STRENGTHENING PATHWAYS INTO SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CAREERS

AN EVIDENCE-BASED TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS SUPPORTING GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

THE SCGE PROJECT

This toolkit is an output from the SCGE project supported by funding from the British Council's Going Global Partnerships programme.

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Lead institutions:

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Partner institutions:

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ABOUT THE SCGE PROJECT

The Sustainability Careers and Gender Equality (SCGE) project is supported by funding from the British Council's Going Global Partnerships programme aimed at strengthening pathways into employment and career opportunities. We design practice-based research and interventions that focus on the student aspirations gap, gender inequality and reality in sustainability and climate careers.

The overarching aim of this project is to highlight sustainability careers for women university students in the UK, South Africa, Botswana, Ghana and Australia, and arm them with future possibilities based on a more efficient information set so that they can navigate challenges and barriers to entry. Accelerating the role of women in green agendas represents a pivotal avenue through which they can not only gain economic empowerment, but also wield significant influence and agency in shaping sustainable development trajectories. Mentorship activities can help build confidence, offer guidance on overcoming the obstacles and inspire mentees to achieve their goals.

In collaboration with industry, our innovative cross-cultural collaborative project offers unique practical interventions to 1) broaden women students' perspectives on possible sustainability career options and 2) bring industry/practice and higher education closer in addressing climate action. We do this through uncovering lived experience, elevating diverse voices and empowering motivated action. This project contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5 and 17.

Women can play instrumental roles in driving innovation, fostering social cohesion and spearheading grassroots initiatives mitigating environmental degradation to the benefit of all. By harnessing the potential of green jobs as vehicles for empowerment, women can secure their livelihoods and improve their quality of life, additionally contributing to the collective endeavour for a just, equitable and sustainable future.

Throughout the SCGE project, we gathered input from over 800 students and over 30 sustainability practitioners from the participating countries. The materials produced as part of the SCGE project have been designed so that lecturers can use activities in class, whereas students can work through activities on a self-study basis. In addition to conducting one cross-country survey, we also delivered four practical local workshops in the UK, South Africa, Botswana and Ghana, conducted a practical mentorship scheme, and hosted three international capacity-building webinars.

Our project includes the development of an evidence-based toolkit for educators supporting gender equality, climate action

and awareness of sustainability careers for embedding development opportunities in classrooms. In addition, we produced three open-access video resources that offer cross-cultural, contextual and practical understanding of the role of gender in climate action, including educational and industry contexts. Our recorded capacity building webinar series challenges existing practice and shares new methodologies for increasing awareness about gender roles in sustainability and preparing students for success in an uncertain world and the ever-changing workplace through the building of skills in collaboration, problem solving, creative thinking and communication. The final showcase webinar disseminates our research findings to a broader global academic community to support educators to develop their understanding of the skills, competencies and behaviours necessary for graduates to thrive in the diverse sustainability career workplaces of tomorrow.

You can find more information about the project and its partners by visiting https://sustainabilitycareersgenderequality.co.uk.

We hope you enjoy exploring our materials.

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is based on findings from the British Council-funded project "The Student Aspirations Gap, Gender Equality, and Reality in Sustainability Careers". The project brought together universities, students and practitioners across five countries to better understand how students perceive sustainability careers and what support they need to pursue these pathways.

The toolkit translates these insights into practical activities and guidance that educators can use in their teaching. It focuses on helping students understand sustainability and climate careers, recognise the skills they already have and build confidence to explore these career pathways. The toolkit also supports educators in addressing gender equality in sustainability careers by helping students access role models, networks and opportunities that strengthen career readiness.

In the toolkit, we draw evidence from qualitative data collected from students and sustainability practitioners across the participating countries. Students shared their views on sustainability careers, including the skills they believe are important, how prepared they feel and what support they need. Practitioners shared insights on the skills, experiences and guidance that help students succeed in sustainability careers.

Several themes emerged from the data:

- Students are interested in sustainability careers, but often have limited awareness of available pathways.
- Students identified communication, problem solving, teamwork and analytical skills as important for sustainability roles.
- Many students reported that their university education helps develop relevant skills, but that more practical exposure would be helpful.
- Practitioners emphasised the importance of mentorship, real-world exposure and opportunities to apply knowledge in practice.
- Both students and practitioners highlighted the importance of visible role models and support structures, particularly for advancing gender equality.

These insights directly informed the structure, activities and guidance included in this toolkit.

OBJECTIVES AND CORE PRINCIPLES

The objectives of this toolkit are as follows:

- To increase students' awareness of sustainability and climate career pathways
- To help students recognise and develop skills relevant to sustainability careers
- To connect academic learning to real-world sustainability roles
- To support the design of inclusive learning experiences
- To support students' confidence, motivation and career readiness.

The toolkit responds directly to evidence from students and practitioners, who highlighted the importance of practical exposure, mentorship and clear career information in supporting sustainability career development.

This toolkit is designed for:

- university lecturers and students;
- course and module convenors;
- programme coordinators;
- career and employability staff; and
- educators involved in workshops, mentorship and enrichment activities.

The activities included are illustrative examples intended to guide educators; they are not exhaustive and may be adapted, expanded or combined. The activities have the following characteristics:

- Evidence-informed: Reflect the experiences and perspectives shared by students and practitioners
- Interactive and reflective: Encourage discussion, reflection and active student participation
- Connected to real-world practice: Help students understand how sustainability is applied in professional settings
- Supportive of career development: Help students recognise their skills and explore career pathways
- Focused on gender equality: Help increase awareness, confidence and access to sustainability career opportunities.

The activities can be used in different ways:

- As part of existing modules
- As part of self-study
- In standalone lectures or workshops
- During guest speaker sessions
- In career development activities
- In mentorship or co-curricular programmes.

The toolkit is flexible and can be adapted across disciplines, class sizes and teaching formats, including face-to-face, online and hybrid learning. Educators can use individual sections or activities on their own, combine them in different ways or adapt them to suit their teaching context and students' needs. Students can use individual sections or activities for self-study and professional development.

The toolkit was designed to ensure that activities are practical, relevant and grounded in real student and practitioner experiences.

This toolkit is guided by five core principles:

1. **Student-centred learning:** The activities help students reflect on their interests, strengths and career goals.
2. **Connection between learning and careers:** The activities show how academic knowledge and skills apply to real sustainability and climate careers.
3. **Gender equality:** The activities help address barriers to career access and support equal participation in sustainability careers.
4. **Practical and adaptable:** The activities are designed to be easy to use and adapt across different teaching contexts.
5. **Reflective learning:** The activities encourage students to reflect on their skills, career interests and next steps.

2. UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CAREERS

USE THIS SECTION IF YOU WANT TO:

- introduce sustainability and climate careers broadly;
- challenge narrow or technical career stereotypes; and
- prompt discussion on visibility and access across genders.

OVERVIEW

Sustainability and climate careers exist across many sectors, including business, government, finance, consulting, non-profits and community organisations. These roles include sustainability analysts, environmental social governance specialists, project managers, policy advisors, sustainability accountants and communication professionals. What surprises many students is that you don't need a specialised environmental degree to enter these careers. Many professionals working in sustainability today come from diverse academic backgrounds such as business, engineering, social sciences, humanities and arts. The transferable skills you develop across different disciplines such as critical thinking, communication, problem solving and collaboration are exactly what employers are looking for.

Educators have an important role in helping students understand just how broad sustainability careers really are. When students see that their existing skills are valuable and relevant, they're more likely to explore these pathways seriously. This is especially important for supporting gender equality in sustainability careers. Research shows that when students can see clear and relatable career pathways and have role models to follow, they're much more confident about pursuing those opportunities.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

ISEP (Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals) Green Careers Hub
https://www.greencareershub.com

The Green Careers Hub offers job profiles, monthly webinars and career stories from professionals across different sectors. Their video case studies show the day-to-day realities of working in sustainability roles, including stories from career changers who moved into the field from completely different backgrounds.

Career story examples

Sadat Itohan Ihwughwavwe's journey to environmental stewardship

https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/career-stories/sadat-ihwughwavwe-environmental-stewardship/

In this career story, Sadat shares her path from studying environmental science to working in environmental stewardship, discussing the skills she developed, challenges she faced and practical advice for students interested in similar roles. This can help students see how academic learning translates into professional practice and understand the varied pathways into sustainability careers.

Richard Naylor – from sales to sustainability

https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/career-stories/richard-naylors-career-from-sales-to-sustainability/

Richard's career in furniture took him from sales to sustainability leadership, demonstrating how professionals can transition into green roles from non-environmental backgrounds.

Green Horizons video series

https://www.greencareershub.com/green-horizons/

This digital series explores the future of green jobs, the skills needed to thrive and professionals already making an impact through short films and interviews.

Sustainable Matters podcast (ISEP)

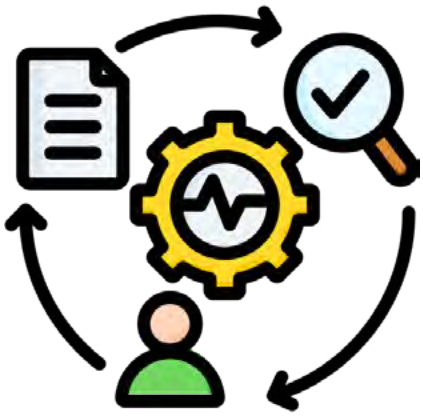
https://www.isepglobal.org/sustainable-matters

Hear from experts in technology, conservation, food, finance and nature discussing ideas, challenges and hope for the planet. This podcast is ideal for students who want to understand different perspectives in sustainability work.

SCGE PROJECT EVIDENCE INSIGHT

Students in this project often report limited awareness of sustainability career pathways. Some students associate sustainability careers only with scientific or technical roles and do not recognise how their own degree and skills could contribute. Practitioners similarly noted that sustainability roles are evolving rapidly and require professionals from diverse educational backgrounds.

Students across all participating countries reported gaps in their understanding of sustainability career pathways, even when they expressed strong interest in climate and sustainability issues. Practitioners emphasised that sustainability roles exist across disciplines and that improving awareness is an important first step in preparing students for these careers.



ACTIVITY 1
EXPLORING SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CAREERS ACROSS SECTORS

PURPOSE

This activity helps students explore the diversity of sustainability- and climate-related careers through real-world examples. It encourages students to identify transferable skills required in these roles and to critically reflect on issues of visibility, access and gender representation in sustainability professions.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Undergraduate or postgraduate students across disciplines.

RESOURCES IF NEEDED

- Three to four short case examples of sustainability professionals (e.g. LinkedIn profiles, short video interviews, blog features, organisational staff pages – you can use the links below)
- Flipchart paper or shared digital board
- Markers or online collaboration tools
- Internet access (optional).

(Note: Educators may use local or international examples from sectors such as finance, agriculture, engineering, human resources, policy, technology, media or entrepreneurship.) See below useful links and resources.

SUGGESTED OPEN RESOURCES

Business sustainability events/Case learning

- GreenBiz/Trellis events: https://trellis.net/events/greenbiz/

Women in sustainability networks (gender lens and role models)

- Women in Sustainability Network: https://womeninsustainability.net/
- Women in Sustainability: https://womeninsustainability.org/

Role models and sustainability leadership (talks)

- Erin Meezan (TED speaker page): https://www.ted.com/speakers/erin_meezan
- Kara Hurst (TED speaker page): https://www.ted.com/speakers/kara_hurst

Short video prompts (use as optional case examples)

- Video 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iuthw2VeHk
- Video 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35e_WbTv-FI
- Short video: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/AjFAyAL9pzQ

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Introduce the activity (5–10) minutes

Begin by asking students: Who do you imagine when you hear 'climate or sustainability professional'?

Collect a few responses and briefly discuss common stereotypes (e.g. environmental scientist, activist, policy expert).

Explain that students will analyse real examples or case studies of sustainability professionals working across different sectors to better understand the diversity of roles in the field.

Case analysis in small groups (20–25 minutes)

Divide students into small groups. Assign each group one short case example of a sustainability-related professional (e.g. sustainability officer in a bank, climate data analyst, agricultural sustainability consultant, ESG specialist, green HR manager, renewable energy entrepreneur).

Each group should:

- identify the professional's role and sector;
- list the key skills required;
- identify transferable skills (e.g. communication, analysis, leadership, data literacy, stakeholder engagement);
- discuss how this role connects to climate or sustainability outcomes; and
- reflect on who is visible in this role (gender, background, region).

Sharing and synthesis (15 minutes)

Each group presents:

- one key insight about the role;
- one transferable skill that surprised them; and
- one observation related to access or representation.

The facilitator synthesises the following themes:

- Sustainability careers exist across sectors.
- Technical and non-technical skills are both important.
- Visibility and representation influence career aspirations.
- Access to these careers may differ by gender, confidence or exposure.

Reflection or discussion questions

- Which sustainability role challenged your assumptions the most?
- What skills from your current field could transfer into one of these roles?
- Are some sustainability careers more visible to certain groups? Why?
- What barriers might limit access to these roles, and how can they be addressed?

Link to sustainability and climate careers

This activity demonstrates that sustainability and climate careers extend beyond environmental science and policy.

Through analysing real-world professionals across sectors, students recognise that sustainability roles exist in finance, business, agriculture, engineering, media, technology and public service.

The exercise helps students see sustainability not as a niche pathway, but as an integrated dimension of multiple professional fields.

Gender equality focus

The activity encourages students to examine:

- representation in sustainability roles;
- gendered expectations in technical or leadership positions;
- confidence gaps and visibility of role models; and
- structural barriers that may influence career access.

Through prompting reflection on who is seen in sustainability leadership and technical roles, the activity helps students critically consider equity, inclusion and opportunity in climate and sustainability careers.

3. KEY SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CAREERS

USE THIS SECTION IF YOU WANT TO:

- help students recognise transferable sustainability skills;
- connect existing coursework to climate careers; and
- build confidence, particularly among women students.

OVERVIEW

Sustainability and climate careers require a unique mix of technical knowledge, people skills and strategic thinking. Universities teach foundational knowledge such as research methods and critical analysis. At the same time, employers want to see graduates who can put this into practice through stakeholder engagement, systems thinking, collaboration across disciplines and creative problem solving. Students often do not realise how many transferable skills they're already developing through their coursework, group projects and activities outside the classroom. The good news is that professional organisations have created excellent resources to help bridge this gap.

The ISEP Green Careers Hub (www.greencareershub.com) is particularly valuable. In their job profiles section, you can explore day-to-day realities of roles such as carbon accountant, sustainability consultant, environmental auditor and many others. Their video case studies feature real professionals talking about their career journeys, including career changers who moved into sustainability from other fields. For example, watch this video case study featuring sustainability professionals at Clarion Housing Group (https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/sustainable-job-inspiration/clarion-housing-group/), where you can hear first-hand how they apply sustainability skills in the social housing sector, demonstrating how green careers exist across all industries.

You can learn practical skills through their monthly webinar series, which covers topics such as giving presentations, communicating complex information clearly and managing projects. These webinars count towards continuing professional development (CPD). ISEP also provides a sustainability skills map that helps you identify which competencies you already have and which ones you might want to develop.

Different professional bodies offer resources tailored to specific career paths. For students interested in finance and sustainability, ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) offers a Professional Diploma in Sustainability where you can learn about sustainability frameworks, strategy and reporting. Their Certificate in Sustainability for Finance teaches how to assess climate risks and integrate environmental, social and governance factors into business decisions. CIMA (the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants) similarly provides resources on how management accountants can drive

sustainability in their organisations, while the CFA Institute offers courses on ESG investment and climate risk analysis for those pursuing investment careers. For students in environmental science and ecology, CIEEM (the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management) provides career guidance, competency frameworks and resources on conservation and environmental management careers. Those interested in the built environment can explore RICS (the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors), where you can learn about net zero buildings, sustainable construction and green property development.

It is worth noting that confidence in your career readiness can be influenced by your gender and background. Research shows that women and gender minorities often report feeling less confident about their abilities, even when their performance is equal to or better than that of their peers. This pattern is particularly strong in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and environmental fields. Recognising the skills you already have, identifying what you want to develop and talking openly about confidence can help all students see themselves as future sustainability leaders.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

ISEP Green Careers Hub

https://www.greencareershub.com

ACCA Professional Diploma in Sustainability

https://www.accaglobal.com/gb/en/qualifications/glance/professional-diploma-in-sustainability/overview.html

ACCA Certificate in Sustainability for Finance

https://www.accaglobal.com/learning-and-events/acca-learning/certificate-in-sustainability-for-finance.html

CIMA Sustainability Resources for Management Accountants

https://www.aicpa-cima.com/topic/management-accounting-and-finance/ma-sustainability

CFA Institute Sustainable Investing Certificate

https://www.cfainstitute.org/programs/sustainable-investing-certificate

CFA Institute Climate Risk, Valuation, and Investing Certificate

https://www.cfainstitute.org/programs/climate-investing-certificate

ACCA and CFA Institute Climate Finance Course

https://www.accaglobal.com/climatefinance

CIEEM careers in ecology and environmental management

https://cieem.net/i-want-to-be/how-to-become-an-eem/careers/

RICS sustainability in the built environment

https://www.rics.org/news-insights/current-topics-campaigns/sustainability

SCGE PROJECT EVIDENCE INSIGHT

Sustainability and climate careers require a combination of technical knowledge and transferable professional skills. Students in this project identified communication, problem solving, analytical thinking, teamwork, leadership and project management as the most important skills for working in sustainability roles. These findings show that sustainability careers are not limited to technical expertise. Many of the most important skills, such as communication, collaboration and critical thinking, are developed across different academic programmes. Helping students recognise these skills can increase their confidence and help them see themselves as capable of contributing to sustainability work.

This is particularly important for gender equality. Students may not always recognise or value the skills they already possess, even when those skills are highly relevant to sustainability careers. Educators can help students identify these strengths and understand how they apply to real-world sustainability roles.

The figure below illustrates that communication, problem solving and analytical skills were the skills most frequently identified by students, highlighting the importance of transferable and interdisciplinary capabilities in sustainability careers. Communication was the most frequently cited skill, because meaningful change depends on strong engagement and open dialogue. Problem solving and critical thinking are essential skills in sustainability careers because real-world challenges are ambiguous, complex, interconnected, constantly changing and without easy solutions. Analytical, data and research skills are vital in sustainability careers because effective solutions must be grounded in reliable evidence and careful analysis.

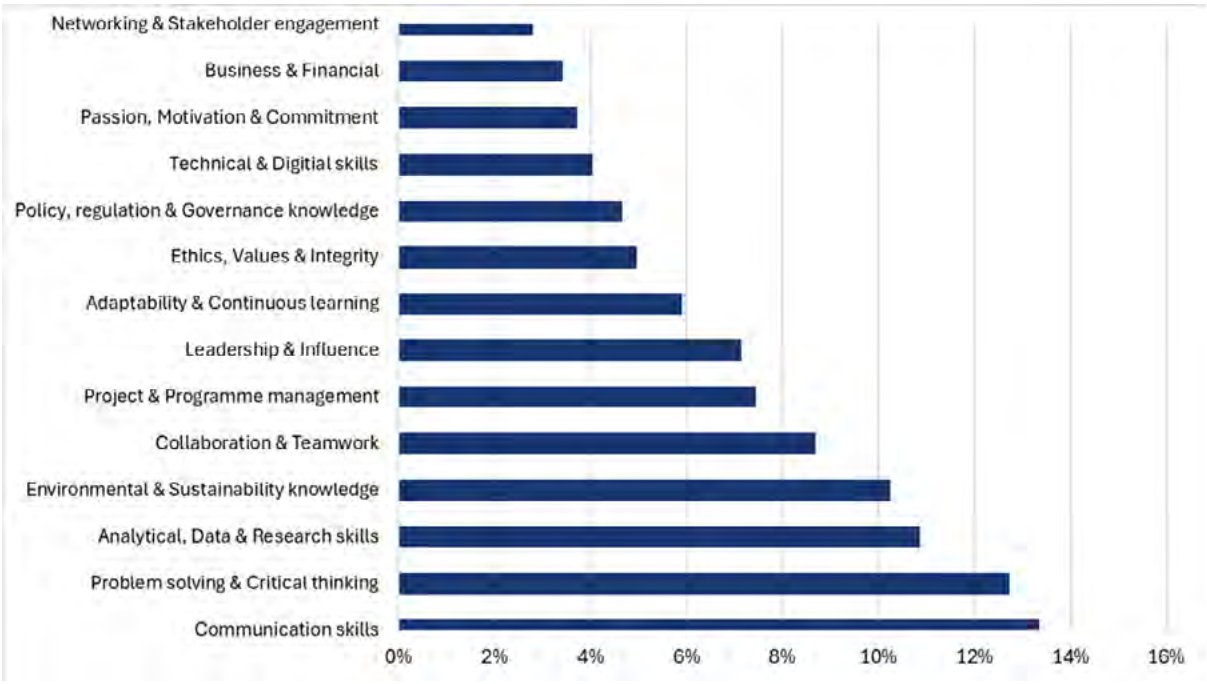


Figure 1. Student-identified skill clusters for sustainability careers

Practitioners reinforced that these skills are essential for working effectively across teams, organisations and sectors. This highlights the interdisciplinary and applied nature of sustainability work. These skills are highly transferable, underscoring the importance of embedding sustainability and climate action across curricula rather than confining them to specialist modules.

4. PERCEIVED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT GAPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

USE THIS SECTION IF YOU WANT TO:

- prompt reflection on preparedness; and
- identify gaps between study and career expectations.

OVERVIEW

Students sometimes feel their university learning does not quite match what employers are looking for in sustainability and climate careers. This isn't because universities are failing to teach well. It's more that sustainability roles are evolving quickly, and real-world work can feel very different from academic study. What students may not realise is that the skills they develop through essays, group projects, presentations and research are often exactly the transferable skills employers value most.

The gap students perceive is often about confidence and context rather than actual capability. When you've spent years writing research papers, you've developed analytical thinking and clear communication. When you've worked on group projects, you've practised collaboration and negotiation. The challenge is recognising these skills and being able to articulate how they apply to sustainability roles. This is particularly important for women and underrepresented students in STEM and environmental fields, who often underestimate their abilities despite strong performance.

Creating space for students to honestly assess their skills, identify what they want to develop further and understand that everyone experiences confidence gaps can help level the playing field. The most important thing is helping students see that they already have valuable foundations to build on.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

ISEP sustainability skills map

https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/careers-advice/identifying-your-skills/

This tool helps you identify which sustainability competencies you already have and which ones you might want to develop. It breaks down skills into clear categories so you can see where your academic experience fits.

Stories of green upskilling – ISEP webinar

https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/careers-events/stories-of-green-upskilling/

This webinar covers insights into the green skills gap and provides context on how individuals can upskill and train to get where they need to be. It features real stories from career changers and tips for working through transitions.

Securing your first job – Green Careers Hub guide

https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/careers-advice/securing-your-first-job/

This guide gives practical advice on translating your academic experience into compelling job applications and understanding what employers are really looking for.

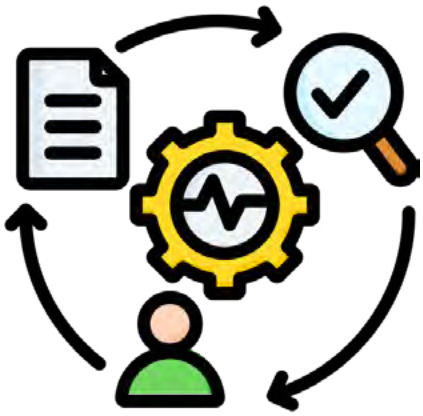
SCGE PROJECT EVIDENCE INSIGHT

We also asked students whether they believe they can acquire these key skills as part of their university education. Most students (**63%**) in our sample reported that their university education helps them develop useful skills, but **26%** said they only partially feel prepared for sustainability careers. In addition, **10%** felt they could not gain relevant skills through their studies, and **1%** were unsure.

Students and practitioners both emphasised the importance of applied learning, mentorship and clearer links between academic study and sustainability careers. Students highlighted uncertainty about career pathways, limited practical exposure and difficulty connecting academic learning to real-world sustainability work.

Practitioners also noted that career readiness is strengthened when students have opportunities to apply their knowledge, reflect on their skills and engage with real-world challenges. Even when students have strong academic knowledge, they may lack confidence in how to apply this knowledge in professional settings.

Educators can help bridge this gap by creating opportunities for reflection, discussion and practical engagement. Helping students recognise both their existing skills and areas for growth can improve confidence and support stronger career readiness.



ACTIVITY 2
THE SKILLS GAP AUDIT: MAPPING YOUR SUSTAINABILITY CAREER READINESS

PURPOSE

This activity helps students critically assess the alignment between their current academic experience and the competencies required for sustainability and climate careers. Students will identify specific skills gaps, evaluate their confidence levels in applying academic learning to real-world contexts and reflect on how gender and other identity factors may influence their perceived preparedness and career aspirations.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Undergraduate and postgraduate students across all disciplines. It is particularly valuable for students in years two to four of undergraduate study or those in taught postgraduate programmes who are beginning to consider career transitions. The programme is adaptable for interdisciplinary cohorts.

RESOURCES IF NEEDED

- Skills audit worksheet (two-column template: “Skills I’m developing” vs. “Skills needed for sustainability roles”)
- Sample job descriptions or competency frameworks from sustainability organisations (e.g. UN climate change careers page, environmental consultancies, renewable energy companies, sustainability roles in corporations)
- Access to breakout rooms (for online delivery) or group working space
- Large flipchart paper and markers for group synthesis.

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Introduce the activity

Begin by briefly explaining that while universities provide foundational knowledge, students often report feeling unprepared for the practical demands of sustainability and climate careers. Frame this not as a failure of education, but as an opportunity for self-awareness and proactive skill development. Share two to three real job descriptions from sustainability roles (e.g. climate policy analyst, corporate sustainability manager, renewable energy consultant) and highlight the range of skills required: technical, interpersonal, strategic and contextual knowledge.

Individual skills audit

Ask students to work individually using the skills audit worksheet. In the left column, they list skills they are actively developing through their degree (e.g. data analysis, research methods, critical thinking, specific technical skills). In the right column, they identify skills required in the job descriptions provided that they feel are not sufficiently addressed in their coursework (e.g. stakeholder engagement, policy advocacy, systems thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration). Encourage honesty and specificity.

Paired or small group discussion

In pairs or groups of three to four, students share their audits and discuss patterns. Prompt them to consider: Are there common gaps across the group? Do students from different disciplines notice different gaps? Do students feel equally confident discussing their preparedness, or do some hesitate more than others? Invite them to reflect (without pressure to disclose) on whether their gender, background or prior experiences influence how ready they feel.

Whole-class synthesis and discussion

Bring the class together and facilitate a discussion. Ask groups to share the most commonly identified gaps. Create a visual list on the board or flipchart. Discuss: Which of these gaps could be addressed through coursework adjustments, extracurricular activities, internships or self-directed learning? Highlight transferable skills students may undervalue (e.g. group project experience as stakeholder collaboration). Explicitly invite discussion on confidence: Do students feel that the curriculum prepares them to speak authoritatively about climate issues in professional settings? Identify any gendered patterns in responses if students are comfortable discussing them (e.g. women expressing less confidence despite equal or greater competence).

Reflection or discussion questions

1. Which skills required for sustainability and climate careers surprised you most? Why do you think these weren't immediately visible to you in your degree programme?

2. What is one skill gap you identified that you could begin addressing in the next academic term? What specific action could you take?

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel applying your academic knowledge to real-world sustainability challenges? What would increase that confidence?

4. Have you noticed any differences in how you and your peers express confidence about career readiness? What factors might contribute to these differences (e.g. gender, prior work experience, discipline, access to networks)?

Link to sustainability and climate careers

This activity directly mirrors a core competency in sustainability work: gap analysis. Professionals in climate and sustainability roles routinely assess gaps between current states and desired futures, whether in organisational carbon footprints, policy frameworks or community resilience. By incorporating this analytical skill into their own development, students gain meta-awareness of the iterative, self-reflective nature of sustainability careers. Furthermore, the activity demystifies career entry points by grounding abstract 'sustainability careers' in concrete, readable job descriptions, helping students see themselves in these roles and identify tangible next steps.

Gender equality focus

Research consistently shows that women and gender minorities in STEM and environmental fields report lower confidence in their abilities despite equal or superior performance – a phenomenon linked to imposter syndrome and systemic underrepresentation in leadership. This activity creates space for students to name confidence gaps without pathologising them and to recognise these as structural rather than individual failings. By inviting comparative reflection in groups, students may identify gendered patterns in how preparedness is articulated, helping to normalise the experience and reduce isolation. The activity also highlights how curriculum design may inadvertently prioritise skills valued in male-dominated spaces (e.g. technical expertise) while undervaluing relational or collaborative skills often held by women, prompting critical discussion about what 'career readiness' actually means.

SKILLS GAP AUDIT WORKSHEET

Mapping your sustainability career readiness

Instructions

Use this worksheet to identify gaps between the skills you are developing in your degree programme and those required for sustainability and climate careers. Review the job descriptions provided by your educator, then complete both columns below.

Skills I'm developing *(through my degree programme)*	**Skills needed for sustainability roles** *(that I need to develop further)*
Example: Research methods and critical analysis	*Example: Stakeholder engagement and consultation*

Reflection

1. Which skills gaps concern you most? Why?

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2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel about your readiness for sustainability careers?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

(Not confident) (Very confident)

3. What is one action you could take this session to begin closing a skills gap?

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5. WHAT IS NEEDED TO SUCCEED IN SUSTAINABILITY CAREERS

USE THIS SECTION IF YOU WANT TO:

- design support structures; and
- integrate mentoring, networking and guidance.

OVERVIEW

Success in sustainability careers is not just about what you know or which degree you have. It's also about who you know, who believes in you and who opens doors for you. This is where mentorship, networking and professional support structures become crucial. When students have access to mentors, professional networks and peer support, they build confidence, learn about career options and develop the connections that help them transition into sustainability roles.

For women and underrepresented groups in particular, mentorship can be transformative. Having someone who understands the challenges you face, who can vouch for your capabilities and who actively creates opportunities makes a real difference. Mentors can help you navigate workplace cultures, negotiate job offers, understand unwritten rules and see yourself as belonging in spaces where you might feel like an outsider. Good mentorship isn't about having all the answers; it's about having someone in your corner who wants to see you succeed.

Networking isn't just about collecting business cards or LinkedIn connections. It's about building genuine relationships with people who share your interests and values. Start by connecting with professionals whose work inspires you, attending webinars and events, joining professional organisations and staying in touch with people in meaningful ways. Every conversation is an opportunity to learn something new and to be remembered when opportunities arise.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Environmental Leadership Program (ELP)

https://www.elpnet.org/

ELP is dedicated to cultivating the next generation of environmental leaders through fellowship programmes that provide mentorship, training and networking opportunities.

AASHE Mentorship & Peer Collaboration Program

https://www.aashe.org/get-involved/mentorship-program/

This programme connects sustainability staff, faculty and students for knowledge sharing, project collaboration and advancing sustainability in higher education.

Green Careers Hub – mentoring resources

https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/careers-advice/mentoring/

Here you can get guidance on finding mentors, making the most of mentoring relationships and understanding what makes effective mentorship in sustainability careers.

Professional networking for sustainability careers

- **ISEP professional networks:** Connect with sustainability professionals through ISEP's various networks and special interest groups.
- **LinkedIn groups:** Join sustainability-focused groups to connect with professionals and stay updated on industry trends.
- **University alumni networks:** Many universities have sustainability-focused alumni groups that offer mentoring and networking.

Tips for building your network

- Attend virtual and in-person sustainability events and conferences.
- Reach out to professionals whose work interests you for informational interviews.
- Join professional bodies early (many offer student memberships).
- Engage meaningfully on LinkedIn by commenting on posts and sharing insights.
- Follow up with people you meet and stay in touch.

SCGE PROJECT EVIDENCE INSIGHT

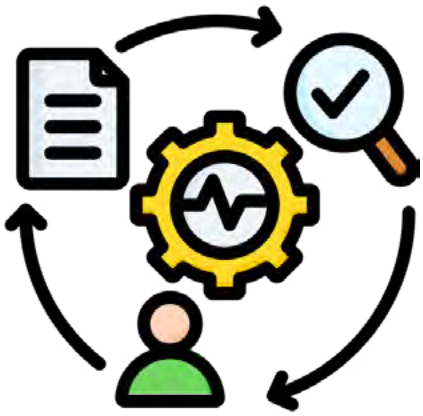
Students and practitioners consistently highlighted that support, guidance and exposure to real-world practice are important for building sustainability careers. Mentorship, networking opportunities, leadership development and confidence building were identified as key factors that help students move from interest to career action.

These forms of support do not require complex programmes. Simple activities such as practitioner talks, mentorship conversations, reflective exercises and peer discussions can help students better understand career pathways and build confidence. These opportunities allow students to ask questions, learn from real experiences and see how sustainability careers develop over time.

This support is especially important for advancing gender equality. Access to mentors, networks and visible role models can influence students' confidence and career decisions, particularly in emerging fields such as sustainability where career pathways may be less familiar.

Students and practitioners consistently highlighted the following forms of support as important for succeeding in sustainability and climate careers:

- **Mentorship and guidance**
  Mentorship does not need to be formal or long-term. Educators can begin with short conversations with practitioners, alumni talks or small-group mentoring sessions linked to a module.
- **Practical workshops and training**
  Skills development can be introduced through short workshops on communication, project planning or career storytelling, rather than full training programmes.
- **Leadership development**
  Leadership can be explored through classroom roleplay, group facilitation or reflective tasks that help students recognise leadership in everyday sustainability work.
- **Networking and exposure**
  Networking opportunities may include guest speakers, virtual sessions or structured Q&A sessions with practitioners, rather than large networking events.
- **Confidence building and resilience**
  Confidence can be strengthened through reflection, peer discussion and recognising that sustainability careers are often non-linear.
- **Supportive professional environments**
  Classroom discussions can explore workplace culture, gender equality and what students should look for when considering employers that offer sustainability careers.



ACTIVITY 3
WHAT IS NEEDED TO SUCCEED (SUPPORT, EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY)

PURPOSE

This activity helps students to expand their awareness of sustainability and climate career pathways and challenge narrow or gendered perceptions of who belongs in the sector. It supports students in accessing accurate information, visible pathways, relatable role models and inclusive narratives that demonstrate how mentorship, peer learning and professional engagement contribute to equitable participation in sustainability and climate careers.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Undergraduate and postgraduate students across disciplines, adaptable to business, environmental sciences, engineering, social sciences and accounting.

RESOURCES IF NEEDED

Practitioner video (choose one to show in class):

- Clarion Housing Group – sustainability in social housing: https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/sustainable-job-inspiration/clarion-housing-group/
- OVO Energy – green jobs in energy: https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/sustainable-job-inspiration/ovo-energy/
- Sky – sustainability in media: https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/sustainable-job-inspiration/sky/
- Canal & River Trust – environmental conservation: https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/sustainable-job-inspiration/canal-and-river-trust/

Additional career resources

- ISEP career stories: https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/career-stories/
- Green Careers Hub organisation case studies: https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/organisation-case-studies/
- Sustainability Careers Gender Equality project: https://sustainabilitycareersgenderequality.co.uk/
- UN climate careers portal: https://careers.un.org/lbw/Home.aspx
- World Economic Forum – The Future of Jobs Report 2025: https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/

Materials

- Internet access or pre-downloaded video
- Slide deck with climate career categories (policy, finance, engineering, ESG reporting, renewable energy, climate research, social impact, agribusiness, entrepreneurship and consulting)
- Career mapping worksheet (template provided as appendix)
- Mentorship conversation guide (template provided as appendix)
- LinkedIn connection message templates (template provided as appendix)
- Sticky notes or flipchart for group feedback
- Optional: Guest practitioner (virtual or in-person).

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Introduce the activity

Begin by explaining that research shows that many students are unaware of the breadth of sustainability careers and that gender stereotypes can influence who feels that they belong in the field. Briefly introduce the purpose: to explore climate and sustainability careers, identify transferable skills and reflect on how support, empowerment and gender equality shape access to these careers. Emphasise that career success depends not only on qualifications, but also on mentorship, peer networks and professional exposure.

Play a short practitioner video featuring diverse professionals in sustainability roles. Recommended: Clarion Housing Group case study (https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/sustainable-job-inspiration/clarion-housing-group/), which shows multiple professionals across different roles in social housing sustainability.

Student reflection or engagement

Step 1: Individual reflection

Using the career mapping worksheet, ask students to write down:

- three sustainability careers they know;
- whether they see themselves in any of those roles; and
- any perceived barriers.

Step 2: Small-group career mapping

In groups of three to four, students work together on the career mapping worksheet to:

- categorise sustainability careers across sectors (policy, finance, engineering, ESG reporting, renewable energy, climate research, social impact, agribusiness, entrepreneurship and consulting);
- identify required skills for selected roles;

- map which skills they already possess and which can be developed; and
- identify potential barriers (e.g. stereotypes, financial constraints, lack of role models).

Groups write key insights on sticky notes or flipchart.

Sharing, mentorship framing and practitioner connection

Step 1: Facilitate whole-class synthesis focusing on the following:

- Interdisciplinary career pathways
- Transferable skills
- Structural vs. personal barriers
- The importance of mentorship and networking.

Step 2: Transition the discussion towards how students can actively build support systems through mentorship, peer learning and connecting with practitioners.

Step 2.1: Support systems through mentorship

Suggestions for educators:

- Invite sustainability professionals (especially women and underrepresented leaders) as guest speakers or virtual mentors.
- Create a 'mentorship moment' segment where students prepare and ask career-focused questions using the mentorship conversation guide.
- Partner with alumni working in sustainability sectors to offer short mentoring clinics.
- Have students practise mentorship conversations in pairs using the mentorship conversation guide, selecting four to six questions most relevant to their interests.
- Encourage structured follow-up by having students draft LinkedIn connection messages in class using the provided templates, then share in small groups for peer feedback.
- Establish optional semester-long micro-mentorship pairing (one practitioner, small student group).

Why this matters: Mentorship reduces confidence gaps, increases the visibility of role models and provides students, particularly women, with relatable success pathways.

Professional networks and mentorship resources

- ISEP: https://www.isepglobal.org
- ELP: https://www.elpnet.org/
- CIEEM: https://cieem.net
- Green Careers Hub events calendar: https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/careers-events/

Step 2.2: Support systems through peer learning

Suggestions for educators:

- Use small-group career mapping exercises to encourage collaborative discovery.
- Rotate group roles (facilitator, note taker, presenter) to ensure inclusive participation.
- Create peer accountability partnerships where students exchange completed career mapping worksheets, identify two to three skills their partner has that they may not recognise, and hold each other accountable to take one action step before next class.
- Introduce 'skill exchange circles' where students share strengths (e.g. data skills, writing, networking strategies).
- Encourage peer-led reflection discussions on stereotypes and access barriers.

Why this matters: Peer learning builds collective confidence, reduces isolation and creates supportive learning communities that empower underrepresented students.

Step 2.3: Support systems through connecting students with practitioners

Suggestions for educators:

- Direct students to explore these specific sustainability organisations: ISEP Green Careers Hub https://www.greencareershub.com, RICS Sustainability https://www.rics.org/news-insights/current-topics-campaigns/sustainability, Women's Networks: Diverse Sustainability Initiative (https://www.diversesustainability.net/) and Women in Sustainability and Environment (WISE) (https://www.wise.org.sg/).
- Organise short practitioner webinars or panel discussions.
- Assign students to research and present real sustainability professionals from diverse backgrounds using ISEP career stories (https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/career-stories/).
- Facilitate mock networking sessions in class where students practise their LinkedIn messages.
- Encourage attendance at sustainability conferences, online forums and professional associations.

Why this matters: Direct exposure reduces information gaps and strengthens students' professional self-efficacy.

Reflection or discussion questions

- What sustainability career pathway aligns most with your interests and skills?
- What stereotypes might discourage certain groups from entering this field?
- How can mentorship influence career confidence and access?
- What practical step can you take this semester to connect with a sustainability professional?

Link to sustainability and climate careers

This activity prepares and connects students to real-world sustainability roles by demonstrating interdisciplinary career pathways, highlighting the skills and entry routes required across different sectors and encouraging active networking, peer learning and mentorship as essential components of career development.

By moving beyond awareness to structured engagement and action planning, the activity helps students translate knowledge into practical professional steps. The provided templates (career mapping worksheet, mentorship conversation guide, LinkedIn connection templates) give students concrete tools they can use immediately. As a result, students leave with a clearer roadmap towards climate-related careers and a stronger understanding of how professional ecosystems, networks and support systems function in the sustainability sector.

Gender equality focus

The activity explicitly:

- challenges gendered perceptions of sustainability roles by showcasing diverse professionals through video case studies;
- reduces self-doubt by identifying transferable skills through structured peer feedback;
- increases visibility of diverse role models through curated resources and career stories;
- encourages mentorship and peer support to address structural inequities through practical conversation guides and connection templates; and
- promotes inclusive participation in climate leadership spaces by making networking tangible and actionable.

Resources for gender and climate careers

1. UN Women – gender and climate change https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected

2. WISE network https://www.wise.org.sg/

3. World Economic Forum – The Future of Jobs Report 2025 https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/

4. Sustainability Careers Gender Equality project https://sustainabilitycareersgenderequality.co.uk/

5. ELP: https://www.elpnet.org/

6. ISEP career stories (featuring diverse professionals) https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/career-stories/

7. Diverse Sustainability Initiative https://www.diversesustainability.net/

CAREER MAPPING WORKSHEET

Exploring sustainability and climate career pathways

Part 1: Individual reflection

1. List three sustainability or climate careers you know about.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

2. Can you see yourself in any of these roles? Why or why not?

_____

_____

3. What barriers (if any) do you perceive to entering sustainability careers?

_____

_____

Part 2: Group career mapping

Work with your group to complete the table below. Choose two to three sustainability career paths to explore

Career path/ sector	Required skills	Skills we have	Skills to develop
Example: ESG reporting analyst	*Data analysis, communication, sustainability frameworks*	*Data analysis, written communication*	*ESG frameworks, reporting standards*

Part 3: Barriers and solutions

What potential barriers did your group identify (e.g. stereotypes, financial constraints, lack of role models, unclear pathways)?

_____

_____

_____

What support systems could help overcome these barriers (e.g. mentorship, peer networks, professional connections)?

_____

_____

_____

Part 4: Your next step

What is one practical action you can take this semester to connect with a sustainability professional or learn more about a career path?

_____

_____

_____

MENTORSHIP CONVERSATION GUIDE

Questions to ask sustainability professionals

Use this guide when speaking with sustainability professionals, whether in mentorship sessions, guest lectures, networking events or informational interviews. Choose four to six questions that are most relevant to your interests.

About their career journey

1. What did you study at university, and how did it prepare you (or not) for sustainability work?
2. How did you first get into sustainability careers? Was it planned or did you discover it along the way?
3. What was your first role in sustainability, and how did you get it?
4. Have you changed careers or sectors along the way? What prompted those changes?

About their current work

5. Can you describe a typical day or week in your role?
6. What skills do you use most often in your work?
7. What do you find most rewarding about your work? What's the most challenging?
8. How do you balance technical knowledge with people skills in your role?

About skills and development

9. What skills do you think are most important for someone starting out in sustainability careers today?

10. Are there any skills you wish you'd developed earlier in your career?

11. How do you keep learning and developing professionally?

12. What advice would you give to students who feel they don't have enough technical knowledge yet?

About confidence and belonging

13. Did you ever doubt whether you belonged in this field? How did you work through that?

14. What helped you build confidence in your sustainability work?

15. Have you experienced or observed any barriers related to gender or background in this field?

16. What advice would you give to students from underrepresented groups considering sustainability careers?

About networks and support

17. How important have mentors or professional networks been in your career?

18. How did you build your professional network when you were starting out?

19. Are there professional organisations or networks you'd recommend joining?

20. What's the best way for a student to approach someone for career advice or mentorship?

About next steps for students

21. What practical steps can students take while still at university to prepare for sustainability careers?

22. How important are internships or volunteering experiences? Where should students look?

23. What do you look for when hiring or recommending someone for a sustainability role?

24. If you could give one piece of advice to your student self, what would it be?

After the conversation

- ☑ Send a thank you message within 24 to 48 hours.
- ☑ Mention something specific you learned or found helpful.
- ☑ If appropriate, connect on LinkedIn.
- ☑ Reflect on what you learned and what actions you'll take.

LINKEDIN CONNECTION MESSAGE TEMPLATES

For connecting with sustainability professionals

Use these templates as a starting point for reaching out to sustainability professionals on LinkedIn. Personalise them by adding specific details about why you're interested in connecting with that particular person.

Template 1: After attending their talk or webinar

> Hi [name], I really enjoyed your talk on [specific topic] at [event name]. Your insights on [specific point they made] particularly resonated with me, as I'm currently studying [your subject] and interested in [career area]. I'd love to connect and follow your work in [their area of expertise]. Best regards, [your name].

Template 2: Cold outreach (informational interview)

> Hi [name], I came across your profile while researching careers in [their field]. I'm a [year] student at [university] studying [subject], and I'm really interested in learning more about [specific aspect of their work]. Would you be open to a brief conversation about your career journey and advice for students entering this field? I understand you're busy, so even 15 to 20 minutes would be incredibly valuable. Thank you for your consideration, [your name].

Template 3: Alumni connection

> Hi [name], I'm currently studying [subject] at [university] and noticed we're both alumni! I'm exploring careers in sustainability, particularly [area of interest], and came across your work at [their organisation]. I'd be grateful for any insights you could share about your career path and the sustainability sector. Would you be open to connecting? Best, [your name].

Template 4: Following up after meeting

> Hi [name], it was great meeting you at [event/class]. Thank you for sharing your experience in [their area of work] and your advice about [specific advice they gave]. I've been reflecting on our conversation and would love to stay connected as I continue exploring sustainability careers. Looking forward to following your work! Best regards, [your name].

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL LINKEDIN CONNECTIONS

DO:

- ☑ Personalise every message with specific details.
- ☑ Keep it brief (under 300 characters for connection requests).
- ☑ Explain why you're reaching out.
- ☑ Be respectful of their time.
- ☑ Follow up if they accept but don't respond (wait one to two weeks).

DON'T:

- ❌ Use generic copy-paste messages.
- ❌ Ask for a job in your first message.
- ❌ Write your life story in the connection request.
- ❌ Send multiple messages if they don't respond.
- ❌ Expect an immediate response (professionals are busy!).

6. PRACTICE-BASED AND INDUSTRY-ENGAGED LEARNING OF SUSTAINABILITY

USE THIS SECTION IF YOU WANT TO:

- bring practice into the classroom; and
- challenge gendered career assumptions.

OVERVIEW

The best way to understand sustainability careers is to experience them, even in small ways. Hands-on experience helps you see how theory connects to practice and builds confidence that what you're learning in the classroom actually works in the real world. This might mean internships, volunteering, community projects, industry collaborations, guest lectures from practitioners or case study analysis of real sustainability challenges.

When you work on actual projects, you develop skills that are hard to teach in lectures. You learn how to work with people who see things differently, how to handle ambiguity and incomplete information, how to adapt when plans change and how to communicate your ideas to non-experts. You also start building your professional network and getting a clearer sense of which types of work energise you and which don't.

For students who feel uncertain about whether they belong in sustainability careers, hands-on experience can be particularly powerful. When you see yourself successfully contributing to real projects, it builds the kind of confidence that no amount of reading can provide. It also helps you understand that sustainability work is collaborative and interdisciplinary. There is room for people with all kinds of backgrounds and skills, and the best solutions come from diverse teams working together.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

https://sdgs.un.org/goals

Familiarise yourself with the 17 SDGs to understand how sustainability work is structured globally and how different careers connect to these goals.

ISSP impact stories

https://www.sustainabilityprofessionals.org/impact-stories

Read real stories from professionals working on sustainability projects, showing how academic theory supports practical contributions to the SDGs.

Green Careers Hub – practical experience

https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/practical-experience/

The Hub offers resources on volunteering, apprenticeships and getting hands-on experience in sustainability roles.

Volunteering opportunities in sustainability

https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/practical-experience/volunteering/

Find opportunities to gain experience through environmental volunteering while building skills and networks.

Case study resources

- **ISEP organisation case studies:** https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/organisation-case-studies/
  Watch these video case studies showing how organisations are embedding green skills and driving sustainable change.
- **Green Horizons digital series:** https://www.greencareershub.com/green-horizons/
  These short films show professionals applying sustainability principles in diverse sectors.

Tips for getting practice-based experience

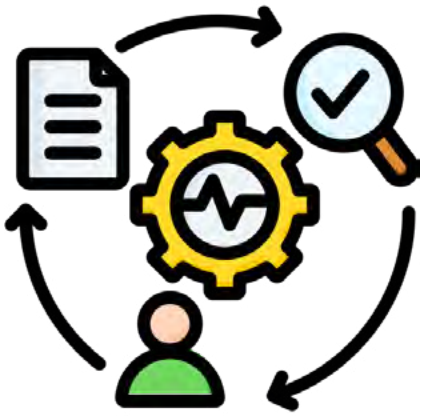
1. Start small – volunteer for local environmental projects or community initiatives.
2. Look for summer internships or placement years with sustainability teams.
3. Propose sustainability projects at your university or student organisations.
4. Attend industry conferences and networking events (many offer student rates).
5. Reach out to local businesses or non-profits to offer project support as part of coursework.

SCGE PROJECT EVIDENCE INSIGHT

Practitioners emphasised that students benefit from learning experiences that connect classroom teaching to real-world sustainability practice. Exposure to practitioner experiences, case studies and applied activities helps students understand how sustainability challenges are addressed in organisations and communities.

Practice-based learning allows students to see how their academic knowledge can be applied in professional settings. It also helps students understand the range of roles available and the skills required to work in sustainability careers. These experiences can increase motivation, confidence and career readiness.

Engaging with practitioners also helps students see diverse career pathways and role models, which supports gender equality by increasing visibility and representation in sustainability fields. Practitioners recommended guest lectures, real-world case studies, project-based learning and field engagement as effective ways to prepare students for sustainability careers. These experiences help students develop practical understanding and connect academic learning with professional practice.



ACTIVITY 4
SUSTAINABILITY CAREERS IN ACTION: COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS TO THE SDGS

PURPOSE

This activity helps students understand how diverse theoretical perspectives can be applied in real-world contexts for sustainable development. It supports students in connecting academic concepts to practice, recognising collaborative and interdisciplinary sustainability career pathways and reflecting on how various role players contribute collectively to advancing the United Nations SDGs through inclusive and participatory practice.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Undergraduate and postgraduate students; adaptable across disciplines such as natural sciences, communication, business, environmental studies, development studies, social sciences and humanities.

RESOURCES IF NEEDED

- Short practitioner video, podcast, blog or case study focused on sustainable development work
- SDG case study analysis worksheet (template provided as appendix)
- Internet access or pre-downloaded material
- Worksheet or guided reflection prompts
- Slides or flipchart for group feedback.

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Introduce the activity

Begin by explaining that various sustainability careers play a key role in advancing sustainable development across social, economic and environmental dimensions.

Briefly introduce the UN SDGs and their relevance to professional practice (THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development).

Present a practitioner story, video, blog or case showing a professional working on a sustainability-related project (e.g. community development, sustainable agriculture, responsible business, waste management, social innovation, education for development). Examples include:

(ISSP Impact Stories)

ISEP organisation case studies: https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/organisation-case-studies/

Green Horizons videos: https://www.greencareershub.com/green-horizons/

Highlight how academic theory supports practical contributions to the SDGs.

Student reflection or engagement

Ask students to work in small groups to search for practitioner stories, videos, blogs or case studies that illustrate professionals working on sustainability-related projects linked to sustainable development and the SDGs.

Each group selects one case, story, video or blog and analyses the example by considering:

- the sustainable development challenge being addressed;
- the relevant SDGs linked to the case;
- the role and responsibilities of the primary practitioner;
- other role players and career fields that contributed to addressing the challenge;
- how the sustainability challenge was addressed in practice through collaboration among the various role players;
- the academic concepts being applied;
- the skills and competencies required across different roles; and
- the career pathways reflected in the example.

Groups are encouraged to reflect on how interdisciplinary teamwork is effective and inclusive in sustainability practice.

Sharing and synthesis

Facilitate a whole-class discussion in which groups share their case studies and analyses, highlighting the role of the primary practitioner and the range of other role players and organisations involved in addressing the sustainability challenge.

Emphasise the wide range of sustainability careers across sectors, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government, private companies, social enterprises, community organisations and local leadership structures, and how these actors contribute collectively to sustainable development.

Highlight transferable skills such as ethical leadership, systems thinking, community facilitation, participatory communication, stakeholder engagement, collaboration, problem solving and innovation.

Encourage reflection on how various role players and diverse voices strengthen sustainable development outcomes and long-term impact.

Reflection or discussion questions

- Which SDGs are addressed in this case, and how did different role players contribute to achieving them?
- How did the collaboration and participation of various role players influence the way the sustainability challenge was addressed?
- What skills, values and forms of knowledge were required across the different roles involved in this initiative, and how did they complement one another?
- How does this example challenge or broaden your understanding of sustainability careers as collective, interdisciplinary and socially embedded practices?

Link to sustainability careers

Ask students (in their small groups) to create a table listing all the sustainability careers represented in their chosen case study. For each career, they should include the typical qualifications or educational background required, as well as the key soft skills and competencies needed to succeed in that role.

Gender equality focus

Ask students to reflect on how gender was represented across the different roles in their chosen case study. Encourage them to consider the following:

- Which roles were occupied by women, men or other gender identities, and how this influenced decision making and participation?
- Where power and influence were concentrated, and how this affected the implementation of the sustainability initiative?
- Potential gender-related obstacles, such as limited access to networks, mentorship, resources or decision-making opportunities
- How these barriers could have been addressed or overcome through more inclusive and equitable practices?

Students should connect these reflections to the broader impact on sustainable development outcomes and consider how gender-responsive approaches strengthen collaborative, participatory and effective sustainability practice, contributing to SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

SDG CASE STUDY ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Sustainability careers in action: Collaborative pathways to the SDGs

Group Members:

_____

Part 1: Case study selection

Case study title/name:

_____

Source (website, video link, article):

_____

Part 2: Understanding the challenge

1. What sustainable development challenge is being addressed?

_____

_____

2. Which SDGs are relevant to this case? (List the SDG numbers and names.)

_____

_____

Part 3: Analysing roles and collaboration

3. Who is the primary practitioner featured in this case?

Name/Role: _____

What are their main responsibilities?

_____

_____

4. What other role players and organisations were involved (e.g. NGOs, government, private companies, community groups)?

_____

_____

_____

5. How did collaboration among these role players help address the sustainability challenge?

_____

_____

_____

Part 4: Skills and career pathways

6. What academic concepts or theories are being applied in practice?

_____

_____

7. What skills and competencies are required across the different roles (e.g. systems thinking, communication, stakeholder engagement, problem solving)?

_____

_____

_____

8. Complete the sustainability careers table below.

List all the sustainability careers represented in your case study:

Career/Role	Qualifications/Educational background	Key skills and competencies
Example: Sustainability manager	*Business, environmental science or related field*	*Project management, stakeholder engagement, strategic planning*

Part 5: Gender equality reflection

9. How was gender represented across different roles in your case study?

_____

_____

10. Where were power and influence concentrated? How did this affect the initiative?

_____

_____

11. What gender-related barriers might exist (e.g. access to networks, mentorship, resources, decision making)?

_____

_____

12. How could more inclusive and equitable practices strengthen this initiative and contribute to SDG 5 (Gender Equality)?

_____

_____

_____

Part 6: Group reflection

13. How does this example challenge or broaden your understanding of sustainability careers as collective, interdisciplinary and socially embedded practices?

_____

_____

_____

7. EMPOWERMENT, CONFIDENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY

USE THIS SECTION IF YOU WANT TO:

- build confidence and agency; and
- address gendered barriers explicitly.

OVERVIEW

Confidence isn't just a nice-to-have in sustainability careers. It affects whether you apply for opportunities, whether you speak up in meetings, whether you negotiate for what you deserve and whether you see yourself as someone who belongs in leadership. Research consistently shows that women and gender minorities report lower confidence in their abilities, even when their performance is equal to or better than their peers (Exley & Kessler, 2022; Exley & Nielsen, 2024). This is not because they're less capable; it's because confidence is shaped by who we see in leadership, whose voices get heard and whose contributions get recognised.

In sustainability and climate fields, where women remain underrepresented in senior positions, these patterns are particularly visible. Women students often second-guess themselves more, downplay their achievements and hesitate to pursue opportunities they're qualified for. Research by the Behavioural Insights Team (2022) in the UK found that women and men have similar application thresholds, with women applying when they meet around **56%** of job requirements and men at **52%**. This isn't about individual confidence; it's about systemic messages about who belongs.

Creating space to talk openly about confidence, to recognise skills and contributions explicitly and to understand how gender shapes our experiences can help level the playing field. When students see role models who share their identities, when they practise articulating their value and when they build networks of support, confidence grows. The goal is not just individual confidence – it is changing the systems and cultures that make some people feel they belong more than others.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Women in sustainability leadership

- **Diverse Sustainability Initiative:** https://www.diversesustainability.net/
  This ISEP initiative focuses on advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in sustainability professions.

Leadership development for climate careers

- **ELP:** https://www.elpnet.org/
  This fellowship programme is specifically designed to support emerging environmental leaders from diverse backgrounds.
- **ISEP professional development:** https://www.isepglobal.org/skills/
  ISEP offers training courses, CPD opportunities and professional development pathways.

Building confidence and professional identity

- **Green Careers Hub – careers advice:** https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/careers-advice/
  Get practical guidance on building your professional identity, identifying your strengths and navigating career transitions.
- **Securing your first job:** https://www.greencareershub.com/developing-your-career/careers-advice/securing-your-first-job/
  Read tips on presenting yourself confidently in applications and interviews.

Resources on gender and sustainability careers

- **Sustainability Careers Gender Equality project:** https://sustainabilitycareersgenderequality.co.uk/
  Access research and resources on gender equality in sustainability and climate careers (this is the project that formed the basis of this toolkit).

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- Exley, C. L., & Kessler, J. B. (2022). The gender gap in self-promotion. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 137*(3), 1345–1381. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjac003
- Exley, C. L., & Nielsen, K. (2024). The gender gap in confidence: Expected but not accounted for. *American Economic Review, 114*(3), 674–713. https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.20221413

Practical steps for building confidence

1. Keep a 'wins' document tracking your achievements, skills developed and positive feedback.
2. Practise articulating your value and contributions in clear, confident language.
3. Find a peer accountability partner to support each other's applications and goals.
4. Attend women-in-sustainability events and connect with role models.
5. Volunteer for speaking opportunities to build comfort with public visibility.
6. Seek out mentors who understand the specific challenges you face.
7. Remember that imposter feelings are normal and shared by many successful professionals.

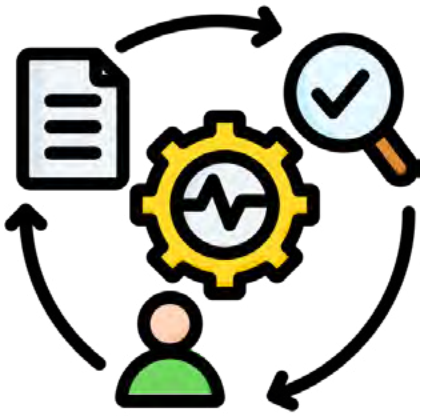
SCGE PROJECT EVIDENCE INSIGHT

Confidence and self-belief play an important role in students' career decisions. Many students expressed interest in sustainability careers, but were unsure whether they had the skills, knowledge or confidence to pursue these pathways. Students also highlighted the importance of encouragement, mentorship and role models in helping them explore career options.

Students and practitioners emphasised that confidence, mentorship and visible role models are important for career development. Providing supportive learning environments and opportunities for reflection can help students see themselves as capable contributors to sustainability and climate action.

Educators can help build confidence by creating opportunities for reflection, discussion and career exploration. Activities that help students recognise their strengths, understand career pathways and engage with practitioners can increase confidence and motivation.

Addressing gender equality is an important part of this process. Students are more likely to pursue careers when they feel supported and can see clear examples of people like themselves working in those roles. Creating supportive learning environments can help students develop confidence and take steps towards sustainability careers.



ACTIVITY 5
CLAIMING YOUR PLACE IN CLIMATE ACTION

PURPOSE

This activity supports students to reflect on their confidence, identity and sense of agency in relation to sustainability and climate careers. It helps students recognise their skills and motivations, identify gendered barriers to participation and leadership and see themselves as legitimate contributors to climate action.

WHO THIS IS FOR

- Undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- Mixed cohorts; adaptable across disciplines and suitable for mixed cohorts.

RESOURCES IF NEEDED

- Breakout rooms or small-group discussion spaces
- Confidence and agency reflection worksheet (template provided as appendix)
- Reflection prompts (slide or shared document)
- Optional: short profiles or videos of diverse sustainability and climate professionals (e.g. from NGOs, industry, finance, policy or community organisations)
- Optional: links to mentoring schemes, professional networks or leadership programmes in sustainability.

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Introduce the activity

Explain that sustainability and climate careers require not only technical knowledge, but also confidence, voice and the belief that one belongs in the field. Introduce the idea that confidence and access are not evenly distributed, and that gender can shape who feels visible, heard or supported in climate-related work. Emphasise that the activity is a reflective and supportive space, not an assessment.

Student reflection or engagement

Invite students to reflect individually for a few minutes on their interests in sustainability or climate action, and on how confident they feel expressing these interests in academic or professional settings.

Then, in pairs or small groups, ask students to share:

- one sustainability or climate issue they care about;
- one strength or skill they already bring (academic, personal or lived experience); and
- one factor that has made them feel more or less confident about pursuing related opportunities.

Encourage students to notice patterns across the group, particularly where confidence or hesitation seems linked to gendered expectations, stereotypes or experiences.

Sharing and synthesis

Bring the group back together to discuss emerging themes. Highlight how diverse skills, perspectives and lived experiences are essential in sustainability and climate careers. Discuss how gender norms, representation, mentoring access and workplace cultures can influence confidence and career aspirations. Reinforce the message that climate action requires many roles and that students already have valuable contributions to make.

Reflection or discussion questions

- What experiences have most shaped your confidence in relation to sustainability or climate careers?
- Where do you notice gender influencing who speaks up, leads or feels entitled to pursue opportunities in this field?
- What strengths or perspectives do you bring that are needed in climate action, even if they are not always recognised?
- What kinds of support or role models would help you feel more confident taking your next step?

Link to sustainability and climate careers

The activity connects students' self-perception and confidence to real-world roles in sustainability and climate, including policy, finance, community engagement, research, engineering, education and advocacy. By identifying existing skills and motivations, students can better recognise their fit for internships, projects, leadership roles and long-term careers in climate-related sectors.

Gender equality focus

This activity explicitly creates space to discuss how gendered barriers, such as confidence gaps, representation, access to mentoring and workplace culture, affect participation in sustainability and climate careers. By validating diverse identities and experiences, it supports students of all genders to see themselves as credible and empowered agents of climate action.

CONFIDENCE AND AGENCY REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Claiming your place in climate action

This is a reflective and supportive space, not an assessment. Be honest with yourself and share what feels comfortable in your group.

Part 1: Individual reflection (complete on your own)

1. What sustainability or climate issue do you care most about?

_____

_____

2. What strengths or skills do you already bring to this area?

Think broadly: academic skills, personal experiences, lived knowledge, ways of thinking, values, perspectives

_____

_____

_____

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel expressing your interest in sustainability or climate action in academic or professional settings?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

(Not confident) (Very confident)

4. What factors have made you feel more confident about pursuing sustainability or climate opportunities?

(e.g. supportive teacher, role model, successful project, positive feedback, peer encouragement)

_____

_____

5. What factors have made you feel less confident or hesitant?

(e.g. feeling you lack technical knowledge, not seeing people like you in the field, stereotype threat, imposter feelings)

_____

_____

_____

Part 2: Small-group sharing (share what feels comfortable)

In pairs or small groups (three to four people), share:

- ☑ one sustainability or climate issue you care about;
- ☑ one strength or skill you already bring; and
- ☑ one factor that has influenced your confidence (positively or negatively).

Group observation task

As you listen to each other, notice any patterns:

- Do certain experiences come up repeatedly?
- Are there differences in how people express confidence?
- Do you notice any connections to gender, background or identity?
- What barriers are mentioned most often?

Notes from your group discussion:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Part 3: Deeper reflection

6. What experiences have most shaped your confidence in relation to sustainability or climate careers?

_____

_____

7. Where do you notice gender influencing who speaks up, leads or feels entitled to pursue opportunities in this field?

_____

_____

8. What strengths or perspectives do you bring that are needed in climate action, even if they are not always recognised?

_____

_____

_____

9. What kinds of support or role models would help you feel more confident taking your next step?

_____

_____

Part 4: Action planning

What I will do	When I will do it
One small step to build confidence: *(e.g. speak up in next seminar, attend an event, reach out to someone)*	
One person to connect with: *(e.g. peer, mentor, professional, lecturer)*	
One learning opportunity: *(e.g. webinar, course, volunteer project, reading)*	

Remember: Building confidence is a process, not a destination. Every small step counts!

8. REFLECTIONS AND CLOSING REMARKS

This toolkit addresses a globally underdeveloped intersection: the integration of creative and co-creative pedagogical approaches, sustainability and climate action education, career development and gender equality. By embedding these dimensions together, educators can play a transformative role in preparing students to contribute meaningfully to climate action while advancing gender-equal professional futures.

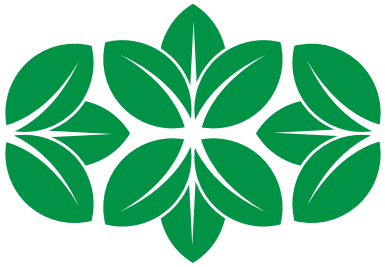
The toolkit is adaptable to disciplines, class sizes, delivery modes, resource-constrained settings and culturally diverse contexts.

Educators are encouraged to tailor activities to local sustainability challenges while remaining attentive to gender dynamics. Implementation may involve small adjustments rather than a full redesign. Educators might vary the duration of activities, adapt reflection questions to local sustainability issues or involve local practitioners where possible. In resource-constrained settings, activities can be delivered using discussion-based formats without additional materials.

To assess impact, educators may capture changes in:

- sustainability career awareness;
- confidence and skills development;
- perceptions of gender equality; and
- readiness to pursue climate-related roles.

Student and practitioner feedback is useful for informing continuous refinement of teaching approaches. Reflection and evaluation can be integrated into normal teaching practice through short feedback prompts, reflective journals or end-of-activity discussions. Educators may also revisit activities over time to assess whether students' awareness of sustainability careers and confidence in pursuing them has changed.



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