

Freelance contract brief

Contract overview

Title:	Horticultural Practitioner
Contract type:	Freelance 6-month period (with option to extend)
Contract output:	Expected 1.5/2 days per week over 6 months
Location:	East Lothian Community Hospital
Key deadlines:	Deadline for submissions 5pm Monday 20 th April Interviews Wednesday 29 th April 2026 Contract start: 1 st June 2026

1. Introduction

About NHS Lothian Charity

From the everyday to the transformational, we support NHS Lothian to excel for all its communities; whether that's patients, their families, staff or communities. From prevention and early intervention to treatment and recovery, from birth to end of life care, we provide support throughout the full healthcare journey and across all health conditions. By enhancing experiences and environments for patients and staff, investing in research and innovation, and helping to progress better health outcomes for all our communities, we play a key role in improving physical and mental health and wellbeing for everyone. As an independent but integral part of NHS Lothian, we are able to tap in directly to what support is needed to make the biggest difference.

About The Green Health Programme

The NHS outdoor estate is a valuable asset. If planned and managed well, it can make a significant contribution to the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our staff, patients, visitors and local communities. It is also a key asset in our response to the climate emergency. Our Green Health programme works with staff and partners across a wide range of sites to unlock this potential, find out more: <https://greenhealth.nhslothiancharity.org/>

The Role of the Horticultural Practitioner

The Practitioner will serve as a specialist for the maintenance and engagement of the newly built Ward 1 and Ward 2 gardens at East Lothian Community Hospital (ELCH). Key responsibilities include:

- 1) Designing and delivering activities for patients, visitors and staff to support rehabilitation and wellbeing.
- 2) Working with clinical staff to integrate horticultural activities into patient care plans.
- 3) Building relationships with NHS volunteers and facilities management (GTFM) and demonstrating biodiversity-focused greenspace management to estates and facilities colleagues.

2. Project Background: East Lothian Community Hospital Therapeutic Gardens

The East Lothian Community Hospital is a relatively newly-built hospital based in the grounds of the former Roodlands hospital site in Haddington. It is a PFI hospital run by Galliford Try Facilities Management (GTFM) and the Grounds and Gardens are maintained by NHS Lothian.

A major project, scheduled for completion in Summer 2026, will introduce two purpose-built therapeutic gardens and has been funded by the Blythe Family Trust. These spaces have been designed by Hinterland Studio in collaboration with clinical staff to ensure they meet the specific needs of patients, visitors, and employees. The primary objective is to transform these areas into accessible, biodiverse environments that offer year-round sensory interest through varied colour, movement, and fragrance.

While the gardens share a cohesive design aesthetic, their operational purposes differ significantly:

- **Ward 1 (Palliative Care):** Designed as a quiet, contemplative sanctuary. The environment is calmer, and the Practitioner's role here focuses primarily on high-standard maintenance to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for patients and families.
- **Ward 2 (Adult Mental Health & Dementia):** Designed for active engagement. As patients often stay for extended periods, the garden serves as a hub for exercise, social interaction, and physical gardening. The Practitioner will lead activities such as vegetable cultivation, bird watching, and flower arranging.

View the layouts:

[Ward 1](#)

[Ward 2](#)

[Contact Iain](#) to see the design documents created by Hinterland in association with staff.

3. The role of the Horticultural Practitioner

The Practitioner will provide expert, non-clinical guidance to ensure we get the most out of these new gardens for patients, visitors and staff. While not a clinical therapist, the Practitioner is responsible for creating a supportive, empathetic environment for patients with complex needs. The Practitioner will use their horticultural skills and knowledge to ensure the gardens become well established and thrive.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Patient Engagement (1/3 of time):** Delivering horticultural activities to individuals and small groups, supported by clinical ward staff.
- **Volunteer Coordination (1/3 of time):** Supervising and coordinating 4–5 gardening volunteers (recruited by the NHS Lothian Voluntary Services Manager) to maintain the aesthetic and health of the gardens.

- **Garden maintenance (1/3 of time):** Deliver comprehensive maintenance for the Ward 1 and Ward 2 gardens to ensure their establishment and success.

Key Deliverables

- **Inclusive horticultural activity with patients:** Create and lead gardening activities specifically tailored for patients with complex needs. This involves collaborating closely with clinical staff to understand ward-specific challenges and ensuring the gardens are accessible to all.
- **Establishing core group of garden volunteers:** Working with NHS Lothian Voluntary Services Manager to support skilled volunteers to maintain the gardens.
- **Garden maintenance:** Lead the implementation of existing comprehensive maintenance plans for the Ward 1 and Ward 2 gardens, ensuring these spaces remain high-quality therapeutic environments.
- **Specialist advice & delivery for NHS staff:** Provide expert non-clinical guidance on horticultural enhancements and best practices, working in partnership with staff and volunteers to deliver impactful projects.
- **Provide risk assessments for key activities:** Take full responsibility for operational health and safety during all activities. This includes conducting task-specific risk assessments, establishing protocols for tool use, and strictly adhering to NHS Lothian safeguarding policies.

Most challenging parts of the contract

- Difficult conversations, such as supporting people to compromise over the use of space; dealing with patients in distress and community members with different opinions.
- Breaking down barriers for groups experiencing health inequalities to access activities.
- Understanding requirements and permissions in relation to infection control and other requirements in health care settings.

4. Contract requirements

It is expected that this contract will deliver 1.5/2 days of activity per week over a 6 months period. Beyond technical horticultural expertise, this role requires strong social skills and a deep sense of empathy to effectively work alongside clinical staff and patients in sensitive healthcare settings. We are seeking a creative, enthusiastic, and practical individual to join our team. You will have experience in horticulture, ideally with experience of establishing a new garden, and of supporting groups in outdoor settings. What we are looking for:

Essential Experience:

- Experience in developing and delivering enjoyable engagement horticultural activities with groups of participants whilst also ensuring high levels of safety.
- Experience of working with people with support needs or health conditions, people with long-term health conditions, mental health needs, dementia or disabilities
- Experience in managing and working with volunteers.

Essential skills & knowledge

- Problem solving skills and ability to work under own initiative.
- Strong interpersonal skills including the ability to connect with a wide range of people.

- Practical skills and the ability to use tools, for example staking a tree; planting bulbs; growing on seeds etc.
- Good understanding and compassion for those who experience challenges with their health whilst also recognising that strong professional boundaries are essential
- Ability to respond appropriately to patients or family sharing information which might be distressing or need to be escalated.

Other requirements

- PVG Scheme Membership, a Right to Work in the UK check and proof of any qualifications declared in your application will be required.

Desirable attributes:

- A Degree/Diploma in Horticulture/ Horticultural Therapy /Ecology or other related disciplines and or/able to demonstrate equivalent knowledge, skills and competencies gained through an approved training programmes or other relevant experience.
- Relevant training and qualifications in either horticulture or supporting people with mental health are desirable.

5. How to submit your proposal

Please email the required documents outlined below by 5pm Monday 20th April email to

Iain Cartwright, Green Health Project Manager, : iain.cartwright@nhs.scot

Required documents:

1. **Cover letter and CV** : Detailing your proposed approach to the contract and how you meet the requirements listed above. Please including relevant work experience, projects, clients and qualifications.
2. **Examples**: Up to three examples (with images if appropriate) of relevant past activities delivered.
3. **Proposed fee**:
 - a. Total fee amount (This must include all VAT and associated expenses. Please also note whether you are VAT registered.)
 - b. Breakdown of costs including
 - i. Daily fee rate and number of days
 - ii. Other additional expenses
 - c. Proposed schedule of payments.
 - d. Number of days available / week and possible working pattern. Available start date, and confirmation that you would be able to undertake the contract.
4. **References**: Contact details of two references from a similar project, including your last contract/ post (please detail whether these can be contacted after interview without prior briefing).

6. Further information

If you would like an informal chat about this contract and working for NHSL charity, please contact:

Iain Cartwright
Green Health Project Manager | NHS Lothian Charity
Mainpoint | 102 West Port | Edinburgh | EH3 9DN
M: 07816 257342 E: iain.cartwright@nhs.scot

Selection criteria

The following criteria and weightings will be used to assess the proposals:

- Proposed approach to the contract (1/3)
- Experience & skills (1/3)
- Value for money (1/3)

Job share and organisations

Due to the limited nature of this contract we do not envisage job-share applicants for this post. Whilst it would be appropriate an individual, we would also look favourably on proposals from local organisations with the correct ethos, skills and capacity to take on this work.

7. Disclaimer

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