



Agriculture & Horticulture
DEVELOPMENT BOARD



Grower Summary

CP 76

Qualification Pathways for
Commercial Growers

Annual 2011

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HDC is a division of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board.

Project Number:	CP 76
Project Title:	Qualification Pathways for Commercial Growers
Project Leader:	Tim Briercliffe
Contractor:	The HTA
Industry Representative:	Ian Ashton
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Headline

- New training solutions for production horticulture need to be developed which are flexible, affordable and engaging; in-house or local training is preferred.
- Progression routes rarely exist, but are desired by the majority of the workforce. The lack of progression routes hinders the attractiveness of horticulture to potential employees.
- A new pilot training unit for the ornamental's sector will be developed in the second year of the project.

Background

This training and development project is primarily funded through the Technology Strategy Board's Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) programme (www.ktponline.org.uk) and is a partnership between the Horticultural Trade Association (HTA), the University of Reading (UoR) and the HDC and aims to deliver new training solutions for horticulture.

The disengagement of the horticultural industry with formal training and qualifications is well documented, for example, Lantra statistics document that only 22 learners participated in level 2 NVQs and no participants at level 3 NVQs in production horticulture in 2008/9. A better understanding of the shortcomings of current training offerings and the needs of the industry to successfully up-skill staff will help to ensure that new training programmes and qualifications have relevant content that can be applied, and are useful for both learners and their employers.

New training programme and qualifications developed under this project will fit within the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) which aims to make achieving qualifications more flexible and fitting to individual needs; it essentially provides the opportunity to overcome barriers to vocational training by providing bite-size learning units.

The expected deliverables from the first year of this project, which focuses on the ornamentals sector, include:

- Gathering information on the types of training and qualifications currently being offered.

- Generating an insight into the preferences of the industry in relation to the delivery format and content of training and qualifications.
- Obtaining an understanding of the practical barriers to the delivery of training and qualifications and associated progression routes.
- Examining the attitudes of those working in the industry and how this fits with the image portrayed to the general public.
- Providing guidance and recommendations on how to move forward using this information to design new training and qualifications that are worth investing in.

The remainder of the project will cover the design of the training programme and an industry pilot. Finally, a suitable qualification accreditation will be sought.

Summary

A consultation with the ornamentals sector was held via an online survey and face-to-face interviews on a number of nurseries. The consultation process revealed that:

- There is a need for new training solutions and that there is both enthusiasm and the willingness to find funds for training that is relevant and of a high quality.
- Training solutions need to be flexible, affordable and engaging; this has to be combined with choice of delivery for organisations and learners, but with common quality standards in relation to delivery and assessment.
- It was clear that training on the nursery, or at close by locations, is both preferable and practical.
- Despite this, employers see the value in gaining experience from further afield which could take many formats such as nursery visits, field trips and the use of outside industry experts.
- A clearly defined period in which training should occur was identified; this was at the quieter times of the season between October and February.

- There is ever increasing accessibility to computers and some employees like the principle of participating in on-line distance learning.
- A sufficient level of IT literacy was necessary to exploit opportunities through the use of new technologies and computer-based training solutions.
- Those with lower levels of numeracy and literacy need to be catered for and supported.
- Training solutions need to help professionalise the image of the horticulture industry.

These findings will be used to guide an industry working group to make conclusive decisions concerning the content of compulsory and optional training units and the learning mechanisms to be used. Following this, the first module will be produced and piloted by the industry and evaluations used to further improve the development of new and innovative training that really works for grower managers and their staff. The initial module will test the use of new delivery mechanisms such as on-line learning, materials to formalise in-house programmes delivered by skilled staff and provision of industry workshops. It may be that module content is delivered in more than one format to embrace the needs of a variety of organisations and individuals.

Finally, the consultation has also illustrated that careers in the industry are rewarding, that supervisory roles are available to aspire to, and that small changes within the industry and its training provision could reinvigorate the opportunities the industry provides; this provides the potential to produce a pool of labour that fully equips the industry today and for the future.

Financial Benefits

There are currently no financial benefits to growers arising from this project. However, this project will facilitate the development of a clear qualification structure within the industry, which is necessary to attract and retain the high quality workforce required to drive the industry forward. A clear qualification structure will also support recruitment, and promotion decisions, facilitating a professional approach to talent management and succession planning.

Action Points

- Consider training as an investment and an opportunity to plan ahead.
- Consider allocating a formal training budget.
- Help promote a positive image of horticulture by continuing to improve working conditions and by valuing staff.
- Engage with future consultations on training and qualification to get the industry's voice heard.
- Participate in the pilot of the first training module (Plant Growth and Development).