

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Agri-Food industry requires an ambitious skills strategy in order to inspire the industry itself and to inform policymakers and funding agencies. It is a key part of repositioning the industry within a changing world. While there needs to be a strategy which covers the whole sector, this report concentrates on skills and infrastructure support for the agricultural and horticultural industry. This is arguably different in nature, due to specific skills needs and the fact that 95% of businesses employ fewer than 10 people and therefore lack professional human resources support.

UK agricultural productivity lags behind other countries and the lack of the right skills has been widely identified as a key factor. While the agricultural and horticultural industry is highly skilled, the level of qualifications is low by comparison with other sectors, there is poor uptake of continuing professional development (CPD) and less than 35% of UK farmers have any formal management training. This is largely due to lack of awareness of options and benefits, a mismatch in funding and industry needs and a general inertia to develop people. There is recognition of the need to bring more professionalism to the industry and that this is necessary to meet public expectations for post-Brexit support for agriculture to continue. The impending implications of Brexit means that there is a recognised urgency to address the situation in a transformational manner.

The current agriculture and horticulture skills landscape is fragmented and characterised by the involvement of a wide range of bodies. A significant amount of work has already been undertaken and numerous reports have been written covering various aspects. While some of these have included action plans, the action plans have not been undertaken in a coordinated manner, monitored or followed through, resulting in insufficient progress.

The AgriSkills Forum has been instrumental in trying to bring together the various parties and has undertaken significant work to win over hearts and minds. However, while there have been good intentions, in reality, matters are not that much further forward. Over a year ago, the AgriSkills Forum achieved agreement with a number of organisations to work in a collaborative manner, but they have not stepped up to the mark and the agreed actions have not materialised. The fragmentation of bodies, their discrete agendas and lack of realised collaboration is therefore a major cause for concern and has arguably been, and is likely to continue to be, an obstacle to progress.

The Industrial Strategy, the UK Government consultation on 'Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit' (the Command paper) and Brexit offer the opportunity for transformational change which should be seized. Continuation of the same approaches will not achieve change and, consequently, it is timely to think differently.

The policies from the government departments (Defra, BEIS, DFE and DFID) with interests in the success of the agricultural and horticultural industry need to be coordinated and actively engaged across all aspects of the sector. While the Industrial Strategy presents this opportunity, there is a real need for the industry to be engaged with the Department for Education (DfE) to ensure that funding is directed to support courses and qualifications which are aligned with increasing productivity, competitiveness and export potential. This needs to include recognition of subjects involved as STEM to attract greater funding and also to improve perception in order to encourage participation in industry-relevant courses and careers.

There has never been formal agreed collaboration between the range of bodies involved to devise and implement a coherent strategy and to make a real attempt to professionalise the industry at all levels. The current informal approaches have not delivered sufficient results. Continuation of the same is likely to result in slow, inadequate progress and be hampered by a proliferation of vested interests

with a lack of overall ownership. In order to drive forward the strategy, appropriate governance will be pivotal to its success. It will require an industry-wide formal approach, in the form of an overarching independent structure, supported at the highest level, which presents a coordinated position not only internally to the industry but externally as well, which holds the various parties to account. The agreement to support such a structure needs to be robust in order to be able to withstand the continuous adaptation which will be required to meet future and changing demands, all of which, in reality, are likely to pose many challenges. So, as an absolute minimum, the industry must respond to the need for **change** and **collaborate** in a formal manner.

However, it is recommended that the theme of coordination and collaboration is further developed in order to take a transformational step forward to professionalise the industry. It is proposed that serious consideration is given to the development of the **concept** of a new independent professional body as a medium- to long-term objective. In the short term, a Senior Leadership Group should be formed to **coordinate** current activity, encourage and facilitate **collaboration** to reduce duplication and drive forward the business case for the professional institute. The new independent, dedicated Institute for the Agriculture and Horticulture Industry (IAHI), working title, would work in an integrated way with the new Food and Drink Council, in terms of both the Agricultural Productivity and Workforce work streams. The IAHI, the 'Institute', would be the vehicle to coordinate the following:

- A professional framework for standards; a professional register
- A careers and recruitment portal
- Continuing Professional Development information
- Business support and research information

The Institute would provide the governance structure to monitor and implement the strategy, which would be delivered either through its own resources or by contracting with other bodies to provide various aspects. By encouraging membership of the Institute, both corporate and individual, it would bring a further professionalism to the industry and also indicate industry and personal ownership of the need for **continuing professional development**. It would provide a vehicle for agriculture and horticulture, like other industries which have professional bodies, to set standards and promote **career** paths and undoubtedly drive change within the industry. Indeed, in due course, the Chartered Farmer concept could be considered and developed. The business case for the Institute needs to be developed, but it needs to be an independent, wide, overarching body which is attractive to join.

It is recognised that this model is transformational and also potentially controversial as initially it would be seen as the creation of yet another body. However, it could bring formality to the work done by the AgriSkills Forum, provide added focus to some of the work of AHDB, act as an attractive vehicle to bring together other bodies and provide a focal point for joint investment by industry and government in skills and careers, now and into the future.

This report recommends the adoption of a vision and objectives, consistent with the Food and Drink Council; the immediate establishment of a cross-agricultural and horticultural formal Senior Leadership Group to take ownership of the creation of an inclusive environment to: establish an industry vision, commission a formal labour market intelligence study and to drive forward the work streams identified above. For the strategy to be successful, it will require full, industry-wide support, including endorsement from the Food and Drink Sector Council.

Key stakeholders have already been involved and consulted on the development of this report, which it is intended will then be more widely consulted upon before finalisation and implementation. The report draws on previous work and makes reference to other industries and nations.