



What do installers think about heat pumps and the future of gas?

We asked them and here's what they said...

At the end of last year we asked our own customer-base, as well as PHPI readers, about the future of the building services sector.

The industry is on the cusp of great change as we begin the challenging but inevitable task of decarbonising domestic heat. It's a topic of interest for a wide range of sectors and has received considerable coverage in the national and trade press, and on social media.

With so much public discourse (not all of it helpful!) we wanted to hear it from the installers on the ground, those who are out on the tools, talking to customers every day and who ultimately will be responsible for delivering low-carbon heating solutions.

Are they excited or reticent? Do they view change as a business opportunity or a threat? Are they ready to embrace renewables or do they see a long future in gas?

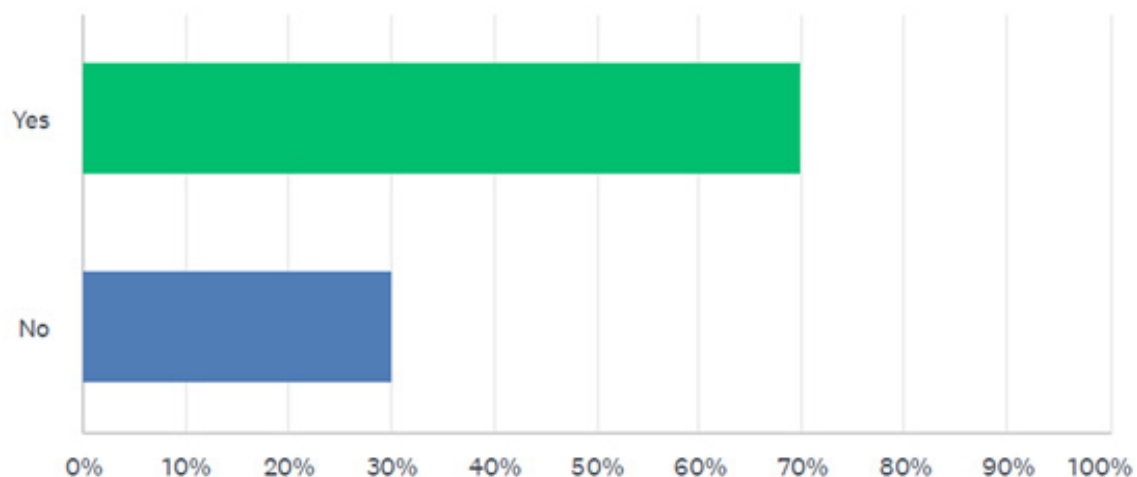
Here's what they said...



The future is bright for gas engineers – but we need new faces!

70% of installers said that gas engineering is a good career choice and 83% would recommend a career in building services to a school leaver.

Do you feel a career in gas is a good choice at the moment?



“The building services industry will always be required, but as a sector that has not always been seen as glamorous or appealing, it is extremely important that it invests in young people. More importantly we should be developing home grown talent so that we can avoid industry skill shortages.”

“With women being offered more opportunities it is a great time for the industry to push this and help women and girls see building services as an empowering career move.”

“A career in the trades is better than getting into too much debt at university and there is plenty of work for the future.”

“Buildings are becoming more complex and systems more integrated. We need more fresh talent, especially school leavers planning a lifetime career.”

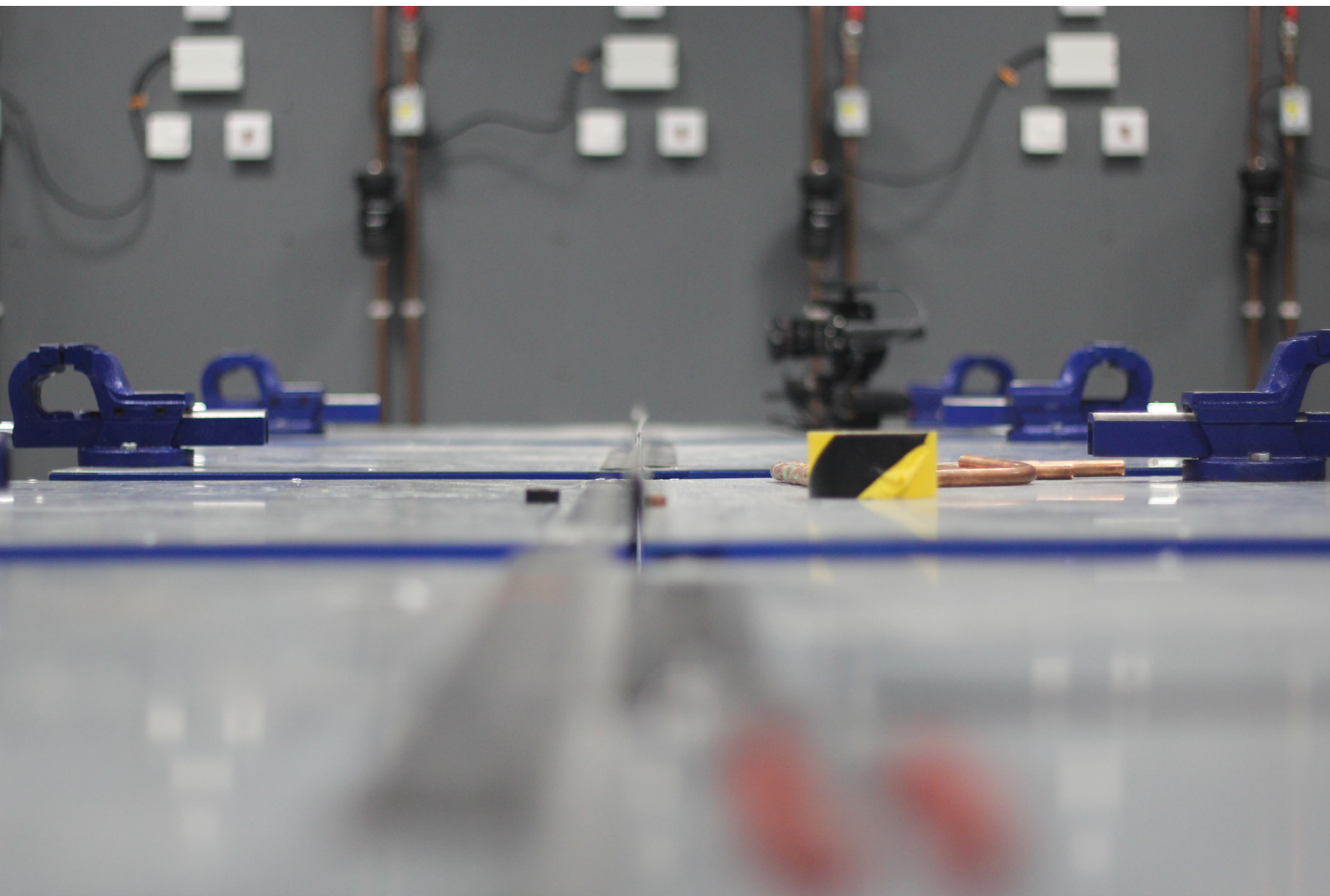
Gas boiler ban - any impact on gas engineers?

Despite dubious headlines regarding 'gas boiler bans', tradespeople still have a lot of confidence in the sector, with many stating that there will always be a strong demand for those with heating and plumbing skills, whatever the future brings.

"It's a great industry with varied elements to specialise in and the skilled tradesperson will always be in demand."

"No matter how the industry evolves, humans will always need water and heat so it's a job for life."

"Learning a trade stands someone in good stead for the rest of their lives. Other opportunities present themselves as they progress through their career. Plus, a good tradesman is never out of work."



What's it like being a plumbing and heating engineer?

As a career, building services engineering was praised for its variety, good rates of pay and stability, providing good opportunities for those willing to work for it.



"I enjoy plumbing - it keeps you fit, it makes you think, you travel around and the pay is quite good."

"It's a good career that can be very rewarding but you have to be willing to work hard."

"It's a fast-moving industry that may be a good earner for people that like to mix up learning and installing."

However, some felt underappreciated compared to white collar workers and underpaid for the weight of responsibility on their shoulders.

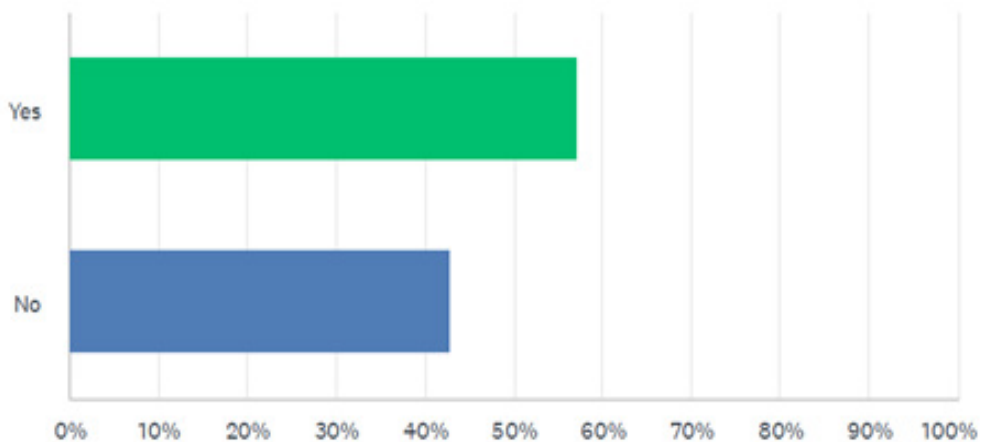
One installer said while they would recommend a career in building services, installers "need to be multi-skilled and salaries must better reflect this."

The industry is shifting

The survey results show a shifting industry.

Consumer interest is growing, with 57% of installers reporting an increase in questions from customers about renewables and low-carbon heating.

Are your customers asking more questions about renewables and/or the future of gas?

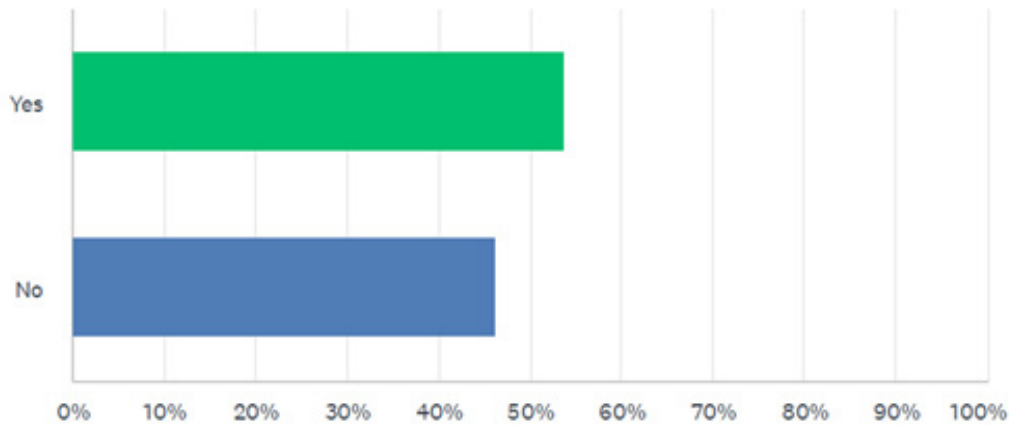


Tradespeople are the customer facing arm of the heating industry and a valuable source of information for the public. Its important that installers set aside time to undertake new or complimentary qualifications and product training to ensure they are up to date.

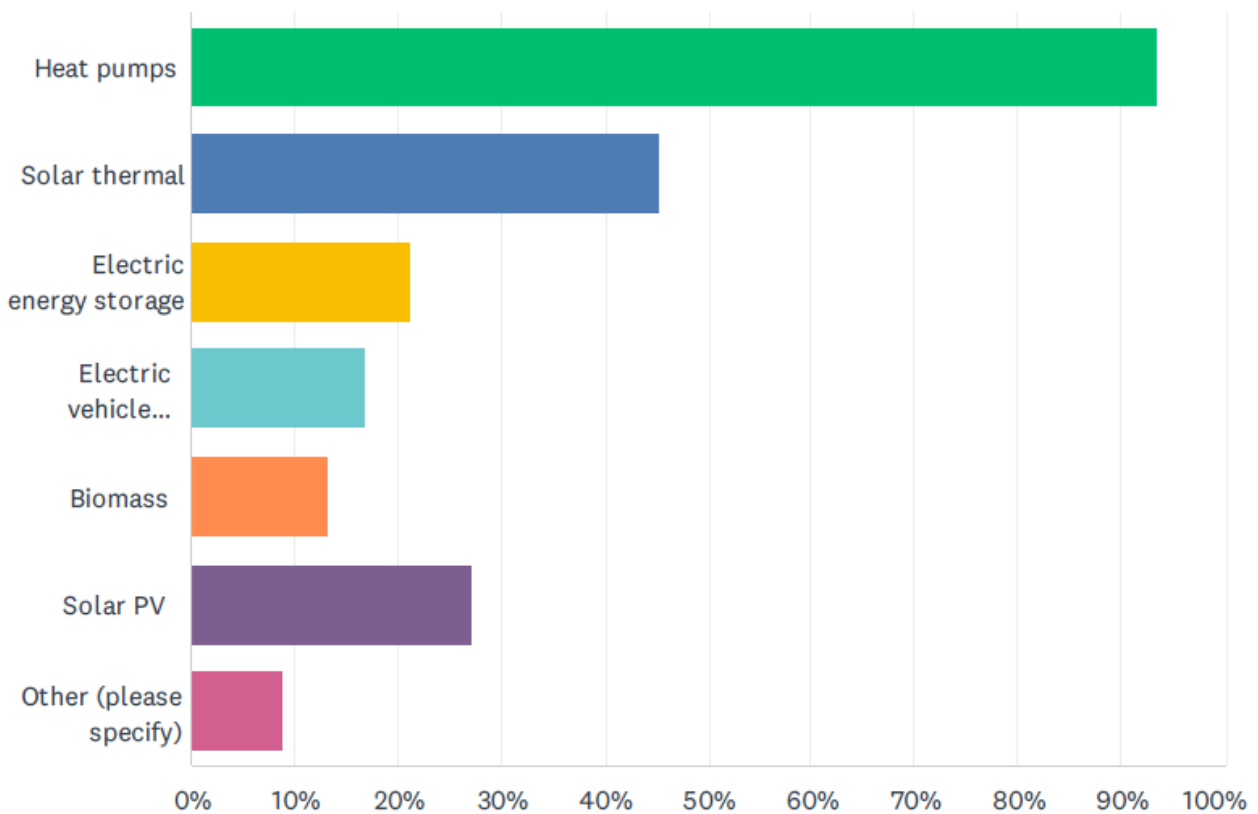


Over half of respondents (54%) said they had started to think about upskilling into renewable technologies, particularly heat pumps (91%) which will be installed in 90,000 homes as part of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme from March 2022.

Do you plan to/or have you already trained in heat pumps and/or other renewables?



Heat pumps were the most popular, followed by:

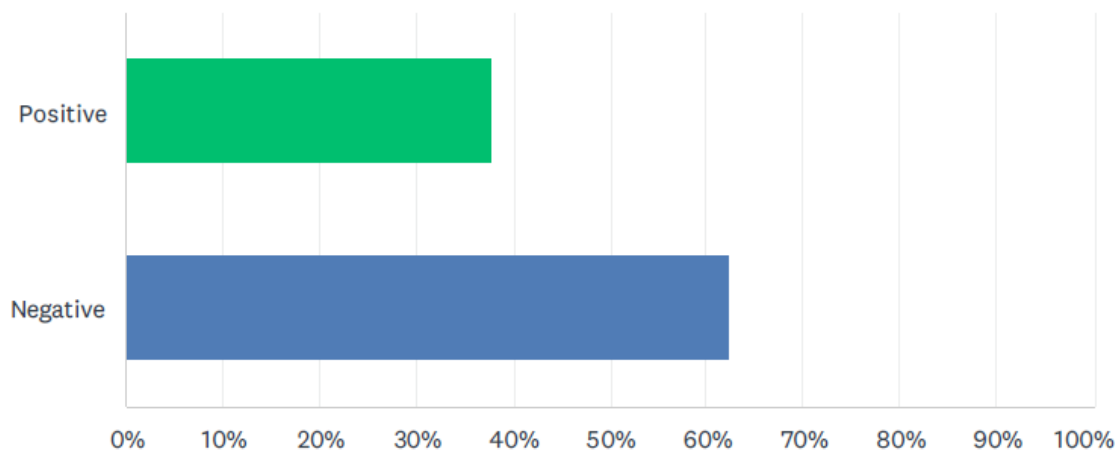


Heat pumps are promising, but not seen as a blanket solution

Heat pump technology was recognised as an important part of the future heating mix.

However, many installers disagreed with the view that heat pumps are a viable solution across the board, illustrating the nuance of the decarbonisation challenge.

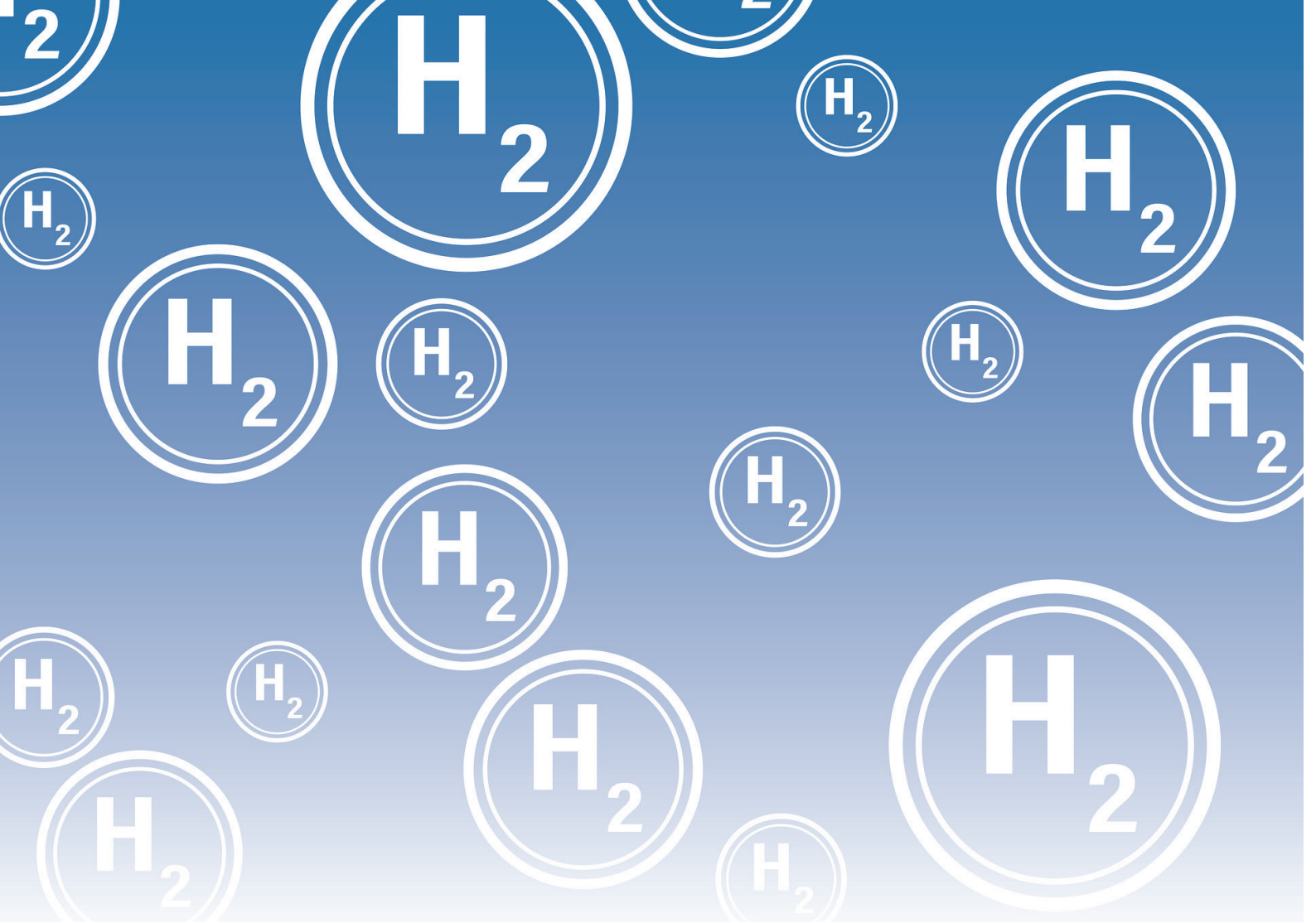
Do you see the new Boiler Upgrade Scheme, which offers money towards replacing a gas boiler with a heat pump, as positive or negative?



“I do not believe retrofitting heat pumps into older poorly insulated buildings is practical. Bringing the thermal performance of old housing stock up to standard should be addressed first. Only then can you look at cost effective renewable solutions that operate on lower temperatures.”

“Renewables may work for new builds but how will this be implemented in Victorian or Edwardian homes or multi occupancy buildings?”

“As a business we will have to move with the times but electric heating and inefficient heat pumps are simply costing the British consumer more than they can afford.”



There is hope for hydrogen

Hydrogen was mentioned across the survey as a fuel with great potential to decarbonise domestic heat in a cost-effective way.

“There is a future in the gas industry but it hinges on the use of hydrogen as a replacement fuel, rather than air source heat pumps, which the majority of homeowners can’t afford.”

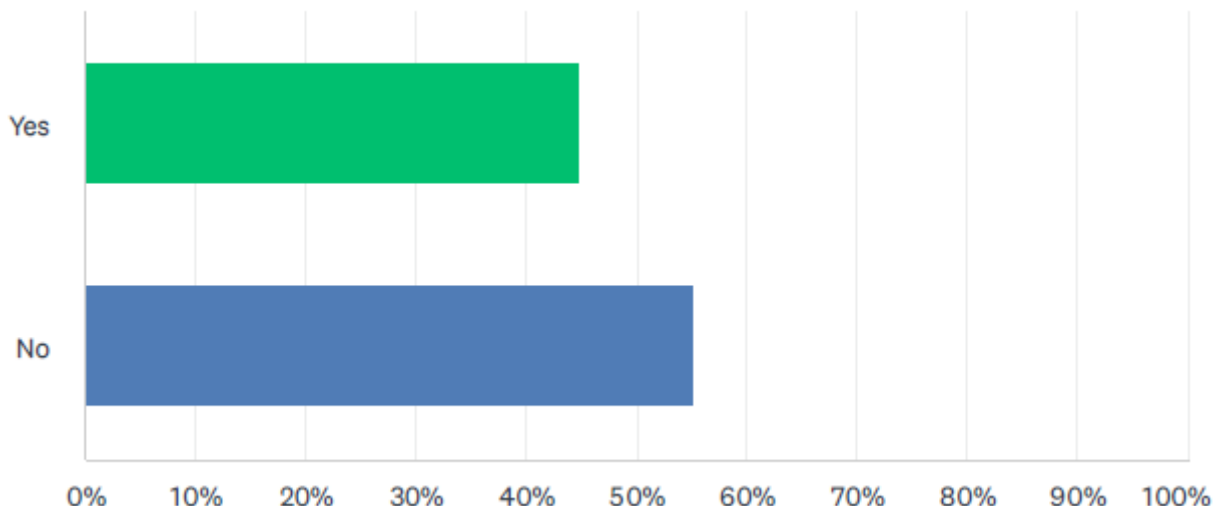
Government must do more to instil confidence in its plans

Set against the backdrop of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, we were keen to find out how installers felt about Government plans to accelerate the take-up of heat pumps and other renewables. While 44% planned to develop their business as a result of the scheme, only 38% thought it was a positive move.

“There will possibly be a large spike with heat pump installation, not all of them will be appropriate or of a good standard and there are likely to be subsequent problems. The transition from gas will take many decades and there will still be a requirement for competent persons in this field.”

55% of those who said they had no plans to upskill (46%) stated a lack of confidence in government schemes as the reason, with one installer commenting:

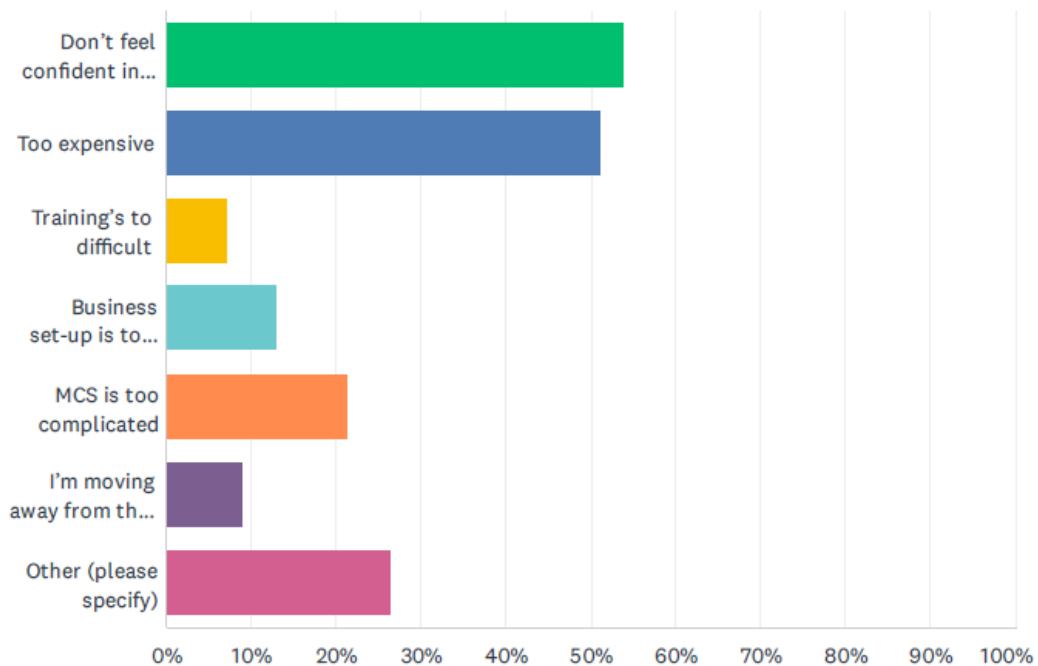
Do you plan to develop your business as a result of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme?



“It’s so hard for business to get access to the grant schemes, leaving it open to bigger companies who then sub the work out, paying poor wages and usually giving the customer a poor job. The government should support smaller business to access schemes more easily.”

“Heat pump installations need to be done correctly and schemes don’t encourage that, they only encourage quick buck merchants who charge and then run, not doing the job correctly.”

Why no?



Ask the installers!

One respondent raised the critical point that installers and even industry experts are not properly consulted when policies are drawn up.

The recent heat and buildings strategy largely overlooked the issue of upskilling existing installers and data on the current workforce is severely lacking.

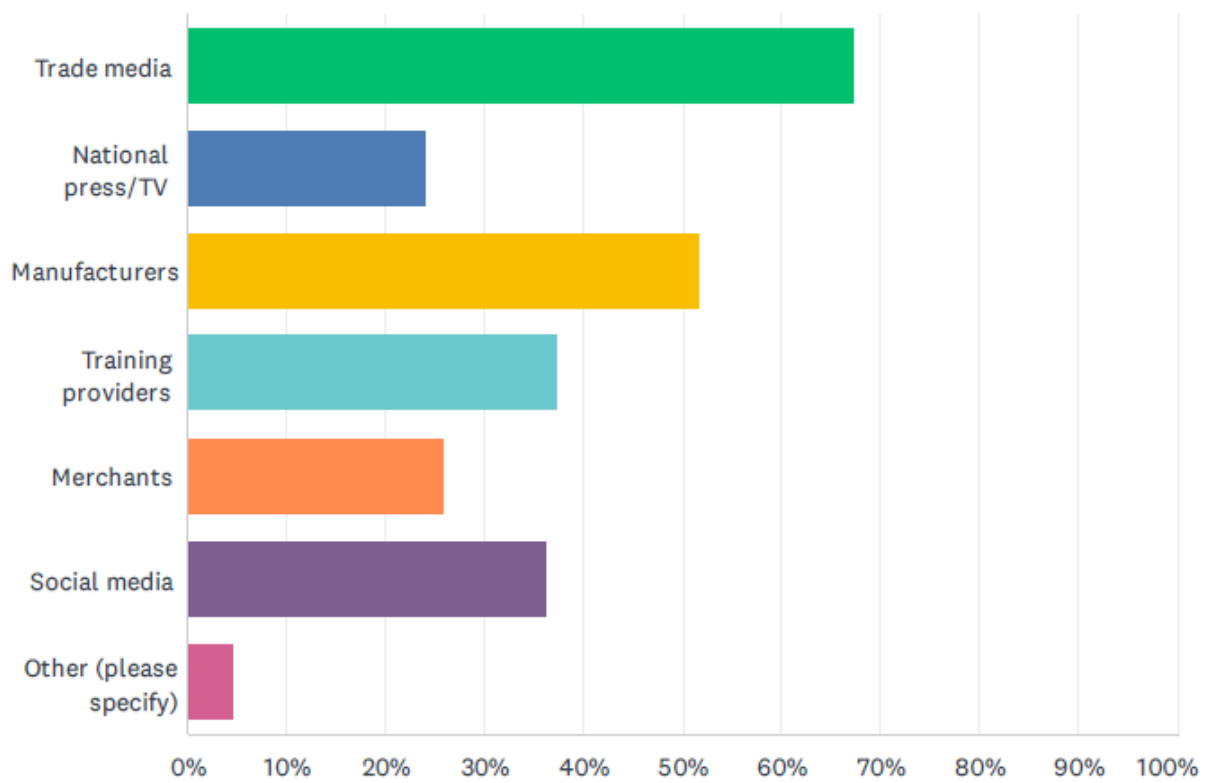
“Knee jerk ‘policy statements’ by uninformed headline grabbers should be checked over by someone with experience in the industry.”

Trade media is top source of information for installers

The trade press has moved with the times, expanding from print into digital and social media and creating well targeted, engaging and easily accessible content specifically for tradespeople.

Our survey revealed that 68% of tradespeople get their information from the trade press and it remains a valued and trusted source of news and advice.

Where do you find out information about the future of the building services industry?





**Mark Krull, Director for
Logic4training said:**

“The heating industry is on the cusp of great changes that will see a transition from gas and oil to greener alternatives, such as hydrogen and electric heat pumps. It’s great to see that the majority building services installers are feeling positive, predicting strong demand for plumbing and heating skills.

“Ultimately, gas is just a fuel. Whatever technologies take its place, heating engineers are best placed to deliver low-carbon heating solutions. With 85% of UK homes heated by gas, what we need now is more newly qualified gas engineers to secure the supply chain. Experience in gas is the perfect grounding to then move into other areas.

“Existing plumbing and heating installers should really be thinking about becoming multi-skilled, but what’s clear from our findings is that Government must do more to instil confidence in its plans; without a strong installer base, low-carbon schemes will fall flat.”

