

Inclusion in green jobs

Summary report
November 2023

nesta



Contents

Item	Pages
Executive summary	3 - 4
Section 1: Background and methods	5 - 8
Section 2: Findings	9 - 22
Section 3: Interventions	23 - 27

Executive summary

Previous [BIT and Nesta research](#) found that **women were significantly less interested in green skills training** compared to men.

To understand what factors might be driving this gap, **we interviewed 16 UK women who were actively looking for work or education** and found:

- a **notable proportion of participants had never heard of 'green jobs'**
- that some **participants associated green jobs with practical, hands-on work**, often characterised by men in high-vis clothing
- 11 unique **barriers and facilitators** that cut across different stages of women's job search journeys.

Barriers and facilitators within the job search journey

The job search journey



Section 1: Background and methods

We wanted to find out why women seem less interested in green jobs compared to men

This study aims to understand why women seem less interested in green jobs compared to men.

Our previous Predictiv experiment (N = 8120) found that **men were significantly more interested in green skills training than women (53% vs. 47%)**. LinkedIn data shows that two thirds of people transitioning into green jobs are men and Boston Consulting Group has estimated that only [25% of global green jobs will be held by women](#) by 2030. This is striking since women [have been shown to act more pro-environmentally](#) and be [more concerned about sustainability](#) than men.

Given this context, the Behavioural Insights Team were commissioned by Nesta to understand what might be driving this disparity and what it suggests for potential interventions to reduce the gender gap in green jobs.



We interviewed 16 women with varying levels of experience and expertise to find drivers of the gender gap

Characteristic	Interviewed	Target (difference)
Employed	11	Min 6 (+5)
In education/recently graduated	5	Min 6 (-1)
STEM experience or aspirations	6	Min 6 (0)
Education	9 with degree	Min 4 (+5)
	4 with a Masters or PhD	Min 2 (+2)
	7 below degree level	Min 4 (+3)
18-35 yrs old	12	Min 10 (+2)
Location	8 England South	Min 2 (+6)
	5 England North	Min 2 (+3)
	2 Scotland	Min 2 (0)
	1 Northern Ireland	Min 2 (-1)
	0 Wales	Min 2 (-2)

We held **semi-structured interviews with 16 women** who were actively searching for a job or about to start a new qualification and who were not currently working in a green job.

Our recruitment targets for each characteristic.

Table 1: Our final interviewee sample recruited via BIT's recruitment platform Lucid.

This table shows the characteristics of the participants we interviewed, including the number who were employed, in education or recently graduated, have STEM experience or aspirations, have a degree (and what level), their age-group and the region they live in the UK.

Our interviews addressed four central research questions about women's awareness, perceptions, and interest in green job

Research question	How was this assessed?
1. Are women aware of the concept of green jobs?	We asked participants whether they had come across the term green jobs and what they thought it meant.
2. How do women perceive green jobs?	We asked participants to describe what images came to mind when they pictured someone working in a green job. We then used AI software (DALLE) to translate these descriptions (or 'prompts') into images.
3. What are the barriers and facilitators for women's interest in green jobs?	We presented a list of example green jobs to participants, and then asked them to elaborate on the reasons why they would or would not consider working in each.
4. What would encourage women to consider a green job?	We asked participants what might tempt them to work in a green job.

Table 2: Our four main research questions and how they were assessed Throughout our analysis we also consider how our findings varied for different kinds of participants e.g. those with or without STEM skills or students vs. employed participants.

Section 2: Findings

Many participants had little to no familiarity with the concept of green jobs

When asked whether they had come across the term green jobs outside of the interview setting, **many participants mentioned that they had not heard the term at all**. However, they were often able to surmise that it referred to “something to do with the environment”, which suggests that the term may have helpful associations for many people.

Participants who had heard of green jobs had only a passing familiarity with the concept rather than an in-depth understanding of what the term referred to or where they had heard of it.

“Is [green jobs] a term you've come across before today at all?” [Interviewer]

“No. [...] from the word green I'm assuming [it has] something to do with sustainability or something to do with the environment. So, any job that is aiming to help the environment in some sort of way, I guess, or implement green practices.” [Participant]

Some participants associated green jobs with practical, hands-on work, while others saw them as more office-based

Other participants felt that - dependent on the exact role - **green jobs might “look like any other job”**, given that they could be done from an office setting. The images and prompts these participants generated were office scenes filled with plants and other sustainable features such as recycling bins, often staffed by younger, casually-dressed workers.

There were no clear themes regarding which participants perceived green jobs in either way.

Image 2

This is 16 images in a four by four grid generated by participants in DALL-E depicting their perceptions of green jobs. The images are predominantly of men, but also women, in hi-vis jackets set in outdoor settings, for example working with wind turbines or solar panels. A few images also depict indoor scenes of workers in offices.



Image 2: DALL-E images, key: practical office

We found a number of barriers and facilitators related to different stages of the job search process

To work in or apply for a green job, a number of aspects must fall into place for individuals, from being aware that green jobs exist through to it being feasible to find jobs and apply. Below, we set out these aspects, mapped against the **barriers** and **facilitators** we found during our research:

				
I am aware that green jobs exist	I'd like to work in a green job	I think I'm qualified for a green job		I can easily find and apply for a green job
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of awareness of green jobs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Interest in tackling climate change 3. Perceived flexibility of green jobs 4. Poor pay perceptions 5. Other job factors more important 6. Association with men's work 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Perceived skills mismatch and retraining concerns 8. Perception of available opportunities 9. Perceived competitiveness of applications 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Difficult to find green jobs 11. Greenwashing concerns 	



Many participants hadn't considered working in a green job because they were unaware of the concept

Awareness of green jobs

Many participants had not heard of green jobs prior to the interview and so **had not explicitly considered looking for a green job**. This is in line with [previous survey evidence](#) which suggests that, compared to men of the same age, women aged 16-25 were more likely to say that they have never heard of green skills (72% vs. 53%) and that they did not understand what green jobs are available (48% vs. 40%).

However, having learned about them during the interview, some participants expressed interest in working in a green job and doing more research after the interview had come to an end, suggesting that **simple awareness raising interventions may help drive interest in green jobs**.

"Is working in a green job [...] something you've ever considered yourself before?" [Interviewer]

"No, not really. [...] It's just not something I'd thought about, really. [...] I might start looking a bit more about these electric cars, computers, and whether I can get a hand in it somehow. [This interview] has given me food for thought." [Participant]



Some participants were keen to work in a green job because of their interest in tackling climate change

Interest in tackling climate change

Several participants mentioned that they would be **interested in working in a green role because they think it is important to do what they can to help the planet**, and that they would feel good about working in a green job compared to a less green role. This matches survey evidence that women are, on average, [more supportive than men of climate change policies](#) (eg, net zero) and [more likely to make changes](#) to help tackle climate change. It also matches [previous BIT research into girls' aspirations for STEM careers](#) which found that girls were more likely to prefer a career which helps others.

Although the same BIT research found that such preferences were associated with lower interest in STEM careers, our findings suggest that this may not be the case if **STEM careers are viewed through a green jobs lens**.

“Whether it's mental health, or something to do with sustainability, or anything that's helping other people or helping the world, I would find [that] really rewarding. So, I think a green job is definitely something that I would like to be involved in if I can, in the future.”



The perceived flexibility of green employers was a positive, but some had a negative perception of pay

Perceived flexibility of green jobs

Many participants expressed **a desire for flexibility** in their jobs, such as the ability to work from home, work reduced hours, or take a good amount of annual leave. This is in line with [previous BIT research](#). Some participants thought that specific green jobs might involve long hours (e.g. working at a recycling centre), but **others thought that green employers were more likely to offer flexible working arrangements.**

Poor perception of pay

Some participants would be less likely to consider working in a green job because **they thought that the pay would be poor**, in part because they associated them with working for NGOs or charity sector.

"[Greener companies] would be more accommodating of people in my situation than this big corporate giant that I work for now. I would imagine that they would have more flexible holiday pay, and an ability to buy holidays [...] whereas I wouldn't get that with where I am now as well."

"I think that the pay would be worse [in a green job], because, I don't know, in my experience those worthwhile jobs always seem to pay less. The charity sector, in my experience, has always paid less than the kind of work that I'm in now, so I would imagine that the pay would be less, but then I would imagine that they would be more progressive and the benefits would be better, or would be better for me, would be more aligned to what I was looking for."



Some participants felt that other factors were more important than whether a job was green or not

Other job factors more important

A group of participants expressed a view that although the 'green status' of a job was not an insignificant factor, **other criteria were far more important** to them in choosing a role. This included factors such as pay, the option to work remotely, and other benefits on offer.

"I would consider [working in a green job], for sure. I wouldn't say I would consider them above the others. [...] I currently have a picture in my mind of what I'm looking for or what is a must for me, so remote, specific salary and definitely will look at what benefits the company is offering, but as long as they will be somewhere around what I'm looking for I'm more than happy to look at it, to be honest."

"I would definitely be happy if I worked for a green company, but it's just a job. There's so many things involved like the location, the hours and that has to fit in with your life too, so I'd be looking more at that rather than is it a green company or not."



A small proportion of participants associated some green jobs with “men’s work” and found this off-putting

Association with men’s work

During the interviews, participants were presented with a list of example green sectors. Some were more STEM-related (eg, green heating, green construction, green technology) and others less so (eg, professional services focused on sustainability, green education). **A small subset of participants associated more ‘hands-on’ green jobs with a male-dominated workforce**, and described how this might be an uncomfortable environment to work in, but would be comfortable office-based green roles.

This matches our previous Predictiv findings:

- Men were significantly more likely to be interested in **green technology** (43% vs 28%), **green heating** (21% vs 11%), and **green construction** (22% vs 8%).
- Women were significantly more likely to be interested in taking up **education-related roles** (37% vs 29%).
- There were no significant differences for **natural environment workers** or **professional services**.

“For example, when I read on the list [...] like solar panels and stuff, instantly I always think that’s a man’s job. [...] I’ve just never seen a woman do it. [...] Sometimes I feel like men might not take them seriously in those kinds of jobs. [...] If I were to do an office job [...], I may be a bit more interested in that because, again, it’s something I’m comfortable doing [...]. I’ve never really done hands-on jobs, so maybe that’s why I’m not as confident with that.”



Some were put off by the perception that they would need specialised skills, experience or qualifications

Perceived skills mismatch and retraining concerns

Some participants felt that they would **struggle to obtain a green job due to not having the required experience or qualifications. The financial and time commitment for retraining was also cited as a barrier**, sometimes compounded by caring responsibilities.

Even some participants with STEM experience or other relevant skills felt they did not have the right experience to work in a green job. One student looking for entry-level data analysis roles thought that green jobs would require sector-specific qualifications, and found it difficult to imagine what a green data analytics job might entail.

"I am not in a position to stop working [to retrain], and I have a two-year-old. [...] It's something that I would be interested in doing I think, but [...] I don't think I have the willpower, never mind the financial power, to do that at the moment."

"If I was looking for a job like a junior data analyst and it was in [a green job industry], I would apply for it. But those jobs are just not that much relevant to what I've been studying and what I do. [...] Maybe not all the jobs you would need a degree for, but you'd probably want experience in that industry. [...] I'm sure that a lot of them could definitely employ a data analyst but I can't think for what reason though."



Perceived growth in green job sectors was appealing, but some had concerns about competition

Perception of available opportunities

Some participants thought that green jobs would be **an important and growing part of the economy in the future** and this was appealing to them from the perspective of their career development and job security.

Perceived competitiveness of applications

Others thought that it might be **difficult to get a green job because the opportunities would be very competitive**. Some participants, particularly those at the beginning of their careers, were concerned about limiting their options by only searching for green jobs, even though working in a green job would be appealing to them.

"I would view it as positive [if I came across a green job in my job search], because like I say, I think it's the way forward now. [...] A lot of jobs are going to be green jobs, and if I don't have those skills necessary, that eliminates me from the work world, or from certain roles. So I just think because it's the way forward, and it's a very hot topic at the moment, for me, I'd definitely take a look at the advert and I'd do that in preference over a job that wasn't a green job."

"I'm just quite keen to get a job and continue my career so I don't want to just focus on green jobs [...]. If I can work for a [green] company [...] then that would be really great, but it's not the end of the world at this current stage of my career."



Perceived difficulties finding a green job

Ability to find green jobs

Some participants felt that it would be difficult to identify these jobs or distinguish them from non-green roles.

Other participants mentioned that they might find green jobs by looking at companies that had b-corp certification, but they were unsure whether there was a difference between a b-corp role and a green job.

Greenwashing concerns

Some participants raised concerns about greenwashing. Some thought that it would be helpful if the definition or classification criteria were transparent so that they could have more confidence in whether a role was truly a green job.

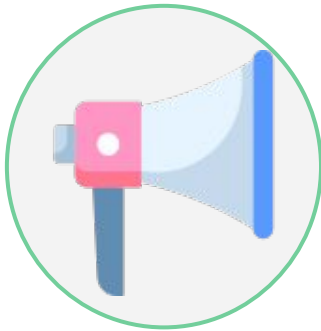
"If I type in operations manager, I'm going to get operations manager for every single company. It's not going to specifically be in relation to a green job or a green company. [...] So, a website that had what's been rated as the tip-top [green] companies, or companies that are improving as such, would be invaluable."

"I think that sustainability and green is a bit of a buzzword now to try and get people to like lure them in, and it's not necessarily forthcoming of what the company may actually do and believe with some things. Like I say, if it's like a sustainable manager, it might be the sustainability manager at Barclays Bank"

Section 3: Interventions

Potential interventions

Our findings suggest three main avenues for future interventions to reduce the gender gap in green jobs, each designed to target different barriers and facilitators from our research.



1. Communications
/ awareness

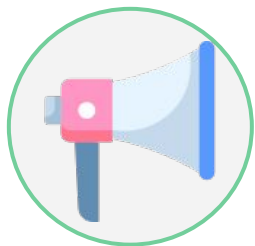


2. Targeted messaging



3. Green jobs site

Communications / awareness



1. Communications / awareness

Given the lack of awareness about green jobs, and the distinct aspects of green jobs that may encourage or discourage women from applying for them, a simple communication campaign or recruitment campaign from green employers may help to reduce the gender gap in green jobs, particularly if the communications:

1. Emphasise how the job will **benefit the climate** and **help others**
2. Provide **female role models** to help women imagine themselves in the role
3. Mention **flexible working** options



Based on other barriers we found, it may also help if communications mention the following information, to improve the appeal of green jobs more generally:

- Emphasise that green jobs are a **growing sector**
- Give some indication of the **available salary** in typical green roles and sectors
- Help people **visualise roles** that match their skills sets

Targeted messaging



Awareness raising may simply improve general knowledge of and interest in green jobs, rather than specifically for women. Thus, it is worth considering how messaging can be targeted at women, particularly those who may be especially well-qualified, and help them visualise themselves in a green job. See examples below.

2. Targeted messaging



Make use of women's employment networks. Green employers could encourage female employees to work with sector-specific networks (e.g. university courses, professional women's networks such as [Women's Engineering Society](#)) to build awareness of green jobs.



Target locations that women visit more often. For example, [women are more likely to visit museums than men](#), so climate-based grant organisations could work with relevant museums to establish exhibitions that display the variety of green roles and to increase understanding of green jobs.

Green jobs site



Several participants thought that having a website that collated green jobs, similar to those for [charity jobs](#) or [creative roles](#), would be helpful. A green jobs site has the potential to help address some participants' concerns that it might be difficult to find green roles.

3. Green jobs site

Additionally, a green jobs site might benefit from the following features:



1. Ensure criteria for labelling a job as green are transparent, to build credibility and reduce greenwashing concerns.
2. Make it easy for individuals to understand the skills and experience required for green jobs so that they can understand whether they are qualified and, if not, what skills they need to build.
3. Encourage employers to advertise their roles as flexible, such as by defaulting job adverts to label a job as available on a part-time or a job-share basis (see BIT's [previous research on flexible working](#)).

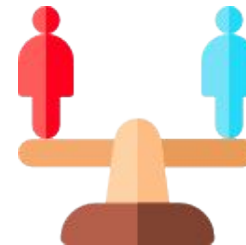
Recommendations for future research



Investigate prevalence of these themes through a representative survey, and use this information to prioritise interventions to reduce the gender gap in green jobs.



Test awareness and perceptions of green jobs as an overall concept, and compare this framing to alternatives (eg, eco jobs). Also, test perceptions of specific green jobs or sectors to consider the best way to build awareness of green jobs.



Consider further qualitative research on specific green roles which are anticipated or shown to have a sizeable gender gap (eg, green heating, construction & technology).

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