

Getting into...

Environment and Sustainability



The types of role within this sector are incredibly varied - from desk-based research and policy jobs, to working in the community raising awareness of environmental issues, to technical and practical outdoors roles.

It's important to think about what your motivation for working in the environmental and sustainability sector is - do you want to work in a practical setting or are you happy to be working in an office? New job roles and specialisms are developing due to increased awareness of and interest in environmental impact, future shortage of natural resources, and issues such as fairtrade and the move to NetZero.

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Exploring Your Options

In this section, we will be talking about the types of areas that exist within the industry, and where you might expect to work. There will be many roles and employers that we don't cover here, but these are some popular examples that you can use as a starting point when exploring your options.

Typical areas

This guide from Prospects provides a good overview of the most in demand roles and larger employers with more information on role areas below:

Education, marketing and promotion

Working for a charity, council or within a museum or education centre raising awareness of environmental and sustainability issues. Example job title: Environment Education Officer.

Policy, strategy and consultancy

Formulating policies to tackle environmental issues, auditing, advising and developing action plans on an organisation's sustainability, environmental impact or corporate social responsibility (CSR). In some instances, this could involve compliance – ensuring an organisation is operating within environmental law relating to emissions and environmental impact. Example job titles: Policy Officer and Planning & Environmental Policy Analyst.

Research or technical

Designing, creating and analysing structures, systems and products with an environmental and sustainable purpose, or providing insights into environmental risk. Conducting research to help inform policy and strategy.

Some jobs might involve more than one of these types of work. Another way to identify opportunities is to consider the subject focus of the work you want to pursue e.g. with renewable energy or recycling. Examples of job titles in these areas include: Research Analyst and Energy and Environment Researcher.

Environmental protection and enforcement

This type of role exists within a variety of settings. You might work in construction companies to monitor the impact of projects on the local environment, in supermarkets to check food standards or in local authorities to monitor pollution and public health. Example job titles: Environmental Health Officer/Practitioner.

Water and Air

Involved in ensuring water and air quality. Example job titles: Water Treatment Consultant, Wastewater Network Modeller, Hydrologist, Air Quality Consultant, Flood Protection Manager, Water Supply Coordinator and Clean Air Change Officer (Campaigns).¹

Recycling

As well as roles related to the collection and recycling of waste, there are also roles within this area that are less 'hands on', for example looking at cost and performance issues. Example job titles: Recycling Officer or Waste Management Officer.

Corporate/Business

Organisations across all sectors may have roles focused on sustainability, particularly large ones. Example job titles include: Sustainability Manager, Environmental Officer, Environmental Manager, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Consultant and Corporate Services and Partnerships Administrator.

Buildings and Infrastructure

Ensuring the environment and sustainability are considered when building and developing infrastructure. Example job titles: Urban/City Planner, Architect/Landscape Architect, Regeneration Officer, Sustainable Development Officer and Environmental Compliance Officer.

Working with plants/habitats/animals

A well-known area of sustainability relates to the sustainability of habitats and wildlife. Example job titles include: Ecologist, Microbiologist, Land Manager, Environmental Risk, Pollution Analyst, Zoologist, Biodiversity Officer and Nature Conservation Officer.

When researching what jobs are available in the environment and sustainability sector, make sure to use various different search terms and synonyms – for example 'Recycling' and 'Waste Management'.

Key Considerations

It is also important to think of the location and type of organisation you would like to work for, as well as to consider your work lifestyle. Opportunities in this sector exist throughout the UK and internationally. It is possible to work in a sustainability team in a large organisation or work in a sustainability company that provides support and advice to other organisations. A willingness to work outdoors and in different climates may be required, particularly for conservation and research jobs. Some jobs will also be much more physical than others.

As well as in industry, charities and NGOs, opportunities exist in the public sector (local and national level). The main government body in charge of environmental issues in the UK is the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Defra works with agencies and public bodies like the Environment Agency, which has a well-known graduate scheme.

For more information about this industry, take a look at Prospects' [Environment and Agriculture](#) page. For further details about the related areas of environmental engineering and renewable energy see our guides on [Energy](#), [Science](#) and [Engineering](#).

Getting Industry Ready

In this section, we will talk about the kinds of skills and experiences employers might be looking for within this industry, and how you can go about gaining them yourself. What employers are looking for will vary depending on the role, but below is a general overview of key areas you might like to think about. It is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required.

Some job roles, such as Environmental Manager or Energy Consultant, have only emerged recently, so you might find there isn't a clearly defined route into them. Be proactive about gaining work experience and gathering relevant skills and consider working in a related role first.

What employers want

Qualifications

Postgraduate study is not essential for all jobs in the environment and sustainability sector, but you should check job descriptions what level of education is required. For some technical, scientific and research-based jobs a Master's degree or even a PhD will be required. For certain roles, it will be mandatory for employees to obtain professional accreditation or qualifications, which you can learn more about from the appropriate professional body (see Resources section) who will have information on qualifications required and lists of accredited courses.

Postgraduate study is not a substitute for work experience, and employers will still expect you to have done some placements or become involved in volunteering or projects outside of your studies.

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is the main UK funding agency for those looking to do postgraduate research in the environmental sciences. Their website gives details of how to apply for such funding, together with information on careers in scientific research and some vacancies.

Skills

Here are some key skills many employers within this sector are looking for when hiring graduates. As was mentioned before, it is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required for that particular role.

Enthusiasm and dedication

Demonstrating enthusiasm for the environment and dedication to improving the way companies and individuals impact upon nature are crucial if you intend to work in this field.

Innovativeness

The environment sector is rapidly developing and being able to think creatively is important, particularly for technical roles and research jobs. Working in education, consultancy and conservation positions may also require you to be able to approach environmental issues from a new angle or find original solutions to problems.

Data and analytical skills

Some of the more technical, research and science-based roles involve processing large quantities of data. Candidates will therefore have to have a good maths background and the ability to work with statistics, as well as strong analytical and critical thinking skills.

Communication and persuasion skills

Effective communication of your knowledge, ideas and work to others is a key requirement for many jobs in the environmental sector, particularly in the field of research, education and consultancy. Being able to persuade your clients or the public of the necessity to work and live in an environmentally friendly, sustainable way is also important for those working in corporate responsibility or lobbying roles.

Independence/self-starter

With the environmental sector changing so much in the last few decades, a number of the jobs in this sector are still relatively new. This means you might have to shape the role you're in, rather than be told exactly what to do. Working in research or conservation might require working alone for long periods of time with little supervision. Self-assurance and confidence are also needed if you are to work in consultancy.

Team work and interpersonal skills

The ability to work within and across specialist teams is crucial. Most roles will require you to network and build relationships with colleagues and clients.

If there are any skills that you feel you need to develop, try to gain some work experience or volunteer where you can use that skill so you can add it to your CV. The following section details how to find opportunities.

Commercial awareness

Keeping Informed Keeping up to date with the key issues, news and campaigns within the sector is important: you may be asked about this at interview. This is known as commercial awareness or business focus. If you can talk passionately about these issues, this proves your interest in the sector to future employers.

The environment, as a policy issue and a profession, is ever-changing so anyone wanting to work in this sector must stay abreast of developments. Read the environmental press, including specialist publications and websites, follow organisations and industry commentators on Instagram, X and Linked In to get the latest news and join member organisations to find out about events. Being aware of current issues within this area is becoming more and more important, with issues such as climate change and food mileage becoming mainstream talking points. (Take a look at our [Commercial Awareness resources](#) to find out more)

How to gain relevant skills and experiences

Use your time at university to develop the skills mentioned above. Remember that part-time work, volunteering and involvement in clubs and societies are all opportunities to do this!

Take on responsibility

Take on positions of responsibility, whether voluntary or paid. This could be a Team Leader at work, or a committee member for a university society. As well as joining one of the [environment focused societies](#) at Queen Mary, you could join other societies and look to identify ways to reduce their environmental impact. Take a look at the NUS' sustainability arm, and find out about green initiatives at Queen Mary.

Volunteer

Volunteering for a local conservation or charity for example can give you an insight into funding, bids, community partnership, technical/maintenance concerns and marketing. There are a number of charities and campaign groups in London that are focused on issues such as air, water or noise pollution, rubbish/litter and urban conservation areas. Look to find local groups where you can get involved. There are also remote virtual projects with an international perspective such as using GIS skills for the Humanitarian Aid focused OpenStreetMap. Employers will look for volunteering as evidence of your motivation, enthusiasm and drive for this area of work.

Read job descriptions

Use the information in job descriptions for the roles you are interested in to understand what employers are looking for. Use this information to market yourself to employers and target your applications. If there are skills you don't yet have experience of using, think about ways you can gain them through extracurricular activities e.g. writing a funding application,

completing an audit. Once you have found job board you like, bookmark it, subscribe to their updates and check back regularly for new opportunities.

Follow organisations online

Use social media to see what organisations are doing and build commercial awareness and your network (e.g. @GreenpeaceUK and @NERCscience). You can also take a look at industry magazines and join professional associations.

Attend events

Attend university or external events to hear from recruiters, develop your understanding of the industry and make new contacts. You can ask these contacts for advice, or even for an opportunity to shadow them in their role.

Get application ready

Update your CV and have a speculative letter ready to adapt should you need to apply for an opportunity at short notice. Book an appointment to get it checked by Careers and Enterprise.

Showcase your passion for sustainability related issues

The Royal Geographical Society is an essential resource with a range of live and recorded webinars featuring practitioners from a wide variety of career paths who may be receptive to helping you individually if you reach out to them. Your Careers Consultant and academics regularly post about upcoming events and opportunities on the [Geography & Environmental Science Careers QM+ page](#). This could be from your dissertation and research interests, it could be through volunteering. Any volunteering that see's you impact the environment in a positive manner (for example River clean ups etc.) will be looked on favourably and allow you to showcase your deep-rooted interest in the sustainability industry. Similarly, societies like Engineers without Borders, allows you to work on a engineering related project that addresses sustainability related issues (recent projects have included a solar-powered self cleaning dustbin, a robot that skims along the canal cleaning litter).

How can Careers and Enterprise help you?

Careers and Enterprise Support for you

There are a number of ways Careers and Enterprise can help you build skills and prepare for applying to opportunities.

Appointments

We run one-to-one appointments with expert career consultants who can talk to you about a variety of topics including your CV and applications, as well as give you career guidance and advice surrounding making career decisions. You can also book [Practice Interview appointments](#) to test your skills, for when you have an upcoming interview

Events

We hold a range of [careers events](#) throughout the year where you can learn more about an industry, network with employers and find out what people look for in a graduate.

Programmes

If you are looking to develop your skills, Careers & Enterpriser is home to the [Aspire Programme](#): Queen Mary's Student Career Development Programme. These programmes take place alongside your degree, allowing you to gain vital employability skills to add to your CV, as well as raise your commercial awareness. Please note: Eligibility requirements apply

Online Resources

Our bank of [online resources](#) is a great place to go for careers support. We have guides (such as this one), templates for things like CVs and applications, as well as tools that you can use to build or improve a CV ([QM CareerSet](#)), practice for a psychometric test ([Graduates First](#)) or practice for a video interview ([ShortlistMe](#)).

Make the most of work experience opportunities

Once you have found a work experience opportunity, it is important to make the most of it! Here are some things to keep in mind before, during and after the opportunity.

1. Discuss your expectations with the employer at the start, so that you have the same understanding of what the experience will involve.
2. Always be polite, motivated and interested. Work experience can involve boring tasks, but being flexible, helpful and willing to get involved will make a good impression and could lead to more opportunities.
3. Be inquisitive and learn everything you can about the way the organisation works. How do they hire? What key skills are they looking for? What are the main issues affecting the organisation at the moment?
4. Talk to people who work at the organisation and find out what they do and how they got there. You might uncover job roles and employers that are new to you, as well as pick up some helpful tips. Keeping in touch with people you meet can be a great way of finding out about future opportunities and expanding your network.
5. Ask for feedback at the end of the placement to identify your strengths and the skills you need to develop further.

For more information on where you can develop your skills and experience, see the resources section.

Finding Opportunities

Professional bodies

Professional bodies or associations such as those under the Resources section are excellent for career and training information, as well as for commercial awareness. Many advertise work experience placements and jobs and have directories of their members who you can contact directly for work opportunities. Some resources are only available to members, but student rates are available. Examples from the environmental and sustainability sectors are below.

Speculative Applications

Many students and graduates find work experience through making speculative applications and by networking. Almost all charities will offer volunteering, and many small to medium companies might have internships or work placement schemes available. However, unlike larger charities and businesses, not every organisation can afford to advertise these opportunities so making speculative applications is an excellent approach that is common in this industry.

Contact companies directly to ask whether they have any opportunities available. Commercial awareness (understanding the industry) is a vital way of getting to know about different employers and project areas so you can apply to the organisation directly. Improve your chances of success by finding organisations that fit your skills and interests, allowing you to make a more targeted approach. Although you may see yourself working in a large company, the greatest number of jobs are actually within small and medium-sized companies. Think about where you live – are there urban farms, zoos, areas of woodlands or parks where you could volunteer or apply for work experience? Also consider local councils, conservation charities and campaign groups.

Networking

Networking and making contacts are useful tools in finding both work experience and job opportunities. Build your network by attending talks, insight days, conferences and by being a member of a relevant university student society. Consider becoming a member of a professional body or scientific society to take advantage of their networking opportunities. This is an excellent method to learn more about the industry, find out further about different organisations and get useful advice from recruiters and people working in the industry.

Social media platforms like LinkedIn, Bluesky and X can be valuable tools for keeping up-to-date with careers information, events, news and jobs. Create/update your LinkedIn profile and find interesting LinkedIn groups to join (like the Queen Mary Alumni page and the RGS Geography Undergraduate Career Hub & Opportunities). LinkedIn can be a useful tool in finding opportunities.

Personal projects

If you feel passionate about a particular environmental or sustainability issue, why not start a blog to raise awareness? You could organise a fundraising event, create a society on campus or start a campaign. If you can spot a particular environmental problem on campus, why not try to design a solution? This shows initiative and allows you to develop a portfolio of competencies that are valued by potential employers.

Likewise, if there is a particular cause to do with the environment or sustainability which you feel requires greater attention, then you could start your own charity. Charities are established by individuals with an entrepreneurial vision who see a need in society and wish to do something about it. The [Charity Commission](#) for England and Wales provides guidance on how to set up a charity.

You could also consider setting up a social enterprise. Social enterprises make money from selling goods or services, but they invest their profits into the community. A high profile example of a social enterprise related to the environment is the Eden Project. Visit our website to find out how we can support you with starting or growing a business.

Recruitment agencies

If you already have substantial work experience (one year plus) and you are looking to gain a full time job, you might consider looking at roles offered through recruitment agencies. It is important to remember that these agencies make their profit through placing candidates in roles, saving companies the time and cost of recruiting. Sometimes you could be asked to fill a role you are not particularly interested in, so it's helpful to know the type of work or organisation you are interested in beforehand. Search [Agency Central](#) for a list of agencies in the UK or type the job roles you are interested.

Resources

Exploring Your Options

Guardian Environment

Articles and information on current environment and sustainability issues.

Environmental Data Interactive Exchange (EDIE)

Provides news and information on corporate social responsibility and sustainability. Includes a jobs board, a calendar of events and details on courses and training.

Royal Geographical Society

The UK's professional body for Geographers of any kind with a very extensive careers section with internship and jobs board directories, webinars, guides and case studies on a wide range of career options.

The Environmentalist

The online magazine of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), this site contains news, articles and features on various environmental issues.

United Nations Environment Programme

News and information about global environmental issues. Includes vacancies, internships and volunteering roles.

Chartered Institute of Waste Management (CIWM)

Membership provides discount on training, events and publications. Includes student and graduate membership options. Also has a directory.

British Zoological Society

Student fellowship gives exclusive access to annual careers event and resources, and there are also river and zoo based volunteering opportunities.

Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA)

Has a comprehensive 'Careers and Training' section which includes information on developing knowledge and skills, advice on job hunting and guidance on working in the environment sector.

Institute of Environmental Sciences (IES)

Covers a number of areas including, for example, Conservation, Ecology, Forestry, Impact Assessment, Sustainability, Transport and Waste Management. Includes a good careers section and a mentoring scheme for those looking to enter this field of work.

Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM)

Includes jobs listing, information on events and on postgraduate study. Also publishes reports and a journal in conjunction with the IES.

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CEEM)

Has an excellent section on careers in ecology: www.cieem.net/students-careers

Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

A comprehensive website with information on careers in town planning and qualifications needed, news, events, jobs listing, volunteer opportunities and a directory of planning consultancy companies.

Institute of Water

Includes news and events and a careers development section.

Geographical Society

News, resources and volunteering opportunities.

Company Directories

Water UK

Has a comprehensive list of all UK water and waste water companies including links to their websites where you can get information on vacancies and graduate schemes.

Environmental Data Services

Supporting researchers and anyone with an interest in learning more about the natural world by hosting the largest collection of environmental science data in the UK. Funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), part of UK Research and Innovation, to advise researchers on how to prepare data for long term storage and dissemination.

Green Pages

A comprehensive site with information on environmental products & services, publications, organisations and events, both within the UK and internationally. The directory contains the details of hundreds of companies and organisations.

Environmental Expert

Database of thousands of companies in numerous countries who offer products or services related to the environment. Also has an international jobs board, news, and events.

Finding Opportunities

Top Geography & Environmental Science related job sites

Wide ranging general environment & sustainability roles:

- [EnvironmentJob](#) for wide selection of internships & entry level roles as well as volunteering opportunities, information on courses and training, and a directory of environment organisations.
- [SustainabilityJob](#) for selection of opportunities clearly differentiated for early career.
- Royal Geographical Society [Internship Directory](#) and extensive list of [Industry Jobs Boards](#).

Conservation & Ecology roles:

- [Countryside Jobs Services](#) for various jobs in environment sector, including volunteer roles.
- [The Conservation Volunteers](#) (TCV) - volunteering organisation useful for gaining work experience.
- [Countryside Jobs Link](#) Includes profiles of some of the larger environment and conservation organisations.
- [Lantra](#) Information on land-based careers, including agriculture, animal care, fisheries and environmental conservation. Has comprehensive 'careers' section and a jobs board.
- [Climate Internships](#) - US centric but many of the internships offer remote working if the time difference is viable.

Planning, Infrastructure & STEM roles:

- [Planning Jobs](#) - vacancies in areas such as urban planning and regeneration.
- [Pathways to planning](#) local government graduate programme.
- [Earth Works](#) - specialising in science based and technical jobs within the environmental sector.
- [Gradcracker](#) for engineering and STEM corporate internships and graduate schemes.
- [Prospire](#) for wide range of more corporate and STEM environmental roles & internships.

For Global Development roles try:

- [IR CareerStarters Monthly Newsletter containing several hundred internships, traineeships, fellowships, and entry-to-early-career positions.](#)
- [10 Paid Internships in Human Rights, Humanitarian Aid and Development](#)
- [UN Online Volunteers](#)
- [UN Careers](#)
- Int Development Jobs board Dev Ex <https://www.devex.com/jobs/search>
- Directory of worldwide social impact focused jobs boards <https://probablygood.org/reso>