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SCHOOLS OUT, WHAT NEXT?

The revision is over; the exams have been sat and now comes the agonising wait for results. For millions of GCSE and A level students the next few weeks will be highly stressful, with results determining whether they will continue in education, head off to work or even combine both. For students who have achieved their anticipated results the next number of weeks will be spent preparing for the next stage in their life. For some this will be university, for others it may be continuing education, seeking employment or training.

Lantra Sector Skills Council works to highlight the variety of environmental and land-based careers by emphasising the benefits of apprenticeships and vocational qualifications, which meet employers' needs and demands.

In the past rural careers, including farming, were deemed 'uncool' with students. This attitude has a dangerous impact as the sector needs to attract thousands of workers to remain competitive. If this trend goes unchanged, it could have a massive effect on Northern Ireland's economy.

Chris Catchpole, Lantra's Sector Entry and Careers Manager said: 'There are many different career choices available with the environmental and land-based industries. In Northern Ireland this sector employs over 63,000 people but we estimate that the sector will need at least 1,000 new workers each year to meet demand. This means there are plenty of career opportunities for the new generation of employees.'

He continued: 'Land-based and environmental careers may seem old fashioned, but these careers have made huge technical and scientific advances in recent years and will help provide a sustainable future for Northern Ireland.'

Employers in the sector say they still find it difficult to recruit people with the right skills and qualifications. Michael Pollock of Beechill Landscapes said: 'With the downturn in the economy many employers are looking to increase the quality of their staff when the opportunity arises. I would encourage anybody unemployed and everyone in employment to remain focused, motivated and take any time available to them to seek out any courses that may be available. Lantra is the obvious starting point.'

Campbell Tweed, Ballycoose Farm said: 'There are excellent opportunities for both skilled and dedicated people in agriculture, and across the land-based sector. With a number of unfilled or

inadequately filled jobs, I would encourage young people to examine all the available options and see what is most appropriate for them.

To find out more about available careers visit our dedicated website www.afuturein.com. To search for your closest courses, please visit www.lantracoursefinder.co.uk. Further information on apprenticeships can be found on www.apprenticeshipsni.info.

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EDITOR S NOTES:

" Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for environmental and land-based industries represents the interests of approximately 30,000 businesses which employ around 63,000 employees (approximately 9% of the workforce) in Northern Ireland.

" 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.

" Information on apprenticeships can be found on www.apprenticeshipsni.info or by calling the ApprenticeshipsNI freephone helpline on 08000 854573.