

Climate Jobs: Building a workforce for the climate emergency

Chapter 1: Why we need to act-the urgency of now.

Technical Companion

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Skills and the FE sector

Graham Petersen

The scale of the problem

Green skills can't be seen in isolation from the systemic failures surrounding vocational education and training (VET) in the UK. There is a skills crisis. Even the Government recognises this:

Unlike many of our OECD peers, this country has not always shown further education the esteem it deserves, with too many people – and too many employers - wrongly believing that studying for a degree at university is the only worthwhile marker of success”

We will move on from previous underestimations of further and technical education and reinforce its pivotal role as a pathway to a bright future.” Gavin Williamson’s Foreword to the Skills for Jobs White Paper 2021

The hypocrisy of this statement is breath-taking. The last 11 years of Conservative-led administrations has seen the further education sector decimated by funding cuts and failed policy initiatives. Williamson would like us to think that the problem lies with *‘this country’* and the *‘people,’* and not at the heart of government. Even the Institute for Government felt obliged to point out that *‘The sector has undergone five major reorganisations during the last two decades, and no institution has survived for longer than a decade, making it difficult for any of them to build the necessary experience and skills to learn, adapt and become more effective over time.*

[IfG_All_change_report_FINAL.pdf \(instituteforgovernment.org.uk\)](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/IfG_All_change_report_FINAL.pdf)

A report by the Industrial Strategy Commission highlighted that in 2020 *‘the UK is set to fall to 28th out of 32 OECD countries for intermediate (upper-secondary) skills. Comparatively we have a small and underperforming technical sector, largely underfunded, hardly noticed, and run in totally different and too often disconnected ways from either the higher education or school sectors that sit either side of it.*

[Laying-the-Foundations-the-Industrial-Strategy-Commission.pdf \(industrialstrategycommission.org.uk\)](https://www.industrialstrategycommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Laying-the-Foundations-the-Industrial-Strategy-Commission.pdf)

There has been a failure to integrate a skills strategy into climate, industrial strategy, planning, and social justice policies and there is little sign of this improving. The Government’s Skills for Jobs White paper published in January 2021 contains only one sentence on the green economy and is yet another missed opportunity to develop a strategic approach.

Green skills and the FE sector – Every job requires green skills. It is one reason why the UCU has launched, with the NUS, a campaign to ‘Decarbonise and decolonise the curriculum’ [UCU - Decarbonise & decolonise 2030](#) There are jobs in ‘climate critical ’ sectors such as energy, transport and construction which will need a massive investment in training programmes to meet the potential demand. Unless the supply and demand for these skills is brought together, we will repeat the experience of the failures of the Green Home Grant. Consistency rather than policy flip flop is essential. Developing an apprenticeship programme can’t just be turned on and off like a tap.

What is needed

Of course, the problem is not just with government policy. The Learning at Work Institute Report in July 2021 '*shows that the decline in employer training over the past decade mean workers get 20 million fewer training days each year than if training had stayed at 2011 levels. It also shows that UK employers invest less per employee than many other countries.* Union action to address this is vital.

Vocational Education and Training is a vital part of the response to the climate crisis. The TUC publication 'Cutting Carbon: Growing Green Skills' identifies examples of union action. [Cutting carbon, growing skills – green skills for a just transition | Unionlearn](#) Yet the ability of unions to support skills development has not been helped by the Government decision to scrap funding for the Union Learning Fund in England.

The Friends of the Earth / Transition Economics report 'An emergency plan on green jobs for young people highlights the importance of the FE sector in delivering the apprenticeships and upskilling of existing workers. [An emergency plan on green jobs for young people | Policy and insight \(friendsoftheearth.uk\)](#)

An expansion of VET should support issues like **diversity** in employment sectors to be addressed. For example, in construction:

If it is to meet its future recruitment needs, the sector will need a more diverse workforce. Despite its size, the construction workforce is one of the least diverse: 86% of construction workers are male and 94% are white.' [Construction Sector Deal \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

The Green Jobs Taskforce Report makes recommendations on skills which have implications for the FE sector. Of course, there is no guarantee that these will be adopted or have the funding needed for implementation. [Green Jobs Taskforce report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Further Education (FE) Colleges and Universities are key to imparting the knowledge, skills and competences required by young people and the existing workforce for a transition to a green economy and coordinating work-based training provision. Climate literacy needs to be embedded in curricula and in each, and every occupational profile. FE colleges have too long been deprived of funding and the capacity to develop comprehensive vocational education and training (VET) programmes in well-equipped workshops and classrooms, despite their key role. Local and regional authorities need to work with colleges, universities, and trade unions to

develop plans and programmes to meet carbon emission reduction targets and to ensure a smooth just transition.

Additional measures include:

Funding the FE Sector - Creating a network of National and Regional Centres of Excellence for Zero Carbon Skills at further education colleges. For this to deliver at the scale required and with social justice as a central element require:

Union rights - A legal framework that supports union rep engagement on economic restructuring that will impact on job retention and creation, conditions of service **and skills requirements** at workplace, sector, and national level.

Skills Audits - Industrial Sectors must have a clearly defined Skills pathway linked to zero carbon emissions. Sector Councils and associated employers above a certain size must carry out skills audits to ensure lifelong learning is rooted in job enhancement and employability.

Climate Commissions – Established across national, regional, and local government. Green job creation and skills development should be standing items on the agenda, with task groups to draw up detailed proposals.

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