



Midlands Highway Alliance Plus
MHA, MSIG, WMHA: Moving Forwards Together

Value and Skills

Wednesday 20 September 2023

**Human Capital Management Research
Project Update & Building and Maintaining
Resilience in the Place Workforce**





Future Highways
Research Group



Human Capital Management (HCM) Research Project (Update)

Research sponsored by



Karen Farquharson, Director, Proving Services Ltd
k.farquharson@provingservices.co.uk

Decision Equipped.





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Background to Proving Services

Formed by two directors from Cranfield University School of Management in 2003, joined in 2017 by the Commercial Operations Director of CIPFA.

Proving are research partners of ADEPT.

Developers of sector-leading, research-led tools and processes for the evaluation of strategic options, innovation, business change, value for money and value chain relationships widely adopted by organisations within both the private and public sectors.

In 2016, in conjunction with ADEPT, Proving established the FHRG Future Highways Research Group (FHRG), bringing together over 40 local authority highways service directors in a forum where they discuss, develop and collaborate on strategies aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the sector.

In 2022, the FHRG launched the Human Capital Management (HCM) Research Project aimed at understanding the scale and consequences of the skills and resourcing challenges faced by LHA's and their providers and where possible, identifying potential solutions.

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FHRG Value for Money Assessments

(Impact of the skills shortage)



Staff paid at or typically below market rates.

Increasing (but unsustainable) use of salary premiums.

Long-term use of expensive agency staff.

Increasing reliance on external top-up or outsourcing.

Significant skills gap (capacity & capability).

Staff 'overworked, constant fire-fighting, stressed and low moral'.

Staff fully utilised but not optimised or fully productive.

Strained channels of communication (members & customers).

A 'thin client' leads to a decline in effective collaboration with partners.

Decline in the quality of service provided.

Reduction in the scope and scale of services offered.

Inability to take advantage of revenue generating opportunities.

Decline in customer and member satisfaction.

Repeated service re-organisations.

Focus on short-term operational activities, rather than realising strategic objectives.

Unable to afford, attract and retain specialist skills necessary to deliver strategic objectives, incl:

- Carbon reduction
- Environmental
- New materials
- Digitalisation

Perceived poor performance of service.

Difficult relationships (officers, members, providers).

Pressure to change operating / delivery model.

Increased staff turnover (early retirement).

A year later, the issues identified remain, further exacerbated by inflation, underfunding and competing sectors.

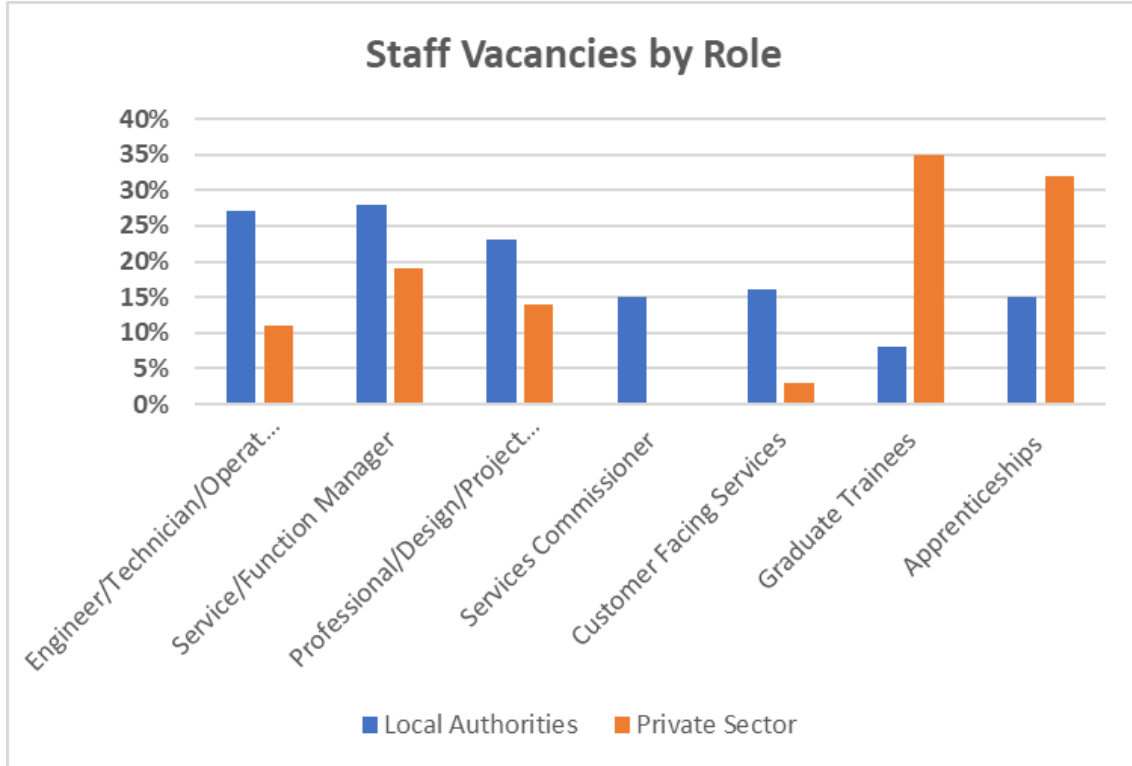


Staff Vacancies & Profile 2022

(Responses : 31 Local Highways Authorities, 5 Private Sector Providers)

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	Local Authorities	Private Sector
Gender Profile - % Men	76%	83%
Ethnicity Profile - White, European, Other	84%	86%
Age Profile		
30 and under	11%	19%
Between 31 and 45	22%	27%
Between 45 and 55	34%	25%
56 and Over	33%	29%

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HCM Survey: Future Skills Required

- Survey participants identified the following skills:
 - Design/repurposing highways (modes of transport/EV infrastructure)
 - Digital (e.g., smart highways)
 - Data analytics
 - Environmental/sustainability
 - Carbon reduction/zero carbon
 - New materials and recycled materials
 - Communications and community liaison specialists
 - Contract / procurement management.
- These skills types are expensive, in high-demand and with low availability.

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Status of Local Highways Authority Sector

- **External sector challenges**

- Cost of living crisis.
 - **Scale of pay is becoming even more critical for staff, particularly for the lower-paid.**
- Increasing difficulty recruiting even agency staff.
- Inflation and energy crisis – operating costs 20%+.

- **The move to fully outsource many (or all) highways services has significantly contributed to the problem.**

- Many LHA's are progressively de-skilling.
- The roles regarded as challenging and interesting have largely been outsourced.
- Heavy reliance on agency staff (up to 50% of professional staff).
- A small client team makes recruitment more challenging.
 - **Visible evidence of a lack of career progression.**
 - **Absence of a team can make it a 'lonely' place to work.**

- **Seeing a steady progression of LHA's to some form of 'Mixed Economy' operating and delivery model.**

- Member preference to retain or move customer facing services in-house, (e.g. re-active and winter maintenance, design services).

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Status of Local Highways Authority Sector (cont..)

- **Recognition that the service needs an adequately resourced and intelligent client / commissioning team.**
 - Commercial and strategic acumen to maximise the VfM realised from external contracts.
 - Increasing emphasis on effective stakeholder management skills.
 - **Member engagement, local knowledge and understanding (communities, network, priorities and constraints).**
- **Suggestion that a purely engineering background may lead to reduced career progression at the very senior levels of local government.**
 - Increasing requirement for experience of 'place' and/or 'environment'.
- **Nearly all LHA's said the skills shortage impacted their choice of service delivery model.**
 - Seeking to increasing the level of external support, but;
- **All private sector responders said the skills shortage impacted their decision on which contracts to bid for.**



Apprenticeships and Training

Recognised across the sector that there are significant challenges in accessing local, quality and relevant training, particularly at operator level.

- Lack of clear and relevant educational and professional progression.
- Groundworker apprenticeships have limited highways content, focus on construction.
- 35 registered apprenticeship providers.
- Closure of level 2 apprenticeships (groundworkers) due to a lack suitable of FE /HE lecturers.
- Lecturers increasingly are not up-to-date in new technologies and technique

Reluctance by some FE colleges to invite sector experts to assist in training. College prerequisite that lecturers have teaching not just presentational skills.

- Some apprentices may require resource intensive pastoral support and care.



Under-40 Roundtable Discussion

- **Good representation from women.**
 - Many had entered the sector by ‘accident’.
 - Keen to build a career in engineering / highways-related services.
- **Flexible working (hours and location) is highly valued.**
 - Willing to take a slightly lower salary.
- **Working for the good of their community and local environment is often an important consideration.**
- **Seeking opportunities for career progression.**
 - Not necessarily linear progression
 - Some seeking portfolio careers.
 - Development of skills and experience in adjacent functions/ sector is seen as highly beneficial.
 - Require financial support and mentoring support from employers.
 - **Improve the quality, content and accessibility of training programmes.**
 - Specifically current apprenticeships, NVQ’s and HNC’s in civil engineering.



HCM Challenges – Viable Solutions

Solutions (Local Authority Perspective)

Raise the Profile / Attractiveness of Sector

Redefine the roles and opportunities.
(Skills, qualifications, background)

Re-consider the channel, placing and content of communications and job advertisements.

Early and active promotion within schools / colleges / universities / apprenticeship schemes.

Talent Development 'Grow Your Own'

Source from a more diverse pool of potential resource.
(Journey to Work)

Actively promote the benefits of working for local government.
(e.g. flexibility /pensions/ security)

Ensure continued skills development and career progression to retain staff.

Provide training and mentoring support.
(Cost and resource implications)

Focused Sector Engagement & Collaboration

Rotational secondments between LHA, private sector and FE colleges / universities.

Jointly develop relevant training programmes and qualifications, particularly at operator level.
(design, funding and delivery)

Develop relationships and partnerships with new sector entrants and specialists.

Skills Sharing (between LHA's, through Alliances)

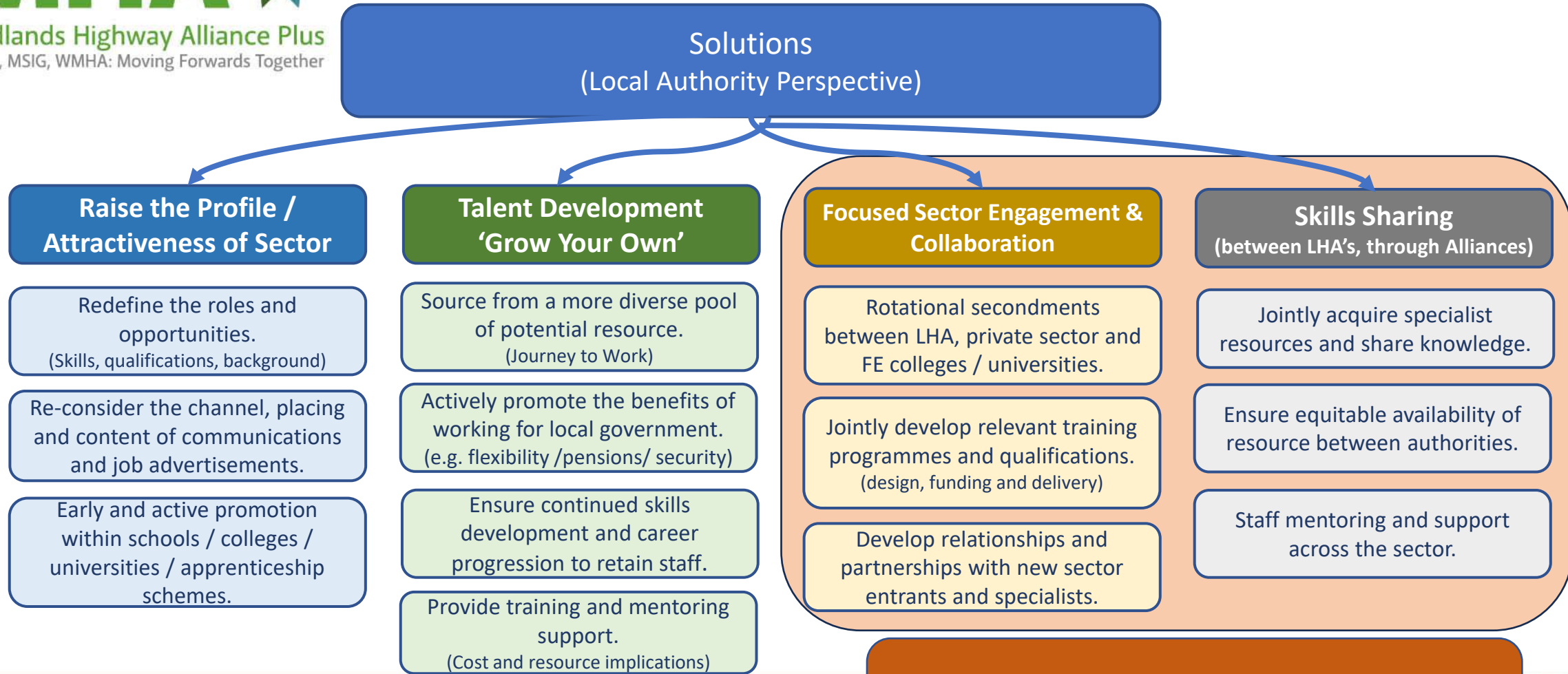
Jointly acquire specialist resources and share knowledge.

Ensure equitable availability of resource between authorities.

Role for sector bodies and alliances?



HCM Challenges – Viable Solutions



Could the MHA+ act as a collaboration agent to help achieve these objectives?



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Sector Initiatives Include:

- **ADEPT / COLAS** (Mark Saunders)
 - Building on the FHRG research, progressing four workstreams:
 - **Staff retention**
 - **Attracting young people to 'Place'**
 - **Equality, Diversity, Inclusion**
 - **Future skills/ jobs**
- **LCRIG**
 - Highways Operative Apprenticeship in conjunction with Salford City College and Salford Council (launched Sept 2023)
 - If successful, replicated across the country.
 - LCRIG Skills: Signposting of Courses
- **Diversity & Social Inclusivity Schemes**
 - E.g., Amey - Journey Back to Work, Supporting Offenders to Gain Skills
- **CIHT, Highways Sector Council, National Highways, England Economic Heartland, West Midlands Skills Academy.**



Building and maintaining resilience in the place workforce

RETENTION & ATTRACTION



Mark Saunders Client Director - Colas



Introduction

- At the ADEPT Autumn Conference, we held a series of workshops relating to workforce issues in place, building on the Future Highways Research Group (FHRG) report on 'Human Capital Management'
- The **TOP 4** issues as voted were:
 - Staff retention
 - Attracting young people to 'Place'
 - Equality, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI)
 - Future skills/ jobs
- Relevant across the industry, here and internationally

Explored in 'roundtables'

1. Recruitment & Retention (Oxford)
2. EDI & Future skills (Chester)



Progress and activity

We wanted to produce discrete deliverables for each

1. **Staff retention** – see later
2. **Attracting young people to ‘Place’** – see later
3. **Equality, Diversity, Inclusion** – ‘personality-driven’ social media campaign (in production)
4. **Future skills/ jobs** – Implication and application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on future roles – ADEPT Autumn Conference and follow up ‘white paper’



DEVELOPING A STAFF RETENTION TOOLKIT





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We learned

- Human relationships/bonds are important
- Pandemic lock downs have profoundly affected the workplace, forever
- People need reasons to stay as well as leave
- It's not all about money

We Need

- A sense of achievement an ability to have an impact and a celebration of success
- Career pathways and variety even if away from current organisation (secondments)
 - Support with health & wellbeing





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Share your good experiences/ campaigns



HELP TO BUILD THE GUIDE

- It will have tips, tools and case studies
- 'Great' practise not 'Best' practise
- It will be a living document
- Contributions welcome
Send to jo.oliver@colas.co.uk
- It will be available in November

GET INVOLVED!



DEVELOPING A recruitment campaign to attract 'Gen Z'





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We learned

- The 'Place' sector is struggling to attract and retain young (16-25) and diverse talent.
- Even if young people found 'Place' and available roles, it wouldn't resonate

We Need

- A Recruitment campaign which raises awareness of roles in Place and encourages young people to enquire and apply



During our discussions, and desk-based research we found 4 key findings

Research

'Place' doesn't land

The majority of people in general do not know what the term 'Place' means and young people in particular do not understand nor relate to this phrase.

Not considered aspirational

Young people don't see working for the Local Authorities as aspirational for a number of reasons.

E.g. Boring/politics/bad reputation.

Living in different worlds

Young people and the 'Place' industry are communicating in different realms.

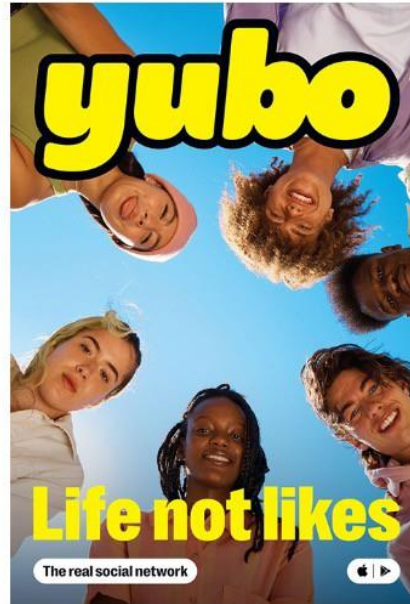
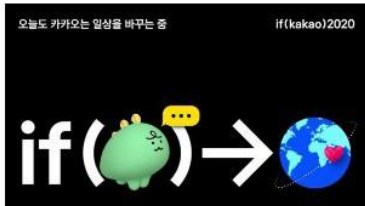
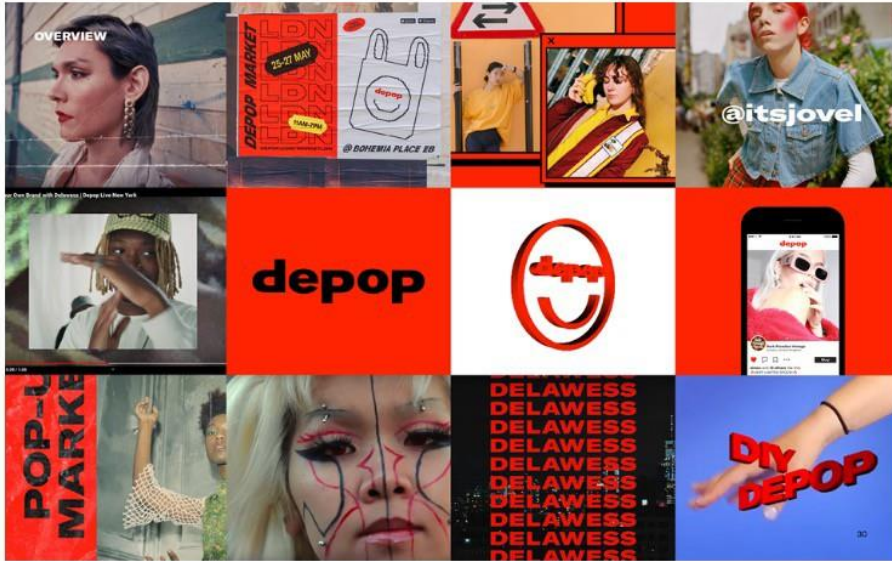
E.g. LinkedIn/Guardian vs Tiktok/Youtube).

Emphasis on the visual/experience

The current aesthetics of the Local Authorities don't cut it with Gen Z who are used to more stimulating design and seamless experiences.



The visual world of Gen Z



The visual world of 'Place'

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BETA Complete an independent survey to [give us feedback](#) about our website.

Seasonal work: advice for finding work this summer

Home: [Explore careers](#) > Bin worker

Bin worker

Refuse collector, waste operative, recycling collector, bin loader

Bin workers remove waste and recycling from homes or businesses.

Average salary (a year) Typical hours (a week) You could work

£17,000 (Starter) to £25,000 (Experienced) 38 to 40 a week evenings / weekends / bank holidays on shifts

LGO jobs.com Local Government jobs

Chief Executive

Apply Bookmark job

Forest of Dean District Council

- Colford / agile working
- Permanent
- Up to £110,000 per annum
- Published on 5 May 2023

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Forest of Dean DISTRICT COUNCIL

Chief Executive

Up to £110,000 per annum

An exciting time to join Forest of Dean District Council

Our district is already a special place, but we need to do more to sustain and enrich our area by making it an even better place to live, learn, do business and enjoy.

To do this successfully we need to build on its rich cultural and economic heritage and to nurture the area, its unique natural environment and amazing people. We want the Forest of Dean district to be a place where residents have a fantastic quality of life and feel secure in their communities - creating a draw for industry to nestle amongst the wild spaces.

A modern, connected Forest with deep cultural roots and a proud history. So join us to celebrate this wonderful area, its towns, its communities, and help them thrive, by delivering good quality well paid jobs, enhancing its education provision, improving housing options and the social mobility of our young people.

About the role

As Chief Executive, you'll be a pivotal part of the representation, promotion and orchestration of the District Council in delivering social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the area.

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Suffolk Jobs Direct

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Giving the feeling that local
authorities (and partners) are

OLD FASHIONED

from a GEN Z perspective



Proposed creative concept

**That's
a job?**

Who knew?

Youtube Shorts/Tiktok ads





**Cindy
makes the
workforce
more diverse**

**That's
a job?**

Who knew?

Find the jobs you never knew existed at
Thatsajob.com

Cindy, 27, Diversity Officer, Nuneaton



1307 01

Jamie, 35, Tree Surgeon, Sheffield

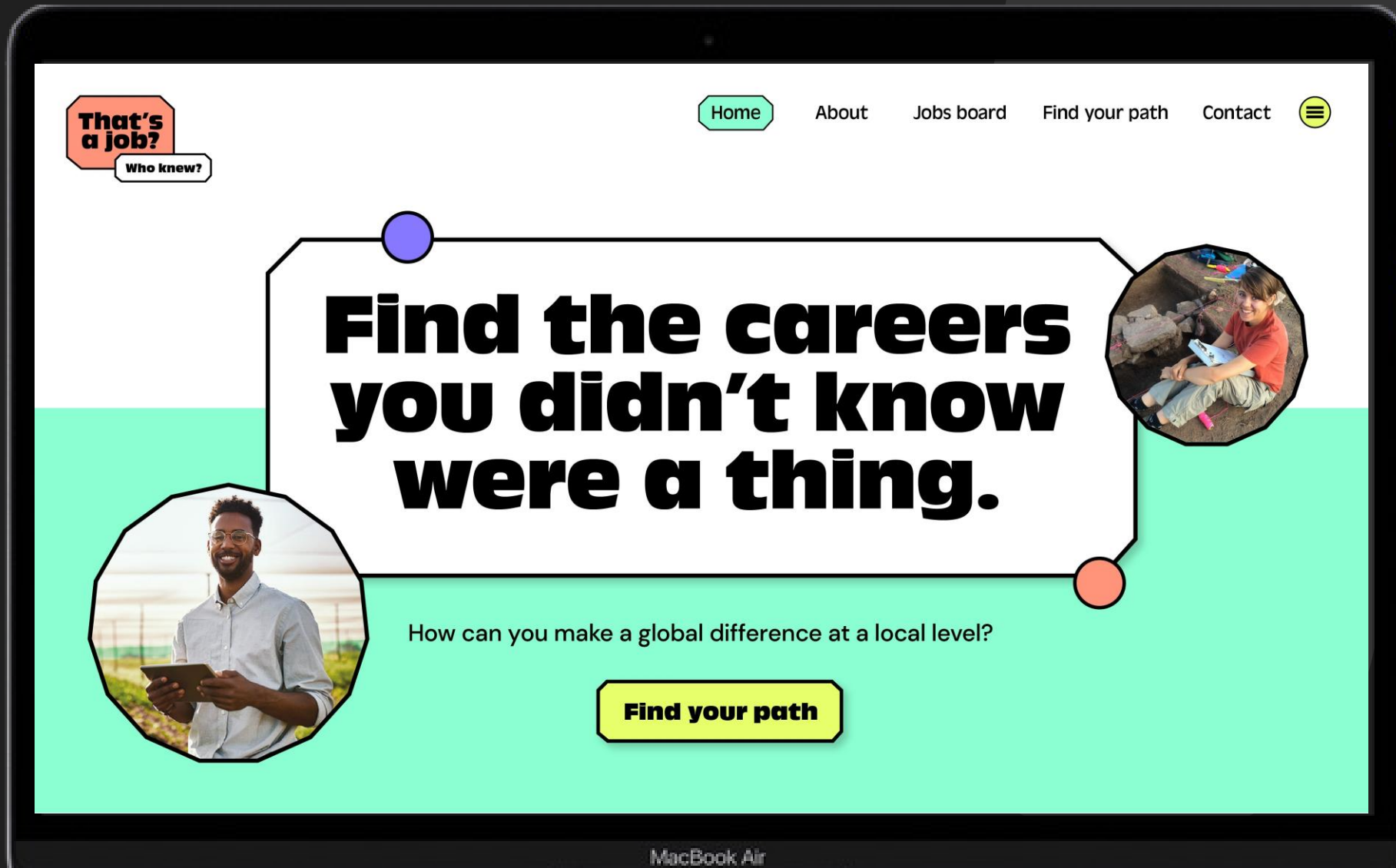
Jamie climbs trees for a living

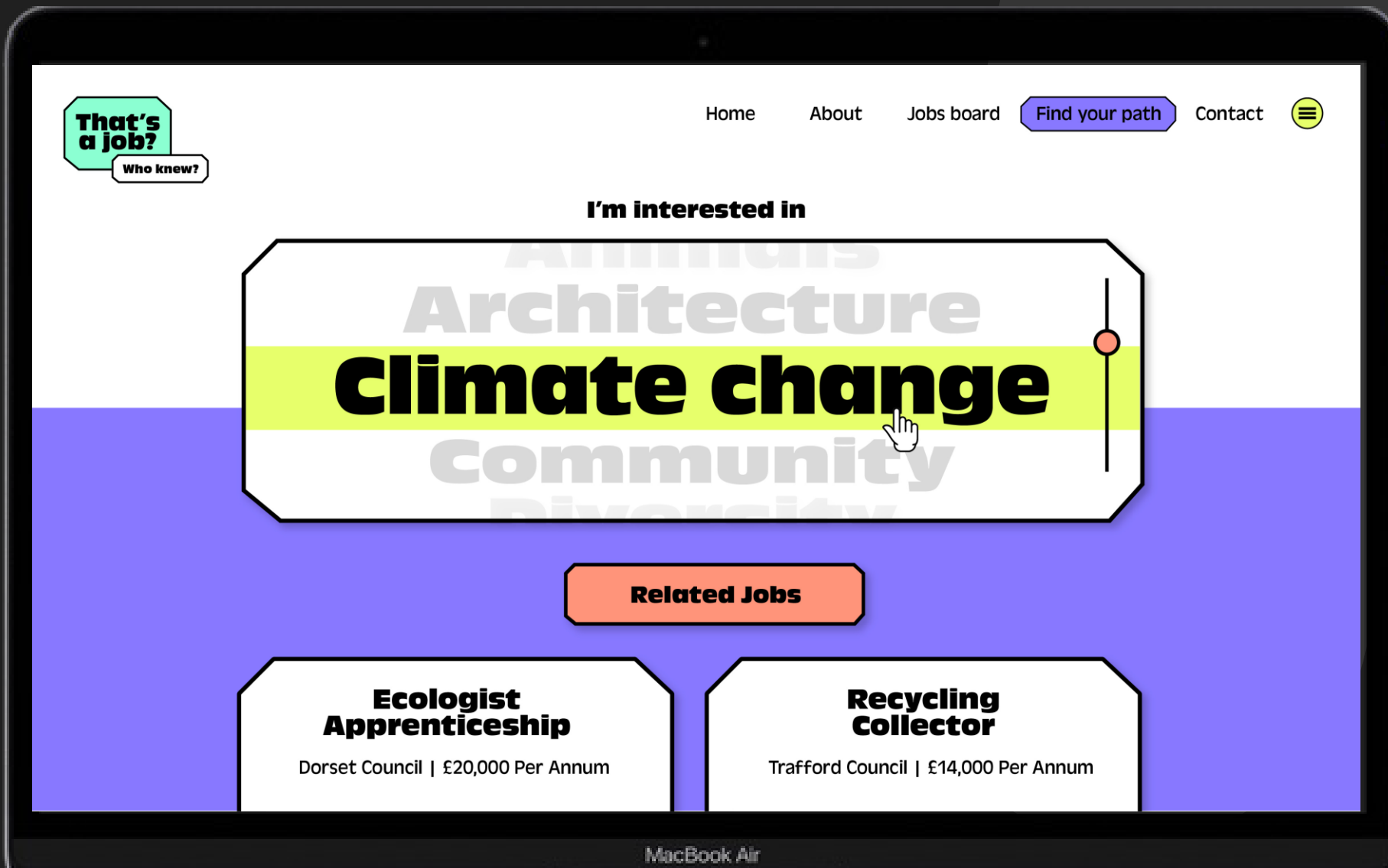
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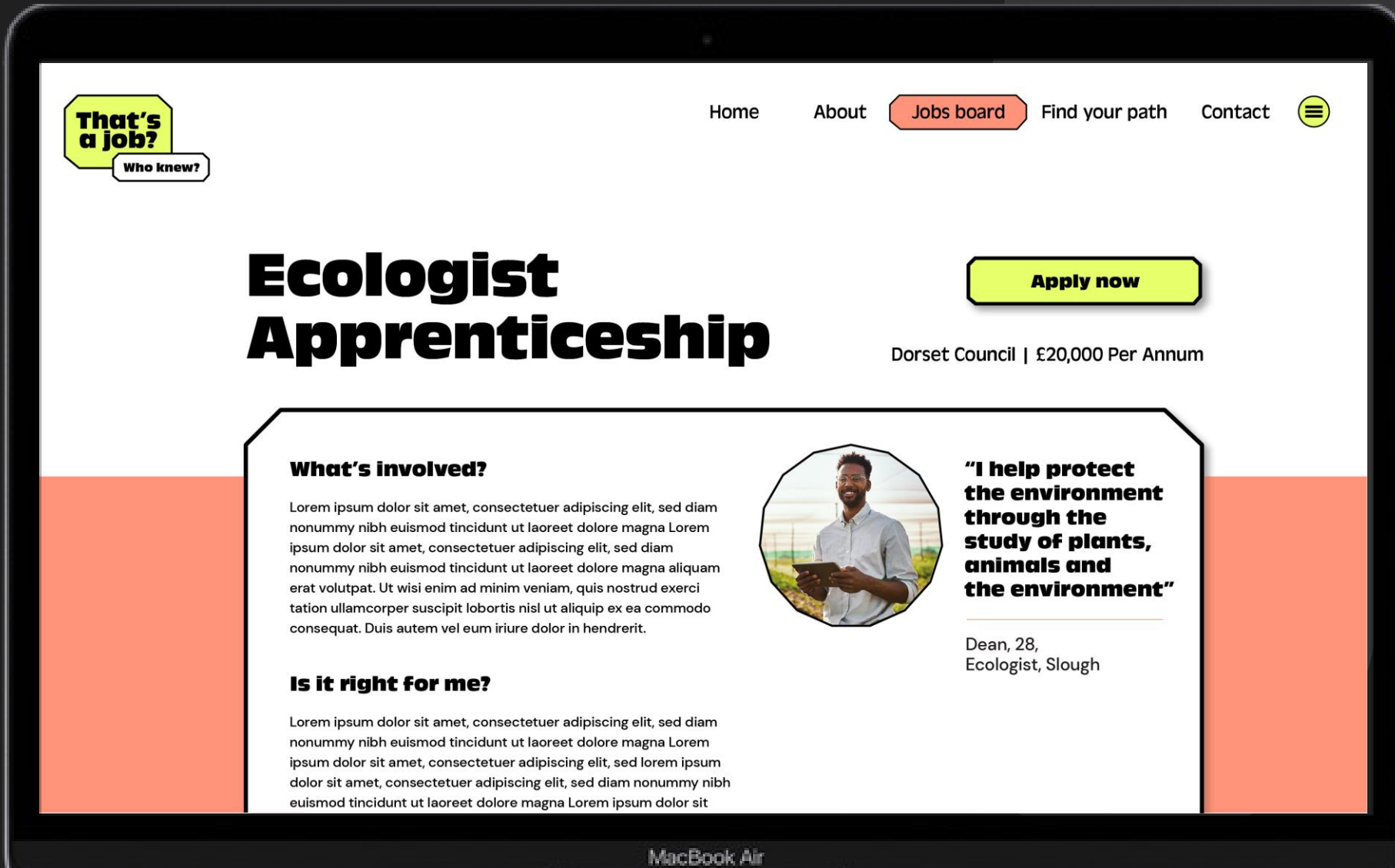
Who knew?

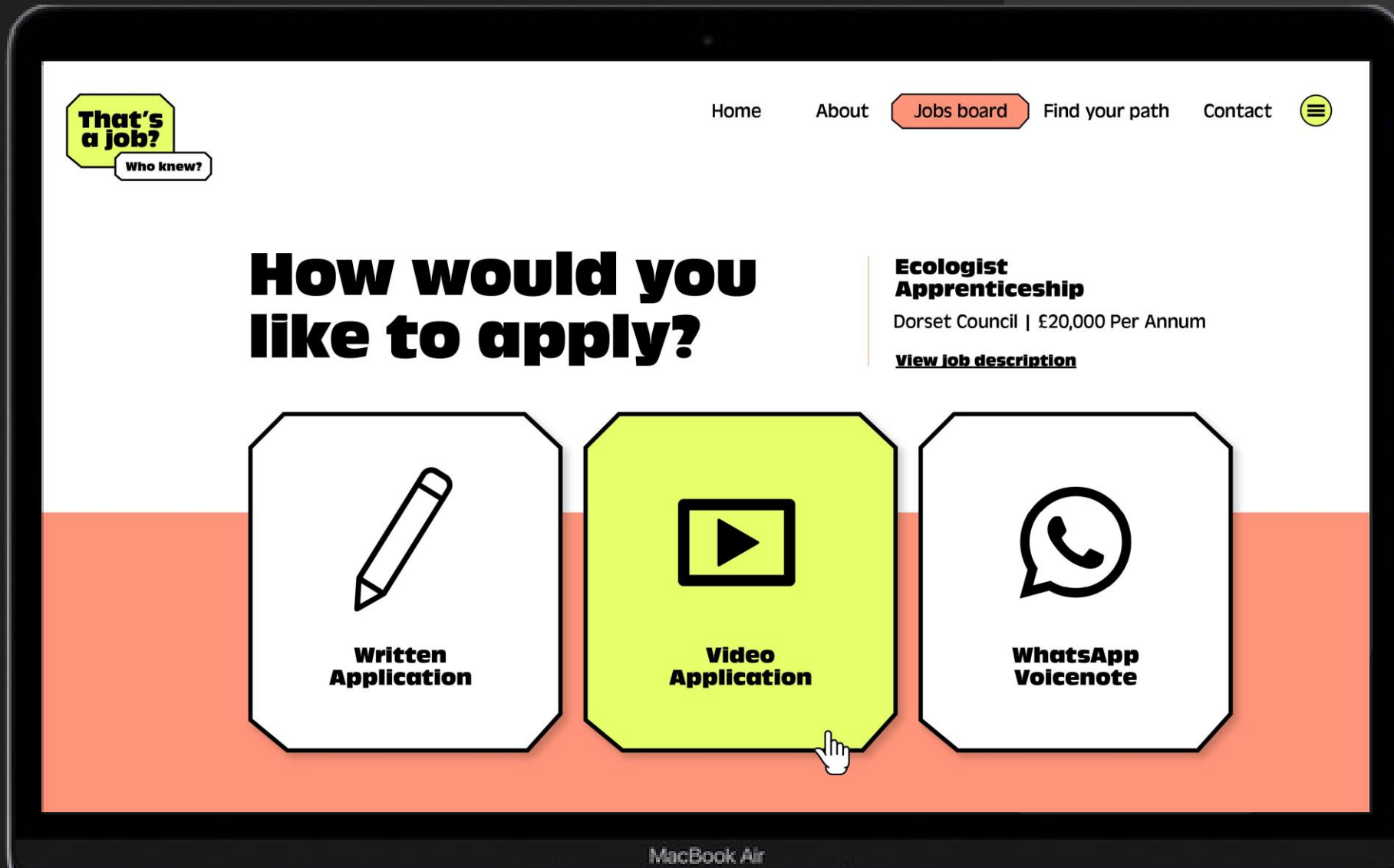
Find the jobs you never
knew were a thing at
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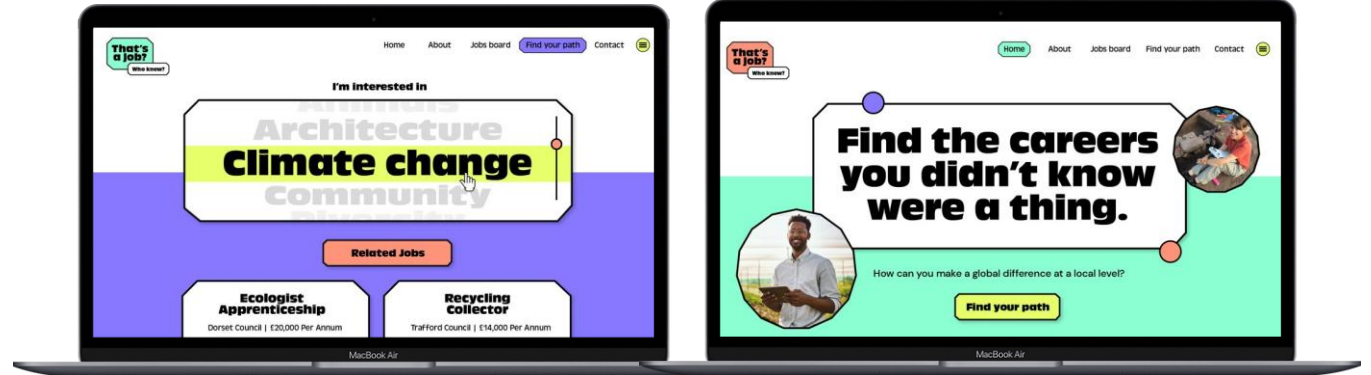






SUMMARY

That's a job?
Who knew?



Summary

- **Maintaining the *status quo* is not an option**
- **None of these issues are simple, nor have single solutions**
- **Collaboration and sharing is always the best course of action**
- **Let's move forward with these tangible outputs and see how far they could go!**





Thank you

