

# Professional Gardeners' Trust Report



16/8/17

name: Ian Davies

part of country: Dorset

name of fund: Finnis Scott Award

amount of fund: £500

course: City & Guilds Level 3 Horticulture Diploma

course provider: Kingston Maurward College

cost of course: £7172

career changer: my previous career was in music performing, teaching and technical production

First and foremost I would like to extend my thanks to the Professional Gardeners' Trust to awarding me the Finnis Scott Award, this contribution to the cost of my course was very generous and I am greatly appreciative.

I took this course to gain the relevant qualification, skills, knowledge and experience to develop a career in horticulture to a high level, with an emphasis on practically working with plants in a garden. Therefore the course had to deliver, and be judged, on several elements that met these needs: 1) course content, 2) how well this was delivered, 3) usefulness of content, 4) fit for purpose. Also, was the course successful at a more fundamental level: did I learn something useful and did it help me get a job?

At this fundamental level then yes, the course was a resounding success. I learnt a lot in diverse aspects of horticulture, some of which I probably wouldn't have learnt otherwise, and I have now secured an entry level seasonal position as a gardener. I particularly enjoyed and found of benefit the garden design module. The teacher was very knowledgeable and skilfully led the students through the processes to get to a final design and to present it in a professional manner. The construction of hard landscaping module was a surprising highlight of the course, even though it's not a career path I wish to take. Again the teacher was very knowledgeable of this subject, however the process of learning was a little haphazard for my personal learning preference. But we got there in the end and produced a pergola, decking bridge and pond that I feel very proud of.



Another useful module that I learnt a lot from was machinery - I wasn't a confident user of garden machinery but the teacher gradually guided us and my confidence and skill level increased. I am now using garden machinery at work and, while it'll never be my favourite thing, I am happy and confident in its use. Plant and soil science I found useful and interesting for background knowledge and understanding. The business module was taught by a very nice and enthusiastic teacher but the content was not particularly useful as it focused on big business and, as most gardeners are sole traders, not the kind of things that would be realistically useful. There was a whole module on propagation of plants which is an area of great interest to me, the teacher had a lot of knowledge and was very keen to teach us and we did learn and do a lot. However, considering how much lesson time we had, I felt there was a lot of wasted time and I personally didn't really expand upon my existing knowledge of propagation as much as I would have liked. As part of the turf module we learnt about wildflower meadows which was of great interest to me and an industry expert came in to speak about this. I learnt so much from this experience and I feel that more experts from the industry could have contributed to the learning experience of the course in general.

As stated above my main interest in horticulture, and what I wanted most from the course, was to develop and expand upon my knowledge and skill with plants and practically working with them in the garden. In the first term the plant module was excellent and above and beyond the stated course curriculum, among the highlights were touring the college gardens to learn about the plants in-situ and in making a herbarium - which I would encourage everyone to do. However, from the second term onwards the plant module reverted and we lost the elements that made it excellent. We only did a few very basic practical lessons and learning about the plants was a bit

lacklustre in comparison (this I feel was due to the nature of the course and in no way reflects the competence or knowledge of the teacher). This part of the course was a big let down as I felt it really wasn't up to a level 3 standard, in fact it was much lower than what was covered in the RHS level 2 practical module that I did a few years ago as an introduction to gardening. In addition to this disappointment I felt the course was more aimed towards school leavers and not for adult learners. Furthermore, the teaching style that was mainly used, called 'flipped learning', did not suit my learning style and I would have preferred a more direct, informative and professional work based approach.

After trying unsuccessfully to address these issues with the college I resigned myself to the fact that the course did not deliver some key aspects of what I was wanting. However, on a more positive note, the course did provide me with a level 3 certificate and I learnt a lot of good and useful aspects of horticulture (just not so much about plants). Hopefully as time passes I will see more benefits to the course.

If I were to give advice to someone in my position, that of a mature learner who is wanting a career change into horticulture, I would advise them to consider doing the full RHS level 2 diploma and possibly level 3 later on. Also to consider doing a trainee scheme, such as the WRAGS. Or to just get out there and start a gardening round and possibly do short professional courses as and when they are needed.