

1) Name of institution

University of Westminster

2) Name of the initiative

Sustainability Consulting in Practice: Developing Green Skills Through Authentic, Interdisciplinary Learning

3) Initiative outline

This is a new Level 6 undergraduate elective module (one semester, 12 weeks) offered by the Centre for Education Teaching and Innovation (CETI) and open to students from any undergraduate programme. The module has run once to date.

4) Context/history/need for initiative

The module closes two gaps simultaneously. The knowing–doing gap: students can name sustainability concepts theoretically but cannot apply them with a real client. And the representation gap: only 4.7% of UK sustainability professionals identify as people of colour, against 16% of the wider workforce (RACE Report, 2025), with educational pathways that too often lack inclusive design.

5) What happens and how is it assessed (where relevant)

There are four design features: authentic consulting projects with local clients (e.g. small businesses and social enterprises) recruited through collaboration and partnership with local government; service-learning, delivering genuine value to the community by helping businesses work towards Westminster Council's net-zero targets; industry co-delivery, with sustainability professionals, consultants and leadership coaches actively co-teaching; and interdisciplinary student teams.

Teams are designed combining business, engineering, life sciences, law and creative perspectives. Professional sustainability work is itself interdisciplinary. Composing teams to mirror that reality means students learn how professional sustainability work actually functions.

6) Green Skills developed or applied

Students develop technical skills (e.g. ESG reporting, carbon accounting and net-zero target-setting); transferable consulting skills (e.g. consulting frameworks and project lifecycles; client communication, change and project management); and transformative capacities, notably systems thinking, anticipatory competency, and collaboration across disciplinary difference.

7) Contributions to leverage points

- LP 2 — (Stakeholder communication and engagement): stakeholder mapping, relationship management and client-facing communication are taught and practised.

- LP 5 — (Organisational model innovation and transformation): student teams help local organisations embed sustainability and work towards Westminster City Council's Sustainable City Charter (SCC) and its 2040 net-zero targets.
- LP 7 — (Futures literacy through a values-based mindset): weekly coaching-informed reflection and leadership development cultivate students' sense of purpose and agency.

8) Impact, successes, challenges

What worked

- Students engaging directly and confidently with their client organisations from Week 2; a fast transition into professional behaviour,
- High attendance and engagement were sustained across all 12 weeks
- Of 16 students, around half achieved a first-class mark
- Client satisfaction and student feedback were consistently strong.

Student voice

"The most valuable thing I found in this module is how much I have grown in confidence, as I am a very introverted person... I have also gained a lot of leadership skills and learnt to take constructive criticism."

Challenges

- Working in an interdisciplinary team for a real client was genuinely stretching, making weekly individual and group feedback essential.
- Recruiting clients willing to work with student consultants over 12 weeks requires sustained relationship-building
- Disciplinary diversity creates early friction; structured team-building, rotating roles and weekly reflection were needed to manage it.

Impact

Students finished with a real client-facing project in their portfolios, experience of the full consulting cycle, and demonstrable professional confidence — genuinely differentiating in a green job market that is expanding rapidly yet reports a shortage of work-ready graduates. By opening the module to all disciplines we created an accessible entry point into sustainability careers for underrepresented students; longitudinal tracking of their progression is a priority, and early signs are encouraging.

Client organisations received actionable strategies aligned with the Council's 2040 net-zero targets.

9) Advice for others

The three-phase consulting methodology used to design the module (Initiation and Research, Stakeholder Engagement, Definition and Planning) is replicable; the specific partners are not. What matters is structuring the module around a genuine need of a credible anchor partner (in our case Westminster Council).

- Start with the partner, not the syllabus.
- Design interdisciplinary teams deliberately.
- Invest real time in making students feel seen, helping students see themselves as leaders with agency in the green transition before they enter the workforce.