

1) Name of institution

The Open University

2) Name of the initiative

Raising awareness of Green Skills Careers in partnership with the Department for the Economy (DfE) in Northern Ireland

3) Initiative outline

Develop a range of resources which highlight how green skills are being applied across a wide range of roles locally. Including:

- [A Green Skills Careers Bulletin](#)
- [A young person's guide to green skills careers in Northern Ireland](#)
- [An adult's guide to green skills careers in Northern Ireland](#)

The resources are to be published on DfE citizen-facing platforms and promoted via DfE social media channels. The link to the publications will also be disseminated on the NI Direct Careers website and shared with DfE careers advisers and other key stakeholders.

4) Context/history/need for initiative

The Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland has identified seven growth priority areas, one of which is Low-carbon / net zero (green economy). A ten-year digital & green skills transformation plan has been developed supported by an industry-led green skills delivery group and four sub-working groups. The Open University sits on all four sub-working groups. A key output of the ‘Promoting awareness of careers and opportunities in green jobs, green skills and transversal skills’ group was a green skills careers bulletin which The Open University played a key role in the development of.

5) What has happened

The initiative was focused on raising awareness of what green jobs are and why they are important. A key part was to include ‘career role snapshots’ of people working in the green skills industry to provide role models that inspire. The Open University was delighted to supply a case study of a former student who studied a Bachelor's Degree in Natural Science and Masters in Environmental Management, and is now working as a Sustainability Officer.

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Green Skills Career Snapshots



Name: Supriya Foster

Role: Sustainability Officer, South West College

"It's given me options that I didn't know were there for me...I'm now of the mindset that the sky is the limit. It's given me the confidence not just to pursue career choices but also further academic choices"

Pathway into a Green Skills career: [Open University Bachelor's Degree in Natural Science and Masters in Environmental Management](#), now working as a Sustainability Officer

Supriya Foster plays a **key leadership role in driving sustainability, climate action, and environmental education** across South West College (SWC). As the college's Sustainability Officer, she works with students, staff and the wider community to encourage greener ways of working and to support action on climate change.

Supriya's background in **Natural Science and Environmental Management** helps her in her role as Sustainability Officer. Through her studies, she developed a strong understanding of the natural environment, including ecosystems and biodiversity, which she now uses in her work. This knowledge supports her in developing practical workshops and sustainability initiatives, leading carbon-reduction work, delivering carbon literacy training, and helping the college plan for a more sustainable future.

In this short video clip, Supriya talks about her career journey to becoming a sustainability officer, explains how being able to combine work and study through distance learning helped her achieve her goals, and outlines her plans for the future.



[Supriya - Green Skills](#)

Another key part was to provide clarity around the education pathways into green skills careers from level two to level seven, developed through the Further Education Colleges and the Universities in Northern Ireland.

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Higher Education - Green Skills-Related courses

The Open University

The Open University has a dedicated [Study Sustainability hub](#) that signposts qualifications, micro-credentials and short skills courses, alongside free learning through [OpenLearn's SustainabilityHub](#). Flexible, distance learning lets learners in Northern Ireland upskill or reskill alongside work or other commitments, with routes from taster content to full degrees.

Free Learning and Short Skills (OpenLearn & Micro-credentials)

OU's [OpenLearn Sustainability Hub](#) offers a large catalogue of free courses, articles, videos and interactives covering climate change, energy, circular economy, sustainable transport and more - useful for first steps, CPD, or building foundational green awareness. In parallel, OU sustainability pages highlight skills-focused short courses and micro-credentials for targeted upskilling aligned to workplace needs.

Undergraduate Pathways

Environmental Science

► Learners can develop green skills through OU undergraduate pathways in **Environmental Science and Environmental Science (Environmental Management)**.

Interdisciplinary/flexible study

► There are options to build an interdisciplinary programme or tailor study via flexible degrees (such as through the **Combined STEM degree** or an **Open programme**). These routes could enable students to cover topics such as environmental systems, sustainability practice, energy and resource management, and data/digital tools used across green roles.

Postgraduate Pathways (Advanced Environmental & Management Focus)

At postgraduate level, OU offers advanced study in **Environmental Science** and **Environmental Management**, combining policy, regulation and organisational change with technical/environmental analysis, systems thinking and project work.

You can find full information on The Open University courses on [The Open University website](#)

6) Impact, successes, challenges

The project has created a range of resources that help make green skills more relatable and accessible. As the project group included a diverse range of stakeholders, there were challenges around the definition of green skills as there is not one universally agreed definition. There were also challenges in the sourcing of career case studies and the distilling of a huge amount of information into a digestible format.

7) Advice for others

Cross-sector working really helps ensure that the message meets industry needs. Having businesses represented in the working group alongside educational providers ensured pathways from education to careers are clearly defined and meaningful.