestigious organisations to address the sector's skills problems. A group of partners⁵ was established in 2004, coordinated by Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for the Environmental and Land-based industries.



1. UK tourist visits to heritage and garden sites; STAR UK (Statistics on Tourism & Research UK), 2002-03

2. The Economic Impact of the Eden Project-17th March 2001 to 1st October 2004' Geoff Broom Associates & the Eden Project

3. The sector is responsible for an almost uniquely rich heritage of wildlife and plants. It is estimated that 80% of Europe's veteran trees are found in the UK. Over 300,000 species of cultivated plants are grown in British gardens (compared with only around 1,500 native species)

4. The Report on the Botanic & Historic Gardens Skills Research Project. Published by Lantra, September 2005

5. as shown on back page



This group initiated a major bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund seeking support towards "The Historic & Botanic Gardens Bursary Scheme" which will, if successful, enable a number of sector employees each year to undertake detailed training placements and exchanges. The result of the bid will be known in December 2005 but other issues are also in urgent need of work to ameliorate their effects on the sector.

The partners held a "Green Skills Summit" in April 2005 which resulted in a clear statement of eight targets, each of which was accepted as a responsibility by a specific Partner:

1. to influence the development and implementation of GCSEs in Science
2. to increase the availability of apprenticeship schemes
3. to establish cooperative careers information and marketing
4. to provide career development for those changing careers
5. to provide career structures and competences at craft and managerial levels
6. to establish a single voice on all skills, education and careers issues
7. to provide clear information on qualifications and learning pathways
8. to build employer support for training

These targets form the basis of a major body of work to which the Partners have committed themselves.

Attracting & Developing People

The research highlighted a number of key issues for the sector:

Training the over 25's

Almost half of the sector's recruits are what the industry calls "second careerers". Most of these begin as volunteers and then seek full time positions. As funding streams are generally tailored heavily towards under 25's, many find themselves virtually disqualified from Government apprenticeship schemes. Almost half of second careerers are female, a group which has been very much in the minority in the sector as a whole, as are black and ethnic minority groups; groups that Partners are anxious to encourage.

Reviewing existing programmes

The Partners have already identified a number of priorities:

- Reviewing and enhancing existing apprenticeship programmes
- Researching and developing new programmes of training leading to accredited units of national standards
- Identifying existing and developing new courses which mix theoretical and practical content to meet the sector's need for highly knowledgeable and skilled people. This is particularly important where practical skills, plant knowledge and identification are concerned.

Improving qualifications

The sector has a good basis of occupational standards but needs to simplify the qualifications that are available for its employees and managers and to create clear progression routes.

Work is urgently needed on flexible but clear sets of qualifications that meet very specific skill needs.

Developing Management Training Schemes

The work of managers in the heritage and botanic sector has changed radically in recent years. Today the role is much wider and extends to a depth that was unknown in the past. Modern managers have to cope with a more varied workforce, often composed of mixtures of full time and volunteer staff, more complex financial planning processes, a highly competitive environment in which their gardens and historic attractions are competing with a multitude of commercial venues, and a much more rigorous health & safety and risk assessment environment.

The sector needs to improve and enhance development schemes for its managers at all levels. Graduate Apprenticeships would be a particularly valuable tool in this effort.

Careers and image

An extremely varied and demanding sector, historic and botanic gardens can offer careers that are little known and understood in many schools, colleges and careers centres.

Horticulture bridges science, technology, the arts and humanities, it requires a technical understanding of engineering, plant science and ecology as well as an understanding of design and history of gardening and gardens. Those managing gardens open to the public require a full range of skills - including marketing, strategic management, personnel and financial planning.

The Partners have identified a requirement for work on careers, progression routes and flexible approaches to training as overwhelming priorities.



The next generation of skilled gardeners and managers will have the task of maintaining and enhancing an already unique range of historic and botanic gardens throughout the UK. To attract younger people into the workforce, the sector recognises that it will have to work directly with schools and colleges, with careers services and learning partnerships, as well as parents and teachers.

Through individual organisations, much work is already being done - including ongoing work by the Institute of Horticulture, the Royal Horticultural Society, and Plant Network, initiatives such as "Come into Horticulture" and "Growing Schools", and the Lantra website and course finder facility.

Much more needs to be done, however.

Joint effort

The Partners have taken the initiative in driving the sector's skills agenda and have already initiated several vital pieces of work. Lantra, for its part, is representing the sector's views to Government on current and future skills requirements through the Sector Skills Agreement.

The historic and botanic garden sector represents a vital part of both national and local economies, but it also underpins policies as diverse as rural development and equal opportunities, bio-diversity and national skills enhancement.

The heritage and botanic garden sector is determined to ensure the future sustainability of skills of this sector and they call upon the Government and all its agencies to support and contribute to their effort and to help save the legacy of skill that will ensure that our horticultural heritage is passed on to future generations.

This project has been made possible through the partnership of

English Heritage
Lantra
The Royal Horticultural Society
The Royal Parks
Kew
Historic Royal Palaces
The Institute of Horticulture
Professional Gardeners Guild
PlantNetwork
Heritage Lottery Fund
The National Trust
Historic Houses Association
Royal Botanic Gardens - Edinburgh
Corporation of London
Sir Harold Hillier Gardens
University Botanic Gardens
The Eden Project

This research project aims to identify and map organisational structures, occupations and specialist skills within historic botanic and gardens. Detail has been collected on salary structures, qualifications and experience and staff expectations. The report has identified current and future staffing needs and skills shortages, provides case studies and demographic information for the sector and provides economic and business information for those working in historic and botanic gardens.

For more information on the research and findings, please contact Lantra
T - 02476 696996 E - connect@lantra.co.uk

The full report may be downloaded from the following web sites:

www.english-heritage.org.uk

www.lantra.co.uk

www.rhs.org.uk

www.edenproject.com

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk

www.hha.org.uk

www.pgg.org.uk

www.rbgkew.org.uk