



SustainNet

HR Checklist and Guidance

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HR Sustainability Checklist & Practical Guidance for SMEs

PART A - Organisation Information

To be completed

Organisation Name

Sector / Industry

Country

Contact Person

Job Title

Email Address

Date of completion

PART B – HR Sustainability Checklist

Instructions:

Please tick the option that best applies to your organisation.

Q1. Does your organisation currently address sustainability or responsibility in its people management practices, in general?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Q2. Do employees receive any guidance or training related to sustainability, ethics, or responsible behaviour at work?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Only informally

Q3. Is sustainability reflected in any of the following HR areas?

(You may tick more than one)

- ☐ Recruitment & onboarding
- ☐ Training & development
- ☐ Performance management
- ☐ Employee health and well-being
- ☐ Internal communication
- ☐ Not reflected in HR practices

Q4. How would you describe your organisation's current approach to HR sustainability?

- ☐ Not yet considered
☐ At an early stage
☐ Partially integrated
☐ Well integrated across HR practices

Instructions:

Please tick the option that best reflects your organisation's current situation.

Response Key:

- ☐ Not in place ☐ Partially in place ☐ Fully in place

Q5 Strategic HR & Sustainability Alignment

	Not in place	Partial	Full
HR strategy aligned with sustainability / CSR goals	☐	☐	☐
Sustainability objectives included in HR planning	☐	☐	☐
Clear HR responsibility for sustainability topics	☐	☐	☐
HR involvement in sustainability or ESG discussions	☐	☐	☐

Q6 Recruitment, Selection & Employer Branding

	Not in place	Partial	Full
Fair and transparent recruitment processes	☐	☐	☐
Diversity, equality, and inclusion principles applied	☐	☐	☐
Job descriptions include ethical or sustainability values	☐	☐	☐
Employer branding reflects sustainability commitments	☐	☐	☐

Q7 Learning, Training & Skills Development

	Not in place	Partial	Full
Continuous learning opportunities for employees	☐	☐	☐
Sustainability / ethics training available	☐	☐	☐

Green skills or ESG-related training offered	☐	☐	☐
Leadership development linked to responsible management	☐	☐	☐

Q8 Performance Management & Behaviour

	Not in place	Partial	Full
Clear performance evaluation system	☐	☐	☐
Behavioural or ethical criteria included in appraisals	☐	☐	☐
Feedback mechanisms for employees	☐	☐	☐
Recognition of responsible or sustainable behaviours	☐	☐	☐

Q9 Employee Well-being & Work Design

	Not in place	Partial	Full
Employee well-being initiatives in place	☐	☐	☐
Flexible working arrangements (where applicable)	☐	☐	☐
Health and safety procedures implemented	☐	☐	☐
Employees are encouraged to propose ideas to improve work practices.	☐	☐	☐

Q10 Ethics, Equality & Employee Voice

	Not in place	Partial	Full
Code of ethics or conduct exists	☐	☐	☐
Whistleblowing or reporting mechanisms	☐	☐	☐
Employee feedback or consultation channels	☐	☐	☐
Responsible digital & social media use guidelines	☐	☐	☐

PART C - Reflection & Improvement Planning Questions

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions briefly. Your responses will help identify priority areas and possible next steps for improving HR sustainability practices.

Q11. Which HR sustainability practice/s currently work well in your organisation?

(Please briefly describe)

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Q12. Which HR sustainability practices would you like to improve or further develop within the next year?

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Q13. What is the main HR-related sustainability challenge your organisation is currently facing?

.....

Q14. How do you believe your organisation could improve its HR sustainability practices?

(e.g. training, tools, policies, external support, technology)

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PART D - Practical Guidance & Support (How to Improve)

This section is here to support you in strengthening HR sustainability in a practical and manageable way. The tools, benefits, and examples below show simple actions you can adopt and adapt to your organisation's size and resources. Use this guidance to identify what may work for you, support your people, and take small but meaningful steps towards more sustainable and responsible HR practices within your organisation. The tables below present practical HR tools, key benefits, and real SME examples to help you strengthen sustainability through your people management practices (Tables 1,2 and 3 respectively).

HR Technology, Tools and Mechanisms	Purpose	What it Supports
Green Skills Development Platforms	E-learning courses on sustainability literacy, ESG awareness, ethical decision-making, and green competencies	Employee upskilling, ESG awareness, motivation and long-term behavioural change
Sustainability Onboarding Toolkits	Structured onboarding integrating CSR values, environmental behaviour, and responsible workplace practices	Early value alignment, responsible culture, consistency

Employee Engagement Mechanisms	Internal digital platforms, micro-learning tools, and communication systems	Participation in sustainability initiatives, collaboration
Behavioural Change Interventions	Nudges, rewards and incentives, recognition schemes promoting eco-friendly behaviours	Resource efficiency, waste reduction, everyday sustainable actions
Green Leadership Training	Programmes supporting managers in leading sustainable change and fostering psychological safety	Leadership capability, change management, sustainability culture
Sustainable Work Design	Redesign of job roles to include green responsibilities and digital sustainability skills where applicable	Job relevance, innovation, alignment with emerging technologies and emerging employee needs
Responsible Digital & Social Media Use Policies	Guidelines and training promoting credible sustainability communication and avoiding greenwashing	Ethical communication, digital responsibility, reputation protection
Employee Feedback & Needs Assessment Surveys	Surveys to understand employee needs, expectations, well-being, and engagement related to work conditions and sustainability practices	Employee voice, motivation, engagement, trust, and evidence-based HR and sustainability decision-making.

Table 1: HR Technology, Tools and Mechanisms

Area	Benefits
Reporting & Compliance Readiness	Improved readiness to respond to European sustainability and ESG reporting expectations related to human capital, ethics, and responsible organisational practices
Culture & Values	Stronger internalisation of sustainability values and long-term behavioural adoption Development of a transparent, ethical, and accountable organisational culture aligned with CSR and ESG standards.
Employee Engagement	Higher motivation, participation, and sense of purpose through meaningful participation in green initiatives Higher employee retention
Ethics & Governance	More transparent, ethical, and accountable organisational culture
Skills & Capability	Increased readiness for green transition through reskilling and upskilling
Operational Efficiency and risks	Reduced waste, inefficiencies, and resource misuse through behavioural improvements. Improved resilience during organisational change
Employer Branding	Attraction and retention of purpose-driven talent
Trust & Ownership	Stronger trust, psychological ownership, and alignment with sustainability narratives
Organisational & Strategic Benefits, CSR	Clearer documentation of HR practices, makes internal processes easier to manage Better coordination between HR, management, and sustainability-related actions

	Improved decision-making based on structured HR information Increased organisational credibility with partners, customers, and public authorities Reduced risk of “CSR on paper only” by embedding responsibility into practice through HR processes Greater employee awareness, ownership, and motivation through shared social and environmental responsibility
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Table 2: Benefits

SME Type	Practice Implemented	Outcome
Hospitality SME	Ruby Hotels introduced a Green Workplace Behaviour Programme supported by short digital learning material for employees, focusing on energy-saving practices in daily hotel operations (lighting, heating, housekeeping routines).	Reduced energy consumption, increased employee awareness, and measurable operational cost savings. Employees became more motivated and engaged as they could clearly see the positive results of their actions and their direct contribution to energy savings.
Retail SME	BIO COMPANY integrated sustainability principles into employee onboarding and customer communication training, enabling employees to clearly and responsibly communicate product sustainability qualities.	Employees confidently engage customers on sustainability topics, reducing greenwashing risks and strengthening customer trust.
Technology SME	Ecosia implemented internal training on ethical digital behaviour, responsible data use, and sustainable digital practices, aligned with its sustainability mission.	Improved digital responsibility, reduced digital environmental footprint, and stronger alignment between employee behaviour and organisational values. (digital environmental footprint: the environmental impact of an organisation’s digital technologies and everyday digital practices, e.g. energy use, data storage, and IT equipment).
SME-scale retail units and franchises	The Body Shop integrates sustainability values into employee onboarding, ongoing micro-learning, and ethical communication guidelines. Employees are trained not only on product sustainability features but also on responsible customer communication including avoidance of greenwashing.	Employees feel confident, informed, and responsible when discussing sustainability with customers, leading to stronger engagement, credible CSR communication, and alignment between internal values and external messaging. This makes the branding stronger.

Table 3: SME Good Practice Examples

