

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

RECRUITING DIVERSE TALENT INTO
WASTE AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT





Groundwork is a federation of charities with a collective mission to take practical action to create a fair and green future in which people, places, and nature thrive. We support communities and businesses to build capacity and resilience in order to tackle hardship, achieve a just transition to net-zero and help nature recover in a way that reduces inequality and leads to healthier, happier lives for all.

Environmental Services & Solutions Expo (ESS Expo) is a leading platform that brings together professionals, innovators, and thought leaders in the environmental services industry and across sustainability and net-zero. The expo provides a unique opportunity for networking, knowledge exchange, and collaboration to address current and future environmental challenges.



KEY FINDINGS



Almost half of respondents to the survey felt that having a job which will help the UK reach its Net Zero targets was important.

The percentage of participants that would consider working in any of the listed green industries, however, was much lower and nearly a third had no interest in any. This highlights that there is still some work for employers offering green jobs to do to marry young people's interest in climate friendly careers with the real-life jobs that are, or will be, on offer.



84% of the young people surveyed had not considered a career in waste and resources management, with 70% not receiving any formal or informal advice on the skills required or roles available in the sector. On average, respondents wanted to receive information via social media and professional job platforms, however there was some variation between groups.



Closing the skills gap requires a balanced flow of supply and demand, where there is a consistent stream of workers who can rely on sustainable, secure employment. Given the similar challenges of recruitment, skills and diversity, there is scope to test models like New to Nature in sectors such as waste and resources management. This programme demonstrates how the private and charity sector can work together to successfully provide entry-level routes into the sector, especially for new and diverse talent.

INTRODUCTION

Waste is a substantial contributor to climate change in the UK that puts pressure on our natural resources and can lead to biodiversity loss and pollution. Waste must be reduced by 50% from 2019 levels by 2042 if the UK is to meet the targets set out in the Environment Act 2021, and the waste and resources management sector will be central to any efforts to reach our climate targets. In addition to the environmental benefits, substantial economic gains can be made by growing the circular economy. A shift to repairing and repurposing items previously considered waste, for example, could create 550,000 jobs by 2030.

The sector, however, faces multiple challenges. While some, such as economic inactivity and illness, are widespread throughout the economy, there are industry-specific difficulties that require urgent solutions, such as ensuring the adequate recruitment and retention of skilled workers. Given how important it is that the sector flourishes, there is a clear need to discover what can be done in lieu or in partnership with government funding or initiatives. This research aims to investigate young people's perceptions on waste and resources management, and any barriers that might prevent them from choosing the sector as a career. To achieve this objective, Groundwork worked with Whitestone Insight¹ to interview 536 16 to 24-year old's online in June 2024, and the results are presented in this report. The report spotlights successful initiatives from across the green economy that can be adapted to ensure that the sector remains a strong, innovative public service that continues to deliver sustained environmental and economic outcomes. This includes models such as Groundwork's **New to Nature** programme and **Green Doctor Academy**, which actively work with diverse young talent to ensure that they develop the skills and knowledge that are necessary for the careers of the future.



THE RELEVANCE OF RESOURCES

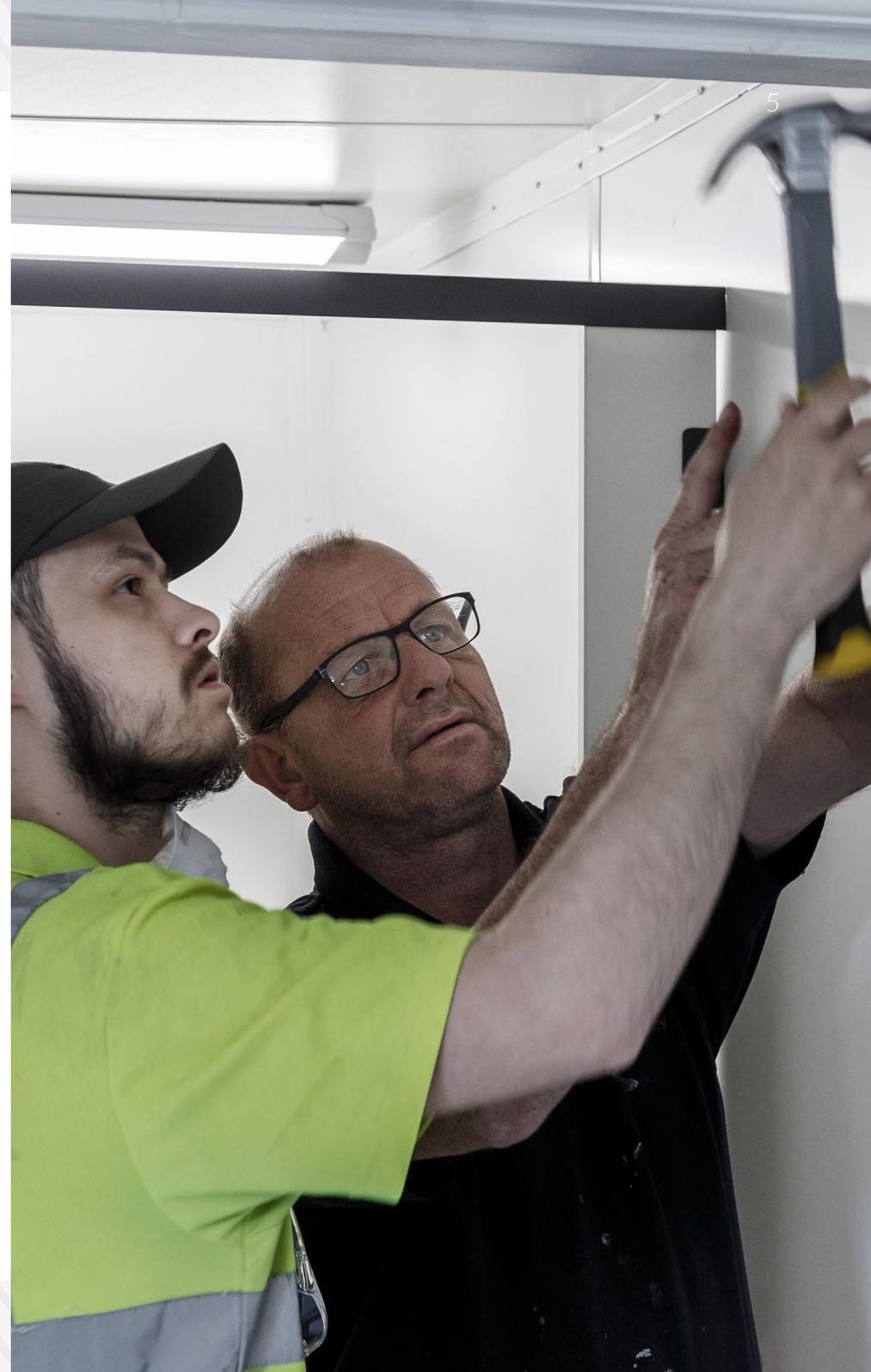
Waste is a substantial contributor to climate change in the UK, with 6% of UK greenhouse gas emissions coming from landfill, energy-from-waste (EfW) facilities, and other waste treatment such as waste water.² The UK produces 75m tonnes of household, commercial, and industry waste a year,³ exacerbated by the greater demand for products and materials. This has put pressure on our natural and finite resources, leading to biodiversity loss and pollution. In line with the UK's comparatively large GDP, we produce more waste than many other parts of the world,⁴ resulting in a waste and resources management sector that is already an immense, essential public service. The sector comprises of collection, treatment, recycling, reprocessing, disposal, and EfW, equating around £78bn and employing around 142,800 employees.^{5 6} This includes 75 EfW facilities that generate energy equal to 1% of the national power demand from 15m tonnes of diverted unrecyclable waste from landfill.⁷ Given its sheer scale and size, there are clear environmental and economic impacts that ensuring a strong waste and resources management sector can bring.

The sector will be at the core of any efforts made to reaching our climate targets, as many of the materials used in measures implemented by other sectors will ultimately come back to the waste sector for management. Waste must reduce by 50% from 2019 levels by 2042, if the UK is to meet the targets set out in the Environment Act 2021.⁸

As a result, there have been calls that any new investments must be resilient to future climate risks and have accelerating change built in by design, necessitating an increase in specialist roles in the sector. Although there has already been some progress made to protect the environment within the sector, such as the substantial shift from landfill to recycling (around 44.6% of waste is now recycled),⁹ there is much more to be done. Promoting a circular economy, where it is easy for people to maximise use and minimise waste, is fundamental. While this would not eliminate waste entirely, it could reduce emissions by up to 33m tonnes as emissions can be reduced across the entire lifecycle of a product.¹⁰ Other benefits include improving resource security and safeguarding the natural environment.¹¹ Schemes such as the deposit return scheme are good examples of how the waste industry can be directly involved in the journey to lowering emissions and waste.



In addition to the benefits for the environment, there are substantial economic gains to be made from an innovative and productive waste and resources management sector. It is estimated that approximately 615,000 tonnes of material that is landfilled could be donated, repaired, or resold, where the reduction in waste management costs could save taxpayers around £60m a year.¹² There is also a substantial amount of recycled waste that could be repaired or resold, leading to more savings for taxpayers through reduced disposal costs. Moreover, moving to a circular economy would mean that products last longer and the cost of repairing items would reduce. This would, conceivably, lead to more people replacing items less often. It is estimated that, when combined, the gain could total £375m.¹³ The move to a circular economy could create 550,000 jobs by 2030,¹⁴ ranging from front-line jobs closing the raw material cycle, to education and design, and other less direct roles such as logistics.¹⁵ Outside of the circular economy, there will be a pressing need in the near-future to increase capacity across the sector, providing more job opportunities in traditional frontline roles, and also in emerging areas of priority such as redesign, behaviour change through policy, automation, and the recovery of high-value materials.¹⁶



CHALLENGES WITHIN THE INDUSTRY

Despite the centrality of the waste and resources management sector to our environmental and economic success, it has experienced significant challenges that, if unsolved, could be highly detrimental. 13.3% of all businesses in 2022 struggled to recruit, often due to common challenges such as economic inactivity and illness,¹⁷ yet the waste sector has faced particular challenges. SUEZ¹⁸ research found that 60% of respondents had found it difficult to fill various roles, such as frontline workers, specialist technical support roles, and project managers. Some challenges that are specific to the waste and resources management sector include:^{19 20 21 22}

- > **Relationships between public, private, and third sector stakeholders**
- > **Lack of competitive wages**
- > **Workforce leaving the UK following Brexit and Covid or other immigration challenges**
- > **Age of workforce meaning exposure to retirement**
- > **Work-related ill-health**

RECRUITMENT

A workforce reaching retirement age exposes the waste management sector to significant and potentially sharp losses, despite the evident need for industry-wide expansion. This necessitates that the sector actively and successfully recruits new people into the sector. It may be possible to attract young people to join the sector with the correct approach, with research suggesting that they want jobs that protect the future of the environment or do not have a negative impact on the planet.²³ Green jobs, especially those that are seen as modern, high-skilled, and interesting, are particularly attractive.²⁴ While many of the current and emerging roles in the waste industry fit this brief, presently many people 'fall into' the sector, rather than actively choosing a career in waste. An expansion and take up of roles in the industry is both fundamental for the success of the sector, but could also curb unemployment in roles that are gradually changing, like retail and hospitality, or in areas at risk of job losses due to Net Zero, such as the North East or West Midlands.²⁵ This does not mean that there is not an important place for an aging workforce, whose experience will be invaluable if they choose to transition into trainers and mentors for younger employees.

The potential expansion of roles to recruit for include: ^{26 27 28 29}



26,000

vacancies predicted for waste management industries by 2026



19,650

jobs for end of life electrical product remanufacturing, reuse, and repurposing



35,600

employees would be needed if every household in the UK sent an item a year for reuse, repair or remanufacture



2,500 - 3,500

additional frontline jobs collecting food waste



12,000 - 15,000

additional community jobs e.g., reuse shops, refurbishment



700+

new trainers needed

There are several challenging assumptions about the sector that may hinder recruitment, as roles are commonly seen as precarious and poorly paid.³⁰ Students, who often rely on careers advice, are not being exposed to how vital the sector will be, and how it can offer a fulfilling career that will help deliver the UK's environmental commitments.³¹ A perceived and actual lack of diversity also poses a significant barrier. The sector employs nearly 150,000 people in the UK, however most of these workers are white and male. Only 16% of the workforce are female, and 3% are from a minority ethnic group, compared to the national averages of 47% and 12% respectively.^{32 33} Raising awareness of how diverse a career in the waste and resources management sector is, therefore, only part of the solution. An intentional and sustained effort must be made to encourage the participation of under-represented groups, using techniques such as changing hiring practices and organisational cultures to remove this as a barrier.



SKILLS

There has been an increasing recognition that every job, in some way, must imminently adapt to become a 'green job', where companies across the board will need to invest in 'green skills' to hit their climate targets.³⁴

³⁵ The growing attention in green skills has been concentrated on energy-related skills, such as retrofitting homes or heat pump installation; the waste management industry being a smaller upskilling or reskilling consideration. The sector, however, can only achieve the change and impact needed by actively training a skilled workforce that can develop and deliver an innovative approach to waste management, with a particular emphasis on the circular economy. There is an inadequate level of provision for current sector needs, and these roles are constantly evolving. This highlights the need for increased and ongoing investment into upskilling and retraining, as it is essential if the sector is to have the right skills and capacity to lead on sustainable solutions and deliver on government objectives.³⁶

Some of the expected skills needed in the sector include:

- Circular economy, including reuse and repair, logistics, material handling
- Data, tech and IT, including improving digital literacy, knowledge of AI, packaging design
- Soft skills, such as change management, systems thinking, project management, communications, drivers
- Climate change focused, including carbon literacy and efficiency



It is estimated that around 20% of the sector hold no qualifications, and many may have had poor school experiences that act as a barrier when trying to engage them in adult education.³⁷ This may pose a substantial obstacle, as a growing number of roles require a degree-level qualification, and the number of roles that will require diverse yet specialised knowledge is only expected to increase as technological advancements are made.³⁸ While the diversity in skills may make it an incredibly exciting and innovative sector, it may also limit the clarity that recruits have on career progression, or the necessary continued professional development may put off workers from remaining in the sector.³⁹ Other skill-related challenges that are specific to the sector include logistical barriers, such as SME's and sole traders being unable to travel to, or take a day off for, training events. These actors may also not be aware of the avenues to find training.^{40 41} As 80% of the current workforce will still be active in 2030, it is important that policy and programmes do not only focus on attracting new recruits, and ensure that the opportunities are available to upskill or reskill through education and training. The sector has called for the government to invest, innovate, and create the infrastructure that will secure the future of the UK waste and resources management industry.⁴² This might include a Green Skills Fund or a national skills strategy that ensures the UK remains competitive with the offering in the USA or other European states.⁴³



The research aimed to investigate young people's perceptions on waste and resources management and any barriers that might prevent them from choosing the sector as a career. To do so, Groundwork developed a set of questions that were answered by 536 young people aged 16 to 24 online. In addition to the seven substantive questions, demographic data was collected about the participants, such as their gender, ethnicity, and disability status. The results have been analyzed and are presented in three overarching themes.



The importance of Net Zero

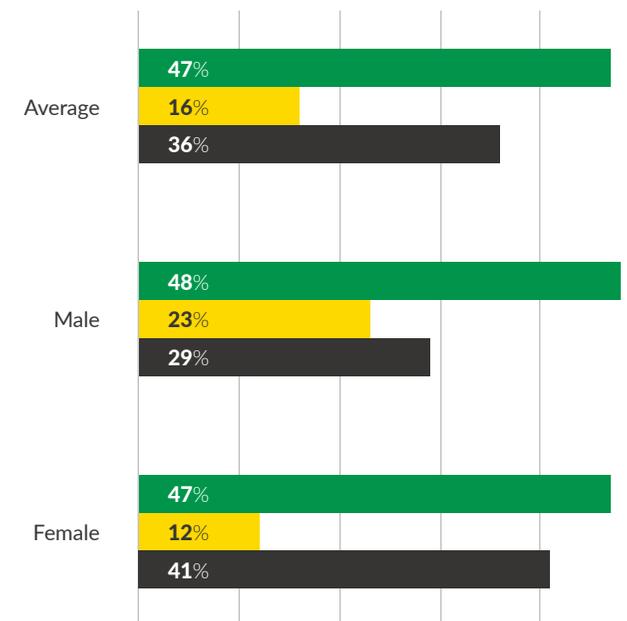
Our findings show that 47% of respondents felt that helping the UK reach its Net Zero targets was important, with only 16% stating that it was unimportant and 12% who were unsure. This shows that finding a career that supports Net Zero is more often important to young people than not; concurrent with other research conducted with young people in the UK. Male and female participants responded fairly equally, however there was an interesting difference between age groups. 29% of those aged 16 and 17 stated this was an important aim. This jumps to almost half (48%) for the 18 to 24 group. There were some differences between education levels which may explain some of this variation, with those university-educated or equivalent more likely than those educated to a secondary school level to find this an important consideration. While the average for those living with a disability was consistent with the overall average of 47%, there were some inter-group differences. Only 36% of those with a physical disability, compared to 51% of respondents with a mental health condition, felt that contributing to the delivery of Net Zero was important. Some speculative explanations for this difference may be that those living with a physical disability share the common perception that jobs that work towards Net Zero are manual and, therefore, may be less accessible. Finally, people from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds were more likely than the average to view supporting Net Zero delivery as important, at 67% and 55% respectively. This demonstrates the potential for the waste and resources management industry to diversify their talent pool.

When asked about specific green industries and career pathways, there were some interesting differences in responses. 36% of female respondents, for example, had not considered a career in any of the listed industries – the most common answer for the group. In comparison, only 19% of the male group had not considered any of the options. Instead, a career in digital and IT development was the most popular at 40%. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the male group had considered every industry more often than the female group with one exception, as females were very slightly more likely to have considered eco-design. The largest differences, at around 15%, were in manufacturing, construction and demolition, and waste and resources management.

It is important to recognise that although these differences may, at first, appear stark, the consideration of professions across all groups was fairly low. The average rate that an industry had been considered was never above 35% and, on average, 29% did not want to work in any of the industries. This highlights that there is still some work for employers offering green jobs to do to marry young people’s interest in climate friendly careers with the real-life jobs that are, or will be, on offer.

Responses to 'How important is it to you that your job helps the UK reach its Net Zero targets?'

BY GENDER

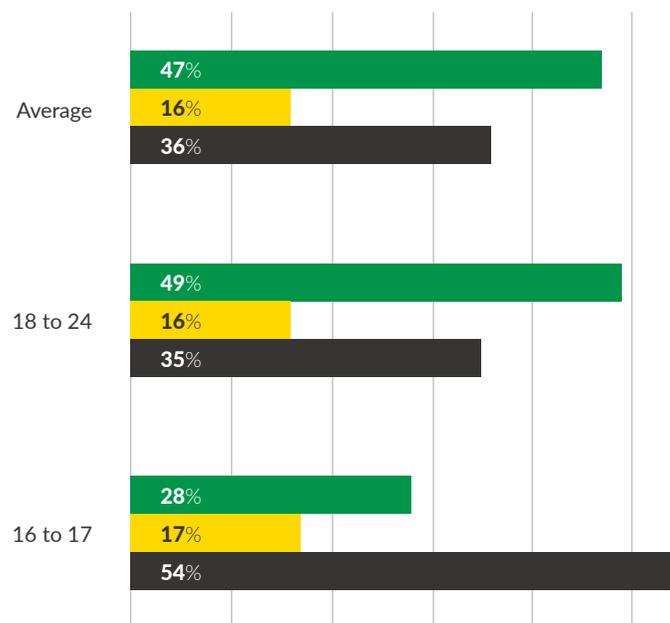


Percentage of Respondents

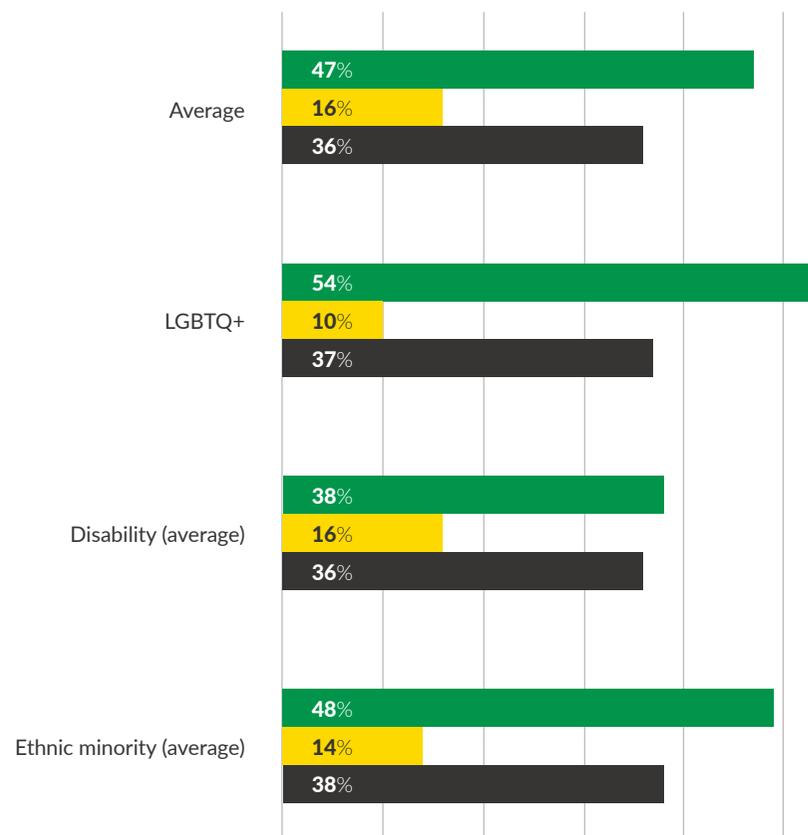
■ Important ■ Not Important ■ Neither or don't know

Responses to 'How important is it to you that your job helps the UK reach its Net Zero targets?'

BY AGE



BY PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS



Percentage of Respondents

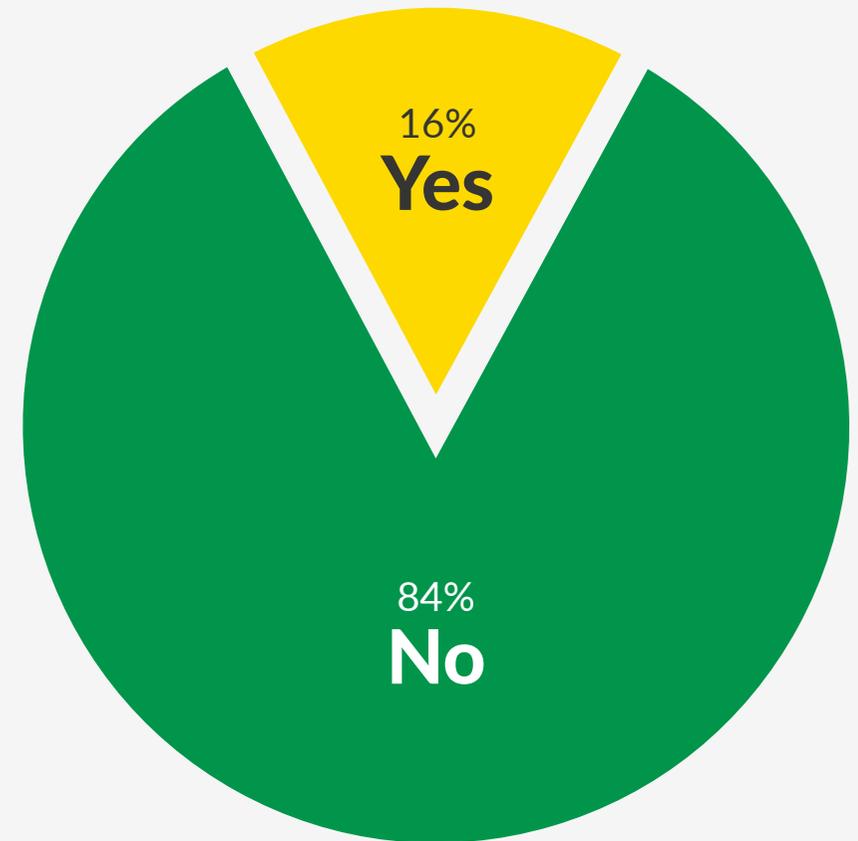
■ Important
 ■ Not Important
 ■ Neither or don't know

Waste as a career preference

When asked directly, 84% of respondents had not considered a career in the waste and resources management sector. It was a consistent trend across all demographic groups that more respondents had not considered the sector rather than had, yet there were some small but noteworthy differences between groups. In the North West, for example, 39% of respondents had considered waste and resources management as a career. This is in comparison to Wales, where 96% of respondents had not considered the sector, despite their higher preference for achieving Net Zero through their work.

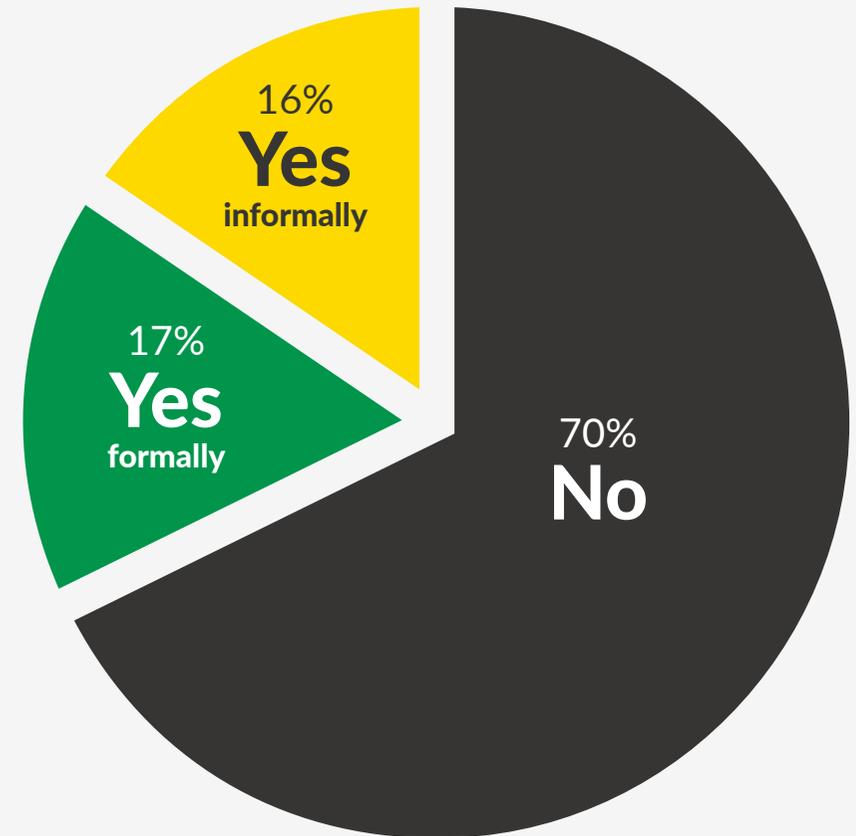
It would seem to make sense that the sector suffers from limited awareness when looking at how many respondents had received any formal or informal careers advice on the industry. This, again, was consistently low across all groups, averaging at 70% stating they had not received any careers advice on the skills required or roles available in the waste and resources management sector. There were some slight regional variations, such as 80% of those in the South East not receiving any formal or informal information. In contrast, 39% of those in the North East had received formal advice in school or college and 26% of respondents in Wales had received informal advice, compared to averages of 17% and 16% respectively. It is essential to highlight, however, that despite these differences, the majority of respondents in the North East and Wales had still not received any formal or informal careers advice.

Responses to 'Have you ever considered a career in the waste management sector?'



The perceived barriers to entry into the sector should be of interest to employers looking to diversify their recruitment methods to attract new workers into the sector. Around half of respondents believed that a lack of information about the sector was the main barrier to entry. Around a third on average also believed that the work is perceived as dirty or unappealing, the salary and benefits were insufficient compared to other sectors, and that the career progression and job stability was uncertain. Respondents in the 16 to 17 age category more often ranked the work as being dirty or unappealing (62%) and containing a lack of role models (42%) as barriers to entry, rather than the lack of information. Interestingly, black respondents were also more likely than the average to view a lack of role models as a barrier to entry (32% compared to 22%), which may suggest that younger groups and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be put off by the sector's current composition. In areas such as the South East and Northern Ireland, a barrier posed from lack of information sat higher than the average at 64%. Insufficient salary and benefits and uncertain career progression and job stability was more often seen as a barrier for those that are self-employed compared with the average, with uncertainty ranking the highest.

Responses to 'Have you ever received careers advice that informed you about the types of roles and skills needed for the waste and resource management sector?'



- Yes - informally e.g., family or friends
- Yes - formally e.g., at school or college

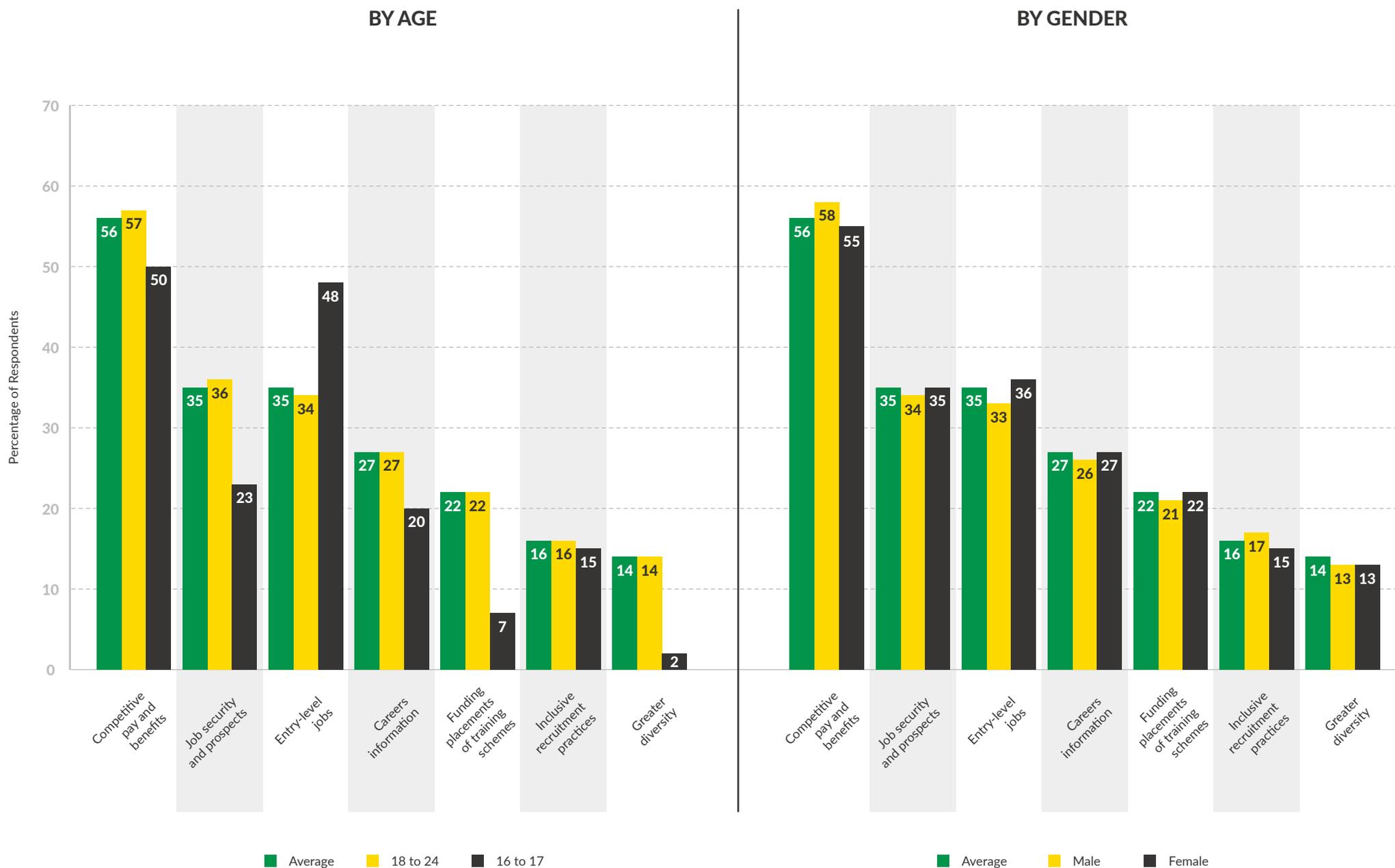
Attracting diverse talent

On average, respondents preferred to receive information about careers and vacancies via social media platforms (53%) and professional websites and job boards (50%). There was a notable deviation to some of the patterns in the responses from the 16 to 17-year-old category, as 71% wanted to receive information by social media. Moreover, only 17% wanted to receive direct emails and newsletters compared to the cohort average of 38%. In comparison, 61% of those not in work but seeking employment wanted to receive these emails and newsletters. Respondents living with a mental health condition were less likely than the average (26% compared to 36%) to select receiving careers information through workshops and networking events. Similar to the results on career preferences, it is important not to overstate any differences between groups on their preferences for receiving career information, and it would be beneficial to undertake more extensive research or look to other successful recruitment models to understand what works to attract particular groups.

Participants were asked what would encourage them to enter into the waste and resources management sector, with competitive pay and benefits, job security, and more entry-level jobs the three most popular choices. 69% of respondents from mixed ethnic backgrounds, 49% of those looking for work, 43% identifying as LGBTQ+, and 40% living with a mental health condition reported that more entry-level positions would allow them to enter the sector, compared to the 35% average. 32% of respondents with a physical disability advocated for more inclusive practices (16% on average), and 38% of respondents that were still in full-time education wanted to receive more careers advice (27% average). The average response for greater diversity as a pull factor to the industry was fairly small at 14%, however this jumps to over double at 32% for black respondents and 29% for Chinese respondents. This suggests that successful efforts made by businesses to improve diversity could trickle down and encourage those from ethnic minority groups to self-select into the sector in the future.

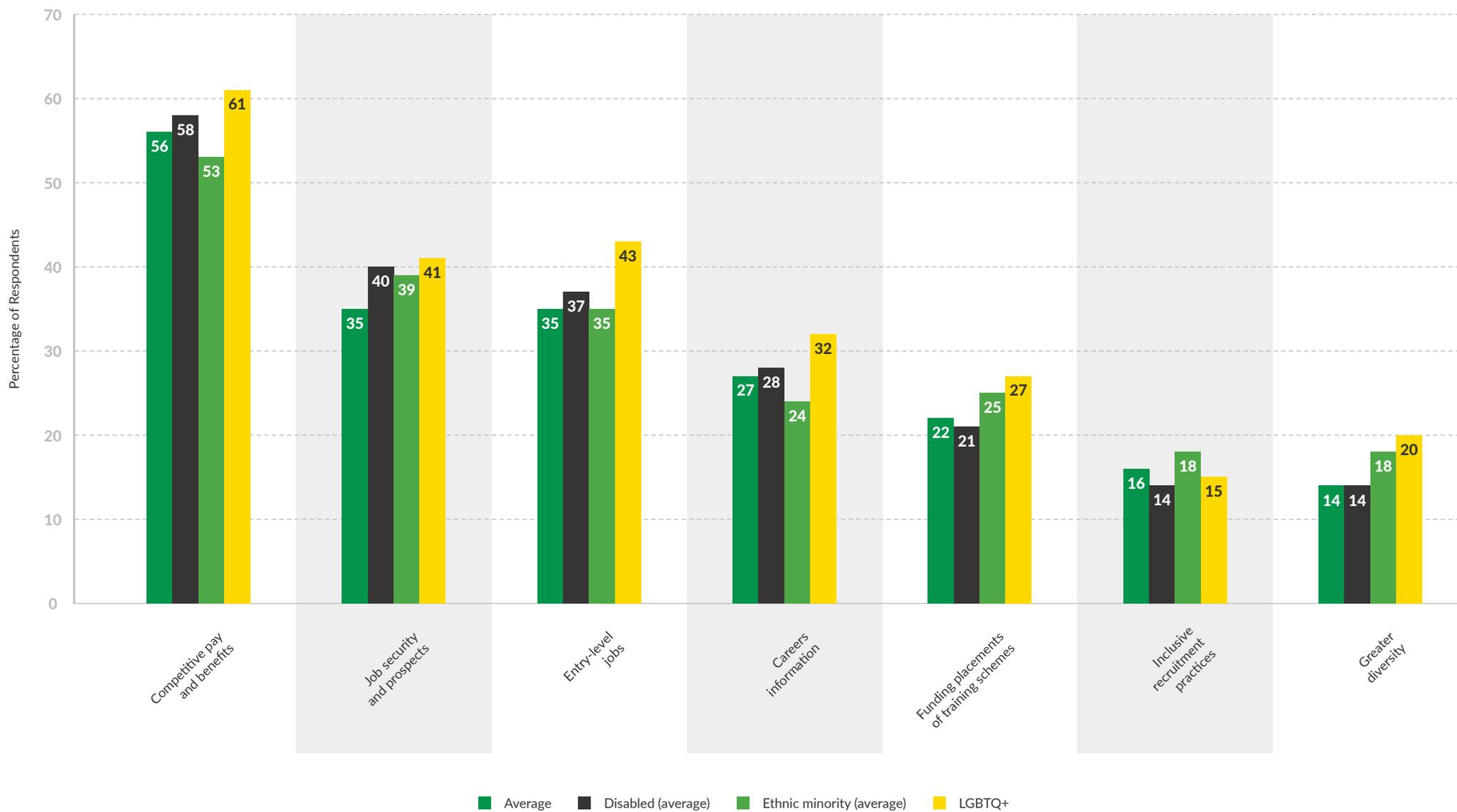


Responses to 'What would make you more likely to consider a career in the waste sector?'



Responses to 'What would make you more likely to consider a career in the waste sector?'

BY PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS



Government interventions

The UK is legally bound to various Net Zero and climate change targets that will impact the waste and resources management sector. The Environment Act 2021 sets out that by 2050 residual waste must be halved and biodegradable municipal waste in landfills must be eliminated, and avoidable plastic waste must be eliminated by 2042.⁴⁴ While there are several government-backed schemes that will support the sector to reach these goals (e.g., extended producer responsibility packaging scheme, consistent collections project, and deposit return scheme) progress has been slow and clarity is still needed on how each policy can benefit businesses, consumers, and households.⁴⁵

Running alongside the legislative targets and requirements, the previous Conservative government prioritised a 'ladder of opportunity', created by academic and technical qualifications at Level 3 or above to attempt to fill the skills gap. This included measures like the Advanced British Standard, T Levels, Skills Bootcamps, and Higher Technical Qualifications. This has arguably meant a lack of focus on vocational pathways into work, particularly at Level 2 or below, despite this being where many employers recruit their employees into the sector. The knock-on effect of this is that for those who do not achieve a Level 2 qualification, getting onto this 'ladder' is unachievable. Instead, the industry has suggested the use of more practical training, rather than academic testing, to increase accessibility, with subsequent career progression left to employers. Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) were introduced to put employers at the heart of local skills systems. This may have some benefit for local employers and stakeholders, however does not ensure that training and skills are being delivered in a standardised manner, or that a flow of recruits is accessible by larger, national bodies.

Under the previous government, the Green Jobs Delivery Group⁴⁶ brought together national and local government, industry stakeholders, education and skills providers, and more to work together to create a UK workforce plan that will ensure that we reach our environmental commitments. This included sector-specific working groups, such as Waste and Resources, who have worked to identify where there are workforce shortages and skills gaps, and how both new recruits and existing workers can access opportunities that lead to low carbon and nature-positive careers. It is vital that government policy over the course of the next Parliament are informed by intelligence from industry, to move away from a supply-driven approach to a demand-led skills system.

The Labour Party manifesto⁴⁷ sets out a vision for creating 650,000 new high-quality jobs through their planned transition to a clean-energy system. The manifesto details that they intend to involve various industries and ensure that opportunities are created across the entire country. In addition, there are plans for a British Jobs Bonus that will reward clean energy developers who offer good jobs, terms and conditions, and utilise industrial heartlands, coastal areas, and energy communities when building their supply chain. While the Kings Speech⁴⁸ did not directly mention green jobs, there were explicit commitments for the new Government to establish Skills England, pursue sustainable economic growth through investment in industry and skills, and to work towards a clean energy transition through the creation of Great British Energy. Data produced by Energy & Utility Skills, however, highlights how steep the challenge ahead may be, given that a number of industries that are critical for green economic growth are competing to fill skills gaps with a talented and, importantly, more diverse workforce.⁴⁹

Government investment and initiatives are seen as critical to enabling sectors like the waste and resources management industry to grow economically and environmentally, however recent efforts have fallen short in terms of garnering enough demand whilst also not offering an appropriate supply. There has, for example, been a decline in the take-up of Level 2 apprenticeships since 2015,⁵⁰ meanwhile programmes like Kickstart include a very small number of green courses.⁵¹ It is vital that the government works collaboratively with the sector, as they will have to contribute much of the investment into new infrastructure that will change current practices, increase vacancies, and deliver training. This will include overcoming the feeling from some businesses that consultations leave them unclear on the detail of plans, and that the time given to respond does not allow them to fully engage.⁵²



What can the sector do?

It is imperative that the challenges of recruitment and skills are tackled in a coordinated way. The number of roles, trajectory of the skills required, and demand for recruits is relatively well-understood, meaning that the system must be designed to accommodate industry need. Closing the skills gap will mean a balanced flow of supply and demand, where the industry can be confident that there is a continuous stream of highly skilled workers, who themselves can then rely on finding and remaining in sustainable, secure employment.



RECRUITMENT

Securing a sustained flow of recruits will be essential for the sector as the UK strives to meet Net Zero and international climate commitments. As research suggests that young people want jobs that protect the future of the environment, waste and resources management should, in theory, be able to comfortably attract young people into the multitude of modern, high-skilled, and interesting roles that are, or will be, on offer. Concurrent with other findings, the participants in this study reported that they value employment that works towards Net Zero, however they had contemplated specific green career pathways fairly infrequently and an explicit consideration of waste and resources management was limited. More than half of the respondents felt that not knowing enough about the sector and its opportunities was a barrier. This shows that the industry needs to make itself more visible to help the UK achieve its climate goals and should use methods that young people are more receptive to.

Cranfield University's Exploring Sustainable Futures Game

Cranfield University's Masters students have been participating in the **Exploring Sustainable Futures Game** as part of its **Sustainability Business Specialist Apprenticeship**.

This part-time, remote programme equips current executives with the technical knowledge and management capabilities to drive positive change in their organisations and share their knowledge and experiences with their colleagues and peers.



In the game, players represent established businesses, entrepreneurs, policymakers, civil society, and the public to interact and react to changes in the economy, technology, and society.

To win, players must achieve their purpose and accumulate resources by working collaboratively. The initial findings show the game deepens skills and learning in relation to sustainability, systems change and environmental, social and governance (ESG). This has included:

- > The radically different, plausible futures that could happen
- > The interrelationship between business, society, and the wider living world
- > What might have to change for sustainable development to happen
- > The scope for actors to regenerate or degrade society

The team are looking to grow the project to continue transforming the knowledge of sustainability to engender change. The game can be adapted for multiple contexts to facilitate a desired outcome. This includes both corporate and educational settings where, for example, schoolchildren can understand the value of their actions and the role different actors can play in societal change. As the waste and resources management industry will be a central service for a sustainable future, this model could help spark the interest of current or future workers to consider a career in the sector as a tangible way to contribute to a sustainable future.

Led by IEMA, the **Green Careers Hub** (GCH) is a collaboration of over 40 organisations (including Government, employers and other bodies) that share content, information, and opportunities on green skills, jobs and careers.

The GCH has 3 central aims:

- Be the go-to resource for anybody who wants to find out more about green skills and jobs
- Bring together key stakeholders to champion green careers
- Support diversification of the profession



The GCH stems from the understanding that organisations cannot achieve the transition to green jobs on their own; partnership and collaboration are critical. By bringing together a wide range of partners, it is possible to develop content, scale outreach, and signpost to experts doing fantastic work in this space. The forward-looking approach transforms potential competition to collaboration, which is vital to drive the change needed. Engaging with organisations across different sectors is a strong way to emphasise that all jobs can be greener.

The launch campaign saw great engagement on social media posts – exceeding the target and hitting over 1m views of the video case studies across all campaign activity since the launch. There has been a 71% rise in engagement across posts, showing that this is only the start for the GCH. IEMA are looking and researching into future phases, to understand how a wider range of audiences can be supported.

The results suggest that any efforts made to promote the Net Zero credentials of the sector or to advertise career opportunities must be paired with tackling the perceived barriers of diversity and accessibility in order to be maximally effective. Increasing the number of role models and entry-level positions can encourage young people from priority groups to apply for jobs in the sector, and improve their confidence in finding a desirable career to progress in.

New to Nature

New to Nature was a programme of paid work placements designed to deliver life-changing career opportunities for people from under-represented groups, whilst contributing to wider efforts to create a more diverse and accessible natural environment sector.

The programme was developed to respond to the need for a new green workforce and a lack of diversity in the environmental sector, and was delivered through a partnership of Groundwork, Youth Environmental Service, Prince's Trust, Disability Rights UK, and Mission Diverse. It is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



The New to Nature model was made up of the following activities:

- Creating a diverse portfolio of opportunities hosted by committed organisations
- Utilising outreach strategies and accessible recruitment strategies to attract applicants from priority groups and break down barriers
- Creating full-time, 12-month work placements paid at the Real Living Wage with a personal budget
- Participants offered careers support, training and networking to support long-term career development
- Capability building and networking with placement hosts to support them to become more diverse and inclusive
- Gathering and dissemination feedback, evidence, and learning to inform future practice

There is scope to test the applicability of the model in other sectors that have similar challenges in terms of recruitment and diversity. As waste and resources management is dominated by a small number of large private companies and a wide infrastructure of SMEs and sole traders, public bodies and charities could provide valuable, entry-level experiences for people at the start of their career or re-skilling.

In 2023, data from New to Nature delivery showed that 98 young people were recruited as New to Nature Trainees, hosted by 82 different environmental organizations. Impressively, 86% of these trainees came from priority groups, with 29% from ethnically diverse backgrounds, 42% being disabled, 63% from low-income backgrounds, and 54% belonging to more than one priority group. All trainees reported that the program allowed them to gain new skills and experiences beneficial for their future careers. Additionally, 92% of the trainees expressed confidence in finding a job in their desired field, and 94% felt confident about progressing within their chosen careers.

Energy & Utilities Careers & Jobs

Energy & Utilities Careers & Jobs is a collaboration of 18 leading organisations bought together by Energy & Utility Skills, advertising a range of professional opportunities, graduate progression routes, and apprenticeships.

The platform has contributed to the sector-wide workforce by attracting talent through building knowledge, direct engagement, and brand promotion.

Energy & Utilities Careers & Jobs offers benefits for both employers and prospective employees. For organisations, it has a proven record for attracting diverse applicants (e.g., female, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, service leavers) and streamlining the workforce development cycle. Utilising this single point of reference provides cost and time efficiencies related to engagement, attraction and recruitment, meaning that businesses can reduce their costs while securing a high-quality talent pipeline. Prospective candidates can use the intuitive search tool to find opportunities based on sector, job type, work hours, salary, and location. In addition, they can upload a CV for employers to view, and receive job alerts.

Waste and resources management, energy, and utilities will all have to build a green workforce to ensure that the UK can cut carbon emissions and reach net zero by 2050. By creating a platform that explicitly displays the opportunities and benefits available in green industries, employers can more easily develop, recruit and retain a workforce of young people, apprentices, graduates, redeployed professionals, and service leavers.



SKILLS

Waste and resources management offers a diverse array of career pathways, and this is only expected to increase as roles continue to emerge and evolve. The skills required cover various types of abilities and expertise, ranging from the use of AI and technology to physical handling of materials and repairs. Our research found that 70% of respondents had not received any formal or informal careers advice on the skills required or roles available in waste and resources management, meaning that the majority would be reliant on other routes in, such as 'falling into' the sector or personal interest.

The sector can only achieve the change and impact needed by actively training a skilled workforce that can develop and deliver an innovative approach to waste management. It is understood, however, that sole traders and SMEs can find it difficult to find the time or expertise to train people, highlighting the need for a collaborative approach, where private industry, government, and charities must work in partnership to strengthen take-up and delivery.



Cadent Foundation Green Doctor Academy

The Cadent Foundation **Green Doctor Academy**, developed in partnership with Groundwork, will create 35 new Green Doctors – independent energy advisors who visit homes to offer practical guidance on energy saving, behaviour change tips and referrals to other local support services – over the next three years.

There is currently a significant green-skills shortage across the UK – with the demand for roles significantly out-weighting capacity. The need for jobs to enable the transition to net zero, tackle environmental issues and inequalities and support the development of new green technology is never more needed.



In response, the programme offers a 12-month traineeship and is open to people of all ages, with a key focus on those who have a disability, are from an ethnic minority background, a low-income household or are unemployed from local communities, in order to create more accessible environmental jobs pathways and inspire people from diverse backgrounds to view green jobs as a viable career option. The programme is designed to attract diverse talent into the sector by being as accessible as possible, with a central focus on the recruitment process. This will be done by:

- Minimising specific requirements and encouraging applicants who have interpersonal skills, commitment to our mission, and the motivation to learn
- Promoting the opportunity through local networks and partnerships, advertisements and newsletters, and social media
- Being explicit when using positive action in recruitment adverts and shortlisting processes and using the tie-break principle to select candidates
- Making reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process and work environment, including extra support and equipment

Subject to appetite and capacity, this model could be successfully replicated in the waste and resources sector to ensure young people can gain the much-needed experience and skills they need for future careers.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Whitestone Insight is a specialist public opinion and research firm based in Westminster, and is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.
For full tables visit www.whitestoneinsight.com
- ² The waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste | DEFRA
- ³ Industry at a glance | Environmental Services Association
- ⁴ A vision for the future of UK waste | Enfinium
- ⁵ Beyond Waste: Essential Skills for a Greener Tomorrow | CIWM
- ⁶ GRJ0062 Written evidence submitted | CIWM, WAMITAB & UK Resources Council
- ⁷ A vision for the future of UK waste | Enfinium
- ⁸ The waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste | DEFRA
- ⁹ The waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste | DEFRA
- ¹⁰ Delivering climate ambition through a more circular economy | WRAP
- ¹¹ The waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste | DEFRA
- ¹² Routes to reuse: Maximising value from reused materials | Local Government Association
- ¹³ Routes to reuse: Maximising value from reused materials | Local Government Association
- ¹⁴ Delivering climate ambition through a more circular economy | WRAP
- ¹⁵ Skills for the Future: The Journey to 2030 | CIWM
- ¹⁶ Too good to waste: Tapping the potential of vocational education and training in the waste management sector | CEDEFOP
- ¹⁷ Skills and labour shortages | House of Commons Library
- ¹⁸ Modern apprenticeships address emerging skills gaps | SUEZ
- ¹⁹ Reuse in the UK and Ireland – a ‘State of the Nations report for the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management | CIWM
- ²⁰ Pay rates amongst refuse workers in the UK | APSE
- ²¹ Green skills for education and employment | UK Parliament
- ²² Executive Summary of Waste and Recycling Industry Safety Statistics, 2023 | FirstMats Research Hub
- ²³ A greener workforce for a greener future | British Gas
- ²⁴ Green shoots: growing the green workforce of the future | Green Alliance
- ²⁵ GRJ0062 Written evidence submitted | CIWM, WAMITAB & UK Resources Council
- ²⁶ Levelling up through circular economy jobs | Green Alliance
- ²⁷ Waste Management Industry: workforce and skills profile | Energy & Utility Skills
- ²⁸ Beyond Waste: Essential Skills for a Green Tomorrow | CIWM
- ²⁹ Skills for the Future: The Journey to 2030 | CIWM
- ³⁰ GRJ0062 Written evidence submitted | CIWM, WAMITAB & UK Resources Council
- ³¹ A blueprint for green workforce transformation | Deloitte & IEMA
- ³² Green skills for education and employment | UK Parliament
- ³³ Waste Management Industry: workforce and skills profile | Energy & Utility Skills
- ³⁴ A blueprint for green workforce transformation | Deloitte & IEMA
- ³⁵ Green shoots: growing the green workforce of the future | Green Alliance
- ³⁶ GRJ0062 Written evidence submitted | CIWM, WAMITAB & UK Resources Council
- ³⁷ Green skills: Identifying skills gaps in the waste sector | Circular
- ³⁸ GRJ0062 Written evidence submitted | CIWM, WAMITAB & UK Resources Council
- ³⁹ A blueprint for green workforce transformation | Deloitte & IEMA
- ⁴⁰ Green skills: Identifying skills gaps in the waste sector | Circular
- ⁴¹ Green skills for education and employment | UK Parliament
- ⁴² GRJ0062 Written evidence submitted | CIWM, WAMITAB & UK Resources Council
- ⁴³ Green skills for education and employment | UK Parliament
- ⁴⁴ The waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste | DEFRA
- ⁴⁵ How the industry reacted to the latest Deposit Return Scheme delay | Speciality Food
- ⁴⁶ Green Jobs Delivery Group | gov.uk
- ⁴⁷ Labour’s Manifesto – Make Britain a clean energy super power | The Labour Party
- ⁴⁸ The Kings Speech 2024 | Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street
- ⁴⁹ Many Skills One Vision | Energy & Utilities Skills Partnership
- ⁵⁰ Green skills for education and employment | UK Parliament
- ⁵¹ The UK has a willing green workforce, it just needs to train them | Inside Track
- ⁵² Resources and waste strategy for England | DEFRA



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