COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE

Human Resources and Sustainability

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Global Compact Network UK

Sustainability Essentials for Core Functions

WHY THIS LANDS ON YOUR DESK

As the HR function, you're measured on attracting and keeping the right people, building the skills the business needs, and fair, compliant pay and policies. Sustainability now intersects with all these areas: talent considering an employer's ESG credentials, upskilling as the economy decarbonises, climate creating new health and safety risks, and expanding pay gap and workforce reporting rules. Because many sustainability issues are people issues at heart, these pressures reach HR first.

The good news: you don't need to become a sustainability expert. Your sustainability team can track the standards, provide content and expertise for training and objectives, and help you show how your strategy already contributes – you keep the people decisions. However, it benefits both HR and sustainability to collaborate.

70%

of Gen Z & millennials weigh an employer's environmental credentials (Deloitte)

99%

of CEOs see upskilling as a key driver of sustainability progress (Accenture)

250+

staff: the threshold for coming ethnicity & disability pay-gap reporting

THE BENEFITS TO YOU

Attraction and retention

Younger generations now expect employers to have a credible sustainability offer, and sustainability is one of the few topics that employees raise unprompted as a source of pride in engagement surveys. It's critical that HR can accurately talk about what the company is doing.

Solving business problems

Sustainability-based people initiatives can often solve genuine business problems. A return-to-work scheme, for example, can fill a skills gap and diversify the workforce at the same time.

A stronger case with clients

Clients and tenders increasingly ask suppliers to evidence their people policies; having them in place avoids drafting under pressure.

Policies built on evidence

Combining workforce data, employee voice, and wider context produces policies with strong uptake that retain people at risk of leaving, such as inclusive parental leave.

Future-ready skills

Workforce planning that anticipates how markets, technology, and regulation will change keeps the business ahead on skills.

Influence at the top

HR becomes the sponsor of an agenda leaders care about, rather than only a delivery function.

Regulatory readiness

Pay gap, human rights, and workforce disclosure requirements are growing, and much of the data already sits in HR systems.

WHERE SUSTAINABILITY SHOWS UP IN YOUR WORK

Sustainability isn’t a separate programme. It sits inside systems you already run.

Your area of work	Why it matters to you	What it looks like in practice
Recruitment and employer brand	70% of Gen Z and millennials consider environmental credentials when evaluating an employer (Deloitte), though pay, progression, and security still come first.	Set out sustainability responsibilities in job descriptions, and let employees, rather than polished campaigns, tell the purpose story.
Onboarding and learning	The business will need new skills as markets and regulation change; 99% of CEOs see upskilling as a key driver of sustainability progress.	Add a sustainability module to onboarding, build sustainability literacy into learning pathways, and use upskilling to support a just transition to a low-carbon economy.
Performance and objectives	Role-specific objectives give people clear goals they can act on, rather than a target owned by a central team.	Make targets relevant to the role: for example, the site manager who needs to cut water use owns that objective and performance is reviewed on progress.
Reward and benefits	Pay, bonuses, and benefits shape who you attract and keep, and the default pension fund is often an employee’s largest investment.	Consider the real Living Wage, ESG measures in executive incentives, and greener commuting benefits. Review how the default pension fund is invested to consider ESG alignment.
Wellbeing, health, and safety	Extreme heat, flooding, and disruption create new health, safety, and absence risks.	Build climate risk into health and safety, flexible working, and absence policies.
Fair work and pay transparency	Gender pay gap reporting is in place, and mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting is coming for employers with 250 or more staff.	Strengthen pay equity analysis and anti-harassment, whistleblowing, and modern slavery policies.
Inclusion and social mobility	Inclusion programmes now need to show evidence and business value, and HR owns most of the policies.	Lead on fair hiring and promotion, grievance mechanisms, and inclusive leadership, using data that considers a diversity lens.
People data and reporting	Much of the workforce data now required for disclosure already sits in HR systems. The UK Sustainability Reporting Standards (UK SRS) and EU CSRD expect data to be reliable and assured.	Share turnover, absence, grievance, inclusion, pay, and training data reliably with sustainability, while protecting employee privacy.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR SUSTAINABILITY TEAM

In many organisations, the HR and sustainability teams operate in separate silos. The value comes from using sustainability expertise to strengthen the people systems you already run.

1. **Map the employee life cycle together**
   Ask sustainability to help find where it adds business value, from attraction and onboarding to reward and exit, but be careful about shoehorning it in.
2. **Get ready-made content**
   Ask for training modules, onboarding content, and role-specific objectives you can drop into existing programmes.
3. **Start with a goal you already own**
   Form a working group around an outcome you’re measured on, such as retention or skills, with top-down buy-in, and use employee networks and champions to carry it where a central team can’t reach.
4. **Use their evidence for your case**
   Ask for the customer and regulatory insight that strengthens the business case for your people initiatives, and the information you need to answer client tenders.
5. **Ask for it in your language**
   Request that targets are translated into what it means for roles, skills, and behaviours. The Uplifting People HR-ESG cheat sheet and SDG map shows where your people strategy already overlaps with sustainability, the CIPD sets out how HR can lead, and the UN Global Compact Academy offers free training for both teams.