

BEFORE APPLYING

WHEN APPLYING

AFTER APPLYING

CASE STUDIES

GREENWASHING

As a university student or new graduate, you may be considering one of the big [graduate employers](#) for a job (or been fortunate to secure a place already). Between the top 100 employers, there could be over 20,000 graduate vacancies on offer in autumn 2021.¹

But what about the ethics of these employers? To what extent are they contributing to a more sustainable world?

From the big banks and accountancy firms to the small and independent businesses, how organisations work influences the world around us. Incoming graduates can collectively have a huge impact on the practices of places they work in.

We need all candidates to use their power to call for practices that find solutions to the environmental and social injustice we see. We need *Candidates for Change*.

BEFORE APPLYING

Just graduated? Or are you about to? What's next after university?

You might want to go on to further study, but many graduates will be looking to the world of work. Broadly, we can categorise employment within three sectors: public, private and third.

Public - usually owned or run by the government and provides public services, such as healthcare and education.

Private - generally run for profit and not controlled by the government.

Third - also called the "voluntary" sector, this includes charities and other not-for-profit organisations, [social enterprises](#) and [cooperatives](#).

What kind of world do you want to see?

On average, say we graduate at 21 and retire at 67, we could be spending over 40 years in work. That's a lot of time to positively influence our employers!

How employers act can have a massive influence on how society runs - though of course governments play a crucial role in this too.

For example, some employment practices can drive wealth inequality: senior management within countless large businesses still earn huge sums of money whilst their workers (UK and abroad) do not even earn a living wage. Or, despite us facing climate and ecological emergencies, some practices uphold business as usual, supporting the fossil fuel industry and preventing ambitious emission reduction targets being set.

Organisations could - and should - use their vast expertise and resources to work a better world. What if their success was measured by this and not only maximising profit?



Looking at things in isolation rarely gives the full story: [environmental and social issues are interconnected](#)

WHEN APPLYING

What can you do?

Let's think about the recruitment process...

There are three key stages in the job search and recruitment process where students or new graduates can have impact:

Looking for work



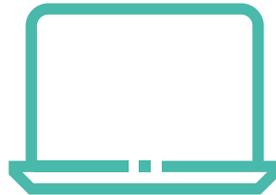
What?

- Researching employers
- Asking questions

How?

- Online - website and social media
- Careers fairs
- Talking to current employees

Applying for roles



What?

- Asking questions
- Stating expectations

How?

- In applications
- At interview

Newly employed



What?

- Understanding where impact can be had
- Asking questions
- Organising with colleagues

How?

- Research and meetings with relevant colleagues
- Leading by example in your role where possible

A note on careers fairs

Most universities will hold careers fairs for students over the academic year. These may cover a range of sectors or be specific to an industry. This is a great opportunity - in a non-committal, relaxed environment - to ask questions and tell employers what graduates expect from their workplaces.

Some questions to consider:

1. General

- a. What is the impact you are trying to make in the world?
- b. To what extent do you work with the fossil fuel industry or other harmful industries?
- c. To what extent do impacts on people and planet influence commercial decisions?

2. Finance

- a. Do you have a public ethical policy covering who you bank with, your pension provider and any other investments?
- b. To what extent do your policies include financing fossil fuels?
- c. To what extent do your policies prioritise funding positive change in society?

3. People

- a. Do you pay at least a [real living wage](#) to all staff and contracted or outsourced workers?
- b. To what extent do you use [zero-hours contracts](#)?
- c. Have you set a [maximum pay ratio](#) between the highest and median/lowest paid workers?
- d. What steps do you take to ensure your workplace is diverse and inclusive?
- e. What learning opportunities are provided that are specific to sustainability?

4. Emissions and supply chain

- a. Have you set any emission reduction targets that are dated, quantified and public?
- b. To what extent are you reducing waste (including packaging) across your supply chain and prioritising the reusing of resources?
- c. What ethical checks are in place before you buy from, or sell to, another organisation?

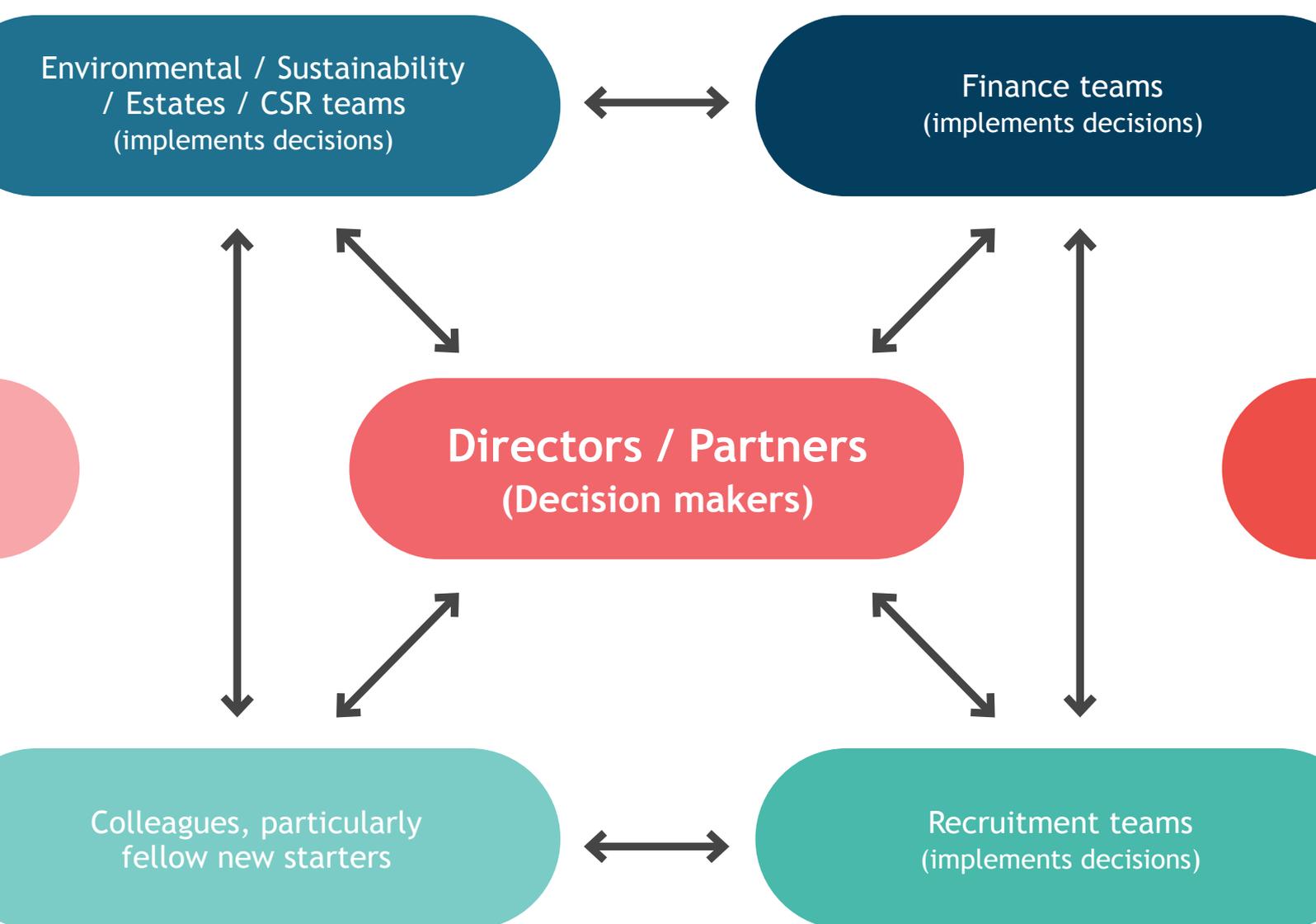
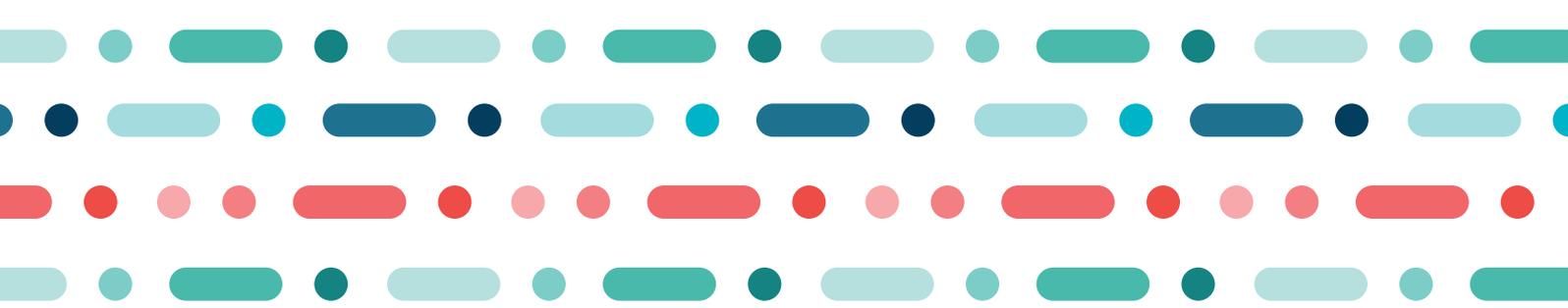


AFTER APPLYING (AND STARTING NEW JOB)

How to effect change?

Identifying those with power and influence:

- Who makes decisions?
- Who implements those decisions?

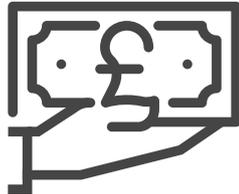


Some areas to consider

Consider whether these actions can be done together with other colleagues - the more people that demand change, the more likely it is to happen.

Banking and investments

Banks and financial services companies are themselves big employers of graduates. In addition, nearly all employers will need the services of a bank or building society.



However, since the 2015 Paris Agreement, many banks continue to fund the climate crisis by providing trillions to the fossil fuel industry.² They have also been involved in tax avoidance, human rights abuses, the arms trade and deforestation by the [Big Livestock](#) industry.

With so much money and influence, though, banks should be leading the way in only funding solutions that make our world a better place - from renewable energy and nature-friendly farming, to affordable housing and community groups.

What you can do:

- Ask your employer who they bank with and why. If problematic, lobby them to switch banks.
- Check if your employer has an ethical investment policy and if they are adhering to it
- Consider who you personally bank with - check out the [Banking with Who?](#) campaign

Pensions

Most of us will be automatically enrolled in a pension scheme when we start work.

Pensions are investments, invested in companies for a regular financial return which then contributes to your retirement fund. Of all the money invested in the UK, nearly half is our pension savings - £2.6 trillion!



However, this is mostly going into “default” funds that invest in industries such as fossil fuels and mining; tobacco; arms; and many other areas driving environmental and social breakdown.³ As with banking and other investments, pensions have the potential to be funding positive change.

What you can do:

- Ask your employer who your pension provider is and check how ethical the default fund is e.g. does it invest in fossil fuels?
- Ask what ethical funds are available and consider opting for one of them
- Lobby your employer to opt for a more ethical fund as the **default** option
- “Question your pension” using [Make My Money Matter’s 10-step guide](#)
- Further reading of [ShareAction’s guide](#) or [Ethical Consumer’s research](#)

Emissions

Increasing greenhouse gas emissions because of human activity is the [leading contributor](#) to the climate crisis.

Particularly in the Global North (due to its [historic role](#) in driving emission increases), employers need to take urgent **and** significant action to reduce their emissions. This process, when meaningfully done, should also positively affect many other areas of the organisation (and wider supply chain).



What you can do:

- Ask your employer if any emission reduction targets have been set. Consider:
 - o whether targets are dated, quantifiable and publicly reported on?
 - o how their credibility has been verified e.g. through the [Science Based Targets initiative](#)?
 - o do they cover [scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions](#)?
 - o if emission **reduction** is prioritised over [carbon offsetting](#)? For any offsets, ensure credible and socially just schemes are used.⁴
 - o to what extent they also protect jobs and support a [just transition](#)?
- Ask your employer how they are engaging more widely on this issue too e.g. signing up to the [Race To Zero campaign](#)

People

Employers have a huge impact on the people they hire, as well as on others throughout their supply chain.

Good workers' rights include things like paying a living wage, progressive pay ratios, secure contracts, freedom from discrimination and productive engagement with trade unions. Sadly, profit is often maximised at the expense of decent conditions for all staff.

What you can do:

- Review your employer's policies and lobby for change where needed, for example through a trade union
- Speak to colleagues about their experiences
- Ask your employer how they promote and verify workers' rights **throughout** the supply chain
- Consider to what extent diversity and inclusion is being actively promoted and call for more action if needed. Check out this [list of questions](#) on inclusivity.
- If the employer advertises on social media, ask them to engage with the [Stop Hate for Profit campaign](#)

Suppliers & clients

Who an employer decides to work with is a key reflection of their values.

Harmful industries are kept afloat through crucial goods and services being provided to them by others. Setting minimum standards in this regard prevents commercial decisions being driven by what's most profitable and allows for more ethical considerations about people and planet too.

It can also send a strong message to other employers leading to their improvement, as well as shape wider public opinion.

What you can do:

- Ask your employer what ethical checks are in place before agreeing to sell to a client or buy from a supplier
- Check if the employer provides goods or services to destructive industries like fossil fuels
- Check to what extent the employer prioritises working with more sustainable organisations

CASE STUDIES

These examples shed light on specific practices and are not a condemnation or endorsement of any particular employers as a whole. We encourage you to do your own research too.



Area	The bad	The better
Clients and finance	Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds, NatWest and Santander all continue to fund the fossil fuel industry. Some also finance companies involved in factory farming, which contributes to deforestation in the Amazon and beyond. ²	Triodos Bank has a set of minimum standards which prevent it from working with (and funding) numerous harmful industries e.g. including fossil fuels, factory farming and weapons.
People	Amazon, Deliveroo and Uber's business models rely heavily on casual workers who are rarely afforded the same rights as a normal employee, though legal challenges are changing this. The lack of guaranteed pay on zero-hours contracts has resulted in some at Amazon and Deliveroo not even earning a minimum wage, making it harder to budget for basic living costs.	Following a 10-year campaign involving workers and the trade union IWGB , in 2020 the University of London recognised previously outsourced cleaners as directly-employed staff, resulting in stronger employment rights for them.
Paying taxes	The Big Four accountancy firms Deloitte, EY, KPMG and PwC are all involved in selling corporate tax avoidance schemes to their interested clients. This contributes to tax avoidance at large, reducing the money governments have to spend on vital public services like health and education.	Over 60 employers have now signed up to the Fair Tax Mark , which is a certification awarded to those paying corporate tax responsibly.

GREENWASHING

Greenwashing is a deceptive practice used by businesses to trick you into thinking they or their product are sustainable when, in reality, they're not.

There is a growing awareness of the climate and ecological crises and this has led to some making genuine efforts for positive change. However, others are increasingly using greenwashing to present a “reforming” brand whilst still maintaining the status quo behind the scenes.

[More detailed guides](#) to greenwashing are available and here's just some things to watch out for:

- The core business model e.g. a clothing company mainly reliant on fast fashion releasing a new “sustainable” range
- Imagery e.g. breath-taking natural scenery being featured within an advert for a fossil-fuel-dependent car
- Ownership structures - follow where the money goes e.g. a problematic brand selling more “sustainable” products through its sub-brands
- Need - does the product even need to be bought? e.g. tap water instead of buying bottled water, even if it is marketed as “locally sourced” or in recycled packaging
- Vagueness e.g. a “carbon neutral” commitment, with no dates and action plan backing it up

There are plenty of [other examples](#) out there, including by fossil fuel companies.

¹The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers indicates graduate job prospects remain optimistic, Epigram, 30 October 2020, accessed on 12 March 2021, <https://epigram.org.uk/2020/10/30/the-times-top-100-graduate-employers-indicates-graduate-job-prospects-remain-optimistic/>

²Banks, climate change and the environmental crisis, Ethical Consumer, 9 September 2020, accessed on 15 March 2021, <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/money-finance/banks-climate-change-environmental-crisis>

³ShareAction webpage, accessed on 15 March 2021, <https://shareaction.org/pensions/i-want-to-learn/>

If you have any comments, suggestions or are a student or new graduate wanting to get more involved in the campaign or share your experiences, please e-mail aqeel.kapasi@sos-uk.org.

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