

Business Recruitment

Green champions' positive impact

Switching from a traditional job role to a more sustainable one is not difficult, writes **Jane Hamilton**

Many corporations have weathered “greenwashing” claims, where companies are called to account for exaggerating their eco-credentials. Now they are braced for the “greenlash”, a backlash caused by concerns about the economic costs of imposing net zero.

However, despite this febrile global geopolitical atmosphere, most organisations are increasingly folding sustainability roles into their mainstream corporate structures.

The recognition that sustainability is a business prerequisite for Gen Z and Gen Alpha — and the realisation that if a company is not sustainable then its business model is, by default, unsustainable — is driving the rapid creation of new job roles such as B-Corp reporter, circular economy consultant and sustainable materials officer.

It's annual Earth Day on April 22, with the focus on clean energy, but the UK is also emerging as a global leader in evolving traditional business functions into eco-roles, from sustainable supermarket packaging specialists to eco-friendly engineers.

The latest Office for National Statistics figures show there were 639,400 people in “green jobs” in 2022, 8.4 per cent higher than 2021. With more than 200,000 UK companies upholding environmental, social and governance values, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) estimates there are almost a million people employed in wider sustainability roles nationally.

“Sustainability roles aren't limited to traditionally green fields. While specialised positions in fields such as renewable energy and material science are vital, the transition requires diverse talent across all functions — from marketing to policy development, finance and operations,” Alexandra French, chief executive of the plant-based plastic alternative spinout Xampla, said.

“We have team members such as our principal scientist who incorporate sustainability strategy into their existing responsibilities, as well as a specialist responsible for our B-Corp reporting alongside their primary role, responsibilities that didn't exist two decades ago.”

The growth in these “sustainability-plus” roles is being fuelled by regulatory changes and consumer demand and by increased investment activity, with the CBI suggesting that between 2023 and last year the net-zero economy grew by 10.1 per cent, contributing £83.1 billion in gross value added. Pay rates for sustainable specialist roles are about 18 per cent higher than comparable jobs, making them an attractive option.

Juliette Devillard, an eco-expert from Climate Connection, believes that



‘Focus on work that contains meaning’

Case study

Alexandra French, the chief executive of Xampla, helped develop material to eliminate polluting plastics, including the Morro coating used by Just Eat, the takeaway platform. The 48-year-old from Cambridge began her career at the chemicals

group Johnson Matthey, as a development chemist designing new formulations for automotive emission control catalysts. “The sustainability sector is brimming with innovative technologies addressing our planet's most pressing challenges. Ask yourself what genuinely motivates you,

what problems you feel passionate about solving, and seek opportunities. “The most successful transitions happen when your personal motivation sits well with the mission of the organisation you work for. Throughout my career I've followed my passions and focused on work that feels meaningful.”

Making a sustainable change may be easier than you think

Here is expert advice from Xampla's Alexandra French and Pranuthi Chander, chief operating officer at Subak.

Develop dual expertise Combine knowledge in a field with sustainability principles. The most sought-after candidates bring practical skills alongside understanding of environmental challenges.

Think commercially Sustainability can come about only if the sums

add up. Understanding business models is crucial for solutions that are both environmentally beneficial and economically sound.

Seek experience Internships and project work with companies developing tangible solutions provide practical knowledge that theoretical study just never could.

Cultivate resilience Breakthrough innovations often face

setbacks. Persistence, adaptability and maintaining perspective on long-term goals are essential.

Focus on impact Those who can show concrete environmental improvements stand out. **Showcase your values** People who choose to work in sustainability generally do so because they have a personal connection. Don't be afraid to show why this means so much to you.

green skills should be taught as “a baseline part of regular jobs”. She said: “Engineering courses need to discuss greener ways of building and finance courses must acknowledge the impact of investments.”

With 60 per cent of professionals prioritising an employer's environmental purpose, ensuring each job role has a positive sustainability impact is a unique selling point for employers keen to attract and retain staff.

Maisie Kemp, change-making programmes associate at the climate action think tank Subak, said switching from a traditional job role to a sustainable one involved focusing on long-term aims and outcomes. “Whatever your profession, you can make a positive impact on the planet,” she said.

Six from the best

As Emea head of Canva, **Duncan Clark** has helped scale the business from a local Australian start-up to a global platform used to create almost 40 million designs each day. Doubling his own team in the past year, here he shares his advice on how to maintain a successful culture.



- 1 Crack the culture code.** Don't assume — learn what drives different teams in different countries. Cultural understanding is key to building trust.
- 2 Treat mistakes as fuel, not flaws.** Test. Tweak. Try again. In global teams and new markets, speed of learning beats fear of failure.
- 3 Mix wisdom with fresh thinking.** Every generation and culture brings something new to the table.
- 4 Lead with adaptability.** Your team takes cues from you. If you embrace change with agility, they will do the same. But if you resist, they will find reasons to hesitate.
- 5 Coach, don't manage.** Empower global teams with guidance, trust and growth opportunities. Great global teams need autonomy, not control. Managing might get results today; coaching builds leaders for tomorrow.
- 6 Mission or nothing.** Strategy can shift and markets change — but your mission will remain the anchor. Make sure every goal points back to it. When global teams row in unison, every effort drives meaningful progress.

Appointment of the week

Stoll Foundation veterans' service seeks chair

The Stoll Foundation is seeking to recruit a new chair. Founded more than 100 years ago, the foundation provides supported housing and support services for veterans across schemes in London and Aldershot.

The foundation is poised to expand its mission and is looking for a chair who will bring a fundamental empathy with the needs of military veterans and the challenges they face, particularly with regards to housing and reintegration into civilian life.

Applications are welcomed from any sector, but candidates must have strategic leadership experience and the ability to support the foundation's executive colleagues to maximise its impact over the next strategic period.

Some trustee or non-executive experience is essential and the successful candidate will have experience of overseeing diverse teams, functions and asset portfolios, and modernising systems and operations. Applicants should also be able to demonstrate how they would maximise the foundation's assets and influence, to support the development of a bold new vision.

Apply by May 6 at appointments.thetimes.com

Working week

Feathering the nest

Companies are embracing “workplace peacocking” to lure staff back to the office. Area, a fit-out specialist, said the new trend refers to visually impressive, experience-led offices, with examples including “immersive happiness rooms”, and concierge services for booking holidays. Gary Chandler, Area's boss, said: “Office design is increasingly borrowing from the hospitality sector, who generally do ‘experience’ very well.”

Job-hopping hurts career

Changing your job frequently could damage your long-term career prospects with 42 per cent of employers hesitant to hire a “job-hopping” candidate. The report from the recruiter Hays shows private sector employers are more deterred by frequent job changes than hiring managers in the public sector. Hays' Emma Kwiatkowski said: “Many employers value loyalty and stability and frown upon job-hopping.”

Bosses back staff rights

More than 3,000 employers have signed up to back the Better Business Act coalition, which hopes to place the rights of employees and local communities on a par with shareholders. The campaign is calling for an amendment to Section 172 of the Companies Act. Key firms putting their name to the proposal include Iceland, Bidfood, Tony's Chocolonely, the Institute of Directors, Danone, Virgin Group and Elemis.

AI is just the job for CV

Just two years after the breakthrough launch of ChatGPT, 59 per cent of jobseekers have integrated AI into their job search. Adzuna said one in five relies on AI tools for every job application, while 31 per cent reported saving more than 30 minutes per application. The most sought-after features include CV and cover-letter writing, valued by 46 per cent and 44 per cent respectively, who utilise AI-powered interview preparation.