
SUSTAINABLE FUTURES TOOLKIT: EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR A GREEN CAREER

A resource kit designed to help young people explore and thrive in the ever-evolving field of sustainability careers.

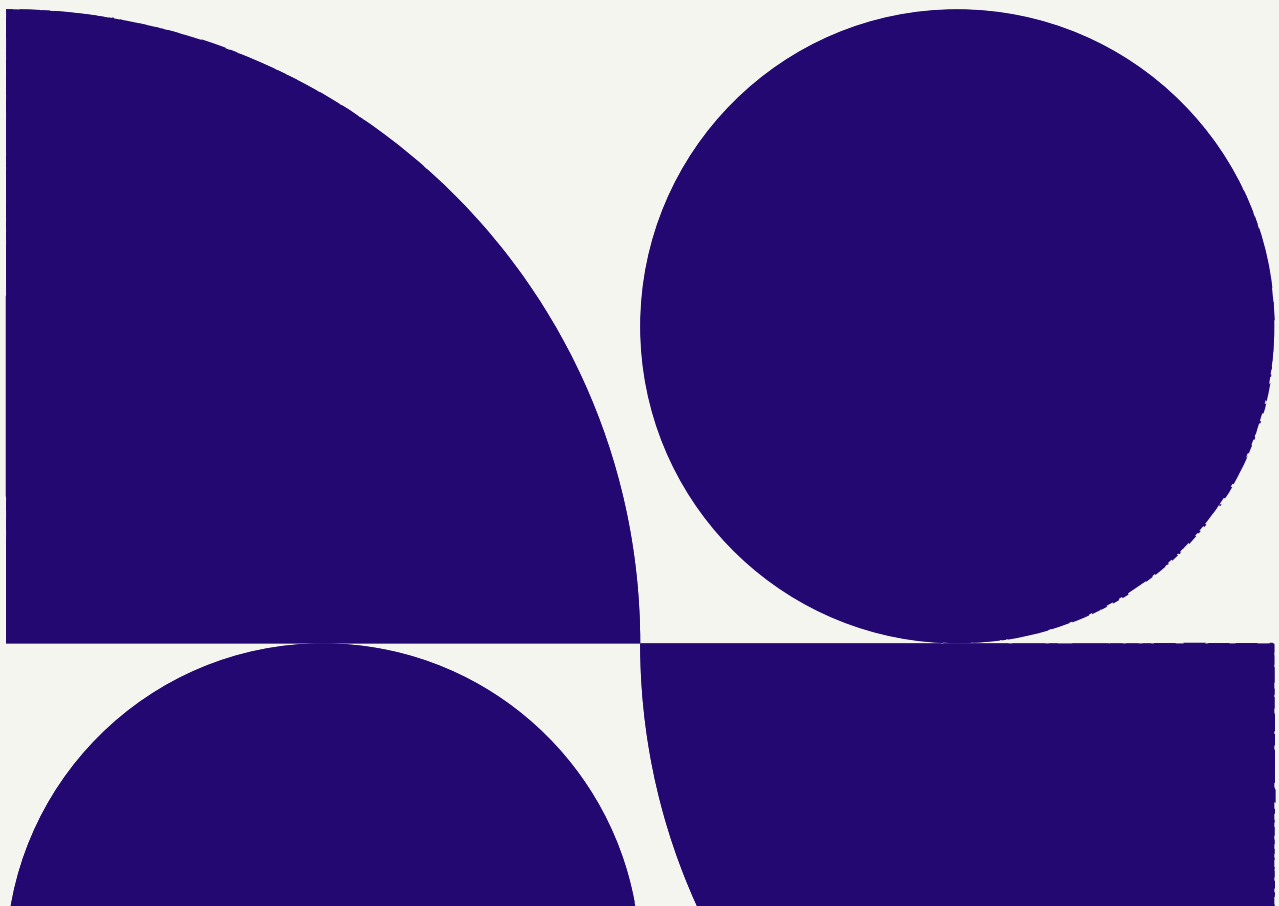


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INTRODUCTION

The world is increasingly facing a range of environmental and social risks. Climate change, ecosystem collapse, social polarisation and conflict are amongst some of the top-ranked risks in the WEF 2024 Global Risks Report. There has never been a more urgent time for action. Under the Paris Agreement, nation-states have agreed to reach net-zero by 2050.

It is crucial to empower and involve young people in the transition to net zero to ensure that no one gets left behind. Young people are already playing a pivotal role in finding mitigation and adaptation solutions to climate change in communities around the world; the question is, how can youth pursue climate change action in their careers?

The urgent need to re-design complex, global systems means that job sectors will also radically shift. Young people will need to be sufficiently upskilled in preparation to enter an ever-more dynamic world of work. Despite the need to redesign our labour markets to account for the long-term impacts of climate change and the need for long-term solutions, current education systems do not sufficiently equip youth with the necessary skills to develop a career in sustainability. Additionally, youth-led solutions lack access to funding and resources to further enable this skill development. As a result, young people entering the job market are often unprepared, missing essential technical knowledge and problem-solving skills.

In a call to demystify the sustainability career industry, we, as young people early in our own careers in sustainability, have gathered insights from sustainability practitioners around the world to create an accessible and consolidated toolkit for youth globally. If you are a young person interested in a career in sustainability, this toolkit is for you to understand what career opportunities are out there for you, and what skills you need to develop in pursuit of these opportunities.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This is not just an informative report, but it is an action-focused toolkit. We hope it can serve as a springboard for you to discover how you want to start your career with a focus on sustainability and impact.

Notably, given the sample size of this survey, it is impossible to encapsulate the spectrum of career experiences across industries and sectors, as even one role could differ from one year to the next. Therefore, the case studies are designed to give you a brief snapshot in time of a particular person's experience, but by no means represent an entire industry or a standard experience in the field.

Throughout the report, there will be key prompts and questions for you to consider how you can best leverage the insights from our research in your own purposeful sustainability career journey.

We hope this is the start of what is an exciting journey of self-discovery!

Methodology and survey demographics

To understand the skill demands of the wider sustainability market, we established and disseminated a survey using social media and professional digital platforms. In the survey, individuals were asked about their work and sector to better understand their involvement and responsibilities in their respective fields. Then, participants were asked in an open-ended manner about the top three skills that they found most important for success in a sustainability-focused career in their respective industries. Lastly, there were demographic questions that asked about country of work, gender, and age. This was used to better understand the background characteristics of the individuals answering the survey.

The survey was designed with the capacity of participants in mind and their time. Therefore, the design aimed to take up to 5 minutes to complete. We received a total of 72 responses from individuals from varying backgrounds, seniority levels and industries around the world.

Following the collection of the survey responses, we developed a set of thematic codes based on the responses. Some discretion was used when answers were expanded upon and seemed to fit well with other thematics, whilst some wider themes were merged at a later stage of the analysis.

Our Results

The majority of our survey respondents were based in the UK (54%), and the majority of them worked in consulting (30%)

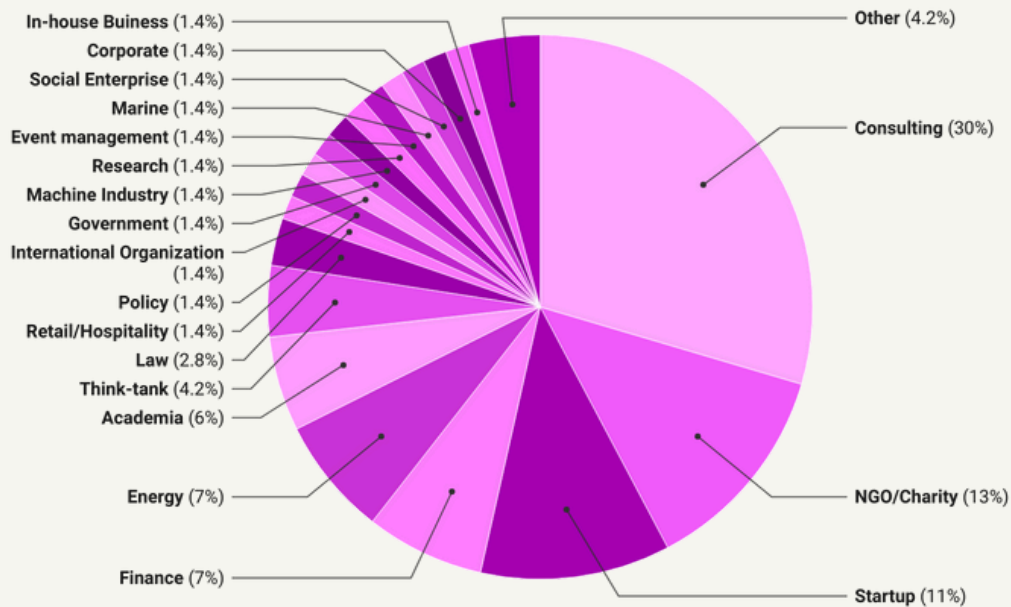
21
SECTORS

16
COUNTRIES

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Sector

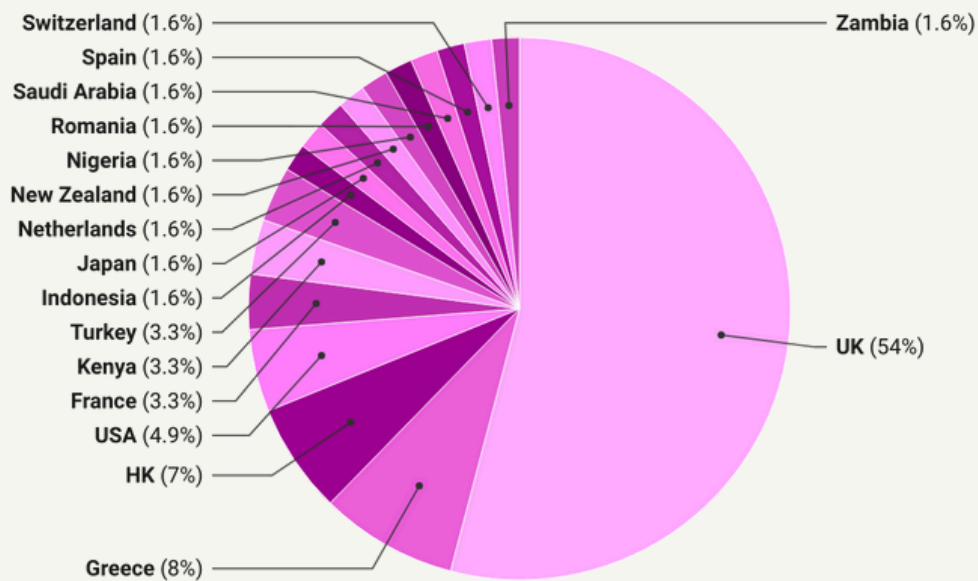
Sectors that survey respondents worked in



Source: Green skills survey • Created with Datawrapper

Country

Respondents' country of work

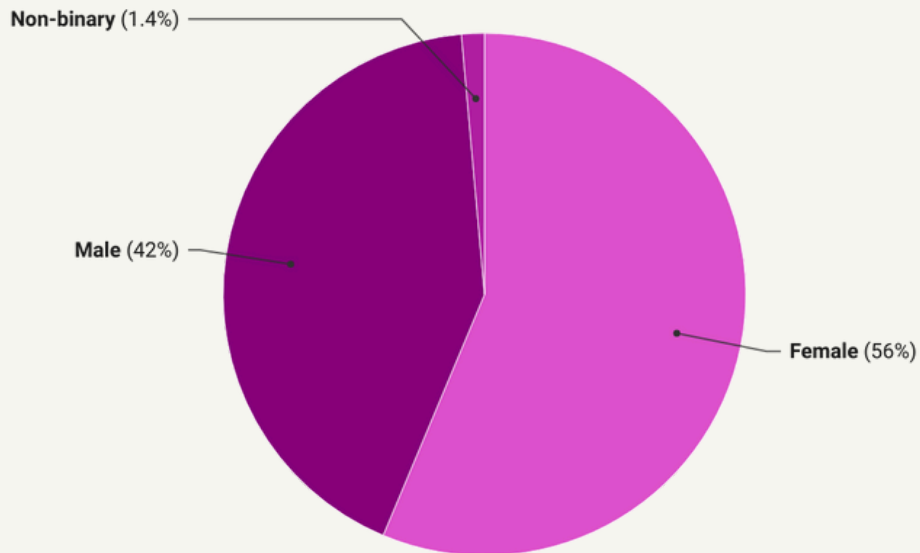


Created with Datawrapper

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

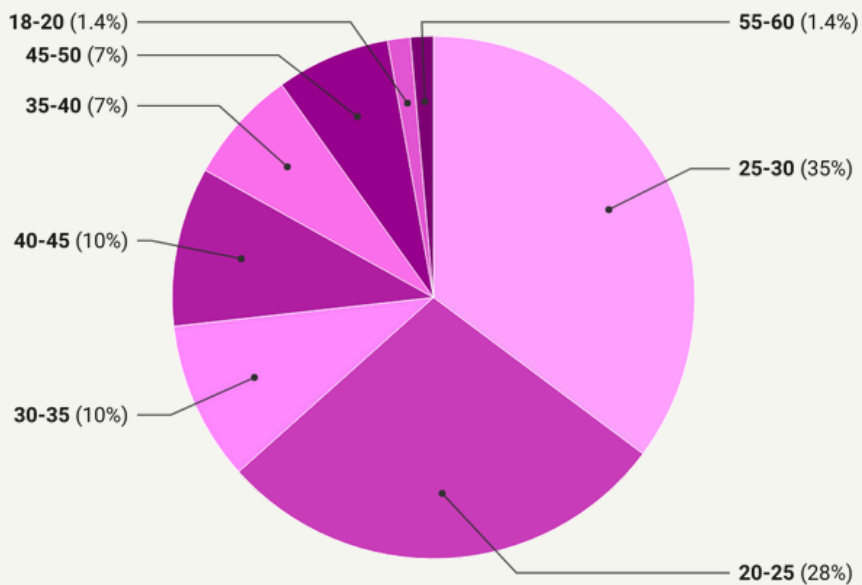
Respondents' gender



Created with Datawrapper

Age

Respondents' age group



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DEVELOPING THE 'RIGHT' SKILLS FOR A CAREER IN SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is an incredibly broad concept. In practice, this can result in highly diverse careers. In a space as rapidly evolving as sustainability, there is a need to develop a mix of soft skills and technical skills.

The main difference between soft skills and technical skills is how they are obtained and how they are applied in the workplace. Technical skills are obtained through hands-on experience, such as coding or website development. Soft skills – often referred to as 'people skills' – are character traits and interpersonal skills that enable relationship-building and complement, if not underpin, technical skills in the workplace. Importantly, both soft and technical skills can be developed over time, albeit in different ways. For example, many online courses now offer training for technical skills, whereas soft skills such as communication are harder to develop through online courses.

The following sections detail key insights from survey respondents that highlight skill sets required across the private sector, public sector, and NGO and civil society. Note that academia has also been categorised as part of civil society.

Most notable is the significance of soft skills to adapt and succeed in a highly dynamic and fast-moving career field. There is also a growing demand for technical skills, particularly regarding data analysis, synthesis, and data manipulation. Our findings indicate that regardless of the industry, an interdisciplinary approach for skill development is critical.

YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD ABOUT THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS), HOW ABOUT THE INNER DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

The Inner Development Goals (IDGs) are a useful framework that includes 5 dimensions and 23 skills and qualities identifying the soft skills needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was developed by a global team as an open-source initiative aimed at fostering inner development for sustainable futures.

These goals are primarily soft skills and qualities which many of our survey respondents have mentioned. As you read through the rest of the report, consider how all five pillars and their listed skills might be relevant and linked to different roles. You will also find some useful advice on how to develop these skills. One exercise is for you to think about examples of how you have demonstrated these skills, and under what circumstances these skills would be useful in different jobs that you will learn about.

WHICH CAREER SHOULD I FOCUS ON DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR?

Pathfinder

We are grateful to be collaborating with Pathfinder, an initiative led by London [Global Shapers](#).

In a four-step journey, Pathfinder will lead you on a path of self-discovery, guiding you through frameworks and exercises that you can use to gain clarity. Using Pathfinder, we bring together the framework and tools that support young people to Discover, Empower, Explore and Plan for their goals.

Pathfinder's mission is to guide young, aspiring change-makers between the ages of 16-24, to understand their values, identify their personal & career goals and map a route to achieving their vision, through their structured 'DEEP' self-paced learning journey.



You can access the Pathfinder here

We encourage you to read through this report and undertake the Pathfinder journey in parallel, to really hone in on your focus areas for your career and the key mindsets and skill sets that will set you up for success.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Respondents to our survey highlighted several top soft and technical skills most valued in their line of work. These skills were mentioned the most by respondents. What is evident is that though some jobs require more technical skills than others, there are a few stand-out soft skills valued by the majority of respondents.

Before diving deeper into each of the top soft and technical skills, here are some other skills that respondents highlighted that, although do not make the list for frequency, we thought were also interesting and worthy of mentioning.

Soft Skills	Technical skills
Communication	Data analysis & visualisation
Team work	Modelling
Critical thinking	
Systems thinking	

CURIOSITY

Sustainability is a fast-evolving field and a willingness to proactively learn is vital to career success. A manager in the manufacturing sector said, *“Master the art of asking questions!”*

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

This is the foundation of good collaboration and engagement with diverse stakeholders. Being able to negotiate, communicate, and work towards shared goals is important to success.

ADAPTABILITY

An entrepreneur said, *“Things change so fast in [sustainability], you need to adopt a learner's mindset as there is always so much to learn in the sustainability field.”*

CREATIVITY

An educator said, *“Think outside the box for what sustainability in your field can look like, or even how to communicate and articulate concepts when engaging with colleagues and other stakeholders.”*

POSITIVE-THINKING AND RESILIENCE

One respondent working at an environmental NGO said, *“Learn to manage setbacks and your own expectations, climate change is a major issue with many moving parts that will not be fixed overnight. It's good for your mental health to not attach your value or self-worth as an individual or professional to your perceived impact, celebrate the wins, no matter how small.”*

SOFT SKILLS

1.COMMUNICATION

The most important skill identified by all participants was communication - including oral and written communication skills. 22 of the 72 respondents representing several parts of the world, and coming from diverse backgrounds, made the point that clear communication is key. Some saw this as a gateway to building trust and partnerships, while others saw this as a way of communicating climate change information to those who do not have a background in this sector.



Who pointed this out?

The respondents who pointed out the importance of communication skills included consultants, analysts, researchers, a policy director, co-founders, engineers and managers. They all came from different seniority levels. These people also worked in several sectors including academia, international NGOs and private organisations, as well as charities, while their work spanned from water, air-quality, corporate sustainability, partnership development, interpersonal relations and more.

Enhance this skill by participating in interdisciplinary projects, honing public speaking skills, and learning negotiation techniques.

Reality Check

To show your strong communication skills in the interview process, provide examples of times when you had to explain complex information, or provide an example that demonstrates your ability to influence others. Particularly think about the audience you were communicating with. What did you do well? What did you not do so well?

2. TEAM WORK

Many respondents pointed out the importance of collaboration to succeed in a career. There is so much more that can be achieved through the collaboration of diverse skill sets and perspectives, particularly in the field of sustainability involving many cross-cutting topics. Working together with others is a chance for you to bring your acumen and knowledge to improve project outcomes.

Teamwork is a mixture of various skills: the ability to effectively communicate, be an active listener, resolve conflict, and work together towards shared goals.

Partnership-building is a key example of collaboration that can really drive transformative systems-wide impact. Undoubtedly, the transition to a sustainable future will require collaborative effort from people across industries, backgrounds, ages, and sectors.



Who pointed this out?

This was pointed out by project managers, team leads and finance professionals.

Building effective partnerships requires the following:

1. Ensuring everyone is aligned on the goals (useful tip: look to really understand the bigger picture for the project and proactively communicate with others).
2. Building trust: practice active listening, show appreciation for others, and set boundaries.
3. Being adaptable and agile: be honest and communicate upfront if things are not going as planned.
4. Holding yourself and others accountable: take ownership of key tasks and encourage others to do the same.

Reality Check

To highlight this in your CV, résumés and in job interviews, provide examples when you worked in teams of different sizes. Reflect on what your role was in these teams. What did you do well or not as well? What were the key challenges you encountered and how did you overcome these challenges? Demonstrate how you were able to resolve a conflict or when you took initiative to help your team meet a goal.

3. CRITICAL THINKING

Another key skill identified by the respondents was critical thinking. According to the Inner Development Goals, critical thinking includes skills in reviewing the validity of perspectives, evidence and plans. But overall, developing cognitive skills for evaluating information more broadly has been identified as an essential skill in most of our survey responses, and this is also pointed out by the IDG Framework. Critical thinking includes other skills such as long-term orientation and visioning, sense-making, perspective skills and complexity awareness. The latter is closely linked with other skills such as systems thinking because it gets us thinking about complex conditions. This was pointed out by several respondents because of the interdisciplinary nature of climate change and sustainability.

Who pointed this out?

Project managers, directors and consultants all stated that critical thinking was amongst one of the most important skills to succeed as a sustainability-focused professional.

Reality Check

To highlight critical thinking skills in interviews, focus on showcasing your thought process for achieving results. Highlight a situation where you were able to offer different perspectives, viewpoints, or create innovative solutions to deliver on a goal or output.



4. SYSTEMS THINKING

Systems thinking is the ability to think holistically and make connections between areas that are typically siloed. Thinking systemically is seeing the bigger picture. Within the context of sustainability, this is often framed through the triple bottom line, a phrase coined by John Elkington, which signifies “people, planet, and profit.” Systems thinking in sustainability is recognizing that the society, environment, and economy are interdependent and interconnected. For example, climate change can negatively impact biodiversity loss which can lead to public health crises. Public health crises can exacerbate racism and perpetuate socioeconomic inequities due to unequal access to healthcare in low-income communities and communities of colour. Being able to see how all of these areas are interconnected is thinking systemically.

According to page 56 of the book *Reimagining Systems for a Sustainable Future* by Sade Bamimore, “because sustainability is inherently interdisciplinary, it requires thinking in systems. Whether one defines sustainability as strictly the triple bottom line, as ESG (environmental, social, governance), or in terms of meeting the needs of current and future generations, these all require thinking beyond one focus area.”

Who pointed this out?

Respondents working in sectors ranging from retail to sustainability consulting pointed out the importance of systems thinking.

A director of sustainability and resilience of a large city government discussed with Sade for her book the vitality of systems thinking in sustainability leadership roles, “It is not just about knowing or being an expert in one area—it is about being an expert in multiple areas. You have to understand systems thinking in order to understand the various components that contribute to outcomes, and how, for example, retrofitting actually contributes to better public health because it lowers emissions.”

A professional in sustainable finance from our survey pointed out that “sustainability is about the wider system, not applicable or exclusive to one sector or topic. Everything is interconnected. Having that mindset in making decisions, be it operational or investment decisions, is very important.”

To learn more about systems thinking in practice, take a look at sustainable solutions that draw on different realms such as circular economy or food systems.

Reality Check

To demonstrate systems thinking in an interview, provide examples of scenarios that demonstrate adaptability, your ability to synthesise, how you show empathy and practice mindfulness in the workplace, and your enthusiasm for change.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

1. DATA ANALYSIS & VISUALISATION

Almost every role requires the ability to interpret data, and then use data to make informed decisions. In short, being data literate is crucial to be able to drive positive change. This is because data driven insights are powerful ways to engage wider audiences and can lead to influencing strategy development, partnership-building, policies and more.

Being proficient in data analysis means being able to utilise tools to evaluate quantitative and qualitative data. Once the data analysis is conducted, data visualisation is the ability to communicate the data through graphical representation. Some data analysis and visualisation tools and programs include: Microsoft Excel, SQL, R, Microsoft PowerBI, Tableau, Python, ArcGIS, and SAS. These tools are used to sort data to first derive key insights, and then help you to visualise the data in a clear and engaging way to audiences.

A training and development specialist from Kenya said, “*Understanding the latest technology is imperative to enhance sustainability in any industry. These skills include data analytics to derive data driven insights.*”



Reality check

When you are in an interview, prepare examples that demonstrate your ability to analyse and visualise both quantitative and qualitative data. Depending on the role, you may want to prepare numerous examples of quantitative data analysis. Emphasise your ability to maintain accuracy and organisation in your data analysis process. Describe the tools and softwares you use to conduct data analysis and visualisation.

2. MODELLING

Modelling involves using mathematical and computational methods to simulate key processes and systems. This is useful to test and evaluate different scenarios, such as modelling natural systems and processes. For example, climate modelling can provide a way to better understand climate change and its impacts at various spatial and timescales. Understanding climate models is not just the job of climate scientists, it is relevant for several professions. Models are tools used to make decisions on adaptation and mitigation measures (for corporations) or policies (in government). Other examples include modelling land-use change, flooding, or air pollution, all of which then inform response strategies. Modelling can help to simulate processes that enable optimisation, such as energy efficiency or financial modelling, amongst others.

Modelling as a technical skill ranges from knowing how to build an Excel model to coding with R. Not all jobs require building models, but it is still useful to be able to interpret modelling results and then be able to communicate its implications to stakeholders.

Modelling is linked to wider programming and statistical analysis skills and is not a singular type of technical skill.

Who pointed this out?

Respondents working as energy analysts, professionals in finance, and as climate risk consultants all listed modelling as a useful technical skill to have.



Reality Check

To demonstrate modelling skills in an interview, prepare concrete examples of past projects or experiences where you developed solutions. Convey your technical acumen by describing the modelling programs and softwares you know how to use and provide scenarios where you have successfully used these programs and/or software.

Disclaimer: Note that the descriptions below are by all means not representative of jobs overall given that there will be specific geographic differences, and even within one organisation, no two jobs are going to be the same. The examples below are meant to be an indicative glimpse of what our respondents' experiences look like.

Careers showcase

Having now identified important skills, how are they relevant for different types of jobs? This section aims to introduce you to some of the jobs that our survey respondents work in, to share some more detail about important skills in their line of work, and some valuable tips from them about working in the field.

When planning the kind of job you want to be applying for, use this section to get a sense of what that job might look like.

Feel free to use the below sections as a reference point, but be sure to do further desktop research and conversations with professionals in your geographic area of interest, as job opportunities, experiences, and salaries will differ greatly in different countries.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector refers to organisations not owned by the government, such as those owned by shareholders and investors. These are characterised as profit-driven entities. With immense economic power, the private sector is a crucial driver for the sustainability transformation. For example, the private sector is playing a critical role in financing nature-based solutions and scaling new technologies such as electric vehicles. Notable examples of private sector collaboration include the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), comprised of over 230 leading businesses coming together to tackle a range of sustainability-related topics.

Depending on the size and type of company you work for, sustainability roles can vary immensely. The following subsection explores roles that work in-house (i.e. within specific companies in a specific industry), or sustainability consulting (working with a range of different companies in a specific sustainability field such as finance, energy, or more broadly as a generalist consultant).

1. CONSULTANCY

Companies are increasingly looking to integrate sustainability into their business models and operations due to pressure from regulators, investors, and consumers. As companies strive to set sustainability goals, publish annual reports, and identify, assess, and prioritise sustainability-related impacts, risks, and opportunities, sustainability consulting has become an increasingly critical service to support the sustainability transition for businesses. Consultants help to drive this change by working with businesses across a range of industries and sectors to understand and improve corporate sustainability performance. The types of projects consultants work on can be very diverse and segmented, ranging from hydrogen-specific projects, to measuring greenhouse gas emissions, or advising C-suite executives on setting a realistic sustainability strategy. In the UK, the market for sustainability consultancy is set to almost double over the next five years, reaching 16 billion GBP by 2027.

Increasingly, the role of sustainability consultants is to help companies make sense of, and respond to evolving mandatory regulations and voluntary sustainability-related frameworks. Reading widely and having an understanding of global and regional frameworks and regulations is useful for preparing to work as a sustainability consultant.

Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important to succeeding in this role?

Strategic and systems thinking. The role requires thinking critically about connections, key priority areas as the field evolves, and seeing the business as part of a bigger picture of societal and environmental transformation.

This includes general knowledge about the relationship between the environment and society.

Project and programme management. Some respondents highlighted the importance of being able to build a business case for sustainability and then effectively delivering projects for clients. The Group Head of Sustainability in a multinational company pointed out that, “much of sustainability is about implementation, so it has to make business sense.”

Research and analytical skills. The role requires an understanding of the science behind environmental issues such as climate change, an awareness of policy developments, and an understanding of the latest market trends and drivers in sustainability within the private sector. Thus, being able to identify credible sources of updated information is important for effective project delivery and for communication with clients. Additionally, data analysis is crucial, especially when managing large datasets like greenhouse gas inventories (lists of carbon dioxide emission sources) and biodiversity data. The ability to synthesise extensive information to identify key gaps and insights is immensely valuable.

Negotiation skills are essential for this role, which involves collaborating with various stakeholders to understand trade-offs and develop long-term strategies that can be adopted by cross-functional teams within a clients' business.

Useful technical skills:

- Microsoft Excel
- Microsoft Powerpoint
- Carbon modelling
- Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

Please refer to the 'Useful Resources' section of this toolkit for further reading of relevant material in sustainability consulting.

Sustainability Consultant at a global sustainability consultancy

What does a day in your life look like?

Sustainability consultants advise companies on embedding sustainability into their business model. Consulting is typically a project-based role. Depending on the consulting firm, a consultant may be assigned to multiple projects in a variety of industries and sectors at once, or one project that they devote the majority of their time to. Projects may vary in terms of length, spanning from one week to multiple years. Depending on the project, no one day will be the same. Tasks may include collaborating with team members to create a PowerPoint presentation on strategies for sustainable value creation, conducting desktop research on the latest sustainability trends and regulations, writing annual sustainability reports aligned to global sustainability reporting standards, or analysing large amounts of data – such as greenhouse gas emissions – in Excel.

What kind of skills are most important in your line of work, and what are your top tips for how to develop them?

Being able to synthesise a lot of different information to come up with a consolidated viewpoint: The world of sustainability moves so fast, clients find it valuable when you can provide relevant information in a succinct way.

Time management: You will be required to work on different aspects of a project or even different projects simultaneously. Learn how to prioritise your time and always try to leave some buffer for when things do not go as planned.

Communication: A lot of my work involves communicating technical concepts such as climate change risk to people who might not have the same technical background. Learning to adapt the way you communicate in a clear manner to achieve intended outcomes is very valuable!

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

Look to build your personal brand. Openly communicate what your own goals and interest areas are within the consultancy.

Network. This can start even before you join a company. Understanding career opportunities, and even just viewpoints on sustainability will be very valuable.

Read widely about the key sustainability issues and topics that the private and/or public sector across different geographies are focusing on. Sustainability is a field that moves very quickly and to do the job well you need to be able to stay on top of the latest trends.

For more insights from graduate sustainability consultants about what it is like working in the field, listen to two SustainaPod episodes featuring graduate consultants working in corporate sustainability and climate change risk [here](#): and [here](#).

2. IN-HOUSE SUSTAINABILITY

As sustainability becomes more mainstream, companies are increasingly hiring sustainability professionals to join their in-house teams. To clarify, the phrase “in-house sustainability” is also referred to as “corporate sustainability.” A career in this field is demanding, requiring knowledge of various business functions, effective communication and the ability to see through both the commercial lens and sustainability lens for the business. Despite these challenges, it is an immensely rewarding career, offering the chance to leverage both sustainability and industry-specific expertise to drive meaningful change. The work days are varied, involving meetings and engagements with internal teams and external stakeholders such as investors and customers, as well as reviewing the company’s sustainability strategy and disclosing year-over-year performance.

In-house sustainability practitioners are crucial for ensuring companies have clear and defined sustainability ambitions. They drive changes to culture, internal processes, technologies, and infrastructure through a method known as ‘change management’. Effective organisational change relies on engaging with people to bring everyone along in the process. Therefore, it was no surprise that change management skills were highly valued by respondents.

Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important for succeeding in this role?

Communication and negotiation: Being able to articulate sustainability issues and topics to a diverse range of stakeholders.

Problem-solving: Being able to resolve various issues that arise in the implementation of sustainability initiatives or during the wider strategic transformation of the business.

Stakeholder engagement: Working collaboratively with diverse internal and external stakeholders to achieve collective sustainability goals.

Leadership: Leading various initiatives across teams within the company.

One Sustainability Strategy Manager in Manufacturing said, *“This job is very interdisciplinary, and in a field where there is much change management to do, and much frustration along the way, you have to steel yourself for that, as your resilience can be the difference needed to make an impact.”*

Sustainability officer at a global risk management company

What does a day in your life look like?

There is a strategic aspect and an administrative aspect. I am expected to engage with colleagues in other divisions of the business, such as human resources, finance, legal, supply chain to focus on understanding what these stakeholders are currently doing and potentially can do to support the company's sustainability strategy. On the administrative side, some of my work ranges from answering questionnaires from external stakeholders who are asking about the sustainability report, number crunching in Excel, or vendor management. There is also a lot of reading required including understanding upcoming sustainability regulations and their implications for different parts of the business. I also develop presentations to communicate these implications to others in the business. Working in-house means I am often seen as the 'expert' for sustainability from colleagues in other parts of the business, so I need to be familiar with the different sustainability initiatives, projects, or targets in specific areas of the company.

What kind of skills are most important in your line of work, and what are your top tips for how to develop them?

Data analysis: This doesn't mean being an expert data analyst, but at least being able to understand what different types of data mean and what this means for the business.

Reading comprehension and synthesis: The role brings different parts of the business together to tackle sustainability topics. Being able to understand complex topics and apply them to the business is useful.

Resilience and problem-solving in the face of challenges: Driving change internally is hard and there is sometimes frustration because teams work differently and there are expectations from the executive team as well as the challenge of implementing different projects at the same time. Being resourceful in the face of setbacks and not losing hope is important.

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

It is useful to have background knowledge about economics and financial systems because a big part of the job is trying to reconcile commercial interests with sustainability. For example, relating non-financial metrics to financial metrics. A lot of the role is about having good upward communication; I need to be talking to the executive team of the business and deliver messages in a succinct and persuasive way. Learn to do this well by understanding the objective of each message and delivering the message appropriately. Throughout your career (not just at the start), I would also encourage you to really reflect on whether there is a specific aspect of sustainability you would like to focus on more. While many sustainability roles in-house are focused on decarbonisation, for example, there are also other roles that are more focused on the social aspect of sustainability, such as sustainable procurement. There are opportunities to be a generalist or a technical specialist, and both are equally valuable. Networking is a must. Try to attend sustainability-related webinars and conferences, and when you are there, try to learn about the challenges that company representatives share. Particularly if you are interested in working at the company, this is a great way to understand the business ahead of interviews.

Head of sustainability at a large food retailer

What does a day in your life look like?

My work is incredibly varied. That's the most interesting part — there is not one day that is the same. I do more strategic work as the business's Head of Sustainability as opposed to a hands-on 'do-er' role in an operation or in a market, but there is plenty of opportunity in this sector for this. My day involves a lot of meetings with a lot of different people across the business such as the risk team, finance team, central procurement or marketing teams. A lot of those conversations could be focused on a very specific topic like procurement or the [EU Deforestation Regulation](#). Some meetings may be issue-specific such as strategy and target development, understanding what issues are coming up with stakeholders, and what are the key challenges different teams are facing with existing focus areas and targets. I will then think about how we can develop these sustainability targets going forward. I also do a lot of reading, getting to grips with new standards and regulations. I draw on that information to formulate plans and strategies for the business.

What kind of skills are most important in your line of work, and what are your top tips for how to develop them?

Negotiation and communication: You are constantly trying to sell things, be it ideas or implementation approaches to the business. You have to make sure you can articulate very technical complex information to non-sustainability experts. A lot of what we do is negotiating and trying to phase things into the business in a pragmatic way.

Attention to detail: It can be a very 'implementation' focused role at times, you need to understand and articulate key concepts and practices effectively with relevant technical knowledge of the processes.

What can one do to start developing good communication and negotiation skills?

Try it out in your everyday life! Many people don't know what sustainability means; have a think about whether you can try to explain why you do certain things (doesn't have to be sustainability-related) and focus on whether you can explain it in a way that anyone can understand. So, practice communicating to others and get in front of audiences as soon as possible.

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

This job is for you if you're curious, have a genuine passion for sustainability, and are not afraid of really throwing yourself into it and getting into the details. There are two things that have got me far in my own career: being curious and also being persistent. Have a realistic sense of impact. You won't change the world all at once, but even a little helps. A lot of job descriptions for sustainability try to cover a list of requirements and skills, but there is also flexibility for you to shape and develop roles once you are in it. Don't worry if the job description doesn't check every box that you are initially expecting. Finally, really take the time to understand the fundamentals of the business you are working in. This is crucial to doing the job well.

Want another case study? Check-in SustainaPod's interview with an in-house sustainability practitioner [here](#).

3.ENGINEERING

Engineering is fast becoming a sector where sustainability skill sets are becoming increasingly important. Sustainability professionals in the engineering sector enable the design of products and processes that can improve material and energy efficiencies to minimise environmental impacts to meet the needs of key stakeholders (such as consumers, manufacturers and investors). Depending on the sector, there can be highly technical skills required.

“Sustainability is a massive driver for the direction of the engineering industry. We’re already embarking on the green revolution with a focus on feasibility and the just transition. A key focus of the industry moving forward is supply chain diversification to ensure resilience and continuation of the engineering work with the needed raw materials and labour force.” - Low Carbon District Energy Design Engineer

Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important for succeeding in this role?

Communication: Negotiation and presentation of work to a range of stakeholders.

Technical skills: Modelling and coding.

Research skills: The ability to obtain research insights with agility and speed to inform project work.

Paul Jenkinson, President of European Young Engineers (EYE) offers some valuable advice for deploying the above skills in the role: *“Listen carefully, think proactively and don't cut corners! As a young person in the complex world of engineering, it is easy to go into autopilot mode and not take true accountability for fully understanding a concept. Make sure to take the opportunities to be inquisitive, learn from colleagues and really feel secure about your topic. This approach will help you find the areas for improving sustainability throughout any process.”*



Civil Engineer working in at an engineering consultancy

What does a day in your life look like?

This changes every day. On a given day, I juggle multiple projects but I usually have to focus on one or two and do small tasks for the others as necessary.

I will give you two typical examples. The other day, I started the day by first coordinating with the digital team who were putting together a drawing set for our design. Usually a drawing set for a design will be modelled. We normally keep in contact throughout the process, and then when they are done, I check their drawings in a programme and make comments for them to revise the drawings or model. Many projects now are moving away from producing drawings and only having a digital model. Our projects still generally have both as it depends on what we agree with our clients. While the digital team was helping me with the model, I was working on the design report (we were at the latter stages so the calculations were done already) to capture all the design features.

I also attend meetings throughout the day on various workplace initiatives I am part of. For example, I am part of the Sustainability Champions team, the team that is in charge of our Broader Outcomes strategy for my sub-discipline, and the Infrastructure Symposium Committee (we are putting together an internal conference for our infrastructure discipline ~250 staff in July). I also have other projects going on in the side where I will check in with various team members on progress but if the project is not my particular focus for the day I probably only spend 15 minutes on it to make sure things are going along.

Another example is that for one of my projects for construction, I get 'requests for information' notifications which are specific questions about the design. Sometimes clients want to change things, so I will respond by doing appropriate calculations amongst other things to make sure the design still works. Sometimes it even involves me going to a site to have a closer look.

What are the key skills that are needed in your line of work?

Technical skills like using various softwares and understanding first principle calculations.

Communication skills, project management skills and people management skills are also all important.

However, as the technology space changes, upskilling is important, you have to be constantly learning.

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

To advance these skills, sometimes it is on the job training (particularly with interpersonal skills). I also recommend checking out online courses to understand more techniques and then putting them into practice. Having a mentor (can be informal or formal) can be very useful for this process.

To hear some more interview tips, check out SustainaPod's interview with Dr Elisabeth Marlow, the Vice President of the Institute of Structural Engineering in the UK [here](#).

3. LAW

The legal profession is becoming key in addressing the challenges of climate change. For example, the Law Society published its Climate Change Resolution in 2021 outlining the role that solicitors can play in addressing the climate crisis. Importantly, the resolution urged legal professionals to approach matters in a way that regards climate realities and identifies climate change risks, liabilities and 'greener courses of action' as a means of future-proofing the profession.

The role of lawyers in the sustainability discourse varies, often in competing ways. Lawyers can play a key role in advocating for climate-change policies, such as from climate change litigation. A good example of this work can be found in [Client Earth's work](#). Columbia Climate School, Sabin Center for Climate Change Law in Columbia Law School has created a [Database of Climate Change Litigation](#) in the US and internationally.

On the contrary, there are litigation lawyers that work for a large corporate law firm. Their clients may be a fossil-fuel company that is sued by an NGO for their current and historic GHG emissions.

In another scenario, lawyers can play a crucial role to provide legal advice in the field of compliance and disclosure, such as enforcing the legal frameworks for a green transition [according to Legal500](#).

This includes working as an in-house lawyer and advising internal teams at a company on the implications of evolving regulations or working externally and advising a range of corporate clients on understanding their obligations and navigating the new waves of environmental compliance requirements and the legally binding targets affecting most businesses.

Another example includes enabling change from contract drafting and transactions. But this largely depends on the client's needs and best interests rather than those of society as a whole – which can be quite indicative of the competing priorities within the legal profession and progress as a whole.

Disclaimer: This section does not focus on the legal profession in a specific jurisdiction or international environmental law. Instead, it focuses on the intersection between legal professionals and the sustainability agenda more broadly.

Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important to succeeding in this role?

Quick learner: Read and understand vast amounts of information quickly.

Agility: Responding in agile ways to the upcoming regulations and sustainability-related disclosure landscape.

Legal knowledge: Understanding regulations relating to sustainability.

Commercial awareness: Keeping up with commercial topics.

What does a day in your life look like?

I spent time in two different teams that both worked on ESG-related issues. In the project development and finance team, we focused on renewable energy projects – drawing up and negotiating contracts behind their financing, construction and operations. In the litigation team, we worked on environmental and human rights lawsuits (acting for the defendants, e.g. oil & gas or mineral companies being sued for violations). In both teams, we advised clients on ESG-related issues, such as complying with supply chain-related legal obligations or reporting obligations.

In terms of the day-to-day, in the project development and finance team, I spent a lot of time reviewing client and counterparty comments on contractual clauses, amending the contracts to reflect these comments, and attending meetings to discuss outstanding issues with the clients and counterparties. I also spent time doing research on the latest trends in clean energy technologies, which helped with the team's business development efforts (i.e. producing know-how that the team can use to show clients that we understand their industry and therefore win their mandates).

In the litigation team, I spent time doing legal research and writing research memos on cases we were working on and on other high-profile cases that our clients may be interested in, reviewing evidence in lawsuits, and assisting with various admin tasks surrounding legal cases. I also spent time researching topics such as greenwashing, human rights abuses in supply chains, and the COP conferences (Note: COP stands for Conference of Parties, an international conference organised by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change every year).

What were the key skills you think were most important for doing well in the rotation (in the ESG team)?

As a lawyer working on ESG-related issues, you need to have a genuine interest in this area of law, have good communication skills, teamwork, attention to detail and an analytical mind. Below are the specific skills for the different teams.

Project development and finance

As the work you'd be doing will be primarily transactional (you are helping clients make transactions happen, e.g. building a wind farm or a solar park), you need to be able to work in a fast-paced environment, be pragmatic and solution-oriented, and have strong interpersonal skills. It is also important to develop good contract drafting skills.

You will also benefit immensely from having some understanding of the technologies and industries you are working on (e.g. How does a wind turbine work? How does an electricity grid work and how would a wind farm fit into that? What are the pros and cons of wind energy? What are the main players in wind energy in your jurisdiction/market? How long does it take to build a wind farm and what are the main risks surrounding it?).

Environmental litigation

You need to have strong analytical and research skills which will benefit you when researching difficult legal issues. You need to be able to see the big picture when working on a case and understand how a wide range of complex issues fit into that big picture. You will also need good case management skills as there will be a variety of administrative tasks involved with every court case.

Again, it would be helpful to have some level of scientific understanding of your case. For instance, how does a product at the centre of a court case cause water pollution? What are its effects / how does it affect the environment, people and animals?

(Sector-specific question): How would you say the legal sector is being impacted by sustainability?

The legal sector is being impacted by sustainability issues on a number of fronts.

Regulatory compliance: Countries are imposing increasingly stringent environmental regulations and standards. Companies need lawyers to advise them on how to ensure compliance with these new obligations.

Litigation: As mentioned above, environmental and human rights issues are increasingly the subject of litigation. Both claimants (often local communities or groups of people who have suffered some kinds of wrong) and defendants (often oil, mining and other types of multinational companies) need lawyers to represent them.

Corporate governance: Companies are increasingly expected to introduce policies to ensure their compliance and meet shareholder or public expectations.

M&A transactions: As ESG issues grow in importance, they are now increasingly factored into consideration in M&A transactions. For example, if company A (a conglomerate) buys company B (a water company) and, after the transaction, the news break out that company B has been pumping untreated sewage into rivers and causing water pollution, then company A (now owning company B) may face a reputational crisis resulting in adverse financial consequences and the prospect of government enforcement action and penalties. Therefore, before company A agrees to the purchase, it will want to make sure it conducts thorough due diligence on company B's environmental records and ensures there are mechanisms through which it can protect itself from risks arising from any past sustainability issues company B may have. Lawyers have a key role to play in such due diligence and in negotiating contractual clauses that manage related risks.

Legal industry itself: Of course, the legal sector itself is also thinking about its role in climate change and exploring ways to reduce emissions. Many law firms have introduced emissions targets and initiatives to help them achieve these goals.

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

Speak to as many people as possible who are working in environmental fields. It doesn't matter whether they are lawyers or not. There is so much happening in the field right now that it will help to get exposure and insights on what others are doing to inform your own career.

4. SUSTAINABLE INVESTING

Sustainable investing has become a key strategy for investors looking to build and promote sustainability within their portfolios while ensuring financial success. One of the most common approaches involves making investments in companies or financial products that aim to generate measurable environmental, social, and governance (ESG) impacts alongside financial returns. Sustainable investing is not only being adopted by financial institutions and investment firms; companies across the private sector are getting involved, and the field is projected to continue to grow. Assets with an ESG focus are predicted to surpass a value of \$40 trillion USD by 2030.

The first step to sustainable investing typically involves including or excluding specific sectors, companies or practices from a financial product or portfolio based on certain ESG criteria. The assets' ESG performance is assessed and ranked based on predefined criteria – these ratings are issued by both commercial and non-profit organisations to help investors assess companies and their products. Examples of this include: MSCI, Morningstar and Bloomberg ESG. Beyond funding companies, there are ways to fund specific projects aimed at achieving sustainability goals through sustainable debt finance (such as sustainability-linked bonds). To learn more, check out the range of sustainable finance instruments that companies can develop here.

Given that the private sector is increasingly focusing on sustainable investing as a valuable way to positively contribute to sustainable development while generating real financial returns, demand for sustainable finance professionals is increasing. Roles in sustainable finance are varied depending on the type of company you work in (E.g. consultancy, investment firm or a bank).

Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important to succeeding in this role?

Analytical and critical thinking skills: Applied to investment decision-making.

Financial analysis and valuation skills: Crucial to understanding the value of ESG issues when assessing risk and/or factoring into investment decisions.

Research: Useful to gain proficiency in ESG frameworks, ratings and metrics and market trends.

Teamwork: Sharing knowledge and collaborating with investors, portfolio managers, industry experts, ESG data providers and others to stay informed about best practices and investment processes.

Sustainable Investment Analyst

What does the day to day look like?

My day-to-day involves working in a fast-paced environment involving working with a range of different people from portfolio managers, asset managers, research teams, to other internal and external stakeholders.

For example, I support asset managers in assessing a potential project / asset's ESG performance based on a predefined criteria. This criteria may be driven by regulatory obligations (such as requirements to being a "Sustainability Impact" fund under the UK Sustainable Disclosure Requirements, or to being aligned to an activity classified under the EU Taxonomy) or internal investment commitments (the expectations held by the investors of the asset managers). When undergoing due diligence (assessing a potential project for investment), we would work with the key parties involved in the project to understand the project's adherence to the asset managers' commitments/obligations from pre-investment all the way through to exit.

Strategy implementation encompasses a lot of services. An example would be if a company would like to raise a fund in the UK and Europe that would classify as "sustainable" under a number of EU and UK ESG regulations. We would assist in shaping the fund to ensure that when the fund is launched, it would adhere to these requirements and avoid any risk of greenwashing. This may involve including ESG metrics and indicators into asset allocation strategy, ensuring robust engagement policies with investee companies, adherence to social safeguards like human rights and more. Another example would be if an existing fund or fund manager is looking to integrate ESG considerations into their traditional operational departments (e.g. risk management teams, deals teams, etc.). This would include valuing assets' exposure to climate-related risks and factoring them into risk appetites and investment decisions, improvements to the firm's governance structures, and so forth. Strategy implementation is a great way to learn how to translate ambitions into practical actions.

(Sector-specific question): Would you recommend getting a certification for ESG investing?

Certification helps you build your credentials and confidence to speak about particular topics relating to ESG investing. Some people in the finance sector go for a certification to improve their reputation. Ultimately, companies really are looking for self-starters who are able to pair a good understanding of ESG and sustainability with financial knowledge.

I would also add that a background in finance is very valuable. Pairing a financial background with good understanding of ESG and sustainability as a whole is key to excelling in a career in this rapidly emerging field.

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

Be curious – keep reading and speaking to people about the evolving space of ESG investing. It is a rapidly changing field so embrace the journey!

Stay on top of the latest trends in the space, such as mandatory and voluntary sustainability disclosures and what this means for different companies.

Come to interviews with different perspectives about financial sector implications for various ESG related regulations.



Understand ESG ratings and rankings, particularly where their limitations are and what the landscape looks like for different industries. Some, such as renewable energy, are growing very fast.

Being able to communicate effectively is key – you can showcase that in the interview by giving examples of when you tailored communication and presentation to different audiences.

Some of the advice from the above case study have been extracted from a 'SustainaPod' podcast episode. The link to the full episode is [provided here](#)

5. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Starting your own company is no easy feat, requiring a certain appetite for risk, passion for the vision, and a lot of resilience. But there has also never been a more exciting time to be an entrepreneur. The sustainability field urgently needs innovation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and entrepreneurs are drivers of transformation across all sectors, from packaging, clean energy to the food we eat (just to name a few). To give just one example, [Notpla](#) is a company making an alternative to plastic-packaging using seaweed, founded by two Imperial College London and Royal College of Art students that received the prestigious Earthshot Prize in 2023.

In the early stage of scaling an idea into a viable business, entrepreneurs can face challenges across all domains, from building a good team and a customer base, to securing the financial resources to achieve growth goals. But for someone with big passion, ambition and belief in the vision of the idea, founding a startup and/or working in one is highly rewarding, requiring a high degree of agility in the ways of working compared to jobs in large and well-established corporations.



Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important to succeeding in this role?

Leadership: Setting clear goals aligned to the wider mission and establishing the processes and accountability to the team.

Communication skills: This includes adapting communication for negotiation with key stakeholders and for working with others on the team.

Learning quickly: This is important to build financial, technical literacy even in a non-technical role, particularly around innovation.

Commercial acumen: Making sustainability profitable is vital for entrepreneurship in this field.

Founder of a zero waste and vegan Kimchi company in the UK

What does the day to day look like?

My day varies a lot. I'll be speaking to suppliers, making kimchi (of course!), setting up my stall, working on my social media account and marketing strategy, and also looking for new hires.

What are the most important skills to develop to succeed as a founder?

Prioritisation and time management. Learning how to prioritise tasks and reflect on continuously improving how to operate in the day today is essential. To improve your time-management, you can learn effective time-management skills from practice (figure out what time-management practices work for you to set a good routine).

Resilience and problem-solving. There will be so many challenges so you need to have a mindset of never giving up and being resourceful to overcome problems when they occur.

(Sector-specific question): Why is entrepreneurship important in the sustainability field?

Sustainability inherently means going against the status quo and involves changing systems and behaviours. The skill sets that come up with creative solutions often overlap with entrepreneurial tendencies, such as questioning, designing, implementing, and leading. But most importantly, I think entrepreneurs want to make a positive impact in whatever field they choose to tackle in sustainability.

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

You have to love your idea because you will be living, breathing, and sleeping it.

If you aren't thinking of founding a startup, but instead working at a startup, be proactive. It's a great opportunity to really get exposure to loads of different aspects of the business in what is likely a smaller and more tight-knit team.

Want to hear more about the career journey of other sustainability entrepreneurs? Check out the following SustainaPod's interviews

[Interview](#) with a co-founder of a sustainable alternative to plastic packaging (The Invisible Company)

[Interview](#) about working at green tech startup CarbonBase

[Interview](#) with the founder of a sustainable beer company Breer

PUBLIC SECTOR

The public sector is a catch-all term for organisations operated or owned by government(s) that provide a service for citizens. For the purposes of this toolkit, we have included a feature on both working with/in governments at the international and national level.

6. UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations is an intergovernmental agency that establishes global policies and launches initiatives to promote peace, human rights, and sustainable development. There are numerous entities within the UN with specific focus areas on different topics, such as Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), UN Women, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

No day may look the same depending on the UN entity you are interested in. Tasks vary from collaborating with various countries (locally or nationally) to develop and launch workshops to educate global stakeholders, or conducting research and reporting findings in publications.

What are the key skill sets most important to succeeding in this role? As we did not get too many respondents working at the UN in our survey, the top skills for this role have been desktop research: communication, data analysis, multicultural teamwork, leadership, project management, and problem solving.

In terms of landing a role at the UN, it is common to do so via an internship and then secondarily via a contract role. It is rare that people enter the UN system through a permanent role.

Policy Specialist: Youth and Agrifood Systems at the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)

What does the day to day look like?

My day-day activities consist of a range of tasks including reading reports, documents, papers or scientific articles related to policy coherence and categorising or summarising them in the form of a literature review. I also do communication and coordination work with country offices for activities such as launching a country brief, podcast release, and more. Additionally, some of my work involves supporting concept note formulations and consultation in preparation for key events being held at the FAO. I will also take part in meetings with supervisors and colleagues (both one-one and team meetings).

(Sector-specific question): What useful resources do you recommend for young people to look at if they are interested in learning more?

Job vacancy portals for the FAO, going through the recent resources in FAO divisional websites, joining relevant LinkedIn groups, and staying updated through the [FAO podcast](#).

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

Look to understand the concepts, practices, and challenges relating to agrifood systems across different contexts (both globally and locally). This job in the FAO is something you will enjoy if you are interested in agriculture and food systems, and if you like normative work in policy and governance issues in a very international environment.

Network with colleagues working in the agriculture and food systems sector (UN/ NGOs/ INGOs) through LinkedIn or at conferences. Reach out with some interesting questions and try to secure coffee chats.

Vacancies open up at varying times across the year, try to apply for relevant jobs whenever possible (you learn a lot even from a simple application and/or interview process).

7. CIVIL SERVICE

The civil service refers to a group of government officials who are employed in civil occupations that are neither political nor judicial. Civil servants work for central, state, and local governments and they are accountable to the government, not political parties or politicians.

The civil service plays a key role in driving the sustainability agenda in the following ways:

Policy Development and Implementation: Civil servants are responsible for developing and implementing policies that align with sustainability goals. This includes coordinating activities with the private sector and civil society, making sense of thousands of indicators, and tying the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in with the needs of citizens at a local level.

Education and Advocacy: The Civil Service Environment Network (CSEN) was created as a space for all civil servants to share and build knowledge and capabilities in environmental policy. The aim is to educate, develop, and inspire civil servants across four cross-cutting themes: Climate Change; Natural Resources; Biodiversity and Ecosystems; and Sustainable Development.

Infrastructure Management: The UK government manages the biggest property portfolio in the country. Buildings account for a significant proportion of total emissions, so driving sustainability and reductions in energy consumption in the public estate is a priority. The Government Property Strategy makes a clear commitment to create a smaller, better, and greener public estate.

Setting Targets: The civil service helps set specific targets and provides a delivery framework for departments and other governmental organisations to improve their sustainability. For example, the UK government has a target to reduce direct emissions from public sector buildings by at least 50% by 2032.

Civil service plays a critical role in fostering advocacy and mediation in policy development, identifying crucial development priorities, proposing practical solutions and policy opportunities, and evaluating policies.

Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important to succeeding in this role?

Critical thinking for policy evaluation and development.

Teamwork that increases legitimacy for recommendations.

Topical expertise paired with an innate desire to learn.

Data analysis to understand policy impacts.

One respondent working in the UK civil service shared that: *“Diversity of skills is more emphasised. It is useful to have different viewpoints and opinions.”*

Fisheries Management in the UK Civil Service

What does the day to day look like?

The day-to-day life of someone working in the civil service varies. The role can include data collection and analysis, or desk-based research such as evidence reviews. A lot of work goes into engaging with stakeholders around specific policy concerns. This means that some civil servants may also spend time coordinating stakeholder engagement and outreach. Other civil servants may use this research to make presentations for briefings and meetings.

What kind of skills are most important in your line of work, and what are your top tips for how to develop them?

Technical capabilities: This includes a strong background in mathematics, statistics, and programming. This can help you thrive even if it has nothing to do with Fisheries. In my line of work in particular, there is a lot of emphasis on population dynamics models. There are books by Beverton and Holt as well as Walters and Holborn which are fundamental to fishery science. But really, fisheries are a multi-faceted area where a diversity of backgrounds are required due to the nature of the importance of fisheries to society, the economy and the environment.

Advice for young people looking to enter this field:

Enthusiasm and passion for the topic and role is the most important. Knowledge of key issues in fisheries as well as some prospective solutions is useful but not essential because it is normally very rare to have a scientific background in fisheries.

The most important tip is the ability to look to transfer your pre-existing skills and knowledge into the work environment.

8. CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is a broad umbrella term encompassing “a wide array of organisations: community groups, non-governmental organisations [NGOs], labour unions, Indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations.” In the world of sustainability, civil society plays a key role in advocating for the implementation of new laws, programmes at the international, national and local level and holding the public sector (governments) and private sector (companies) accountable to the sustainability transition.

One area of civil society, the NGO, is dynamic and varied, given the diversity of topic areas that NGOs work on. Working in an NGO provides an opportunity for rewarding and meaningful work alongside colleagues that share the same mission and purpose. Self-growth and initiative is vital, particularly in smaller organisations where individuals may be required to take on numerous roles.

Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important to succeeding in this role?

Communication: Partnerships and stakeholder engagement are essential in this sector.

Adaptability and flexibility: NGOs are often required to navigate challenges, work cross-culturally and potentially deal with sensitive issues while working with diverse populations.

Project management: Deploying a mix of tools and practices to complete projects while constrained by scope, time, and budget.

Data analytics: Leveraging a range of tools and softwares to drive data related insights for stakeholders with a specific focus on impact measurement and metrics.

Fundraising: Many NGOs rely on grants and donations, so good commercial acumen and ability to engage with donors as well as strong writing skills are needed.

Uzoamaka (Uzo) Nwamarah, Imperial alumna and Climate Change Adviser at the Commonwealth Secretariat offers some great advice: *“Reach out and engage with people. There’s more to university life than your course so take full advantage of the opportunities presented within the wider university ecosystem. Join clubs, work with different lecturers and volunteer your time across the various institutes, labs and innovation centres, so you’re building your skills and developing relationships. I know you’re thinking about your future and passing exams, but the time in university goes quickly. Seek out those connections that challenge and inspire you, because in them lies the foundation for a future rich with potential and possibility.”*

Project manager at a youth-led sustainability NGO in Hong Kong

What does the day to day look like?

Identifying potential funding sources and collaborators, brainstorming ideas, designing projects and programme structures. This means quite a few meetings for me with key stakeholders throughout the day. For days where I am visiting schools to deliver workshops about climate resilience and sustainability, I prepare content and run through workshop logistics.

What kind of skills are most important in your line of work, and what are your top tips for how to develop them?

Constant willingness to learn. There is always so much to get involved in. I feel like my role shifts constantly. Stay curious and motivated to put yourself out of your comfort zone to embrace challenges.

I would also say skills such as marketing, financial management, project management are all important ones that you should have the willingness to learn about and try out on the job.

What are your key advice & top tips for young people looking to enter this field?

I will focus on advice for preparing your CV. List out projects that show your passion and tell your own story. Make sure to use LinkedIn actively for your personal branding – look through the profiles of people you admire and identify what they do well to tell their story.

Also, be opportunistic! Be it identifying potential new partners, or coming up with new creative ideas for a workshop to be held, always keep an open mind for opportunities that you can leverage.

(Sector-specific question): Do you have any resources you would suggest young people can look at?

There are plenty of resources that are global and regional, so here are my suggestions:

At a Global scale: [Work in Climate](#), [Climate Drift](#)

Specific to the UK: [GreenJobs Board](#), [The Guardian](#)

Specific to Asia: [Jobmakesense](#), [Climate Incubator weekly career booster](#) (Hong Kong)

9. ACADEMIA

Academia as a whole is another large institutional stakeholder and profession in the sustainability field. Academia plays a key role in bridging the gap between experts and non-experts. There are two routes to “academia” or “research” which includes:

1. Joining a think-tank or a knowledge (in-house) team.
2. The traditional academic route where one teaches and conducts research in Universities.

Universities and research institutes work on climate change and the environment to drive discovery and implement innovative solutions. These also work to communicate academic knowledge to businesses, industry and policy-makers. An example of this is the [Grantham Institute at Imperial College London](#). Importantly academia is a key stakeholder in societal commitment to combating climate change and a source of independent knowledge. Universities and higher education institutions are recognised for their responsibilities when knowledge, skills and innovation are needed to deal with global challenges.

Academic research ranges in all areas related to climate change, the environment and the natural world. This is not specific to one University Department due to the large breadth and complexity of sustainability that necessitates research on several “niches.” This can include research in policy, education, biology, engineering, social sciences, law, psychology and more



Based on the survey, what are the key skill sets most important to succeeding in this role?

Research skills: By nature a PhD is all about research, so being able to collect data, analyse information and adopt a critical eye to the research is important.

Partnership building and stakeholder engagement: Building community partnerships with those on the ground who would have contextual realities, establishing trust and rapport with interviewees/people in the field for potential synergies in future academic research or policymaking

Technical and analytical skills including data management

Science communication and presentation skills

What does the day to day look like?

The day-to-day of a researcher looks different depending on their area of expertise. For instance, if their research focuses on secondary information (i.e. a literature review), then you are likely to find academics on their computers or in the library reading. Some academics and researchers go on what is known as “field work” where they visit a different locality (can span from Richmond in London to different parts of Thailand). Others work on technical topics and can be found in university labs analysing samples or testing theories.

(Sector-specific question): What are the most challenging aspects of pursuing a PhD?

In my experience, the most challenging aspects of pursuing a PhD vary from technical to interpersonal. On a practical note, funding your research can be a challenge. There are two approaches. One is to do someone else’s proposed project, or an aspect of their research where they have already received funding. The other is where you have a research idea that you want to fund and develop further. The choice of supervisor is also key because you will be working with that person for a minimum of 3 years – their expertise in your research field is important so that they can guide and support you throughout your PhD process. Lastly, on a practical note, having the necessary technical skills to complete your research is also key.

On an interpersonal level, a PhD can become lonely from time to time. Academia has some rigid, traditional hierarchies that PhD students have to navigate. A PhD also requires strong self-organisation skills and discipline. Your supervisor is unlikely to micromanage you throughout the 3-4 years of your PhD’s duration, which means that you have to set and manage your own ‘internal’ or ‘self’ deadlines.

(Sector-specific question): How does a PhD position people to enter the job market after completion?

You will not find a lot of PhD students that know what they want to do after they finish their project, but a PhD opens a lot of doors. Answers to this also depend on the stage that a PhD student is in in their career already, for instance, we have many experienced professionals in my department who have worked in industry before pursuing their PhD. We also have students with 0 - 1 year experience in industry who then pursued their PhD. From my perspective, there is the obvious career path in academia. While you do your PhD, you also get a lot of opportunities to teach in university as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), which means that you are building your CV and experience to follow that path. For those of us without previous experience, internship or external consulting opportunities during our PhD are important to get a feel for what is out there after graduation. Depending on your PhD, you can do many things after graduation that do not include academia. For instance, consulting, policy advising, project management or joining a think-tank.

(Sector-specific question) Top tips for students hoping to successfully apply for a PhD?

Think about the topic you would be pursuing and whether that is something you can think about everyday for the next 3 to 4 years of your career. Measure the pros and cons: time commitment, career development, network development, research, capacity and funding. Leverage the skills and knowledge you already have and any previous research experience. Connect with your supervisor and make sure your working styles are compatible. Lastly, find your 'circle' – a PhD buddy who doesn't necessarily have to be in your Department or research group, but someone who you will be able to connect with throughout your PhD experience.

What is your key advice & top tips for young people looking to enter this field?

Luckily - or not - there are some standard ways to "get into academia." This includes getting a PhD. There are different degrees. For instance, a traditional path to academia looks like this:

1. Undergraduate
2. Master's programme
3. PhD programme

Another approach looks like this:

1. Undergraduate
2. MPhil programme which includes what you would learn in a Master's and can then progress into:
3. A PhD


Your PhD can be self-funded, but you may also receive funding from an organisation to carry out specific research. This can be traditionally between 3 and 4 years if done full-time or 7 to 8 years if done part-time.



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 The Sustainable Futures Toolkit Resource Hub is here! Feel free to send over recommendations for resources you would want to see. Disclaimer: we are not affiliated with any of the organisations, these are purely...

 Eirini's Notion on Notion

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For any feedback/ thoughts on how we can improve this, please don't hesitate to reach out to hello@sustainabilityforstudents.com.