

Quarterly Policy Briefing: Environmental Sustainability

July 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 April, the Bute House Agreement – the Scottish Government’s formal co-operation agreement with the Scottish Green Party – came to an end. Party co-leaders Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater ended their tenure as Cabinet Ministers. The following month, Humza Yousaf formally resigned as First Minister and was replaced by John Swinney. One of the implications of this has been the postponement of the consultation on updated Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) statutory guidance. A date for this is still to be determined.
- Also in April, Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy Mairi McAllan responded to the [Climate Change Committee’s Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland 2023 Report](#) which stated that the Scottish Government’s target of 75% reduction in emissions by 2030 is now out of reach. Ms McAllan confirmed her intention to introduce [amendments to the national emission reduction targets in the Climate Change Bill](#). Ms McAllan also wrote to the Chief Executives of all public bodies reminding them of their PBCCD obligations and the need for further action on decarbonising heat and understanding and reducing climate risk.
- In April, Scottish Government closed its [draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan 3 consultation](#). EAUC Scotland’s response can be found on our [Consultations webpage](#). EAUC Scotland have advocated for public sector estates funding to require evidence of comprehensive climate risk assessments at application stage, and for Scottish Government and public bodies to adopt as a minimum the Climate Change Committee’s recommendation to adapt to 2°C of warming and assess the risk for 4°C.
- In April, Scottish Government closed its draft guidance and general determination for Teacher Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) consultation. EAUC Scotland’s response can be found on our [Consultations webpage](#). EAUC Scotland have advocated that the guidance must be adapted to better reflect Scotland’s national goals and priorities, which includes sustainable development, and integration of this within TQFE training and assessment.

- In April, the Scottish Government's [New Build Heat Standard](#) came into force. Under this standard, new homes and buildings will not be allowed to use direct emissions or polluting heating systems, such as oil and gas boilers and wood-burning stoves. However, a review is being carried out in response to criticisms from rural communities who say that they rely on wood-burning stoves for emergency heating.

UK Policy Updates

- In April, the [UK's Deposit Return Scheme was delayed again until 2027](#). The policy will now not come into effect until almost a decade after it was proposed.
- Local elections took place on 2nd May. The results saw the Conservatives lose control of ten councils to Labour and the Liberal Democrats, while the Green Party saw a surge in councillors. The [Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit commissioned polling in advance of the election](#) that found that more than half of prospective voters thought the government should do more to tackle climate change.
- In May, the Migration Advisory Committee completed its [rapid review of the Graduate route](#), recommending that the route stays in place in its current form. [Professor Iain Gillespie, Convener of Universities Scotland responded:](#)

"Universities are relieved to get confirmation that the Graduate route will remain in place, albeit with a new package of measures aimed at future-proofing against any potential abuse.

It is vitally important that the rest of the world hears that the graduate route remains in place so that we can arrest any further negative impact on recruitment for the autumn. Recruitment has taken a major hit this academic year, with the financial consequences already felt deeply in institutions."

- In June, the Supreme Court found that a [local council should have considered the total climate impact of burning oil](#) from new wells. The case could set a precedent that threatens new UK fossil fuel projects. The court ruled that Surrey County Council acted unlawfully in granting permission for a drilling project in Horse Hill as their environmental impact assessment only included direct emissions, rather than those produced by burning the fossil fuels extracted from the site.
- In June the revision of the [QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) was published. For the first time it explicitly refers to sustainability as a key component of quality education provision. The new Quality Code supplements the 2021 [Guidance on Education for Sustainable Development](#) (ESD, also known as Learning for Sustainability) that provides advice and support on curriculum design, as well as teaching, learning and assessment approaches. It's a widely used resource that EAUC members contributed to in both its first

and second iteration. EAUC published a [news item on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and sustainability](#).

- A UK general election has been called and set for 4th July 2024. Parliament was dissolved on 30th May.

International Policy Updates

- The [European Elections 2024](#) took place between 6th - 9th June. The results saw a shift towards the right and euroscepticism, which is likely to have an impact on the bloc's ambitious climate plans. This has potential knock-on impacts for Scottish institutions relating to emissions from supply chains derived within the EU. Reuters has [published an explainer covering the results](#).
- In June, UN Secretary General António Guterres called for a [ban on advertising by the world's fossil fuel industries](#), comparing their impact on the climate to the impact of the tobacco industry on human health. This continues the trend of reducing the social licence of fossil fuel companies within public spaces e.g. university divestment actions.
- Also in June, the G7 met in Fasano, Italy where discussions focused on global security with brief mentions of climate change and biodiversity. [Green economy groups expressed frustration with the agreements](#) made on environmental issues, which largely reiterated previous commitments.
- Also in June, the EU Environmental Council adopted the [Nature Restoration Law](#). The law sets a legally binding target for EU countries to preserve a fifth of the bloc's land and seas.