

# Quarterly Policy Briefing: Environmental Sustainability

## December 2021

This document outlines the main policy changes seen in the last quarter that will impact Scottish institutions and related EAUC-Scotland activity as a result.

### Scottish Policy Updates

- **Scottish Government published new [Public Bodies Climate Change Duty \(PBCCD\) Reporting Guidance \(October 2021\)](#)**. There are key requirements under the themes of Governance; Finance; Reporting; and Accountability.

The guidance also summarises current climate change targets that apply to Scotland's universities and colleges:

1. Zero direct emissions by 2045 at the latest, including interim targets to monitor progress.
2. Zero direct emissions from all estate buildings by 2038.
3. Net zero targets for indirect emissions that clearly state what is included. If an institution chooses to exclude a source of indirect emissions from its target it must clearly explain the reasoning.
4. All new fleet cars and light vehicles must have zero emissions by 2025 and larger new vehicles by 2030.
5. No waste to landfill by 2030.
6. Air travel should be minimised and mainland UK air travel should be eliminated. Where air travel is unavoidable it is recommended that the passenger class is the most efficient in terms of emissions (e.g. economy class as default).

EAUC Scotland has produced a [sector briefing paper](#) drawing out the key changes and requirements for institutions.

- **Universities Scotland has passed a paper recognising the new PBCCD legislative changes (see above)**. Within Universities Scotland's governance (1) the role of Convenor of the Executive Group will now include overall elected leadership on climate emergency issues; and (2) the Universities Scotland Efficiency and Effectiveness Committee (USEEC) has been renamed to Universities Scotland Efficiency and Climate Emergency Committee (USECEC). The paper and governance actions create a stronger foundation for university collaboration and consensus-building on responding to the climate emergency.

- **Scotland's launch of the [Deposit Return Scheme has been postponed to 16th August 2023](#)**. Roll out of infrastructure will begin in earnest from summer 2022.

## UK Policy Updates

- **The UK Government has published its [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener policy paper](#)**. The strategy sets out plans to keep the UK on track for UK carbon budgets, its 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution, and for net zero by 2050. The paper includes:
  1. decarbonisation pathways to net zero by 2050, including illustrative scenarios
  2. policies and proposals to reduce emissions for each sector
  3. cross-cutting action to support the transition

Of particular relevance to the Scottish FHE sector is the stated commitment for the UK to have a fully low-carbon electricity grid by 2035. If realised this would significantly reduce the sector's Scope 2 emissions and reinforces the need for the sector to focus predominantly on reducing Scope 1 and 3 emissions.

- **The UK Government's new [Environment Bill](#) has now passed into law (10<sup>th</sup> November)**. Priority areas for the Environment Bill are air quality; water; biodiversity; resource efficiency and waste reduction. The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) has now been officially formed as watchdog to ensure businesses and local authorities comply with the UK's long-term environmental policy requirements following Brexit. It is unclear at this stage how this may impact the Scottish FHE sector, though commitments to improving England's resource efficiency and waste management may result in the longer-term lowering of waste management conversion factors being used within PBCCD reporting.
- **The UK Government's Department for Education has published [Sustainability & Climate Change: A draft strategy for the education & children's services systems](#) (November 2021)**. The vision of the strategy is the UK is the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030 (Early Years to Higher Education). In England, this will be achieved through the following strategic aims:
  1. Excellence in education and skills for a changing world: preparing all young people for a world impacted by climate change through learning and practical experience.
  2. Net zero: reducing direct and indirect emissions from education and care buildings, driving innovation to meet legislative targets and providing opportunities for children and young people to engage practically with the net zero concept.
  3. Resilient to climate change: adapting to mitigate against the worst impacts of climate change in our education and care buildings and infrastructure.

4. A better environment for future generations: enhancing biodiversity and increasing access to nature in and around education and care settings.

The finalised strategy is expected to be published April 2022.

## Other Updates

- **Association of Colleges (AoC; England-only) has published a new report, [The Green College Commitment \(October 2021\)](#).** The report sets out 15 recommendations for the UK Government to support 'green colleges'. Priorities include:
  1. Making climate and environmental education a compulsory part of all study courses
  2. Launching the Lifelong Loan Entitlement for training in priority green sectors
  3. Providing investment through the National Skills Fund to meet demand in key green growth sectors
  4. Investing in the college workforce to ensure they have the resources and knowledge to train those moving into green growth sectors
  5. Investing £1.5 billion in the next three years in the capital budget to sustainability transform the college estate and for investment in innovative technology required for green jobs training.
- **Universities UK has published [Confronting the climate emergency: A commitment from UK Universities \(October 2021\)](#).** All UK universities commit to the following:
  1. Set targets for scope 1 and 2 emission reductions which support the government's plans for reducing emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels and achieving net zero by 2050 at the latest (or devolved government equivalents).
  2. Set a target for scope 3 emission reductions and other environmental targets beyond emissions, or commit to a programme of work to set targets as soon as possible.
  3. Ensure that these targets are visible on their websites, alongside information on how the university is addressing the climate emergency through their teaching, research, leadership, local contributions and campus responsibilities (for example, through reference to existing sustainability plans or strategies, or the development of one).
  4. Set out how progress against these targets will be reported in a transparent, consistent, and understandable way, and collectively work with official statistics providers to improve data collection.
  5. Sign the UN's SDG Accord or embed elements of SDG accord reporting into their existing reporting.
  6. Use the Climate Commission's Climate Action toolkit to assess how further actions through the university's policies and reporting could advance the UN SDGs and respond to the climate emergency.

- **Brief summary of COP26 Key Outcomes:**

1. Mitigation – secured Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) from 153 countries with commitment to future strengthening of mitigation measures. Over 90% of the world’s economy is now covered by net zero commitments and signatories are expected to return next year to COP27 with strengthened commitments.
2. Adaptation & Loss and Damage – 80 countries are now covered by either Adaptation Communications or National Adaptation Plans. There is a commitment to doubling the 2019 levels of finance specifically for adaptation work by 2025.
3. Finance – developing countries are expected to reach the \$100 billion climate finance goal by 2023 at the latest (originally 2020). 34 countries and five public institutions will stop international support for the unabated fossil fuel energy sector from 2022.
4. Collaboration – creation of structures to enhance collaboration between governments, businesses and civil society to deliver climate targets faster, with additional specific ‘collaborative councils’ focused on energy, electric vehicles, shipping and commodities.

For further information see [COP26: The Glasgow Climate Pact](#) resource. [Climate Action Tracker](#) (CAT) has updated its analysis of pledges and targets determining that forecast global temperature rises will increase between 1.8C (best case scenario) and 2.7C (based on real world action and current policies) by 2100.

COP27 will take place 7<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> November 2022 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.