

RIBA Response

Environmental Audit Committee - Green Jobs

The Royal Institute of British Architects champions better buildings, stronger communities and higher environmental standards through the practice of architecture and our 40,000 members. We provide the standards, training, support and recognition that put our members – in the UK and overseas – at the peak of their profession. With government and our partners, we work to improve the design quality of public buildings, new homes and new communities.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. The built environment is responsible for around 40% of global carbon emissions and architects have a significant role to play in reducing UK greenhouse gas emissions. The RIBA joined the global declaration calling an environment and climate emergency on 29 June 2019; just two days after the UK government passed a law stipulating the UK end its contribution to global warming by 2050, by bringing all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero.

Improving the energy efficiency of buildings is essential to helping the UK meet its long-term climate goals. At the same time, it provides the opportunity to create jobs and support a green economic recovery to the coronavirus pandemic.

The RIBA recommends the Government:

- Bring forward a National Retrofit Strategy which sets out a clear trajectory for retrofitting our homes, to help create thousands of new green jobs.
- Must include adequate training and education to ensure competence and skills within the energy efficiency supply chain.
- Should require POE as a condition of procurement of public funding for building projects to create new green jobs.

Improving the energy efficiency of our existing building stock can create thousands of new jobs

In 2019, the residential sector was responsible for 19% of the UK's total carbon emissions – up from 15% in 2008. With 85% of our homes expected still to be in use by 2050, and around 19 million requiring retrofitting, we need a clear roadmap of how we are going to reduce the emissions from our housing stock.

To achieve this, the RIBA recommends that the Government bring forward a National Retrofit Strategy – a long term policy and investment programme for upgrading the energy efficiency of our housing stock.

Setting out a clear trajectory for retrofitting our homes is key to creating new green jobs. Research by the Energy Efficiency Infrastructure Group, of which the RIBA is a member, highlights that investing in energy efficiency can support over 150,000 skilled and semiskilled jobs by 2030.¹

Retrofitting homes can help create skilled employment opportunities across the country and help a green economic recovery

Some regions in the UK, for example the North East and West Midlands, have both a high volume of energy inefficient homes and high levels of unemployment.² Investing in energy efficiency will create jobs across the country, often in areas that need it the most – providing local jobs for local people.

Research highlights how improving energy efficiency can help “level up” the UK. A clear retrofitting strategy can support not only a significant number of jobs, but also aid business growth. Additionally, the benefits of energy efficiency improvements would also be felt by residents with household savings on energy delivering wider multiplier benefits for local economies.³

Young people are likely to be disproportionately affected by the economic impact of COVID-19, however, investing in education and training on energy efficiency and retrofitting for school leavers provides an opportunity for a highly skilled, well paid job for life.⁴

For employees unable to return to sites due to pandemic health and safety, they should be encouraged to undertake training and education on net zero construction and retrofit, for example, training to become a retrofit coordinator. This is an opportunity to drive the upskilling of the workforce and create a high quality, professional, cost competitive construction sector.

Adequate training and education are key to ensuring a safe and reliable construction sector

The Government has a key role to play in ensuring that the UK has the relevant skills and expertise to do retrofit safely and effectively. To achieve this, the Government must include, as part of the National Retrofit Strategy, adequate training and education to guarantee competence and skills within the supply chain.

¹ EEIG, *Rebuilding for Resilience*, https://www.theeeig.co.uk/media/1096/eeig_report_rebuilding_for_resilience_pages_01.pdf, June 2020, pg. 9

² EEIG, *Rebuilding for Resilience*, pg. 10

³ IPPR North, *Northern Powerhomes: A green recovery plan to decarbonise homes in the North*, <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-11/decarbonising-housing-nov-20.pdf>, November 2020, pg. 29

⁴ Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit, *Britain's homes hold the key to rebooting the economy*, <https://eciu.net/blog/2020/britains-homes-hold-the-key-to-rebooting-the-economy>

This has been done in other countries, such as New Zealand. In their response to COVID-19, allocated NZ\$1.1 billion (£0.55 billion) as part of an environmental jobs package, and a further NZ\$1.6 billion (£0.8 billion) over four years for trades and apprenticeship training.⁵

The Government should play a fundamental role in safeguarding consumers and ensuring that energy efficiency improvement works meet the highest standards. The announcement that the Green Homes Grant would only apply for tradespeople who are part of the TrustMark accreditation scheme is a very positive development. However, further funding for training and education is key to ensuring quality and safety for those entering the market.

Recommendations:

- The Government bring forward a National Retrofit Strategy which sets out a clear trajectory for retrofitting our homes, to help create thousands of new green jobs.
- The Government must include adequate training and education to ensure competence and skills within the energy efficiency supply chain.

Undertaking Post Occupancy Evaluation can create jobs and improve the energy efficiency of the built environment

It is vital that building owners and users gain a better understanding of how their buildings are performing compared to the design intention. Even when a building's design has energy efficiency at its heart, the promised energy efficiency standards are not always met.

Undertaking Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) is key to ensuring that a building is as energy efficient as intended. POE is the process of obtaining feedback on a building's performance in use after it has been built and occupied. POE accurately measures factors such as energy consumption, water usage, maintenance costs and user satisfaction.

The Government should not only promote and endorse POE but require POE as a condition of procurement of public funding for building projects. This is essential for transparency of how public money is spent, but also provides data that can be shared and learnt from, allowing for continuous improvement on energy efficiency within the built environment.

POE requires a professional to undertake the work, providing employment opportunities. Measuring the energy performance of our buildings in use, through POE, can help create new jobs and help improve the energy efficiency of the built environment.

Recommendation:

- The Government should require POE as a condition of procurement of public funding for building projects to create new green jobs.

⁵ EEIG, *Rebuilding for Resilience*, pg. 17