

# Quarterly Policy Briefing: Environmental Sustainability

## October 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 July, Scottish Government published its [Wellbeing and Sustainable Development \(Scotland\) Bill: Consultation Analysis Report](#). Whilst responses varied across the consultation, the majority of respondents agreed that:
  - A definition of 'wellbeing' is required
  - A definition of 'sustainable development' is required, which includes alignment to global definitions and includes living within planetary boundaries
  - Supplementary guidance alongside definitions would be useful for public bodies
  - Scotland should establish an independent Commissioner for Future Generations.You can find EAUC Scotland's submission to the consultation on our [website](#).
- In September, Scottish Government published its [Programme for Government 2024-25](#) which includes "Tackling the Climate Emergency" as one of its four priorities. It was also confirmed that the Scottish Government plans to introduce 14 Bills over the parliamentary year, including:
  - Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) Bill
  - Heat in Buildings Bill
  - Natural Environment BillThe Heat in Buildings Bill will be of particular importance to colleges and universities in supporting local and regional scoping and investment in heat networks, and reduced emissions associated with homeworking.
- In September, Scottish Government published its [Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029](#) (SCAP3). The Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) contained within the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 89 require listed public sector organisations – including all colleges and universities - to act in the way best calculated to help deliver the statutory Adaptation Programme and to report progress annually. This is a key mechanism which makes climate adaptation a legal imperative for public bodies in Scotland. To date, the sector has made slow progress on understanding climate risk and implementing adaptation action plans. It is likely that public sector adaptation action will become more scrutinised by Scottish Government over coming reporting years.
- In September, Scottish Government published legislation to create a carbon budget approach to setting climate targets. The [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#) seeks to amend the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, in

response to the Climate Change Committee's (CCC) advice that Scotland's interim emissions reduction target for 2030 was beyond what could be achieved. Whilst carbon budgets are standard for other nations, the change in approach has caused tensions within public bodies regarding leadership for sustainability e.g. "if it is ok for Scottish Government to miss targets, they can't complain if we miss ours".

- In September, the new [Scottish Climate Intelligence Service \(SCIS\)](#) launched. SCIS will work with all of Scotland's local authorities to help deliver climate action at the scale and pace. Whilst the organisation's focus is on local authorities, it is expected to bring additional benefits to wider public bodies as well through, for example, improved data collection and analysis of localized climate risk and adaptation; improved decision making regarding sustainable travel investments etc. These will have positive knock-on effects to Scotland's colleges and universities.

## UK Policy Updates

- In July, the UK Government announced the creation of "[Skills England](#)" over the next 9-12 months. The organisation, in collaboration with central and local government, as well as businesses, training providers and unions, will provide strategic oversight of the nation's post-16 skills system, in line with the Government's forthcoming Industrial Strategy. This is on the backdrop of [research from LinkedIn](#) which revealed that only 5% of Gen Zs in the workforce believe they have the green skills required to help drive a net-zero transition.
- In September, the UK Government announced the [largest renewable energy auction to date](#) through its "contracts for difference" scheme. Once built, these projects are expected to generate more than 10% of the UK's current electricity demand. This is relevant to Scottish colleges and universities as it is expected emissions associated from their electricity use will continue to become less emission intensive as more renewable energy comes online and feeds into the National Grid.