



Horticultural Sector Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The horticultural sector

Thursday 23 March 2023

10.35 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Redesdale (The Chair); The Earl of Arran; Baroness Buscombe; Baroness Fookes; Baroness Jones of Whitchurch; Lord Sahota; Baroness Walmsley; Lord Watson of Wyre Forest; Baroness Willis of Summertown.

Evidence Session No. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 41 - 53

Witnesses

[I](#): John Shropshire, Chair, Independent Review into Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain; Janet Swadling, Chief Executive, Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture.

Examination of witnesses

John Shropshire and Janet Swadling.

Q41 **The Chair:** I thank the witnesses for joining us today. Can I ask you both to give a very brief introduction of yourselves and your organisations?

Janet Swadling: Thank you very much. I am the interim Chief Executive at the Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture—TIAH—but I also sit on the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board as an independent member. I wonder if this is an appropriate time to introduce the organisation. I should probably start by saying that the Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH) is a new professional body. It has been established with funding from Defra and its purpose is to help to address skills and labour problems, to develop a professional capability framework, to encourage lifelong learning and to act as an overarching body to help to defragment the sector. I can say more about that as the discussion continues.

John Shropshire: Good morning. I am currently chairman of the independent labour shortage review for Defra. I am also chairman of a family farming business. We are an international business. We farm in five different countries, including in Africa and Europe and in the UK, and our main product is fresh produce. We are fully integrated in dealing directly with the supermarkets and we do some added-value processing; we have an added-value processing business in the USA.

Q42 **The Chair:** Thank you very much. That leads into the first question. What are the key labour issues impacting the horticultural sector today? Just a small question.

John Shropshire: In the last few years, there has been a tremendous amount of uncertainty where we have not known whether we have a labour supply. I am talking principally about the seasonal labour supply. We have not known until the last minute whether we will have it, so everything has been pretty chaotic and poorly managed. We have a bit more certainty now because we have a two-year arrangement, but two years is not a lot when you are looking to invest for the future. That is a cloud over something that is getting better. Another question attached to that is the whole ethical and welfare issue; we can cover that now or later. That is a big issue that we need to address. That is the seasonal side.

The shortage of full-time staff is probably the same as in every economy, every country, in the western world that we are operating in. We have shortages of key staff everywhere, engineers in particular. We want to automate, but there is a shortage of engineers. We have a shortage of skilled staff in some areas.

Janet Swadling: Again, by way of background, it is probably important to say that TIAH was established as part of the Food and Drink Sector Council's agricultural productivity working group. The remit for TIAH is very much production horticulture and edibles pre farm gate. Having said

that, the kind of systems and the help that we are developing for growers can be very much adapted across the ornamental or environmental horticulture sector. In that respect, we enjoy a very good relationship with the Ornamental Horticulture Round Table group and we sit on the employment and education group.

TIAH has been doing some research into the labour market. That has thrown up four key areas: labour supply, workforce modelling, staff recruitment and retention, and the development of the appropriate skills. I can say more about those various aspects. The research was undertaken by Exeter University, and respondents certainly made it very clear that they had had significant difficulties filling vacancies. This was not helped by migrant labour problems, as well as a declining domestic labour pool.

Maybe we can learn some lessons from New Zealand, where there is quite a different approach, with a very clear understanding of the future direction, with government, industry and education working together. In that sense, there probably needs to be more emphasis on workforce modelling and looking at planning for the future. Again, in New Zealand, that is done in a very detailed way, down to actual skills levels. To take this forward, we have developed a labour modelling tool and have demonstrated that to the group that John is leading. That could be useful to help with future planning.

In terms of staff recruitment and retention, the industry faces tremendous problems with its image. These are highly skilled jobs. There is an image that they are poorly paid, but a lot of the jobs are extremely well paid. Part of the problem is that we do not necessarily work together as an industry to try to promote that across all the spectrum of careers that are available.

Q43 Lord Watson of Wyre Forest: Good morning and thank you for your time today. It is greatly appreciated. You both talked a bit about skills in your opening remarks. If I can focus on that for a few minutes, that would be great. John, you mentioned that there are immediate skills shortages for engineers. Can you elaborate a bit more about the current shortages and, perhaps more importantly, what the predicted shortages are in the future, if it is possible to do that?

John Shropshire: Janet's point about modelling would probably help us to get a better grip on the future, but one of the problems for us is that there is new technology coming on all the way along and there are more opportunities to introduce that technology. It is getting the skill levels up fast enough within the organisation to cope with it, just to install it or make it work efficiently. The industry is spending vast amounts of money on automation, but to get it to work efficiently is a challenge. It would be difficult to put any sort of numbers on that.

The review is coming to the end of the evidence gathering and we are just starting to write it all up now. It will be issued in a couple of months and we should have some more data and figures, but at the moment I

cannot tell you what the numbers look like. That is a major challenge for the industry. It is not just a question of paying for the equipment; it is the expertise in trying to get it installed.

The point about the image of the industry is a very good one, and as part of our review we have done a lot of work researching what happens abroad. We looked in depth at Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, and particularly at Holland and Denmark, which are on our doorstep, to try to understand why they seem to have a much better image for their industry, how that goes back into schools and how we can make recommendations on that. Hopefully that will be part of our report.

Lord Watson of Wyre Forest: Is it possible for you to easily access the data on skills shortages now? We have seen evidence that there may be gaps in industry reporting. As a leading commercial grower, how easy is it to identify industry-wide gaps?

John Shropshire: Probably quite difficult. In the review, we had to do this through questionnaires and things like that. We had quite a good success rate with a questionnaire—400 companies came back—but that is the whole of the food industry; it is not just horticulture. As Janet was saying, it is a very good opportunity for TIAH to provide that.

Lord Watson of Wyre Forest: Last year, the Unit for Future Skills was created. Has that come across your radar? It replaced the Skills and Productivity Board and is supposed to advise the Government on future skills and where there are mismatches in demand. Has it done any outreach to you yet, or does that feature in your daily lives?

John Shropshire: I am not aware of it.

Janet Swadling: No. Now you mention it, I vaguely recollect it being set up, but certainly it has not reached out to us¹.

Baroness Buscombe: Janet, I think you mentioned staff retention work. Can you talk a bit more about that, please? What is the issue with staff retention?

Janet Swadling: John is probably better placed than I am to talk from a practical point of view, but we are particularly keen to encourage much more of an ethos of lifelong learning so that people have the skills to pick up these new developments and cope with the various different changes that come into the business. That means that, whatever technological changes are happening, they can be retained, can continue to get satisfaction from the roles they are performing, and do not feel attracted to going into other industries.

That is a very real problem that we face, because with a lot of the skills that we need we are in tremendous competition now with other industries, given the growth in the need for data skills and the ability to

¹ The witness would like to clarify that TIAH did have a short introductory meeting with the Unit for Future Skills in December 2022

analyse the outputs of the various sorts of automation. Having said that, there are tremendous opportunities if we can sort out the industry's image, because these are potentially careers where people can make a big difference.

The Chair: John, if you are able to share with the committee any indicative results from the research, that would be helpful.

John Shropshire: It is probably not possible, because we are still collating the information.

The Chair: Our committee will go through to the end of the year.

John Shropshire: Yes, obviously we will. Within two months we should have this, yes.

Q44 **Baroness Willis of Summertown:** Janet, you mentioned automation and technological innovation and basically the need to have quite high skill sets to deal with some of this and develop this whole area. We have also heard from other people that the solution is in robotics. In your experience, is that the case? There is such a mixed skill set required here and I am interested to hear how we get success to come through in these different areas and attract people to come in and stay.

Janet Swadling: First, although the various technological advances are happening they will not be immediate solutions to any labour supply problems. There is quite a long lead time. As things are developed we need sufficient understanding of the kind of flexible, adaptable skills that people will need to be able to handle the uptake of the advances. Technological innovations have the ability to reduce some of the repetitive tasks and that type of thing. Again, that is probably how the industry is seen, as quite manual. I think the technology will bring in different skills that will enable us to analyse the outputs of that. An overarching thing in all this is about making sure that there are the appropriate leadership and management skills to handle everything.

Baroness Willis of Summertown: Do you feel you have enough academic partnerships to be able to develop the different innovations that are required? So far, we have heard from one or two universities, but as a scientist myself I am not aware of anybody else doing this sort of work outside those one or two places.

Janet Swadling: There probably needs to be—and I know this is an age-old problem—much closer interaction between industry and academia, and a real understanding of the problems that need to be solved. We will always need the blue sky research. That is particularly important, for example, in pest management and propagation—those types of basic scientific skills. There needs to be much better dialogue and much better understanding as research projects are launched. What will be required at an early stage to make that research able to be applied and be useful? There is a group under way, under the chairmanship of one of your fellow committee members, Lord Curry, looking at the application of science to

make it of more value in an applied sense. That is a group of institutions working together with academic input.

- Q45 **Baroness Walmsley:** My question is for John. How successful has the seasonal worker scheme been in alleviating labour shortages in the sector? What has been done and what could be done to ensure their welfare? We have been hearing all kinds of issues, such as that the quota can change each year and sometimes at very short notice, which probably makes it difficult for both growers and potential seasonal workers to plan. We have been hearing difficulties about the short stay allowed and the short return window.

On exploitation, how much can we trust the gangmasters? How well regulated are they on fees and pay and all those issues?

Finally, have you analysed the gender split of the seasonal workers? We would be interested in that too.

John Shropshire: The scheme has been successful in that it has alleviated what was going to be a disaster, so at least we are still in business, but every developed country in the world that I am aware of has a seasonal worker scheme for the industry. We have had a farm in Poland for 10 years and never employed anybody from the EU on the farm. It has always been a seasonal worker scheme there. Germany has a fantastic scheme, as do America and New Zealand. All these countries have very good schemes. SAWS was a very good scheme, but it was shut down in 2015, unfortunately. We have always been on the back foot and there have been a lot of political issues flying around this whole thing.

I think the result will be that we will just export the industry because it is easier to go to Poland to produce crops, or to Senegal, where we have a farm, or to Spain. The Germans are taking significant chunks of our market, which is crazy—that a country like Germany can come here and compete. We have to have the scheme if we want to have a horticultural industry, because British people want permanent jobs. There is this rubbish, "Oh, British people are lazy. They don't want to work in the fields". They are not lazy; 99% of the population are incredibly hardworking and they want full-time jobs, not seasonal work working in the fields. That is the same everywhere else in the developed world, as I have just said.

We have to have a scheme. We need a scheme that has plenty of longevity so that we know in the future where we are going and we can invest in that scheme. We have two years now, which is better than what we had before, but one year it was announced in March. This is so open to abuse it is actually really poor. This is me speaking as G's Group now. I have to say this is my business and I have spent a hell of a lot of time trying to campaign. The amount of hours and days I have spent campaigning for this is just ridiculous.

We have to have a scheme. We need some longevity and then we can invest and start to back British production rather than just focusing on taking it abroad. When we have a scheme with longevity, we need

regulations, because a lot of small companies are employing these people and they do not even have an HR team or an HR officer. A big company like ours has an ethical audit team, and we can audit the whole trail right back through to the start, but not many companies like us can do that. We have to have regulation and there then has to be enforcement.

To back that up, because it is easy for me to say that and I have been saying it for years, with the review we are working on finding out about the best regulation and enforcement in the world. How are Germany, Holland, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, all these countries, managing their programmes? What can we learn from the best in the world about regulation and enforcement? That hopefully will come out within two or three months. This is what we think the best in the world is and we should be as good as that, should we not? We are not good at the moment and I am very troubled by this.

Janet talked about the image of the industry. We have a poor image. If it is in the newspapers every week that there are people from Nepal or the Far East or whatever who are paying £3,000 through extortion to get a job in Britain, it is completely unacceptable. What we have picked up in our company with people who are coming to us we can deal with, but a lot of companies are just not capable of doing that because they do not have the size. We cannot all be big companies.

On pay, last year we were paying more than the minimum, so I think the pay rate is good. We had a very big problem last year when the Ukraine war started. Most of the people had been coming from Ukraine. Of course, they were all prevented from coming and we had to switch to a whole host of countries. The more countries that are involved the worse it will get, because it is completely fragmented. Then, of course, we took up to six weeks to deal with the visa applications, whereas our competition in Germany dealt with the visas in less than two weeks. The industry then ploughed in £60 million worth of crops—this is all in the public arena—and replaced it by importing from Germany, Poland and Spain. We need a scheme that is managed right from the beginning right to the end. It needs a major, major sort out.

Baroness Walmsley: Are we in danger of exporting our emissions, then?

John Shropshire: Of course. It is easy for us to get to net zero if we produce nothing. We need our own farming and horticulture. I am passionate about it. I have had a lifetime of trying to build the UK season, to get a bigger and bigger season, extend the seasons and produce in Britain, but up to about seven years ago we imported about 5% of our seasonal amount and now it is 20%. There are 65 million heads of produce coming into my company that are imported. It was 15 million. There are these sorts of things. It is just easy. You can pick up a phone and ring Germany or Poland and get a load of anything.

We might have had Brexit, but we are still in a free market. There is a free market with Europe. There is a lot of talk about how difficult it is. It

is not that difficult. For bigger companies like us, importers, it is easy: you just put a team on it and get on with it. We can pick up a phone and buy a load of lettuce or tomatoes from Holland. It is not a problem to import. We produce through Senegal in the summer now. We did not think that it could, but we found that it can. People are desperate for work. It is inevitable that that is the way it will go if we do not sort this out properly.

Q46 Baroness Buscombe: I feel in some ways that I am in la-la land listening to you both. As we sit here, one in five UK working-age households are entirely workless. I get that these people would prefer permanent jobs, but I can speak from my knowledge as an ex-Minister at Work and Pensions that universal credit supports people into work, including temporary work, and helps people to come off and on the system. Mel Stride, our Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, said last Sunday in an article in the *Telegraph*, "We have millions of people who could work who are not". They are being paid not to work through other people's toil. He also said, "It is far better that we train people up, and then we can rely less on migration".

Are you in discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions on how we can fill this gap with domestic workers when we have so many people who want to work but who are being told that it is perhaps not for them or whatever? We need to encourage these people. They have a very important role to play.

John Shropshire: A major part of the review is looking at this whole area—jobcentres, incentives to work and the whole universal credit thing. We are looking at that whole area and that will be in the report. In the area where we operate, there are not any unemployed people. There are a lot of people on long-term sick, but—

Baroness Buscombe: There are several million who can work, who are completely capable of working. They are not on long-term sick.

John Shropshire: With the jobcentres in our area, the number is about a quarter of what we need, so there are very few unemployed people in the area where we need them.

Baroness Buscombe: Is it not easier to move them than to move people from the Philippines and ensure that they are properly regulated and looked after?

John Shropshire: Hopefully we can be closer than the Philippines. One area that we are looking at in the review is the hard-to-reach people, people who have learning difficulties and autistic people, these sorts of things. There are a lot of people in that category who are not working. That is one of the things we are looking at to see what could be done to get some of these people into work. That is a big issue for the Government; it is not just the food industry. That is a big issue, totally.

Baroness Buscombe: We have 1 million more able to work.

John Shropshire: We are looking into that.

Baroness Buscombe: Good.

John Shropshire: This is not unique. The whole of the developed world has a seasonal worker scheme. Two years ago when we hit Covid we could not bring people from central and eastern Europe. We then had the Pick for Britain scheme, which Defra pushed and it worked well. We had 500 people, British residents, who came from all walks of life. The head of exams at Cambridge University came with her daughter; Frankie Dettori's son came, who was fantastic, the *Sun* came and interviewed him and all that sort of thing.

But as soon as the bars opened and a new market started up again, a lot of young people preferred to run bars, or racing. In horticulture, we are a bit at the bottom of the pile in terms of what people would aspire to. Working in fields is nice on a sunny day, but it can be too hot, it can be wet. It is not the greatest place to work, so for British seasonal workers, people looking for work on the basis you describe, there is a lot of other competition from bars, holiday resorts, supermarkets and holiday cover—that type of labour.

Q47 **Baroness Fookes:** John, you lamented the demise of the previous seasonal worker scheme in 2015. In your report, are you going to give us a fully developed new seasonal worker scheme that you think should be adopted? Can you give us a preview now?

John Shropshire: I have probably said too much. I will be in trouble with my Defra team.

Baroness Fookes: Will there be a full new scheme that you want to introduce, even if you cannot tell us the details?

John Shropshire: What I have said I have been saying for quite a while in several public platforms. I have not said anything today that I have not said before, but I am representing G's, so I have to be a bit careful. The review will come out with some suggestions on how it can be improved, but I am not sure yet what they will be because we are still doing the research on the best in the world. We are getting the information in. How is Germany able to do it so much better than we can? It dealt with eight times more refugee visas than we did, yet the refugee visas were the excuse: "Oh, we have so many refugee visas". Well, Germany has eight times more and it is putting the visas through in two weeks. We will be making recommendations. I think the current scheme could be fine, but it just needs a few things. We will see what comes out in the recommendation.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: John, I certainly appreciate how candid you have been today. It has certainly given us some food for thought. You talked about there being a lot of small companies out there employing migrant workers for the seasonal schemes. By that, do you mean people who set themselves up as small companies that will get you the staff? You are not talking about farmers trying to employ people

direct, presumably, or are you talking about farmers trying to access migrants from third world countries? What did you mean by there are lots of small companies?

John Shropshire: Sorry, I meant small horticultural businesses that might only have two or three people or 20 people or even 100 people come to do seasonal work. No, I meant farmers, I meant growers.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: How do they go about finding somebody in the current climate?

John Shropshire: The scheme at the moment, currently there are labour providers who are in the middle. They have been given a licence by the Government. There is some government input, where one of them has had it revoked because there were so many problems. These labour providers are then going on to recruit, but you have to recruit, not just ring up an agent in Uzbekistan or Nepal and the agent then goes to another agent, which is what has been happening. It has to be properly done. We go to the providers and say, "We want so many people in such and such a place" and they sort it out, then you have one of the permits or a number of the permits.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: I do not know that sector at all. Are there half a dozen big labour providers that you could choose from? Are there not a lot of smaller people, in that case?

John Shropshire: No, there are half a dozen, but one of those has been revoked.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: Can I ask again a very naive question? You talked about best in the world and specifically you have talked about New Zealand, Janet. John, you talked about the Netherlands. Are we all fishing in the same pond? Are we all trying to find seasonal workers from the same countries or have the Netherlands and/or the other countries that you are looking at cracked it? Do they have a particular relationship with another country that is now a secure arrangement?

John Shropshire: The northern Europeans are all fishing in the same pond as us, I would say. Ukraine was a big labour source for all northern European countries, going back a long time. In southern Europe there is Spain: certainly we have a big farming operation in Spain and we have Moroccans and Ecuadorians and South Americans through their links to those countries. For the USA it would be Central America and Mexico with its scheme and Canada would be the same. It is not all the same, but certainly we are in the northern European pond, as you describe it.

Baroness Buscombe: I just have one very tiny question. Are most of these people we are inviting to come in as seasonal workers skilled or unskilled?

John Shropshire: The scheme we are talking about is unskilled. I think it should be described as skilled. To cut a lettuce or stick of celery is very difficult. We have spent millions of pounds, literally millions, trying to

mechanise it in the last 20 years and completely failed at the moment. It is quite difficult to get it perfect. The consumer wants a manicured product; it has to be right. I think there is a skill in it, but it is described as unskilled, yes.

- Q48 **Baroness Foakes:** This one is to my namesake, Janet. How well does the education system prepare young people with the skills that the horticultural sector needs? In talking about the horticultural sector, I always divide it firmly into edible and environmental and my particular interest and concern is the environmental.

Janet Swadling: Let us start by saying that from the kind of industry collaboration we have undertaken, there is basically a mismatch between the provision and industry requirements. I think we also need to recognise that horticultural in general is quite a small area in terms of education provision, let alone when it is then broken down into the different sorts of edible versus ornamental/environmental. If we look at this from the point of view of the education system and how this might serve the industry, so to speak, in terms of the curriculum throughout there are a lot of areas where there could be contextual learning about horticulture. I think that is rarely taken advantage of at the different stages and there are a number of areas where it could be brought into the curriculum in a very live way.

We are up against this problem of practical skills. These are very practical skills in lots of senses and they do not necessarily equate with success. Everything is about trying to get higher qualifications, degrees and so on. I think there is generally—we can talk further about this—a low awareness of the potential of careers in the industry. If you look at careers advisers' roles in the education system, again from research we have done, farming and growing in the widest possible context features with hardly any of them. As I say, this kind of experiential learning could really help. There are lots of examples where it could be used to help to support the curriculum.

Probably it is worthwhile looking at funding as well, in terms of funding going to the right places. There are issues here about local versus national. A lot of money goes in via the LEPs now, but in reality horticulture skills would not feature greatly at a local level just because it is an area with a perception of low demand, whereas I think if there was a national approach to the money that is being distributed locally, that could help support a national skills programme. Has the education system adopted e-learning, virtual experiential learning in a way to maximise that? That clearly requires some investment, but it would help with the problem. We cannot have vast horticulture education facilities on everybody's doorstep. Where they are available, they will attract the youngsters into the courses, but we could potentially look at more use of online e-learning, gamification and that type of thing.

I would just reinforce that there is limited provision. It is great to see today Hadlow College announcing the opening of its new £1 million-funded horticulture unit, which has state of the art facilities and will

attract people in. That will be great for the people within the vicinity, but it is very difficult if you are somebody urban and you want to go into this. Where do you go, how do you do it and is it feasible?

Baroness Fookes: Is there a role for TIAH in trying to get at teachers and particularly careers advisers? I think their role has been appalling and it is a very sore point with me. Would there not be a role for your organisation?

Janet Swadling: Absolutely. That is something we are very proactive on. We did commission research through Family Kids & Youth particularly to look at the barriers to entry generally into agriculture and horticulture careers. We undertook a wide survey, particularly with emphasis on the influencers—the parents, grandparents, carers and careers advisers. We found that within that there was basically a complete lack of awareness. It is something we are proactively working on. We have somebody who has recently joined us as a careers manager, an ex-teacher. She has literally just come out of the system and is very much engaged in working with careers adviser networks. The awareness within those careers advisers, I do not think it is an exaggeration to say, is virtually non-existent.

Baroness Fookes: I am afraid you are dead right.

Q49 **Baroness Willis of Summertown:** As a supplementary question, within the education system of course we have GCSEs, we have A-levels. Many would say that we are becoming more and more restrictive when people get to A-levels and far too strict when they come to the university sector, because many of them do not then have the right skill sets to do any of the degrees. I am trying to understand where in that education sector you think the horticultural training should be. Are you saying that it should be in further education or are you talking further down the education system?

Janet Swadling: I think probably at all levels. Why is advantage not taken of the touch points, so to speak, at the different levels? For example, particularly if you look at GCSE level, there are options there within biology and science to introduce more relevant practical work and content. One of the points that has come through from Ruth, as I say, who has recently joined us and has been teaching these courses, is that often one of the problems is that it is taught in a way that focuses on problems such as causing soil erosion and so on. Often it needs to be turned around to say that these are things that can be changed and these can be solutions to some of the climate problems. It is important that it is perceived to be not just at FE level, because a lot of decisions are made way before then about the types of things people want to do.

Baroness Willis of Summertown: I get that point, but I do wonder whether it is also a communication point going both ways, because every child that I have ever spoken to wants to go into environmental science right now because of climate change. They want to go into these things and I think it is where the opportunities are for them to follow through.

That is where my question on FE comes in.

Janet Swadling: I see Alex is in the room with us, and Alex will be much better placed to talk about the detail of that. Yes, lots of people do want to go into those kinds of subjects. If your question is about what the potential careers are, I think that is something where we are poor. That is something that TIAH is definitely trying to address as an umbrella organisation—not trying to replace what is going on in the other organisations. Let us be clear, there are lots and lots of organisations doing lots of good pieces of work on different aspects of careers. If you go back to something like Bright Crop, there were 30 different organisations involved in careers activity. This is part of the problem. To date we have not had a coherent, co-ordinated approach.

The other thing that we have identified, and part of the rationale for TIAH, is to put in place a professional framework for different kinds of careers. Of course there are lots of different opportunities to provide those routes so that it is clear to the influencers and then to the young people themselves what their potential options are. How can they develop a career that can sit alongside somebody who is going to do accountancy or law? There are no pathways at the moment. You would be dissuaded, but, as John can cite, there are much better-paid jobs in some of the areas in our industries than there are in others.

I was absolutely struck recently: we are beginning to dip our toe in the water with careers events. We wanted just to attend the Green Careers event at the University of Cambridge, but we were asked, "Could you put up a stand?" so we did. At that event, it was all students who were completing their Master's degrees in either geography or environmental sciences. There were a lot of other Cambridge University stands there, the Ernst & Youngs and so forth, but we were absolutely struck by the number of students who stopped and said, "Oh, I had not actually thought about agriculture and horticulture and using my degrees in that way". Someone who was currently working in cancer said, "But that is not really where I want to be. I want to be in something that can really help the environment".

I will be perfectly frank, we were struggling to say at that point in time, because we had not done the work and we did not necessarily have the support to do it yet, how we would direct these people into the appropriate pathways. We want to work with others. We want to work in a highly collaborative way, co-ordinate what is going on, maximise the use of the limited funds that there are across the piece and do that to promote appropriate careers at different levels that there are within the industry and within the different facets.

Q50 The Earl of Arran: Janet, you have already answered my question. You are saying it is jolly difficult to attract people into this profession, whatever advice or career information is given. It is not a particularly relevant question, but those who live near a garden or a field as opposed to those who live an entirely urban life, are they more likely to want to enter the profession because they have grown up with it, so to speak,

and can see it?

Janet Swadling: I do not know whether there is any particular research that supports that, but what we have found is that one of the overarching reasons as to why people come forward is locality—if something is on their doorstep and is easily accessible. Where that is not the case or where there is not a family history, it is very much about how we get to the influencers, the teachers—it is probably teachers more than careers advisers—which is why it is important to get it into the curriculum and to the parents and other family and care support members, to convince them that this is something that is very worthwhile and will give people a solid, meaningful future.

The Chair: Thank you. Lord Watson, you had to declare an interest.

Lord Watson of Wyre Forest: I do, Chair, thank you. Apologies to colleagues. I need to declare that I have no interest.

The Chair: A double negative, fantastic. Moving on to Baroness Buscombe.

Q51 **Baroness Buscombe:** I appreciate we are short of time now. This has been incredibly helpful, thank you both. If you could suggest one recommendation you would like this committee to make to the Government, what would it be? What can we do to help, for example with the image? Is there something Government can do, but also the rest of us in Parliament, not just the Government?

Janet Swadling: We have discussed this within TIAH and we think that what is needed is much greater cross-industry collaboration. Within the industry we need to collaborate much more on labour and skills, but this should be combined industry/government collaboration. We are building the capability to support and develop the workforce across all forms of farming and growing, including the different aspects of horticulture. We would like to see a recommendation that all parties at play here work proactively together with TIAH as the co-ordinator and that there is continued appropriate support from government.

We have been very grateful for the support to date to enable the developments we are undertaking, but there will be no short-term fixes in this. This is not a short-term problem. We have recognised the collaboration that we have been able to achieve with Defra, which has been incredibly helpful. We have found in our work we have been able—through the help of some very able civil servants—to co-ordinate quite a lot of the activity within Defra. We have very good interaction with the different policy teams. I recall a very interesting discussion about different definitions of regenerative agriculture, for example.

I think there is a big co-ordination role and it is extremely important for that to be undertaken and to encourage greater industry collaboration, but also industry and government collaboration, with a clearer idea of where we are heading into the future to help with that modelling so that we know what we are trying to produce down the pipeline. Development

of skills is not a short-term thing; it has quite a long lead time in certain areas.

John Shropshire: I could say a short-term fix—that we have to fix the seasonal worker scheme because of the sort of questions I was getting—but that would not be my answer. My answer is that we do need a vision and I am sure that is what you are helping to create. We need a vision for the industry. In my formative years when I built my business, I had a clear vision in the 1980s. We had a real steer and a strategic vision from the Government. That went into the 1990s and that has just all been lost. We do not really know. We are just sitting there beavering away, trying to run our businesses, but there is no feeling that we are even really wanted or where we want to be. We do not know; we are just beavering away.

I think it is that strategic vision that we had in the 1980s and 1990s. I used to moan like hell when my father talked about how wonderful it all was in the past, and I find myself doing the same, but it was a period when we did have a vision, Food from Britain, and we had a vision for the entire industry. I think in horticulture we could do with a vision. I am sure that is what your committee will help come up with.

Baroness Buscombe: Good, because sometimes we are rather poor at using our memory and a bit shy, saying, “Oh, it is a bit historical, it sounds old-fashioned”. But that is extremely helpful, thank you.

Q52 **The Chair:** I will ask one and then we have time for one minute from Baroness Walmsley. You mentioned being able to get people to work. Rural housing has not been raised yet, but with second homes and things like that, and all the problems of getting affordable housing, is that a major concern or is it not such a concern in the areas that you are working in?

John Shropshire: That will be in the review, for sure. That is a big issue. The seasonal worker scheme is mostly temporary, caravan-type accommodation, so it does not impact on housing. Housing is a big issue, the cost of housing. I was on the regional economic commission for Cambridge and there is more poverty in Cambridge, our richest city in the country, than there is in Wisbech because of the lack of housing. The housing issue is a massive issue. That is not just in agriculture and horticulture, it is a big issue for the UK, in my opinion.

The Chair: Baroness Walmsley, you have 30 seconds.

Q53 **Baroness Walmsley:** Yes, thank you. I wanted to take Janet back to how to attract young people into the sector. Is there a role for the voluntary sector? It occurs to me that young people who might work in their local country park as a volunteer or for the Groundwork Trust or anything like that might be more inclined to go into this sector than others. Are you looking at whether there is a formal way of engaging with that sector to help to encourage young people to make a career out of that sort of work?

Janet Swadling: That is a very interesting suggestion and certainly something to think about. We have not as yet engaged with any of the voluntary organisations, so to speak—we are relatively new—but we will. Certainly we will take that away and think about how we might look at that in terms of other partnerships.

The Chair: I thank you on behalf of the committee for getting an hour-long grilling. Thank you very much. We will move on to our next witnesses.