

Meet a... Head of Sustainability



Simon Goldsmith, Head of Sustainability at the University of Greenwich

How would you describe your job in a tweet i.e.140 characters?

Working with all levels, in all areas, finding the most effective ways of enabling and embedding meaningful sustainability outcomes.

What does an average day look like?

There is no 'average' day. Though there is some time spent in the office in front of a computer there's time spent working with staff, co-creating solutions to some of the challenges we face. I frequently work with other staff to help identify opportunities that they can take ownership for and visit the three main campuses (two in London and one in Kent) visiting projects including those improving energy use, biodiversity, student engagement etc. Our role is also to work with the local community so I also engage with businesses, local authorities as well as colleagues working in the sector.

What are the key skills and qualifications required for your job?

Sustainability is one of the few subjects that reaches every part of the world and work. It is useful to have a good generalist knowledge of sustainability plus a good understanding of specific areas to help reduce specific risks and capitalise on opportunities. The role very much requires me to understand systems thinking – how to interact with the system to lever the most efficient outcome without causing other problems elsewhere. I studied a couple of sustainability Masters the last one in strategic sustainability leadership in Sweden using The Natural Step's sustainability framework. This is probably the best way of defining sustainability clearly in a way that can be applied in any situation. Having worked in the sustainability sector for over 20 years I have managed to pick up a range of experiences, skills and qualifications that have helped. Using sustainability as a 'lens' to understand how we can act to deliver a sustainable society we can constantly learn about the challenges and opportunities in the world around us, learning from our successes (and failures..). Sustainability requires you to constantly be aware of everything around us as it all relates to sustainability and usually our roles. The world is full of useful information and it is the sustainability professional's role to use this information to successfully lever sustainability improvement.

What training and continuous professional development do you require?

There is much that can be learned from peers in the sector and importantly, outside of the sector. I seek learning from sectors and areas that may not have a direct relationship with the HE sector yet can be considered and interpreted creatively and applied in our sector.

What are your top three responsibilities?

- Delivering sustainability strategically.
- Meeting key sustainability targets and managing risk (such as our Carbon Management Plan & ISO 14001).
- Sustainable culture change.



To help our Members understand more about the roles in further and higher education institutions, we've created a suite of career profiles. These share the main responsibilities and skills and knowledge required of many of the key roles that play a part in embedding sustainability in a tertiary education institution.

View the entire suite at www.eauc.org.uk/meet_a_member

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Tell us something surprising about your job that people may not know about?

That I/we have one of the most important jobs on the planet!

What are the positives and negatives of the job?

More of a frustration – sustainability is such a critically important issue yet for many people they don't recognise this and act accordingly. There are so many opportunities that sustainability can bring and so many outcomes that a sustainability literate staff and student body could deliver, yet it feels often that we still have a long way to go to achieve this. Otherwise a challenge we face is that there may be some great ideas we develop yet the staff time available by those colleagues we wish to engage is limited. The positives are all about the potential the sector can do to deliver a sustainable future for all!

Do you manage a budget, and what are your key priorities for this?

Yes, the key priorities are to maximise change towards sustainability. This includes expenditure on behaviour change and engagement programmes that connect people to the issue of sustainability.

What does the path to career progression in this role look like?

There is the potential to deliver transformational change within the sector, putting sustainability at the heart of strategic decision making. With this in mind the Sustainability Director's role should become more central and have a higher profile and level of responsibility. The HE sector has a massive role in helping move society at large towards a sustainable future. The role of the HE Sustainability Director can prove to others outside of the sector the opportunities that sustainability can bring and open up exciting career opportunities in the wider world of work.

What is the minimum and maximum salary band for this role?

The future of our societies and economies (including our universities) can only be successful if they are truly sustainable. To ensure all organisations are sustainable will require sustainability to be applied strategically at the heart of organisations as well as throughout their operations. Sustainability is therefore crucial to the future of our universities and the role of a Director of Sustainability should be at a similar level to members of the Vice Chancellor Group and if so then the pay should be reflective of that body.

What advice do you have for graduates and other potential candidates who are considering joining?

Seek knowledge and experience wherever you can find it. I volunteered for a year at Friends of the Earth and that gave me my foot in the door. Put as much as you can into any role. Be creative and bold. Learn ways of engaging and empowering others, deliver the solutions that people need and want. Connect with people and become indispensable. Join a "Good For Nothing" chapter (check it out on line and get involved with amazing people doing brilliant stuff).

What department do you and your line manager sit in? Which departmental interactions are vital for your role?

We sit within Estates & Facilities. This has been essential to bring about the sustainability integration on the key areas of impact and to work closely with the E&F team. We are very grateful for their support. We work with all other departments in differing ways for example by delivering Green Impact through our 51 Sustainability Champions or working with staff on particular projects that may be focused on a particular area or university-wide change.

What opportunities and challenges does working in a higher education institution bring?

The demands for sustainability come from many places, from inside and outside the University. This provides us with a legitimacy and a set of drivers to enable us to have broad and deep conversations, delivering sustainability in a range of ways. Universities 'work in the future'; delivering the knowledge and skills that graduates require, developing the research that will be available to meet the needs of the future. Sustainability is an issue that drives novel research demanded by a world needing the solutions it can bring. Students seek to have relevancy in the future jobs market, and to feel that they can contribute to the future that they will help design and deliver. Having more enlightened staff helps, as do a different set of business drivers that enable a longer-term thinking for the strategic delivery of



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sustainability. The sector also encourages collaboration around sustainability and there is always a peer in another university that can help you find some of the answers you are looking for.

How do you communicate the outputs of your role to the wider institution, and what does this include?

We use our email system occasionally but mostly use our Blog & Website and Twitter Account. Our PR department is always helpful in promoting our successes. Our network of Sustainability Champions disseminate information to departments which is invaluable to us.

How has EAUC Membership helped you in your job and within your institution?

It is useful having a representative body that can support the needs of sustainability professionals in the sector. Being part of a group can help in many ways and there are many elements of support that EAUC offer.

How can other Members contact you?

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