



ISEP
Institute of Sustainability &
Environmental Professionals

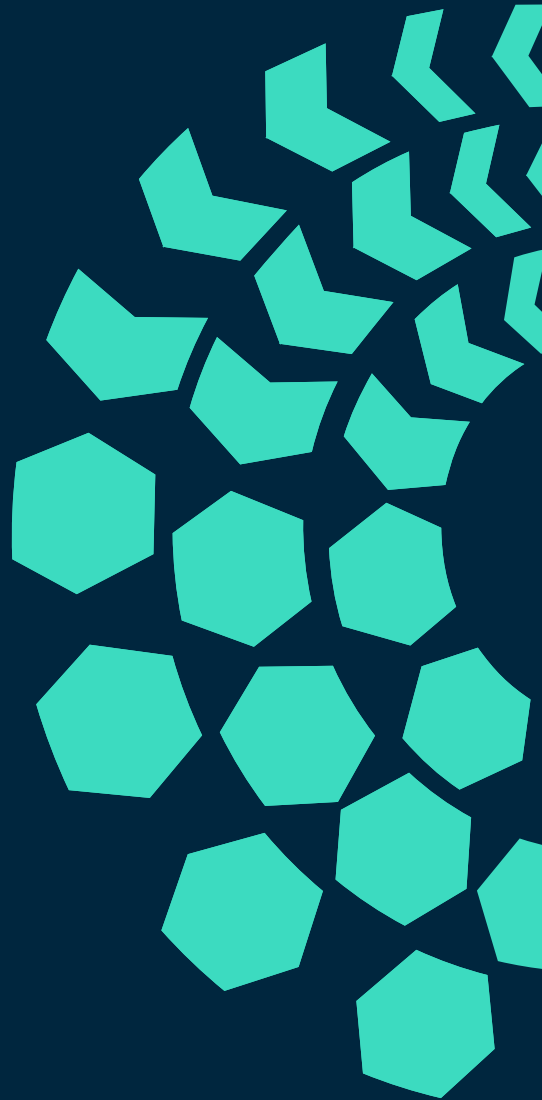
State of the Profession

Report 2025



Table of contents

1. Executive summary	page 4
2. Roles and remits (including salaries)	page 7
3. Structures and governance	page 13
4. Investment and impact	page 20
5. The future landscape	page 26
6. Questions for the path ahead	page 33
7. Methodology and acknowledgements	page 37



About the author



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Skills and Toolkit report with ISEP during her time at Deloitte.

She is committed to advancing the impact of the profession.

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Executive summary

This is the 11th edition of the SOTP report and the first since we became the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP) - after more than 25 years as IEMA.

During that time, the role of sustainability has moved from the fringes of the global economy to the centre, and the change of name reflects the crucial role the profession now plays at the heart of many organisations.

Previous editions of this report have primarily focused on the individual, including salaries, career progression and the profile of professionals at that time.

While those consistent themes remain, this report – which is based on a primarily UK-focused survey and interviews with industry leaders – also aims to provide insights on the role and impact that sustainability professionals are making within their organisations.

The findings in this report are spread across five interconnected sections: **Roles and Remits, Structures and Governance, Investment and Impact, The Future Landscape and Questions for the Path Ahead.**



Roles and Remits

The last five years has seen significant shifts in expectations of the sustainability and environment profession. More than 40% of individual respondents experienced a change in responsibilities in the past year, reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of the profession.

There is a wide and varied spread of topics within the remits of sustainability professionals, yet more than 70% of all respondents have a focus on waste management, climate change mitigation and energy efficiency, which clearly maps to regulatory and cost control pressures.

Despite increasing recognition from industry leaders that there is a shift towards value creation in the responsibilities of sustainability and environmental professionals, only 30% indicate that disciplines such as product and service innovation are part of their role, while a focus on disciplines that provide value protection for organisations is far more prevalent.

More broadly the role of sustainability teams continues to shift from solely leading efforts to acting as a central hub of expertise, enabling and supporting operational managers to take ownership.

Professionals are increasingly becoming internal consultants, collaborating across various departments like marketing, operations, legal, and finance. Their role includes influencing, educating, setting direction, and bringing together different parts of the business.

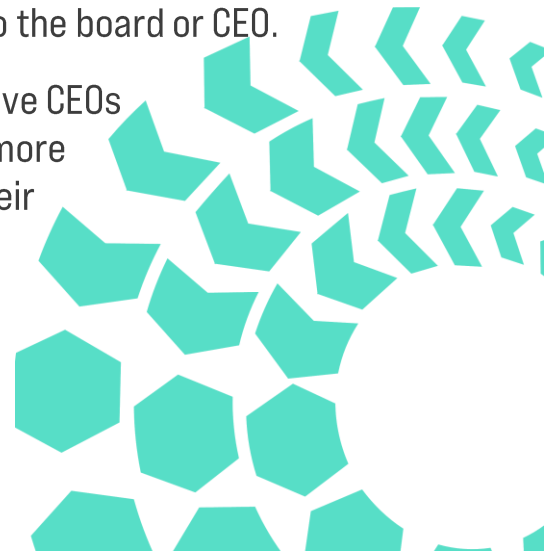
What's clear is that there is an increasing number of specialist roles with clear distinction from generalists, ranging from reporting specialists such as carbon accountants to nature specialists or social value focused roles.

In addition to key highlights – such as providing salary benchmarks (for example, ISEP Fellows now average over £90,000 per annum, an increase of more than 15% since the last survey in 2022) – and lowlights, including a gender pay gap that appears to have reverted to 2018 levels after halving in the interim – we explore Roles and Responsibilities through two lenses; topics and disciplines.

Structures and Governance

Alongside the shifting responsibilities, the level of responsibility and accountability for sustainability professionals has also increased, with 48% saying their function reports directly to the board or CEO.

There is now fewer than 1% who say they have CEOs that are “laggards” on sustainability. While more than half of respondents say they regard their CEO as “leading, proactively supporting or a visible champion of sustainability and environment” – which, according to the data, may be linked to better emissions reduction performance.



An effective route to driving cross organisational responsibility is through an efficient operational model, with 40% of respondents working within either a ‘hub and spoke’ model (a central sustainability team with additional individuals embedded within other functions) or a ‘dandelion model’ (with sustainability teams embedded within specific functions, often with a small central team for support or coordination).

Only 25% of respondents say their organisation has integrated sustainability into training and personal development structures, and only 6% directly link sustainability outcomes to remuneration.

Over 12% reported they lacked any form of operating model, even some working in very large organisations of 20,000+ employees.

Investment & Impact

We explore whether current macro-economic and geopolitical influences are putting pressure on businesses to deprioritise sustainability.

However, less than 2% of respondents say their sustainability budgets have decreased, while almost half increased.

Just over 50% say the sustainability budget in their organisation is owned by the function, while 32% of respondents say they do not have a dedicated budget for sustainability and the environment at all.

The profession’s impact is advancing significantly, more than two-thirds reported that their organisation has moved beyond measuring only direct carbon emission (Scope 1 & 2) to also measuring indirect emissions (Scope 3) such as those emerging within their supply chain.

Yet 28% of responders suggested their organisation does not measure emissions at all, 41% say their organisation does not currently measure water consumption and 60% of those at relevant organisations say biodiversity net gain isn’t measured.

Finally, when cross referencing carbon emission reductions and the value that organisational leadership places on sustainability, 80% of responders with emissions reductions above 50% had CEOs that were described as “leading, proactively supporting or a visible champion of sustainability and environment”.

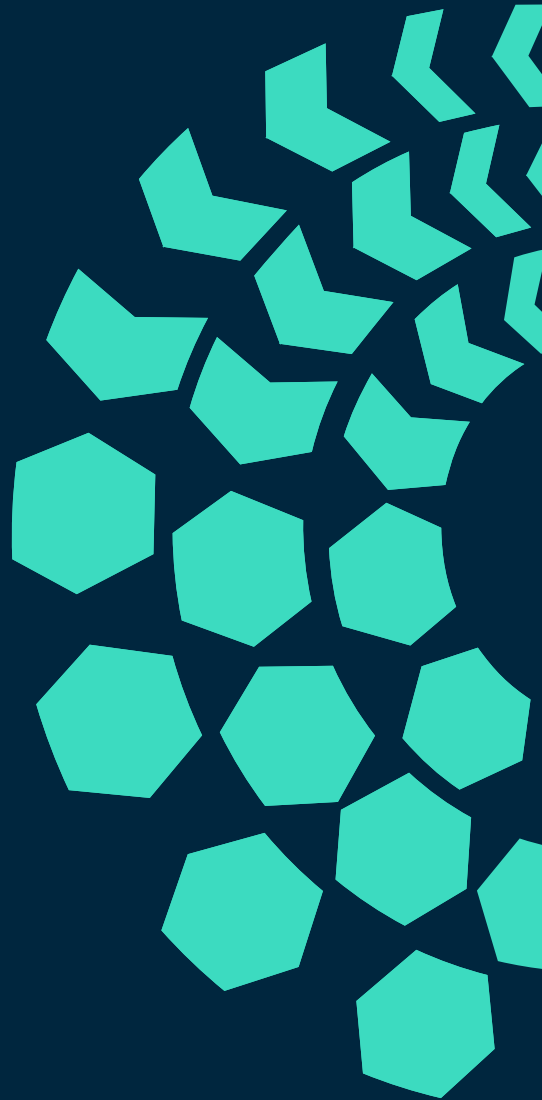
The future

Looking to the future landscape, we hear a rich and varied picture of the potential future for the profession. We explore the new and in-demand roles appearing in the profession, debate whether the future success of sustainability equals mainstreaming at the expense of dedicated teams and ask whether creating value should really be the domain of sustainability and environmental professionals.

Roles and remits

In previous State of the Profession reports we looked at the types of individuals in the profession and the salary they receive for the role.

In this section we build on those basics and explore the roles and remits of sustainability and environmental professionals through two lenses: the topics within their remits, such as climate mitigation and waste management, and the disciplines they apply to those topics, such as reporting and disclosure or risk management.



Range of responsibilities

Professional remits continue to evolve

While 56% of respondents say there was no change in the role of the sustainability and environment function in the past year, a sizable number of did report change. Over 40% of individuals are continuing to experience shifts in responsibility, reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of the sustainability profession.



"The sustainability profession has evolved significantly, requiring a broader skillset than its initial focus on compliance and waste management. Leaders must now navigate complex political landscapes, balance organisational values with market demands, and possess strong business acumen"

Claire Atkins Morris
 Sustainability Director Sodexo



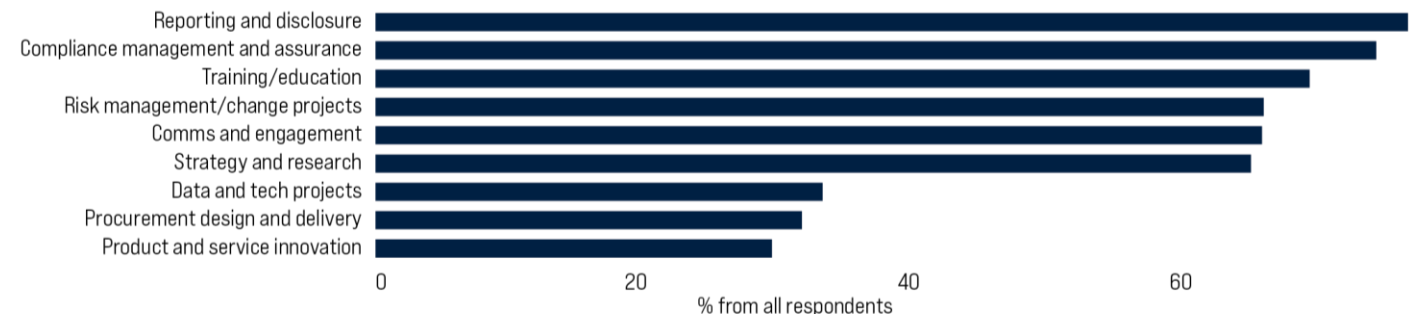
Value protection disciplines appear to dominate the profession

The role and responsibilities of the sustainability profession can be viewed through a discipline lens and topic lens. We asked about both these dimensions to better understand the range and breadth of roles. Firstly we look at disciplines covered by the profession.

- There is a clear weighting of focus towards Reporting and Disclosures and Compliance Management and Assurance. These can be considered value protection disciplines, along with Risk Management and related Change Projects. This weighting is common across all organisation sizes and sectors.
- It's notable that a limited number of responders have Product and Service Innovation within their responsibilities. Across the interviews conducted for this report there was a clear trend towards the incorporation of this value creation aligned discipline. Typically, this discipline is delivered in collaboration with Product and Service leads across the organisation to draw on the strengths of the sustainability profession and other professions to create viable and sustainable outcomes.

Cemex views sustainability as a direct contributor to the business's bottom line and has adopted a model where the sustainability function collaborates with product and market teams, and has created a specific product and services portfolio. A **Vice President for Urbanisation Solutions in EMEA at CEMEX** say:
"Sustainability is a bottom line a topic ...we want to continue differentiating and sustainability is a competitive advantage as opposed to a burden."

Disciplines within professional remit (% of total respondents)



Range of responsibilities

The spread of topics within remits remains large but there may be opportunities to increase focus on social topics

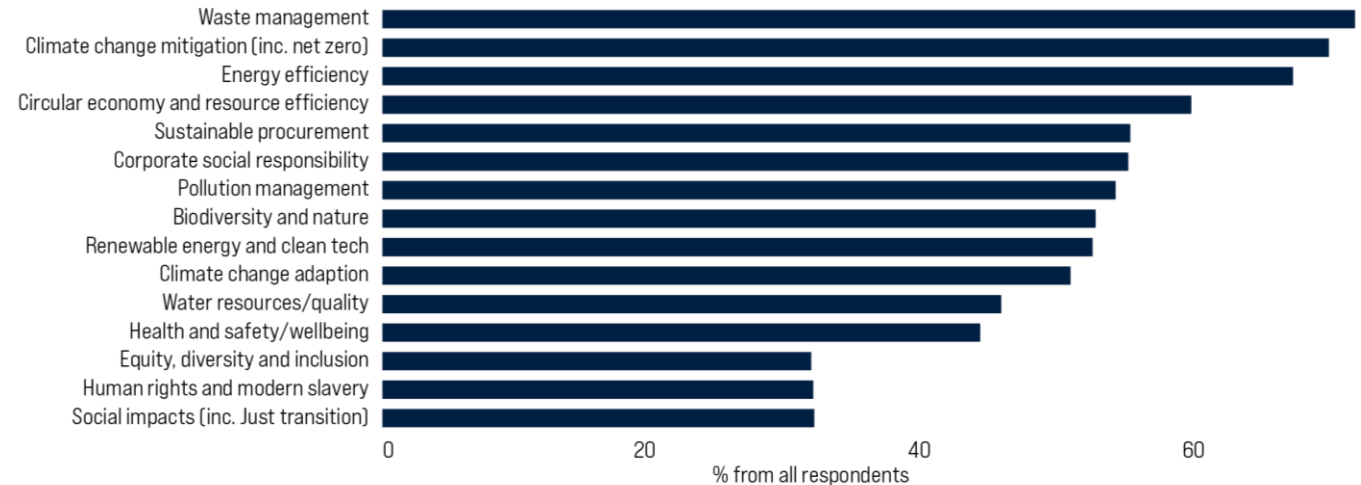
The breadth of topics which sustainability professionals and functions cover is a widespread, with interviewees indicating a need to have a broad understanding alongside the ability to 'know where to go' for more detail.

There is a wide and varied spread of topics within the remits of sustainability professionals regardless of organisation size. However there are some trends which are useful to consider given they are consistent.

More than 70% of all respondents have a focus on Waste Management, Climate Change Mitigation and Energy Efficiency, which clearly maps to regulatory and cost control pressures. There is a potential 'opportunity realisation gap' as Climate Adaptation, Renewable Energy and Clean Technologies, and Water Resources/Quality – all areas of potential solutions and value generation against the risk topics – are not equally covered in remits.

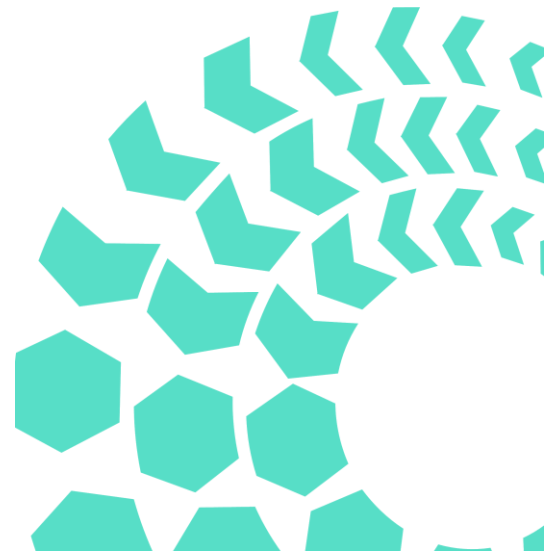
The topics with least focus are EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion), human rights and modern slavery, and social impacts – topics broadly under the umbrella of 'social sustainability'.

Topic within professional remit (% of total respondents)



"you have to be super interested in such a broad range of things ... the weirdest thing I ever learned was about Bison ... there's an area that's been designated as a water neutrality zone and that means that new developments have to be water neutral so to find offsets one of the things I ended up finding out was the amount of water cows drink when they are lactating or not. You have to find interest in a broad range of topics and continually keep learning."

An interviewee



Types of roles

"It's often difficult to spend the time on the E bit of the [HSE] role. The urgency of avoiding someone being killed due to a health and safety issue is always there. I know climate change is no longer a distant thing and might pose similar risks, but there is already so much to do [on the Health and Safety side], it's difficult to find the capacity to prioritise it."

ISEP Fellow workshop, HSE role holder

Top 20 current job titles



The profession has multiple levels and job titles

The most common role title among respondents is 'Head of Sustainability', this in itself may simply illustrate the reach of our research. However, alongside other information provided we can draw out a number of insights:

- Head of Sustainability post holders typically have 11 or more years in the profession. Although there are examples of respondents with this job title that have less experience this is less common. Only 24% of respondents with this job title had 6 or less years experience.
- Of the 101 individuals who responded that have 'Head of' job titles 52% of them are Chartered Environmentalists (CEnv) and 37% have a Sustainability and Environment related Postgraduate degree. But there is a spread of other qualifications amongst this group, illustrating the varied paths individuals have taken to acquire their roles. Although only 3% of respondents have Apprenticeship qualifications, we believe this is something to watch as we may see changes as new education provisions becomes more established.
- There remains a range of combined Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) roles across the profession. An interesting pattern across job titles to consider is whether Quality is included or not alongside HSE. While the data collected doesn't allow for a robust commentary on this, we can pose a question; might this breadth of remit create capacity and independence challenges?
- When asked what new roles have recently been added or are expected in the coming year, there is a trend towards Carbon Accounting and Reporting roles, with one respondent even specifying a standard specific role i.e. SBTi Programme Manager. Heightened reporting expectations are a clear driver and even with the reduced Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) coverage, individuals don't expect this need to diminish. In fact, in interviews, individuals noted the increasing technical knowledge and specific skills required to deliver adequate reporting which informs decision-making, rather than just serving disclosure requirements.
- Another new role area highlighted by a significant number of responders is Sustainable Procurement. This is driven by a change in how organisations expect to procure, but also how they need to react to procurement expectations of their customers.

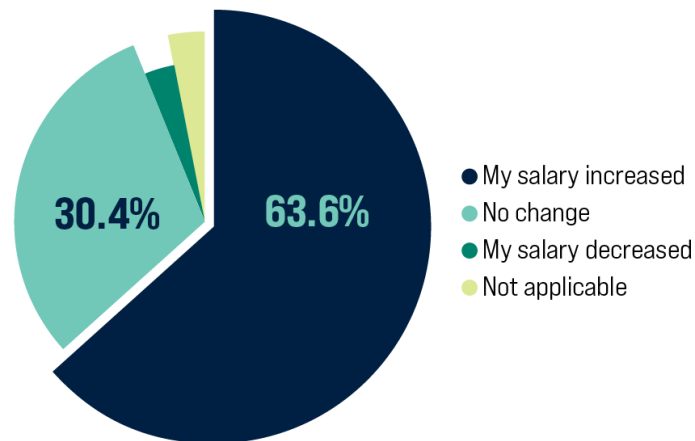
Salary benchmarks

Most receive a salary increase

Despite challenging macro-economic times, 64% of respondents received a salary increase in the past year.

This is lower than we saw in 2022, when 72% had received an increase. However, a pay rise was more prevalent among those in their role for 5–10 years. Only 3% of respondents had a salary decrease.

Salary changes in the past year (%)

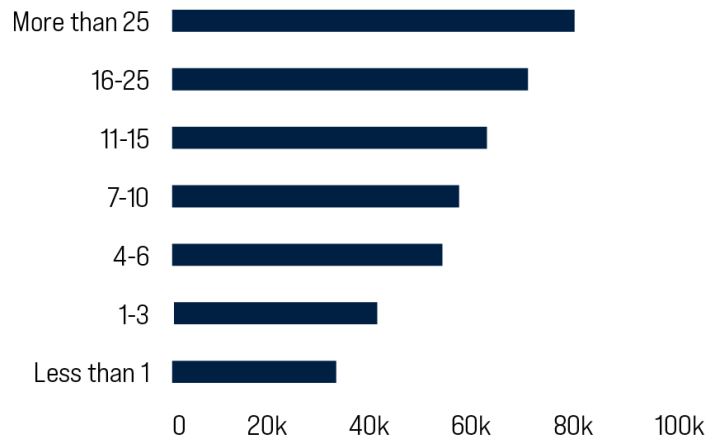


Averages salaries have increased

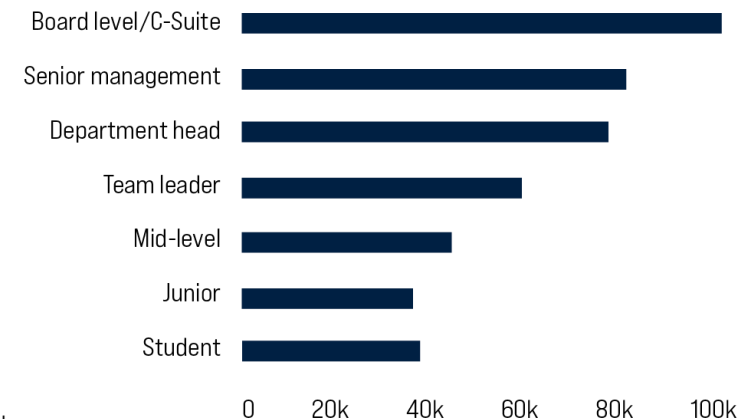
Reported salaries remain positive,

- Around 8% of respondents to this question earn £100,000 - £200,000. and a small number of individuals earn £200,000+.
- ISEP Fellows have an average salary of £91,911, up from £79,369 in 2022.
- ISEP Grad level respondents have an average salary of £37,069, up from £30,547 compared to 2022. This puts grads working in the profession at the same level as the overall average salary for the UK - £37,000 based on ONS data (£711 for total weekly earnings and £667 for regular weekly earnings in Jan 2025).
- Average salaries for sustainability professionals differ depending on which sector they work in, the most notable difference being in Finance (average £90,000) and Mining (average £80,000).
- Organisation size also affects salary averages to some extent, There is typically £15,000 - £20,000 additional for an average salary in large organisations versus small organisations.

Average salary by years in the role



Average salary by level of role



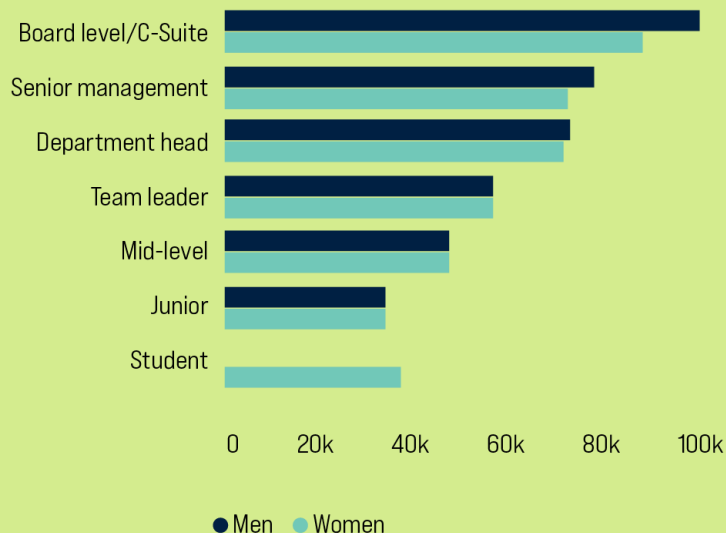
Salary benchmarks

The gender pay gap has bounced back

As has been seen in wider research, the gap between the average salary for males and female has widened.

The respondents indicate a gap of 14.7% this year compared to 8.75% in 2022, making it close to the gap we last saw in 2018 (14.1%).

Average salary by level of role



More needs to be done to reach and support diverse talent

The data has been reviewed through a number of different lenses to understand the experiences diverse talent pools may be having in the profession:

- Gender pay differences appear to widen at Senior Management and Board level / C-suite (male salaries are 12% and 15% higher respectively in the data) although the gap is much less at the levels prior to this (between 1 - 4% at Junior, Mid, Team Leader and Dept. Head levels).
- There is no significant difference in reported salary change year on year, 63% females vs 64% males say they received an increase. This suggests there may be a lack of widespread initiatives actively helping to narrow the gender pay gap.
- Only 7.1% of respondents declared a non-white ethnicity (by contrast to 18% of the UK being non-white). This under-representation within the respondents matches other research conducted within the environmental sector, indicating a wider talent diversity issue but we also recognise the limitations of the opt-in sampling method used for this report.
- The data shows limited difference in salary averages when comparing non-white respondents to the overall averages.
- Only 4.3% of people declare they have a disability (compared to 23% working age individuals with a declared disability in the wider UK population). The average salary of disabled respondents is not significantly different. However, there is a difference when looked at by level, the average salary for Senior Management is £65,583 compared to £72,147 across all respondents. Given the small sample size this will need to be further examined in future research to see if its widespread.

Structures and governance

This section is focused more strongly on inhouse sustainability professionals and their teams.

We expanded our research to look at the trends around internal structures and governance. Through this analysis we expect to track the shifts in team shapes, sizes and structures as the profession evolves.



"Sustainability is an absolutely key, core strategic partner at the highest level of the organisation and meets with the CEO on a weekly basis for five hours for future in action strategies this is similarly replicated at regional level..."

Respondent from large construction business



Governance and leadership

Sustainability reports to the Board or CEO

When discussing changes to the profession over the past 5–10 years, interviewees highlighted a shift in the levels of responsibility and accountability within the field. Although there is no formal benchmark for comparison, the data supports this observation: nearly 48% of sustainability functions or professionals say they report directly to the Board or CEO.

There are differences by sector. In the Built environment sector this increases to 62%, and in the Energy and Utility sector it drops to 27% and HSE becomes the more dominant reporting line (45% say they report to HSE).

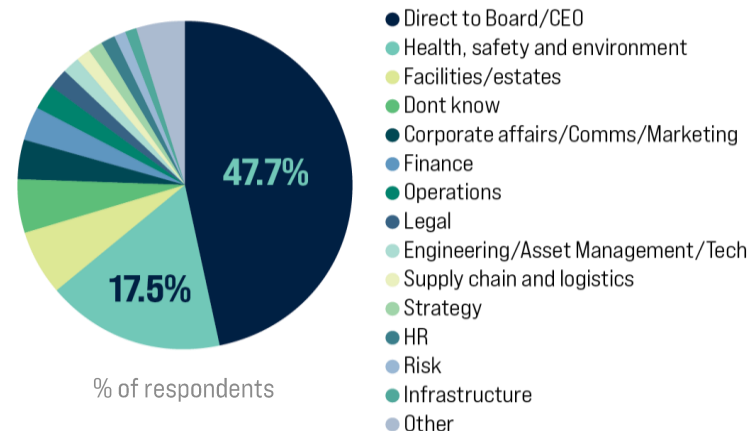
In Education and Central government and NGOs the largest majority of respondents report Direct to the Board or CEO but its Facilities or Estates that is the second most likely reporting route.

Leading from the front

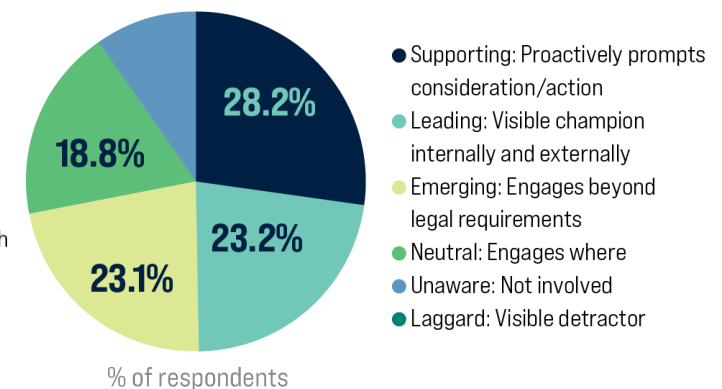
While current macro-economic and geopolitical influences are making sustainability professionals feel under pressure, respondents indicated that there is often a positive internal support system within organisations.

- More than 50% of respondents report that they regard their CEO as “leading, proactively supporting or a visible champion of sustainability and environment” (28% say their CEOs proactively support and 23% say they are a visible champion).
- Only 4% of CEOs (or equivalent) are reportedly unaware and less than 1% respondents say their CEO is a laggard when it comes to involvement in sustainability and environment. This is a positive shift we’ve seen in the last 5 years based on anecdotal membership feedback.
- On cross referencing these responses with those on GHG emission reductions the data might point to an uplift in impact as a result of CEO closeness (as an example, 80% of responders with emissions reductions above 50% had Proactive support or Leading CEOs), however this needs to be further interrogated with future benchmarking before we can claim a solid trend.

Reporting line for sustainability and environmental functions



CEO (or equivalent) involvement in sustainability and environment



Governance and leadership

Mainstreaming decision-making

15% of respondents suggest sustainability is explicitly integrated into other management decision-making processes.



“SUEZ has embedded a triple bottom line approach across its business. This means there’s dialogue around decision-making for what contributes towards our triple bottom line, as it’s not always going to be 33% equal weighting across [people, planet, profit], the world doesn’t work like that, but it ensures all projects contribute appropriately to our strategic goals.”

Leigh Broadhurst, Environment and Sustainable Development Lead at SUEZ UK



Governance remains specific and standalone

While many leaders appear to be proactively supporting and visible champions of sustainability, the practice is still not mainstream in many organisations – an outcome often discussed as an ambition in the profession.

- Across all organisation sizes, the most common governance of sustainability (40% of respondents) is through an “annual strategy and plan approved by the Board / Committee and delegated day to day decisions at a functional level”. This jumps to 50% and above for the largest organisations. This is often supported by a regular committee/steering committee with cross-organisational representatives who approve quarterly / monthly plans and decisions (30% of respondent report this).
- At this point 15% of respondents suggest their organisation already “explicitly integrates sustainability into other management decision making processes and forums”. When cross referenced with reporting lines, 23% of respondents with a “leading CEO who is a visible champion on sustainability” have this form of integrated governance. While at the other end of the spectrum, 14% say there is no separate governance because an ad hoc approach is in place.

Governance structure of sustainability and environmental function

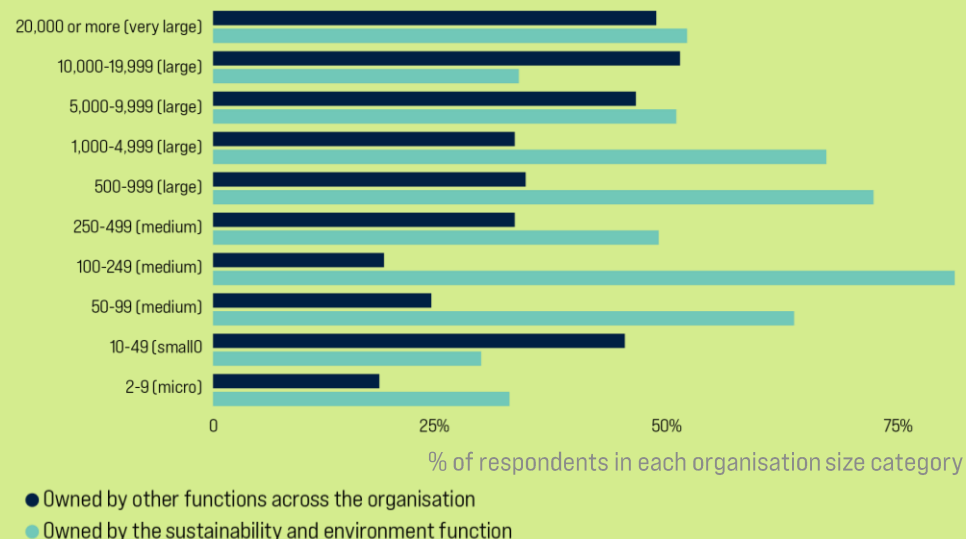


Governance and leadership

Budget governance is varied

Overall, 54% of respondents say the sustainability budget of their organisation is owned by the sustainability and environment function. When analysed by organisation size this varies widely, only 29% in small organisations say they own the budget in the function, in medium organisations the range is from 49 – 81%, and it ranges from 34 – 72% in the large organisation categories.

Ownership of sustainability and environmental budgets

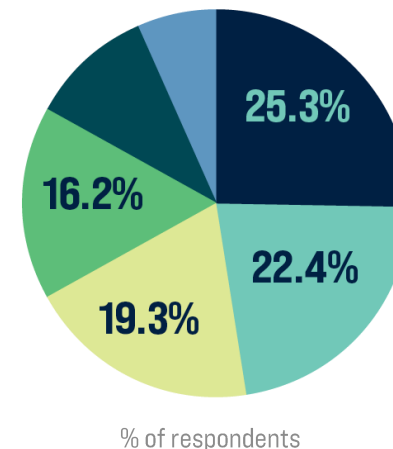


Integration into HR systems and processes remains patchy

Incorporating sustainability and environmental awareness as standard criterion in job descriptions or requiring specific personal objectives in talent review processes, is a strong lever to amplify impact. A variety of organisations have used our [Green Skills](#) report and toolkit to review their organisation and team skills.

- While 25% report integration of sustainability into training and personal development there is also a similar number [22.4%] of respondent who say there is no formalised approach to integrating sustainability and environment into HR systems and processes.
- Only 19% say their organisation integrates sustainability and environment into job descriptions and recruitment and even fewer have direct links to remuneration [6%]. This does differ when considered against organisation size, amongst the largest organisations (5,000+ people) 11 – 12% of respondents say remuneration is directly linked to delivery of sustainability and environment target/s for key roles compared to 2 – 7% across small and medium organisations.

Integration of sustainability into Human Resources



- Training and personal development includes sustainability provision
- No formalised approaches to integrating sustainability into HR
- Job descriptions include relevant sustainability criteria as standard
- Performance management encourages sustainability in individual objectives
- Individuals have annual sustainability target/s
- Remuneration directly linked to sustainability targets in key roles

Operating models

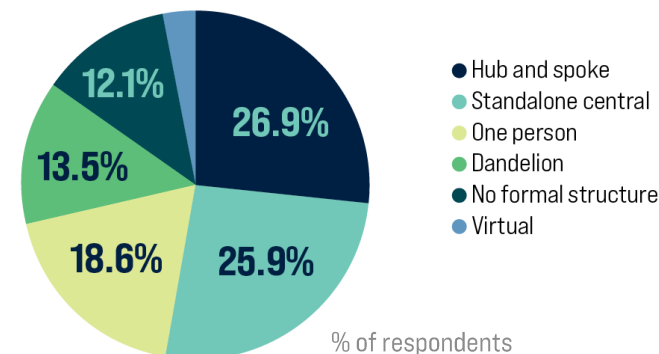
Not all smooth sailing

Over 12% of respondents report that their organisation lacks an operating model. This issue is not confined to smaller organisations but is evenly spread across medium, large, and very large organisations. One responder commented: 'It's a real mess, no-one wants to take responsibility'.

A range of operating models are in use across all sizes of organisation

- An effective route to driving cross organisational responsibility is through either a hub and spoke operational model (a central team with additional individual team members embedded in other functions and dotted line reporting into the central team) or a dandelion operating model (sustainability teams in other functions who report into that specific function, with a small central team for some support or coordination). Looked at together, they represent the highest proportion (40%) of operating models reported by respondents.
- A hub and spoke structure is more common and is reportedly in place in 18% of small organisations and between 12 – 15% of medium sized organisations. The hub and spoke model is most common within the largest organisations (1000+ people) with 33 - 40% of the respondents from this size of organisation indicating this as the structure in their sustainability and environment function.
- Standalone central teams are reportedly the most common structure in organisations with 500 – 999 people (38% in this size category). In medium organisations (50 – 249 people) the most common structure reported is one person only teams (35 – 41% of responses attached to this size category).
- Around 6% of respondents say they have more than one operating model structure. There was no clear pattern but some suggest this was a consequence of mixed structures at Group and individual Country or Business unit levels.

Operating models for sustainability functions



Note: This analysis excludes respondents who say their whole organisation was focused on sustainability.

Operating models

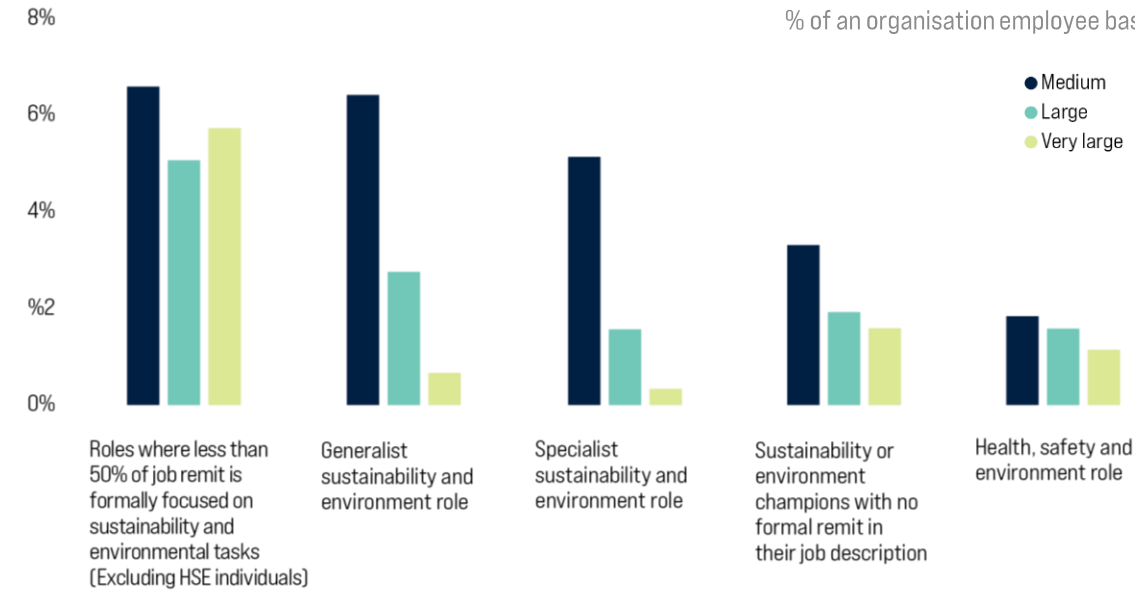
Sustainability remits are found across some organisations entire employee base

There are consistent patterns relating to the size of sustainability and environment teams across a range of organisation sizes. To identify these patterns, we converted the absolute numbers provided for each role type into proportions relative to the overall organisation size, allowing for meaningful comparison.

In medium, large and very large organisations there is typically around 5 - 7% of the organisations' total employee base who have a role with up to 50% of their remit formally focused on sustainability and environment tasks (this excludes HSE individuals who are counted separately).

Based on responses received, for example, in very large organisations (20,000 – 50,000) the average number of people in this type of role is 1,632. In medium organisations (100 – 499) the average number in this role is between 10 and 12.

Proportion of employees holding sustainability and environmental roles



The next largest category of professionals is unsurprisingly, generalist sustainability and environmental roles. In medium organisations this is around 6% of the total employee base but drops to c3% in large organisations and 1% in very large organisations.

This is similar with specialist sustainability and environment roles (5% in medium orgs, 1.5% in large, 0.5% in very large).

In medium, large and very large organisations there is reportedly only between 2 - 3% of employees who are sustainability and environment champions with no formal remit in their job description.

We believe this is indicative of a shift to increase formal role recognition for champions as we have had this anecdotally reported over the last 5 – 10 years.

Throughout the responses provided it is clear there is still a strong contingent of individuals covering sustainability as part of a combined HSE role.

In interviews, and workshops to review early findings, individuals with these mixed roles commented on the pressure this creates. Health and Safety always feels more urgent than social and environmental sustainability and as a result they believe they are not able to provide the focus of investment required to have the impact they desire. In response to the question asking for numbers of individuals in HSE roles the typical proportion of an employee base was 1 - 2%.

Small and micro-organisations who responded have significantly greater proportions of employees with sustainability roles (e.g. 50% generalist sustainability and environment roles, 40% specialists). Respondents generally note this was because their whole organisation is a sustainability business.

Note: we excluded this category from the chart to avoid it impacting the scale.

Outsourcing trends

Establishing retained suppliers is most common

Multiple outsourcing approaches are typically in place in every organisation size. The most common approach is the use of a small number of retained suppliers (37% of responses), closely followed by the use of competitive tenders for specific activities or projects (32%).

The use of competitive tenders is predictably lower in smaller organisations and the majority of respondents from micro-organisations (53%) say they don't outsource.

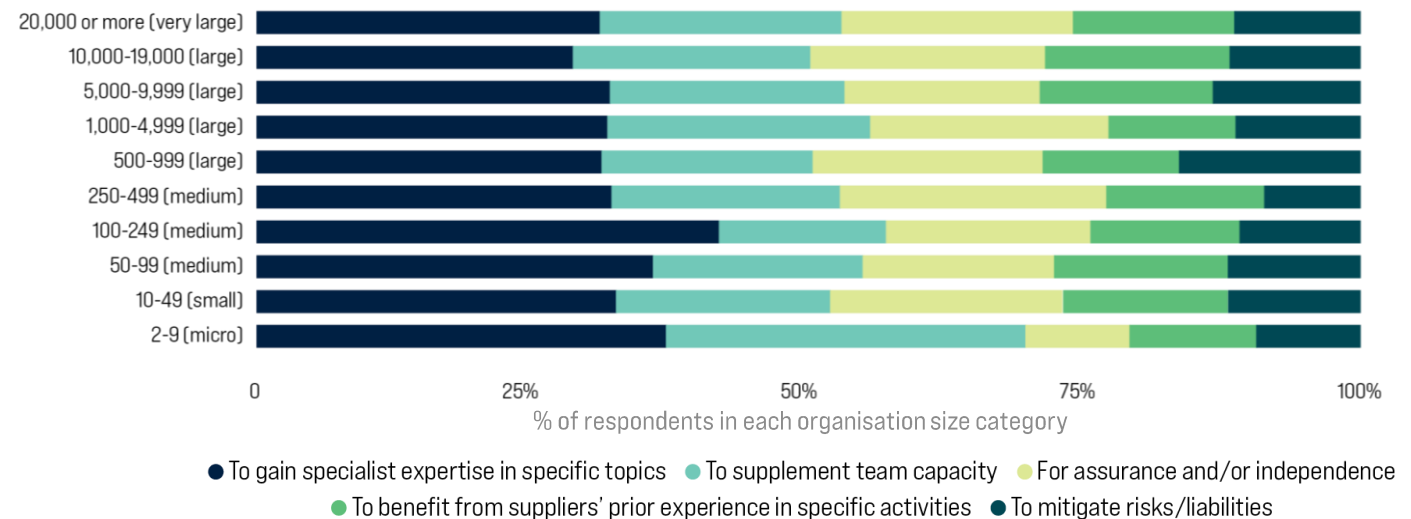
21% of respondents say they don't outsource, some because they are an expert supplier themselves.

Access to specialist expertise is the most common reason to outsource

As highlighted in the Roles and Remits section on the various topics and disciplines within the profession, delivering on sustainability and environment remits requires a broad range of knowledge and skills. As such, outsourcing is often used to access specialist expertise.

- Around 32% of respondents point to the use of outsourcing to gain specialist expertise in specific topics. This is fairly consistent regardless of organisation size, demonstrating that even large organisations and teams continue to need further specialists at specific points.
- Only 22% of respondents indicate the use of outsourcing to supplement team capacity, although this understandably jumps to 33% amongst responses from micro-organisations.
- Outsourcing for assurance and / or independence purposes and to mitigate risks or liability are both notably low (20% and 11% respectively). We can't draw further conclusions on this during this first year of expanded data capture but anticipate examining this further in future.


Typical reasons for outsourcing



Investment and impact

This is our first year collecting data and insights on the investment and impact patterns observed by sustainability and environment professions. The aim is to illustrate the value the profession is bringing to organisations and the wider world.

All analysis is based on impacts and investments provided by respondents and as such the underlying methodologies used might differ. This analysis has taken a pragmatic approach and simply reports on the data as it was given.



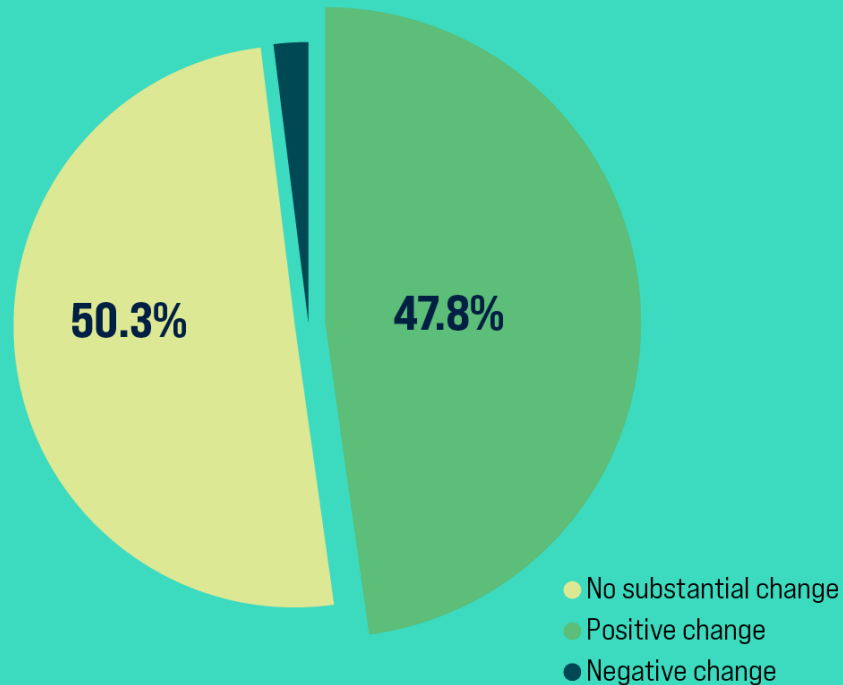
"I think it's so obvious really... if you want your business to be here tomorrow and be better than everyone else at creating additional margin then it's got to be sustainable"

Survey respondent



Investment trends

Budget changes for sustainability and environmental functions in past year
 (% of respondents)



Sustainability budgets remain positive

While current macro-economic and geopolitical influences may be putting pressure on businesses to deprioritise sustainability, this has not (at the time of asking) had an impact on budgets.

- More than 98% of respondents indicate that sustainability and environmental budgets in their organisations are increasing (47.8%) or at least being maintained at previous levels (50.3%), with only 1.9% of respondents saying their budget has negatively changed.
- Higher proportions of the transport and logistics, food production and processing, and the built environment sector respondents report the most positive changes to investment, with 60%, 57% and 55% respectively.



"Sustainability isn't going away. I think it will always be impacted by politics...but as organisations we have to be true to our values and also understand what our marketplace is doing."

Claire Atkins Morris, Sustainability Director Sodexo



- While a notable number of organisations across all sizes (32% of respondents overall) still do not have a dedicated budget for sustainability and the environment, this is improving slightly year on year (from 36%). While some respondents suggest this is because their organisation is entirely sustainability focused, this was a minority.
- Amongst the sectors with sufficient representation in responses to our questions on budget, it appears the Central Government and NGOs, Local Government and Public Service sectors changed the most – across these sectors 19% say they have a budget of £100k - £500k this FY compared to 13% last FY.

Investment trends

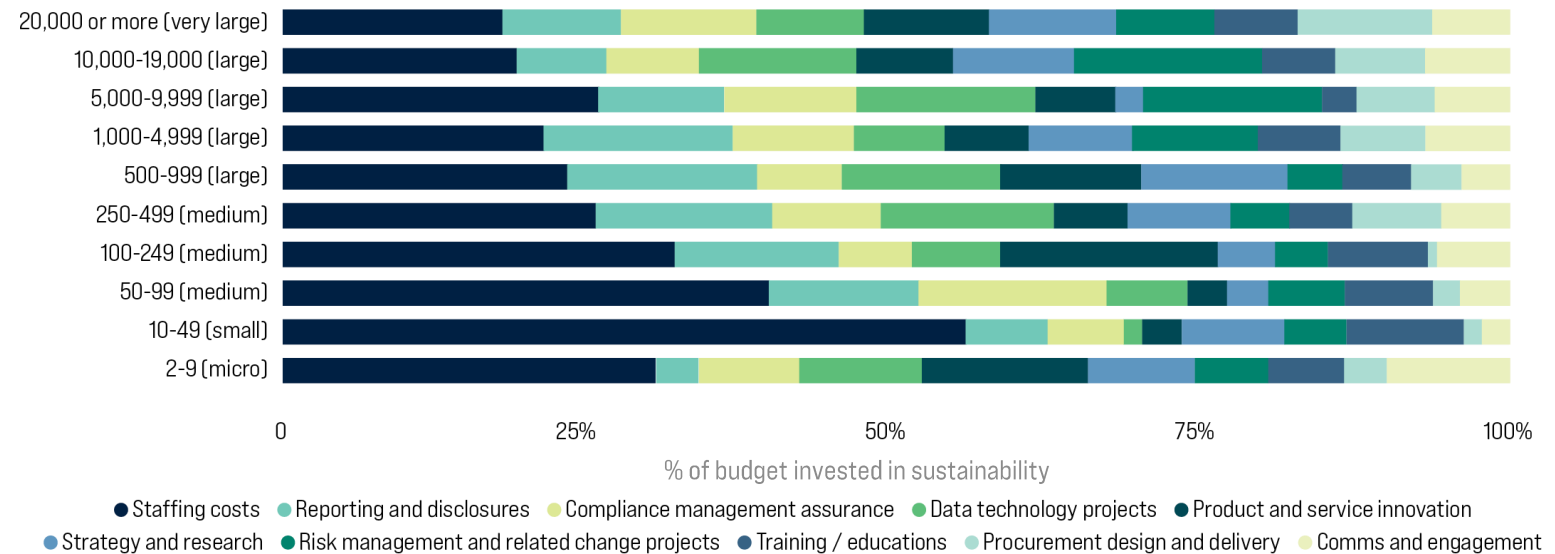
Beyond staffing costs there is an emphasis on budget spend related to value protection

We asked respondents to provide a view of which disciplines within the sustainability and environmental function are the main focus of budgets and investment.

Across all sizes of organisation, respondents make the largest share of budget expenditure on the largest share of budget expenditure (29% overall average). Small and medium organisations are reportedly spending the highest proportions of their budget on staffing (from 26-56 %) followed by large organisations (19 – 32% of budget). Alongside the reported high degree of outsourcing (78% use outsourcing, see page 19) this reinforces the picture of a highly human capital intensive approach to delivery of sustainability and environment at this time.

Sustainability and environment activities are often viewed through the lens of value protection and value creation.

Breakdown of budget/investment spend by sustainability and environmental functions



Value Protection activities within the survey options include Reporting and Disclosures, Compliance Management and Assurance, and Risk Management and related change projects. Value Creation activity options include Product and Service Innovation, and Strategy and Research.

The remaining options could fall into either category depending on the specific detail.

When considered through this lens (and excluding options which could be either) the data suggests that the majority of organisations commit a higher degree of their budget to value protection – 40% protection vs 26% creation as an overall average.

Yet the reflections of leading sustainability voices indicate that this gap is likely to narrow in the coming years.

“[We need to demonstrate how sustainability] is going to be a win for the business functions, how it’s financially valuable, and provide a proper value proposition.”

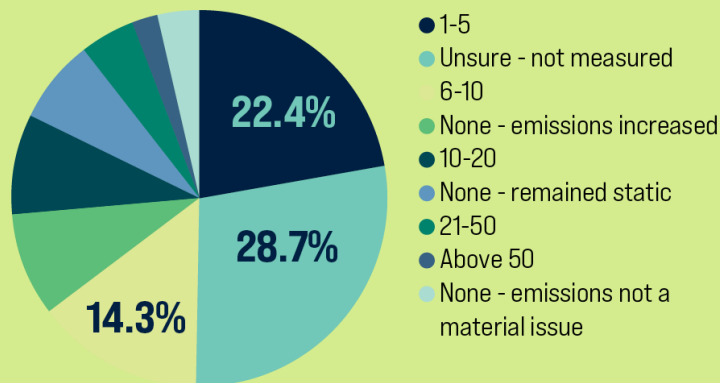
Andy Griffiths FISEP, Global Head of Transformation, Diageo

Impact trends

The link between financial investment and impact

In future reports we hope to further investigate the link between investment and impact by building the dataset between, for example, the greenhouse gas emissions reduction of organisations and their sustainability budgets.

**% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions
(past year)**

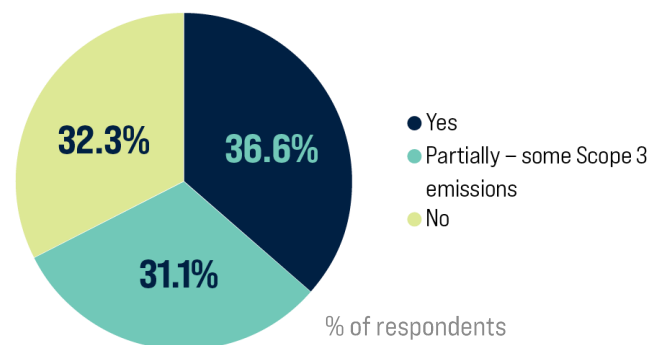


Large organisations are more likely to have reduced emissions and waste to landfill

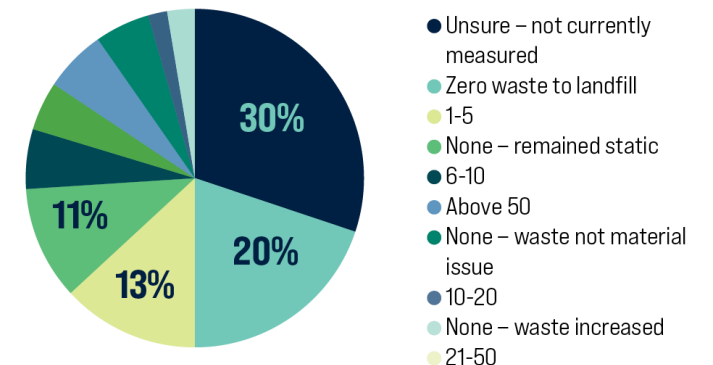
The sustainability and environmental profession's impact has advanced significantly as emissions and waste reporting and action plans have progressed over the years. But there is still more to do.

- More than 28% of respondents say their organisation does not measure greenhouse gas emissions. This is distinct from the 3.5% who say emissions are not material. There is no obvious sector or organisation size correlation among those that are not measuring.
- For those that do measure emissions, close to 68% say in addition to measuring direct carbon emissions (Scope 1 & 2) their organisation also measures indirect Scope 3 emissions (e.g. supply chains).
- Overall, large organisations are reportedly 50% more likely to have reduced emissions than small and medium organisations. Given that they are often likely to be starting from a larger emissions base, there is a double positive in terms of the absolute level of emissions from a larger organisation and their propensity to reduce.
- This pattern continues in waste to landfill reduction data, where 40% of respondents in large organisations report reduced waste to landfill compared to 26% in small and medium organisations.
- If we total up the reported emissions reductions through mapping to sector averages this could mean the respondents have helped save 30.04KtCO₂e. This equates to 496,714 tree seedlings grown for 10 years.

**Measuring Scope 3
greenhouse gas emissions**



**% reduction of waste to landfill
(past year)**



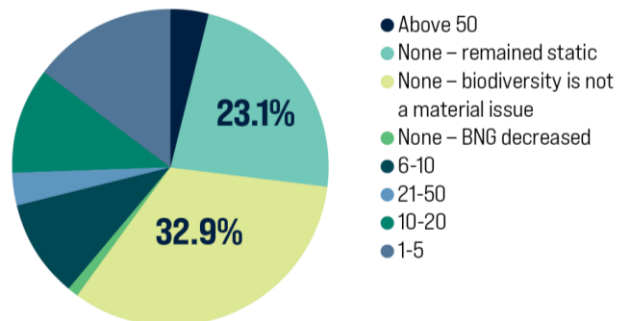
Impact trends

Nature, biodiversity and water are under prioritised

Net zero and climate mitigation has been in the spotlight over recent years, but this represents only part of the profession's remit and potential for impact.

Survey respondents views closely align with insights from interviews, with near-unanimous agreement that nature and biodiversity represent the next area to grasp.

% increase in Biodiversity Net Gain (past year)



The majority of respondents (70%) report that their organization does not currently measure biodiversity net gain or believe it is not a material issue.

Of those that do measure it, 23% say it has remained static and 14% say it increased by 1-5. There is limited sample size to robustly compare between organisation sizes and sectors, but on the surface there appears limited differences.



One survey respondent highlighted an emerging practice:

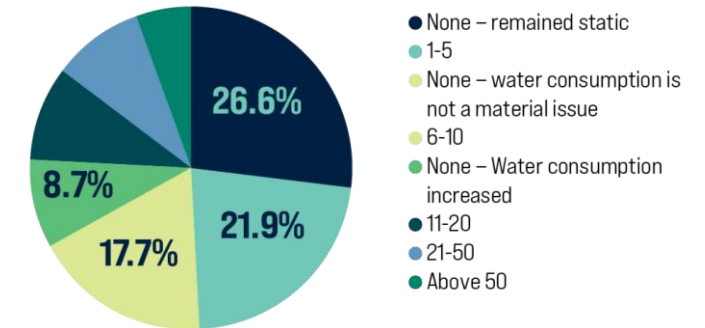
“[We] put a Nature Guardian on our Board in 2022... and are now working to embed nature into our working practices and daily decision-making. This will create additional value for the business and nature simultaneously.”



With recent challenges to water systems in the UK, you would expect water consumption to be a high priority for businesses. However, 41% of respondents it is not currently measured.

Among those who say their organisations do measure water use, clear sectoral patterns emerge that closely reflect materiality.

% reduction in water consumption (past year) (excl. unsure/not measured)



Around 38% of local government bodies report a 1–5% reduction, while 36% of central government entities and 30% of food sector respondents report similar levels. Additionally, 30% of respondents in the food sector report a 10–20% reduction.

Sustainability and environmental professionals seeking to work within these sectors must take these trends into account when developing their skills and knowledge. Doing so may also give them an advantage when transitioning to other sectors or global regions, as these too will likely begin to deal with water scarcity challenges in the near future.

Impact trends

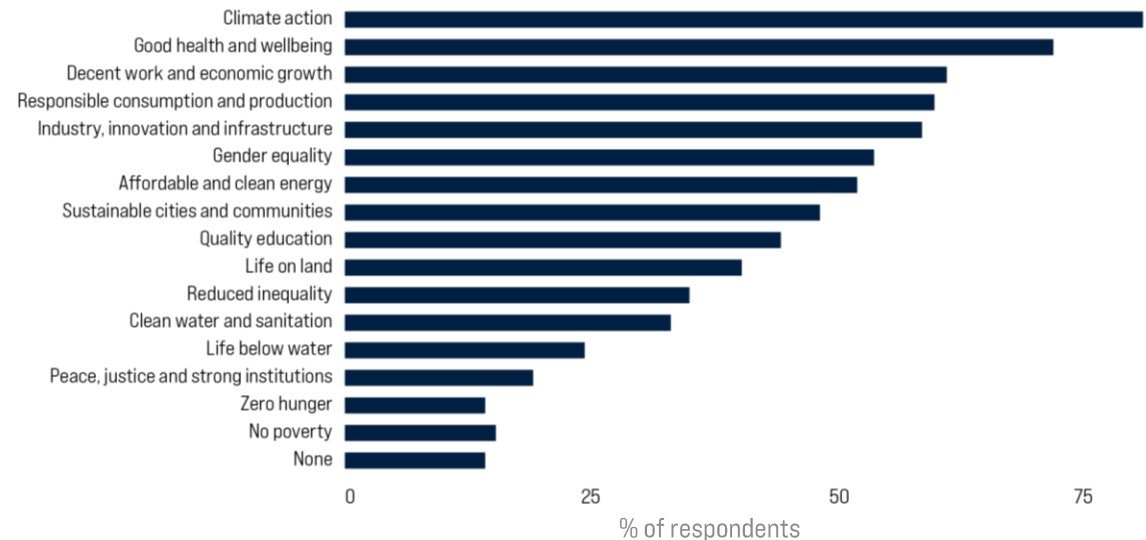
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Using the United Nations 17 SDGs as an organising framework, we asked respondents where their organisation had delivered positive outcomes in the past year.

Progress on social outcomes trails that of environmental outcomes

- Unsurprisingly climate action is the SDG against which most respondents say their organisation has made a positive impact (81%). While Good Health and Well-being (72% report positive impact), Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Responsible Consumption and Production (both around 60%) also feature prominently.
- Despite a few years of challenging social issues with widespread cost of living and equity challenges, areas such as Zero Hunger and No Poverty each has only 14 – 15% of respondents indicating positive outcomes. It may be this impact falls under other SDGs such as Good Health and Well-being or Decent Work and Economic growth which appear higher. Alternatively, this might be reflective of the earlier finding around the lower focus on social topics in sustainability and environment profession roles and remits (see page 9).
- With increasing expectations in procurement related to social value creation this may change in future, particularly in public sector contracts with the UK Governments Social Value Model refresh in March 2025.

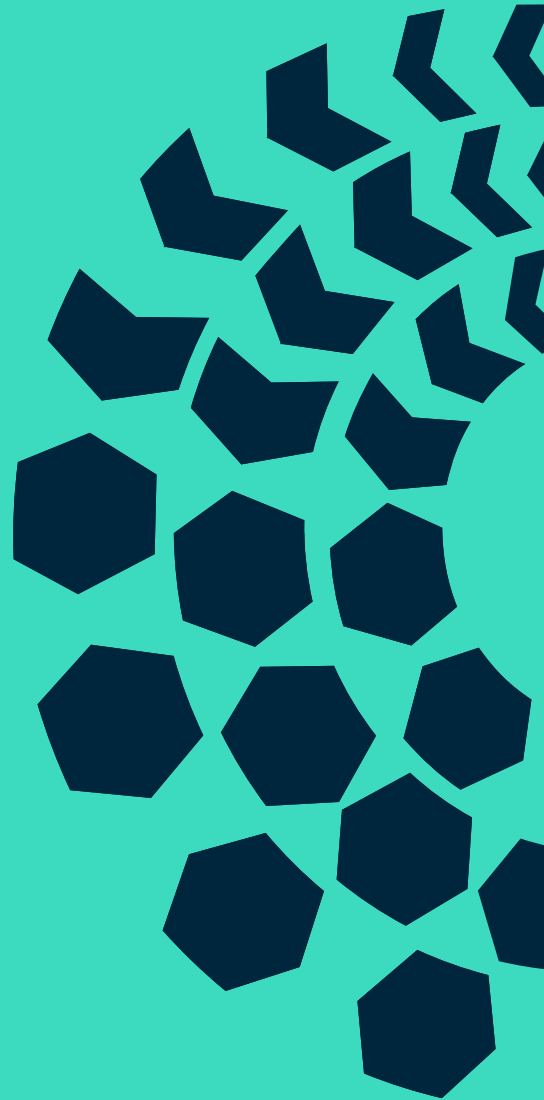
Sustainable Development Goals: Areas where respondents reported their organisation had a positive impact in the past year



The future landscape

In this section, we explore varied visions of the future for the profession, gathered through interviews with leading sustainability and environmental professionals and survey responses.

The views offered range in the horizon they looked to. Some respondents focus on the next 12 to 18 months while other look at 5 – 10 years time.



The future landscape



"I think the future is uncertain especially with the awful state of current politics and the public opinion towards climate change being in a state of flux. However I think the role is likely to stay fairly similar in terms of working towards implementing and tracking sustainability metrics towards companies net-zero goals and I believe the methods sustainability teams will use to engage stakeholders including senior leaders may have to change to show more of the coupled benefits of sustainable action."

Survey respondent



A view of the future

There is no escaping the challenges the profession and many professions are currently experiencing during this time of multiple crises and geopolitical disruptions. Yet many respondents view this as a temporary blip requiring resilience and adaptation of approach, a part of the typical 'down' in a frequent 'up down' cycle often experienced in the sustainability profession.

As we pursue 'sustainable by design' products, strategies and operations, there's a strong trend towards embedding sustainability mindsets and tasks across the organisation. There are differing views on whether dedicated sustainability teams will eventually disappear. Some sources suggest the ultimate success is when sustainability is simply "how businesses run" and "not a separate thing that's done on the side". However, others argue that a dedicated function will always be needed to synthesize information, provide strategic direction, ensure accountability, manage external complexities, and bring a singular voice to the topic.

As we get closer to set goals and targets and the quick wins have all been had, it's clear that the profession will need to innovate to deliver on expectations.

"We will be approaching the midway point in our goal to reach Net Zero in 2040 so I expect there to be a lot of reflection and assessment to find innovative ways to meet our goals once the "easier" actions have been taken"

"Continue to grow, diversify/expand across global regions, digitisation of services/use of AI, greater investment and uptake of major decarbonisation projects as we get nearer to net zero target years."

In this section we outline expectations of how roles and remits will change, the new types of roles emerging, and the key skills professionals are expecting will grow as a requirement.

The future landscape



"The space evolves so quickly ... [it's] continued to grow but also the opportunities to address them continue to grow evolve, I think it's going to be a dynamic space probably beyond the days of my career."


Survey respondent



Roles and remits will continue to evolve

The sustainability and environment profession is widely seen as continuing its evolution, moving from a more niche, compliance-focused area to becoming deeply integrated into the core of business strategy and operations.

- **Broader scope and mandate:** The remit has significantly expanded and this isn't expected to stop, with many suggesting nature as the next topic to grasp. For instance, Diageo's integrated structure includes teams focused on climate risk, carbon management, water, nature, agriculture, circularity, and public affairs.
- **Navigating complexity and uncertainty:** Professionals expect increased need to deal with more complex issues, evolving regulations (like CSRD), and geopolitical uncertainty, requiring adaptability and the ability to focus on what truly matters. Heidi Barnard from NHS Supply Chain highlights the need for "adaptability" and "open to flexibility around things" due to changing regulations. John Scanlon from SUEZ says they navigate an unpredictable world by setting a "true north" and sticking to what's important for the business.
- **Increased external and internal engagement:** Professionals are already spending significantly more time engaging with diverse stakeholders and expect this to grow. One interviewee from the tech sector emphasised the ability to build strong partnerships and relationships both internally and externally.
- **Focus on value creation:** Plus as already highlighted in this report, there is a growing expectation that professionals will need to demonstrate the commercial value of sustainability initiatives.



"Volex has always approached sustainability with a broad and comprehensive scope which includes defining, measuring and managing our social and environmental impacts, managing workforce and supply chain risks, general corporate governance including the duties of directors. We are now explicitly moving towards net zero goals and expanding our ability to create positive local value to the communities within which we operate."

Alan Taylor, Group HR Director, Volex



The future landscape



"Over the next 2-3 years, I expect our sustainability and environment function to: 1. Integrate more closely with business strategy 2. Leverage data-driven decision-making 3. Enhance stakeholder engagement 4. Focus on climate resilience and adaptation We'll prioritize transparency, upskilling, and collaboration to drive systemic change and accelerate progress toward our sustainability goals."

Survey respondent



Generalist and specialist roles will become increasingly distinct

As we continue to know more we realise there is so much more to know. This is expected to drive increased specialisation and the creation of new narrow roles (e.g. recent roles seen include an SBTi Reporting specialist and Global Nature Lead). This does not mean the generalist roles are going away, they continue to evolve to better serve the expected remit of 'internal consultant' and business transformation agents.

Specialist roles will deepen technical expertise in evolving areas: The need for deep technical knowledge in specific areas is already becoming more prominent, such as biodiversity, nature, circularity, resource management, and specific decarbonisation technologies (like carbon capture). CEMEX teams have become "a lot more technical, a lot more specialists" in fields such as nature and climate change adaptation. Meanwhile, Network Rail emphasises the importance of understanding nature-based solutions and the need for ecology support.

Generalist roles are already seeing an increased need for business strategy and "soft" skills: Beyond topic knowledge, there is a significant emphasis on skills like communication, influencing, stakeholder engagement, building relationships, empathy, flexibility, adaptability, and coaching. Generalists must be able to translate complex technical information and communicate its relevance and value to diverse audiences, from the board to factory floors. This involves simplifying information and explaining the "why" behind data requests or initiatives. One responder highlighted the need for "empathy and flexibility" to understand exact needs and act as a trusted advisor.



"I expect a big increase in job opportunities, particularly with high demand for biodiversity roles and climate resilience. My organisation is going through a cultural shift and carbon is becoming a key metric on the agenda and that will continue to develop."

Survey respondent



The future landscape



“The requirements of my team are increasing every year, with more requirements from clients and more obligations to be aware of. We know there is a growing topic of nature that is on the horizon, especially with TNFD, which we see will be a big shift for our team”

**Environmental & Sustainability Manager,
Large Built Environment organisation**



New or in-demand specialist job roles and remits that may deliver job growth

Topic focused specialists

- **Carbon Accountants / Carbon Managers / Carbon Leads:** Roles focused on measuring, managing, and reporting greenhouse gas emissions are common additions.
- **Energy Managers / Energy Engineers / Energy Specialists:** Roles dedicated to improving energy efficiency, transitioning to renewable energy, and managing energy use are being added.
- **Nature Leads / Biodiversity Specialists / Ecologists:** There is an emerging focus on natural capital, biodiversity, and nature-based solutions, with reporting looming on nature-related financial disclosures, leading to specialist roles in these areas.
- **Social Value Executives / Social Impact Roles:** The social dimension of sustainability, including areas like human rights, community engagement, and just transition, is gaining prominence, resulting in roles focused on social impact and value creation.

Discipline focused specialists

- **Sustainability Reporting Specialists / ESG Reporting Specialists:** These roles are frequently mentioned. The rise of regulations is driving a significant increase in the need for detailed reporting and disclosure, requiring dedicated expertise in collecting, managing, and reporting relevant data.
- **Sustainable Procurement Leads / Sustainable Procurement Officers:** As organisations look beyond their direct operations to address Scope 3 emissions and supply chain impacts, roles focused on embedding sustainability criteria into procurement processes are becoming increasingly important.
- **Data Analysts / ESG Data Analysts:** The increasing need to collect, analyse, and derive insights from complex sustainability data is leading to the creation of data-focused roles within or supporting sustainability teams.

The future landscape



The expanding remit of sustainability professionals requires a “heightened awareness around the interconnectivity of issues”, covering topics like social impact, community engagement and climate adaptation alongside traditional environmental concerns.

Dr Shamir Ghumra from NHS Property Services
and ISEP Chair



Certain skills and competencies will become more critical

While the topics and disciplines professionals cover today are expected to remain important, two additional themes emerged as areas for critical professional development:

- **Data literacy and technology proficiency (including AI):** Proficiency in data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting is increasingly important. The rise of digital technologies and AI is expected to play a significant role, particularly in areas like modelling, data analysis, and increasing efficiency. Professionals need to understand how to leverage AI effectively, while also being mindful of its energy use and potential negative impacts.

Navigating data complexity and ensuring data quality for sustainability reporting is a significant challenge. Responders hope that leveraging technology like digitisation and AI will open opportunities to make many processes more efficient. One respondent mentioned their hope that ESG rating submissions could be done more efficiently through AI in future, freeing up time for more impactful conversations. While another noted the complexity involved in calculating scope 3 emissions and the potential of AI to help manage this.

- **Systems thinking and interconnectivity:** A crucial capability required is the ability to see how different environmental, social, and economic issues are interconnected, and how they relate to different parts of a business and its value chain. This includes understanding the link between sustainability and the financial bottom line and understanding the entire enterprise and its external interfaces.

Systems thinking is considered critical, especially in areas like transformation partnerships, to understand the interaction between different systems and how to adapt and evolve them. One responder mentioned having a “broad perspective of what may be in the making” and the “ability to bring analogies between businesses”. Network Rail emphasized understanding the railway system as a whole and joining different parts together, like circular economy and decarbonisation, or biodiversity and climate change adaptation.

The future landscape



"[There is a growing need for] well-rounded sustainability professionals that understand the language of business" and the importance of "building relationships and social capital".

Claire Atkins-Morris
Sustainability Director, Sodexo



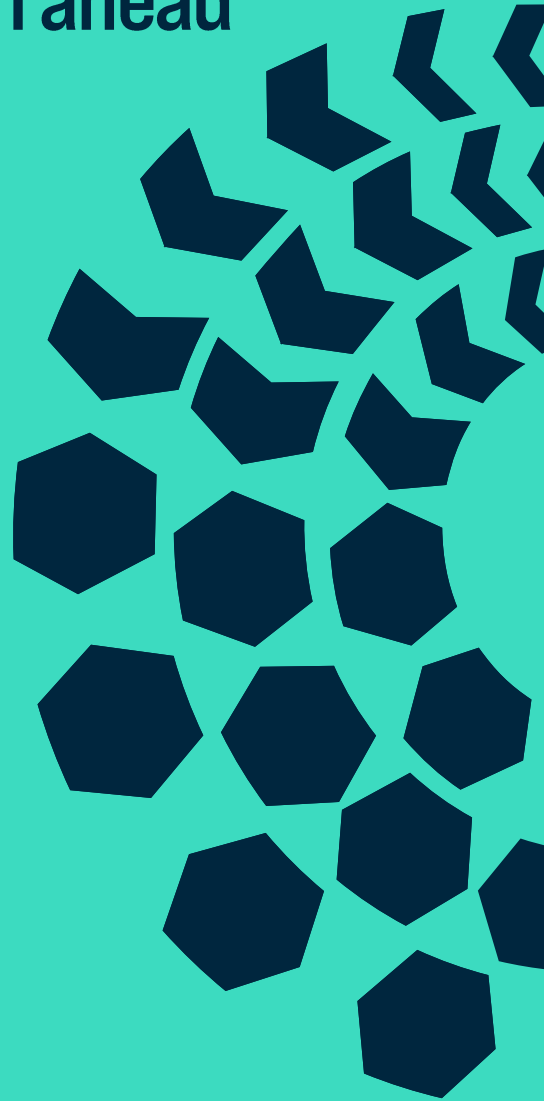
A need to continue developing business skills remains

Beyond technical knowledge, there continues to be a significant emphasis on skills like communication, influencing, stakeholder engagement, building relationships, empathy, flexibility, adaptability, and coaching. Professionals must be able to translate complex technical information and communicate its relevance and value to diverse audiences, from the board to factory floors.

- **Communication, influencing, and stakeholder management:** Sustainability Professionals need to understand the evolving regulatory landscape, engage with policymakers (lobbying), and collaborate with external partners such as customers, suppliers, NGOs, and research institutions. Building alliances and navigating complex influencing strategies, both internally and externally, are important skills. One respondent says their public affairs efforts aim to get regulations in place that provide a business case for investment. Engaging with stakeholders early and often is critical for projects. Another respondent highlights navigating competition law while collaborating to address challenges.
- **Change management and partnership building:** Sustainability professionals often act as catalysts and change agents within their organisations. They need to "facilitate work for others", empower colleagues in different departments to take ownership, and guide the process of integrating sustainability into existing workflows and decision-making. This involves setting clear standards, providing support, and celebrating progress to build momentum. Drawing on frameworks like the "agitator, facilitator, steward, executor" model, as suggested by one interviewee, can be helpful in understanding the different approaches needed at various stages of change.
- **Resilience and adaptability:** The profession operates in a complex and often unpredictable environment influenced by geopolitics, policy changes, and market shifts. Personal resilience, adaptability, and the ability to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty are crucial skills for navigating these challenges and maintaining momentum. It involves staying focused on the core mission despite external noise and setbacks.

Questions for the path ahead

These insights raise some important questions for the immediate future of the sustainability and environmental profession. From the macro-economic and geopolitical influences to global climate impacts and local environmental challenges through to the changing disciplines and skills, we need to stay relevant. Here, we highlight a few of those questions.



Questions for the path ahead

As the mainstreaming of sustainability becomes more widespread, how can we ensure the successful integration of sustainability into organisations' strategies?

Many industry leaders say sustainability is moving from being primarily a compliance-focused function to becoming a core part of the business strategy and operations, where "all functions will integrate sustainability into their work and collaborate to produce more sustainable solutions".

One survey respondent said: "Over the next 2-3 years, our sustainability and environment function will integrate more closely with business strategy, leverage data-driven decision-making... prioritise transparency, upskilling and collaboration to drive systemic change".

For some businesses, this is already becoming a reality, Andy Spencer of CEMEX describes this transformation, stating: "That moment in time was a real transformation for us and we went from... being an important function to one that was almost the centre of virtually everything that we were doing."



"[The sustainability function] has become much more mainstream, it's much more incorporated within what businesses do."

Claire Atkins-Morris
Sustainability Director, Sodexo



"We view sustainability as a "lens" through which we look at our business to find where money is being wasted and where the opportunities are to directly impact on our bottom line."

Alan Taylor, Group HR Director, Volex



Do we need to rebalance the focus between value protection and value creation?

While the need for reporting and disclosure, compliance management and assurance is only likely to grow in the years to come, the recognition that sustainability offers value creation opportunities continues to grow, with a clear focus on products and services that are not only more sustainable, but better than the products and services we already have.

As one survey respondent put it: "[Sustainability] will become more involved in actual product design and site work/installation rather than only admin/reporting."

VOLEX emphasises translating sustainability goals into "tangible business benefits" like customer share, recruitment, retention and savings, viewing sustainability as a "lens to look at business to find where money is wasted and where opportunities are."

Questions for the path ahead

How can we integrate nature as strongly as carbon into sustainability and environmental strategies?

Organisations that already have specialist roles, such as nature leads or biodiversity specialists, will have a clear advantage in successfully navigating new concepts such as natural capital and the practical application of interventions like biodiversity net gain and nature-based solutions.

SUEZ sees the need to get into “more of the underlying stuff beyond carbon, including nature and biodiversity”. **Diageo** has specialised teams focusing on water, nature and agriculture. **CEMEX** teams have become “a lot more technical, a lot more specialists” in fields such as “nature and climate change adaptation”.

As one respondent from a large built environment organisation said: “The requirements from clients and obligations for my team are increasing every year. We know there is a growing topic of nature that is on the horizon, especially with the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), which we see will be a big shift for our team”.



“There's been an understanding that nature is a really big factor but people don't know how to bring that into climate”

Interviewee



“[The sustainability function] will become more involved in actual product design and site work/installation rather than only admin/reporting.”

Survey respondent



Which new or in-demand job roles will provide job growth in the sector over the next few years?

With heightened reporting expectations, roles with the specific technical knowledge and skills required to deliver adequate reporting which informs decision-making, rather than just serving disclosure requirements, are becoming increasingly in-demand. The most in-demand roles appear to be carbon accountants, carbon managers, reporting and data specialists for areas such as ESG and sustainability, and sustainable procurement officers.

As one respondent said: “I expect a big increase in job opportunities. My organisation is going through a cultural shift. Carbon is becoming a key metric on the agenda and that will continue to develop.”

Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Laila Takeh in collaboration with ISEP. Laila and the ISEP team would like to thank all the individuals who contributed throughout the process. Here are just a few of them:

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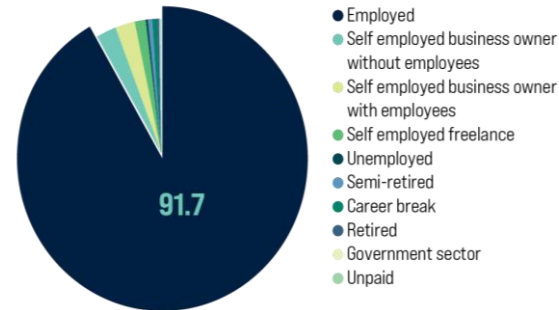


Methodology 1 of 2

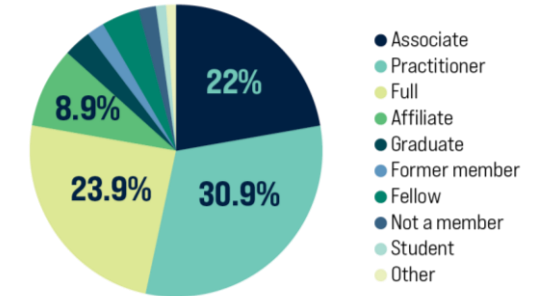
This report was informed by a survey circulated to ISEP (previously known as IEMA) members and other relevant communities and networks between February and March 2025. Alongside this, 16 interviews and a workshop were held with representatives of the profession and key stakeholders.

- Close to 900 individual responses were received, these charts indicate the profile of responders.
- AI was used to capture and analyse interviews conducted.
- Data visualisation dashboards were used to review and analyse survey data.
- The survey was designed on the basis of past State of the Profession surveys to benefit from previous baselines. Additional questions were added to add to this baseline for future reports and analysis.
- Apart from a small number of outliers, all data input by respondents has been taken as read. As such, we recommend the reader conducts further validation of specific points if necessary for the specific purpose you are using this report.

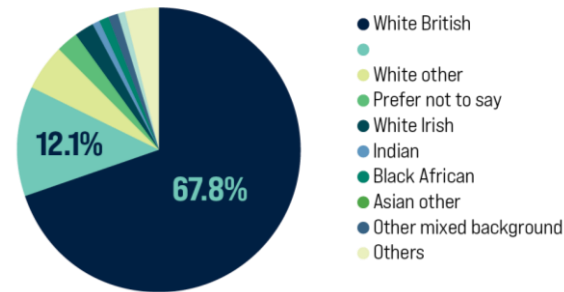
Working status of respondents



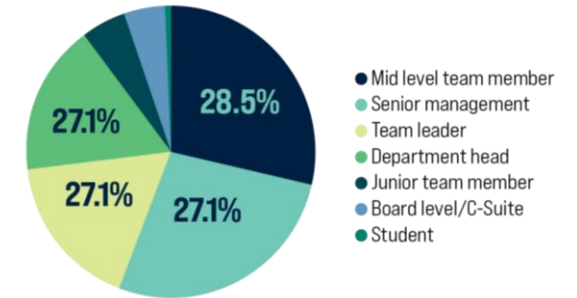
ISEP membership grades of respondents



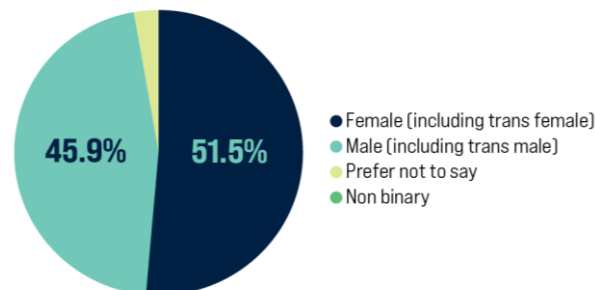
Racial or ethnic identity of respondents



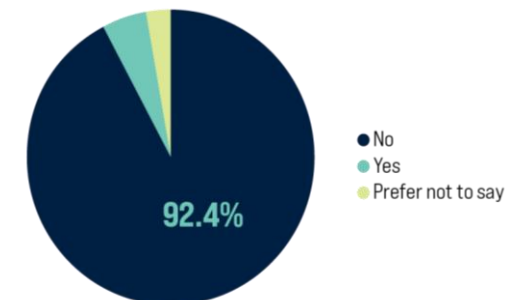
Employment level of respondents



Gender of respondents



Respondents living with a disability

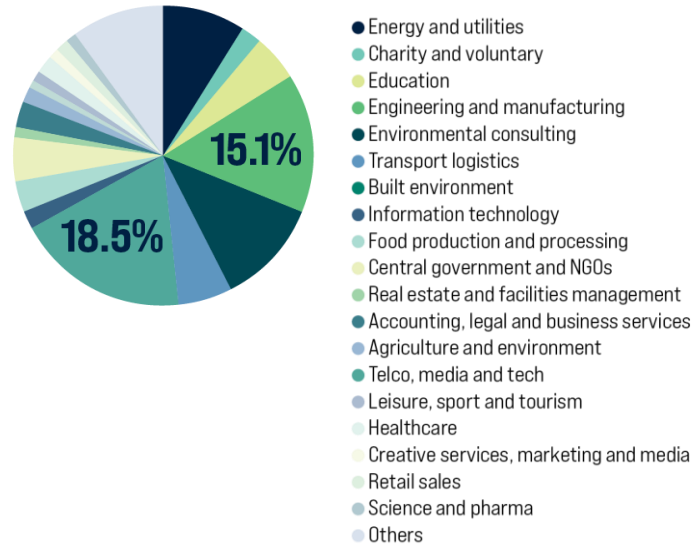


Methodology 2 of 2

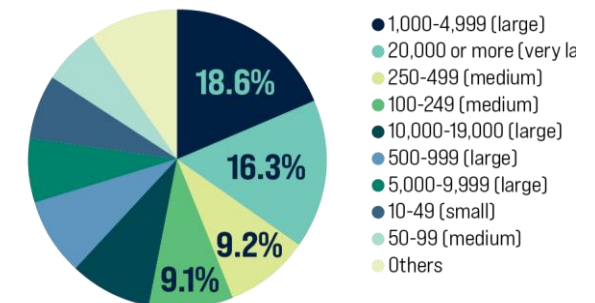
The survey received a wide range of respondents from different sectors and organisation sizes.

Not all sectors and organisation sizes achieved a representative number of respondents. Only those sectors with greater representation were considered in greater detail.

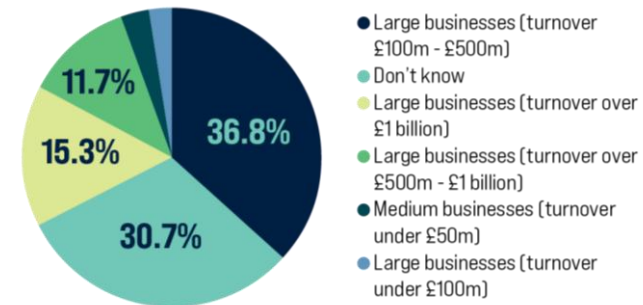
Sectors of respondents – full data



Size of respondents organisations



Revenue of organisations



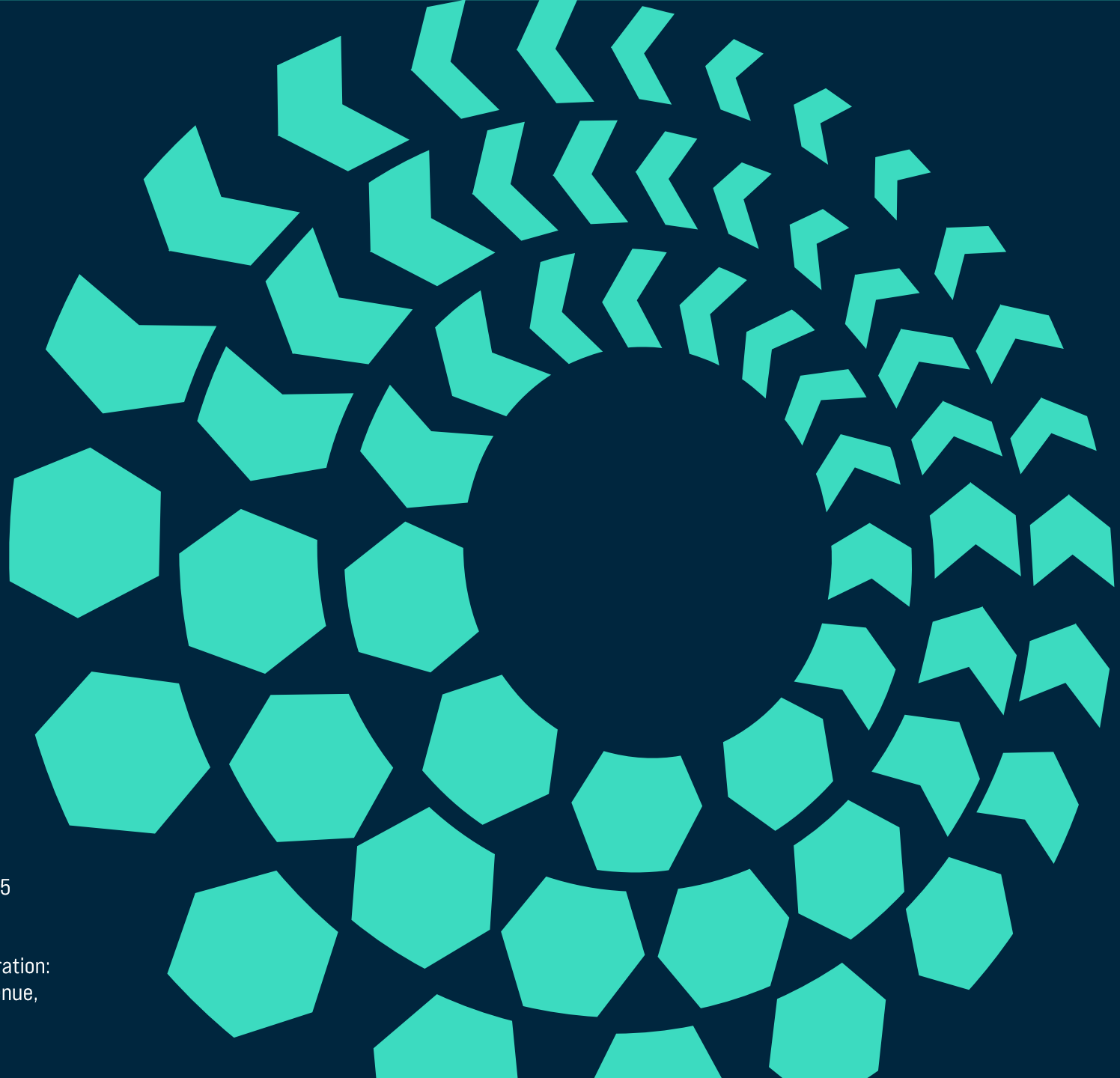


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