

“When young people see role models with a similar background to them, it can make them see the reality of what is possible.”

Tim Campbell, MBE

PSR Social Mobility Roundtable: Could the ‘Green Skills’ gap unlock Social Mobility

23rd September 2024

In a roundtable discussion hosted by Public Sector Resourcing (PSR) on the intersection of green skills and social mobility, industry leaders from AMS, LinkedIn, and Sparta Global examined how the UK's ambitious net zero target for 2050 could also become a lever for social mobility. The conversation examined how government organisations can lead the charge in bridging the skills gap, ensuring inclusivity in the green economy, and preparing the workforce for the future to address two of the nation's pressing challenges—sustainability and social inequality. [Watch the full recording here.](#)

Panellists



Moderator

Tim Campbell MBE

Strategic D&I Advisor to AMS and former winner and current advisor to Lord Sugar on BBC's The Apprentice



Lauren Duncan

UK Public Sector Lead
LinkedIn



Gaia Caruso

Director of DEI & ESG
Sparta Global and UN
Women Delegate for
the Commission on
the Status of Women



David Ingleson

Director for Energy,
Engineering, and
Industrial Sectors,
AMS

“Green skills are wide in scope... there are technical and soft skills, and they don't just define green jobs but are needed across industries.”

Lauren Duncan

“A green job could be a roofer installing solar panels or a labourer digging for heat pump installations—these are all critical roles in the green economy.”

David Ingleson

The panellists explored one of the most pressing questions: how will we find the green skills necessary to fill the roles required to meet the UK's net zero commitment?



Key takeaways from the session:

Defining Green Skills and Green Jobs: Thinking broadly

The definition of green skills is rapidly evolving. While traditionally associated with highly technical roles in sustainability like solar consultants or wind turbine engineers, green skills now encompass a broader range of responsibilities. This includes roles not immediately recognised as "green" but are integral to enabling sustainability across industries.

Green jobs could be categorised into two types: "green jobs" and "greening jobs". Green jobs, such as sustainability managers, environmental engineers, or renewable energy consultants require specific expertise in sustainable practices. On the other hand, a "greening job" refers to roles that are not explicitly labelled as environmental but require embedding green practices as part of broader job functions. Examples include facilities managers who implement energy-saving measures, project managers leading carbon reduction initiatives, or even procurement officers who ensure the supply chain aligns with sustainability goals.

What's crucial for organisations to recognise is that green skills go beyond technical expertise. They can include the ability to manage stakeholders, influence environmental policy, and foster a culture of sustainability across departments. By embedding sustainability into traditionally non-environmental roles, organisations can prepare their workforce for a greener future without needing to create entirely new job categories.



Education as the foundation: Bridging the gap between learning and employment

Education is a critical factor in building a socially mobile workforce, but the current system is not designed to align seamlessly with the future demands of the job market—especially green jobs. To foster social mobility through green skills, there needs to be a more strategic link between the education system and the workplace. This involves not only teaching students about green industries but also preparing them with practical skills that can be transferred to the job market.

The conversation emphasised the need to introduce employability concepts at a much earlier age, starting at primary school level. By introducing sustainability and green jobs into the curriculum early, children begin to see these careers as viable and aspirational. Mentoring, coaching, and role modelling also play an essential role in shaping the ambitions of young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A key point raised was the importance of storytelling and using language that resonates with young people. Technical jargon can alienate potential candidates, especially those from diverse or underrepresented backgrounds. The panel suggested simplifying the language around green skills and careers, focusing on relatable success stories to demystify green jobs and make them more accessible.

Only 1 in 8 people feel they have green skills and for Gen Z, this drops to **1 in 20**.



“Simplification of language is crucial—there is a risk of overcomplicating what green skills are and it can alienate people.”

Lauren Duncan

“We must go beyond recruiting fresh talent and focus on reskilling the existing workforce, including women and older workers, to fully mobilise the multi-generational workforce of the future.”

Tim Campbell, MBE

“We proactively go out into society and find talented people from disadvantaged or diverse backgrounds, train them in digital and ESG skills, and deploy them.”

Gaia Caruso

Recruit, Train, Deploy: Recruit, Train and Reskill tomorrow's 'Green' workforce

The "Recruit, Train, Deploy" (RTD) model which can be accessed via PSR is becoming an effective solution to bridge the green skills gap, particularly in addressing both new and reskilled workers. It's not just only about bringing in fresh talent; it's about taking a multi-generational approach to recruitment by offering retraining opportunities to existing employees who may want to transition into green roles.

Organisations can improve social mobility by actively recruiting candidates from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly those from low socio-economic areas, women, and minority groups. Initiatives like Sparta Global's Athena Academy, designed specifically to recruit, train, and deploy women into the workplace, were highlighted as a model of how to make green skills accessible to those who may not have traditional qualifications but demonstrate the right attitude, aptitude and potential.

The conversation highlighted the importance of designing training programmes that don't require candidates to meet unattainable thresholds. The "90% rule" for women was discussed which acknowledged that women are less likely to apply for roles where they don't meet 90% of the criteria meaning that job descriptions must be rethought to emphasise potential and willingness to learn rather than rigid qualifications or experience.

60% of Gen Z would reject a job offer if they disagreed with the employer's green policies.



Employer Branding: Using sustainability initiatives to attract socially conscious talent

Employer branding has become more important than ever in the context of sustainability. In today's job market, particularly among Gen Z, potential candidates are actively looking for companies with strong green credentials. A key insight from the discussion was that companies posting about sustainability on LinkedIn could see a 75% increase in followers, highlighting the importance of communicating green initiatives to attract talent.

Organisations need to promote their commitment to sustainability and make these efforts visible across all channels. Green jobs and sustainable practices should not only be internal goals but part of the employer brand strategy. Candidates, particularly from younger generations, expect to see purpose-driven messaging that aligns with their values, and companies who fail to promote these efforts risk losing out on top talent.

For government organisations, this becomes even more critical, as the public sector has a responsibility to set an example in achieving sustainability goals while fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce. Utilising social media and public platforms to broadcast green initiatives can enhance employer reputation and draw in a wider pool of socially conscious candidates.



The UK Government's commitment to achieve **Net Zero by 2050** sets the backdrop for the skills revolution required across industries.

“There’s a war for green talent now. Companies must use marketing and advertising for good, telling stories of real people to attract the right candidates.”

David Ingleson

“Gen Z rate sustainability higher than any other generation; 60% would reject a job offer if they disagreed with the employer’s green policies.”

Lauren Duncan



“One solution does not fit all. The UK is diverse, and different regions have different needs. Policies must be equitable.”

Lauren Duncan

Equitable, not just Equal: Collaborating for the Green Economy

No single entity can solve the green skills gap or the social mobility challenge alone. Collaboration between government, educational institutions and industry is essential to create effective, tailored solutions that are equitable across different regions and sectors.

The roundtable highlighted the need for policies that are "equitable, not just equal." While equality aims to give everyone the same tools, equity ensures that people receive the specific support they need to thrive. For example, regions with higher unemployment or underrepresentation of women in the workforce will require different interventions than areas with different demographics.

Collaboration also means creating scalable models that can be adapted locally while being flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of the UK's workforce. The emphasis on continuous upskilling and training will be key to ensuring that the workforce is prepared for future green economy jobs, whether through local job centres, apprenticeship schemes or corporate training programmes.

The intersection of green skills and social mobility presents a unique opportunity for government organisations to lead the way in addressing two of the most pressing challenges of our time—climate change and social inequality. By investing in education, simplifying messaging, and collaborating with industry and community, government entities can create equitable pathways into the green economy. Leveraging models like Recruit, Train, Deploy to engage the entire spectrum of the workforce and placing a strong emphasis on continuous learning will not only close the green skills gap but also ensure that underrepresented groups are included in this economic transformation.

Suggested reading and key websites:

- [UK Parliament Post: Green Skills in Education and Employment](#)
- [LinkedIn Global Green Skills Report 2023](#)
- [Green Skills Resources from LinkedIn](#)
- [Article: AMS Climb the Social Mobility Employers Index](#)
- [Article: Are We Ready for the Green Skills Revolution?](#)
- [Report: PSR Social Value Strategy Report 2024](#)



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