



**International Institute
for Sustainable Finance**

IISF

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION • COURSE 02 OF 06

Sustainable Business Models

Course Syllabus

Self-paced online course

About 20 hours • 8 modules • 40 lessons

2026 Edition

Version 1.0 • October 2026

sustainablefinance.in

COURSE 02

Course Overview

How companies redesign what they sell, how they make it, and how they are governed and financed.

A sustainable business model creates value without eroding the natural and social systems it depends on. This course shows how such models are designed, tested, governed, and financed, using the tools that strategy and sustainability teams apply in practice.

Participants work with the Business Model Canvas, double materiality assessment, the ISO 59000 circular economy standards, the SBTi Corporate Net-Zero Standard, the Transition Plan Taskforce framework, and the ICMA and LMA principles for sustainable debt.

At a glance

Level	Introductory to intermediate
Format	Self-paced and online. Recorded lessons on the IISF learning platform.
Study time	About 20 hours
Structure	8 modules and 40 lessons
Enrolment	Open throughout the year, with no fixed start date
Access	12 months from enrolment
Assessment	A quiz in every module, then a final quiz
Award	IISF Certificate of Completion for the course
Fee	USD 200. All six courses taken together: USD 1,000.
Prerequisites	None. Course 1, Foundations of Sustainability, is recommended first.

Who the course is for

- 1 Managers and strategists responsible for products, operations, or corporate strategy.
- 2 Sustainability professionals who need commercial and financial fluency.
- 3 Founders, consultants, and bankers who assess or advise businesses.

COURSE 02

Outcomes and Structure

What you will be able to do

On completing the course, a participant should be able to:

CO1	Analyse a business model and identify where it creates and destroys environmental and social value.
CO2	Apply a double materiality assessment to set strategic priorities.
CO3	Design a circular business model and select indicators to measure it.
CO4	Construct a marginal abatement cost curve and evaluate a corporate transition plan.
CO5	Evaluate governance, controls, and assurance over sustainability performance.
CO6	Select financing instruments suited to a sustainable business strategy.

Course structure

Module	Title	Lessons	Study time
Module 1	Why Business Models Must Change	5	2 h 15 min
Module 2	Materiality and Strategy	5	2 h 15 min
Module 3	Circular Economy Models	5	2 h 15 min
Module 4	Decarbonising the Business	5	2 h 15 min
Module 5	Social Value and Inclusive Models	5	2 h 15 min
Module 6	Governance, Risk, and Assurance	5	2 h 15 min
Module 7	Financing the Sustainable Business	5	2 h 15 min
Module 8	Leading the Transformation	5	2 h 15 min
Assessment	Revision and final quiz		2 h
Total		40	20 h

MODULE 1 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Why Business Models Must Change

What a business model is, why the linear model is under strain, and the archetypes that replace it.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
1.1	The business model	Value proposition, creation, delivery, and capture; the Business Model Canvas.
1.2	Limits of the linear model	Resource constraints, externalities, regulation, and the expectations of customers, lenders, and staff.
1.3	The business case	Revenue, cost, risk, access to capital, and talent: what the evidence supports and where it is thin.
1.4	Shared value and purpose	Porter and Kramer on shared value, stakeholder capitalism, and the main criticisms of both.
1.5	Model archetypes	The eight sustainable business model archetypes of Bocken and colleagues; the Triple Layered Business Model Canvas.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 1.1	Describe a business model using the Business Model Canvas.
LO 1.2	Explain the commercial case for sustainability and identify its limits.
LO 1.3	Classify a company's model against the sustainable business model archetypes.

Standards and frameworks	Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur); Triple Layered Business Model Canvas (Joyce and Paquin, 2016); sustainable business model archetypes (Bocken et al., 2014); Creating Shared Value (Porter and Kramer, 2011).
Core reading	Marked extract from Bocken et al., A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes (2014).
Key terms	value proposition; value capture; linear model; shared value; stakeholder capitalism; archetype; triple layered canvas.
Case study	Interface. A carpet tile manufacturer's Mission Zero programme and the redesign of an industrial product.
Practice exercise	Map a company you know on the Triple Layered Business Model Canvas.

MODULE 2 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Materiality and Strategy

How a company decides which sustainability issues matter and turns them into strategy and targets.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
2.1	Double materiality	The assessment process under ESRS 1, and how it differs from financial materiality under IFRS S1.
2.2	Stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder mapping and the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard.
2.3	Risks and opportunities	Industry topics in the SASB Standards, scenario analysis, and strategic screening.
2.4	Setting ambition	Near-term and net-zero targets under the SBTi, and the design of key performance indicators.
2.5	Strategy integration	Capital allocation, portfolio choices, and the decision to divest, transform, or build.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 2.1	Apply the steps of a double materiality assessment to a given company.
LO 2.2	Identify the material sustainability topics of an industry using the SASB Standards.
LO 2.3	Formulate strategic priorities and targets from a materiality assessment.

Standards and frameworks	ESRS 1 and EFRAG materiality assessment guidance; IFRS S1; SASB Standards; AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (2015); SBTi Corporate Net-Zero Standard Version 2.0.
Core reading	Marked extract from EFRAG, Implementation Guidance 1: Materiality Assessment (2024).
Key terms	impact materiality; financial materiality; impacts, risks and opportunities; stakeholder mapping; industry-based topic; key performance indicator; capital allocation.
Case study	Unilever. The Sustainable Living Plan of 2010 to 2020: what it achieved, what it missed, and what replaced it.
Practice exercise	Build a materiality matrix for a sector and justify the three highest priorities.

MODULE 3 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Circular Economy Models

The principles, business models, design methods, rules, and metrics of the circular economy.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
3.1	Principles	The three principles of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the butterfly diagram, and the R-strategies.
3.2	Circular business models	Product as a service, sharing, life extension, resource recovery, and circular inputs.
3.3	Design and life cycle	Ecodesign, design for disassembly, life cycle assessment, and the product carbon footprint.
3.4	Policy	The EU Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, the Digital Product Passport, and producer responsibility in India.
3.5	Measuring circularity	ISO 59020, the Circular Transition Indicators, and the Material Circularity Indicator.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 3.1	Explain the principles of the circular economy and classify circular business models.
LO 3.2	Describe the stages of a life cycle assessment under ISO 14040 and ISO 14044.
LO 3.3	Design a circular version of a product and select indicators to measure it.

Standards and frameworks	ISO 59004, ISO 59010, and ISO 59020 (2024); ISO 14040 and ISO 14044; ISO 14067; EU Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (2024); WBCSD Circular Transition Indicators; India's Extended Producer Responsibility rules.
Core reading	Marked extract from Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Towards the Circular Economy, Volume 1 (2013).
Key terms	technical cycle; biological cycle; R-strategies; product as a service; life cycle assessment; functional unit; extended producer responsibility; circularity indicator.
Case study	Philips. Lighting sold as a service at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, and what the model changes for maker and customer.
Practice exercise	Redesign a consumer product for circularity and state how success would be measured.

MODULE 4 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Decarbonising the Business

From footprint to abatement plan: levers, costs, targets, claims, and the transition plan.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
4.1	The corporate footprint	Emission hotspots across Scopes 1, 2, and 3 in different sectors.
4.2	Abatement levers	Efficiency, electrification, renewable procurement, fuel switching, process change, capture, and removals.
4.3	Cost and carbon price	The marginal abatement cost curve; shadow prices and internal carbon fees in investment appraisal.
4.4	Targets and claims	Net zero and carbon neutral; ISO 14068-1; the VCMI Claims Code; the role of carbon credits.
4.5	The transition plan	Ambition, action, and accountability in the Transition Plan Taskforce framework and IFRS S2.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 4.1	Construct a marginal abatement cost curve from a set of abatement projects.
LO 4.2	Apply an internal carbon price to the appraisal of an investment.
LO 4.3	Evaluate a corporate transition plan against the Transition Plan Taskforce Disclosure Framework.

Standards and frameworks	GHG Protocol; SBTi Corporate Net-Zero Standard Version 2.0; ISO 14068-1:2023; ISO Net Zero Guidelines (IWA 42:2022); VCMI Claims Code of Practice; ICVCM Core Carbon Principles; Transition Plan Taskforce Disclosure Framework (2023); IFRS S2.
Core reading	Marked extract from Science Based Targets initiative, Corporate Net-Zero Standard, Version 2.0.
Key terms	abatement lever; marginal abatement cost; shadow price; internal carbon fee; residual emissions; carbon removal; beyond value chain mitigation; transition plan.
Case study	Microsoft. An internal carbon fee charged to business units since 2012, and a target to be carbon negative by 2030.
Practice exercise	Build a cost curve from ten projects and test each against an internal carbon price.

MODULE 5 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Social Value and Inclusive Models

Business models that create social value, and the standards for decent work and human rights in operations.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
5.1	Inclusive business	Serving low-income markets, inclusive value chains, and the base of the pyramid debate.
5.2	Hybrid forms	Social enterprises, cooperatives, B Corp certification, and benefit corporation law.
5.3	Decent work	Living wages under the Anker methodology, health and safety under ISO 45001, and inclusion.
5.4	Human rights due diligence	The process set by the UN Guiding Principles, grievance mechanisms, and the EU due diligence directive.
5.5	Measuring social value	The Social and Human Capital Protocol, social return on investment, and the GRI and ESRS social standards.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 5.1	Compare social enterprise, cooperative, and benefit corporation models.
LO 5.2	Explain the living wage and calculate a wage gap using the Anker methodology.
LO 5.3	Apply the due diligence process of the UN Guiding Principles to a company's own operations.

Standards and frameworks	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; ISO 45001:2018; Anker methodology for living wages; B Lab Standards; EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, as amended; GRI 400 series; ESRS S1 to S4; Social and Human Capital Protocol.
Core reading	Marked extract from OECD, Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct (2018).
Key terms	inclusive business; social enterprise; cooperative; benefit corporation; living wage; grievance mechanism; salient human rights issue; social return on investment.
Case study	Amul. A dairy cooperative owned by millions of farmers, and what its model returns to producers.
Practice exercise	Carry out a living wage gap analysis for a workforce in one location.

MODULE 6 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Governance, Risk, and Assurance

How boards oversee sustainability, how risk and controls are organised, and how claims are assured and policed.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
6.1	Board oversight	Duties, committees, and skills; the sustainability chapter of the G20/OECD Principles of Corporate Governance.
6.2	Incentives	Linking executive pay to sustainability targets, and the design errors to avoid.
6.3	Enterprise risk	ISO 31000 and the COSO enterprise risk management framework applied to climate and nature.
6.4	Internal control	COSO guidance on internal control over sustainability reporting, and data governance.
6.5	Assurance and claims	ISSA 5000, limited and reasonable assurance, and the rules against greenwashing in the EU and India.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 6.1	Describe the board's responsibilities for sustainability under the G20/OECD Principles.
LO 6.2	Distinguish between limited and reasonable assurance under ISSA 5000.
LO 6.3	Evaluate a sustainability claim against the rules on misleading environmental claims.

Standards and frameworks	G20/OECD Principles of Corporate Governance (2023); ISO 31000:2018; COSO Enterprise Risk Management framework; COSO Internal Control over Sustainability Reporting (2023); ISSA 5000 (2024); EU Directive on Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition (2024); India's Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Greenwashing (2024).
Core reading	Marked extract from COSO, Achieving Effective Internal Control over Sustainability Reporting (2023).
Key terms	board committee; remuneration link; risk appetite; three lines model; control activity; limited assurance; reasonable assurance; substantiation of claims.
Case study	DWS. How overstated sustainability claims at an asset manager led to penalties in the United States and Germany.
Practice exercise	Draft a one-page sustainability dashboard for a board, with indicators, owners, and thresholds.

MODULE 7 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Financing the Sustainable Business

How lenders and investors assess sustainability, and the instruments a company can use.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
7.1	Capital and sustainability	What lenders and investors ask for, the evidence on cost of capital, and why ratings diverge.
7.2	Labelled bonds and loans	Green, social, and sustainability bonds under the ICMA principles; frameworks and external review.
7.3	Sustainability-linked debt	Key performance indicators, performance targets, and step-ups under the ICMA and LMA principles.
7.4	Transition finance	The ICMA Climate Transition Finance Handbook and taxonomies in the EU, ASEAN, Singapore, and India.
7.5	Equity and public support	Venture and growth capital for climate technology, grants, concessional finance, and carbon revenue.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 7.1	Compare use-of-proceeds and sustainability-linked instruments.
LO 7.2	Design key performance indicators and performance targets for a sustainability-linked loan.
LO 7.3	Select a financing instrument suited to a company's sustainability strategy and justify the choice.

Standards and frameworks	ICMA Green Bond Principles, Social Bond Principles, Sustainability Bond Guidelines, and Sustainability-Linked Bond Principles; LMA, APLMA and LSTA Green Loan and Sustainability-Linked Loan Principles; ICMA Climate Transition Finance Handbook; EU Taxonomy; ASEAN Taxonomy; CDP.
Core reading	Marked extract from ICMA, Sustainability-Linked Bond Principles.
Key terms	use of proceeds; second-party opinion; key performance indicator; sustainability performance target; coupon step-up; transition finance; taxonomy alignment; greenium.
Case study	Enel. Sustainability-linked bonds, a missed 2023 emissions target, and the coupon step-up that followed.
Practice exercise	Set two indicators, targets, and a margin adjustment for a manufacturer's loan.

MODULE 8 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Leading the Transformation

Turning strategy into change: organisation, innovation, data, and communication.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
8.1	Managing change	Change leadership, culture, capabilities, and the role of middle management.
8.2	Innovation and partnership	Sustainable product innovation, open innovation, and pre-competitive collaboration.
8.3	Data and digital	Sustainability data systems, product passports, and the footprint of digital technology.
8.4	Integrated reporting	The Integrated Reporting Framework, connectivity with financial statements, and honest communication.
8.5	The transformation plan	Sequencing, ownership, budget, milestones, and review.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 8.1	Analyse the organisational barriers to a sustainability transformation.
LO 8.2	Explain the six capitals of the Integrated Reporting Framework.
LO 8.3	Formulate a transformation plan with priorities, owners, milestones, and financing.

Standards and frameworks	Integrated Reporting Framework (2021); IFRS S1; Natural Capital Protocol; Transition Plan Taskforce Disclosure Framework (2023).
Core reading	Marked extract from IFRS Foundation, International Integrated Reporting Framework (2021).
Key terms	change leadership; open innovation; pre-competitive collaboration; data governance; six capitals; value creation; connectivity; roadmap.
Case study	Patagonia. Purpose, product durability, and the 2022 transfer of ownership to a trust and a non-profit.
Practice exercise	Outline a three-year transformation plan for a mid-sized company.

COURSE 02

Learning and Assessment

How you will learn

Recorded lessons	Five lessons in each module, available at any time on the IISF learning platform.
Core reading	One marked extract in each module, of about ten pages, taken from the standards and reports named in this syllabus.
Practice exercise	One exercise in each module, with a worksheet and a worked solution. It is not assessed.
Case study	One case in each module, drawn from practice in advanced and emerging markets.

How you will be assessed

Module quizzes	A short quiz at the end of each of the eight modules.
Final quiz	A quiz covering all eight modules, taken once the module quizzes are complete.
Pass requirement	Completion of the eight module quizzes and a pass in the final quiz. The pass mark is stated on the learning platform.

Certificate

Course certificate	The IISF Certificate of Completion for this course is awarded to participants who meet the pass requirement.
Executive Certificate	Participants who earn the certificate in all six courses receive the IISF Executive Certificate in Sustainability and Sustainable Finance.
Verification	Every certificate carries a reference that can be checked online.

COURSE 02

Core References

The course draws on the sources below. Each module names the standards and frameworks it teaches, and the learning platform links to the current edition of each.

Publisher or author	Document
Osterwalder and Pigneur	Business Model Generation (2010)
Bocken, Short, Rana and Evans	A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes, Journal of Cleaner Production (2014)
Porter and Kramer	Creating Shared Value, Harvard Business Review (2011)
EFRA	ESRS 1 General Requirements and materiality assessment implementation guidance
ISO	ISO 59004:2024 Circular economy: vocabulary, principles and guidance for implementation
Ellen MacArthur Foundation	Towards the Circular Economy, Volume 1 (2013)
Science Based Targets initiative	Corporate Net-Zero Standard, Version 2.0
Transition Plan Taskforce	Disclosure Framework (2023)
OECD	G20/OECD Principles of Corporate Governance (2023)
COSO	Achieving Effective Internal Control over Sustainability Reporting (2023)
ICMA	Green Bond Principles and Sustainability-Linked Bond Principles

Currency of the syllabus

Standards and regulations are cited as in force in October 2026. Lessons are revised when a named standard changes, and the revision is recorded on the learning platform.

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

The Learning Pathway

This course is one of six. Each stands alone and may be taken in any order, although Course 1 is recommended first.

Course	Title	Study time
Course 1	Foundations of Sustainability	20 h
Course 2	Sustainable Business Models This course	20 h
Course 3	Sustainable Supply Chains	20 h
Course 4	Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems	20 h
Course 5	Renewable Energy and Green Infrastructure	20 h
Course 6	Impact Investing	20 h

Fees and the Executive Certificate

Each course costs USD 200. The six courses taken together cost USD 1,000. Completing all six earns the IISF Executive Certificate in Sustainability and Sustainable Finance.

Short courses and the CSFP

A short course is assessed by online quiz. The Chartered Sustainable Finance Professional (CSFP) is a designation earned by proctored examination. The short courses carry no exemption from the CSFP examinations, and they are useful preparation for Level I.

About IISF

The International Institute for Sustainable Finance (IISF) is a professional body that sets standards of competence and conduct for sustainable finance, transition capital, climate risk, and responsible investment. It awards the CSFP designation.

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