



RISE

Retrofit information,
support & expertise

Upskilling and Supporting Resident Engagement in Leeds

Case study

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Contents

Summary 3

Social value as the starting point.....3

From retrofit demand to local skills.....4

Skills that lead somewhere 4

What does this mean for residents? 5

Resident engagement as part of good retrofit 6

Lessons for the retrofit sector 6

Key takeaway.....7

Summary

The **Real Green Jobs Accelerator – Leeds External Wall Insulation (EWI) Academy** demonstrates how social value can be embedded into retrofit procurement to address skills shortages, create employment and deliver better outcomes for local communities.

Developed alongside Leeds City Council's retrofit programme, the initiative brings together **Efficiency North (EN) Procure, Equans, Leeds College of Building, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, DWP Jobcentre Plus, Enable Futures, Jewson Partnership Solutions, Wetherby Wall Systems and Hamilton Building Contractors**. The partnership connects classroom learning with practical training and live-site experience on retrofit projects in Leeds.

Two cohorts have completed the programme, with **four local learners progressing into employment with Equans and Hamilton Building Contractors**, while others have continued into further learning. The approach demonstrates how investment in retrofit can simultaneously deliver **warmer homes, green skills, employment and wider community benefit**.

Readers that would like this document in a more accessible format should contact rise@turntown.co.uk.

Social value as the starting point

For Efficiency North (EN), social value is not an add-on to retrofit delivery. It is a way of using social housing procurement to generate benefits for the communities in which investment is taking place.

As **Simeon, Head of ESG at EN**, explains:

"Social value matters because it's a means of enabling procurement to deliver additional benefits through the pure works."

EN has therefore invested significant resource over the last four years in employment and skills programmes, with an increasing focus on **retrofit and green construction skills**. This philosophy is embedded within EN's frameworks, where social value commitments are linked to activities including workforce upskilling, work experience, new employment and apprenticeships.

The Leeds EWI Academy puts this principle into practice. Rather than separating social value from the physical retrofit programme, the project uses the demand created by housing investment to create **real training and employment opportunities**.

In Simeon's words:

"The journey to retrofitting and therefore the journey to net zero really just needs a very joined-up approach... focused on skills and focused on getting those homes warm as quickly as possible."

From retrofit demand to local skills

The Academy was created in response to a real skills need. EN estimates that around **700,000 homes across Yorkshire require retrofit**, while the Construction Industry Training Board has forecast a significant additional workforce requirement for External Wall Insulation (EWI) nationally (Source: [EN](#)).

The six-week programme therefore connects training directly to available work. Learners combine classroom and workshop training with experience on **live Equans retrofit sites**, developing both technical competence and workplace confidence.

The partnership makes this possible:

- **EN** connects procurement and social-value commitments to skills delivery.
- **Equans and Hamilton Building Contractors** provide live-site experience and routes into employment.
- **Leeds College of Building** delivers technical tuition.
- **Jewson Partnership Solutions** provides the practical training space, with **Wetherby Wall Systems** supplying materials.
- **Enable Futures and DWP Jobcentre Plus** support recruitment and learners, while the **West Yorkshire Combined Authority** funds the tuition element.

This joined-up model ensures that learners are not being trained without a destination. Every trainee is offered an interview for an entry-level role linked to the Leeds EWI programme.

Skills that lead somewhere

The programme's strongest social-value outcome is its connection between **learning and employment**.

One learner describes the value of learning in a live environment:

"The on-site experience... you take more from that than you would a college, because you are seeing the men doing the process of what they are doing."

After completing six weeks of training, the same learner had already secured employment:

"I've been offered a job, so I start next Tuesday."

Across the first two cohorts, **four Leeds residents have progressed into employment**, working with Equans and Hamilton Building Contractors on EWI projects in the city. But employability is not only about gaining technical competence. Learners also highlighted the confidence and social benefits of participating:

"It's a learning experience, you learn the trade, you meet new people, you get your confidence."

The programme therefore delivers benefits in several areas:

- **Technical skills** – learning how EWI is installed
- **Work experience** – understanding live site conditions
- **Confidence** – becoming comfortable in a professional environment
- **Networks** – meeting contractors, colleagues and other learners
- **Employment prospects** – creating a route into paid work

This is particularly important where people are entering the construction sector from non-linear career backgrounds. One graduate described the opportunity as something that meant a great deal to him and his family and said he wanted to pursue EWI as a career.

This is what makes the programme an example of meaningful social value: **training responds to an actual industry need and provides a credible pathway from unemployment or limited opportunities into the growing retrofit workforce.**

What does this mean for residents?

The purpose of developing retrofit skills ultimately comes back to the people living in the homes being improved.

In Seacroft, Equans is delivering EWI and associated energy-efficiency improvements to **more than 270 Leeds City Council-owned homes**. The works include:

- Loft and external wall insulation across the properties
- New radiators and radiator controls
- Improved ventilation
- Trickle vents and door undercuts
- New kitchen and bathroom fans
- New doors and windows where required
- Re-roofing where required
- Improvements to side extensions and porches

Residents interviewed during the project described properties that had previously been difficult and expensive to keep warm.

One resident explained:

"In winter the house was really cold. We were constantly running the heating... As soon as the heating went off, you felt the heat leave the house...So it was definitely needed, and we're definitely feeling the benefits now."

Another resident reported monthly energy costs reducing from around **£250 to £150**, while residents spoke positively about warmer and more comfortable homes.

There is also a connection between the retrofit programme and the wider neighbourhood. Joseph, a resident who lives locally, reflects:

"I live very local, like five minutes from here, so it's quite nice to see areas I've grown up in my entire life get upgraded and look smart."

This provides an important link between the skills programme and its social purpose. Learners are not simply being taught a construction technique; they are learning a trade that can directly improve people's living conditions. As one learner reflected:

"It helps people because it keeps the cold out... you are saving people on energy costs, you are doing a bit of justice, aren't you?"

Resident engagement as part of good retrofit

The Seacroft experience also highlights that skilled retrofit delivery is about more than technical installation. Working in occupied homes requires communication, respect and an understanding of the resident experience. Residents described receiving regular updates about when contractors would attend and what work would be undertaken, while one resident noted:

"They've been respectful, they've cleaned up after themselves."

Joseph, Equans' Site Manager in Seacroft, describes this as fundamental:

"Good communication and relationship with tenants is absolutely key... without that communication, our job would be next to impossible."

This is an important lesson for workforce development. **A competent retrofit workforce needs both technical and resident-facing skills.** Training and live-site experience can help new entrants understand that successful retrofit is ultimately delivered in people's homes and communities.

Lessons for the retrofit sector

The Leeds experience shows that **social value works best when it is connected directly to delivery**. Retrofit investment creates demand for skills; that demand can create training opportunities; and those opportunities can provide pathways into employment for local people.

The programme also demonstrates the value of partnership. Procurement bodies, contractors, colleges, suppliers, employment services and local government each provide a different part of the pathway. Bringing these functions together turns training into a route towards actual work rather than an isolated qualification.

Most importantly, it connects workforce development back to residents. The ultimate purpose of building retrofit capability is to deliver **warmer, more affordable and more comfortable homes**.

Simeon's reflection captures the wider ambition:

"If you've got a great house that provides a stable place to grow up, if you've got some skills that enable you to go out into the world and pursue your own dreams, that's a great start in life."

Key takeaway

Seacroft demonstrates how retrofit procurement can deliver two forms of investment at once: investment in homes and investment in people. By embedding upskilling and employment into delivery, social value becomes part of how retrofit is delivered – not something added afterwards.

Referenced resources:

[Leeds real green jobs accelerator scheme launches](#)

[How our ESG model is addressing demand for green construction skills and supporting social mobility in Leeds](#)

RISE resources:

[An introduction to social value in retrofit](#)

[Embedding social value in retrofit projects](#)

[Embedding EDI in retrofit: The key to creating energy-efficient homes at scale](#)



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