



Institute for the
Future of Work

Report

Flourish

*Increasing the number of people in good
green training and work in Cornwall*

June 2026



Produced with funding from



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Acknowledgements

This report has been produced by the Cornwall Community Research Team: Joana Geisler, Oliver Nash, Oli Whittington, Tim Hunt, and Ivan, Imogen and Harry who played such an integral role in this research. Illustrations by Sonia Whitehead.

Disclaimer

This report has been produced based on community research conducted in partnership with Cornwall Council.



All views expressed here are of the Institute for the Future of work and do not necessarily reflect the views of any partner or other affiliated organisations.

Citation

Geisler, J. Nash, O., Whittington, O., *Flourish - Increasing the number of people in good green training and work in Cornwall*. London: Institute for the Future of Work.
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19205895

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1. Introduction

This green transition is generating a significant economic opportunity. Between 2023 and 2024, businesses in the net-zero economy contributed disproportionately to economic growth, growing at 10.1% (compared to 0.9% growth in the wider economy), with similar figures for employment (Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit and CBI Economics, 2025). However, the education system is currently not providing the technical skills and capabilities needed for this transition, with, for example, apprenticeship starts in England decreasing approximately 29% since 2016/2017 (Murray, 2026).

Flourish aims to address these structural barriers as a research-impact project, led by the Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW), funded by Ufi VocTech Trust, and in partnership with Cornwall Council's Youth Engagement Programme (YEP). It aims to get more young people into good green pathways by addressing a structural problem identified by IFOW's prior research: individuals in peripheral and post-industrial regions face multiple, interacting barriers to entering the green economy, and existing career tools and training pathways are insufficiently tailored to the specificities of place, prior experience, or ambition. Cornwall has significant opportunities in the green economy, but also faces structural barriers to capitalising on this opportunity (Rawlinson, Pitts and Papagianaki, 2025). This makes it an important and exciting place to be centring through this work.

The approach of this project can be summarised as: flourishing, participatory, and design-led. It centres flourishing of people and place as its goal, does this by platforming the voices of community researchers with lived experience of the structural barriers, and allows us to imagine a better future of work through design approaches to innovation.

This report details findings from the first year of the Flourish project, which outlines and discusses the with five most important challenges as identified by community researchers. They are the awareness, capabilities, support, access, and the financial challenge. All of them are distinct but nonetheless intersectional – for example, those more affected by the financial challenge are also more likely to face an access challenge.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows: it introduces Cornwall's green economy, the UK's skills ecosystem, and their stakeholders. This is followed by an introduction to the five challenges as identified by community researchers. Each challenge is discussed using insight from interviews by the community researchers and IFOW's conversations with stakeholders, which feed into the policy recommendations for each challenge.

The IFOW team would like to thank the contributions of three community researchers, Harry, Imogen, and Ivan for their dedication, deep insight, and demonstrating a creative vision for what flourishing can be, as well as the YEP programme – in particular, Tim Hunt – for supporting this project in many capacities.

2. Flourish Project Context

2.1 The Flourish project is a research-impact project aimed at increasing the number of people in good green training and work in Cornwall

The future of work in Cornwall is green. However, it will need to be shaped actively to make sure that everyone benefits. The Flourish project aims to contribute to this mission; as a research-impact project, it exists to support more people onto good green career pathways. It does this through i) novel participatory research with young people from Cornwall surfacing the barriers people face to entering the green economy and ii) using these insights to develop, together with the community researchers, a technology platform to address these barriers, for example by helping individuals identify their motivations and skills. This report is aimed at shedding light on the first by bringing together insights from the community research with those from system stakeholders.

IFOW is a non-profit socio-technical research and development institute whose mission is to transform working lives for good. We do this through policy-relevant research, events and conferences, practical toolkits and frameworks. By collaborating with local and national government, academics, regulators, businesses, and other charitable organisations, we ensure our work changes systems, not just symptoms. For this project, we have partnered with Cornwall Council's Youth Engagement Programme (YEP), who work with people aged 16-24 who are currently or soon to be not in employment, education, or training (NEET). This ensured the research was grounded in the Cornish context, and – in particular – the experiences of young people who face barriers to pursuing a good pathway for them.

2.2 Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are playing a key role in the green transition, bringing significant economic opportunity with it

The UK's transition to a net-zero economy represents one of the most significant structural shifts in the country's economy. The UK government's legally binding target is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, positioning clean energy, decarbonisation, and environmental restoration as central pillars of industrial policy (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2025) and as a path to energy sovereignty (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2026). In Cornwall, the net zero goal is set for 2045.

This transition brings with it significant economic opportunity. Between 2023 and 2024, businesses in the net-zero economy contributed disproportionately to economic growth, growing at 10.1% (compared to 0.9% growth in the wider economy), with similar figures for employment (Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit and CBI Economics, 2025). Many of the 951,000 jobs in the net-zero economy are also highly productive: the economic contribution per green job stands at £105,542, which is 38% higher than the average UK worker (Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit and CBI Economics, 2025). They are also growing, with net job creation from the energy transition expected to be between 135,000 and 725,000 in the next four years (Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, 2025). In summary, the green sector offers a route to creating good jobs with higher-than-average-wages, secure employment, and purpose.

Cornwall is playing a key role in this transition. With its rich industrial history and significant opportunities relating to the green economy, such as with floating offshore wind (FLOW) in the Celtic Sea, mining of critical raw materials, and geothermal power (Rawlinson, Pitts

and Papagianaki, 2025), the future of work and the green economy in Cornwall go hand-in-hand. The county already hosts significant renewable energy assets, and green job adverts in Cornwall make up 3.4% of total job adverts (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2024). While only slightly above the national average, the significant expansion of the green economy is likely to make Cornwall a large green employer in the next decade.

Box 1 - What is a green job?

For this report we take the green job definition by the Green Jobs Taskforce, namely “employment in an activity that directly contributes to – or indirectly supports – the achievement of the UK’s net zero emissions target and other environmental goals, such as nature restoration and mitigation against climate risks”.

Green jobs can be divided into:

- ‘light’ green roles, where sustainability is one element of the job,
- ‘mid’ green roles, which focus on adapting to new green technologies, and
- ‘dark’ green roles where sustainability is central to the job.

This is relevant because research convened by IFOW on good work in Cornwall has shown that, despite high employment rates and low NEET rates, there are currently few opportunities for good work in Cornwall (Rawlinson, Pitts and Papagianaki, 2025). This is attributed to a range of structural factors such as skills gaps, poor housing and transport, and a high density of low-margin businesses, such as seasonal work in tourism. The Pissarides Review into the Future of Work and Wellbeing (2025), a three-year Nuffield-funding research programme hosted by IFOW, suggests that these structural factors limit technology adoption and productivity growth, which are crucial conditions for good work. Done right, a growing green economy is a significant opportunity to increase the amount of good work in Cornwall.

2.3 Skills are crucial for the green transition, but the current education system is not accommodating demand from the green sector

To get more people in Cornwall into good green work, they will need the skills and capabilities that equip them for this growing segment of the economy. The skills gap, defined here as the lack of qualified candidates relative to job vacancies, is a critical challenge. Left unaddressed, it will mean the UK will struggle to meet its net zero goals (Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, 2025). Skills mismatches are broader issue, however, estimated to have a cumulative cost to the economy of £120 billion by 2030 (Melville and Bivand, 2019).

Currently, the UK skills system is not accommodating the need for technical skills, hampering the growth of sectors relevant to green growth such as like construction, vehicle repair and retail, and water, sewage, and waste management (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2024). For one, the UK will need an additional 250,000 workers to meet its new housing and retrofit targets, which is unlikely to realise without action by government (Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, 2025). There is also a significant lack of skills in nature recovery and climate adaptation, with over 50% of businesses in the sector reporting hard-to-fill vacancies and turning down greening projects as a result (The Landscape Institute, 2022).

A strong vocational education system is crucial to develop the kinds of technical skills needed for the green transition, but the UK’s bet on higher education has left the vocational education and training (VET) system ill-equipped to provide skills for the green sector. With apprenticeship starts in England having declined by approximately 29% over the past decade (Murray, 2026), the skills gap in the green economy ensuing from the VET system

reflects structural issues in a system which devalues technical education relative to academic education. In opposition to many OECD peers with strong VET systems, technical education receives around 23% less funding, per student, than their academic peers (Robinson, 2020).

Recent announcements in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper and a renewed policy focus on apprenticeships and lifelong learning from the Government are aimed at tackling the lack of technical skills in the UK (DfE, DWP and DSIT, 2025). This includes greater flexibility in how firms can use the Growth and Skills Levy from April 2026 onwards, including for short courses or so-called ‘apprenticeship units’. While non-apprenticeship training will initially focus on eight priority areas, including skills relevant for the green economy such as heat pump installation, significant uncertainties remain, potentially undermining business buy-in (Ogden and Tahir, 2025). Despite a welcome increase in flexibility, FE Week reported in February 2026 that government had not clarified whether there will be a cap for firms’ spending on non-apprenticeship training, though some stakeholders highlighted the need for a cap to ensure apprenticeships remain prioritised (Camden, 2026) as they enable high-quality skills development that is industry-relevant and shares costs with employers.

Cornwall, which has below-average educational attainment rates and severe barriers of physical accessibility, offers limited training opportunities for progression into higher-skilled pathways (Rawlinson, Pitts and Papagianaki, 2025). Although there have been innovative partnerships between firms and educational providers, such as mining apprenticeships, more incentives are needed to promote technical education for renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, construction, and technology. This would significantly enhance career progression opportunities, as highlighted in Cornwall’s Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

2.4 Interconnected stakeholders are needed to get more people onto pathways into good work

Work in the Flourish project confirmed that getting more people onto pathways that lead to good work will require a multi-stakeholder approach - as shown by the map in Figure 1.

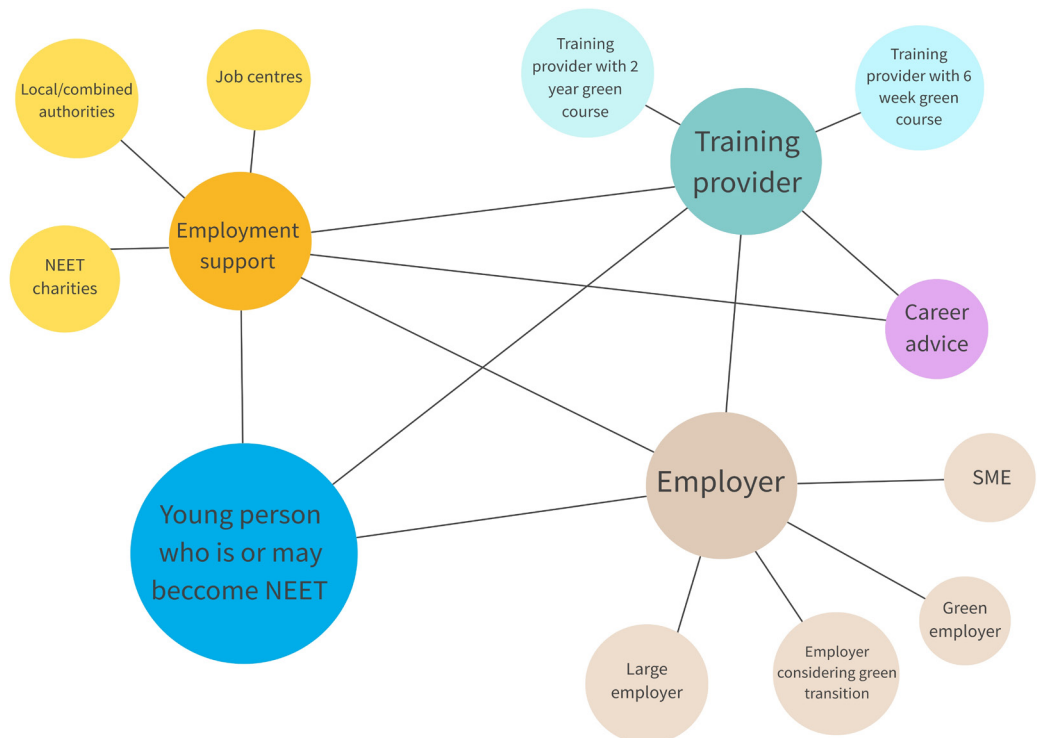


Figure 1 - Map of Cornwall's green pathways

To understand this green pathways ecosystem, we identified six relevant stakeholder groups: jobseekers and learners, career advice, employers, employment support, training providers, and Cornwall Council, which sit within the wider economic and policy context.

Jobseekers / learners need pathways that accommodate their diversity, not exclude it

This group includes potential workers in the green sector. Our research focused on NEET young people or those at high risk of becoming NEET and those in low-wage work seeking progression, including key sub-groups such as neurodiverse learners.

Case Study: Truro & Penwith Careers team



The careers team at Truro & Penwith, part of the college's 'Future is green' project, work to increase the visibility of green training and work opportunities, especially around floating offshore wind (FLOW). However, a major challenge in promoting these pathways to young people is the perception of inaccessibility, and the fact that many of these are future opportunities, when people are more interested in real, existing jobs.

Career advice plays a crucial role in linking young people to good pathways

These individuals play a critical intermediary role but are severely under-resourced relative to the breadth of their remit. Careers advisors primarily rely on their professional networks to stay in the loop about local green economy opportunities, as national information resources are rarely place-specific. They are a key supporting institution for young people.

Employers demand skills and capabilities, but also play a key role in developing them

Employers play a key but heterogeneous role in the green economy and the system of skills formation. Employers are what drive the green economy and play a key role in the skills system, for example as part of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) and as providers of skills and capabilities, for example through apprenticeships.

Case Study: Naked Solar



Naked Solar is a B-Corp solar panel installer in the South West which has seen major growth whilst contributing to a qualified workforce by innovating a short course on Solar PV Installation. However, as a small organisation, it is difficult for them to offer an electrician or roofing apprenticeship, even if they need more people with those skills.

Employment support organisations offer an alternative to formalised education and career support, usually to young people with diverse needs

These organisations provide crucial careers support for young people most marginalised from the labour market. Generally working through referrals, they provide an opportunity to gain skills in ways that are more accessible to many young people with additional needs.

Case Study: MPower Kernow



MPower Kernow operates an engineering and construction skills training facility that provides practical learning for young people who are NEET. Based on a historic industrial site at St Blazey, Cornwall, they recognise that conventional education does not work for everyone – particularly those with greatest need for support. As an employment-focused training provider, they deliver a blend of modern and traditional technical skills training, designed primarily for kinaesthetic (hands-on) learners. This approach creates a practical, nurturing learning environment that builds self-confidence and enables those furthest from the labour market to progress into long-term, sustainable careers in engineering and construction.

Training providers are key to ensuring young people’s skills are relevant now and in the future

All vocational education and training requires an element of school-based learning, making training providers crucial to addressing the skills gaps in the green economy. They work with firms so their students can access work placements and develop practical skills.

Case Study: Cornwall College St Austell



Offering several Level 3 green apprenticeships as part of the ‘Future is Green’ programme, Cornwall College in St Austell is pioneering specialist green training such as a course in Air Source Heat Pumps. However, despite having the funding to offer apprenticeships and employer demand for those skills, it can be difficult to engage employers for work placements.

Cornwall Council plays a key delivery and coordination role in reducing the NEET rate and narrowing the skills gap

The council is an active stakeholder in the green economy and the NEET challenge. Its initiatives, such as Celtic Sea Power, the YEP Programme, and the Future is Green programme, demonstrate its involvement in aligning young people’s careers with the green economy. It is also engaged in coordination through the LSIP and SEND employment forum.

2.5 Our approach: flourishing, participatory, and design-led

Having provided an overview of the green economy and pathway system in Cornwall, it’s important to lay out the project’s approach, namely one of flourishing, participation, and design. It centres the flourishing of people and place, platforms the voices of community researchers with lived experience, and imagines a better future of work through design.

Flourishing – the lens

Skills – whilst crucial to the green transition – are just one piece of a complex puzzle of how people progress in their careers. The capabilities approach, coined by Nobel laureate Sen and applied in the Pissarides Review (2025), suggests that people have different ‘conversion

factors' when it comes to turning skills into valued employment opportunities. In other words, the same 'amount' of skills investment in two people results in different outcomes depending on the conditions and circumstances of each person. For this reason, the project goes beyond skills to understanding how we can promote the capabilities – and ultimately the flourishing – of the Cornish and Cornwall.

Here, our definition of flourishing is inspired by Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia (εὐδαιμονία), defined not as a fleeting emotion or static condition, but as an active state of living and functioning well (VanderWeele et al., 2025). Flourishing in this sense means actively realising one's capacities in relation to the social, civic, and ecological world around us (Shrivastava and Zsolnai, 2022). Viewing work and education through this lens means asking not what a person can produce, but what conditions allow them to genuinely live, work and thrive in ways they have reason to value (Kristjánsson, 2025).

Sen's Capabilities Approach, rooted in Aristotle's understanding of human flourishing, identifies functionings, capability, and agency as prerequisites for a flourishing life (Sen, 1999). The Flourish platform draws on these prerequisites directly: surfacing what skills and transferable experience participants already have (functionings), opening up green economy roles they have real reason to value but may not have seen as accessible (capabilities), and supporting each person to determine what matters to them and shape their own path forward (agency) (Halstead et al., 2025).

Zooming out to Cornwall, we understand flourishing of a place as having a workforce rich in skills and capabilities, a regenerative and sustainable economy, and an abundance of good work, that is, work that promotes dignity, autonomy and equality; work that has fair pay and conditions; work where people are properly supported to develop their talents and have a sense of community (IFOW, 2018).

Participatory – the process

Throughout this project, we applied a participatory community research approach to directly involve participants in Cornwall's pathway ecosystem. To centre lived experience within the skills system, we worked with three young people from Cornwall – with current or recent experience of being NEET – as community researchers between August 2025 and March 2026. Research design, data collection, and interpretation were co-created by community



Figure 2 - Community Researchers clustering interview data in Cornwall

researchers and IFOW research staff. This allowed the project to centre the voices of those with expertise from their lived experience in the local pathways ecosystem. Community researchers collected data through interviews with 21 people from Cornwall from all walks of life. The project reflects these individual experiences.

Design-led – the method

The method of collecting and interpreting interview data was design-led, and led towards design challenges. Design challenges involve defining a problem and thinking creatively about solutions by envisioning possibilities, not just reflecting on current approaches. The community researchers chose the five most salient design challenges that emerged from the interview clustering, presented in this report. Solutions were designed into the Flourish tool (not covered in this report). To complement the community researchers' design challenges, the IFOW team conducted interviews and informal conversations with different stakeholders in the green economy.



There is a growing need to improve how young people in Cornwall access clear, engaging information about the green economy, helping them understand what green jobs are, why they matter, and how to access them locally.

This should be supported by a central, accessible platform that connects their interests and skills to real opportunities, while clearly signposting training pathways and available roles.

Tim Hunt - Youth and Business Engagement and Strategy Lead, Cornwall Council

3. Key challenges to increasing the number of people in good green training or work

The community researchers identified five key challenges that limit the number of people who enter good green training or work.

Awareness Challenge:

How might we increase awareness of green jobs?

It's not always clear what a green job is, even though many are attracted by the meaning from contributing to protecting the environment.

Capabilities Challenge:

How might we effectively support & communicate with young minds about how to apply for jobs?

Online job application processes are difficult to navigate and can be alienating, particularly for those with no prior experience in the process.

Support Challenge:

How might we build confidence for applicants and employers to support those with varying needs?

Needs and disabilities increase barriers to accessing work or training. Once in work, those with additional needs do not always feel understood by their employers.

Access Challenge:

How might we support young people in rural or remote places to access good work and training?

Location is a major barrier to accessing good training and work, and is exacerbated for people living in places with no good work opportunities.

Finance Challenge:

How might we support young people overcome financial barriers to education or training?

The cost of training means that people are not able to complete the type of courses that would help them progress professionally.

4. Implications of these challenges for the skills and careers support landscape

Here, we discuss the five challenges identified by the community researchers in the previous section. Insights from the community researchers (in **bold**) are discussed using with IFOW's own research, including original interviews for the project with stakeholders across the green economy.

Awareness challenge: increasing the awareness of green jobs

The awareness challenge emerges from the fact that many people interviewed by the community researchers did not know what green jobs were, beyond the most obvious roles. "I think [of] wind turbines", someone said when asked about green jobs.

This aligns with the views of professionals IFOW spoke with, who said that the language around green is complex and inconsistent (e.g. green, net-zero, low-carbon, sustainable), leading to confusion about what is, and isn't, a green job. Relatedly, there is a need to widen people's understanding of green jobs (see Box 1).

A broadened understanding of a "green" job is important because many people did not consider green jobs as an option for them and did not know where to look.

Clearly, the lack of consistent information on green jobs available to careers advisers trickles down to support they can give. Many students struggle to access information about available green training and jobs due to a lacking framework of classification (one study showed that 57% of young people do not know what green jobs are available (Whincup et al., 2023)). Due to stretched resources for careers support, senior buy-in for a green-specific careers programme is crucial.

Despite this lack of information about green jobs, people are generally open to the idea of a green job. Many said it is important to have a positive impact on others and the environment, with one saying that "it would feel good to [...] help the planet".

This view was not shared by everyone; some college students emphasised that the 'system' is not built for 'people like them' – certainly not with them. The green transition was viewed with scepticism, manifested in the alienating experience of repairing electric vehicles (EVs).

In this context, awareness and narratives should be seen jointly. Awareness and different pathways shapes how green jobs and the economy are perceived. Careers advisers raised the need to promote awareness of green jobs at an early age, including through project-based learning, to foster early awareness, excitement, and a sense, that, green jobs are for 'people like them'. This is especially important in Cornwall, which can suffer from a narrative that "to get on you need to get out", as one person put it.



Community Researcher

Therefore, increasing the visibility green jobs, and the pathways into them, is crucial to narrow the knowledge gap of what green jobs are and raise expectations about what work is available in Cornwall. This shows people that there is something for them in the green transition, which can be powerful when rooted in Cornwall's history of industrialisation.

Capabilities challenge: guiding young people through job-searching process

The Capabilities challenge refers to the gap between where people currently are and where they are hoping to progress. People said they found job application processes challenging, especially online, and often had little to no support.

The capability challenge was strongly present in IFOW's conversations with different stakeholders. Those supporting young people into long-term employment noted that the education system does not sufficiently foster the human-centric skills young people need to apply for a job. It also does not tailor to the diverse needs and preferences of young people.

Some people said they did not know how to build a good CV, for example how to present their skills to a potential employer. One person said that: "Preparing a CV was a nightmare because I had never done it before". This is especially true for people where English is not their first language or those with additional needs. Often, people resorted to their own research on CVs and used AI tools for advice and input.

This illustrates the variation in people's capabilities, that is, their ability to turn their skills into valued opportunities. Some reported that this inadequate support for varied capabilities leads to poor mental health, low motivation, and anxiety about the future.

Another recurring theme was the importance of in-person networks and online application portals that are impersonal and difficult to navigate. Many people relied on their network to find out about opportunities and to increase their chances of success.

Other stakeholders confirmed the importance of relationships, with job opportunities regularly spreading by word-of-mouth. This is important for learners and the people supporting them, such as career advisers. The current lack of sector-specific employer networks limits learners' ability to land work placements and jobs, with one learner reportedly calling garages across Cornwall to inquire about possible work experience.

Support challenge: supporting young people with SEND from school to work

The support challenge emerged from the observation that the pathway system creates significant barriers for people with special needs, such as ADHD.

Aligned with insights from the capabilities challenge, the stakeholders IFOW spoke with acknowledged that a one-size-fits-all approach to learning, education, and careers support alienated many people with special needs and neurodivergence – starting in education.

For people with disabilities, application processes are often inaccessible and support inadequate. For this group, the capabilities challenge was particularly relevant.

Formal institutions can struggle to meet the diverse profiles of people with SEND, leaving people without adequate support. This is something that has been recognised nationally, with the recent Milburn Review highlighting the experience of neurodivergent young people not feeling understood or accommodated in employment. In addition, young people who are NEET – and therefore without access to a career adviser – might struggle to get the support they need, a problem also raised in the Milburn Review. As a result, the most marginalised are sometimes referred to employment support programmes (e.g. YEP programme and MPower Kernow), which are designed to accommodate SEND, either directly or by linking people to development opportunities.

Once people with additional needs are in employment, they sometimes found it difficult to explain their needs and disabilities and at times felt misunderstood. One person said: “Many people still do not understand the difficulties of ADHD and just don’t understand what it actually is”.

This is confirmed by the fact that firms sometimes lacked the confidence to take on young people with SEND or mental health issues, particularly smaller firms without the capacity for dedicated support. This is an important problem to solve as work placements are an excellent opportunity for practical learning that can be more attractive to persons with SEND. Another person said firms often perceive skills development as a social responsibility, rather than a way to build talent, speaking to the need for better engagement.

Access challenge: making sure place and transport is not a barrier to good work

The access challenge emerged from the finding physical access to good training and work opportunities is a challenge many face. This is particularly acute in Cornwall and aggravated by high levels of deprivation. One person living in a deprived area could not find work close to them and transport was a barrier to accessing good work elsewhere.

While the wide and rugged landscapes are one of Cornwall’s greatest assets, different stakeholders raised the significant impact of location and transport when accessing work, training, or other opportunities. In Cornwall, 45.4% of people in Cornwall travel more than 10km to work, compared to 34.9% in England and Wales (Cornwall Council, 2025b).

The access challenge is particularly severe for young people without a driver’s license or car, people with disabilities that mean they cannot drive, and people in poverty.

A young person with a disability shared that a cut to their benefits would impact their journey to college. We also heard that the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) introduced a significant barrier to accessing further education.

In addition, Cornwall’s sparse population some sectors are small or non-existent. One person in the arts said that, “such skills are not really required [in] Cornwall”.

Similarly, IFOW heard from stakeholders that adult training opportunities are poor in Cornwall, with people having to travel to Devon or further to access the skills they need.

The access challenge is in part shaped by businesses constrained by the rural nature of Cornwall. While some businesses were

not able to find the skills they need locally, with 86% of the Cornish economy being micro businesses (<10 people) (Cornwall Council, 2025b), their ability for local skills development is limited. Micro businesses generally cannot offer the dedicated support that good apprenticeships or work placements require.

Finance challenge: increasing access to relevant training and development

The finance challenge came out of community researchers’ observation that the costs of courses and training were significant barriers to progression into or in a job. The result is that there is a ceiling to upskilling – at some point, the courses are no longer funded,

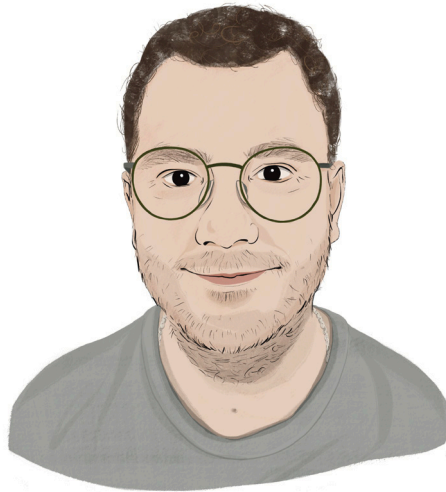


Community Researcher

meaning that what is available only provides basic skills. As a result, people sometimes took courses that, despite not being as aligned with their professional development, were financially viable.

Even where the cost of a course is covered, interviews by IFOW with stakeholders showed that financial factors still acted as a barrier to training, especially since the scrapping of the EMA (see access challenge). Beyond the cost of attending training (e.g. transport cost), taking a course means forgoing earnings, which many people may not be able or willing to do. For green careers in particular, the growing but currently few opportunities in the sector mean that people are taking on risk when pursuing training if there are “no job opportunities” available after completion.

Training providers and employers also face financial barriers when it comes to offering in-demand skills development. The sparse population of Cornwall means that training providers cannot afford to offer some courses due to an insufficient number of students, even when there is employer demand. Similarly, small and micro businesses struggle to offer work placements due to a lack of capacity and resources.



Community Researcher

5. Recommendations

Following the identification of these five challenges, community researchers developed features for a technology platform called Flourish, that aim to get more people onto good green pathways in Cornwall. These were centred around three aims: increasing understanding, improving support, and discovering opportunities relevant for oneself.

Given the insight gained into the real challenges faced by people in Cornwall through this research, this section is dedicated to turning this insight into actionable policies, both at the national and local level. While recommendations speak to specific challenges, the interconnectedness of these challenges imply that recommendations should not be seen in isolation but as existing within a system of pathways and therefore complimentary to each other.

Connecting local and national labour market systems

1. The Government has an opportunity to build on its recent skills taxonomy and mapping work to foster better understanding of green jobs opportunities throughout the careers support ecosystem.

Government has begun work on fostering consistent and accessible terminology and skills pathways, for instance through the work of DESNZ and the Office for Clean Energy Jobs on green skills passports, Skills England's sector mapping, and the JobHelp website. But on the ground, people still lack a clear understanding of 'green jobs' and available pathways. Further work could see departments and Skills England working with industry, civil society, and academia to ensure people understand the available pathways and opportunities, especially in relation to place. This should be linked through to people's experiences with career support, for example it could also be used as an official label in job postings, which demonstrating the diversity of green roles available.

Relevant challenge(s): Awareness Challenge

2. Local Authorities and regional businesses could be supported to explore mechanisms to provide up-to-date, locally grounded information about green jobs to stakeholders such as schools, careers advisers, and training providers.

With Local Authorities and industry already working productively in partnership through a range of forums including Local Skills Improvement Plans, Local Growth Plans, and other projects, there is an opportunity to bring granular data on local opportunities together for use in the careers sector. Dashboards such as the Cornwall Economy Hub illustrate the possibilities, and the Flourish platform's labour market matching function is designed to address this gap. This could also benefit Jobcentres, ensuring that users of their services can see the best results within their local economies and communities.

Relevant challenge(s): Awareness Challenge, Support Challenge

Careers education & learner motivation

3. Careers education can help shift the narrative on green jobs by emphasising opportunities for development that address skills gaps in the green economy.

This can include fostering early awareness, showcasing positive role models that make everyone feel included in those opportunities, and by highlighting higher pay and the positive social and environmental impact of a green job to combat misconceptions about work in the green economy (such as lower pay).

Relevant challenge(s): Awareness Challenge

4. Schools and colleges should be supported to embed motivation and autonomy-related practice into careers advice.

Skills such as writing CVs and navigating application portals are detrimental barriers for transitioning from education to employment, but meeting this goes further than the development of specific techniques. By helping young people understand and channel their motivation, schools can foster the confidence and resilience needed when navigating transitions.

Relevant challenge(s): Capabilities Challenge

Supporting local government and employer networks

5. Local and national government should support sector-specific employer networks to increase the availability of and access to apprenticeships.

Many employer networks, including in Cornwall, are already engaging with local authorities via Local Skills Improvement Plans and related initiatives, but there is opportunity to further connect this to training and placement opportunities, for instance with firms in sectors that want to offer placements to people in green training. Employer networks are key to enabling SMEs to offer apprenticeships by enabling standardisation within an industry. This is shown by international models, such as Germany's well-established local chambers of commerce (IHKs), as well as in Cornwall, such as through the Cornwall Manufacturing Group, which offers apprenticeships in partnership with Cornwall College. Extending sector-specific employer networks should be encouraged and facilitated where possible where skills gaps exist, such as in construction. Such networks could also make it easier to share opportunities for work experience, and for training providers, employers, and other stakeholders to support each other. This gives young people the opportunity, through experience, to better understand their skills, capabilities, and motivations.

Relevant challenge(s): Capabilities Challenge, Access challenge

Inclusion pathways

6. The Government should explore initiatives to link young people to the green economy, as part of wider effort to join up employment support and skills policy.

The creation of Jobs and Careers Centres (a merger between the National Careers Service and Jobcentres) and the move of Skills England into DWP is an opportunity to join-up employment support for young people – especially those who are NEET – with skills policy. This can help reframe businesses' perception that hiring young people is a social responsibility to an investment in their workforce. Success will depend on learners feeling confident and supported to access the most useful training in local contexts, whatever their pathway. There is an opportunity to build on lessons from the Youth Guarantee pilots, and from local initiatives such as Cornwall's Youth Engagement Programme (YEP). The plan for the Jobs and Careers Service, to be announced in April 2026, should seize on the opportunity to ensure careers advisers and work coaches are working in tandem with each other to help people – both those in and those not in work – develop their capabilities, employability and choice options, informed by local labour market tracking. Further work is needed to ensure that support is sufficiently linked in this way.

Relevant challenge(s): Capabilities Challenge, Support Challenge, Financial Challenge

7. Local Authorities should be better supported to deliver supported internships programmes.

Supported internships play a distinct purpose compared to apprenticeships and other training pathways for SEND people. Local Authorities can struggle to engage employers in these programmes due to low awareness, and young people do not always know they are an option. Central government has a role to play in promoting supported internships as part of the skills offering, raising awareness with employers and with adults including parents, carers, teachers, and careers professionals – possibly as part of the Youth Guarantee. In addition, DfE funding for supported internships is often subject to a delay of several months, hampering the ability of small training providers to offer them if they do not have the ready cash flow to absorb the costs temporarily. In some cases, Local Authorities are fronting the initial cost on training providers' behalf to unlock supported internships, but this might not be feasible in all Local Authorities. DfE should seek to rectify this, devoting more resources to well-functioning supported internships as a way to reduce the NEET rate. This can draw from efforts to cut apprenticeship approval times from 18 to 3 months.

Relevant challenge(s): Support Challenge

Access and infrastructure

8. The Government has an opportunity to work with local stakeholders to address a range of geographic frictions and barriers to accessing work.

Areas like Cornwall have undergone recent retractions of local transport, with negative implications for labour market inclusion, but recent updates to the Green Book to focus more on place-based analysis and a full range of social, economic, and distributional impacts opens space to shore up people's ability to access work. A wider range of factors could be considered for transport provision, and DfT, DWP, and Local Authorities could work with local businesses on a wide range of access to work initiatives in line with Local Growth Plans and Local Skills Improvement Plans. Involving Cornwall in Mission Coastal covered in the Schools White Paper is an important step to ensuring geographic frictions do not hinder good transitions for young people.

Relevant challenge(s): Accessibly Challenge

Funding, incentives, evaluation

9. The Government should invest in long-term programmes which effectively address the skills gap in the green sector.

Government should learn from and build on the 'Future is Green' programme, which is part-funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund and delivers skills development courses and programmes to individuals across Cornwall and The Isles of Scilly, as this allows training providers to offer courses they otherwise could not. According to Cornwall Council, as of December 2025 500 people had taken part in green courses. Learning from this programme in terms of what works – and what doesn't – is crucial to build a long-term qualified workforce. Depending on evidence emerging from Future is Green programme, the Government could consider providing financial incentives to learners, seeing this as an investment in the economy given high productivity of green jobs.

Relevant challenge(s): Financial Challenge

6. Conclusion

Cornwall stands at a pivotal moment. The green economy offers a genuine path to good work in a region where this has historically been scarce. But this opportunity will not be realised automatically. It requires deliberate action to address the structural barriers outlined in this report that prevent people from accessing green training and employment.

This report presents the findings from an IFOW collaboration with Cornwall Council and three community researchers with lived experience of being NEET, drawing from design practice to turn research into actions. Interviews conducted by community researchers were used to prioritise five interconnected challenges people in Cornwall face in accessing good green work or training: awareness, capabilities, support, access, and finance. The discussion of these challenges was complemented with original research by IFOW from conversations with key stakeholders in the green pathway system.

The awareness challenge captures that many people do not know what green jobs are and that they could have one. Even where awareness exists, there is a capabilities challenge: navigating job applications is difficult without adequate support. For those with additional needs or disabilities, a one-size-fits-all system compounds these barriers further, leaving many without the tailored help they require. Geography, poor transport links, and unevenly distributed opportunities mean that where you live can determine what you can access. And even where the right opportunity exists, the finance challenge shows that the cost of pursuing it can still put it out of reach.

What emerges clearly is that no single challenge can be addressed in isolation. The young person who lacks awareness of green jobs may also face financial barriers to training, live somewhere with poor transport links, and have additional needs that the system is ill-equipped to support. These challenges are mutually reinforcing, and so the response must be too. Addressing one without attending to the others will not be enough.

Cornwall's history of industrialisation is not just a backdrop to this work; it is a resource. As many existing initiatives demonstrate, the skills, resilience, and sense of place that characterise Cornish communities are assets that a well-designed green economy can build on. The Flourish project, through its participatory approach, has tried to honour that by platforming the voices of those with the most at stake in getting this transition right.

The second year of the project will take these insights forward, developing the Flourish platform to translate research findings into a technology tool that support individuals on their journey into good green work. The challenges are real, but so is the opportunity. With the right investment, coordination, and commitment to leaving no one behind, Cornwall can be a place where the green transition is not something that happens to people, but something built with them and for them.

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Citation

Geisler, J. Nash, O., Whittington, O., *Flourish - Increasing the number of people in good green training and work in Cornwall*. London: Institute for the Future of Work.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19205895

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