

YOUTHFUL INSIGHTS: A COLLABORATIVE NEWSLETTER

SUSTAINABILITY & THE WORLD OF WORK

Hopscotch Consulting and Youth Leads UK have joined forces to share the views and insights of young people we work with.

In this issue, we look at the relationship between work and eco-awareness, empowering you to make an impact!



INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly important element particularly in the world of work, with a growing national focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the need for businesses to adapt to meet the net zero economic target.

We recently sat down with the Youth Leads UK and Hopscotch Youth Insight Panels, a curated selection of diverse young people with a wide range of ages and backgrounds from across the UK, to gather their insight, understanding and opinion on what sustainability means to them and how it affects their attitudes and choices when it comes to careers.

In this report, open discussions were used to record and then summarise their responses to the following questions:

1. How important is sustainability to you?
2. How successfully do you feel the UK is tackling sustainability/climate change?
3. To what extent does sustainability inform your decisions about your future?
4. Do you understand what is meant by 'green jobs' or 'green skills'?
5. How important is it to you that the organisation you work for prioritises social impact and sustainability?

FOLLOW UPS

- Does sustainability affect your attitudes and choices when it comes to your career?
- Does climate change affect your attitudes and choices when it comes to your career?



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Q1: How important is sustainability to you?

Interestingly, our findings showed that the importance of sustainability varied among young people. There was a consistent recognition and awareness of its general significance. However, answers differed in terms of how each personally prioritised sustainability.

Some individuals saw sustainability as important, tied to self-awareness and considering others, favouring jobs aligned with good morals and positive communication. Others prioritised it lower, focusing instead on company values, wages, treatment of staff and other factors related to employment in particular, saying, "For us, there are other influential factors at play".

"Sustainability is important to me because it can help to reduce my individual impact on the environment and climate change. In general living sustainably encourages me to make healthier choices. In particular, shopping sustainably also gives you a chance to discover new things and support local communities."

"It is quite important because as much as I am in need of materials and resources, the future generations to come will also be in need just as much. We are already starting to struggle and it will become worse for the future. To unnecessarily use limited things we don't need right now would just be selfish."


"I think that sustainability is important to everyone, climate change impacts us all, we should all be aiming to maintain the planet we live on to the best of our abilities so it's definitely something I consider important."

"Honestly, in a general sense sustainability is important but on a personal level I don't feel it is a priority in my life. Sometimes I feel like sustainability is something I offload to others more apt."

On a wider environmental level, many were aware of its significance to others and strived to make changes to how they lived their life. However, some young people also admitted placing limited focus on how it impacted their choices, recognising the need for it but not adapting their day-to-day routine.

Q2: How successfully do you feel the UK is tackling sustainability/climate change?

In a similar vein, young peoples' responses to the UK's efforts in tackling sustainability and climate change indicated a mixed perception. While some acknowledge a few positive steps, such as transitioning power stations to renewable sources like tidal and hydroelectric energy and introducing payments for plastic bags, there was a prevalent sentiment that these changes need to be more extensive. Some implied that the government was taking two steps back for every step forward achieved and that further awareness and regulation were required.



"Certain things are being done, for example having to pay for plastic bags and the increasing use of electric cars, however I believe more could be done for example more awareness and more strictness with rules."

"They have changed power stations, before they only ran on non-renewable - they're getting tidal, and hydroelectric - but not enough change, because of the costs."

Whilst it was recognised that there was some individual environmental responsibility required, many indicated a need for meaningful change from government and big businesses which had yet to materialise, with some citing empty promises and a lack of urgency on the part of the government.

"Although I believe the UK is doing some things to help with climate change, the reactions to Just Stop Oil partially reveal the Government and UK's lacklustre response. We seem to be more vexed at protestors holding up traffic than the destruction of the planet if we don't commit to more sustainable methods."

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Young people expressed a desire for more impactful measures, potentially aligned with the Green Party's approach, as there was a general consensus (and wide frustration) that recent governments have significantly prioritised profit and economic growth over sustainable development goals, especially in the wake of the pandemic.

"I've seen limited progress in terms of sustainability and many empty promises, I do not believe our current government considers it a priority and their main goal is to profit even if it is costing the deterioration of the planet."

"The economy seems to be more of a priority for this current government which means sustainability may not always come to mind when dealing with ventures where money is the primary focus i.e. house building and fossil fuels/fracking."

"Currently, there is higher focus on improving the economy than preserving the environment or tackling climate change. There is no balance between the two goals especially after the pandemic which caused an even more of a bigger focus on profit and economic growth."

"The lack of enthusiasm for reaching the sustainable development goals and instead focusing on economic growth, completely disregarding the consequences of climate change, seem unreasonable and irrational."

To contribute to a positive change, respondents suggested actions like adopting electric cars and recycling, with a focus on reducing petrol car usage and eliminating plastic disposables. **Overall, there was a consensus that more forceful and direct approaches were needed to address sustainability effectively, although some young people did also admit to not having a strong opinion on the UK's success to date.**

"I am not well versed in how the UK is tackling climate change and promoting sustainability and so my knowledge stems largely from the news, social media, and people around me. From what I have gathered, governing bodies have been setting ambitious targets in recent decades yet there appears to be an inconsistency between policy goals and actual implementation."

"Personally, I find it difficult to evaluate the progress and success of various policies and campaigns."

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Q3: To what extent does sustainability inform your decisions about your future?

The responses about how sustainability informs young people's decisions about their future revealed a similarly diverse set of opinions.

Some felt passionately that sustainability had a strong impact on their career choices.



"I feel as though sustainability plays a key role in my future decisions, especially with me being vegetarian and relying heavily on public transport, whilst also intending to aid sustainability by hoping to use ESG and Green Finance in the future. However, I also understand that a singular individual cannot be held accountable for the impacts of climate change and a collective approach is required which needs to be taken by local authorities and enforced by legislation."

But the majority seemed to feel that, whilst it was an important issue, it wasn't the only or most important factor they'd take into account when making decisions about their career. Factors such as salary, job description, work ethics, and company reputation came up as other influences on career choices.

"To be completely honest it isn't the first thing that I take into account, however if there is a better option or method that is more sustainable and also leads to my wanted goal then I would take that into account."

"Sustainability not the key factor but nice to see."

"In regards to my personal life choices, climate change and sustainability wouldn't stop me from making a life decision I want to, however I would consider the most sustainable way to do what I want in my life."

"Look at the salary at first and then the job description."

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Some young people expressed a willingness to avoid companies with poor sustainability records while acknowledging that not everyone can afford sustainable choices, particularly in terms of travel options. The availability of sustainable jobs is noted as a limitation.

"Wouldn't work with a company that has a bad reputation with sustainability."

"Climate change won't specifically affect the kind of career I choose however it will impact the type of company I would work for. I would prefer to work for a company that prioritises sustainability and is open to change."

In terms of broader life choices, opinions were divided. Some believed that sustainability changes positively impact life choices, highlighting factors like work culture and job goals. However, there were differing views on how climate change influences decisions such as home ownership and family planning.

A few felt it would influence big choice such as where they'd choose to settle down. While others felt their feelings about climate change affected smaller decisions, such as what they buy and how they get around.

"I think it mainly informs smaller actions, such as how I travel to places, what I consume and buy etc. But hopefully I guess, the idea is that these little things add up and so in their own way, hold some significance."

"It has made me consider wanting to move to a greener area when I settle down eventually. I would not want to raise my children in a polluted, fast paced city environment."

"I think it impacts my transport mainly, if i were to own a car how would i reduce my carbon footprint? would it be electrical? and would i opt for trains for longer journeys etc."

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Still more felt the inevitability of climate change makes it less influential on life choices, and others stating it simply wasn't something they felt strongly about.

"Climate is getting worse and is inevitable so doesn't affect life choices."

"I feel I almost have a selfish view of sustainability. I care about the environment and in the world becoming more sustainable but I'm just not passionate about it on a more personal matter. For example, I'm vegetarian and would love to go vegan/plant based in the future but that is more for ethical reasons than for the planet. In all I don't think sustainability would inform much about my future decisions."


Overall, sustainability is seen as important but not always the primary determinant in career and life decisions, with other factors and limitations also at play.



Q4: Do you understand what is meant by 'green jobs' or 'green skills'?

The responses concerning the understanding of "green jobs" and "green skills" revealed a range of familiarity and perceptions. Generally, there was limited awareness of these terms among young people and while some individuals had heard of the terms, their understanding varied. Comparatively, respondents felt more confident identifying a definition of green jobs (whether fully accurate or not) than greens skills.

Young people tended to view green jobs as directly related to environmental concerns. Whilst some did perceive green skills to be more universally applicable skills that contribute to environmental benefits (with some citing a link to general sustainability), many were unclear as to what was meant by the term and tended to associate this with specific actions like recycling or reducing energy output. For some, this was their first encounter with these terms.



"I know a little about green jobs. I suppose they are jobs that are beneficial to the environment. Like a windmill worker using green energy. I'm not sure what green skills are, I'm guessing skills to do with being sustainable."

"I believe green jobs are something to do with farming."

"It, from my limited understanding, mainly refers to skills involved in roles within the renewable sector (i.e. those that work in energy or install solar panels etc)."


"This is the first time hearing about green skills and green jobs."

"They are jobs and skills that would have an element of helping to restore or maintain environmental conditions such as climate change."

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Interestingly, a job description that highlighted an environmentally-conscious practice, such as planting trees for employees, captured attention.

While some respondents considered every job to have some degree of ecological impact...



...“Any job that has the aim to substantially restore or improve the environment.”

...there was a sense that green jobs are not as visible or well-defined for young people. The word "green" was often associated with the environment or farming.



“The word 'green' - makes me think of grass and the environment.”

Young people expressed an interest in searching for green jobs or skills online if needed, suggesting a willingness to learn but a lack of clarity.

Overall, there was a consensus that the terms could benefit from clearer definitions and communication to enhance understanding, with a call for greater emphasis on what the term "green" actually entails in the context of jobs and skills.



Q5: How important is it to you that the organisation you work for prioritises social impact and sustainability?

Responses indicate a varied perspective on the significance of organisations prioritising social impact and sustainability. Some young people felt that these were important factors for them, and that they would prefer to find an organisation that aligned with their personal values, though many also said they would take other considerations, such as salary, diversity and company culture into account too. Some agree it's important, but would only consider it a factor if they could afford to.

"Many organisations now are prioritising social impact and climate change. So if an organisation did not align with my personal values or beliefs I can find other organisations to work for. However, if an organisation is not actively harming the environment or having a bad impact on society and is open to improving their practices I would consider working for them."

"The ideal workspace: a clean healthy environment, physically & mentally, nice colleges, good social awareness, people who are aware of the problems in the world - it's not just about you."

"It's a nice bonus - I wouldn't have thought about it before looking for job."

"If I was more stable and could afford to make the choice - not a priority right now."

Several indicated that, whilst it wasn't necessary for the organisation to actively prioritise sustainability, that negative company reputations in regards to climate practices could discourage application or employment.

"if I already knew [a company] had a bad reputation I wouldn't apply."

"I would consciously prefer to avoid working for an organisation that goes against my values of sustainability... additionally, if the organisation has means to offset its carbon emissions through green initiatives without causing lasting damage on the environment, I'd be happy to work with such an organisation."

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The topic of green washing came up several times, with participants concerned that claims of sustainable practices were merely 'publicity stunts' to make their brand more appealing today's eco-conscious consumer.

"In a way, I think it is virtually impossible today to have a completely ethical and sustainable business. There is a lot of greenwashing going on, with companies presenting themselves as working towards a rose tinted vision in favour of the people and environment. I am wary of this."

"I would prefer a company to be sustainable but I'm sceptical towards most companies sustainable practices. It feels like they are just green washing because they know young people are into environmental activism. Especially since many organisations uses unethical means- like child labour and sweatshops- to make their core products. What use is it if a brand claims their shoes are made from sustainable materials when they've had a dubious history of using sweat shops and child labour?"

Overall, social impact and sustainability matter, but their weight varies among the young people we surveyed.



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Q: Does sustainability affect your attitudes and choices when it comes to your career?

Two responses offer contrasting views on how sustainability affects career attitudes. One participant believes it isn't a primary consideration, focusing more on factors like company values, wages, treatment of staff, benefits, and mental health support. Conversely, another respondent values sustainability as part of good morals and positive interactions, influencing their career choices.

DIRECT RESPONSES

"Probably not - what do u look for then? Company values, wage, goals, how they treat staff, safe space, benefits, mental health day."

"Yes. Got to think about yourself and how they affect others. rather go for a job that goes for good morals, good communication, and how they speak to others."

Q: Does climate change affect your attitudes and choices when it comes to your career?

The responses reveal slightly aligned views on whether climate change impacts career attitudes. One participant initially considered it but now believes individual actions won't change the outcome. Others feel climate change and career choices are separate, with its inevitability minimising its influence on their decisions.

DIRECT RESPONSES

"At one point, yes it would have affected the decision. But the more I read, climate change is going to happen, we can only slow it. It's not one person's actions that are going to change anything."

"I don't think it matters, work is different from climate change. Other than transportation. Even though climate change is inevitable, it shouldn't really matter."

"If climate change is going to happen anyway, it doesn't really matter how sustainable a company is. Climate change is always going to happen."

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Hopscotch and Youth Leads UK passionate Youth Insight Panels help provide a voice for their peers across the UK. We use them to generate inspiration, test ideas and evaluate the end result, so we know that it works for the audience its been created for. We don't ask them to do it for free, either, paying at least the UK Living Wage for their time and offering them the chance to learn skills that will make them more attractive to employers.

If you're looking to create impact with purpose and would like to find out more about how our youth panels can provide you with insight on a particular topic please don't hesitate to get in touch at hello@hopscotchconsulting.co.uk and info@youthleads.uk



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