Insights on Aotearoa New Zealand Sustainability Professionals

2026 Report



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Sustainable Business Council | WBC Global Network

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Executive summary

Now in its seventh year, Insights on Aotearoa New Zealand Sustainability Professionals continues to provide an important snapshot of the sustainability profession in Aotearoa New Zealand, both as a point-in-time view, and as a growing record of how the profession has evolved since 2020.

Seven years of this research now allows us to see what is settled and what is shifting. Role typologies are established. Remuneration progresses through management levels. Sustainability professionals report wellbeing in line with, if not more favourable than, the broader workforce. Confidence in role competency has continued to climb. The profession has, in many ways, arrived.

But coming of age brings a different kind of work. The 2026 data points to a profession entering its deepening phase: one defined less by establishing its own legitimacy and more by ensuring the progress holds, distributes, and reaches further. Remuneration momentum has stalled. Career pathways remain elusive with many not able to identify a development pathway. Capability requirements are growing faster than the resourcing to meet them.

This year, 208 sustainability professionals contributed to this research. Their insights describe a profession that is now central to organisational success, but is also stretching to keep pace with what is being asked of it. How we take these insights and use them will determine whether what we have built can be deepened and sustained and support the profession to grow.

“Seven years of data tells us the profession has built a solid foundation. The sustainability profession in Aotearoa New Zealand is no longer establishing itself - it’s here. The work ahead is different. It’s about deepening, equipping, and ensuring this profession is one people can build a life in.”

Dr Sarah Holden, Founder and Director, Oxygen Consulting

Executive summary

PAY HAS PLATEAUED

- Remuneration momentum has stalled in 2026. Average remuneration eased from $143,848 to $141,675, and four of seven management levels saw pay decline against their 2025 peaks. Manager and senior-level pay fell most notably, while graduate and junior pay is stagnating.
- Two-thirds of professionals (66%) received a pay increase in the past year, with the average annual change of 2.1-3% marginally outpacing wage inflation of 2%. The vast majority of increases (83%) occurred within the same role rather than through any internal or external role-mobility.
- A structural gender pay gap continues to exist across the profession, narrowing from 8.46% in 2025 to 6.98% in 2026, but remaining above the national average of 5.2%.

CAPABILITY IS GROWING; RESOURCING ISN'T KEEPING PACE

- Professional confidence continues to improve, with the share of professionals strongly agreeing they have the necessary competency for their role rising to 40% (+3% v 2025).
- The persistent gap between the importance professionals place on development and the resourcing they receive remains a challenge. While 84% of professionals consider ongoing training important, only 40% feel they can keep up, and professional training participation has fallen to its lowest recorded level (27%, down from 34% in 2025).
- 40% of professionals identify gaps in current training, clustering across six areas: technical skills, commercial and financial acumen, strategic influence and communication, project delivery, te ao Māori competency, and sector-specific or advanced training. The breadth of these gaps reflects the breadth of the modern sustainability role.

WELLBEING HOLDS; BUT WARNING LIGHTS ARE FLASHING

- Sustainability professionals continue to hold a sober view of the world's trajectory. Belief that humanity will overcome our collective challenges has held steady since 2024, four in ten believe the environmental situation is getting much worse, and three in ten strongly agree that climate change impacts their personal wellbeing.
- Wellbeing measures across work demands, job satisfaction, and work-life balance remain stable and broadly comparable with, or more favourable than, the wider New Zealand professional cohort. However, the gap between sustainability professionals and the rest of the workforce has narrowed almost completely, suggesting both groups are now experiencing a similar working environment.
- Turnover intentions have crept up year-on-year since 2022 and the gap to the wider workforce has all but closed. The most pronounced flight-risk signal is among 18–25 year olds, half of whom are strongly considering leaving to work overseas.

The 2026 research reinforces a profession that has come of age, but whose work is far from finished. The maturity of the sustainability profession in Aotearoa New Zealand will increasingly depend on the deepening of capability, the strengthening of pathways, the closing of pay equity gaps, and the support of those who will carry the work forward. Seven years of data tells us the profession has built a solid foundation. The years ahead are about ensuring it endures.

As always, we welcome your feedback and the opportunity to support your sustainability journey through this research.

Dr Sarah Holden, Founder and Director, Oxygen Consulting

Practical takeaways from this research

Practical next steps for supporting the sustainability profession in Aotearoa New Zealand.

ORGANISATIONS

Strengthen career pathways: Establish clear progression routes and succession planning to support long-term career development. This remains one of the top barriers to growing the profession.

Give sustainability a seat at the table: Move sustainability beyond a standalone team into governance, strategy, and executive decision-making.

Resource roles appropriately: Match performance expectations with capacity and acknowledge the emotional and professional toll of sustainability work.

Invest in targeted development: Support learning opportunities for sustainability professionals in your organisation. Training investment and resourcing must match organisational aspiration.

Review gender pay gaps: Regularly review on pay equity and ensure transparency. Consider setting a pay equity target.

SUSTAINABILITY PROFESSIONALS

Develop your commercial fluency: Build financial literacy and business acumen to make sustainability arguments land at the executive level.

Protect your wellbeing: Acknowledge the emotional demands of working with complex global challenges. Seek peer support, set boundaries, and try not to take on the weight of the world. Progress happens through collective action, connect with others in the field.

Build cultural competency: Te ao Māori integration and Pacific perspectives are increasingly valued but under-developed. Actively seek opportunities to deepen this capability.

Leverage your strategic visibility: Use your growing influence to advocate for better resourcing, cross-functional collaboration

EDUCATORS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROVIDERS

Make professional development more accessible: Cost and location remain persistent barriers. Offer smaller, more affordable, or more frequent learning opportunities throughout the year.

More education on broader skills: Many professionals are reporting a lack of broader skills in current training offerings. Consider increasing education and training options that extend beyond traditional sustainability-related skills.

Design for senior practitioners: A clear gap exists for masterclass-level development aimed at Heads of Sustainability and above. Consider co-designing with senior practitioners to reflect the complexity of their roles.

STUDENTS & ASPIRING SUSTAINABILITY PROFESSIONALS

Build business and commercial skills: Sustainability roles demand financial literacy, strategic thinking, and commercial acumen. Pursue these alongside technical knowledge.

Be curious and adaptable: The profession is evolving rapidly. Stay across emerging issues, from nature-positive frameworks to new mandatory disclosure.

Connect early: Reach out to professionals for advice, mentorship, and insight into different pathways.

Gain real-world experience: Volunteer work, internships, or applied projects related to sustainability or the niche you'd like to be working in.

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Contents

5 Methodology
6 Sustainability Role Types
7 Our People
15 Remuneration
20 Capability & Development
28 Wellbeing & Job Satisfaction
32 Shifting the dial
35 Contributions



Methodology

Photo by Thomas Necklen on Unsplash

Insights on Aotearoa New Zealand Sustainability Professionals 2026 provides a holistic view of the current state of the sustainability profession in New Zealand – the role requirements, remuneration, development pathways, and wellbeing of those in sustainability jobs.

This report reflects the results of an online survey developed by Oxygen Consulting with guidance from Auckland University of Technology (AUT). The survey ran from 2 February – 2 March 2026 and was made publicly available to potential participants through the networks of Oxygen Consulting, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Sustainable Business Council (SBC), Sustainable Business Network (SBN), relevant industry associations, as well as a range of social media platforms such as LinkedIn.

The role typologies investigated in this research (General, Specialist, and Additional) were developed in 2023 by Oxygen Consulting based on insights gathered from previous years of this research, and in consultation with sustainability professionals in New Zealand. The typologies and their descriptions were circulated to sustainability professionals for feedback via Oxygen Consulting's email and LinkedIn networks. The typologies were then amended to reflect the feedback received.

Target participants for this research included any employed people who currently have 'sustainability' as part or all of their role. 'Sustainability' includes responsibilities that address the social, environmental and economic risks to the organisation. The scope included anyone in full time, part time or contractual positions within public, private, non-governmental, charity, and not-for-profit organisations.

Information was gathered at an industry group level only, with a focus on the sustainability professionals employed in New Zealand organisations. Organisational sustainability strategies and activities were out of the scope of this research.

Anonymity of participants was maintained through the aggregation of results. Personal information that could be used to identify individuals (e.g., names, email addresses, workplace names), was not collected.

As the seventh concurrent year of this research, the 2026 sustainability professionals research compares trends and findings with the 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 research where relevant. 208 people participated in the research compared with 274 in 2025, 322 in 2024, 236 in 2023, 157 in 2022, 113 in 2021, and 130 in 2020.

Wellbeing data was compared against an equivalent AUT New Zealand general professionals data set for 2020 - 2026. 803 people participated in this survey group in 2026 compared with 486 in 2025, 414 in 2024, 500 in 2023, 441 in 2022, 441 in 2021, and 442 in 2020. This was used to compare the New Zealand sustainability professionals dataset with other New Zealand professionals from a variety of alternate industries.

Limitations and uncertainties:
The 2026 research had a reduction in respondents compared to 2025, increasing the uncertainties associated with insights included in this report. For this reason, a number of insights reported in 2025 have not been reported this year.

Sources:
Stats NZ: NZ's Gender Pay Gap 2026
Stats NZ: NZ's Annual Wage Inflation 2025

The research was conducted in accordance with AUT's Ethics Committee processes (AUTEC Reference number 23/1).

Defining the sustainability role types

Three different sustainability role types are benchmarked throughout this report.

General

This role focuses 100% on broadly managing the organisation's sustainability agenda.

This role may be leading the strategic direction, coordination, and implementation of organisational sustainability, and often has 'sustainability' in the job title.

Example roles:

- Chief Sustainability Officer
- General Manager Sustainability
- Head of Sustainability
- Sustainability Manager
- Sustainability Advisor
- Sustainability Graduate

Specialist

This role provides 100% specialist expertise and focuses on specific technical or specialist aspects of sustainability.

May include specialist roles working in organisations, as well as sustainability consultants providing specialist expertise to organisations.

Example role specialties:

- Nature and Biodiversity
- Climate Change
- Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)
- Carbon Accounting
- Green Property
- Circular Economy
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Te ao Māori
- Community Engagement

Additional

This role is predominantly focused on other activities or another profession but has some sustainability responsibilities.

May include roles in sustainability associations.

Example roles:

- Procurement professional also managing sustainable supply chain practices
- Communications professional also managing the organisational sustainability report
- Finance professional also managing the organisation's carbon inventory
- Corporate affairs professional also responsible for overseeing sustainability

Our People

Demographics:
Identifying Aotearoa New Zealand's sustainability professionals

Organisations:
Where sustainability professionals are working and who employs them

Tenure:
Role tenure of sustainability professionals

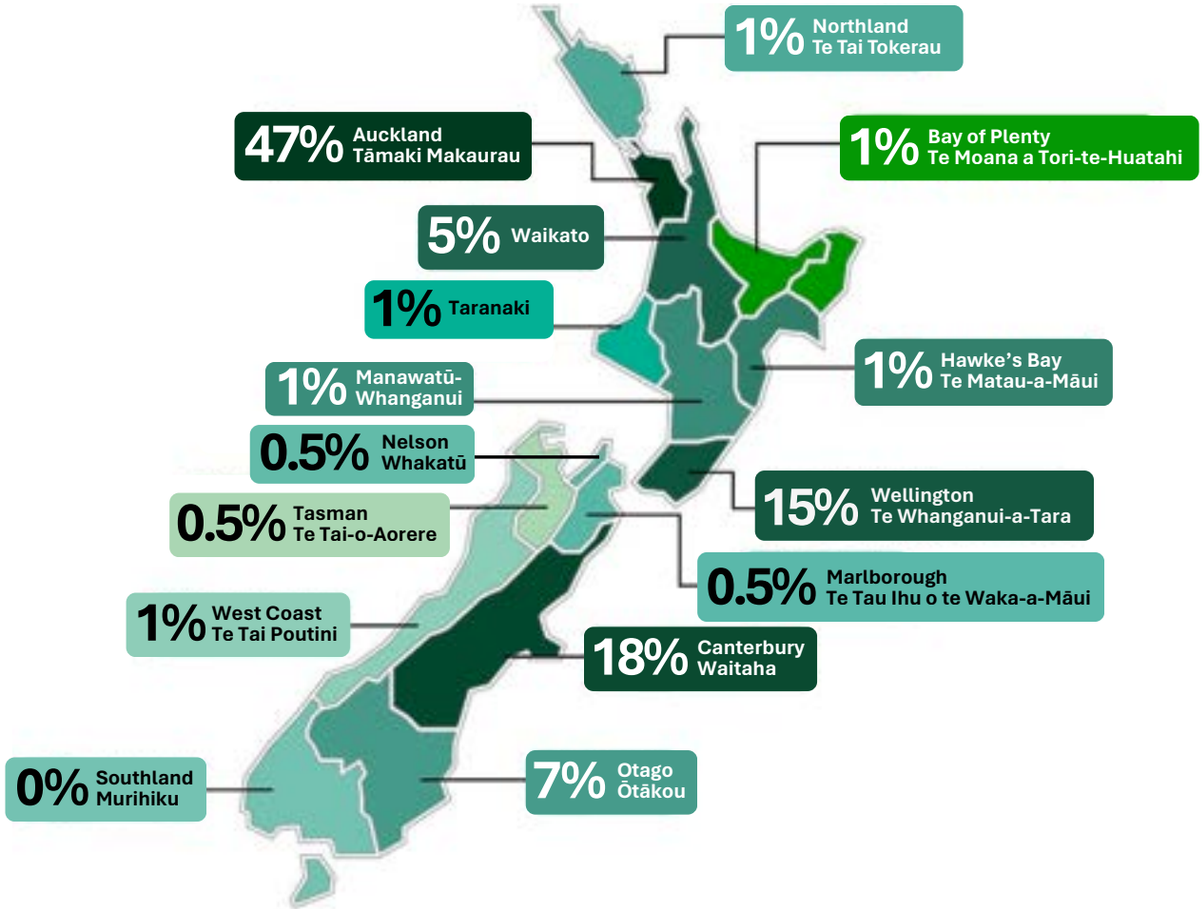
Education:
Level of qualification and field of study



Photo by Johan Mouchet on Unsplash

Sample distribution

Region



Roles

47%
General

39%
Specialist

14%
Additional

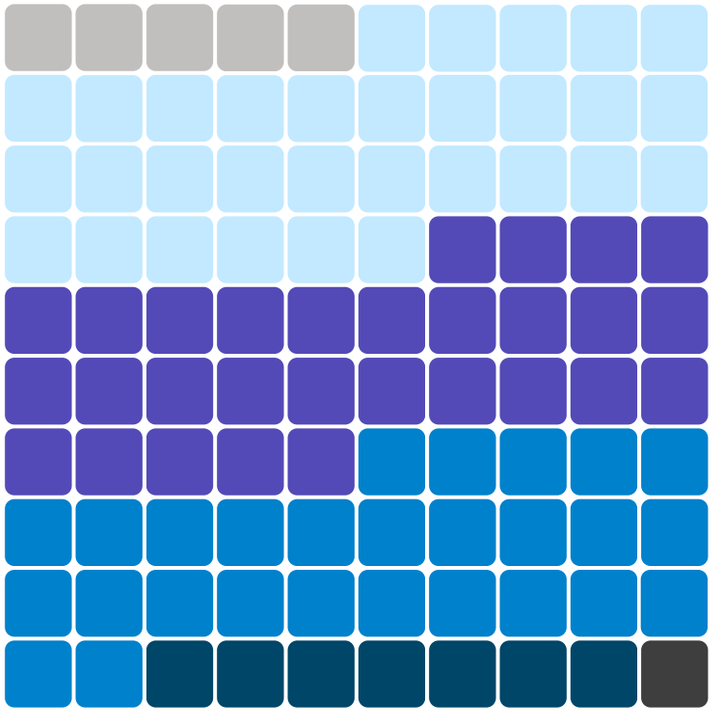
Q: What location in NZ are your based in?

Q: Thinking about your current role, which of the following sustainability roles do you most identify with?

The people working as sustainability professionals

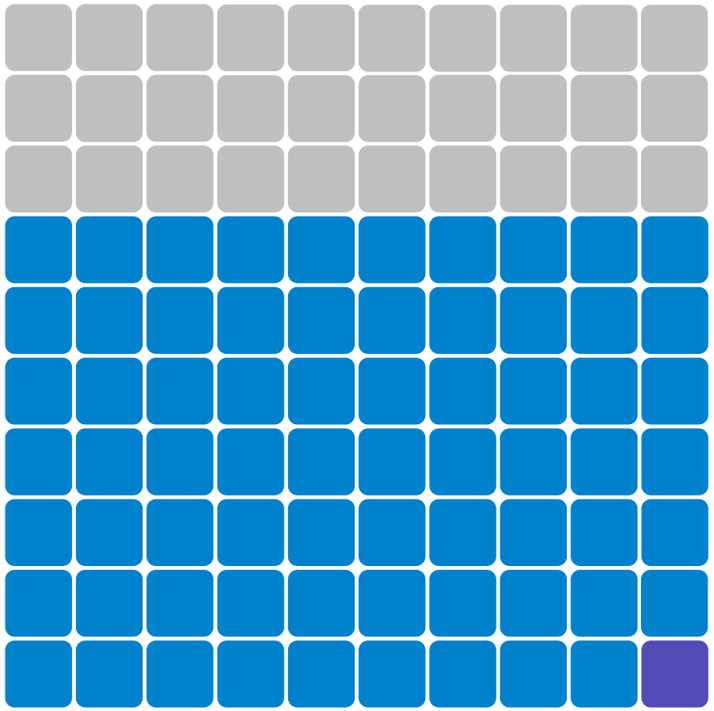
The sustainability profession remains predominantly female (69%), broadly distributed across the 26-55 age range, and majority NZ European (78%). Representation of Māori (1%) and Pasifika (0.5%) has remained very low over the last 7 years of this research, indicating that diversifying the profession is a deepening priority that has yet to gain traction.

Age



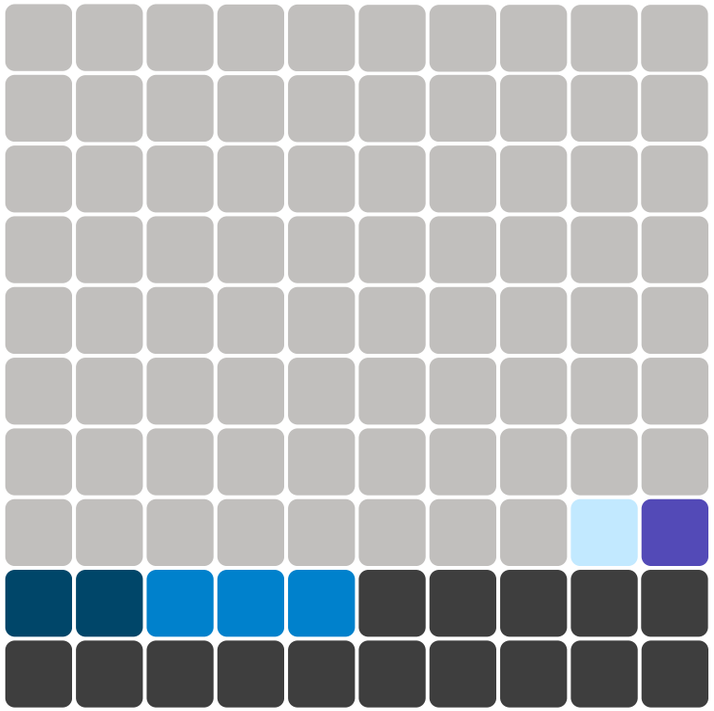
18 - 25 (5%) 26 - 35 (32%) 36 - 45 (30%)
46 - 55 (27%) 56 - 65 (7%) 65+ (0.5%)

Gender



Male (30%) Female (69%) Non-binary (1%)

Ethnicity



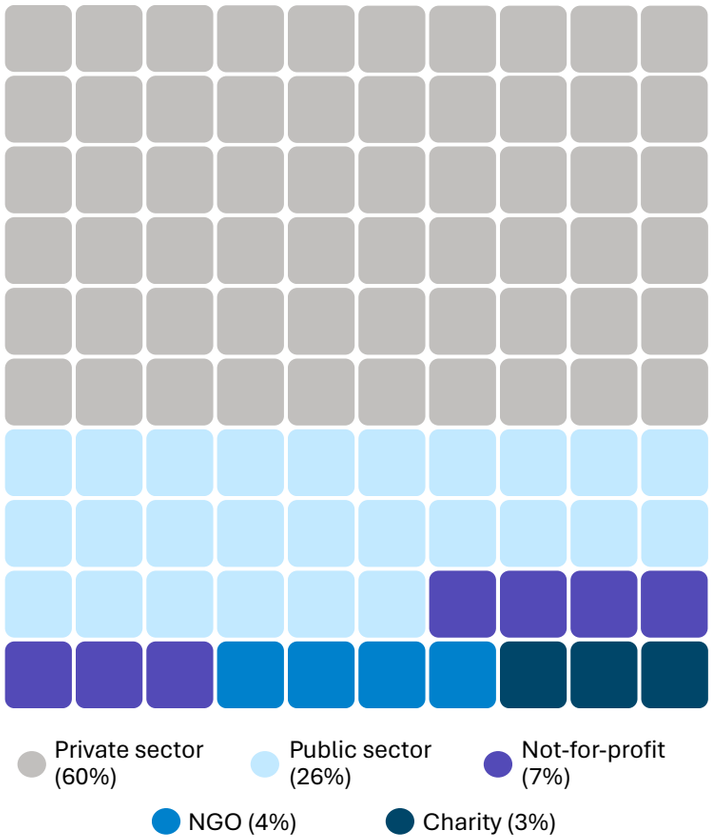
NZ European (78%) Māori (1%) Pacific Peoples (0.5%)
Middle Eastern, Latin American and African (2%)
Asian (3%) Other (15%)

Q: Age
Q: To what gender do you most identify?
Q: Ethnicity

The industries employing sustainability professionals

The majority of sustainability professionals work in organisation with 250 or more employees (68%), primarily in the private sector (60%) and public sector (26%).

Organisation type



Organisation size

11%
1 - 9 employees

5%
10 - 19 employees

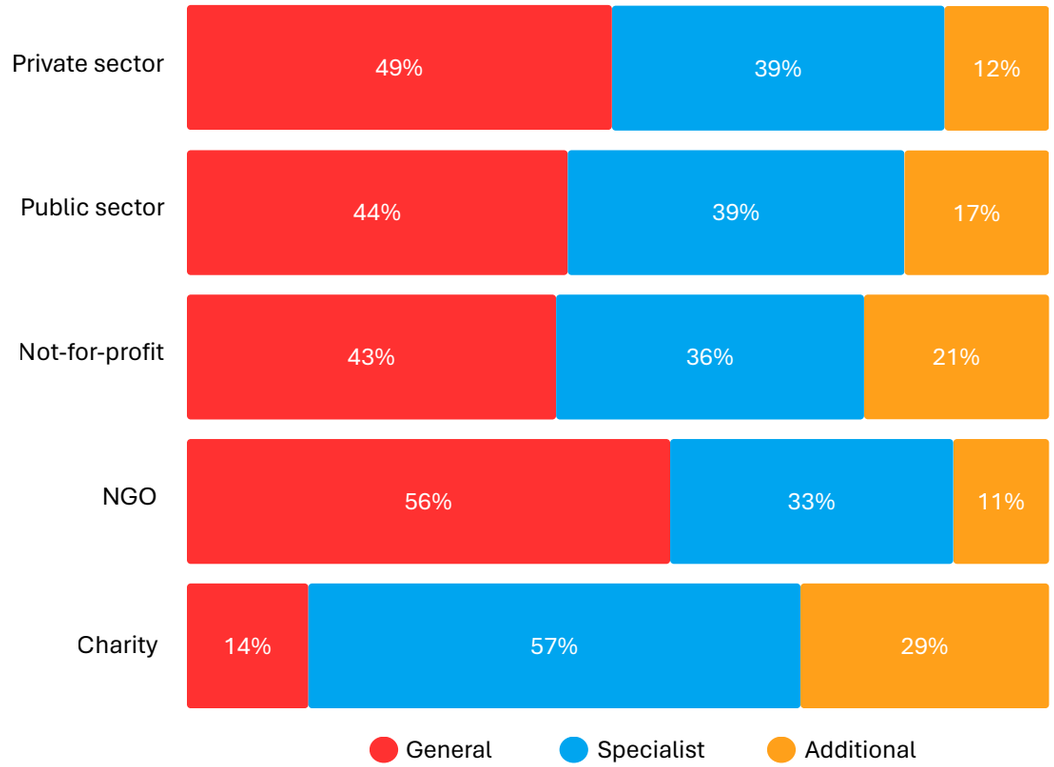
4%
20 - 49 employees

11%
50 - 249 employees

22%
250 - 1000 employees

46%
1000+ employees

Organisations by role type

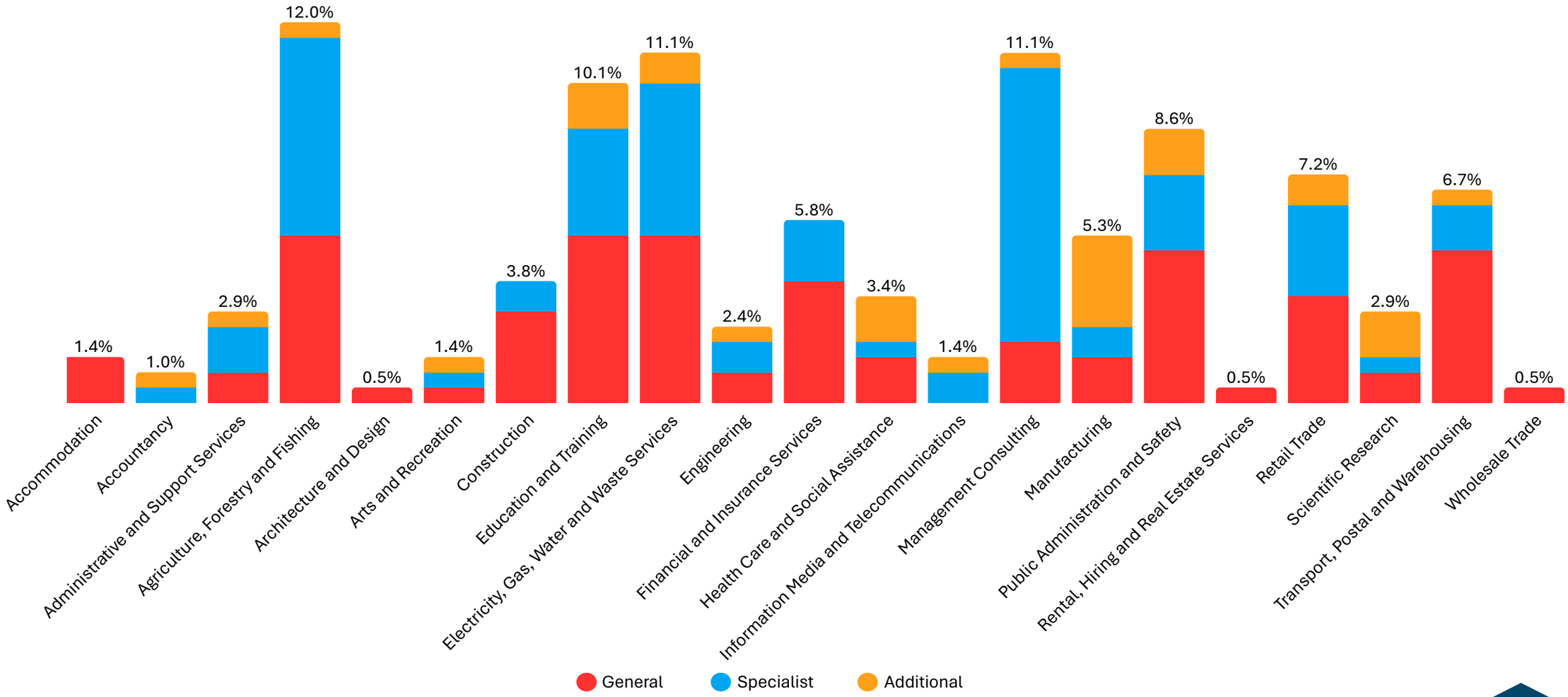


Q: What is your organisational type?
Q: What is the size of your organisation?
Q: Thinking about your current role, which of the following sustainability roles do you most identify with?

The industries employing sustainability professionals

The Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry is the largest employer of sustainability professionals in 2026 (12%), followed by Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services (11%), Management Consulting (11%), and Education and Training (10%), together accounting for nearly half of all professionals. Specialist roles remain heavily concentrated in Management Consulting, reflecting the nature of technical consulting roles.

Industries by role type



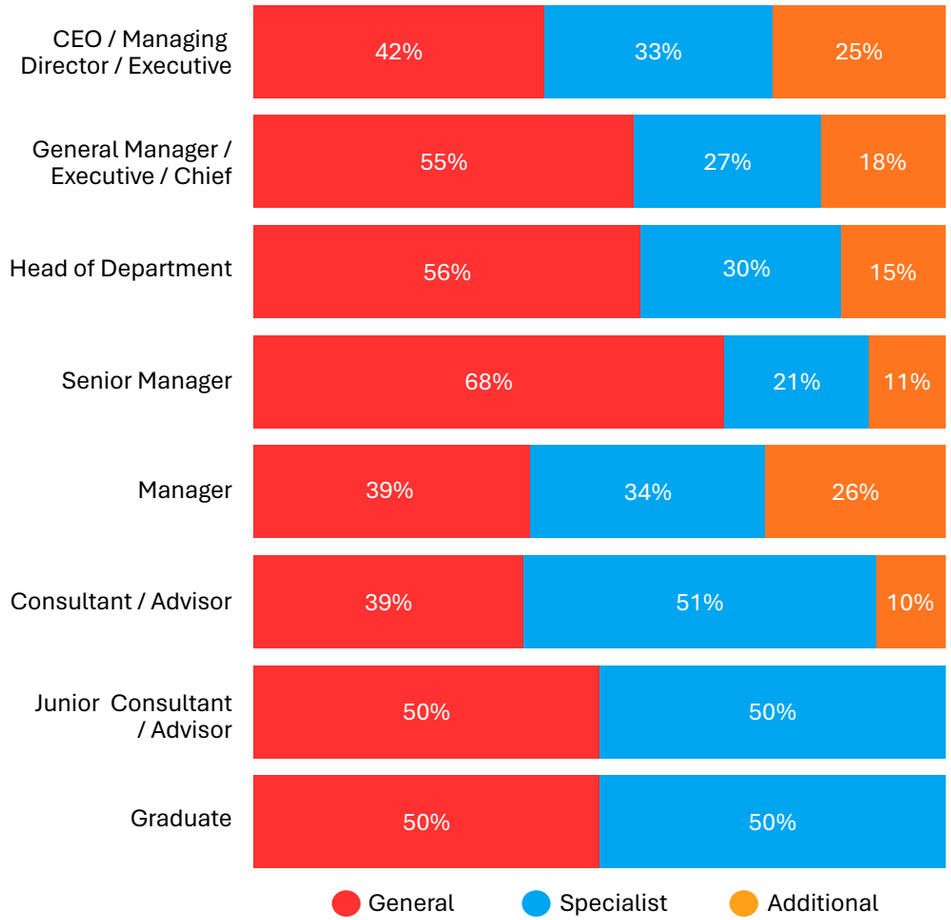
Q: What location in NZ are your based in?

Q: Thinking about your current role, which of the following sustainability roles do you most identify with?

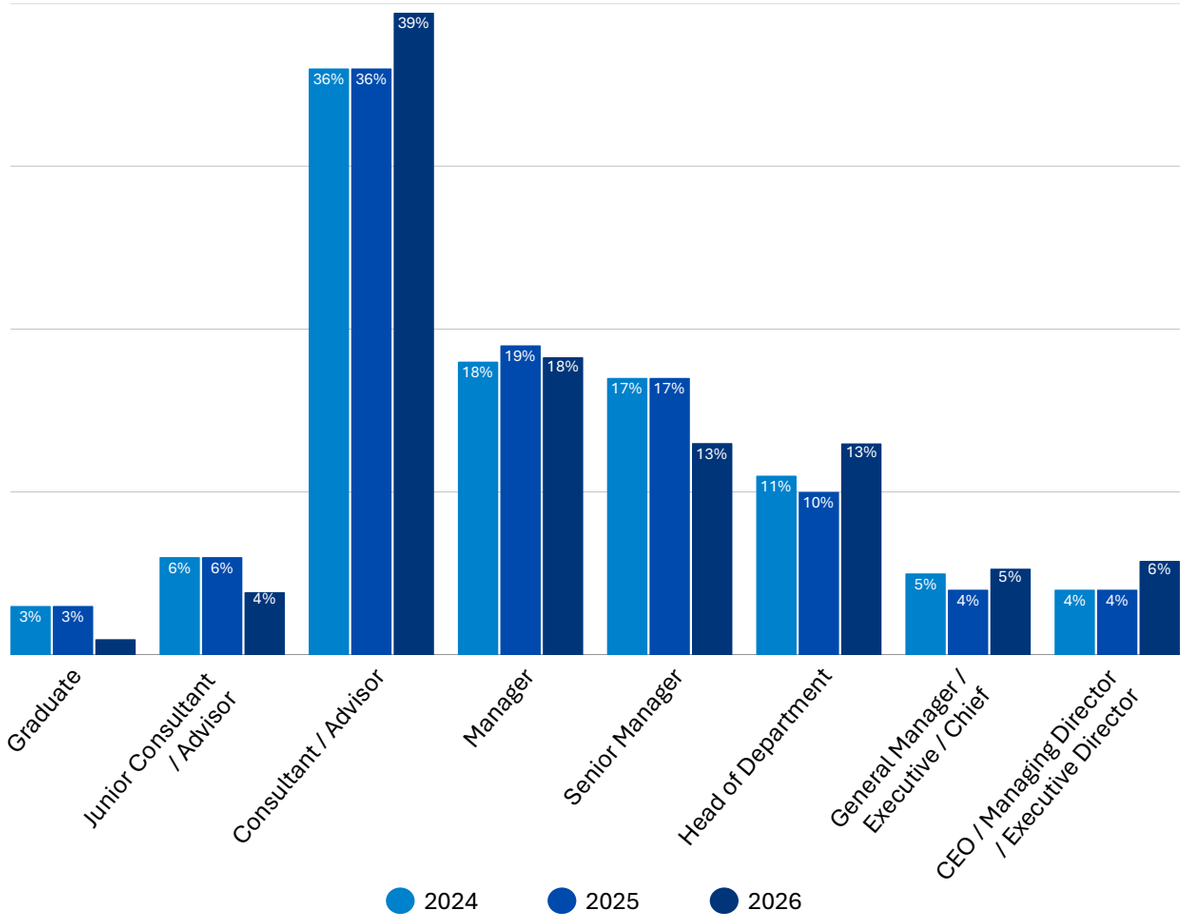
Management level of sustainability professionals

Sustainability professionals are most likely to sit at the Consultant/Advisor level (39%, up from 36% in 2025). Generals are well represented across all management levels, Specialists concentrate at the Consultant/Advisor and junior levels, and Additionals cluster at the Manager and CEO/Managing Director/Executive level.

Management level by role type



Management level over time



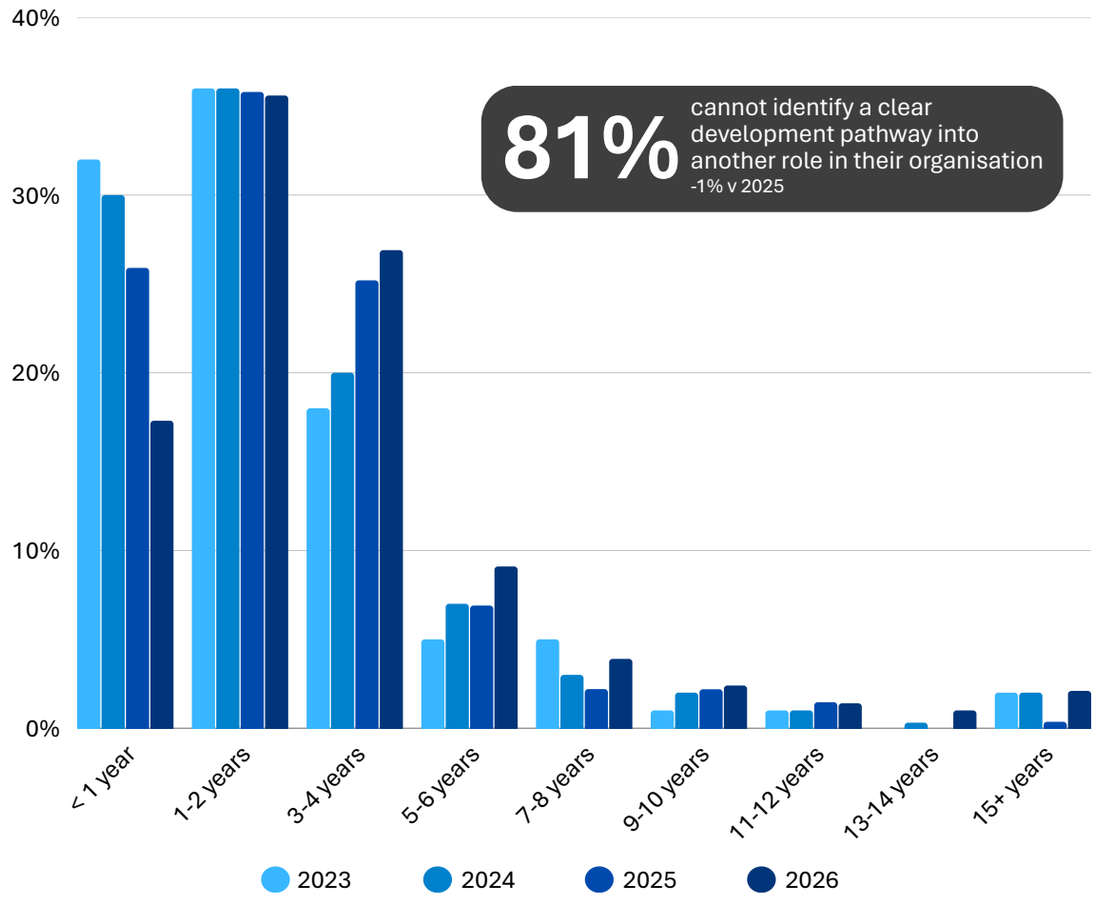
Q: What is the management level of your role?

Q: Thinking about your current role, which of the following sustainability roles do you most identify with?

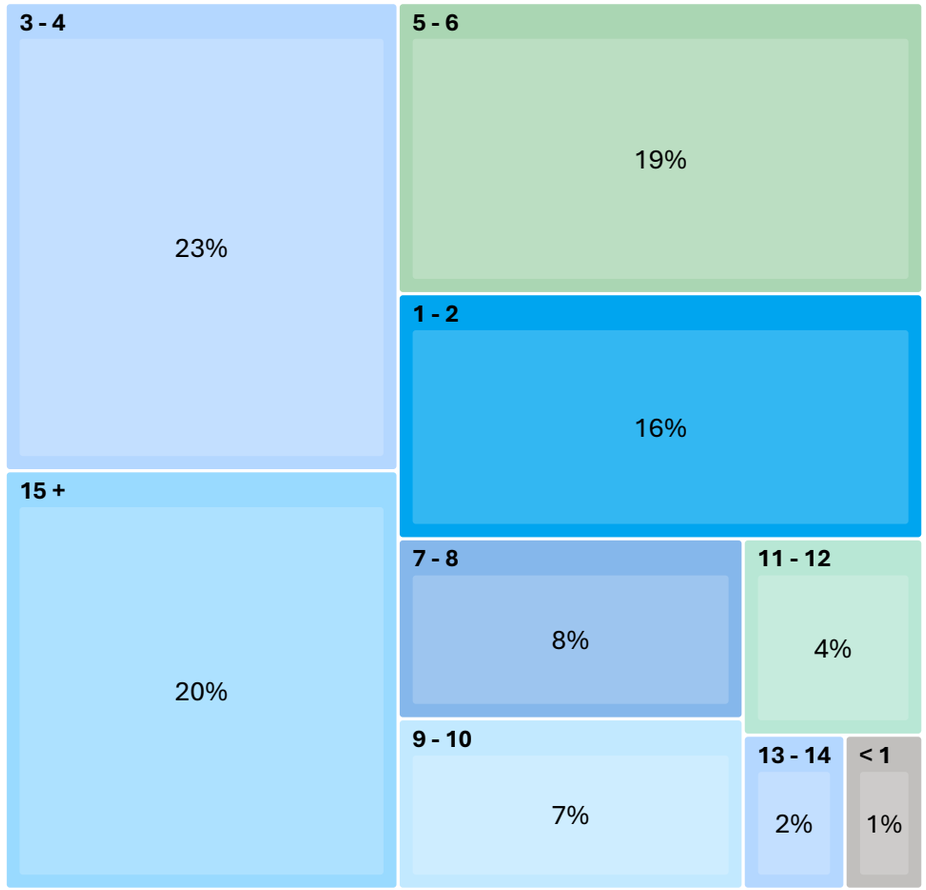
Tenure of sustainability professionals

Sustainability professionals are staying longer in their roles than in 2025, with those that have been in their role for under 1 year reducing from 26% to 17%. A notably small number of professionals have joined the industry in 2026 (1%, compared to 8% in 2025). 81% of professionals still cannot identify a clear development pathway in their organisation, a persistent structural issue of the profession.

Time in current role



Years as a sustainability professional



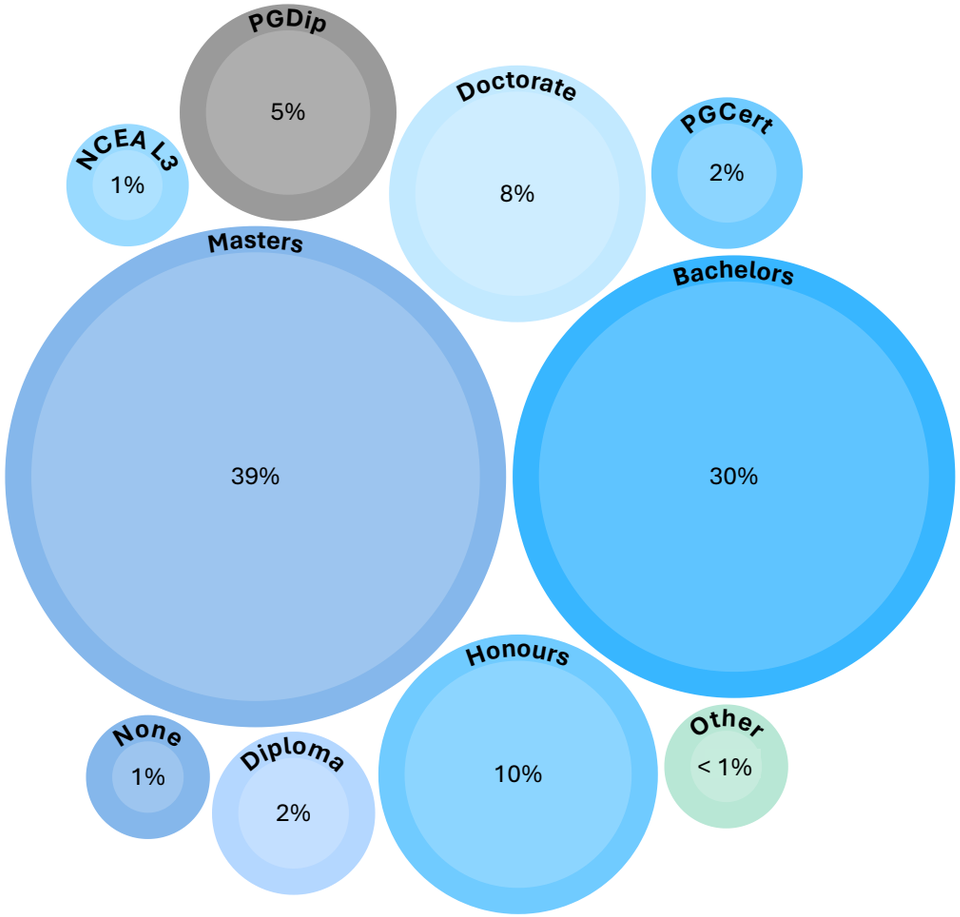
Q: How long have you been in your current role?

Q: How long have you been working as a sustainability professional?

Education of sustainability professionals

Sustainability professionals are highly educated, with 97% holding a tertiary qualification and over half holding a postgraduate qualification. Science, Sustainability and Business/Commerce remain the most common education background of sustainability professionals and are frequently combined with one another.

Highest level of education



Field of study

This heatmap shows how often fields of study were selected together by the same respondent

	Science	Sustainability	Business / Commerce	Humanities & Social Sciences	Arts	Engineering	Law	Architecture & Design	Other
Science	**82**	14	8	9	5	4	3	1	1
Sustainability	14	**51**	18	11	5	4	3	4	
Business / Commerce	8	18	**52**	5	4	1	4	1	1
Humanities & Social Sciences	9	11	5	**37**	2	1	3	2	
Arts	5	5	4	2	**18**		1		
Engineering	4	4	1	1		**15**		1	
Law	3	3	4	3	1		**12**		
Architecture & Design	1	4	1	2		1		**10**	1
Other	1		1					1	**14**

Q: What is your highest level of qualification?

Q: In what field of study?

Remuneration

Average remuneration 2020 - 2026

Remuneration by management level 2020 - 2026

Remuneration change

Gender pay and distribution



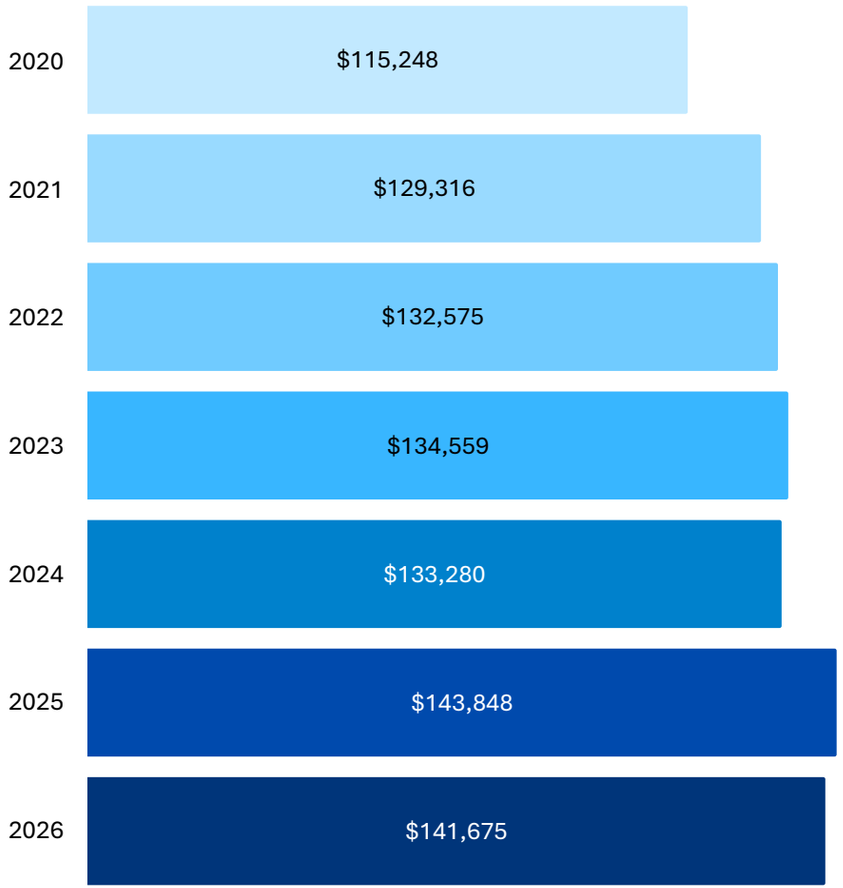
Photo by Sandro Scalco on Unsplash

Remuneration of sustainability professionals

The average remuneration of sustainability professionals has reduced in 2026, following a large increase in 2025. This was driven primarily by the Private, NGO, and Not-for-Profit sectors. Those in the Charity and Public sectors observed a modest increase.

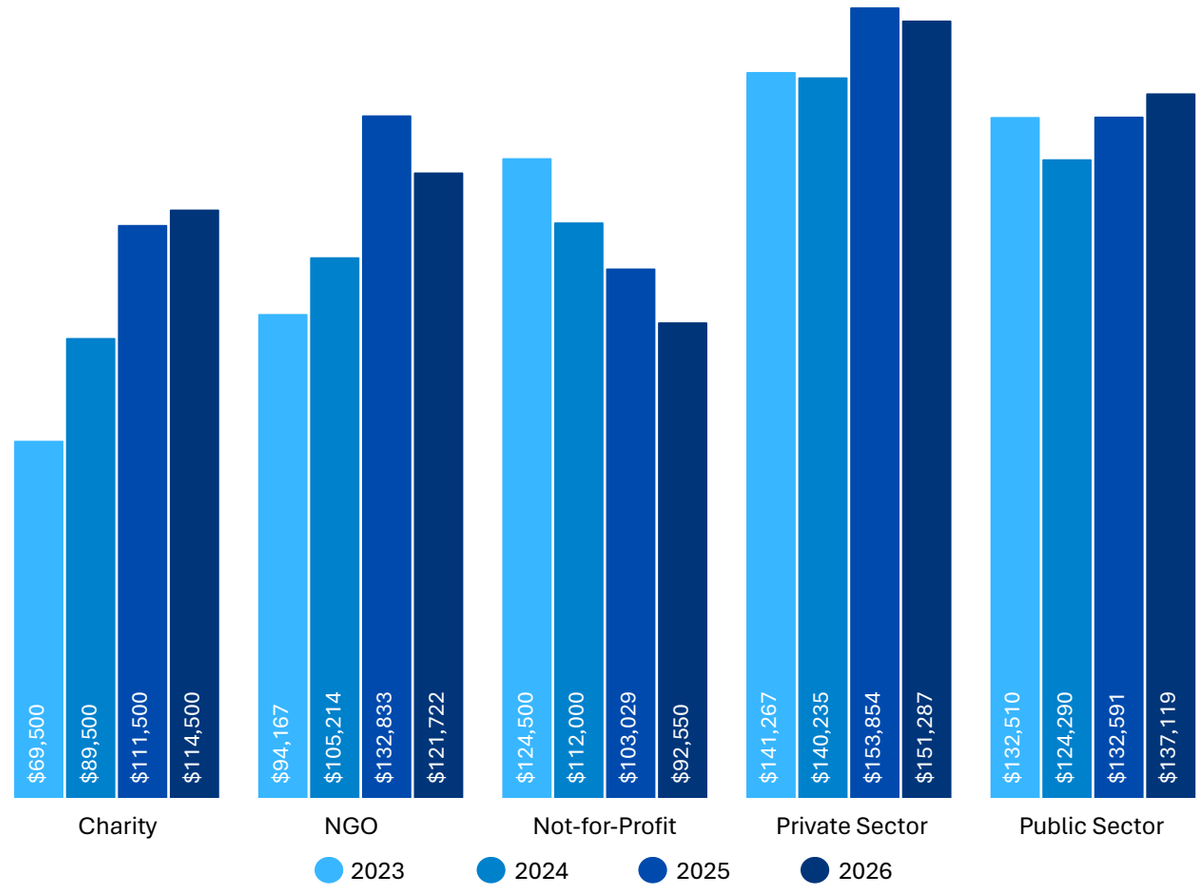
Average remuneration

Calculated using the mean. Full-time respondents only. 2025 has been restated.



Average remuneration by organisation type

Calculated using the mean. Full-time respondents only. 2025 Private Sector has been restated.



Q: What is the total remuneration band for your role?

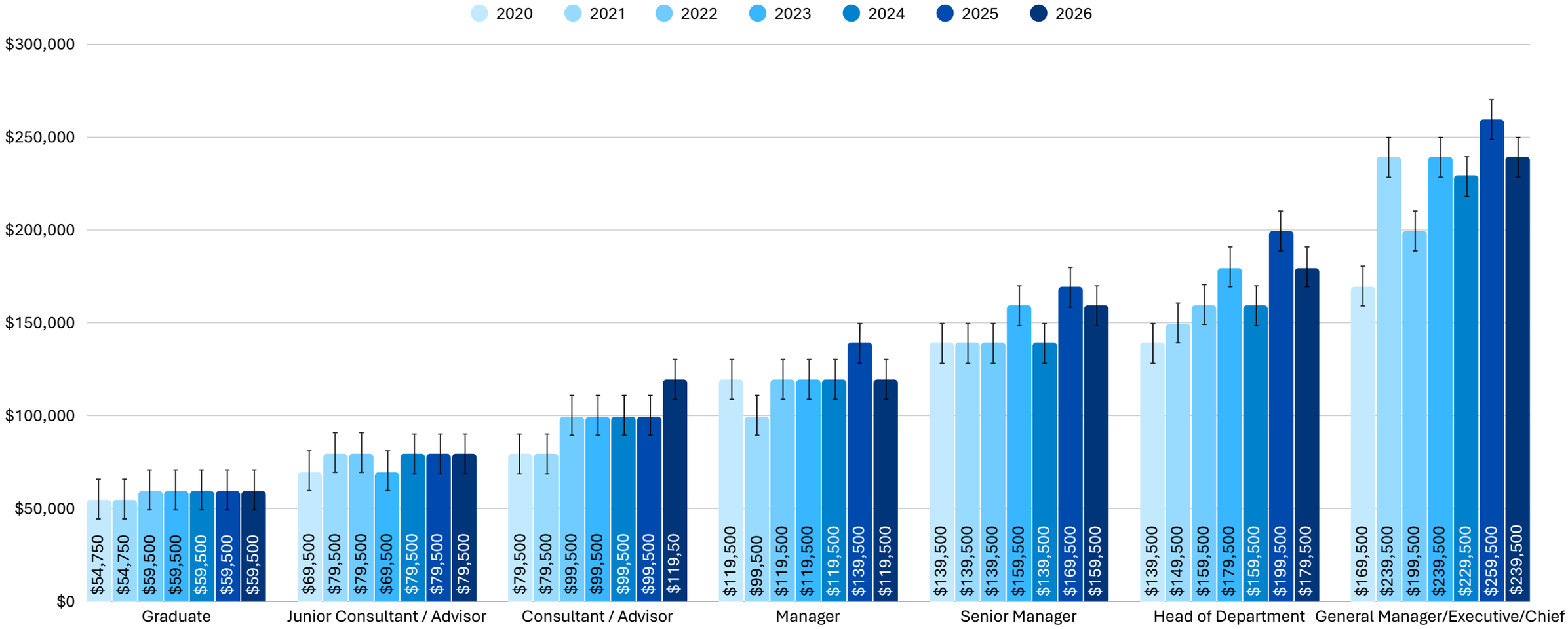
Q: What is your organisational type?

Remuneration of sustainability professionals

Remuneration momentum has stalled in 2026 with manager and senior-level roles falling off their 2025 peak. Graduate and Junior Consultant/Advisor roles also continue to stall and have observed little change since the research began. Consultant/Advisor roles were the only level to observe an average increase in the past year.

Average remuneration by management level

Calculated using the median. Full-time respondents only. Remuneration bands are in $19,000 increments, and represented by error bars.



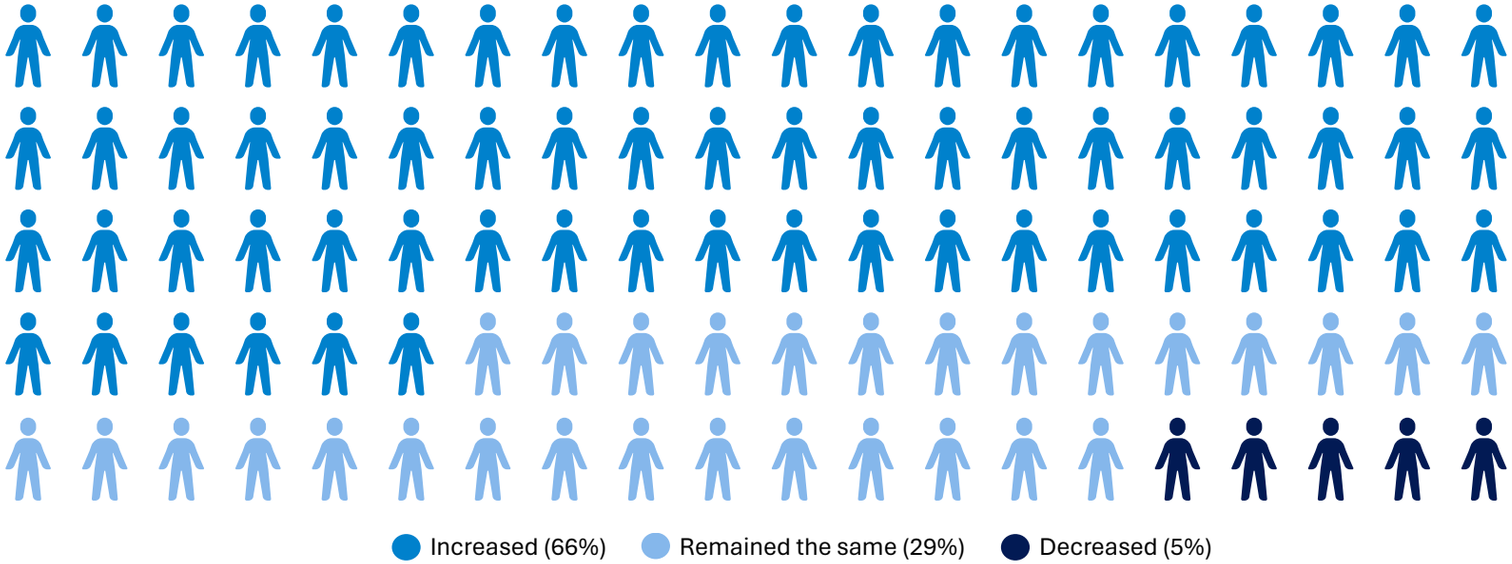
Q: What is the total remuneration band for your role?

Q: What is the management level of your role?

Remuneration changes

Two-thirds of sustainability professionals received a pay increase over the past year, with an average remuneration change of +2.1-3%. The vast majority of increases were through adjustments in their current role (83%), suggesting steady progression rather than an increase in role mobility.

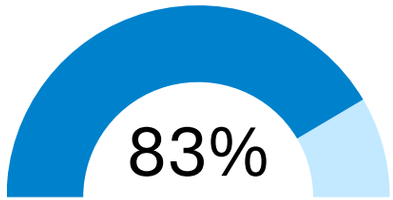
Remuneration change



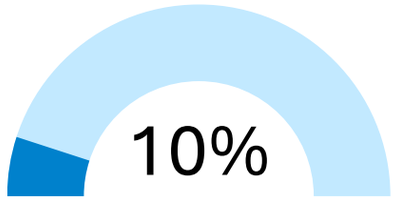
+ 2.1 - 3%
Average annual remuneration change

2% Annual wage inflation
(December 2025: Stats NZ)

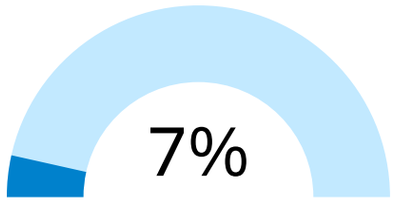
Reason for remuneration increase



Within the **same** role



Transitioning to a new **internal** role



Transitioning to a new **external** role

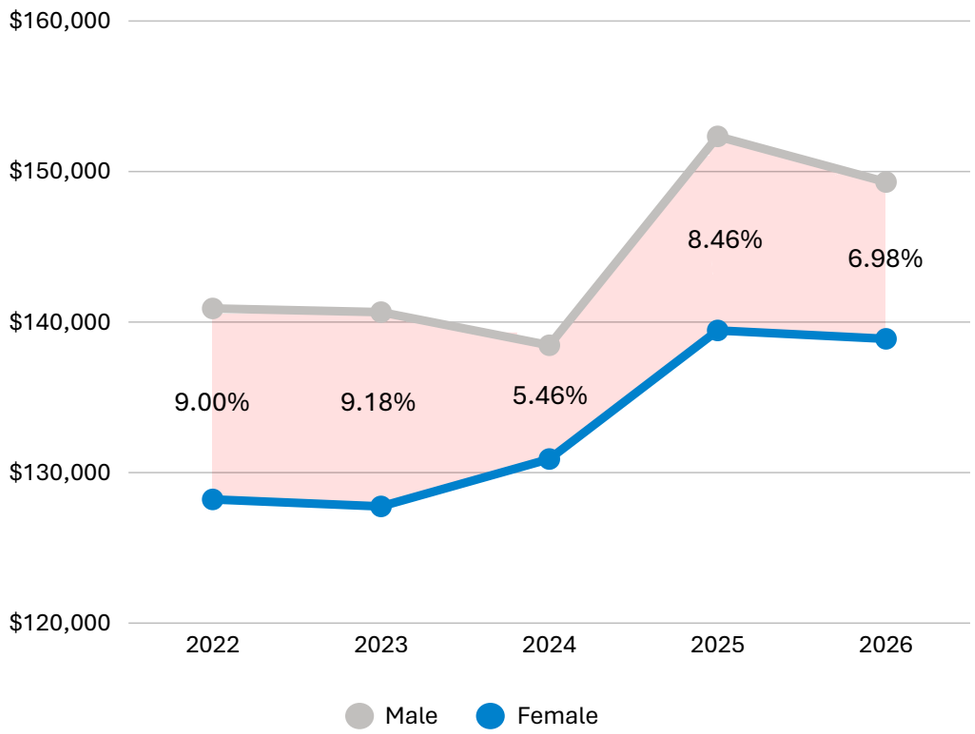
Q: Has your remuneration increased, decreased or remained the same in the last 12 months?
Q: How much has your remuneration changed in the last 12 months?
Q: Was this change within the same role, or as a result of transitioning to a new role?

Gender pay gap

A structural gender pay gap continues to exist across the profession, sitting at nearly 7% in 2026 and above the national average.

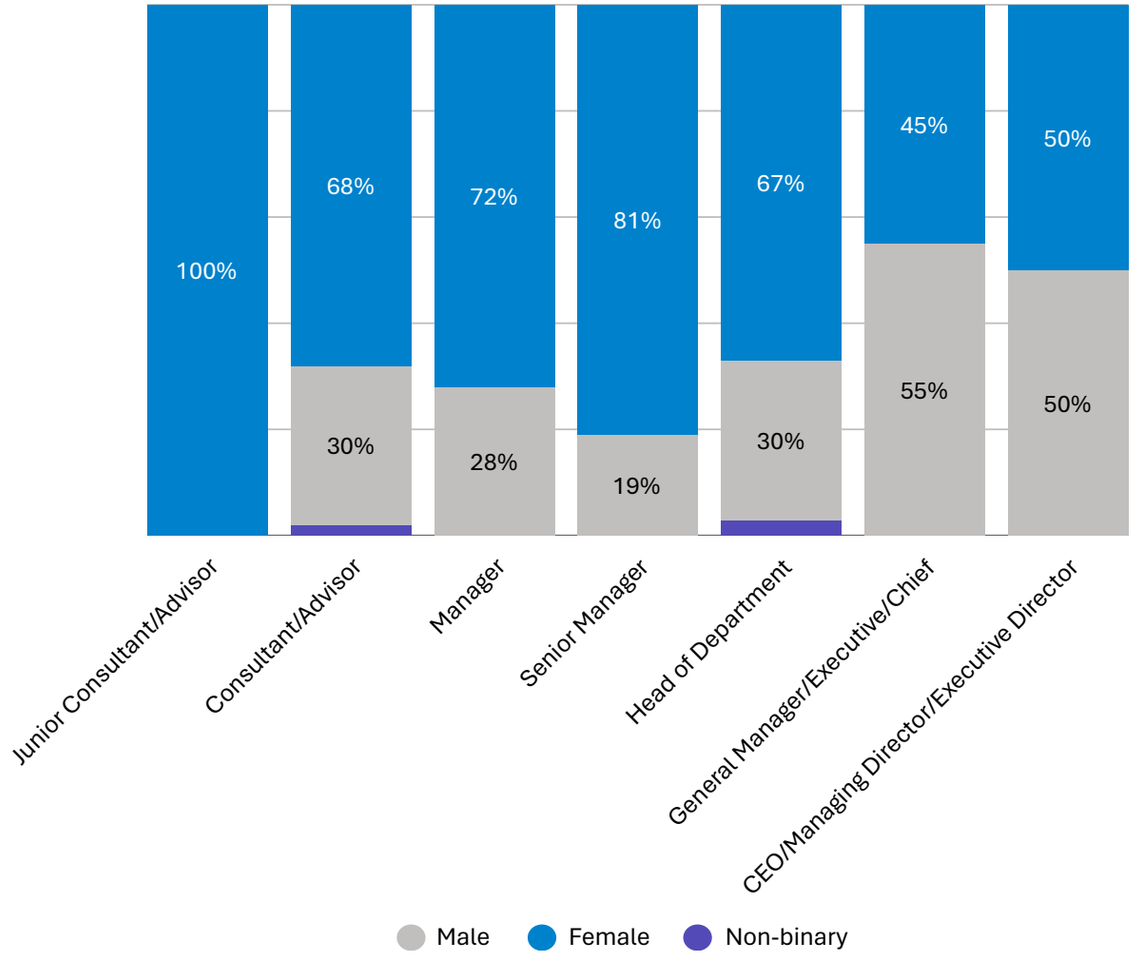
Gender pay gap

Calculated using the mean. Full-time respondents only. 2025 restated.



5.2% National median gender pay gap (June 2025 Quarter: Stats NZ)

Gender distribution, by management level



Q: To what gender do you most identify?
Q: What is the management level of your role?
Q: What is the total remuneration band for your role?

Capability & Development



Activities included in sustainability roles

Competencies required in sustainability roles

Perceived role competency

Ability to keep up with the changing sustainability landscape

Capability development and training

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Activities managed by sustainability professionals

Generals and Additionals spend most of their time on sustainability strategy development, delivering sustainability initiatives, and assessing sustainability risks and opportunities. Specialists spend more time engaging stakeholders and reporting progress and are spending less time assessing sustainability risks and opportunities relative to other activities than in 2025.

High priority

Low priority

General

	Change v 2025
Sustainability strategy development	-
Delivering sustainability initiatives	+ 1
Assessing sustainability risks & opportunities	+ 1
Reporting progress to internal stakeholders	- 2
Stakeholder engagement	- 1
Reporting progress to external stakeholders	-
Managing internal sustainability governance	+ 1
Measuring / analysing the social, environmental or financial impact of sustainability initiatives	- 1
Managing sustainability certification	-

Specialist

	Change v 2025
Stakeholder engagement	-
Reporting progress to internal stakeholders	+ 2
Reporting progress to external stakeholders	-
Sustainability strategy development	+ 1
Measuring / analysing the social, environmental or financial impact of sustainability initiatives	+ 1
Delivering sustainability initiatives	+ 2
Assessing sustainability risks & opportunities	- 5
Managing sustainability certification	-
Managing internal sustainability governance	-

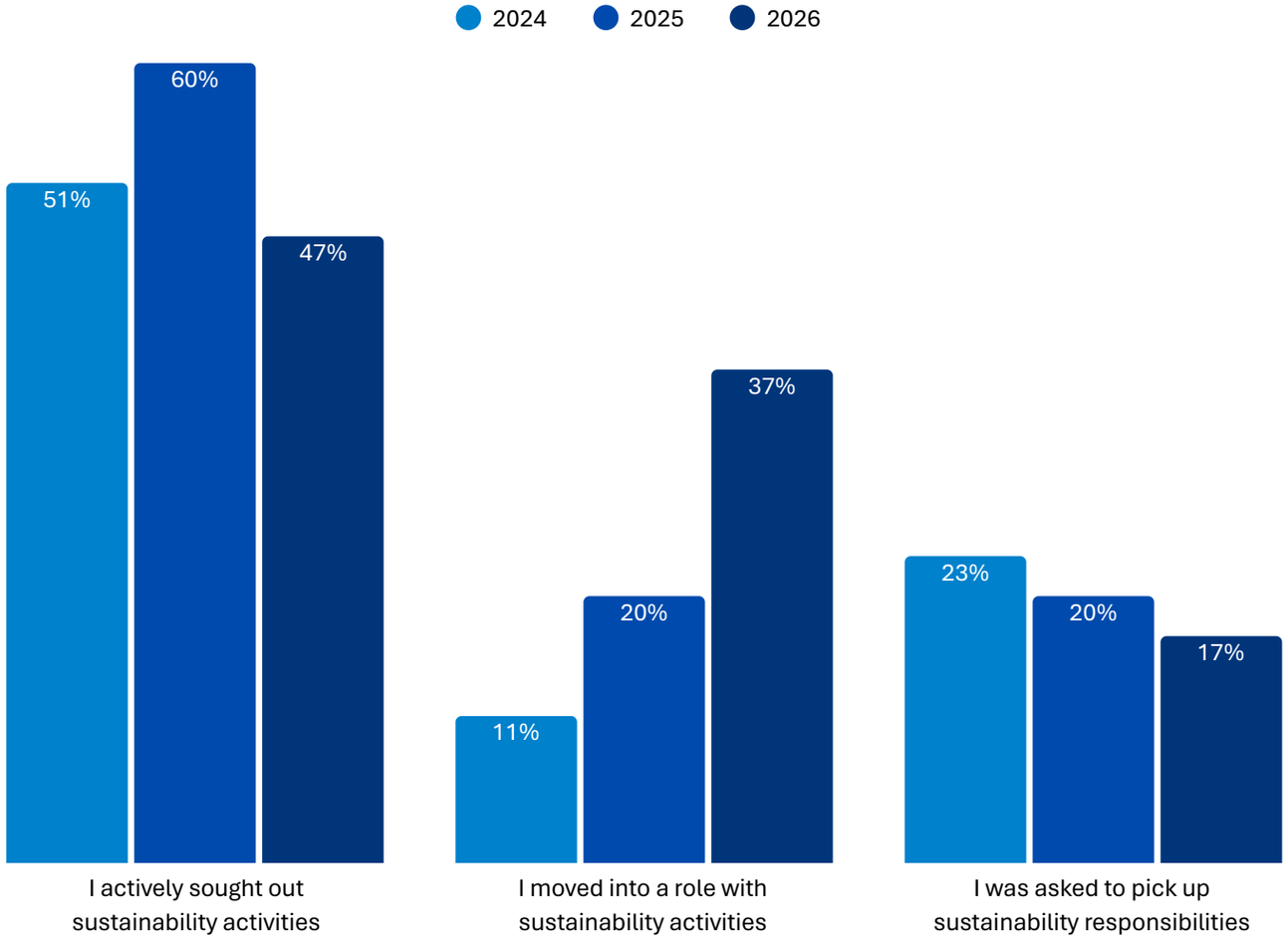
Additional

	Change v 2025
Stakeholder engagement	-
Delivering sustainability initiatives	-
Assessing sustainability risks & opportunities	+ 2
Sustainability strategy development	- 2
Reporting progress to external stakeholders	+ 1
Reporting progress to internal stakeholders	- 1
Managing internal sustainability governance	+ 1
Measuring / analysing the social, environmental or financial impact of sustainability initiatives	- 1
Managing sustainability certification	-

Additionals

Additionals continue to actively seek out the sustainability activities included in their roles and are increasingly moving into roles with sustainability activities. Alongside managing and undertaking the sustainability activities included in their roles, Additionals primarily undertake Management, Customer Service, Communications, Sales, Operations, and Health and Safety activities.

How did sustainability become part of your role?



Primary activities managed by Additionals



Q: If you identify as an 'Additional' sustainability role, what non-sustainability related activities do you primarily manage or are responsible for as part of your role?

Q: If you identify as an 'Additional' sustainability role, how did sustainability become part of your role?

Competencies required in sustainability roles

Communication remains the most in demand competency required in sustainability roles, followed by strategic skills, problem solving, technical knowledge, and building partnerships.

High priority

Low priority

General

	Change v 2025
Communication skills	-
Strategic skills	+ 1
Problem solving	- 1
Building partnerships	-
Reporting skills	+1
Leadership skills	- 1
Project management	-
Technical knowledge	-
People management	+1
Analytics / Data	- 1
Research skills	-
Cultural skills	-

Specialist

	Change v 2025
Communication skills	-
Problem solving	-
Technical knowledge	+ 1
Building partnerships	+ 2
Reporting skills	- 2
Project management	- 1
Analytics / Data	+ 2
Strategic skills	- 1
Leadership skills	+ 1
Research skills	- 1
People management	-
Cultural competency	-

Additional

	Change v 2025
Communication skills	-
Building partnerships	+ 2
Problem solving	-
Strategic skills	- 1
Project management	+ 2
Leadership skills	- 1
Reporting skills	+ 1
Technical knowledge	+ 1
Analytics / Data	+ 2
People management	- 5
Research skills	- 1
Cultural competency	-

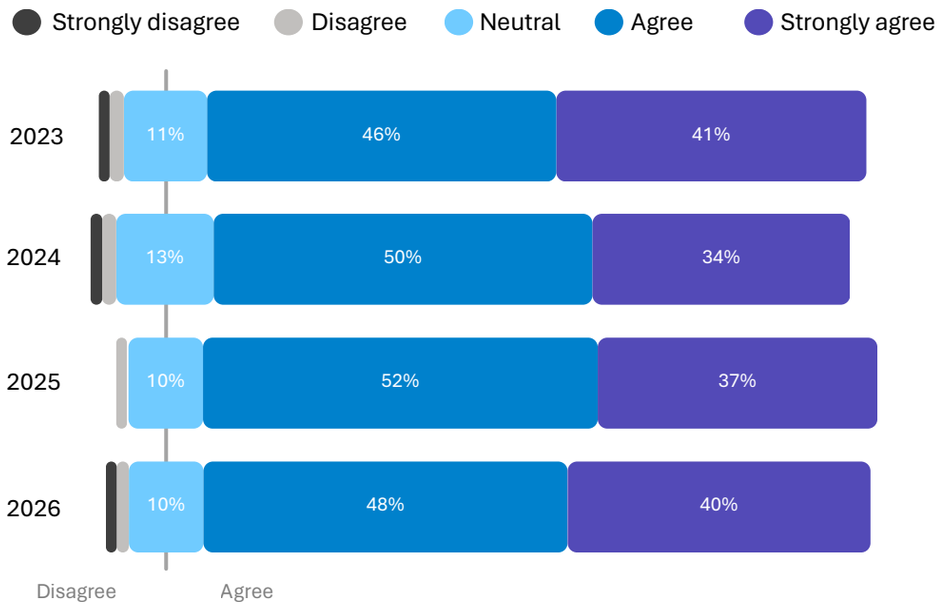
Q: Thinking about your current role, which of the following sustainability roles do you most identify with?

Q: What competencies are required in your role now?

Sense of competency

88% of professionals agree or strongly agree they have the necessary competency for their role, with those strongly agreeing rising to 40% (+3% v 2025). Confidence is highest among Heads of Department, where 96% agree or strongly agree. CEOs/Managing Directors/Executive Directors and General Managers/Executives/Chiefs report the lowest confidence.

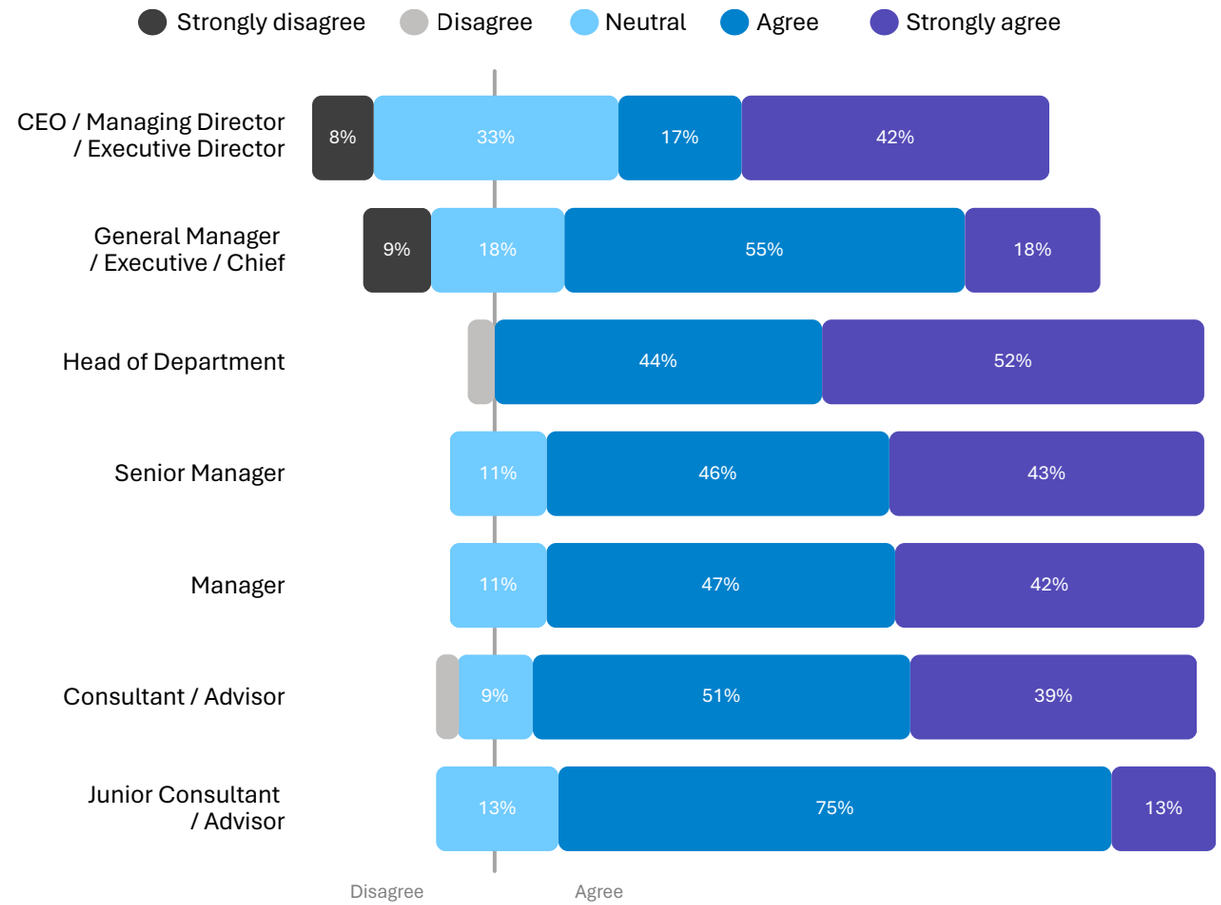
I have the necessary competency to undertake or manage the sustainability activities included in my role



88% **Agree or strongly agree** they have the necessary competency to undertake or manage the sustainability activities in their role
-1% v 2025

71% are using external consultants to support their role

I have the necessary competency to undertake or manage the sustainability activities included in my role, by management level

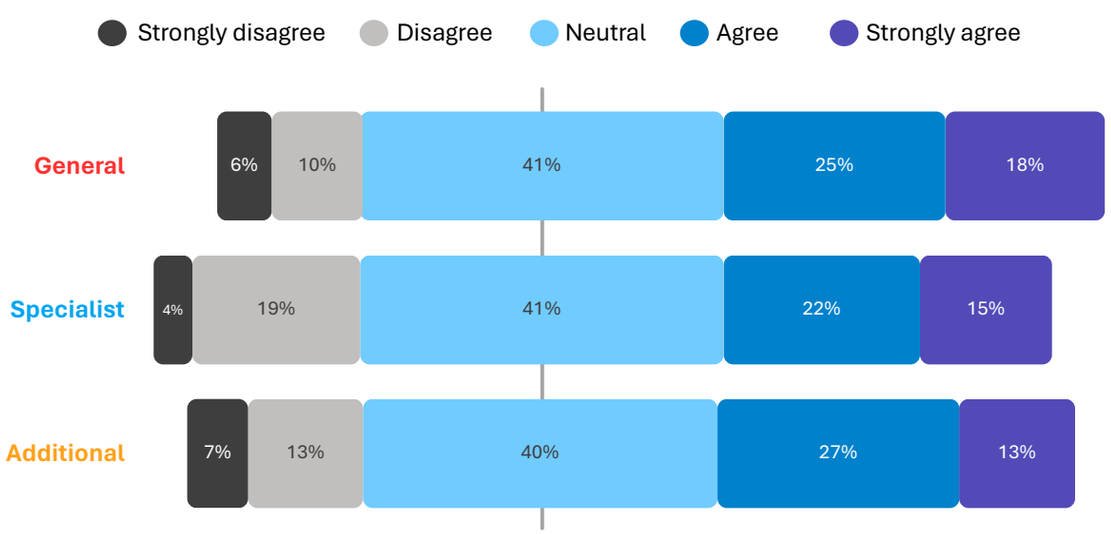


Q: I have the necessary competency to undertake or manage the sustainability activities included in my role.
Q: What is the management level of your role?
Q: Do you use external consultants to support your sustainability role?

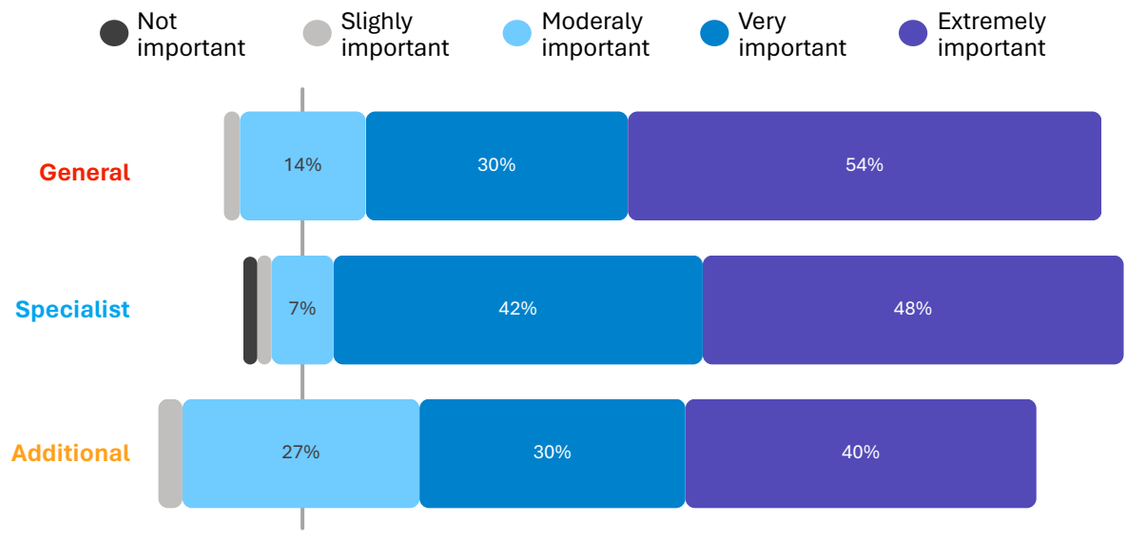
Keeping pace

While most professionals consider ongoing training and professional development very important, only 40% feel they can keep up with the training their roles requires (-3% since 2025), and just 62% are aware they have access to training budget through their organisation. The persistent gap between the importance professionals place on development and the resourcing they receive is one of the most consistent findings in this research.

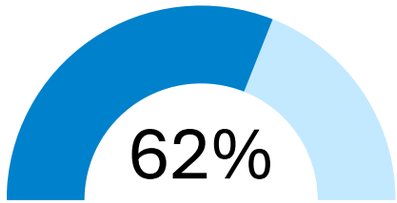
I can keep up with the training and professional development that is required in my role

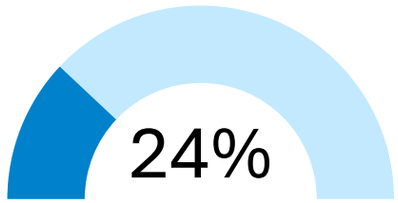


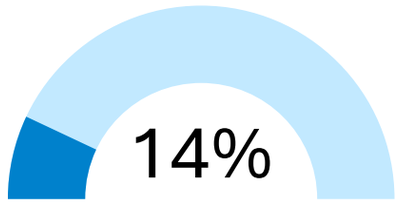
Importance of ongoing training and professional development to stay up-to-date with relevant industry changes



Organisations allocating budget for sustainability training and professional development







40% **Agree or strongly agree** they can keep up with the training and professional development required in their role.

-3% v 2025

Q: I can keep up with the training and professional development that is required in my sustainability role?

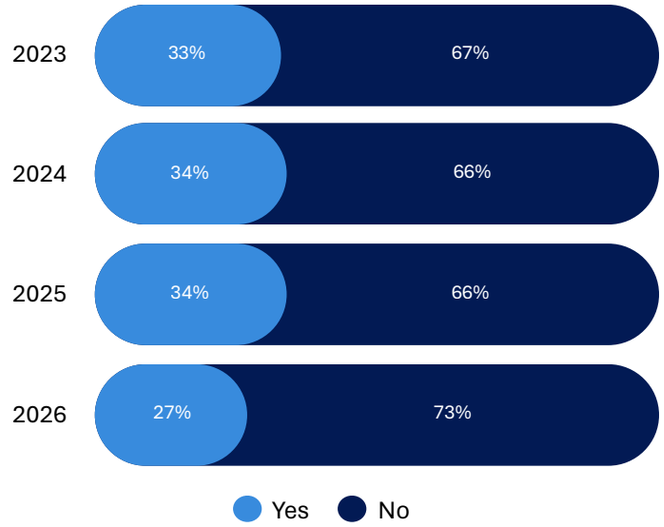
Q: My organisation allows budget for me to undertake prodessional sustainability training and development.

Q: In your opinion, how important is ongoing training and professional development to stay up-to-date with relevant industry changes?

Professional training and capability development

Professional training participation fell sharply in 2026, with only 27% of professionals undertaking sustainability training in the past year. On-the-job experience and research remain the most common ways professionals develop their capability, but only 52% of professionals say this is enough to manage the sustainability activities and develop the competencies required of them.

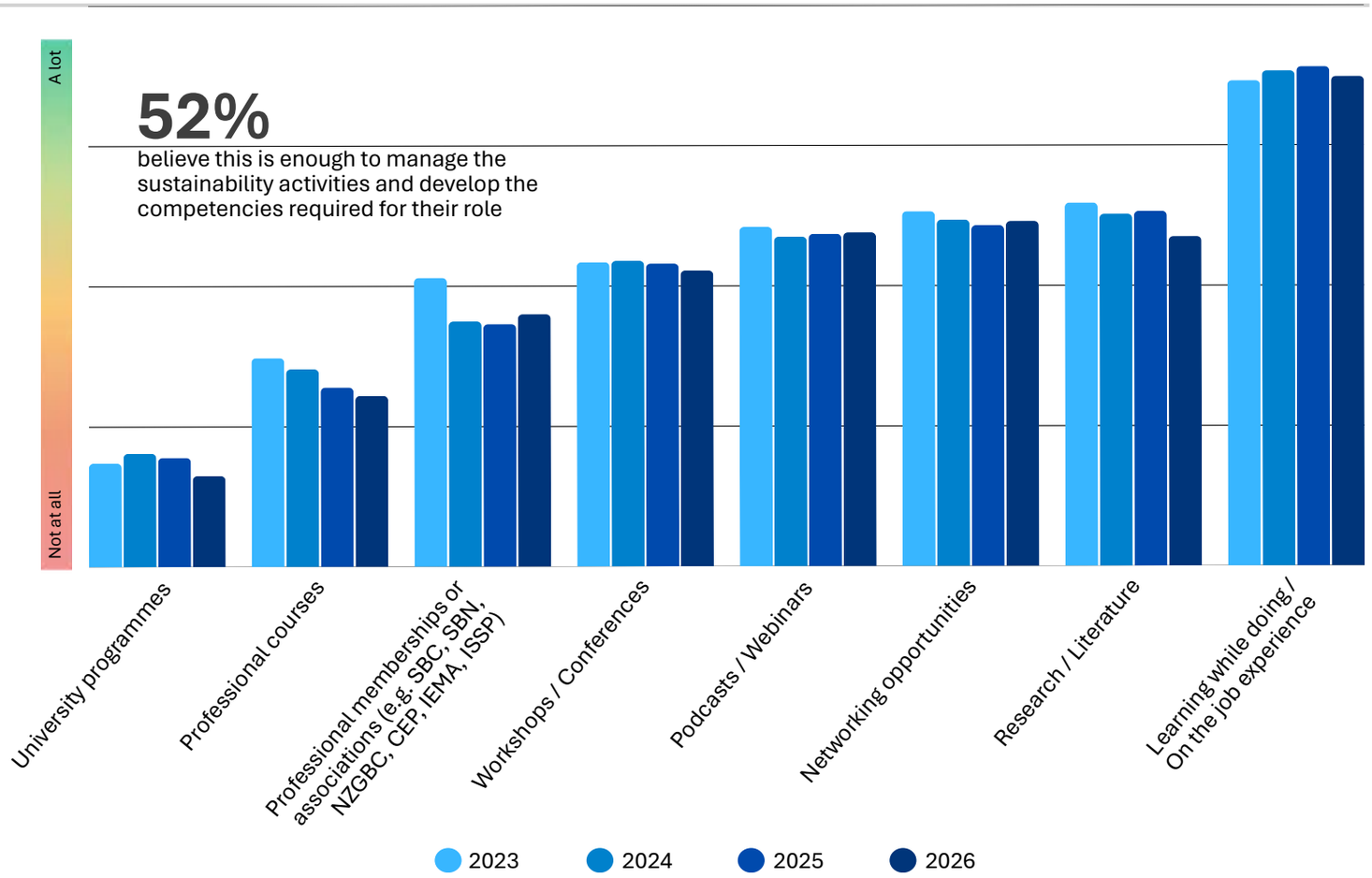
Professional sustainability training undertaken in the past year



Preferred training organisations

1. **Membership organisations** (e.g. SBN/SBC/CEP/NZGBC)
2. **Tertiary institutions** (e.g. University, Institute of Technology, Wānanga, Private training establishment)
3. **Professional associations** (e.g. IEMA, ISSP)

Mode of capability development by sustainability professionals



Q: In the last 12 months, have you undertaken professional sustainability training?
Q: If yes, through which entity was this professional sustainability training undertaken?
Q: How are you developing your capability within your role?
Q: Is this enough to manage the sustainability activities included in your role and develop the competencies required for your role?

Training gaps

40% of sustainability professionals believe current training offerings lack specific sustainability skills, with gaps clustering around six key areas. These areas reflect the breadth of the modern sustainability role and the number of skills required to undertake them.

1 Technical skills

- GHG emissions (including Scope 3)
- Life cycle assessment
- Climate-related risk assessment
- Climate adaptation planning
- Nature and biodiversity

2 Commercial & financial acumen

- Quantifying climate-related and sustainability risks and opportunities financially
- Business case development
- Connecting sustainability to commercial value and outcomes

3 Strategic influence & communication

- Gaining senior leadership buy-in
- Communicating through resistance and conflict
- Translating technical information to non-technical audiences
- Effective advocacy of sustainability in decision-making

4 Project delivery & governance

- Project management
- Risk and dependency identification
- Monitoring and reporting

5 Te ao Māori competency

- Approaches to sustainability in te ao Māori
- Building effective partnerships across sectors and cultures

6 Sector-specific & advanced training

- Sector-specific training
- Advanced and applied training for senior professionals

40% Believe current training and professional development offerings are lacking specific sustainability skills or competencies.

Q: In your opinion, are there any specific sustainability skills or competencies that you believe are lacking in the current training and professional development offerings?

Q: If yes, what specific sustainability skills or competencies do you believe are lacking?

Wellbeing & Job Satisfaction



Perceptions about the world

Work demands & job satisfaction

Overall wellbeing & turnover intentions

Photo by Steven Biak Ling on Unsplash

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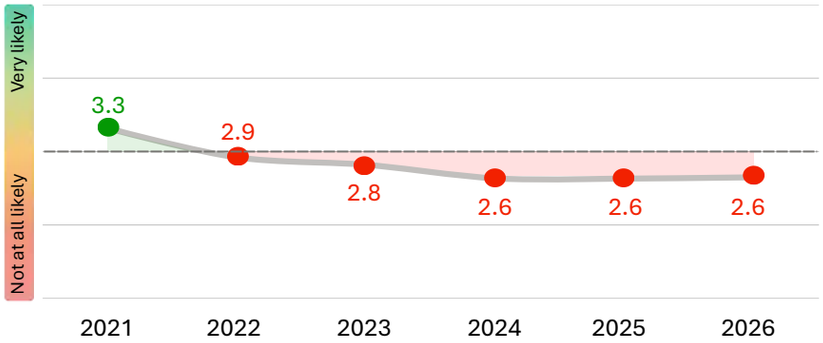
Perceptions of the world

Sustainability professionals continue to have a sober view of the world and our ability to overcome our collective challenges. These feelings are also reflected in relatively high levels of climate anxiety.

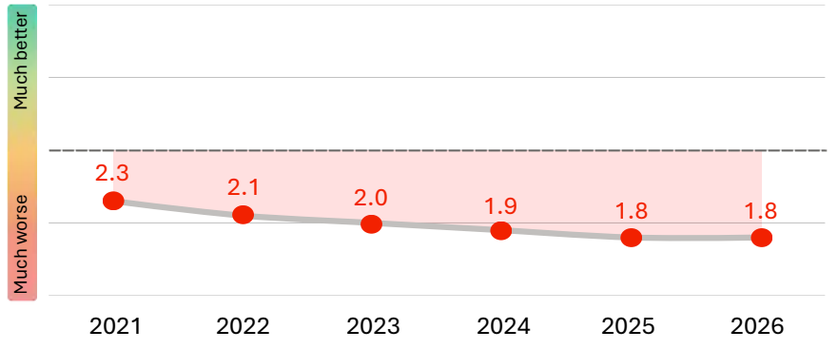
Perceptions that we will overcome our social, environmental, and economic challenges



1 in 10

believe it's not at all likely that we overcome societal challenges

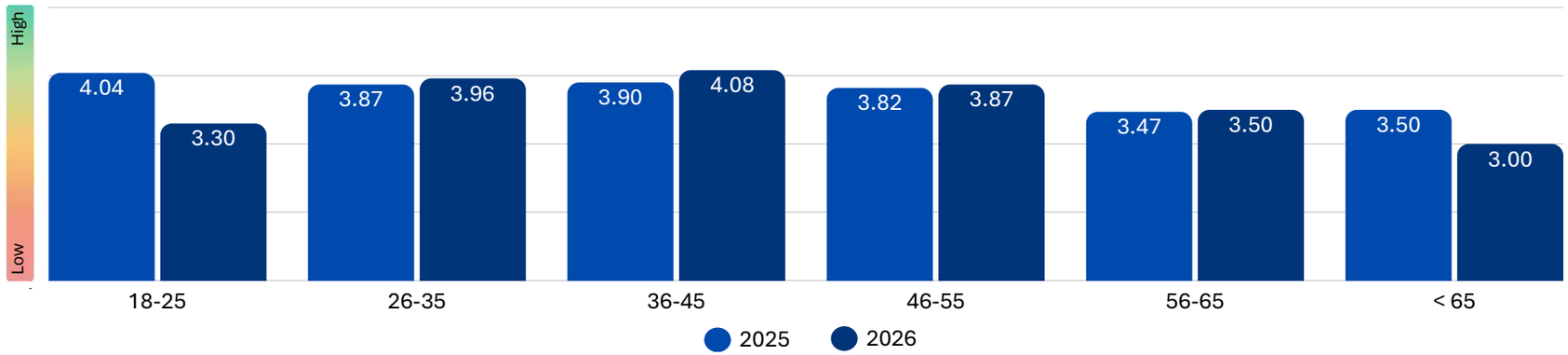
Perceptions that environmental issues are getting better or worse



4 in 10

believe the environmenal situation is getting much worse

Impacts of climate change on sustainability professionals' wellbeing



3 in 10

strongly agree that climate change impacts their wellbeing

Q: How likely, if at all, do you think it is that humanity will find a way to overcome our current social, environmental and economic challenges?

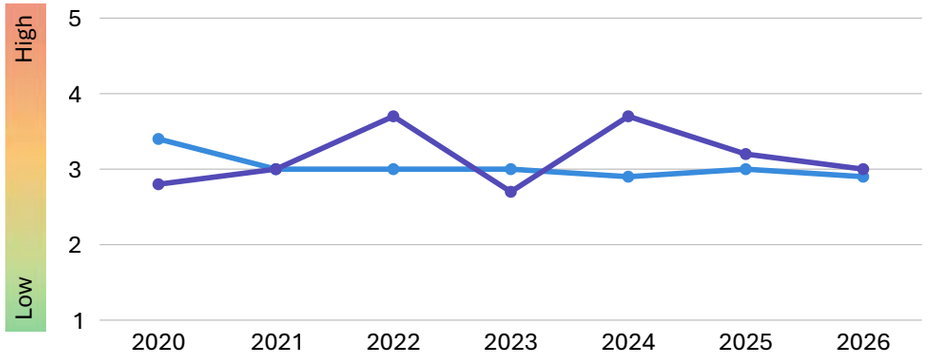
Q: Thinking about the world, do you believe the environmental situation is getting better or worse?

Q: Climate change impacts my personal wellbeing.

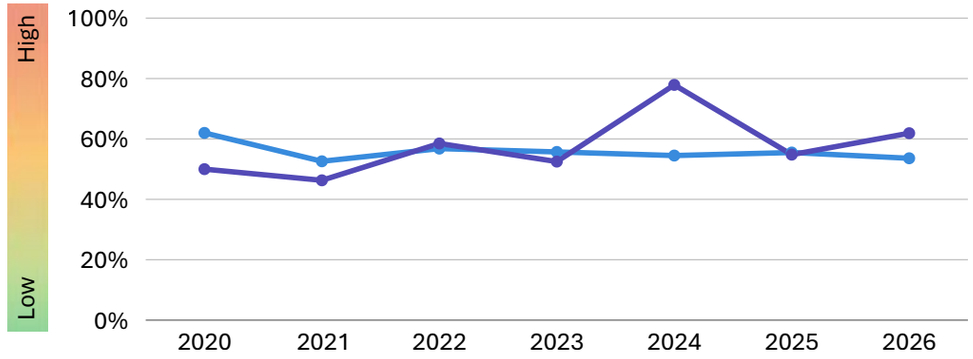
Wellbeing

Sustainability professionals continue to report wellbeing measures broadly in line with, and in some places more favourable than, all other professionals in New Zealand, with stable trends across work demands, job stress, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. The closing gap between sustainability professionals and the wider workforce suggests both groups are experiencing a similar working environment.

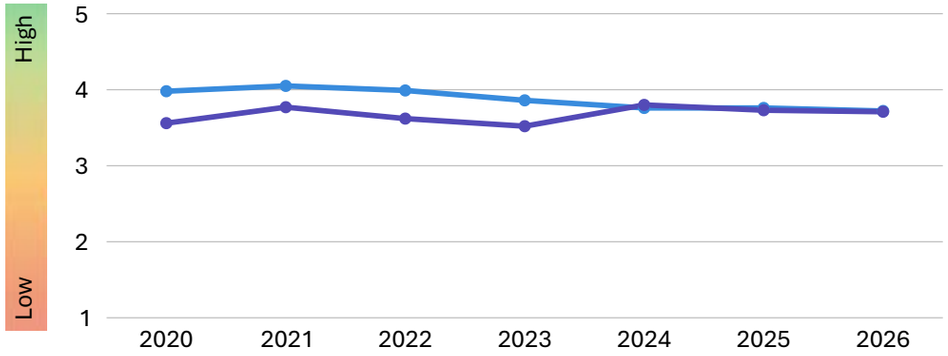
Work demands



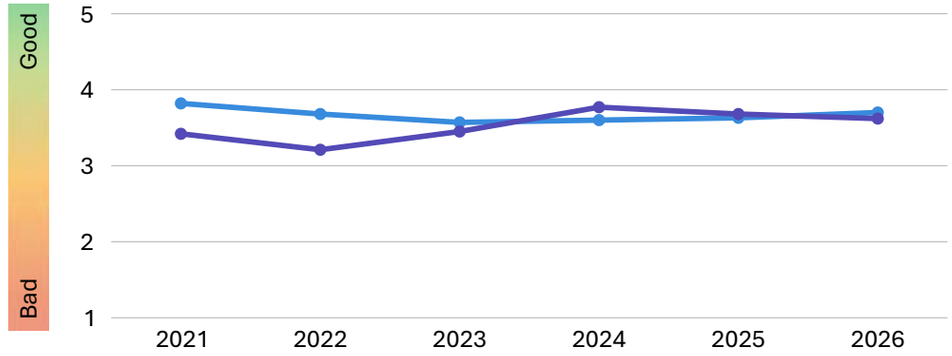
Job stress



Job satisfaction



Work-life balance

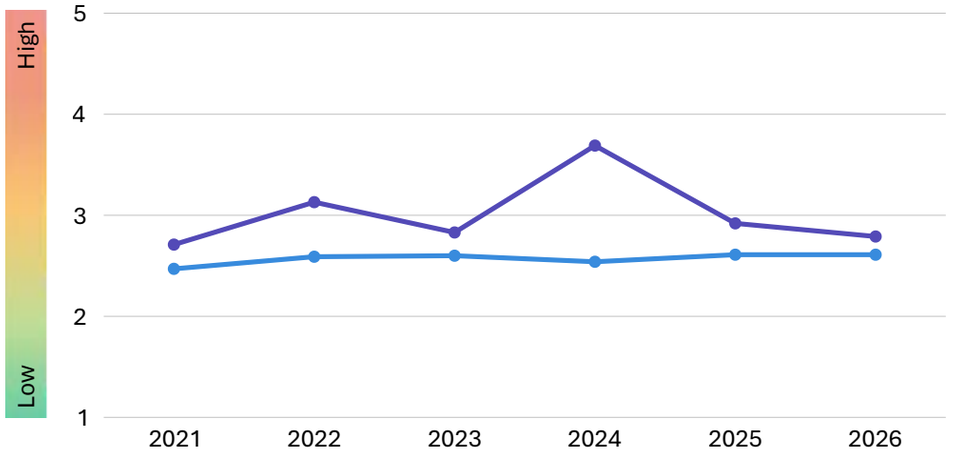


Sustainability Professionals NZ Professionals

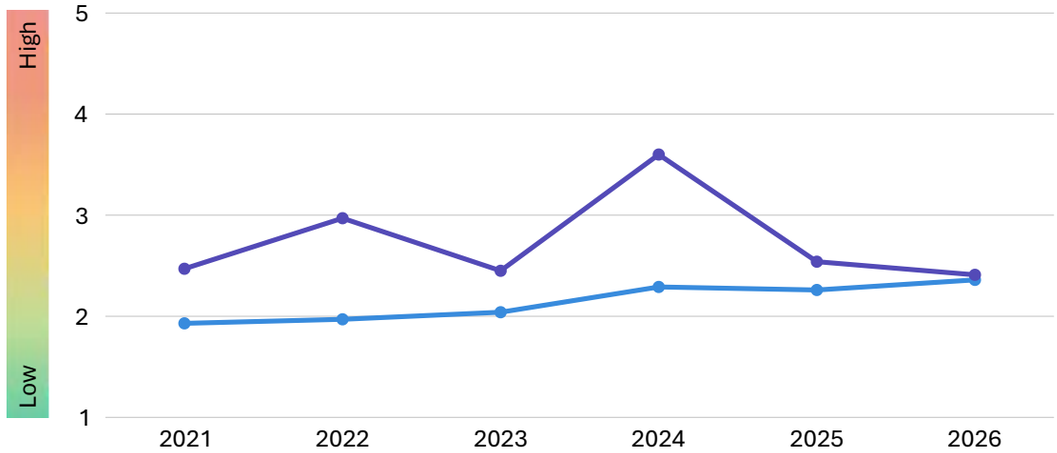
Wellbeing and turnover intentions

Emotional exhaustion and cynicism remain lower for sustainability professionals, holding just below all other New Zealand professionals. Turnover intentions continue to grow and the gap between sustainability professionals and the rest of the workforce was slim in 2026. The most significant risk is among 18-25 year olds, half of whom are strongly considering leaving to work in another country.

Emotional exhaustion



Cynicism



Sustainability Professionals NZ Professionals

Turnover intentions

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Sustainability Professionals	2.23	2.45	2.54	2.56	2.63
NZ Professionals	**3.14**	2.59	**3.66**	2.84	2.67

Low Risk High Risk

1 in 2

18-25 year old sustainability professionals are strongly considering leaving to work in another country

Shifting the dial

Growing the sustainability profession



Photo by Sander Lenaerts on Unsplash

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Shifting the dial

What is the one thing that would help grow the sustainability profession?

An approach that adds value to a business through solving problems and making improvements.

The profession needs analytical and strategic thinkers with strong influencing, communication, and commercial skills, not just passionate people.

More networking events that are specific to sustainability professionals in each specific industry.

Support from top down, both within organisations but also wider industry and government.

A greater focus on practical/applied sustainability for business resilience.

More clearly defined roles. Sustainability can be a bit of a do-it-all profession.

A New Zealand-based professional body for sustainability professionals.

Building sustainability into job descriptions of non-sustainability roles.

More connection with each other in the industry. A willingness from people to share experiences through networks or informal interviews.

More training courses and budgets for training - a recognition this is the profession where people constantly need to upskill as the 'ceiling' for what is best practise is constantly shifting.

Better resourcing to better empower those working in it, so they can increase their influence and therefore grow the profession further.

Being able to speak the same language as the business to allow for sustainability success and improved economic performance.

Q: What is the one thing that would help grow the sustainability profession?

Contributions

The following people provided valuable contribution to the development and execution of this research and insights report.

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	Kelly Flatz	Senior Sustainability Consultant
	Maeva Ord	Sustainability Specialist

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	AUTEC	
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	Jay Crangle	Director of Programmes
	Rebecca Lowe	Director of Communications & Events
	Connie Maddock	Digital Communications Advisor
Sustainable Business Network	Rachel Brown, ONZM	Chief Executive Officer
	Fiona Stephenson	Head of Communications and Marketing

Oxygen Consulting and the research partners would like to extend our gratitude to the industry associations who also helped circulate and promote our research survey.

Photo by Look Up Look Down Photography on Unsplash

Research Partners

OXYGEN CONSULTING

Oxygen Consulting is an independent, Aotearoa New Zealand consultancy providing sustainability advice and solutions to hep organisations succeed. We've worked with over 120 organisations across all sectors and provide comprehensive sustainability solutions for businesses, including: Carbon, Climate and Nature; Sustainability Strategy and Advisory; Disclosure and Reporting; Independent Audit and Assurance; Capability Development, Mentoring and Leadership Training, and; Market insights. Oxygen Consulting is a certified B Corporation and a member for the Sustainable Business Council and the Sustainable Business Network.

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AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (AUT) SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

The sustainability team at AUT researches the people side of sustainability including topics such as employee engagement, hope, embedded sustainability practices etc. Its student research also gives it a strong voice to youth engagement in sustainability. AUT scored high in the Times Social Impact awards and sustainability teaching is integrated throughout all degrees in the business school, including accountancy, finance economics and marketing. At present the AUT Business School runs 12 sustainability and social impact courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

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SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS COUNCIL (SBC)

The Sustainable Business Council (SBC) is a CEO-led membership organisation with around 130 businesses from all sectors, ambitious for a sustainable New Zealand. Members represent $175 billion of collective turnover, 42% of GDP, and nearly 275,500 full-time jobs. The network gives members unparalleled influence and the ability to take large-scale collective action and is aligned with the Climate Leaders Coalition. SBC is part of the BusinessNZ network and is the New Zealand Global Network Partner to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

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SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS NETWORK (SBN)

The Sustainable Business Network (SBN) is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest sustainable business organisation, representing a diverse cross-section of the business and sustainability communities. We're at the forefront of change, driven by a vision of a world where people and nature prosper. We provide the tools, knowledge and connections needed to accelerate the shift to a sustainable future.

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MAXIMISE TOMORROW

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