



Institute for the
Future of Work

Report

Flourish

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

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Disclaimer

This report has been produced based on community research conducted in partnership with East Marsh United.



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.

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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 (Murray, 2026).

Flourish aims to address these structural barriers as a research-impact project, led by the Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW) in partnership with East Marsh United, funded by Ufi VocTech Trust. 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. Grimsby has significant opportunities in the green economy but also faces structural barriers to capitalising on this opportunity. This makes it an important and exciting place to be centring in 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 discovery, responsibility, matching, navigation, and entry challenge. All of them are distinct but nonetheless intersectional – for example, those more affected by the entry challenge are also more likely to face an discovery challenge.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows: it introduces Grimsby'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. We finish off with policy recommendations and a conclusion.

The IFOW team would like to thank the contributions of the community researchers, Juthika, Liv, Zaine, and Matus, for their thoughtfulness and dedication. We'd also like to thank East Marsh United, in particular Tracey, for their incredible support of the research and of the community researchers, making them key to the success of Flourish.

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 Grimsby

The future of work in Grimsby is green. However, it will need to be shaped actively to make sure 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 Grimsby 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 stakeholders in Grimsby's green economy.

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 East Marsh United, a community group in the East Marsh of Grimsby working on improving the lives of its residents to facilitate the community research that has shaped the project. This partnership allowed the research to be grounded in Grimsby's context, and, in particular, the experiences of young people who face barriers to pursuing a good pathway.

2.2 Grimsby is 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).

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.

Greater Lincolnshire, and Grimsby in particular, is playing a key role in this transition. Home to once the largest fishing fleet in the world, Grimsby is now a hub for offshore wind power in the North Sea, including Hornsea, Dogger Bank, and Triton Knoll (BBC News, 2020).

Growth of the renewables sector has brought with it much-needed economic regeneration of a region generationally suffering from the decline of fishing. In Greater Lincolnshire, the industry is said to already contribute £1.2 billion to the economy annually and employs 12,000 people, with £60 billion of private investment planned for the next 15 years (Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission, 2024). Grimsby is benefitting significantly as the home to several offshore wind firms' operations, including RWE, Ørsted, and Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy. As a result, Grimsby is helping provide 3% of the UK's energy (1GW), with an expected capacity of 8GW in the coming years (Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission, 2024). While these major energy companies are German and Danish owing to a lack of a large British developer, they enable local businesses to emerge along their supply chain, including Prior Power Solutions providing Crew Transfer Vessels (Whitlock, 2025).

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.

The transition from fishing to offshore renewable energy in Grimsby is also embodied in its people – possibly no one more than by late Kurt Christensen, a fishing veteran who transitioned into the renewable sector in its early days in Grimsby by using his maritime expertise to start Wind Power Support, a company transporting maintenance equipment and passengers to offshore turbines (BBC News, 2020). Christensen, a recognised and awarded pioneer, represents the adaptation that Grimsby and its people have undergone, with many excited by the kind of work that the renewables sector offers after decades of industrial decline (IFOW, 2021).

The renewable energy sector brings with it significant opportunity to increase the availability of good work in a town where, since the 1990s, low-paid precarious food processing has been one of the main sources of employment (IFOW, 2021). IFOW's research suggests that North East Lincolnshire has some of the lowest rates of good work in the country, ranking above just seven out of 317 local authorities (IFOW, 2025b). The Pissarides Review into the Future of Work and Wellbeing (2025), a three-year Nuffield-funding research programme hosted by IFOW, suggests that a lack of good work is detrimental to the wellbeing of people and innovation in the economy. It also negatively affects young people, with 24.3% of 18-to-21-year-olds in North East Lincolnshire on Universal Credit, compared to an average of 11.1% in Britain (DWP, DfE, HMT, 2025). Done right, a growing green economy is therefore a significant opportunity to increase the availability of good work in Grimsby and the region.

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 Grimsby 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). While skills gaps are significant in the green economy, they are a broader issue and are estimated to have a cumulative cost of £120 billion to the economy 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 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 to 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, which is important according to stakeholders who highlight a cap would ensure apprenticeships remain prioritised as a form of high-quality skills development that is industry-relevant and shares costs with employers (Camden, 2026).

Grimsby, as one of the most deprived areas in England, faces significant challenges relating to the skills and capabilities of its workforce. For one, 40% of people of working age hold a level 3 qualification and 19.2% have no qualifications (compared to 56.6% and 12.4% average for England, respectively) (MHCLG and ONS, 2025), leading to a low employment rate, particularly amongst young people (DWP, DfE, HMT, 2025). In addition, the latest Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Greater Lincolnshire outlines challenges relating to essential employment skills and many young people not having any workplace experience when leaving school (Federation of Small Businesses, 2023).

However, investment in new partnerships has helped to increase the supply of skills needed for green businesses, particularly in offshore wind power. For example, North Lindsey College offers the Maintenance and Operations Engineering Technician (MOET) training to apprentices at Ørsted and Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy, who learn side-by-side. There is also a growing offer of green courses in the Greater Lincolnshire area, such as part of the soon-to-open decarbonisation centre of CATCH apprenticeships.

Despite these investments, the LSIP for Greater Lincolnshire outlines that employers reported skills gaps relevant to the green economy, including basic climate literacy, retrofit and construction, engineering and welding, as well as electrical (Federation of Small Businesses, 2023). For example, 75% of engineering firms surveyed for the LSIP reported having one

unfilled vacancy for at least three months. The extent to which growing a course catalogue has already addressed the skills gap in the green economy might only become apparent in the LSIP to be published in the Summer of 2026.

2.4 A map of Grimsby’s green pathway system reveals the interconnectedness of stakeholders in getting more people onto pathways into good work

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

Case Study: North Lindsey College Careers Team



North Lindsey College provides learning for over 100 offshore wind apprentices in the region. This reflects in its careers team. Its careers programme has included a Careers Day for sustainability, emphasising the range of available careers in the green sector, in collaboration with North East Lincolnshire Council.

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.

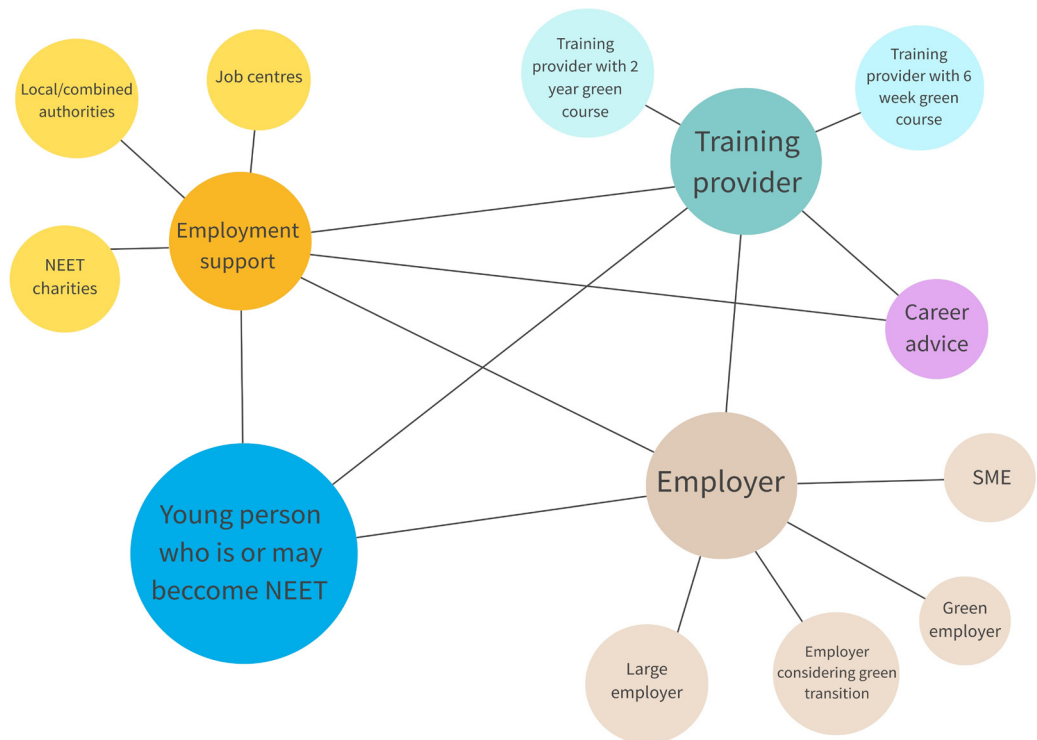


Figure 1 - Map of Grimsby’s green pathways

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 advisers 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.

Case Study: Ørsted



The Danish company and energy giant is playing a major role in the development of offshore wind power in the North Sea. They operate 12 offshore wind farms in the UK (including the world's largest) that produce energy to power almost 6 million homes a year. To run these wind farms, Ørsted is currently employing over 600 people in its hub in Grimsby. They also have a successful apprenticeship programme with a 100% retention rate. Since 2017, they have recruited over 54 apprentices, about 15 each year, in partnership with the Grimsby Institute and Furness College.

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: Careers Café by Target NEL



The Careers Café is an initiative by Target NEL and the council to make localised careers advice available to everyone. It provides drop-in support through personalised careers guidance, up-to-date information from employers, and practical guidance, for example relating to childcare. The wrap-around support makes it distinct from other public employment support such as Jobcentres.

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: CATCH apprenticeships



CATCH apprenticeships is an innovative training provider in Stallingborough offering school-based component for apprenticeship and Skills Bootcamps, unique for offering site experience in safe learning environment. CATCH is contributing significantly to a skilled workforce in the green economy, and is planning to train 1,000 apprentices annually by 2030 in its £60 million National Net Zero Centre.

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 skills gaps. They work with firms to ensure their students can access work placements and develop practical skills.

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

Having provided an overview of the green economy and pathway system in Grimsby, 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 career. 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 a person. For this reason, the project goes beyond skills to understanding how we can promote the capabilities – and ultimately the flourishing – of the people and place of Grimsby.

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 Grimsby, 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 Grimsby’s pathway ecosystem. To centre lived experience within the skills system, we worked with four young people from Grimsby – with current or recent experience of being NEET – as community researchers between August 2025 and March 2026. Research design, data collection, and interpretation was co-created by community researchers and IFOW research staff. This allowed the project to centre the voices of those with expertise in their lived experience of the local pathway ecosystem. Community researchers collected data through interviews with 46 people 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 leading 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.

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.

Discovery Challenge:

How might we get people to have a better understanding of green work?

There's not a good understanding of what a green job is, what it entails, and how to find and get into a green job.

Responsibility Challenge:

How might we encourage employers to reply to applications?

Employers are not always engaged in their community in a way that fosters people's trust in the labour market.

Matching Challenge:

How might we build trust between employees and employers by sending fewer, higher-quality applications for the work that is right for a person?

A lack of understanding of one's motivations – and subsequent lack of aspiration – means that people do not have a good sense of which opportunities are right for them.

Navigation Challenge:

How might we make training and information about training more accessible and relevant to people?

How a training course connects to a job is not always clear, whilst finding a relevant course can also be a challenge.

Entry Challenge:

How might we support people with no experience in their first step to gaining experience?

People find that a lack of experience is a significant barrier to accessing a job, which is made worse by not enough training being available for everyone.

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

This section discusses the five challenges identified by the community researchers and presents avenues for future policy development. We discuss each challenge by combining insights from the community researchers, **marked in bold**, with conversations and interviews IFOW conducted with stakeholders across the green pathway ecosystem.

Discovery challenge: helping young people understand green work

The discovery challenge emerged from findings that people in Grimsby have a high-level understanding of green work, but don't know enough about it to apply, such as what the jobs involve, where to find them, and how to apply. This is important to address because people are interested in green work for its positive impact on the environment.

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).

Many students struggle to understand what green training and jobs are available 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)). As a result, several careers advisers we spoke with shared the need to educate students about green jobs as early as Year 6, for example through taster days or project-based learning. However, due to stretched resources for careers support, senior buy-in for a green-specific careers programme is crucial, demonstrating the importance of institutional commitment.

Even if there is an understanding of what a green job entails, people said it can be challenging to find local job opportunities at all, green or otherwise. One person mentioned that they started looking for a job "with Indeed and LinkedIn, then tried local Facebook groups and youth services because they had more job postings". However, greater information was found not to address the fundamental challenge of what some perceived as a lack of availability of local job opportunities, expressing that they wished there were more jobs in Grimsby.

This links to a conversation with a local large employer in the green economy, who noted the high number of applications to their apprenticeship programme, making it a very selective process. As a result, increasing the number of opportunities for people is a major challenge. We have heard that the availability of apprenticeships and other opportunities to enter the labour market, for example supported internships, rely on successful networks between training providers and employers,



One of the biggest challenges for young people in finding opportunities in 'Good Green Work' is for them to be supported to understand the different pathways into this sector. Employment for this age group is becoming increasingly difficult so understanding and knowledge are the keys to success"

Tracy Slattery - Community Research Network Lead

as well as between employers in the same sector. This is especially important for resource-constrained businesses, such as small and micro-sized businesses, who may instead prefer hiring someone who is fully qualified.

Therefore, whilst increasing the visibility green jobs and the pathways into them is crucial to raise expectations about what work is available, it should not be seen as a be-all and end-all solution to increasing the number of people in good green work or training. A narrative that completely ignores the lack of available good work (IFOW, 2025b) in Grimsby might make people feel that there is something wrong with them if they struggle to find work.

Responsibility challenge: making firms more accountable to applicants and employees

The unresponsiveness of firms after sending an application was said to have a significant impact on people’s motivation when looking for a job. Lack of responses from employers led to a loss of enthusiasm and loss of trust in the job application process. People described it as “not a good experience”, “frustrating”, and “difficult”. Some looked for work through recruitment agencies, but these did not eliminate the responsibility challenge. One person said: “I have looked at multiple [...] websites, jobcentres, and agencies but none have gotten back to me, so I have stopped looking”.

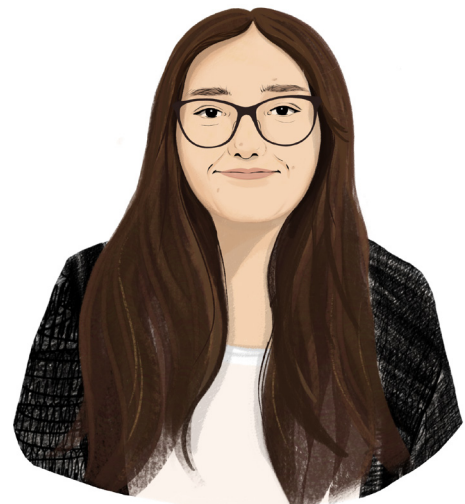
IFOW has heard of a competitive and discouraging job application system, with some people applying for 200 jobs and not hearing back. This is leading to a loss of motivation and, importantly, trust in the system.

Trust in the system is further undermined by some people reporting ‘ghost’ job advertisements. ‘Ghost’ job ads have recently gotten increased media attention, with some reports suggesting that up to one-quarter of UK job ads may be roles not actively being hired for, a few thousand of those being instances of fraud (i.e. with the purpose of distorting applicants for payment) – though firms may also post vacancies for other reasons such as promotion (Bish, 2025; Furney, 2025; Employment Hero (UK), 2026).

From the employer perspective, we heard that some prefer to hire fully qualified workers (sometimes due to capacity reasons) – thereby excluding young people with little to no experience – whilst others hired for attitude and mindset as they were able and willing to provide training in-house.

People also expressed that they would like more responsibility from employers in relation to their employees’ wellbeing. In particular, some reported long working hours and understaffing leading to a stressed workforce and making it harder for them to balance their life and work.

We heard that the experiences people have in their workplace are wide-ranging. In the most extreme case, someone told us they were robbed at knife point whilst working in a corner shop. This stood in stark contrast to employees with SEND who said their employer was responsive to their needs, allowing them to thrive at work. People also expressed that they valued having the opportunity to learn on the job, making their work rewarding. IFOW’s Good Work monitor shows that North East Lincolnshire has some of the lowest rates of good work in the country (IFOW, 2025b). Green jobs, with their above-average pay and high job security, provide an opportunity to increase the availability of good work in the area.



Community Researcher

Matching challenge: prioritising quality over quantity of job applications

The matching challenge is the flipside of the responsibility challenge as it emerges from people sending applications to jobs that are not a good fit for them, leading to wasted time for applicants and businesses. As a result, several people described the job search process as “overwhelming”. This is worsened by a fragmented search process, as outlined in the discovery challenge.

Employers have reported receiving a high volume of applications, but only few of these are high-quality (Federation of Small Businesses, 2023) – this may have gotten worse since with generative AI tools making it easier to apply (Galdin and Silbert, 2025). However, the root of this challenge might in part be explained by the fact that (young) people often struggle to articulate themselves and their motivations in job applications. As previous IFOW research has shown, these capabilities have been overlooked in the formal education system, with many young people not supported in channelling their motivations (Halstead et al., 2025). This particularly affects young people with a lower socio-economic status and those with SEND, leading many to prioritise pay now over a sustainable and meaningful career.

Firms can play a key role in helping young people better understand different work options through their engagement with the community. For one, the Lincolnshire careers hub offers firms the opportunity to engage with young people – whether through workplace experiences, careers talks, mentoring, or curriculum support. This can help people get a taste of what a job involves, which is especially important for those who do not think a career is something available to them. We heard this is relevant for people with SEND, as green pathways often offer an opportunity to combine practical and school-based learning.

Addressing the matching challenge must therefore go beyond finding available job and training opportunities to helping people figure out what the right opportunities are for them, finding those relevant opportunities, and supporting them in the application process. This requires taking a holistic, asset-based approach that considers people for people’s motivations, strengths, and needs, helping build people’s agency.

Currently, this approach is missing where it is needed the most, with one person describing jobcentres as “process-centred, not human-centred”. Instead, stakeholders advocated for careers services, whether in schools or jobcentres, that acknowledge and value differences between people and make them feel their story matters. This is especially important for people with SEND, who we heard are not always well accommodated in traditional education. Instead, they are referred to specialised employment support programmes, but these are often small in scale and serve people who are already NEET, rather than focus on prevention.

Navigation challenge: finding and understanding different training pathways

The navigation challenge is characterised by the fact that people found it difficult to find training that is right for them. This is important as several people acknowledged the importance of training for their progression, with one person saying: “[I’m] open to more training to build experience”.



Community Researcher



Community Researcher

Relating to this challenge, IFOW's conversations with stakeholders demonstrated that it was often unclear what training they should do for a specific job. This was especially confusing when training did not result in a job because of experience requirements of firms; for example, there is a large and growing construction skills gap, but many jobs in the sector require experience. As a result, it was emphasised that there is a need for clear and valued pathways, such as of apprenticeships, ensuring people land a job after their training.

Linking to the discovery and the entry challenge, people found it difficult to both find and access training. As a result, people said they would like Grimsby to have training opportunities for everyone.

The green economy in Grimsby has brought with it significant increase in availability of training, with CATCH apprenticeships (a major training provider) more than doubling its intake of apprentices from 100 to 220, with plans to take in 1,000 apprentices annually by 2029. However, we heard that green apprenticeships are competitive, with hundreds of applicants for a couple of apprenticeships, linking to a lack of good work (IFOW, 2025b).

From employers, we heard what could help increase the availability of good quality training in Grimsby. For one, a dedicated apprenticeship manager or significant supervision within a formalised pathway is key to a training programme that benefits both apprentice (especially for people with SEND) and employer – though this is something that small firms with little capacity struggle with. Additionally, sector-specific employer networks or training partnerships have been crucial in enabling training providers to offer the school-based element of apprenticeships, such as the partnership that Siemens Gamesa and Ørsted have with DN colleges.

Entry challenge: supporting people have their first work experience

Many people mentioned their lack of experience as a major barrier to getting a job. Many job opportunities had experience requirements, with one person saying: “[I’m] looking for any job that will give me experience”.

Experience is a key requirement for many jobs. At the same time, a job is necessary to build experience. As noted in the recent Milburn Review, this chicken-and-egg problem is a significant and increasing challenge for many young people entering the labour market, making attitude and motivation one of the main factors considered by employers at the entry-level (Fishbach and Woolley, 2022). IFOW's previous research highlights that young people often are highly motivated, but may struggle to connect this to their professional development, requiring a reframing of what we consider 'relevant' experience (Brewin et al., 2026).

Conversations with stakeholders highlight the importance of young people trying things out, as this allows them to gain experience without needing to overcome all the barriers they might face in getting a job. However, there are currently too few under-18s with workplace experience (Federation of Small Businesses, 2023). The Lincolnshire careers hub was mentioned as an initiative allowing young people to come into contact with employers, and we have heard that supported internships are particularly effective in giving young people

with SEND experience. These lower-stakes experiences promote young people’s human-centric skills by building a network that could serve as an entry-point into the labour market.

Community researchers found that people would like to have more training opportunities available to them as a way to build experience, develop new skills, and to help them get into work. One person expressed a desire for “more work and training in Grimsby for everyone”.

Training can be important ways to access job opportunities, as it can provide people with the skills required for a job. In addition, apprenticeships generally guarantee work at one’s employer upon completion. However, as outlined under the navigation challenge, breaking the entry challenge also requires increasing the availability of high-quality training.

That being said, the Pissarides Review into the Future of Work and Wellbeing (2025) and other IFOW research (Halstead et al., 2025) demonstrates that skills are not enough. It is people’s capabilities – and the support they get according to their capabilities – that allow them to turn their skills into valued opportunities. As a result of these different capabilities, people need tailored support to enter the labour market, and we should not expect a one-size-fits-all approach to tackle the high rate of NEET.



Figure 2. Community researchers and IFOW co-designing Flourish features

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 Grimsby. These were centred around three aims: increasing understanding of green work, and discovering jobs relevant to oneself, and finding training opportunities that connect to jobs.

Given the insight gained into the real challenges faced by people in Grimsby 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 Energy Skills Passports for workers transitioning from carbon-heavy to green energy, 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): Discovery Challenge

2. Local Authorities and regional businesses could be supported to explore mechanisms to provide up-to-date, locally grounded information about green jobs and pathways 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. 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. Careers advisers could use the data to foster early awareness, illustrate the diversity of opportunities available, and map different and clear pathways into and within the green economy. Firms can also contribute to a better understanding of green work through careers sessions (e.g. as part of the Lincolnshire careers hub), school visits, or the development of education and learning sites such as Projekt Renewable (discontinued).

Relevant challenge(s): Discovery Challenge, Navigation Challenge

Building capabilities

3. Schools, colleges, jobcentres, and employment support should be encouraged 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, promoting positive role models, and affirming the attainability of career rather than ‘a job’, these institutions can foster the confidence and resilience needed when navigating transitions. Given the importance of motivation for young people who face additional barriers to entering the labour market, Government should explore how motivation could be integrated into its Mission North East outlined in the Schools White Paper to improve outcomes where attainment gaps are significant.

Relevant challenge(s): Matching Challenge, Entry Challenge

4. Local authorities should encourage firms to commit to better working conditions and hiring practices.

Young people’s trust in hiring and the quality of work must be restored. Local Authorities should build on partnerships they have with businesses (for example, through LSIPs) to encourage good work and hiring practices that go beyond legal obligation. There are precedents for this; IFOW’s Good Work Charter outlines the ten principles for firms to improve wellbeing through better working conditions and has been adopted by organisations such as Southampton City Council. In relation to hiring, the Better Hiring Institute’s Charter includes “championing wellbeing in the hiring process”. Many firms are already doing more than their legal duty in hiring, showing that this is possible: for example, there is no legal obligation in the UK to provide a written employment contract for someone to start working, but it is good practice.

Relevant challenge(s): Responsibility Challenge

5. Central Government should regulate ‘ghost’ vacancies.

Firms posting false job ads are less likely to commit to good hiring practices. Instead, they must face pushback from regulators. With [one-quarter of people](#) saying they have applied to what they believe are a ghost job, this is an important problem to address for applicants and policymakers due to erosion of trust, unnecessary inefficiencies, and labour market distortion. In Ontario, Canada, employers are legally obliged to respond to applications and there is a transparency requirement for whether the firm is advertising a current vacancy. Something similar for the UK would be a welcome improvement to the job search process and could reinstate trust.

Relevant challenge(s): Responsibility Challenge

Supporting local government and employer networks

6. Local and national government should support sector-specific employer networks to help connect training providers and careers advisers with placements and jobs.

Many employer networks are already engaging with local authorities via Local Skills Improvement Plans and locally through the Lincolnshire careers hub, but there is opportunity to further connect this to training and placement opportunities. Employer networks are key to enabling SMEs to offer apprenticeships by enabling standardisation, as seen by international models, such as Germany’s well-established local chambers of commerce (IHK), and in Grimsby, such as the partnership between Ørsted and Siemens Gamesa with North Lindsey College. Expanding and formalising existing networks between

employers in Greater Lincolnshire should be encouraged and facilitated where possible to promote apprenticeships across the supply chain of the green economy in Grimsby, such as retrofit and 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 given firms are reluctant to take on under-18s for work experience. This is crucial because it gives young people the opportunity, through experience, to better understand their skills, capabilities, and motivations. This should fit within a wider programme of simplifying apprenticeships, such as the recently announced cut in approval times from 18 to 3 months.

Relevant challenge(s): Responsibility Challenge, Navigation Challenge

Inclusion pathways

7. 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 (the 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. Success will depend on learners feeling confident and supported to access the most useful training in local contexts, whatever their pathway. 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. A “No wrong door” policy and initiatives such as the ‘Careers Café’ in Grimsby can provide learning of how to provide a holistic offer of careers support that includes practical support, access to information about jobs, and personalised guidance. Allowing some drop-in appointments in the new Jobs and Careers Service, for example, could be one way to reframe the offer from enforcement to genuine support. Seeing that Greater Lincolnshire was set up as a Combined Authority in May 2025, there is also an opportunity to build on lessons from the Youth Guarantee pilots to improve the support to people aged 18-24. Government should also explore the best ways to leverage the Social Value Act to bring young people who are NEET into green work, using the Crown Estate’s approach in the Celtic Sea as a learning opportunity.

Relevant challenge(s): Matching challenge, Entry Challenge

8. Local authorities should be supported in delivering shorter courses, such as Skills Bootcamps and supported internships, to allow people to gain initial experience and address training bottlenecks.

Apprenticeships and other higher education courses are long, competitive to enter, and not suitable for people with no or poor qualifications, a major challenge in Grimsby. To allow more people to access training, try things out, and build confidence through experience, the Greater Lincolnshire Combined Authority should capitalise on its new mandate for skills and adult education to promote and increase the offer of shorter alternatives, such as Skills Bootcamps. In addition, Central Government should help promote supported internships for people with SEND, raising awareness with employers and with adults including parents, carers, teachers, and careers professionals. 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 temporary loss. In some cases, Local Authorities are fronting the initial cost on businesses’ behalf. DfE should seek to rectify this, devoting more resources to well-functioning supported internships to reduce the NEET rate.

Relevant challenge(s): Matching challenge, Entry Challenge

Funding, incentives, evaluation

9. The Government should support long-term programmes which effectively address the skills gap in the green sector whilst increasing the availability of good work and training

Government should learn from and build on investment in the skills offer for the green sector, as this allows training providers to offer courses they otherwise could not. This can include direct funding, such as the £3 million invested in green training offer through the Made Smarter Programme, or by bringing in private actors, for example the £1.5 million investment in CATCH's Skills and Apprenticeship Centre. Learning from these programmes in terms of what works – and what doesn't – is crucial to build a long-term qualified workforce and narrow skills gaps, in the green economy and beyond. Government could also consider expanding the remit of initiatives such as ORE Catapult, a UKRI-funded innovation centre supporting the development of offshore wind, as skills have been recognised as a key pillar to successfully transitioning to net zero.

Relevant challenge(s): Navigation Challenge, Matching Challenge

6. Conclusion

The green economy represents a genuine opportunity to transform the world of work in Grimsby, a town that has long struggled with a lack of good jobs. Yet this transformation is not inevitable. Realising it depends on confronting the structural barriers that currently prevent people from accessing green training and employment.

This report presents the findings from an IFOW collaboration with East Marsh United and four 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 Grimsby face in accessing good green work or training: discovery, responsibility, matching, navigation, and entry. The discussion of these challenges was complemented with original research by IFOW from conversations with key stakeholders in the green pathway system.

The discovery challenge captures that many people have a high-level understanding of green work but do not know enough to find or pursue it. Even where awareness exists, there is a responsibility challenge: unresponsive employers and a discouraging application process erode trust and motivation in those seeking work. The matching challenge reflects that people often lack a sense of what opportunities are right for them, leading to low-quality applications and missed connections between jobseekers and employers. For those who do find a relevant pathway, the navigation challenge shows that understanding how training connects to a job remains difficult and confusing. And even where training is available, the entry challenge means that a lack of experience continues to shut people out at the first hurdle.

What emerges clearly is that no single challenge can be addressed in isolation. The young person who struggles to discover green work may also lack the confidence to apply, and face an application system that offers little accountability or feedback. These challenges are mutually reinforcing, and so the response must be too. Addressing one without attending to the others will not be enough.

Grimsby's transition from fishing to offshore wind is not just an economic story; it is a human one too. Its maritime history and the skills, resilience, and adaptability of Grimsby's people 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 supports 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, Grimsby 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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