

**DRAFT – An analysis of the current position of land based industry practitioners, based on comments written by those in the industry on the Landscape Juice Network.**

### **A Landscape Practitioners Network.**

The Landscaping Industry suffers from the start by way of attempting to define the practitioners involved. Born out of the Horticultural and Agricultural / Forestry Industries, to many within and out with the industry it now represents a broad spectrum of professionals and artisans from many backgrounds. It sees a regular and steady influx from other industries and is a service industry that suffers rapidly from wider economic issues. As such in order for practitioners to secure their positions, the core of these practitioners have evolved into small, self regulated units operating within localised zones.



[landscapejuicenetwork.com](http://landscapejuicenetwork.com)

The present placing of Landscape related organisations, associations and quangos has inadvertently seen the divisions of the land based industry divide even further apart. The practitioners and many professionals within the industry are far separated from the academic, altruistic and most importantly the downward representation of the industry to the general public from the policy makers themselves. This is exasperated by a well funded media section, heavily influenced and biased by and towards the amateur sector and thus represent a tiny and insignificant portion of the real skills and knowledge base of the industry, to such an extent that many skills are ‘reinvented’ by media professionals without resorting back to the ‘on the ground’ practitioner.

As the vast main core of all land based practitioners have remained wholly independent and unrepresented there have been many attempts from a business angle to define and bring accreditation to the industry. This has led to strong positioning by a minority of practitioners in well defined sectors, which again inadvertently has led to further splits in land based industry as a whole.

However due to significant developments which affect the UK landscape as a whole the need to provide a vehicle to lobby and protect the interests of the average practitioner are vital and have been recognised at all levels. Without this, serious implications will occur to the economic, social and environmental fabric of the whole of the UK landscape and in many cases this is already occurring. The identified threat to the landscape as a whole has been clearly identified and the subsequent developments by academics have started to filter into regulatory guidelines, affecting all within land based industry:

**An identified need and requirement to maintain and protect urban and rural green spaces.**

**An identified need to adopt sustainable practice, identify and protect endangered traditional ‘rural’ skills and sustain a knowledge base to maintain heritage and conservation.**

**An identified need for consultation between all interested parties including practitioners, academics, regulatory bodies and the general public.**

Due to the lack of a sufficient industry wide medium, much of the policy decisions remain hidden until regulation, with enforcement powers, is introduced.

This, combined with the following additional threats to the industry, is leading the industry into a further fractured and confused position:

The huge surge of interest in the vegetable growing / allotment / smallholder sector. This growth sector of the industry was ill prepared for by the industry as a whole, and mainly due to a lack of representation of professionalism in this sector by the massive media coverage, particularly by television. In turn this led to a bypassing of significant issues, which have started to create some serious problems in the actual landscape itself. Furthermore misrepresentation of the landscaping industry by the media is common place and further compounded by a strong amateur lobby and ineffectual and often insular representation by middle tier organisations due to remits concentrating on the amateurs and entrepreneurs entering into this sector at the expense of the incumbent professionals. This is threatening the industry by way allowing a majority amateur lobby, which frequently ignores serious issues regarding land use management threatening the natural habitats of the UK.

By way of protecting the public against the ‘rogue trader’ a plethora of ‘accreditation schemes’ have been introduced, with several linked back to local or central government. This, whilst in good faith, has led to confusion by the practitioners and more importantly the public. It also risks favouring and empowering larger enterprises, which further threatens the large base of skilled craftsman and artisans contrary to the ratified conventions which stipulate the protection of such people.

Further division between all sectors within the industry - this includes, but is not exhaustive: Traditional Craftspeople / Maintenance Providers / Artists concentrating in an external medium / Hard Landscapers / Growers / Suppliers / Garden Writers and Photographers / Garden Designers / Surfacing Specialists / Landscape Architects / Arborists.

As each of these sectors within land based industry are independently threatened by economic forces, trends etc., insular policies are often adopted and exasperated by public relations professionals who tend to ignore the remaining and crucial service providers within the industry as a whole.

Education has seen some rapid changes and the identified desires of those entering Further and Higher Education has led to the forming of many courses, which reflects trends rather than the industry needs. Land based industry is one of the most attractive industries in which to work and average salaries reflects this. As FE and HE establishments increasingly look towards the higher end of the public sector in land use management, the FE and HE students opt to enter into the peripheral and middle management public sector of the industry, which has seen rapid expansion prior to recent economic problems, or they choose to enter another industry from which the salaries can afford to help pay off increasing student debts. Training in traditional methods is virtually ignored and there is now an identified lack of properly qualified personnel available to work in the frontline public sector and NGO's. The low salaries of the private industry lead to unskilled labourers rather than the skilled and qualified

and private industry lacks the resources to train suitable potential personnel who could fill voids in the public sector shortfall let alone the private sector.

There is a noticeable lack of an all encompassing medium for the private sector. The attraction to gain from the huge amateur ‘gardening’ market has led to the majority of printed media, TV and radio and more recently the internet, concentrating on material suitable for the amateur market. Even if the initial principles were to tailor towards the industry, due to a lack of any coherent structure the funding is poor and the resulting publication reflects this and is often too heavily reliant on sponsorship and advertising. As such a journal encompassing across all the sectors of the industry as a whole remains non-existent.

Although the above issues are non exhaustive in terms of listing current problems and threats to the UK land based practitioner, they are all through external forces. However it is important also to note that the large bank of independent practitioners has in itself led to a threat simply due to the natural progression these individual units have had to take in order to maintain and protect their own individual businesses. This has resulted in a huge data bank of reference on the methodology of implementing operations and operating the business in itself – which in itself is a huge potential strength of the industry, but does also slow the process of progression in putting in place a cohesive way forward for all in the industry due to varying and often strong opinions on every subject.

### **Identified Requirements for Resources to Assist Landscaping Practitioners in the UK, resulting from the above.**

#### **AN ASSOCIATION:**

There is a considerable desire to see a new association emerge. Debate on a proposed model often reflects on existing accreditation organisations and the emergence of a satisfactory model for self regulation. The fact remains that still the large core of the industry operate without need for such membership and that such an association would need funding from within the industry, i.e. from potential members, which in turn would dissuade potential membership.

Networking is a key factor and the very nature and success of the [Landscape Juice Network](#) reflects this. As such the accreditation issue is more effectively dealt with by debate within an open and transparent forum. What the LJN can achieve through its existing ethos must be translated into the association, ‘to allow empowerment to every land based industry practitioner’.

Given existing debate a new association would be better placed as a voice for the industry if it were;

- a) Of reduced subscription cost and open to all\*.
- b) Altruistic; non profit making and with charitable status or linked to an existing charity.
- c) Had international connections.
- d) Had academic connections including student membership.
- e) Simple – the existing ethos of [Landscape Juice Network](#) can easily be transferred with an intrinsic link into the future.

\*This is due to the existing accreditation organisations and a wide choice of subscription groups in existence, where subscription is already lacking in most areas.

A stronger relationship between peripheral organisations and training establishments, (on all levels) would be easy to achieve for any new association, with actual linkage rather than the republication of PR. Funding is already currently available in this regard and hasn't been sought as the existing associations are mainly businesses.

## **LIAISON & CONSULTATION:**

There are many peripheral groups, charities and quangos whose aims match in with those desired and recognised by practitioners. Assisting and sharing in conferences and workshops as well as even subtle on the ground presence at all events would allow the practitioners to fully develop the industry from within. With added education to the general public as well as to trainees and students, the self regulation model, (described below) can be fully explained and would eventually allow for widespread recognition by potential clients. The members of the [Landscape Juice Network](#) will be empowered instantly through the general recognition within all the sectors of the whole of the industry. Due to the geographical placing of members made possible by the internet, it would be easy to have representatives attending a huge range of events.

## **INTERNATIONAL LINKS**

As much of the new wave of regulation evolved in Europe, the international angle is one of vital importance. Firstly it would open up new funding areas as it would enable the transfer of knowledge and skills across the World. This would ultimately allow for a stronger voice within the UK which due to an insular media has largely ignored the worldwide landscaping and horticultural industry. In particular whether, pro or anti the European Union, the decisions made in Brussels [Indeed there is real evidence of a deferral of policy making by the UK government with regards the landscape industry to both the EU and Council of Europe] will always have an impact on the UK industry, an empowered practitioner association could easily find a method for discourse within this arena for the good of the whole of the industry.

## **SELF REGULATION MODEL**

A free resource of materials to sign up to available to all those in the industry, (available already on the [Landscape Juice Network](#)), but with the backing of an association would require little more than proof of an insurance document. This in itself is a huge training tool, providing the new practitioners to be able to start up without the huge costs and referrals required by existing accreditation organisations.

Natural progression, if desired, by any business may well mean that further accreditation into one of the existing groups is essential. The scrutiny of said organisations with comment passed by way of private communication would assist in ensuring these organisations or any new organisations are not given a position to introduce unfair competition within the industry.

