

Written evidence submitted by The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) (TPW0091)

Wednesday, 1st December 2021

I am writing with supplementary evidence further to my letter on the 22nd of June 2021.

The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) has now completed its Wages and Benchmarking Survey, which provides the most recent evidence of the seasonal labour needs in ornamental horticulture.

Seasonal workers make up around one third of the total ornamental horticulture workforce, currently numbering c6,000 full time equivalents (FTEs).

The Survey found that 68% of members reported shortages in labour recruitment, resulting in UK plant and tree growers being short of 1,200 FTEs annually. Nurseries which grow trees and related plants such as hedges and shrubs have a shortage of 800 FTEs – two thirds of the total shortage being experienced by the sector.

52% of plants and tree growers reported that the shortage is impacting their ability to deliver business projects, such as enhanced tree production schemes. This is despite the efforts of our industry to recruit more workers locally.

As an industry we have recently launched a growth strategy which includes commitments to continue to make horticulture an attractive sector to work in, but these measures will take time. We need a change in policy on seasonal workers now.

To resolve this shortage, and ensure that we are able to grow the trees and plants needed to meet our environmental ambitions, we have three sensible and modest solutions:

1. Include plants and tree ('ornamental' horticulture) production in the seasonal workers scheme next year. The current scheme is only for edible horticulture. Extending it to plant and tree nurseries feels logical and efficient - many edible and plant or tree nurseries are literally across the road from each other. Many will be supplied with the same seasonal worker agencies. It's arbitrary to sub-divide an industry.
2. Extend the current seasonal workers scheme to ensure ornamental horticulture's needs are adequately met. Increasing the current numbers by 10% is all that is needed. The numbers could be reduced over time as local recruitment and automation implementation makes a difference.
3. For the visa scheme to be extended by three months to nine months. This will allow flower picking, such as daffodils (early Spring) and tree production (Autumn) to be included. The current six-month scheme misses out these sectors.

I hope this supplementary evidence is useful to you and the Committee.

With kind regards,

Brian Fraser
HTA Board Member