

# Sustainability Spotlight | From Reflection to Action

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JULY 3 2025

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Centre for Facilitation | Christine Bell



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## Summary

The Sustainability Spotlight Forum 2025 (From Reflection to Action) was held on 3rd July 2025, bringing together 69 invited representatives. The audience included representation from 15 external organisations, including 3 international guests and representing 17 departments across the University. **There** were 38 people who registered but who were unable to attend, **however this year** this was built into the event prediction **model** and the food waste from non-attendance was minimal.

The event provided an opportunity for reflection on the progress of the Spotlight and created space for the community to develop their ideas that they wanted to drive forward for the next programme of activity. **This was also set in the context of wider global sustainability concerns by involving external stakeholders in the conversations throughout the event.**

This year the focus was on turning ideas into action and for the actions to be owned by the community so that this Spotlight shifts towards a truly community focused co-creation process that can be sustained by the activists within the community and is not reliant on top-down leadership.

**The event was facilitated by Christine Bell and Amelia Wakeford from the [Centre for Facilitation](#) with support from Cher-Xueer Zou and Tanya Liguori. The Collab Leads took on group facilitation roles for the Like Wish Wonder Review Session so that they were able to closely hear the ideas shared during the session.**

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## Overview of the Workshop

The structure and process for the event continued the relaxed and engaging format that had been used for the launch event in July 2024. Participants had appreciated having time to talk to each other and to build relationships and this was an essential element in the launch of this community. A key design element was to support the community towards more self-organisation and less reliance on the collab leaders.

The workshop started in a similar style to the 2024 event, with a series of short networking conversations to build relationships and develop existing connections.

This interaction session was followed by a series of short presentations from the 4 Colabs to share progress and learning from the first Spotlight season. This was followed by a reflective review session where participants were invited to share their feedback about the first year and to plant some early ideas about what the Spotlight could focus on in the next season.

These community generated ideas were further developed in a series of conversations and participants are invited to return to the forum gathering in September having developed these ideas into more robust proposals.

A high-level panel and international guests helped to ensure that the discussions looked beyond the confines of Warwick to consider the wider global sustainability agenda.

## Workshop Outputs

All the outputs can be found on the Padlet with photos, live reporting, and a brief summary document.

### [Output 1](#)

The Sustainability Spotlight Review “Flowerpot” Posters, notes from slide presentations and additional notes made by participants to add to the posters.

### [Output 2](#)

The collated reflections of our participants both on post it notes and in discussion in the workshop session following the presentations about the first year and their own experiences of the Spotlight community activities.

### [Output 3](#)

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A selection of icons was provided so that participants could use these to provide a brief summary about the first Sustainability Spotlight season.

#### Output 4

The participants were asked to summarise their hopes for the next Sustainability Spotlight season into a short statement from each of the 7 groups.

#### Output 5

The participants were invited to generate ideas to develop next season (20205/6)

#### Output 6

From Ideas to Action: participants shortlisted ideas and started to develop them into potential action plans.

#### Output 7

This section includes the panel members, notes taken during the panel session, the additional questions asked, and the comments made on the additional questions by some of the panel members.

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# Output Summary

In the following sections we have summarised the output generated by the participants during the session into a narrative to support the community to identify core themes that emerged from the discussions across the different tables.

## 1 OUTPUT 1 | Spotlight updates and vision for 2025/6

Professor Elena Korosteleva gave an overview of the Spotlight's achievements in 2024/5 and overarching vision for 2025/6. The role of the spotlight is to enable the growth of the community, identifying champions at Warwick who can then mobilise the community to co-create activity and leverage broader networks.

Four “Colabs” have been established to drive the work of the Spotlight forward:

- **Colab 1: Mapping and visualisation**
- **Colab 2: Research synergies and funding**
- **Colab 3: ECR platform and training**
- **Colab 4: impact and visibility**

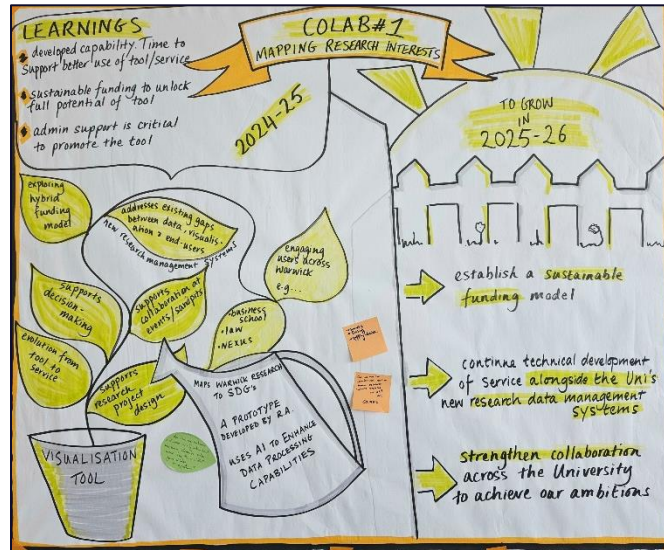
Together these have successfully established strong foundations for community-building and collaboration (across disciplines, career stages, sectors) The participation has demonstrated that sustainability is relevant to all disciplines.

The vision for 2025/6 is to enable self-sustaining growth of the spotlight through self-organisation by the community for the community. The Spotlight Steering Group would like to involve a wider range of people in steering and governance (e.g. ECRs and disciplines not currently represented).

Each Colab then gave their own update on work undertaken in 2024/5 and their vision for 2025/6:

### 1.1 Colab#1: Mapping Research Interests: Dr Feng Mao

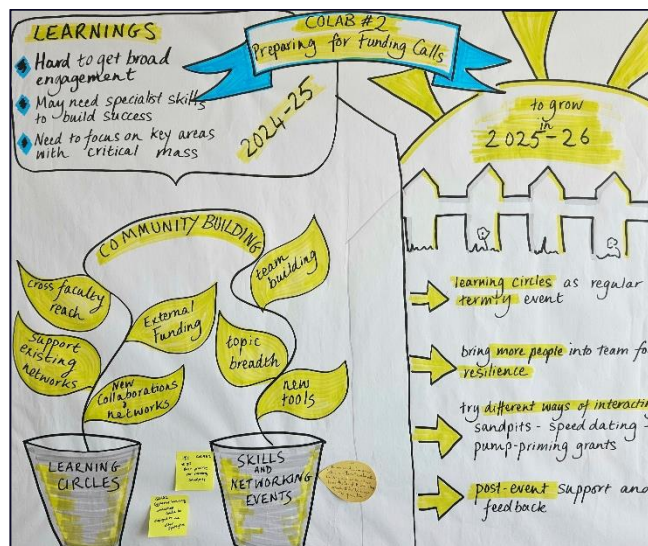
The focus of Colab #1 has been the creation of visualisation tool mapping Warwick research to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the 2024/5 the team developed the tool into a service for researchers across multiple faculties, addressing the gap between data and end users The vision for 2024/5 is.



The vision for 2025/6 is to identify a sustainable funding model that will permit the team to continue the engagement work, extending use to more departments (admin support is critical), extend use to more departments; and pursuing technical development alongside the university's new research data management systems.

## 1.2 Colab#2: Preparing for Funding Calls: Prof Gary Bending / Dr Fred Dahlmann

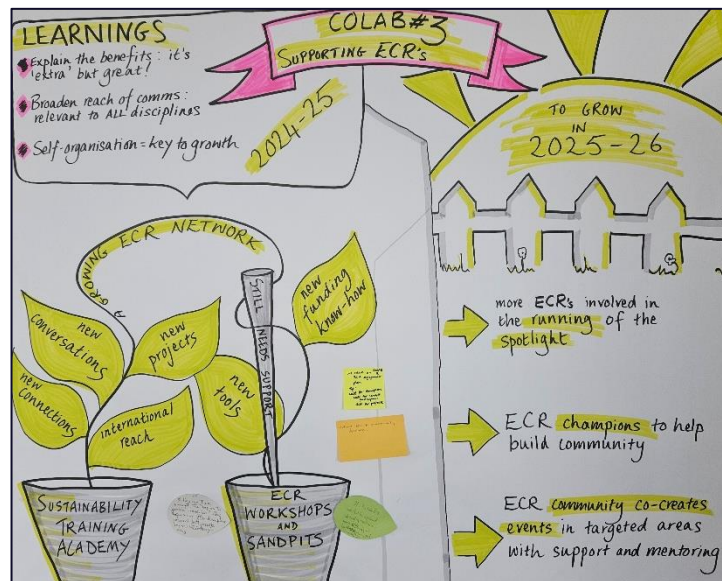
During 2024/5 Colab #2 built interdisciplinary synergy around funding calls, establishing learning circles, and events to **provide** specific training in support of funding applications and network building. It has made use of the Colab #1 visualisation tool and works in direct collaboration with R&IS. This has resulted in new external funding.



The Colab #2 vision for 2025/6 is to create resilience by bringing more people into the leadership team. It will embed learning circles as regular termly events; and trial new types of activities to support the growth of collaboration – for example sandpits, speed dating, pump priming grants; as well as providing post-event follow up and feedback.

### 1.3 Colab#3: Supporting Early Career Researchers: Prof Stuart Coles / Professor Elena Korosteleva

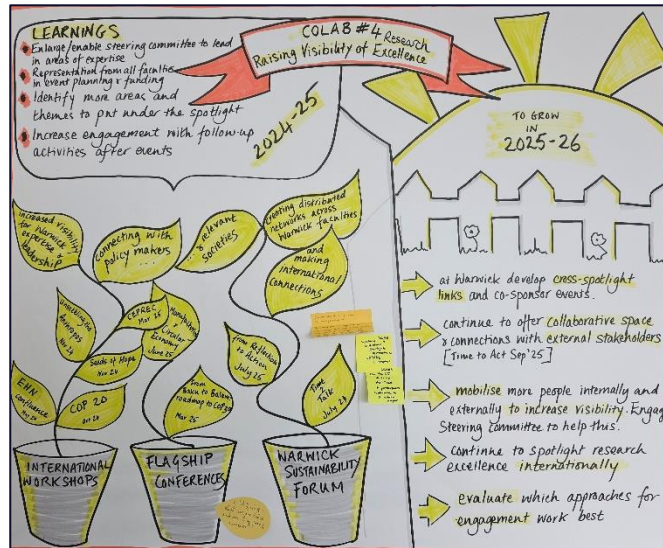
Colab#3 furnished ECRs with new tools and funding know-how by running a series of training events. The International Training Academy was a particular success, bringing together an international community of ECRs to build connections for the future at the interface of new research areas.



The vision for 2025/6 is to enrich the spotlight by involving ECRs in the governance and steering of the spotlight, supporting them to drive their own sustainability priorities forward, enabling them to champion further community building.

### 1.4 Colab#4: Raising visibility on our Research Excellence: Professor Giuliana Battisti / Dr Nick Lawrence

Colab#4 ran a programme of events to raise the visibility of Warwick research on a variety of topics and with a range of stake holders. These ranged from internal forums to international workshops to flagship conferences and internal forums. To extend this work, the Colab leadership recognised the need to enlarge and enable the steering committee, to encourage wider disciplinary representation and identify new focus areas and themes.



The Colab#4 vision for 2025/6 is to continue offering collaborative spaces for engagement with external stakeholders; evaluating which approaches to engagement are most **effective, and** to mobilise people internally and externally to continue the work of increasing visibility nationally and internationally.

## 2 OUTPUT 2 | Reflections on 2024-5

Following the presentations participants were invited to reflect on the work of the Colabs during 2024-25. These reflections were collated through verbal comments and post it notes in seven breakout groups. The Collab leads and the Spotlight administrator facilitated the group discussions and listened to the observations and feedback from the participants, who had been randomly allocated to groups.

The comments were grouped into 3 categories.

- **LIKES** – the highlights of the programme, what elements participants liked.
- **WISHES** – reflections about improvements to the programme, things that could have been done differently.
- **WONDER** – ideas about future possibilities that could be explored by the Spotlight Community that would build on the positive achievements and address some of the emerging concerns.

The output from all the groups have been merged, along with the group leaders notes to produce a summary of the key themes that emerged from the discussion and the data.

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## 2.1 What Was Liked?

### 2.1.1 ECR Engagement

There was a clear support for the involvement of ECRs throughout the spotlight, including the mapping activity. The plans to get ECRs involved in the leadership team were supported. The ECR academy was recognised as helping to build expertise across Warwick and there was an appreciation for how inclusive the events were, especially for ECRs.

### 2.1.2 Growing an Interdisciplinary Community

There was support for the ambition to create and grow a community of practice that involved a diversity of disciplines. The creation of this community both encouraged a diversity of approaches and provided a breadth of activity across the campus and building links globally on sustainability challenges. The enthusiasm and effort to build and develop this community was appreciated alongside having clear ownership and KPIs built into the process.

### 2.1.3 Mapping Expertise

The use of mapping expertise to visualise the SDGs and to help identify links between different disciplines and professionals was very helpful.

### 2.1.4 Sharing Learning

The interdisciplinary approach meant that there were rich learning opportunities for all, and the learning circles had supported this aim. There was a consistency to taking a learning focused approach across the collabs.

## 2.2 What Was Wished For?

### 2.2.1 Cultural and Behavioural Change in the Community

A significant theme in the feedback was about wanted to see the community tackle a deeper understanding of sustainability and to consider the extending the concept to include durability. The Spotlight community could do more on deeper cultural change in the mindset (live for less) and to challenge the persistence of a growth mentality within communities and government.

### 2.2.2 More Involvement Beyond Research Community

There was a desire to reach externally beyond the research community so that researchers could have more exposure to practitioners, policy makers and journalists and start to develop joint strategies and projects together. We need to ensure that Spotlight networking efforts spans further than academics. This extended reach should also include more consideration of global impacts and how we might build collaboration with poorer communities/countries.

### 2.2.3 Making an Impact

Although the KPIs were liked there were concerns that the impact of the Spotlight needed more consideration, how will we be able to track progress in 5 years' time. It was felt that a more strategic approach would be needed if we want to see more growth of action orientated research that would directly translate into industry or community change.

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#### 2.2.4 More Diversity

The interdisciplinary approach was working but was felt to be orientated towards STEM departments. More involvement of social scientists and the arts community would help strengthen some of the outcomes of the work and more fully account for all the dimensions of sustainability. It was also suggested that more engagement was going to be needed to bring in researchers on climate change and emissions to this Community.

A more targeted approach to incentivise people to join in the Spotlight and more action that would increase accessibility and improvements to publicity so that the work was better advertised. We need to find better ways to bring in colleagues not already involved in the network and inspires others to be part of the solution.

#### 2.2.5 More Dedicated Time for Sustainability Activities

A final theme was on the pressure of time and regrets of not being able to contribute to and/or participate more in the events. The learning from the first year could help create more standard formats for activities and timings of activities such as the learning circles and ECR/Sandpit events. It would be better if training programmes were more focused on each faculty to reflect the diverse needs and be more targeted use of time.

## 2.3 What were Ideas for the Future? (We Wonder If...)

### 2.3.1 Systems Based Sustainability Approach at University of Warwick

How might the Spotlight help to embed sustainability within the University using a system-based approach? This might relate to subject areas, fundings applications, proposals and to a wider and deeper understanding of sustainability across the campus.

- Would it possible to develop a more inclusive solution focus by working with our university community/Coventry communities to develop relevant solutions? This might help to widen participation and engagement with our local community and break down the ivory towers that academia can build and could build to more specific and concrete outcomes.
- How might we wider the scope of sustainability challenges, so that it is not just framed as environmental issues but looks at socioeconomic justice, equity, and newer topics like the impact of AI on sustainability and takes in account cultural and ethnic dimensions? Could we host events on Degrowth as a sustainability initiative?
- How can we make more of our teaching at some collaborative events? Would it be possible to present research excellence to a student audience through skills modules or impact lab projects?

### 2.3.2 Making More Use of the Mapping

Would it be possible for the mapping process could be extended and used to map professional services skills and interests. The mapping would be a visual tool to share if we can present it in an engaging manner for the internal and external audiences, including the student population.

- Is there the potential to use this to map competencies and identify learning needs?

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- Can we use this to highlight specific research and actions?
  - Could we make more use of it so we can talk about the work that University of Warwick are doing in this area?

### 2.3.3 Widening our Reach and Impact

How can this community better engage with industry and local/global communities to provide access to training and networking? We have to move beyond research papers and engage with the public and with policy makers. This means that sustainability research needs to become more impact driven and that this community becomes more diverse with professional services, students and external stakeholders working alongside the research community to drive sustainability actions.

- Could we use the Spotlight to help us create equitable partnerships that could work across university silos and support the impact of the work?
- Could we deepen our innovation and tech transfer to industry?
- Industrial and policy engagement should be part of a PhD or PDR programme to help prioritise participation in these activities.
- The learning circles could have targeted areas to bring in community events and we could use the model from WMG for more co-creation and look for examples of creative forms of collaboration.

### 2.3.4 Promoting More Engagement

How can we make it easier for individuals to engage with the spotlight and make contributions towards events?

- It was suggested that “keyword” events might help to bring people together. We could also use a focus on different SDGs to bring people together from different disciplines.
- Could we increase publicity about the Spotlight in Open Days and other internal communication?
- Could we run events like the Systems Training workshop for other Spotlights, sharing our expertise and raising awareness of our focus?

### 2.3.5 Early Career Researchers

How can we build on our success at engaging with ECRs within the current programme?

- Could we create more inclusive events by inviting ECRs, PDRAs and PhD students? Could we also make options available for undergraduate researchers, opening up the new funding opportunities?
- Could we make more of the opportunities for ECRs to take on leadership roles and create space/support for self-organisation so that ECRs could shape the future ECR agenda?
- How can we make the benefits of getting involved (both short and long term) clearer?

### 3 OUTPUT 3 | Summary of the 2024-25 Season

Having listened to the feedback from last year the Collab Leads and group facilitators were asked to leave the room to encourage the groups to move towards self-management and to ensure an honest exchange of views about the overall achievements of the 2024-5 season and the hopes for the next season.

The groups then selected an icon that best represented the first Spotlight season explained the reasoning behind the choice. The icons provided were a random selection.



Icon	Number of groups selecting	Why did this icon illustrate the 2024-5 Season
	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-creation, Co-operation, and Co-ordination</li> <li>• Climbing</li> <li>• Complexity - The more you learn, the harder it gets.</li> <li>• All backgrounds, working together in openness.</li> <li>• Transdisciplinary</li> <li>• Team</li> <li>• A party!</li> </ul>
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas spreading</li> <li>• Seeds for new ideas</li> <li>• At infancy, with the start of potential for growth</li> <li>• The spotlight sees its ideas spreading and growing</li> </ul>
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weaving together new skills and ideas</li> </ul>
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive beginnings</li> <li>• Seedling to potential growth</li> </ul>
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Dedication</li> <li>• Consistency</li> <li>• Enduring</li> <li>• Fun</li> </ul>



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## 5 OUTPUT 5 | Ideas for the next season

In the afternoon, participants were given the opportunity to explore ideas they wanted to drive forward in 2025/6. 23 ideas were generated of which 8 were selected for development into potential action plans during the workshop. However, any of the 23 ideas can be developed for the 'Time to Act' event on September 18<sup>th</sup>.

Ideas were evenly spread across the colabs and there appears to be consistency in the messaging, with participants showing enthusiasm for:

- **The need to create definitions, direction, and organisation.**
  - What does Warwick Sustainability research stand for?
  - how do we define sustainability?
  - how might we group ourselves?
  - what is our vision and direction?
- **The importance of mapping research.**
  - Expand it to include more people and career stages.
  - Consolidate it to generate focus areas.
- **Developing specific Research Focus Areas:**
  - Sustainability and AI
  - Perceptions of Sustainability and Behaviour Change
  - Food sustainability
- **Becoming a “living lab,”**
  - working with the local area to put research into practice.
  - Involving practitioners, innovation, and enterprise.

### 5.1 Colab#1 | Mapping and Visualisation | Ideas for 2025/6

5.1.1 A clearer vision and direction for people at Warwick to align themselves with. And better communication of who works on sustainability at Warwick. **Further Development| [Output 6](#)**

5.1.2 Workshops to co-define sustainability that goes beyond SDGs.

5.1.3 Create a geo-spatial remote sensing Research Technology Platform (RTP) to act as an enabling service for university-wide projects.

5.1.4 Constant review of sustainable cycle across the colabs at multiple points throughout the year to feed future sustainable developments. Think-plan-act-review.

5.1.5 Information availability about sustainability activity. Let each other know what we are working on – early-stage paper-development workshop.

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## 5.2 Colab#2 | Research Synergies and Funding | Ideas for 2025/6

- 5.2.1 Platform for different departments and faculties electronic mapping for different research topics in departments – conference / forum specific for ECR/PhD stage. **Further Development| [Output 6](#)**
- 5.2.2 Organise a cross-spotlight workshop & funding bid for the Digital and Sustainability spotlights on AI environments.
- 5.2.3 Challenge the unsustainable ways of the past. They don't have to be the ways of the future.
- 5.2.4 Co-creating research bids: research synergies and funding.
- 5.2.5 Have better collaboration within the department.
- 5.2.6 Collaborate beyond academic institutions, increasing synergies with large bids from *[illegible]* at the university beyond the spotlights by in-kind support from the spotlight and costing the spotlight into bids.

## 5.3 Colab#3 | ECR platform and training | Ideas for 2025/6

- 5.3.1 Explore cross-faculty innovative projects (mini) in sustainability (broadly defined) to provide training, KE, opportunities for supervisors and students. Chances of grants, promotion, impact, and change. (**Further Development Black [Output 6](#)**)
- 5.3.2 Formally ask all Warwick proposals (PhD / Internal Funding / Appraisals) to articulate how they contribute to a better world (referencing the Warwick new mission statement and referencing social and environmental
- 5.3.3 Have an ECR forum (including context-dependent activities) that is self-organised for PhD students, postdocs, probationary lecturers, research-active admin staff supporting the specific needs and requirements going beyond their research and connecting them with experts in their interest areas. Organise by putting a call out for champions.
- 5.3.4 Get ECR to collaborate, sharing research methods that are context specific and aimed at some action as an output.
- 5.3.5 Create a platform for mapping ECR expertise.

## 5.4 Colab#4 | Impact and Visibility | Ideas for 2025/6

- 5.4.1 Workshop in behaviour change and sustainable ways of living (**Further Development Pink|[Output 6](#)**)

- 5.4.2 Bring those working on sustainability locally to share/showcase their research, build networks, generate ideas together (**Further Development RED** | [Output 6](#))
- 5.4.3 Marry the goals to eliminate household food insecurity with a sustainable global food system (**Further Development orange** | [Output 6](#))
- 5.4.4 Understand public perception (gen public/industry partners etc) of sustainability and how best to disseminate and communicate work. Develop an understanding of international practices. The UK is not an island (**Further Development Lilac** | [Output 6](#))
- 5.4.5 Create research assistant opportunities embedded within the curriculum of any/all subject area [unreadable] on ongoing sustainability-related research (**Further Development Blue** | [Output 6](#))
- 5.4.6 Have a sustainability conference.
- 5.4.7 Sustainability Incubators: Warwick innovation and enterprise should be linked to any initiative linked to sustainability (behavioural marathons, challenges, nudgeathons)

More detail on each idea can be found in [Output 5](#)

## 6 [OUTPUT 6](#) | From Ideas to Action

The ideas in bold in Section 5 above were further developed to create the draft action plans in development as shown in [Output 6](#).

## 7 [OUTPUT 7](#) | Panel discussion



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The panel were recruited by Prof Elena Korosteleva to represent a diverse group of people with interests in Sustainability in the region and globally. The members of the panel were (in order from left to right from this photo):

1. Lord Teverson - House of Lords
2. Faji Bibi - President Global Sustainability and Inclusion Centre for Excellence
3. Kathryn Magnay - Director of Energy and Decarbonisation EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council)
4. Julie Walden – Partnership Lead - E. ON UK
5. Margot James - Independent Chair of Coventry Climate Change Board
6. Muneeba Amjad - Student Union Leader

The panel was moderated by Professor Stuart Coles. The discussion in the panel session covered four main discussion points: the challenge in making progress on sustainability in the current climate, how researchers could make an impact on sustainability issues, building sustainability into institutions and addressing inequalities. The main points are listed below with additional questions captured by the Menti poll from the audience.

## 7.1 The Challenges Faced in Making Sustainability Progress

The panel shared the biggest challenges to UK becoming sustainable.

1. **Misinformation & Public Perception:** The spread of disinformation, "alternative facts", and mixed messaging undermines trust and slows progress. Net zero denial further erodes momentum.
2. **Complacency & Delay:** There's a danger of normalising climate impacts (the "boiling frog" scenario), leading to delayed action. We must actively challenge this mindset.
3. **Resource Use & Circular Economy:** Failure to "close the loop" and reduce reliance on new materials is unsustainable. Long-term thinking is needed — recognising we're borrowing the planet from future generations.
4. **Energy System Challenges:** Inaccurate demand projections, rising energy use from AI, and limitations in storage and network infrastructure pose risks to a reliable, clean energy future.
5. **Political and Global Factors:** Domestic efforts are affected by international actions (or inaction). For example, policy shifts like US tax changes under Trump can undermine global progress and discourage UK action.
6. **Community Engagement & Empowerment:** Achieving sustainability requires grassroots involvement. Engaging local communities and empowering individuals — especially students — is crucial to driving broader change.

## 7.2 Making an Impact

The panel welcomed some of the discussions from the previous session exploring how the University of Warwick could work more effectively with local communities in Coventry to support

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implementation of sustainability initiatives. The Spotlight community was encouraged to consider ways of working with both communities and local authorities and to find ways of working that disrupt the existing top-down methodology. A place-based project in Hillfields, Coventry (where 46% live in fuel poverty – double the city average) had helped with levelling up in an area of low social economy and prevalent poverty. The focus was on making homes more energy efficient – therefore warmer AND cheaper to run. This could be taken further by understanding what could be done to benefit the region and support communities.

We would look at green spaces in the city and how to bring more of these spaces to more residents in the city.

### **7.3 Building Sustainability into the Institution**

Research into sustainability should be something that the whole institution is focused on, and we can influence the diverse communities and leaders who join our programmes and bring in voices to the conversation from across the globe.

The panel recognised that the squeeze on local authority budgets often means that sustainability activities get moved to the “nice to have” rating. Activism therefore has a role in making things happen on the ground. This could include making the use of student power/activism, starting with local activities but then extending these to the students place of origin.

### **7.4 Addressing Inequalities in Sustainability Research/Policy**

The panel explored how to ensure that research interventions do not simply deepen existing inequalities. An example was the push towards ownership of electric vehicles, when most people do not have driveways so would find EVs impossible to charge easily.

The group were urged to consider how to make communication inclusive to all including community members who are not fluent in English. It was also about making the time and space to really listen to people we want to engage with to find out what impacts are important to them and to listen to their ideas about how their community could become more sustainable. Research solutions need economic viability and community buy in and this needs to be factored into the research outline from the start.

### **7.5 Questions from the Group**

A Menti poll was used to collect in questions from the audience. There was limited time to address these in the session, but some panel members have [added comments to the questions on the Padlet](#)

1. How can we fix our economic and financial systems to encourage, not hinder, a transition to sustainability?
2. Where can a university such as Warwick best help with the sustainability challenges you

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face in your current roles?

3. To what extent is the current mantra of growth compatible with sustainability on a finite planet?

4. AI can help energy efficiency as well as be an increase in energy use. We need to know the balance.

5. How would you foresee something on the scale of the Manhattan Project on sustainability in the UK?

6. Is there a possibility of a local flagship sustainable project? For example, a fully sustainable care centre.

7. When did you last fly and why?

## 8 Closing Review

In the final closing statements the participants were encouraged to continue their conversations, develop the ideas and to meet again on 18<sup>th</sup> September (details to follow) where ideas could be shared, discussed, and prepared for implementation with the support of the community.

The forum had been a positive experience and the opportunity to connect and develop deeper conversations with others interested in sustainability was clearly valued. The transition towards community ownership of the work of the Sustainability Spotlight has been started and with gentle support from the core team the potential for this Spotlight seems positive.