

Quarterly Policy Briefing: Environmental Sustainability

January 2024

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 October, the [Scottish Government published its fourth annual progress report on Scotland's land use strategy](#), covering the period 2022-23. The strategy aims to address the role of land use and management in the just transition to net zero. The annual reports summarise actions taken in each financial year.
- In November, the Scottish Government published a [feasibility study into Negative Emissions Technologies \(NETS\)](#), estimating the maximum NETs potential achievable in Scotland from 2030-2050. The study found that current potential is significantly lower than the stated ambition and will require additional policy intervention. For the context of Scotland's colleges and universities, this underlines the importance of the sector reducing their emissions as a priority and only using carbon offsets as a last resort.
- In December, Environmental Standards Scotland issued its [Climate Change Improvement Report](#) to the Scottish Government. This follows their investigation into the support provided to local authorities in their duty to contribute to the delivery of climate change targets. Five recommendations were made to Scottish Ministers:
 1. Make climate, adaptation and sustainability plans at local authority level compulsory
 2. Ensure that the planned statutory guidance covers the full breadth of local authorities' climate change responsibilities and includes the changes which will be required as a result of the recommendations contained within this report
 3. Introduce a separate reporting framework for local authorities
 4. Make the reporting of Scope 3 emissions mandatory for local authorities
 5. Identify or introduce an appropriate monitoring body and give the monitoring body the necessary powers, including the powers to: scrutinise compliance; follow-up on climate plans; and recommend improvements in climate activity

Whilst the report and recommendations are specific to local authorities, implementation of the recommendations would positively impact colleges and universities from a sustainability leadership perspective (particularly regarding all institutions having adaptation plans; greater scrutiny of sustainability action by a monitoring body).

- In December, the Scottish Government published its proposed 2024-25 budget. [Annex J](#) details the spending proposals for climate change and sustainability. Alongside this a [high level carbon assessment of the 2024-2025 budget was published](#). This document, part of the Scottish Government's statutory requirements under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, estimates the consumption-based carbon emissions associated with the upcoming year's planned expenditure. As of November 2022, colleges and universities in Scotland must provide evidence of how spending plans align with sustainability targets – the work of the high-level carbon assessment above shows one route linking sustainability to financial planning.
- Also in December, in response to DEFRA's WEEE consultation (see below), the Scottish Government published a series of impact screening assessments:
 - [Island communities impact screening assessment](#)
 - [Fairer Scotland duty summary](#)
 - [Equalities impact assessment](#)
 - [Business and regulatory impact assessment - partial](#)
- From December 2023 to February 2024, the Scottish Government is inviting responses to a [consultation on its proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill](#) which "aims to further improve decision making and the implementation of the National Performance Framework to ensure that all policy and delivery is focused on increasing the wellbeing of people living in Scotland, both now and in the future."

UK Policy Updates

- In November, the [UK Government confirmed its plans to introduce new licenses for oil and gas extraction](#) in the North Sea, which will be awarded annually. News of the [oil and gas bill prompted criticisms](#) from climate groups, as well as former COP President Alok Sharma and former minister Chris Skidmore.
- The UK Government launched a Call for Evidence on the costs, benefits and practicalities of Scope 3 emissions reporting. [EAUC submitted an organisational response](#) to this consultation with input from EAUC Scotland.
- From December 2023 to March 2024, the [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#) is holding an [open consultation on reforming the producer responsibility system for electrical waste](#). It is hoped that reform will increase levels of WEEE reuse and recycling, supporting the circular economy.
- In December, the Department for Education published [Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy: our progress so far](#) presenting the progress of the strategy which responds to recommendations for education from the Committee for Climate Change, Dasgupta Review and Green Jobs Taskforce report.
- In January, the [pathway for zero emission vehicle transition by 2035 became law](#), providing the UK with a regulatory framework which will see 100% of new vehicles sold required to be zero emission by 2035. However, the UK Government has [missed its targets on EV chargers near motorways](#) and [2023 saw EVs fail to increase their market share](#).

International Policy Updates

- COP28 took place from 30th November – 13th December 2023 in the United Arab Emirates. The [conference resulted in nearly every country in the world agreeing to transition away from fossil fuels but left many frustrated](#) at the lack of a clear timeline for this phase-out and the inclusion of loopholes allowing for further fossil fuel production and consumption.