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Cabinet Secretary presents awards to Scotland's top learners

The crème de la crème of Scotland's land-based and aquaculture learners were recognised for their skills by the Cabinet Secretary, Richard Lochhead at this year's Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year awards hosted by Lantra Sector Skills Council.

Scott Simpson from Rothesay on the Isle of Bute scooped the top prize, Overall Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year, receiving the Peter Alexander Perpetual Trophy and a £250 cash prize. Scott completed a Modern Apprenticeship in Agricultural Engineering at Oatridge College.

Scott who is currently employed with Hamilton Brothers, said: "Growing up on the island of Bute I was surrounded by tractors and farm machinery. Watching visiting technicians repairing the equipment gave me the desire to do this sort of work. Going to Oatridge College and studying for a Modern Apprenticeship allowed me to do the job I love, it has also given me the opportunity to get hands-on experience while also learning the theory behind the practice."

A total of 25 awards were presented during the eighth annual Lantra Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year Awards ceremony. The awards, which attracted over 60 nominations, are designed to inspire new entrants to take up a career in the land-based and aquaculture sector.

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead said: "This is the third year I have been honoured to attend the Lantra Awards and, like both previous occasions, I have been impressed by the enthusiasm and skill of the trainees.

"Farming and rural industries face challenging, but interesting times. Scotland's economy is recovering, our food and drink sector is world renowned and we are on the cusp of an energy revolution which is opening up new and exciting opportunities.

"Rural Scotland is very well placed to take advantage of many of these new opportunities and I am sure that many in the hall tonight have the talent to make a significant contribution."

Rebecca McWilliams from Irvine in Ayrshire was awarded the 'Overall Runner-Up Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year' award prize winner, scooping a £150 cash prize. Rebecca who completed the Entry to Farmery Course with Oatridge College was also awarded the 'Equine Learner of the Year' award.

National Director for Scotland, Willie Fergusson said: "The Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year awards attract a very high calibre of candidates who are committed to further developing their skills and knowledge. It is vital for the future of these industries that we continue to encourage new entrants and demonstrate how employers can see the bottom line benefits that highly skilled new entrants can bring to the business."

Willie continued: "Each year Lantra and its panel of judges are very impressed with the quality of hard work and enterprise demonstrated by the nominees. Once again, Lantra have uncovered some of Scotland's talent, young people who are committed to further developing their skills and knowledge."

The eighth annual Lantra Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year Awards ceremony was attended by 140 guests, including Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, learners, employers, farmers, crofters, land managers, training providers, key stakeholders and members of the Scottish Parliament.

Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Marine Harvest were the main sponsors of this year's awards ceremony, with additional sponsorship received from employers, farmers, land-managers, key stakeholders and training providers which demonstrates the commitment of industry to training and to the awards ceremony.

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Full list of winners:

- Overall Winner Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year: Scott Simpson
- Overall Runner-Up Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year: Rebecca McWilliams
- Agriculture Learner of the Year: Scott Simpson
- Agriculture Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Craig Connell
- Aquaculture Learner of the Year: Harris Wright
- Aquaculture Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Robert Wyvill
- Equine Learner of the Year: Rebecca McWilliams
- Equine Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Susan Torrance
- Floristry Learner of the Year: Debbie McKenna
- Game and Wildlife Learner of the Year: Joshua Bunton
- Horticulture Learner of the Year: Daryl Russell
- Horticulture Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Ryan Mooney
- Higher Education Learner of the Year: Zane Pretorius
- Higher Education Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Graeme Dunlop
- Land-based Curriculum for Schools Learner of the Year: Danny Watson
- Land-based Curriculum for Schools Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Ryan Munro
- Modern Apprentice of the Year: Stuart Burns
- Trees and Timber Learner of the Year: Eamonn Staunton
- Trees and Timber Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Carina Convery

Special Awards:

- Algo Blairgowrie Ltd - Endeavour Award: Rigla Purvis

- Algo Blairgowrie Ltd - Endeavour Award: Eve Schulte
- Taypack Potatoes Ltd – Endeavour Award: Debbie McKenna
- CARAS Scotland Award: Zane Pretorius
- CARAS Scotland Award: Fraser Mitchell
- CARAS Scotland Award: Righa Purvis

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EDITORS NOTES:

- Lantra is the Sector Skills Council for land-based and environmental industries, working to ensure these businesses access the training, qualifications, skills and knowledge they need.
- Lantra in Scotland represents the interests of approximately 24,500 businesses (13% of all businesses), which employ 115,700 individuals (representing 2% of all employment across the workforce) and 40,000 volunteers.
- Lantra represents 17 industries: agricultural livestock and crops; animal care; animal technology; aquaculture; environmental conservation; equine; farriery; fencing; fisheries management; floristry; game and wildlife management; land-based engineering; horticulture, landscaping and sports turf; production horticulture; trees and timber and veterinary activities.
- By working together with the sector, Lantra leads research on skills issues and business needs, sets national standards and develops qualifications to meet modern business needs and help businesses grow through skills.
- For more information see www.lantra.co.uk.