

PRESS RELEASE

Flagship report accelerates Tertiary Education Sector's path to Net Zero

First profile of carbon footprint for UK Higher and Further Education Institutions released alongside innovative framework for sector-wide carbon reporting

LONDON, 23rd January 2023 – The Royal Anniversary Trust today released “**Accelerating towards Net Zero**,” an ambitious roadmap for carbon reduction in the tertiary education sector. The report offers a robust profile of the tertiary education sector’s carbon footprint – the first of its kind – using detailed modelling which highlights target areas for emissions reporting and reduction. It also proposes a new Standardised Carbon Emissions Framework designed exclusively for the sector which will enable all HE and FE institutions to measure, report and manage carbon emissions.

The report is the result of a year-long research project – The Platinum Jubilee Challenge – led by 21 higher and further education institutes from across the UK, all recent winners of the prestigious Queen’s Anniversary Prize. It concludes with 14 clear recommendations to Government and priorities for the sector that will accelerate progress towards Net Zero; Ministers are expected to respond by 28th March, 2023.

Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said: *“The fight against climate change is one we will only win if we all work together. The UK’s world-leading higher education and further education sectors are creating a pipeline of talent to fill the key skills gaps that will be vital to our national response to climate change. Institutions from across the UK are working together towards our common goal to be net-zero and I am hugely grateful for their work to date.*

“I also want to thank the Royal Anniversary Trust for their recommendations to both the sector and Government. These will be carefully considered and we look forward to responding formally later this year.”

Kristina Murrin, CEO of The Royal Anniversary Trust commented: *“Our ambition was to bring together the extraordinary winners of the Queen’s Anniversary Prizes to collectively tackle a tough shared challenge. The resulting report sets out a clear action plan for the tertiary education sector to accelerate progress to Net Zero, with recommendations for institutions and government. We are enormously proud of the proposed carbon reporting Framework – if adopted sector-wide, this will allow for consistent, transparent, and data-led decision making.”*

Report Highlights:

The Department for Education, which funded the Challenge, has confirmed that they will work to enable all universities and colleges to report their carbon emissions by 2024 as per their Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy. While many do already report, there is currently no agreed model or framework to allow them to do this consistently. The Challenge group sought to rectify this.

[Accelerating the UK Tertiary Education Sector towards Net Zero](#) provides a comprehensive overview of specific challenges and opportunities for decarbonisation of the tertiary education sector and how this can drive change across wider society.

- The report provides the first estimated total carbon footprint for the tertiary education sector. Emissions across Scope 1, 2 & 3 were estimated to be 18.1 Mt CO₂e, with HE institutions contributing approximately 86% of this and FE 12%.*
- The report includes a sector-specific Standardised Carbon Emissions Framework based on the Greenhouse Gas Protocol.
- The report identifies three key Action Pathways to Net Zero: The Built Environment, Travel and Transport, and Sustainable Supply Chain. Together these three areas account for 80% of the sector's total emissions.
 - 19% of the sector's total emissions are related to the Built Environment, representing an institution's Scope 1 and 2 fuel and electricity as well as Scope 3 emissions related to construction.
 - 24% of the sector's total emissions relate to Scope 3 Travel and Transport from business travel, employee and student commuting and international student travel.
 - 36% of the sector's total emissions relate to Scope 3 Supply Chain emissions, which are highly influenced by specialised purchases such as medical equipment and business services.
- The report outlines practical measures the government can take through policy, regulation and resources that will unlock system-wide change to facilitate decarbonisation.
- The report includes five student-led funded projects and over 30 innovative case studies including the largest Passivhaus Premium building in the world; an online staff and student sustainability engagement platform; creative partnerships with local public transport links; green Cloud computing service and climate solutions training.

**The detailed work on the carbon footprint modelling for the report was conducted by SB+CO and EcoAct. Data was used for the academic year 2020/21, except Business Travel that is based on 2018/2019 data to reflect pre-pandemic activity. Financed emissions are excluded.*

The Reporting Framework

[The Standardised Carbon Emissions Framework for Further and Higher Education \(SCEF\)](#) was developed by EAUC - The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education in consultation with the Challenge participants and the sector via member bodies, including the Association of Colleges (AoC), Colleges Scotland and Universities UK (UUK). The Framework will bring good practice and guidance and will develop a fuller understanding of how institutions contribute to the climate emergency and enable them to take action.

Fiona Goodwin, CEO (Interim), EAUC commented: *“To ensure students and stakeholders can hold their institutions to account, a standardised framework must be used for colleges and universities to ensure transparency and comparability. This Framework ensures institutions are taking their responsibilities seriously and taking action to become Net Zero and be part of the solution through their world leading teaching, learning and research.”*

14 Recommendations to Government

- 1.** Establish a UK-wide Decarbonisation Institute for the tertiary education sector to support the implementation of a low-carbon energy transition and Net Zero emissions in the built environment. It should provide individual institutions with data and insights to back the right solutions, identify system-wide regulatory blockers, and promote collaboration across the wider public and private sectors.
- 2.** Fast-track the transformation of the National Grid to remove barriers that currently hamper the adoption of renewable technologies by the sector. The large education estate has high potential to generate green energy but needs the right infrastructure and commercial framework in place.
- 3.** Fund the research and development of a simple digital business travel measurement tool and portal, which will allow institutions to accurately and consistently track, measure, and influence their staff and students' business travel.
- 4.** Require all local councils to consult with local universities and large colleges on their sustainable transport plans to adequately represent the needs and impact of the broad education community.
- 5.** Require publicly funded research bodies, including UK Research & Innovation (UKRI), to ensure transparent principles of sustainable travel and related emissions are mandatory within research-led funding bids.
- 6.** Make the data from existing carbon reporting requirements, e.g., SECR, ESOS, PPN0621, available via a dedicated online portal, for utilisation in measuring detailed supply chain emissions.
- 7.** Incorporate sustainability and carbon reporting modules within the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) 'Help to Grow' scheme to increase carbon literacy amongst SMEs and support emissions reporting.
- 8.** Extend 0% VAT rate relief to incentivise decarbonisation of the existing tertiary education building stock through low emissions refurbishment and retrofit ahead of new builds, and conduct a review of current restrictions on debt levels through the Office of Students.
- 9.** Ring-fence the proportion of carbon emissions that tertiary education is responsible for from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (Salix) specifically for the sector, and improve access for the institutions most in need.
- 10.** Create a UK government-backed mechanism for smaller tertiary education institutions to band together to raise incremental private sector funding for investment in renewables. Investigate what would facilitate a central collective capital raise.
- 11.** Fund and create a sector-led digital 'hub' to share resource materials (e.g., good practice, policy frameworks, case studies) across sector estates and sustainability teams, to accelerate knowledge for those who are responsible for creating and implementing Carbon Action Plans and Net Zero strategies.
- 12.** Fund a dedicated regional human resource for FE institutions to kick-start and transfer the skills needed to collect and measure carbon data in order to deliver on the requirement for a Carbon Action Plan per institution by 2024.
- 13.** Offer incentives to capture FE leavers and HE graduates with sustainability expertise and skills, to work in the tertiary education sector in order to retain green skills and drive the sector's Net Zero transition.
- 14.** Regulate and improve transparency on land use and sale for carbon capture schemes, building on current work by The Scottish Land Commission. Commercial schemes must not be allowed to further damage natural habitats, deplete non-marginal agricultural land, or exclude local communities from a project's consultation process or access to the natural landscape.

Asks of the sector

Built Environment

To achieve Net Zero by 2050 or sooner, the sector needs to ensure that every building is Net Zero emissions in operation and climate resilient. The sector should invest in adaptation to protect estates from climate change and remove embodied carbon by embracing sustainable construction standards. To

deliver these priorities, the sector needs the right skills and resources for detailed carbon reduction planning and implementation, access to long-term capital investment, and public-private partnerships to implement change at scale.

Travel and Transport

The sector should reduce non-essential travel, shift mindsets and behaviour towards more ‘purposeful travel’ and prioritise low-carbon travel. To fully understand the scale of travel, the sector should accurately measure and report against its travel-related Scope 3 emissions and aim to understand the impact of current internationalisation strategies on business and international student travel. Institutions should embrace more sustainable travel planning and policies and engage students and staff to encourage behaviour change.

Sustainable Supply Chain

The sector must adopt sustainable procurement standards, policies, and processes to allow procurement teams to effectively reduce emissions across Scope 3. The adoption of an accurate measurement methodology would help to drive more sustainable purchasing decisions. The sector should equip purchasing decision-makers with the carbon skills necessary to influence tenders and contracts, develop case studies to share good practice, and to report progress. At the same time the sector should support small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), that are a crucial part of the sector’s supply chain.

Finance and Investment

The sector should take a long-term investment approach to financing sustainability and the decarbonisation of its estates. Working with its stakeholders, including the DfE, it should identify ways of unlocking greater investments from the public, private, and third sectors, including novel sources such as green bonds, to support the delivery of its Net Zero strategies. The sector should also work to understand and mitigate the financed emissions of its own investments.

Internal Skills and Resources

The sector should define the key internal skills that are needed for individual institutions to speed up their journey to Net Zero, and the key resources, policies and standards that should govern implementation. This should span from Built Environment to Travel and Procurement, and involve work with education stakeholders, including the DfE and professional bodies, to encourage the inclusion and accountability of sustainability training into staff onboarding and professional learning and development.

Notes to Editors

The Challenge Participants

The Platinum Jubilee Challenge group is comprised of the 21 winners of the most recent round of The Queen’s Anniversary Prizes. This is the highest national honour, awarded to the most innovative and impactful institutions across HE and FE in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The winning institutions are diverse in terms of size and specialisation; this year’s recipients range from the COVID-19 vaccine team at University of Oxford to the Chichester College Group teaching previously lost furniture craft skills to 16-18 year olds.

While receiving a Queen’s Anniversary Prize at Buckingham Palace has always been a prestigious achievement in its own right, the Trust felt it was missing an opportunity for these institutions – whose collective contribution to sustainability and experiences of decarbonisation is already significant – to share good practice with their peers and potentially co-create something even better. The Platinum Jubilee Challenge has allowed these “best-of-the-best” to come together on a joint challenge during 2022. Over the last year, these 21 institutions have taken part in in-person visits, a residential workshop, and working groups to capture key themes and common challenges faced by the sector in reaching Net Zero. The participants are:

University of Aberdeen
Anglia Ruskin University
University of Bradford
Chichester College Group
Exeter College
University of Glasgow
The TEC Partnership
Heriot-Watt University
University of Huddersfield
Imperial College London
University of Leeds
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
The London School of Economics and Political Science
The Manchester College
Nottingham Trent University
University of Oxford
University of Reading
South West College, Tyrone and Fermanagh
University of Strathclyde
Swansea University
Warwickshire College

About the participants:

- Of the 21 participants, 15 are HE institutions, 6 are FE institutions
- 15 institutions are in England, 4 in Scotland, 1 in Wales and 1 in Northern Ireland
- There are 20 urban campuses (of which 7 have a rural hub) and one rural campus
- Four have overseas campuses and five hold additional agricultural land
- Over 50% of the participants have a sustainability research institute
- Their combined student population includes 70% UK and 30% international students

The Royal Anniversary Trust was established in 1990 to create a national programme of celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of The Queen’s accession in 1992. It runs the Queen’s Anniversary Prizes – the highest national honour awarded in UK further and higher education, with Prizes granted every two years. A total of 296 Prizes have been awarded to 83 universities and 54 colleges of further education over 14 Rounds, for work that shows outstanding quality and innovation and delivers real benefit to the wider world.

EAUC is the alliance for sustainability leadership in education. EAUC represents over 200 institutions in the UK & Ireland with a combined total of 2 million students and nearly 400,000 staff with a spending budget of over £25 billion. We help leaders, academics and professionals to drive sustainability to the heart of their post-16 education institutions. EAUC also work on an international level with United Nations Environment and other UN bodies on several global education initiatives. EAUC are the secretariat for the Race to Zero for Universities and Colleges. For more information, visit www.eauc.org.uk and <https://www.educationracetozero.org>

EcoAct, an Atos company, is an international climate consultancy and project developer, helping businesses and organisations succeed in their climate ambitions. They joined the Challenge team alongside SB+CO to provide deep technical knowledge of climate issues and carbon accounting. In addition to supporting the overall programme and working groups, EcoAct worked with EAUC on the development of the Reporting Framework and supporting guidance. EcoAct also developed the

overview of the sector's carbon footprint within this report, based on current emissions data and standards.

SB+CO are experts in sustainability strategy and engagement and have been working in this space for over twenty years. They developed and led the Challenge programme on behalf of the Royal Anniversary Trust. This included the overall engagement process with the participants and their institutions, the design and facilitation of the main residential event, management of multiple working groups, general research and insight development, and the creation of the final report. They were also responsible for alignment with EAUC on the development of the Reporting Framework and participated in the DfE's associated steering group.

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