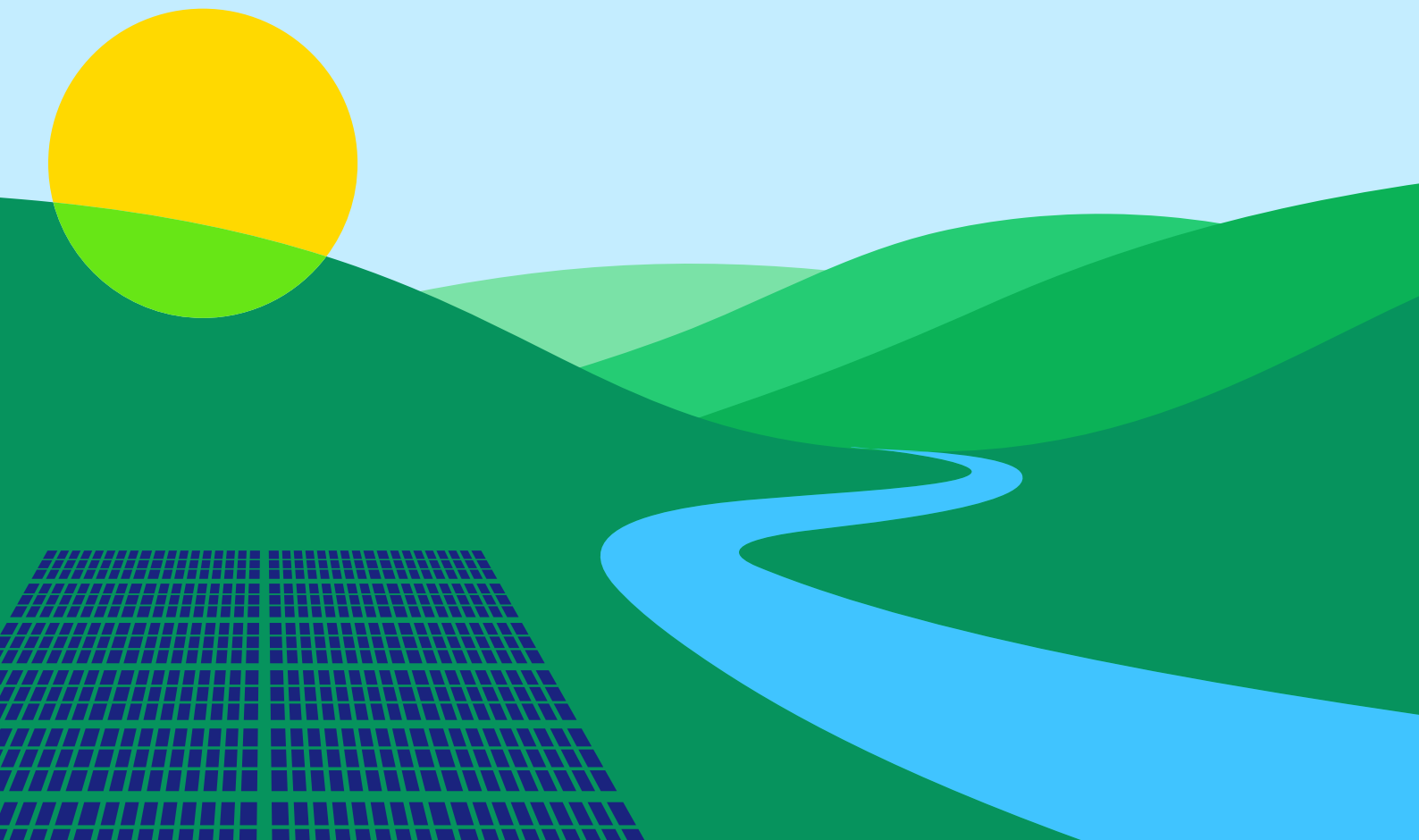


DBA Design Effectiveness Awards  
**Solar Energy UK**  
rebrand



Client  
**Solar Energy UK**

Agency  
**Brand Ethos**



# Executive summary

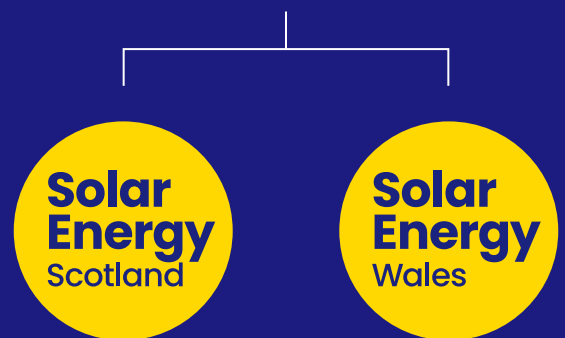
Solar energy is vital to the UK's renewable energy market. Now more than ever, this industry is seizing the opportunity to dramatically increase capacity. Membership body, the Solar Trade Association (STA), is at the forefront, driving the sector to triple output over the next 10 years.

The association advocates for the solar sector and its member businesses to government and the industry's stakeholders in the UK and overseas. It also offers a range of membership services such as training and events.

But its brand did not stand up to its bold 10-year target. Nor did it meet the expectations of its membership. The existing brand was dated and lacked impact. A rebrand was conducted to better define and articulate the association's purpose and strategy, demonstrate its pivotal contribution, and reflect the innovative, high-tech solar sector.

Until the rebrand the association had seen falling member numbers and accompanying revenue. Despite capacity increasing – the number of solar panels – the number of businesses and pool of potential members remained static. So, the rebrand's primary purpose was to reposition the association to reflect its ambitious business development strategy, finding new income streams and driving member and industry growth.

The STA was renamed Solar Energy UK to capture its advocacy role and sector-leading positioning, and this was accompanied by a strident and distinctive new visual identity and a new website.



*Left: Logo before the redesign  
Above: Logos after the redesign*

The rebrand had a significant and direct impact.

**Recruitment of new members:** from 180 members in 2019 to 262 at the end of 2021.

**Member retention:** 92% of members have been retained and 24 members have upgraded their membership to bring in an additional £49k in membership fees.

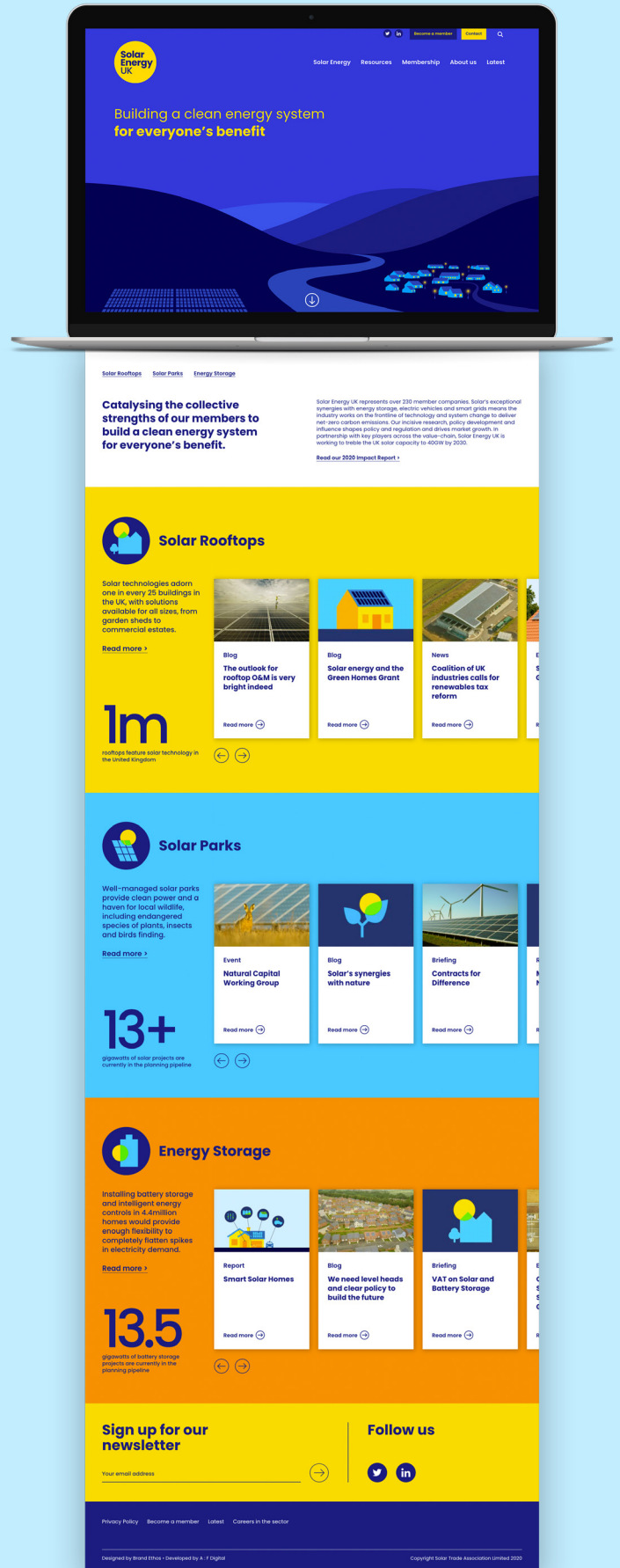
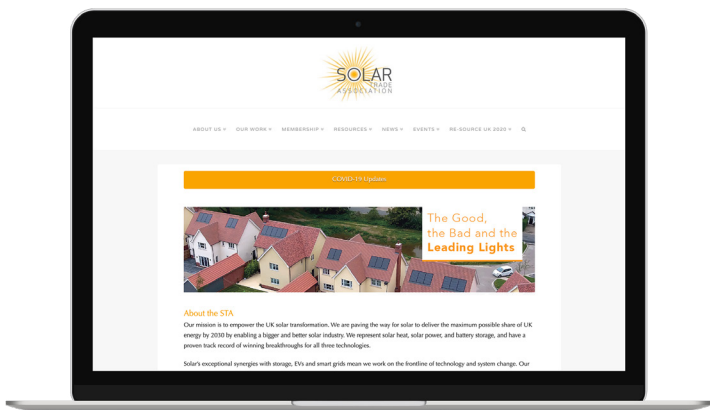
**Increased revenue:** membership fees, and revenue from partners and sponsors jumped from £383k in 2018 to £565k in 2021 and is on track to deliver £880k in 2022.

**Nearly doubling the team size:** from seven team members in 2019 to 13 today.

**Positive membership buy-in:** 75% of members surveyed post rebrand agreed that Solar Energy UK unites the sector with a common purpose to advance industry interests.

**New strategic partnerships:** one 10-year partnership deal with the leading solar conference and exhibitor provider in the UK bringing in additional revenue of £85k/year and a three-year partnership with MCS Certified netting £65k/year.

**Big policy wins:** the association's influence brought about long sought after policy changes to positively impact on the sector and its members.



Left: The website before the redesign  
Above: After the rebranding of the Solar Trade Association to Solar Energy UK

# Context and overview

## Market context and challenges

UK technologies and businesses are at the forefront of solar energy innovation. The contribution of solar energy to overall renewable capacity has increased from 1% to 27% since 2010<sup>i</sup>. Against the backdrop of high gas prices and soaring energy bills, building the UK's own supply of clean energy has never been more critical.

The Solar Trade Association (STA) has existed to serve this industry for over 40 years, representing over 400 solar businesses at its peak. Its role is to push the sector to contribute more to the UK's ambitious clean energy targets, mobilising its wide and varied membership to work together to make this happen.

Between 2015 and 2020<sup>ii</sup> the average number of businesses operating in the UK in solar installation had remained largely unchanged. But despite STA supporting an ambitious growth in industry capacity, its potential member base has not increased. In fact, STAs membership has halved since 2015. At the start of 2020 it had just 180 members providing income of £383k, and an employee headcount of just seven.

## The business challenge

The STA was losing market share and profile and it needed a reboot. *"To become and be seen to be a modern trade association with the credibility to lead a high-growth, high-tech industry"*, according to its chief executive.

With the sharp decline of members and income, in part due to the withdrawal of government subsidies and loss of market share to competitor trade associations Renewable Energy Association and Regen, it was clear major change was required.

An increased focus on business development resulted in senior hires in 2019/20 and a more strategic approach to both membership recruitment and retention, and income-generating partnerships.

## Refining the brief

The primary business objectives of the brand review were to:

1. redefine the brand so that it reflected the modernity of the industry and was more appealing to both existing and prospective members, and strategic partners
2. support the association's ambition to grow in line with the wider trajectory of the solar and storage industry to at least triple capacity over the decade.



On appointment, we worked with the client to refine the brief so that it aligned with the STA's ambitious 10-year business strategy and factored in recent values development work. A full rebrand was agreed as a result with Board and member support. The brief included naming, identity and a new website, in order to reposition STA in the sector and build a robust digital platform for income growth.

## Brand outputs

- Solar Trade Association renamed as Solar Energy UK, to capture its advocacy role and sector-leading positioning
- compelling new brand proposition statement and core narrative
- refreshed brand identity with a highly distinctive look and feel to stand out internationally
- new suite of accessible brand identity assets, brand manual and templates
- redesigned website with an intuitive and accessible UX/UI.

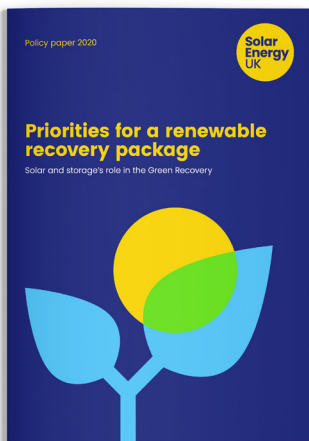
## The design approach

At the heart of the client's brand proposition is the simple belief that solar energy can be harnessed to create a healthier planet in the UK. We developed a new name, logo and identity as straightforward as this proposition, avoiding the sunbeam clichés of solar trade bodies across the globe.

A bold yellow circle logo with the name inside radiates confidence and modernity, and literally radiates on website rollovers and ident animations. Three versions of the logo were created, with Scotland or Wales versions for special reports and commissions.

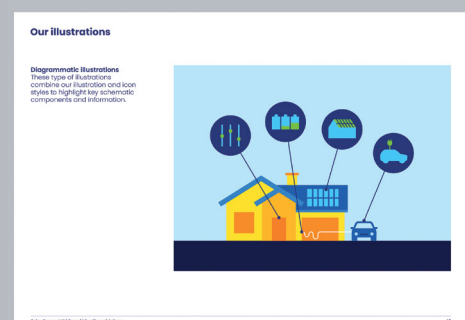
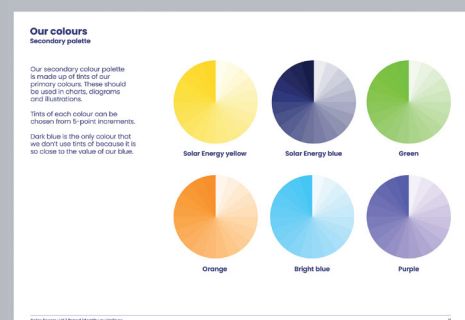
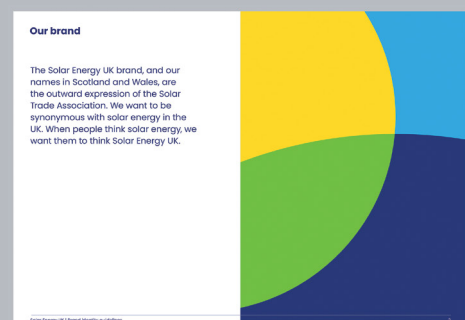
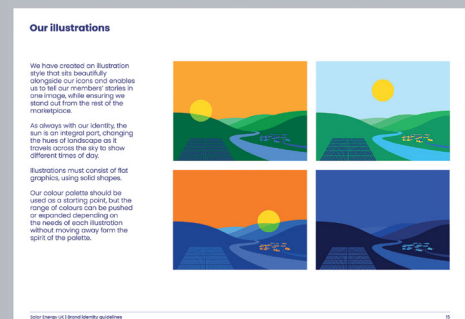
Positioning the logo at the top of all communications symbolises the sun's position while emphasising the overarching impact of the solar industry on the UK's energy market.

The case for changing the name was compelling. Moving away from Solar Trade Association, a description of 'who they are', to a more confident assertion of 'what they are for', Solar Energy UK, positions the organisation as sector leaders, able to drive policy and enable positive change.



Above: Sample publication covers

Right: Pages from the brand identity guidelines showing the breadth of creative opportunities with a focus on accessibility





## Radiant visual palette

The primary colour palette is inspired by nature to reinforce green credentials: yellow sun, blue sky, green earth. Complementary secondary colours: orange, bright blue, purple and dark blue are used for contrast, accents and in illustrations. We created specific guidance on colour combinations to ensure optimum text legibility, meeting Solar Energy UK's strict accessibility standards.

## Bold illustration

We commissioned an award-winning illustrator to create a series of stunning illustrations to show solar in action in rural and urban settings. The sun-circle from the logo nestles beautifully into the illustrations that gradually change from day to night. Each illustration has changing sun positions and landscape colours to indicate different times of day. The illustrations are used to clever effect on the website homepage, too, with sun-circle position and colour scheme changing to align to the movement of the sun throughout the day.

Social media visuals, icons and illustrations were designed to help data visualisation, and a range of stationery and publication templates were produced. A bespoke suite of icons was created for different industry sectors, using variations of the sun-circle motif.

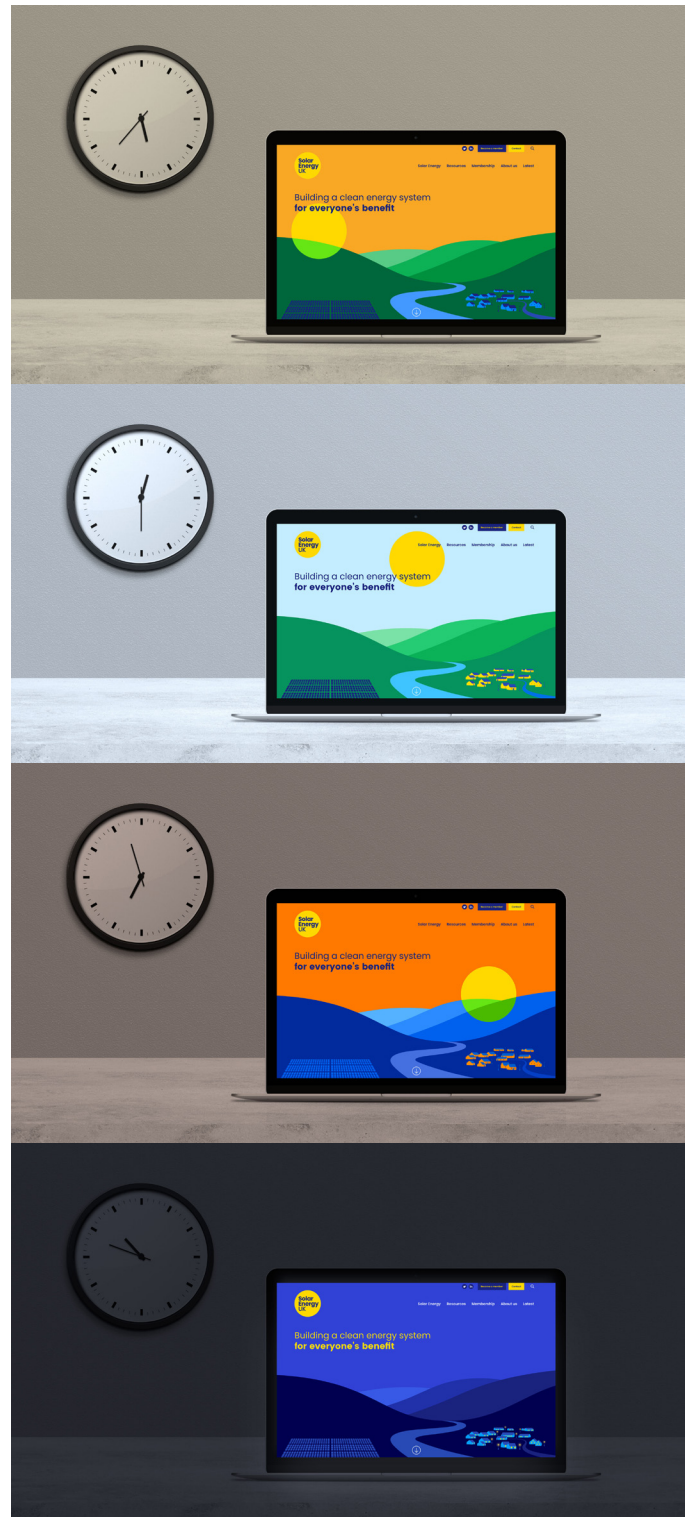
## Bright new website

The main brand platform is a completely new website using the SEUK palette and graphic style in a bold design that is imbued with confidence and optimism in SEUK's vision. To complement the time-shifting home page illustrations, a simple and highly intuitive structure guides users with clear signposting and minimal navigation.

## Key facts

Launch date: January 2021

Design fees: £10,000 for the rebrand.



*Above: The bold illustration approach shows how the sun during the day brings light to homes and businesses at night. The four illustrations are coded to change and adjust to match the time of day you're viewing the site*

# Results

## Organisational growth

Since the start of the rebrand project, overall income has risen from £405k in 2020 (6% increase on 2019, somewhat down on ambitions given the pandemic and decision to invest senior resource in leading the rebrand) to £595k in 2021 (47% increase) and is projected to reach £880k by end of 2022 (48% increase).

As a result, Solar Energy UK has **almost doubled its head count** from seven to 13, appointing several senior new policy roles to help drive the transition to a clean and resilient energy system for the UK. It has also recruited an additional business development lead, securing additional income growth after only six months into the role.

## Membership growth

 **26%**

55 new members were recruited during 2021 bringing the total to **262** with annual recurring value of **£171k**.

**92%**

members renewed in 2021, including **24** upgrading their fee level to contribute an additional **£49k**. Solar Energy UK's existing member retention rate is substantially above the UK trade association benchmark of 84%.

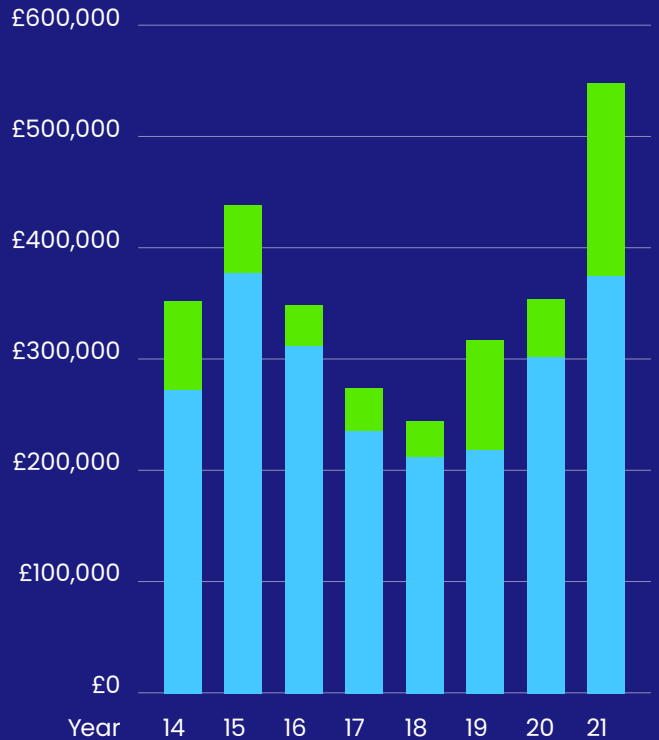
## Membership buy-in

Annual member surveys have shown positive feedback on brand positioning and purpose among members.

**“It’s a simply brilliant concept, with great execution. The feedback we’ve had has been overwhelmingly positive. I am confident this rebrand will be transformative for Solar Energy UK, and the hugely dynamic, growing industry we represent.”**

**Chief executive, Solar Energy UK**

## Membership income 2014–2021



 Have renewed in year

 Joined during year

## Membership survey November 2020

### – pre-rebrand

In reviewing the brand values, members offered strong support when asked about them in a survey in 2020 prior to the launch of the brand with 7 in 10 members who responded supporting them.

## Membership survey November 2021

### – post rebrand

Members responded positively to the rebrand, highlighting increased industry visibility and positioning as key outcomes.

## Membership survey November 2022, interim results

75% of members surveyed post rebrand agreed that Solar Energy UK unites the sector with a common purpose to advance industry interests.

## New strategic partnerships

On the back of the rebrand Solar Energy UK secured its first two strategic partnerships in September 2021. The partnerships offer huge growth potential including diversifying income streams and strengthening of its position as the lead body for solar:

1. 10-year revenue sharing deal with a leading private events business to help elevate and grow annual industry exhibition Solar & Storage Live contributing £85k+ a year
2. three-year partnership with MCS Certified to provide free affiliate membership to their 1,200 rooftop installers, netting £65k a year.

## Social media engagement

Followers on LinkedIn (which during the pandemic was the primary source of prospective member leads) have more than doubled over the period since the rebrand to over 12.5k.

## Greater policy impact

Solar Energy UK achieved an unprecedented set of policy wins in 2021, long-sought after policy changes outlined in its manifesto *Lighting the Way*.

## Income 2021 – £595K



## Income 2022 – £880K



- Members
- Partners
- Sponsors

**“Visibility both within the industry and with consumers has improved massively. The branding is strong.”**

Director of Marketing, Solis



# Proof of effect and other influencing factors

## Proof of the effect of design

Two objectives were set to inform the redesign.

1. redefine the brand so that it reflected the modernity of the industry and was more appealing to both existing and prospective members, and strategic partners
2. support the association's ambition to grow in line with the wider trajectory of the solar and storage industry to at least triple capacity over the decade.

Feedback from members, increased membership and revenue, high levels of retention and upgraded memberships, new strategic partnerships and achieved policy goals prove that Solar Energy UK's rebrand has highly been effective. It is the single uniting factor behind Solar Energy UK's growth and success.

## Influencing factors

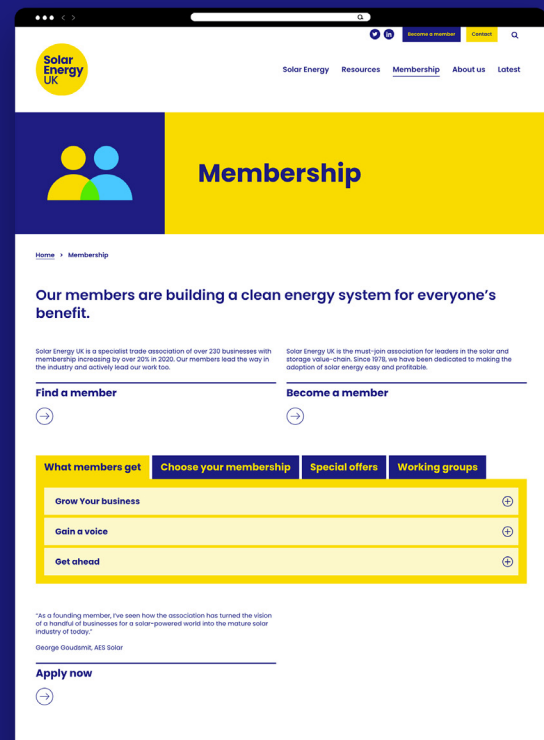
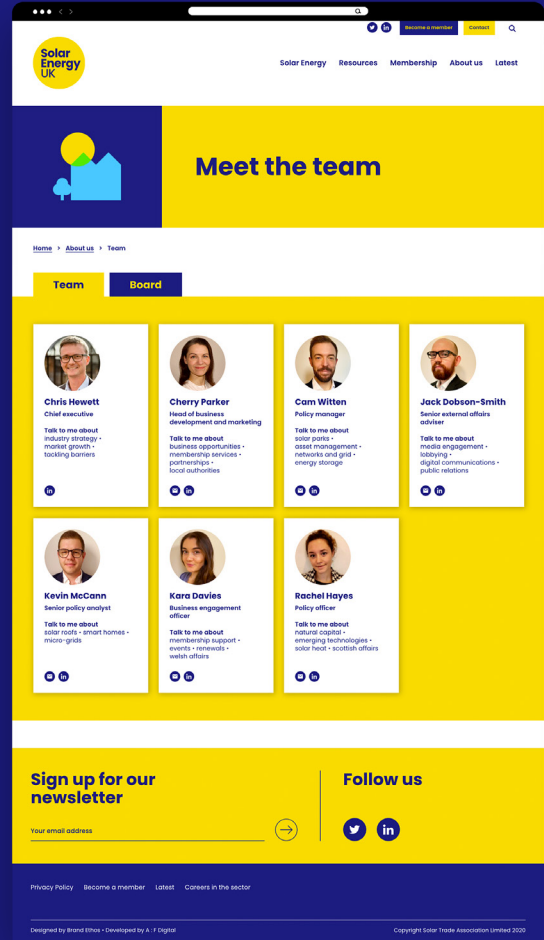
Trade associations all face external influences on their bottom line, but the client is clear that its improved fortunes and continued growth are without doubt linked to the rebrand and its stronger, more coherent purpose and positioning within the sector.

## Did Covid-19 and the accompanying lockdowns cause the value of trade associations to become more apparent?

Prior to the pandemic, most trade associations relied heavily on face-to-face meetings, training and events, e-marketing and social media. While some were in the process to moving to a digital transformation, online conferencing was non-existent for many. The pandemic forced associations to reconsider the delivery of their services and demonstrate the support they could give their members. This is certainly true of Solar Energy UK, who quickly adapted to deliver coordinated and consistent digital and virtual communications to feed its prospective member pipeline. Stronger visuals, clearer messaging and a renewed sense of confidence has meant Solar Energy UK has seen online engagement soar, particularly on target platform LinkedIn.



Above: Twitter profile  
Right: Sample hub pages and icons



## Has the size of the solar energy market increased?

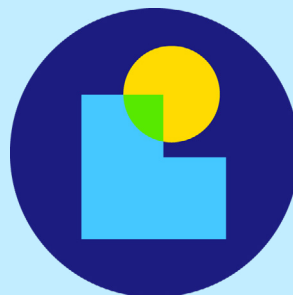
There are several factors that affect the solar energy market.

While capacity and energy generated from solar have grown, due to the low maintenance of solar facilities the growth in that part of the sector is slow and opportunities of membership for the trade body is modest.

Because government support for installation has fallen away, the number of installations has declined yet the number of installation businesses in the UK has remained constant, again keeping the number of potential members of the trade association unchanged.

Appetite for solar energy is increasing, but this is not always matched at a local level when new farms make planning applications, again restricting the potential membership pool for the association.

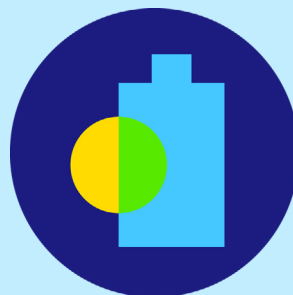
Although the government no longer fiscally supports the solar energy sector in the way that it has in the past, the cost of energy more generally makes the payback of the cost of installation more attractive. It is hoped that as this becomes more widely understood the demand for installations will continue to grow capacity.



Business



Households



Energy storage



Solar parks

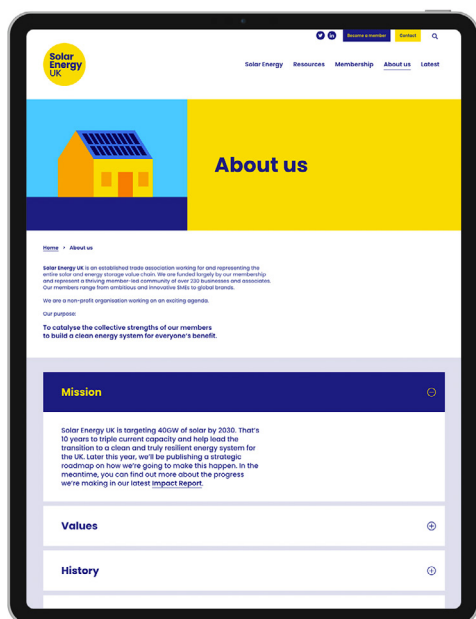


Environment



Solar rooftops

*Above: Icons were used to describe the different industry sectors  
Left: A sample web page*



**“Clear messaging on the need for and benefits of deploying 40 GW of solar PV by 2030.”**

Head of Advisory, Natural Power

### Has marketing affected the drive for membership?

There has been no increase in marketing or communications budgets. The cost of the rebrand and new website was funded out of an event budget that was not needed because of the move to remote working. The rebrand has enabled smarter and better marketing and communications without additional spend.

### Have there been any changes in the team?

Yes. The team has got bigger, and this is in part because of the success of the redesign. More members need more support, and the growth of the association is in response to this.



<sup>i</sup> Energy Trends, UK, April to June 2022, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, National Statistics, 29.09.22

<sup>ii</sup> Low carbon and renewable energy economy, UK: 2020 17.02.20 Office of National Statistics