

A person is shown in profile, looking at a computer screen. The screen displays a stylized graphic of a wind turbine. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a laboratory or office setting with various equipment.

# **INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE TO PURSUE GREEN CAREERS:**

**RESEARCH FOR THE CO-OP  
GREEN OPPORTUNITIES FUND  
JANUARY 2026**



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We would like to thank all the stakeholders who participated in the research, provided insight into the barriers and enablers facing young people on their way to green jobs, and discussed their views on the potential of the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund.

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# FOREWORD

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# FOREWORD

## THE CO-OPERATIVE GROUP CEO



**This report marks an important step in the part that we can play in addressing the green skills gaps.**

In all the challenges and opportunities that we face – locally, nationally or indeed globally – we lose sight of the climate and nature crises at our peril.

At Co-op, we have long been deeply committed to addressing the urgent reality of climate change. Reducing our environmental impact as a business, alongside increasing the sustainability of the products and services that we sell, remains a priority because our members tell us consistently how much it matters to them.

In 2023, along with the Co-op Foundation, we published our Gen Z(ero) report<sup>1</sup> to explore young people's views about the impact of the journey to Net Zero on their lives and how together we can deliver a greener, cleaner, fairer future.

We could not have heard more clearly that young people want to play their part, and to have the tools to seize with both hands the economic opportunity that the transition presents.

However, we also know that the young people of today, particularly those from underserved and marginalised groups do not feel equipped with the knowledge, skills and pathways to plug these gaps.

The demand for green skills is rapidly growing as the UK moves towards Net Zero, and we know that businesses are warning that a green skills shortage is looming. Whilst talent is spread evenly across the country, opportunity is not.

The lack of clarity and inaccessibility, skills development opportunities and confidence are all key challenges for young people to thrive in the economy of tomorrow.

1 Basis Social (2023). [Gen Z\(ero\): Creating a pathway to a greener, fairer future](#). Manchester: Co-op Foundation and Co-op.



At Co-op we believe we owe it to future generations to act now to protect nature and our environment. We also continue to believe that the transition to Net Zero needs not only to be faster, but fairer too, for the sake of both people and planet.

That's why, over the next three years, through the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund, we are backing Britain by investing over £2million in projects across the country to support, upskill and empower disadvantaged and marginalised young people. We're proud to be working with our charity, the Co-op Foundation, to make green skills and green careers more accessible and more attractive to future generations.

Working with and alongside young people, we will educate, inspire and create systemic change. Our future is their future, and by investing in green skills today, we can help to build a fairer and more resilient society tomorrow.

This report marks an important step in the part that we can play in addressing the green skills gaps. It explores how young people can be given more power to develop the skills, opportunities and confidence to thrive in the green economy.

I hope you will join us on that journey.

**Shirine Khoury-Haq**

Chief Executive Officer

The Co-operative Group

# FOREWORD

## CO-OP FOUNDATION CEO



**The Co-op Green Opportunities Fund is about creating a pathway for young people to be part of the transition to net zero.**



At the Co-op Foundation, we're rooted in a co-operative approach to grantmaking, where we listen and learn to ensure our funding has the biggest impact it possibly can in building fairer communities for everyone.

The findings from our Gen Z(ero) report led us to explore how we can deliver on our commitment to creating more sustainable communities through putting young people's voices and needs front and centre. The Co-op Green Opportunities Fund is about creating a pathway for young people to be part of the transition to net zero through the jobs that they choose. To do that we need to understand the barriers and enablers that exist for young people when considering green jobs and identify where funding is most needed to drive positive change.

We know from the research that there is a lack of representation in green jobs from women, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, people from global majority backgrounds, and those with special educational needs and disabilities. Our ambition for the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund is to make green jobs both desirable and accessible to young people, particularly those from underrepresented and underserved groups.

Through the fund we want to build on the great work that Co-op is doing to enable social mobility throughout society. We and Co-op believe that social mobility is simply fairness; wherever you start should not determine where you end up. Putting this right is everyone's responsibility.



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Foundation

I'd like to say a big thank you to The Social Agency for supporting us with this research and to our Environmental Collective – our youth advisory board. The Environmental Collective have shared their experiences and insight to help shape the development of this research and the fund. We're passionate that no decisions are made about young people, without young people.

By co-operating with Co-op and listening to young people, our Co-op Green Opportunities Fund will contribute to creating communities that look to a more sustainable future, with equal access to opportunity. It reminds us that to build communities of the future, we must first equip everyone with the skills they need to succeed. Then, we can build those communities, together.

**Nick Crofts**

CEO

The Co-op Foundation

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Co-op and the Co-op Foundation are launching a £2.2 million Co-op Green Opportunities Fund to support initiatives across the UK that influence young people to develop green skills and pursue green careers. This research, conducted by The Social Agency, was commissioned to help define the scope of the fund and ensure it maximises its impact within the available resources. The fund specifically aims to address barriers around green skills and careers for young people from underrepresented groups who would otherwise be unlikely to consider green careers. The research aimed to define the fund's focus, map the funding landscape, identify good practice, and establish guidance for eligibility criteria.



# KEY FINDINGS



## DEFINING GREEN JOBS

The research used the following definition of green jobs<sup>2</sup>

- **Green ‘new and emerging’ jobs** created by the transition to a sustainable economy in sectors including renewable energy, electric vehicle manufacturing, low-carbon hydrogen production, and carbon capture
- **Green ‘enhanced skills’ jobs** requiring significant changes in tasks and skills due to green economy demands, spanning construction, transport, manufacturing, agriculture, utilities, and professional services

## THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE

The research revealed a complex green skills funding landscape with piecemeal provision, overlaps and areas of unmet needs – making it challenging to comprehensively map funding gaps and opportunities for the fund. However, stakeholders identified strategic opportunities for Co-op and the Co-op Foundation to consider. These include prioritising regions with higher deprivation, focusing on underrepresented communities, supporting tangible work experience and apprenticeships, and targeting younger age groups (14+) to inspire interest earlier (addressing a significant gap as most existing funds target 16+ groups). Importantly, stakeholders identified the need for someone to act as a strategic coordinator within the broader green skills funding ecosystem.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, S., Krishnan-Barman, S., Whincup, E. (2014) [Green jobs: rapid evidence review](#). Nesta

## BARRIERS AND ENABLERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The research identified a range of barriers and enablers across knowledge, practical, financial, social, and identity-related factors:

### Knowledge barriers

Young people lack awareness of what a green job is, and which sectors provide them. Research shows 59% of young people who had heard the term 'green job' could not explain what they were.<sup>3</sup>

### Practical barriers

Subject choices in school, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), significantly influence access to green careers. A lack of practical, hands-on learning can cause declining interest in STEM subjects.<sup>4</sup>

### Financial barriers

Training and travel costs, student debt, and perceptions of low earning power, can deter young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>5</sup>

### Social barriers

Parents and carers heavily influence career choices but they often lack awareness of green jobs. Young people's awareness of green jobs through formal education is mixed, with 46% of young people reporting they had not heard about green jobs during their education.<sup>6</sup>

### Identity and beliefs barriers

A lack of representation and misconceptions about poor pay, job insecurity, and a high degree of specialisation,<sup>7</sup> combine to make young people feel green jobs aren't 'for me'.

3, 6, 7 Crowhurst, M., Taylor, A., (2023) [Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution](#). Public First

4, 5 Hamlyn, B., Brownstein, L., Shepherd, A., et al., (2024) [Science Education Tracker 2023](#). Verian, The Royal Society, Engineering UK

## POLICY AND ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

Stakeholders identified several opportunities for Co-op and the Co-op Foundation to influence policy by leveraging their position as a major employer and funder. Potential strategies include:

- Convening employers, educators, governments, third sector organisations and funders to provide strategic direction to the funding landscape
- Seeking representation on government advisory panels and taskforces
- Addressing evidence gaps through impact evaluation and further research
- Advocating for integration of green skills into curriculum and careers advice
- Making long-term public commitments to green skills funding
- Ensuring policy addresses barriers faced by underserved groups
- Engaging employers to promote employer-led training and investment



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings highlight a unique opportunity for Co-op and the Co-op Foundation to drive meaningful societal change through their Co-op Green Opportunities Fund. The research identified several gaps the fund could address to have greater impact.

## 1

### **Inspiring the next generation: choosing the right age group**

The evidence shows a clear need to ignite interest earlier. Prioritising 14-20 year olds addresses a significant gap, as existing provision predominantly targets 16+ groups for specific skills training, with less work done to spark early interest in green careers.

## 2

### **Underrepresented young people: championing inclusion in the green economy**

The research found a gap in funds specifically targeted towards underserved young people. The Co-op Green Opportunities Fund should prioritise young people who are underrepresented in green jobs—including women, young people from Global Majority backgrounds, young people with disabilities, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Importantly, the fund should recognise how these characteristics intersect and overlap.

## 3

### **Rethinking education: valuing informal pathways**

Another opportunity lies in prioritising informal educational pathways. Informal opportunities outside traditional classrooms are underfunded and undervalued yet can have greater impact than formal education routes. Community-based, flexible learning environments enable young people to access inspiring, hands-on experiences exploring green skills outside traditional classrooms.

## 4

### **Leading the way: Co-op's strategic role**

Beyond direct funding, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation have an opportunity to play a broader leadership role by convening stakeholders, shaping policy and coordinating the fragmented green skills landscape. However, national leadership must ensure funded programmes connect to local realities to create clear employment pathways.

## 5

### **Building from the ground up: a regional approach to scale**

Finally, while the fund will operate across the UK, evidence shows that the most effective interventions start regionally. By building partnerships with local educators, governments, and employers, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can create models that respond to community and industry needs. Then these regional successes could be scaled by the UK Government into a national framework rooted in local realities.

# INTRODUCTION

# 4

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT



The Co-op Foundation has long recognised the scale and challenge that climate change poses to society, and the role that young people can play in the transition to a sustainable economy. In 2022, for example, the Foundation launched its 2022-2027 strategy: 'Building Communities of the Future Together'.<sup>8</sup> A priority of this strategy is for the Co-op Foundation to help create sustainable communities. In 2023, the Foundation and Co-op commissioned The Social Agency to carry out research to better understand young people's views on the impact of the journey to Net Zero on their lives, what matters most to them as the UK decarbonises, and how they would like to be involved in a just transition.<sup>9</sup> This research found that young people are keen to learn more about the transition to a sustainable economy, including what green job opportunities exist for them.

In response to these findings, **Co-op and the Co-op Foundation are launching the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund.** The £2.2 million fund will support initiatives across the UK to influence young people to develop green skills and go into green careers. This research demonstrated that perceptions around green jobs are broadly negative and that there is a green skills gap in the UK. The aim for the fund is therefore to influence behaviour and perceptions around green skills and careers amongst young people and their families, carers, and educators.

In particular, the fund aims to influence young people from groups who are underrepresented in green jobs and would otherwise be unlikely to consider a green career, by changing their perceptions of what a green job is and who can pursue them. The fund is proposed to focus on young people aged 14-20. Co-op and the Co-op Foundation hope to do this by funding awareness-raising activities, social media campaigns, career fairs, work experience, and other activities that will address the barriers young people face when considering green jobs.

<sup>8</sup> Co-op Foundation (2022) [Building communities of the future together: Co-op Foundation strategy 2022-2027](#).

<sup>9</sup> Basis Social (2023). [Gen Z\(ero\): Creating a pathway to a greener, fairer future](#). Manchester: Co-op Foundation and Co-op.

The aim of the research is to help define the scope of the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund for it to maximise its impact. The research had four objectives:



**The research questions which The Social Agency sought to answer were:**

**1**

What industries could the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund potentially focus on, considering both impact and creating accessible routes for young people?

**2**

Where are the skills gaps and how do we approach changing behaviours to fill those gaps?

**3**

What are the main barriers for young people deciding to take up a green career and what evidence exists on tackling these barriers? Where are the gaps for innovation?

**4**

What data and evidence exists on what works for changing perceptions and behaviours of young people in green skills?

**5**

What project ideas and interventions exist that might be at concept stage in organisations that do not have the funding yet and could potentially help address the issues the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund will try to address?

**6**

How should we define green skills and behaviour change within the focus of the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund?

**7**

What options could Co-op and Co-op Foundation pursue as part of the legacy of the programme, through further campaigning and advocacy work?

# METHODOLOGY

This research was undertaken in three separate but complementary strands:

- Analysis of the funding landscape
- Audience and behavioural analysis
- Stakeholder interviews

## MARKET ANALYSIS OF THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE

The Social Agency conducted a market analysis to better understand the funding landscape. Specifically, the market analysis helped identify:

- The industries and skills gaps that will form the focus of the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund
- Other funders that operate in the area of focus of the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund
- Funding gaps and potential match funders
- Organisations, networks, and examples of good practice related to the focus of the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund.





The market analysis consisted of a literature review of 26 documents. As well as documents provided by the Co-op Foundation, The Social Agency identified the literature from Google and Google Scholar using the following search terms:

Green jobs + UK  
Green new and emerging jobs  
Green new and emerging jobs UK  
Green new and emerging jobs + UK  
Green enhanced skills jobs UK  
Green enhanced skills jobs + UK  
Green jobs in construction UK  
Green jobs in circular economy UK  
Green new and emerging jobs UK  
Green jobs in transport UK  
Green jobs in agriculture UK  
Green jobs in land use UK  
Green jobs in energy UK  
Green jobs in heavy industry UK  
Green jobs in manufacturing UK

After collating and screening the literature, The Social Agency analysed the documents using an AI-assisted qualitative analysis platform. The research team used the platform to summarise key themes from the papers, and then manually analysed each theme in depth.

## AUDIENCE AND BEHAVIOURAL ANALYSIS

The aim of the audience and behavioural analysis was to help the Co-op Foundation understand:

- The different demographics of young people that the fund could target to be most impactful
- The barriers and enablers to young people taking up green jobs
- The behaviour change required to motivate young people to pursue green jobs.

The audience and behavioural analysis also consisted of a literature review of 26 documents. As well as documents provided by the Co-op Foundation, The Social Agency identified the literature from Google and Google Scholar using the following search terms:

Factors affecting young people taking up green jobs  
Factors affecting young people taking up STEM careers  
Factors affecting young people taking up STEM careers 11-17 years UK  
Factors affecting young people learning green skills  
Young people + barriers + green jobs + UK  
Green new and emerging jobs UK

Based on the key themes identified from the literature, the researchers analysed the barriers and enablers manually in more depth. Researchers used the COM-B behavioural model as a framework to structure this analysis.<sup>10</sup> This framework enabled researchers to consider the extent to which young people have the capability, opportunity, and motivation to take up green skills and pursue green careers.

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The Social Agency undertook 15 stakeholder interviews to complement the market and behavioural analyses. Stakeholder interviews were held via MS Teams and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. Stakeholder interviews took place over two waves. The initial stakeholder interviews helped inform early thinking about the scope of the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund and identify existing good practice, and other evidence to examine in the literature reviews. The remaining stakeholder interviews – conducted after the evidence review – helped confirm and further explore findings.


The Social Agency worked with the Co-op Foundation to identify stakeholders to interview. Stakeholders had experience in the green careers and green skills sectors and included experts from think tanks, education and skills advisory organisations, universities, charities, government departments and local government bodies.

<sup>10</sup> Michie, S., van Stralen, M., West, R., (2011) [The behavioural change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions.](#)



# LIMITATIONS

The funding landscape for green skills is very fragmented.

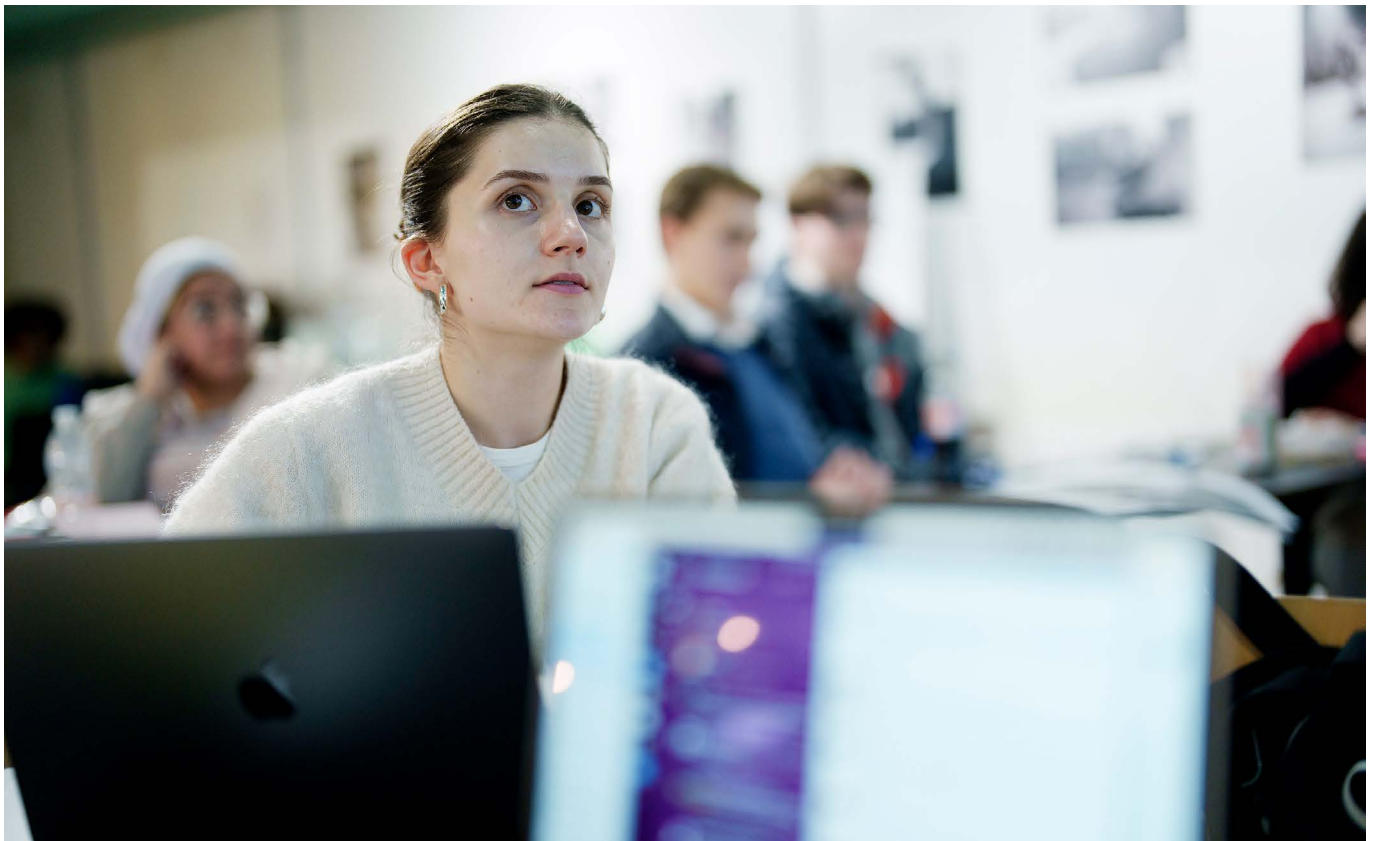


The Social Agency kept the following limitations in mind when conducting this research:

There is not a universally recognised definition of green skills and green jobs, which had implications for comparative analysis of literature.

The time and budget for the research did not allow for a full exploration of available literature. Consequently, the market, audience and behavioural analyses focused on only the most important and relevant themes.

The funding landscape for green skills and green jobs is very fragmented and there is no strategic overview of what funding is available or the relationship between funds. Several funds that support green skills have a broader focus (for example, on local economic development). This made identifying the full range of funds available, and associated gaps, challenging.



# MAIN FINDINGS

5

# DEFINING GREEN JOBS

In this section, we provide a definition of 'green jobs' to narrow down the focus of the research. We then detail the relevant roles, skills, and sectors within the chosen definition of 'green jobs' and identify the implications for the types of jobs the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund should ultimately support once it launches.

## WHAT IS A GREEN JOB

The term 'green job' is very broad, and the existing literature provides several definitions. The definitions of green jobs differ in what roles they include and the sectors they cover. This creates a challenge when trying to define the scope of the research.

## CHOOSING A DEFINITION

Given this context, The Social Agency examined several definitions of 'green jobs' from organisations which have an interest in the transition to a sustainable economy. The strengths and limitations of these definitions were shared with Co-op and the Co-op Foundation, and then a definition was selected to inform the focus on the research. The definitions included:

**Green Jobs Task Force's** definition of green jobs as "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".<sup>11</sup>

**SOS-UK's** (Students for Organising Sustainability) definition of deep green jobs as jobs which are "fundamentally transformative" in creating new, sustainable ways of living which challenge the essential drive for growth in capitalism and systems that drive ecological destruction.<sup>12</sup>

**O\*NET's** occupational typology of green jobs which include green 'new and emerging' jobs, green 'enhanced skills jobs', and green 'increased demand' jobs.<sup>13</sup>

11 GOV.UK (2021) [Green Jobs Taskforce | Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#).

12 Crowley K. (1999) [Jobs & Environment: the Double Dividend of Ecological Modernisation](#). *International Journal of Social Economics*.

13 Davidson, S., Krishnan-Barman, S., Whincup, E. (2014) [Green jobs: rapid evidence review](#). Nesta



The Green Jobs Task Force definition, while comprehensive and linking clearly to policy, was rejected for use by the fund due to its breadth. In practice, the definition provided too wide a range of jobs in scope of the fund, including those which are 'indirectly green'. The definition by SOS-UK, while attractive due to its focus on change, was ultimately rejected because it was too conceptual. Specifically, in practice, it would be difficult to identify whether or not a job is "fundamentally transformative".

On balance, The Social Agency and the Co-op Foundation felt that the O\*NET definition was most suitable for the purpose of this research. Specifically, the 'new and emerging' and 'enhanced skills' categories of the typology provided a clear focus to target funding resources. Consequently, the types of green jobs and skills the research focused on were:

- **Green 'new and emerging jobs'** which are jobs created by the transition to a sustainable economy, with unique tasks and requirements. This includes jobs in the following sectors:
  - Renewable and low-carbon energy generation
  - Electric vehicle manufacturing
  - Low carbon hydrogen production
  - Carbon capture, usage, and storage
  
- **Green 'enhanced skills jobs'** which are existing jobs which require significant changes in tasks, skills, knowledge, or credentials due to green economy demands. These jobs tend to be found in industries that are facing large scale 'green' transformation, and include the following sectors:
  - Construction
  - Electricity networks
  - Transport
  - Manufacturing and heavy industry
  - Agriculture and land use
  - Waste and water management
  - Finance, legal, and professional services
  - Utilities (water, heat networks, smart metering)



## IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEFINITION FOR THE CO-OP GREEN OPPORTUNITIES FUND

Many green jobs and green industries are facing significant skills gaps and workforce demands.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes these skills gaps are general and overlap with demand from other sectors – for example, skills gaps in project-management; data, cyber-security, and AI expertise; and cross-disciplinary knowledge of environmental regulations, green finance, and sustainability reporting.<sup>15</sup> Research by PwC suggests that these general skills are particularly relevant for entry-level roles.<sup>16</sup> These overlapping skills gaps cause different sectors to compete with each other for the same pool of talent.<sup>17</sup>

Green jobs also require more specialist skills and experience technical and job-specific skills gaps.<sup>18</sup> For example, the skilled trades needed for mass retrofit and green infrastructure roll-out, or the technical skills needed in renewable-energy engineering.

**Therefore, the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund should consider a focus on both vocational and technical roles for young people, to address both general and technical skills gaps and workforce needs.**

<sup>14</sup> Roger, P. (2025) [The Green Gap: Identifying the deficit in skills funding needed to support the net-zero transition](#). SOS-UK

<sup>15</sup> White, Y. et al., (2022) [Skills for a net-zero economy: Insights from employers and young people](#). Learning and Work Institute

<sup>16, 18</sup> PwC (2023) [Green Jobs Barometer](#).

<sup>17</sup> DESNZ (2025) [Assessment of the clean energy skills challenge](#). Gov.UK.

# FUNDING LANDSCAPE

In this section, we explore the current funding landscape for green skills, the different types of funds and their focus, and identify good practice from successful funds to inform the design of the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund.

## THE GREEN SKILLS FUNDING LANDSCAPE

The market analysis revealed that there is a lack of strategic oversight and coordination of green skills funding in the UK. Stakeholders pointed towards a complex patchwork of funding and felt they lacked an understanding of what is being done by funders of green skills programmes at a national or regional level.


**“There isn’t a network or alliance or whatever that might be at the moment, with that understanding of what everyone else is doing, it’s possible that there are overlaps, that there are folks doing stuff that everyone doesn’t know about.”** – Stakeholder



The market analysis found that funding comes from a range of different areas and initiatives, leading to fragmented provision. This fragmentation may mean that funding is not clearly tailored to the needs of young people and businesses in an area, which in turn may lead to funding gaps or alternatively overlaps in provision.

In addition to the fragmentation of funding, stakeholders said that green skills funds can often struggle to define their scope and eligibility criteria, due to broadness of the term ‘green’. Consequently, creating a green skills fund that is effective and relevant for the wide range of roles in scope is challenging.

**“Green often suffers from being enormously broad. And the concept of something like a green skills fund would be extremely hard to replicate on a national scale because it would come to encompass a fifth to a quarter of jobs, depending on how you slice it.”** - Stakeholder




Several stakeholders felt the term ‘green’ is poorly understood and can lead to misconceptions about what green jobs are. This had led one stakeholder to drop the term ‘green’ entirely from their programmes, as it was easier to promote ‘skills’ than it was to promote ‘green’.

**“I think, A) there was this understanding gap, and B) when people did know about [green] jobs, they didn’t think they were very good jobs.”** - Stakeholder



**“When it comes to green jobs and green skills as a label, one thing we’ve really encountered with the communities we work with is that it doesn’t switch people off necessarily; they just don’t know what it is. And a lot of the time, we end up changing our language away from green and we just talk about skills.”** - Stakeholder



Stakeholders also said that green skills funds often sit under other areas of funding, making them hard to track and coordinate. For example, levelling up funding, Department for Education’s (DfE) Local skills improvement fund, and Greater London Authority’s (GLA) Good Work for All Fund all supported green skills initiatives.

The combination of these factors means that this research was unable to comprehensively map green skills funder activity and interventions across the UK. Consequently, it is challenging to clearly define gaps and opportunities for the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund to operate in. Nonetheless, the market analysis identified a range of different types of green skills funding programmes (described in the next section). Co-op and the Co-op Foundation should consider the focus and relationship of their Co-op Green Opportunities Fund relative to these types of programmes.

### WHAT ARE THE MAIN TYPES OF GREEN SKILLS FUNDING?

**Sector specific green skills funds** – Several funding programmes were sector specific, with a notable focus on the energy, construction and agriculture sectors. For example, the Office for Clean Energy Skills Fund which aims to address green skills gaps in the energy sector.

**General green skills funds** – Also common were funding programmes that took a generalised approach. These focused on ‘green skills’ broadly across a range of sectors and subject areas. For example, City and Guilds Foundation’s Green Skills Bursaries which provide green skills funding in a range of subject areas including automotive, energy, construction, and utilities.

**Demographic specific funds** – While most funds were open to all, fewer funds focused on specific demographics. For example, the National Lottery Community Fund was one of the few funds identified that included programmes specifically focused on underrepresented groups of young people (in this instance, young people with disabilities and young people from ethnically minoritised communities in Wales).

**Regional or nation specific funds** – Several funds focused only on specific areas of the UK, with regional funding identified by stakeholders as particularly important. For example, the West of England Combined Authority ‘Adult Skills Fund’ has targeted green skills gaps in the manufacturing, construction and installation, and operation and maintenance sectors.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> [Adult education](#) (2021), West of England Combined Authority.

**Short term and longer-term funds** - The majority of funds identified in this research were either annual (e.g. Cornwall College Group's 'Future is Green' fund) or fixed term (e.g. the National Lottery's 'Climate Action Fund', which runs for 2-5 years). Stakeholders felt the lack of long term secure green skills funding presented a broader challenge for green industries.


**Rigid versus flexible funding** - Several funds (like the apprenticeship levy and certain government grants) impose significant restrictions on use, eligibility, and access, while others (like local authority or philanthropic grants) may be more flexible but are often less coordinated and less secure in the long term.

## WHAT DOES GOOD PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?

Stakeholders identified a range of features of funds that they felt were successful and important for maximising impact. Co-op and the Co-op Foundation should consider how to incorporate these features into the initiatives it supports through the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund.

**Collaboration** - One important feature was collaboration between relevant actors, notably with governments (national, regional and/or local), other funders, educators, and employers. Where there was greater collaboration between different actors, industry needs were better understood and ultimately more likely to be met.

**"Bringing employers into the school and the school into the employers through those teacher encounters is incredibly valuable in helping teachers to understand the emerging skills that industry has and the needs that they have, and vice versa. And without the funding—which, as I say, there's no guarantee that will continue—there's a big gap there in terms of bringing industry and education closer together."** - Stakeholder




**Employer-led apprenticeships and training** – Stakeholders emphasised the importance of providing tangible opportunities for young people to gain skills. Employer-led apprenticeships and work experience opportunities were seen as a successful and important example of these, and stakeholders felt that the inclusion of procurement clauses that incentivise training and apprenticeship opportunities were effective in generating these.

**“Bridgewater and Thompson College have got this really interesting model [where they] create a simulated environment with local employers. For example, with the Mulberry handbags, they repurposed the space to make it almost exactly like the factory floor. It allowed for delivery of skills in a real, tangible, experience-led way.”** – Stakeholder



**Inclusivity and accessibility** – There are a range of groups that are underrepresented in green careers. In this context, focusing on providing inclusive and accessible training opportunities was important to ensure that the additional barriers experienced by underrepresented groups could be addressed.

**“Children and young people with disabilities, or SEND children from ethnic and minority backgrounds, and children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds... Like, any way you slice disadvantage, if you’re thinking about high-skilled, high-paying jobs (which a lot of green jobs are), if you’re thinking about future-facing jobs, a lot of people who are already at a disadvantage in society aren’t going to see themselves represented because they haven’t had the same advantages to get to those high-skilled, high-paying jobs. So, it’s an access question across the piece.”** – Stakeholder



**Flexible and modular training** – Similarly, stakeholders argued that initiatives that provided flexible and modular training were preferred by young people as they enabled them to manage other responsibilities and commitments alongside gaining green skills.

**“We wanted to design a model that was really easy and accessible for young people, a more bite-sized kind of entry point into work experience. So, we do micro placements... But more importantly, we wanted to have a flexible model that was much more aligned to the modern way of working. So flexible, hybrid shift patterns, you know, four-day weeks or something that fitted much more within the modern world of work.” -**

Stakeholder



**Clear career pathways** - Given the broadness of the term ‘green job’, stakeholders emphasised the importance of demonstrating clear career pathways to young people. This meant clearly demonstrating and communicating how a young person can turn early education and learning around green skills into a credible and secure career in the future.

**“More accessible information and advice around less well-known and emerging career options. So that would cover these skills, support us to start thinking early about life beyond school, and help us understand where school subjects could lead us and, make links between what they’re doing in school and what skills they might use outside of school or after school subjects.” -**

Stakeholder



**General employability skills** - Some stakeholders also emphasised that young people benefit from general employability skills when seeking to advance their careers. They felt that young people are actually more engaged than other age groups on climate change and the transition to a sustainable economy, but less equipped to manage the world of work. Therefore, effective green skills training and opportunities should not only be providing people with green skills, but also the confidence and resilience to function in workplace environments.

**“Young people are coming into the workforce relatively well equipped with an understanding of the core problems of climate change, biodiversity loss, the need for a more circular economy. They have access to that knowledge. What they’re not coming in equipped with is personal resilience, ability to manage mental well-being, workplace etiquette, workplace experience. Those aren’t skills that are necessarily specific to the green sector, but those are the skills that actually we see employers worried about when they’re recruiting people.”** -

Stakeholder




### **WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CO-OP GREEN OPPORTUNITIES FUND?**

Whilst it was not possible to comprehensively map funding gaps and opportunities due to the complex and fragmented funding landscape, the research identified several areas they felt warranted greater focus.

Stakeholders felt that there are a range of regions that have received less funding than others. They argued existing funding programmes have been disproportionately focused on London and the South-East, and that other regions with higher levels of deprivation are in greater need of funding. They also explained that communities where green employers are already embedded already benefit from employer-led initiatives. They felt future funding should be focused on “left behind” communities and areas with higher levels of deprivation.

**“I think people in London and the South-East probably have different views from people in sort of left-behind towns and cities in the North. So, I think if they could do some pilot schemes with this kind of idea outside London and the South-East, I think that might be interesting as well.”** - Stakeholder



The literature review identified a lack of representation in green jobs from women, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, people from global majority backgrounds, and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).<sup>20 21</sup> A report by Policy Exchange in 2017 ranked the environmental sector as second-to-last in terms of diversity in the UK.<sup>22</sup> Many groups are not just under-represented at career level, but at the school level too (in triple science, for example).<sup>23</sup> They require additional measures and interventions to influence their interest in green jobs and help them into green careers. Stakeholders felt that targeting demographics that are underrepresented in green jobs was important for the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund.

**“So, a lot of the jobs in the green transition are quite sort of technical jobs, engineering jobs, and engineering is traditionally massively dominated by men... Huge problem with people of colour as well [being] massively underrepresented in these sectors... It’s just a waste of talent”** – Stakeholder

Another opportunity comes in the form of improved stakeholder engagement with employers to support the provision of work experience, placement, and apprenticeship opportunities. Stakeholders emphasised that these opportunities give young people tangible experiences that bring with them a clear pathway to a green career, a chance to learn and earn, and general transferable employability skills.

**“I would encourage the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund to in part fund or support work experience, because it’s a priority for the Government to improve access to and quality of work experience for young people. But I think, yeah, it’s a really important step in a young person’s ability to see what options are available to them in future.”** – Stakeholder


20 Engineering UK (2024) [Fit for the future](#).

21 Green Alliance (2024) [Green Shoots: Growing the green workforce of the future](#).

22 Policy Exchange (2017) [The two sides of diversity: Which are the most ethnically diverse occupations?](#)


23 Hamlyn, B., Brownstein, L., Shepherd, A., et al., (2024) [Science Education Tracker 2023](#). Verian, The Royal Society, Engineering UK

**“That idea of work experience and making work experience accessible, whatever your financial situation. So [young people] said, like, we will understand the world of work best by experiencing it. So, creating opportunities which are less reliant on being able to work for free or having that social connection, that social network to make that possible, I think, would be really key.”** – Stakeholder




Given the lack of strategic oversight and the complex and fragmented nature of the green skills funding landscape, stakeholders felt there was an opportunity for an actor in this space to coordinate funding from a more strategic perspective. They felt that green skills funding would benefit from an organisation acting as a ‘steward’ to coordinate funders, share learnings, and maximise the effectiveness of interventions.

**“I would like to see [the Co-op Foundation] doing some work around the broader ecosystem [...] There are a few people that do stuff, but it’s all very piecemeal and not very well connected.”**  
– Stakeholder



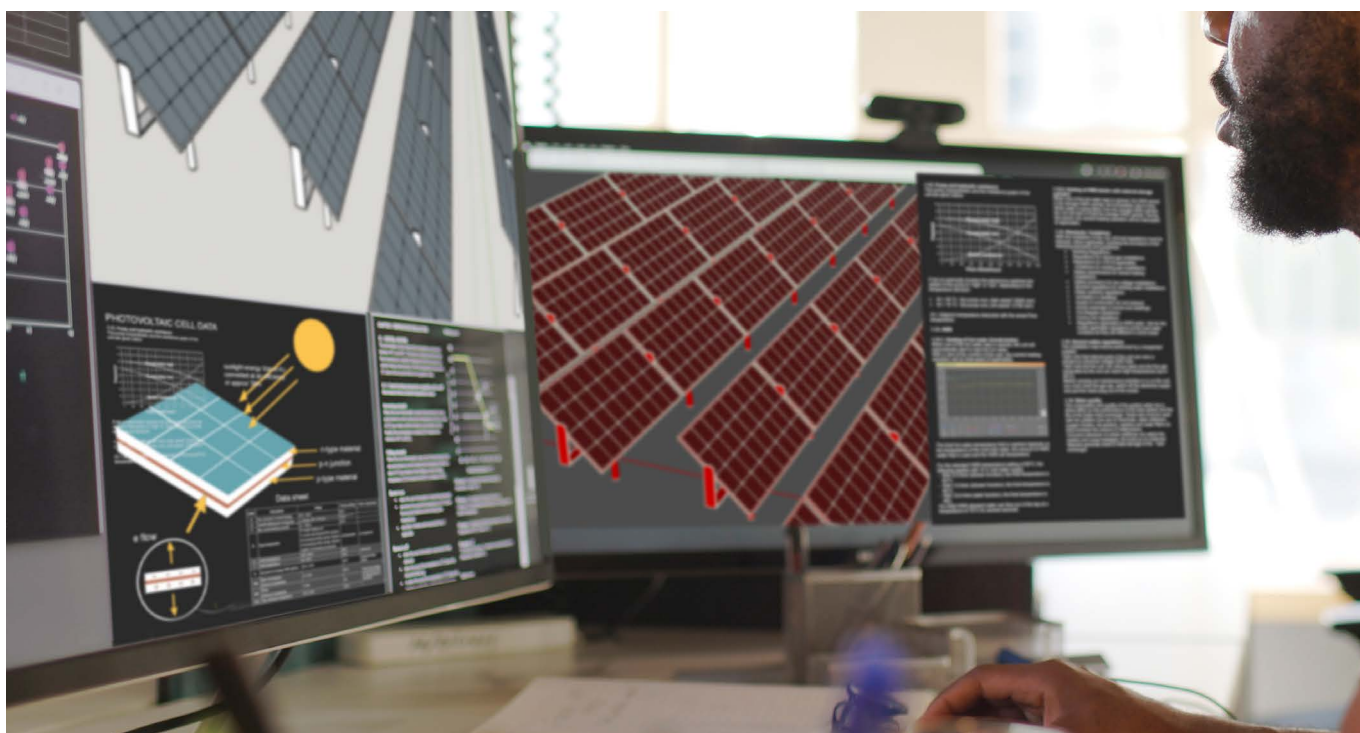
Most of the green skills funds identified in the research focused on 16+ age or adult age groups and were concerned with providing training and support to meet specific skills gaps in specific sectors. There were few funds focused on younger age groups and inspiring an interest in green jobs. This was identified as a significant gap by stakeholders, and a potential area for Co-op and the Co-op Foundation to address.

**“I really think the hearts and minds thing is important upfront. Like, no doubt about it. I think that to be 11, 12, 13 in a world of crisis and a lot of bad news, it’s very easy to kind of check out of that quite quickly. And you know, at that age, like, you want to see and believe and be inspired and kind of start to discover your passion and what you’re curious about.”** – Stakeholder



Specifically, while young people in their early teenage years may not be looking for jobs, several career theories (Social Cognitive Career Theory<sup>24</sup> (SCCT), Career Construction Theory<sup>25</sup> (CCT), Human Capital Theory<sup>26</sup>) highlight education, skills, and personal development during these years as pivotal in informing future careers. CCT argues young people are most likely to develop interest in activities and subjects at which they feel they are effective, and expect positive outcomes from. This tends to occur during their adolescence, after which interest development becomes much less ‘fluid’.

Similarly, CCT emphasises that the teenage years are crucial for developing a sense of vocational identity, as adolescents begin to explore their interests, values, and roles through experiences with others, their environment, and self-reflection. Human Capital Theory positions education during these years at the centre of our understanding of how individuals develop careers. Subsequently, purposeful career development interventions in educational settings can support young people on their career journeys.<sup>27</sup>



24 Lent, R.W., Brown, S.D. and Hackett, G., (2002) Social cognitive career theory. *Career choice and development*.

25 Savickas, M.L. (2013) Career construction theory and practice. *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work*.

26 Becker, G. S., (1993) Human Capital. University of Chicago Press

27 Hooley, T., 2021. Career development and human capital theory: Preaching the “education gospel.”. *The Oxford handbook of career development*.

In summary, when considering the market analysis, the implications for The Co-op Green Opportunities Fund are as follows:

Consider prioritising regions and communities with higher levels of deprivation and less of an entrenched relationship to green employers.

Consider focusing on communities that are underrepresented in green jobs, such as women, global majority, those with disabilities, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Consider placing an emphasis on initiatives that support engagement with employers, the provision of tangible work experience, placement, and apprenticeship opportunities.

Consider their role within the broader ecosystem of green skills funding and understand how Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can leverage their reach and influence as a strategic co-ordinator of green skills funding.

Consider focusing further 'upstream' on educational pathways to inspire and spark an interest in green jobs at an early age.

# BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO YOUNG PEOPLE GAINING GREEN SKILLS

Addressing barriers and enablers is critical to motivate young people to learn green skills.

In this section, we consider the barriers and enablers faced by young people when considering green jobs. These barriers and enablers relate to three areas:

- Knowledge and awareness of green jobs
- Practical steps to getting a green job: financial factors; social factors (such as influence of family, carers, or educators)
- Identity and beliefs about green jobs.

Addressing these barriers and enablers is critical to motivate young people to learn green skills and take up green jobs. Some of these barriers and enablers are particularly pertinent for underrepresented groups in green jobs, namely women, global majorities, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and people with SEND.



## KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS-RELATED BARRIERS AND ENABLERS

**A major barrier to young people pursuing green jobs is their lack of awareness and understanding of what a green job is.**

Specifically, young people do not know what makes a job green or what sectors provide green jobs. For example, a study by The Prince's Trust found that 59% of young people polled who had heard the term 'green job' could not explain what they were.<sup>28</sup> The same study found that when young people think about jobs in the transition to Net Zero, they are more likely to think about the environment and the conservation sector rather than jobs in retrofitting and carbon capture.<sup>29</sup> This lack of knowledge explains the gap between the care that young people have for the environment, but how few young people channel this passion directly into their careers. Stakeholders also frequently mentioned awareness as a big factor in young people pursuing green jobs.

**"The first barrier is knowing what's out there... Because you can't want to have a job in something, or you can't aspire to have a job, if you don't know it exists and if you don't know what's out there."** – Stakeholder



**Furthermore, young people also lack the knowledge in how to access green jobs.** For example, they do not know what qualifications they need to get a green job, or how they would acquire the skills needed for a green job.<sup>30</sup> Young people often lack awareness of local opportunities, not understanding where the green skills gaps are within businesses in their local area. Even those living in areas expecting significant green transformation do not necessarily have access to information which will help them get green job opportunities.<sup>31</sup>

28, 29, 31 Crowhurst, M., Taylor, A., (2023) [Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution](#). Public First

30 White, Y., et al., (2022) [Skills for a net-zero economy: Insights from employers and young people](#). Learning and Work Institute

**“I think the dialogue around green skills aren’t really the most accessible for people to actually access. And when it comes to parents or carers [...] if you think about sort of the jobs and things that parents and carers will be informing their young person about, you’ll be very, very hard pushed to find green skilled jobs getting mentioned.”** – Stakeholder

Increasing young people’s awareness of green jobs and knowledge of how to obtain them could help enable them to pursue green jobs. Formal education has a big role to play in raising awareness of green jobs through school assemblies and careers advisers in schools and colleges.<sup>32</sup> Stakeholders also identified campaigns as an effective way to improve young people’s knowledge about green jobs, which is particularly important in reaching young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).



<sup>32</sup> Dr Hauxwell-Baldwin, R., (2023) [Getting Gen Z into retrofit and renewables jobs](#), MCS Charitable Foundation

## PRACTICAL BARRIERS AND ENABLERS

Practical barriers and enablers relate to the knowledge, skills, and opportunities that young people may encounter on their path to green jobs.

**Subject choice and early qualifications in school are a big factor in whether young people pursue green jobs.** In particular, the take-up of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) is important in the journey towards a green job, due to their technical nature. Young people often lose interest in STEM subjects beyond their compulsory study years. One reason for this is that a lack of practical, hands-on learning can cause students' interest and confidence to decline.<sup>33</sup> Practical ways of bringing STEM to life combined with better knowledge of learning pathways for students is important to address.


Furthermore, whether young people pursue science-related careers can depend on the amount of "science capital" a family has.<sup>34</sup> Science capital involves the science-related qualifications, understanding, knowledge, interest, and social contacts in a science-related job, that a family might have. Students from middle-class families are more likely to possess science capital than students who are from underserved backgrounds and are therefore more likely to study sciences at a higher level. This leaves young people from underserved communities less likely to study science after GCSE-level, which can hinder their chances of pursuing a green job.<sup>35</sup>

**"I think awareness is the big [barrier]. Not just awareness of [green jobs] as a concept, but awareness of what that actually looks like in a practical sense [...] Knowing 'if I choose this for my GCSE, if I choose this for my A levels or my T level or my apprenticeship, then I could go into this.' That's sort of like stepping backwards to know what their options are and what pathways they're going down and how that could influence their ability to access various different types of green career."** - Stakeholder



<sup>33</sup> Hamlyn, B., Brownstein, L., Shepherd, A., et al., (2024) [Science Education Tracker 2023](#). Verian, The Royal Society, Engineering UK  
<sup>34</sup>, <sup>35</sup> Archer Ker, L., DeWitt, J., Osborne, J. F., Dillon, J. S., Wong, B., & Willis, B. (2013). [ASPIRES Report: Young people's science and career aspirations, age 10 -14](#). King's College London

**Often schools do not offer young people the technical training they need for specialised green jobs.**



**Beyond subject choice, a lot of green jobs require technical training.** Specifically, this applies to green jobs in industries such as construction, engineering, manufacturing and technology, transport, energy and infrastructure industries.<sup>36</sup> Often schools do not offer young people the technical training they need for these specialised green jobs, because they prioritise university pathways and academic qualifications over vocational pathways.<sup>37</sup> Recent announcements by the UK Government to introduce The Occupational Pathway (a two-year employment-focused programme broadly equivalent to GCSEs) and V levels in 2027 could demonstrate a shift towards more accessible vocational training.<sup>38</sup> When it comes to green careers in engineering, however, Engineering UK have stressed that BTECs should be continued in schools to enable underrepresented groups of young people (such as students with SEND) to access vocational pathways.<sup>39</sup> Currently though, the lack of access to vocational training can be a barrier to young people who want to take up green jobs, particularly in construction, engineering, and manufacturing.<sup>40</sup>

**For many young people, hands-on work experience opportunities, apprenticeships, and entry-level jobs are out of reach.**



**Work experience opportunities and internships provided by schools and employers are particularly important for young people who do not have access to or knowledge of networks of employers.**<sup>41</sup> There are big regional disparities of opportunity across the UK meaning that for many young people, hands-on work experience opportunities, apprenticeships, and entry-level jobs are out of reach.<sup>42</sup> Young people whose schools have inconsistent or non-existent relationships with green employers are therefore at a disadvantage and cannot develop their interest in green jobs as early as those who do.

**"I did some workshops with young people recently and the thing that really stood out in terms of feedback from them was they wanted more activity that they could experience. [...] They don't want assemblies and information disseminated to them; they want to get their hands literally in the soil, building structures and doing things that have an impact. That's how they really want to engage with learning about green opportunities and green skills."** – Stakeholder

36, 40 White, Y., et al., (2022) [Skills for a net-zero economy: Insights from employers and young people](#). Learning and Work Institute

37 Green Alliance (2024) [Green Shoots: Growing the green workforce of the future](#).

38 Department for Education (2025) [New V levels and post-16 qualifications explained](#). The Education Hub

39 Engineering UK (2024) [Fit for the future](#).

41 Crowhurst, M., Taylor, A., (2023) [Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution](#). Public First

42 Williams, J., Alexander, K., Wilson, T. et al., (2021) [A better future: Transforming jobs and skills for young people post-pandemic](#). IES Report

## FINANCIAL BARRIERS AND ENABLERS

Financial barriers are a critical factor in preventing underrepresented groups of young people – particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds – from pursuing green jobs.

**Travel costs to reach green jobs can be unaffordable.** Young people who do not have local green job opportunities will be forced to travel further to reach them. Train fares and driving-related expenses, however, are increasingly costly. Expenses are exacerbated for young people who live in rural areas, who may have to travel further to get to a town or city where there is a green job, and who do not have access to reliable, cheap public transport.<sup>43</sup>

**Costs of training courses for green jobs can be a barrier.** For the more specialised green jobs, the training courses or higher education degrees that are needed can be very expensive. Young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who are already underrepresented in green jobs, can be deterred from these courses due to the prospect of student debt.<sup>44</sup>

**Young people may prioritise earning more now.** Young people want to follow career paths which earn them money straight away, but the environmental sector often presents opportunities for unpaid internships, or low-paying apprenticeships.<sup>45</sup> This delayed payment creates a barrier to green jobs. For example, one study found that “earning money straight away” was the biggest reason that year 10-13 students preferred to follow a vocational route to engineering over a higher education route.<sup>46</sup> In particular, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds struggle to justify sacrificing good wages or incurring student debt.<sup>47</sup> Instead, they prefer to choose alternative careers which pay earlier.

43 Green Alliance (2024) [Green Shoots: Growing the green workforce of the future](#).

44, 46 Hamlyn, B., Brownstein, L., Shepherd, A., et al., (2024) [Science Education Tracker 2023](#). Verian, The Royal Society, Engineering UK

45 Green Alliance (2024) [Green Shoots: Growing the green workforce of the future](#).

47 Hunt, J., Atherton, K., Collerton, E. et al., (2021) [Effective careers interventions for disadvantaged young people](#). The Careers and Enterprise Company

## SOCIAL BARRIERS AND ENABLERS

Social barriers and enablers for young people pursuing green jobs involve the influence of family, teachers, role models, and peers.

There is a gap to be filled in formal and informal education to enable young people to learn about green jobs earlier.

**Formal education (schools, colleges and other structured institutions) and informal education (sports clubs, youth workers, community leaders) have a big influence on whether young people pursue green jobs.** Young people often learn about and explore different career options in schools or colleges, with teachers or careers advisers. Currently, however, young people are not being encouraged towards green jobs in school consistently enough or early enough. A study by The Prince's Trust found that 46% of young people had not heard about green jobs during their education.<sup>48</sup> The report also showed that young people want to learn about green jobs as early as when they are choosing their GCSEs or equivalent, which is around the age of 14. Young people who are NEET were also keen to learn about green jobs at an earlier age. Those with SEND are at higher risk of becoming NEET and may therefore need more targeted support for careers advice, including for green careers.<sup>49</sup> There is a gap to be filled in formal and informal education to enable young people to learn about green jobs earlier.


**"One of the things that comes up quite often is that actually careers advisors are not themselves fully up to date on what the future of green careers looks like. So that is a barrier to young people themselves understanding."** – Stakeholder



<sup>48</sup> Crowhurst, M., Taylor, A., (2023) [Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution](#). Public First

<sup>49</sup> Hunt, J., Atherton, K., Collerton, E. et al. (2021) [Effective careers interventions for disadvantaged young people](#). The Careers and Enterprise Company


Some parents and carers hold misconceptions about green jobs and see them as unreliable and risky career choices.



**One of the biggest influences in young people's career choices is their parents and carers**, especially when it comes to STEM careers. Parents and carers help their children set aspirations, develop confidence, and provide career models for them to follow. Many parents and carers, however, are unaware of what a green job is or how to get one. This means that young people are not exposed to the option of a green job in conversations about careers with their parents or carers. This is particularly true for young people from underrepresented groups, for example those who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds and whose parents did not go to university. These young people will be much more reliant on their schools and teachers for careers advice than their parents or carers.

Furthermore, some parents and carers hold misconceptions about green jobs and see them as unreliable and risky career choices. These misconceptions can mislead young people about green jobs, or lead parents and carers to put pressure on their children to avoid green jobs. While parental influence affects young people from all backgrounds it is a particularly important factor for young people from underrepresented groups, such as those from Black and Asian ethnic groups, in pursuing STEM careers.<sup>50</sup> For example, in a study by King's College London, Black parents in particular felt that science qualifications led to narrow career options for their children (either as scientists or doctors).<sup>51</sup> These beliefs can deter Black students from pursuing sciences and therefore green careers which are STEM-related. Therefore, it is important to convince parents and carers (especially those of underrepresented groups) of the opportunities and rewards of science qualifications and green jobs, to enable young people to pursue green jobs.

**"I was reading a [programme] application from someone who said, 'it took me five years to persuade my parents I didn't have to do a degree in the traditional professions, and that I could do a [green] job'. [...] How do they convince their parents and other mentors that actually there is good work to be done here, and it's very well-paid work? Because the other thing is the perception that environmental work is poorly paid."** – Stakeholder



<sup>50</sup> Hamlyn, B., Brownstein, L., Shepherd, A., et al., (2024) [Science Education Tracker 2023](#). Verian, The Royal Society, Engineering UK  
<sup>51</sup> Archer Ker, L., DeWitt, J., Osborne, J. F., Dillon, J. S., Wong, B., & Willis, B. (2013). [ASPIRES Report: Young people's science and career aspirations, age 10–14](#). King's College London

There is a great need for role models in green jobs because they are new and often misunderstood by young people.

Another important enabler for green jobs is access to role models. Role models can help young people understand and access the jobs they want.<sup>52</sup> There is a great need for role models in green jobs because they are new and often misunderstood by young people. Professionals in green jobs could give advice to young people, answer their questions, and motivate them to have green careers of their own.

This is especially important for piquing the interest of young women who, as a group, are often underrepresented in green jobs. For example, a poll by The Prince's Trust found that female respondents were half as likely as their male counterparts to say they would like to work in a male-dominated green job (such as an electrical vehicle manufacturing operative or as a heat pump installer).<sup>53</sup> Having more visible women role models in green jobs could inspire young women to want to pursue these green jobs, even if they are traditionally male-dominated.



<sup>52</sup> Dixon, N. (2022) [Our Bright Future](#) and [YouthLink Scotland: Green Employability in the youth work sector](#), YouthLink Scotland  
<sup>53</sup> Crowhurst, M., Taylor, A., (2023) [Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution](#), Public First

## IDENTITY AND BELIEFS- RELATED BARRIERS AND ENABLERS


Young people's beliefs about themselves and green jobs create powerful emotional and psychological barriers and enablers to their pursuit of green jobs.

**The belief that green jobs are ultra-competitive or overly-specialist and only for 'high achievers' discourages many young people from considering them as a career option.**



**A lack of representation in green jobs is a big barrier for young people pursuing them.** The evidence suggests that when young people are not represented in a career, they struggle to see themselves in that job and so are discouraged to pursue it.<sup>54</sup> This is especially relevant to green jobs, which are heavily dominated by white, middle-class men.<sup>55</sup> For example, the construction industry is a big source of green jobs but only 14% of construction industry professionals identify as women.<sup>56</sup> This can be off-putting for young people who crave a diverse workplace, but especially for young women or young people from global majority backgrounds. Young people from underrepresented groups in green jobs need to start seeing people like themselves in green jobs to be assured that it is a viable career option for them.

**"We still have a major issue of young girls not seeing themselves in STEM jobs, and a lot of green jobs are STEM jobs. [...] But industry engagement in schools can help them realise that [green career] pathways are actually relevant to them, that they could be a good option, and that they are capable of [following them]. And the same thing applies to disabled children and children from ethnic minority backgrounds who might not see themselves in [green jobs]."** – Stakeholder



<sup>54</sup> Groundwork (2025) [Youth in a changing climate](#).

<sup>55</sup> Policy Exchange (2017) [The two sides of diversity: Which are the most ethnically diverse occupations?](#)

<sup>56</sup> Green Alliance (2024) [Green Shoots: Growing the green workforce of the future](#).

**Other barriers to young people pursuing green jobs relate to beliefs about pay and job security.** Some young people believe that green jobs are poorly paid and short-term.<sup>57</sup> Overall, many green jobs (e.g. in clean energy) do offer well-paid careers and tend to be advertised for salaries above the UK average.<sup>58</sup> However, when compared specifically to other highly skilled sectors, green jobs can be lower paid than their counterparts. For instance, 'green finance' jobs pay more than the average job, but less than the average for the financial sector.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, stakeholders noted that some young people are sceptical about green jobs, seeing the label of 'green' as more of a political tool than a stable career choice. In particular, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds may find these misconceptions hard to ignore, as they may be under more pressure to find better pay and job security.

**Students who have a history of low attainment at school are therefore likely to feel like green jobs are out of reach.**



Other barriers include **the belief that green jobs are ultra-competitive or overly-specialist, and therefore only for people who think of themselves as 'high achievers'.** For example, a report by PwC found that the proportion of the green jobs workforce who have university degrees is higher than that of the general workforce.<sup>60</sup> Students who have a history of low attainment at school are therefore likely to feel like green jobs are out of reach. This is more common for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, in Kings College London's 'Aspires' report, Black students were more likely than their white and Asian peers to feel that science careers are only for the "brainy".<sup>62</sup> As many green careers are also science careers, young people from Black backgrounds may be stopping themselves from pursuing green jobs. These beliefs are a pervasive barrier to pursuing green jobs and are very difficult for underrepresented groups to overcome.

57 Crowhurst, M., Taylor, A., (2023) [Generation Green Jobs? Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution](#). Public First

58 DESNZ (2024) [Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A new era of clean electricity – assessment of the clean energy skills challenge – evidence annex](#).

59 Sato, M., Cass, L., Saussay, A., et al. (2023) [Skills and wage gaps in the low-carbon transition: comparing job vacancy data](#).

60 Pwc (2023) [Green Jobs Barometer](#).

61 Hunt, J., Atherton, K., Collerton, E. et al., (2021) [Effective careers interventions for disadvantaged young people](#). The Careers and Enterprise Company

62 Archer Ker, L., DeWitt, J., Osborne, J. F., Dillon, J. S., Wong, B., & Willis, B. (2013). [ASPIRES Report: Young people's science and career aspirations, age 10 –14](#). King's College London

**“That idea that green jobs are for white middle-class people, you know, having the social capital to get you into that. I suppose just that having a network where you know somebody who knows someone who will give you an opportunity is less available to more marginalised young people. And that’s true of all employability. But then there’s a particular view that green jobs are niche. Youth workers reported that young people they work with feel as though a career in the green economy is someone else’s problem: unattainable, abstract, niche, and seen as specialist as well.” - Stakeholder**

Ultimately, these social and identity-based factors can be summarised in young people feeling like green jobs ‘are not for me’ – particularly amongst those from underrepresented groups. These barriers can be overcome through accessible career information, representative role models in green jobs, encouragement from parents, carers, and educators, and by challenging common myths about green jobs.



# POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Despite the complex and fragmented nature of the green skills funding landscape, the UK Government has taken steps to detail a workforce plan to support the transition to a green economy. Most recently, they have published the Clean Energy Jobs Plan, which sets out, for the first time, the workforce needed to deliver against the Government's clean energy ambitions.<sup>63</sup> The plan identifies 31 priority occupations, with plumbers, electricians, and welders in particularly high demand, and includes setting up five 'technical excellence colleges' to train young people to fill these roles. The plan also outlines the UK Government's ambition to create "benefits for every nation and region". These developments present Co-op and the Co-op Foundation with a unique opportunity to influence government policy on green skills and green careers by leveraging their position as a major employer and funder. Both the literature and stakeholders identified a number of potential strategies and opportunities.

**Stakeholders suggested that Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can play a convening role, bringing together national and local governments, employers, and other stakeholders to develop a collective industry voice around the future of green skills and green careers.**



The literature suggests that in order to articulate practical and specific policy recommendations, governments should be informed by real world evidence and intelligence from industry and educators. This will help to shift from a supply-driven to a demands-led skills system.<sup>64</sup> Stakeholders suggested that Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can support these efforts by playing a convening role, bringing together national and local governments, employers, and other stakeholders to develop a collective industry voice around the future of green skills and green careers. For example, one specific recommendation from the literature is to ensure that local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) align with national priorities. This would help to integrate the approaches of local employers, local governments, and educators into a national strategy.<sup>65</sup> As part of a convening role, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can seek representation on current and future advisory panels and taskforces, such as the DfE's Green Apprenticeships Advisory Panel which is aimed at aligning apprenticeships to Net Zero objectives and employer needs.<sup>66</sup>

63 DESNZ (2025) Clean Energy Jobs Plan. Policy Paper. Gov.UK. [Clean energy jobs plan - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/clean-energy-jobs-plan)

64 Wilson, P (2024) [Planning For The Future: Recruiting Diverse Talent Into Waste and Resource Management](#). Groundwork. Environmental Services and Solutions Expo.

65 Birket, E., Luke, A., & Bunt, P. (2022) [Green Jobs, Red Wall](#). Onward.

66 Department for Education (2023) [Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems](#). Gov.UK.

Linked to strategic oversight is the need to address evidence gaps around the green skills and green careers funding landscape, and to evaluate the effectiveness of existing initiatives. Both the literature and stakeholders called for a stronger evidence base and continuous monitoring of progress.<sup>67</sup> By evaluating and publishing the impact of its green skills initiatives, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can provide governments with much-needed data on skills gaps, effective interventions, and workforce needs.

Some stakeholders described successful advocacy efforts that have already influenced policy and curriculum reviews, showing that funders and sector actors can have a real impact on government policy. Their recommendations included engaging in similar advocacy, especially around integrating sustainability and green skills into the curriculum and careers advice, ensuring that teachers and career advisors are better equipped to guide young people towards green careers. This includes supporting the upskilling of educators and intermediaries, as well as promoting the mainstreaming of climate education in formal qualifications.

**“Effectively, part of the reason Labour is doing a curriculum assessment review is because we fought for it... And then we’re now influencing the official Becky Frances curriculum assessment review.”** – Stakeholder



Stakeholders emphasised the need for more certainty around green skills funding in the long term. They wanted ambitious, systemic change rather than funding that was limited to short term discrete initiatives. Funders can show leadership by making this public commitment and aiming for long term funding programmes for green skills. They can also place pressure to encourage governments and other stakeholders to commit to further funding into green skills. By aiming for systemic change rather than short term discrete initiatives, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can help build a legacy of improved green skills pathways and workforce readiness.

<sup>67</sup> Climate Change Committee (2023) [A Net Zero Workforce. Climate Change Committee.](#)



**“Hopefully, the Co-op Foundation will send a signal that work around green skills–Net Zero Skills–is an important thing. But you can’t just fund an isolated bit and then move on, because that’s what everyone does, and that isn’t really what we need... we need something much bigger than that!”** – Stakeholder

Stakeholders felt that Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can ensure policy considers the barriers faced by underserved groups and ensure equitable access to opportunities for all. By focusing on social justice and a just transition, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can highlight and address barriers such as financial constraints, lack of awareness, and outdated perceptions around green jobs, that disproportionately affect underserved groups. Stakeholders also highlighted the need to address regional disparities to prevent what one stakeholder described as a *“postcode lottery of green opportunity”*.

Alongside influencing government policy, stakeholders wanted Co-op and the Co-op Foundation to engage employers and promote employer-led training programmes. One stakeholder argued that employers invest less in the skills system in the UK than other countries, and that greater onus should be placed on them to train young people and retrain existing workforces as part of the transition to a sustainable economy. As a major employer, Co-op is already leading by example. From this position, they can advocate for other employers to invest in green skills training, and for changes in regulation that incentivise or require employers to invest in green skills training.

**“The level of employer investment in the skill system is lower than it was in 2011. Employers invest much less in their skills than they used to, and they invest less in their skills than they do in other countries, including companies that have presences in the UK and other countries. Some of them invest less here because it’s not the norm.”** – Stakeholder

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6

# UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR A GREENER FUTURE

Our findings highlight a unique opportunity for Co-op and the Co-op Foundation to drive meaningful societal change through their Co-op Green Opportunities Fund. By identifying key gaps in both funding and skills development, they can help shape a more inclusive, sustainable future for young people across the UK.

## 1. Inspiring the next generation: choosing the right age group

One of the most significant opportunities lies in deciding which age group to focus on. Supporting younger people means inspiring them upstream – sparking curiosity and passion for green careers just as they begin making choices about their education and future. Working with older groups, meanwhile, offers downstream opportunities to develop technical expertise and practical skills for green jobs.

While both approaches have merit, the evidence shows a clear need to ignite interest earlier. Together with Co-op and the Co-op Foundation, it was agreed that the Co-op Green Opportunities Fund should **prioritise 14-20-year-olds**, a critical window where young people can be inspired to make life-shaping decisions and start developing the skills that will power the green economy.

## 2. Underrepresented young people: championing inclusion in the green economy

The research found a gap in funds specifically targeted towards underserved young people. The Co-op Green Opportunities Fund should prioritise young people who are underrepresented in green jobs, including women, young people from Global Majority backgrounds, young people with disabilities, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. By giving more power to those who are too often excluded, the Fund can open doors to opportunity, creativity, and leadership in the green sector, and ultimately provide a beacon to inspire young people in the future.

Importantly, the **Fund should recognise how these characteristics intersect** – understanding how overlapping identities and experiences shape the challenges young people face. By addressing these intersections, the Fund can create pathways that are not just open, but truly equitable, ensuring every young person has the chance to build a bright, green future.

### 3. Rethinking education: valuing informal pathways

Another opportunity lies in choosing the types of educational pathways to support. Formal education – delivered through schools, colleges, and universities – remains vital, but informal pathways often have greater impact. These community-based, flexible learning environments foster creativity, confidence, and connection, yet they remain underfunded and undervalued.

In recognition of this, and based on the evidence, the Fund should encourage approaches that **prioritise informal educational pathways**, ensuring that young people can access inspiring, hands-on opportunities to explore green skills outside traditional classrooms.

### 4. Leading the way: Co-op's strategic role

Beyond direct funding, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation have an opportunity to play a broader leadership role. The green skills landscape is currently fragmented, with limited coordination between funders. With its UK-wide reach, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can act as a **national convener**, bringing together stakeholders, shaping education and training policy, and driving a shared vision for green skills development.

However, national leadership must also connect locally. Ensuring **strategic coordination at the community level** will be key to creating clear pathways into employment for young people who participate in Co-op Green Opportunities Fund-supported programmes. Consequently, funded partners must consider how their activities join up with other green skills training and career opportunities for young people locally.

### 5. Building from the ground up: a regional approach to scale

Finally, while the Fund will operate across the UK, evidence shows that the most effective interventions start *regionally*. By working closely with local educators, governments, and employers, the Fund can create models of success that respond directly to community and industry needs. These regional partnerships can then be scaled up, forming a **national framework for green skills** that is rooted in local realities and driven by collaboration.

Through these opportunities, Co-op and the Co-op Foundation can not only support young people to build the skills of the future but also help shape the systems that make those futures possible, creating a generation of confident, capable, and climate-conscious changemakers.



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# APPENDICES

8

APPENDIX 1: STAKEHOLDER SAMPLE DETAILS

Stakeholders interviewed brought a range of perspectives from the different types of organisations they represent. The achieved sample of stakeholders can be broken down as follows.

Stakeholder type	Interview achieved
Academic	2
National Government	2
Local Government	1
Private Company	1
Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE), including grant-giving organisations	9

## APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Interviews with stakeholders lasted 30 minutes and followed a semi-structured format using the following topic guide.

### Topic guide:

This research is being carried out by The Social Agency, on behalf of the Co-op Foundation and is undertaken in confidence. Co-op and the Co-op Foundation are launching a Co-op Green Opportunities Fund. This fund will aim to support young people aged 11-17, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, to get into green careers (jobs that support climate action and the environment).

The purpose of this research is to define the scope of the fund, and where the fund should focus to ensure it has the biggest impact. We would like to interview you as part of this process.

Am I okay to record the interview? (Only available to us)

Researcher to cover the following questions:

- Re-introduce yourself briefly i.e. name, organisational role...
- Views on our working definition of green skills (O\*NES Green New and Emerging Jobs and Green Enhanced Skills Jobs)
- What are the main barriers and enablers for young people (aged 11-17) developing green skills?
  - How do these differ across different groups of young people?
  - Do you have any examples of effective initiatives that have addressed these barriers?
- Where are the main funding gaps to support young people to develop green skills?
- Do you believe it would be better for Co-op and the Co-op Foundation to focus on:
  - Raising awareness and inspire young people to consider green jobs/skills generally
  - Focusing on specific green skills that will enable young people to get a particular job
- If you oversaw the fund, what would you do with it?
- What other organisations would be helpful for us to speak to?

Thank and close

# ABOUT CO-OP FOUNDATION

## WE'RE THE CO-OP'S CHARITY AND WE'RE CO-OPERATING FOR A FAIRER WORLD.

We believe co-operation is at the heart of strong communities and this makes us a different kind of funder. We work closely with communities, we listen and we learn.

We unlock communities' power by focusing on those who have most at stake.

That's why we asked young people to shape our vision for fairer, more co-operative communities. They're the next generation of leaders and pioneers. We make it easy for organisations and individuals to access our funds, work with us and campaign alongside us. We're always ready to share what we've learned and we're proud to be part of the Co-op. Co-operate with us, and let's build communities of the future together.

## ABOUT CO-OP

### CO-OP IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST CONSUMER CO-OPERATIVES.

The Co-op has interests across food, funerals, insurance and legal services.

Owned by millions of UK consumers, the Co-op operates over 2,500 food stores, over 800 funeral homes and provides products to over 5,000 other stores, including those run by independent co-operative societies and through its wholesale business,

Nisa Retail Limited. Employing almost 60,000 people, the Co-op has an annual turnover of over £11 billion and is a recognised leader for its social goals and community-led programmes. The Co-op exists to meet members' needs and stand up for the things they believe in. Over the last two years Co-op has invested in extensive research including Ghosted Generation 2021 and Unfair Tales 2022 to understand the attitudes, life chances and aspirations of young people.

