Verdant questions UK datacentre job claims

LEVEL B2


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I. WARM-UP

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word datacentre?
2. Which new technologies do you think create many jobs? Why?
3. Should governments invest in AI facilities? Why or why not?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

thinktank
an organisation that studies an issue and publishes research and advice

projection
a number that estimates what will happen in the future

scepticism
doubt about whether something is true or will work

sovereignty
a country's independent control over key decisions and resources

methodology
the system a researcher uses to collect and analyse data

capacity
the maximum amount of power or resources something can use or hold

infrastructure
basic systems a country needs, such as roads, grids or datacentres

intensive
needing a lot of people or effort for each unit of output

III. READING

UK datacentres will create far fewer jobs than the tech sector promised, according to new research by the environmental thinktank Verdant. It says planned sites are likely to employ about 10,400 workers, just 25% of the more than 40,000 in industry projections.

The report lands amid public scepticism over the water and energy these facilities use. Verdant based its analysis on staffing data from 20 projects and international comparisons.

It estimates that existing sites have created fewer than 4,400 jobs, or about 8.6 jobs per megawatt of power, versus 43.7 in TechUK's projection. It adds that much larger future sites will be less job-intensive, perhaps 1.6 roles per megawatt. The study focuses on permanent roles, not temporary construction work.

The government rejected Verdant's jobs-per-megawatt methodology, saying it ignores the wider value of compute and confuses electricity capacity with consumption. Labour has classified AI datacentres as critical national infrastructure to speed planning.

Andy Burnham backed the sector by appointing AI minister Kanishka Narayan to his cabinet; Narayan has argued for rapid expansion on sovereignty grounds.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "UK datacentres will create just 25% of jobs...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who produced the analysis that challenges the job numbers?
2. How many direct jobs does Verdant predict for planned UK datacentres?
3. What jobs-per-megawatt figure did Verdant find for existing sites?
4. Which metric or method did the government reject?
5. Which party named AI datacentres critical national infrastructure?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Are jobs the best way to judge large tech projects? Why or why not?
2. Should the UK prioritise energy use or job creation in datacentres?
3. Is jobs-per-megawatt a fair comparison across industries?
4. How much weight should sovereignty have in tech planning?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Past perfect continuous

Use had been + verb-ing to show an action that was continuing up to a past point (e.g. before, by the time, when). It describes an activity in progress before another past event.

"Verdant **had been analysing** *staffing data before the report."*

"Local planners **had been planning** *larger sites for months."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence using the past perfect continuous (had been + verb-ing).

1. Before Verdant released figures, researchers (study) ___ staffing. _____
2. By then planners (design) ___ proposed datacentre sites. _____
3. For months staff (monitor) ___ energy use at sites. _____
4. Until the audit, engineers (assess) ___ energy needs. _____
5. When the news broke, the firm (prepare) ___ a press release. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading, 10 minutes comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or elicit thinktank, projection, scepticism, sovereignty, methodology, capacity, infrastructure, and megawatt with quick board examples.
- Reading approach: set a numbers hunt—students underline every figure, then pair-check what each number refers to before tackling comprehension.
- Differentiation: stronger students evaluate whether jobs-per-megawatt is a useful metric and suggest one alternative; others summarise Verdant's findings in 2–3 sentences.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Take a quick poll first, then ask students to name two non-job benefits or costs.
2. Set up a spectrum line: "energy first" to "jobs first", and have pairs justify positions.
3. Prompt with examples (car plant, hospital) and push for pros and cons of the metric.
4. Elicit two meanings of sovereignty (security, ownership) and ask for ranked priorities.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In two teams, prepare and deliver 2-minute speeches for or against rapid datacentre rollout.

Writing: Write a 120-word brief for a local council explaining Verdant's key findings in plain terms.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Past perfect continuous

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who produced the analysis that challenges the job numbers?
   The environmental thinktank Verdant.
2. How many direct jobs does Verdant predict for planned UK datacentres?
   About 10,400 jobs.
3. What jobs-per-megawatt figure did Verdant find for existing sites?
   About 8.6 jobs per megawatt.
4. Which metric or method did the government reject?
   The jobs-per-megawatt methodology.
5. Which party named AI datacentres critical national infrastructure?
   Labour.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use had been + verb-ing to show an action that was continuing up to a past point (e.g. before, by the time, when). It describes an activity in progress before another past event. (Examples constructed.)

> *"Verdant* **had been analysing** *staffing data before the report."*
>
> *"Local planners* **had been planning** *larger sites for months."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence using the past perfect continuous (had been + verb-ing).

1. Before Verdant released figures, researchers ___ staffing. **had been studying**
2. By then planners ___ proposed datacentre sites. **had been designing**
3. For months staff ___ energy use at sites. **had been monitoring**
4. Until the audit, engineers ___ energy needs. **had been assessing**
5. When the news broke, the firm ___ a press release. **had been preparing**