



WISE CONFERENCE 2021 ONLINE

Inclusive, Transformative, Driving Sustainability

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10 things we learned from our 2021 Conference

This year, our conference focused on the urgent need for us to take action on climate change by building greater diversity to drive sustainability. It certainly gave us a great deal to think about and lots of practical advice to take back to our workplaces. So here are a reminder of the ten things we learned to get us started on this journey.

1 Equality, equality, equality

The overriding message of the conference was the importance of equality in creating a sustainable world. Baroness Brown of Cambridge and WISE Ambassador set out the facts:

“Disasters are unfair... Fairness has to be a core tenet of our approach to addressing climate change. Policy to address climate change must address fairness.”

She called for:

“girls to have the right education opportunities and encouragement to enable them to take up these interesting and professional careers which offer good salaries and prospects.”

And concluded with:

“we will need all the talent available to us all to deliver the equality and fairness we need so that we have the STEM workforce that can deliver a more sustainable world.”



Baroness Brown of Cambridge
WISE Ambassador



Employers need to be more open-minded about pathways into STEM, building flexibility into the DNA of their policies as a route to ensuring a sustainable future for all.



Kay Hussain CEO, WISE



2 We need to help 50% of our population to see themselves as the solution

We need to help young women to feel that can play their part in addressing climate change through the careers they choose. The importance of role models and mentoring in encouraging and supporting young women in their career choices and development featured throughout the conference. Catalyse Change is just one organisation helping young women to understand 'green' career choices, co-founder Traci Lewis, said:

“We aim to increase women’s belief that they can be the change. We want young women to be part of the solution and work to increase women’s belief that they can be the change.”



Traci Lewis
Co-founder, Catalyse Change

“

...if you can code, you can turn it to anything, so learn to code.

Penny Enderby CEO, MET Office

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3 Science is critical to our understanding of climate change

Penny Enderby, CEO of the MET Office, gave us plenty of food for thought with a reminder that:

“science is critical to our understanding of climate change, policy making and how we respond to it.”

If we needed an opportunity to encourage girls to study STEM subjects and women to enter scientific roles, Penny encouraged us to harness the interest and passion that many women have in climate change. She said:

“Women are not unwilling to go into science careers. They like to see a direct effect of the work on people and therefore are usually attracted to health roles, but climate change bucks that trend. Doing something good for the environment is attractive.”

And for women considering how to get into a ‘green’ role, she suggested:

“if you can code, you can turn it to anything, so learn to code.”



Penny Enderby
CEO, MET Office

4 We need 400,000 new jobs by 2050 to achieve net zero emissions

We face a serious skills gap. There need to be 400,000 new jobs by 2050 to achieve net zero emissions. Louise Parry from the Energy and Utilities Partnership gave us a detailed insight into the landscape, the opportunities and issues, stressing the importance of STEM education. She said:

“We need to focus on STEM education, increase the number of girls studying STEM subjects. Apprenticeships need to grow by 30% to ensure we have the skills we need. Once young people opt out of STEM, getting a role in sustainability becomes very difficult. We also need to raise greater awareness of the types of roles in sustainability, water and utilities industries to inspire people.”



Louise Parry
Director of People & Organisational Development,
Energy & Utilities Skills Partnership

5 Values matter to employees and employers

The essential ingredients we need to create sustainability for the future are creativity and innovation both of which come from greater diversity and plurality of thought. We must embed these values at the heart of an organisation to build a culture that truly embraces diversity. In short, our values and the values of the organisations we work for matter and need to align.

Fakhara Jones from Surfachem, a chemical distributor to businesses across the globe, inspired us with her experience of embedding diversity as central company value. She concluded that values;

“allow us to create a more emotionally intelligent workforce.”



Fakhara Jones
Technical Director, Surfachem

“

...allow us to create a more emotionally intelligent workforce.

Fakhara Jones Technical Director, Surfachem

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6 We all have a role to play in sustainability

Finding the solutions to the environmental challenge we face is everyone’s responsibility both at an individual and a corporate level.

For those of us wondering where to begin, Emer Murnaghan, Head of Responsible Sustainable Business, at GRAHAM who opened day two of our conference, shared her own inspiration. She said:

“I relate most of the work I do directly or indirectly to the UN sustainable development goals because I believe the work of civil engineers is directly related to making the world a better and more inclusive place, and accelerating the change that we want to see in society.”

Check out the [UN sustainable development goals](#) and see how you can relate your work.



Emer Murnaghan
Head of Responsible Sustainable Business,
GRAHAM

7 Allyship goes beyond the lanyard

If you've ever thought about being an ally or establishing an ally network, then the detailed and practical insight into allyship delivered by Alasdair Henderson, Global Director, HR Business Partnering at Royal BAM NV, is an incredibly powerful must watch!

We learned what it takes to be an ally, how businesses can develop allies, how important they are to changing mindsets, demystifying gender balance, informing people and answering concerns. Alasdair gave us a very vivid and powerful image of allyship when he described it as "going beyond the lanyard". He said:

"Allies are part of the answer, not the answer in themselves. ... They don't create change, they aim to get mass involvement and create momentum. ... We're asking a lot from allies – they need to be humble, willing to question their views and acknowledge their privilege. Self-motivation and holding oneself to account has to form a large part of this."



Alasdair Henderson
Global Director, HR Business Partnering,
Royal BAM Group NV

8 Think 5 jobs ahead

We need more women in senior roles to develop the much needed greater diversity and innovation to drive sustainability.

A panel discussion hosted by our Young Professional Board (YPB) offered advice for women planning their progression to the top, much of it based on personal experience, including; "think 5 jobs ahead", "don't wait for opportunities to come to you, venture out, be bold, reach out, be active and connect and ask for help." Alexandra Lawson, production engineer at Shell UK and member of the WISE YPB, said:

"In terms of female career progression, one of the issues is that young women don't know about the help that's on offer. I have found opportunities through word of mouth or people putting me in touch with other people. I also think early career women are very influenced by stories and will be more likely to tune into a lunch and learn with a role model than read an email bulletin on career progression."

The panel concluded:

"Growth only happens when you are out of your comfort zone, so step out, learn and grow."



Alexandra Lawson
SEGAL Hydrocarbon Scheduler, Shell UK

9 Monitor, measure, understand, action, repeat

Network Rail shared their Gender Matters Project and helped remind us that building greater diversity in our teams needs to be treated like any other business project with ongoing monitoring, measuring and action planning. Network Rail's Gender Matters Project aims to increase the number of women working at all levels of the business and remove barriers to inclusion we know women face. Their aim is that women will represent at least a quarter of the workforce by 2024 and to reduce the gender pay gap over time.

With the first stage of the project complete and having achieved good results including an increase in the number of women in leadership roles up from 20% in 2014 to nearly 30% in 2020, a year on year increase in the number of women taking secondments, plus an increase in promotions awarded to women, they invited WISE to help identify remaining barriers to female progression through quantitative and qualitative research. Lily Kitchen, Network Rail's Project Manager (Diversity and Inclusion), explained:

"While we have had these successes we knew there were still issues and that we could not be complacent. We wanted to measure, monitor and analyse performance at every stage to further understand the barriers to women progressing in our business."



Lily Kitchen
Project Manager (Diversity & Inclusion),
Network Rail

10 Form a queue to play your part

Sustainability careers may be gender balanced, however, the many other professions that are involved in the interdisciplinary approach required to create sustainability, are less so and we need to act now.

Our last panel of the conference shared their motivations for working in 'green' roles and again stressed the importance of education, role models and women in senior roles in their efforts to create a sustainable future. Dr Rachael Rothman of the Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures, said:

"There are not enough women in the pipeline. We need them queueing up to take the next senior roles that come open. We need to speed up the pipeline and create greater flexibility to support them." So come on – let's get that queue forming now!



Dr Rachael Rothman MA MEng (Cantab), PhD, AMI ChemE
Academic Lead for Sustainability,
The University of Sheffield