

National Competitions



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Foundation Skills: Horticulture Technical Handbook 2026

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WorldSkills UK

WorldSkills UK is an independent charity and a partnership between employers, education and governments. Together, they are raising standards in apprenticeships and technical education to enable more young people get the best start in work and life.

They are leading the charge to ensure that all young people have equal access to high quality apprenticeships and technical education, by:

Inspiring young people through their careers advice resources, to choose excellence through apprenticeships and technical education as a prestigious career route on their path to reaching their potential, whatever their background.

Developing excellence in young people by testing and assessing their skills and knowledge against their peers through their national and international competitions programmes, improving their confidence and potential. Innovating to mainstream global excellence to help improve the standard of teaching, training and assessment through international benchmarking to help young people, employers and the UK economy succeed.

They are also part of WorldSkills, a global movement supported by over 80 member countries, which celebrates young people achieving world-class standards in the biennial 'skills Olympics'.

This [link](#) can be used to access more information about WorldSkills UK and the work it undertakes:

Sector Overview

Horticulturalists are trained to maintain gardens, be involved planting containers and borders, working on nurseries, perhaps even in design. But many also find themselves working within Garden Centre Retail.

The Foundation Skills competitions have been created to showcase the skills of students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), additional learning needs (ALN), or who require additional support for learning (ASL). Participants will be tested against core competencies aligned to Entry level 3 or level 1.

These competitions provide excellent opportunities for students and learners to develop their vocational skills, employability and wider skills for work, personal, social and independence skills.

Through the course of this competition, students and learners will undertake tasks that reflect the standards and skills required of a skilled or semi-skilled horticulturalist within today's horticultural industry. Competitors

could be required to complete a range of practical activities, including added-value plant displays, soft horticultural elements such as bed preparation, design and planting of a raised border, potting on shrubs and trees, seed sowing and even the effective merchandising of a display within a retail plant area.

Career Pathway

Horticulture can apply to many sectors. There are many opportunities for working in the sector. Here are a few.

Garden Centre (retail), Production Nursery (Grower), Garden Maintenance (Landscaper), Green Keeper & Sports Turf or Professional Gardener. The competition is designed to support your journey, help you work towards your goals and offer advice on potential career paths

" I was a little nervous at the start but after the judges explained to me what I had to do I really enjoyed the competition. The judge give me instructions to follow, that was a big help, then I started my display showing what I had practiced with my coach back in college. Thank you for picking me as a winner, my self confidence as grown and my family and friends are really proud of me. The college put on awards evening and invited my family along, my coach said a few words about me and my mum cried. Thank you to the judges for organising the competition."

- Junior (Foundation Horticulture)

Competition Cycle 2026

Date	Stage
2 March – 27 March	Registration
March – April	Entry Stage
June	National Qualifier
6 July	Announcement of finalists
W/C 16 November	National Finals

Competition Overview

This competition assesses the skills and abilities of competitors entering the field of Horticulture.

This competition consists of:

- at Entry Stage: a remote assessment in which you must complete an online multiple-choice question and a pricing up exercise.
- a qualifying heat: at this you will be asked to perform a horticultural task. This could be planting a hanging basket to a set theme, plant a series of planters for immediate sale, sowing seeds, etc. The task will last approximately 1.5hrs and you will be given full instructions ahead of the day.
- a UK national final: taking place W/C 16th November across locations in South Wales as part of WorldSkills National Finals.

Core Competencies

Competitors taking part in this competition should be able to demonstrate the following competencies:

- a) Ability to plant to a plan or follow instruction.
- b) Ability to handle plants correctly.
- c) Ability to plant up a pot/basket.
- d) Knowledge of basic horticulture.
- e) Time management of the task.
- f) Safe working practices (Keeping area tidy and free from debris and trip hazards).
- g) Ability to complete some simple mathematics.
- h) Ability to complete a retail transaction (Final Only).
- i) Appropriate workwear (Health and Safety).

Qualifications

This competition is mapped out to the following qualifications:

"The Foundation Skills competitions have been created to showcase the skills of students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), additional learning needs (ALN), or who require additional support for learning (ASL). Participants will be tested against core competencies aligned to Entry level 3 or level 1.

These competitions provide excellent opportunities for students and learners to develop their vocational skills, employability and wider skills for work, personal, social and independence skills".

Pre-Competition Activity

Before registering to enter students and apprentices to take part in a WorldSkills UK Competition, it can be helpful to enable them to practice, test and challenge their technical and mental skills by getting involved in the [pre-competition activity](#). As well, the following activities could be used to support prospective competitors to get a feel for what will be expected of them in a WorldSkills UK Competition, whilst still in an environment with which they are familiar.

Entry Stage

To ensure that competitors are committed to entering the WSUK Foundation Horticulture competition, The APL set a simple entry stage test.

This could be a combination of multiple-choice questions, picture identification and a pricing up exercise.

The Entry Task will be sent out to competitors once registration is complete.

This task will be an online test and is theory based.

The top 30 scores will progress to the next stage. (There will be 5 reserves selected)

National Qualifiers

The top 30 scores will progress to National Qualifiers (reserves may be called up for the qualifiers in the case of other competitors dropping out before the day). This stage will be a practical test, where competitors will have the chance to demonstrate their skillset. This will take place at the North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire Nuneaton Campus in June 2026.

This stage will be marked by APL expert judges. The top 8 scores from the national qualifiers will then go through to the next round, the National Finals. (There will be 3 reserves selected).

National Finals

The 8 highest scoring competitors (3 reserves may be called upon before the end of October) from the National Qualifier heats will be invited to compete at the finals - in November 2026. Competition will be marked by APL expert judges.

This will be held in a physical location which will be announced at a later date.

The competition will be held over a 1 day event where the competitors can showcase their skills.

There will be medals presented for 1st, 2nd and 3rd (Gold, Silver and Bronze).

Judges' Tips

- Read the brief carefully.
- If creating something draw this first so you can see what you are doing before you start.
- If a planting task, make sure you plant at the right depth.
- Always make sure you remove broken, damaged or diseased foliage / flowers.
- Always make sure you work area is tidy and free from trip hazards.
- Always keep an eye on the time, you are able to ask judges at any point what time you have left.

Contacting Us

For further information please contact Natalie Ilsley - natalie.ilsley@hta.org.uk

Useful sites for careers

<https://www.horticulture.org.uk/grow-careers>

<https://www.chooselandscape.org>

<https://www.golandscape.co.uk>

https://www.thegardenersguild.co.uk/horticultural_colleges.html

Useful site for Horticultural Tips that will help with competition.

The RHS have loads of information on their site regarding all horticultural questions.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/container-gardening/how-to-plant-up-a-container>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/container-gardening/how-to-plant-a-hanging-basket>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/propagation/how-to-sow-seeds-indoors>



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