HACT

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Growing Green Skills

A collaboration to support social housing communities connect with training and employment opportunities

Learning Journal part 1



Introduction

The Green Skills programme is focused on developing skills, training and employment opportunities for social housing residents within the green economy. Led by HACT in partnership with Sovereign Network Group (SNG) and funded by JPMorganChase Foundation, the programme is based on collaboration between housing associations, the local council, local training providers and businesses. Supporting net zero goals, it aims to tackle stigma around green industries, create green job opportunities, and boost financial resilience in local communities as part of our wider approach towards a just transition.

The project has two components: the first nurtures learning and collaboration at a national level through the Green Skills Network. Good practice examples and learning are shared by a wide range of organisations and industries, providing a space to identify effective pathways for communities into the growing green job market. To date, over 60 organisations have participated in the Network and through connecting people and organisations, we aim to accelerate progress through shared knowledge and accessible expertise.

The second core aspect of the project is the localised two-year, place-based pilot led by SNG in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP). By aligning local supply and demand, the Green Employment Pathway developed by SNG supports people to access advice, guidance, vocational training, work and better work related to green skills roles and organisations. Having started in September 2024, the team have already engaged over 60 local people with over 30 already completed the programme and more than 10 who have gained green skills qualifications. A central part of our programme is to share learning. We know the housing sector has net zero targets to decarbonise homes by 2050. Unemployment and poor job access hurt community financial resilience. By sharing knowledge, we can co-create effective solutions.

This learning journal shares our early project learning. It highlights the key reflections we and partners have noticed at both a local and national level. This includes what is enabling and holding back the potential of a just transition, where all communities have access and the confidence to engage in the emerging green skills and job markets as the UK strives to achieve net zero.

01 The importance of language

During the discovery phase of the project, we commissioned a report from Retrofit Academy CIC to explore the supply chain requirements and retrofit roles within BCP, while also considering wider challenges across the UK. The report highlighted an urgent need for roles such as retrofit advisors, assessors and coordinators in order to meet the UK's retrofit targets. We initially referred to our project as The Retrofit Skills Project.

However, the term retrofit skills held little meaning for the communities we hoped to engage. In contrast green skills has enabled us to better start conversations with residents locally, helping connect subsequent retrofit discussions to a broader social purpose that is more widely talked about and familiar with the public.



02 Good starting points

We have learnt that to engage communities in a just transition towards net zero requires agility. The local programme in BCP has shown us that although we are wanting to support communities into technical retrofit roles, many need a different starting point to build confidence and engage with these roles in the longer term.

It has also become apparent that these roles require significant training and time to earn qualifications, limiting the range of individuals we could reach within our scope of our local two-year project. Additionally, these qualifications feel out of reach for many who are struggling financially, may be working more than one job to make ends meet or have caring responsibilities.

Rather than training specifically for specialist retrofit roles, we wanted to support individuals begin their journey into green careers, feeling confident that a broad range of routes into this field will allow for progression in the long term into green industries, including retrofit.



02 Good starting points

This agility and commitment to engaging communities has been one of the driving forces behind SNG's design and delivery of the local Green Employment Pathway and we are hopeful this will help provide an accessible route for communities into these skills and employment opportunities.

Nationally, through the Green Skills Network, we have also seen other organisations taking a more flexible approach to support communities into green jobs, including short courses that prepare people for further retrofit assessor qualifications, taster days to familiarise the industry to communities and tailored in-work programmes to support staff to re-train into this area.

Reflections from the SNG team:

Many people in our local communities are unfamiliar with terms like Green Skills, Retrofit, Net Zero, and Just Transition. Even when they've heard these phrases, they often don't fully understand what they mean or how they relate to their lives. As part of the Green Employment Pathway, we spend a lot of time debunking myths and breaking down these concepts in simple, relatable ways. Our goal is to help participants see how gaining green skills and working in the green economy can bring long-term benefits, not just for the environment, but for their own futures and their families.



03 Employer relationships and funding to support employers

One of the most significant challenges has been unlocking and growing green jobs with employers. Although there is clear interest and enthusiasm, this is not necessarily converting into new training and jobs being created. Engagement with employers suggests that this is due to a lack of certainty around the funding available for organisations to support hiring into and upskilling people into these roles.

The position can directly impact communities' engagement with green skills and job opportunities. To increase the number of residents onboarded, people need to see and understand the employment pathways available to them to give them confidence that their efforts will lead to tangible opportunities. Through our project in BCP, SNG are working to build visible pathways into green jobs, however its success is deeply connected to the pipeline of training and job opportunities in the local and national market.

Increasing buy in from both employers and local communities is vital to the success of the project. We can see there is clear desire from individuals for employment and open to this being in the 'green' space, but the opportunities need to be available.



04 Building relationships locally

Community engagement has been one of the most successful aspects the local pilot in BCP so far. Our delivery partners, SNG, have found that being active and visible within local communities by attending events and speaking directly to individuals, offering clear information about the training which is available has been the most effective way of engaging.

Building a network of local connections, being visible in the community and meeting people face to face is at the heart of the positive impact the team are nurturing in BCP.

They have found that the offer of 'free training' can sometimes give the impression of low value or of a 'too good to be true' offer, however talking to residents has allowed them to build trust whilst opening conversations up with employers and charities.

These interactions can provide opportunities to collaborate with other organisations doing similar work, potentially allowing for co-creation of pathways and employment solutions in the future too.



04 Building relationships locally

Reflections from the SNG team:

We're excited about the positive community engagement because it shows our approach is working. By being present and approachable in local areas, we're helping more people learn about the project, building trust, and encouraging them to get involved. These conversations are also giving us helpful feedback to improve and shape the pathway as we go.



05 Resources to unlock diversity

A crucial factor in enabling greater community participation in green jobs is the availability of funding to invest in the vital community engagement work and to support employers have confidence to invest in this space.

We feel this would not only enable organisations to create new roles but also help promote greater diversity in the sector's workforces. 15% of the construction sector workforce is female and this can make it difficult for women to see their careers in this space and neighbouring sectors.

The team at Clarion and Wates noticed this too when delivering a pilot project to support communities train as retrofit assessors, where they saw that 98% of the individuals on the training programme were male. They are now exploring ways to support women into these opportunities and also, through the Green Skills Network, encourage this attention on diversity further.



Reflections and next steps

Collaboration between organisations is hugely important. While organisations may offer different training opportunities, they are working towards the shared UK net zero goal. By aligning efforts and sharing any resources we can maximise impact and ensure a more cohesive approach to building a skilled green workforce. It is also important to recognise that although the training offers in this space are likely to be similar, the ways in which individuals engage will differ. A flexible person-centred approach is vital to effective community engagement and enabling the opportunities to be inclusive.

While there is a clear interest from individuals to access training and green employment, significant barriers particularly around employers' engagement and funding must be addressed to make meaningful progress. Collaboration between organisations, whilst building accessible and clear pathways are essential to support a just transition towards the UK's net zero ambitions.

We plan to continue sharing our learning throughout our project and publish further Journals to support our collective efforts across the UK.

To stay in touch and engage in our Green Skills Network, head here.

To find out more about the Green Skills Pathway in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, head here.

Reflections and next steps

"The local component of the Green Skills Project in Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole is creating a vital blueprint for how we can build inclusive, community-centred Green Skills and Employment Pathways.

In partnership with SNG and funded by JPMorganChase, this initiative demonstrates that a just transition to net zero must start with engaging the local community, building confidence, trust and providing accessible routes into green skills, training and green careers.

Our work through the national Green Skills Network reinforces that collaboration, aligning efforts, and sustained community engagement are essential if we are to break down barriers, address labour shortages in key retrofit roles and unlock the full potential of the green economy.

This project is not only creating opportunities today- it's laying the foundations for a more equitable and sustainable future for all."



David Bussey

Employer & Partnerships Manager at Clarion Futures
Chair of the national Green Skills Network.

HACT

HACT is a long-established organisation with over 65 years of experience supporting the UK social housing sector. Through consultancy, innovation and collaboration HACT works closely with housing associations to deliver meaningful social impact.

HACT brings national insights to local contexts with a strong track record in mapping community needs, engaging residents and analysing large-scale resident data. HACTs strength lies in extensive and wide range of experience amongst the team and its ability to drive evidence-based, community-focused solutions.



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