

Advancing Project Management for Nature Recovery in a Natural Capital Era: a cross-sectoral approach to knowledge, skills and competency

Dowson, J¹., Liu, H¹., Lawman, A.E¹., Akhavan Tabassi, A²., Thompson, K³., Williams, N⁴., Wall, T¹., Bowe, C¹., Amoakoh, A.O¹., Rowley, A.¹

1 Liverpool John Moores University

2 Manchester Metropolitan University

3 Responsible Project Management

4 Portsmouth University

Abstract:

Effective project management (PM) for nature recovery requires collaboration, robust monitoring, and contracts linked to ecosystem performance, guided by sustainable project management (SPM) principles. Despite the need for ethical, transparent, and impact-driven approaches, conventional PM frameworks often overlook environmental and social dimensions, limiting long-term success. Dominant methodologies continue to prioritise conventional parameters of time, cost, and scope over longer-term environmental and social values, perpetuating a gap between policy ambition and implementation (Orien et al., 2024). This rigidity limits the effectiveness of nature restoration planning, as it overlooks the dynamic interdependencies of ecological processes and socio-economic systems.

In the UK, funding models reward measurable ecosystem services, yet a shortage of green skills remains a barrier. Professional bodies recognize the demand for sustainability-focused competencies, but gaps persist in equipping project professionals for evolving challenges. A recent cross-sector survey by Aljaaidi et al., (2025) identified persistent skill deficit in areas such as systems thinking, adaptive leadership, and stakeholder engagement—competencies essential for effective nature recovery project delivery. A structural misalignment is noted between current graduate training outcomes and the rapidly evolving nature sector requirements, particularly regarding interdisciplinary integration and the evaluation of environmental outcomes (da Costa et al., 2025). Conventional project-management proficiencies are therefore insufficient for contemporary nature recovery challenges, necessitating a more integrated skillset that includes ecological science, finance literacy, and governance expertise.

This research responds to the emerging competency challenge by examining how project management is currently practised in UK nature-recovery contexts. It identifies the knowledge areas, technical skills, and behavioural competencies considered most critical by practitioners, and explores where capability gaps persist. By clarifying these requirements, this study provides an evidence base to inform academic curricula, professional standards, and workforce development strategies. In doing so, it aims to strengthen the capacity of project managers to translate natural-capital policy and finance into tangible and measurable ecological improvements.

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da Costa, T., Aranda Lopez, L. I., Perussello, C., Quinn, F., Crowley, Q. G., McMahon, H., & Holden, N. M. (2025). Addressing the Demand for Green Skills: Bridging the Gap Between University Outcomes and Industry Requirements. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 17(6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17062732>

Orien, H. O., Ndubuisi, N. L., Eyo-Udo, N. L., Ilojany, V. I., & Biu, P. W. (2024). Sustainability in project management: A comprehensive review. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 21(1), 656–677. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.21.1.0060>