



# ENSURING EQUITY IN THE GREEN TRANSITION

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# THE NEED FOR TRANSITION

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Our economy is changing. Adapting to climate change, reducing carbon emissions and reversing the decline in biodiversity present challenges and opportunities for how we work. In many sectors of the economy this means new knowledge and a skills transition, while in some it means significant growth in capacity and the creation of whole new training and professional development frameworks.



Forecasts for how many new jobs will be needed and in what sectors vary significantly. The Government's Green Jobs Delivery Plan talks of supporting the creation of **480,000** skilled green jobs by 2030<sup>1</sup>. National Grid has estimated that **117,000** roles will need to be filled in the energy sector over the same time period<sup>2</sup>, and the waste company Suez has calculated that if every person repaired rather than threw away one item per year, this would require **40,000** new jobs in the circular economy across the country<sup>3</sup>.

Whatever the scale of the transition needed it is already clear that some employers and some industries are already struggling to meet demand. Recent research from Ofgem found that a further **6,000** new solar engineers will be required per year to meet demand and, whilst the number of electrical engineering graduates is steadily increasing, it is estimated that only around **1,000** per year go on to join the industry<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, the Institute of Chartered Forestry has called for urgent action given meeting current tree planting targets will require a **70%** increase across the workforce<sup>5</sup>.

Compounding the skills gap we are also seeing a 'participation gap' in the UK labour market with an increasing number of people not looking for work, the largest group of which are people reporting long-term health issues. This adds further pressure to the supply of labour and the challenges of recruitment.

Finally, we have a 'representation gap' with only **4.8%** of 'environmental professionals' coming from a non-White background (compared to the all-profession average of 12.6%), with agriculture even less diverse than that<sup>6</sup>. To add to this, there is a history in some sectors of pathways into jobs being dependant on experience gained through unpaid work, which is not possible for many people on low incomes. These issues mitigate against people from a wider variety of backgrounds taking up opportunities in this sector due to the perception that this work is 'not for people like them'. This in turn limits the effectiveness of policy as environmental sustainability is seen as the preserve of one section of society.



<sup>1</sup> Green jobs delivery steps up a gear - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

<sup>2</sup> Building the net zero energy workforce | National Grid Group

<sup>3</sup> OPINION: Putting reuse and repair at the forefront of the circular economy - [letsrecycle.com](http://letsrecycle.com)

<sup>4</sup> Will the UK's skills gap be our Net Zero stumbling block? | Solar Power Portal

<sup>5</sup> Forestry skills crisis puts climate targets at risk - The Institute of Chartered Foresters

<sup>6</sup> New research shows lack of diversity | [www.the-ies.org](http://www.the-ies.org)

# OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO WORK

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In the face of this supply and demand challenge there is a need to think creatively and ambitiously about how we bolster the capacity to bring about this transition so that we can meet national targets on net zero and nature recovery. There is also an economic and moral imperative to think about how we make this transition more inclusive – helping those currently out of the labour market to re-connect with economic opportunity, ensuring those who might otherwise miss out are given the support they need to succeed and ensuring that the policy levers pulled don't further disadvantage those who are already most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.



Waged work placements are a tried and tested model to help people overcome barriers to work, in particular people with no recent experience of employment. They can also be used to add additional capacity at low risk to organisations in sectors where marketplaces are not yet mature or which are dominated by SMEs and microbusinesses who are generally more cautious about investment and growth.

Groundwork has been operating waged work placements (historically known as 'intermediate labour markets') since the 1980s as a mechanism to help people maintain economic independence, reskill themselves or search for more permanent opportunities on the basis that 'it's easier to get a job if you already have a job'. This experience dates back to coalfield regeneration programmes through the Future Jobs Fund and more recently the Government's Covid-related Kickstart scheme.



Supported, waged placements have the following benefits and advantages when considered against other forms of training scheme:

- they help people with limited work experience acquire the personal disciplines and transferable skills valued by employers
- they can be accompanied by a range of in-work wraparound support (often provided by a third party) which can help address personal or health issues that may impact on longer-term success
- they ensure trainees are productive from the outset, adding value to the work of their host employer and delivering services and benefits to communities
- the waged nature of the opportunity means that they are more accessible to those on low incomes or with other responsibilities eg carers
- they provide employers with the opportunity to develop the skills and competencies of trainees in a way which makes them more likely to succeed in future rounds of recruitment
- managed as a coordinated programme they can be used to help trainees network with each other, supporting their personal and professional development and benefiting employers and whole industries through the sharing of ideas and experience



# PATHWAYS INTO THE GREEN ECONOMY

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# New to Nature

In the last 12 months Groundwork and partners have been applying this knowledge and experience to the delivery of training placements in the land and nature sector. Using funds provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, New to Nature has seen **95** people employed on a 12-month contract with a variety of environmental organisations including large national charities, local social enterprises and the environmental teams of local authorities. A range of positive action approaches have been taken to ensure the roles were accessible to people under-represented in the sector – young people, people from minority ethnic or low-income backgrounds and people with disabilities. Trainees have been supported by an employment coach and invited to participate in a range of group sessions focused on career inspiration and practical skills development. Evaluation of the programme is ongoing but early evidence suggests:

- the approach is popular with employers, with demand for placements more than double the number available
- the job roles are attractive to the target audience with **2,500+** applications received for **95** jobs
- the scheme has helped diversify the sector with **88%** of those employed having one or more of the targeted characteristics.

Learning from the programme is being fed into the Government's Green Jobs Delivery Group and used to inform development and advocacy on campaigns for a National Nature Service and a Youth Environmental Service.

Given the level of demand from employers and potential trainees, the partners are committed to extending and expanding the approach. There is scope to do this both nationally – in collaboration with major employers in the fields of ecology, land management, forestry and agriculture – and regionally to link with place-based environmental opportunities such as the construction of Eden Project North in Morecambe and large-scale projects to create natural solutions to climate change such as peat bog restoration or the installation of sustainable urban drainage systems.

A range of models exist for embedding the learning from New to Nature into other employment support initiatives, but an investment of **£7.5m** would enable this one-off programme to be developed into a rolling programme with an annual intake providing entry-level jobs for **50** people every year for five years. This would create a growing alumni of new and diverse talent entering the industry, nurture commitment amongst employers around inclusive practices, and build significant learning about what works over time.





## New to Net Zero and the circular economy

There is scope to test the applicability of the model in other sectors of the green economy with similar challenges in terms of recruitment and diversity. Each is projected to see significant growth in demand for a range of entry-level roles, creating opportunities to ensure that people who are currently underrepresented in the environmental sector are supported with first steps into high quality careers.



### New to Net Zero: Energy and retrofit

Decarbonising our homes and community buildings will require a significant upscaling of capacity and capability – both in the technical trades needed to install insulation and more efficient heating systems and in the coordination and management of retrofit programmes. The sector is heavily dominated by SMEs and sole traders, who find it difficult to expand their workforce given the current volatility of demand. There are also an increasing number of charities and social enterprises operating place-based services to support people in fuel poverty with the potential to grow and diversify their activities.

### New to the circular economy: Waste and resources

This sector has seen significant change over recent years, switching from a traditional image of refuse collection to being at the cutting edge of the circular economy, driving change in systems and behaviours around waste reduction, re-use and recycling. Whilst the industry is dominated by a small number of large private companies, they operate within – and support – a wider infrastructure of SMEs, public bodies and charities able to provide valuable entry-level experiences for people at the start of their career, or re-skilling. This will help develop the soft skills and vocational knowledge needed to enable rapid progression routes into more stable roles.

An investment of **£1.5m** would enable a pilot to be undertaken with employers in one of these sectors comprising a campaign to recruit host employers and support an initial intake of **50** trainees<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> All wage costs captured in these proposals reflect Real Living Wage for 12-month placements, and incorporate an average 10% contribution from host employers.

# CONCLUSION

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All political parties are considering proposals to accelerate the transition to a green economy in their election manifestos. At the same time industry bodies and individual employers are working hard on strategies to ramp up recruitment in order to meet demand and targets. Success will require action at all levels – we need a new-look industrial strategy from government, education and training providers with the courses and capacity to support reskilling and professional development and employers finding better ways to help people understand career pathways. Helping more people from more diverse backgrounds access entry-level opportunities with the support they need to be successful in the longer-term needs to be part of the plan.

A coordinated programme of waged work placements can help make this happen, bringing multiple benefits: diversifying the environmental workforce, increasing labour market participation, helping to level up communities lacking economic opportunity and supporting employers so that they can recruit and grow. Joint investment from government and employers could be unlocked, for example, by matching public funds with corporate CSR budgets or by re-purposing unspent apprenticeship levy funds. Both Conservative and Labour governments have invested in this solution previously at times of crisis – in the wake of the 2008 financial crash and as a response to Covid. The crisis we face now – the prospect that we may not move fast enough to meet our own targets for tackling this existential threat – warrants similarly ambitious action.





## GROUNDWORK

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