



RISE

Retrofit information,
support & expertise

Practical steps to partner with Works and Training Organisations

Supply chain advice pack

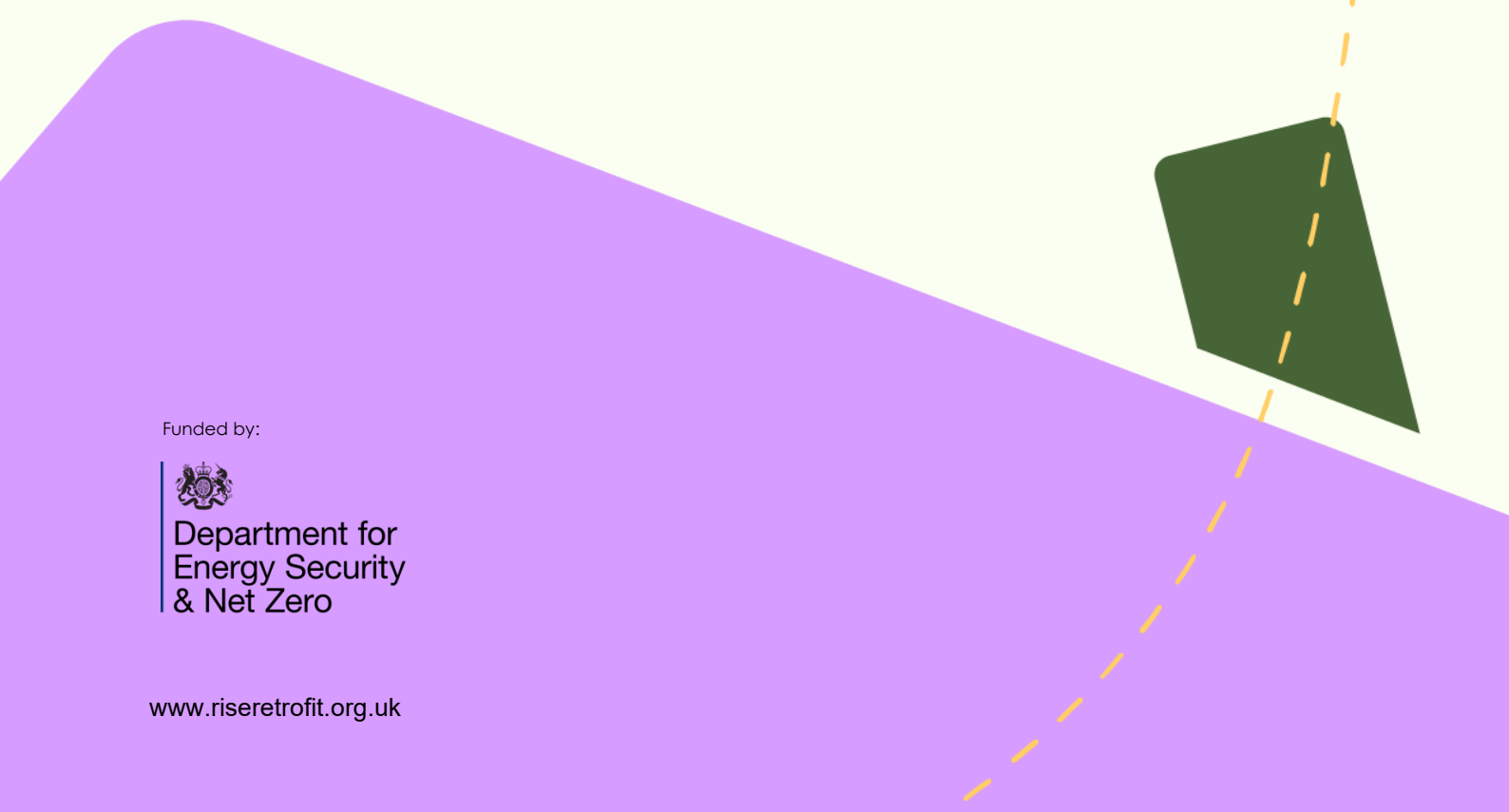
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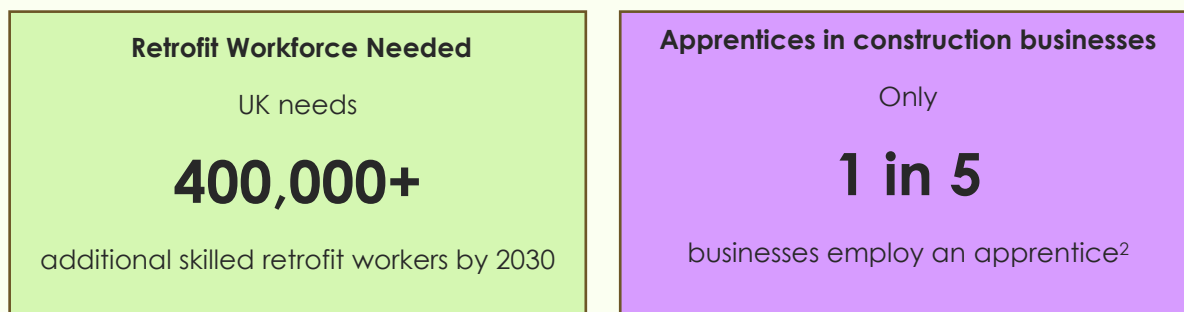
Department for
Energy Security
& Net Zero

www.riseretrofit.org.uk



Introduction

The UK retrofit sector faces a significant labour shortage, with an estimated 400,000+ additional workers needed by 2030 to meet national net-zero and fuel-poverty commitments.¹

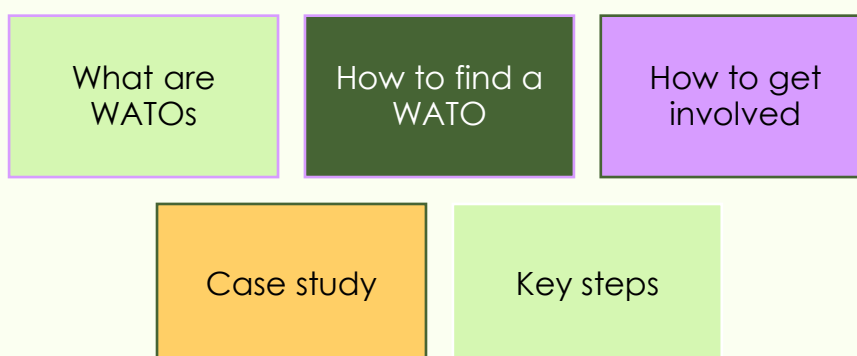


Works and Training Organisations (WATOs) provide a structured, supported route for new entrants who might otherwise face barriers such as:

- Lack of knowledge or experience
- Low confidence
- Limited access to tools, equipment, transport
- Unfamiliarity with construction environments
- Caring responsibilities or flexible-working needs

WATOs help supply chain organisations build larger, more representative, and more resilient workforce while meeting social value commitments.

This Advice Pack will cover -



¹ UK Parliament, Workforce planning to deliver clean, secure energy, available [here](#)

² CITB, Construction Apprenticeships: Challenge. Opportunities. Support., available [here](#)

What are WATOs

WATOs (Works and Training Organisations) are community based organisations that combine hands-on training, pastoral support, and real-world supervised work experience. Unlike traditional training that emphasises classroom learning, WATOs prepare participants for retrofit employment by offering **progressive exposure to live site environments**, while maintaining safety, supervision and learning-focused conditions.

WATOs typically support:

- **New entrants** with limited experience
- **Women** entering male dominated trade environments
- **Young people aged 18–24**
- **People returning to work** after career breaks
- **Career changers** moving from other sectors
- **Individuals facing financial, social or confidence related barriers**

Their model particularly benefits retrofit because the sector requires a **blend of soft and technical skills** - communication with residents, safe working practices, basic tool use, problem-solving, and awareness of PAS 2035 processes. WATOs provide this foundational layer before workers attempt complex tasks in commercial environments.

How WATOs Work

Supported learning environments

- Supervised workshops that mimic real-world retrofit settings
- Gradual progression from observation → assisting → supervised task execution
- Trauma-informed, inclusive approaches prioritising wellbeing

Barrier-free access routes

- PPE, tools, and clothing provided
- Access to travel support, childcare signposting and employability mentoring
- Accessible onboarding redesigned for people with limited experience

Workforce development and employer connection

- Joint training programmes with retrofit installers
 - Employer-designed placements tailored to workforce needs
- Core competencies aligned with retrofit roles (e.g., safe working at height, materials handling, basic retrofit measures)

How to find a WATO

WATOs operate locally and regionally, so the easiest way to find one is to use existing retrofit, skills and training networks that already map community-based training providers.

Common ways organisations identify WATOs include:

- **Local authorities and combined authorities** – many maintain lists of community training providers and funded employability organisations working in retrofit or construction.
- **Regional retrofit partnerships and skills alliances** – networks such as retrofit hubs, training alliances, or local green skills boards often signpost approved WATOs.
- **Industry bodies and national directories** – organisations supporting construction or green skills sometimes hold searchable registries of training and employment-support organisations.
- **Community and voluntary-sector networks** – WATOs frequently emerge from local charities, community workshops, and social enterprises with training facilities.

Where a member of the supply chain can find WATOs

Supply-chain organisations can use several routes to locate nearby WATOs and understand what types of placements or training they offer.

Typical places suppliers and installers look include:

- **Online search directories** – local skills directories, community training maps, and retrofit-skills portals provide listings of nearby WATOs.
- **Local authority retrofit teams** – often know which WATOs are active, funded, or running pilot programmes.
- **Colleges and FE providers** – many partner with WATOs and can direct employers to supported learning pathways.
- **Retrofit networks and forums** – groups involved in PAS 2035 delivery, workforce planning, or social value often collaborate with WATOs and can make introductions.
- **Existing delivery partners** – main contractors or Tier 1 partners may already be working with WATOs and can share contacts or joint-working opportunities.

How to get involved

Partnering with a WATO is flexible and scalable. Retrofit organisations can start small - for example with a one-day workshop - or build a long-term pipeline of trained workers that supports future capacity.

Why get involved



Ways to engage with WATOs

Engagement method	Benefits to Employers
Provide short site-exposure sessions	- Introduces learners to real retrofit environments in a safe, low-pressure way. - Helps candidates understand day-to-day expectations before starting a placement.
Host 1-6 weeks structured placements	- Allows employers to assess learner reliability, motivation, and practical aptitude over time. - Shows how well individuals adapt to existing teams and site routines.
Deliver mock interviews or tool-skills day	- Strengthens employer presence and visibility within local communities. - Builds trust by offering realistic insights into workplace culture and expectations.
Co-design retraining pathways for career changers	- Enables employers to shape training content to match actual workforce needs. - Provides access to motivated individuals bringing transferable skills from other sectors.
Guarantee interviews for WATO graduates	- Creates a dependable, long-term recruitment pipeline aligned with organisational needs. - Reduces reliance on agency staff and helps lower recruitment costs.

Practical tasks WATO trainees can support with

- Materials handling and site preparation
- Loft or cavity access preparation (supervised)
- Basic insulation tasks (non-technical)
- Customer engagement support (leaflets, appointments, simple surveys)
- Documentation support: photographing works, capturing basic data
- Tidy-up work, waste sorting, materials movement

Case study³

Canopy Housing – Leeds³

Project overview:

- **12 properties** being upgraded over **2 years** using a **£200,000 Energy Redress Scheme grant**.
- Delivered with support from **around 150 volunteers**.
- **1,000+ volunteers** engaged over the organisation's 25-year history.
- Volunteers include people seeking DIY skills, future construction careers, and individuals in severe housing need.
- On each project, **one homeless volunteer ("self-helper")** typically works on and later moves into the completed home.



Source: Carbon Copy

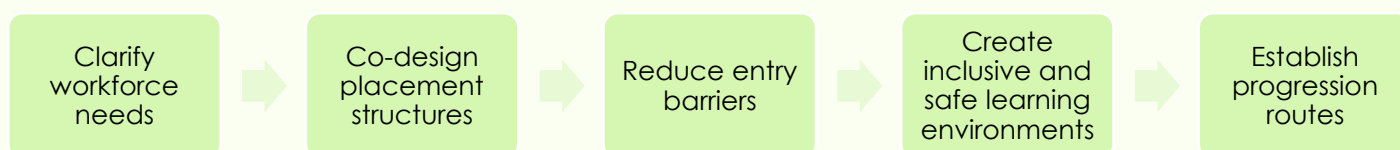
Effective solutions observed:

- **Supervised, hands-on learning environments** that allows volunteers to gain real retrofit skills while contributing to project delivery.
- **Self-help housing model** – homeless renovate the homes they ultimately move into, improving wellbeing, motivation, and long-term housing sustainability.
- **Use of internal insulation and bio-based materials** to improve safety for inexperienced, volunteers, ensure high-quality oversight, and maintain building health.

³ CarbonCopy, Canopy Housing available [here](#)

Key steps for partnering with a WATO

Below is a recommended pathway for supply-chain organisations to begin working with WATOs.



Clarify workforce needs

Map your short and long-term labour requirements:

- General operatives
- Installer assistants
- Future PAS 2035 roles
- Specialist trades

Co-design placement structures

Work with the WATO to agree:

- Duration and frequency
- Expected competencies
- Supervisory arrangements
- PPE/tools requirements
- Learning milestones

Reduce entry barriers

Support learners by:

- Providing PPE and appropriate tools
- Offering flexible start times
- Considering travel vouchers
- Simplifying initial paperwork



This directly addresses the barriers faced by under-represented groups in trades (e.g., perceived treatment, lack of support, or practical constraints) identified in sector research.

Create inclusive and safe learning environments

WATOs adopt trauma-informed, learner-centred approaches. Employers should mirror this through:

- Clear task explanations
- Safe breakout areas
- Zero-tolerance for discrimination
- Respectful guidance and feedback

This is especially important given the persistent gender imbalance and workplace challenges experienced by women in the trades.

Establish progression routes

Plan how WATO learners can move into:

- Guaranteed interviews
- Paid trial shifts
- Apprenticeships
- PAS 2035 roles (Assessor, Coordinator, Installer Assistant)

This helps counter the national skills shortage affecting energy-efficiency and heating-system delivery, where roles remain difficult to fill across the UK.

Summary

WATOs provide a powerful mechanism for building a more inclusive, diverse and resilient retrofit workforce. By offering supervised, supportive pathways into the sector, WATOs help individuals build confidence and competence while enabling employers to access a broader talent pool.

Through thoughtful partnership, inclusive supervision, reduced barriers to entry, and clear progression routes, retrofit organisations can tap into motivated local talent while meeting their social-value commitments. WATOs create routes into meaningful green careers, strengthen community impact, and help deliver high-quality retrofit at scale, ensuring the UK's transition to net zero is both effective and equitable.

Resources



Podcast: All RISE podcasts are available [here](#).

Podcast: "Social value in retrofit" available [here](#).



Masterclass: All RISE masterclasses are available [here](#).

Masterclass "Retrofit Team Roles" available [here](#).



Advice pack: All RISE advice packs available [here](#).

Advice pack: "Apprenticeships in retrofit for the supply chain" available [here](#).



This pack aims to share insights, good practices, and lessons learned from the sector. It is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute as recommendations or endorsements of specific suppliers, products, or services or as legal advice. Please always check the latest regulations.



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