



Green Skills Survey: a summary of the headline findings and recommendations

Research undertaken by the Environmental Policy Forum

December 2023

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Executive summary

Please see below the findings of the survey, listed against the three key research aims.

Research aim	Headline findings
<p>Determine the extent of the green skills challenge across sectors and anecdotal/ research evidence to demonstrate this challenge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a significant cross-sector green skills challenge. This is demonstrated through both research and anecdotal evidence. • Specialist knowledge/ skills, attracting recruits/ entry routes are the biggest skills challenges. • Limited awareness of green jobs/ routes available is the biggest barrier to entry – linked to insufficient reach to teachers, students, and careers advisors. • Notable skills gaps include behavioural change and digital.
<p>Discover the activity underway or planned to address green skills challenges where they exist.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current activities include improving awareness of roles/ entry routes through online content and campaigns, as well as calling for more investment in green skills through policy work. • Raising awareness of roles/ routes with those in education is projected to become a top priority.
<p>Determine interest in collaboration and areas where activity could be focused to maximise our collective impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is growing majority interest in collaborating on boosting green skills. • The most common key asks of government, investors, and employers: a collaborative, joined-up approach, improving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and ensuring greater investment in/ funding for green skills (including providing financial incentives to enter green jobs).

Research aims

In the Summer of 2023 the Environmental Policy Forum (EPF), a collective of 13 professional bodies and learned societies, issued a green skills survey.

The survey was borne out of a combination of existing anecdotal and research evidence EPF members had led or were aware of. This evidence pointed to shortages and gaps in green skills across a variety of sectors – including but not limited to ecology, the built environment, health, water, forestry, resource management, fisheries, and the sciences.

EPF were concerned by this evidence, knowing that green skills are essential to achieving our long-term environmental goals, stimulating economic growth, and fostering a more sustainable and resilient global workforce. In the UK alone, the government has committed to deliver two million green jobs by 2030¹. Without investing in the underlying green skills, however, these green jobs can't be performed to the required effectiveness.

With the above in mind, the EPF developed the green skills survey to determine:

- The extent of the green skills challenge across sectors and anecdotal/ research evidence to demonstrate this challenge.
- Activity underway or planned to address green skills challenges where they exist.
- Interest in collaboration and areas where activity could be focused to maximise our collective impact.

This document acts a summary of the survey findings, and it is intended to help increase awareness of both the challenges and solutions associated with green skills, facilitating action to the benefit of the environment, economy, and society as a whole.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1185360/green-jobs-taskforce-report-2021.pdf

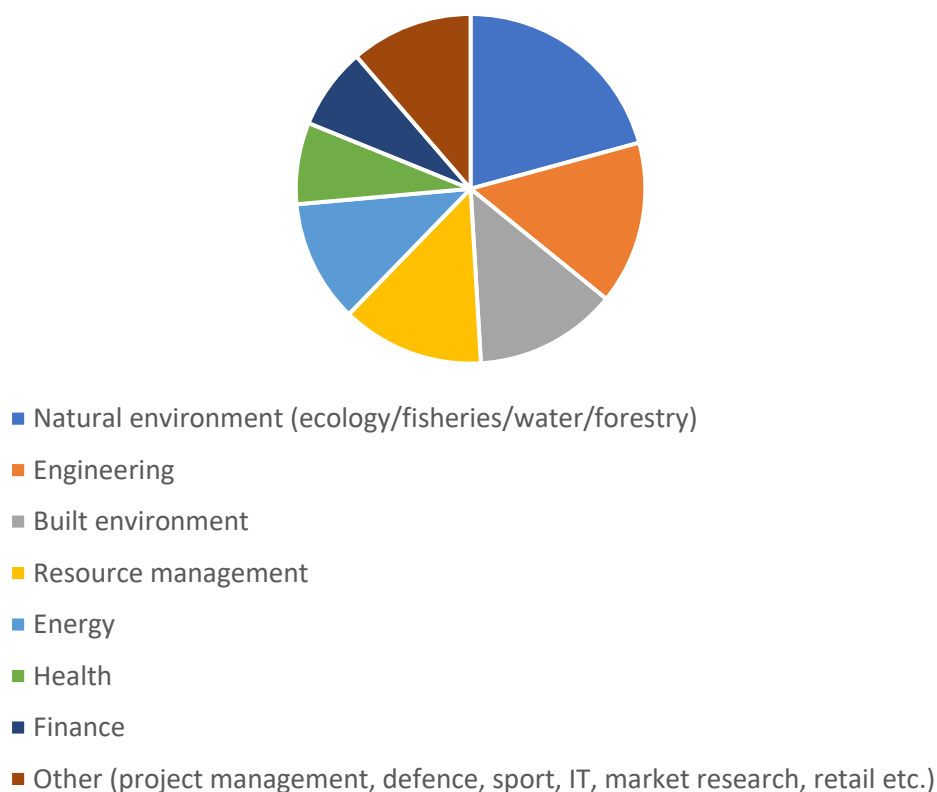
Reach

The survey was completed by 31 professional bodies and learned societies with a wide range of remits. The top three most represented sectors were natural environment (incorporating for example ecology, fisheries, water, and forestry), engineering and the built environment.

Professional bodies and learned societies were chosen as the participating group for this research because of the knowledge they have of their professions, through their memberships, and engagement in the skills/ professional development space.

Carrying out the survey across a wide network strengthened evidence in sectors well represented by EPF members, such as the natural environment. Significantly, the survey also provided insights into the specific experiences and perspectives of sectors largely outside the EPF remit, including engineering and finance.

Main remits of respondents



Findings

i. The challenges

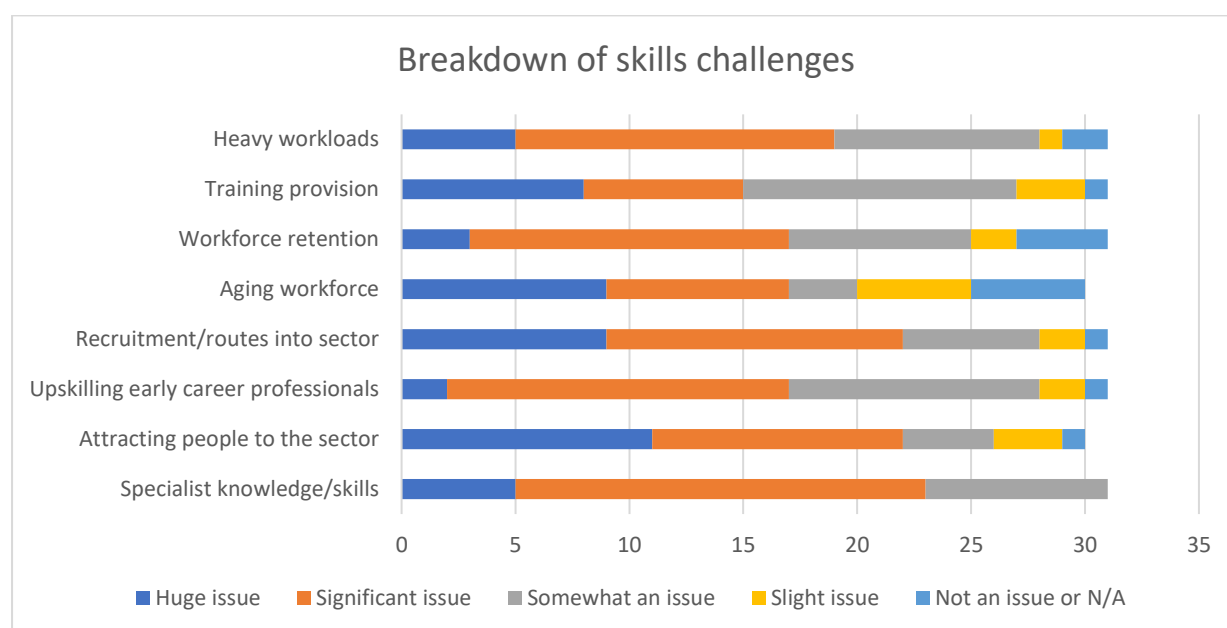
The scale of the green skills challenge

The average number respondents selected to describe the extent of the skills challenge in their sector was **76/100**, highlighting a significant cross-sector green skills challenge.

77% of respondents said this answer was based on both research and anecdotal evidence. Where publicly available, the findings of the research evidence can be accessed in the 'Useful resources' section (see pages 14 – 15).

The challenges

Similar skills challenges were reported across sectors.



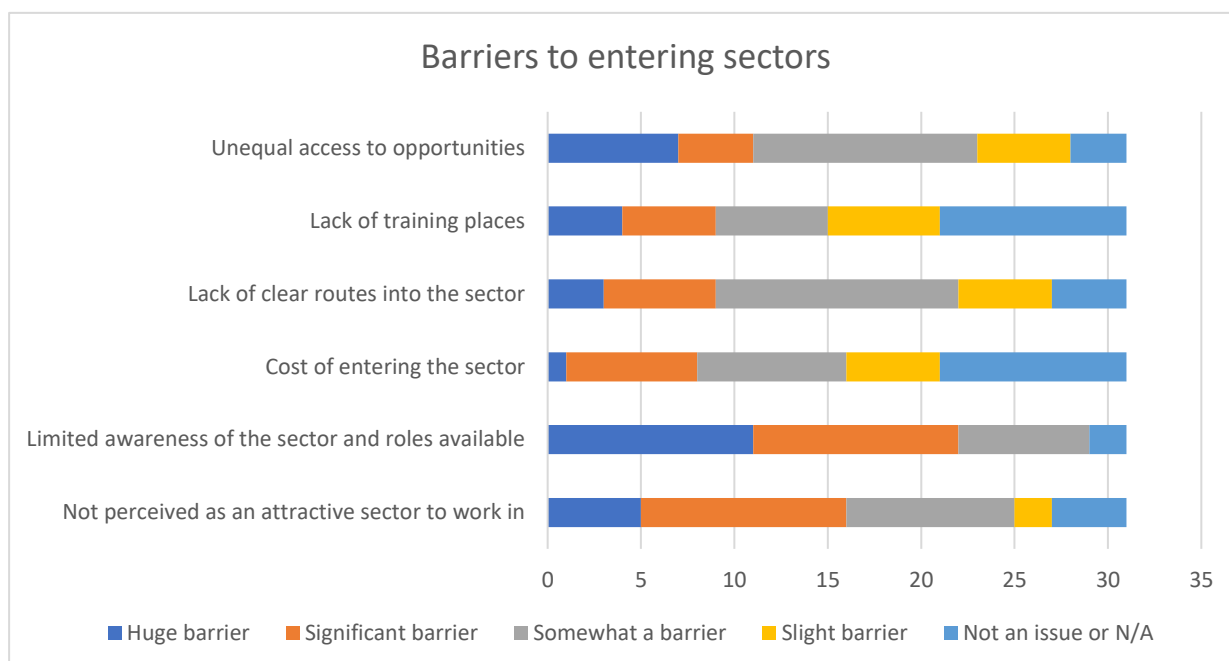
As shown by the graph above, the top three most commonly reported huge or significant challenges were:

- Specialist knowledge/ skills in the workforce.
- Attracting people to the sector/ careers advice.
- Recruitment/ routes into the sector.

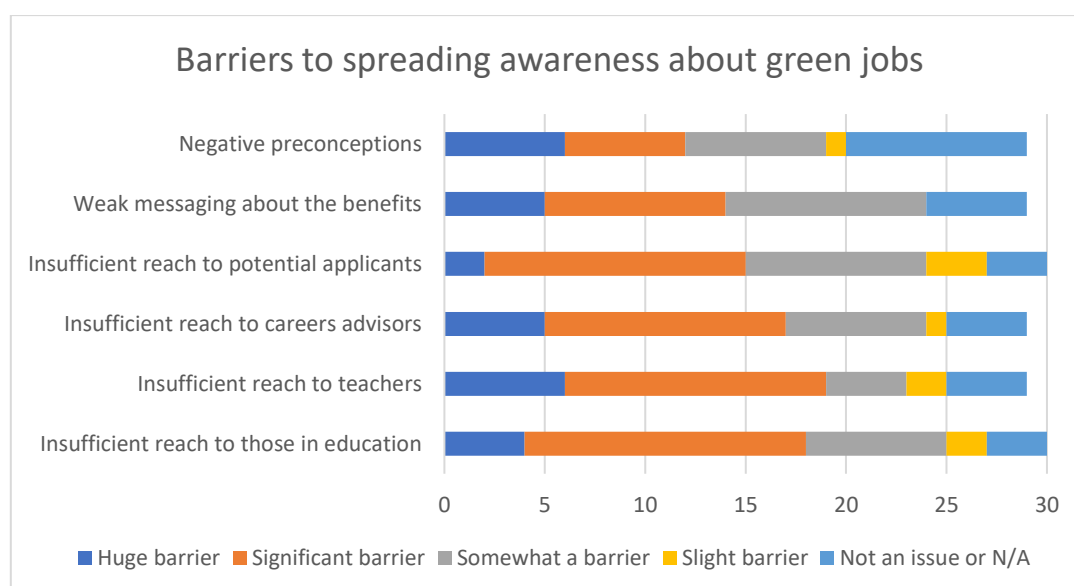
Some challenges were more sector specific. For example, an aging workforce was reported a huge or significant challenge by more organisations working in natural environment, as opposed to say, finance.

The key barriers

Similar barriers to entering sectors were also reported.



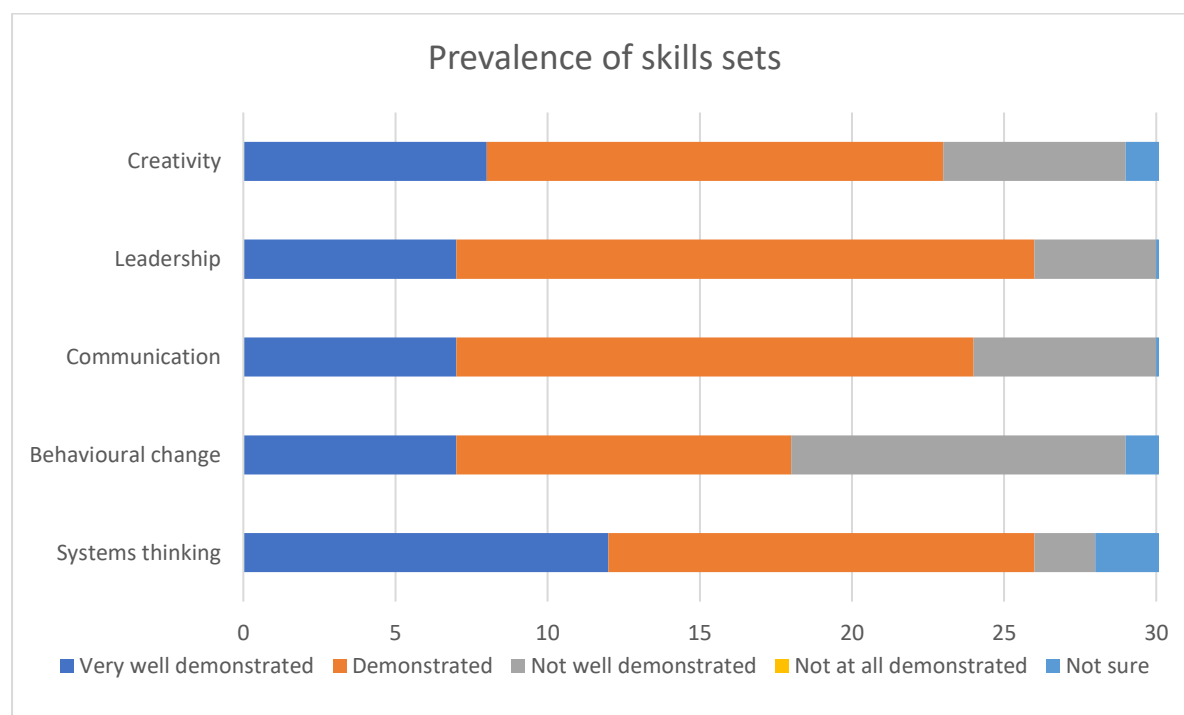
As shown by the graph above, the most commonly reported huge or significant challenge to entering sectors was 'limited awareness of the sector and routes available'. Given this finding, it's not surprising that the most commonly reported huge or significant challenge to spreading awareness about green jobs (as shown by the graph below) related to insufficient reach to those who could enter the sector. Most notably, to teachers, followed by those in education, and then careers advisors.



Meanwhile, negative preconceptions was more of a barrier for some sectors than others. This was reported as a huge or significant challenge within specific sectors such as resources and waste, forestry, and water.

Skills gaps

When asked the degree to which professionals in their sector(s) demonstrated particular skills sets, the most well demonstrated skill sets were systems thinking and leadership and the least well demonstrated was behavioural change. See the full breakdown in the graph below.



When asked to list any other noteworthy skills gaps in their sector(s), respondents also cited digital and sector specific skills gaps.

ii. The solutions

Overall, respondents viewed the growing conversation around green jobs as a helpful opportunity to address the green skills challenge.

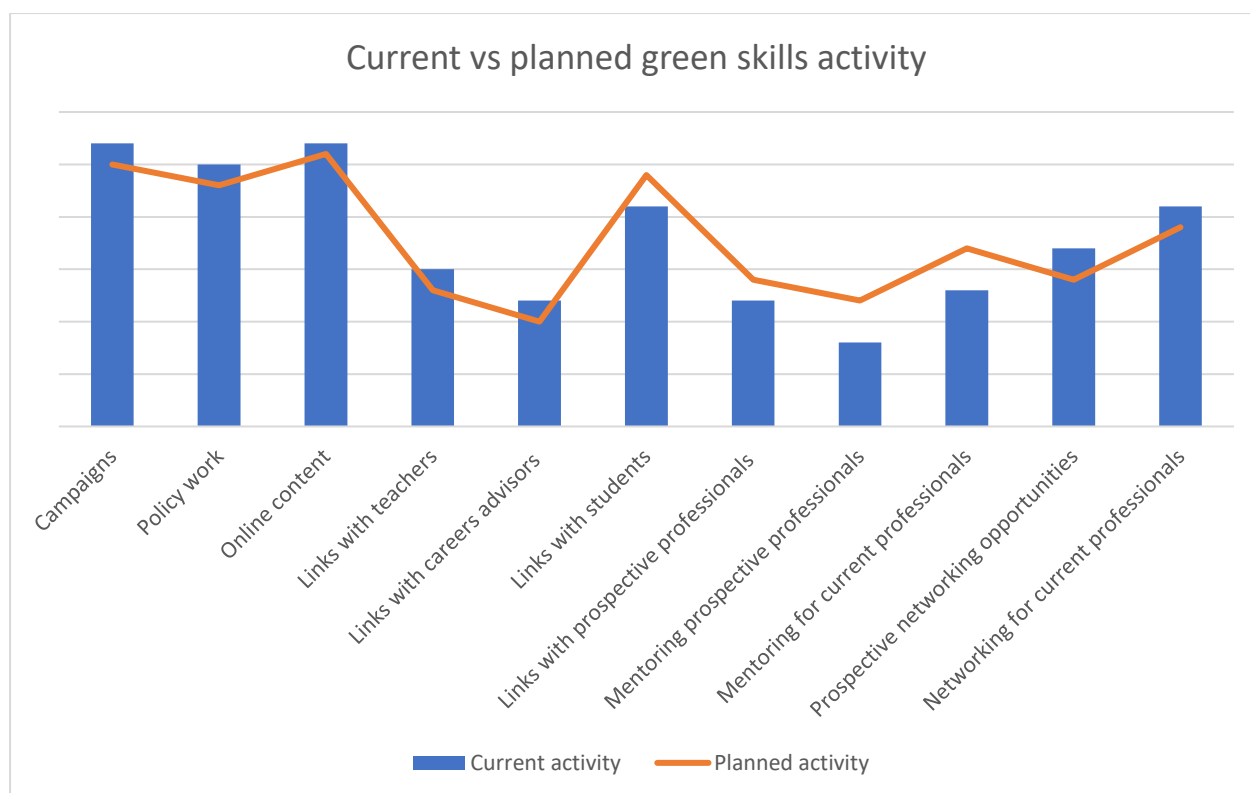
Activity to tackle the green skills challenge

Thinking back to the top three most commonly reported huge or significant green skills challenges, they're presented within the table below against the top three activities respondents are carrying out/ plan to carry out to tackle these (and other) challenges.

Most common challenges	Most common current activities (solutions)	Most common planned activities (solutions)
1. Specialist knowledge/ skills in the workforce	1. Producing online content to raise awareness of the benefits of working in the sector (joint top)	1. Producing online content to raise awareness of the benefits of working in the sector
2. Attracting people to the sector/ careers advice (joint second)	1. Getting involved in campaigns or initiatives to improve routes into your sector (joint top)	2. Getting involved in campaigns or initiatives to improve routes into your sector
2. Recruitment/ routes into the sector (joint second)	2. Doing policy work to influence decision-makers on the prioritisation of green skills	3. Directly targeting those studying/ in education to raise awareness of the benefits of working in the sector

When it comes to comparing current and planned activity, referring to the table above and graph below you will note that producing online content and getting involved in campaigns or initiatives remain the most popular planned activities (if slightly less than the level at which they are currently being carried out). Policy work is also high among planned activities, but notably now behind '[building] links with students: directly targeting those studying/ in education to raise awareness of the benefits of working in the sector'.

While still not as commonly planned, other activities which respondents are planning to do more of are: 'mentoring for current environmental professionals', '[building] links with prospective environmental professionals' and 'mentoring prospective professionals'.



Defining 'green jobs'

The average number respondents selected to reflect the usefulness of the growing conversation around green jobs was 68/100. However, it's noteworthy that only 27% of respondents use the 'green jobs' term in their communications. Respondents suggested that the lack of a common definition for the term is a barrier behind growing awareness of green jobs.

The definition of green jobs that most respondents had come across was that provided by the Green Jobs Taskforce: "Employment in an activity that directly contributes to - or indirectly supports - the achievement of the UK's net zero emissions target and other environmental goals, such as nature restoration and mitigation against climate risks".

Wider solutions

The most common key asks of government, investors and employers were around the need for a collaborative, joined-up approach, improving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and ensuring greater investment/ funding in green skills.

i. A collaborative, joined-up approach

63% are collaborating on their green skills activity, with this figure growing to 69% when asked about their future plans. Respondents reported the need for good practice sharing/ collaboration in boosting green skills. A joined-up approach must also be taken

by government and other decision-makers, to ensure policy is stable and consistent, producing the right environment for investment to occur.

ii. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

The collaborative activity reported by respondents includes Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion work, with dedicated sectoral taskforces underway, including in the energy, natural environment and built environment sectors. Notably, the Diverse Sustainability Initiative takes a cross-sector approach to this issue. In total, 90% of respondents reported being involved in activity to boost their sector(s) equal access and opportunities.

iii. Investment/ funding

Increased funding was reported as a key solution to tackling the green skills challenge, for a range of skills sets, from soft and transferable skills to deep technical knowledge. Suggested recipients of funding included further education and professional organisations, enabling delivery of quality education and training respectively.

Financial incentives were also suggested such as bursaries, encouraging entry into green careers as recognition for the environmental, economic, and social benefits that they provide. Ideas for making it easier for businesses to invest in green skills included amending the current structure of the apprenticeship levy to allow access to green and sustainable finance programmes. There appears to be somewhat of a gap in the current/ planned activity of respondents relating to these incentives.

Key recommendations

Solution raised by survey findings	Cross-cutting focus	Specific focus	Method(s)	Example(s) in action
Producing online content to raise awareness of the benefits of green jobs	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion	Sharing good practice on how to do this. Adding value – not duplicating content.	Knowledge sharing Forums Roundtable meetings	greencareershubs.com greenjobsfornature.org
Getting involved in campaigns or initiatives to improve routes into green jobs		Agree common definition of green jobs: suggest Green Jobs Taskforce. Apprenticeships trailblazer groups.	Knowledge sharing Forums Roundtable meetings	diversesustainability.net
Doing policy work to influence decision-makers on the prioritisation of green skills	Taking/ calling for a collaborative, joined-up approach	Calling for greater investment/ funding of green skills. Specific piece of work on financial incentives.	Letters Position statements Events	iema.net/articles/iemas-call-for-green-skills-commitment-at-cop28-gains-support
Directly targeting those in education to raise awareness of the benefits of green jobs		Educational outreach. Sharing good practice on how to do this (sustainability specific).	Outreach Online (e.g., hubs, webinars, student specific newsletters)	greencareersweek.com speakersforschools.org

In the coming months, EPF will be bringing together interested respondents to deliver on the recommendations and will hold two online meetings in early 2024 to kickstart discussions. These calls will be on investment and incentives and educational outreach. We are also open to discussions with anyone who would like to work with us in delivering on these recommendations – our contact details are on page 13.

About EPF/ contact

The Environmental Policy Forum (EPF) is a coalition of 13 professional bodies and learned societies representing around 70,000 environmental professionals across a variety of different disciplines.

Representing an extensive network of experts, we strive to promote environmental sustainability and resilience for the public benefit. Through regular meetings, workshops, and electronic media, we lead on the production of policy papers and research in order to influence environmental policy and its formulation.



Contact:

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View all the EPF's work via our website:

envpolicyforum.org.uk/our-work

Useful resources

Useful resources highlighted during this research and EPF's wider green skills work include:

Reports and articles

[Green Jobs Taskforce Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

[Skills for greener places](#) (LI)

[Can't see the skills for the trees – critical shortages in forestry workforce skills put climate targets at risk](#) (ICF)

[Greening your organisation: A blueprint for a green workforce transformation](#) (IEMA/Deloitte)

[Beyond Waste: Essential Skills for a Greener Tomorrow](#) (CIWM)

[Tackling greenwashing with environmental professionalism](#) (SocEnv)

[Skills shortages in the UK economy](#) (Edge Foundation)

[Reskilling Everywhere All At Once: Skills for the future of financial services 2023](#) (Financial Services Skills Commission)

[Net Zero by 2050: A Roadmap for the Global Energy Sector](#) (IEA)

[Connecting schools to nature: lessons learnt](#) (BES)

[How should the UK enhance its green skills?](#) (CIWEM)

Resource hubs

[Green Careers Hub](#) (IEMA)

[Green Jobs for Nature](#) (CIEEM)

[Engineering skills needs – now and into the future](#) (Engineering UK)

[Tackling Inclusion and Diversity in Energy \(TIDE\) Taskforce](#)

Campaigns/ initiatives

[IEMA campaign for green skills commitment at COP28](#)

[Diverse Sustainability Initiative](#)

[Speakers for schools](#)

[Climate Change and Environmental Skills Strategy](#) (IfATE)

Podcasts and videos

[The green skills podcast](#) (CIWM)

[The Green Edge](#)

[EnvCast: Environmental professionals in conversation](#) (SocEnv)

[Nature in a nutshell](#) (CIEEM)

[Material Change: Resourcing Net Zero](#) (IOM3)

[Future skills of the environment sector webinar](#) (IES)