

Spotlight

Thought leadership and policy

Skills and Apprenticeships: Jobs in a changing world

Robert Halfon MP

Toby Perkins MP

Caroline Norbury



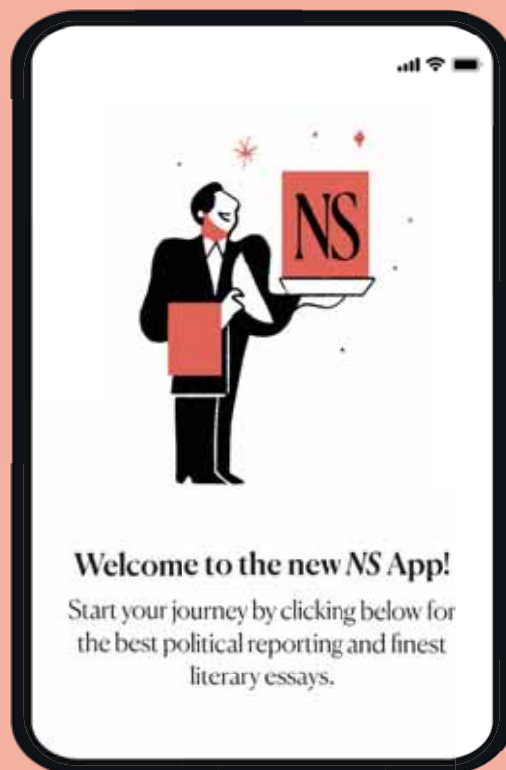
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There's no such thing as "unskilled" labour

Jeremy Hunt tried to reassure Britain at the end of last month with his alliterative plan for the economy. By focusing on "the 'four Es' of economic growth" – Enterprise, Education, Employment and Everywhere – the Chancellor would ensure a long-term boost to the UK's economic fortunes.

On the second "E", he said: "If we want to reduce dependence on migration and become a high-skill economy... education will be essential – and that means ensuring aspiration and opportunity is as open to those who do not go to university as to those who do."

That the UK suffers from multiple skills shortages is as widely accepted as the fact that our low productivity is a hard-to-solve puzzle. To take just one example, according to techUK's Digital Economy Monitor, 57 per cent of UK IT firms say talent shortages and access to skills are some of the biggest barriers they face. And, as Nick Ferris points out

(see pages 20-21), the UK could miss out on the green jobs boom if it doesn't invest in the training required to ensure that people are upskilled sufficiently well.

But the term "high-skill economy" implies that there is such a thing as a low-skill, or even unskilled, economy. This is a misnomer that devalues people working in jobs that are central to the economy. It also hurts the sectors that rely on their work.

Hospitality, for example, is an industry suffering from workforce shortages, especially after Brexit. Today, as Samir Jeraj reports (see pages 16-17), the UK's restrictions on "unskilled" labour from outside the EU make it hard for all but those deemed the most "skilled" (or earning a higher salary) to get a work visa. It's partly a matter of perception: In Europe and many countries outside of the EU, hospitality professionals are valued and seen as skilled.

The perception problem ranges across other sectors, including care – whether for the elderly, disabled people, or children. The Chancellor's hopes for long-term economic growth might prove more fruitful if his government invested in professionalising these. That would mean higher wages and defined career paths, recognising that the people who do those jobs are highly skilled, too. ●

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Older workers held back by lack of digital skills

Over 55s are being prevented from changing careers or roles because they are not being encouraged into training, according to new research.

AND Digital, a digital services company, found that nearly one-in-three workers over the age of 55 wanted to improve their skills to change job before retirement. The scale of the digital skills challenge is much greater too, with nearly one-in-five over 55s feeling they lack the skills to do their current role

Employers need to improve their training, according to the research, as six-in-ten over 55s reported receiving no training for digital upskilling. One of the barriers is that workers do not feel confident to put themselves forward, with nearly three-in-ten saying they are in this position. A greater proportion, four-in-ten, of young workers between 18–24 years old also say they feel they lack digital skills but do not feel able to ask for training.

Harriet Perks, London learning and development lead at AND Digital, said: “It is vital that we build on the valuable experience in human skills, such as communicating with empathy and problem solving, that many mature workers have accrued during their careers and can bring to existing digital teams.” She added that it was important to support people in their professional lives during a time of economic turmoil.

“Business leaders must help to reduce the embarrassment and stigma all age groups feel around their capabilities and what they’d like to advance,” Perks said.

AND Digital’s research calls for a more tailored approach to training, with older workers preferring on-the-job learning, while younger workers wanted materials and content to read. ●



Apprenticeship starts fall after completions rise by 16.7 per cent

More than 122,000 adults started apprenticeships in England in the first quarter of the 2022/23 academic year, according to the latest government figures.

The number of people aged 16 and over starting new apprenticeships is down 6.1 per cent on the same period (August to October) from the year before, totalling 122,290 new starts. Of these, those aged between 16 and 18 made up nearly a third, at 38,480 places.

Despite apprenticeship starts decreasing, completions have increased. Apprenticeship achievements – the number of people who complete their apprenticeship by passing the end-point assessment – have gone up by 16.7 per

cent since the same period in the 2021/22 academic year, to 30,650. This is partly due to Covid-19 restrictions being lifted.

Since May 2010, there have been more than five million apprenticeship starts. Boosting the availability of vocational courses has been a key tenet of the government’s Levelling Up agenda.

Last month, the recipients of the second round of the Levelling Up Fund were announced, totalling £2.1bn. Of this, £75m will go towards further education projects in England, including a £40m carbon-neutral campus for Blackpool and The Fylde College, a training academy for health and social care workers in Somerset, and a creative and digital training facility in Dover. ●

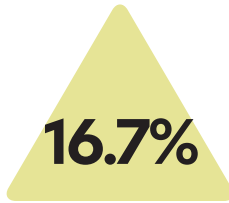
Creative industries “at risk” from ministers’ complacency

The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee has warned the UK’s position as a leader in the creative industries is at risk from incoherent government policies and complacency.

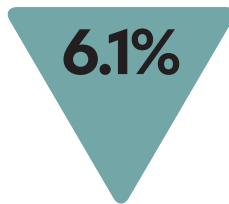
International competition and domestic economic challenges are threatening the prosperity generated by the creative industries, according to the committee’s report. The Lords also highlighted the challenges from skills shortages among young people and the lack of encouragement into jobs in creative industries.

The report also calls for arts and creative topics to be included with science and technology teaching in schools.

Creative industries are fast-growing sectors, provide high-quality employment, drive innovation, and support civic and social well-being, according to the Lords, who noted that they contributed more to the UK economy than the “life sciences, aerospace and automotive industries combined.” ●



Increase in the number of adults finishing apprenticeships in 2022/23



Decrease in the number of adults starting apprenticeships in 2022/23



A quarter of all apprenticeship starts in 2021/22 were in Stem subjects

New academy hopes to meet green skills challenge

At Manchester’s Green Skills Academy, which opened last week as part of a pan-northern effort to help the UK meet its climate goals, courses on how to install heat pumps, solar panels and EV charge points will sit alongside those in retrofitting old homes with new insulation – a replica home inside the academy’s renovated warehouse provides a living classroom for the green revolution.

Developed by The Growth Company with support from local businesses and the council, it is hoped the initiative will improve job prospects for individuals and the region. Speaking at its inauguration, Mayor Andy Burnham stressed the desire to “bring in jobs that really are there for the long-term”.

But the UK’s current green skills gap looms much larger than this academy alone can fix, with acute shortages across every major sector. And the Conservative government is being helped in meeting this skills shortage in the worst of ways: cuts to funding for green projects during David Cameron’s premiership mean that the proportion of green job openings has “declined significantly”, according to new analysis by the London School of Economics’ Grantham Research institute on Climate Change and the Environment.

Vacancies in the low-carbon economy now make up a smaller share than they did in 2012. ●

Skills becoming more desirable than degrees, LinkedIn data suggests

Employers are increasingly using skills as the key parameter in hiring rather than degrees or experience, according to LinkedIn data.

Nearly a quarter of US-based job postings on the site no longer require degrees, up from 15 per cent in 2020. Forty per cent of human resources teams are also now using skills data to assess candidates. LinkedIn has also noted an increase in conversations

around “skills-first” hiring approaches, with mentions roughly doubling from October 2021 to October 2022.

However, research from educational organisation Jobs for the Future shows that employers still lack the confidence to hire based on skills. While 80 per cent believe in prioritising skills over degrees, half say they are still hiring based on the latter because it feels less risky. ●



The view from government



Robert Halfon MP
**Minister for skills, apprenticeships
and higher education**

“Technical education should no longer be seen as a ‘Cinderella service’”

I was delighted to return to the role of skills, apprenticeships and higher education minister in October. As many of you will know, whether in or out of government, I've been passionate about skills and technical education for many years.

My interest began when I was still a parliamentary candidate, after meeting some young people who were desperate to do an apprenticeship but didn't know how to get started. I decided that clearing the path to this route would be my mission if I entered parliament.

In fact, my first ever speech in the House of Commons was about apprenticeships. I urged teachers to encourage students to consider them, rather than seeing university as their only option to a great career.

To be reappointed skills minister has given me the chance to champion the ladder of opportunity from within government. I am committed to ensuring that, regardless of background, everyone has access to excellent skills education, in order to gain sustainable, fulfilling work.

It helps that we have a prime minister who really values skills education. There can be no clearer demonstration of this than his appointment of Gillian Keegan as the first education secretary to hold a degree-level apprenticeship. The prime minister has called education “the closest thing we have to a silver bullet” for changing life chances and named it as one of his government's key priorities. Our ambitious skills agenda is the backbone to this, providing £3.8bn over this parliament for T Levels, reinvigorated apprenticeships and Higher Technical Qualifications.

The prime minister's recent announcement that all students in England should study some form of maths until the age of 18 will better equip them for the jobs of the future. I find it alarming that sometimes we give the appearance of being rather relaxed about being “bad at maths”. We should reconsider this approach to numeracy. Around eight million adults in England have maths skills lower than those expected of a nine-year-old. The problem is particularly acute for disadvantaged pupils, where 60 per cent do not have basic maths skills at age 16.

This is problematic because maths and financial literacy is, of course, essential for carrying out basic tasks in daily life, including managing personal finances and maintaining a basic level of competence at work in many professions. The Prime Minister wants to make this positive difference to people's lives so they can confidently pursue life's opportunities and a successful career in an industry of their choice.

And it's not just about maths. Our skills agenda is transforming the education landscape, taking its cue from employers in order to fill the skills gaps in many industries. We're doing this through investment in resources, skills qualifications, infrastructure, careers guidance and improved employee engagement.

Apprenticeships are an outstanding way for people to climb the ladder of opportunity, especially those who need the security of an income to develop the skills they need to get ahead. This can be especially powerful for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In fact, the Education Secretary often refers to her apprenticeship as her social mobility ticket. That is why we'll have invested £2.7bn in them by 2024–25,

working with businesses of all sizes to build the skilled workforce needed to boost the economy.

I often say “degree apprenticeships” are my two favourite words in the English language. They combine the best of vocational and academic education, allowing young people to earn while they learn and remain free of student loans debt. Under this government, the popularity of degree-level apprenticeships has soared, with over 148,000 starts since their introduction in 2014-15.

We also introduced T Levels in 2020, the new gold standard in technical qualifications. They offer a non-academic route for young people to access specialised training, which sets them up for future study and a successful working life. These top-quality qualifications are an important element of our skills reforms, and their rigour gives them parity with the A-level route. The T Level Transition Programme supports those students who benefit from the additional study time and preparation before progressing to T Level learning.

We have invested £300m to develop a network of prestigious Institutes of Technology across the country. These, alongside the higher technical qualifications (HTQs) they help provide, are supporting more people to secure exciting and rewarding careers. In turn, they also make a valuable contribution to their communities, employers and economy. To date, 106 qualifications have been approved as HTQs across digital, construction, and health and science routes for teaching from September 2022, and there are over 70 institutions able to deliver them.

It is never too late for someone to change career or retrain. That’s why we continue to offer free training to all adults who need support with maths or English – or new skills for key sectors like digital, green technologies and healthcare. We invested over £150m in the last year to expand our flexible Skills Bootcamps and free courses for job training schemes, which thousands of adults have already taken advantage of.

Further education and skills are often described as the “Cinderella service” of post-16 learning. It is a phrase I absolutely detest. I always remind people that, at the end of the fairy tale, Cinderella became a member of the royal family.

Our ambitious skills agenda does just that, and it is transforming lives. We are building the prestige of skills education – and ensuring lifelong learning by enabling people to train, re-train and upskill throughout working life in a way that suits them. This extends the ladder of opportunity to everyone, supporting them to achieve rewarding employment, regardless of their background or their circumstances.

There is still lots of work to do. But my hope is to never again meet young people who feel they have no viable routes to getting a good job and a great career. ●

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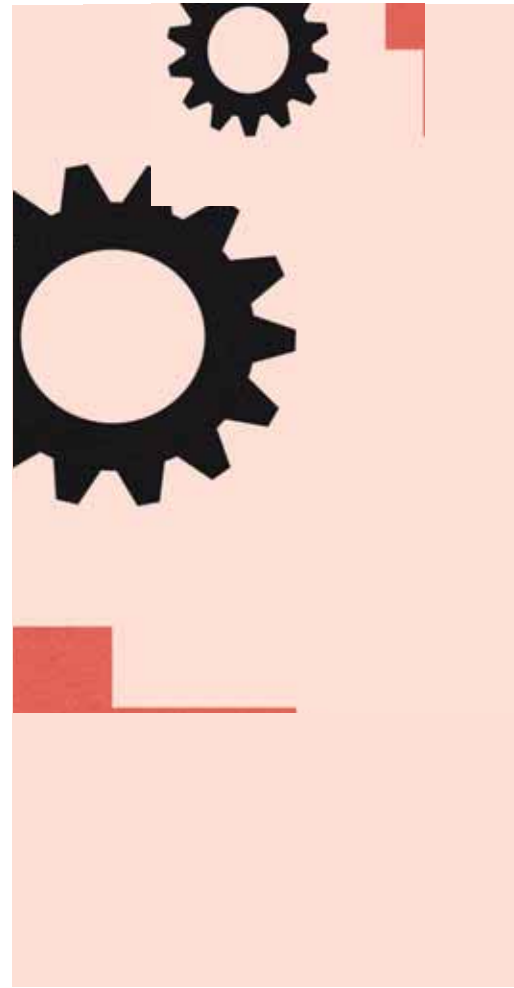


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“Our future depends on it”

Andrew Pollard, co-creator of the Oxford Covid vaccine, on careers in clinical research

By Sarah Dawood



During the pandemic, the lightning-fast rollout of Covid vaccines highlighted how vital clinical research is to the world. We depend not only on doctors, nurses and paramedics, but also on scientists to prevent millions of deaths.

The UK was the subject of much of this attention due to the Oxford-AstraZeneca (Oxford-AZ) vaccine. Developed in partnership between Oxford University and the British pharmaceutical giant, the vaccine was distributed to 183 countries, more than all of its competitors. This was down to its fridge-standard storage temperature, easy transportability, and comparatively cheap price – AstraZeneca originally agreed not to profit from it.

The vaccine also faced scrutiny for rare side effects, such as blood clots. Last year its use was discontinued as research found that mRNA vaccines such as the Pfizer and Moderna jabs were more effective as boosters. Regardless, the



The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine saved 6.3 million lives globally in 2021

Oxford-AZ partnership is deemed a British scientific success story. The vaccine saved 6.3 million lives globally in the first year of rollout, the most of all the vaccines in circulation at the time.

Professor Andrew Pollard, director of the Oxford Vaccine Group within the university, was one of the three scientists who led on the vaccine. The group designs, develops and tests vaccinations to tackle health emergencies, from Covid-19 to ebola and meningitis. Pollard worked alongside the acclaimed professors Sarah Gilbert and Teresa Lambe. Gilbert led on vaccine development, Lambe on laboratory supervision, and Pollard led on clinical trials that involved more than 23,000 volunteers globally and 2,000 members of staff.

The pandemic has helped to showcase the importance of the life sciences sector, especially to younger people, Pollard tells *Spotlight*. A 2022 report from the Association of the British Pharma-

ceutical Industry (ABPI) concluded that the development of the Oxford-AZ vaccine improved perceptions of the industry as a potential employer.

Research from the Medical Schools Council also found that undergraduate medical courses attracted a record number of applications (28,690) in 2021, 20.9 per cent up on the previous year.

“There’s been a lot more applications to medical schools in the last couple of years as a result of the very prominent role the media has played in presenting science to the public,” says Pollard. “Many of us [scientists] have also been lecturing in schools and talking to young people. I think scientists have a really important role in [engagement].”

But despite the Oxford-AZ jab being hailed as a “breakthrough”, the vaccine was in fact born out of decades worth of clinical research around coronaviruses. “I think there’s a lot of work to do for the next pandemic around the different viruses or bacteria that could cause it,”

says Pollard. “Although the Covid vaccine has been presented in the media as a rapid development, the truth is it was only rapid if you exclude 20 years of work that had gone beforehand. If something turns up that we don’t know about... we may need months or even years before we could start trials. That’s the chilling thing for me about future pandemics.”

It has therefore never been more crucial to invest in the life sciences, he says. More funding from organisations such as the Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust would be instrumental in understanding “preclinical science”, says Pollard: “If you don’t understand the bacteria and viruses, you don’t even know where to start with making a vaccine.”

The industry needs a steady pipeline of scientists to undertake this research. According to the ABPI’s report on bridging the skills gap in life sciences, despite some improvement, certain disciplines are still experiencing



Professor Andrew Pollard led on clinical trials for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine

◀ shortages. This is particularly true of the more digital and data-driven roles, such as formulation science (designing products such as pharmaceuticals from raw materials) and physiological modelling (developing mathematical models that replicate biomedical organs and systems). There are “persistent concerns”, the ABPI states, across all biological sciences in terms of both “the quality and number of candidates”.

Chronic staff shortages within the NHS also have an impact. Many health-care staff would normally transition between clinical and research work, says Pollard, but this has reduced as NHS resources have depleted. Doctors often train as medical researchers, who plan and conduct medical experiments, and nurses train as clinical research nurses who carry out day-to-day activities such as collecting blood samples, administering vaccines, and checking lab work. But fewer and fewer medical staff are available to work in research settings.

“Across health and science, we are currently quite short of people,” says Pollard. “The overall number of skilled individuals is low. For [clinical research] jobs where you might have had 200 applicants five years ago, we’ve got a handful of applicants now, which suggests there’s a smaller pool.

“Older people have retired early, some traumatised by the pandemic and some

by the current system,” he continues. “Many [doctors] at the lower end are also leaving after qualifying. There’s a shortage of staff, chronically, within the health system. We have to train more people, but we also need to do more about retention.”

The latest statistics show that young people’s interest in medicine remains high but that there are significant barriers to entering the profession. A lack of doctor trainee places made 2022 the hardest year in “living memory” for A-level students to get a place to study, according to heads of medical schools.

To increase staff across medical and research roles, the government needs to invest in clinical research as its own discipline, says Pollard, with more training schemes, such as those provided by the National Institute for Health Research, to prevent the life sciences sector siphoning off valuable NHS staff. “I think it would definitely be a good

Research and clinical care should not be in competition

thing to invest more in clinical research so that it doesn’t compete with other priorities,” says Pollard. “If you’re spending time enrolling your patients into clinical studies, that’s time the NHS doesn’t have to deliver patient care. There’s a tension between research and clinical care unless there’s more capacity in the system. [They] should run in parallel but not in competition.”

Encouraging more people to pursue a career in life sciences starts with education. Better communication around the lifesaving roles of specific scientific disciplines would help. “[Young] people are often driven by what impact they can have in their life,” says Pollard. “They’re not quite as cynical as adults. They’re perhaps thinking about what [they] could do that would be good for the world. Making sure we communicate impact could be a very important thing.”

Better school education on vaccines could also empower people and tackle vaccine scepticism; this was a major barrier to vaccine uptake during the pandemic, which was exacerbated by online misinformation. “This isn’t just to persuade people to come and work in vaccine development – it’s actually a life skill,” says Pollard. “So that when they go into the GP surgery for their own vaccine or for their child, they know exactly what’s happening, and it removes the uncertainty that breeds fear.

“Everyone’s become a bit of a Covid vaccine expert, and I think that needs extending to a much deeper understanding of the biology,” he continues. “Countries that do that well through their education system have a much greater acceptance of vaccines.”

Whether it is another novel virus outbreak or a long-standing health crisis such as cancer, the life sciences sector remains critical in preventing deaths – and an unsung hero.

“In my career, many of the childhood cancers have become curable,” says Pollard. “Those are incredible achievements through clinical research. We are on the verge of a huge sea change in our ability to treat many cancers.”

But “a future pandemic could be an existential threat,” he continues. “We were lucky with Covid, but we might not be so lucky next time. Investment in life sciences not only helps our global standing as a university – our whole future depends on it.” ●

The truth about employability

Reaching those who are furthest from the job market requires trust and compassion

By Ewan McCall

Poverty smells of damp clothes and mouldy walls, it feels like cold bones and tastes of another missed meal. We recognise what it looks like too – poorly insulated homes, damaged roofs, worried families. But what does poverty sound like? As I sat down with a Wise Group support group for employability and skills, the most distinctive sound was laughter.

People shared stories of “drafts so strong they blow doors open”, and the jumble of slippers, onesies and coats you would wear to keep warm; it was a relief to know you were not alone. But the laughter stopped as we discussed a more familiar sound of poverty, one which too many people encounter when they take that first step to seek support – the crackle of a bad phone line, and the words, “I’m sorry but I can’t help.”

Across the group, being rejected for support was a common experience. Where support did exist, a maze of

procedures and processes failed individuals who disproportionately require training in numeracy and literacy.

One individual, who worked as a welder until recently, spoke about how he had lived on £63.50 a week. Within this budget, he spoke of how essential it was to set aside money for a mobile phone, describing it as a “lifeline” to services without which he would be “lost”. His incredibly tight budget meant that he was already stretched beyond the limit, meaning that he “couldn’t save any more” to provide for the steep rise in bills. As individuals opted to ration food and self-disconnect energy, the prospect of fair and sustainable work became distant.

At the Wise Group, it is our job to lift individuals, families and communities out of poverty through relational mentoring. We work with people of all ages looking for fair work, struggling with bills or trying to break the cycle of reoffending. Last year, we helped 50,000 people through trusting, compassionate relationships, one conversation at a time. A million such conversations have taught us that systemic change on an individual level requires systemic change at a societal one.

The group I visited is part of a project which has helped nearly 1,000 individuals find and maintain employment, and nearly 500 to go on to further education and training. This was possible through sustained support – everything from a fresh set of clothes to energy advice, from digital inclusion to numeracy training, both before and during the employment process – sometimes for as long as 18 months.

Reaching those who are furthest from the employment market requires relationships built on trust and compassion; in a time of crisis, kindness goes a long way.

If we can boldly state “I can help”, and put people before process, we will unlock deep wells of potential across thousands of communities. Let’s do that, together. ●

Ewan McCall is head of insight and influence at the Wise Group.

Contact us to find out more about the work of the Wise Group’s 300 mentors across the UK at buildingbridges@thewisegroup.co.uk

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Should maths be the primary focus of secondary education?

Experts discuss plans to make the subject compulsory until the age of 18

Andreas Schleicher | Caroline Norbury

FOR

Andreas Schleicher

Director for education and skills, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

How a society develops and uses the knowledge and skills of its people is among the chief determinants of its prosperity. Mathematics plays a central role in this. Findings from the OECD's "Survey of Adult Skills" shows that individuals with poor maths skills are severely limited in their access to better-paid and more rewarding jobs. For no other measured skill was this relationship stronger.

Digitalisation is amplifying this pattern; as new industries rise, others will fall, and it is often mathematic skills that provide a buffer to weather these shocks. We used to treat maths as a subject for specialists who became scientists or engineers, but today it is hard to imagine a future-proof profession that does not require people to reason quantitatively or have a profound understanding of concepts like uncertainty, change and relationships, and space and shape.

And it does not end there – the "Survey of Adult Skills" shows that people with poor maths skills are not just more vulnerable in a changing job market, they are also more likely to feel excluded in society and see themselves as powerless in political processes. A better maths education seems to be one of the best investments we can make for our future.

Making mathematics an optional extra has also become one of the biggest social dividers in school systems, with parents from privileged backgrounds knowing about the advantages of a good maths education while students from disadvantaged backgrounds often opt out of this unpopular subject as soon as they can.

Will compulsory maths education solve this problem or just prolong the misery? Most children love mathematics: it is about playing with numbers, understanding complex phenomena in

the real world, testing new ideas, thinking creatively, and figuring out cause and effect. But as students grow older, many turn away from this early love, and consider it to be an abstract world of formulas and equations that is unrelated to their lives and dreams.

That has little to do with the subject, and more to do with how we teach it. The mathematics we learn in school is quickly memorised and then forgotten; it is unrelated to the real world around us, and often unrelated to the principal ideas of mathematics. Amid all the facts and figures, we too often lose a sense of what it means to think like a mathematician and to apply mathematical theories to real-world problems.

If we were running a supermarket, rather than a school, and day after day and year after year we saw a large proportion of customers leave the shop without buying anything, we would surely change our inventory. We need to do this in maths education too.

It can be done differently. In 2012, 10 per cent of the most disadvantaged 15-year-olds in Shanghai scored better in mathematics than 80 per cent of students in the UK. And when asked what their favourite subject was, many responded that it was mathematics. The easiest and arguably most effective way to encourage more people to study the subject is to teach it in more relevant, engaging and applied ways. ●

AGAINST

Caroline Norbury
Chief executive, Creative UK

It is a commonly held belief that children studying science, technology, engineering and maths (Stem) subjects are more likely to go into higher-paying careers than those studying the arts, humanities and other creative disciplines. Yet data from the British Academy suggests that this is not the full picture. While average salaries for arts, humanities and social science graduates are slightly below Stem graduates, the difference is minimal.

What's more, over the first decade of their careers, arts graduates can progress just as quickly, with greater wage growth than doctors, for example. Importantly, creative subjects also give young people employability across a range of sectors. They learn creativity, communication skills, independence and adaptability – all of which are highly sought-after attributes in a world of constant change.

So how can we reform our children's education for the better? By putting the arts into Stem, we'll give students at all

stages of education the best possible chance of success. Increasingly, employers are seeking workers with finely tuned cognitive skills, the ability to think both critically and creatively, and the initiative and intuition to solve complex problems. These high-level abilities are inherent to creative education so its marginalisation risks disadvantaging the next generation, depriving them of the essential foundations our future workforce will require.

Creative roles already represent nearly a third of the government's shortage occupation list, a proportion that will only grow if crucial interventions aren't made to turbocharge our talent pipeline. Be it shortages in our fashion industry, or spiralling demands for programmers and coders, there are many gaps that must be plugged.

The UK's creative sector is a global success story. Prior to the pandemic, employment in the creative industries grew at four times the rate of the UK economy and while UK employment fell in 2021, creative jobs grew by more than 5 per cent. If we are to sustain a high-growth trajectory and guarantee that UK creatives maintain their cutting edge in the face of international competition, we must invest in our creativity.

That investment means placing creative skills at the heart of the government's education agenda and finally delivering the arts premium promised in the Conservative Party's 2019 manifesto, which was expected to total £270m. Fulfilling this since-abandoned pledge would embed creative education into the national curriculum and address the imbalance between creative learning in England, and the far greater provisions offered in Scotland and Wales.

Creativity brings joy and inspiration, contributes to our sense of self, and helps us to understand and connect with the world around us. But creative learning also gives us the confidence to communicate and work with others, and challenges us to think differently and remain open to new ideas.

Every young person should have the opportunity to unlock their creativity, and gain the toolkit required to thrive in an ever-changing world. If the value of creative education is overlooked, or access to it restricted, then we not only limit our children's learning today – we'll fail to meet the needs of tomorrow. ●



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If we are to achieve a just transition, one pertinent challenge is recruiting, retaining and retraining the workforce of the future, which will enable new green industries to flourish and generate value for generations to come.

At Centrica, our purpose is to help our customers live simply, sustainably and affordably. Achieving this is only possible if we put people at the centre of our net zero plan.

That's why we've introduced a £50m support package for our customers to support them through the cost-of-living crisis, including for vulnerable households and front-line charities.

And our trusted brands such as British Gas, Centrica Business Solutions, Bord Gáis, Hive, Local Heroes, PH Jones and Dyno deliver innovative solutions to help solve customers' needs, and make their lives simpler and more affordable.

We're also committed to making big changes to create a cleaner and greener future, by cutting both customers' and our own emissions. We have been helping businesses and the public sector decarbonise, and are expanding to 650 megawatts of solar farms by 2026, which will help us achieve net zero by 2045 and help our customers do so by 2050. This is also why we are investing in low-carbon solutions by scaling up our heat-pump, solar and demand-side response technologies and investing in hydrogen.

To ensure we have the skills for a decarbonised future we are continually upskilling our engineering workforce at our academies, and have committed to hiring one new apprentice every day until 2030.

Apprenticeships offer the opportunity to earn and learn

Centrica's People & Planet Plan focuses on areas that are most important to the company and where it can make the most difference. Two of its priorities are recruiting 3,500 apprentices by 2030 and providing career development opportunities to people from under-represented groups.

Our apprenticeship programme allows Centrica to reach a diverse workforce, working with those who want



Centrica has taken on 1,000 apprentices in the past year

a career change or who were displaced due to Covid-19. We offer a wide range of apprenticeships across our businesses including smart metering engineering, digital and technology, customer service, project management, and business analysis, to name a few.

Apprenticeships are aimed at all ages and backgrounds, with the ambition that 50 per cent of participants are women. To help boost interest from female applicants, the company has launched a targeted recruitment campaign and has also signed up to the Tech She Can Charter, a commitment by organisations to increase the number of women in technology roles. The company has taken on 1,000 apprentices in the past year, a third of whom were female.

Building a net zero battalion

Centrica has also set out plans to recruit 500 former Armed Forces personnel into roles with British Gas and the wider group by 2023, to facilitate the transition to net zero.

The first intake of 12 ex-service trainee gas engineers included Alex Smith from Wolverhampton, a former sniper with the 2nd Rifles. Smith began his 42-week training course with Centrica after being medically discharged in 2013 following

tours of Afghanistan. Having faced adversity, he views the programme as a route back to normality.

“I have always wanted a trade and this offer was amazing,” he says. “It’s a skill to be proud of, which will give me stability in my working life to provide for my family, and it opens up a lot of routes for progression into green energy.”

Upskilling the UK

The demand for skilled workers is greater now than ever before, so it is crucial that we help people achieve their potential. This is a vital pillar of the levelling-up agenda and vital in boosting social mobility across the UK.

Since 2003, British Gas has trained around 7,000 apprentices across our four academies in Dartford, Hamilton, Leicester and Thatcham.

The training academies deliver approximately 100,000 training days each year, which includes teaching engineering apprentices how to install smart meters, alongside upskilling our existing engineering workforce on areas such as boiler servicing and repair.

Working with our trade unions

Centrica’s chief executive, Chris O’Shea and the GMB union’s general secretary,

Gary Smith, are co-chairing a skills group focused on creating a skilled workforce that will ensure Britain is a global leader in both the green transition and energy resilience.

The group will build on the work of government-led initiatives such as the Green Jobs Taskforce, and produce two reports. The first will examine how we can create careers for the future as the UK accelerates plans for energy independence in a more geopolitically challenging environment. The second will explore how we ensure there is a just transition for the UK’s existing high-carbon workforce.

The programme will look at how we create domestic and international competitive advantage from home energy efficiency, nuclear, hydrogen, electric vehicles, and clean heavy industry, and how existing oil and gas infrastructure can be repurposed for the future. It will also consider how we ensure that high-skilled, low-carbon jobs are based in the UK, creating a major export revenue stream.

As the nation advances on the exciting road to net zero, we’re proud to be playing our part as a purpose-led company that believes in a just transition that doesn’t leave anyone behind. ●

Is it last orders for the Great British curry house?

How workforce shortages are hurting the UK's Indian restaurants

By Samir Jeraj

At the end of last year, Rishi Sunak gave a speech about his time waiting tables before going to university. Working at Kuti's Brasserie in Southampton, he said, was the "best training" he had in preparing to be prime minister. Sunak cracked jokes about the balancing act that both waiters and holders of high political office need to master.

At the start of this year, however, the company that owns Kuti's was placed into voluntary liquidation. Its owner lamented the "difficult times" for the restaurant.

In fact, today the £4.2bn industry as a whole is in labour crisis. In recent decades, the children and grandchildren of pioneering Bengali restaurateurs have opted not to join the family business, going instead into professional jobs supported by access to university. The steady stream of migrants looking to start out in the kitchen and build a successful restaurant has slowed to a trickle, too. In 2007, 12,000 Indian restaurants were open across the UK. Today there are only 8,500 – and more are closing every week, according to the industry.

"[The] number one point I think is Brexit," says Bashir Ahmed, president of the British Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce. Before Brexit, he explains, European nationals provided much of the workforce to hospitality businesses. The UK's restrictions on "unskilled" labour from outside the EU make it hard for all but the most skilled (or highest earners) to get a work visa. A chef might earn enough to meet the £25,600 salary threshold and make it through the lengthy process for a visa with the support of their employer. Given their far lower salaries, however, kitchen, cleaning and waiting staff have no chance. Ahmed says this "unworkable" point-based system has made it impossible to recruit and fill the vacancies opening up in restaurants.

Syed Aziz has worked in restaurants for his entire adult life. "When I first came, I was more or less like an alien here because everything was strange to me, from the weather to the language," he recalls, a few days after the 50th anniversary of his arrival in the UK. Aziz was part of a wave of migration from Bangladesh in the 1970s, following a brutal struggle for independence from Pakistan. He started out as a commis



There are 3,500 fewer Indian restaurants in the UK today than there were in 2007

waiter in his family’s business and was running it within a few years. Ten years after arriving in the UK, he launched his own restaurant in Newcastle.

Decades later and Aziz is still running restaurants in the north-east of England, including a “curry train” experience along the Tyne Valley. Bengalis like him would come to dominate the British curry scene, running 90 per cent of restaurants by 2012.

In the past, there have been calls to train up British-born workers to fill the labour and skills gap in the sector but, so far, the results have been disappointing. In 2011, a £1.75m scheme launched by then-communities secretary Eric Pickles to establish “curry colleges” ended in failure, as few students enrolled and the programme was quietly shuttered. There have also been industry-led attempts: the late Enam Ali – founder of the British Curry Awards – tried to set up his own curry academy in 2017.

“It’s time now that people stopped talking about celebrating the curry industry and started thinking about

actually saving the curry industry,” says Rabina Khan, a former policy advisor on immigration. Khan points out that the sector is modernising and developing, but that it needs support to survive and thrive. She believes policymakers have failed to understand how the sector works, and how it enables the people working in the industry and their families to be upwardly mobile.

“Hospitality still has a perception problem in the UK population, I think in terms of a career versus a job,” says Kate Nicholls, chief executive of UKHospitality, which represents more than 700 companies. In Europe and many countries outside of the EU, hospitality careers are backed up by a range of hotel schools that turn out highly skilled workers. Meanwhile, Covid-19 disrupted the talent pipeline for the industry, she explains.

“This idea, that it’s either train up the UK staff or import foreign workers, to my mind, is a false dichotomy. You’ve got to do both,” Nicholls says. She believes the UK needs a labour strategy that looks at the workforce challenges

across sectors, not just those experiencing acute shortages now. “At the moment, our immigration policy is insufficiently nuanced to reflect the needs of the labour market,” she says, adding that joined up policies to support people into the labour market must come alongside education and training, a supportive benefits system and immigration reforms.

Ahmed is also keen to focus on practical solutions, such as lowering the salary threshold for visas or reducing the standards on fluency in the English language in the points-based system to provide a lifeline to the industry. “At least 70 per cent of the UK’s curry houses are in danger of closing down due to the cost of living and labour shortages,” he says.

The end of the curry house would not just mean that the likes of Rishi Sunak would lack for a minimum-wage job to nostalgically invoke decades later; it would mean the end of a pathway for migrant families to aspire and succeed – and the loss of that business dynamism for the country. ●

The view from the opposition



Toby Perkins
Shadow minister for further
education and skills

“Skills shortages are a bigger concern than they have ever been”

Under this government, we have a failing and fragmented approach to skills, with competing priorities and a plethora of initiatives that exclude too many learners and place British employers at a competitive disadvantage.

Under Keir Starmer, Labour has embarked on a mission to reimagine this approach and create a coherent system that better serves employers and learners and revives the institutions we rely upon.

Over the past 13 years, Britain’s further education sector has been decimated. The pandemic and energy price spikes have only exacerbated this crisis, and there are several colleges in danger of collapse or further wholesale redundancies.

A coherent approach to skills policy requires an industrial strategy working in the national interest. This means qualifications that strengthen our

educational institutions and create transparent pathways from school to the workplace.

The apprenticeship levy, introduced in 2017, has virtually shut small and medium-sized businesses out of providing apprenticeships, due to a lack of funding and excessive bureaucracy. Labour wants more focus on entry-level apprenticeships at levels 2 to 4 to ensure more young people are able to get into work. Since the levy’s inception, there has been more than £3bn returned to the Treasury from the levy pot. Labour is proposing to reform it into a skills and growth levy, allowing half the funds to be spent on pre-apprenticeship training or other high-quality qualifications.

Under our plan, the need for a strategic approach would be the responsibility of a new body, Skills England, informed by employers and educationalists charged with creating a coherent landscape. An incoming Labour government would also introduce face-to-face, professional careers advice for every pupil, and ensure the equivalent of two weeks of meaningful work experience to widen pupils’ horizons, with every school assessed on the quality of its students’ interactions with the workplace.

As someone who spent nine years in the recruitment industry before entering parliament, I know employers have long struggled to recruit skilled staff. However, despite every Tory skills reform since 2010 being labelled an attempt to put employers in the driving seat, skills shortages are a more prominent concern for employers than they have ever been. Our government has allowed Britain to have the lowest levels of participation in adult and workplace education in 30 years.

Labour will give apprenticeship levy payers the freedoms they have often asked for, but there is also an onus on employers to help those further from the workplace to become economically active too.

Starmer has also committed a future Labour government to an era of devolution. This doesn’t have to contradict the need for a strategic approach in the national interest; we envisage a clearer pathway that encourages local initiatives.

Last year, he set out a transformative vision for Britain, with ambitious plans to double Britain’s onshore wind capacity, treble solar power and quadruple offshore wind; invest in tidal, hydrogen, and nuclear; back carbon capture; and commit to green steel production. He discussed proposals to establish renewable ports, new gigafactories and the insulation of 19 million homes. This will require the biggest partnership between government, business and communities in this country’s history. It will mean more than a million new jobs, and training for plumbers, electricians, engineers, software designers, technicians and builders.

Labour wants to see a more balanced skills system, recognising the needs of both the learner and the employer. All stakeholders must work together to create a holistic offer for learners and employers. ●

Look at the person, not the CV

Why giving opportunities to disadvantaged young people will benefit your organisation

By Richard Hamer

In association with

BAE SYSTEMS

At BAE Systems, we are in the fortunate position of having contracts to deliver some very long-term defence and security programmes. This helps us plan our business and the resources we need, making sure we have the right number of people with the right skills on board.

This includes science, technology, engineering and maths (Stem) skills, which are critical. In fact, we describe our company as a “skills enterprise” because the delivery of the submarines, military aircraft, frigates and cyber systems we design and manufacture at more than 50 sites across the UK depends on specialist technical skills. We also talk about these skills being “sovereign”, as they provide the UK with an indigenous defence capability and therefore freedom of action in defence terms. We believe this helps maintain the UK’s interests and our position on the world stage.

One important way in which we

retain this talent pipeline is through apprenticeships. Some of the skills we need, such as welding and pipe fitting, require unique expertise and can take many years to develop. Apprenticeships help us grow our own specialist technical skills. Currently, we are training more than 3,000 apprentices, the most at any time in our history. With a 95 per cent completion rate, our apprenticeships are highly sought after and we are proud to be rated an “outstanding training provider” by Ofsted.

Apprenticeships are a proven route to success, not just for organisations, but for apprentices themselves. They offer tremendous opportunities for people to progress their careers and become socially mobile. In fact, last year 27 per cent of our apprentice intake in England came from disadvantaged communities, and a significant number of our current executives began their career as apprentices with the company or at another engineering organisation.

In 2014 we decided to take this further by supporting an organisation established specifically to help young people who had fallen out of the education and employment system. Our involvement in this project, Movement to Work, has evolved into us providing around 100 work placements every year, which comprise a three-week programme of training and work experience.

Our support for Movement to Work has been so successful that we now routinely offer apprenticeships to some 30 young people completing the placements each year. In total we have provided 700 placements through the programme, with 420 young people securing full-time roles. Of these, 210 have been employed at BAE Systems, the majority starting apprenticeships.

The young people placed by Movement to Work have overwhelmingly demonstrated their capabilities, challenging existing thinking within BAE Systems. Diversity of thought is critical to the technologies we deliver. Giving opportunities to young people from a variety of backgrounds has been of enormous benefit. ●

Richard Hamer is education director at BAE Systems. For more information about careers with BAE Systems, visit: <https://www.baesystems.com/ukcareers> For more information about offering work experience, visit: www.movementtowork.com

Why the UK could miss out on the green jobs boom

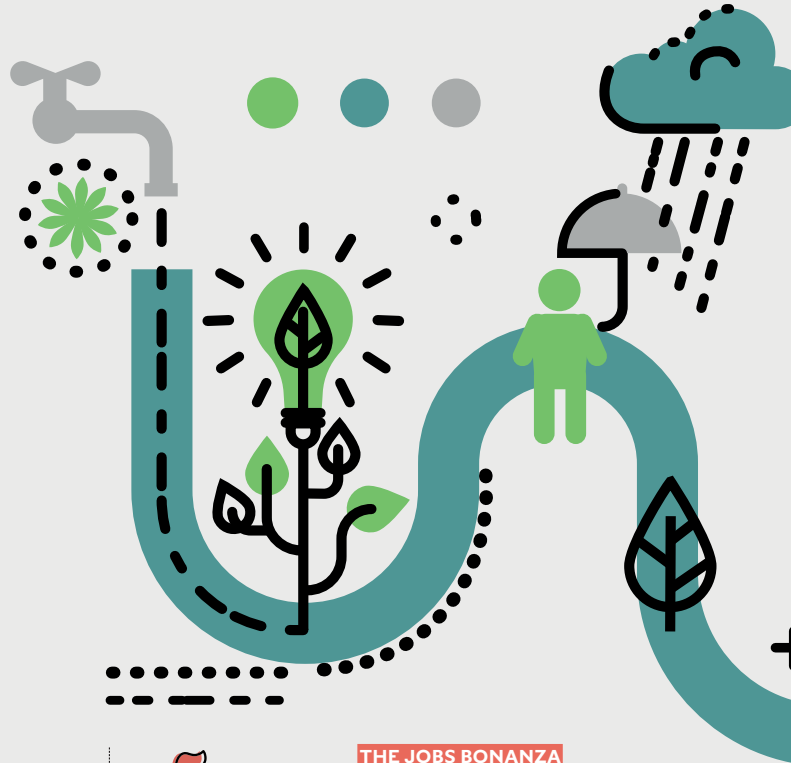
By Nick Ferris

Renewable energy infrastructure is being built at a rate that even the most optimistic analysts would have thought fantastical. From 2022 to 2027, the International Energy Agency now predicts that, spurred by the energy crisis that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine, renewables will grow by 2,400 gigawatts. That's 85 per cent more than the previous five years (the entire UK power grid is around 75 GW).

One of the clearest benefits of this massive shift is new employment opportunity. The UK Energy Research Centre projects that the renewables industry will create three times as many jobs per million invested than the fossil fuels industry.

But the promised jobs boom is already here. The biggest market for renewables jobs is China, where 0.7 per cent of the total workforce (5,368,000 people) were employed in the sector in 2021, followed by Brazil, with 1.3 per cent of the workforce (1,272,000 people). The next biggest markets are the EU (1,939,000 jobs), the US (923,000 jobs) and India (863,000 jobs), according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (Irena). The world can expect to have 38.2 million jobs in renewable energy by 2030, says Irena, if countries stick to their climate promises.

In the UK, 1.2 million direct jobs and 1.5 million indirect jobs in energy efficiency could be created by the middle of the century if £7bn were invested annually until 2050 to retrofit buildings for net zero, according to the Institute for Public Policy Research. But such job creation is not guaranteed. The UK needs new training programmes and skills academies, as well as improved job standards and skill accreditation systems, to make the most of the opportunity. ●



THE JOBS BONANZA

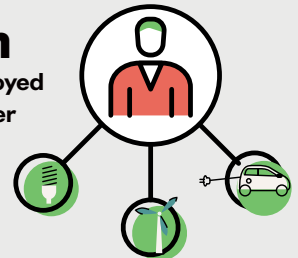
12.7 million

the number of people employed in renewable energy globally in 2021, nearly double the figure from a decade ago



74.2 million

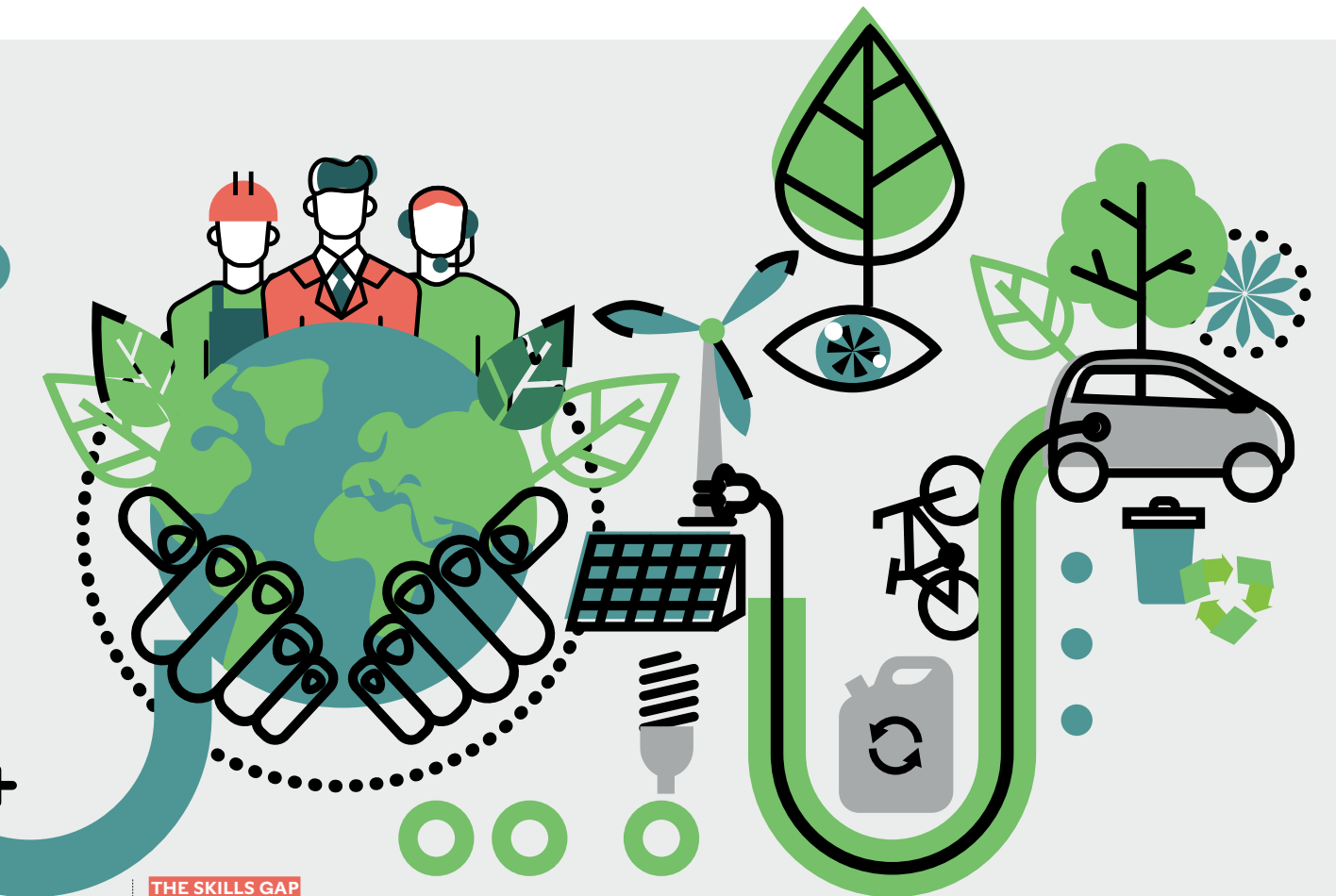
people could be employed by the hydrogen, power system management, electric vehicle, and energy efficiency sectors by 2030



Major economies employ roughly 1% of their workforce in

Brazil 1.3%

Germa



THE SKILLS GAP

400,000

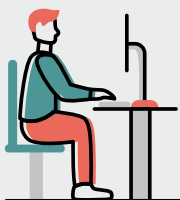
the number of green energy roles the National Grid will need to fill by 2050 to meet net zero targets

260,000

of these will be additional roles (equivalent to roughly 35% of the UK's current energy workforce)

140,000

of the 400,000 will replace those who have left the workforce



270,000

the number of people currently working in UK oil and gas who are expected to transition to renewables

One-fifth

of the existing energy workforce is expected to have retired by 2030



the renewables industry:



SOURCE: IRENA, PWC

Tim Bradshaw: “Investment in R&D will give us the talent pool to tackle pandemics and climate change”



The chief executive of the Russell Group on the importance of research and development, barriers to global academic collaboration, and the need for a Zero Carbon Act

How do you start your working day?

Catching up on emails and the latest news, especially from the higher education press (Research Professional and Wonkhe), with a decent cup of coffee. Usually, I'll do this while on a train to Euston.

What has been your career high?

Working with brilliant people. I've got a super team at the Russell Group, real experts I can call up right across our 24 member universities, and passionate vice-chancellors who are doing an incredible job despite the backdrop of economic and political turmoil.

What has been the most challenging moment of your career?

Dealing with people who are so ideological that they won't accept evidence and reasoned argument to the contrary. To be fair, that has not always been politicians, but it would help if party ideology could be put aside more often to deliver evidence-based policy.

If you could give your younger self career advice, what would it be?

Be more confident to expand horizons, try new things and network more widely.

Which political figure inspires you, and why?

David Sainsbury was an excellent science minister [under Tony Blair]: knowledgeable, politically astute and determined to raise the profile of research and innovation as an investment. I always enjoyed meeting with him while I was working for the Confederation of British Industry.

What UK policy or fund is the government getting right?

It was good to see the new Prime Minister and Chancellor stick with previous commitments to invest £20bn a year in research and development by

2024-25. In the short term, this will create thousands of high-value jobs and stimulate the business investment needed to kick-start economic growth. In the medium to longer term we will see new technologies, medicines and ideas spun out of universities, feeding innovation clusters across the country. And as an evergreen investment, we'll have the talent and knowledge base at our fingertips to deal with the real challenges facing us, such as climate change, pandemics and the ageing population.

And what policy should the UK government scrap?

The Foreign Influence Registration Scheme [Firs] proposals in the National Security Bill are a mess. There is no differential between links with North Korea or with friendly states such as Denmark, so the registration requirements will create huge amounts of burden and real legal headaches. Firs will create a chilling effect in terms of academic collaboration and business links with friendly countries, and more barriers to foreign investment here.

What upcoming policy or law are you most looking forward to?

Can I cheat and say that I'm really looking forward to the next set of general election manifestos? I'm a bit of a glutton for punishment and will read each of them avidly.

What piece of international government policy could the UK learn from?

I think the bigger question is whether the government can rein itself in and learn to govern properly. A period of stability and fiscal competence is required to give confidence again – to business, the markets and individuals. The government also needs to demonstrate that it can be trusted internationally and work harder to make amends with our nearest neighbours.

If you could pass one law this year, what would it be?

A Zero Carbon Act backed up with (at least) Ministry of Defence levels of public investment to transform every aspect of the UK, and create a paradigm shift in how the economy and society work. ●

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