

TRANSFORM

For environment and sustainability professionals

Environment ●
Economy ○
Society ●

Sep/Oct 2025
isepglobal.org/engage/transform

PLUS

Compass of truth

Mike Berners-Lee on why honesty is the best policy

Get it together

How systems thinking changes everything

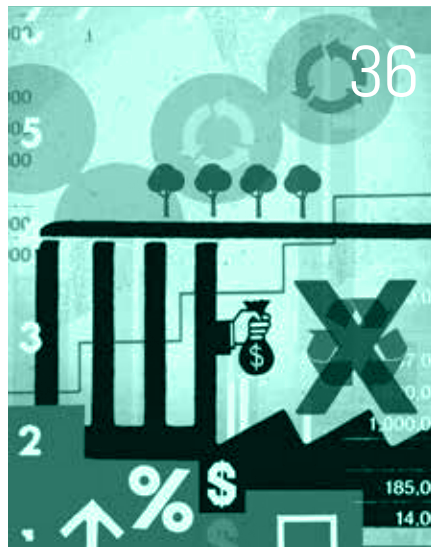
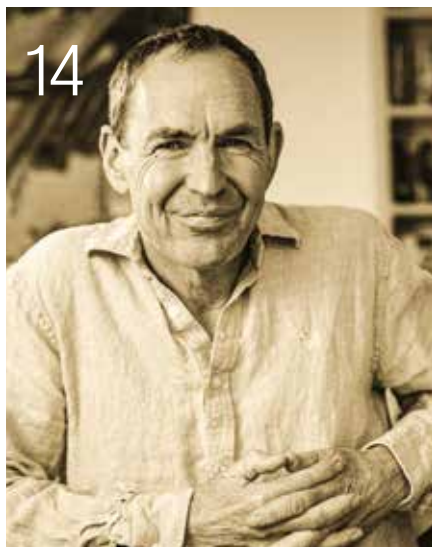
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Making the polluter pay

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TRANSFORM

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Complexity to clarity

Elana Chesler explains how stakeholder engagement skills can help navigate complex projects.
www.bit.ly/4nG8mLp

Engaging untapped talent

Research shows strong student demand for sustainability roles, yet limited opportunities hold them back, write Dr Karen Cripps and Dr Jonathan Louw. www.bit.ly/46mG9SV

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Senior marine consultant Hannah Fougner PISEP

The truth of the matter

SARAH MUKHERJEE MBE, CEO, ISEP

Hello, and welcome to another edition of *Transform*, your regular tour of the sustainability landscape with insight from the sector's leading figures.

The logistics in the run-up to the COP30 climate change talks in Belém in Brazil have been as unpredictable as the negotiations ahead of the event, with even the president of COP30 inviting delegates to reflect on the future of the process itself. With climate scepticism growing hand in hand with populist politics in many countries, Mike Berners-Lee makes a powerful argument that politicians from all parts of the political spectrum have been deluding us, and themselves, when it comes to the reality of the situation. Is it all too late? And can we do anything as individuals? Chris Seekings and Chloë Fiddy find out.

The British Labour Party grew from the trade union movement. Some commentators have expressed concern about the current UK government's commitment to nature and sustainability. Sam Perry from the Trades Union Congress argues that trade unions can drive change across the workforce – and that working with trade union representatives is the way to bring about meaningful change.

The move towards populist parties across Europe is increasingly being reflected in legislation. A new Omnibus package of EU legislation aims to radically reduce the reporting requirements for European business. As Elisabeth Jeffries reports, what may seem like a simplification could end up creating greater confusion.

As always, we love to hear your thoughts and comments about the articles in *Transform*. Please let us know if you have an idea for publication – many of our articles come from members on a fascinating range of subjects.

“Mike Berners-Lee makes a powerful argument that politicians from all parts of the political spectrum have been deluding us, and themselves, when it comes to the reality of the situation”



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EDUCATION

Academics call for more climate education in school curriculum

University College London (UCL) has recommended that every subject in England's national curriculum should contribute to climate change and nature education. The proposal comes amid the current Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR), with the final recommendations due later this autumn.

An interim report published in March concluded that "rapid social, environmental and technological change necessitates that the curriculum keep pace", including "greater focus on sustainability and climate science".

UCL said that the aims of every subject in the national curriculum should include a reference to their distinctive contributions to climate change and nature education.

These aims – in part or in full – could be easily integrated into the revised curriculum and would legitimise and encourage teachers' efforts to respond to the climate and nature crisis.

Importantly, they would also highlight the role of skills and values alongside knowledge.

Dr Alison Kitson, programme director at UCL's Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education, said: "We know that the CAR panel is looking to reduce ... the amount of prescribed content in the revised curriculum. However, we also know there is an urgent



Nature education in schools

need for the curriculum to reflect the climate and nature crisis in ways that are meaningful, constructive and empowering. This proposal sets out a way to achieve both at the same time."

It ends with a statement underscoring teachers' voices: "We know that many teachers would value more commitment from policymakers to support them in their desire to make young people's education fully fit for purpose."

"To ignore the wishes of those people responsible for educating the youth of today would be a missed opportunity."

HOUSING

New alliance homes in on green jobs

A national partnership has been launched to bring together leaders from the social housing, net-zero homes and employment sectors to generate more green job opportunities.

Spearheaded by Communities that Work, the Housing, Growth and Green Jobs Alliance will ensure that social housing tenants are not left behind in the green transition.

By fostering collaboration, the group aims to help the UK meet its net-zero goals while unlocking skills,

employment and economic growth opportunities.

Communities that Work managing director Lynsey Sweeney said: "The drive to decarbonise our homes is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Social housing communities are at the heart of this mission. By bringing together expertise from housing, employment and sustainability, we can ensure that the green transition delivers both environmental benefits and economic opportunity to those who need it most."

MARITIME

£1.1bn boost for coastal industries

Coastal communities across the UK are set to benefit from more than £1.1bn of investment for the maritime sector to unlock growth and jobs in engineering, green technology and construction.

The funding includes £700m of private investment for major ports and leading industry players, as well as £448m of public investment to reduce emissions from shipping.

The almost half a billion pounds will bolster the government's UK SHORE

programme, which supports the research and development of new clean maritime technologies and fuels, including electric, hydrogen, ammonia, methanol, wind power and more.

Transport secretary Heidi Alexander said: "We're committing almost half a billion to cut carbon emissions from shipping, steering us towards net zero by 2050 and cementing Britain's place as a clean energy superpower through our Plan for Change."

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Advice on making the most of the UK's green growth opportunity

BY AGNES CHRUSCZCZ

The UK potentially stands on the threshold of a transformative economic shift that could deliver £75bn in GDP growth and create half a million jobs by 2030.

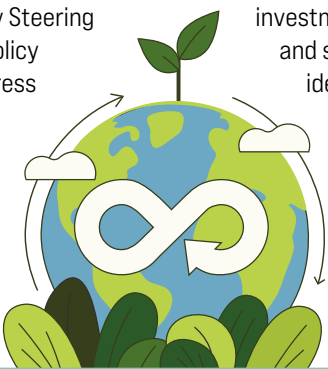
In its manifesto, the UK government committed to deliver a circular economy and develop a strategy for England. Defra set up the Circular Economy Taskforce in 2024 and has been working to co-design this key framework. The much-anticipated strategy and sector roadmaps are due for consultation this autumn.

ISEP's Circular Economy Steering Group has been shaping policy recommendations that stress the need for a systems-based approach and to align policy, regulation, investment, infrastructure and workforce development. The group argues that the

circular economy is an opportunity to build prosperity and resilience in the economy while decoupling material use from growth. It's also an opportunity to secure the UK's place at the forefront of this emerging market globally.

The group recommends a fiscal framework review to level the playing field between virgin and circular materials, making refurbishment, remanufacture and recycling economically competitive. It advises embedding circularity standards in procurement and trade, and aligning

investment strategies with regional and sectoral development needs identified in the Industrial Strategy. This requires a comprehensive skills review and development across all career stages to ensure communities nationwide benefit from emerging opportunities.



The transition's local and global social implications also require assessment to ensure an equitable approach that maximises benefits while addressing community impacts.

To drive accountability, sector roadmaps should be underpinned by robust resource productivity targets, enabling transparent progress evaluation.

The group recognises the need to remove regulatory barriers to circular innovation and for home-grown circular enterprises to have targeted support to help them scale up.

Lastly, infrastructure development should encompass material recovery facilities – especially for critical materials – and sustainable logistics networks to efficiently move skilled workers and products across the system, as well as digital infrastructure and standards necessary for system-wide transformation.



WATER

ISEP prepares water stewardship guidance

BY LESLEY WILSON

The ISEP Environmental Management Network is set to publish an advice note on water stewardship.

Organisations that are effective water stewards have a clear understanding of their own water use, the context of the catchment area in which they operate, and the shared risks linked to water governance, availability, quality and water-dependent ecosystems. With this knowledge, organisations can take meaningful action to deliver benefits for their organisation, people and nature.

The advice note explores how current water stewardship frameworks – such as the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) – can enhance the effectiveness of the ISO 14001 environmental management system (EMS) standard.

An EMS can set the initial system governance foundation for holistic environmental management. An AWS framework delivers an in-depth context with a community focus needed for effective water stewardship within a catchment area, which helps organisations understand where they should focus their efforts, identifying associated challenges and opportunities.

This advice note highlights how actions from ISO 14001 and AWS frameworks interlink, enabling more robust, context-driven water management. It considers the key benefits of incorporating water stewardship into an EMS, with practical steps for getting started.

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RECRUITMENT

Latest IA journal tackles recruitment and retention challenges

BY RUFUS HOWARD

In August, the Impact Assessment Network published the latest volume of the *Impact Assessment Outlook Journal*, 'Recruitment and Retention in Impact Assessment'.

This landmark edition explores the profession's most pressing challenges: recruitment and retention. It is guest edited by Juliette Callaghan, partner at Trium Environmental Consulting and chair of

ISEP's Impact Assessment Steering Group.

Impact assessment (IA) is a profession with purpose. It safeguards people and the environment, drives better project design, and ensures that decision-making is transparent and informed. Yet, to continue achieving these outcomes, the sector must attract, nurture and retain a resilient and diverse workforce. This edition brings together thought

pieces from leading practitioners from around the world, each sharing innovative solutions and personal reflections on how we can strengthen our profession for the future.

Highlights include Ireland's sectoral training response, which is building capacity through new micro-credentials and national collaboration; Waterman's apprenticeship scheme, offering structured pathways

for early-career professionals; and practical strategies for embedding soft skills alongside technical expertise. Contributions also explore the role of competency frameworks, professional development and inclusive workplace practices in retaining talent.

The *IA Outlook Journal* is free to download at www.isepglobal.org

POLICYWATCH

BY ASIM ALI

ISEP continues to engage with policymakers and stakeholders across the environmental and sustainability agenda.

We recently brought together members and experts for a roundtable discussion with Dr Emily Nurse, head of net zero at the Climate Change Committee (CCC). Nurse explained the CCC's view on sector-specific priorities for the UK's next carbon budget, followed by a discussion with ISEP members.

Key points included:
● Certainty for business: carbon budgets remain a central tool for reducing emissions while offering

businesses valuable certainty to plan and invest for the long term.

● Progress and challenges: while there has been progress, the speed of decarbonisation varies across sectors, with significant challenges ahead.

On 23 September, ISEP members and experts met with Natural England for a roundtable focusing on opportunities to strengthen collaboration on nature recovery and environmental governance.

In October, ISEP will join a Broadway Initiative event with Ed Miliband, secretary of state for energy security and net zero, as speaker. It will explore how the UK can accelerate progress on its climate and sustainability goals.



Ed Miliband

BIODIVERSITY

Key insights and learning on BNG in England

BY LESLEY WILSON

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) was introduced in England in 2024, mandating at least a 10% uplift in biodiversity for developments.

Since then there has been much analysis of take-up, challenges, case studies and economic value, as well as a consultation to abolish BNG for smaller developments.

BNG is a world-leading mechanism for offsetting biodiversity losses from development. In England, mandatory BNG has been operating across major and small-scale developments, currently excluding Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. This marks a bold step towards the quantification of biodiversity loss, which has previously been lacking.

Sites that previously would not have fully addressed habitat and species losses must now do so, and any lost habitats are

compensated either on or offsite. This is a positive step towards halting biodiversity losses and promoting nature's recovery. Marine net gain preparation remains in development (see the ISEP webinar, autumn 2024, at www.bit.ly/MNG-webinar).

A new paper to be published soon, developed by the ISEP Biodiversity and Natural Capital Network, will give a broad overview of key insights and learnings so far. It covers the BNG register; local nature recovery strategies in England; what's happening in Scotland and Wales; the local planning authority perspective; the changing planning and legislative landscape; legal agreements; farming; and more.

The paper is aimed at all stakeholders, including landowners, ecologists and local authorities.

ISEP CONNECT 2025: Empowering Changemakers Globally

ISEP is proud to announce the return of its flagship annual members' conference, ISEP Connect 2025: Empowering Changemakers Globally.

Now in its fifth year, Connect has become a cornerstone event for environment and sustainability professionals worldwide, offering a unique space to harness the collective expertise of our global membership across three key themes:

1. Turning policy into action
2. Transforming the world today for a sustainable future
3. Advancing careers and nurturing talent.

This year's theme reflects the conference's mission to transform collective expertise into tangible action.

What to expect

Connect 2025 attendees can participate in immersive workshops, learn through expert-led webinars, and network with each other and speakers through our interactive digital platform.



**OPEN
FOR
REGISTRATION**

The conference empowers ISEP members with opportunities to learn from industry leaders and renowned experts, provide invaluable insights on the latest policy approaches, best practice and real-world examples that deliver change.

Session highlights, include:

- From Risk to Resilience: Climate Scenario Analysis Made Practical
- Building a Workforce Fit For a Sustainable Future
- Digital Tools For SME Sustainability: Streamlining

Measurement and Management

- Practical Sustainability Strategies: Decentralising Responsibility to Drive Impact
- The Role of Nature-Based Solutions in Meeting Net Zero and Nature Positive
- ISEP Connect: Live – this year there will also be an in-person evening event on 9 December in London. Spaces are limited. More details to follow.

Why you shouldn't miss it

The ISEP Connect 2025 conference gives members the chance to collaborate, expand their professional network and draw on diverse

perspectives by connecting with professionals worldwide.

It will enable attendees to stay ahead of global sustainability trends, gain hands-on insights and power real change.

Join us and put yourself at the heart of a global movement driving sustainability forward.

Register at www.isepglobal.org/isep-connect





NETWORKS

Fellows gather to lead the way and share expertise

The launch of ISEP in July was attended by a number of our Fellows, pictured, showcasing the breadth of expertise across sectors and specialisms that define our community.

On the same day, a dedicated Fellows Network

met to focus on identifying critical skills gaps within the profession and exploring practical solutions. Insights from this session will directly inform future initiatives.

Our Fellows continue to lead with impact. As part of their legacy ambitions, ISEP chair

Dr Shamir Ghumra FISEP and Amanda Williams FISEP, both part of our People of Colour mentoring pilot scheme, joined two mentees in a webinar to share outcomes from the pilot and announce the launch of our new cohort. The recording is available online.

Back row (from left): Michael Nates, David Dowson, Matthew Goldberg, Kirsty Green-Mann, Laila Takeh, Andy Griffiths, Peter Watts, Carl von Reibnitz, Heidi Barnard and Pete Caddock
Front row (from left): Martin Baxter, Anya Ledwith, Arlette Anderson, Beth Knight, Gill Mulroe and Helen Woolston

FELLOWS EVENTS

- Our Futures and Fellows webinar on 6 November will highlight the value of networking and practical actions to build your influence. www.bit.ly/42n4VRt
- Many of our Fellows will be at our Connect conference in December, including keynote sessions and lunchtime networking.

OTHER NEWS

Blog: How to network and why it matters in sustainability
Nicola Stopps FISEP offers some insights on the importance of engaging with like-minded career professionals, tips on how to start a conversation and network effectively, and the benefits of creating strong and enduring connections. www.bit.ly/HowToNetworkBlog

Workshop: Interested in becoming an ISEP Fellow?
Register for our Fellow Member Upgrade Digital Workshop on 22 October 12.00–13.00 BST. This online interactive event will enable you to explore the highest level of ISEP membership. You do not need to be a member to attend. Price £25. www.bit.ly/MemberUpgradeWorkshop

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

ISEP makes online access easier for all with Recite Me toolbar

As part of our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategy, website users can now access a wide range of accessibility and language support tools through Recite Me assistive technology.

This inclusive approach is essential in supporting individuals who may face challenges on websites because of disabilities, learning difficulties, visual impairments, or for those

who speak English as a second language.

The Recite Me assistive toolbar is available on the ISEP, Green Careers Hub and Diverse Sustainability Initiative websites. The toolbar includes screen-reading functionality, multiple reading aids, customisable styling options and an on-demand live translation feature that boasts more than 100 languages including 65 text-to-speech and styling options.

DIARY DATES

The Big Sustainability Expo & Awards 2025

Thursday 9 October, 10.00 to 15.30

The Expo is dedicated to the reduction of the environmental impact of organisations.

- Visit www.bit.ly/BigSustainabilityExpo2025

Global Networks Volunteer Forum

Tuesday 14 October, 8.00 to 9.30 BST, online

An opportunity for volunteers to connect with head office, receive updates and engage in meaningful discussions.

- Visit www.bit.ly/VolunteerForumMeeting to book

ISEP New Member Meet and Greet

Friday 24 October, 11.00 to 12.00 BST, online

A chance for members who have recently joined to meet ISEP and their fellow peers in a friendly and informative session.

- Visit www.bit.ly/ISEPMeetAndGreet to book

ISEP EUROPE

Latest ‘educate and elevate’ session hits Europe

BY DAMIEN PLANT FISEP

ISEP Europe was delighted to host the Institute's first corporate partners event under the new mantle. Fittingly, the session, organised by Alan Darby, focused on Europe and the EU.

The interactive panel explored the complexities, challenges and opportunities of operating across multiple regulatory landscapes, examined some of the Europe-wide legislation and considered implications for national governments.

The conversation, chaired by Damien Plant FISEP, co-chair of ISEP Europe, featured Peter Bragg, EMEA sustainability and government affairs director at Canon, and Tertius Beneke, chief sustainability officer at CargoLux.

Both speakers were refreshingly candid, tackling the ‘tsunami of regulations’ and the ever-shifting



movement of goalposts associated with them, and the challenges of truth-telling in today's climate. They also touched on discussions around the continued relevance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Highlights included:

- A stark reminder that 75% of global freight by value moves by air,

reshaping the way we think about supply-chain management.

- Bragg reporting on the complexities Canon faces in navigating European requirements alongside Japanese corporate culture.
- Recognising the many opportunities for forward-looking companies alongside the challenges.

This first Eurocentric session for corporate partners marks the beginning of what we hope will be a continuing series. ISEP Europe is now working closely with ISEP Central to ensure members stay informed about pivotal European developments through corporate events, webinars, *Transform* and ISEP Connect.

Thanks to Alan Darby for leading the initiative and to Beneke and Bragg for their thoughtful contributions.

Stronger together: closing the sustainability gap in supply chains

The AS Edge app builds supplier capability and confidence, moving organisations and partners forward together

Across industries, large organisations are under pressure to deliver on net zero and sustainability commitments. But there are two common roadblocks:

1. Suppliers aren't engaging with sustainability goals.
2. Suppliers lack the knowledge or resources to deliver.

It's no surprise. Many suppliers are SMEs – already stretched, unsure where to start and without access to the training or insights they need. The result? Customers risk missing their targets. Suppliers risk losing contracts. Everyone feels the strain.

That's why we created Act Sustainably Edge™ – an app designed to support both sides of the equation. For customers, it makes supplier engagement real. For suppliers, it provides the skills, intelligence and confidence to step up.

Inside Edge: suppliers unlock:

- **Edge Learning:** £1,800+ of structured training.



- **Edge Insights:** weekly in-depth articles on pressing sustainability challenges.
- **Edge Intel:** weekly research briefings, curated to highlight trends and regulatory shifts.
- **Live expert briefings and Q&As** with sustainability leaders, policy innovators and practitioners.
- **Global peer support,** where professionals and suppliers learn and collaborate together.

For large customers, Edge means engaged suppliers, stronger data and smoother progress towards ambitious commitments. For suppliers, it's a practical way to build capability, credibility and confidence.



At Act Sustainably, we're more than a company – we're a global community committed to building a fairer, greener future. As proud members of 1% for the Planet, every subscription fuels real-world impact – helping us plant more than 14,000 trees with One Tree Planted and support 342 entrepreneurs across 40 countries through Kiva.

Sustainability isn't a slogan – it's our standard.

Email solutions@actsustainably.com or scan the QR code to book a call with Dave or Jamie.

Help your suppliers rise to the challenge – and accelerate your own journey.



Scan the QR code to book your free call



A major shake-up of the main regime addressing industrial pollution in England is coming, warns **Neil Howe**



Legal insight

It is looking like a busy few months, with big changes to the industrial activities side of environmental permitting, along with details of the long-awaited waste exemption reforms.

Permitting modernisation

Defra has launched a consultation on proposed reforms to the industrial emissions permitting framework in England. Reviews of the current regime, while emphasising it has been an overall success, found it to be outdated, slow and not flexible enough to support the rapid industrial and clean energy transformation needed to accelerate innovation, streamline regulation and support the net-zero transition. The proposed changes focus on industrial activities only, such as installations and medium combustion plants. They will not cover waste or mining waste operations, and will exclude activities involving radioactive substances, water discharge, groundwater or flood risk.

🔗 tinyurl.com/32wnrh4w

Waste exemption reforms

Defra has published a policy paper on the new waste exemptions system in England and Wales. The new policy targets the widespread abuse of the low-risk waste exemptions, which are often used to disguise illegal activities, such as large-scale stockpiling and landfill tax



Proposed reforms target industrial emissions

evasion, costing the economy an estimated £87m a year. The reforms will be carried out by amending the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016, and aim to improve regulatory clarity, crack down on waste crime and protect legitimate businesses.

🔗 tinyurl.com/59379rkj

New charges for waste exemptions

Linked to the waste exemption reforms above, the Environment Agency has introduced new charges aimed at tackling waste crime and funding regulatory work. From 1 July 2025, those registering a waste exemption will have to pay a registration fee and a compliance charge. Some exemptions will apply, and discounts are available if multiple exemptions are registered.

🔗 tinyurl.com/bdv8jkym

Neil Howe PISEP is head of writing at Barbour EHS

IN COURT

The Environment Agency has successfully fined East Midlands Airport £892,500 for three offences of breaching environmental permits by allowing discharges of drainage water containing

aircraft and runway de-icing fluid.

🔗 tinyurl.com/45ufj49yw

In *Wildcat Haven Community Interest Company v Scottish Ministers*, the Supreme

Court has rejected a challenge to the approval of a wind farm in the Scottish Highlands on grounds of environmental harm to the endangered wildcat population.

🔗 tinyurl.com/yc7jkmyj

ON THE WATCHLIST

Further PFAS restrictions head up the list of potential new regulations

PFAS in firefighting foam

A consultation has begun on restrictions on the sale and use of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), or 'forever chemicals', in firefighting foams.

🔗 tinyurl.com/mcapa77s

Waste carriers, brokers and dealers

Defra has outlined plans to improve the waste carrier, broker and dealer system in England, aimed at making it easier for regulators to target high-risk waste operators effectively.

🔗 tinyurl.com/2rzu5z9x

Power shift for devolution

A new English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill aims to broaden and deepen devolution across England, providing mayors with unprecedented powers to deliver growth. The Bill will specify a 'strategic authority' for each area, which will take on functions previously held by central government, such as housing, transport, economic development, net zero, skills and employment support.

🔗 tinyurl.com/bdkdfnne

Awareness of air pollution

The Welsh government has published proposals to support and encourage voluntary actions to improve air quality. A Promoting Awareness Delivery Plan will outline how to raise awareness in Wales about the risk to human health and the natural environment caused by air pollution, as well as ways to reduce pollution.

🔗 tinyurl.com/2bacpxpj

Home truths

We're in a polycrisis, and will never escape unless we raise standards of honesty in politics, the media and business, world-leading carbon accounting expert **Mike Berners-Lee** tells Chris Seekings and Chloë Fiddy

Two decades of ground-breaking research into carbon accounting have led Mike Berners-Lee to a stark realisation: the root of the climate crisis comes down to "flat-out dishonesty".

Piecemeal actions from individual companies have failed to even make a dent in global emissions this century, while politicians continue to ignore scientific facts as they look to prop up the status quo.

"We've got to get past this post-truth experiment," he says. "Every year, the rate of fossil fuel burning is higher than it was the year before. You can draw a line through all the COP conferences over the past three decades on the carbon curve, and you don't see any evidence that they've done anything to reverse the trend – something's clearly not working."

Climate-sceptic political parties are gaining unprecedented support across the western world as the media bombards us with misinformation and businesses push polluting goods and services that we don't need.

In his latest book, *A Climate of Truth*, Berners-Lee explains how these dishonest actors are accelerating us into a polycrisis

of climate change, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, pollution and inequality, and offers a route out of the quagmire.

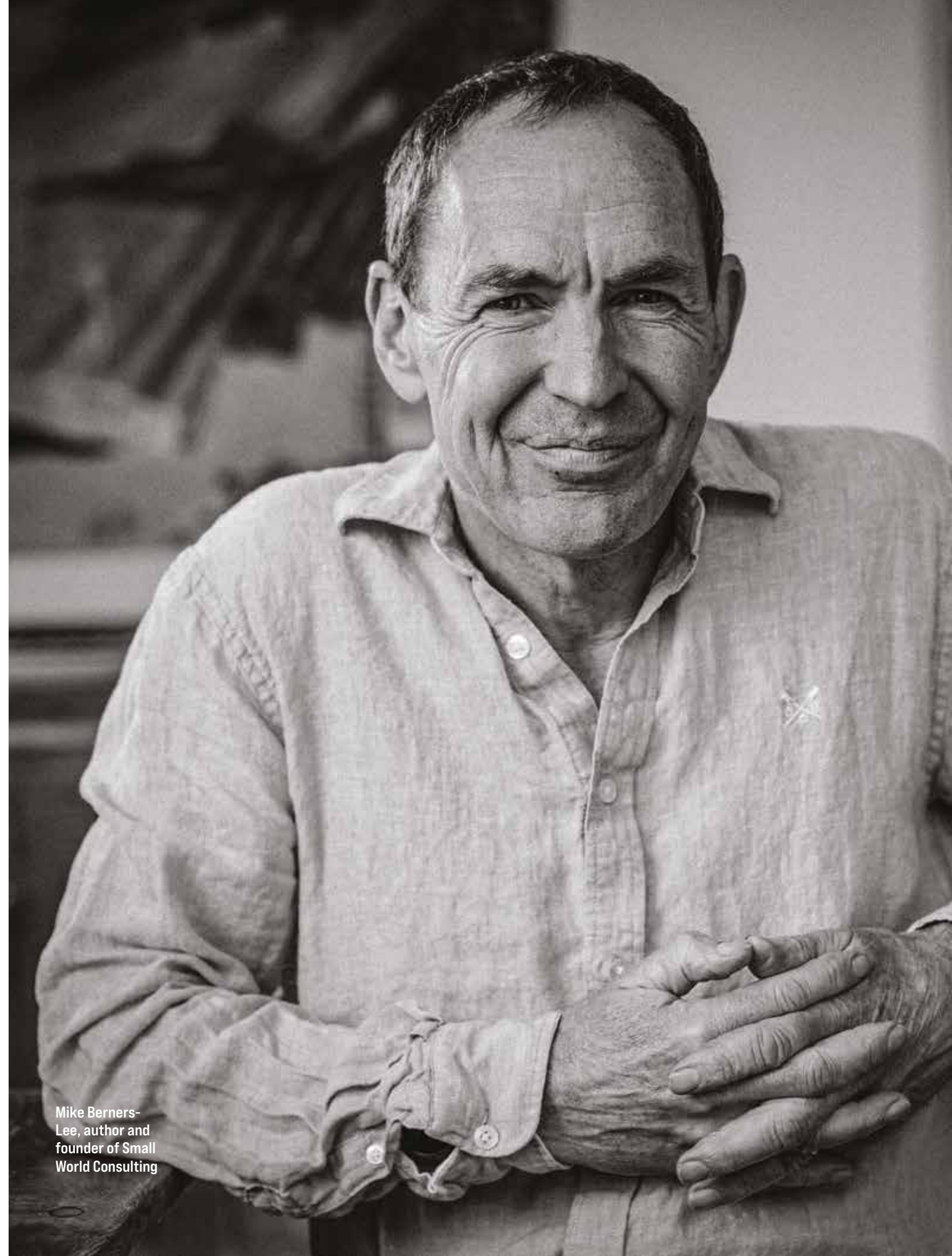
Systemic failure

As founder and director of Small World Consulting, he is acutely aware of the widespread greenwashing that takes place among the business community and the importance of honesty in the climate discussion. "It can be done through story lines around carbon accounting and focusing on trivial things, like an airport going on about its LED light bulbs and not talking about the flights," he says. "Or it might be supply chain carbon accounting that's not counting everything to get a story you like."

In 2010, he wrote the critically acclaimed *How Bad Are Bananas?*, which details the carbon footprints of a wide range of activities and helps guide people towards less-polluting lifestyles.

However, it became clear that this everyday knowledge was not enough to bring about the change needed, with the "carbon curve rising exponentially".

"Everything about how we do economics, politics and run our lives dates back to an era in which we could just expand, and if we made a mess, we could



Mike Berners-Lee, author and founder of Small World Consulting

“

Piecemeal actions from individual companies have failed to even make a dent in global emissions

”

survive," he explains. "We're not in that context any more."

"We are in the Anthropocene; doubling our energy demand every 30 years or so and creating different ways of messing up the environment. We need to be so much more careful than we've ever needed to be."

Indeed, he says that climate change is just one of many cascading risks we face in an era of polycrisis, with plastic pollution another challenge that is "threatening to get out of hand" as more science emerges on the impact on human health and that of every other species.

"Every year the science is giving a more serious picture of the threat to planetary boundaries, which is being ignored. We can't keep going round with this script until we are on our deathbeds."

"*A Climate of Truth* sounds like a book on climate, but it's actually about anything you might care about."

A higher standard

He describes the book as "emphatically not party political", but singles out the previous UK government for spreading mistruths on the need for new oil and gas licences in the North Sea to bring down energy prices, and for approving a Cumbrian coal mine on the grounds that it would be a 'net-zero mine' and was necessary to extract coking coal for steel production.

"The arguments were fundamentally dishonest from the start. They claimed

‘perfect substitution’ – in other words, that the mine would lead to an equal and opposite closing of coal mines globally, flying in the face of every economist in the world.”

The current government has also been accused of rolling back environmental regulations in an effort to boost growth, particularly those that are perceived to be ‘unnecessary blockers’ to housebuilding.

Berners-Lee says that both parties are now “playing really fast and loose with the truth”, and must be taken to task.

“If we can’t get on top of this routine dishonesty, we can’t get anywhere on climate or anything else you might care about.” He wants to see leaders held to a higher standard, and calls for an “evolution of how political systems function”.

“We need a cultural shift. It’s a must-have if we’re going to steer our way through the complex joined-up challenges we’ve got in this fragile world that’s currently careering towards disaster.”

Although the public can remove politicians at the ballot box, the media often does a poor job of highlighting dishonesty when it arises. Berners-Lee explains how much is owned by “nefarious billionaires” with a track record of doing things that are “absolutely poisonous”, and that the public needs to be very discerning about that.

Returning to the business world, he adds: “If a company is trying to corrupt the debate through lobbying politicians to do things that fly in the face of the science, then don’t support them – spend your money elsewhere.”

This is no mean feat, with carbon-intensive products and services pushed on us by companies constantly. “The Advertising Standards Authority was set up by the advertising industry itself, which is in the business of persuading us to buy things regardless of whether they’re actually in our best interests,” Berners-Lee explains.

A new standard for high-carbon advertising could help limit the ubiquitous

Berners-Lee wants to see political leaders held to a higher standard

“

If we can’t get on top of this routine dishonesty, we can’t get anywhere on climate or anything else you might care about

”

marketing. “It will give local authorities and outfits like Transport for London a clear basis for ending some of the adverts they’re currently putting on bus stops and just inflicting on the public at every turn.

“We’re being pushed into this consumerist, terrible lifestyle that doesn’t make us happy and trashes the planet – clearly madness. It takes a lot of psychological persuasion to keep us in this position, and that comes from all these adverts.”

COP chaos

We are now little over a month away from COP30 in Belém, Brazil, with last year’s climate conference in Azerbaijan widely considered a failure and described as

“one of the most poorly led and chaotic COP meetings ever”.

The summit was shrouded in controversy from the very beginning after footage emerged showing the host nation’s deputy energy minister, Elnur Soltanov, using his role to broker fossil fuel deals, while Saudi Arabia was accused of blocking progress throughout.

“The best thing that came out of COP29 was a much more widespread realisation that this process is broken, and that it’s been corrupted by vested interests in a very cynical way,” Berners-Lee says.

“At least two things are going badly wrong. One is the need for consensus, because you only need to have one country like Saudi Arabia – which should have been rejected from the last COP right away – to ensure they fail, so that’s got to change.

“The other is the massive influence of lobbying from companies with vested interests. They are very skilled, sophisticated and effective, using the playbook from the tobacco industry, and we need to get that out of the system.”

Speaking of vested interests, former UK prime minister Sir Tony Blair created a stir earlier this year when he argued that limiting energy consumption and fossil fuel production is “doomed to fail”.

ADAM TATTON-RED/HAY FESTIVAL

However, Berners-Lee says: “He’s getting a lot of money from sources that we absolutely shouldn’t be trusting, such as Saudi Arabia and a US Department of State that’s got a ‘drill, baby, drill’ narrative going on. That should straight away make us realise he is a source of information that we shouldn’t be taking particularly seriously.”

Addressing the elephant in the room, he describes the Trump phenomenon as a symptom of the economic pain many Americans are feeling today. “If you can persuade someone that you can make America great again by drilling, and your life is rubbish, it can be nice to indulge in a bit of fantasy. I like seeing fiction films occasionally, but this is not going to be an American dream for the masses – no way.

“What we have to establish now is whether the truth matters or not. This is not just about climate. If you care about inequality between and within countries, for example, we can’t have these bogus narratives around levelling-up being pushed by politicians who know they are engineering a widening of the gap between the rich and poor.

“This is especially important when the arguments can be plausibly swung either way in the space of a radio interview. It’s so easy to do bullshit on the radio, and so hard for serious scientists to explain why it isn’t true. So we’ve got to have a culture in which we’re absolutely insistent on the principle of not being misled.”

The era of AI

Like his brother, Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, he has a keen interest in computer science, and is concerned about the environmental impact of artificial intelligence (AI) as it permeates our lives.

Google estimates that AI could help mitigate 5%-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 through efficiency advancements. However, Berners-Lee is sceptical. “It’s not an enabler of climate targets, unfortunately,” he continues.



COP29 seen as “poorly led and chaotic”

“Our relationship with technology has taken us to a very dangerous place.

“The capitalist economy as it currently works – and I’m not anti-capitalist *per se* – doesn’t give us agency over the trajectory of any technology and the impact on carbon emissions. The default of an unconstrained system is to increase environmental impacts, because the activity goes up by a larger proportion than the efficiency improvement.

“We’re millions of times more efficient than we were in the 60s, but we do billions of times more of it, with the result being that the carbon footprint of ICT is now one of the highest rising parts of the global economy.”

However, he stresses that there is a world in which AI could be an enabler of climate targets, if we apply a constraint. “All roads lead back to the carbon price. There’s no internal regulation of this industry that will ever end up being as effective, because there are so many ways around it. It’s not enough to say that a technology can be used for good

“

It’s so easy to do bullshit on the radio, and so hard for serious scientists to explain why it isn’t true

”

things. You also have to be able to say it won’t be used for bad things. And unfortunately, in the case of AI, that is the glaring gap.”

Inconvenient truths

Returning to carbon accounting, ISEP and the Carbon Accounting Alliance plan to launch a Carbon Accounting and Auditors Register and recently published a competency framework setting out the skills needed to qualify.

Berners-Lee says that the register can’t come soon enough, explaining how “we’ve been stuck in a fragmented madness of supply chain carbon accounting”.

“If you don’t have competent auditors, then all carbon footprinting is just a fundamentally random question of what you have decided to include and exclude,” he continues. “There’s a step change for the industry that’s waiting to happen, and we can bring it about now.”

However, he stresses that all businesses must be playing by the rules. “If they don’t, there’s a lot of leakage and you can create a competitive advantage for those that are not playing the game if you’re not careful. You’ve got to be cutting your carbon, and if not, you get isolated from the economy.”

This goes back to the fundamental question of honesty and avoiding the tendency to greenwash. “The trouble with any consultancy is that the easiest way of making a living is to tell your client what they want to hear.

“I’ve had consultants say to me that they’ve been working with a business on carbon accounting, and admit they know it’s rubbish, but they’ve got a mortgage to pay and just go along with it. It is really incumbent on our industry to honour the science as best we can, and tell the story like it is, even when that’s inconvenient for our client, and that principle applies for wider society too.”

Order *A Climate of Truth* at www.climateoftruth.co.uk



No deal is a better deal

David Burrows reveals a glimmer of hope after a bitter end to the Global Plastics Treaty

Environmental investment groups last year called for ExxonMobil – the world’s largest producer of plastics – to examine how global efforts to cut plastic use will affect its bottom line. Shareholders voted down the proposal, with CEO Darren Woods explaining that the current bans “are location-specific and don’t represent a significant impact on our business”.

A cap on plastic production, as part of an ambitious Global Plastics Treaty that also restricted the use of certain chemicals in production and followed a full lifecycle approach to regulations, would surely have piled pressure on Woods to produce such an analysis. But there is no treaty. The ‘final’ talks in August ended with competing interest groups and nations almost as far apart as they started. Oil-producing nations, for example, were accused of not budging as they targeted a tame treaty focused on waste management and recycling. Those, such as the UK, who pushed for an ambitious agreement were left licking their wounds.

Joan Marc Simon, founder of Zero Waste Europe, says that consensus can’t deliver progress but the silver lining is that “we have avoided a bad treaty which would do nothing to address plastic pollution” and have “a treaty of the willing almost ready”.

Sceptics may see this as clutching at (plastic) straws, but more than 100 nations back controls on plastic production, improved

David Burrows is a freelance writer and researcher

“So many people are now aware of the hazardous chemicals in plastics, leaching from packaging into food”

recycling, a dramatic increase in recycled content and a cut in chemicals.

The chemicals card is an increasingly powerful one. Jane Muncke, founder of the Food Packaging Forum and a key member of the Scientists’ Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty, says: “So many people are now aware of the hazardous chemicals in plastics, leaching from packaging into food, and they know plastics are not inert.”

Chemicals are emerging as ‘the issue’ for campaigners and scientists alike – and not just in relation to plastics. Single-use packaging made from paper and card has also attracted attention in relation to the chemicals added to them, either intentionally or unintentionally during the production or recycling process. These too can leak into our food and drinks.

Toxicity: The Invisible Tsunami, a report by Deep Science Ventures, warned that chemical toxicity is now as concerning as climate change, with more than 3,600 synthetic chemicals from food contact materials alone found in human bodies. “With toxicity we are still in the 1990s in terms of public awareness and action, but we’re in 2025 in terms of the consequences,” the authors wrote.

When Woods describes, as he has in the past, a significant reduction in plastic demand as “an unrealistic future scenario”, he probably has a point. For now.

Because as the *Wall Street Journal* writer Saabira Chaudhuri notes in *Consumed: How Big Brands Got Us Hooked on Plastic*, the CEO of ExxonMobil “had, unintentionally, offered up the clearest argument yet as to why a total sea change in policy and approach to the world’s increasingly multi-faceted plastics problems was needed”. And still is.

Fragmented bans aren’t working, global plastic consumption and waste are both forecast to nearly triple by 2060, and it is clear that recycling systems are ill-equipped, overwhelmed and unable to deal with even the existing flood of plastics coming through their doors, Chaudhuri explains.

Three years of treaty talks have taken the wind out of the sails of countries seeking a progressive plastics pact, but expect them to come back fighting.

Green skills rising

Training today for jobs of tomorrow

SPECIAL
SECTION

 Green
Careers HUB

 ISEP



Education in turbulent times



My favourite [Green Careers Hub content] from this year is our new slide deck for teachers and careers leads – designed to bring green careers into the classroom



Welcome to our third annual careers and education edition of *Transform*. This year, we've done things slightly differently for this special issue, as our main feature draws from a roundtable that we hosted in June titled Education for the Green Transition: Challenges in Turbulent Times. I was lucky enough to attend; our fantastic participants brought some real energy and insight to a dynamic debate. I hope you enjoy the write-up.

The Green Careers Hub continues to support individuals in their career choices. We've added new sector content, job profiles, blogs and inspiring career stories. My favourite from this year is our new slide deck for teachers and careers leads – designed to bring green careers into the classroom [see www.bit.ly/GreenPresentation].

We've also expanded our video offering, in partnership with Content With Purpose. The Green Horizons campaign, exploring the future of green jobs and skills, achieved more than 1.4 million video views and 3.6 million impressions. To watch the videos, visit www.bit.ly/GCH-videos.

I'm delighted that our team has also played such a key role in the ISEP Pilot Mentoring Scheme for People of Colour, which you can read more about in this issue. Thanks to the scheme's success, we'll be running another cohort this Autumn, so watch this space.

We are always open to new ideas for the Hub, so please do reach out. And if you're job hunting, sign up for alerts on the ISEP jobs board to stay ahead: www.isepjobs.org/newalert

Rebecca Turner, senior manager, careers and education at ISEP

CAREERS AND EDUCATION

Research shows that millennials and Gen Z consider a firm's environmental credentials

A Deloitte survey of 23,000 Gen Z and millennial adults across 44 countries found that 70% consider a company's environmental record when choosing an employer – and nearly one in four research a firm's green policies before accepting a job. It also revealed that 11% have switched jobs because of environmental concerns, while nearly half have pressured employers to act on climate. Two-thirds of respondents also report recent eco-anxiety.

➔ www.bit.ly/GenZ-Employment

Climate Ambassadors programme – helping schools in their climate change journey

The Department for Education (DfE) requires all education settings to have a sustainability lead and a climate action plan in place by the end of 2025. To support this, the DfE funds the Climate Ambassadors programme, which pairs schools with volunteers who can share expertise in decarbonisation; adaptation and resilience; climate education and green careers; and biodiversity. Despite having 800+ registered ambassadors, more are needed.

➔ www.bit.ly/ISEPClimateAmbassadors

NEWS IN BRIEF

Changes announced earlier this year to funding for level 7 apprenticeships in England

➔ www.bit.ly/Level7Funding

Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance updated from September 2025

➔ www.bit.ly/GatsbyGuidance

LinkedIn green skills report 2024

➔ www.bit.ly/LinkedInGreenReport

COVER IMAGE: MARIAN FEMENIAS-MORATINOS



Doubling our reach

Farhana Khan on how mentorship can help diversify sustainability leadership

Farhana Khan is a senior communications officer at ISEP



In a major step towards tackling racial inequality in the sustainability profession, the Diverse Sustainability Initiative (DSI) is doubling the capacity of its pioneering mentoring programme for People of Colour, following a highly successful pilot scheme earlier this year.

Launched to address the significant underrepresentation of ethnically diverse professionals in sustainability leadership roles, the pilot programme received glowing feedback from participants, with 9 out of 10 rating their experience positively. The expansion aims to double the scheme's reach, offering more early-career professionals vital support in a sector long criticised for its lack of diversity.

According to *The RACE Report 2024*, only 4.8% of senior leaders across 131 organisations in the environment, climate, sustainability and conservation sector, identify as People of Colour (PoC). This is well below the 18% of the UK population who do not identify as White.

This stark disparity is what ISEP's scheme is designed to challenge. It connects mentees with experienced sustainability professionals – ISEP Full and Fellow members – who offer career guidance, support and a sense of representation.

"As the saying goes: 'you can't be what you can't see'," explains Caris Graham,

senior diverse sustainability officer at ISEP. "By supporting PoC already in the profession, we aim to close the racial gap at the top – and inspire future generations by creating more role models and advocates."

The scheme's success was underscored by research by Dr Katherine Ellsworth-Krebs, chancellor's fellow in sustainable design at the University of Strathclyde. With funding from the Economic and Social Research Council, her evaluation of the programme found that it contributed meaningfully to mentees' professional development, boosting skills, confidence and career clarity.

"There are so many reasons why increasing diversity in the sector is critical," says Ellsworth-Krebs. "Mentees told us that lack of representation shapes their everyday experiences in the field – and these lived realities make navigating the profession even more difficult."

Participants praised the programme for fostering personal growth, enhancing networking opportunities and improving their ability to set and pursue clear career goals. Its findings are now shaping the next phase of the scheme.

Graham warns that while mentoring can be transformative, it must be done thoughtfully: "Mentoring programmes that ignore the unique challenges faced by racially minoritised professionals risk perpetuating the very inequalities they aim to solve. That's why our report is essential reading for any organisation serious about real inclusion."

One of the key takeaways from the research is the importance of validating mentees' experiences. "Retention is often the lesser-known cousin of recruitment when tackling workforce diversity," says Graham. "When mentees heard from experienced professionals that systemic racism is a real barrier – not just a personal hurdle – it helped shift their mindset and gave them renewed confidence to persist and thrive."

The full report on the mentoring pilot scheme will be published in due course.



Validating lived experiences can be the difference between people leaving or thriving



SHUTTERSTOCK

Schooled in green skills

A panel of education and training specialists explore the barriers young people face in acquiring green skills. **Chris Seekings** reports on the roundtable discussion

The UK's Climate Change Committee (CCC) estimates that the net-zero transition could deliver up to 725,000 new jobs by the end of this decade, with 250,000 already created so far. However, an "inadequate supply of skilled workers" is delaying progress, and clearer plans are needed to ensure education and training providers nurture green skills that can be applied in the real world. Yet the term 'green skills' is itself a source of confusion for students and educators, and there are mixed views on whether the term does justice to the vast breadth of career paths on offer.

Inflexible curriculums that fail to respond to political changes, siloed

sustainability education, unequal opportunities based on racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, social science gaps and the changing nature of apprenticeships are also barriers to being part of the green transition.

These issues and more were explored in an in-depth and lively roundtable discussion hosted by ISEP, with seven education and training specialists airing their views on what's needed to plug the skills gap at a time when resources are being stretched to the limit.

State of confusion

ISEP defines green skills as "the knowledge, behaviours, capabilities and technical skills required to tackle the

environmental challenges we face and to unlock new opportunities for growth". While an accurate description, there are concerns that many people still view the environment and sustainability as being all about "wind farms and wellies".

"As someone who graduated not that long ago, I remember what it was like hearing about green skills and jobs for the first time, and thinking, what does that mean?" says Kathrin Möbius. "We use the terms a lot in policy and strategy, but we don't often support learners to really understand what they mean for them."

Indeed, a poll of more than 2,000 16-25-year-olds by The King's Trust in 2023 found that only 27% had heard of the term 'green jobs' and could explain what it

meant. Even after it was explained, just 46% were familiar with the kinds of jobs that would exist in the green economy.

"There are parallels with tech companies shouting about not having the right skills in their organisations," says Simon Bozzoli. "Everyone thinks you need to become a programmer or software engineer, but that's not true at all; they need a huge range of transferable skills, and it's the same in the green skills space."

"Green jobs range from heat-pump engineers to data analysts and people who are trying to improve organisational performance and manage change. If we reframe it as a huge growing sector with tonnes of opportunity for people with all sorts of different skills, that might be a more helpful way to close the skills gap."

It's not just young people who are confused by the terminology. A survey of 1,500 adults by Keele University this year found that 24% have "no understanding" of net zero, and 47% don't know what the transition will mean for them.

This is made more worrying by LinkedIn's *Global Climate Talent Stocktake* 2024 report, which revealed that the green talent pool must double by 2050 "at a bare minimum" to keep pace with demand, with roughly half of

green jobs set to lack qualified candidates on current trends.

There's still a "massive issue across the board" from employers about what green skills are, says Ruth Joseph, from the Strategic Development Network, which has a focus on developing T Levels that blend classroom learning with work experience.

"That definition is needed, and overall acceptance of what sustainability means and where it relates to each particular business," she continues. "There's still confusion there, not just for young people, but for businesses as well."

To help demystify these terms, EAUC Scotland published a green careers guide, which helps to break down what green jobs and skills are and signposts the best resources out there, including ISEP's Green Careers Hub.

"This guide breaks down green jobs into categories and explains how everyone can contribute, whether it be specialist roles for the net-zero and nature emergencies, systems and behaviour-change jobs, green enabling jobs in HR, and so on. We update it regularly and have a green jobs myth-buster, too," Möbius explains.

Increasingly, there is also a spotlight on how educators can support young people into green jobs and careers, and the EAUC's guide comes with a version for careers and student support staff. However, educators need ringfenced time for this, says Möbius: "There is a lack of capacity in the education system –

people are incredibly stretched. No one has time to think about all these things because the requirements on their shoulders are already so massive that they're nearly drowning."

Moving the goalposts

The challenge with sustainability is that the space is changing all the time, with scientific knowledge and government policies constantly evolving, making it difficult for educators to respond.

"There is not necessarily alignment with what is on paper academically, and what is happening in the industry," says Nooshin Akrami. "I think that's been the biggest and most important feedback that we have had from the students."

"The goalposts for sustainability and climate issues are constantly changing, and educators often haven't had the training to respond to that – there's a massive knowledge gap."

Continuing professional development is lacking, with teachers struggling to stay ahead of developments in sustainability because of time constraints, workload pressures and costs.

Quinn Runkle says: "I was speaking to an academic the other day, who said they have less than a week between finding out their course load and actually teaching it, so how can we expect them to be dynamic and respond to all these changes? They're going to pick up the slides from the person who taught [the course] last year and regurgitate them."

Research carried out by ISEP in February among its University Corporate Partners found that a lack of resources and finances were the two biggest challenges they face in advancing sustainability education, followed by conflicting goals and competing priorities.

"The focus on closed-book exams also leans us towards a very knowledge-based curriculum, and towards pedagogies that force students to memorise facts, rather than develop the skills and capacities to



ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS



Nooshin Akrami
MISEP
Head of student experience and enhancements, OLC (Europe)



Simon Bozzoli
CEO, LDN
Apprenticeships



Ruth Joseph
Programme and partnerships manager, Strategic Development Network (SDN)



Andrew Hall
Skills and technical education senior manager, The Careers & Enterprise Company



Charles McKnight MBE
Programme leader MSc Supply Chain and Logistics Management, University of Lincoln



Kathrin Möbius
Sustainability in learning and teaching lead, EAUC Scotland



Quinn Runkle
Director of education, SOS-UK

embody the sort of leadership that we need to have in the system,” Runkle adds. “I’d love to see some of that content stripped out so that there’s the freedom for educators to respond to current events, changing economic priorities and what we see in the news. That’s better quality education, students prefer it and it helps with educator retention – there are lots of co-benefits.”

This is a recurring theme throughout the discussion, with concerns that much of the sustainability-related knowledge being passed on to young people is not easily transferable to the workplace.

The benefits of outreach

Employer involvement in curriculum and training design has helped address this challenge, but many organisations are failing to do this and are missing opportunities to grow and diversify their talent pipelines.

“There are some good examples of employers that have worked with the core curriculum to make sustainability issues specific to their organisations,” Joseph says. “We also need to get more employers involved in hosting industry placements for students post 16.”

Research by The Careers & Enterprise Company has found that businesses doing the most intensive work on meaningful workplace experiences are 89% more likely to report they are closing skills gaps.

“When businesses do good outreach into schools, young people are more likely to want to take up those careers, and businesses are more likely to have fewer skills gaps,” Andrew Hall explains.

“We are now connected with 93% of schools and colleges across the country, so if you are a business that wants to engage, you can visit the careers hub section on our website, put your postcode in and get a name, phone number and email address for somebody who can help you engage with schools and colleges – we are building those connections.

Appreciating apprenticeships

Employer involvement has been less of an issue for apprenticeship schemes – at least in England – where they are becoming increasingly popular owing to government support, the rising cost of traditional higher education and the practical benefits on offer.

“There are many strengths to apprenticeship programmes, but one of the main things that works really well is employer involvement in the design,” Bozzoli explains.

“The Institute for Apprenticeships (now Skills England) is doing lots of work to embed green skills in every apprenticeship standard, and there are more coming out that are occupationally relevant to the sustainability agenda. Apprenticeships can be a phenomenal



Apprenticeships can be a phenomenal tool to help address elements of the skills gap, and employer involvement in the pathways is critical



tool to help address elements of the skills gap, and employer involvement in the pathways is critical.”

However, there are concerns that the take-up of these programmes may suffer after the Apprenticeship Levy was this year replaced by a Growth and Skills Levy, which allows employers to use up to 50% of their levy contributions for non-apprenticeship training.

“One of the big changes with apprenticeships in this country is that they have become less for young people leaving school, and more for people who are already employed and want to upskill and retrain,” Bozzoli continues.



“There is a financial and commercial risk to an organisation taking on a young person and supporting them to develop skills, and the government is not doing enough to help employers take that risk.”

Charles McKnight believes there’s still a wider issue around businesses not fully understanding their role in the green transition. “Do they even know what they need? Which is really interesting when it comes to how we frame the green skills gap,” he says.

“The government should be devising policy to guide and enable corporate-level strategies, which should encompass operational as well as regional needs.

“Lincolnshire is famous for being an agricultural region; London is famous for tourism, and so on. They each have specific commercial, supply chain and logistical needs, and organisations have to determine where their activities are having the greatest impact – for example, is it waste management, harmful emissions or energy usage? It’s a complicated quandary, but one which could help identify green skills requirements.

SHUTTERSTOCK

More broadly, he believes many organisations are still unsure about the breadth of sustainability and the interconnectivity of issues. “You can guarantee the majority will say that it’s all about the environment, but I see sustainability as an ethical dilemma.

“We need to look at the social aspect, communities, economics, education, the whole lot and bring it together. Every Friday, we have nearly 300 students in an auditorium that are so engaged with the subject, particularly the ethical attachment to sustainability. When you start talking about the people dimension, the discussion in the classroom is brilliant.”

Working in silos

Indeed, polling consistently shows that young people are fully behind the sustainability agenda and want to play their part. However, a worldwide survey by ISEP partner Capgemini earlier this year found that only 44% of 16-24-year-olds feel equipped to do so.

Geography and science classes are typically where UK students develop an interest in green skills, but Runkle

believes that failure to implement sustainability across subjects is inhibiting progress.

“The very siloed nature of education in this country in particular contributes to an inability to meaningfully integrate sustainability, because green skills tend to be taught in a very narrow portion of the curriculum,” she says.

“Subjects aren’t talking to each other, they’re not engaging with each other. When you look at education systems that do this well, the Finnish have ‘transversal competencies’, and weave that all together so students have a more holistic understanding of sustainability from a range of subject perspectives.”

Some of these transversal skills, which are taught across secondary education in the country, include: grit and resilience in a world of change and surprises; value-based and ethical action for the common good; appreciation of circular economy and sustainable consumerism; and democracy skills, influencing for a safe, just and sustainable future.

“Sustainability should be a cornerstone for the courses that we are developing and delivering, but schools and universities are so busy working on retention and recruitment that it’s been lost on the agenda,” Akrami comments.

“The problem is that we are working in an economic system in contradiction with the principles of sustainability and regeneration. Whatever you are working on, whether it be logistics, healthcare or education, sustainability should be the



The very siloed nature of education in this country contributes to an inability to meaningfully integrate sustainability



key goal, but there is a big misalignment, so bringing that together is a massive challenge for everybody.

“Sustainability is about joining the dots, and solving problems in silos does little good for that end goal. We need a serious paradigm shift, and until we do that our green skills will fall short – as Stephen Covey says in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, it’s like trying to find an address in Chicago holding a map of Detroit in our hands.”

A recent survey of employers working in sustainability by Oxford Brookes University found that 23% of job applicants are “not at all ready” when it comes to systems thinking. Bozzoli believes that getting people to be critical thinkers when applying their knowledge in the real world is key.

“Everybody who goes through the education system needs to come out understanding the interdependencies and the correlations between everything to do with sustainability, from social to environmental to economic. This is not just about skills, but behavioural and cultural change,” he says.

Breaking down barriers

Another piece missing from the green skills puzzle is diversity within the sector, with *The RACE Report* revealing that just 4.5% of staff across 159 environment and sustainability organisations identify as People of Colour (PoC).

“The people who are most effectively engaging in the green economy tend to be white men, so there’s a growing opportunity gap, and an intersectional lens through which we need to be looking,” Runkle says. “There are some interesting and complicated dynamics around race and culture when we think about access to green skills and jobs and whether these sorts of careers are seen on an equal footing to others.

“Particularly for young people in some Black and other minority ethnic communities, parents have a big influence



that organisations and institutions like ISEP need to be doing during these reviews,” Runkle says.

“There’s an underappreciation of climate and nature in education, and there’s a huge opportunity for influencing there that we need to take.”

McKnight urges the government to “invest in education”, and wants to see more involvement from professional bodies, too, highlighting how ISEP helps inform his curriculum design. There are already several apprenticeships in England that fully align to membership with ISEP, which also supports universities through its degree approval programme.

Hall adds: “The infrastructure that has been built around careers education over the past 10 years has overseen improvements since the launch of the Gatsby Benchmarks. Good careers education closes skills gaps and reduces the likelihood of young people not being in education, employment or training, but we appreciate that employers, young people and educators have finite bandwidth, which is why it’s important for them to know there are many organisations and resources out there that they can turn to for help.”

on career choice, and they often don’t see these careers as having equal parity and stature. There’s lots to unpack around what young people think about green jobs and skills, what informs that thinking, and how we can guide them to make sure everyone gets the benefits and opportunities on offer.”

Socio-economic backgrounds are another feature of a person’s identity that can inform career choices, and although ISEP’s latest *State of the Sustainability Profession* report reveals that the sector continues to offer well-paid jobs, that is not always the perception.

“We find that people, especially from economically deprived backgrounds, believe that green jobs are badly paid, and think ‘Why would I do that? I want to get out of poverty, not stay in it,’” Möbius says. “We need to do more to bust some myths about green jobs, making it engaging and accessible, and use language that people understand at all levels.

“There’s also a massive gap in awareness around the social science and humanities aspects of green skills, which we are not communicating well either.”

Organisations that are committed to tackling the lack of diversity within the sector can join ISEP’s Diverse Sustainability Initiative, which is now planning to expand its PoC mentoring scheme.

The road ahead

The UK government’s *Curriculum and Assessment Review Interim Report*, published in March, suggests that “rapid social, environmental and technological change necessitates that the curriculum keep pace; including a renewed focus on digital and media literacy, and a greater focus on sustainability and climate science”. A repeated concern raised in its call for evidence was that “curriculum content in several subject areas should be brought up to date where it has become redundant or less relevant”.

The researchers also heard “consistently” from young people and parents that they want more focus on applied knowledge and skills that will equip them for later life and work, with a third of parents wanting more attention paid to life skills and preparation for the job market. “There’s a lot of advocacy



We find that people, especially from economically deprived backgrounds, believe that green jobs are badly paid



Useful resources

ISEP encourages professionals to get involved with local schools to educate on the types of green careers available. Its Green Careers Hub aims to raise awareness of green skills and jobs. Visit: www.greencareershubs.com

EAUC’s Green Careers Guide:

www.eauc.org.uk/green_careers_guide
State of the Sustainability Profession Report 2025 www.isepglobal.org/state-of-the-profession
Diverse Sustainability Initiative www.diversesustainability.net
Curriculum and Assessment Review Interim Report www.bit.ly/CurriculumAssessmentReview



Still on the sidelines

Georgiana Allison reflects on how the deep-rooted idea that sustainability is an optional extra continues to hold institutions back

I have written before about the problem of sustainability being framed purely as an environmental issue – and that when it comes to decision-making, what is best for the environment is often quickly overruled in favour of other motivators.

This rhetoric-reality gap has been studied exhaustively; meanwhile, the planet continues to burn.

This article has been prompted by 2025 marking my 20th year working in sustainability, much of it within higher education. As I prepare for my next career adventure, I have been reflecting on how the priorities, language and culture in this space have evolved since the mid-noughties – and, perhaps more tellingly, what hasn't changed.

In 2005, the 'head of sustainability' role did not exist. By 2008, I only knew of one director of sustainability. Most of us were environmental officers or environmental managers, often tucked in close to other operational risks such as health and safety. We were almost always positioned within the estates or facilities departments.

Even now, despite our continued professional development, the growth in our professional community and a wider recognition of sustainability as a discipline, I strongly believe we are impeded by institutional memory. Sustainability?

Oh yes, that's in estates, right? Meanwhile, the proliferation of sustainability-related research means that universities are full of academic talent; world experts in their field who are advancing scientific knowledge and understanding of what is the most wicked of problems.

Yet there remains a disconnect between those who research sustainability and applied practice. What works in theory doesn't always translate in practice, especially when layered with extra factors such as the age, gender and seniority of responsible post-holders (or all three).

Those leading organisational sustainability efforts come from a variety of backgrounds and with different experiences. Naturally, we apply every transferable principle and experience wherever we can – that's the *modus operandi* of anyone trained in sustainable development. To succeed, we must be accessible in our language and character; we must listen, translate, signpost and reassure. "Not everyone can do everything, but everyone can do something!" This is so easily understood and applied in a financial setting or a financial crisis, but all too often in sustainability I still hear, "I just don't know what I should be doing". Meanwhile, any webinar or event with sustainability in the title is forwarded to us.

As Stephen Sterling said in his book *Sustainable Education: Re-visioning Learning and Change* (2001), the world isn't suffering from a lack of information; it is suffering from a shortage of people who can join the dots and see the world as a whole.

As long as sustainability is perceived as a separate 'thing' – managed alongside other operations, or tucked away in the final pages of an invitation to tender (on page 69 of 70, I've seen it happen!) with a token weighting – it will always be considered as optional.

The best approach is one of integration – to change our thinking so that we know sustainability is relevant, and it is up to each of us to understand how.

Dr Georgiana Allison FISEP CEnv FHEA, head of sustainability at Lancaster University, is relocating to New Zealand in November. She is exploring career opportunities and welcomes conversations with ISEP members in the region.

“The world ... is suffering from a shortage of people who can join the dots and see the world as a whole”



Tangible tools

Charles McKnight MBE on embedding responsible management across the curriculum

Often when we think of sustainability, we focus on environmental protection, resource conservation and minimising waste. Yet sustainability also encompasses social impact, community wellbeing, ethical behaviour, governance and accountability, and the economic viability of business. The challenge, therefore, is where do we start with such a complex topic? As a university lecturer, I faced the same difficulty while developing a module on this broad subject, as well as providing the practical application for my students as future supply managers.

Fortunately, my professional background, coupled with my academic interests – and incorporating external events such as the global pandemic and strained geopolitics – highlighted that all these functions are not only crucial to business, but are far-reaching and can influence, positively and negatively, other organisational outputs and strategies. Combine this with ethical issues and emissions, and it made this module one of the most challenging I could design.

I spent several months scrutinising the triple bottom line, the Five Capitals Framework, planetary boundaries, circular economics, the Sustainable Development Goals, industrial symbiosis, corporate responsibility – the reading

“As [the module] took shape, the interconnected nature of the themes became increasingly clear”

list was endless. Yet the question remained, how do these ideas and frameworks translate into a postgraduate programme, and what concepts are relevant in a supply chain context? In short, they all have relevance and, depending on your position, some are more relevant than others. Some common themes emerged during my research, which were: risk, choice, decision-making and systems thinking.

We need to approach ‘risk’ from the perspective of what risks do we pose to our environment, and, as managers, we have many ‘choices’, but we are always accountable for our ‘decisions’ and, given the many interrelationships of sustainability, some ‘systems thinking’ is required. What became clear from my research is that responsible management is not exclusive to supply chains and has a wider application and value. Responsible management must be embraced across an organisation and not as a standalone problem, as changes in one area inevitably affect and influence others.

Building on this conceptual foundation, and guided by the ISEP Sustainability Skills Map and its 13 competencies, I developed a ‘Responsible Supply Chain Strategy’ module. As it took shape, the interconnected nature of the themes became increasingly clear, highlighting broader relevance across the enterprise. This was further demonstrated when the module attracted interest from the MBA and MSc International Business programme leaders at Lincoln International Business School, as well as programmes from the University of Lincoln School of Engineering. As a result, the module will be integrated into their curriculums from the 2025/26 academic year.

The true value of responsible management – its systemic nature, wide-ranging application and practical impact – is best captured in the words of my student Vy Nguyen: “What felt abstract or idealistic has become a tangible set of tools, strategies and values that I can apply in my personal decisions and future professional practice.”

Charles McKnight MBE is programme leader, MSc Supply Chain and Logistics Management, University of Lincoln



Key to a just transition

Trade unions can help employers turn climate ambition into real progress, writes Sam Perry

It might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think about trade unions, but workplace sustainability is essential for us. Our first duty is to our workers’ livelihoods. So, building the conditions by which jobs and workplaces can survive and thrive in an era of net zero and destabilising climate change is a top priority.

This is about job security. It’s also about helping our members – a quarter of all workers – to be part of shaping a future of positive growth in their organisations.

The term ‘just transition’ came out of 1970s North American trade union campaigns to reduce pollution, safeguard local communities from industrial hazards and promote protections for populations from take-them-or-leave-them dirty jobs.

In the UK, trade unions have been pushing since the late 1980s to build sustainability into workplace strategies and industrial relations. Over the past decade, we’ve seen growing demand from trade union members to be part of workplace climate action.

In some industrial actions, managers have refused to include workers in their planning, but we have also seen collaboration agreements struck with unions on this agenda nationwide. The latest is the Just Transition Framework recently agreed in further education, where annual negotiations resulted in a recommendation that all colleges work alongside unions and staff to

Sam Perry is policy lead at the Trades Union Congress

“[Green reps] provide prized conduits for workers’ concerns, enabling effective change management”

rapidly decarbonise and make provision to future-proof jobs. This is the first sector-wide agreement, but it builds on local agreements from workplaces around the UK, and we expect other sectors to follow suit.

We are also now seeing a growing number of trade union branches electing ‘green reps’ to focus on sustainability. They educate members and colleagues on the importance of sustainability and how to achieve it. They work with enterprise sustainability leads to make progress on climate action and workplace decarbonisation, offering shopfloor perspectives and insights, providing useful grounding voices and jockeying along more ambitious action. And they provide prized conduits for workers’ concerns, easing and enabling effective change management.

Green reps’ essential framing is ‘just transition’, ensuring that change happens and in a way that staff can support and value.

Several other types of trade union workplace representative are supported by statute to take time out of their normal working day to engage in their work. But, so far, these time-release rights have not been applied to green reps, a situation we seek to change. Many employers who see their worth provide this, of course, but it has to be won workplace by workplace. As sustainability professionals, you may wish to push for the green reps in your organisations to have this time. Especially now.

The period 2025-26 has been designated the Year of Trade Union Climate Action. As such, we’re expecting a large number of events, from climate action stalls to green rep recruitment drives to sustainability CPD to fresh policy interventions.

We have rewritten our Green Reps at Work training course to provide reps with the best education and strongest tools for creating impact in each workplace. We have released our Greener Workplaces Toolkit, a handbook for worker climate action that made the Top Reads list in May’s The Green Edge Podcast. We are also looking to hold a national green reps conference in summer 2026.

Our simple message to those wanting to increase their impact is to: embrace, empower and work with trade union green reps.

The bigger picture

Consulting shouldn't be about who does what. **Becky McLean** explains why the future belongs to those who can think in systems

For any business it is important to have a clear service offering, to help clients understand what you can do for them as well as to help colleagues understand what they are selling.

However, when it comes to environmental and sustainability consulting, those service lines start to blur – that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it can be confusing. Who does what and when, and (I get asked this regularly) what's the difference and how does it all fit together? I have been pondering this and have concluded that the belief that they are two completely different professions might be holding us all back.

The traditional divide

Environmental consultants are often seen as the experts in measuring, tracking and mitigating environmental problems. Think environmental impact assessments (EIA), strategic environmental assessments, ecology, noise, air quality, land and water pollution monitoring, and regulatory compliance. These professionals are grounded in the physical sciences, technical assessments and environmental legislation.

Sustainability consultants are associated with the ‘triple bottom line’ – environmental, social and economic impact. Their focus might include carbon assessments, ESG reporting, corporate sustainability reporting, climate risk, adaptation and resilience, circular economy, net-zero strategies, employee training and green building certifications, such as BREEAM or LEED.

Simple, right?

Is that the whole picture?

These definitions might seem tidy on paper but, in practice, they increasingly overlap. More importantly, seeing them as separate misses the interconnected nature of today's challenges – and limits the value we can bring to projects and clients.

Take EIA, for example. It's arguably the original systems-thinking framework, where coordinators pull together diverse technical disciplines to assess the broader implications of a project. Over the past decade, EIA has evolved to cover far more than environmental risk. It now includes climate change, materials and waste (circular economy), human health, and social impacts – all topics that would traditionally fall under 'sustainability'. Typically, as it is required as part of the planning process, an EIA must also consider policy, engagement and consultation.

In my experience as a lead EIA coordinator, we are also often the specialists advising on sustainability enhancements during the design process, drawing from multiple disciplines to influence better decisions. In many cases, we are acting as sustainability consultants in all but name. And frankly,

“Clients, collaborators and project teams don’t care who ‘owns’ sustainability. Everyone should care about outcomes

an EIA that does not consider sustainability as part of the design process is no longer fit for purpose.

Meanwhile, specialists from other angles – mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineers, carbon consultants, circular economy strategists, resilience advisers – are shaping project outcomes in equally critical ways. Their technical knowledge is essential, not just for reducing impact but for future-proofing outcomes.

Why does this matter?

I passionately believe that dividing these roles holds us back.

Clients, collaborators and project teams don't care who 'owns' sustainability. Everyone should care about outcomes – how to design better, deliver more resilient and compliant projects, and create long-term value for everyone. If we maintain artificial boundaries between environmental and sustainability professionals, we miss opportunities for integration, creativity and systemic solutions.

When we embrace the overlap – and support professionals who straddle both areas – we unlock a more powerful way of working.

The path forward

To deliver the best outcomes for projects, clients and the communities they serve, we need:

- Every team member to see sustainability as part of their role
- Environmental and sustainability professionals to collaborate more closely – or to be the same person
- A shift away from narrow labels, and towards systems thinking.

In my experience, the most effective consultants aren't defined by one title or the other. They are the ones who think across boundaries – connecting disciplines, asking the right questions and keeping the bigger picture in view.

Environmental and sustainability consulting don't belong in separate boxes. The challenges we face are complex, and the best solutions come when we blur the lines, share expertise and work as one team. For clients, this means more integrated advice and smarter outcomes. For consultants, it means greater scope to lead and influence.

And for all of us, it's a clear message: sustainability isn't just a specialist's job – it's everyone's responsibility.

So next time you're building a team for a project, as well as 'What's their title?', ask 'Can they think in systems?'. The best results come from those who see the bigger picture.

Becky McLean FISEP is director of sustainability at Civic



THINKING IN SYSTEMS CHANGES EVERYTHING

Systems thinking is about embracing complexity with insight and empathy – seeing the big picture by weaving together environmental, social, infrastructural and community layers.

It's collaborative, inclusive and practical: a lens through which cities and all spaces can be designed to be resilient, vibrant, beautiful, functional and reflective of the communities they serve.

In practice, systems thinking means looking beyond your project's red line to see how it can help the wider area, and its current and future communities, to thrive.

Could you create high-quality green space linked with better public transport, helping reduce air pollution? Could you daylight a river, integrating water management, public realm, flood resilience and community wellbeing? Could you provide community facilities? Could you connect soft landscaping to existing habitats, boosting biodiversity and linking into blue networks? Could you collect rainwater to reduce irrigation needs, and use the system to educate local schools and residents on water efficiency? Everyone has a role and that can be as simple as using the following question to inform designs: how can this project/plan/proposal create the greatest positive impact for the whole system it sits within?

Our environment is like the human body – everything is connected
You can treat it as a set of isolated parts, or you can consider the whole system and how to improve it. When we aim to get fit, as well as exercise we need to consider nutrition, hydration, environmental

conditions and sleep. The environment is no different: we must consider people, water, energy, biodiversity, culture, heritage, community, movement, food security, waste and transport. Importantly, we have to seek to understand how these elements interrelate.

When you map and value these connections, the best solutions often reveal themselves. Systems thinking doesn't just make better projects – it creates places that work harder for people and nature, now and in the future. It also tends to create better-connected communities, which are far more resilient to deal with the effects of climate change.

Systems thinking is ultimately about shifting our perspective, from asking ‘What do we need to deliver?’ to ‘What future can we help shape?’

It invites us to see projects not as endpoints but as catalysts for positive change that ripple far beyond their boundaries. By thinking in systems, we design not just for today's needs but for people, places and the planet for generations to come.

Closing the loop

Jennifer Pollard and **Claire Brierley** examine the challenges and enablers of applying circular economy principles to building services

Picture an office building: the new tenants are refitting the space and changing the configuration, redesigning the layout, adding meeting rooms, maybe removing a kitchen. These fit-out works involve stripping out the existing mechanical, electrical and public health (MEP) building services and replacing them with new, while most of the old is sent to recycling.

Now, picture an office building that has been vacant for years. The owner has upgraded the building services to make it marketable but still there are no interested parties, so a change of use is proposed to a hotel or residential use. The recently installed MEP services are not suitable for the new use type and are destined for waste.

Variations of these scenarios happen regularly throughout the lifecycle of commercial buildings. In a typical case, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors predicts relatively short replacement cycles for MEP building services (15 to 30 years) compared with a building lifecycle of 60 years, and replacement can be more frequent than that. Despite this, circular economy (CE) principles are rarely applied in MEP design and construction. Current linear practices generate substantial

waste and carbon impacts – up to 27% of the embodied carbon emissions for a newbuild project, and as much as 75% for a refurbishment, according to the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers' *TM65: Embodied Carbon in Building Services: A Calculation Methodology*.

Challenges to circularity

There are several barriers to widespread implementation of CE principles in MEP services. The bespoke nature of buildings means that services are designed to specific projects and occupancy demands, complicating reuse and standardisation. The industry's cautiousness, coupled with warranty and insurance concerns for second-life equipment, creates obstacles to adopting circular solutions. Equipment often becomes functionally obsolete owing to changing building user needs, decarbonisation efforts or updated regulations.

Returning to our example of the vacant office building, in the current market it would also be very unlikely that the removed MEP installations would find a home in another building because of factors such as:

- The lack of reverse logistics services or resale platforms



Building services are often replaced long before end of life, creating avoidable waste and carbon



- The unavailability of warranties or guarantees for repurposed equipment
- Limited capability for matching stock between projects that have equipment to give away and those that need it, as well as interim storage facilities
- Challenges in design for disassembly – whether the equipment being removed was designed and installed to be easily accessible and disassembled without damage.

It's not all bad news, though. There are important enablers that can support the transition to a CE and reduce how much equipment from these office buildings goes to waste.

Policy and industry

Evolving policy and industry frameworks are pushing CE adoption. Regional and local authorities increasingly require CE statements and whole-life carbon assessments as part of planning

applications and post-decision reporting, such as the Greater London Authority through the London Plan Policy *S17: Reducing Waste and Supporting the Circular Economy* or Greater Manchester's Policy *JP-S6: Resource Efficiency*.

In our vacant office example, when seeking planning for the change of use, the owner could be mandated to provide a pre-demolition or pre-refurbishment audit that identifies any potential equipment for reuse, on or off site, aiming to reduce waste.

Similarly, if the tenant in our fit-out example is pursuing BREEAM accreditation, several of the credits encourage circular principles, including designing for material efficiency, adaptability, maintenance and end of life. The key thing is that these enablers trigger conversations among engineers and clients about what is possible for existing or future buildings.

Design for circularity

Standardisation and modularity in the design of MEP systems allow for easier upgrades, repairs and component replacement. In our office cases, if the existing systems are to be reused elsewhere, they must be able to be removed and disassembled without damage. Designing MEP services with

maintenance and end-of-life disassembly in mind is key to overcoming practical barriers of equipment accessibility and dismantling. Modular designs also enable adaptation of systems for changing building uses without full replacement.

Additionally, if existing equipment is still suitable, using condition surveys to assess equipment can determine whether replacement is necessary or if parts can be incorporated in the new design.

Manufacturers hold significant influence in driving CE adoption by rethinking their product design, business models and service offerings.

Here are a few examples of models and schemes that manufacturers embracing circular models could set up or use to enable circularity in the office case:

- Take-back and remanufacture programmes for office luminaires at end of life
- Product service systems for the procurement, ongoing maintenance and take-back of vertical transport lifts
- Heat-pump recycling schemes encouraging the return of equipment by offering compensation for new purchases



Circularity in MEP demands new approaches to design, procurement and reuse



Circular economy

- Recovery and recycling of refrigerants from heating and cooling equipment
- Modular heat pumps that enable component part replacement.

Although these business models alone are not sufficient, building owners and those leading procurement need to be aware of, and willing to engage in, alternative procurement routes.

Effective data management

Equipped with complete data on MEP services within office buildings, including service history and condition surveys, a project team would stand more chance of finding a second home for unwanted equipment, and would be better able to discuss re-certifying the equipment or resale. Comprehensive handover processes ensure that facilities management teams have access to accurate information, including the end-of-life strategy. Improved operation and maintenance planning can extend equipment life and drive the realisation of intended end-of-life processes like reuse or refurbishment.

Even with all these enablers in place, would our building owner or tenant and their project teams maximise the onward reuse of redundant equipment? Would they put circular strategies in place in the design of the new scheme to enable circular management in the future?

Embracing the CE requires a fundamental shift in the attitudes and approaches to design and procurement of MEP services to enable longevity, disassembly and reuse. It involves collaboration among building owners, engineers, manufacturers, facilities managers and contractors to embed circular principles throughout the product lifecycle, accompanied by supportive policies and improved data management.

Jennifer Pollard MISEP CEnv, senior associate, and **Claire Brierley**, senior consultant, at Hoare Lea



Kept in the dark

Transparency reductions could weaken corporate disclosure rules and blind investors to climate risks, argues **Elisabeth Jeffries**

Shutters are being pulled down. Many suppliers to major EU companies, which had previously been required to disclose on issues like nature, greenhouse gas emissions and workforce, can now put reporting on hold. This means that large corporations will stay silent on the matter, leaving investors financing them in the dark. These disclosures had formed the core of the Corporate Social Reporting Directive (CSRD), which took effect in 2023. Following the political shift to the right in the 2024 EU elections, these radical transparency rules have come under pressure through an initiative known as the Omnibus package. Covering environmental, social and governance (ESG) corporate disclosures, as well as due diligence by companies, it was launched in February 2025. “We have to be frank. This is an attempt to slow down the [climate] transition by aligning legislation with the

laggards,” says Julia Otten, senior policy officer at Frank Bold, an NGO in Brussels. Otten is particularly concerned about a European Parliament proposal to delete mandatory climate transition plans from another component of the package, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). Along with transition plans, it requires companies to identify, prevent and mitigate adverse human rights and environmental impacts in their operations and value chains. The intensity of the strike against transparency varies according to each proposal to limit mandatory requirements. Efforts to lower the numbers of companies obliged to report in the CSRD on a range of ESG topics, or to reduce the strictness of criteria for reported data, define the seriousness of the damage that could be inflicted. For example, the European Commission Omnibus package proposed to raise the minimum CSRD scope to companies with

more than 1,000 employees and €50m turnover. Later, a Parliament report from the European People’s Party (EPP) proposed companies with a minimum of 3,000 employees and a turnover of €450m. In another variant, the European Council suggested a minimum of 1,000 employees but echoed the EPP’s plan for €450m turnover (see table, right). All these contrast with the original CSRD, which demanded disclosures from companies with 250 employees or more. According to data provider ISS, the Commission proposed amendment to the law reduces the number of companies required to report by around 80% from over 45,000 to approximately 9,000. **Omnibus package scope, CSRD** At the same time, an estimate by Accountancy Europe indicates that the EU Parliament suggestion would leave one-third of member states with fewer than 10 companies reporting. The

SHUTTERSTOCK

European Council’s position on the CSDDD this summer was even more draconian than on the CSRD, limiting scope to a minimum of 5,000 employees and €1.5bn turnover. The other institutions retained the same scope for both directives. The breadth of companies disclosing makes a major impact on ESG integration into the EU economy through the CSRD and CSDDD. Another concern is the stringency of reporting requirements. Smaller enterprises, which do not need to disclose under the CSRD, would apply the Voluntary Sustainability Reporting Standard for non-listed SMEs (VSME). However, the VSME is not compatible with the mandatory reporting standards for the CSRD used by larger companies. In the Commission proposal, the information needed by companies with more than 1,000 employees from smaller corporate subsidiaries and actors in the value chain is lacking. “This is messing around with business-to-business information that prevents large companies from being able to disclose accurate good data. We need a better targeted standard for this mid-cap category,” says Otten. On value chain greenhouse gas emissions, for instance, some of the data expected in the VSME is too vaguely defined, creating confusion. “The VSME is not very clear in terms of scope 3. That means that either you need to create exceptions for that or that the larger companies won’t be able to make calculations conforming to their own standards system.” Due diligence rules are also not specific enough and the CSRD can be overlooked, she states. “The VSME is optional, not mandatory. SMEs can use it but they don’t have to.” If the CSRD scope were broader, fewer smaller enterprises would be excluded. Hence, opponents to the changes argue that the final CSRD disclosures generate superficial information. Eurosif, a forum representing sustainable investors, says suggestions made by the Commission are too weak.

Omnibus package scope, CSRD

Proposing entity	Applicability threshold
EU Commission (Omnibus)	Wave 1: Large EU public interest entities > 500 employees
	Wave 2: Large EU companies Large companies with (2 out of 3) > 250 employees > €50m net turnover > €25m balance sheet
	Wave 3: Listed EU SMEs with (2 out of 3) Between 10 and 250 employees > €700k net turnover > €350k total assets And companies with > 1,000 employees and > €50m net turnover or > €25m balance sheet
EU Council	> 1,000 employees and > €450m net turnover
EU Parliament	> 3,000 employees and > €450m net turnover

Source: ISS-Corporate

“We believe that the CSRD should maintain a scope that makes sense and that companies that have to report do so against standards that are credible,” says Pierre Garrault, Eurosif senior policy adviser. At 1,000 employees, he considers the minimum too high. “This doesn’t necessarily mean investors will stop investing sustainably but it will mean that it becomes more difficult for them to do so,” he says. One question is the scope that works to embed ESG transparency and climate change considerations into the economy

through corporate reporting and due diligence. According to the European Central Bank (ECB), a minimum of 500 employees is a good number for CSRD reporting. In an August announcement, it said that the proposed reduction would weaken the European banking system’s ability to make granular assessments of climate-related financial risks on its balance sheet and in its collateral framework. “Descoping 80%-94% of companies from the CSRD does not strike the right balance – to the contrary, it creates long-term risks for the European economy,” says Christine Lagarde, ECB president. The core of sustainability reporting in the EU risks being lost. Should decisions align with the most extreme suggestions, the clock would turn back 10 years to before the introduction of mandatory non-financial reporting. “We have already reached a critical threshold with the proposals,” says Otten. If they are accepted, the corporate story on climate and nature impacts and risks, as well as labour conditions, may not get past the first page. The first CSRD disclosures have only been published this year. Garrault says: “The next wave of companies is beginning to prepare reporting but hasn’t reported yet. CSDDD was supposed to report from 2027. It’s difficult to assess the benefits of rolling these back before they are implemented.” Politicians proposing that cancellation may be working against some market sentiment. A large proportion of investors say that they support much of the original CSRD and CSDDD. This summer, 110 investment organisations and financial institutions, along with 55 companies, came out in favour of the wider scope (more than 500 employees) in a Eurosif statement. The outcome of battles in EU institutions will not be known until the end of this year, however, “We will see how this is going to be carved out,” says Otten.

Elisabeth Jeffries is a freelance ESG writer and editor

THE POLLUTER PAYS?

Catherine Early reports as a global push for climate levies gains ground ahead of COP30

The climate finance gap is mind-bogglingly big, and growing by the year as floods, droughts and wildfires deepen their impacts. At UN climate talks COP29, developed countries promised to deliver US\$300bn annually by 2035 to support climate action on mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. The COP also called for major collaboration to scale financial flows to \$1.3trn a year by 2035 from public and private sources. Though huge, the figure agreed at COP29 is a drop in the ocean compared with the \$6.5trn annual estimated need to 2030 to meet climate targets, rising to \$7trn-\$8.1trn by 2035. This was calculated by independent economists, led by the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change

and the Environment, tasked by the COP to find solutions to close the gap. The group has been clear that the role of the private sector will be much more important than in the past, given public funding constraints. Some \$1trn per year by 2030 and \$1.3trn by 2035 needs to come from sources outside government coffers, including the private sector, it says. One of the recommendations by the economists is for “innovative solutions”, including international taxation of high-emitting sectors, which it believes could raise up to around \$150bn in additional revenues by 2030, alongside other non-traditional sources of funding such as debt swaps and philanthropy. A dedicated taskforce, co-chaired by the governments of Barbados, Kenya and France, has been considering how to achieve this.

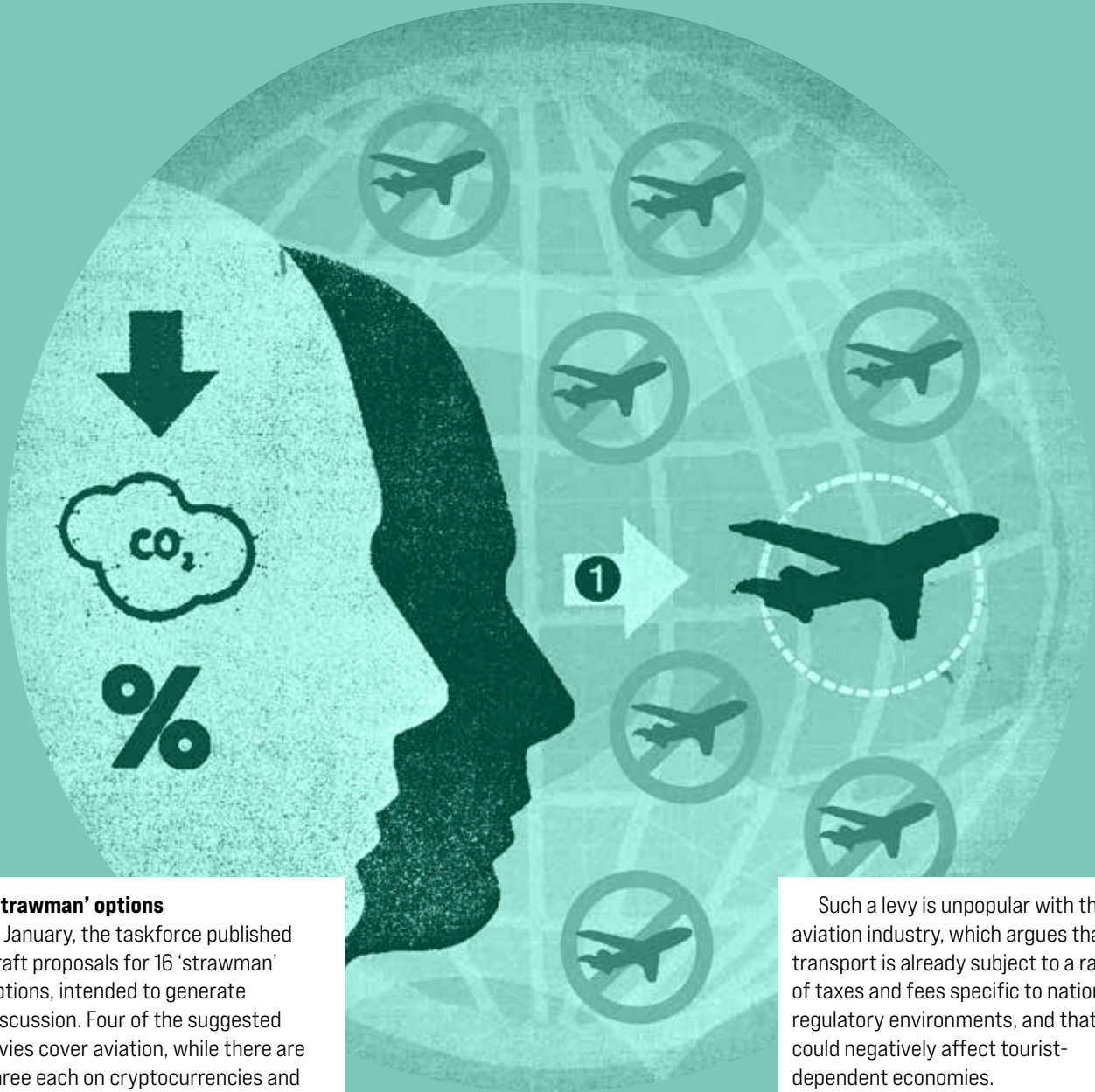
The Global Solidarity Levies Task Force is looking at how to introduce levies that are “feasible, scalable and sensible”, and how revenues would be allocated to countries in need. It is co-led by veteran climate diplomat Laurence Tubiana, one of the key architects of the 2015 Paris Agreement, and Ismail Momoniat former acting director-general of South Africa's National Treasury. The International Monetary Fund; UN; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); World Bank; and the G20 group of nations are among a broad group of organisations involved. The taskforce will present its findings in November at COP30 in Brazil. Its plan is to bring together a “coalition of the willing”, ready to implement one or several of the ideas. So far, 14 countries have signed up as members of the coalition, including Colombia, Denmark, Spain and Zambia. This means they support the idea in principle and will consider introducing the levies proposed by the taskforce domestically, and are willing to redistribute part of the funds collected for international climate action.

ALEX WILLIAMSON / IKON IMAGES

‘Strawman’ options
In January, the taskforce published draft proposals for 16 ‘strawman’ options, intended to generate discussion. Four of the suggested levies cover aviation, while there are three each on cryptocurrencies and fossil fuels. Financial transactions, shipping, plastic polymers and high-net-worth individuals all have one proposed levy, and carbon pricing has two. The most popular proposal so far is a levy on aviation, including targeting jet fuel, flyers with first and business class tickets or users of private jets. According to a report summarising responses, there is majority support for this option. Many see it as one of the fairest choices, given that just 1% of the global population is responsible for half of the world's aviation emissions, and 80% of the world's population have never flown.

“Four of the suggested levies cover aviation, while there are three each on cryptocurrencies and fossil fuels”

Such a levy is unpopular with the aviation industry, which argues that air transport is already subject to a range of taxes and fees specific to national regulatory environments, and that it could negatively affect tourist-dependent economies. In June, France, Kenya, Barbados, Spain, Somalia, Benin, Sierra Leone, and Antigua and Barbuda announced that they were forming a coalition backing a levy on premium flyers. “New levies on premium flyers can raise vital funds for climate and development. In the current context, everybody is pessimistic, saying we cannot do anything. This announcement is proof that we can make progress,” says Tubiana. A levy on premium flyers could raise €78bn per year, according to research by CE Delft. While the overall aviation sector is responsible for more than



2.5% of carbon dioxide emissions, premium travel has risen sharply in recent years, with a 46% increase in emissions from private aviation between 2019 and 2023.

The idea also benefits from public backing, with three out of four people in 13 countries believing that wealthier air travellers should pay more tax, owing to their outsized impact on climate change, according to research by Oxfam and Greenpeace.

Political hurdles

Speaking at a Chatham House debate on climate levies in June, Avinash Persaud, special adviser on climate change to the president of the Inter-American Development Bank, said that governments had to act to make up for the shrinking pot of Official Development Assistance finance, which fell by 7% in 2024 compared with the previous year, according to the OECD.

Though some people will say such levies are impossible to introduce, and will be evaded, some countries have already introduced similar taxes – for example, France and Italy have launched financial transactions taxes in the past 10 years, raising almost \$20bn.

“That’s \$20bn we wouldn’t have had if we’d listened to people saying that it can’t be done,” says Persaud.

“Shipping is a big system. Aviation is a big system. Finance is a big system. We need to find small taxes on these big systems and tax them,” he adds.

French climate ambassador Benoît Faraco points to the example of a tax on air tickets introduced in France by former president Jacques Chirac in 2005 to finance campaigns against diseases in Africa – in particular, the fight against HIV/AIDS.

“One of the lessons we learned was that of course you can start with a

small group, but at the end of the day, you need to enlarge the base – it’s not sustainable in this complicated world to be front runner forever,” he says.

Though the current geopolitical climate is unhelpful in terms of ideas such as solidarity levies, France still wants to have the conversation, Faraco says. “It will take time, but it will be necessary,” he argues.

Creon Butler, director of the global economy and finance programme at Chatham House, fears that countries that do not support the idea of levies could create problems. For example, given US president Donald Trump’s stance on tariffs, among other things, he could decide that levies by other countries discriminate against US interests, and take action against them.

“We’re in a new kind of world where a ‘coalition of the willing’ may not be enough,” he says.

To get public support for solidarity levies, Persaud stresses that it will be vital for countries that introduce them to communicate them clearly.

Some of the current pushback on green policies has been caused by electorates feeling that climate transitions involve costs for them, and they have not seen the benefits such as cheaper bills from renewable energy, he says.

“The politics will not work if a country is levying a tax on its people, and all of those resources are going somewhere else. If a significant proportion is kept internally for projects to build resilience, and the rest distributed internationally, that may work,” Persaud argues.

Perception shift

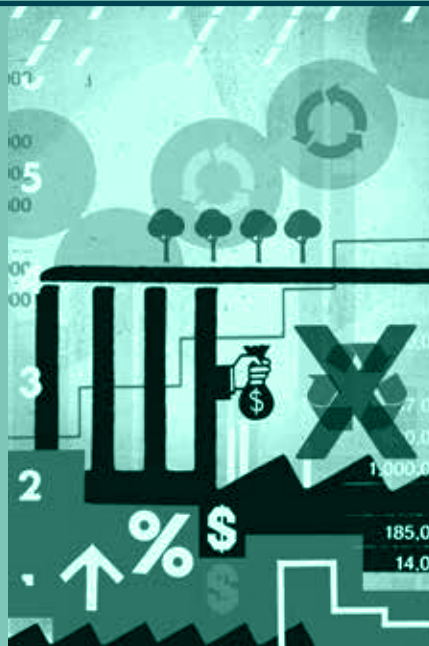
Anna Åberg, research fellow at Chatham House, says that although geopolitics makes a massive breakthrough on levies unlikely in the short term, that does not mean that nothing can be done to progress the agenda.

She points to the debate on creating a fund for loss and damage to help the poorest nations pay for the irreversible impacts of climate change – an agreement on which many people had thought impossible, though it had been discussed for decades.

“Positions and perceptions shifted a lot in just one year – it was quite remarkable to see that play out. Similar things can be said for discussions around net zero, or putting an end date to oil and gas production,” she says.

“In the beginning, it seems like some kind of fantasy, but then it becomes a normalised part of the discussion. You dig into the details and all of a sudden you see these shifts taking place,” she adds.

As Åberg points out, solidarity levies are not new – some 30 countries have a form of tax on financial transactions, and more than 20 implement some kind of levy on aviation. “There are models we can build on and replicate in the short term,” she says. “It would be great if lots of governments did this, but it’s okay to start small because it enables the conversation to be normalised, it raises the profile, and you can build momentum over time.”



ARTERIES OF POWER

With offshore wind capacity surging in the UK, Ed Walker looks at how subsea transmission cables are rewiring the nation's energy flow

As the UK progresses with the energy transition, domestic success in offshore wind and other low-carbon energy sources continues to gain attention. With such fundamental changes in the energy system, the way in which we transport our electricity from point of generation to point of use is evolving rapidly too.

The UK is highly successful in offshore wind, with more than 16GW

of offshore operational capacity, according to RenewableUK. This figure is ever-growing; earlier this year, Neart na Gaoithe became the latest UK offshore wind project to become operational, generating up to 450MW of electricity.

There are numerous other projects in the pipeline too, including 'Salamander', which gained consent from the Scottish government in July 2025. Salamander is a joint venture partnership between Simply Blue Group and Subsea7, and

will use cutting-edge floating offshore wind technology.

Considering Scotland specifically, 'ScotWind' (Crown Estate Scotland's first leasing round for offshore wind) continues to progress at pace. Alongside 25GW of potential generation, this round includes specific provisions for floating offshore wind.

In Wales, the Celtic Sea region is an area of huge forecast floating growth too; most recently, Equinor and Gwynt Glas were announced as preferred

bidders in the Celtic seabed leasing for 3GW of floating wind.

At a strategic level, the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan has been brought forward by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. Supported by the UK's leading public finance institutions, investment bodies and industry, the plan cites the particularly important role of offshore wind as "the backbone of the clean power system".

But what does this have to do with transmission cables?

The UK's transmission system is ageing, and the electricity grid was originally built to connect electricity generated from generally large and centralised power stations, run on fossil fuels, such as coal from the North and Midlands of England and South Wales. Electricity generated through renewable and low-carbon technology is growing rapidly and this presents challenges. For instance, renewable and low-carbon energy – such as offshore wind – is more dispersed around the UK, and usually distant from the main sources of demand.

The overhaul of the UK transmission system will require a combination of upgrades and new infrastructure onshore and subsea. SEN Transmission is the owner and operator of the high voltage (HV) electricity transmission system for the North and islands of Scotland, while Scottish Power Transmission is responsible for the transmission of electricity in central and southern Scotland. National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) owns and maintains the HV electricity transmission network in England and Wales. These organisations are called 'transmission owners', or TOs.

The three TOs have each published business plans for the 'RIIO-T3' (a price control period from 2026-2031) and they all feature subsea upgrades.

When ISEP last covered the topic of subsea transmission (*Transform*, Dec/Jan



The overhaul of the UK transmission system will require a combination of upgrades and new infrastructure onshore and subsea

2022/23), two new subsea links between Scotland and England were highlighted – Eastern Green Link 1 and Eastern Green Link 2. At that time, energy market regulator Ofgem had approved the need for both projects, but they were still progressing through the consenting process and installation had not yet begun. Since that point, all primary onshore and marine consents have been awarded and construction onshore is underway. Offshore, Eastern Green Link 1 and Eastern Green Link 2 are in the process of completing various final surveys to help support precise planning for how cables will be installed on the seabed, and to segue into installation.

Beyond these two projects, there are further plans for subsea transmission upgrades; of the 17 projects in NGET's 'Great Grid Upgrade' (which it says is "the largest overhaul of the electricity grid in

generations"), six feature significant subsea infrastructure. This includes Eastern Green Link 3 and Eastern Green Link 4, two new (and separate) primarily offshore HV links between Scotland and England. Alongside the subsea link, they will each feature onshore infrastructure, including onshore cables and converter stations at both ends used to turn HV direct current (typically used for long-distance transmission) into alternating current (to feed into the national grid).

Why is this relevant to ISEP?

Projects of this nature, scale and complexity involve a range of people in numerous disciplines, including environment and sustainability professionals. This involvement can vary hugely, based on project geography and approach, as the examples below show.

Conceptualisation and early development of a project

At this stage, a fundamental driver for a project may exist, but there may be limited definition on how to deliver it. This is an excellent opportunity for early influence into the development of the project, to ensure environmental and sustainability topics are considered. For example, a proponent of a subsea transmission upgrade may have found two broad regions that they want to link, but may not have identified specific landfalls where cables will come to shore.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Environmental professionals can help inform this analysis and decision-making process, to ensure the selection of the best options on balance. Evaluation of important environmental factors is also crucial to the routeing process.

Time and energy invested at this stage can often result in improvements in environmental performance and a reduction in consenting risk.

At this early stage, surveys may also be planned and carried out to inform onward development. Environmental input into survey design, permitting and analysis of results is also vital. Environmental input into procurement is increasingly common, which means that environmental performance can be embedded into contractual requirements.

Consenting

Subsea transmission links typically require a marine licence for some or all of their delivery. Marine licence applications are dealt with by the Marine Directorate Licensing Operations Team (in Scotland), the Marine Management Organisation (England) and Natural Resources Wales (Wales). Through the preparation of good-quality environmental assessments and supporting consent documentation, the regulators and interested stakeholders can accurately understand potential environmental impacts.

Inevitably, the consenting process will give rise to queries and areas of discussion – the involvement of environmental professionals is key to navigating this process promptly, to help secure consent in a timely manner.

Construction and installation

It is a common misconception that environmental involvement concludes once consent is awarded. Ironically, it is often the case that new and greater challenges emerge during the complex and pressurised construction phase. It often takes many years between conceptualisation

and installation, with various project personnel changes. Equally, incoming contractors may only have limited detailed knowledge of a project or specific geographies from tender. Being able to consolidate, record and then hand over comprehensive environmental information is therefore really important – the devil is in the detail.

Most marine licences will have a range of complex post-consent requirements to complete before, during and after installation of a subsea cable. They can vary dramatically, but could include the provision of in-depth design information or a marine construction environmental management plan before works start or provision of as-built/as-laid data once works have concluded (and anything and everything in between). More widely, there are a plethora of roles involved in ensuring compliance during the installation process.

Ed Walker MEI FISEP CEnv is an environmental specialist working on a range of marine-power projects for global energy consultancy Xodus



A vessel laying subsea cabling

Subsea transmission

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Completing the upgrades required to the electricity transmission system is a huge undertaking, and many subsea cables are being delivered now or in the pipeline. Identifying landfalls and subsea cable routes is becoming more challenging because of busy UK waters and competition with other sectors, such as offshore wind and associated cables. A thorough appreciation of environmental, technical and commercial factors at this early stage can help project proponents manage the risk.

The UK's marine regulators are busy and under constant pressure to do more with less, so it is particularly important to work proactively and in collaboration with them, to help them fulfil their regulatory responsibilities, while respecting their own space for decision-making.

In the pressure of the construction and installation process, promoting environmental performance,

ensuring compliance and keeping to programme can be tough, particularly with multi-billion project costs. Staying focused, pausing the process if necessary and having the confidence to say 'no' is critical – the ISEP competency framework and Fellows Network have been key tools to help me with this in recent years.

The challenges can be hard to overcome, but it does mean there is never a dull moment. Actively contributing to an urgently needed component of our UK journey to net zero is also a good motivator for those particularly challenging days.

“It’s thoroughly enjoyable to be challenged”

Hannah Fougner PISEP REnvP, senior marine consultant, Haskoning

Why did you become an environment/sustainability professional?

I have always been interested in sustainable development and wanted my career to be in a field that helps find that balance between progress and protecting our natural resources.

What is your current role and what does it involve?

I coordinate and lead aspects of the marine consenting and environmental impact assessment (EIA) processes for complex infrastructure projects, with a focus on floating offshore wind development.

What’s the best part and most challenging part of your work?

It’s constantly learning and adapting to changes. One day my job might involve thinking outside the box on new impacts that should be considered in EIA; another day it may involve rethinking strategy owing to new legislation or guidance. Either way, it’s thoroughly enjoyable to be challenged; and working with colleagues to adapt to these challenges is one of the best parts of my job.

What are the most important skills for your role?

Collaboration and communication – which involves coordinating lots of different people and requires understanding and aligning differing viewpoints and perspectives to ensure that everyone works towards a shared goal.

Where would you like to be in five years’ time?

Continuing to lead and support the consenting



Hannah Fougner: “Say ‘yes’ to different projects and types of work”

process for innovative renewable energy projects that are helping to move us towards net zero.

work and effort that our teams put into our projects.

Greatest risk you have ever taken?

Moving to England by myself in 2017 to attend university. While daunting at the time, I now love living in the UK and feel at home.

If you could go back in history, who would you like to meet?

George Woodwell, for his part in responding to global ecological and climate challenges.

Describe yourself in three words

Creative, driven, conscientious.

What motivates you?

Seeing the positive outcomes of the hard



What’s your story?

If you would like to contribute a member profile, contact: s.maguire@isepglobal.org

Green Careers Hub content spotlight: construction

We pick up the theme of building and construction in this issue and highlight some top resources for you.

The Hub showcases a number of job profiles within this sector, such as retrofit coordinator, provided by the Chartered Institute of Building. There is a growing demand for retrofit assessors, coordinators and installers as we transition towards a net-zero built environment. Some estimates suggest that 80% of the buildings used today will still be in use in 2050. A retrofit coordinator oversees the assessment of dwellings for retrofit opportunities and integrates the design, specification, installation, monitoring and evaluation of energy-efficiency measures, in accordance with standards for retrofitting in buildings.

Our dedicated construction page (www.bit.ly/3K1ojgB) provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities in the sector, or you can watch short video clips (www.bit.ly/4pp8As5) of jobs from the following organisations:



- Amey
- Arup
- Clarion Housing Group
- Egis
- RSK
- The Crown Estate

The Green Careers Hub has a mission to ensure a more sustainable future by providing access to information and opportunities around green skills, jobs and careers.

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