

# Energy, sustainability and environment

**From global energy companies to specialist technology firms, regulatory bodies to think tanks, national power generation companies to micro-generation schemes, conservation charities to mining corporations, carbon consultancies to commodities traders: the range of opportunities in this sector is immense.**

Students consider a career in sustainability, energy or the environment for a range of reasons. Many seek to make a positive impact and work for organisations whose values mirror their own.

Environmental-awareness is not limited to careers that are traditionally considered 'green'. Existing businesses are changing – consider the development of electric cars, or moves to increase sustainability in retail. Sustainability is an issue for all sectors; a new breed of firms exploiting the drive for business to operate in a more sustainable way has emerged, but in-house opportunities also exist in large established organisations. This diversity means that well-defined career paths in sustainability can be hard to find. Roles may have sustainability as the core focus, a main responsibility or just a small aspect.

## Getting in and entry points

The diverse nature of this sector is reflected in the wide range of possible entry points. Graduate schemes offered by large companies and multidisciplinary consultancies tend to recruit students from any discipline, with closing dates

towards the end of Michaelmas term or early in Hilary term. Many also offer internships to students in their penultimate year at Oxford. Look beyond the job title to establish if sustainability is incorporated into a role.

The renewable energy and environmental industries are dominated by small or medium-sized organisations with only occasional vacancies, and may require relevant expertise (perhaps gained through a relevant postgraduate qualification). It is important, therefore, that you take a proactive approach. Research firms that match your interests and connect with alumni working in relevant roles to learn more and build your network.

Build relevant experience to develop skills, showcase motivation and increase your knowledge of the sector and issues affecting it through student societies, volunteering, attending talks and completing internships. The Micro-Internship and Summer Internship Programmes often offer opportunities relevant to this sector and are open to students of all year groups.

Build specialist knowledge and practical experience through your degree by selecting relevant modules, and focus essays, assignments, and projects on topics of interest. These can be communicated in applications.

Employers' responses to questions about their approach to environmental sustainability are available through CareerConnect.





### Extra-curricular ideas

- Take an active role in relevant student organisations such as the Nature Conservation Society, the Energy Society, or Oxford SU's Environment and Ethics campaign.
- Stand for election for your college JCR committee, many colleges have an environment and ethics rep.
- Volunteer with charities such as the Oxford Conservation Volunteers, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, or with sustainability charities that work with Oxford Hub.
- See relevant sectors of this Guide for ideas to develop skills for roles in engineering, finance and marketing. If you are interested in a graduate scheme with a large energy company, see the Developing Core Skills' advice for ideas on how to develop leadership and organisational skills for project management.

Industry and businesses are increasingly required and motivated to engage with their impact on the environment, and there is huge potential for innovation – so it's an amazing time to be exploring roles in this area.

*Dr Alice Carrington-Windo, Policy Adviser (EU and Environment), Water UK*

### Next steps

[www.careers.ox.ac.uk/energy](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/energy)

[www.careers.ox.ac.uk/sustainability-environment](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/sustainability-environment)

### Alumni profile

# Holly Woodhead

**What:** As a Policy Principal at the economic regulator Ofwat, I largely lead projects focused on developing the business market for the water industry and protecting customers. I've worked on projects enhancing support to vulnerable customers, supporting the rollout of smart water meters to allow better detection of leaks and more accurate bills, and facilitating innovative approaches to water efficiency. As a policy professional, my work involves lots of researching problems, developing solutions, and writing papers to convey these ideas. I also work with water companies regularly, in both industry groups and policy consultations.

**Why:** Like many humanities students, I knew I had a strength for writing critically, and I wanted a career which played to that strength. I also had an interest in politics. I secured a place on the Houses of Parliament Fast Stream and worked in the House of Lords for 18 months. I liked the policy development work, but other elements did not suit my skillset and personality. In moving to a policy job at Ofwat, my role now suits my skills and interests far better. I also really enjoy working in an area which is high-profile and dynamic – water is a massive area of public interest and concern, and it's a privilege to be part of the effort to transform performance in the sector.

**Advice:** When applying for public sector graduate jobs, I felt there were few options beyond the Fast Stream – in reality, there are lots of schemes if you go and look for them. Particularly look out for schemes at regulators (Ofwat, Ofgem, Ofcom, FCA, CMA, Bank of England, etc) and public sector bodies beyond central government departments (Forestry Commission, GCHQ, ONS).

Internships and micro-internships will help you to gain a greater sense of the skills you'd like to use, and to tailor applications appropriately to stand out in a competitive field. Graduate schemes are a great way to develop skills quickly and enable swift promotion, but don't feel you need to stay the entire course if it isn't meeting your needs.



### Position

Policy Principal, Ofwat.

### Background

BA Theology and Religion, Worcester College, 2021.



## Alumni profile

# Charlotte Whittlesea

**What:** I work at Acorn Bioenergy, a London-based renewable energy developer. We aspire to be the biggest anaerobic digestion company in the UK, supplying biomethane, a green gas for heating homes and biogenic CO<sub>2</sub> from agricultural materials. I started in September 2022, just as the company secured investment from an infrastructure development fund.

**How:** I started to make applications only after my dissertation was submitted, in June 2022. I found myself quite deflated by the overwhelming number of jobs advertised and finding that larger firms filtered out my application as my degree was not directly 'sustainability related'. This prompted me to try a different approach, where I contacted smaller companies directly to advertise that my degree did have a lot to offer. I had more success with this, including securing my role at Acorn Bioenergy.

**Early career:** My job was pacy from the start and I was quickly chosen to coordinate and lead Acorn's PR and marketing strategy.

I'm now working on exciting commercial proposals and researching the biogenic CO<sub>2</sub> markets. Day to day, I initiate discussions with large corporates about how Acorn's nature or technology-based carbon reductions contribute to their decarbonisation whilst also modelling different biogenic CO<sub>2</sub> offtake scenarios. I find the voluntary carbon offset opportunities the most exciting part of my role.

In my experience, small companies offer wide ranging roles and opportunities and although there can be a lack of structure, the level of responsibility and trust from an early stage is something I really value.

**Advice:** Illustrating you have a passion for sustainability and showing confidence in your skillset are the most important mindsets when applying to this field. I showcased my Master's – which investigated the effect of microplastics on human health – and completed an internship with a sustainable development charity.



## Position

Renewable Energy Developer,  
Acorn Bioenergy.

## Background

MBiochem Biochemistry, Trinity  
College, 2022.

In-person

## SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY FAIR 2024

📅 Saturday, 26 October | 10:30-13:30

📍 Examination Schools, OX1 4BG

Find out about the career options available in a variety of technical areas with organisations ranging from leading global companies to specialist technology firms.

[www.careers.ox.ac.uk/set](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/set)



## Kickstart your career in the energy industry with Aurora Energy Research

Do you want to contribute to the global energy transition through analysis, modelling, research and data? Join Aurora Energy Research, a leading power market analytics company providing data-driven intelligence for strategic decisions in the global energy transformation.



SCAN THE QR CODE  
TO FIND OUT MORE  
[auroraer.com/grads](http://auroraer.com/grads)

We are always seeking new, dynamic individuals.  
Visit [auroraer.com/careers](http://auroraer.com/careers)

AURORA  
ENERGY RESEARCH

