

YOUNG PEOPLE AND GREEN JOBS

This briefing provides a summary of the key findings from research designed with Groundwork's Youth Advisory Board. The project explored how young people want policy to respond to issues that are important to them, such as green jobs and mental health. The document is part of a series of briefings that provides all young people with an accessible tool for engaging in meaningful conversations on decisions that will shape their future. The Youth Advisory Board members have been invited to participate and give feedback at every stage of the project to ensure the results genuinely reflect their views, highlighting the importance of inclusive, coproduced research.

GREEN JOBS: CONTEXT

What are green jobs? What opportunities could be made available?

A green job is an “activity that directly contributes to, or indirectly supports, the achievement of the UK's net zero emissions target and helps mitigate climate risks”.¹

There is a huge potential for growth across many sectors in the UK:

- 725,000 jobs could be created in industries such as construction, nature, decarbonizing power and energy, the circular economy, transport, and other 'heavy' industry like exporting, to support the net zero transition.²
- Improving woodland, peatland and urban parks could create 16,050 jobs. In particular, these roles could be created in areas that are experiencing the most acute employment challenges.³
- Suez calculated that if everyone repaired one item per year rather than throwing away, 40,000 jobs would be needed.⁴
- 6,000 new solar engineers will be required to meet demand in the future.⁵

¹ Green Jobs Taskforce, 'Green Jobs Taskforce report', 14 Jul 2021.

² Green Alliance, 'Green shoots: growing the green workforce of the future', 23 Jan 2024.

³ Ibid at 2.

⁴ SUEZ, 'Re-use: Seizing the opportunity', 04 Apr 2023.

⁵ Energy and Utility Skills, 'Workforce Renewal and Skills Strategy 2020-2025', 05 Jun 2020.

⁶ Groundwork, 'Growing Green Careers', Apr 2022.

⁷ Green Alliance, 'Green shoots: growing the green workforce of the future', 23 Jan 2024.

⁸ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'Economic security: A foundation for dignity, opportunity and hope in an age of uncertainty', 20 Jul 2023. Money and Mental Health, 'Untapped potential: Reducing economic inactivity among people with mental health problems', 13 Mar 2023.

⁹ Resolution Foundation, 'Left behind: Exploring the prevalence of youth worklessness due to ill health in different parts of the UK', Jun 2023. King's Trust, 'Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution', Nov 2023.

Work, health, and young people

- Two thirds of employers are struggling to recruit into roles that support the Net Zero economy.⁶
- It is estimated that reducing the number of NEET 20-24-year-olds could add £38bn to the UK economy over time through increased productivity and less reliance on services.⁷
- There are currently 2.7m people that are out of work due to ill health or disability, with 1 in 4 long-term sickness cases listing poor mental health as their primary condition, and 1 in 8 people that are inactive for any reason listing a mental health issue as their primary condition.⁸
- In the most deprived local authorities in England, youth worklessness due to poor health is twice as high than in the least deprived. Young people who are NEET are around 10% less likely to feel confident that they understand terms such as Net Zero.⁹



What barriers do young people experience?

Knowledge: A Groundwork report in 2021 found that 33% of young people wanted more information and resources on green careers and pathways. Research conducted 3 years later by Groundwork showed that this rate remained high, with 27% still wanting more careers information. This is consistent with findings from the King's Trust, that only 27% of young people had heard the term 'green jobs', and less than half could explain the types of jobs that exist in the green economy.¹⁰

Qualifications: Young people who are taught about green jobs during their education are more interested in these roles, yet less than half have heard about green careers during their education. Youth Employment UK found that only 36% of young people believe that their secondary school understands the skills that employers are looking for, and only one third feel supported by their school. There is a perception that many roles in the green economy require advanced educational qualifications. Young people are acutely aware of this barrier, with only 5% stating that someone in a green job would be someone without a university degree.¹¹

Cost: The cost of training, uniform, and digital equipment can be prohibitive, and it is impossible for many to gain experience as there is a heavy reliance on voluntary or low-paid work. This is further compounded by roles that are short-term and temporary, as these cannot offer the opportunities for security and progression that are essential for many young people entering into the labour market.¹²

Diversity: Many 'green' organisations lack diversity. Only 7% of staff in the environment sector identify as part of an ethnic minority group, and only 14% of construction workers identify as women. This leads young people to believe the sector is 'not for them'. When researching the waste and resources management industry, Groundwork found that almost a third of Black respondents wanted greater diversity in the sector, and a similar percentage of those with physical disabilities would feel encouraged by more inclusive hiring practices.¹³

GREEN JOBS: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Groundwork researched young people aged 16 to 24 and found that they wanted policy responses that are long-term, preventative and publicly financed to ensure that policy can tackle persistent issues and prevent crises from arising. They also wanted policymakers to consult with those who have lived experience and local communities throughout the process to facilitate appropriate decision-making. In general, green jobs were regarded as highly important, yet inaccessible due to a lack of entry-level positions and a lack of relevant training opportunities.

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I don't think you can suddenly get a load of 22 year olds and say 'do this job, care about this' ... The interest in nature and environment has to happen earlier, and I think for young people to have access to nature from a young age (will mean that) they want to protect it.

Focus group participant

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¹⁰ Groundwork, 'Youth in a Changing Climate', Nov 2021. Groundwork, 'Planning for the future: Recruiting diverse talent into waste and resources management', Sept 2024. King's Trust, 'Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution', Nov 2023.

¹¹ King's Trust, 'Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution', Nov 2023. Youth Employment UK, 'Youth Voice Census 2024', Sept 2024.

¹² Green Alliance, 'Green shoots: growing the green workforce of the future', 23 Jan 2024. Groundwork, 'New to Nature Inclusive Recruitment Guide', Nov 2023. King's Trust, 'Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution', Nov 2023.

¹³ Wildlife and Countryside Link, 'Race and the Environmental Emergency: Call for Written Evidence', Nov 2023. Go Construct, 'Women in Construction'. Groundwork, 'Ensuring Equity in the Green Transition', Aug 2023. Groundwork, 'Planning for the future: Recruiting diverse talent into waste and resources management', Sept 2024.

- > **11 members of Groundwork's YAB took part in focus groups where having access to, and the importance of, green jobs was regularly discussed.** They believed that attainable opportunities in green roles should be the normal experience of job-seeking, however a lack of entry-level positions and low visibility of green jobs make them inaccessible for many.
- > **While there was a strong call for businesses to improve their early career pathways and recruitment into these roles, young people wanted to see revisions made at the governmental level to education and training so that every individual can be prepared for work in the green economy.** Tangible policy changes included ensuring that the national curriculum provided students with an integrated, solutions-focused education that fostered a greater connection to the environment, or increasing worthwhile apprenticeships and training schemes. Importantly, opportunities such as apprenticeships were held to be necessary for new workers and for those transitioning or returning to the labour market.
- > **The interdependency between green jobs and mental health was raised in the focus groups.** The discussions went further than a recognition that being in good health means you're more likely to enter, and remain in, employment. Young people offered an insightful awareness that investment in green careers would likely lead to fruitful returns from higher productivity and a lower healthcare bill due to improved mental health. Green jobs were valued as able to offer a particular boost to mental

health as it could involve doing something for the local community, spending time in nature, or finding the work meaningful. This was especially important for young people who felt that their climate anxiety could be reduced by taking practical action in their work.

- > **125 young people completed an online survey.** All regions of England were represented in the responses, as well as Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and over three quarters were not current or previous beneficiaries of Groundwork projects. Around half of those who responded to the survey were unclear on what roles or work would constitute a 'green job' and only one third were aware of the skills or experience needed to be attractive to green employers. Despite 65% of respondents feeling that they did not have enough information on green jobs, there was still a considerable amount of interest in various industries that do (or will) offer green careers. The most popular choices were agriculture, farming or forestry, fashion and consumer goods, healthcare, renewables, transport, and travel and recreation.
- > **Over two thirds of the young people agreed that a lack of entry-level positions or pathways was a barrier, which is both concurrent with the focus group findings and the previous research conducted.** Only 2% of the 125 respondents did not feel that young people would experience any barriers when trying to access green jobs.

Percentage of survey respondents who agreed that young people experience this barrier when accessing green jobs

