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Ayrshire girl scoops top equine award

Equine student, Rebecca McWilliams from Irvine in Ayrshire was named 'Equine Learner of the Year' at the eighth annual Lantra Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year awards, and was among the winners who met the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead at the awards ceremony.

Rebecca, who completed an Entry to Farriery Course at Oatridge College was also awarded the 'Overall Runner Up, Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year' award.

Enrolling at Oatridge College, Rebecca took a bold move, breaking into the male dominated world of farriery. After a year, she emerged as 'Best Student' in the entry to farriery course, beating off competition from the 23 young men and six other women in her class. Rebecca said: "There are plenty of riding instructors and I wanted something different. I went to college with the thought, take the course and show the boys how it's done! The course has really benefited me though, I have learnt a lot from college which have allowed me to build up skills which means I have a lot more to offer an employer." Rebecca is hoping to start an apprenticeship with an approved training farrier in the near future.

Susan Torrence from Raphloch in Stirling was awarded the 'Equine Runner-Up of the Year' award; she recently completed an Advanced Certificate in Equine Studies through Oatridge College.

Sharon Anderson, Equine Team Leader at Oatridge College said: "Susan is not only an excellent student, but a joy to have around. She is incredibly willing and hard working, and through volunteering as a helper at the new Oatridge branch of the RDA, Susan has been able to use the skills she has learnt in helping to set up an equestrian vaulting club at the college."

A total of 25 prizes were presented during the Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year awards ceremony organised by Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for land-based and environmental industries. 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 and make employers aware of the benefits of a well trained workforce.

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."

Willie Fergusson, National Director 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: "Recognition of the importance of the awards by industry, their commitment to them, and their generosity in sponsoring this event has grown significantly over the years and we are indebted to the sponsors who make this event the success that it is."

Some 140 guests attended this prestigious event at the Crieff Hydo hotel, including learners, employers, farmers, crofters, land managers, training providers, stakeholders and members of the Scottish Parliament. Skills Development Scotland, Marine Harvest and Scottish Natural Heritage were the main sponsors of the event.

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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: Righa 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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CREDIT FOR PHOTO:

180 - Equine Learner of the Year, Rebecca McWilliams with Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead and David Ralston, Easterton Stables

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.