

Green Skills Adult Education Provision in London

Executive Summary

RCU Ltd

December 2021

ABOUT THE STUDY

These are the summary findings of a research report on the provision of 'Green Skills' funded through the Adult Education Budget in London. The study was commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA). It was undertaken by RCU Ltd. The research was carried out between April 2021 and August 2021. Some of the data collection was delayed by the lockdown due to Covid-19.

OUR REMIT

The research focused primarily on the extent to which the demand for green skills is currently met by courses funded through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and the potential for using the AEB for developing green skills in the future. The specific objectives of the research study were to:

- Identify existing AEB-funded courses developing skills required for, and complementary to, green occupations.
- Establish the profile of learners enrolled on courses associated with green occupations.
- Locate green skills courses in the full training pathway for green occupations including progression to green skills courses not currently fundable under the AEB, including FE loan-funded courses and apprenticeships.
- Identify the training providers (including AEB-funded providers and those not funded under the AEB) currently delivering green skills courses.
- Identify the barriers for potential learners to take up green skills courses.
- Identify the barriers for training providers to deliver green skills courses.
- Identify the barriers for employers in hiring green skilled workers and upskilling current employees in green tasks/occupations.

OUR APPROACH

The research used a mixed-method approach involving both fieldwork and data analysis. The fieldwork involved online video interviews with 38 training providers, London Boroughs, employers, employer and sector bodies and awarding organisations¹. The primary source of learner data for the quantitative analysis was the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). This provided information on learners, apprentices, courses and providers (including FE colleges and private training providers) funded through further education and skills funding streams. The data analysis focused on learners who have a normal permanent residency within Greater London.

Although there has been extensive research on green sectors of the economy and green jobs over the past few years, there has been comparatively little analysis of how the current adult education provision in the UK can support the demand for green skills. Previous research studies have noted that there is no universal definition of a green job and the green economy and therefore identifying relevant 'green skills' courses was not straightforward.

Our research used a methodology based on previous research carried out by GLA Economics that identified a list of SOC2010 occupations affected by greening based on O*NET, an occupational classification database developed in the United States. This categorisation is particularly useful for the current research project as it provided a mechanism for mapping green occupations at SOC2010 to existing qualifications (both AEB

¹ Organisations participating in the research are listed in Annex B.

funded and others). GLA Economics identified a total of 63 green occupations at SOC major groups 3-9. These occupations generally have an entry requirement at Level 3 and below, which corresponds to the qualification levels funded through the Adult Education Budget.

The report includes analysis of qualifications supporting the following industrial sectors that are key to transitioning to net zero: Building & Construction; Transport & Logistics; Environment, Conservation & Agriculture; and Energy & the Circular Economy. The report also includes a section focusing on specialist enabling STEM skills required across a wide range of sectors and a section reviewing the need for generic green skills courses that provide all individuals and businesses with the skills needed to reduce carbon emissions.

MAIN FINDINGS

The AEB supports the green skills agenda in a range of different ways. Only a small number of AEB-funded learners are taking courses that are providing very specific green skills, such as installing heat pumps or electric vehicle (EV) charging points or supporting the development and maintenance of renewable energy sources. For example, in 2019/20 there were just 60 learners taking the Diploma in Refrigeration, Air Conditioning and Heat Pump Systems.

However, the AEB provides support for the green economy in other ways. Firstly, the research highlighted the need for an increasing number of general construction workers and electricians who have a wide range of relevant skills. The AEB is currently supporting initial training in these areas.

Many AEB learners are also taking STEM qualifications such as digital technology, science and engineering. These 'enabling' skills are required in different sectors including construction, transport, environment and energy that have a key role to play in the green economy. Digital technology is seen by employers as a particularly vital tool for reducing carbon emissions.

The AEB also helps to develop skills in generic areas such as finance, project management, marketing, retail and customer service. Whilst these are not uniquely 'green skills', expertise in these areas will be required if a net zero economy is to be realised. Employers in the automotive industry, for example, felt that developing customer service skills at dealerships will be needed in order to encourage the purchase of electric vehicles. Construction employers stressed the importance of project management in the retrofitting of buildings.

The research reviewed course and module content for some of the most popular qualifications in key green sectors. Green and sustainability issues were sometimes mentioned but this was often a small element of the course and the level of detail that would be covered was unclear. In many cases qualifications were felt by employers and providers to be rather traditional and were not reflecting the latest green requirements.

The characteristics of learners varied by sector but in general 'green skills' courses attracted a higher proportion of male learners than other AEB-funded courses (51% compared to 30%), but a similar proportion to the population of all 19+ London residents. Courses relevant to green skills also attracted a higher proportion of ethnic minorities and learners from deprived postcodes compared to other AEB-funded courses and the population of 19+ London residents. The proportion of learners on courses relevant to green skills who were classified as White was 40% compared to 60% for all 19+ London residents. Approximately 25% of learners taking courses relevant to green skills lived in the most deprived quintile in England, compared to just 16% for all 19+ London residents.

Learners were predominately studying at Level 2 and below and many learners will have had few prior qualifications before taking the course. AEB-funded green skills courses include both short courses for employed adults and initial training qualifications for young adults starting out on their career.

Apprenticeships appear to provide the most popular progression pathways in Building and Construction and in Transport and Logistics. Apprenticeship Standards are very occupationally specific, and a number are closely related directly to green jobs e.g. Refrigeration, Air Conditioning & Heat Pump Engineering Technician and Water Environment Worker. In Science and IT (Practitioner) the most popular progression route is into higher education, often via an FE Loan-funded course such as a HE Access Programme.

However, progression pathways do not appear to be clearly defined in all areas. This is partly due to historical AEB funding rules which prioritised the funding of courses below Level 3. Recent GLA AEB rule changes and the new DfE Level 3 entitlement provides an opportunity to develop more explicit progression pathways from the AEB to higher education and into employment. Level 4 and 5 higher technical education in green skill areas is also under-developed and there appears to be a need to review the vocational green skills offer across all funding streams to ensure that there are appropriate progression pathways.

Employers in all sectors felt that it was important to focus the AEB on developing long term career pathways for individuals with a broad range of skills rather than short term jobs for particular 'green' tasks. This would help to provide routes to good sustainable employment for the most disadvantaged individuals in London.

Green skills technical updating courses for already qualified adults are often, it appears, delivered commercially at full cost rather than through the AEB. For example, City and Guilds offers a range of short courses for trained electricians in installing EV chargers. However, it is difficult to establish the scale and scope of commercial provision as it does not appear on any public dataset.

Discussions with providers, employers and awarding organisations highlighted several barriers to developing green skills. These included:

- The accreditation of new AEB fundable qualifications is often a lengthy and time-consuming process and not felt to be responsive to the needs of employers and providers. There were several examples of colleges developing bespoke full cost provision for employers as existing publicly funded qualifications were not appropriate. Awarding organisations are keen to work with the GLA, employers and providers to develop new qualifications and have enormous experience in this area.
- The uptake of skills is hampered by a lack of demand for important green products and services such as heat pumps, electric cars and hydrogen technology. Employers and providers are waiting for Government action to incentivise the market before investing heavily in this area.
- Green skills were felt to be poorly defined and poorly understood by many employers and individuals. Whilst most people were supportive of the need to move towards a net zero economy it was not clear what practical actions needed to be taken and by whom. It was felt that simple, clear communication was required. Many businesses were focusing on immediate issues and did not see the need to invest in green skills at this time. This was particularly the case with small businesses.
- Many teaching staff have not kept up to date with the latest developments and would find it difficult to integrate green issues into their teaching. Staff development was seen to be a priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The GLA to facilitate partnerships between employers, providers and awarding organisations to support the delivery of green skills, including through the Mayor's Academies Programme

The research project found that employers, providers and awarding organisations were positive about the need to develop green skills. However, development of green skills within courses funded by the Adult Education Budget was often patchy and it was unclear how future developments in this area would be coordinated.

The GLA should seek to encourage partnerships between employers, providers and awarding organisations that have a focus on delivering green skills for London residents, including through the Mayor's Academies Programme. Suggested priorities for the partnerships are listed in the recommendations below.

The Mayor's Construction Academy has already helped to develop partnerships in the Building and Construction sector. The launch of new Academies in Green Skills and Digital should provide partnership development opportunities in other green sectors with the potential to include awarding organisations and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 2: Employers to work with providers and other stakeholders to better define and develop suitable career and training pathways to progress into good quality 'green' jobs

Most of the AEB provision is at Level 2 and below whilst employers are reporting skill shortages at higher levels. The GLA has already introduced a number of flexibilities which can support a wider range of Londoners to access the AEB. Greater flexibility of funding rules provides an opportunity for partners to map out and develop career pathways allowing progression from Entry Level to higher education and into employment.

Developing green validated career pathways would involve reviewing and developing holistically both AEB-funded courses and higher technical qualifications, together with their associated curriculum content, to ensure that green skills within specific sectors are properly developed.

Employers in green sectors told us that new individuals entering the workforce will require a broad range of skills. Whilst there is a short term need for tasks such as installing EV charging points and heat pumps, these tasks need to be embedded within broader training pathways that provide long-term careers.

Recommendation 3: Awarding Organisations should develop flexible micro qualifications in 'green skills' for trained adults

Employers told us that meeting adult skills needs would benefit from a greater range of modular micro-qualifications that are delivered flexibly for existing employees. Although largely outside of the scope of the AEB, these micro-qualifications could be at all levels from Level 2 to Level 6 but should be part of a coherent package of continuing professional development. GLA facilitated partnerships could help to develop this type of flexible provision.

Recommendation 4: Providers should continue to support digital and STEM skills as part of meeting net zero goals

Employers across all sectors told us that digital and STEM skills were vital in moving towards a net zero economy. The skills required are at all levels with a particular requirement for programmers, data analysts and engineers. The AEB can provide both initial training (with progression pathways to higher education) and professional updating.

Recommendation 5: The sector should develop a coordinated green skills teacher training programme

Providers and employers felt that teacher training would be essential if the AEB was to be effective in developing green skills. Teacher training would need to be contextualised to specific industrial sectors and different learner groups. This could cover specific green skills requirements in areas such as construction and the environment as well as general green awareness training in other areas.

Recommendation 6: Providers and awarding bodies should embed green awareness across the adult curriculum

The research highlighted the need for general green awareness for all individuals. Whilst most people were supportive of moving towards a net zero economy, many were confused about what they could do personally to make a difference.

In 2019/20 over 200,000 people enrolled on AEB-funded courses, some or many of whom could have benefitted from accessing a short green awareness course or taster session. Such courses for individuals could help to raise awareness and improve understanding in measures that could help with creating a more sustainable environment. This could include a focus on areas such as waste reduction, recycling, adapting to climate change, carbon footprint calculations, renewable energy sources, EV benefits etc. The GLA could support this development by communicating the value of green awareness courses to London residents.

Teaching staff should also be encouraged to develop examples related to sustainability and low carbon within their teaching, across all subject areas. This could include basic skills and ESOL provision which is the largest AEB-funded subject area. This would help to raise green awareness and encourage progression into green vocational areas.

Recommendation 7: The GLA should continue to actively promote the Importance of green skills to help support the ambition of growing London's green economy

The GLA should help to promote green skills through its communications and marketing channels. In particular, it should develop a series of case studies of learners who are employed in green areas of the economy and use these to encourage other adults to take up courses, helping them to progress into jobs in these sectors. The GLA should also help to promote participation in green skills courses through careers advice and guidance services.

Employers and providers felt that London's government had an important role to play in promoting green skills qualifications by stimulating demand for green job creation and supporting skills supply, including through its network of suppliers and subcontractors. This could involve, for example, the development of procurement standards that helped increase the demand for green skills qualifications.