



Agriculture & Horticulture
DEVELOPMENT BOARD



Grower Summary

CP 076

Qualification Pathways for
Commercial Growers

Final 2012

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Further information

If you would like a copy of the full report, please email the HDC office (hdc@hdc.ahdb.org.uk), quoting your HDC number, alternatively contact the HDC at the address below.

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

Project Number:	CP 076
Project Title:	Qualification Pathways for Commercial Growers
Project Leader:	Penny Evans
Contractor:	Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)
Industry Representative:	Ian Ashton, Lowaters Nursery
Report:	Final 2012
Publication Date:	15 th November 2012
Previous report/(s):	Annual report, May 2011
Start Date:	6th June 2010
End Date:	6th June 2012
HDC Project Cost (Total Project Cost):	£39,937 (£121,022)

Headline

The project has:

- worked closely with industry to define an outline training and qualification framework to meet industry skill gaps.
- has demonstrated the importance of technical/non-technical skills within Ornamental Production.
- has piloted the use of technology for delivering learning
- has supported the transference of learning materials into e-learning formats.

Background

The project was developed in order to address the lack of accredited vocational training in commercial horticulture skills, available to the UK's ornamental plant industry. Initial research soon validated the original assumption that the limited amount of formal training available in horticultural skills was not integrated and in some parts of the country non-existent, apart from the training provided by employers themselves.

The development of a suite of training recognised formally through a qualification would create a progression pathway supporting the attraction and ability to retain the high quality workforce required to drive the industry forward. Such a structure will also support recruitment and promotion decisions and facilitate a professional approach to managing talent and succession planning.

Delivering training through enhanced methods, will support learners' ability and wish to engage with training, meet accreditation needs and provide a less-bureaucratic way of administering the training/qualification.

The project would also seek to re-engage the industry, through its approach, to identify core future training needs and ascertaining preferred training delivery mechanisms, to provide a practical, sustainable solution. This collaborative style of working would be embedded and encouraged for future training design processes.

Summary

An industry facing ever increasing economic challenges strengthens the need for ornamental producers to have a workforce that are knowledgeable and highly effective. The Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) was set up to bring together industry, academia and the latest

research & development to create a new system of effective learning, delivery and assessment that was integrated into the Qualification Credit Framework and utilises HDC research and development outputs to best effect.

The KTP partnership included The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA), Horticultural Development Company (HDC) and the University of Reading, drawing on their expertise to meet the overriding aims.

The KTP project began in June 2010 with the appointment of a KTP Associate (a recent graduate), working full time delivering the project. The project objectives were:

1. To develop an effective qualification structure at Level 2 and Level 3.
2. To create training materials and assessment which support a qualification structure.
3. To pilot, evaluate and implement the new structure at a national level.

The project was planned and implemented over two stages. Stage 1 focused on understanding the current marketplace and working closely with industry to define future requirements. Stage 2 aimed to use that research and analysis to define and develop the learning qualification structure.

Stage 1 – Ornamental Grower Consultation

The consultation consisted of two phases, the initial stage being an online survey and the second phase a number of nursery visits (x17) across England and Wales where grower managers were interviewed and staff guided through a questionnaire. A variety of nurseries of different sizes growing different types of products were visited, to provide a representative sample. The 17 nurseries included growers of hardy nursery stock (HNS), herbaceous perennials, pot liners, ornamental trees, bedding plants, shrubs, ferns, grasses and alpiners. The questions aimed to gather more in-depth knowledge of the profile of ornamental producers, identification of skills gaps, barriers to delivering training and to gain details about employees' experiences of working in horticulture and the training and development they have received.

The key findings from Stage 1 included:

- A core staff is maintained throughout the year, providing a more focused use of temporary workforces than previously experienced. Attention should be placed on these staff for training purposes.

- It is not necessary to deliver training products in alternative languages, as core staffs are fluent in English or English is relatively strong as a second language.
- The diversity of the industry, with its unique mix of practical skills and commercial scope, represents the type of training that is required, covering both technical skills and commercial awareness.
- The key priority skills gaps identified for both the horticultural worker and supervisor/team leader were Plant Nutrition, Crop Identification, Crop Irrigation, Pest & Disease and team leader/management skills.
- Accessibility of computers for staff and the use of technology to support learning were discussed with the conclusion that the industry is moving forward in its use of technologies, with caution.
- Whilst the use of technology to deliver training will be considered, more traditional styles of delivery such as practical training on a nursery are still preferred by the industry.
- The training needs to be flexible, affordable and engaging providing training and assessment of a high quality.

The findings from this consultation are detailed within the HTA report, 21st Century Training for Commercial Ornamental Production Report, which can be accessed through the HTA website, or provided upon request.

Stage 2 – Defining and delivering a learning framework

Following the completion of the consultation phase the project turned its attention to turning the findings into reality. The HTA had already taken on-board the need to deliver cost-effective and accessible training to all its members in the future and the KTP was an opportunity to validate this approach with ornamental producers, whilst considering the cautious optimism detailed within the consultation report findings. The benefit of delivering training on-line is a reduction in the cost of training to levy payers/members as opposed to more traditional training courses.

In September 2011 the KTP project faced operational difficulties with the departure of the KTP Associate. A thorough review of the project's status and a planning activity took place to understand how the project could continue using a different resource model. This review resulted in a trainer/subject matter expert(s) design team being formed, who could begin to design the outline learning framework and start to collate and write learning materials to support the piloting of an on-line delivery approach. This team, while successful in

continuing the project, was not able to match the resource levels planned originally, therefore the development activity needed to be refined to reflect this.

The design team developed a small section of e-learning in support of two modules (Plant Growth and Development and Crop Observation and Identification Skills) to be piloted in February 2012. The pilot was conducted with 5 nurseries, engaging 32 staff with the training. The pilot evaluated both content to ascertain if the learning outcomes had been reached (content included, e-learning and practical nursery exercises), but also user experience and accessibility. The result of the pilot from the representative sample was positive across all areas.

Following the pilot it was clear that the use of technology as a way of delivering training, that included both e-learning, assessment and practical nursery exercises was the most beneficial approach for industry.

Following this design process, it was clear that the time required for designing each module and then building each module was going to be extensive and more complex than more traditional design methods, ultimately resulting in a need to re-focus on the outcomes achievable under the KTP Project.

To maximize the remaining time, it was agreed that the design team would focus on clarifying learning outcomes, assessment needs and content for 3 of the 8 modules.

KTP outcomes:

- A clear understanding of the profile of the industry, challenges they face and training delivery preferences.
- An industry list of prioritised skill gaps for both the Horticultural Worker and the Team Leader/Supervisor.
- Overarching outline learning framework for the Horticultural Worker (Level 2, GCSE equivalent, and the Team Leader/Supervisor, Level 3, A-level equivalent)
- Successful pilot engaging with a number of industry partners.
- A full set of learning outcomes have been produced for all Level 2 modules, using national occupational standards. On-line delivery has been tested under pilot conditions for the Crop Observation and Identification Skills and Plant Growth and Development Modules. Further design work has also been completed for the Crop Irrigation Module, but all these modules will require further design and build work.
- Validation that using technology to access training is feasible and supported.
- Breadth of possible resources available to support the training is good, with the challenge being to draw this together and translating to meet the different audiences.

- Increased understanding and capability within the project team in designing training for on-line delivery.

Following the outcomes attained under the KTP project, it is proposed will be carried forward under a joint partnership between the HTA and HDC, to develop and build the training qualification framework, providing level 2 training modules that reflect the most up to date knowledge and practice for the Horticultural Worker. Level 3 (supervisor/team leader) training would require a further project and investment and will be reviewed whilst the Level 2 training was being developed.

Financial Benefits

The KTP outcomes have not provided current financial benefits. Ornamental Growers will benefit from receiving cost-effective training (compared to more traditional methods) that provide both e-learning and practical training for their staff, should the proposed development go ahead. The industry will benefit from having the infrastructure and processes in place to provide industry relevant, sustainable training.

Action Points

- A proposed collaborative partnership between HDC and HTA is currently being considered.
- Growers' engagement and input for the proposed next stage will be critical to ensure the development and build of the training modules are fit for purpose and up to date.