

Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Response submitted online

<https://bit.ly/2Mt85wW>

15 August 2019

Dear Environmental Audit Committee,

Please find below our inquiry response on the UK Government and actions they need to take to meet net zero carbon emissions.

Consultation: Net zero Government.

EAUC – The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education:

Response on behalf of our Members (United Kingdom and Ireland)

About the EAUC

Our passion is to create a world with sustainability at its heart. That's our vision. We exist to lead and empower the post-16 education sector to make sustainability 'just good business'.

The membership of the EAUC comprises higher and further educational institutions, with a combined budget of some £25 billion, responsible for educating over 2 million students supported by half a million staff.

We have regional and country chapters, with member institutions connected deeply with business, industry, health and civic bodies at local levels, with reach internationally via their research, innovation and student mobility.

We believe

- That UK and Irish education should be a global leader in sustainability
- That educational institutions have a responsibility as anchors in their communities to be agents of change
- That education has a unique opportunity to transform lives and communities
- That education is at the heart of global sustainability
- That every student should have access to sustainability education
- That education should reflect best practice in operational sustainability
- In being flexible and adaptable to find solutions for a resilient future
- In the value of international collaboration

Our values

- Pioneering - driving sustainability through innovation
- Independence - our own unique voice
- Collaboration - together we go further
- Role Model - leading by example
- Empowering - supporting and inspiring our members

EAUC's Approach to the Inquiry

EAUC has taken the lead in the university and college sector on the Climate Crisis, and we are currently lobbying our members to declare a climate emergency and commit to net zero carbon targets. You can see the list of UK institutions that have so far, here:

https://www.eauc.org.uk/net_zero_carbon_pledge.

Additionally, we provide a guide called 'Adapting universities and colleges to a changing climate: Making the case and taking action' for institutions. We are working on more guidance and resources for institutions, following on from a Think Tank event we held in July on the topic with sector leaders. We will also be hosting a Climate Crisis Summit in the autumn with key sector agencies and institutional leaders to create a sector wide response.

In addition to our domestic work, we also work on a global scale on this topic, in particular with UN Environment and Second Nature. We facilitate a Global Climate Emergency platform for institutions as well, and this asks signatories from all over the world to commit to a three-point plan:

1. Mobilizing more resources for action-oriented climate change research and skills creation;
2. Committing to going carbon neutral by 2030 or 2050 at the very latest;
3. Increasing the delivery of environmental and sustainability education across curriculum, campus and community outreach programmes.

We currently have 138 institutions representing approximately 2,315,614 students, and 41 networks representing approximately 8296 institutions signed up to this. We will present the sector's call for a drastic societal shift to combat the growing threat of climate change to the UN Climate Summit in September 2019.

Universities and colleges have a big role to play in this fight – they own and operate large estates, produce research which can advance our knowledge of how to best respond to the climate crisis, and recognise that the young minds that are shaped by their institutions must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and capability to respond to the ever-growing challenges of climate change. However, they need support to do these things – and the Government has shown very poor stakeholder engagement attempts on this. We have made attempts to reach out to share sector opinions, but usually get little or no response. This is all the more surprising because we have good relationships with various departments on other sustainability topics for example we recently held a webinar with DEFRA on recycling practices in Higher Education.

We don't believe the Government is taking as much advice as it should from the Higher and Further Education sector on the topic of Net Zero, and would encourage the Government to get in touch with us and work with us to harness the knowledge, skills and enthusiasm of our Members in addressing the carbon reduction challenge.

Response to the consultation:

- What must be done to achieve a net zero Government?

There must be a mandate that Government departments reduce their carbon emissions by a certain percentage annually to ensure net zero is reached in a prompt manner. We would suggest 2050 is far too late and this should be brought forward to 2030. This should reach beyond Government departments and include any bodies that receive primary funding from the Government. Supply chains should also factor into this - Government should be encouraging best

practice by requiring those in its supply chain to commit to net zero carbon. The Government must research and develop offsetting as well as a last resort, and this must be regulated.

- What time frame is required for Government to achieve alignment with net zero emissions?

Alignment with net zero emissions should be by 2030. The current proposed deadline of 2050 is far too late and it is a deadline that if crossed, would prove deadly. Jim Skea, Co-Chair of IPCC Working Group III states in the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C: “Limiting warming to 1.5°C is possible within the laws of chemistry and physics [by 2050] but doing so would require unprecedented changes.” The UK Government should, as a first world country, lead by example and push to reach net zero as fast as possible to ensure that this target is met by 2050 at the very latest.

- What challenges might Government encounter as part of this process? How could these be overcome?

There will be departments that will find it difficult to reach ambitious 2030 net zero targets, and there will be stakeholders that push back as financially it is not in their best interest in the short term. However, net zero targets are not a ‘nice to have’, they are a necessity to prevent the destruction of our planet and mass species extinction.

There must be heavy investment in education to help develop the essential knowledge and skills for a zero-carbon economy and foster nationwide behaviour change, including awareness of the scientific basis for these requirements. Internally, for the Government, this means upskilling civil servants in all departments on sustainable development on the whole, with a strong carbon literacy focus. On a wider basis, this means transforming all levels of formal education and offering knowledge development and reskilling opportunities for the wider public.

Internally, the Government must create guidelines for staff about all elements of their job that have carbon emitting potential. This includes measures such as: switching off computers at the plug, not overfilling the kettle, holding virtual meetings, allowing more working from home, limiting travel in carbon emitting transport (particularly flying). These are quite well known measures, in addition to these, there must be awareness of the carbon footprint caused by moving to a more virtual world – for example – experts estimate that an average person’s incoming annual emails equates to 136kg of emissions, or the equivalent of driving 200 miles in a car. Staff should also be encouraged to take part in carbon offsetting voluntary work.

The Government should look to set aside carbon budgets to assist with the changes required, and public and private sector organisations and companies should also ensure they are preparing budgets to manage the shift to a low carbon society.

- What must Government do to ensure a just transition and decent work as it moves its estate towards net zero?

As the Government moves towards a net zero sustainable estate, it must have the foresight now, to ensure a just transition for staff. This should primarily consist of upskilling staff to ensure they are also future proofed in their changing role.

When looking at policy, the Industrial Strategy should be reassessed to better incorporate the need for a just transition to a net zero society. We are concerned that the Green Finance Strategy only mentions it will look into a just transition, and does not outline any plans for this as of yet. This must be researched rapidly and implemented as soon as possible.

- To what extent is Government “leading by example” in aligning its estate and operations with net zero emissions?

Currently it is not doing enough and is not leading by example. Some departments are doing better than others, but none are leading. Certainly at a policy level Government is setting a good example globally by declaring a Climate Emergency and legislating net zero carbon targets but these need to be filtered through to all public bodies. Many local authorities have also declared climate emergencies, but as is commonly the case, there is a lack of consistency across local authorities when it comes to net zero. Government should mandate local authorities all have a comprehensive carbon neutral plan, which includes engagement with key stakeholders in their community, including schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, etc.

Now is the time for action, and rather than investment in a ‘Year of Green Action’ that has seen little action, we would like to see Government making more funding available for communities and education institutions to instigate sustainability initiatives, more regulation demanding improvement from resistant sectors, and more engagement with the younger generation.

We believe it is essential that Government “lead by example” and align its estates and operations with the net zero emissions target. This needs to reach beyond its own estates and provide mass reskilling and lifelong learning throughout the nation.

- What examples of good practice could Government implement to become a net zero Government?

There are so many examples of best practice within the Higher and Further Education sector. They are truly doing some amazing work on this. We have many, many more, but will give some below:

[University of Bristol and UWE](#) – Both universities work closely with their community, in partnership with the local authority, to ensure Bristol is as sustainable as possible. Through the Bristol Green Capital Partnership there has been huge amounts of knowledge exchange and community engagement on the topic of net zero emissions. Bristol City Council was the first local authority in England to declare a climate emergency at the end of 2018, while University of Bristol was the first UK university to declare a climate emergency in April 2019.

[University of Sheffield](#) – Staff and students at the University of Sheffield set up a Carbon Neutral University Network. This connects the university with the wider local community, provides and develops sustainable solutions and holds the university to account.

[Newcastle University](#) – Their new Urban Sciences Building (USB) is a building-as-a-lab (BaL) dedicated to innovative, interdisciplinary sustainability research, and home to Newcastle University’s School of Computing. Completed in August 2017 and situated on Newcastle Helix, once the site of a colliery in the heart of Newcastle, the USB now stands as an exemplar for a lower carbon age.

Electrically led, the building features a heating system fed by heat pumps, grid-integrated energy storage, photovoltaic (PV) and PV-thermal arrays – linked to a DC micro-grid, and over 4000 digital sensors/meters to realise the BaaL concept.

Borders College - Borders College, in partnership with SHARC Energy Systems, recently completed the installation of the UK's first heating plant using sewage/waste water as a sustainable heat source within a joint HE/FE Campus with multiple building types, ages and construction designs at the Galashiels Campus

University of Cumbria - reduced its reliance on travel and vehicles through an extensive change programme. This has involved staff and students, business and commuting journeys. They have implemented Skype for business, bus passes for students, incentives for car sharing, a novel scheme to make rail travel more attractive, together with fundamental policy changes.

University of St Andrews – They have a 6.5MW wood chip biomass plant and 23km district heating network - it supplies 44% (by GIA) of the University's teaching and accommodation buildings with renewable heating.

- How should the Government work with the devolved administrations to achieve common goals across the UK?

A lot more cohesively. There needs to be more consistency across the UK to avoid confusion. Scotland and Wales and to an extent Northern Ireland are all further advanced than England on the sustainability agenda – there are many lessons to be learned here. You can find more about Scotland's 2045 net zero target [here](#), and Wales' climate change mitigation [here](#). Devolved administrations should also be more proactive in sharing best practice.

The UK's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Voluntary National Review (VNR) should act as a big catalyst to hugely improve England's contribution, as well as the wider UK, to common sustainability goals, and the SDGs should be used as the blueprint for this. This would require the SDGs to move from DFID into a more appropriate department to ensure cohesive domestic implementation of the SDGs. DEFRA would be the preferred department for the SDGs to sit in.

- How can the Government report on and reduce its water use?

As below, this is partly investment in buildings and innovative new water recycling initiatives, and partly behaviour change to reduce the amount of water being used.

- How can the Government report on and reduce its carbon footprint?

There needs to be a recognition by society as a whole, but in this scenario Government staff, that we are facing an imminent Climate Crisis. Ripples of this can already be seen in the increasingly tumultuous weather conditions we see across the world, including in the UK with prolonged bouts of flooding. Half of the problem is that people do not understand the gravity of the situation. So first step is to educate staff on this, and the next is to ensure a tangible step change in accountable behaviour. There are many examples of this in the Higher and Further Education sector. Initiatives such as [Reduce the Juice](#) and [gamification apps](#) can help to drive behaviour change. But also, the Government must invest. It must invest in buildings and infrastructure,

much of which will need retrofitting to get them up to net zero standard. It must also reassess its current practices and look for innovative ways to increase output while decreasing carbon emissions. Options could include downsizing, working from home initiatives, promoting more sustainable transport, etc.

With reporting, there needs to be clear reporting mechanisms and targets, and this must include Scope 3 emissions. This should be a reporting exemplar for other organisations and businesses to follow, with real clarity on what is and is not within scope. The Government should also research and develop offsetting initiatives, this must be a regulated industry as there has been some issues with offsetting companies in the past. Offsetting measures should be based in the UK, and offsetting must be a very last resort. Every effort should be made to minimise carbon emissions before offsetting is considered.

The Government needs to get this right so that it can lead the country by example. We need drastic nationwide low carbon infrastructure improvement and clear policy on this topic. All new homes should be zero carbon, there should be more EV points to cope with the influx of electric cars needed to phase out the use of petrol and diesel, there should be more research into using hydrogen to heat homes, there should be more funding for low carbon and renewable energy upskilling in the workforce.

- How should Government drive behaviour change in staff to ensure greener, healthier workplaces?

All staff must receive carbon literacy training. This must be a mandated requirement. It is relevant to every single job role within Government and net zero will not be achieved by anything less than everyone playing their part.

We hope this information helps the Committee. The Government needs to lead by example and there is plenty of best practice to learn from, especially in the tertiary education sector. They must get better at stakeholder engagement and they must deliver tangible results now that they have declared a climate emergency and committed to net zero carbon targets.

Yours sincerely,



Iain Patton, CEO, EAUC