

DRAFT

SEG Site Visit Notes - Skills Centre, Build East



The key purpose of the Build East Skills Centre is to address skills gaps, create social value, and provide employment opportunities for local people, particularly the young, turning people, and the unemployed, by training them up and connecting them with jobs.

Uniqueness and Specialisation of the Skills Centre

The difference between this centre and NCC (which is a massive organisation, even if they have a presence in Hackney) is the focus. NCC's system is often not for true entry-level people who can't just walk up and start; you often need to be in the industry already. This centre provides a more accessible, specialised provision for those starting out.

The centre is unique, potentially the only one in London, specifically focusing on **insulation** training. This contrasts with broader college offerings or other models, which focuses on replicating training for systems, boilers, and general electrical/plumbing work.

The curriculum is evidence-based, drawing from a study done for the School Barracks. The specific focus on insulation addresses a critical industry need, especially considering issues like damp and mould.

The organisation's overarching value, 'reimagined opportunity,' is to support underserved groups who are often the first to face unemployment due to lack of opportunities or knowledge. The goal is to help them thrive and create a lasting positive ripple effect for their families.

The programme is flexible and adaptable. It can be tailored to pre-employment programmes and other contexts, collaborating with employers to meet demand. The Skill Centre hopes this is the first of many such programmes.

The focus is not just on certification but on filling the knowledge gap and sparking interest. The success stories, like a young woman who, after attending, is now planning to start her own business, highlight the power of showing people what is possible.

The Skill Centre works with industry partners who complain about the skills shortage, encouraging them to take trainees on as apprentices. The process is a two-way transition: the services provide support, but the individuals must also be interested and invested in their progress.

The training acknowledges that individuals come from different places, including those with mental health or neurodiverse learning needs. The approach is to be flexible and meet the "human being" where they are, adjusting the framework to ensure they succeed, rather than rigidly adhering to a structure that would exclude many. When an individual isn't ready, the centre maintains contact and an 'eye on what they are doing next' to draw them back in when they are.



Funding

A significant factor is that the facility is *free* for students because its revenue funding is subsidised by councils, including a large portion of GLA funding.

Student Profile and Entry Requirements

The centre offers **entry-level pathways** for anyone in or outside of London, primarily catering to 16 to 18-year-olds (and 60-plus individuals). Crucially, there are **no entry requirements**, not even GCSEs. The only requirement is a good attitude and commitment. The courses vary in length, from a week to a month, or the duration of an apprenticeship.

The programme's curriculum is practical and hands-on, aiming to get people involved directly. For instance, a session on Wednesday covered the basics of electricity—a sort of "Electricity 101"—including foundational technology and essential health and safety practices for electricians. The philosophy is that learning often comes from making mistakes.

Participants are applying this knowledge by building a small rig designed to use a solar panel to charge a battery, which then powers an inverter to run internal floodlights. The end goal is to see this system turn on.

A key element of the training is developing project management skills through practical application. Roles have been assigned to team members, including a coordinator and a safety lead, and they are utilising these roles during the build.

The programme also seeks to raise awareness of the significant job opportunities in the renewable energy sector, especially in London. Currently, there is a serious labour shortage to meet the growing demand for green energy jobs. The goal is to address this gap by providing exposure and training.

A successful example is a former Hackney resident who went through similar training, then studied mechanical engineering at university. He now works with a sister company, developing battery storage systems using second-life battery cells. He applies his skills globally, training groups in Africa, the UK, and beyond, demonstrating the powerful ripple effect of accessible knowledge and skills.

The Skill Centre's initiative is partly a response to local large-scale solar projects (like those at Lucas Park and Hackney City Hall) where local Londoners were not involved in the installation. The skills centre aims to ensure that Hackney residents benefit directly from the local green economy, making this training accessible and relevant.

The team here, who initially lacked a deep understanding of electrical engineering and solar technology, has combined efforts to grow the workforce and allow participants to find roles they genuinely enjoy and can thrive in.

One individual shared that she was introduced to renewable energy in 2020 after finishing sixth form and has been in the sector for about a year and a half. She found that before her involvement, the sector felt distant and irrelevant to her personal life. She now believes that a lack of personal understanding of how renewable energy can transform lives is a major barrier to engagement.

Industry Engagement and Readiness

The facility works closely with contractors and developers in the area, such as those involved in the LLDC (Olympic legacy development) area. Developers get involved to commission specific courses for their staff.

The central concept is **entry-level pathways** and **pre-apprenticeship training**. Employers are currently saying that many people are **not ready for apprenticeships**, not just due to a lack of GCSEs, but because they lack **industry awareness**. This centre is designed to bridge that gap.

The courses are specialised, as mainstream college courses, even those that have adapted slightly, often still don't sufficiently integrate City & Guilds processes, particularly for those with no prior qualifications.

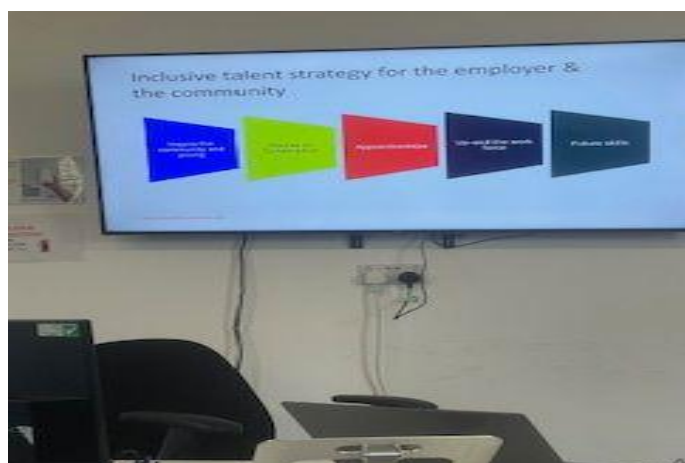
A key goal is to get people to the point of being "job ready," which includes practical industry awareness - for instance, understanding best practices for roof insulation, even when not holding formal qualifications.

They are working to ensure that contracts for local building projects include a requirement for local residents to be on-site and supported with working opportunities. This "build for when they win" strategy is about creating circularity and reducing poverty by safeguarding training opportunities for local people.

The programme can lead to formal qualifications:

- **Pre-employment programmes** provide a minimum of Level 1 in construction and a CSCS card, granting access to construction sites.
- **Boot camps** (e.g., in formwork and cladding/roofing) offer units toward an NVQ, allowing participants to progress incrementally.

A significant event is planned for Wednesday, where different employers (including electricians, cladders, bricklayers, painters, and dry liners) will be interviewing Hackney residents, including the current training group.



Skills Centre, focusing on construction and retrofit training, and its partnership with Hackney Council

The centre's core ambition is to train young, unemployed, and out-of-work people in construction skills and place them into employment, thereby "creating social value by delivering opportunities for local people.

"Strategy and Apprenticeships

The centre operates on five strategies, which primarily focus on inspiring the young community and delivering apprenticeships rooted in construction. The centre targets "in-demand apprenticeships":

- **BLD's Centre:** Formwork and Steel Fixing.
- **Canada Water, Essex, and Edgware Centres:** Groundwork and Highways Maintenance.

- **Essex and Edgware Centres:** Interior Systems (Dry Lining).

They also deliver NVQs from Level 2 to Level 7. The current London centres are supplemented by locations outside London, including Gravesend, Essex, Birmingham, Bicester, and Cardiff. The Retrofit Demand (Hackney Focus)

The centre was approached by Hackney to build a specific centre due to the local demand for retrofit training, driven by the need to retrofit homes across the borough.

Current Issues in Retrofit Training:

- No specific retrofit training is easily accessible.
- High cost to boroughs.
- Lack of qualifications and general public understanding of "retrofit."
- Lack of responsive training providers.

The Demand for Skills (London-wide, including Hackney):

The centre currently delivers a cladding and roofing boot camp, and is looking to train PV installers and Heat Pump installers.

The presenter, a plumber by trade, stressed that heat pumps are only truly efficient when combined with high levels of insulation (roof, floor, cavity walls, windows).

Training and Progression

The training provided is currently at a basic level, aiming to make learners "ready for work, ready for industry," and putting them in front of employers for progression.

Current Training/Programmes:

- Level 1 and Level 2 Insulation courses.
- Pre-employment training (CSCS, Work Ready, Site Ready).
- Boot Camps: Formwork, Steel Fixing, Groundwork & Dry Lining.

These programmes serve as a foundation, with learners progressing to higher-level training once employed.



Impact and Social Value (Hackney Results)

The Skills Centre has delivered Green Skills training to Hackney residents, resulting in:

- **148 jobs** (of which 20 are apprenticeships).
- Successful work placements in roles like dry lining and insulation.

Partnership with Badu and ALP Technologies

The presentation included input from an organisation called Badu, which focuses on social justice, jobs, opportunities, and skills, working with young people and families to tackle intergenerational deprivation.

Badu is transitioning young people into the skills space. A technology offshoot, ALP, was built to address the gaps in the market, focusing on climate action and renewable energy, specifically developing battery storage units. The Skills Centre is working with Badu and ALP to deliver solar panel training.

Funding, Regulation, and Attraction

- **Funding Sources:** Hackney Council (pre-employment), GLA (boot camps), DfE (apprenticeships), and South Bank University (pre-courses for jobs). The centre is heavily reliant on winning competitive funding bids.
- **Regulation:** The centre is regulated by Ofsted and received an **Ofsted "Good"** rating in September 2023.
- **Attraction (Why Choose the Centre over a College?):** The centre has strong ties to employers, offering learners a guaranteed interview or work placement opportunity, not just a qualification. The centre is also highly adaptable, able to quickly change course content (e.g., from electronics to bathroom/kitchen) based on current employer demand.
- **Accreditation:** Courses are accredited by **NOCN** (except for traditional trades like

Plumbing, which would use City & Guilds).

Q&A Highlights

About the Training Centre and Courses:

- **Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs):** There is discussion about the suitability of ASHPs, with the centre representative noting they are expensive to run in inefficient, older buildings but are welcomed for new builds.
- **Course Delivery:** The centre provides Level 1 and Level 2 pre-employment courses (insulation, CSES, work-ready, site-ready), boot camps (formwork, steel, groundwork, dry lining), and apprenticeships.
- **Accreditation:** Courses are accredited by NOCN, which is seen as more flexible than City & Guilds for certain trades like formwork and steel fixing. City & Guilds would be used for plumbing.
- **Level 3 Insulation:** A Level 3 insulation course is mentioned, a 12-week program, done off-site at Orange West and requires Level 1 or 2 as a prerequisite.
- **Adapting to Demand:** The centre tailors its courses (e.g., practical training focus on electrics, or bathrooms/kitchens, or formwork) based on the immediate needs of employers.
- **Job Demand:** The centre shapes its provision, such as running a dry lining course, based on current high job demand.
- **Cladding:** Cladding is a high-demand career, with the centre successfully placing people with cladding companies.
- **Attraction vs. Colleges:** The centre's main advantage over traditional colleges is having employers directly attached, guaranteeing learners an interview and job opportunity, and the ability to adapt courses quickly.
- **School Outreach:** The centre is engaging with Hackney schools to offer construction-related activities and training.
- **Women in Construction:** A specific Women in Construction course is scheduled for the week of March 16th, with guaranteed placements from Ardmore, Durkan, and Berkley. The centre faces challenges in recruitment for these courses and seeks help leveraging Hackney's networks (e.g., newsletters, Start Headlines).

Funding and Regulation:

- **Funding Sources:** The centre is funded by various partners, including Hackney Council (for Hackney residents), the GLA (for boot camps), the DFE (for apprenticeships), and South Bank University (for pre-courses for jobs).
- **Reliance on Bids:** The centre is "solely reliant on winning these bids," with a significant GLA funding wave ending soon, and is awaiting confirmation for the next wave.
- **Regulation:** The centre is regulated by Ofsted, having received a 'Good' rating in September 2023.
- **Company Ownership:** The centre is a private, profit-making company with a small number of shareholders, founded and owned by the CEO, John Howlin.



Employer and Council Relationships:

- **Employer Network:** The centre works with a large number of contractors and subcontractors, and is continuously looking to expand this network.
- **Small Contractors:** The centre is eager to work with smaller contractors (Tier 2 and subcontractors), who actually provide the majority of jobs on sites. Skills Centre welcome the Council's help in facilitating these introductions. Hackney Council was encouraged to facilitate these introductions. There is **no cost** for employers to be involved.
- **Hackney Council Employment:** Currently, the centre has not placed any learners into apprenticeships or jobs directly with Hackney council or Tower Hamlets council housing/service departments.
- **Bespoke Training for Hackney:** The centre is flexible enough to run bespoke courses for Hackney residents/staff (e.g., functional skills, or upskilling council staff in specific trades). Multi-skill course that resulted in five jobs with Ardmore.

Future Plans:

- **Future Location:** The centre anticipates moving in two to three years due to the development of the existing site, but will remain local (e.g., Silvertown, Royal Docks, or Bow Road).
- **Relationship with Hackney:** The Skills Centre does not anticipate the relocation affecting its relationship with Hackney and other 'host boroughs'.

Summary

Key Purposes and Strategies:

- **Social Value and Opportunities:** To create social value by delivering opportunities for local people.

- **Training and Employment:** To train up unemployed people and place them into employment. This is the core motto: "training them up, and then replacing them with employment."
- **Targeted Apprenticeships:** To deliver "in demand" apprenticeships rooted in construction, such as formwork and steel fixing (at this centre), groundwork, highways maintenance, and interior systems (at other centres).
- **Addressing the Retrofit Skills Gap:** A key reason for the centre's location and focus is to address the local demand and lack of specific training in retrofit skills (roof insulation, heat pump installation, etc.) needed for homes across the boroughs, particularly Hackney.
- **Work Readiness:** To provide basic-level skills training to get learners "ready for work, ready for industry," and then connect them with employers for progression and further training.

Key Benefits and Outcomes Mentioned:

- **Jobs and Work Placements:** The centre has resulted in numerous jobs and work placements for local residents (e.g., Hackney residents, 148 jobs, of which 20 are apprenticeships).
- **Employer Connection:** Unlike traditional colleges, the centre has employers attached, providing learners with interviews and opportunities for placement.
- **Adaptability:** The centre can quickly adapt its courses based on the specific needs and demands communicated by employers (e.g., offering courses in bathroom/kitchen fitting or formwork as needed).
- **Partnership with Local Government:** The centre works closely with and receives funding from Hackney Council and the GLA, often running bespoke courses for Hackney residents.
- **Higher Level Progression:** Learners can progress from entry-level (Level 1 and 2) training to higher levels (up to Level 7 NVQs) once they secure employment.

