unionlearn
with the TUC



Stewarding the green skills agenda

A think-piece commissioned by unionlearn for the consideration of trade unions and partner organisations



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Foreword

Unionlearn exists to support and promote trade union learning. That includes helping to deliver the skills that the economy in England needs. In 2011, unionlearn was asked by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to promote awareness of the learning, skills and employment opportunities associated with the 'green economy': a broad range of skills that are collectively known in the trade union movement as 'green skills'. This was a very welcome development drawing upon the already impressive experience and commitment of many in the trade union movement.

The trade union movement has long been leading the debate on the industrial and skill changes needed to move to a low-carbon economy. In particular, UK unions have united with trade unions across the world to campaign for a global 'just transition' in which global governments plan large industrial and social changes in a responsible way with regard to workers' rights and livelihoods and is supportive of the particular challenges for developing countries. More recently in the UK, the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee has made the case for strong government and active stakeholder engagement. The TUC Green Workplaces programme has shown what trade union reps can achieve in terms of reducing carbon usage with many impressive projects across the economy.

The skills needed for a low-carbon economy are both generic and specialist in nature. Trade unions recognise the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to the green economy. But equally they want to see 'environmental literacy' for all. Every worker in every workplace should be supported to develop a vision of working in a sustainable way. There are huge strides to be made to ensure that UK workers have the skills to help deliver industrial challenge in sectors as strategically important as power generation and supply, private and public transport, the built environment, manufacturing, public services and the service sector. Trade unions have been working hard to deliver these changes and this work must continue.

Unionlearn commissioned Capacity Global to research and capture the thoughts and initiatives of full-time trade union officials who have been grappling with the challenge of delivering skills for a green economy. This report argues it is vital that trade unions build on their strong advocacy of green skills and develop the union role in 'stewarding' the transition to a green economy, particularly with regard to employment and skills issues. Unions should also continue to innovate and support initiatives such as the Green Skills Partnership and the World Skills Environmental Science Competition described in these pages and work strategically to deliver the skills needed for a green economy. I am sure that this paper will be a valuable stimulus to new ideas and initiatives.



Tom Wilson
Director of unionlearn

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[1] For confidentiality reasons we have not included everyone's name in the list.

Recommendations

1. The trade union role with regard to skills for a low-carbon or green economy should be one of progressive 'stewardship'.
2. In accepting the stewardship mandate, trade unions must:
   a. demonstrate through the skills agenda that trade unions can steward a 'just transition': unions will have to be visible leaders and public facing
   b. be inclusive of union membership: by stepping outside policy language and helping explain how climate change relates to all working lives, unionised and non-unionised
   c. resolve conflicts between trade unions, particularly over sectoral and membership interests as the transition takes hold
   d. champion a fair transition of wages
   e. guard against exclusion and create inclusion into the job market, especially for people who have been locked out of the job market at present on the basis of educational attainment, race, age, gender or class, sexuality or disability
   f. stand up for decent and quality jobs as new 'green jobs' are created and existing roles are 'greened'
   g. support local and regional low-carbon economy development, particularly with regard to skills and attracting international investment
   h. champion strategic skills for a green economy, particularly science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills and be advocates for progression routes into key sectors
   i. champion 'environmental literacy' and basic sustainability training for all workers
   j. develop good practice and union innovations including Green Skills Partnerships and the Green Workplaces programme
   k. act as a catalyst for investment in terms of public procurement reform.
3. Trade unions should continue and advance the leadership role that they have played in public policy with regard to their championing of a progressive role for government and stakeholders: inclusive of campaigning for a strategy to ensure the management of supply and demand for the skills needed to meet the EU 2020 targets and other key climate-preserving objectives going forward.
4. Trade unions should focus on a 2017 agenda (interim to 2020) that defines success for the union leadership role in skills for a green economy as:
   a. bringing a cross-sector workforce on board the green skills agenda
   b. acting quickly
   c. focusing on developing a green skills strategy that supports or initiates a just transition to a low-carbon economy
   d. keeping fairness on the table.

Introduction

Methodology

This paper is based on the reflections of union officials and those working with trade unions around the low-carbon and skills agenda in England. The reflections are based on a qualitative analysis from interviews and a focus group. Five key questions were asked of interviewees and group participants.

The questions were designed to explore the following:

- perceived principles and ethics of trade unions
- defining and understanding the low-carbon economy and green skills
- ideas on the role of unions in developing green skills
- key priorities for trade unions
- what a successful union leadership role would look like by 2017.

The intention was to focus on the union movement's reflections on their role on skills for the green economy and provide a contemporary snapshot of where trade unions are and where they can play an enhanced role. For this reason the majority, around three quarters, of participants taking part in the interviews and focus groups were from trade unions. The remaining quarter were from business, government, higher education establishments and sector skills councils.

The following sections provide an analysis of the opinions expressed about the potential opportunities, barriers and tensions in relation to the green skills agenda.

Setting the scene

An economy that operates on a just low-carbon model is the only way forward to tackle and mitigate climate change. Although there is no agreed definition for a low-carbon or green economy the terms are generally understood as meaning business, services and activities that are "adopting more resource efficient solutions within the economy that use less carbon and directly or indirectly protect the environment"[2]. This has implications across the economy and is inclusive of public authorities, the built environment, domestic usage, commercial offices, public transport, manufacturing, the rural and marine economy and the power generation and distribution industries.

Climate change has been internationally accepted as a huge priority for both wealthy and poor countries. The Committee on Climate Change urged the UK government to commit unilaterally to reducing emissions of all greenhouse gases (GHGs) by at least 34 per cent in 2020 relative to 1990 levels (21 per cent relative to 2005) and by 42 per cent relative to 1990 once a global deal to reduce emissions is achieved[3].

Trade unions, along with government, civil society and business have held a responsibility to lead in creating an economy based on the principles of sustainable development, arguably since the industrial revolution. The delivery of a fair or 'just' low-carbon economy requires leadership and a framework to shape the industrial, social, environmental and economic shifts.

Transitioning to an efficient sustainable development economy means understanding and defining the challenges of climate change, planning for better social and economic inclusion, remodelling work and domestic living to better use finite natural resources, and all of this means creating thousands of new jobs and developing the skills of the workforce.

The Brundtland report[4], though written over 25 years ago, set the cornerstone for sustainable development, calling for new infrastructures and an ethical prerogative for a world based on maintaining the

[2] *Towards a Low-Carbon Economy*, 2009

[3] Committee for Climate Change: *Building a Low-Carbon Economy*, 2008

[4] Also known as *Our Common Future*, 1987

"I think unions represent the most effective democratised influence for workers rights – a very powerful and positive force"

Interviewee

economic, social and environment balance that meets the needs of present and future generations. The Stern report some decades later is unequivocal on the need for key stakeholders to collectively develop a low-carbon economy. Trade unions understand that there is a synergy between equity and common interest. In essence this means dealing with the connections between resource depletion and climate change stress arising from what Brundtland called "the disparities in economic and political power".

A number of reports, together with organisations including trade unions, call for central governments to play an active interventionist role. The present government platform has been one of state roll back – cutting back on interventionist policy and supporting a market-based economy, albeit with some emphasis on social responsibility. The move to a low-carbon economy is recognised by the government and its activities include the market-led green economy framework *Enabling the Transition to a Green Economy*, setting up a green investment bank, and developing the Green Deal, but many including trade unions argue that much more is needed.

Nonetheless, state intervention has been rolled back and in the foreseeable future unions and other stakeholders must consider pragmatic responses. This is no less true for the skills agenda where trade unions should take up leadership and advocacy roles, working with partners such as the sector skills councils, challenging and supporting employers to meet their obligations and making the case in education and localities to deliver the skills needed for the green economy of tomorrow. That way, trade unions along with others have a key role to play not only in delivering skills for the green economy but also shaping the low-carbon economy policy agenda.

Trade unions are recognised by government, civil society and progressive business as having a transformative role in national social and economic change. The union record on fair economic policies, ensuring healthy workplaces and delivering on skills opportunities means that it is not really conceivable that a fair transition to a low-carbon economy can happen without unions at the table. In particular, the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee, which informs the work of trade unions and meets with government, has developed a strong reputation for sound and expert advice on 'green' industrial development. And the TUC is represented on government stakeholder groups including the Green Economy Council and the Skills for a Green Economy Group.

"I think unions represent the most effective democratised influence for workers rights – a very powerful and positive force"

Interviewee



Progressive stewardship and expertise

Nicholas Stern's[5] blueprint for a safer planet stresses that a successful response to the risks of climate change is through creating good economic policy and technology through collective action and less tangible factors such as access to information to make the right low-carbon choices at grassroots, business and government level.

Since the first Rio Summit in 1992 to the present consultations and Rio20, unions have made a commitment to taking action on climate change and sustainable development at global, national and local forums. Ultimately this means that unions made a public obligation to shaping enormous economic, social and environmental change.

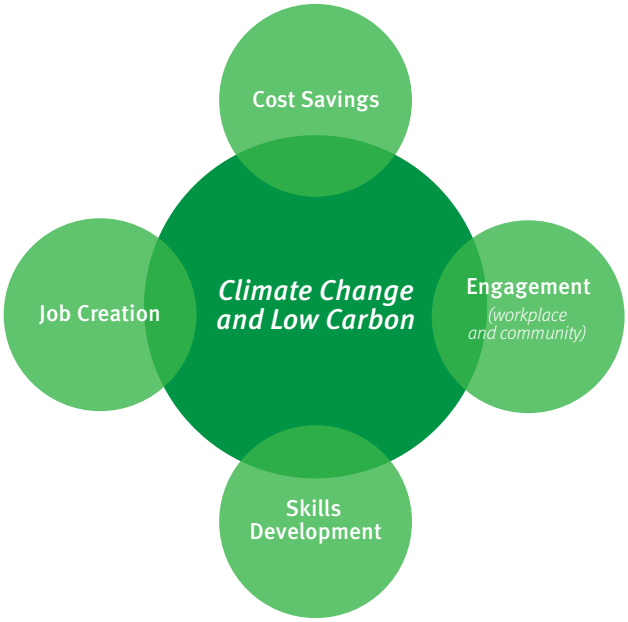
The Trades Union Congress (TUC) and its affiliates, and global trade union organisations such as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) have made public commitments to combat climate change to prevent economic and environmental disaster and to harness ambitious targets for carbon reduction to deliver jobs.

Agenda 21 was a formative call for public and civil society participation in sustainable development at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. This included principles with regard to collaboration between workers and their representatives, governments and employers to address very significant industrial change.

One of the interviewees noted that the need for skills for a green economy could be compared to previous economic and social shifts similar to those seen in the industrial revolution. A number of the interviewees felt that unions have a role similar to that of the Fabians who pushed for fair and democratic change as part of progressive industrial and social reform. Similarly, work by David Uzell refers to a representative from the UN Labour Organisation who commented that:

"change in production, change in ways people are working ... is nothing new to trade unions. They have always been adapting to transition ... it's also very relevant to the climate change agenda, especially for the transition period"[6]

The diagram below is based on the TUC's four central messages, for why climate change and green skills are a trade union issue.



Whilst unions are making a strong case for prioritising green skills, the analysis of the focus group and interview discussions identified recurring concerns around the complexities of a fair transition to a low-carbon economy and green skills. The research revealed four key concerns:

A just transition includes fair wages

This perspective suggests that a just transition and the operation of a low-carbon model will mean making sure that jobs are fairly waged. Fair wages can be achieved by competitive and socially responsible business. However, business, one of the key stakeholders in the low carbon setting agenda, is

[5] *A Blueprint for a Safer Planet*, 2009

[6] *Green Skills, Green Jobs and Other Magic Wands*, ICELS, 2012

"How do you define this [low carbon] to a bus driver? Makes for great speeches but in practice it's ill defined."

Interviewee

often suspicious about regulation on fair wages or fair wage negotiations.

This suggests that the discourse around fair wages will not be an easy one even if progressive business, unions and NGOs see it as part of the low-carbon economy package.

How do you define low carbon to a bus driver?

This question posed by one of the interviewees reflects on a common concern around how the terminology and language presently used around a low-carbon response to climate change may antagonise a workforce caught in economic decline. A number of interviewees and the focus group participants felt that the mainstream workforce perceive green skills to be an environmental issue which should not be prioritised against 'real' problems of redundancy and loss of pensions.

This suggests that 'environmental literacy', meaning the skills and knowledge to communicate environmental issues in different contexts, is important if unions are to create a workforce movement that supports and understands the need for a transition. However it also illustrates that green skills and a low-carbon economy will need in the first instance to also have a non-green story behind it that focuses on job creation and enhancing skills to develop a competitive and efficient economic model.

Getting over external perceptions of unions

Union and non-union participants were strongly aware of both the positive and negative perceptions of trade unions. Whilst they were clear that unions have a progressive role in industrial change and skills development they were equally clear that unions could still be perceived as regressive rather than progressive.

The low-carbon and green skills agenda, however, gave a perfect opportunity to communicate within and outside the union movement the union role in delivering a new and forward-thinking economy built on efficiency not waste, including the best use of natural and human resources to generate economic and social benefits for everyone.

Managing change can catch trade unions off guard

This perspective was based on union participants' experience of union culture that can be reactive rather proactive. They were candid about their experiences of clashes within and between unions around ideology and priorities especially when working with limited resources.

These reflections suggest that unions, like other stakeholders, will have to deal with internal wrangling over ideology, resource management and their sense of identity. Unions are having to deal with this in providing equal support for carbon-heavy transition sectors such as coal and transport as well as championing clean technology and the 'non-green' service industry.

What the conversations above also illustrated was the ability for trade unions to look critically at themselves, identify problematic areas within their culture and explore solutions to tackle barriers and respond to opportunities. It also showed that non-union interviewees from business and government showed empathy and an understanding of the contextual complexities trade unions face.

Setting the agenda: defining the low-carbon economy and green skills

Attempts at defining the low-carbon economy have been made at national and international level by trade unions. There is no universally accepted definition for a low-carbon economy. But most definitions have carbon-efficiency, massive reductions in carbon usage and a fair or just transition that encourages economic development and investment at their core.

It is recognised that creating a low-carbon economy also requires a strong 'green skills' strategy that is a lynchpin for providing the skills that will be required within the workforce to ensure the transformation happens. And it is widely assumed that unions have a role in defining the low-carbon economy and how a 'green skills' agenda will help to deliver it.

Participants (union and non union) that took part in the research for this think-piece were asked to reflect on *'what is a fair transition to a low-carbon economy and the role of green skills'*.

All participants illustrated that they understood that the low-carbon economy was a fundamental response from government, industry and society to tackle climate change in a way that would mean transforming everyone's skills set and environmental literacy. The following are key concerns coming out of the research for this report:

- The low carbon economy needs to be accessible to everyone.
- Jobs in the low-carbon economy needed to be decent, safe, fair waged and allow for learning and career progression.
- The phrase 'low-carbon economy' is 'policy speak' but it doesn't have great resonance on the shop floor.

These points reflected perceptions that trade unions have a strong stewardship mandate to ensure that any economic transition is not only low carbon but is an economic model that provides for the best use of human resources: employees, workers and employers.



The diagram above shows how green skills would operate in a fair and just transition that makes the most of employee resources. [7]

In essence this means changing a mind set from 'any job is a good job' to an understanding that good jobs, whether traditionally green jobs or otherwise, need to create inclusion in the job market, especially for people who are locked out at present on the basis on educational attainment, race, age, gender, class, sexuality or disability.

It was felt that unions have to show ways in which jobs can be designed to allow for career progression and guard against direct or indirect discrimination. Another focus was that unions would be expected to embed the need for fair wages if the transition is based on a legal and ethical notion of equality.

Union leadership will have to explain the significance of the low-carbon economy in terms that are relevant to members and their aspirations. For members who are not environmentally literate or sympathetic to prioritising climate change the focus should be on three things:

[7] This diagram was influenced by the 'doughnut' in Roworth and Rostrom's *A Safe and Just Space for Humanity: can we live within the doughnut?*

"The two [low-carbon economy and green skills] are intimately linked. You need to view both as beyond new industries but also the greening of existing occupations ... in every sector."

Interviewee

- the need to develop skills so that people can maintain employment
- the need to provide skills for people to enter the job market for the first time
- a way to create jobs and create a competitive workforce.

Dialogue on those terms is more likely to lead to the union membership having greater support for green skills as a priority issue for their leadership.

"Low carbon and saving the universe doesn't click at all"

Interviewee

Developing the green skills agenda

A low-carbon economy is carried on the back of a strong skills strategy steered by government. Skills are vital for both 'dark green' and 'light green' jobs[8]. Regardless of the shade of green, the skills are about consistently equipping people in any job to make carbon-efficient and environmentally friendly choices in the workplace.

People with green skills need training and learning opportunities. At present it is generally accepted that a massive investment in skills building is key. But what are also needed are good practice models for green skills development that have integrated the development of environmental literacy amongst workers, employers and business.

Whilst economic downturns often deter skills investment, it is the opposite that is required. Unions have consistently maintained a focus on the need for workers' skills to be developed not only for the personal and economic well-being of an individual but also for the economic stability of a country.

The early commitment of trade unions to green or low-carbon skills is well documented. They have seen it as a crucial to dealing with tough economic competition, workforce skills gap and responding to the demands of a low- carbon market. Unions have argued for a 'ramping up' of the green skills agenda for some time. The TUC has said that the skills needed for a green economy cannot happen in a vacuum and need a strategic policy that backs new and old industries in a low-carbon economy. A sign of whether this has been heard is if the Green Deal or other low-carbon initiatives have a skills policy that is strong enough to provide large scale investors and community initiatives with the confidence to invest in training schemes and projects. Unions have consistently asked for a policy platform that will facilitate not only this but a national policy on green and low-carbon skills.

"The TUC believes that stakeholder consultancy, policy certainty and clear long term direction are vital to securing sustained green economic growth as a key contribution to economic recovery"

TUC's written evidence submitted to the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 2010–12

The focus on investment in skills is a natural fit for trade unions. Unions are recognised as having a strong stewardship mandate to work collectively with government and business to deliver training and provide an evidence base for a strong skills 'road map'. They have been acting as an incubator for a number of good practice initiatives that range from supporting green work placements agreements, to environment and skills representatives and providing resources to sectoral and local partnerships. Some of these initiatives are discussed in the case studies section below.

"Defining a fair transition to a low-carbon economy is far harder than defining green skills"

Interviewee

"The two [low-carbon economy and green skills] are intimately linked. You need to view both as beyond new industries but also the greening of existing occupations ... in every sector."

Interviewee

[8] 'Dark green' jobs are those solely related to environment, climate change and low-carbon activities, products or services. 'Light green jobs' are those where only a part is related to the environment, climate change and low carbon but is not its sole purpose.

Unions' commitment to skills and green skills was strongly identified by research participants. Unions were seen as being able to provide added value to workplace and community schemes and national policy making.

"Green skills is one bright area of activity for involvement"

Interviewee

Unions are well placed to communicate and support opportunities for reskilling and developing worker and employee skills. However, research participants saw 'green skills' as a term that needs to be owned and properly understood for the workforce to truly get behind it. There has to be tangible meaning behind what can sometimes be seen as 'green skills rhetoric'.

There is an important agenda with regard to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills that are needed across the economy as a whole but no less so in the low-carbon economy. Trade unions must encourage interest and participation in STEM in schools, further education, higher education and in the workplace. But unions must also work to ensure that STEM skills are seen in the context of building a green economy and that new green occupational and professional identities provide inspiration and a status to aspire to. Furthermore, trade unions should work to ensure that STEM careers are opened up to underrepresented groups including women and some ethnic minorities to ensure consistency with their vision of a more just and egalitarian future.

Trade unions need to promote ways of integrating sustainability skills into jobs and to workplace training programmes. This is particularly important in sectors such as construction where regulatory drivers on carbon reduction mean that increasingly the building trades are set new challenges and need to develop understanding of new building models. The case study on Wakefield District Housing illustrates how this can be done.

A key role for unions is to promote 'environmental literacy' and in particular to understand 'carbon efficiency'. But the question of improving environmental literacy is not only for workers and employees but something that union leaders will need to constantly develop. Developing knowledge and language behind green skills allows people's jobs and careers to adapt to an economic efficiency model in a way that is more likely to create ownership and commitment. 'Environmental literacy' needs to be communications savvy. It needs to allow people into the conversation without necessarily having to sign up in the first stages to a green or environmental agenda.

The ability to communicate green skills and the response to climate change is important but challenging. Union officials were clear on the tension between using the terminology of green skills comfortably at policy level but not so comfortably at grass roots level with union members and the workforce at large. Showing by example was seen as an easier way to start the discussion.

Unions and their affiliates have been working hard to develop and support skills-based initiatives at three levels: innovative education forums, collective business and community partnerships plus developing green workplaces. All offer opportunities to inform not only active involvement but create a good practice evidence base.



Leading by example – good practice models

Unions are in a unique place to illustrate by example not only what 'green skills' mean but how they can help bring about economic and social investment through inspiring collaborative cross-sector action.

Below are five examples of unions' role in good practice models. The case studies have been instigated by unions or developed with cross-sector partners from government, higher education, community groups, private companies and NGOs to inspire, develop and create green skills initiatives that meet the needs of a low-carbon economy. What connects all of them is the way in which unions and their partners have sought to work together for a common cause.

Green Skills Partnership for London

The Green Skills Partnership for London (GSPL) was created as a partnership body in South London, but is now extending to cover the capital. Presently working in Wandsworth, Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich and Southwark, there are also advanced discussions regarding projects in Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Hounslow and other authorities. Partner organisations involved in the project are unionlearn, TUC Education, UCATT, FE colleges, Asset Skills, Summit Skills, Construction Skills, Job Centre Plus, various London borough councils, employers (see below) and voluntary sector organisations including Groundwork.

The intended purpose of the partnership is to deliver green skills within target sectors such as construction, retrofit, horticulture, waste management and hair and beauty. The Green Skills Partnership is run by an organising committee, convened by unionlearn, which meets regularly to oversee the objectives of the pilot project and any subsequent projects.

The aims of the partnership are:

- developing the alliance to promote community engagement with green economy training and work, including linking college training with local community groups
- supporting awareness and commitment to the low-carbon agenda
- increasing work experience, apprenticeship and employment opportunities in the construction, building technology, horticulture and waste management sectors
- increasing work experience, apprenticeship and employment opportunities in SMEs in hairdressing, property management and insulation
- encouraging the values associated with green jobs being decent jobs, a principle that underpins contact with all partners
- raising issues of access for disadvantaged groups, local employment opportunities, community benefits, health and safety standards, career progression and trade union membership

Outcomes from the project include:

- award of JCP Flexible support fund to key partner Groundwork to deliver 100 pre-employment opportunities in the horticulture, waste management and retrofit sectors in South London, with a further 60 green and low-carbon jobs to be created
- agreements with Wilmot Dixon and Lendlease Beonsite concerning work placements, guarantees on interviews, apprenticeship and employment opportunities in South London
- working with Carillion and Lakehouse regarding relationships with their training and community engagement on regeneration projects
- a pioneering workers cooperative, the Lewisham New Leaf Collective, which is being set up to integrate renewable energy generation into sustainable retrofitting of social housing: representing diverse partners – employers, trade unions, community and vulnerable groups – it will offer an exciting and innovative approach to working together in the struggle against fuel poverty by expanding local participation in the renewable energy revolution
- an environmental community course with 200 funded places piloted in partnership with Wilmot Dixon

- 25 people completed the TUC Discussion Leaders training – Environmental Skills and Eco-Awareness (Level 2 OCN accredited)
- six people placed into part-time paid training as 'green ambassadors' through Lewisham College and the construction union UCATT
- funding secured for PTLLS and Assessors training for those unemployed, and part funding for those employed, without a Level 3 qualification
- the Green Skills Partnership being conceptualised and branded for transfer to other regions, including projects being developed in Leicester, Bristol and Kent regions.

TUC Green Workplaces programme

The Green Workplaces programme started in 2009. In over three years it has worked with over 1,300 green reps in schools, hospitals, prisons, libraries, museums and fire stations to green their workplace. This has been a union collaboration with the TUC, its affiliates, unionlearn and TUC Education.

Through an expanded network and consortia such as the Climate Solidarity project the programme has supported green reps to introduce environmental efficiency actions that create healthy workplaces and save costs. Since it was established the Green Workplaces programme has also trained up to 100 people in joint union-management training courses.

Union learning representatives (ULRs) have also led the way in negotiating training on environmental sustainability. For example, at A&P Falmouth, ULRs representing dock workers negotiated a half day's training for all workers on site.

The role of the green rep is to:

- promote environmentally sustainable workplace initiatives and practices
- carry out environment risk assessments and audits
- consult on workplace environmental policies, practices and management systems
- negotiate relevant training and skills development
- deliver resource efficiency training.

Unions are campaigning for reasonable facility time to do this work and for legislation for the role of green rep to be recognised on the statute books in the same way as the ULR role.

More recently the TUC has extended the Green Workplaces programme into a number of other European countries including Belgium. This new initiative is called the ETUC Green Workplaces Network. There are six new UK case studies being developed in the UK at:

- Euston Tower
- Magor Brewery
- Harlow District Council
- Wakefield District Housing (see case study below)
- Felixstowe Docks
- Merton and Wandsworth boroughs (Greener Jobs Alliance)

World Skills UK – environmental science

WorldSkills UK is a set of annual skills competitions managed in partnership with organisations from industry and education. The union Prospect, in collaboration with the British Geological Survey, Semta, Tec Trust Fund, unionlearn and other partners has developed a national environmental science competition aimed at young people who have an interest in sustainable natural resource exploitation, sustainable energy production, environmental protection and climate change. The competition has been designed to raise skills and awareness in the science and engineering disciplines for emerging technologies and industries that will support the green economy.

Competitors work over three days, in teams of two, to:

- devise a sustainable energy solution for an island community
- produce a model to generate renewable energy
- produce a report and present their work to a panel of judges and sceptical stakeholders.

The 2011 competition final, which was held as part of World Skills International in London, also included a team from the Netherlands and featured a range of 'have a go' activities to engage the interest of students of all ages, apprentices and their parents.

UCATT and Wakefield District Housing (WDH)

UCATT has a working partnership with WDH to achieve the company's vision of becoming carbon neutral by 2016: WDH is responsible for 31,000 homes. Key to the developed understanding between company and union is the UK's largest 'zero carbon' housing development, the 91-home Park Dale project in Airedale, Castleford (West Yorkshire). The company and the union are both showcasing the development and in particular a show home that provides the opportunity for the local community and other visitors to learn about environmentally friendly homes and green construction technologies.

Another key initiative is the development of the apprenticeship training to be inclusive of green installations such as grey water systems and photo-voltaic cells. Apprentices have the use of specially adapted construction training facilities supported by tutors and union learning representatives. A new project has recently been initiated to facilitate the transfer knowledge of new 'green' technology installation to other parts of the workforce under the TUC Green Workplaces Programme.

Greener Jobs Alliance

The Greener Jobs Alliance (GJA) has been formed as a partnership body inclusive of trade unions, student organisations, campaigning groups and a policy think tank. It campaigns around the issue of jobs and the skills needed to support transition to a low-carbon economy and initiates practical projects to influence the development of the green economy.

The founding members of the GJA are the University and College Union (UCU), Trades Union Congress, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, National Union of Students, People & Planet, and the Institute of Public Policy Research. The UCU is the co-ordinating organisation. UCU helped to produce a film entitled Community Approaches to the Green Deal based on a project carried out in the FE sector. The intention is that it can be used as an education tool for staff and students.

The Alliance has produced a 'Green Skills Manifesto' to help deliver a step change in skilling the workforce for a low-carbon economy. There are eight component parts to the manifesto: government leadership; stakeholder consultation; a national sustainability skills programme; adapting apprenticeship programmes; local authorities co-ordinating community engagement; restoring sustainability to the school curriculum and adapting FE and HE programmes; employers engaging their staff on sustainability issues; and developing community alliances to stimulate change and educate on a local level.



A seat at the table – unions as key partners

A just transition to a low-carbon economy and the need for green skills has traction within the trade unions. Their role as a key player in developing national strategy in this area is recognised by government, business and NGOs. This is evidenced by unions having a seat at the table of leadership forums that are shaping strategy and practice on green skills.

The TUC and its affiliates have representation on government bodies such as the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and the Green Economy Council, progressive business coalitions like the Aldersgate group and sector skills councils and academies. Unions are recognised as key partners in increasing the skills of the national workforce.

The question for unions is not how they get a seat at the table but what they lead on and prioritise. Four areas that consistently came up in the research were:

- leading the field on environmental literacy for the workforce
- safeguarding the national and international commitment to fairness at the heart of a low-carbon economy
- developing and communicating good practice green skill models that are replicable and scalable
- being visible leaders and public facing.

A low-carbon and environment-literate workforce

A competitive workforce in a low-carbon economy requires a workforce that can adapt to, and also understands why it is adapting to, the demands of a fair, carbon-efficient model. The consensus from all the participants is that unions are best placed to work with employers, workers, business, NGOs and government to shape a national low-carbon literacy programme or strategy. At the time of writing there is little co-ordination on entry-level focused environmental literacy programmes that can be offered to a diverse workforce that will improve skills and employability.

Trusted stewardship on a just transition

The unions are committed to a transition process to a low-carbon model that is just and delivers an economic model based on equality and equity. However, as discussed earlier, it is unions – not government or business – that are most likely to be trusted to ensure that fairness stays in the room when the process and model is defined. The perception is that unlike business and government it is the union ethos on workers' rights and political commitment to equitable economic models that gives them a legitimate role as civil society steward for a just transition.

Showcase good practice, green skill-based models

An area of opportunity is for unions to show how their investment in green skills and workplace initiatives can help shape a green skills-based economic model. As discussed earlier, the collective ways of working with business, educational institutions and community projects can provide a template for good practice.

Leadership means being visible

Despite this being the information age it can be difficult for people unfamiliar with work on green skills to see or hear about the union movement's green skills commitment. This is the one place where unions need to have a high profile. The profile should illustrate their progressive stance on the need for a new, carbon-efficient model that supports job creation, job stability and economic investment.

"I think there's a soft and hard agenda... the unions need to focus on soft training and skills, and hard strategy driving."

Interviewee

The four priorities on the previous page illustrated where there was definite participant consensus but there were secondary issues, particularly for the trade union participants. The chart below shows the secondary issues.

Issues	Overview
Early shapers	Government and progressive business are open to collective approaches. It's important to shape the debate early before positions become entrenched.
Green Deal	Clarity is required on whether the Green Deal is going to be the focus for action on green skills. If it is, the unions need to be in position to influence the Green Deal now. If it is not, then avoid being side-tracked.
Regional profile	Despite the scrapping of RDAs there is still a need to operate at a regional level and support regional green skills initiatives and policy.
The 'ask'	Unions have a tangible role that government understands. There are opportunities to talk directly with government and government bodies, often in conjunction with progressive business groups at forums such as the Green Economy Council. It's crucial that unions are clear on their 'ask'.
Act as brokers	Developing a green skills strategy will require cross sector partnerships. Unions must step up to broker some of these partnerships.

Future forward

Leadership often needs a plan. And a good plan requires understanding what success looks like in the short, medium and long term. This think-piece has focused so far on the current situation. However, what could success look like after five years, in 2017?

The research participants were very clear about objectives for the unions' leadership role up to 2017. These were to:

- bring a cross-sector workforce on board the green skills agenda
- act quickly
- focus on developing a green skills strategy that supported or initiated a just transition to a low-carbon economy
- keep fairness on the table.

Bringing cross-sector workers on board

Unions have a wide platform to work with members and their employers across different sectors.. Their role is not seen as contentious by non- union members or even non-unionised companies if they assist in providing opportunities that enhance workers' skills and offer environmental and economic efficiencies.

Developing 'green' work placements and training and skills-based initiatives for unionised and non-unionised workplaces highlights how unions can be leaders in skills and offers a soft introduction to non-unionised workers about the progressive roles unions play in supporting workers.

Acting quickly

Throughout the conversations with the research participants the need for unions to act quickly was highlighted. Participants felt that if unions were to be successful they would need to act strategically in what a number referred to as a 'short window of opportunity' where government and business were also seeking to shape the agenda and the seat at the table for unions was not questioned.

It was felt that the window could slowly close. The next two years were seen as a crucial space in time where key stakeholders involved in decision-making did not yet have entrenched positions.

Focusing on developing a green skills strategy that supports or initiates a just transition to a low-carbon economy

Transforming a global and national market to a new way of doing things will be complex and difficult. A just transition to a low-carbon economy will not be easy. An area where all stakeholders are agreed is that -green skills and skills improvement are crucial for any kind of industrial transformation. The transition to a low-carbon economy could have similarities to the industrial revolution were workers had to learn new skills demanded by increasingly automated services.

To develop their leadership position unions will need to consistently use their knowledge and understanding with their wider partners, sector skills councils and progressive business to help shape the economic model and any industrial strategy that will underpin it. At all stages of the model and strategy development the unions need to be influencing the skills policy or strategy that goes hand in hand with it.

Keeping fairness on the table

There is a genuine concern that government and business will not safeguard the commitment to a fair transition, especially in times of austerity.

It was suggested that whilst the economy is in difficult times business and government would 'drop the fair transition' and just make a low-carbon economic model that represents business as usual as far as inclusion, accessibility and fair wages are involved.

Unions were seen as the key stakeholder most trusted to make sure fairness stays on the table and to champion the right balance between economy, people and the environment.

Secondary objectives

Further analysis of the focus group and interviews suggested secondary objectives for successful union leadership. The table below reflects these.

Issues	Overview
Maintain a strategic position	Unions need to take strategic board positions in institutions and organisations shaping green skills and in progressive business seeking to develop skills and be carbon-efficient.
Help attract investment	Unions need to play their part in attracting investors from the best companies in the world who support a renewable energy and carbon-efficient agenda
Support green skills procurement policy	Unions need to continue to develop the support they are providing to local authorities on designing procurement policy, to include using services that promote 'green' Apprenticeships and skills
Stimulate a regulatory framework with business	Unions and progressive business believe that a regulatory framework stimulates growth. At a time when government is rolling back regulations, unions and business need consistently to illustrate the need for regulations that guide investment.
Explain by example	Unions have a plethora of good practice working on cross-sector projects and policy development. Maintaining a leadership role will mean showing how green skills can be used to develop workplace skills, educational institutions' training offers, behaviour change and community initiatives.



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About unionlearn

Unionlearn is the learning and skills organisation of the TUC. Unionlearn works to assist unions in the delivery of learning opportunities for their members as well as managing the £15m Union Learning Fund (ULF).

Over the past 12 years, more than 28,000 union learning representatives (ULRs) have been trained and 230,000 people are being given training and learning opportunities through their union every year.

Unionlearn is also responsible for providing education and training opportunities for workplace reps and professionals via TUC Education. Each year more than 50,000 trade union members enrol in trade union education courses organised by the TUC.

Union learning is growing fast; almost every union is now involved in union learning, supported by unionlearn, helping hundreds of thousands of learners at all levels, from basic numeracy and literacy to degree-level qualifications.

In a recent survey of 400 employers, with a total of 6 million employees, 87 per cent said that they wanted to continue to support union learning, with two-thirds saying that it benefited the organisation and 81 per cent saying it benefited the individual.

Every major political party – Labour, Liberal Democrats and Conservative – has voiced strong support for unionlearn.

About Capacity Global

Capacity Global provides a unique link between community action and policy development.

Capacity Global is an independent think tank and social enterprise that inspires and illustrates environmental and social justice in a fair society. Our aim is to develop environmental and social justice by providing innovative thinking on policy, research, legislation and community action.

It combines policy analysis and debate informed by the partners it works with in the UK and internationally from communities, academia, government and business to create better strategies and solutions. We do this through our four programmes: greener jobs, community outreach, advocacy and research.

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