



# University climate action: seeking your views

## About this document

This document is a paper copy of the University's 2023 Climate Strategy consultation.

It contains the same information you will be presented with in the online consultation, which will open on Monday 20 November at 10am and close on Monday 18 December 2023 at 12 noon.

The online consultation and all supporting information can be accessed at [edin.ac/climate-strategy](https://edin.ac/climate-strategy)

## Let's make our climate strategy better

The University's existing Climate Strategy dates from 2016 and we want to update it in 2024. This consultation seeks your views on our proposed updates.

Reading our proposals and responding to the consultation will take about 30 - 60 minutes.

At the end of the consultation, you can enter a prize draw for one of ten £50 gift vouchers for Love2shop to thank you for your time.

We recommend reading the supporting consultation information before responding at: [edin.ac/climate-strategy](https://edin.ac/climate-strategy)

## Attend a Town Hall event

We will be holding a series of town hall events where you can hear more about our proposed approach, ask questions and share your views.

- Monday 20 November, 6pm to 8pm (Potterrow, in collaboration with the Students' Association) - [book on Students' Association website](#)
- Thursday 23 November, 11:30am to 12:30pm (Kings Buildings)
- Tuesday 28 November, 11am to 12pm (online)
- Wednesday 29 November, 12pm to 1pm (Central)
- Monday 4 December, 11am to 12pm (online)

[Book your place](#)



## Your data and privacy

We are collecting your information on the basis of legitimate interest and your responses will remain strictly confidential.

The consultation is being conducted online and the software used to power this survey is Online Surveys.

For further information please visit the [University of Edinburgh's privacy statement](#).

## Section 1: What is a Climate Strategy?

A Climate Strategy sets out an organisation's approach to addressing climate change. It will typically include net zero targets, interim targets and outlines plans for both mitigating negative impacts, such as reducing operational greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and amplifying positive impacts, such as research and partnerships.

[Read about our current Climate Strategy & progress to date](#)

## Section 2: Our Current Climate Strategy & Progress to Date

In our 2016 [Climate Strategy](#) the university committed to become net zero by 2040 by eliminating avoidable greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and sequestering any unavoidable emissions.

We set out a whole institution approach to climate mitigation and adaptation across our research, learning & teaching, estates and operations, procurement and investments.

You can hear our Principal, Professor Peter Mathieson, tell us what sustainability means to him and why it is important to the University in this [short video](#).

The University has made major progress in delivering a wide range of commitments on climate change, biodiversity and circular economy leading to our [QS sustainability rankings of first in Europe and fourth globally](#).

You can find more details on the [breakdown of our organisational GHG emissions and reductions progress here](#).

Our emissions continue to fall despite strong organisational growth, and we are actively delivering on major commitments such as carbon sequestration via forests and peatlands.

Some notable successes include:

- **Fossil Fuel Divestment**

In 2021, the University completed [full divestment from fossil fuels](#), marking a significant milestone on its journey to net zero and becoming the largest university endowment in the UK to be free of direct fossil fuel investment. By transitioning



away from investments in fossil fuel, the University's investment portfolio now reflects its commitment to tackling the climate crisis and is focussed on lower carbon products and other investment types that are socially and environmentally responsible. By 2018 the carbon intensity (emissions per million invested) of our directly held shares was estimated to have fallen by over 90% from a peak in 2006.

- **Edinburgh Earth Initiative**

The [Edinburgh Earth Initiative](#) (EEI) was launched in 2021 to drive a step change in University engagements with global climate and sustainability challenges. It resources interdisciplinary research, extends our global partnerships, and supports transformative learning experiences for those most impacted by the climate and environmental crisis. The work of EEI aims to ensure that our research and teaching has the greatest possible positive impact on climate and environmental by 2030.

- **Fastblade**

In 2021, the School of Engineering in partnership with Babcock International, launched [FastBlade](#), the world's first test facility that uses regenerative hydraulic technology to offer high-quality, low-cost fatigue testing of tidal blades and other composite structures for research and product development. FastBlade will help secure Scotland's lead in marine energy and exemplifies the University of Edinburgh's leadership in research on an industrial site. The facility was developed 'for industry & with industry' and will deliver new jobs and attract businesses to Scotland for composites products and tidal blade development.

- **Scottish Climate Intelligence Service**

Work with the City of Edinburgh led to a collaboration across all of Scotland's cities through the [Scottish Cities Alliance](#), and to the formation of the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service, a national programme supporting Scottish Government and all 32 of Scotland's local authorities to deliver area-wide programmes of emissions reduction essential to meeting Scotland's climate change targets and to the global response to climate change.

- **Climate Solutions Open Access Course**

The University delivers many courses on climate and sustainability, both as part of the curriculum and as a series of MOOCs, such as our [Climate Solutions](#) course which is available in English, Arabic and Hindi with versions focused on Egypt, India, Malawi & UAE and has been accessed by over 6,500 learners to date.

- **Sustainable Campus Fund**

Our [Sustainable Campus Fund](#) was established in 2016 as an internal investment vehicle to provide financing within the University for implementing: energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other sustainability projects that generate cost savings. Over £1.25m of projects were funded in the first two years, which yielded



financial savings of £370,000 and carbon savings of 1,300 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per annum. This strong performance led to an increase in overall investment in the Fund to £4.75m over five years.

- **Sustainable Travel Policy**

A new [Sustainable Travel Policy](#) was launched University wide in February 2022. The policy requires the consideration of 'climate conscious travel', a presumption against the use of first-class travel for aviation, and a presumption against mainland UK flights. We are analysing the combined impact of the policy alongside Covid19 in changing travel patterns and early indications show that the trend pre-2019 for ever increasing travel volumes and emissions has been halted.

- **Forests & Peatland Programme**

The University has made a long-term [commitment to capture and store its unavoidable carbon emissions](#) from travel, by expanding forests and restoring peatlands in Scotland to sequester and mitigate over 1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and create positive benefits for nature. We have purchased 431 hectares at [Drumbrae](#) in Stirlingshire, which will be the first of several sites where we will create woodland and improve open habitats to sequester the emissions arising from our travel. The programme also presents significant partnership opportunities for research, teaching, and community benefits. [You can find out more about the programme here.](#)

However, as the various environmental crises deepen, we recognise the necessity of a step change in effort and urgency - this consultation sets out our thinking on how we will respond.

### Section 3: Developing a Successor to the Climate Strategy

To ensure that the University maintains its leadership position, and to realise the benefits of collaborative action, we established four working groups in 2022 to explore a revised approach in each of Operations, Research, Learning and Teaching, and Partnerships.

Over 80 academic and professional services colleagues from across the University worked together through these groups over seven months to identify potential deliverable actions commensurate to the size of the external challenges.

We are currently considering three key recommendations from the working groups that will inform a successor for the current Climate Strategy:

- **Rebalance our focus**, from operational carbon reductions to increase the emphasis on the positive impacts of research, partnerships and learning and teaching to reflect the potential for impact in these areas



- **Widen the focus**, strengthening efforts on biodiversity, water scarcity, and chemical pollution, bringing ambitions in line with our approach to climate change, sufficient to address the magnitude of these interrelated crises.
- **Set science-aligned interim targets**, thus ensuring our net zero carbon target takes a science-aligned approach, in support of our existing 2040 goal.

### Our Principles for Our Climate Strategy

- **Urgency:** The urgency of the climate and nature emergencies mean that we will accelerate climate and biodiversity action across the University as quickly as possible.
- **Led by the Science:** As a globally leading scientific institution we will be guided by the best available evidence, reporting standards, and expert engagement. We will follow international best practice and draw on world-leading expertise from across the University.
- **Whole Institution Approach:** We recognise that as an institution we must maximise the opportunities for impact across research, learning and teaching as well as addressing our operational impacts.
- **Transparency:** Clearly communicating the objectives and opportunities of the Climate Strategy successor is paramount in our large and diverse University community. Likewise, our alumni, external stakeholders and the public all need to have clarity on what we are doing, how, and why. We will provide accessible reporting on all aspects of the strategy.
- **Just Transition:** All action designed to address the climate and nature emergencies must also be considered within the context of achieving a resilient, sustainable and just transition to net zero. We will engage closely with staff, students and communities to ensure the opportunities for their involvement and benefit are maximised throughout.

### Our Climate Strategy vision

The University will embed climate action into all of our key strategies and activities - from learning, teaching, research, innovation and partnerships to estates design and use, IT and energy use, from travel and procurement to our investments.

We will become aligned to the requirements of climate science in reducing our emissions at pace and will successfully deliver our net zero by 2040 target. We will be a local leader and international exemplar, working with partners around the world to play our part in researching, designing and delivering world leading climate solutions.

## Section 4: What will you be asked?

This consultation has eight sections, reflecting the range of actions the University is considering for the successor to our Climate Strategy. The sections are:

- Net Zero
- Learning & Teaching



- Research & Innovation
- Partnerships
- Operations
- Nature & Biodiversity
- Water Scarcity & Chemical Pollution
- Our People & Culture

In each section, we will explain the key actions the University is considering, to strengthen its Climate Strategy, and will then ask for your thoughts. Please read the supporting consultation information available at [edin.ac/climate-strategy](https://edin.ac/climate-strategy).

### What will the University do with the consultation responses it collects?

The University will analyse responses to the consultation and town hall events and collate these into a recommendations report. This will inform the development and finalisation of the new strategy, which will be published in 2024.

A summary of consultation findings will be made available for staff and students and all respondents who have left their details will be notified when the new strategy is published.

For any enquiries relating to the consultation, please contact the University's Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability on 0131 651 3000 or [SRS.Department@ed.ac.uk](mailto:SRS.Department@ed.ac.uk).

## Section 5: Net Zero

Net zero is when an organisation reduces the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with its operational activities and supply chain as far as possible and then balances any unavoidable emissions, such as use of aviation for academic research, with emissions removals like carbon sequestration.

The University has already made a commitment to be net zero by 2040. We will reduce our absolute GHG emissions substantially through emissions reductions actions and our remaining residual annual emissions will be balanced out by equal or greater levels of emissions removals from our forest and land-based sequestration programme.

However, the science is clear that action this decade is crucial. The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) estimates that for a 50% chance of staying within 1.5C of warming, we must reduce our emissions globally by at least 43% of 2019 levels by 2030. The IPCC warns that crossing the 1.5°C threshold risks unleashing far more severe climate change impacts, including more frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves and rainfall.

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change that aims to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.



Within its contribution to the Paris Agreement the Scottish Government has committed to reach net zero by 2045 and set interim targets to reduce national greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040 relative to 1990 levels.

The University has a statutory duty under [Section 44 of the Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) to help deliver Scotland’s national emissions reduction target and we currently report our GHG emissions annually as part of the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties in line with the [GHG Protocol Corporate Accounting & Reporting Standard](#).

As a globally leading scientific institution the University would like to mirror the approach of the Paris Agreement and the Scottish Government and explore setting science-aligned interim targets to support our existing net zero commitment.

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**Question 1: Do you support the University exploring science-aligned targets?**  
(Yes / No)

## Section 6: Learning and Teaching

The University of Edinburgh has a track record of excellent research, teaching and practice on climate, sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals. Strategy 2030 and the University’s Climate Emergency Response Plan in 2019, includes commitments to integrate climate change and the SDGs into our curriculum.

The pace of change required to meet UK and international emissions goals, and to enhance resilience in the face of intensifying climate change impacts, has significant and urgent implications for how we prepare our graduates. We propose, therefore, that teaching and learning on climate, nature and sustainability continues to be prioritised in curriculum development and delivery.

Aligned to Strategy 2030, the Curriculum Transformation Project is a major and long-term initiative for the University, which is working to review the shape, design, and delivery of our current curriculum to ensure it develops with the needs of our future students in mind, providing more opportunities for students to engage with existential challenges. The importance of embedding climate and nature emergencies in the curriculum, ensuring all students critically engage with these issues, has received positive support from the Curriculum Transformation Project Board.

For our students to experience transformative and world-leading education about climate and nature, these topics need to be meaningfully embedded within all degree programmes and richly infused throughout their learning experiences. All students will need opportunities to reflect on and experiment with how these topics are important for their own subject areas and how they will make use of them in their future roles.

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**Question 2: Do you agree with our direction of travel to increase the focus on Learning & Teaching in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Yes / No)*

**Question 3: Do you agree that all degree programmes should meaningfully embed climate and sustainability throughout students' learning experience?**

*(Sliding Scale – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)*

**Question 4: What do you think our priorities should be for learning and teaching in the successor to the Climate Strategy?** Please also share reflections on what resource and support would be required to successfully embed climate and sustainability in learning and teaching.

*(Open)*

## Section 7: Research & Innovation

The University is committed to harnessing our research and innovation to address the climate and environmental emergency. This will require better mapping, supporting, integrating, and communicating of our research and innovation in this area, forging partnerships locally and globally.

It will involve expanding the pool of researchers engaged in research on climate, environment, and sustainability. And it will involve a commitment to institutional infrastructures (like the [Edinburgh Earth Initiative](#)) that have an existing mandate to deliver cross cutting climate and sustainability research and partnerships.

We will introduce an ambitious Sustainability Commitment, covering both the content of our research (how we frame our research questions and design), and how we conduct it (including equipment, travel and engagement). This will include being early adopters and rigorously implementing the new UKRI Concordat for Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice that is due to be published in early 2024.

To maximise the impact of, and opportunity from the University's research and partnerships on the climate, biodiversity, and wider sustainability, aligned to Research and Innovation Strategy 2030, we are considering three strategic areas of focus:

### **1. Strengthening, Expanding and Resourcing our Community of Researchers**

- We will identify research on climate change, biodiversity and wider sustainability as one of three core research missions in our new University wide Research and Innovation strategy currently under development.
- We will boost specialised support for securing grant research funding, philanthropic income generation, and commercialisation in sustainability, within [Edinburgh Research Office](#), [Edinburgh Innovations](#) and the [Edinburgh Earth Initiative](#).





- We will facilitate interdisciplinarity, cross-university coordination and bid effectiveness, with the [Edinburgh Earth Initiative](#) developing a community of practice amongst staff, students, alumni, and partners.
- We will develop a sustainability research framework aimed at supporting the addition of climate and sustainability considerations into research, industry partnerships and commercialisation activity. This will enable staff to integrate sustainability considerations into both research questions and goals, and the way they conduct their research.

## 2. Extending our Partnerships and Engagement

- We will baseline, analyse, and better communicate our research and commercialisation impacts in sustainability, and scope for further opportunities for industry engagement within the region, Scotland, UK and internationally.
- We will build new strategic partnerships with other higher-education institutions, policy-makers, business, the third sector and local communities, with the goal of supporting Scottish and UK Government in meeting and/or going beyond Net Zero targets.
- We will explore the feasibility of developing University-level research impact goals as part of the strategy refresh process, including setting shared objectives focused on the University's areas of strength and partnerships. This will be co-developed with our research community and external stakeholders.

## 3. Maximise our impact through ethically informed engagement and influence

- We will seek to demonstrate our national/international research leadership on climate and sustainability through ethically informed engagement and influence. An ethical partnership framework for climate & sustainability is under discussion through a working group convened by the Head of College of Science & Engineering, in discussing with the VP Philanthropy and Advancement and the [Income Due Diligence Group](#), as well as members of the Senior Leadership Team. This is with a view to assessing the potential for a combined framework building on the income due diligence framework or a standalone dedicated equivalent.

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**Question 5: Do you agree with our direction of travel to increase the focus on research and innovation in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Yes / No)*

**Question 6: What do you think our priorities should be for research and innovation in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Open)*



## Section 8: Partnerships

The University engages with a wide range of with external groups and organisations and many academic and professional staff are engaged in partnership working at local, regional, and international levels to share knowledge and best practice, undertake research and innovation activities, provide educational and skills development opportunities, and influence business and policy agendas.

These activities are supported and encouraged by a range of teams at the University including Edinburgh Innovations, Edinburgh Earth Initiative, Edinburgh Global, Edinburgh Research Office, and Development & Alumni.

Partnerships working at the University is vital for delivering our vision to make the world a better place because it enables us to leverage the knowledge and talent we house – in combination with the resources of our partners - to effect positive change on contemporary global challenges more effectively than we would otherwise be able to achieve individually.

The University continues to be instrumental in accelerating and helping to deliver Edinburgh's and Scotland's climate commitments. The [Edinburgh Climate Commission](#) was formed from an [ESRC-funded research project](#) hosted by the [Edinburgh Climate Change Institute](#) (ECCI) and has supported the city to set its net zero trajectory and to establish the city partnerships needed to deliver this.

The Commission established the [Edinburgh Climate Compact](#), a growing collaboration of 27 city-based companies committed to sharing ambitious climate action in which the university was a founding signatory, and which has since been replicated in Glasgow.

The university was also a co-founder of [Edinburgh's Net Zero Leadership Board](#), a consortium of critical city partners connecting infrastructure investment for net zero delivery alongside other socioeconomic and sustainability benefits. The board is supported by spatial mapping and climate expertise from within ECCI, and its work supports delivery of the university's own climate targets alongside collaboration with energy, infrastructure and city investment partners.

Work with the City of Edinburgh led to a collaboration across all of Scotland's cities through the [Scottish Cities Alliance](#), and to the formation of the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service, a national programme supporting Scottish Government and all 32 of Scotland's local authorities to deliver area-wide programmes of emissions reduction essential to meeting Scotland's climate change targets and to the global response to climate change.

The University also has a huge opportunity to drive innovation and action on climate change, biodiversity, resource depletion and other sustainability challenges through international partnership working, as the recently announced examples illustrate:

- [CircHive](#) is a €11.5m collaborative research project – involving multiple Higher Education Institutions and organisations across Europe - to help businesses and



the public sector recognise, measure and report on the value of nature in supporting the transition to a circular bioeconomy

- [Wits-Edinburgh Sustainable African Futures \(WESAF\)](#) is a doctoral programme, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, aiming to provide research training to equip students (primarily academics already holding tenured positions) to complete interdisciplinary doctoral research on areas related to sustainability on the African continent
- [Through a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh, Universidad San Francisco de Quito and the British-Ecuadorian Chamber of Commerce](#), the Living Lab for Energy Innovation is working to deliver objectives of the Galápagos Plan 2030. Interdisciplinary teams have been researching the challenges and opportunities in sustainable and inclusive decarbonisation of the islands, the focus of a three-day summit held in 2023.

Despite there being evidence of a wide variety of ways in which partnership working positively influences the University's climate change commitments, further work is required to better understand the role partnership working – in all its forms - plays in fulfilling these commitments and to setting out a vision and associated targets to ensure the potential scale of impact is fully realised.

As a first step, Edinburgh Innovations plans to establish a baseline of its climate and sustainability related partnership activity to track progress and work with key stakeholders to develop a framework for assessing the climate and sustainability impacts of partnerships.

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**Question 7: Do you agree with our direction of travel to rebalance our Climate Strategy to increase the focus on partnerships?**

*(Yes / No)*

**Question 8: What do you think our partnership priorities should be in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Open)*

## Section 9: Operations

### 9.1 Energy

Plans for decarbonising the Estate to meet our Net Zero by 2040 commitment are still being developed, however we have made major progress in this area. Notable developments since 2021 include:

- A new Net Zero Heat and Energy Programme Board was created in 2022 charged with overseeing the creation of a plan for the decarbonisation of our estates.
- The University's 1.5 MW solar farm at Easter Bush has been successfully commissioned.



- New design guides to support the delivery of net zero carbon new developments have been created to ensure all new developments are on a net zero pathway.
- Energy and utilities master planning to explore both investment in decarbonised energy supplies, and improved operational efficiency.
- A new carbon calculator to assess and evaluate the carbon implications of new developments and retrofits has been created and is being tested.

The existing estate is large, complex and diverse so there is a significant technical challenge to establish and deliver what will be a substantial programme of work, in some cases, using new and innovative approaches and technologies.

The optimum techno-economic solution also depends on uncertain external factors such as tariffs, future taxation, technology advances, inflation and any campus wide/place-based opportunities – so a complex picture being systematically created.

An Estates energy masterplan to identify the priorities, pathways, engineering and technical requirements and costs of decarbonising has been under development since 2021 and is being refined over the next 6-8 months prioritising Kings Buildings, Pollock Halls and Easter Bush.

The Net Zero Heat and Energy Programme Board has also agreed to create a University wide energy reduction programme, to both reduce costs of energy and reduce emissions, aiming for a 10-20% reduction from business as usual. The programme will include a mix of behaviour change, technical interventions and larger energy infrastructure changes.

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**Question 9: Do you agree with our direction of travel to include greater ambition on energy in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

(Yes, No)

**Question 10: What do you think our priorities should be for energy in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

(Open)

## 9.2 Circular Economy

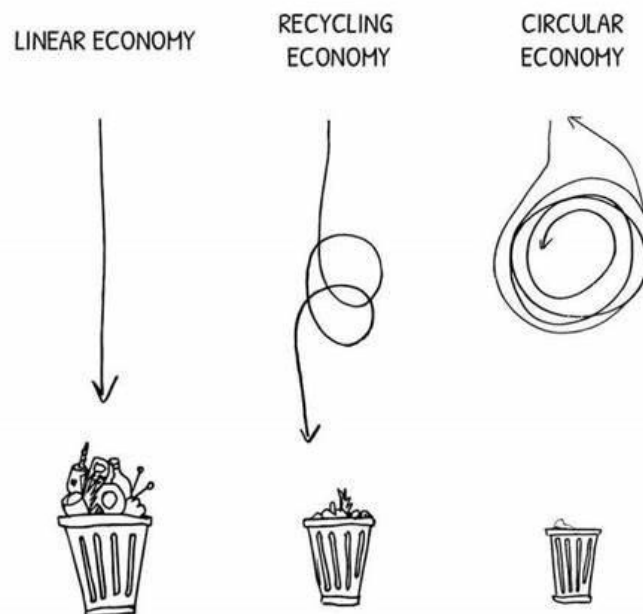
Supply chains currently account for more than 50% of the University's annual GHG emissions so one of the most impactful changes we can make is to transition towards a circular economy approach to our use of materials and consumption.

As illustrated below, in a linear economy, materials are extracted/grown, manufactured into a product, used and then discarded at end of life. This leads to an overall loss of materials from our economy and requires the continuous extraction or growth of new materials.



By contrast, a circular economy keeps as much material at as high a value as possible for as long as possible, in order to reduce the requirement for new materials and the production of waste. In practice this means questioning the need for new purchases, purchasing durable items which are repairable and constructed from materials which can be easily removed from the product and reclaimed for reuse or recycling at the eventual end of life.

For example, by sourcing IT equipment from the University's [IT Reuse Project](#) which has diverted over 5,000 PCs from landfill, avoiding an estimated 1,700 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.



Source: The R Collective

To support a circular economy approach in our estates we will explore opportunities to reduce material consumption such as better space utilisation, increased use of reclaimed materials and lower carbon virgin materials. We will also consider options to reduce our construction waste such as designing for repair, flexibility and disassembly.

Within IT services we will undertake feasibility studies to explore and enact opportunities to reduce overall resource consumption, climate and biodiversity impacts; considering different ownership models, data storage options, circular economy principles and any other actions which can demonstrably reduce negative environmental impacts.

We will also conduct a material flow analysis of our procurement activities to identify where our greatest impacts lie and promote the principles of the waste hierarchy (avoid, reduce, reuse, recycle and recover) within procurement.

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**Question 11: Do you support our direction of travel to include greater ambition on circular economy in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Yes, No)*

**Question 12: What do you think our circular economy priorities should be in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Open)*

### 9.3 Adaptation & Resilience

Climate adaptation and resilience refers to the need for our operations, including our buildings and campuses, to be able to cope with the changes, which are now inevitable as a result of a changing climate. Typically, these include designing for higher temperatures and more extreme heatwaves, droughts, floods, increased storms and greater daily and nightly temperature fluctuations.

Determining the size of the changes required is complex, especially for an estate as large and diverse as the University, and depends, inter alia, on assumptions about the future level of climate change. For that reason, it is likely to take four to five years to build a full picture of accurate plans of resilience and adaptation due to the complexity of, for example, drainage systems across the estate, and cost implications of any major changes to them. That said, adapting the estate can be undertaken at a pace parallel to the emergence of extreme weather events, prioritising work in the most vulnerable areas first.

Estates Committee recently approved funding to undertake extensive surveying and modelling of extreme weather events and drainage systems combined with the potential for sustainable urban drainage systems, with analysis over the period 2023/24 and 2027/2028.

### 9.4 Investments

The University is recognised as a leader in the UK sector on responsible investment and is rated A+ by the [Principles for Responsible Investment](#). The University completed full divestment from fossil fuels in 2021 and has reduced the carbon footprint of its equity investments by at least 70%. The [University Investment Committee](#) which oversees investments has agreed to align emissions from investments to the 1.5 degree pathway, and further technical work is underway, due for completion by winter 2023, to inform next steps.

Subject to satisfactory completion of that technical work and modelling by our investment advisers Mercer, the University will confirm alignment to the 1.5 degree science-aligned pathway for investments during 2024. We will continue to reduce the carbon footprint of our investments across all asset classes and maintain a £60m million allocation in renewables and the sustainable technologies of the future as part of the endowment investments.



## Section 10: Nature & Biodiversity

As signatories to the [Nature Positive Universities pledge](#), we will undertake the following actions with a focus on our campus, wider estate, landscape-scale city partnerships as well as supply chain impacts:

- Play our part in halting and reversing nature loss measured from a baseline of 2020, through increasing the health, abundance, diversity and resilience of species, populations and ecosystems so that by 2030 nature is visibly and measurably on the path of recovery.
- Play our part in ensuring that by 2050 nature recovers to deliver thriving ecosystems and nature-based solutions which continue to support future generations, supporting the diversity of life and playing a critical role in halting runaway climate change.

We will use mapping tools to assess the biodiversity performance of our campuses, agricultural land, forests & peatland and help prioritise action in this area.

We will aim to have a transformative landscape-scale impact across the city region through working on our campuses, our agricultural land and in partnership with the wider community to restore habitats, improve connectivity and facilitate closer relationships with nature. By 2040, all of our agricultural land (self-managed and leased out) will be managed in line with our Nature Positive and biodiversity commitments, and minimising inputs of harmful chemicals.

Beyond our city region we have committed to a multi-million pounds [Forests and Peatlands Programme](#) where we will sequester over one million tonnes of unavoidable carbon dioxide emissions and develop our owned land for forestry and peatland restoration in a way that enhances biodiversity by prioritising native tree species, species suited to future climates, native priority habitats and those which support high levels of biodiversity. We will also take action to better understand and improve the biodiversity impact within our supply chain.

The University recognises the need to consider issues such as deforestation, and protection of natural capital within investments, and is therefore also exploring the integration of nature and biodiversity into future investment strategy. Such integration of nature and biodiversity into investments will be explored over the period 2023-25; this is a complex endeavour where best practice is still being developed. Our thinking will be informed by the recently launched advice from the [Task Force on Nature Related Financial Disclosures](#).

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**Question 13: Do you support our direction of travel to include greater ambition on nature and biodiversity in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

(Yes, No)



**Question 14: What do you think our priorities should be for nature and biodiversity in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Open)*

## Section 11: Water Scarcity & Chemical Pollution

Water scarcity is an emerging environmental crisis that is likely to have an impact on UK food prices and availability in the coming years and may be felt directly in greater drought frequency within the UK.

At a global level, water scarcity will become a key societal issue over the next 2 decades that is likely to lead to geopolitical instability, conflict, famine and migration.

As a large estate owner within Edinburgh this presents an opportunity to cement our leadership position in this area, whilst ensuring we continue our commitment to our civic responsibilities during periods of drought.

We propose that the inclusion of water efficiency targets in relation to addressing water scarcity will apply both directly to the estate, and to embedded water consumption within our supply chain<sup>1</sup>. In relation to the estate, significant action has already been undertaken to reduce our water consumption, with further action expected largely to be undertaken as part of planned maintenance and refurbishment.

The scale of dispersal of chemicals such as microplastics and per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS)<sup>2</sup> is another emerging issue in the science, particularly in relation to their impact on human health. [Research has linked some of these chemicals with harmful health effects, including cancer, immune system dysfunction, liver damage, developmental and reproductive harm, and hormone disruption.](#) We expect this issue to be of increasing importance to both our staff and our students in terms of both providing a working environment that minimises exposure to these risks and the broader societal and environmental consequences.

We expect that this concern will primarily arise in relation to chemicals contained within the products we purchase. As such we anticipate this will take two to three years of exploratory research and analysis to understand where our most significant impacts originate from, and that the potential for mitigation will be determined by supply chain alternatives and contract lengths.

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<sup>1</sup> A water footprint is the amount of fresh water utilised in the production or supply of a product or service

<sup>2</sup> A group of over 10,000 different chemicals, including water-proofing agents, non-stick materials and fire retardants, that are collectively characterised by their longevity and inability to break-down under normal conditions on earth.





**Question 15: Do you agree with our direction of travel to include greater ambition on water scarcity and chemical pollution in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Yes, No)*

**Question 16: What do you think our priorities should be for water scarcity and chemical pollution in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Open)*

## Section 12: Our People & Culture

Embedding sustainability within our overall staff and student culture and through our alumni, and ways of working will help ensure that we are making the right decisions to support the University's vision to make the world a better place and avoid being locked-in to high carbon pathways.

A fifth working group has been established to explore how to create an environment where staff and students feel world-leading sustainability is a core part of what we do, in the same way that they feel world-leading research, and world-leading teaching and learning is what we do. This could involve, for example, the way we recruit, retain, manage and train staff and students, as well as the physical environment around them and our strategic communications.

Initial proposed aims from the working group are to:

- Increase awareness of the University's climate and sustainability ambitions & achievements
- Embed climate & sustainability into people and culture processes and decision-making at all levels
- Ensure staff and students feel confident making decisions on social responsibility and sustainability

We could also consider the creation of advice for our staff and students on how to make positive changes – from on campus to at home and in professional work, holidays, spending and personal finances and investments.

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**Question 17: Do you support our direction of travel to include people and culture in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Yes, No)*

**Question 18: What do you think our priorities should be for people and culture in the successor to the Climate Strategy?**

*(Open)*

**Question 19: Would you like the University to provide advice on how you can make positive climate and sustainability changes on campus and at home?**



(Yes, No)

## Section 13: Demographics

To help us understand views by different groups please provide some information about yourself.

**Question 20: Firstly, which of the following age bands are you in?**

- 20 or under
- 21 to 25
- 26 to 30
- 31 to 40
- 41 to 50
- 51 to 60
- 61 to 70
- 71 or over
- Prefer not to say

**Question 21: Please select your gender:**

- Female
- Male
- Non-Binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other, specify

**Question 22: Select which of the following best describes your role:**

- Student: Undergraduate
- Student: Postgraduate taught
- Student: Postgraduate research
- Staff: Postdoc
- Staff: Academic
- Staff: Professional services
- Prefer not to say

**Question 23: Please select which School or Department you are in**

- Accommodation, Catering and Events



- Applications
- Biomedical Sciences
- Bioresearch & Veterinary Services
- Business School
- Centre for Open Learning
- Clinical Sciences
- Communications and Marketing
- Corporate Development
- CSG Subsidiary Companies
- Data Driven Innovations
- Development and Alumni
- Digital Curation Centre
- EDINA
- Edinburgh College of Art
- Edinburgh Global
- Edinburgh Innovations Ltd
- Edinburgh Medical School
- Edinburgh Research Office
- Estates
- General Council
- Governance and Strategic Planning
- Health and Safety
- Human Resources
- Information Security
- Internal Audit
- IS Corporate
- IT Infrastructure
- Learning, Teaching and Web
- Legal Services
- Library and University Collection
- Molecular, Genetic & Population Health Sciences
- Procurement
- Records Management
- Roslin Institute
- Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies
- School of Biological Sciences
- School of Chemistry
- School of Divinity
- School of Economics
- School of Engineering
- School of GeoSciences
- School of Health in Social Science
- School of History, Classics and Archaeology
- School of Informatics



- School of Law
- School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures
- School of Mathematics
- School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences
- School of Physics and Astronomy
- School of Social and Political Science
- Social Responsibility & Sustainability
- Sport & Exercise
- Sports Union
- Strategic Change
- Student Experience Services
- Student Recruitment and Admissions
- Students' Association
- The Moray House School of Education and Sport
- User Services Division
- USG Business Unit

**Question 24: How long have you worked/studied at the University?**

- 2 years or under
- 3 to 5 years
- to 10 years
- 11 to 20 years
- 21 years or over
- Prefer not to say

## Section 14. Prize draw

To thank you for taking the time to respond to this consultation, you can enter your email address to be in with a chance of winning one of 10 £50 gift vouchers for Love2shop.

The prize draw closes at 12 noon on Monday 18 December 2023 after which we will randomly select the winners and contact them. Your consultation responses will remain anonymous.

[Enter email address]

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## Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to this consultation.



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH  
Social Responsibility & Sustainability

The University will analyse responses to the consultation and town hall events and collate these into a recommendations report. This will inform the development and finalisation of the new strategy, which will be published in 2024.

A summary of consultation findings will be made available for staff and students and all respondents who have left their details will be notified when the new strategy is published.

For any enquiries relating to the consultation, please contact the University's Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability on 0131 651 3000 or [SRS.Department@ed.ac.uk](mailto:SRS.Department@ed.ac.uk).

[END]