



# **DEVELOPING TOOLS AND EVIDENCE TO DELIVER PROSPERITY**

THE ERA OF INCLUSIVITY: EMPLOYEES DRIVING  
GREEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TOWARD  
SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY

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## Abstract

This paper explores employees' place in Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and Sustainable Prosperity. It examines the role of GHRM in organisational sustainability initiatives, emphasising the employee's role in sustainability decision-making. GHRM facilitates the achievement of sustainable practices by using every employee's interface. Its goal is to raise sustainability awareness among employees through HR practices that are environmentally friendly and promote long-term and efficient usage of organisational resources. The paper employs a qualitative case study of the University College London (UCL) through semi-structured interviews and content review based on a qualitative exploratory approach. Drawing on thematic analysis, the paper indicates the need for organisations to place employees at the forefront of sustainability policy formulation that is participatory in character as it cultivates shared ownership and positive outcomes.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management, Sustainable Prosperity, Employees, UCL, Sustainability, Policy Formulation, Employee voice.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Environmental consciousness and initiatives toward long-term sustainability have been topical in every conversation of the 21st century. The highlights of these conversations are the relevant climate change treaties and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as Kyoto (1997), Bali (2007), Copenhagen (2009), Paris Agreement (2015), and the recent COP 26. Consensually these conversations have spotlighted the need to protect the environment, where organisations are encouraged to find the right balance between inevitable economic development and environmental sustainability (Daily and Haung, 2001). Accordingly, organisations worldwide have begun to embrace sustainable or green policies and practices, including the integration of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Environmental Management (EM).

The alignment of Environmental Management and HRM practices can be traced back to 1987's "Our Common Future" by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the then Chair of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development. "Our Common Future" highlighted the critical role of Human Resource Management (HRM) in helping businesses achieve sustainable prosperity. The report focuses on sustainable growth that addresses current needs without jeopardising future generations' ability to fulfil their own (Brundtland, 1987). This growth refers to the transitional mechanism in which industrial development, economic strategy, technical growth orientation, and systemic transformation are all in sync and optimise current and future generations' capacity to achieve their goals and desires (Brundtland, 1987).

Integrating HRM practices with Environmental Management (EM) is a topic of proceeding research (Haddock-Millar et al., 2016). However, the merger of EM and HRM was not labelled until 2008, when Renwick, D.W.S, conceived the word "Green Human

Resource Management" (GHRM) in the study "Green HRM: A Review, Process Model, and Research" (see, Jabbour and Jabbour, 2016; Renwick, Redman, and Maguire, 2008). Meanwhile, Opatha (2013) indicates that Renwick perhaps was inspired by Wehrmeyer's book "Greening people: Human Resource and Environmental Management," edited in 1996. GHRM, according to Mathapati (2013), is the use of HRM policies to facilitate the productive use of resources in businesses and champion the community of environmentalism, which strengthens employee motivation and productivity. Other scholars, such as Jabbour (2013a, pp. 147–148), define GHRM as a 'systemic, planned alignment of typical human resource management practices with the organisation's environmental goals.'

Opatha and Arulrajah (2014) elucidate GHRM as the policies, practices, and systems that make workers of an institution green for the collective good: the employees, society, natural environment, and businesses. GHRM designs various human resource management processes such as recruitment and selection, performance assessment, compensation and rewards, training, and development to build a workforce that respects and encourages green behaviour (Mathapati, 2013). Some scholars argue that GHRM campaigns are part of larger corporate social responsibility schemes (Arulrajah, Opatha, and Nawaratne, 2016). Arulrajah, Opatha, and Nawaratne's (2016) argument is based on the notion that environmental sustainability is the moral responsibility of every organisation because industrial activities contribute to the current climate crisis. This position supports Daily and Haung (2001), where the scholar maintained that industrial activities contribute significantly to global climate change imperil. According to Collins and Clark (2013), human resources and systems are the fundamental cornerstones of any commercial or social entity. They are in charge of creating a green environment

by preparing and implementing eco-friendly initiatives. However, going green will be difficult without promoting human resource development and adopting sustainable environmental policies (Ahmad, 2015).

In contrast, researchers such as Jabbar and Abid (2014) claim that employees have a crucial role in implementing GHRM, yet the literature provides little empirical evidence on their role beyond the implementation stage (see Jabbour and Jabbour, 2016; Arulrajah, Opatha, and Nawaratne, 2015; Renwick, Redman, and Maguire, 2013; Jabbour, 2011). As a result, this paper provides empirical insight on the place of employees in GHRM policies establishment in the race to attain sustainable prosperity in organisations. Prior research views employee participation in sustainability management as critical in producing positive outcomes rather than confining sustainability management to top management and specialists (Renwick, Rahman, and Maguire, 2013). While factors such as industrialisation and stringent regulation continue to drive sustainability, employees are frequently cited as a source of pressure on organisations to address ecological challenges (Ahmad 2015). A study of 400 Canadian organisations by Henriques and Sardosky (1999) revealed that employees' pressure drives environmentally conscious firms. In another study conducted in Belgium, Buysse and Verbeke (2003) found a link between proactive environmental companies and those that place employees as critical stakeholders. Employee participation is often seen as productive relationships between the employer and the employee, resulting in highly motivated and efficient work output (Renwick, Rahman, and Maguire, 2013). Employee relations include employee engagement and empowerment, which can help avoid and overcome issues in the workplace and disrupt work processes. Accordingly, the findings found that when employees are at the forefront of sustainability policy formulation and implementation, it enhances their sense of ownership and belonging, leading to tacit knowledge development, sustainable organisational culture, and positive environmental performance. Essentially, strong collaboration between management and employees leads to the development of sustainable,

prosperous organisations.

The concept of sustainable prosperity is highly ambiguous; as the issue of what constitutes prosperity and sustainability is influenced by context (Jackson, 2016). Sustainable prosperity may mean different things to different people depending on the context. Thus, one's worldview may influence the concept of sustainable prosperity and how it could be assessed. For instance, political, ecological, cultural, and institutional frameworks influence individuals' perspectives on sustainable prosperity. Despite the concept's ambiguity, scholars such as Jackson (2016) and Jones et al. (2016) argue that any conceptualisation must consider the context in establishing sustainable prosperity as a robust view of sustainability in which natural and artificial resources are complementary rather than substitutive. The paper defines sustainable prosperity as a partnership between management and staff of organisations in formulating green policies and practices that resonate with individuals' values and principles and the organisation's vision.

# METHODS

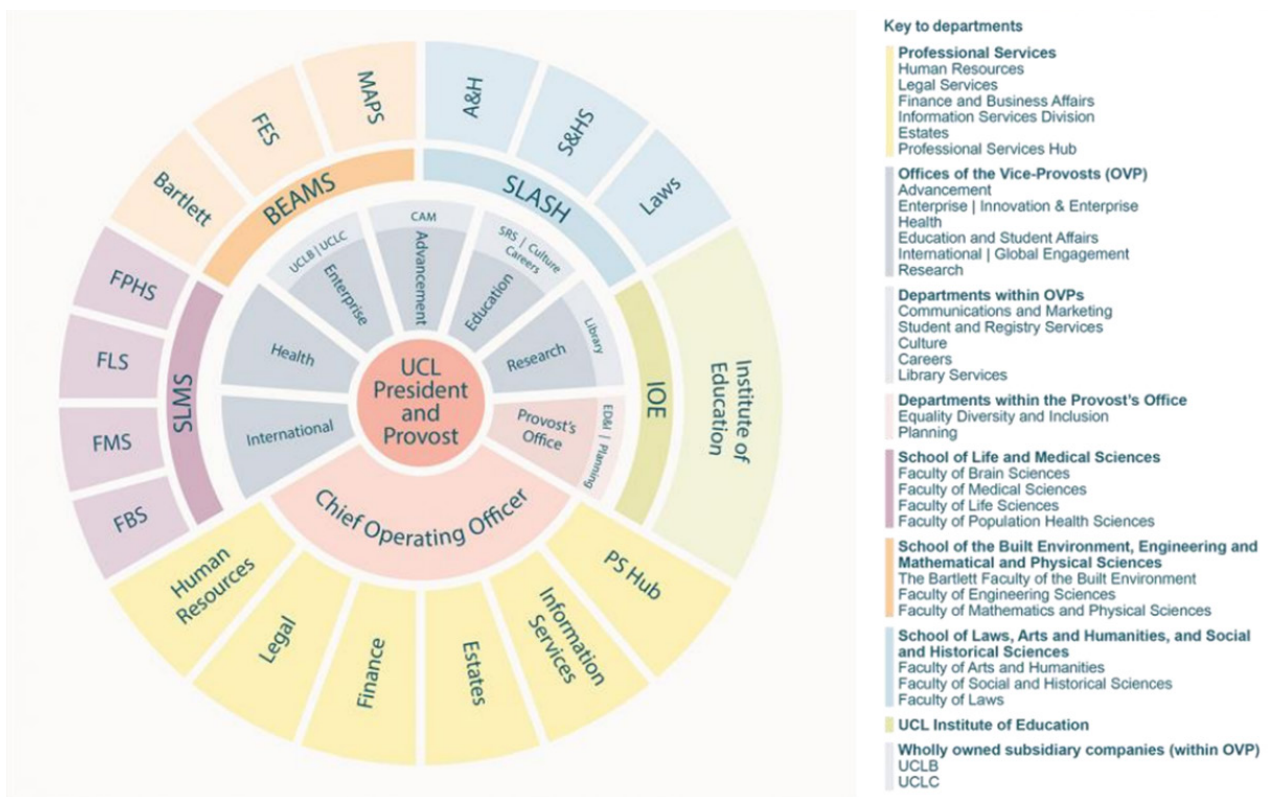
## DESIGN

To establish the place of employees in GHRM policy formulation, the study used a qualitative single case study approach (see Smith 2018; Bryman, 2016; Yin 2009) focusing on University College London (UCL). UCL was founded in 1826 as England's first diverse and inclusive higher educational institute. According to the QS world university ranking 2022 and 2023, UCL is ranked 8th best. UCL has a staff population of 13400, constituting teaching and non-teaching Staff headed by the President and Provost.

The university has four schools, eleven (11) faculties, and six (6) professional services, as shown in figure 1 below.

UCL has almost a decade of experience in sustainability policy establishment, with two major policies in 2013 and 2019. UCL was selected for this study because of its experience in sustainability policy formulation. The focus on a single case is grounded on the study's desire to conduct a comprehensive study to reach a rational conclusion (see Yin 2009).

**Figure 1.** UCL's organisational structure (Credit: UCL HR).



## DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The study adopted an interview-based exploratory case study approach (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989) and content analysis of University College London (UCL) sustainability policy, UCL's annual sustainability reports, websites, and other relevant documentation. Primary data was generated using ten (10) semi-structured interviews of UCL staff: One (1-A) from the UCL HR unit, two (2-B and C) from departmental HRs, one (1-D) from the UCL sustainability team, three (3-E, F and G) teaching staff across three faculties and three (3-H, I and J) non-teaching staff across three professional service units excluding UCL HR. The participants' diversity was deemed necessary to gain a broader understanding of the subject. Therefore, each participant was assigned an ID to ensure absolute protection of personal identifiers. The semi-structured interview allowed the paper to explore the participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on the topic. Interviews were conducted via Teams and Zoom and lasted between 15-20 minutes. Open-ended questions covered areas related to the University's sustainability policy and reports, participants' roles and experience in the sustainability projects, and specific GHRM initiatives and impacts. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed while all participants remained anonymised in the transcripts.

Also, the content review utilised relevant published documents, such as UCL Sustainability policy, UCL sustainability annual reports, UCL ways of working booklet, and other information on UCL websites, mainly UCL HR services and sustainability websites. These documents were reviewed and grouped on various themes such as the process of formulating the sustainability policy, specific GHRM policy emanating from the Sustainability policy, independent GHRM policies, and the role of employees in GHRM initiatives and the broader sustainability policy.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data, including the transcripts and the content review, were subjected to coding, inductively generating a range of themes (Bryman, 2016; Eisenhardt, 1989). The thematic analysis was employed to identify the process of developing the sustainability policy, specific GHRM policies and the functionality of employees in GHRM policies, and the broader sustainability policy formulation rather than focusing on the frequency of these outcomes. The thematic analysis allowed identifying and interpretation of data patterns and underlying relationships by closely examining themes and evidence. The paper focused on the organisation and detailed description of a data set and the interpretation of meaning based on theoretical considerations by examining the data set's implicit and explicit meaning (e.g., Braun and Clarke, 2019; Braun, Clarke, and Rance. 2014; Braun, Clarke, and Terry. 2014).

# RESULTS

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## UCL SUSTAINABILITY POLICY

UCL first established a sustainability strategy in 2013. The strategy aimed to create a campus that supports UCL's academics, research, and enterprise in a sustainable way. After gaining experience implementing the sustainability strategy, the university launched a revised version in 2019 known as UCL 2024. UCL 2024 is a five-year sustainability strategy that aims to tackle broader sustainability within UCL and its environment. UCL 2024 is an institutional sustainability policy that envisions a sustainable future. The strategy has three principal foundations: inspire action, run sustainably, and shaping the debate.

- The first principle, namely “inspire action,” aims to integrate sustainability across curriculum and extra-curriculum activities, such as creating or enabling the existence of sustainability societies. At the time of conducting this study, UCL successfully launched forty-one (41) sustainability programmes and 25 sustainability societies.
- The second principle, namely “run sustainably,” focused on embedding sustainability into planning, processes, and culture of every aspect of the institution. Some initiatives under this principle include a sustainability toolkit (i.e., a systematic framework for implementation and impact assessment), a sustainability induction module for all staff and students, and integration of sustainability into relevant job descriptions (UCL sustainability annual report, 2019/2020).
- The final principle, namely “shape the debate,” aims at starting, leading, and contributing to critical sustainability conversation through research. Some efforts under “shape the debate” include adopting relevant Sustainable Development Goals

as a framework for Action (UCL sustainability annual report 2019/2020). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a platform for guiding sustainability initiatives using a holistic approach. At UCL, various functions drive SDGs achievement, including adopting sustainable infrastructure and engaging local and international organisations through research. This UCL institutional strategy aims not to duplicate SDGs strategies but to acknowledge their significance in fulfilling them (UCL sustainability strategy, 2019).

Aside from these founding principles, the strategy has three signatures: wild Bloomsbury, Positive Climate, and the Loop. These signatures, also known as campaigns, provide a focal point of action for the UCL community, ranging from zero-carbon buildings and zero-carbon travel to plastic-free UCL.

The study found that UCL 2024 was developed through a cross-functional approach involving representatives of various stakeholders, including students, staff, and management. For instance, according to Interviewee (D), “We (sustainability team) did a broad level consultation with the UCL community in 2014 to understand the kind of core sustainability issues UCL staff and students wanted. The consultations involved senior lecturers and researchers, student leaders, staff from various professional services, and other stakeholders” (Primary interview, 2021). The consultation included conducting surveys, using a suggestion box, and in-person interactions. The Sustainability team converted the consultation results into a working document with multiple themes: wild Bloomsbury, Positive Climate, and the Loop. The Sustainability team developed working groups comprised of academics, students, and staff from professional services. Each group was assigned to each theme based on their interest and expertise. The various working groups were tasked to further transform the working documents into semi-finished documents



for further consultation with the UCL community. The consultation aimed to solicit their opinions and comments on the working documents and to confirm whether their needs were well presented in the working documents. The final consultation involved scrutiny from the University's Council. The policy was launched in October 2019 (Primary interview, 2021).

UCL's design process conforms to scholars' advocacy that organisations must actively involve employees in policy formulation (e.g., Afedzie et al., 2020; Jackson, 2016; Ahmad, 2015; Renwick, Rahman, and Maguire, 2013). For instance, Ahmad (2015) encourages result-driven organisations to actively engage employees in policy formulation as it largely influences policy's success. In the case of UCL, it could be argued that the engagements positively impact sustainability outcomes as UCL has been acknowledged for its significant efforts toward sustainability issues. To illustrate, in 2016/2017, UCL received ISO 14001 accreditation. ISO 14001 is an internationally recognised environmental management standard. In 2019/2020, UCL won a first-class award, having been placed 18th among 150 institutions in the People and Planet University League. In addition, the university scored 100% under human resources in sustainability and 80% under staff and students' engagement in sustainability (People and Planet league, 2019/2020). The People and Planet University League is compiled annually by the UK's student advocacy network, People and Planet, which rates higher education institutions' environmental and ethnic performance. Also, UCL achieved first place in the University Carbon League Table, consisting of 519 institutions in the UK, and received ISO 50001 accreditation, the international standard for energy management. Furthermore, from 2013 to 2019, UCL has been credited with 49 sustainability awards given to academics, professional staff, and students for various sustainability efforts (2019/2020 Sustainability Annual Report).

The findings also indicate that UCL's institutional sustainability policy is a significant reference point in formulating GHRM policies and practices as well as niche departmental policies. According

to interviewee (A), UCL HR takes inspiration from the institutional sustainability policy in formulating specific GHRM practices as well as aligning overall HRM practices with the sustainability strategy. This finding matches the argument of Haddock-Millar et al. (2016) and Mathapati (2013), where organisations are encouraged to ensure that their HRM strategy is consistent with broader sustainability priorities. In addition, Jabbour (2011) emphasised that the better aligned human resource management practices, the greater the strength of ecological management targets. Another scholar, Opatha (2013), argues that green initiatives in organisations are unlikely to be methodical, well-coordinated, resourced, or have considerable long-term success without the expertise and support of an efficient and sustainable HR department. All the interviewees affirmed their awareness of the existence of the UCL sustainability policy; however, 60% of the interviewees have little to no knowledge of the details of the policy (primary interview 2021).

Furthermore, 70% of the interviewees have neither seen nor read the annual sustainability reports. For instance, interviewee (J) said, "it is a shame, everything is on the website, but I have not had the time to look at it." Some interviewees (E, G, J, and H) attributed busy schedules as the primary cause of their inability to extensively appreciate the sustainability policy document and the annual reports. In contrast, some interviewees attributed it to ineffective communications channels and packaging. For instance, interviewee (I) stated, "I guess these huge documents (sustainability policy and reports) require a considerable time to read, so I think it would be helpful if they are packaged in small and appealing tones." Interviewee (G) suggested, "The sustainability team can release this information in bits through emails. They can even itemise them and release them as campus news". However, interviewee (D) noted that the sustainability team occasionally disseminates sustainability news such as awards and recognition to staff and students via emails. Nevertheless, the interviewee acknowledges that the university can do better in disseminating information.

## **CONCEPTUALISATION OF GREEN HUMAN RESOURCE (MANAGEMENT).**

UCL HRM often referred to as UCL HR, is the primary body governing the university's staff and supports faculties and departmental HR officers. The UCL HR services and departmental HR units are mandated to promote institutional-wide sustainable HR policies and practices which emanate from the sustainability policy. The study found that GHRM in UCL is called Sustainable HRM (SHRM). According to interviewee (A), "Sustainable HRM (SHRM) in UCL is a set of strategies and practices that intends to inspire employees to engage in an environmentally friendly manner. The aim is to enhance resource-efficient utilisation that facilitates the organisation's efforts to attain holistic sustainability". While (B) asserts that "SHRM are environmentally and ethically conscious practices that advance the institutional sustainability strategy." The typical thread across the interviewees' definitions of GHRM/SHRM were environmental sustainability practices, environmental and ethical strategies, and social and environmental responsibility. The descriptions of GHRM by interviewees (e.g., A and B) correlate with that of Mathapati (2013) and Renwick, Redman, and Maguire (2013), where GHRM is defined as policies that facilitate the productive use of resources and champions the community of environmentalism, which strengthens employee motivation and productivity. GHRM also focuses on developing policies and practices to improve employee skills, awareness, inspiration, and behaviours to achieve organisational environmental objectives (Maguire 2013). Both definitions highlight that GHRM policies and practices do not themselves address environmental challenges; instead, they guide behaviours and actions that expedite the vision of environmentalism. The findings showed that departmental HR units are empowered to devise green/sustainable policies that suit their local needs. The policies, however, must advance the institutional sustainability policy. Some notable

GHRM policies emanating from the institutional sustainability policy were communicating UCL's sustainability vision through recruitment and selection, sustainability training and development packages for all staff, green employee relations, green compensation systems, and encouraging flexible work conditions, such as remote working. These policies will be expanded in the following sections.

## **GHRM/SHRM POLICIES AND PRACTICES EMANATING FROM UCL SUSTAINABILITY POLICY**

### **EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY IN JOB DESCRIPTIONS**

A critical priority action of UCL's first principle of the sustainability strategy (Inspire action) aims to review all relevant job descriptions to ensure sustainability is adequately represented. This priority action aims to ensure that all UCL job vacancies reflect sustainability by reviewing job descriptions with the hope of attracting talent, knowledge, and environmentally sensitive employees (UCL HR 2021; UCL Sustainability strategy 2019). The paper sampled 20 job vacancies on the UCL Human Resource website. 90% of the sample job vacancies advertised have some sort of sustainability embedded in the job descriptions. For instance, one of the job descriptions stated in the introductory section: "Our vision is of a world where everything that's built aims to add to the well-being of people and the environment." This strongly indicates what the department, faculty, or the institution stands for and is being strongly communicated to the potential candidate(s). This action confirms the relevance of making sustainability visible in and out of organisations as sustainability scholars advocate. For example, Tang, Ren, and Jackson (2018), Mandip (2012), and Jabbour (2011) indicate that organisations with a greening vision ought to integrate sustainability into every job description. UCL sustainability report (2019/2020) indicates

that embedding sustainability in job descriptions is in progress, yet no comprehensive details are currently available. However, according to the interviewee (A), UCL is committed to achieving the target by 2024.

Meanwhile, the study found that UCL has long incorporated sustainability in the job description before the arrival of the sustainability strategy. For instance, according to interview (B), “UCL has always been environmentally conscious. There have been several efforts to make it visible in job descriptions even before the launch of UCL 2024; however, the policy has given it legitimacy, and we have since communicated it more forcefully in every job description”. In giving a typical example of how a job description includes sustainability, Interviewee (D) read an aspect of a current job advertisement for the position of a Communication Officer. The vacancy reads, “We are UCL: a diverse community with the freedom to challenge and think differently. From climate change to plastic pollution, infant mortality, to social inequality. The world is facing huge challenges, and we are determined to solve them”. D explained, “We are determined to ensure that every talent recruited at our department appreciates, understands, or is ready to learn and implement sustainability.” In embedding sustainability in the job description, UCL employed a strategic approach reflecting the kind of values the university wishes to create through its employees. Organisations that adopt a strategic path to environmentalism redesign the organisational model to include sustainability in every aspect, including recruitment and selection of personnel (see Cohen, 2012). Brio et al., 2007 argue that integrating sustainability in job descriptions significantly impacts organisations’ public image, attracting environmentally conscious employees who share the organisation’s vision. This conforms to the beliefs of all the interviewees. For example, interviewee (H) asserted, “I left my previous job for UCL even though my then job equally paid well because I resonate more with the ideals of UCL, especially those about the planet and people.” Interviewee (J) stated, “The most fulfilling part is doing what you love and making impactful contributions toward protecting the environment.”

## EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

UCL 2024 highlights three fundamental sustainability training and development programmes. They include sustainable and ethical procurement best practices training for staff in purchasing and procurement units, integrating sustainability into leadership training, academic careers and core behaviour frameworks, and an induction module for all staff, students, and contracted staff. The induction policy mandates all employees to undergo sustainability training. The policy states, “As part of UCL’s commitment to environmental sustainability and carbon reduction, all new employees must complete the e-learning module called green awareness before the probationary period.” The Green Awareness is an e-learning module that introduces employees to what sustainability means to the UCL community, the efforts of UCL in combating climate change issues, and how to be a green employee (UCL HR, 2021). Sustainability inductions are essential for ensuring that employees are informed of an institution’s operations and make a positive first impression on recruits. However, it is more than just a means of exchanging information. Establishing your organisation’s habits and culture is critical to achieving its sustainability goals (see Tang, Ren, and Jackson. 2018; Haddock-Millar et al., 2016; Jabbour and Jabbour, 2016). This paper found that the mandatory induction module takes about 15 minutes. According to the interviewee (A), beyond the green awareness module, generally, a standard staff induction contains the following format:

- “An introductory video: as part of the welcome package or as part of a more significant induction ceremony, we play a video of the Provost and President welcoming staff to the UCL community, including providing up-to-date information regarding the university’s sustainability efforts and culture.
- A presentation from the Sustainability team. The representative provides more detailed information on the various sustainability foundations, campaigns, and contact points.
- The next activity is at the departmental

level. Each department continues the induction by providing relevant information about the job and the department”.

Meanwhile, UCL HR encourages each department to adapt the standard template based on their needs. Interviewee (A) clarified that each department owns the induction process and champions the points above. The participant said, “We only support as and when the need arises, but each unit or department has complete authority to conduct an independent induction. As I said, this is just a standard”. Meanwhile, participants (B and C) confirm the induction template designed by UCL HR and Sustainability Team. C said, “The templates serve as a guide and allow us to tailor it based on our needs.” According to the annual sustainability report (2019/2020), 959 staff have completed the sustainability induction. This represents 7% of the total staff population of 13400. In explaining the low numbers, interviewees (A, B, C, and D) indicated that the mandatory sustainability induction training is only for the new entrance.

Nonetheless, existing staff are encouraged to undertake it as part of their sustainability commitment. UCL’s green awareness module and the entire induction programme support Mandip’s (2012) claim that organisations should integrate sustainability in training and development programmes for existing and new employees. Two out of the ten interviewees – representing 20% – have completed the mandatory induction module. One individual (E) commented, “generally, the module met my expectation; it communicates the University’s sustainability story and challenges us to be disruptive thinkers.” Another employee (I) remarked, “if I am not mistaken, none of UCL waste goes to landfill, which stands out for me in the green awareness module because waste management is a big deal globally.” On the other hand, 40% of the interviewees do not know of the existence of the Green Awareness module, while 40% are aware and plan to take the module soon (primary interview 2021).

Furthermore, according to the UCL sustainability annual report (2019/2020), all employees in purchasing and procurement have undergone

training concerning sustainable purchasing and procurement practices. The training package aims to ensure that staff appreciates the environmental element in products. This was confirmed by the interviewee (A). Meanwhile, the study could not obtain detailed information on such training, including the number of personnel in purchasing and procurement. Finally, the training and development programme involves the integration of sustainability into leadership training, academic careers, and core behaviour framework known as the new lead@UCL. Unfortunately, the paper could not obtain a comprehensive progress report on the framework; however, according to the 2019/2020 sustainability report, all staff in leadership positions have completed the sustainability training programme. Notwithstanding, Daily and Huang (2001) argue that senior management and leadership knowledge and expertise in environmental management should be paramount to pro-environmental organisations. Hence new lead@UCL is a laudable initiative.

## **GREEN EMPLOYEE RELATION**

UCL 2024 establishment adopted a cross-functional approach, as indicated earlier. According to Ahmad (2015), organisations should widen employee relations, in which every employee, from top to bottom, is allowed to participate in decision making. This practice will aid in raising awareness of environmental challenges and generating fresh ideas for environmentally responsible behaviours from various sources. Still, the approach adopted by UCL has been criticised for only involving senior Staff and Researchers. For instance, interviewee (J) expressed his disappointment with the process: “I believe some few senior employees and student leaders were probably consulted. That is not enough for a global university like UCL and a subject as serious as sustainability”. However, the interviewee added, “I am not discrediting the expertise and relevance of those consulted... far from that; instead, I believe a bottom-up approach is better”. The findings agree with Kim et al. (2019) that leadership commitment is a major factor shaping employee behaviour in environmental sustainability management. The interviewee expressed this in two ways; on the one hand, the interviewee believes the

UCL approach is somewhat flawed. On the other hand, the interviewee seems hesitant to criticise the approach. The possible explanation is what Powell and DiMaggio (1983; 1991) described as the “iron cage,” illustrating how institutionalised isomorphism shape employees’ routines and sense-making.

Notwithstanding, concerning Interviewee (J) ‘s criticism of the sustainability policy formulation approach, particularly on employee engagement, Participant (D) insisted, “Employee engagement in our sustainability policies means a lot to us; we want them to own and shape the change we desire. In fact, at UCL, we don’t say sustainability; we do it. That is why we made border consultation”. Two consultative events with the university community were held before the policy’s launch in 2019. The second consultation obtained 2000 comments and feedback on the working document (Primary interview, 2021; UCL sustainability annual report 2019/2020). After the policy’s launch in 2019, the UCL Sustainability team instituted the Green Champions as the central staff engagement platform. The Green Champions is a voluntary network of Staff across UCL that act as a conduit between the sustainability team and their departments. The role does not require prior sustainability knowledge as the sustainability team provides support such as training and supervision. In addition, this Green Champion platform provides staff with opportunities, such as leadership training, project management, and communication skills training, and knowledge of sustainability and behaviour change training. Staff can volunteer for the role or be nominated by their department. Primarily Green Champions report to the sustainability team about their departmental sustainability challenges and disseminate information to staff and students (UCL sustainability, 2021).

Two of the participants currently represent their departments as Green Champions. They both confirm the support and training programmes received as members of the Green Champions network. For instance, Interviewee (G) stated, “I have participated in at least three sustainability training programmes and two forums organised by the Green Champion network in less than two years.” Interviewee (F) said,

“The most amazing part of being a Green Champion is that it unifies a community with a shared vision, passion, and purpose. It serves as a tie that binds individuals together, creates strong friendships, and promotes collaborative effort”. The findings support Ahmad (2015), where the scholar argued that employee engagement promotes a sense of belonging and purpose.

Some interviewees (e.g., E, F, and I) acknowledge the university’s efforts to engage employees in formulating the Sustainability policy; however, they suggest regular engagement with the broader community as the policy is ongoing. For instance, (E) said, “I believe in protecting the planet and its people; sustainability is more pivotal now than ever. I truly believe regular engagement with staff and students is the central vehicle to drive the change we envision”. The participants continued, “To the best of my knowledge, there has not been engagement with staff regarding their experience with the implication of process or the policy itself so far.” In responding to whether there has been such engagement after the policy’s launch, Interviewee (D) confirmed that there had not been such engagement yet. The interviewee, however, indicated that it would be taken into consideration in the future. Interviewee (D) further attributed the COVID pandemic as the cause of the delay in implementing such essential procedures. Meanwhile, plans are far advanced for a staff sustainability forum. The platform would empower staff to learn and share knowledge on various aspects of sustainability (UCL sustainability annual report, 2019/2020).

## **GREEN COMPENSATION**

Compensation and rewards systems are essential HRM practices where employees are appreciated for their efforts and achievements. These HRM strategies effectively connect an individual’s interests with the organisation’s (e.g., Renwick, Rahman, and Maguire, 2013; Daily and Huang, 2001). For example, UCL sustainability has the following compensation and rewards scheme.

- Staff award for outstanding commitment to sustainability,

- Sustainability research award,
- Sustainability impact award,
- Sustainability education award,
- Green impact office awards and LEAF awards for sustainable laboratories.

This compensation and awards system aims to appreciate and acknowledge the outstanding contribution of staff and motivate others to fellow suits. According to (D), “notwithstanding the pandemic, we’ve seen a slew of innovative sustainability initiatives while working and studying from home. This ranges from online wellness events to planting-at-home campaigns to long-term sustainability strategies.” The interviewee added, “thanks to our hardworking staff and students, the UCL community has received several awards and recognition.” For instance, In March 2021, UCL won the UK Higher Education sector Green Gown award for Climate Action. In addition, UCL’s PEARL (Person Environment-Activity Research Laboratory) building in Dagenham, East London, has been awarded an A+ energy rating, making it the university’s first net-zero carbon building, with excess energy from solar panels projected to make it carbon negative (Primary interview 2021; UCL sustainability annual report 2019/2020).

## SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY

Jackson (2016) argued that sustainable prosperity encapsulates a community that advances economic, environmental, and social progress. In this paper, the emphasis is on the relationship between management and employees toward sustainability. GHRM is a promising concept that aims to cultivate a productive relationship between employees and management capable of understanding and appreciating an organisation’s green culture. Such green efforts are embedded throughout HRM policies and recruiting, training, developing, and rewarding practices to promote an organisation’s sustainability policies. A standard view among

the participants was that employees positively impact the success or failure of an organisation’s sustainable policies. For instance, Participant (A) remarked, “Even well-thought-out initiatives are difficult to put into action. For organisations to move toward success, there must be a deliberate effort to involve employees actively. The involvement must be an ongoing process and not a one-off event”. Interviewee (B) commented, “Managers and staff at all levels must be involved and committed to creating and implementing a successful strategy. Most amazing ideas fail to come into fruition often due to failure of organisations to engage and consult workers”. Another interviewee (G) alluded to the notion of involving employees in policy formulation. The interviewee said, “There are many benefits of engaging your workers in critical decision-making. The benefits range from building strong rapport, gaining committed and loyal employees, better performance, and motivated employees. No matter how you look at it, both organisation and the employees stand to benefit; higher performances for the organisation and highly fulfilled employee”. These results suggest a positive relationship between employee engagement and sustainable prosperity. The results match those observed in earlier studies’ conclusion that employee involvement is directly associated with green results (e.g., Afedzie et al., 2020; Tang, Ren, and Jackson, 2018; Ahmad, 2015; Renwick, Rahman, and Maguire, 2008; Collier and Esteban, 2007).

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

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This paper explored the role of employees in driving Green Human Resource Management practices and policies toward Sustainable Prosperity using UCL as a case. The findings showed that UCL 2024 adopted a cross-functional approach where employees from various faculties, departments, and professional services were engaged. Employees played several roles in the sustainability policy formulation, including voicing their needs, working in various groups, and providing constructive feedback to various versions of the policy draft. Employee's voice is the channel through which they express their needs, expectations, problems, and opinions, as well as a platform on which they demonstrate creativity in contributing to management decision-making (Shen et al., 2016). Employee voices have been argued to have ripple effects (Shen et al., 2016). For instance, employee voice allows management to solicit ideas, test them with the workforce, and obtain feedback (Harvey et al., 2013). Employee voice can range from everyday informal interactions to formal engagement and can occur at many levels within the organisation. The use of employee voice as an engagement mechanism can shape and produce valuable insight, knowledge, and experiences that are beneficial to the organisation through collaborative decision-making procedures, which aid an organisation's sustainability journey (Shen et al., 2016; Harvey et al., 2013). Within the sustainable management perspective research, there are hints that employee voice could play a role in accomplishing an organisation's sustainability goals. For example, Boiral (2002) demonstrate that employee voice shapes the cultivation of tacit knowledge. Therefore, employee voices have the potential to offer a framework for employees to express and share tacit knowledge relevant to sustainability management.

Also, employee involvement in the form of working groups can be a crucial source of sustainability

management. Harvey et al. (2013) reiterated that employees' active involvement directly impacts sustainability goal attainment. Furthermore, a recent study on sustainable, transformative leadership highlighted that leadership is not a position held by a single individual; instead, it involves a mutual relationship between superiors and subordinates translated into productive working teams (Singh et al., 2020). Meanwhile, this study found that employees' decision to participate in UCL's Sustainability policy formulation and implementation was based on their personal values and perception of the institution's sustainability commitments. This was expressed in two folds; on the one hand, some participants alluded that the university's Sustainability vision primarily influenced their engagement decision. On the other hand, some participants described their participation decision entirely on their personal values. This agrees with extant literature, which emphasises that the willingness of employees to engage in sustainability management is influenced by the perception of organisational commitment and personal values (Afedzie et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2016; Harvey et al., 2013).

However, some participants criticised UCL's approach used in formulating sustainability policy. Interviewees expressed scepticism about the participatory nature of the policy formulations when only senior staff, researchers, and student leaders were the only active participants. According to the findings, such perception of a top-down approach or selective engagement may breed mistrusts, misalignment of personal and organisational values, and difficulty obtaining employee buy-in. Studies highlight that organisational awareness of employees' perceptions is a fundamental component of employees's voice (Shen et al., 2016; Harvey et al., 2013). Therefore, an inadequate grasp of employees' perceptions may hinder organisational sustainability outcomes. For instance,

Kim et al. (2019) argue that employee support and engagement toward sustainable behaviour are essential for success. However, harnessing this potential without holistically soliciting and understanding employees' perception of the sustainability policy formulation approach creates challenges in determining where to focus efforts to achieve sustainability goals. Also, trust has been highlighted in the literature as a crucial element in nurturing employee participation (Buysse and Verbeke, 2003), employee loyalty, organisational citizenship behaviour, and organisational commitment (Korczynski 2000). Korczynski (2000) contends that trust in an organisational context is built on an employee-organisational relationship grounded on consistency, mutual transparency, effective communication, and aligned values. In the case of UCL, the finding showed that employees do not distrust the institutional commitment to sustainability and the sustainability policy as a whole instead, participants indicated distrust in UCL's commitment to engaging employees regardless of their status.

Regardless of participants' concerns about the inadequacy of employees' participation in the policy formulations, participants indicated their willingness to implement sustainability initiatives, whether consulted or otherwise. For instance, interviewee (I) noted, "The issue of sustainability is a matter of survival; I don't care whether they find it worthy of engaging me or not; I do my part and will continue. But, of course, I cannot institute policies, but I do the smallest things such as putting off the light when necessary, using less paper, and cutting down waste in general". This agrees with extant studies, which indicate that employees who understand the importance and gravity of environmental and sustainability concerns are better able to respond to such challenges by taking pro-environmental measures to reduce resource waste and save operational expenses (Farrukh et al., 2022).

Additionally, employees' voices were also demonstrated through the Green Champions Scheme. The study found that Green Champions is by far the most impactful engagement platform for employees in UCL. Participants emphasised

how the platform helps them develop relevant skills, expand their networks, and be recognised for their efforts. A current Green Champion participant said, "Achieving a sustainable future isn't just rocket science." "It entails recognising and carrying out simple tasks. Getting environmentally conscious employees to cultivate essential skills and knowledge is an essential step and thus what the Green Platform does." This aligns with Tang, Ren, and Jackson's (2018) argument that engaging employees such as sustainability teams cultivates and enhances employee morale and improves productivity. Employee relations are essential actions that incorporate employee participation and empowerment. According to the study, employee involvement in environmental management has a significant positive outcome, with reasonable proof of a correlation with substantial results like efficient resource utilisation, effective waste management, and evidence of a favourable impact on employee outcomes, including delighted employees with high environmental values. However, the research question does not emphasise the benefit of employee relations in environmental management per se. Instead, the research question explored practical green employees' relation where employees have a stake in sustainability management decision-making.

Nonetheless, the study could not distinguish the impact of effective and ineffective green employee relations. Still, it demonstrated that involving employees in environmental management decision-making improves green management performance by aligning employees' goals, capabilities, motivations, and perceptions with green management practices and policies. Furthermore, the result supports previous studies such as Renwick, Rahman, and Maguire (2013), which emphasised that employee involvement in sustainability improves environmental management systems such as resource efficiency, waste reduction, and workplace pollution reduction. According to researchers, positive employee engagement has a favourable impact on organisational productivity and performance, including positive sustainability outcomes (e.g., Afedzie et al. 2020; Tang, Ren and Jackson 2018; Jabbour and Jabbour, 2016; Ahmad



2015; Jabbour 2013; Mandip 2012; Renwick, Rahman and Maguire 2008).

In conclusion, in order to achieve sustainable prosperity, the study suggests that organisations should recognise that they encompass people driven by emotions, values, perceptions, and career aspirations. Hence the process that leads to developing sustainable policies and practices ought to be inclusive. Furthermore, the results indicate the importance of the processes leading to the establishment of green policies rather than the ultimate policy or product itself. As a result, the study admonished every faculty, department, or unit in an organisation, such as UCL, should embrace and integrate inclusivity in approaching sustainability while focusing on aligning sustainability in every activity to make a sustainable future possible. Moreover, UCL management should strive to broaden employee engagement in the extant sustainability societies to include front-line employees known as operational staff in future sustainability engagements. Ultimately, the paper contributes empirically to the emerging Green Human Resource Management scholarship emphasising employees' roles in policy formulation. It also contributes to sustainable prosperity literature focusing on the potential of management-employees partnership in organisational sustainability policy formulation.

## LIMITATIONS AND AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

The study focused on the need to involve employees in sustainability management decision-making. This influenced the selection of UCL as a study area with a sustainability vision and currently implementing specific sustainability policies. In addition, the study concentrated on the university's processes and procedures in formulating the sustainability policy, paying particular attention to GHRM-related policies. As a result, the analysis may not represent the entire UCL sustainability efforts and procedures. Also, the paper could not exhaust every GHRM policy and practice comprehensively.

Furthermore, by interviewing only ten (10) employees out of the over 13,000 staff, the study could not capture the views of the majority of UCL's staff. Also, GHRM is still emerging; hence, the study contributes to broader GHRM and environmental management scholarship. Finally, this study does not provide sufficient empirical grounds to bridge the field's primary and secondary data gap. Instead, it lays a valuable groundwork for future research that could be utilised to generate more evidence on GHRM. Organisations such as UCL have already begun implementing GHRM and a more comprehensive sustainability policy; hence, this study serves as a reference point for a comparative study with organisations yet to embrace GHRM. A thorough examination of the factors influencing GHRM other than employee engagement and a comparative analysis of organisations embarking on GHRM against organisations without GHRM could be pursued.

## RECOMMENDATION TO UCL

The study discussed the role of employees in UCL's sustainability policy formulation and implementation, particularly GHRM policies. Accordingly, the study found that UCL's approach to sustainability, particularly formulating UCL 2024, was not participatory enough as the engagement primarily focused on senior staff, researchers, management, and student leaders. Hence the study offers the following recommendations to UCL,

- The study recommends that the current sustainability policy (2024) should be holistically reviewed. The review should adopt a bottom-up approach as the findings indicated that the policy was formulated using a cross-functional approach, thereby triggering dissatisfaction among operational employees. Therefore, a bottom-up approach review would demonstrate UCL's commitment to understanding the needs of employees. The review should also focus on soliciting rich qualitative data such as employees' experiences, feelings, and expectations, often inadequate in environmental and sustainability

evaluations. A holistic review would offer a viable foundation toward consequent sustainability policies and the attainment of sustainable prosperity

- The study also recommends that UCL, particularly the sustainability team, adopt a more effective communication tool in disseminating sustainability information, such as the policy, reports, and other relevant data. According to the findings, most participants had little to no information on the details of the policy and annual reports. In addition, the study found that the usual chunking out of bulky information through emails and website are ineffective, considering the high volume of emails staff receive daily. Hence, the study recommends that beyond the sustainability ambassadorial scheme, emails, and websites, the sustainability teams should collaborate with various departmental and unit heads for spots in their regular seminar series or events where sustainability information can be presented to participants.
- The study finally recommends that future sustainability policy formulation adopt a bottom-up participatory approach engaging employees from lower to higher ranks. The approach should go beyond usual surveys to employ qualitative tools to solicit in-depth data. Some viable approaches would be conducting town hall meetings, focus group discussions, and one-on-one interviews.

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