

Written evidence submitted by The Horticultural Trades Association (TPW0086)

Tuesday, 22nd June 2021

I am writing to provide supplementary evidence in response to the question from Dave Doogan MP on the shortage of seasonal labour in UK ornamental horticulture.

The HTA estimates that in total ornamental horticulture, which includes tree nurseries, employs 15,000 people in total, with 9,300 employed seasonally. Of these, between 4,500 and 7,000 workers do not live in the UK year-round. However, these estimates are based on figures prior to the UK leaving the European Union. Seasonal workers are crucial to the industry: At key times of the year, they are over 100% of the full-time workforce for tree nursery members. Without additional workforce support we are in danger as an industry of not being able to meet capacity and fulfil the potential we want of producing trees for planting here in the UK and generate an increasing export market.

The Government's Seasonal Workers Pilot scheme currently allows visas for up to 30,000 seasonal workers for edible horticulture only. There is no option to employ seasonal labour for ornamental horticulture via the scheme. The Government needs to have a more joined-up approach to policy-making – not only in properly engaging with the industry about tree planting targets, which they failed to do, but ensure that headline policies like tree planting are fully aligned with other policies across Government, such as immigration.

Since the submission of the HTA's written evidence, the England Tree Action Plan has been published and has announced that the Government will provide funding to support UK public and private sector nurseries. The sector suggest that funding of private and public sector nurseries should be on an equal basis, with the level of funding linked to the volumes of plants produced.

I also want to reconfirm our support for the Nursery Notification Scheme. The Government needs to urgently work and engage fully with the industry to bring the scheme to reality and provide the confidence in the market that growers need. This is through ensuring that landowners have sufficient incentives to plant trees on enough land to meet the targets. The timeframe of only two growing seasons to meet this target is just not achievable without support. It is not just a 'numbers game' though. It needs to be a plan that recognises the importance of urban planting and maintenance of those trees if the Government are going to properly back UK tree producers.

I hope this is helpful. Myself and my colleagues at the HTA are happy to provide further information to the committee to aid its investigations into this issue and in its recommendations to Government.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Fraser
HTA Board Member