



THE EXPERIENCE



GAP

Ireland's Renewable Energy Workforce

The people, skills and experience behind Ireland's clean energy ambitions

Solar Ireland | 2026

Research delivered with

Collins McNicholas
Recruitment & HR Services Group



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With thanks

A special thank you to Michelle Murphy and the team at Collins McNicholas for their partnership, expertise and support in bringing this research together.



Foreword

We spend a lot of time talking about the infrastructure Ireland needs for the energy transition: more renewable generation, more grid, more storage, more electrification.

But behind every solar farm, rooftop installation, battery project and grid connection are people: people designing projects, getting them through planning, financing them, building them, connecting them and keeping them running. And we're going to need more of them.

Almost 90% of employers responding to our survey expect their workforce requirements to increase over the next 6–18 months, and looking two to four years ahead, that rises to more than 92%. Nobody who answered either question expects their workforce needs to fall.

That's a huge opportunity for Ireland. These are skilled jobs, in a growing industry, supporting infrastructure the country needs.

But this research also gives us an early warning. Employers are already finding some of the people they need difficult to recruit, and the biggest challenge isn't quite what we expected. It's experience.

Almost three-quarters of employers say lack of experience is making recruitment difficult, ahead of the 60% who point to skills shortages more generally. Engineers and project managers are particularly difficult to find, but the same story appears across planning, grid, electrical and other specialist roles.

“ We talk a lot about the infrastructure Ireland needs to build. We need to start talking just as seriously about the people who are going to build it.

Ronan Power, CEO, Solar Ireland

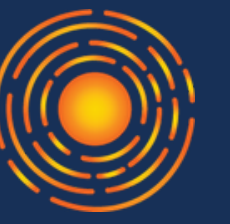
This isn't a reason to question Ireland's renewable energy ambition. Quite the opposite. Industry is telling us what it needs, and it's telling us before the problem becomes more acute. That gives Government, industry and education providers an opportunity to act.

We can build better pathways into renewable energy, help people gain practical experience more quickly and make it easier for people from other industries to bring their skills into ours. We can also do a much better job of showing people just how many different careers exist within this sector.

The energy transition is already creating opportunities across Ireland. Now we need to make sure people can see them, access them and build careers from them.

Ronan Power
CEO, Solar Ireland





The story in six numbers

74%

say lack of experience is making recruitment harder.

That makes experience the most frequently identified recruitment barrier, ahead of a general skills shortage at 60%.

51%

say engineers are among the hardest people to recruit.

Project managers are close behind at 47%.

89.7%

expect their workforce needs to grow over the next 6–18 months.

Nobody responding expects them to decrease.

92.3%

expect growth over the next 2–4 years.

More than a third expect that increase to be significant.

60%

say existing training and education pathways meet their needs only sometimes or rarely.

59%

say increasing training and education capacity would help support workforce growth.

Percentages relate to respondents answering each individual question. See About the Research.



A growing industry needs a growing workforce

Ireland's renewable energy industry is already a significant employer.

Analysis compiled for this report estimates that solar and onshore wind currently support approximately **10,500–11,500 direct and indirect jobs**, with further growth expected towards the end of the decade. Solar alone is estimated to support between **5,480 and 6,440 jobs today**, rising to approximately 7,130 by 2030.

And that's before we consider the full scale of employment that will be required across offshore wind, electricity networks, storage and the wider zero-carbon economy.

Our survey tells us employers are already looking ahead. Over the next 6–18 months, **89.7% expect their workforce requirements to increase**, and around one in four expect that increase to be significant.

Look further out and the direction becomes clearer still: over the next two to four years, **92.3% expect to need more people**, including 38.5% expecting significant growth.

89.7%

expect workforce requirements to increase over the next 6–18 months.

92.3%

expect to need more people over the next two to four years.

Not one respondent expects workforce requirements to decrease.

“ This isn't a problem we should wait to have. Industry is telling us now that it expects to need more people, and it's telling us where the pressure points already are. That's an opportunity. We have time to build the pipeline before it becomes a brake on delivery.

Ronan Power, CEO, Solar Ireland

The question, then, isn't whether renewable energy will need more people. It's whether the workforce can grow quickly enough, and whether those people will have the experience employers need.



The experience gap

74%

identify lack of
experience as a
recruitment challenge

60%

pointed at skills
shortages generally

There is a lot of conversation about Ireland's skills shortage, but our research suggests the picture in renewable energy is slightly different. **Skills matter, but experience is proving even harder to find.**

Among employers answering the question, **74% identify lack of experience as a recruitment challenge**, compared with 60% pointing to skills shortages more generally.

Competition for people matters too. Almost half cite competition from other employers, while 44% point to salary expectations. But the experience finding stands apart.

For us, this is the most important finding in the report.

Employers need people with the right qualifications, of course, but they also need people who have delivered projects, worked through planning and grid processes, managed construction, commissioned infrastructure or dealt with the problems that inevitably arise when complex projects move from a drawing board into the real world.

That's much harder to teach in a classroom. And it's particularly difficult for a young, fast-growing industry because the number of people in Ireland with five or ten years of renewable energy experience is inevitably limited.

One employer put the grid challenge very simply:

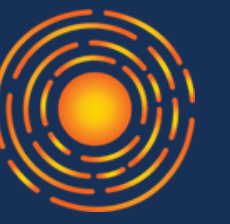
“

Grid is all about experience. A course won't get you that.

Survey respondent

Another employer described project management as requiring a “**multi-year development track**”, rather than a single course or qualification. Training still matters. The challenge is what happens after it.

That doesn't mean training isn't important. Quite the opposite. It means we need to think more carefully about what happens after the training.



Where are people hardest to find?

Some roles appeared again and again in the responses.

51%

Engineers

Electrical, grid, renewable energy, civil and high-voltage engineers all feature strongly here. Engineering is the most frequently identified hard-to-recruit category in the survey.

47%

Project Managers

Project managers are almost as difficult to find, which isn't surprising when you look at what the job actually involves. Renewable energy project managers can be responsible for bringing together engineering, construction, planning, grid, commercial requirements, contractors and stakeholders, often over several years. It's a role where experience matters.

30%

Environmental & Planning Specialists

Planning was one of the themes that kept appearing, even when we weren't specifically asking about planning. Respondents mentioned planners, planning consultants, EIAR specialists, ecologists and people with experience navigating planning applications for renewable energy and grid infrastructure. That raises an important point: planning isn't only a policy and process challenge, it's a people challenge too. We can improve legislation and processes, but we also need enough people, in both the public and private sectors, who understand the system and can make it work.

26%

Electricians

Electricians are another area where employers report recruitment difficulty, alongside technicians, commissioning expertise and other specialist electrical capabilities.

As Ireland electrifies more of its economy, those skills will be needed well beyond renewable generation itself.



Hiring is already taking time

The experience gap has a practical consequence: jobs don't always fill quickly.

39.5%

typically take 1–3 months to fill a role

39.5%

typically take 3–6 months to fill a role

14%

typically take more than 6 months

For more than half of employers, filling a role generally takes at least three months.

Almost four in five employers responding to the question say it typically takes **between one and six months** to fill a role. Some 39.5% say one to three months, another 39.5% say three to six months, and 14% say recruitment typically takes longer than six months.

Put another way, for more than half of employers, filling a role generally takes **at least three months**.

For an established organisation with hundreds or thousands of employees, that can be frustrating. For a 20-person business trying to deliver several projects at once, it can be something much more significant.

“ At Collins McNicholas, we're seeing the renewable energy sector accelerate faster than the talent pipeline can keep pace with. What stands out is that the constraint isn't simply about qualifications or attracting people into the sector. It's the depth of experience employers need, and smaller, growing businesses can feel that particularly acutely.

Michelle Murphy, Director, Collins McNicholas



The experience gap hits smaller employers differently

62%

of respondent organisations employ 50 people or fewer in Ireland.

10%

have more than 500 employees.

There's another part of this story that's easy to miss. Most of the organisations responding to our survey aren't enormous utilities: 62% employ 50 people or fewer in Ireland, and only 10% have more than 500 employees.

That's important because smaller companies are competing for many of the same engineers, project managers and specialists as much larger employers.

A big organisation can run a graduate programme, rotate someone through several teams and projects, and carry a role for longer while somebody builds their experience. A growing business of 15, 20 or 30 people may not have that luxury.

And that opens up a much more interesting conversation than simply asking how we train more people.

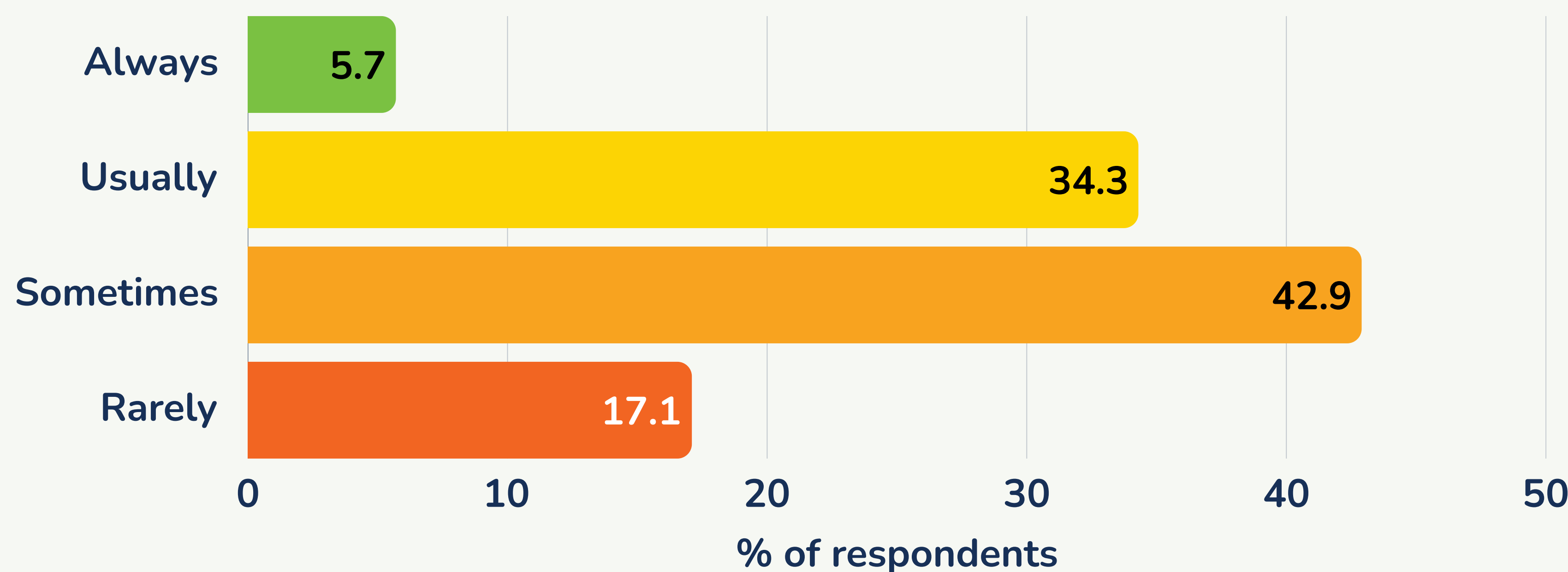
Could companies share graduate programmes?
Could smaller businesses participate in sector-wide placements?
Could apprentices gain experience across several employers?

Those are questions worth exploring.



Training matters. But training alone isn't enough.

Do current training and education pathways meet employer needs?



We asked employers whether current training and education pathways meet their needs. Only 40% say they do always or usually. The largest group, 42.9%, says sometimes, and a further 17.1% says rarely.

We shouldn't read that as a criticism of Ireland's education system. Renewable energy is moving incredibly quickly. Technologies change, regulations change and the skills needed on projects change with them. The challenge is making sure training can move as quickly.

Employers point to gaps or pressures around grid, commissioning, electrical engineering, solar-specific knowledge, planning, project management and practical construction experience.

Battery storage also appears in the qualitative responses, with one employer describing there as being “**virtually no training on BESS**”. That is one employer's experience rather than evidence of the national training landscape, but it is exactly the kind of signal industry and training providers should be examining as newer technologies scale.

And when we asked employers what would help, their first answer was clear: 59% selected increased training and education capacity, making it the most frequently chosen intervention. But training was only part of the answer.

59%

selected increased training and education capacity as something that would support workforce growth.



There isn't one way into renewables

Ways in	Skills & experience	Where they can lead
Apprenticeship	Electrical & technical	Installation, O&M, commissioning
Further education	Technical & operational	Technician, site & operations
University	Engineering, environmental, commercial	Engineering, planning, development
Construction	Project & site experience	Project delivery
Infrastructure & utilities	Grid & engineering	Grid, connections, project management
Finance, legal & professional services	Professional expertise	Investment, commercial, advisory
Technology & data	Digital capability	Controls, optimisation, smart energy

One of the risks when we talk about a “renewable energy workforce” is that people immediately picture engineers in hard hats.

We need those engineers, and we need electricians too. Lots of them. But look across a renewable energy project and you'll also find planners, ecologists, project managers, lawyers, finance teams, technicians, policy professionals, commercial teams, communications specialists, construction professionals and many more.

Some will have known from school that they wanted to work in energy. Most won't.

“ When we talk about the renewable energy workforce, people often picture engineers and electricians. We absolutely need both, but the energy transition isn't delivered by engineers alone. It needs planners, project managers, environmental specialists, commercial teams, policy experts, technicians and people with skills we haven't traditionally associated with energy.

There isn't one pathway in either. It might be university, an apprenticeship or further education. It might be someone bringing ten years of experience from construction, infrastructure, finance or technology into renewables. If Ireland needs thousands more people working in this sector, we need to make those routes much more visible.

Priscila Mc Geehan, Director of Communications & Strategy, Solar Ireland

Building the workforce isn't only about training more people. It's also about helping more people see that there might be a place for them in it.



From learning to doing

If experience is what employers need most, the obvious question is: how do people get it?

38% greater industry-academic collaboration as something that would support workforce growth

For someone starting their career, it might be an apprenticeship, graduate programme, internship or industry placement. For an engineer or project manager coming from construction or another infrastructure sector, it might be a shorter conversion programme combined with experience on a renewable energy project.

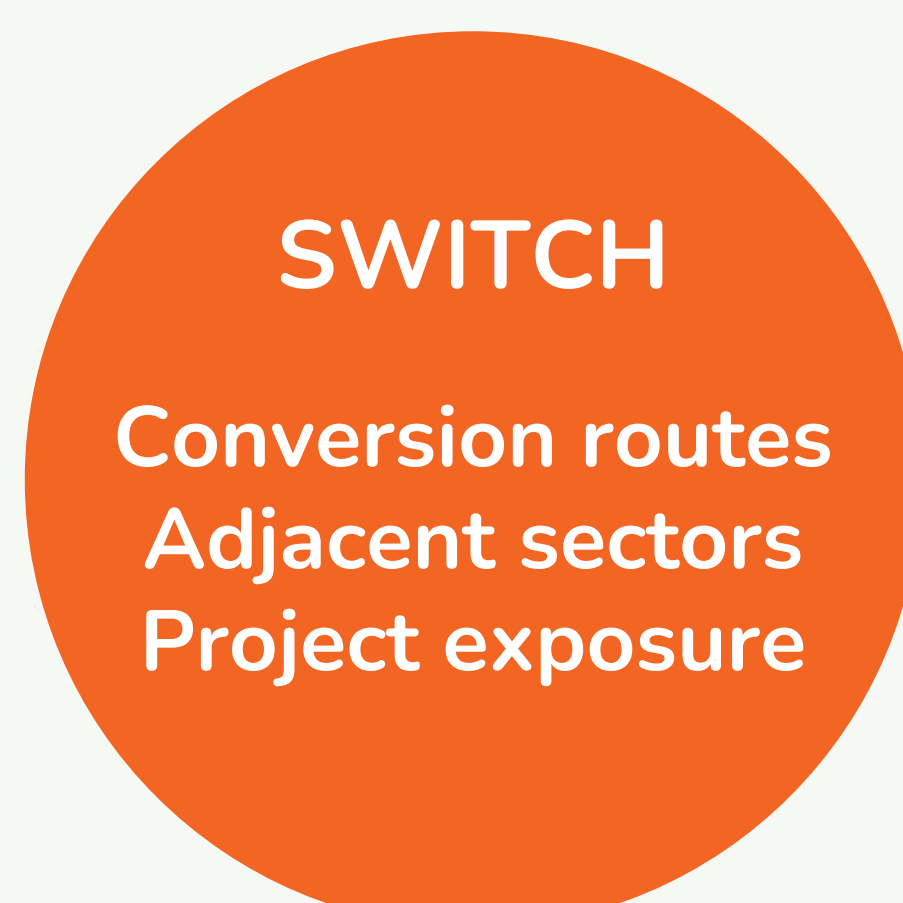
For someone already working in the sector, it could be specialist CPD in grid, planning, commissioning, storage or another emerging area.

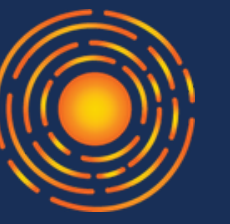
And for some roles, there simply isn't a shortcut. Experience comes from delivering projects over time.

The challenge is to create enough opportunities for people to start building that experience. This is where employers, universities, technological universities, further education providers, Skillnets, professional bodies and Government all have a part to play.

Industry has to be involved too. We cannot ask education providers to produce "industry-ready" people without being clear about what industry actually needs, or without giving people somewhere to gain that experience.

38% of employers selected greater industry-academic collaboration as something that would support workforce growth. That's a useful starting point.





Ireland will still need international talent

Building more capability at home doesn't mean closing the door to expertise from elsewhere. Quite the opposite.

Employers tell us they are already recruiting internationally for solar design engineers, high-voltage specialists, project and construction managers, EPC expertise, asset management, commissioning, grid and other specialist roles.

Some of that reflects how quickly Ireland's market has developed. In areas such as larger commercial solar and storage, employers told us that the depth of experience they need simply hasn't existed domestically for long enough.

International expertise helps fill that gap and can help build knowledge and experience in the Irish market. But it can't be the whole strategy.

What they do show is that employers see building training and education capacity in Ireland as a central part of the longer-term answer.

59%

increased training &
education capacity

47%

financial incentives
& supports

38%

industry-academic
collaboration

21%

faster visa & permit
processes

Respondents could choose several answers. These figures should not be read as employers choosing domestic training instead of international recruitment.



What about where people work?

51.3%

say there are particular regions in Ireland where it is more difficult to source talent.

Note: employers could select more than one region.

Dublin

51.3%

South

25.6%

North West

17.9%

South East

15.4%

West

15.4%

Midlands

12.8%

Just over half of employers say there are parts of Ireland where sourcing talent is more difficult. While the challenges vary by location, it's another sign that workforce planning needs a regional lens too.

Renewable energy projects are being developed across Ireland, creating opportunities for jobs and investment well beyond the major urban centres. But for that opportunity to translate into long-term regional employment, people also need access to the training, skills and pathways that allow them to build careers in the sector.

Regional training, further education, apprenticeships and stronger links between local employers and education providers can all be part of that picture.

If renewable energy investment is going to create long-term economic value in communities across Ireland, careers should be part of that value too.



So, what do we do next?

There isn't one solution to the workforce challenge, and it isn't the Government's problem to solve alone.

The survey points us towards some obvious places to start. Employers want more training capacity, stronger links between industry and education and more opportunities to build practical experience. They are also telling us to pay particular attention to engineering, grid, planning, electrical skills and project delivery.

GOVERNMENT

can help create the conditions for that to happen at scale.

That means looking at how training and workforce supports respond to a fast-moving industry, how smaller employers can participate, and where specialist capability needs particular attention.

INDUSTRY

has responsibilities too.

We need to give people opportunities to work on real projects, be clearer with education providers about the capabilities we need, and invest in developing people rather than competing indefinitely for the same small pool of experienced talent.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

providers are central to this too.

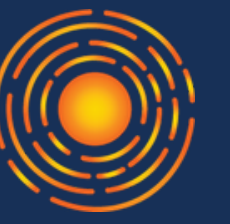
In a sector where technologies, regulations and project requirements change quickly, keeping a close connection between learning and what's happening in industry becomes particularly important.

And all three need to work together.

“ A qualification gets someone through the door. Experience is what gets projects delivered. If employers are telling us that experience is now the bigger challenge, we need to look seriously at how people get from one to the other.

Ronan Power, CEO, Solar Ireland

None of this is beyond Ireland's reach. In fact, knowing about the challenge now is an advantage.



In Conclusion

Does Ireland's renewable energy industry have the people it needs to deliver what the country is asking of it?

The answer from this research is both encouraging and important.

This is a sector building for growth. Nine in ten employers expect to need more people in the near term, rising further over the next two to four years, and not a single respondent expects their workforce requirements to decrease. These are skilled careers supporting infrastructure Ireland has already decided it needs.

But perhaps the most valuable insight from this research is that the industry has told us where one of its biggest pressures lies, and it is not necessarily where the wider conversation tends to focus.

The defining recruitment challenge identified by employers is not simply qualifications or skills. It is practical experience. It is the distance between learning how something is done and having the opportunity to do it. It is the knowledge that develops through working on real projects, alongside experienced people, and encountering the realities that formal education alone cannot replicate.

That should shape how we think about the workforce challenge. Training capacity matters, and employers have told us that more of it would help. But this research also points to the importance of turning learning into doing: **creating more opportunities to gain experience on real projects, providing earlier exposure to the sector, opening pathways for people bringing experience from construction, infrastructure and other industries, and enabling smaller employers to play a part in developing talent rather than simply competing for the same limited pool.**

None of this is the responsibility of any one organisation, nor does it necessarily require one grand initiative. There is an opportunity for Government, industry and education and training providers to consider together how existing programmes, placements and supports can create stronger connections between learning and practical experience.

This report is a starting point for that conversation, not a prescription for it. Solar Ireland intends to play its part in bringing those conversations together and exploring what comes next.

Ireland has strong education and training. It has talented people who want to build careers. And it has a renewable energy industry that needs them. The opportunity now is to build a stronger bridge between learning and experience.

IF EXPERIENCE IS THE GAP, HOW DO WE BUILD THE BRIDGE?



About the research

Solar Ireland commissioned the Renewable Energy Workforce & Skills Survey to better understand how organisations across Ireland's renewable energy sector are experiencing recruitment, skills and workforce development. Collins McNicholas delivered the survey on behalf of Solar Ireland, bringing its recruitment and HR expertise to the project and providing additional labour-market analysis to inform the report.

The survey received responses from 50 organisations, although the number answering individual questions varied. Percentages in this report therefore relate to respondents answering the relevant question, rather than the full survey sample, unless otherwise stated. Among participating organisations, 46% primarily operate in solar, 34% identify as multi-technology, 6% primarily operate in onshore wind and 2% in energy storage, with 12% selecting another area.

The respondent base includes businesses of different sizes, although smaller organisations are particularly well represented: 62% employ between one and 50 people in Ireland. The survey provides a snapshot of employer experience within the participating organisations. It is not intended to be a statistically representative assessment of Ireland's entire renewable energy labour market.

ABOUT SOLAR IRELAND

Solar Ireland is the representative body for Ireland's solar industry, bringing together developers, investors, technology providers, installers, professional services firms and organisations working across the solar value chain.

We represent and champion our members' interests, working with Government, policymakers and industry to support the sustainable growth of solar in Ireland. We provide trusted market and policy insights and create opportunities for collaboration, connection and visibility across the sector.

Our work is focused on helping Ireland realise the full potential of solar as part of a secure, affordable and sustainable energy future.

ABOUT COLLINS MCNICHOLAS

Established in 1990, Collins McNicholas Recruitment & HR Services Group is an Irish recruitment and HR services company providing talent and hiring solutions to organisations across a wide range of sectors.

With more than 35 years' experience, Collins McNicholas works with employers and candidates across Ireland, combining recruitment expertise and labour-market insight to help organisations understand and respond to evolving workforce needs.

For this report, Collins McNicholas delivered Solar Ireland's Renewable Energy Workforce & Skills Survey and provided additional recruitment and labour-market analysis to support the research.



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