

# Value of apprenticeships and National Apprenticeships Week

## Westminster Hall debate

4<sup>th</sup> February 2025



### Background

- [National Apprenticeships Week](#) is an annual celebration encouraging everyone to consider and celebrate how apprenticeships and skills help individuals develop rewarding careers, and employers to develop a workforce with future-ready skills. This year it is running from 10<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> February.
- Central to tackling the climate and nature crises is building a work force with the skills and training to realise the transition to a greener society. Apprenticeships are a key route to building these homegrown green skills.
- We face a major green skills gap in the UK. There is currently no official skills data across sectors, but in the energy sector alone it is [estimated](#) there will be a shortage of 200,000 jobs if the UK is to meet its climate targets.
- Green jobs are not just in energy. There is also a need to build skills in areas like land management, planning services, the circular economy, and nature conservation.
- Skills England was launched by the government in July and will forecast future skills need. This will be crucial for identifying what sort of courses, such as apprenticeships, need to be supported by government, education providers and business, including in green industries. Its [first report](#) highlighted the “green workforce” as one of four key sectors identified as having strong economic importance.
- In September, the government [announced reforms](#) to the apprenticeship system in England, replacing the apprenticeship levy with a new growth and skills levy. The apprenticeships and other training eligible for funding under the levy will be informed by Skills England’s assessment of priority skills needs.
- As of February 2024, 851,000 young people were [not in education, employment or training](#), a 0.2% increase from the previous year. The offer of attractive green apprenticeships can help tackle this.

### What skills are needed in green industries?

- Currently it is hard to fully quantify where we are lacking the skills required to deliver the green changes needed. However, research conducted by some industries highlights the scale of the challenge.
- Solar UK data suggests there were 9,000 full-time equivalent workers in the solar industry in 2022. This will need to be significantly expanded to deliver the Government’s manifesto commitment of trebling solar capacity by 2030. However, the lack of any solar specific apprenticeships is a challenge. The growth and skills levy must support sectors such as solar where new entrants can take many different routes into the industry.
- To meet government targets of installing 600,000 heat pumps by 2028, 27,000 skilled heat pump engineers [will be needed](#). In 2022 there were only around 3,000, with the low numbers of training practitioners highlighted as a reason that training this workforce is tricky.

- There is a severe skills shortage in ecology, particularly within local authorities. This has been highlighted by [professional bodies for the sector](#) and by [the Environmental Audit Committee](#), both of whom note that a lack of people trained with ecology skills will stymie efforts to restore habitats and reduce flooding, as well as slowing down the approval of planning applications.

### **How can government ensure apprenticeships deliver the skills needed to meet the climate and nature crisis head on?**

- Government must ensure skills are supported across the environmental sector, not just in energy. Whilst a new Office for Clean Energy Jobs has been set up to support delivery of the government's clean power mission, support is needed in sectors like water, the circular economy, ecology and planning, which are also crucial to meeting the UK's legally-binding environmental targets.
- The growth and skills levy could be diversified to create a new Green Skills Fund, allowing flexibility for approved training and qualifications to help meet needs of employers to deliver complex change.
- There is also a need to invest in career attractiveness in order to promote green jobs across sectors. Defra should work with Skills England, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education on curriculum and careers advice, with the aim of building a pathway to increase sector attractiveness and encourage more people into green jobs.
- It is vital that a diverse workforce is trained for green jobs. The government should support development of industry initiatives aimed at transforming diversity, such as IEMA's [Diverse Sustainability Initiative](#) or vocational routes into the ecology sector being supported by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

### **What do the public think?**

- Over half of the British public have not heard of green jobs and 65% believe that they don't have access to green skills training through their employer, [according to](#) YouGov and IEMA research.
- Only 27% of young people have heard of green jobs and can explain what the phrase means, [according to](#) research from The Prince's Trust. Those who had been taught about green jobs during their education were more interested in entering a green career.

### **Suggested interventions**

- What work will Skills England be undertaking to identify skills gaps that must be filled in order to meet our climate and nature goals?
- Will the government ensure green apprenticeships are supported across sectors, including areas beyond energy, like conservation, water and the circular economy?
- How is the government working to improve the attractiveness of green careers, particularly for those who have not attended university?