

Written evidence from Association of Colleges

Q. What estimates are there for the jobs required to meet the pathway to net zero emissions, by sector, and other environmental and biodiversity commitments?

The Local Government Association's 'Local Green Jobs - Accelerating a Sustainable Economic Recovery' report (12 June 2020)¹ states that there were 185,000 full-time workers in England's low-carbon and renewable energy economy in 2018, which could rise to 694,000 by 2030, and 1.18 million by 2050, but only if we can close the skills gap. The report goes into detail about what skills are required to deliver this rapid growth and documents the specific skills that are currently lacking in the workforce.

Q. What needs to be done to ensure that these skills and capacity are developed in time to meet our environmental targets?

The role of colleges in building skills and capacity for green jobs

Colleges transform lives and are at the heart of our communities. They are a fundamental piece of the education and skills system as centres of lifelong learning, and as anchor institutions within their communities. They also train and educate across a wide range of sectors which will all have to adapt to net zero, including healthcare, hospitality, and agriculture. All jobs in the future will need to be green jobs to meet environmental targets, and the Government's recently published Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy is clear about the important role colleges and other education providers will need to play in that; "the future workforce will also need to be equipped with the right skills to help them succeed in a low carbon world; supporting sustainability through the education system will be crucial"².

Despite this, all too often, college resources and expertise can be poorly understood, underutilised and insufficiently funded in relation to other parts of the education and skills system. In order to ensure that the necessary skills and capacity are developed in time to meet our environmental targets, it's absolutely essential that the strong and central role colleges can and must play in this process is recognised. They also need to be invested in as a key vehicle for delivering the skills needed for green jobs and in supporting business innovation.

Need for investment

It is only with significant new investment can we substantively repurpose vocational training with the urgency required, which we believe is critical to Government delivering the green jobs of the future and a resilient and sustainable post COVID-19 recovery.

In July 2020, we wrote a joint letter³, in partnership with the University and College Union and Students Organising for Sustainability UK, to the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills and the Chancellor of the Exchequer urging them to commit to major new investment in further education to close the skills gap that is rapidly widening across the low carbon sectors. This letter called for £500m of new money for green jobs

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/local-green-jobs-accelerating-sustainable-economic-recovery>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-decarbonisation-strategy>

³ <https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10999/Retraining-revolution-letter-Jul-20/pdf/20200702-jointletter-retrainingrevolution.pdf>

allocated to colleges over this parliament. This would allow cash-strapped colleges to bring in experienced additional staff to prioritise the development and delivery of low-carbon vocational training and reskilling. £400m of this money should be delivered directly to colleges alongside a framework for implementation and monitoring, which we can draft, working in partnership with industry. The remaining £100m should be used to establish a new network of National Centres of Excellence in Low Carbon Skills at number of further education colleges (with the funding being ringfenced for colleges, rather than the private sector), each focusing on different aspects of the low carbon skills gap.

Opportunities in the 'Skills for Jobs' White Paper

The Government's recent 'Skills for Jobs' White Paper recognises that there are currently significant skills gaps at higher technical levels and that there is not the workforce needed to meet the many vital challenges we face, including building the green economy.⁴ It also sets out the Government's ambition to place employers at the heart of defining local skills needs and highlights the key role of further education in building an agile and adaptable workforce, both of which are vital elements in developing the green skills and capacity needed to meet our environmental targets. The measures and initiatives proposed in the White Paper should be seen as an opportunity and an acid test for delivering on green jobs – the opportunities offered through deeper strategic coordination of colleges, other providers (universities, schools and others) and employers, and through a new approach to funding and accountability aimed at high level strategic outcomes. The Government must ensure that it funds colleges properly so that they can meet the ambitions it sets out.

Bringing together industry, training and education

The 'Skills for Jobs White Paper' sets out the important role colleges will play in providing the green workforce of the future. We know that many of our member colleges are already doing a huge amount of important work in in this area, working in partnership with employers and other training providers across the country to provide the new and updated skills urgently needed for to transition to net-zero. With much needed funding they could be doing much more of this work.

Alongside this urgent need for investment, it is vital that the capacity for partnership and collaborative working is increased. This will require direct action from Government to bring 'Industry' (in its broadest sense) into direct and manageable contact with training and education. This will involve breaking down the intelligence, advice and projections from 'Industry' into workable groups that work across both skills specialisms and geography. This should involve the following:

- i. A sensible breakdown of the skills and capacity required and an agreement that these are the right skills in the right volumes
- ii. development of the likely timeline for the need for these skills
- iii. insight into the likely geographical distribution of these skills
- iv. establishment of a firm partnership between the organisations who will supply the skills and the organisations that will utilise those skills, alongside government officials who will help to foster and support those relationships and recognised and trusted intermediaries on both sides (for example AoC, CiTB and CLC)
- v. clear communication to all who have a role to play of the plans.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth>

This deeper strategic coordination between colleges alongside employers and other education providers is a key element of the Skills for Jobs White Paper, including through the development of a more networked college system through the establishment of Local Skills Improvement Plans and the new Strategic Development Fund.

And it will need effective cross-departmental working too. AoC is currently working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and industry representatives to bring colleges and industry closer together in a working partnership on heat pump installations to try and reduce the lag between training delivery and skills demand, and to work to further align the training to the industrial requirement. This partnership is considering the upskilling of the existing workforce, the migration of other workers from jobs in lower demand and the training of young people who would seek to enter the sector.

Such activity on the up/re skilling of the labour market and the training of new entrants needs to be considered in the broader context of training delivery. Colleges need to be supplying to immediate needs of local employers, most of whom are not yet in the market for the green jobs in question. In the case of heat pumps – a heating company might only fit a very small number of pumps currently and will be more focussed on the skills required to fit gas-fired boilers. The servicing skills for heat pumps are also currently low comparative to what will be needed in the reasonably near future. A college can only really implement training in the new skills set when there are jobs for those who undertake the training to progress in to.

Preparing for future need

When preparing for future need there is an immediate requirement to invest in readiness for that future need. All parties need to be confident that the future need will indeed materialise and there needs to be investment from all those involved at that point. It is important that this is recognised and funded as appropriate. The communication from Government of strategic direction and investment is also needed to give employers the confidence to invest in training and recruiting for green jobs, and seeking support from their local college.

In his recently published book 'How to Avoid a Climate Disaster', Bill Gates predicts that by 2030, 90% of jobs will require significant upskilling and re-training and suggests that 30-40% of new jobs don't currently exist.⁵ As the majority of these jobs will be level 3/4, colleges will be ideally placed to train people for this future need. More broadly, colleges also have a key role to play in teaching generic employability skills such as digital literacy, for example, which are going to be general requirements of these jobs.

Preparing college staff

Investment for initial training on the preparation of college staff is needed to be able to deliver the new skills training and on the existing workforce who will probably be the first to transition. It also points towards some preparatory additions to lower-level training that make learners aware of the changes that are coming and begins to prepare them across all subject areas.

The UK Climate Commission for FE and HE Leaders and Students

This group, a partnership between the Association of Colleges, EAUC, GuildHE and Universities UK, is developing short and medium-term strategies to support colleges in making a significant and positive impact on climate change, including embedding sustainability in the formal curriculum and developing the

⁵ Gates, B., 2021. *How to avoid a climate disaster*.

skills and knowledge needed for the emerging sustainable technologies. In July 2020, the Commission launched its Climate Action Roadmap for Further Education Colleges which outlines clear, feasible and cost-effective actions UK colleges can take to advance sustainability across estates, governance, teaching and engagement, and respond impactfully to the climate emergency⁶. In order to meet the ambitions set out in this Roadmap, extensive capital investment will be required.

Educating all students in sustainable development

Colleges take seriously their responsibility for raising awareness of climate and sustainability issues. Post-16 study programmes should make some reference to Education for Sustainable Development as an entitlement for all students and government should fund this.

Case study - Carbon literacy curriculum for FE

In 2018, BEIS funded the Carbon Literacy Project to work with Manchester Metropolitan University to develop a carbon literacy curriculum for HE and businesses. We recognised that there was a need for this to also be developed for FE and have developed an FE carbon literacy curriculum in partnership with the Carbon Literacy Project which we will be launching on 24 April. This is a short 8-10 hour practical course which measures an understanding of carbon literacy by means of an assessment focusing on what actions individuals plan to take, and what collaborative action they work on within their colleges and communities. This has generated a significant amount of interest from colleges.

We are also undertaking a pilot project with the four FE colleges in Brighton who want all their students to take part in this. This is a collaborative project between the local council, the constituency MP, and local FE colleges and is being delivered holistically and at pace. It has also been co-produced with students. We believe this should be an entitlement for every student in FE and should be funded by the Department for Education.

The need for flexibility in the qualification system

Qualification systems are developed in line with the standards needed when they are built. Flexibility is needed in qualifications and apprenticeships standards to be agile and responsive to the development of green skills and jobs. Additionally, the development of T-levels should include sustainability

Q. How can the UK ensure jobs are created in areas most impacted by the transition to a low-carbon economy?

By working with key stakeholders, sector bodies and agencies, colleges have a key role to play in stimulating local demand and ensuring jobs are created in these areas. The Local Government Association's 'Local green jobs - accelerating a sustainable economic recovery' report published last year highlights the role that FE colleges have to play in working with local authorities and "place shapers" to ensure that local areas take an integrated and forward-looking approach to skills and training within the low-carbon sector.⁷ Colleges can bring a unique knowledge and understanding of their area's labour market to this process and

⁶ https://www.eauc.org.uk/file_uploads/final_roadmap.pdf

⁷ https://www.ecuity.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Local-green-jobs-accelerating-a-sustainable-economic-recovery_final.pdf

this collaborative approach will be vital in ensuring jobs are created in the areas impacted most the transition to a low carbon economy.

Q. What additional interventions should be undertaken to aid in a 'just transition'?

We know that education and skills are among the biggest determinants of local productivity and vital to levelling up economic performance across regions and left behind places. The Levelling Up Fund shows that government sees investment in infrastructure as delivering on this agenda. In addition to this, colleges as anchor institutions want to add in the enterprise, support for businesses and the skills that are vital to this agenda. Colleges are keen to help convene the partnerships needed to deliver – with employers, other education providers, local government and others – a place-based solution that offers jobs, economic growth and prosperity for the long term.

We also know that people are going to have to re-skill and up-skill throughout their lives as the labour market changes and jobs become greener. This will require fundamental culture change in the way the country incentivises, encourages and funds adult learning, and the way that businesses invest in learning and development.

Q. What contribution can green jobs make to the UK's economic recovery from Covid-19?

As tens of thousands of people in the UK lose their jobs due to the pandemic, our FE sector needs to be supporting as many of them as possible to retrain to work in the low carbon sectors, so we can build a resilient and sustainable recovery.

The June 2020 Committee on Climate report⁸ stated that the pandemic will hasten the decline in employment in unsustainable sectors. The report states that reskilling should include “support to train designers, builders and installers [which] is urgently needed for low-carbon heating (especially heat pumps), energy and water efficiency, passive cooling, ventilation and thermal comfort, and property-level flood resilience”.

It adds “The ability of a decarbonised UK manufacturing sector to compete in global markets is dependent on having a labour force with the requisite skills, not only in manufacturing products and materials, but also engineering, procurement and construction management services. If suppressed oil prices continue to affect jobs in the North Sea, we must retrain and redeploy this highly-skilled workforce in the UK's future low-carbon industries, including carbon capture and storage”.

While we welcome many of the announcements made by Government to build a resilient and sustainable recovery such as the £3bn National Skills Fund, more emphasis must be placed on, and funding directed to, the clean growth skills agenda through any retraining revolution. For those people who have been made unemployed as a result of the pandemic, this would provide an opportunity for them to retrain and upskill for a green job.

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⁸ <http://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/reducing-uk-emissions-2020-progress-report-to-parliament/>