

# Bringing new entrants into farming

Research Report

January 2024



# Foreword from **Dr David Llewellyn CBE** Lantra Chair of Trustees

**As a member of the Independent Review of Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain, which recently reported, I am acutely aware of the severe shortages in the agricultural workforce.**

These shortages are reducing the amount of food produced by farmers, with consequences for food security, as well as putting pressure on the health and wellbeing of the existing farm workforce.

Greater use of apprenticeships is one way for the industry to recruit and train much-needed new entrants. There is a widespread assumption that the structure of the industry, dominated as it is by small and micro businesses, explains why use of apprenticeships in agriculture is low compared to other industries. However, there is limited understanding of the barriers that deter farm businesses from taking on an apprentice.

This research, undertaken by Lantra<sup>1</sup>, in partnership with Farmers Weekly, seeks to identify the barriers. By engaging more than 550 farmers it provides useful insights and an evidence base for developing both practical and policy interventions to increase the use of apprenticeships.

We look forward to working in partnership with industry and policymakers to widen the uptake of apprenticeships and pilot new approaches, designed to support small employers. This will provide farmers with extra capacity to increase the resilience of their businesses and consider growth opportunities.



**David Llewellyn**  
Lantra Chair

1. Lantra is a UK charity which aims to help land-based businesses to meet their skills needs.



## **Acknowledgements**

*Lantra would like to thank participants for sharing their insights via the online apprenticeship survey, powered by Farmers Weekly in the summer of 2023. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the farming businesses who participated in Lantra-led focus groups to inform and test the recommendations.*

# The problem

The farming industry is dominated by small, particularly micro-businesses who are struggling to attract and retain farm workers.

This gap in capacity is well documented in recent reports (The Independent Review into Labour Shortages<sup>2</sup>, Hungry to Learn<sup>3</sup> and Labour and skills in the horticulture and agriculture sectors in England<sup>4</sup>).

The consensus is that apprenticeships can play a part in addressing the labour shortage. But there is a need to identify how and what new approaches might be needed.

The aim of this research is to understand the barriers faced by small employers and identify ways to recruit and embed new talent into the workforce.

## Context

### Industry size and structure

- According to the Defra 10-year agricultural census, the number of agricultural holdings in England is around 104,000<sup>5</sup>.
- A large proportion of these businesses are likely to be Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, specifically micro-businesses which employ fewer than 10 staff.

### Workforce Size and Structure

- The agriculture sector employs around 467,000 people in the UK.
- A large component of the workforce are part-time workers (40%).<sup>5</sup>

### Apprenticeship and Skills Policy

- The Apprenticeship Levy is applied UK-wide, but skills policy including apprenticeships is a devolved responsibility. The devolved nations have adopted different approaches to the use of levy funds.
- This report is focused on the system in England.

2. Shropshire, J., Dawson, F., Ford, M., Greet, M., Kendall, W., Llewellyn, D., and Sisson, H. (2023) *The Independent Review into Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain*. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1166600/Independent\\_Review\\_into\\_Labour\\_Shortages\\_in\\_the\\_Food\\_Supply\\_Chain\\_June\\_2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1166600/Independent_Review_into_Labour_Shortages_in_the_Food_Supply_Chain_June_2023.pdf) [Accessed 27 November 2023]

3. Ostrowski, M.S. (2023) *Hungry to Learn: Lifelong learning pathways for the agri-food sector. A report for the Lifelong Education Institute*. Available at [https://cdn.harper-adams.ac.uk/document/page/705\\_Hungry-to-Learn-Respublica-report.pdf](https://cdn.harper-adams.ac.uk/document/page/705_Hungry-to-Learn-Respublica-report.pdf) [Accessed 27 November 2023]

4. Nye, C., Wilkinson, T., and Loble, M. (2022) *Labour and skills in the horticulture and agriculture sectors in England: Summary report. A report for The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH)*. Available at [https://sociology.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/research/microsites/centreforruralpolicyresearch/pdfs/researchreports/Labour\\_and\\_skills\\_2023\\_report.pdf](https://sociology.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/research/microsites/centreforruralpolicyresearch/pdfs/researchreports/Labour_and_skills_2023_report.pdf) [Accessed 27 November 2023]

5. Defra (2021) *Structure of the Agricultural Industry in England and the UK at June*. Last updated 4 October 2023. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-agricultural-industry-in-england-and-the-uk-at-june>

# Our approach

**Our research methodology was designed to engage a large number of farm businesses and gather a diverse range of views.**

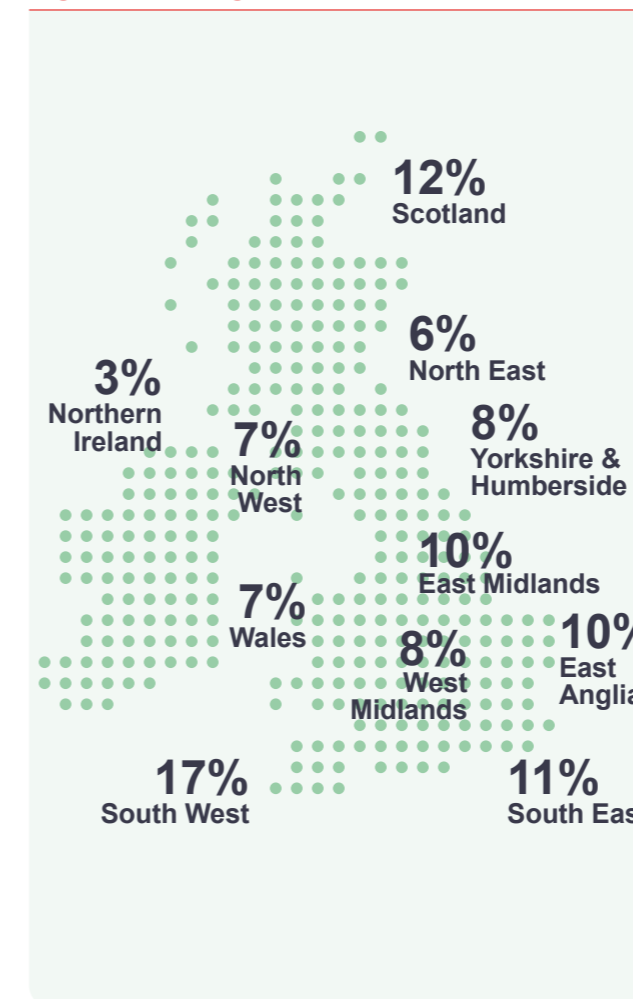
We worked in partnership with Farmers Weekly (a leading agricultural news outlet) to distribute an online survey that was completed by over 550 respondents.

The open-access survey was promoted by industry partners (including the National Federation of Young Farmer's Clubs and other farming organisations). It was designed in line with best practice and included a mix of open and closed questions for standardised responses and specific detail.

The survey was followed-up by two focus groups with sixteen survey respondents who volunteered to participate. The focus groups provided an open forum, where issues with apprenticeships were discussed and potential solutions were suggested, tested, and critiqued.

In parallel, secondary data analysis was undertaken, drawing from The Department for Education sources, with the aim of getting a better understanding of apprentice uptake and completion.

Figure 1 – Geographical breakdown

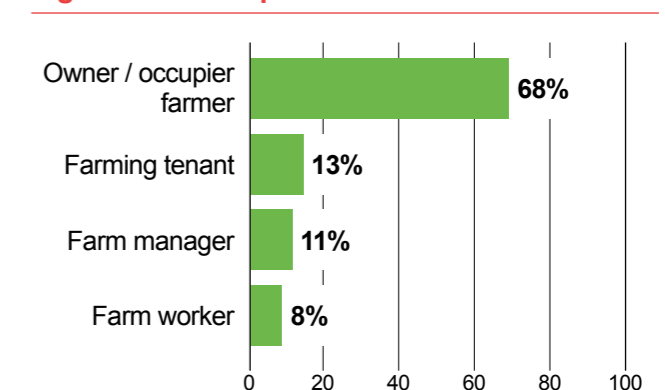


## Participant demographics

In total there were **561** valid responses of which:

- **52** the average age of participants
- **405 hectares** average farm size
- **74%** of respondents come from mixed farming enterprises, of which a high percentage were predominantly cereals cropping (**54%**), followed by beef (**46%**).

Figure 2 – Participant roles



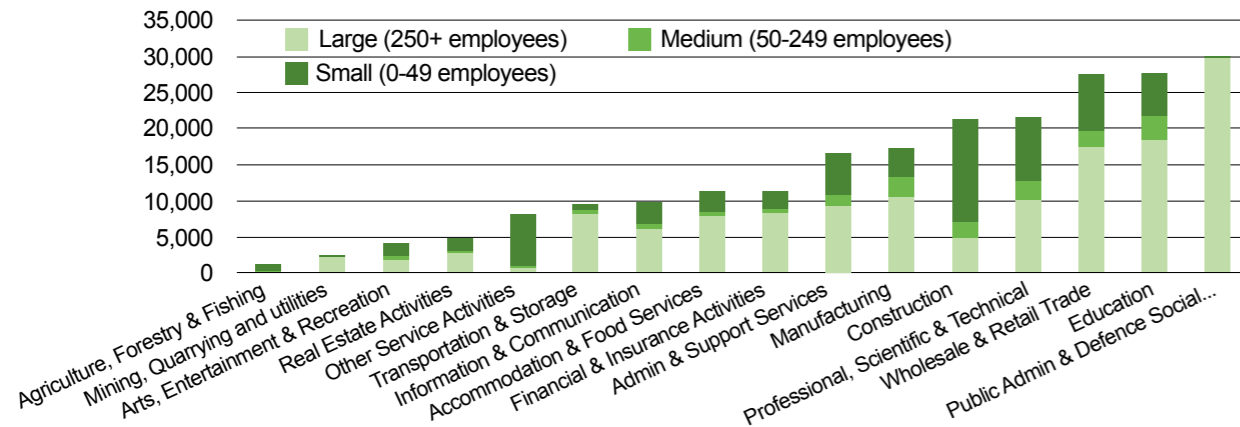
# Findings

## Apprentice snapshot

- Agriculture (Forestry and Fishing) has the lowest number of overall apprenticeship starts, when compared to other industries.

79% of the 1,220 apprenticeship starts (Agriculture) in 2020/21 were in small businesses (0-49 employees).<sup>6</sup>

Figure 3 – Apprenticeship starts 2021/22



- The total number of apprenticeships starts in England between 2018-2023 were 1,723,051. Only 3,737 (0.2%) of these starts were in agricultural apprenticeships as indicated in Table 1.<sup>7</sup>
- There were around 788,000 total successful completions over the same period and 0.3% of them were agriculture apprenticeships.<sup>7</sup>

- The latest full year of data (2021/22) shows that the achievement rate for Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care was 62.4%, compared to Leisure, Travel and Tourism at 59.5% and Construction, Planning and the Built Environment 53.6%. Covid disrupted the previous two years of reporting, therefore a 5-year profile is not available.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1 – Agriculture apprenticeships and number of starts

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Total
Agriculture	436	297	15	1	0	749
Crop Technician	44	67	77	66	70	324
General Farm Worker	0	0	0	48	328	376
Livestock Unit Technician	0	0	0	66	93	159
Poultry Technician	104	126	103	117	96	546
Poultry Worker	88	45	49	83	100	365
Stockperson (beef, pigs)	214	331	315	356	2	1218
<b>Total</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>866</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>3737</b>

6. Department for Education (2022) Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics. Last updated 28 September 2023. Available at Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics , Academic year 2020/21 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk).

7. Department for Education (2023) Apprenticeships and traineeships. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships> [accessed 27 November 2023].

# Survey results

- **50%** of respondents expect to hire staff within the next 12 months.
- **25%** expect to do so within the next 6 months.
- **25%** of those expecting to hire staff believe the positions might be suitable for an apprentice.
- **Almost all** respondents see a benefit in apprenticeships; with **59%** saying an apprentice could provide new skills to their business.
- **72%** would consider an apprentice in the future.
- **60%** of respondents want information on how apprenticeships work.
- **55%** of participants want to know how to find an apprentice.
- **25%** of participants don't know where to look for information on apprenticeships.
- **90%** said they would like help and support to take on a new apprentice.

## Focus Group Insights

- 1 Many farm businesses, perceive the apprenticeship system to be complex and difficult to navigate. Bureaucracy and paperwork were cited as factors deterring engagement.
- 2 Many small and micro businesses (the majority in this industry) lack the HR and management skills to effectively select and recruit suitable new entrants, organise their training, and undertake the administration associated with employment and apprenticeships.
- 3 There is low awareness of where to find practical information about taking on an apprentice. Information that is available tends to be lengthy and fails to convey a simple step-by-step approach.
- 4 9 out of 10 employers who might consider having an apprentice would want help and support, but are unaware of where to get it.
- 5 Especially for small/micro businesses, the requirement for an apprentice to spend at least 20% of their time in off-the-job training, is too much time away from the business.
- 6 The academic requirements of apprenticeships (English and Maths) were seen as a barrier to entry for many people who are otherwise well-suited to farm work.

**7** Committing to employing a new entrant for 18 months (the duration of an apprenticeship) is seen as carrying significant risk where the apprentice is previously unknown to the employer, and especially if they do not come from a farming background.

**8** Conversely, the commitment to an 18-month apprenticeship can seem risky to a potential new entrant, especially one who does not come from a farming background and has limited experience of the farm work environment.

**9** The current apprenticeship standards for farming lack key practical skills and mandatory operator certificates required for employability (e.g., operator certificates for tractor driving, ATVs and telehandlers). Without these certificates apprentices cannot legally undertake a significant proportion of common farming tasks. One-in-four respondents would want an apprentice to have relevant operator certificates before they started work on the farm, or to gain them early in their apprenticeship.

**10** The size of some businesses and the seasonality of farm work could make it difficult for a single business to fully employ an apprentice and/or offer them sufficient range of work experience.

### Findings: from secondary research (an alternative approach)

**11** The level of funding for agricultural apprenticeships (Tables 2 and 3) and the mandatory certificates/qualifications included in the relevant standards are significantly below that provided at comparable levels in other industries.

**Table 2 – Comparison of funding and certificates included for Arborist v General Farm Worker<sup>8</sup>**

Arboriculture Arborist: Funding £14,000	Agriculture General Farm Worker: Funding £5,000
<p><b>Level 3 Awards in:</b> Emergency First Aid at Work; Aerial Tree Rescue Operations; Use of a Chainsaw from a Mobile Elevated Work Platform (MEWP); Aerial Cutting of Trees Using Free Fall Techniques.</p> <p><b>Level 2 Awards in:</b> Safe Use of Brushwood Chipper; Traffic Management (NRSWA Unit 002 Signing, Lighting and Guarding) OR Sector Scheme 12D; Chainsaw Maintenance; Crosscutting Timber Using a Chainsaw; Felling and Processing Trees up to 380mm; Accessing a Tree Using a Rope and Harness; Safe Use of Mobile Elevated Work Platform.</p> <p><b>[Total number of certificates included 11]</b></p>	<p><b>Level 3 Award in:</b> Emergency First Aid at Work</p> <p><b>Level 2 award in:</b> Safe Use of Pesticides</p> <p><b>[Total number of certificates included 2]</b></p>

**Table 3 – Comparison of funding and certificates included Agriculture v Other Industries**

Apprenticeship Standard	Level	Funding	Number of operator certificates/ qualifications included	
			Level 2	Level 3
<b>Apprenticeship Standard</b>				
General Farm Worker	2	£5,000	1	1
Livestock Unit Technician	3	£5,000	2	1
Crop Technician	3	£15,000	2	1
<b>Other Industry Apprenticeships</b>				
Arborist	2	£15,000	7	4
Forest Craftsperson	3	£14,000	Establishment and Maintenance	
			6	1
			Harvesting	
			2	3
Water Environment Worker	3	£12,000	11	0

Under current funding arrangements in England apprenticeships are the only vocational route that attracts funding from the Apprenticeship Levy. However, there are numerous calls from industry for Apprenticeship Levy funding to be more flexible allowing alternative approaches to vocational training to be funded.

Various steps can be taken to address some of the barriers and improve uptake of apprenticeships in farming, but a fundamentally different model may provide a better solution for farming if it could be funded.

In Scotland the “Pre-apprenticeship” model has been successfully piloted, funded by Scottish Government, and administered by Skills Development Scotland. In this model an intermediary organisation employs the new entrant for a fixed period of six months. During their pre-apprenticeship the employing organisation arranges an initial period of work-readiness training including relevant operator certificates. Once the off-the-job training is completed, the employing organisation arranges paid work placements with farm businesses.

This shorter programme with an emphasis on gaining technical skills early allows both the new entrant and the host businesses to “try-out” the working relationship without a long-term commitment or the onerous employment and training responsibilities. At the end of the pre-apprenticeship period the majority of new entrants transfer into employment with one of the farms they have worked on and a significant proportion progress onto Modern Apprenticeships or return to academic studies on an agriculture related course.

8. Source – Institute of Apprentices and Technical Education

# Recommendations for Apprenticeships

## 1 **There is a need for clear and simple guidance to assist employers through the process of taking on an apprentice and supporting them through their apprenticeship.**

Any guidance should simplify what can be overwhelming and confusing, particularly to first time employers. Sharing best practice from farm businesses who have successfully employed an apprentice can be used to inspire others and improve take-up.

## 2 **Many farm businesses would benefit from support to develop people management skills to enable them to be better at recruiting, inducting, developing, and retaining staff.**

Training would help farmers understand what it is to be a good mentor to an apprentice which will lead to a better experience for both parties.

## 3 **Apprenticeship standards in agriculture should be reviewed to include relevant operator certificates, which enable apprentices to undertake common farm tasks.**

A commensurate increase in the funding for agriculture apprenticeships will be required to enable the necessary training to be included.

## 4 **Operator training, health and safety awareness training, and emergency first aid training, should be undertaken early in the apprenticeship.**

Structuring this vital training early in the apprenticeship means that apprentices would quickly become safe and productive members of the farm workforce.

## 5 **The farming industry would benefit from having an intermediary organisation to take on some of the responsibilities normally borne by an employer, but which are a barrier for small farming businesses.**

Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies (FJAAs) fulfil this role in many other industries. FJAAs recruit and employ apprentices, arrange their off-the-job training, and arrange placements with a variety of host businesses for the duration of an apprenticeship. This removes the recruitment, employment and training responsibilities from the farm business and allows an apprentice to be shared between more than one business.

With appropriate funding an FJAA could also provide support to the host businesses to help them develop their people management skills, and to effectively support their apprentices.

# Recommendations – Alternative approaches

6 Although these recommendations can remove or lower some of the barriers and increase the use of apprenticeships, they cannot address all of the issues. An alternative vocational training pathway might provide a solution better fitted to the needs of farming businesses in England.

**6.1 An alternative vocational training pathway modelled on the Scottish pre-apprenticeship should be piloted in England. Such a pathway could provide a more accessible stepping-stone into full apprenticeships for both new entrants and small employers.**

**6.2 There is a need for reform of the apprenticeship levy to support non-apprenticeship training and encourage greater use of short-course training provision.**

As of July 2022, over £3.3bn of unspent Apprenticeship Levy funds was returned to the Treasury for general expenditure. This underspend could provide greater flexibility for the use of the levy.

## Conclusions

- Farming needs to recruit from a more diverse pool of talent than it has typically done historically. Apprenticeships can play a valuable role in bringing new entrants into farming.
- Farming businesses are underutilising apprenticeships because the employment of apprentices is low when compared to other industries with a high prevalence of SMEs.
- The research has identified a set of practical interventions that can make apprenticeships more accessible for small/micro businesses which dominate the UK farming industry.
- Even with the interventions recommended in this report, apprenticeships may not be suitable for a significant proportion of farming businesses.
- With greater flexibility of Apprenticeship Levy Funding (or alternative funding) a shorter and more focused vocational training pathway (pre-apprenticeship) might provide a solution better suited to the needs of smaller farming businesses.



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