

# ***GOOD, GREEN JOBS***

**How to engage the public on green jobs**

**May 2021**

**PUBLICFIRST** 

## Contents

---

About Public First.....	3
1. Conclusions and recommendations.....	4
2. Context and methodology.....	10
3. Public attitudes to work.....	13
4. Knowledge of the green economy.....	18
5. Public interest in green jobs.....	21
6. Covid and the changing economy.....	27

## About Public First

---

Public First is a policy research agency, helping organisations understand what the public think about the most pressing and complex public policy issues. Since our formation in 2016, we have come to specialise in public attitudes to Net Zero.

Our consultants have worked at the highest levels of Government, Parliament, think tanks, campaigns and business. We have worked for Government Departments and agencies in Britain and abroad, for some of the world's biggest brands, and many charities, think tanks and campaigns.

Public First is a member of the British Polling Council and also a Company Partner of the Market Research Society; we abide by the rules and practices of both organisations.

More information: [www.publicfirst.co.uk](http://www.publicfirst.co.uk)

# 1. Conclusions and recommendations

---

Public First conducted ten focus groups for Green Alliance to work out what prospective applicants think about the sorts of jobs that might become available as the green economy develops over the next decade. We focused primarily on working-class audiences and graduates, as well as looking at more general, mixed audiences from across the country. Our aim was to provide national coverage with the research, while beaming in on those groups deemed most likely to apply for jobs in the green economy when the time comes.

This document provides a detailed analysis of the research. We set out here summary conclusions, before making some tentative policy and communications recommendations.

## (a) Conclusions

- **Knowledge of the green economy is extremely low.** We don't say this to be negative. It's simply important at the outset to understand the context: knowledge about the green economy and green jobs is extremely low. This clearly massively affects the conversation it's possible to have with people on these and related issues. Few people – even in the supposedly better-informed graduate groups – knew much at all about the green economy, green jobs or even Net Zero; many in the graduate groups didn't appear even to have heard of these terms. There was a notable exception to this with working-class voters in Glasgow, but this seemed to be the exception that proved the rule. As such, the conversation Green Alliance can have with others in the sector and those in Government is far ahead of the conversation it can have with even green enthusiasts from the general public. For public audiences, the most basic terminology associated with the green economy will have to be discarded and a new vocabulary designed and used. Unless this happens, you will be met with total bafflement. You will be speaking only to yourselves.
- **People find it hard – on their own – to discern “real” green jobs.** Related to this, we also found, particularly in the working-class groups, that many people can't discern genuinely green jobs. This mirrors a shaky understanding of green issues overall – where talk about climate change often ends up being about wholly separate issues such as plastics in the ocean or litter in town centres. As you know, many, if not most, businesses now claim to take sustainability and the environment seriously, even when they don't (“green washing”). Some businesses might, for example, make a great deal of the fact they do basics like recycling waste from their staff members' daily consumption. We found in these groups that some people thought their employers were green because of, for example, having bins to collect plastic waste. As such, it will be necessary to explain to people what really determines a green job in the green economy – and why, without appearing to sneer at businesses small steps, businesses ultimately need to go much further.
- **For many, green jobs seem like “a bit of a punt”.** For older workers, whether they're in skilled or unskilled employment, they have heard predictions about economic change come and go – and many of them will have been affected by changes in the job market and the local and national economies. As such, many people are nervous about their own futures. They lack confidence that green jobs will be around for the long term. There's an additional problem here: that many people think they have heard political promises and political targets a lot in the past; there was a worry from a few people that politicians might just “move on to something else”. Similarly, others worried that if Government spending cuts were required in the future, then unskilled jobs in the green economy “would be the first to go.” This means voluntarily shifting jobs and careers - when the business model underpinning them is opaque - can seem like a gamble, or a “bit of a punt”. As we set out below, this will require Green Alliance and others to show that the green economy is going to happen and that it's a safe bet.
- **While scepticism exists, there's no doubt: “green jobs” are attractive jobs.** We inevitably ran into some scepticism about the merits of some of the jobs we discussed, such as how people would cope with the weather or working with animals (not unreasonable concerns). People sometimes worried about the business model which would sustain them. However, we found that most people thought prospective jobs were interesting and, crucially, that their “cleanness and greenness” gave them an elevated status. It would be too much to say that everyone wanted a “green job” to feel good, but we

did find that people liked the idea of working in roles that would be unambiguously good for the environment. Emphatically, we didn't find people rolling their eyes asking: "who cares?". Clearly, in a focus group scenario – particularly where people are talking about an issue where there is some peer pressure to show virtue, as is often the case in conversations on the environment – you might expect people to be more positive than they might otherwise be. But we did hear criticism of some of these jobs and we did give people the opportunity to say actually, no, they didn't really care. However, when it came to it, most people were positive about these jobs.

- **Covid has changed people's attitudes to the jobs they do.** For many people, lockdowns have meant dramatically changed working patterns, furlough or huge insecurity in their lives. For those on furlough in particular, people got used to living on less – but in return, got some of the work/life balance back. Time at home thinking has led to thinking about the next steps they take post-lockdown and what they want out of a job. This was a very productive line of conversation: doing something different that people might enjoy more – rather than focusing on how "green" a job might be. Even here, though, longer-term security was key.
- **There's something very attractive for many in "make do and mend".** We know from previous research how much people – particularly older people – hate waste. For this reason, they tend to be very hostile towards single-use plastic and plastic bags. And we found in this research that these same sorts of people were very attracted by the circular economy, once the concept was explained. They liked the idea of repairing things, upcycling, of "make do and mend". It was even something that some did as a hobby already and was therefore a good entry point to talking about possible work transitions to do something that people enjoyed.
- **Green jobs can still seem conceptual.** We did far better in the groups when we were able to discuss a significant number of specific jobs; this meant that most people were able to think of jobs that would suit them or that were like the current ones they had. We struggled more when we explained new industries or sectors on a more general basis. With this in mind, when we discussed electric vehicles with the groups, we had particular success – because many people had either seen them in their own lives, or had noticed, for example, charging points on the street; it seemed real to them.
- **Graduates, younger people generally, were clearly the most enthused.** Despite people's fundamental support for green jobs, there was clearly a major enthusiasm gap across the groups. As might be expected, graduates were far, far more likely to be enthused about the prospect of working in the green economy. Working-class audiences were interested (often intrigued), but didn't talk about these jobs as being worthwhile simply because they were green, which we explain more about below. To young graduates, the green economy was the future of the economy; jobs in this sector were viewed as modern, high-skilled and interesting. And these jobs were also viewed as being virtuous in themselves; reflecting their own values, young graduates liked the idea of having jobs that were beneficial to the environment. These graduates were much more likely to say they would prefer to do jobs where meaning was attached. But many were already set on careers – or professions – which they found interesting and rewarding and may have no direct link – yet – to the green economy.
- **For working-class audiences, security and working conditions matter most.** While there was little cynicism about the green economy and green jobs from working-class audiences, they provided some useful reality checks. To these participants – some of whom lived financially precarious lives – green mattered to an extent, but less than job security and positive working conditions; positive in the sense of decent pay, predictable hours, adequate breaks and holidays, for example. For them, "good jobs" mattered more than green jobs. While most said they would be interested in green jobs, they readily admitted they'd consider any job in any sector if it was a good job. With this in mind, we should see green jobs, for many working-class people, as a bonus rather than a necessity. To some extent, this was true of our professional and middle-class groups who were reluctant to leave jobs with security and good pay for a job that may not have the same security – unless it was something where the pay-off was more time at home or doing something they really loved.

- **Familiarity was important for unskilled workers.** As is often the case, there was a tension in the groups: a minority of people liked the idea of doing something new, while most of those that flagged an interest in green jobs did so when they heard jobs that sounded somewhat similar to their own. In other words, while some were excited by change, others were comforted by the familiar. A number of participants in the working-class groups, hearing a list of potential green jobs, gravitated towards the ones they understood the most. Making the connection in their minds to a new career, they started from where they were currently and looked for what was most familiar. For example, selling second-hand clothes appealed to those who worked in retail; this seemed like a natural transition. Within this section of the workforce, people’s confidence in their ability to do a new job is lower than among graduates or skilled workers. This has an impact on many things, including their ambition to move up the career ladder or change roles. This is something that can be addressed in targeted messaging for this group. There was also a very clear gender split between retail (mostly women) and technical jobs (mostly men) such as electric vehicle manufacture.
- **Outside work does it for some but deeply worries others.** Related to this, we also found the prospect of “outdoor work” to be extremely divisive. Some people loved the idea of it, others thought it sounded like the worst possible environment for work. This came down to personality more than anything else: some people love the outdoors and could see themselves as park rangers or planting trees (often, people with dogs who had spent more time walking and being outside during lockdown) while others who were less connected to the natural world could imagine themselves organising community events or working in green retail.
- **It’s unclear the extent to which Covid has been a game-changer.** We tested whether people would be more likely to consider green jobs because of concern about Covid; the rationale being these jobs were more likely to be outdoor and therefore better ventilated, but also because they were less likely to be in big towns or cities and therefore less likely to need getting to via a crowded commute. While there was mild interest in this idea, it did not really capture people’s imagination. More important was the interest in sectors that might not be vulnerable to future lockdowns. It was on many people’s minds that, for example, hospitality had all but shut down, along with much of the retail sector. People were clearly interested not just in whether these jobs were long-term “future-proofed” (our words), but in whether they were protected from short-term disruption.
- **Many young people choose their careers very early; change can be hard.** There was a definite issue in the graduate groups that many young people were effectively making long-term plans for their careers before they had even got to university. Many people are taking “vocational” degrees – not just in careers like law and architecture, but in occupations like nursing too. While it would be too much to suggest that these graduates are “lost” to the green economy early on, it is important to recognise that there aren’t yet early “vocational” paths into the green economy, or well-understood professions associated with it. This will surely change in time, but it’s an issue to consider for now.

## **(b) Communications recommendations**

We set out here some tentative communications recommendations for action for your consideration; we set out policy recommendations below.

### General

- **Make the green economy the safe, long-term bet.** To make short-term progress in encouraging people to move into the green economy, you need to “de-risk” the decision. In the very short-term, it would help to stress that many of these jobs – particularly outdoor jobs – would not face interruptions from Covid (within reason). More importantly, you need to show the green economy is the best long-term bet people can make in their own careers. You should stress these are guaranteed to be the jobs of the future; what is happening is not a short-term political trend, but something happening for real across the world. People need to know they aren’t going to make a decision on their future which will be proven wrong after the next election as the next Government changes everything. To be fair, people do hear political promises *all the time* which turn out to be very short-lived (on the environment, diesel is an obvious example).

- **Be as specific and tangible as possible.** Despite reservations, most people want to be enthusiastic about green jobs; they like the idea of a green(er) economy. However, as we note above, it is a far, far easier sell when you give people specific jobs to think about. You gave us a reasonable number of jobs to test; we found most people could imagine doing one of them at least. But we strongly recommend trying to come up with many, many more specific job ideas. Speaking very tactically, we suggest spending time mapping areas where jobs are likely to be in decline, setting out similar jobs in the green economy that might be viable for people to move into. A major government radio ad campaign run by the DWP is currently suggesting that people who have worked in hospitality have many of the right skills to work in the care industry. A similar approach, using analogous roles, could work well for you too. We also believe you should, in the short-term, talk a lot about electric vehicles. People are excited by them: they think they are modern, futuristic, interesting. More importantly here, they have actually “seen the future” with their own eyes – not just in the form of the cars they see on the roads, but the charge points too. EVs make the green economy seem real – and they can actually conceive of real jobs they might do; not just design and build, but marketing, sales and all the rest. It’s a very useful early case study.
- **Create new, more relevant language.** When talking to expert audiences within Westminster and Whitehall, it obviously makes sense to continue to refer to the “green economy”, “green jobs” and maybe too the “circular economy”; after all, these are the accepted terms and have taken on their own meaning. Clearly, for the public at large, things are different. We suggest it would be better to inject language that points to how this is the economy and these are the jobs of the future - for the long-term. For example: “the sustainable economy”; “the durable economy”; “the long-term economy”; “the green economy of the future”; “resilient jobs”; “future-ready jobs”; “durable jobs”. The best formulation will likely vary depend on the context, but for most people it will be best to talk about things which sound long-lasting.

#### For non-graduates

- **Stress that green jobs are good jobs.** This is our most important observation for this group. For working-class audiences, purpose comes well below working conditions. Communications targeted at this group need to stress that green jobs are good jobs; jobs that pay well, provide a good work-life balance and long-term job security. Here the theme of sustainability can help make the case; as companies and whole sectors move to become greener, green jobs are secure jobs.
- **For non-graduates and working-class audiences, talk about jobs that help reduce waste and pollution rather than how “green” a job is.** As we mentioned above, waste, litter, plastics in the ocean and cars idling in traffic were all things that people felt very strongly about. They were keen to help make their local areas – their towns, woodlands and beaches – nicer places to be and wanted to be part of the “clean-up”.
- **When being specific, emphasise the familiar.** We highlighted above how those in unskilled jobs were more likely to choose green jobs in a sector they knew well. So, when using tangible examples, familiarity will be vital to helping people make the link in their own minds between the job they do now, and the green jobs of the future. For example, “from retail to second-hand retail”, or “from making cars to making electric cars”. Again, the emphasis here needs to be security, not purpose – making the easily-understood argument that, as this is the direction many industries are heading, this is where the secure jobs will be.

#### For graduates

- **Emphasise purpose.** As graduates view green jobs as being virtuous in themselves, emphasising purpose is crucial in persuading them to choose careers in the green economy over more traditional jobs. We are already witnessing young people entering the workforce and rejecting what usually comes with the bottom-rung of the career ladder (very corporate environments, long hours, a culture of presenteeism). By appealing to their *values* – roles with meaning, by being beneficial to the

environment – it will be possible to position jobs in the green economy in a way that traditional roles cannot compete with. Work/life balance is utterly key for these groups too.

- **Work with universities to brand courses in the green economy.** Given many young people choose careers early, it makes sense to place green jobs into the conversation as early as possible. By working with universities to brand courses in the green economy, the pathways into these jobs can have similar starting points to traditional careers. The same might be considered for colleges and schools, helping level the playing field in the competition with well-trodden career paths.
- **Explain how they can use existing skills to transfer without going backwards.** Purpose is important, but career trajectory is too – especially among a generation that will find it ever more challenging to enjoy what previous generations were able to gain through their careers (owning their own home, savings, a certain quality of life). Changing careers will, to some, seem like a risk to their progression and their current and future standard of living. We therefore recommend setting out, again in tangible ways, the types of jobs in the green economy where existing skills are valued. Overwhelmingly, this group already expects to continually retrain throughout their careers.
- **Help them think of investing in their green career.** Among all groups, most people understand and perhaps expect that most industries are adapting to climate change - reducing their impact on the environment or providing services and products that enable transition in the economy and society. It is therefore easy enough to convince people that there is a certain inevitability about the growth of the green economy. In the same way that people have had to invest in their digital capabilities (even at a basic level) to keep pace with rival applicants, so too will people need to invest in their green career now in order to ensure they are well placed to take advantage of future opportunities in the green economy. To put it another way, a sense of urgency needs to be created about investing in their green career.

### (c) Policy recommendations

Green jobs will cover a very wide range of skill levels, physical demands, and specialisms. The focus groups show clearly that:

- For people at “lower skill levels” (i.e. non-graduate), policy needs to address: (i) knowledge; (ii) security; and (iii) adjacency (supporting transition into jobs people recognise as somewhat related to their current or previous occupation);
- For graduates, the barriers are much lower but people need to be aware of the jobs available from a young age - and these need to be linked clearly to available courses.

In this section we have suggested some policies to remove or lower those barriers. These policies are designed to support people *into* jobs – not ensure those jobs exist. (Those are covered in substantial part in a separate [WPI Economics analysis paper](#).)

**Assumption:** At the time of writing, the Government is in the midst of creating a lifelong learning entitlement to support retraining through life. We have assumed for the sake of this paper that this is sufficiently generous and widespread in scope that it will help people retrain as they emerge from Covid (i.e. that the overall number of people training or retraining will increase substantially). We are also assuming that other programmes like Kickstart will continue, at least in the short term.

#### 1. Increasing knowledge for people and training providers.

- a. There was relatively low knowledge through the groups of the jobs and pathways available in green jobs – which is unsurprising since many are only just being created. The Government should consider creating a **framework of green jobs** which maps skills and competences to a defined set of jobs likely to occur in high volume. This can be used to support individual retrainers – but also Higher Education and Further Education institutions that want to



introduce new courses. The Gatsby benchmarks, used by the Careers and Enterprise Company and widely respected, are an interesting model.

- b. One of the messages from the research was the relative enthusiasm of the young influencing their parents. Young people are being educated about climate change, but this is not necessarily translating into careers. There is a clear role for entities like **the Careers and Enterprise Company** to understand and inform young people about green jobs and opportunities, alongside **university careers services**.
2. **Supporting green retraining.** The Government may need to support both institutions to start green courses, and individuals to overcome caution within them:
  - a. **On the institutional side**, the Government should provide **strategic funding** to universities and colleges to launch green courses;
  - b. **On the individual side**, additional entitlements or grants could be provided to support specific green jobs or career tracks, mapped to the framework we mention above;
  - c. The Government could also select a small number of jobs that are **easily conceptualised** that the state will train you in, for **free, with maintenance loans**;
  - d. For **level 4+ training** (above A level equivalent) the Government's current bootcamp model, which is predominantly focused on digital skills, could be replicated for green jobs.
3. **Increasing security for retrainers.** People want to know that these jobs will be decently paid and that they are not taking an unmanageable risk in training for them.
  - a. **Create maintenance loans and encourage work coaches to support green retraining.** One way to give people security is to make sure they can receive maintenance loans when retraining, and/or give them the ability to claim benefits while retraining. Work coaches should be given guidance on green job opportunities to support UC claimants to retrain;
  - b. **Expand the eligibility of Job Centre Courses to cover more green skills.** The Government should set out a list of future skills and need in green jobs which would qualify.
4. **Supporting match of demand and supply.** The Green Jobs Taskforce should also engage with local authorities to deliver local skills plans that reflect dynamic local environments. This would secure long term labour market development away from sectors that will shrink during decarbonisation. **This partnership would ideally also involve universities and colleges. Local Enterprise Partnerships would be an appropriate vehicle since they combine educational, business, and political leaders.**
  - a. As part of this matching of demand and supply, there should be **careful consideration of sectors likely to suffer from economic scarring (many of which have high female unemployment)** and the best "adjacent" careers to encourage people into. Our research shows clearly that people are more interested in retraining into jobs that are somewhat related to their current role.

## 2. Context and methodology

---

Green Alliance is interested in working out how to get the public interested in the potential of working in green jobs in the green economy – and what the policy and communications implications are for Government and other organisations in encouraging the shift. Green Alliance suspected – and this research confirms – that public knowledge about the green economy and green jobs are low. People are interested – and in many cases enthused – about the prospect of a shift, but the policy conversation being held in Westminster is completely detached from ordinary people. This project was designed to try to deal with this reality.

Public First held ten focus groups of different audiences to probe public attitudes. Firstly, we ran four groups of working-class people, focusing mainly on people in towns and small cities in the Midlands and North of England; we also ran a working-class group in Glasgow. Secondly, we ran three groups of middle-class graduates. Thirdly, we ran three mixed groups (“control groups” if you like) in parts of the country which had hitherto not been covered.

We paid particular attention to working-class groups and graduates because they are important target audiences with very different experiences and expectations – and who therefore require very different approaches to engage them. Both of these groups will have many, many jobs open to them in the new, green economy; but it would be naïve not to accept that these jobs differ wildly (at least, for many of them). The control groups were designed to bring the differences between the working-class and graduate groups into sharper focus; we have to know how both groups compare to a “norm”.

Each of the groups took place online and lasted 75 minutes, with six participants recruited for each group.

### Group One: Sunderland

- C2/D
- 40-60
- All working
- All to have previously done manual work in the past
- All agree they expect to change jobs at least once more in the future
- Mixed gender
- Mixed politics

### Group Two: Derby

- C2/D
- 40-60
- All working
- All to have a driving licence
- All to have previously done manual work in the past
- All agree they expect to change jobs at least once more in the future
- Mixed gender
- Mixed ethnicity
- Lean Conservative

### Group Three: Rotherham

- C2/D
- 40-60
- All working
- All to have a driving licence
- All to have previously done manual work in the past
- All agree they expect to change jobs at least once more in the future
- Mixed gender

- Mixed ethnicity
- Mixed politics

**Group Four: Glasgow**

- C2/D
- 40-60
- All working
- All to have previously done manual work in the past
- All agree they expect to change jobs at least once more in the future
- Mixed gender
- Lean SNP

**Group Five: Bath**

- B/C1/C2
- 30-60
- All working
- All agree they expect to change jobs at least once more in the future
- Mixed gender
- Mixed politics

**Group Six: Watford**

- B/C1/C2
- 30-60
- All working
- All agree they expect to change jobs at least once more in the future
- Mixed gender
- Mixed politics

**Group Seven: Long Eaton**

- B/C1/C2
- 30-60
- All working
- All agree they expect to change jobs at least once more in the future
- Mixed gender
- Mixed politics

**Group Eight: Swansea**

- B/C1
- Graduates
- 25-35
- All working
- All agree they're open to a new job
- Mixed gender
- Lean Labour

**Group Nine: Manchester**

- B/C1
- Graduates
- 25-35

- All working
- All agree they're open to a new job
- Mixed gender
- Mixed ethnicity
- Lean Labour

**Group Ten: Leeds**

- B/C1
- Graduates
- 25-35
- All working
- All agree they're open to a new job
- Mixed gender
- Mixed ethnicity
- Lean Labour

**A note on the presentation of the qualitative data**

In this report, we generally present the data split between working class participants and graduates. As the focus group overview shows, coverage was more comprehensive and more nuanced than this; we ensured national coverage and we held conversations with a broader set of people than just working class people and graduates. However, in the discussions we found that, overwhelmingly, people's attitudes to working in the green economy was dictated by the types of the jobs they currently did – and therefore their social background. It would be confusing - and pointlessly and excessively complex - to try to inject differences and similarities between groups just because they happened to be socially mixed or because they were in a particular part of the country. The social grade distinction is the telling distinction and while there were some differences between people of the same social grade, this is really the story of the groups.

### 3. Public attitudes to work

---

What do people want from their jobs? What do they like and dislike about their current jobs and what do they want and expect in the future? These were the fundamental questions we began with across our focus groups. Only by understanding what people want from their jobs can we understand how best to market green jobs.

The working-class groups and the graduate groups differed significantly for two obvious reasons. Firstly, because they were at different stages of their working lives, with the working-class people well into their careers and the graduates at the beginning of theirs; this meant there was a basic optimism gap, with younger people looking forward to what they expected to be a fulfilling and interesting career. Secondly, because the graduates, by the nature of their recently-secured qualifications, were more defined by their jobs and ambitions; their work and their hopes about work were more integral to them as people. As we will explain later, this meant they responded differently to the prospect of a shift into the green economy.

In discussing their jobs and future jobs, across the groups working-class participants dwelled primarily on the practicalities of their jobs and they talked about their aspirations in the same way. This meant they talked primarily about pay levels, physical working conditions, the predictability and sociability of hours and working life with their colleagues.

*“With health issues, getting on a bit now, I think I need a sitting down job now. It’s getting a bit too hard... It’s not what I expected from when I was young... I thought I’d be in a steady situation, doing things for much longer.” Female retail worker in her 50s, Sunderland*

*“I’m getting older, the bones are getting stiffer, so digging holes and that is getting harder...” Gas emergency worker in his 40s, Glasgow*

*“I’m of an age where we used to say, ‘If you’ve a job in a bank you’re set for life.’ But if you had a job in a bank now, I mean, you’ll probably end up in a call centre because they’re shutting all the retail banks because people don’t have to go into a physical bank anymore. It can all be done online.” Pop-up shop fitter in his 40s, Glasgow*

*“There are a lot of jobs, a lot of variety, but there are more applications for these posts now. More people who are graduates – more than when I was applying for jobs 30 years ago. So, there are lots of jobs but the bar is higher.” Café assistant in his mid-40s, Derby*

*“I’ve done painting and decorating most my career, but it can be pretty hand to mouth - and months go by where you don’t earn as much as you’d expect. It can be pretty worrying sometimes.” Male decorator in his 50s, Rotherham*

Typically, the thing people liked most was working with people who had become close friends. The things people liked least were the physical demands of their work – everything from having to lift boxes to working in the cold – and long hours. But it was clear from our groups that there is a deep stress in many working-class people’s lives – admittedly not restricted to working-class people – associated with fears over whether they will keep their jobs for the medium-term. While this was clearly exacerbated by the backdrop of Covid, it was a fundamental issue regardless of the specific economic circumstances of 2020/21. Quite simply, people are worried their employers will go bust or take a financial battering and be forced to make them redundant.

It is hard to overstate the importance of this sense of fear over their groups – and the significance it holds for Green Alliance. In the policy world, we talk about sustainability in the context of environmental policy; for our working-class participants it meant something different: literally, whether their job was viable for the medium to long-term.

Most of the people we spoke to clearly expected to have to change their job in the coming years; few seemed to think they were in a role that would take them to, or close to, retirement – and most were sanguine about that. But there was – in their minds – a clear distinction between a likely change in their careers at some point and living under the permanent shadow of redundancy or a radical change in their employment status.

*"Terms and conditions aren't always the same as what they were. I think they get watered down as time goes on... There's a lot more jobs out there that are zero hours... you might get less holidays than you would have recently, that kind of thing."* Male manual worker in his 40s, Sunderland

*"I'm thinking about job security so I'm thinking ahead and thinking 'hospital' which is more secure than, say, an independent chemist. That's one of the most secure jobs to have: to be based in the hospital."* Shop assistant in her 40s, Glasgow

*"There was a time during the virus where it wasn't clear if I'd have anything to go back to. That sort of worry has probably been there a lot but it has sort of magnified it all a bit. People need security."* Driver in his 50s, Rotherham

*"We've spent most of the last year thinking about what companies are shutting and what ones might reopen. People can't live with that forever – it's too uncertain and you've got to know whether the pay cheque is coming at the end of the month."* Nursery worker in her 50s, Rotherham

*"I was offered the opportunity to leave the Royal Mail on voluntary redundancy and I didn't take it even though I hate the job. But after 21 years there I don't know what else I'd do or anything that would match my salary and the Ts and Cs I've got as well."* Communications manager in his 40s, Watford

As we note above, on the whole the graduates we spoke to had a very different outlook. It has become something of a cliché in recent times that young people obsess about purpose and meaning in their working lives. However, in our research, we found this very strongly to be the case. Young participants were clear they wanted to feel like they were doing something important and worthwhile; arguably, this is a "status" issue for them in the way money was a status issue for young graduates of the past, but it was strongly felt.

In our groups, some graduates had found meaning in their jobs already – particularly those who had embarked on careers following "vocational" degrees like law, architecture, engineering or even nursing – but everyone talked about its importance. Even those graduates who had found themselves in unfulfilling temporary jobs – or jobs which they considered beneath their levels of qualification or expertise – agreed that meaning was crucial.

*"For me, it's more important that I'm doing a job that I feel is fulfilling for me and has value because I think in life everyone has a purpose... I'd rather be in a job that made me happy than one which maybe had more money or was more stable."* Young female graduate in her 20s, Swansea

*"I like to think doing a job that means something is important for a lot of people. It's fine just getting up and going to work to earn money - and that's obviously a big part of it - but to do something and make a small difference is a big thing."* Female university tutor in her 30s, Leeds

*"I think it's good to have purpose... I used to work in a shop, and it used to be very routine, but now I feel a lot more that purpose, kind of helping people as well. So that's what I'm going to continue to do."* Female, 20s, business studies graduate, manager for a law firm, Manchester

*"I've got to enjoy what I do. If I don't enjoy what I do, my heart says, 'don't put [in] 100%' and so I have to want to go to work and want to do what I'm doing. Otherwise, I can't be bothered. That's quite important to me."* Female, 30s, nursing graduate, now lectures in nursing, Manchester

With this in mind, most of the graduates had strong, if somewhat occasionally ill-defined, ideas about what jobs they would never do. They weren't particularly judgemental, but they were clear that there were certain types of business they wouldn't want to work for.

*"I've always avoided sales. It's something I'm unfortunately quite good at... I mean, I've worked in a number of contact centres with management roles... They abused the truth... Pretty much: it is not so*

*much that I want to work for a good company, but I just don't want to work for a morally bad company.”* Male, IT manager, 30s, Bath

*“I don't think I'd work for a bank or a big organisation like that to be honest. There's so many big companies that just care about profit. I've enjoyed roles where it's not so much about that – they tend to be better people and better places to work.”* Offender manager in her 20s, Leeds

*“Fulfilment and having a decent wage are on a par with each other... In terms of working for a company who I wouldn't want to work for; I have worked with those crappy companies who have dodgy morals and do a lot of unlawful stuff, so I can't say I wouldn't work for them, because I just have worked for them...”* Male graduate in his 20s, currently in casual employment, Swansea

*“I suppose when it comes to job satisfaction, or feeling that you're doing something that's ethical...I really think that's more of a job ideal. I think people are incredibly lucky if they manage to find that... I'm well aware of the need to earn money...”* Male nurse in his 30s, Swansea

This all threw up a big gap between working-class people – and indeed those older people in many of the groups across the country - and graduates. While it is true that working-class participants were enthused about the idea of working in an environmentally friendly job or industry, they were *much* less concerned about working in a job or industry that was considered morally virtuous. They volunteered that not only were pay, working conditions etc much more important, but many also said they would take a “good job” in an industry that was not considered virtuous; they were explicit about this.

Would it make you happy to work in a greener and cleaner job? *“It would to a point, but you've got to be happy where you work... I would always keep my options open.”* Male manual worker in his 40s, Sunderland

*“I don't think there's any industries I wouldn't particularly fancy... I would feel more comfortable working in a [greener and cleaner environment].”* Male manual worker in his 40s, Sunderland

*“It would depend on what sort of job it was [in a less virtuous industry]; I would probably think about it.”* Female retail worker in her 50s, Sunderland

*“I think it's something that would be nice if I knew that it was something that was benefitting the planet. But I'm going to be really honest with you: if I was in a role working for a company that was creating, like, cigarettes - that's obviously not good for people – [but I would] need to have that income for family etcetera... If I was working in an environmentally green job, that would be good, that would be a nice thing, but it would not be the absolute priority. If in the tobacco factory it was a higher wage [I would take the job]. Just being honest.”* Pop-up shop fitter in his 40s, Glasgow

*“I'm quite into [the environmental] side of things. I'm not sure if I would transition into another industry because of the green aspect, but I would like to think that the industry that I work in would be getting greener.”* Sales rep of medical equipment in his late 30s, Long Eaton

*“To be honest - you've got to be realistic haven't you - if the job is maybe better for the planet or for the country but it pays you half the salary and isn't that secure then you're not going to go for it are you.”* Cleaner in his 40s, Rotherham

But this appetite to do some good in their working lives was strong in several groups. Quite a few people, across social class and age, found their current employer or job limited their ability to do this – and so they looked for it elsewhere, for example in voluntary work. This is something which could provide a useful way of starting conversations about moving into the green sector.

*“I worked in a really kind of dreadful environment for a long time. And I got to a stage where I wanted to do something different, but corporate responsibility just wasn't on the cards. So, I just took up voluntary stuff and make a difference that way. So, I can't make a difference in the roles that I'm in.”*

*But you can take your skill sets and apply them on a voluntary basis elsewhere.”* Male, highly-skilled working class, late 40s, on the board of a local homelessness charity, Bath

We will deal with Covid in more detail later but, alongside the desire to serve a greater purpose, the single thing that united the graduate groups was the general sense that work / life balance was another key aspect of a job which they valued. Particularly against the backdrop of lockdowns, people had learned to value a slower and healthier pace and more time at home.

The ability of employers to reach people out of hours has probably been increased by the working-from-home revolution which has changed white collar employees’ relationship to work in a way that has not been equalled in centuries. When there is no workplace to “go home” from, the expectation that an employee will respond after 5pm seems to have grown massively.

Alongside that, the absence of commuting and being at home more has made many people realise what they might have been missing. The desire to see this relationship rebalanced came through extremely strongly. Any employer or sector thinking about how they position themselves with regard to the workforce needs to understand this will be a key part of they think about their jobs in the future.

*“As I've got a little bit older, it's the work life balance.”* Male, 30s, maths graduate, operations manager, Manchester

*“I have fallen out of love with my job. The demands that are happening are just mad and the people running the company just don't have any compassion.”* Communications manager in his 40s, Watford

*“It's about finding the right balance between the hours you're working and the salary. But you don't want to work too many hours. Even if the pay is really good. You've got to have your home time.”* Male, 20s, law graduate, currently working for Test and Trace, Manchester

*“I would personally go for jobs that offer flexibility. So having that time with the children at home was special. I can spend time with the children. I would always look for a job that offers flexible hours.”* Female, IT manager, 30s, Bath

Another interesting issue that came up across the groups was the perception about the roles of women. Particularly in the Glasgow group, when discussing the differences between the kinds of jobs that were available today and what the jobs market was like when they first left school (in some cases 40 years previously), an interesting conversation emerged around women in the workforce and access to jobs that would not, then, have been regarded as “women’s” work. There was a real sense of “can-do” among the women in the group – and a feeling that women were especially adaptable and good at adapting their surroundings.

*“When I left school, you either went into an office - because it was assumed that women were good at doing work in offices - or cleaners, shop floor factories... So that's changed a great deal. I know there's a lot of women working in construction and in the shipyards and I think that's brilliant.”* Warehouse packer in her 60s, Glasgow

This led to conversations about what women might do once their children had left home. Apparently, many of the women’s need for security was really only while they were caring for children - so fitting their working time around school hours was probably the most important thing (and flexibility by an employer to understand when childcare crises arose). This was more important by far than job satisfaction or, in many cases, than pay.

*“I'll definitely will change [jobs] after my son's older. I like hard work and I'm quite creative. I always need a new challenge.”* Labourer in her 30s, Glasgow

*“If I'm being very true to myself then money and being there for my daughter is much more important [than saving the world]. It would be nice to save the planet, but those two things matter more to me.”* Assistant in women’s boutique in her 30s, Watford



*"I'm a single mum so I've never been career motivated. I've just been there for my kids."* Receptionist in her 50s, Watford

*"I think flexibility is a big thing now. I think being more flexible on hours where I could start early in the morning or finish later at night - or do all of my hours in one day and have a few more days off in the week - is the ideal for most people now."* Female sales assistant in her 40s, Rotherham

*"For me with a family, it has to be able to fit in. I think that's why I've stayed where I am so long. They're good to me."* Assistant in women's boutique in her 30s, Watford

*"I'm only in my job just now because it suits me [around childcare], but I would definitely change in the near future. I would love to do something like that [upcycling]."* Labourer in her 30s, Glasgow

This group of women - confident, adaptable and ready for the next phase in their lives after their children leave - could be a fruitful and positive target to attract into the green economy for Green Alliance.

## 4. Knowledge of the green economy

---

Across all the groups, knowledge of the green economy – as politicians and policymakers discuss it – was extremely low. This is no real surprise; in the opinion research we have conducted over the last few years, it has been clear that very, very few people have any grasp of the policy conversation taking place in Westminster and Whitehall. There was a notable exception to this with the working-class group in Glasgow which we discuss below.

Although we have noticed over the last year in particular that more people are aware of environmental and climate change policies (and more people are comfortable talking about “carbon emissions” than might have been the case in the past), knowledge is shallow and not widespread. This is perhaps most starkly reflected in people’s lack of recognition of the terms that are commonly used by those leading the policy debate. A minority of graduates had heard the term “net zero”, while virtually none of the working-class participants had; the same goes for the term “green economy”, although those that had heard this term had little understanding of what it meant; and only one person across the groups – someone who had just completed a degree in zoology in Swansea – had heard of the term “circular economy”.

This lack of knowledge of the debate as it stands meant that people often found themselves talking about environmental issues in completely different ways, with completely different terms of reference. For example, in the first working-class group we did, in Sunderland, a number of participants were adamant their workplaces were “green” because their businesses provided things like recycling bins in canteens, discouraged the use of plastic etc. There was simply no sense of what green policy is, as people in Westminster and Whitehall understand it.

*“I think most of us are doing the cleaner and greener thing at the minute. We’re recycling quite a bit – workplaces do that – most places are now... We’ve been doing that for a good few years now – getting rid of plastic bottles, recycling things.”* Female retail worker in her 50s, Sunderland

*“Would it affect me? I’m not sure. I do my bit. I recycle. But am I a person who would say they are really environmental? I do my bit but it’s not a factor, if I’m honest.”* Communications manager in his 40s, Watford

*“Our office makes sure that we have reusable cups and things like that available, but I’m not sure that’s the same as this green economy thing.”* Web developer in his 20s, Leeds

For some, the proliferation of new terms and phrases within the public conversation on green issues was alienating, even for those (perhaps, especially so) who want protecting the environment to be a priority for Government, business and society.

In Glasgow, one woman, who worked in a manual job, talked about how her son had been the one to educate her about the importance of the environment. The idea of children persuading their parents to care more about the environment is common in groups like these.

*“It’s my son. It’s that younger generation. He’s the one who’s convinced me that we need to do something. They’ve made us more aware of climate change. I just wish we’d been taught at school what they’re learning at school now. I really do.”* Female, working class manual worker in her 40s, Glasgow

*“With the recycling and everything, I do my bit. But it’s my daughter: I think it’s the younger generation, she’s always saying it’s ok for the older generation because they’re going to die soon but they’re the ones that are going to be living in this world that’s crumbling and getting destroyed. So, I think it’s a good idea, but I’m not obsessed with it.”* Receptionist in her 50s, Watford

However, emphatically, this is not to say they know nothing – or care little – about the environment; on the contrary, they are often well-informed and interested in specific issues; rather, it is to say they simply do not follow what is being said by politicians and others. Across the groups, people expressed deep concern for the

environment. While the environment – and specifically climate change – was an existential issue for young graduates, it was a significant (a high tier two) issue for working-class audiences.

*“Where I work at the Co-op, they try and do all the green stuff as much as they can, cutting packaging and stuff like that. But I don’t really understand it all. It’s been ruined so quickly. Years ago, people used to recycle things, save string. I still do all that. I don’t understand the ‘eco’ thing, people putting all different names to it. Do we have to be ‘eco’? Why can’t we just be normal?”* Sales assistant in her mid-50s, Derby

Even well-educated, engaged members of the groups had very little concrete knowledge of what the green economy constituted.

*“I think I’ve heard green economy when it comes on the news. I’m not sure but I’m sure I’ve come across it. I couldn’t tell you what it in particular meant though.”* Female, 30s, nursing graduate, now lectures in nursing at a university, Manchester

*“I’m really into recycling. And I do always recycle. But further than that, I haven’t really looked into it much. I mean, I’m always happy to help the environment when I can. But I feel sometimes, I do wonder, are we too far down the line? Has the harm already been done?”* Female, 30s, dental receptionist now but qualified as a dentist, Manchester

*“It’s about making sure we do things in the economy and in work that don’t harm the next generation, I think. I’ve heard about it and I get that we all need to take more care in everything we do but that’s about it really.”* Logistics manager in his 30s, Leeds

This lack of knowledge about the green economy undoubtedly made it difficult to engage people on the sorts of green jobs they might do in the future. It required the moderators to run a long preamble, explaining how the economy might change structurally in the future – and how a cleaner, greener economy might begin to emerge as the Government implemented policies to meet its Net Zero targets.

Especially with working-class audiences, one entry point was not talking about green jobs but about jobs that might help reduce waste. It was here that (across the demographics but certainly in working-class groups) people became highly enthused. It is why being clear about what people understand by “green” or “eco-friendly” matters so much – in order to talk to people about the things that motivate them, rather than those that inspire policy-makers.

*“When I’m at work I get really annoyed because people leave the lights on unnecessarily. I think the NHS...their heating and electricity bills must be colossal. We’ve got the heating on blazing in our delivery rooms and at the weekend I worked and one of the rooms was 30 degrees. It was like being on holiday! All these mums that are in labour are complaining because the rooms are so hot, but the radiators are controlled. We can’t turn them down. Obviously at night it’s cold – that’s why they’re keeping them on – but during the day, we’ve got the windows open, and the heat is just going straight out of the windows. It’s just ridiculous!”* Midwife in her 50s, Watford

*“It’s got to be second-hand retail sales. I mean, I love a car boot, so that’s for me. I can sell anything. The minute I’m not using something, I put it on Amazon Marketplace, or I give it away for free on an Olio app which I use which stops waste in the area, or I sell it in a car boot if I’ve got enough of something. So, you can put me down for second-hand retail because I can sell anything.”* Assistant in women’s boutique in her 30s, Watford

*“I sell all my son’s stuff on eBay once he’s worn it. I’m a big seller on eBay and stuff like that. I’d like to do the recycling. I up-cycle all my furniture. I love it. It’s just my thing. I like that creativity and the transformation of things.”* Labourer in her 30s, Glasgow

*“Second-hand clothes you find some right gems. They used to have like a kilo sale before Covid.”* Labourer in her 30s, Glasgow

*“I love walking so I would like all the walking areas to be nice where people leave all their rubbish, but I think also there’s not enough bins provided.” [She suggested there might be green jobs in making more bins]. Warehouse packer in her 60s, Glasgow*

As mentioned above, there was a noticeable difference with the working-class group in Glasgow. Even though Glasgow is a major city and is less dependent on energy production for its existence (unlike Aberdeen, for example), Scotland as a whole is an energy-producing nation and has always had higher levels of knowledge and interest – because so much work depends directly or indirectly on it.

This group, then, mentioned almost every green job on the list before it was shown to them and were much more open to changing to a “green” job than others. One woman even talked about the Netflix series “Seaspiracy”. In fact, they were aware of the transition debate in a more urgent way as it would likely impact Scotland more than other parts of the UK.

All these were mentioned in response to the question “What would you understand by a ‘green job?’”

*“The windfarms. There’s a company that’s creating windfarms in Fife and that’s securing a lot of jobs in Fife.” Pop-up shop fitter in his 40s, Glasgow*

*“I would think it would be selling solar panels for houses. Maybe a salesperson. Proper insulating so you’re not burning so much heat and that kind of thing. And possibly parks and recreation so that you’re taking more care in the parks and keeping them nice, planting more flowers.” Shop assistant in her 40s, Glasgow*

*“My friend works within the local council and they’ve got a recycling area so that’s for helping things be greener.” Gas emergency worker in his 40s, Glasgow*

## 5. Public interest in green jobs

---

The main part of the conversation in all the groups was a discussion about the sorts of jobs that might be available to people in the green economy. As we note above, fruitful discussions required a long explanation about what the green economy is – and how it might emerge as the Government creates and implements policies to enable it to meet Net Zero targets – or talking about waste and recycling rather than the “green economy” or “green jobs”. This was a systematic process but did not “educate” participants to an unrealistic level; they quickly understood the concept of a cleaner, greener economy and the jobs that might become available.

In each group, we talked about the sorts of jobs that might be on offer in the green economy, that participants might be interested in applying for. We discussed different prospective jobs with different groups; we talked about more physical / manual jobs with the working-class groups (who had been recruited on the basis that they currently worked in these sorts of jobs) and more professional / managerial groups with the graduates; with the mixed / control groups, we talked about a mix of the two – providing a mix as appropriate to the make-up of each particular group.

We will deal with the specific responses of each group, which differed given the nature of their own personal circumstances and the types of jobs we presented as being realistically open to them. However, we deal with the commonalities first.

Above all, people across all the groups were *generally* enthusiastic about the idea of doing jobs that were unambiguously environmentally friendly. There is no question that the young graduates were *more* enthusiastic, but this is relative; because most people said they were at least somewhat concerned about the economy, almost everyone was at least somewhat interested in these jobs.

The second common response – perhaps unsurprisingly – was that those people who were most interested in green jobs were those who were not particularly happy in their existing jobs; perhaps more accurately, those that were settled in professions which a clearly defined career path were *least* interested in green jobs (even though they were supportive of the concept of the green economy). These people were mostly, although not exclusively, found in the young graduate groups. Architects, lawyers, engineers and nurses were emphatic that they would stay in their own careers.

### Presenting practical alternatives

Green Alliance provided moderators with a list of jobs that participants might conceivably do. Moderators read out the following sort of jobs, broadly providing working class groups with lower skilled options, and graduates with higher skilled options, as appropriate:

#### *Circular economy*

- Repairer
- Re-manufacturer
- Recycling operatives
- Biorefining
- Circular procurement professionals
- Second-hand retail
- Rental and leasing

#### *Nature*

- Nature restoration contractors
- Construction, maintenance and repairs
- Wardens and rangers
- Hospitality and retail staff
- Community engagement officers

- Ecologists
- Mapping and analysis

#### *General decarbonisation jobs*

- Insulation technician
- Heat pump engineer
- Electric vehicles – manufacturing, marketing and sales.

#### Working class participants

Thinking specifically about working class people, their single biggest concern by far was that green jobs were “good jobs”. Many of them currently worked in jobs where the work was physically demanding, in less-than-ideal conditions and where the hours were long or unpredictable.

While most responded with some interest and enthusiasm about the prospect of an environmentally friendly job, they were clear that the jobs had to be better than the ones they currently had. Many of our working-class participants were just physically *tired* after their jobs; they did not mind the graft necessarily, but most would have preferred to work less physically hard.

*“I’d probably like to go back to an office job now because the back and legs hurt from hulking boxes.”*  
Shop assistant in her 40s, Glasgow

*“I would like to retire but I don’t have a private pension so I have to wait a few years so I wouldn’t mind doing something, maybe a bit less.”* Warehouse packer in her 60s, Glasgow

*“My job is pretty demanding now and to be honest I’m getting to the stage where I’m thinking about being slightly less physical so I’m not sure. I think it would need to be clearer on how intensive it would all be.”* Driver in his 40s, Rotherham

With this in mind, the groups were divided on whether or not outdoor work was desirable. A significant minority were enthused about the prospect of doing something genuinely different outdoors; this was partly encouraged by their experiences during lockdown, but it was more fundamental than this. Some people spontaneously raised the idea that working outdoors might be good for their mental health.

*“All the jobs are going to help, because they’re out in the open air, they’re going to lead to better mental health. I’d say in the medium or long term I would definitely look at this, because you can be out and about. It’s a job where every day is going to be a little bit different.”* Sales rep of medical equipment in his late 30s, Long Eaton

Most, however, were worried about the idea of having to work in the wet and cold; some were implacably opposed. For some, their responses were made more complex by the prospect of working with animals; a significant minority hated the idea they might have to work, for example, with livestock. In fact, certainly in the first groups, such was the controversy around the possibility of having to work with animals, we had to tell them to think not about animals but the outdoors generally. In the Sunderland group, a sense quickly developed that outdoor jobs might just be done by “the sorts of people” who liked the outdoors – “farmer” equivalents.

*“The outside bit, the fresh air, and something new [sound good]. But where would you put it location-wise?”* Male manual worker in his 40s, Sunderland

*“I’m a big fan of nature, so anything to do with livestock...”* Working class woman in her 30s, currently training to be a nurse, Sunderland

*“The tree nursery manager I don’t think I could get too excited about that. I’d last about two days, to be honest.”* Pop-up shop fitter in his 40s, Glasgow

*"Plant trees, I'd like to do that. I like the outdoors. If it pays, I'll do it."* Labourer in his 40s, Glasgow

*"I think the outdoor stuff sounds great. I work outdoors most the day now and even in the rain and stuff it's really good fun. If it was that plus I was doing my bit and helping the environment then it'd be cool."* Cleaner in his 40s, Rotherham

*"In terms of the nature reserves – I'm not in to digging or too much outdoor work but I love RSPB sites and things like that so the hosting side of things would be great. I think it'd be nice if you can teach kids about the green aspect of life and nature; it'd be a nice job to do."* Sales assistant in her 40s, Rotherham

*"I think an outdoor job would suit me – apart from in mid-winter which I might not be so keen on! My wife and I go to the Yorkshire Wildlife Park all the time and I'd absolutely love a job there."* Decorator in his 50s, Rotherham

*"Everyone loves to be outside in the summer, but in the winter? It really wouldn't be for me."* Male manual worker in his 40s, Sunderland

Almost as important to working-class participants was that green jobs had to be *sustainable* in the sense that they had to be jobs that had long-term prospects. Many working-class people had seen local workplaces and even whole industries decline; furthermore, they felt they had heard politicians set targets and make endless promises in the past, which had ultimately turned to nothing or been abandoned. In other words, they wanted to be sure these jobs were for the long-term; the last thing they wanted was to move into a job or industry that ended up at risk in short order.

*"I think some of them sound interesting, it's just the longevity of it. Is it a long-term thing or is a short-term thing? Does a political party think it's just good for a quick win or something like that? They seem to talk a lot about it – the green economy – but they just seem slow in moving things forward."* Male manual worker in his 40s, Sunderland

*"It's funny you say job security. I actually see it more as company security. So, you could be in a job and the job's great but then look at the likes of Debenhams... I would look more at company security."* Pop-up shop fitter in his 40s, Glasgow

*"What that sounds like, it sounds a little bit like 15 years ago, when everybody seemed to be doing EPC reports for estate agents. And that was sold as the kind of next thing and now, you know, probably less than 3% of those people that bought into that are actually still doing it. Those things have got a shelf life. I don't know, you could say 1000 people could map the entire country in three years. So, what are they going to do after that? That's not new jobs. That's a job just for a time."* Male, highly-skilled working class, late 40s, Bath

*"I think for me, I think I'd need to see commitment. I think this whole thing is a lot of talk about green, the green economy. I see no commitment. And I suspect that in 10 years' time, we might still be having this conversation. And they'll still be talking about the green economy, and we still wouldn't be there."* Working class male, 50s, Bath

*"Listen, all these jobs that you're talking about, where is there going to be a lot of money coming in? It's all got to come from taxpayers or something like that. You make a product and sell a product or be involved in something. These seem to be charity things."* Working class male, 50s, Bath

*"It's the 'in thing' at the moment, this eco thing, and the Government putting all this money into it. But in 10 years' time are we still going to be willing to pay people to plant trees or will the agenda have changed and we'll be spending that money somewhere else?"* Firefighter in his mid-40s, Derby

*"You'd have to be pretty certain you were going to be secure in it – there's been so much uncertainty in the last year that it would need to be long term. It's fashionable at the moment isn't it [the*

*environment] but if it falls out of fashion are you going to be out of a job?" Nursery worker in her 50s, Rotherham*

On hearing the list of potential green jobs, a number of the working-class participants would make an immediate connection with jobs they immediately understood, especially those jobs they thought were linked to the sectors they were currently working in. Familiarity was an important reference point.

*"I like the sound of the second-hand retail one. I've always worked in retail so if I was going to adapt to something easily, it would be a retail job." Chip shop proprietor in her late 40s, Derby*

*"I've worked in sales for most my life so the prospect of selling green products or electric cars or whatever seems fine to me. It's all about transferable skills isn't it so if there's something I could bring across to it I'd go for it." Sales worker in her 40s, Rotherham*

*"I'd probably go for the installation of electric vehicle power points. I'm very much hands on, I don't mind working outside. As long as the training is there, and the pay is there then I'd be happy to do that." Cleaner in his 40s, Rotherham*

*"I wouldn't mind the repairs and manufacturing side of things for white goods. If it would work economically and for my own situation then I'd give it a go." Driver in his 50s, Rotherham*

*"If you're a solar specialist, and there's not that many of them around, it's going to be a bit of a premium. Then you're killing two birds with one stone, you're helping the environment and you're looking after your family properly". IT field engineer and reserve firefighter in his early 30s, Long Eaton*

As we note above, "purpose" was not nothing to working class voters; they liked the idea of green jobs and being part of something "good". But it was much, much less important than working conditions and long-term confidence. A clear majority of working class participants said they would be prepared to work for companies or in industries who had a poor reputation – if the job paid well and there were good working conditions. Similarly, working class participants made it clear that they did not judge those people who worked in the sort of places that might be judged negatively by others; people have to earn a living, they reasoned.

*"I don't like to throw anything away, I always try and repair things so I quite like the sound of [the job of a repairer]. We live in a very disposable society don't we, if anything breaks like your TV then you take it to the tip and buy a new one. We don't repair these things anymore, so that kind of job would definitely be good." Firefighter in his mid-40s, Derby*

*"I'm not really that fussed. I do my bit for the environment and, I don't know... I just want to go to work, earn my money and come home really. I'm at that age now, that's all you want." Sales assistant in her mid-50s, Derby*

*"I've got mates that work in factories and work driving lorries too and I don't even think about who it is they work for. They like their jobs and make a decent living and that's the main thing at the end of the day really." Decorator in his 50s, Rotherham*

### Graduate audiences

If purpose was less important to working class audiences, it was the single most important factor for graduates. Given it has become something of a cliché in recent times that graduates obsess about "meaning" in their life, we tried to approach this cautiously and systematically so that we were not effectively feeding lines we expected to hear.

However, while we did tread carefully, the message could not have been clearer: graduates said what mattered most to them was feeling they were doing something important. Not all of them were in "important" jobs though, and it did not seem as if all thought they necessarily would work in important jobs; the point is that they *wanted* to.



Consequently, the graduates were also very unlikely to say they would accept working for a company – or in an industry – they disapproved of. To be fair – and likely because a number of them struggled in what was clearly a difficult job market – they were not hostile towards – or judgemental towards – those who worked in these industries; to a point, they recognised that people have to pay the bills. But there was a squeamishness about these jobs that was not present in the working-class groups.

*“I’d be interested in finding ways to clean up the environment, but it’s not something that I’d commit myself to totally... But if there were ways to do it, then I’d take the opportunities to do it.”* Male, 20s, law graduate, currently working for Test and Trace, Manchester

*“I think helping the environment and the green agenda is just so huge now, we have to do something about it so anything that was going to be part of that should be attractive to all of us.”* Land manager in his 30s, Leeds

*“Don’t a lot of those jobs exist already? It sounded like a great, positive list of jobs. Would I be qualified for all of them? Probably not, but they do sound good.”* Consultant at a cyber security company in her mid-30s, Long Eaton

*“It was interesting with the idea of sustainability with some of the jobs roles in wildlife and preservation. That’s got to be the way forward, hasn’t it? The phrase ‘circular economy’, to me that says ‘nature’, the circle of life. Educating people. Those job roles fit in with that.”* Music teacher in his mid-40s, Long Eaton

*“Nature reserve warden, that sounds good. No screaming kids, no having to do lessons 6 hours a day. Fresh air, lots of space, being around nature is really good for wellbeing. And that to me really feels like you’re making a difference.”* Music teacher in his mid-40s, Long Eaton

It helped greatly if people could see a way in which skills they had invested time in building up could be “converted” or easily applied to working in the green economy. This was a strong factor, for example for a man who worked in the power supply industry.

*“Electric vehicles, that’s the only job I’ve heard mentioned that remotely appeals to me. I think because part of the business I work for manufactures EV chargers. So, I know a little bit about it. So, I think that side of it does interest me.”* Male, 30s, maths graduate, Manchester

*“The electric car industry definitely is something that I would be interested in. I love cars. I love tech. I love everything like that. The more gadgets, the better for me so I’d be up for a job in that side of things. I could see how my role I could transfer it – building websites for electric car sellers or whatever.”* Web developer in his 20s, Leeds

*“I think creating a new site or a new green leisure facility would be great. I could definitely use my current job and skills to help something like mapping to assess the best place to create nature reserves or whatever. It sounds really interesting.”* Land manager in his 30s, Leeds

It was important for graduates – in Leeds particularly - to feel as though making the shift across to the green economy would not stunt their career growth or require them to retrain or go through new qualifications all over again. Many expected to constantly require CPD-type training throughout their careers, but were initially nervous that the green economy would mean whole new training.

*“I’ve gone through a lot of education in my life and have got to a good stage where I’m happy. I’d want to be sure that it would be jobs where I can transfer that over rather than having to start from scratch in terms of job but also salary.”* Lecturer in her 30s, Leeds

*“You’d hope that quite a few of these green jobs are ones you can just jump across to and not need loads of training. Most of us on this call are quite qualified and you’d like to think we could just do those new jobs easily enough and not need to drop money and spend hours training again”* Logistics manager in his 30s, Leeds

One phenomenon we picked up in Bath was an interest in how the green economy might fit into the specifically local context – a reminder that labour market conditions are very different in different parts of the UK – and sometimes even inside regions. For example, the job market is booming in central Manchester but as short a distance away as places like Oldham, the situation is very different – with persistent long-term unemployment. There are also parts of the country where green politics and green “culture” have a greater foothold. In Bath, for example, there was some scepticism about whether the skills base still existed for more technical jobs – after several decades when the city and the immediate area has lost many engineering and manufacturing jobs.

*“I think it'd be good for younger people. When I left school, late 80s, getting an apprenticeship at Rolls Royce or wherever was often top of your career guidance, literally. But nowadays they'll struggle to fill those places because nobody around for the last 10 years has got any manufacturing skills. Male, highly-skilled working class, late 40s, Bath*

But that was also coupled with a powerful sense of the city as being a place where green issues were a subject of strong local interest.

*“I would say yes, people would be interested in jobs like that. But Bath is quite good. We're quite passionate when it comes to environmentally friendly jobs. Anything that is to do with the environment. We've just introduced the clean air zone which is really important.” Female, IT manager, 30s, Bath*

## 6. Covid and the changing economy

---

We have done vast numbers of focus groups on Covid over the last eighteen months – probably more than 200 – and we have explored every possible aspect of the crisis and its aftermath. In truth, it is hard to say how much people’s attitudes to life and work have changed. Some talk about never wanting to go back to, say, commuting, while most people talk about wanting to go back to “ordinary” life as quickly as possible.

It was important for us to probe all this in these groups. Would people be more likely to want a job in the green economy if it meant, for example, that they would work outside and away from others? What about not having to commute into offices in the cities? What about doing a job that just felt very different from the usual daily grind? What about a job with more meaning?

Overall, perhaps surprisingly, we did not find that Covid had particularly changed the way *most* people thought about their jobs. Most of the working-class participants had not stopped working and most were going into their workplace – not, after all, being able to do jobs like factory / warehouse work at home. They had therefore not had a sort of Damascene moment where they decided they wanted something different. The graduates often seemed to want to return to their pre-Covid, highly-social lives and jobs, though perhaps working from home one or two days a week.

However, across social classes there was *some* belief that things would never go back to how they had been – that there was now much greater willingness to use technology to be “virtually” present, but it is important not to overstate the importance of this; people did not think everything was going to change – nor was there a massive shift in people’s outlook (although, of course, this might change).

*“It’s been really interesting to me that the bigger company that I formerly worked for over the past 25 years used to be really set in their ways. That meant needing to be in certain places at certain times. And you know, there were times that I drove to Leeds for a one hour meeting. Madness. Nine hours drive for a one hour meeting. So, it brings a change in that mentality, a break in that kind of mentality that people have got. Whether that will continue, I think probably it will.”* Male, highly-skilled working class, late 40s, Bath

*“I’m not going to go back into the office every day going forward. There’s just no point. This has shown we can all work remotely and I do miss the interactions but if we met up once a week and then did a social event it would actually make it even nicer for us all.”* Web developer in his 20s, Leeds

*“I just can’t see things going back to how they were. Why would you commute for all that time, sit in traffic or on the train, when you could be getting on with work at home. I just can’t see it.”* Sales assistant in her 40s, Rotherham

*“[The pandemic] hasn’t made me think I’m going to lose my job and have to change my career any time soon, but it has definitely made me reassess what I thought was important. I was really hell-bent on getting as far as I could within the organisation, I think now I think my private time is more important than slugging my guts away. I want to spend more time with my family and friends.”* Consultant at a cyber security company in her mid-30s, Long Eaton

*“I used to be really focused on my career and making it as far as I could but I’ve been able to see my kids more and spend time with my family for so much longer since the pandemic. It really makes you stop and think about things in the future and focus on other things now.”* Logistics manager in his 30s, Leeds

*“This whole thing has made me realise how important taking care of yourself and not working too hard all the time is. I’ve found myself in the past just working non-stop and not seeing friends or whatever, but this situation has meant loads of time to reflect. It’s got to be more balanced going forward.”* Solicitor in her 30s, Leeds

*“For me, the last year from a work perspective has changed things so much. I don’t think now I put as much emphasis on career and wealth. I’m putting more emphasis on my own health. I’m, as you can see, overweight myself. So, there’s been a massive shift in perspective for myself.”* Pop-up shop fitter in his 40s, Glasgow

One thing really did resonate – with working class participants particularly. This was a development of the suggestion that work had to be *sustainable*, which we have covered above in some detail. Many of our participants worked in retail – or they knew others who did – and they were keen (to the extent possible) to work in jobs and industries that would not be wiped out by endless Covid scares or flare-ups. They were philosophical about this – knowing that this might not be possible – but this was the ideal. It applied strongly to many more middle class workers – many of whom had seen colleagues been made redundant or lose their jobs entirely.

*“I want to change now because the retail business has totally changed.”* Assistant in women’s boutique in her 30s, Watford

*“We all want security, and that is some level of security. So, for me, it is important to know that if you decide to stay in a job, it’s sustainable and it will be there for a while. It has definitely, absolutely changed what sort of sector I would think about in terms of getting a new job. Because look at how many people have been on furlough for the last 12 months. Some industries are much more fragile than others, or there’s some which are much more resilient. If, for example, you work in hospitality, that just fell off a cliff. And it’s not as secure.”* Male, 30s, maths graduate, Manchester

*“I do worry about the sector I work in to be honest. Our business had to shut its doors a few times and we got furlough but that won’t happen forever will it. I do think finding something a bit more safe and certain is key for me now which I didn’t even think about before this.”* Sales assistant in her 50s, Rotherham

While we are sceptical that a general but direct post-Covid message would work for most people – something along the lines of “our personal lives have changed dramatically and it’s time to make the same sorts of changes in our working lives”. We do not think there are enough people that would share this view. However, it would undoubtedly do it for some people. The problem is, we did not feel it was possible to predict who these people would be in advance; it was driven more by character / personal values, rather than, say, characteristics like social grade, income, gender etc.