

1) Name of institution

King's College London

2) Name of the initiative

Sustainability in Practice Module

3) Initiative outline

Sustainability in Practice is a final-year undergraduate Geography module that equips students with the skills, confidence, and experience needed to contribute to sustainability transitions through applied, problem-based learning. Working in consultancy-style teams, students collaborate with internal and external partners to address real-world sustainability challenges and develop evidence-based recommendations.

4) Context/history/need for initiative

As sustainability challenges become increasingly complex, employers are seeking graduates who can move beyond theoretical understanding and apply sustainability principles in professional and organisational settings. Sustainability in Practice was developed to bridge the gap between academic learning and hands-on sustainability practice. Over the past two academic years, the module has been redesigned to focus specifically on undergraduate learning, employability, and sustainability practice while supporting King's wider sustainability ambitions.

5) What happens and how is it assessed

The module adopts a **problem-based learning** and **Living Lab** approach centred on real sustainability challenges. Students work in consultancy-style teams alongside university operational staff and external organisations, to investigate sustainability issues and develop practical recommendations. Projects have included collaborations with King's Estates & Facilities, King's Food, and external organisations such as Transport for London (TfL).

To support effective collaboration and professional accountability, student teams sign a group contract at the outset. Team members review and re-sign the contract on a weekly basis, encouraging regular communication, shared responsibility, and early identification of challenges relating to workload or team dynamics. This mirrors professional project management practices and helps students develop skills in collaborative working and accountability.

One recent project explored opportunities to improve food waste management and composting within King's Kitchens. Students investigated existing waste streams, consulted stakeholders, reviewed best practice, and developed recommendations that were subsequently incorporated into a successful composting system across all King's campuses.

Assessment is based on in-class presentations and reflective final reports that require students to critically evaluate both sustainability theory and practice.

6) Green Skills developed or applied

Technical Skills

- Sustainability assessment
- Systems thinking
- Stakeholder analysis
- Environmental data interpretation
- Research design
- Policy and organisational analysis
- Project management

Transferable Skills

- Professional communication
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Report writing and presentations
- Negotiation and stakeholder engagement
- Problem-solving and project planning
- Time management

Transformative Skills

- Futures thinking
- Critical reflection
- Understanding complexity and uncertainty
- Ethical reasoning
- Environmental responsibility
- Confidence in contributing to organisational change
- Working across disciplinary boundaries

7) Contributions to leverage points

The module contributes particularly strongly to:

- LP2: Stakeholder Communication and Engagement
- LP4: Products, Services, Partnerships and Procurement
- LP5: Organisational Model Innovation and Transformation
- LP7: Futures Literacy through a Values-Based Mindset

The Living Lab approach encourages students to work across organisational boundaries and engage directly with the social, institutional, and operational dimensions of sustainability transitions. The module also contributes to King's wider sustainability and responsible futures ambitions by connecting teaching, operational sustainability, and organisational change.

8) Impact, successes, challenges

A strength of the module is its emphasis on experiential learning. Students work on genuine sustainability challenges where there is no predetermined solution, requiring them to navigate uncertainty while balancing environmental, social, economic, and organisational considerations. Students develop not only sustainability knowledge but also the skills, confidence, and transformative capacities needed to contribute meaningfully to a more sustainable and just future.

Students frequently identify the module as one of the most valuable experiences of their degree. For the 2026/27 academic year, enrolment stands at approximately 80 students, the highest enrolment in the module's six-year history. This growth reflects increasing student demand for opportunities to engage with real-world environmental challenges.

Challenges include balancing academic requirements with partner expectations, managing project timelines, and helping students navigate ambiguity. However, learning to work within these constraints is itself an important sustainability competency.

9) Advice for others

Move beyond hypothetical sustainability scenarios wherever possible. Students learn most effectively when working with real stakeholders on genuine sustainability challenges where the outcomes matter. Strong stakeholder relationships are essential, as is providing sufficient support to help students manage uncertainty and complexity. While Living Lab approaches require significant relationship-building and coordination, they can create meaningful benefits for all parties.