

# Quarterly Policy Briefing: Environmental Sustainability

## March 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 February, it was announced that [First Minister Humza Yousaf would chair a cross-party discussion on Scotland's net zero and climate change ambitions](#). As part of this discussion, Chief Executive of the UK Climate Change Committee Chris Stark presented information on Scotland's journey to net zero.
- During the last quarter, the Scottish Government has run several consultations relevant to the sector, including:
  - [Wellbeing and Sustainable Development \(Scotland\) Bill: consultation](#) (closed 14<sup>th</sup> February)
  - [Delivering net zero for Scotland's buildings - Heat in Buildings Bill: consultation](#) (closed Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March)
  - [Circular economy and waste route map to 2030: consultation](#) (closed Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March)
  - [Climate change - national adaptation plan 2024 to 2029: consultation](#) (closing Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April)
  - [TOFE \(Teacher Qualification in Further Education\) consultation](#) (closing Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April)
- In March, the [Climate Change Committee published a news item stating that Scotland's 2030 climate goals are no longer credible](#), citing the lack of a comprehensive net zero strategy and delays to climate promises. Professor Piers Forster, interim Chair of the Climate Change Committee said, "Scotland's Climate Change Plan needs to be published urgently, so we can assess it. We need to see actions that will deliver on its future targets."

### UK Policy Updates

- In January, it was reported that the [Department for Education is to develop a comprehensive roadmap to net zero for education estates](#), including colleges, schools and nurseries. This was confirmed by Baroness Baran, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Education, in a letter to the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) of MPs. This followed concern from experts that only 20% of UK school buildings are on track to be net zero compliant by 2050 due to lack of comprehensive retrofit planning in relation to energy.

- Also in January, a new [£2 million Department for Education initiative co-led by EAUC and the University of Reading was announced](#). The project, an expansion of the Climate Ambassadors programme delivered in association with STEM Learning UK will give every school, college and university in England free access to expert support to become greener and more climate resilient.
- In mid-January, the [Office for Environmental Protection published its annual report](#) on the UK Government's environmental goals, which concluded that insufficient progress has been made on key issues including water quality and scarcity, and adaptation. However, it noted some success in reducing emissions of some air and chemical pollutants, and greenhouse gases.
- In February, the [UK withdrew from the Energy Charter Treaty](#). Originally designed to facilitate the trade of energy between countries, the treaty allowed fossil-fuel companies to sue governments over climate measures as compensation for lost profits. Energy Security and Net Zero Minister Graham Stuart said, "Remaining a member would not support our transition to cleaner, cheaper energy and could even penalise us for our world-leading efforts to deliver net zero."
- In March, the [Environment Agency published its Event Duration Monitoring data for 2023](#) showing that sewage spills had doubled since 2022. Industry body [Water UK claimed that the increase in spillage was due to heavy rainfall](#). However, the Environment Agency said: "It is important to note that heavy rainfall does not affect water companies' responsibility to manage storm overflows in line with legal requirements."

## International Policy Updates

- In January, the Met Office and the University of East Anglia released figures showing that [global temperatures in 2023 were the highest since the pre-industrial period](#). Global average temperatures were 1.46C above the pre-industrial baseline and exceeded those of 2016, the previous warmest year on record.
- In March, Oil Change International published the report [Troubled Waters: How North Sea Countries Are Fueling Climate Disaster](#) which found that none of the five North Sea oil countries – Norway, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark – plan to cease drilling in time to meet the 1.5C warming threshold set at COP21.