

Quarterly Policy Briefing: Environmental Sustainability October 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

- From July to October, the Scottish Government held a [consultation into Energy Performance Certificate \(EPC\) reform](#) with the view to introduce revised Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Regulations to the Scottish Parliament in Winter 2023. The legislation will cover domestic and non-domestic EPCs.
- In August, [environmental charities penned an open letter to Scottish political leaders](#) calling for legal targets for nature restoration, a biodiversity strategy, funding for agriculture and forestry, and marine protection. The letter claims that political leaders at Holyrood have lacked urgency in their response to the climate crisis.
- Also in August, the [Scottish Government's Net Zero Public Sector Buildings Standard](#), originally published in 2021, was refreshed and relaunched. The voluntary Standard helps support public bodies define objectives for their construction project in pursuit of a credible path to net zero operational energy.
- In September, the Scottish Government published an independent [report analysing consultation on the Draft energy strategy and Just Transition plan](#). Key themes emerging from the consultation include the need to fairly spread the cost of decarbonisation across society, the necessity of a supportive policy environment and the importance of government support for upskilling and training for the climate emergency. The [Just Transition strategy will be published by next summer](#).
- Also in September, the Scottish Government published its [biodiversity strategy to 2045: Tackling the Nature Emergency in Scotland](#). The strategy sets out an ambition for Scotland to be Nature Positive by 2030 and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across the country by 2045.
- SSN is working with the Scottish Government to support the development of new Statutory Guidance on Public Bodies' Climate Change Duties. Between September and December 2023, there will be a series of [online stakeholder engagement workshops](#), which will gather attendees' feedback on draft guidance chapters.
- In October, the Scottish Government completed a [Review of the Effectiveness of Environmental Governance](#) following the publication of the [Environmental Standards Scotland \(ESS\) Strategy](#).

UK Policy Updates

- In August, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero published its [Net Zero Business Sector Roadmap Guidelines](#) with criteria which it says will ensure businesses effectively reduce emissions.
- In September, at the Conservative Party Conference, [Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced plans to water down the UK's net zero policies](#) by pushing back the ban on combustion engines from 2030 to 2035, delaying the phasing out of gas boilers (now only an 80% target by 2035), and cancelling plans to fine landlords whose properties were not sufficiently insulated. Sunak also ruled out policies aimed at driving behaviour change, such as carbon taxes on flights and meat, and announced that the HS2 line from Birmingham to Manchester would be scrapped with the savings to fund regional transport infrastructure in the north of England.
 - [Economists have warned that rowing back on net zero now leaves the UK economy open to future risk](#): "By keeping the UK dependent on volatile and expensive fossil fuels, and by reducing the likelihood of securing high paying jobs in green manufacturing, you are choosing to expose the nation to a high cost of living longer into the future. This delay is bad economics, and an example of the very kind of short-termism that has led to the UK's current economic malaise."
 - The [CEOs of IIGCC, PRI and UKSIF have also coordinated a letter to the PM](#) warning that, "Diluting ambition at this critical juncture erodes the UK's position as a global leader on climate, undermines our international competitiveness, and increases the risk that we fail to capitalise on one of the greatest economic opportunities of the 21st century."
- Also in September, [regulators granted consent for the new Rosebank development in the North Sea](#) which the government estimates will produce 69,000 barrels of oil and 44 million cubic feet of natural gas per day.
- The fourth annual [State of Nature Report](#) was published in September, with troubling findings pointing to a continued decline in Britain's wildlife. 60 conservation bodies contributed to the report, which found that 16% of the plants and animals surveyed in Britain are threatened with extinction.
- [Ofgem's energy price cap fell in September](#). However, consumers are still expected to pay more this winter with prices remaining 50% above pre-crisis levels and no government support yet announced.

International Policy Updates

- In August, Reuters reported that [prices in the UK's carbon market had dropped](#) to the extent that key industries will now likely be heavily impacted by the EU's carbon border levy.
- In September, [MEPs voted to boost efforts to expand renewable energy](#). The European Parliament approved plans to update the Renewable Energy Directive by hiking the legally binding target from 32% to 42.5% by 2030.
- Also in September, the UN published [United in Science 2023](#), a high-level report from multiple agencies which finds that we are still on track for global temperatures to rise by up to 2.6C (vs the Paris Commitment to limit to 1.5C or well-below 2C) and with only 15% of the SDGs on track.