COMMUNITY INVESTMENT CONFERENCE 2026

HACT | CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

INCLUSIVE AND IMPACTFUL: HOW TO SHAPE EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS PROGRAMMES FOR BEST RESULTS. LESSONS FROM ACADEMIA AND LOCAL DELIVERY

MEETING ROOM 9

Lynsey Sweeney, **Communities that Work**
Rachel Edmunds, **believe housing**
Dr Rachel Macrorie, **Nottingham Trent University**
Amy Evens, **SNG**
Dr Sanne Elbrink, **Durham University**

Nottingham Trent University

HACT

CLIMATE INSIGHTS

THE MCS FOUNDATION

INclusive Skills Pathways for quality Retrofit Employment.

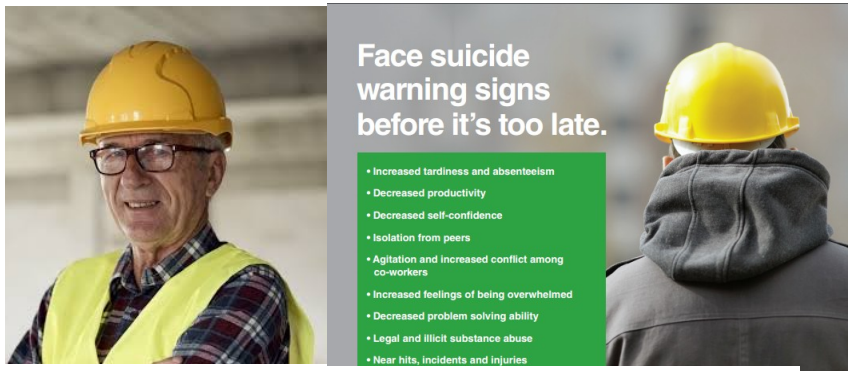
Rachel Macrorie (NTU)

Karen Barrass (Climate Insights)
Rebecca Rieley (HACT)
Kate Simpson (NTU)



Construction industry & RMI challenges

- **'Modernise or die'**: traditional methods & site labour intensity, subcontracting, casualisation of labour, aging workforce & failure to train future generations / upskill (Farmer, 2016)
  - **Highly fragmented,** need change throughout the supply system.
  - **Cultural change needed**: most male dominated industry in UK, culture of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), high suicide rates.
- **Inaction on C/C:** Long overlooked env impact of materials used >
  - **Carbon emissions**: up 1/3 over past 30 years (ONS, 2025). "Action on operational carbon, but emissions generated before a building is in use & during demolition wildly unregulated" (Chair, Built Env C Database).
  - **Resource depletion:** around half of all non-renewable resources consumed are used in construction! (EEA, 2026)
  - **Waste**: 62% UK's waste ~60M t/year. ~90% of this is reclaimed, mainly downcycled, as aggregate. Still 5M t/year to landfill (DEFRA, 2025).





Entering a new phase with climate change which will markedly expose CI's weaknesses. Systemic change.

Building a representative, competent workforce

- **Retrofit at scale:** ~140k construction workers/year for five years (Gatsby Foundation, 2024)
- **Acute shortages in key roles:** retrofit coordinators, heat pump installation & ventilation engineers, building envelope specialists (CITB, 2021).
- **Multiple fronts**: a) new entrants, b) upskill existing workforce, c) ensure qualifications are fit-for-purpose.
- **VET system:** Multiple providers, delivery formats & durations, standards & accreditation bodies (Killip *et al*., 2026)
- **Dual system, different standards requirements** Public sector: Tier 1 subcontracting cascade (PAS 2035) ; Unregulated private market.
- **Retrofit installation failures** (ECO4) major competency concerns. 98% defects in EWI fitted in 36,000 homes (NAO, 2025).



Delivering home energy retrofit at scale is constrained by a massive workforce & skills shortage. Need to future proof the sector & ensure training is quality led.

Inclusive Skills Pathways for quality Retrofit Employment

Paper competence, rather than onsite experience

- **Skill** – practical capability
- **Knowledge** – underlying principles & specifics
- **Experience** – gained through working onsite & with others
- **Behaviour** – integrity, honesty, self-evaluation, reflexivity

Workforce culture & lack of representation

- White, male dominated & aging industry
- 15% women (3% onsite), 6% ethnic minorities, 6% disabled,

>60% LGBTQIA+ homophobia at work (CIOB, 2021)

- Long-term out of work (NEETs, veterans, homeless, ex-offenders)

Connecting training to secure, meaningful employment

- Apprenticeships crisis (47% drop out in 2022/3) (Access Industry, 2025)
- Lack of entry-level jobs (VET to extend to 14+)
- Need for upskilling & experienced built env professionals

Training & job demand regional geography mismatch

- Local employment opportunities & community wealth building
- Devolved strategic planning & housing, & skills agenda



Andy Burnham's plans for technical education build on coalition's UTC roots

Sally Weale

Education correspondent

PM's vocational model also takes inspiration from former education secretary Kenneth Baker's vision

Research aim & methods

- **Research Aim**

Map, analyse & evaluate existing on-the-job (OTJ) vocational education and training (VET) pathways through which a competent and representative home energy retrofit workforce can be developed to decarbonise existing homes in England by 2050.

- **Methods:**
  - Desk-based literature review
  - Qualitative interviews (25-30)
  - Mapping work (best practice, England)
  - Case study site visits & interviews (8 exemplars)
  - Focus groups with retrofit learners (case studies)
  - Place-based scenario workshops (N&S, across the retrofit training & supply system)





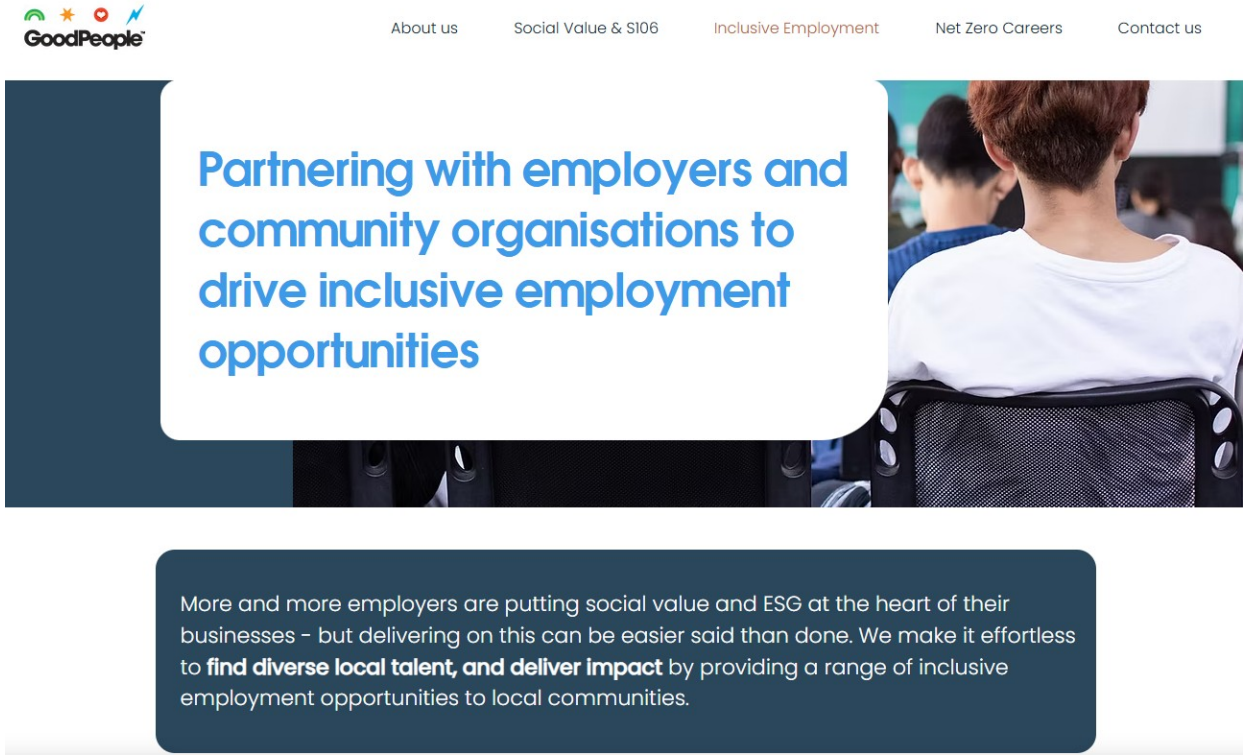


Mapping better practice

A. Government supported training programmes: Shared Apprenticeships (EN:ABLE Futures). Apprentice employed by flexi-job apprenticeship agency (not a single contractor) & placed with 1+ host employers, with wrap around support.



B. Combined authority regional programmes: Greater Manchester MCA partnering with **Good People –** social value procurement framework & inclusive joined-up recruitment to trusted employers.



Mapping better practice

C. Housing Associations & intermediaries

Peabody HA Choose Housing: inspiring disadvantaged local young people about different careers in housing. Role models important.

CHOOSE HOUSING

Create opportunities,
build communities, change lives

D. Industry-led initiatives

FMB & CITB supported **Build Academy**, Shooters Hill College, London. Foundation apprenticeship in construction (16-19yrs), building work-ethic & site readiness for apprenticeships.



Mapping better practice



E. Specialist & Independent Training Programmes
Civic: Square Rebuilders, Birmingham.
6-month fully funded training programme - SMEs (classroom, site visits, practicals) to learn about regenerative, bio-based building techniques & repair/adapt/refit local existing housing.



F. Not for profit organisations – public benefit
Canopy Housing, Leeds.
Empower people who are homeless to transform void social houses into homes and become part of a community.

Initial conclusions

Urgent need for systemic reform of the construction industry & RMI sector to ensure a just transition to a net zero built environment.

Ecofeminist, intersectional justice lens connects work-place exclusion (gendered/ racialised/ ability/ sexuality/ age-based etc.) in construction to environmental / climatic harm by an industry with poor workplace culture & devaluing repair of existing homes (as profit-led/extractive); the two must be tackled together

Experiential, on-the-job learning ties competence-building (essential for retrofit) to genuine access for excluded groups (protected characteristics, NEETs, homeless people, reformed offenders, older workers etc.) & accounts for different learning needs.

Joined-up career pathways - from training through placements & apprenticeships into secure meaningful employment. Importance of SVL procurement & wrap-around support & role models.

Place-based brokerage & community wealth building anchors inclusive retrofit pathways regionally, to deliver a just transition that benefits all, including disadvantaged neighbourhoods and previously overlooked individuals & communities.

Nottingham Trent University

Thanks! Please stay in touch…

rachel.macrorie@ntu.ac.uk

Rebecca Rieley (HACT)
Karen Barrass (Climate Insights)
Til Wallis (Canopy Housing)
Kate Simspon (NTU)













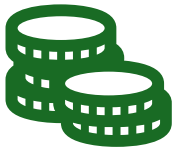
SNG Green Employment Pathway – Key Learning



Language Matters - “Green skills” connected far better with customers than technical terms such as “retrofit”



Green jobs start with employability, not green qualifications - Many customers need employability support before they are ready for sector-specific green training.



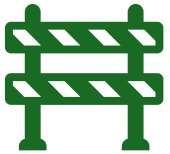
Funding certainty is needed - Employers want to grow their green offer, but hiring and upskilling decisions hinge on certainty of funding.



Social Value plays a key role - Bespoke social value frameworks in tenders let SNG embed green skills requirements into supplier contracts, including volunteering, mentoring, training delivery, vacancy-sharing and careers events.



Flexible entry points - Specialist roles take a long time to qualify for, a confident first step into any green-adjacent role matters more than an immediate technical qualification.



Practical barriers are as real as skills gaps - Transport, disability, anxiety and caring responsibilities are as limiting as any qualification gap.



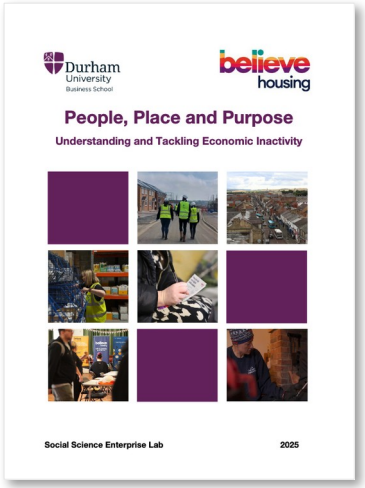
Guaranteed progression is what customers want most - Apprenticeships, entry-level jobs, guaranteed interviews and clear next steps after training.

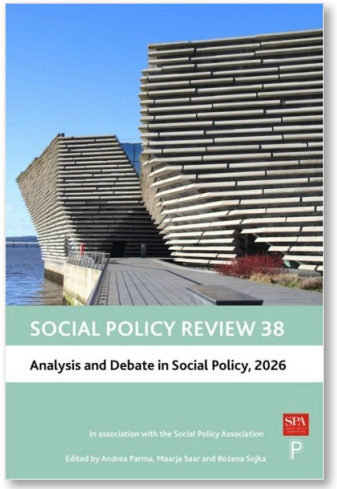


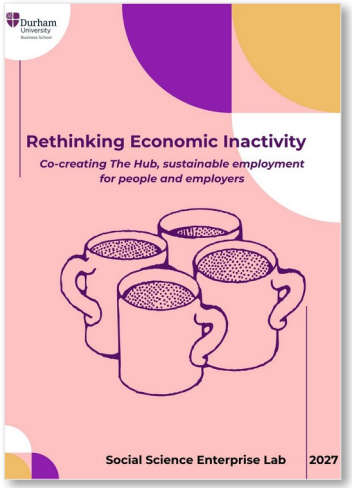
Training - There’s a shortage of accessible training options for those new to the green sector. Most opportunities cater to individuals already highly skilled, making it harder for beginners to get started and build experience.

SNG Sovereign Network Group

Impact with research-practice collaborations







- Read more about our collaboration
- Read and download our reports
- Give feedback on our research

socialscience.ventures/showcase

Rachel Edmunds
Rachel.Edmunds@believehousing.co.uk

Dr Sanne Elbrink
sanne.elbrink@durham.ac.uk

and partners: AAA Caring Caretaker, HIYED, Housing Employment Network North East (HENNE), Teesside Anthropologist, and Waythrough/MoreTime