

Quarterly Policy Briefing: Environmental Sustainability

July 2023

This document outlines the main policy changes seen in the last quarter that will impact Scottish further and higher education institutions and related [EAUC Scotland](#) activity as a result.

Scottish Policy Updates

- In May, Scottish Government published its statutory [Heat networks: Building Assessment Report \(BAR\) guidance](#). All colleges and universities in Scotland are expected to submit building assessment reports to discharge their duty in relation to assessing their building's potential to connect to a heat network. Since mandatory emissions reporting began in 2015/16, the [Scottish college and university sector has only reduced absolute emissions from natural gas by 0.7%](#). This work is a significant step in understanding current and future heat demand, and in establishing planning and business cases for heat network investment to accelerate decarbonisation.
- The [Scottish Central Government Energy Efficiency Grant Scheme](#) guidance has been updated to allow capital project funding of up to £5 million (previously £2 million) and pre-capital funding of up to £60k (previously £50k). The increase in caps have been introduced to encourage organisations to submit applications for strategic projects that consider a whole building holistic approach to heat decarbonisation and energy efficiency. In addition, the fund no longer supports single measure projects (e.g. only LED lighting upgrades) and allows existing gas boilers to be retained for resilience/back up purposes. Upcoming application deadlines are 31st July 2023, 31st October 2023 and 31st January 2024. Please note this is only available to colleges that are unable to access loans.
- The [Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2021](#) were published in June and identified a 2.4% reduction in emissions compared to 2020. Longer term, emissions have reduced by 49.9% vs the 1990 baseline. This has meant Scotland has missed the 51.1% reduction target over the same period as specified in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.
- Scottish Government published its [response](#) to the [Climate Change Committee's \(CCC\) December 2022 Report on Scottish Emission Targets](#). Scottish Government accepted, or partially accepted, 98 of the 99 recommendations made by the CCC. Key accepted recommendations include increased transparency of national pathways for reaching net zero, including costed interventions and clarity on pathway assumptions. The response also reiterated the legal obligation Scottish Government has to deliver on climate change targets, and set out what action is necessary if these are missed. The CCC has also consistently assessed that earlier intervention in

reducing emission reduces the overall cost of reaching net zero compared to stalling action. As such, the Scottish college and university sector should be ambitious in their sustainability delivery, not just in target setting.

- In June, Scottish Government published its [Circular Economy Bill](#). The bill establishes the framework to guide a transition to a more circular economy, including a commitment to introduce consumption reduction targets and plans to meet circular economy objectives. Of particular interest for public bodies, the bill will give Ministers powers to set statutory targets for delivery of a circular economy to measure progress in reducing waste and Scotland's emissions.
- Published in June, the "[All Learners in Scotland Matter - national discussion on education: final report](#)" summarises and synthesises the unprecedented large number of consultation responses to the national discussion on education. The report calls for more equity, inclusivity, and sustainability in the Scottish education system, with the "most powerful message emanating from the National Discussion in Scotland" being "the need to educate *a//* learners in Scotland for an uncertain and unpredictable future".
- [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation](#) (also known as the Withers Report) was also published in June. The independent review of the skills delivery landscape in Scotland addresses tensions, barriers and inconsistencies in the current post-school system, including e.g. disjointed pathways and funding structures, absence of national prioritisation and regional flexibility in education provision, inconsistency of careers advice and education. The report provides 15 recommendations for the Scottish education system to address these challenges, and is relevant specifically for colleges and the provision of "green skills" training and courses.
- "[Target 2030" A movement for people, planet and prosperity Scotland's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan 2023-2030](#) was published, again in June, providing actions and recommendations for the 3-18 education sector. The plan, focuses on how to make the entitlement for all learners a reality, includes actions relevant to colleges and education bodies such as Skills Development Scotland, Education Scotland, and EAUC. It also addresses pathways from schools into tertiary education and how sustainability can be integrated across the whole learner journey.
- [It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: report](#) was published, also in June. The report provides an overview of the current qualifications and assessment structures in Scottish education (with a focus on learners aged 15-18 so includes college programmes). It makes a number of recommendations to improve these, to account for current and future challenges and opportunities. The report states that assessment and qualifications should "reflect the Scottish curriculum whilst being responsive to the changing needs of individual learners and of society, creating a positive and sustainable future for learners, their communities and the wider world." Recommendations include the proposition of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement that allows for more flexibility, real-world relevance, and inclusivity of learning.
- Scottish Government published its three discussion papers on [Just Transition for the Built Environment and Construction Sector](#); [Just Transition for the Transport Sector](#); and [Just Transition in Land Use and Agriculture](#). EAUC Scotland has provided

feedback through the Scottish Government Climate Policy Engagement Network on the Transport Sector paper on how government, local authorities, transport providers and institutions can improve access and affordability of sustainable transport for college and university communities.

UK Policy Updates

- In May, the Department for Education (DfE) published non-statutory guidance on [Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education](#). The guidance references EAUC's [Climate Action Roadmap for FE Colleges](#) as well as the standardised carbon emissions reporting framework as valuable tools colleges can use. This means Scotland's colleges are already compliant and not being asked to use an additional tool to progress their sustainability action.
- In July, an [All-Part Parliamentary University Group \(APPUG\)](#) reception was held at the House of Lords, examining the role of universities in the 'Road to Net Zero'. Charlotte Bonner from EAUC spoke about their role in nurturing and showcasing effective practice and was joined by the Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP, Co-Chair of the APPUG and author of the Independent Review of Net Zero, Professor Judith Petts CBE (Plymouth University and UK Climate Task & Finish Group) and Professor Graham Miller (University of Surrey). Numerous Scottish institutions were in attendance.
- DfE are hosting an [International Green Skills Conference](#) in September to encourage collaboration to accelerate green skills provision. More details are available on the event's website.
- The Department for Transport has [published](#) a transport user personas summary pack to help understand current behaviours and travel preferences of different types of transport users.
- [Research commissioned by recruitment consultants Michael Page](#) revealed that more than two-thirds of business leaders believe the country is heading towards a green skills shortage. A poll of 500 decision makers found 57% think these specialised skills are important to their business – but many are struggling to find skilled staff, particularly in the areas of sustainable engineering and finance. A separate poll of 2,000 employed adults found that 27% are considering a green job as their next career move, although many are unsure if they have the necessary skills.

Celebrating Success

- In July at the International Green Gown Awards 2023 [Borders College was the winner of the 2030 Climate Action category](#) with their submission “Our Sustainability Journey”. This follows their win at the Green Gown Awards UK & Ireland 2022. On the win, Pete Smith, Principle and CEO of Borders Colleges, shared:

“This is an absolutely fantastic win for Borders College! It is particularly pleasing for a small, rural college in the south of Scotland to be recognised on the international stage, and to be sharing the spotlight with so many globally-renowned institutions. I am incredibly proud of all of our staff and students who are helping us to deliver on our sustainability journey.

One of the real benefits of the Green Gown Awards is the recognition and sharing of good practice. Over the years, Borders College has learned much from others and we are delighted to be able to share our own experience with our partners, stakeholders and other institutions as we continue to develop and deliver actions toward being a Net Zero College”.

- [Green Gown Awards UK & Ireland 2023 finalists](#) were announced in July. The Scottish college and university sector has again shown sustainability leadership and innovation across many categories, with 15 Scottish institutions making it to the final with a total of 22 award submissions. Scottish finalists within award categories are:

2030 Climate Action:

Scotland’s Rural College – *SRUC’s Climate Change Action Plan*

University of Strathclyde – *Manufacturing a climate neutral future*

Benefiting Society:

Ayrshire College – *Connecting Communities*

Glasgow Caledonian University – *Enabling student impact at Glasgow Caledonian University*

Robert Gordon University – *Origin – the ability to sustain*

Creating Impact:

Central & South Scotland College Partnership (Borders College; Forth Valley College; West Lothian College) – *Enhancing sustainability impacts by sharing resources between FE colleges*

Dundee & Angus College – *Breaking barriers and driving change: Where industry meets academia, magic unleashes!*

University of Glasgow – *Green Gowns & Second-Hand Suits*

Digital Futures:

The University of Edinburgh – *IT Reuse: Circular economy in action*

Nature Positive:

The University of Edinburgh – *Nature positive communities, campuses and cities*

Next Generation Learning & Skills:

Dundee & Angus College – *Empowering Lives: Next-Gen Learning & Skills*
Glasgow Kelvin College – *Fighting Fast Fashion*
The University of Edinburgh – *Edinburgh Earth Fellows: Student power in urgent climate research*
The University of Edinburgh – *An anti-greenwash framework to embed quality sustainability learning*

Research with Impact – Institution:

University of Aberdeen – *Making ends meet – transforming the readymade garment industry by amplifying the voices of those affected*
University of Aberdeen – *Regenerating Scotland's hemp industry for health, climate and a green economy*

Student Engagement:

University of Glasgow – *Student 2 Student Essentials*

Sustainability Champion – Staff:

City of Glasgow College – *Lisa McGovern*
Dundee & Angus College – *Steven Haden*
University of the Highlands and Islands – *Aimee Harvey*

Sustainability Champion – Student:

University of Aberdeen – *Raghu Mahadevappa*

Tomorrow's Employees:

Scotland's Rural College – *SEEDABLE: Graduates that will create a sustainable future*

The Green Gown Awards UK & Ireland 2023 awards ceremony will be held 30th November in Liverpool.