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Green jobs for a green future

By Nicholas Wyman



Can sustainability bridge the gap between high youth unemployment and the countries growing need for skilled workers?

Green jobs are the jobs of the future and vital for transitioning to a lower carbon economy. A systemically green approach to industry and commerce brings environmental benefits and may encourage disengaged and unemployed young people to enter the workforce.

Green jobs are often understood to be those that have a direct impact on our environment in reducing carbon emissions, developing alternative energy sources or reducing water usage. In fact, green jobs are those jobs embracing 'skills for sustainability', with an inbuilt sensitivity to the needs of the environment. Such skills must be embedded in all jobs, in all sectors in the 21st century.

Organisations such as ACF, the Dusseldorf Skills Forum, and the Australian Council of Trade Unions have all identified the green economy as an opportunity to expand employment (see ACF's report *Creating Jobs, Cutting Pollution* at www.actonline.org.au). The green economy will require both new skilled occupations and skills development in traditional occupations. The green economy will grow through the creation and expansion of innovative organisations that offer solutions based on skills and technology.

There are three drivers for this innovation: Global warming and measures to address climate change; customer demand for products and services that minimise their environmental footprint; and the need to restore and rehabilitate environmental mistakes of the past. These drivers will give rise to real employment opportunities.

Like many countries, Australia faces the challenge of high youth unemployment and disengagement yet according to Skills Australia, the nation will need 2.4 million new workers with Certificate III level skills by 2015, and 5.2 million by

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2025 due to projected retirements. Yet, given the number of young people in the labour pipeline who are achieving those levels, many forecasted positions will not be filled, hamstringing growth in many sectors.

Can sustainability bridge the gap between high youth unemployment, disengagement and the country's growing need for skilled workers?

The Australian Government had aspirations for every one of the country's 450,000 apprentices and trainees to have at least one sustainability module embedded in their training program. In the two years since the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the Green Skills Agreement, the capacity of response from the vocational education and training sector remains mixed. It has had limited success creating awareness amongst employers and educational institutions about the importance of skills for sustainability. There is still a gap between the needs of the environment and the country's economic drivers.

Young people may be a group most motivated to protect and preserve the environment. There is a definite interest in sustainability within this generation, with good depth of knowledge presenting an opportunity to employers to engage more young people in work they will find meaningful and fulfilling. In return, they will get the interest and engagement they seek from every employee.

Finding apprentices and trainees with an interest in the environment enables employers to better attract, retain and develop the next generation of skilled workers. Committing to developing skills for sustainability and creating greener jobs that attract and engage young people is the way for employers to go good for their business and do good for the environment.

Nicholas Wyman
is CEO of WPC Group.

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Time to throw open your doors and bridge the divide between indoors and outdoors now the weather is warming up. **Sarah Johnson** tells us how.

Just as the bright weather encourages us to air out our home so too does the urge to dig, toil, mulch and sow. Spring is a time of rejuvenation and is the best time to get garden beds and soils ready for a productive year.

Get rid of unwanted stuff

Give your garden a good clean and airing. It is the perfect time to get rid of weeds before they too start to take hold with the onset of spring. Hand weed or hoe out new and emerging weeds. This will help aerate the soil too, and get it ready for fertiliser.

Get beds and soil ready to grow stuff

Good soil is essential to a healthy and productive garden. Spring is the best time of year to give your garden a good dose of fertiliser. Once you have weeded and aerated your soil, use compost or castings from your worm farm to turn through the soil. If you don't have either of these, you can purchase some great chemical free fertilisers from your local hardware store, or often on the side of a country road.

Plant stuff

Early spring is the best time to plant vegetables, whether you're starting a new garden or popping some herbs in a sunny window box. Vegies and herbs to plant now (or after the last frosts in frost-prone areas) include summer salad vegies such as tomato, snow peas, capsicum, chilli, lettuce, cucumber, basil, rocket and parsley. Now is also the time to protect your ripening fruit.

Mulch stuff

Mulch the garden beds with clean straw, pea straw or other organic mulches to keep young seedlings and roots moist through summer. Organic mulches have the added benefit of helping to improve the soil structure.

Prune stuff

Plants that have already bloomed or have frost damage can be pruned to encourage new growth. Remove old cane from perennials and grasses to make way for fresh spring growth. To keep shrubs, perennials and annuals in bloom over the months ahead, remove spent flowers regularly.

For more tips on getting the best from your garden this spring visit:

www.diggers.com.au
www.gardenate.com
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