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Planning your future career?

With examination time well under way and the academic year almost over, for many now s the time to start thinking about a choice of career. Lantra Sector Skills Council is encouraging people to consider the exciting and dynamic opportunities that are available in the environmental and land-based sector and are on hand to point you in the right direction.

While work in this sector is often portrayed as being low paid, manual outdoor work with few opportunities for progression, this is far from the truth. As well as a variety of manual roles, the environmental and land-based sector provides a number of opportunities in skilled managerial, high-tech, specialist and highly responsible roles that are well rewarded financially.

In addition, there is a real skills shortage within many industries, with a need to recruit at least 1,000 new workers each year to meet demand, so there are many opportunities available now. Yet many people do not have access to clear advice and guidance in order to make informed choices.

Steven Thompson, Managing Director of The Landscape Centre is one of those people who received limited guidance while at school, relying instead on the support and encouragement of his parents, who persuaded him to pursue the career he always wanted.

Steven s desire to work in horticulture initially developed through his interest in his father s greenhouse, so much so, that at the age of 11 years he got a part time job in a local garden centre. During the following years Steven s desire to pursue a career in this field remained strong. After completing his A Levels he attended Writtle College in Essex to study a BSc (Hons) degree in Horticulture. During this 4 year course Steven had the opportunity to study both commercial and amenity horticulture, deciding early in the programme that amenity horticulture was his preferred field. On completion of his degree course Steven was offered permanent employment; he stated: I finished my last exam in college on a Friday and on the Monday morning I started work.

Steven subsequently gained employment with The Landscape Centre in Antrim, and after 18 months was offered the opportunity to become a Director, which he accepted. Subsequently, he took over the business from the retiring owner in 2007. The Landscape Centre Ltd currently employs 165 staff, and has an annual turnover in excess of £7 million.

Steven believes that horticultural skills are important at every level throughout the business, he states: Horticulture is still a central part of my everyday role and is the part of my job I enjoy the most.

Steven is enthusiastic about his future in the horticulture industry: I take great value in seeing the work that has been completed. Horticulture is still at the centre of what I do every day, and I believe it is a broad sector that can offer rewarding and stimulating career opportunities to young people.

David Seffen, Lantra Partnership Manager said: As Steven shows there are many opportunities to consider and working in horticulture is just one of them. Lantra recognises the importance and value of the sector to our society and is working to encourage people into the sector as well as retaining more skilled people. If you are interested in finding out more about the range of careers available visit our dedicated website www.afuturein.com.

Specific information regarding careers in the sector can be found at www.afuturein.com and relevant course information at www.lantracoursefinder.co.uk. Alternatively you can call 0845 707 8007 for further assistance.

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Steven Thompson, Managing Director of The Landscape Centre, Antrim

EDITORS NOTES:

" Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for environmental and land-based industries represents the interests of approximately 20,000 businesses in Northern Ireland which employ around 63,000 employees (approximately 9% of the workforce).

" Lantra is an employer-led organisation which is licensed by the UK government to drive forward the skills, training and business development agenda for the 17 industries in the sector. The industries represented are: agricultural crops; agricultural livestock; animal care; animal technology; aquaculture; environmental conservation; equine; farriery; fencing; fisheries management; floristry; game and wildlife management; horticulture, landscape and sports turf; land-based engineering; production horticulture; trees and timber; and veterinary nursing.