

Towards a New Professionalism

For food security and a sustained environment

The Skills Strategy for agriculture and horticulture



Foreword



To be a farmer in 2010 is both exciting and challenging. There is a growing realisation of the importance of the industry to the nation and the need for its products. That range of products is becoming increasingly diverse and no longer comprises food alone. Furthermore farming is expected to produce these extra goods in ways that are more environmentally sustainable.

The need for people with not only traditional skills but also scientific, business and other skills can never have been greater and yet the industry is constantly **perceived** by many to be unskilled. We cannot blame others for this, albeit ill founded, perception. We need to look inwards not outwards for the solution and resolve it ourselves.

This strategy sets out to do just that. It has brought together all the major organisations responsible for representing the interests of agriculture and horticulture to address the issues of skills and recognition.

With its new, single and coherent voice on skills, this **industry led strategy** can help industry deliver what the nation and society needs.

Richard Longthorp, AgriSkills Strategy Group Chair



Faced with a growing need to produce more food while impacting less on the environment, the NFU is pleased to be part of the AgriSkills partnership which has put together this skills strategy for the agriculture and horticulture sectors.

The Strategy's publication marks an important stage when we need to move from words to action. We have significant challenges ahead, not just to recognise the professionalism of those involved in the industry, but also ensuring that those involved in our sector have easy access to the training and skills needed to take the industry forward in the 21st century. And for those young people considering an agricultural career we must offer high-quality training and career development.

The AgriSkills Forum is a key vehicle to make this happen. Its formation in 2008 recognised that the 'skills responsibility' is widely shared - farmers and farm workers, growers, trainers, colleges and Lantra - we all share a personal and collective commitment to ensure that the Strategy succeeds in uniting action to benefit this and future generations.

But we also need Defra to champion the industry's case within government. Skills and qualifications too easily fall between departmental responsibilities. We need coordination across government to ensure that training suits the nature of farming and the importance of a productive agriculture sector, one that is known for its innovation, resilience and competitiveness."

Meurig Raymond, AgriSkills Forum Chair and NFU Deputy President

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This strategy was commissioned by the AgriSkills Forum and developed by an editorial group comprising Yorkshire farmer Richard Longthorp, Lantra, NFU and Landex. It has been produced in consultation with industry organisations and Defra.

February 2010

Executive summary

Following the Secretary of State's commitment to hold a skills round table when he spoke at the National Farmers Union (NFU) AGM, The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP chaired a meeting with the AgriSkills Forum at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester in April 2009. Discussions covered the current situation relating to the provision and delivery of training and skills development, and what needs to be done to move forward. At the meeting Hilary Benn, tasked the AgriSkills Forum to develop an AgriSkills Strategy.

An editorial sub-group, comprising Yorkshire farmer Richard Longthorp, Lantra, NFU and Landex, was formed to develop this strategy. It has been produced in consultation with industry organisations and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

This industry-owned, strategy seeks to embed skills development into everyday business practice. It calls for the continuing development of a professional workforce that is recognised and rewarded accordingly, whilst securing the future workforce by offering what must be seen as a career of choice in agriculture and horticulture, not one of last resort.

The aims of this strategy are:

- to recognise existing skills and skills development activities
- to promote skills development and the concept of professionalism as being central to business improvement
- to promote the industry as being a professional and progressive place to work
- to provide government with a strong and influential partner to meet the challenges of the future, and
- to support Defra in its engagement with other government departments and agencies on skills issues.

The vision for the AgriSkills Forum in the UK is to achieve a profitable, sustainable industry, valued by society, that is capable of meeting the demands of agriculture and land management in the 21st century.

The strategy describes the current agricultural landscape and identifies the challenges presented by the key priorities and drivers in the sector such as food and fuel security, climate change, carbon reduction and animal health and welfare. A key theme evident throughout the strategy is the need to recognise formally the professionalism of today's agricultural workforce. A framework needs to be established, using existing schemes and current best practice, which is able to deliver, record and validate appropriate learning and skills provision and continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities.

A culture needs to be developed that acknowledges the central role that investment in personal and continuous professional development plays in the improvement of business performance, competitiveness and sustainability. The sector's existing professionalism, highly technical nature and innovation needs to be valued and harnessed to encourage new entrants.

Furthermore, the strategy identifies the need for a robust partnership between the industry and governments to be established, so policies and practice are integrated to ensure the vision is realised.

In summary, the strategy asks industry to do more, and at a greater pace, to fully embrace training and skills provision and by doing so, recognise how this increases the professionalism of the sector as a whole. It asks providers of learning and knowledge-transfer organisations to work together to ensure high quality, sector-specific CPD that takes on board ever-increasing industry skills levels.

It asks Defra to act on several levels: to work with industry to jointly investigate where the strategic skills gaps are and close them down through co-investment; ensure their own Defra policies fully recognise the importance of skills development in increasing productivity and ensuring resilience, innovation and competitiveness; to reduce the burden of regulation on farms and farmers who demonstrate higher levels of professionalism; and within the Government to influence the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department of Children Schools and Families to maximise the integration of current and future education, skills and enterprise policies for the sector.

In return, if industry, regulators, governments, learning providers and knowledge-transfer organisations all play their distinct part in delivering this AgriSkills vision, the long term goal of an industry recognised for its professionalism and strengthened by its skills acquisition will be realised, capable of meeting the needs of the sector for the 21st century.

Vision and mission

Vision

A profitable and sustainable industry fully capable of meeting the demands and challenges of agriculture and land management in the 21st century

Delivered by a world class, competent, innovative and professional workforce whose professionalism is recognised and rewarded

Where skills development is fundamental and integral to all businesses

And an industry that is seen as a career of choice

Where the significance of farming, horticulture and land management are recognised and valued by society.

Mission

To recognise formally the professionalism of the workforce through the establishment of a framework that is able to deliver, record and validate appropriate learning and skills provision and continuous professional development opportunities

To use this recognition to promote a culture that acknowledges the central role that investment in personal and continuous professional development plays in the improvement of business performance, competitiveness and sustainability

To use the professionalism and highly technical nature of the industry to encourage new entrants

To seek farm businesses returning to profit and agriculture being seen as a place where innovation is valued

To demonstrate the professionalism of the industry so that it enjoys the full confidence of customers and society

To establish a robust partnership between the industry and governments so there is maximum integration of policies and practice to ensure the vision is realised.

Introduction

A strong, productive and sustainable agricultural industry is essential because of its contribution towards food security, sustaining the environment and safeguarding the landscape. Today's farmers undoubtedly have expertise yet they need help to gain additional skills to deal with new technologies and to meet the challenges of climate change and land management in the 21st century. Defra is investing £70 million through the Rural Development Programme to help farmers develop new skills. But there is more to do to improve risk management, stem the loss of practical skills, improve understanding of new technologies, develop business and leadership skills and bring about a more coordinated approach to skills development.

In April 2009 Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, called for an industry round-table conference to overcome these problems and inject real urgency into efforts to meet the challenges and increase food production. The AgriSkills Forum¹, established in autumn 2008 to ensure skills issues were being addressed in the agricultural and horticultural industries, committed to produce this AgriSkills Strategy.

Based around the theme of professionalism and sustainability, with skills embedded into everyday business practice, the strategy builds a series of actions that address the recommendations of the Curry Commission's Report on the *Future of Farming and Food* (2002), Defra's *Learning and Skills Knowledge Review* (2004) and Lantra's *A Skills Assessment for the Environmental and Land-based Sector* (2009). It takes account of the vast amount of "learning" and professionalism that already exists within the industry and recognises that a voluntary approach that does not impose additional bureaucratic costs on businesses or individuals is now required.

A sustainable and profitable agricultural industry will only be achieved with a highly skilled, motivated, innovative and dynamic workforce. Industry must address not only the skills of current employers and employees but also look to the future. The professionalism and highly technical nature of the industry must be harnessed to encourage both young and more mature new entrants. Furthermore, industry must demonstrate it provides an attractive environment for a progressive career.

This concept of professionalism is extended so the value of farming is recognised, not only in the production of high quality food but also in providing wider benefits to society, such as high standards of environmental management, food safety and animal welfare, giving greater confidence to consumers and to the wider society.

There must be the political will to encourage regulators and other similar organisations to recognise the professionalism demonstrated by the industry, with the consequence that a skilled and competent business represents a lower risk, thus requiring a less onerous inspection regime.

¹ The AgriSkills Forum is comprised of members from all the major organisations representing agriculture and horticulture. Terms of reference are included as Annex 1.

Whilst owned by industry, the strategy is also a partnership with Defra. The Westminster Government Department's role is crucial as it must act as the industry's champion within Whitehall. There must be support from industry and partners to enable it to have active involvement with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Children, Schools and Families to maximise the integration of current and future education, skills and enterprise policies to ensure the vision outlined, in this strategy, is realised.

There are signs of improvement in agriculture and horticulture, with many employers growing in confidence about the future of the industries. Current skills and education policies are aimed at encouraging employers to take the lead to address skills issues through the development of a demand-led training and education infrastructure. The time is right to address skills within agriculture and horticulture through the production of this strategy.

Scope and definitions

The strategy takes a broad, inclusive definition of skills including technical, management and entrepreneurial skills; initial and lifelong learning (CPD); informal and accredited learning; higher and further education, namely learning regardless of mode; knowledge and technology-transfer. The primary focus for action lies in lifelong learning, in maintaining and enhancing the skills of the workforce in line with changing demands to create a highly skilled, professional workforce.

The strategy takes a UK-wide perspective of agriculture and horticulture but fully recognises the devolved responsibility and subsequent delivery within Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for many environmental, rural, education and skills policies. As such, it therefore does not seek to develop country-specific action and delivery plans but merely seeks to set high-level objectives and actions that can be tailored to country-specific requirements.

The term "agriculture" is used throughout this document as defined in the act of 1947² and is relevant to horticulture as defined within the Act.

Professionalism is defined as "engagement in an activity for gain or reward and with a high level of competence that is clearly demonstrable. Inspiring confidence".

² <http://www.statutelaw.gov.uk/content.aspx?LegType=All+Primary&PageNumber=4&BrowseLetter=A&NavFrom=1&parentActiveTextDocId=1140435&ActiveTextDocId=1140512&filesize=8704>

Rationale

An integrated approach

Producing more food in the UK today without compromising the environment for tomorrow will require people who are not just skilled in their present activities but are able to adapt their skills to face future challenges. Whilst many in the industry are gaining new skills and responding to these demands, industry cannot afford to be complacent. If the vision of this strategy is to be achievable, industry needs to be questioned as to whether it is doing enough to realise those aspirations. The answer in the main has to be "no" otherwise there would not be the current skills, productivity and recruitment challenges. So, whilst it is important that individual sectors continue to develop and implement their own specific skills solutions, there is a real need for greater co-ordination, so the "skills offer" for UK Agriculture is seen as greater than the sum of its parts. Without this co-ordinated approach industry will likely add to the confusion that already exists in the skills agenda. This strategy seeks a co-ordinated and structured approach, to take full advantage of nationally recognised systems of recording, recognition and validation of skills development.

Business benefits of investing in skills

Training costs are easy to quantify. However, the benefits of having a highly skilled and motivated management and workforce, whilst generally recognised, are very difficult to measure. Many see skills development as a cost linked to compliance, rather than a valuable activity directly linked to business benefit. There is a real need to adequately demonstrate the benefits that accrue from skills development and for industry to value more the investment they make. Skills allow the true value of a professional industry to be appreciated by the food supply chain and by wider society, through increased consumer confidence leading to a wider recognition of the professionalism of the industry.

Actions arising from this strategy must include persuading industry that skills are fundamental in helping businesses achieve the productivity, innovation and profitability needed to compete effectively. Skills have particular relevance in achieving greater staff motivation and better recruitment opportunities, whilst enabling businesses to have greater responsiveness and resilience. Skills encourage better animal health and welfare, more effective food safety and responsible management of the environment. This, in turn, leads to opportunities up the food chain through "unique selling point" or "preferred supplier" status. Despite the widely acknowledged benefits, industry's track record of engagement with the skills agenda and with its Sector Skills Council has not been as positive as it might have been. By offering more opportunity for recognition it is anticipated that more enthusiastic and comprehensive engagement will ensue.

Recognition as a route to industry engagement

Traditionally, there has been low level uptake of formal qualifications and obtaining industry engagement with the formal skills agenda is still a huge challenge. However, a key tenet of this strategy is the pressing need for greater recognition of current levels of skills and development activity. If industry is to achieve the level of recognition needed to add value to what is currently happening and to use that as a lever to encourage further and ongoing development within industry, skills development must be pulled together into an overarching but non-specific and voluntary strategy. “Non-specific” because each sector needs to be able to develop their own implementation plans and “voluntary” because any attempt to make the strategy compulsory will be met with resistance, resulting in skills development falling firmly into the “cost and compliance” category, rather than the “business benefits” category.

Any skills strategy must underpin business sustainability, development and productivity. If it is to achieve industry backing it needs to be regarded as a business benefit, rather than a cost. It needs to make the case that skilled workers already need to continually update and increase their skills levels, if they are to meet future challenges. It also needs to include greater recognition of skills achievement for staff by employers and peers, and for businesses by customers, regulators and governments. Skills not only increase self worth, they demonstrate professionalism.

Demonstration of competence

Agriculture has to face considerable legislation and many inspection regimes. However, regulators and governments are reviewing how they can implement such regimes on a risk basis, with the current farm assurance schemes being viewed as a potential vehicle for helping reduce red tape and duplication. With the unification of existing assurance schemes under the single brand of The Red Tractor and the need for such schemes to be better able to demonstrate robustness and integrity, there is now the opportunity to incorporate more formal skills elements into such schemes.

This strategy recommends that this opportunity, which is already under initial consideration, be accelerated with governments, regulators and industry investigating opportunities to use demonstration of competence as a mechanism for risk-based implementation of regulation. Skills impact assessments should be a requirement on all new and proposed regulations, thus not only just enabling the identification of future skills requirements but also offering the opportunity for “demonstration of competence” to be used instead of legislation either in whole or in part.

As industry looks to the future, there will not only be an increased need to demonstrate competency as a means of illustrating low risk *per se*, but also as the supply chain recognises opportunities for added value or “unique selling point from demonstration of competence”, there will be sound commercial reasons for industry to want to take this route. This could either be for a competitive marketing advantage through preferred supplier status, or to gain commercial cost advantage through a reduced regulatory compliance cost.

Resilience and risk

When considering future risks and challenges that might confront agriculture, Defra recognised that the resilience³ of the agricultural industry will have a significant impact on its objective of securing a thriving food and farming industry with an improving net environmental impact. It seeks a farming industry where a strong market focus can flourish. Many of the drivers such as climate change, carbon reduction, animal welfare and food security, reflect the specific threats to agriculture, including production risks, pests and diseases, weather, market and institutional risks. Risk management options are limited, including diversification of activities, use of storage, forward contracts and credit markets or futures and options. Given these trends, there will be a greater need for risk management and the use of risk management tools. Currently, skills do not feature as a means to ensure the industry is more resilient to the threats identified but they must and should be reflected in the actions within this strategy.

The measures identified to bolster responses will all require new skills, knowledge and expertise, to minimise the risk of Defra's objectives not being realised. These skills could be either technical, managerial, business, financial, adaptation to other industries, or a combination of these. Resilience and the professionalisation of the agricultural workforce are therefore totally inter-related.

Appropriate delivery, recording and evaluation

Success in creating and retaining industry involvement in skills development needs the education supply-side to ensure a good customer experience. Provision must be fit for purpose and accessible by industry and its sub sectors. Learning methods, based on flexible, small pieces of learning, specific to the business requirements delivered through well-tried methods (such as seminars, discussion groups, research dissemination, technology-transfer, peer learning and on-farm events) prove to be highly effective, yet they are often not recognised by accreditation organisations or governments. In addition, the industry has a wide range of CPD programmes that are taken up and valued. Each one has its own recording mechanisms, such as the BASIS professional register, the National Register of Sprayer Operators, the Fertiliser Advisors Certification Scheme, the Poultry Passport and the Pig Industry Professional Register.

Currently, mainstream ways of recording skills measure formal, full qualifications. They therefore fail to recognise much of the development that occurs within agriculture, such as a CPD programme or a small "bite sized" piece of learning. Without a common approach and robust recording and validating systems, the industry is in danger of perpetuating the perception of many, that the industry is low- skilled, yet this is far from the case. Industry must therefore support the work of its Sector Skills Council and work with Lantra to help influence the development of recording and validation systems that are fit for purpose. Training can then be recorded in a common and transferable way to help career progression and record lifelong learning. The current work with Lantra to populate the new Qualifications

³ Resilience and Competitiveness - Supporting Information Document, Defra, October 2009

and Credit Framework is one avenue that should be explored to see how its structure can be adapted to encompass such professional development and the recognition of the non-accredited, informal learning being undertaken.

The importance of business skills

Farm businesses with skills are more likely to display higher business performance and those which have identified and addressed knowledge or skills gaps are more likely to be high-performing businesses than those that have not. "Business skills" may frequently be taken to just mean financial management skills, yet non-financial business skills and, in particular, leadership and entrepreneurial skills are also crucial, particularly where staff are employed. There needs to be specific promotion of the importance of acquiring business skills in the sector.

Agriculture – a priority sector

Agriculture holds the key to a sustainable future. Farmers are no longer just farmers; they are food producers, countryside managers, energy generators and even flood managers. They also have a crucial proactive and beneficial role in managing climate change mitigation. Farmers themselves are multi-skilled, often being required to demonstrate a range of diverse competencies. If we are to achieve sustainability, traditional food producing sectors may no longer find it appropriate simply to produce food.

Whilst not recognised as a “new industry” within the context of industries for a low carbon economy and therefore not seen as a “priority”, the positive impact agriculture has on key political, social and environmental issues such as carbon reduction in the face of climate change, development of alternative energy sources, food security and safety, must not be underestimated. Industry must play its part in developing new skills at an ever increasing pace to deliver this demanding sustainability agenda. It must also work with Defra to enable it to have an active involvement with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, to seek recognition of agriculture as a priority and innovative industry. This will maximise the integration of current and future skills and enterprise policies, to ensure the vision outlined in this strategy is realised.

Recruitment and retention

As pressures are placed on agriculture to produce sufficient high quality food in ways that are sensitive to the environment, there is a critical need to attract and retain the people most capable of delivering, not only against the food agenda but against the sustainability agenda. The agricultural industry has an ageing workforce, with a high proportion of older key decision makers. Many do not have successors in place. It must be recognised that the industry needs to develop and implement a strategy that will not only attract, motivate and retain staff of high calibre but also offer individuals the opportunity to grow and develop a career from within by having coherent and effective succession planning.

Too often a career in agriculture is deemed to be more suitable for those who are amongst the lower academic achievers. To tackle such false perceptions of agriculture, industry must seize the initiative and demonstrate the professional, highly technical, innovative and fulfilling nature of what it does, to those who influence career choices. If every young person now at college or school comes into the industry with an expectation of CPD, change will come, as demand is a powerful influence.

Equally there must be a willingness by businesses to acknowledge improved skills and consequent effectiveness through better remuneration. Businesses also need to embrace the opportunities that exist in an increasingly diverse society by taking a more enlightened approach to recruitment and retention and reaching out beyond its traditional social groups when recruiting.

Qualification developments for young people, such as the new Diploma in Environmental and Land-based Studies, offer considerable opportunities for industry to engage with its potential workforce of the future and this opportunity must be maximised. Whilst significant careers work is currently being undertaken by a range of organisations, much is disjointed, giving rise to an overwhelming need for a more co-ordinated approach

Fit for purpose support systems

Agriculture has long been regarded as having one of the lowest levels of formally qualified people working in it. This should not, however, be confused with having a low-skilled workforce as employers are willing to invest in skills development where they perceive there is a direct benefit to their businesses and they will rapidly use these newly acquired skills within their business.

This is evidenced in the Rural Development Programmes for England (RDPE). Here, specialist advice on technical, business and skills development, relevant to the specific needs of the business, is available on a co-funded basis. The skills programmes have specific characteristics reflecting those identified in Lantra's research as offering integrated business and skills advice, delivered through specialist "brokers", with quality-assured training and assessment matched to business needs.

This is in direct contrast to current mainstream-funded skills programmes, such as Train to Gain, as acquired learning is directly related to the acquisition of skills relevant to the direct business need, rather than tied to the achievement of full qualifications. Flexible approaches to business, supporting ways of learning and training that allow businesses to engage with minimal disruption to their operation are required and should be encouraged through this strategy.

The principles underpinning the RDPE training and development programmes both promote employer investment and lead to significant increases in productivity. Any re-working of publicly-funded schemes to support lifelong learning should therefore recognise the principles upon which the RDPE programme has been built. This adopts a sectoral

approach, having the essential flexibility to be measured by outputs directly relevant to the sector. This will ensure a training and development approach focused on skills utilisation, so that businesses achieve high-performance working practices and raise productivity.

However, the current regional approach to implementation of RDPE skills funding does introduce a degree of complexity and duplication. This leads to inconsistencies across the sector's sub-industries that operate across more than one region with resultant increases in costs of administration and scheme management. Ways need to be sought to influence Regional Development Agencies to consider a more consistent approach.

Prioritisation and "hiding the wiring"

Often described as hard to reach, many farm businesses do not have formal training plans or training budgets and may see skills development as being "for the staff" and not the business principal(s). The whole issue of skills development is all too often accorded too low a priority; not just by businesses but also by representative organisations. The physical and psychological barriers to uptake, such as distance to training venues, lack of transport for young people, poor previous experience, provision not matching business need, cost of training for small businesses, are well documented. In addition, as so many in the sector are small businesses without a human resource function, they find the complexity of the current skills system daunting and complicated, with challenges around nomenclature, the range of qualifications, complexity and variability of funding streams, inappropriate delivery mechanisms and lack of understanding as to where to source skills development. There should therefore be a long term goal of reducing this complexity. In the more immediate term, however, there is a pressing need to develop a real or virtual "gateway" through which individuals and businesses can quickly and easily access training, qualifications, assessment and funding. Such a gateway might take the form of the proposed Business Link "Solutions for Business" or more simply by existing organisations taking responsibility to "hide the wiring" of skills systems from their constituent members or levy payers.

Fit for purpose education system

A fit for purpose education system is crucial to the success of this strategy, with the need for an integrated approach to credit and qualification frameworks across all levels of training and education. The learning, skills and qualifications systems should support entry, progression and lifelong learning in the sector. They need to provide pathways across the 14-19 curriculum, work-based learning and further and higher education and training. The knowledge and skills development of young people and adults entering the sector, together with qualifications and training, must be relevant to industry needs. They must offer flexible pieces of learning and clear career progression routes, as articulated in Lantra's Sector Qualification Strategy.

In addition there is a need to ensure a, high quality network of learning providers to enable the promotion of lifelong learning to increase professionalism, productivity and profit and to demonstrate career and progression routes. There also needs to be mechanisms that

recognise and record qualifications and training (whether accredited or not); that funding should meet sector requirements and that qualifications and training provide clear progression routes and are all supported.

To achieve an education and training system that meets the needs of businesses and individuals will require support from industry, Lantra and governments, with actions focused on structuring provision to meet demand; ensuring the voice of employers is heard by governments, regulatory bodies and funding agencies; the development of integrated learning frameworks for entry and progression, CPD and lifelong learning; the protection and enhancement of the network of specialist providers; encouragement of high quality research and to ensure innovation flows and the facilitation and improvement of knowledge and technology transfer.

Key facts

Agriculture is significant in terms of its size and importance to the UK economy. The gross value added (GVA) of agriculture and the food processing industry is 6.5% and productivity in agriculture has risen steadily since the 1970s, with the sector becoming more efficient, producing more and with less inputs. There are approximately 150,000 agriculture businesses in the UK sector, employing more than 665,000 people, of which 531,000 are on farms and the remainder in agricultural contracting.

The workforce has several distinct characteristics. It is dominated by males (81% of workforce), full time staff account for 83% of total employment with high levels of casual and seasonal employment; the workforce is ageing. 28% are 55 or over, the average age of the workforce is 44 (country average is 40 across all sectors). Key decision makers are older still, with the average age of farm holders being 58.

Workers are often highly skilled and experienced but lack formal qualifications. 25% have no qualifications, 59% have qualifications at level 2 but only 17% have qualifications at level 4.

Skills issues

Modern farming is a skilled operation that requires technical proficiency, business acumen and environmental awareness in equal measure. Lantra's research⁴ highlights:

- a need to reduce skills shortages
- an increased demand for higher level skills for all occupations
- a need to improve workforce competence and enhance specific technical skills of the workforce to ensure flexible, multi-skilled individuals
- a critical need for wider skills in supervisory management, coaching and mentoring, customer service, animal welfare and environmental management
- an increasing need for higher levels of business, leadership and management skills to support business development, diversification, succession planning and to improve the performance and competitiveness of businesses.

Changes in employment

A significant proportion of agricultural employers have problems finding people with the skills they need when they are looking to take on new recruits, with extremely high levels of vacancies that are hard to fill due to skills shortages.

In Scotland ⁵skills shortage vacancies account for 60% of all vacancies. In England, skills shortages account for 31% of vacancies, well above the 21% average⁶.

⁴ A Skills Assessment for the Environmental and Land-based Sector, Lantra, 2009

⁵ Skills in Scotland, The Scottish Government, 2008

⁶ National Employers Skills Survey, Learning and Skills Council, 2007

Overall employment levels will change by occupation, with the greatest decline being in elementary occupations / low-skilled roles. New recruits will be needed at all job levels, replacing those who leave for reasons such as retirement. Over the next 10 years the sector will need 60,000 new entrants. These entrants are likely to require higher skills levels than the workers they will replace.

Learning provision

Further higher education, work-based learning and skills development is largely delivered by a network of specialist providers, both publicly and privately funded. Such providers offer both full-time and part-time learning, work-based learning and technical skills development/continuous professional development.

A significant proportion of higher education is offered in further education institutions. 40% of environment and land-based provision in England is through such directly and indirectly funded colleges. Higher Education Institutions showed 3% growth in land-based provision over the last three years, whereas Further Education Colleges grew by 20% over the same period.

As much as 50% of Higher National Diploma, foundation degree and undergraduate courses are being delivered through the land-based colleges. The three mono-technics (Harper Adams University College, Royal Agricultural College and Writtle College) account for 20% of student places.

The Responsive College Unit (RCU)⁷ Report for Landex⁸ indicates that the number of learners studying agriculture increased between 2004 and 2008, with the numbers enrolled on work-based routes tending to fluctuate from year to year. In higher education 1,378 students were studying agriculture.

In agriculture there are significant levels of uptake of skills-based and occupational proficiencies and competencies at a range of levels. In addition, there is also considerable uptake of non-accredited (and therefore unrecorded) provision, delivered by organisations ranging from levy companies, veterinary practices and professional bodies. Much of this is un-funded, with the cost borne by the employer/individual.

The range of very successful CPD schemes currently operating within the sector have been driven in the main because of either pressure of regulation and potential legislation or by industry/industry bodies recognising the benefits these CPD schemes can accrue.

⁷ www.rcu.co.uk

⁸ www.landex.org.uk

Provision for young people in full time education

Lantra's Sector Qualification Strategy⁹ suggests an adequacy of suitable progression opportunities for young people. However, if the sector is to increase the number of new entrants into the sector, these programmes need to be made more widely available, ensuring there are sufficient opportunities made available to all learners. Programmes also need to provide young people with more work-related skills and knowledge, so they are better prepared for employment.

Apprenticeships

Although apprenticeships are available, they do not always meet the needs of the employer or the learner and this affects uptake. Indeed, progression from Apprenticeship to Advanced Apprenticeship numbers have declined. Apprenticeships need to be reviewed to identify how they can better meet those needs and to allow for greater flexibility within the frameworks. Current governments' policies seek to drive up the numbers of apprenticeships. Yet whilst recognising the importance of apprenticeships as entry routes, they are but one of a range of entry opportunities within the land-based sector.

Workforce development

Lantra's research showed that provision for workforce development needs to:

- be delivered more flexibly
- be delivered in smaller components or bite-sized units
- be relevant to industry needs
- be subsidised and available to all ages
- be recognised whether it is accredited or non-accredited
- have clear progression routes and career maps.

In matching the demands from the sector with the availability of provision, there is clearly a need to have two strands of provision and qualifications available:

- one to support the knowledge and skills development of young people and adults entering the sector, and
- one for the adult workforce and professional development for those already employed.

Qualifications and training need to be relevant to industry needs, developed from National Occupational Standards and be flexible, unitised programmes of learning.

⁹ Sector Qualification Strategy: Recognising Skills, Learning and Professional Development in the Environmental and Land-based Sector, Lantra, October 2007

Actions and recommendations

The strategy's key actions and recommendations are outlined below:

Objective 1: Recognition of existing skills and skills development activities

- To identify the key partners to work with to develop existing continuous professional development (CPD) schemes in order to create a comprehensive and coherent framework of provision that enables an individual's professionalism to be authenticated.
- To gain acceptance in principle, and cooperation from regulators, to help enable those recognised under the new professional framework to be eligible for reduced regulatory burden.
- To increase the focus on skills recognition, and skills development at all levels, leading to the new professionalism and gain commitment from the main farming, trade and professional organisations, including education and training providers.
- To improve links between the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board; the Universities and Colleges and others with significant research and development activity; colleges and training providers with significant teaching and delivery activity; and the new professionals, so that productivity is enhanced.

Objective 2: Promotion of skills development as being central to business improvement and the concept of professionalism

- To communicate a better understanding of the business benefits of education and training and promote skills development, for both employers and employees, as a key way of achieving improvements in businesses.
- To work with organisations to ensure that there are sufficient competent deliverers, facilitators, mentors and assessors to improve availability and effective delivery.
- To identify and develop industry champions to encourage uptake of systems of recognition, furthering the development and selling the concept of "professionalism".
- To promote the understanding that "better regulation" can add value to a business and not simply add more cost and compliance.
- To actively support the expansion of facilities such as reliable high speed broadband and the provision of associated training, so that use of the new technology can be maximised to enhance opportunities for delivery, assessment, recording and the validation of skills and competencies.
- Develop a real or virtual "gateway" through which individuals and businesses can quickly and easily access training, qualifications, assessment and funding.

Objective 3: Use skills development opportunities and professionalism to promote the industry as being an attractive place to work

- To develop industry understanding of the value and importance of new opportunities such as the Diploma in Environmental and Land-based Studies and the Qualification and Credit Framework and promote increased industry involvement in their delivery, promotion and acceptance.
- To provide champions to promote the industry and its professionalism to potential recruits, through better interaction with all relevant forms of careers information, advice and guidance channels for all ages.
- To promote the benefits of learning opportunities for both new entrants and existing staff, including apprenticeships and the wide range of other education, training, and learning opportunities available on a full or part-time basis.
- To communicate the importance and need for succession planning. Encourage research to find solutions and communicate and promote opportunities.

Objective 4: Provide government with a strong and influential partner to meet the challenges of the future

- To work with the AHDB and other major organisations representing the different parts of the industry, to accept the need to present a common voice on major skills-related issues to governments and public, and to work together to find ways of achieving this.
- To encourage industry organisations to provide and maintain an adequate level of resource to enable a co-ordinated approach, reflecting the importance of the development of the new professionalism.

Objective 5: Support Defra in its engagement with other government departments

- To be proactive in communication with Defra to enable them to play an active part in influencing relevant government initiatives across departments that fund and influence policy and advice on education and skills provision.
- To provide governments with effective leadership from industry which consistently promotes the need for professionalism and actively supports the need for ongoing partnerships with relevant government departments, to secure long term viability and developing professionalism.
- To work with Defra to ensure a better understanding of the need to undertake skills impact assessments, so there is no negative impact on skills recognition and development in future government policies.
- To work with Defra to investigate more effective and efficient ways to enable funds to flow into the sector to achieve the strategy's objectives.

Challenges and risks to implementation

The complexity and diverse nature of the agricultural sector means the challenges and risks facing the industry are equally complex and diverse.

While it is important that individual industries develop and implement training and skills development solutions to meet their particular needs, if there is no overarching co-ordinated strategy the risk of fragmentation will increase. Such development can only lead to confusion with the associated waste of resources and money.

Only through a co-ordinated and structured approach can industry take full advantage of nationally recognised systems of recording, recognition and validation of training and skills development.

This strategy, while recognised as critical to the future of food production nationally, is not bound to succeed. Below are just some factors / risks which may prevent the strategy being put into practice.

The professionalism of the workforce will not become recognised, possibly because:

- of lack of unity among the organisations involved in developing and promoting strategy for the industry
- of inability or unwillingness of parts of the industry to take on board the concept, and requirements of professionalism in practice, such as requirements for accountability, and CPD
- of lack of commitment from government and regulatory bodies to accepting and acknowledging the growing professionalism of the industry in its day to day dealings with other agencies
- the proposed framework for delivering, validating and recording learning and skills and CPD opportunities, either does not get developed, or is not fit for purpose
- the needed investment from industry and government bodies to secure ongoing CPD sufficient to ensure appropriate business performance, competitiveness and sustainability, is not forthcoming.

New entrants will not be encouraged to join the industry in sufficient numbers and quality, because:

- they are not convinced of the career structure or prospects available to them
- the industry believes technical complexity is sufficient to attract new entrants, as opposed to development of genuine career structures and progression opportunities within the industry as a whole
- the industry is not able to attract new entrants from the full diversity of people within the overall population
- of lack of funding or available places in initial training establishments such as the land-based colleges.

- of lack of understanding of agricultural opportunities within the minds of, and literature available to, those who provide information, advice, and guidance to potential new entrants. This will include class teachers and year tutors in secondary schools, tutors in colleges delivering disciplines related to agriculture (such as animal care), as well as professional careers advisors
- the impression gained of industry within mainstream media is / continues to be unrepresentatively negative.

The confidence of customers and wider society will not be gained or maintained, because:

- the industry is not fully committed to the culture of professionalism, or is divided into some parts which are, and others which are not fully committed, resulting in a weakened message to the wider world
- although the industry is committed to, and does grow its culture of professionalism, it is not able to communicate this effectively to customers or society
- the government and wider industry groups are not able to communicate effectively to ensure customers and society can differentiate between the standards practised by British agriculture and those elsewhere which also form part of consumer purchases.

The partnership needed between industry and governments to ensure maximum integration of policies and practice to ensure the realisation of the vision, is unsuccessful, because:

- the industry is unable to form a united or consistent voice to present to government about the priorities for skill development in the sector
- the industry, while agreed on the importance of skills development and professionalism in principle, is unable to articulate this in a way which avoids being overshadowed by other, apparently more urgent issues
- continual changes of staff and leadership within either industry representative bodies, or government and regulatory bodies, makes developing understanding into partnership, impossible
- enthusiasm for continually promoting the messages from industry into relevant government departments, weakens with continual changes in personnel
- the importance of food production and land use in government is acknowledged in principal but overshadowed in practice by other, more urgent issues.

Annex 1 **Terms of reference for the AgriSkills Forum**

The primary objective of the Forum is to encourage and facilitate the development of businesses and workers in the land-based sector by ensuring that the content and delivery of training and skills development is available as and when needed, at a price that is affordable and that meets the needs of both the individual and the business.

The Forum will be made up of representatives of bodies and organisations within the land-based sector with interests in the area of training and skills development.

The Forum will meet on a six monthly basis unless necessitated by events or needs.

The constituent bodies and organisations shall provide the conduits between the Forum and their members.

The NFU will act as facilitator and coordinator for the Forum.

The Forum will address the following areas:

- 1 How to effectively engage with industry on the skills agenda by firstly recognising existing skills and current development.
- 2 The involvement of the industry in determining the content and delivery of training and skills development.
- 3 The effective engagement of industry with its Sector Skills Council, Lantra.
- 4 Work with the training and skills development supply chain to ensure that the training and skills development required by the industry is available.
- 5 Publicise the benefits of training and skills development to businesses and workers. Work closely with government, regulatory bodies and the media to ensure that the status and perception of the industry reflect the situation.

Annex 2 AgriSkills Forum members

The vision for the AgriSkills Forum in the UK is to achieve a profitable, sustainable industry, valued by society, that is capable of meeting the demands of agriculture and land management in the 21st century.

Forum members include:

Adrian Joynt	Walford and North Shropshire College
Alastair Mitchell	Health and Safety Executive
Alastair Taylor	Cultiva
Amy Proctor	University of Newcastle Upon Tyne
Andrew Clark	National Farmers Union
Bill Graham	FACE
Bob Fiddaman	National Farmers Union
Cathy Meredith	Institute of Agricultural Secretaries
Colin Holman	Farmer
David Henley	Bicton College
David Llewellyn	Harper Adams University College
Denis Chamberlain	Fresh Start Initiative
George Case	DART
Ioan Morgan	Warwickshire College
Jack Ward	City and Guilds NPTC
John Alliston	Royal Agricultural College
John Alvis	CARAS
John Bridge	AHDB
John Royle	National Farmers Union
John Wibberley	Royal Agricultural College Link
Laura Biddick-Bray	Lantra Sector Skills Council
Madge Moore	Lantra Sector Skills Council
Martin Grantley-Smith	AHDB
Martin Stanbury	National Farmers Union
Meurig Raymond	National Farmers Union (<i>AgriSkills Forum Chair</i>)
Michael Britten	National Farmers Union
Nathan Raines	Poultec
Nia Huws	VETNET LLN
Peter Rudman	RUMA
Peter Martin	Lantra Sector Skills Council
Philip Lowe	Newcastle University
Richard Clarke	Institute of Agricultural Management
Richard Cooksley	Institute of Agricultural Management
Richard Longthorp	Pig farmer (<i>AgriSkills Strategy Group Chair</i>)
Sarah Palmer	NFYFC
Sarah Fairhurst	Grower
Tony Mitchell	Health and Safety Executive
Vic Croxson	Landex

If you are interested in becoming a member please contact Michael Britten
michael.britten@nfu.org.uk

Annex 3 AgriSkills Strategy action plan

The AgriSkills strategy is supported by an action plan that will be regularly monitored, reviewed and revised by the AgriSkills Forum to drive implementation of the strategy forward.

Objective 1: Recognition of existing skills and skills development activities

1.1	Identify the key partners to work with to develop existing continuous professional development (CPD) schemes in order to create a comprehensive and coherent framework of provision that enables an individual's professionalism to be authenticated
1.1.1	Research existing CPD schemes in different parts of the sector and review their effectiveness and applicability with the objective of recognising existing skills of an individual
1.1.2	Encourage and promote development of synergies across existing schemes to avoid duplication
1.1.3	Develop the principles and framework for a quality CPD scheme which might apply across the different parts of the agricultural and production horticulture industries (Make this so that it ticks all the boxes for all the partners)
1.1.4	Investigate ways of acknowledging and capturing current knowledge transfer activity to evidence high level skills
1.2	Increase the focus on skills recognition, and skills development at all levels, leading to the new professionalism and gain commitment from the main farming, trade and professional organisations, including education and training providers
1.2.1	Work with the main farming and trade organisations to ensure full commitment to the concept and requirements of professionalism
1.2.2	Ensure the different sub-industries within the industry are aware of the importance of, and actively engages with, emerging qualifications systems including the Qualification and Credit Framework
1.3	Stimulate research and ensure more effective knowledge and technology transfer (KTT) so as to promote productivity and innovation
1.3.1	Develop a continuum to ensure effective dissemination of KTT between:
1.3.1.1	research institutes, universities and colleges with significant research and development activity; and colleges and other providers with significant teaching and delivery activity
1.3.1.2	those providers and practitioners who make use of the knowledge to enhance productivity and innovation
1.3.2	Fully involve Government research and scientific officers, research and funding bodies and the Chief Scientific Officer for the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board in this work
1.4	To gain acceptance in principle, and cooperation from regulators, to help enable those recognised under the new professional framework to be eligible for reduced regulatory burden
1.4.1	Seek representation from the AgriSkills Forum on the Farm Assurance Boards and within Defra's Better Regulation Task Force and other key bodies to ensure increased focus on skills recognition and development

Objective 2: Promotion of skills development as being central to business improvement and the concept of professionalism

2.1	Communicate a better understanding of the business benefits to both employers and employees of higher level technical, management and business skills
2.1.1	Clearly articulate the business benefits of training and agree communication strategies to disseminate this message
2.1.2	Develop better methods for attributing the value of training
2.1.3	Identify and develop industry champions to encourage uptake of systems of recognition, furthering the development and selling the concept of “professionalism”
2.1.4	Promote the understanding that business improvements can be achieved through skills development for both employers and employees
2.1.5	Encourage farmers to promote a more positive image of the industry to consumers, potential entrants and other partners
2.2	Communicate the benefits of increased professionalism to partners and consumers
2.2.1	Promote the understanding that “Better Regulation” and more business friendly inspection regimes are seen as adding value to a business and not simply more cost and compliance
2.2.2	Promote a positive image of the industry to consumers, government and compliance agencies
2.3	Actively support the expansion of facilities such as reliable high speed broadband and associated technologies in order to optimise the delivery of learning
2.3.1	Encourage use of new e-learning technologies in delivering learning, recording achievement, assessment and validation
2.4	Develop a real or virtual "gateway" through which individuals and businesses can quickly and easily access training, qualifications, assessment and funding

Objective 3: Use skills development opportunities and professionalism to promote the industry as being an attractive place to work

3.1	Develop a better understanding in the industry of the value and importance of new entry routes and career opportunities
3.1.1	Promote increased industry involvement in the delivery, promotion and as consequence the uptake of the Diploma in Environmental and Land-based Studies
3.1.2	Communicate the benefits to employers of all learning they undertake or support being recognised by mechanisms such as the Qualification and Credit Framework
3.1.3	Develop enhanced work-based learning opportunities for students in both further and higher education
3.2	Encourage further participation from industry in supporting learning and promoting careers
3.2.1	Identify, develop and provide champions to promote the industry and its professionalism to potential recruits, through better interaction with all relevant forms of careers information, advice and guidance channels for all ages
3.2.2	Encourage employees and their employees to support work-based learning including by becoming facilitators, mentors or assessors and providing more learning opportunities
3.3	Promote the industry as professional and innovative offering a range of career opportunities
3.3.1	Actively promote the industry to young people both at school and college and particularly those who may influence their career choice namely careers advisers, teachers and parents
3.3.2	Promote the benefits of apprenticeships and the entry and key progression rates
3.3.3	Promote the benefits of learning opportunities for both new entrants and existing staff, including apprenticeships but also the wide range of other education, training, and learning opportunities available on full or part time basis

Objective 4: Provide government with a strong and influential partner to meet the challenges of the future

4.1	Work with the AHDB and other major organisations representing the different parts of the industry to present a common voice on major skills-related issues to governments and public
4.1.1	Develop a rigorous evidence base of the present and future skills needs of the industry to inform policy development
4.1.2	Ensure that future policies fully recognise the skill simplifications and ensure that sufficient resources are available to meet any new development needs
4.2	To encourage industry organisations to provide and maintain an adequate level of resource to enable a co-ordinated approach, reflecting the importance of the development of the new professionalism
4.2.1	Promote across the industry the importance of an authoritative forum on skills which can influence government and other partners

Objective 5: Support Defra in its engagement with other government departments

5.1	Defra actively and effectively influences relevant government initiatives that impact on the industry
5.1.1	Industry supports and informs Defra on developing appropriate responses to education, training, and skills and business development in initiatives which impact on the industry
5.1.2	Industry provides effective support to Defra in the promotion of professionalism across all relevant government departments and policies so as to ensure its long term viability
5.1.3	Defra promotes the need to undertake skills impact assessments, so there is no negative impact on skills recognition and development in future government policies, future skills requirements are accurately identified and also opportunities are explored for the "demonstration of competence" to be used instead of some legislation either in whole or in part where appropriate
5.1.4	Defra and the industry jointly investigate more effective and efficient ways to enable funds to flow into the sector to achieve the strategy's objectives
5.1.5	Promote sectoral approaches to delivering skills solutions and secure the future of those organisations presently delivering them
5.1.6	Defra promotes skills and business development models (such as integrated, specialist "gateways" for all advice on skills and business development) which meet the needs of the sector
5.1.7	Defra promotes a skills and development funding structure based on a modular system supported by the QCF
5.2	Defra ensures that its policies and programmes and those of the Defra 'family' actively support the development of enhanced professionalism across the sector
5.2.1	Creates a single focus within the department to promote skills policies and programmes across the Defra 'family'
5.2.2	Ensures a continuum between industry and Defra research and development forums (strategy groups) and industry
5.2.3	Supports the further integration and contiguity of the RDPE skills programmes
5.2.4	Enables those recognised under the new professional framework to be eligible for reduced regulatory burden
5.2.5	Invites representation from the AgriSkills Forum onto the Better Regulation Task Force and other key bodies to ensure increased focus on skills recognition and development
5.2.6	Promotes within the sector the concept of professionalism and the need for greater joint action by industry members to achieve this
5.2.7	Works with the sector to develop a rigorous evidence base of present and future skills needs by which to drive policy
5.2.8	Promote risk management as a key means of securing future food supplies
5.2.9	Identify sources of funding to further promote professionalism, and skills and business development



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