



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions

Implementation guidance
for suppliers

Executive summary

The Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions (the Pathway) is a structured approach that helps both suppliers and buyers build collaborative, fair and sustainable supply chains.

In accordance with the University of Edinburgh's Strategy 2030, we are driven to make the world a better place locally, regionally, and globally. Our role as an anchor institution in the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal empowers us to collaborate with local schools, colleges and universities, public authorities, industry partners and government to deliver positive environmental and social impact.

To address the climate emergency and support national net-zero targets, it is essential to consider carbon emissions from all sources. Like many other organisations, carbon emissions from our supply chain account for around 55-65% of our emissions. These supply chains also impact on other environmental sustainability areas such as biodiversity as well as social impacts such as human rights violations and increased opportunities to build wealth in the community. We consider this to be responsible procurement.

The Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions will be applied directly at the University of Edinburgh as one lever for reducing the environmental and social impact

of our supply chain. However, we see the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions as an opportunity for buying organisations across the Further and Higher Education (FHE) sector, as well as wider public bodies, to align their approach to responsible procurement. By taking a collaborative approach, we will:

1. Reduce the resource implications for buying organisations and for suppliers by standardising the ask of our supply chain, and the timescales associated to these.
2. Promote best practice by increasing knowledge sharing and use of shared tools or resources
3. Support local and national climate targets, maximising the possibility of staying within a 1.5 degree global warming scenario

This document sets out additional detail in relation to the steps for suppliers, and provides examples of how adopting institutions will support suppliers along each strand of the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions.

The Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions consists of four strands:

- **Embedding:** This strand aims to build up the knowledge and skills of our internal buying community in relation to responsible procurement.
- **Commitment and action:** This strand supports suppliers to set science-aligned targets, underpinned by SMART action plans.
- **Data:** This strand focuses on improving the quality of data available from suppliers, enabling our buying community to make informed decisions on the products they require.
- **Monitoring and reporting:** This strand ensures suppliers are on track towards their commitments, highlighting good practice and notifying all partners when action is needed to realign.

Further information, including the rationale for developing a collaborative pathway, is available at: edin.ac/pathway



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The Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions

The Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions: an overview

The Pathway is a structured approach that helps both suppliers and buyers build collaborative, fair and sustainable supply chains.

For buying organisations, this means making sustainable decisions when purchasing. To do this, the Pathway ensures that buyers have the required knowledge, skills and data on carbon emissions and wider responsible procurement themes before purchasing.

The initial focus for suppliers is the transition to net zero, in line with science-aligned targets. This means completing a timetable of actions to align to a net zero decarbonisation pathway. These progressive actions sit in the categories of commitment & action, data, and reporting and monitoring.

The Pathway is a lever to open up dialogue and explore collaborative opportunities with suppliers as we strive to decarbonise our supply chains.

The Pathway focuses on suppliers with the highest material impact first. A 24-month extension is provided for lower-impact suppliers.



Embedding (buying organisations)

By 2028, our buying community will have the knowledge, skills and tools to recognise key responsible procurement themes. Our processes will ensure that sustainability is considered alongside cost and quality.



Commitment and actions (suppliers)

By 2028, our highest-impact suppliers will have set science-aligned targets, underpinned by SMART action plans. We will see an increase in innovative products that support our ambitions to achieve net zero.



Data (suppliers)

By 2028, the quality of data available from suppliers will have matured from a broad spend-based methodology to product-level environmental detail. This will enable our buying community to make informed decisions on the products they require. .



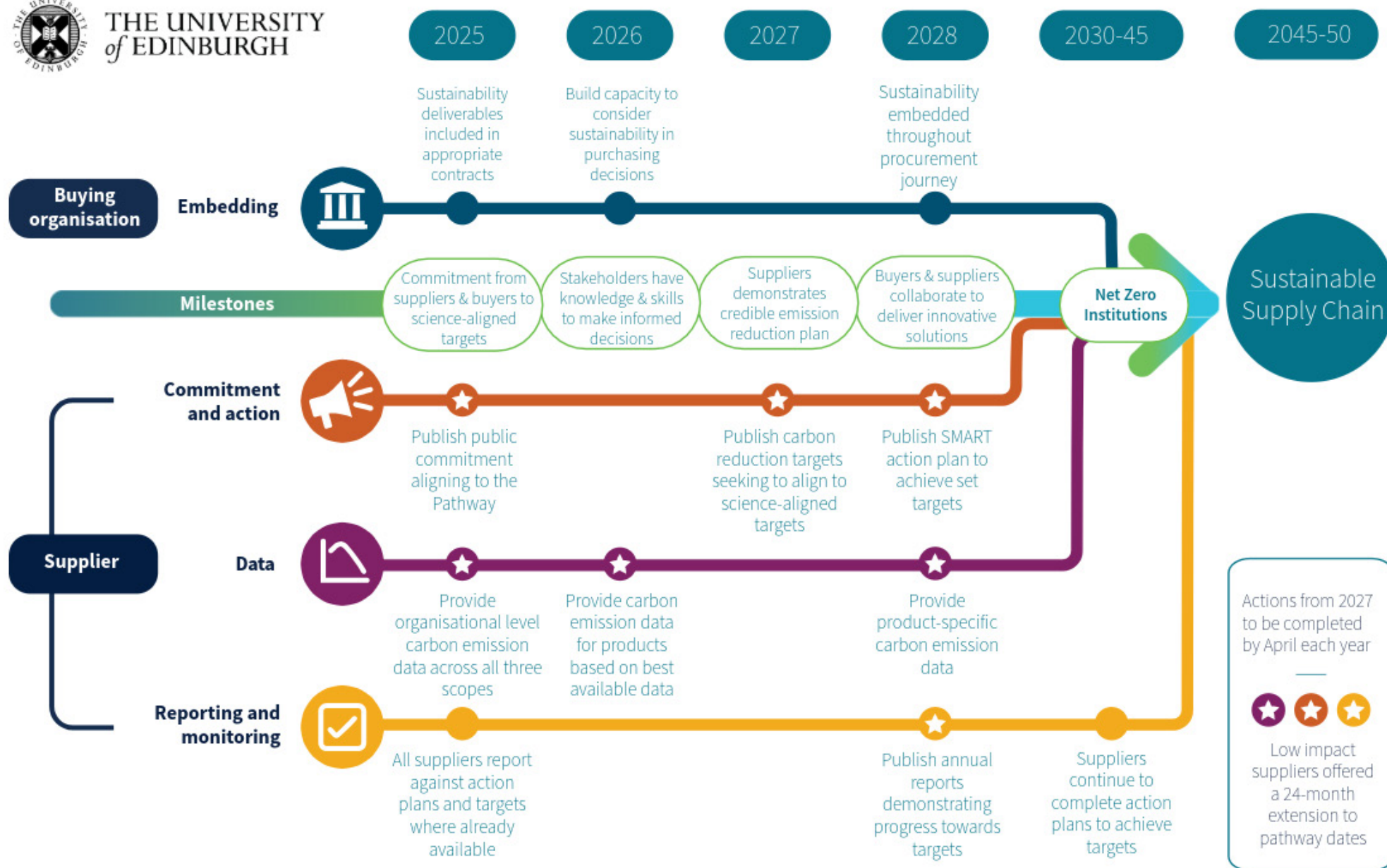
Reporting and monitoring (suppliers)

By 2028, we will be in position to track our suppliers commitments, highlighting good practice and notifying partners when action is needed to realign. We will use these to monitor the impact of our actions on scope 3 emissions.



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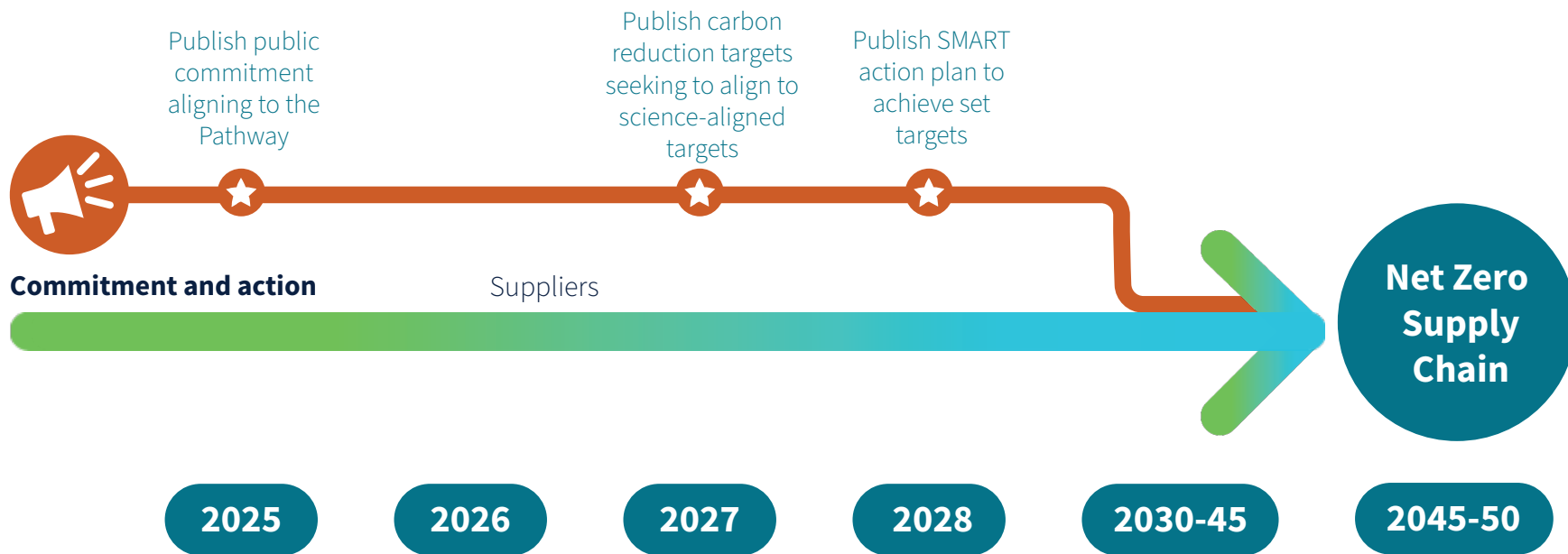
Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions



A visual representation of the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions for buying organisations and suppliers.



Commitment and action



Actions from 2026 to be completed by April each year



Low impact suppliers offered a 24-month extension to pathway dates

Suppliers: commitment and action

The Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions sets out an ambitious target that supports suppliers towards a science-aligned decarbonisation pathway.

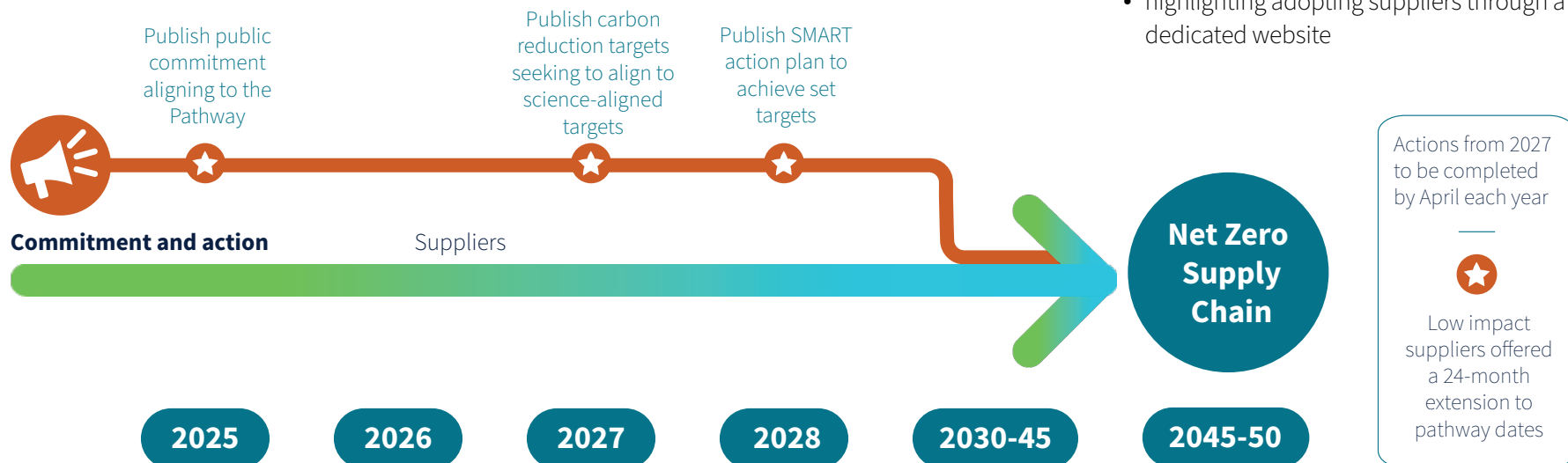
Achieving this is reliant on commitments from our entire supply chain though, as noted above, focusing on high impact suppliers in the first instance.

The Pathway sets out when we expect our suppliers to have signed up to this ambitious target. Once these commitments are in place, the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions looks to focus our suppliers on taking actions at the scale required to make a significant difference.

Supporting our suppliers

Adopting organisations commit to supporting suppliers along the Commitment and Action strand by:

- developing a resource hub for suppliers, signposting to dedicated resources to help suppliers complete these actions, working with suppliers to ensure these remain relevant and effective
- ensuring sustainability is raised during Contract Management meetings, highlighting good practice and working together to overcome challenges.
- providing a single platform for suppliers to share targets and action plans with all adopting organisations
- highlighting adopting suppliers through a dedicated website

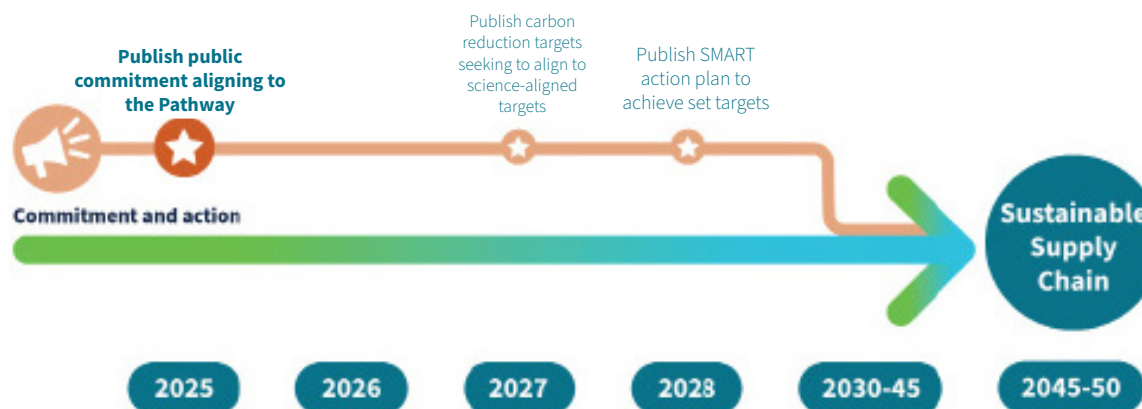


Publish public commitment aligning to the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions

From December 2025

Pathway milestone supported: Commitment from suppliers & buyers to science-aligned targets

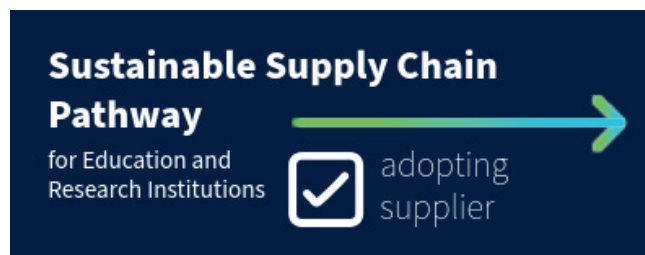
Suppliers will be asked by buyers to publicly commit to undertaking the actions set out in the Pathway for Education and Research Institutions as part of new contracts.



Action 1: Supplier publishes a commitment aligning to the steps set out in the Pathway.

This must be publicly available on a relevant section of the supplier's website, with endorsement from relevant leadership. This should also link back to the relevant Pathway webpages on the University of Edinburgh website (edin.ac/pathway).

Once published, the link to this page must be shared with the buying organisation within three months of the contract start date.



"We are proud to adopt the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions and are actively working towards a fair and net zero future. We are committed to reducing our environmental impact, ensuring fair practices, and enhancing community well-being"
Endorsed by [name, title]

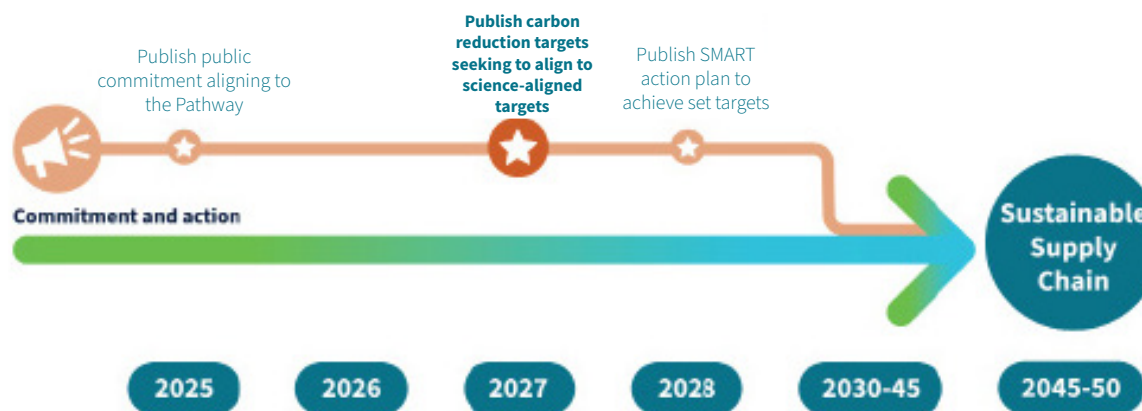
Example commitment graphic & accompanying text, developed by the University of Edinburgh Department of Social Responsibility and Sustainability (SRS) Communications team.

Publish carbon reduction targets seeking to align to science-aligned targets

By April 2027

Pathway milestone supported: Suppliers demonstrate credible emission reduction plan

This step ensures that suppliers confirm their commitment to reducing carbon emissions across all three scopes of emission, and have a credible route to achieving this, aligned to the current scientific consensus, for society to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.



Actions overview for this step:

1. Supplier develops carbon emission reduction targets
2. Supplier publishes carbon emission reduction target, and shares this with buying organisations.
3. Suppliers carbon Emission reduction targets are discussed in contract management meetings

Publish carbon reduction targets seeking to align to science-aligned targets

By April 2027

Action 1: Supplier develops carbon emission reduction targets

Supplier Carbon Emission Reduction Targets will, as a minimum:

- **Commit the supplier to becoming net zero by 2045 at the latest** (2050 where suppliers registered office address is outside of Scotland), across scopes 1, 2, and all material scope 3 categories for their sector. The Greenhouse Gas Protocol provides guidance on how to identify relevant scope 3 activities within an organisation.
- **Include interim targets** aligned to current scientific thinking, set every five years from year of publication, appropriate for their sector.
- **Be set against a representative baseline year.** Baseline carbon emission figures should be completed in accordance with best industry practice, using the best and latest data available. This must be for a year which is representative of typical business activity. Supplier baseline for carbon emission should adhere to the Greenhouse Gas Protocol's Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard.
- **Be signed off by a supplier's director** (or equivalent) and must include their name, job title and the approval date.

Where a supplier adheres to the UK Government Procurement Policy Notice (PPN) 06/21, and the Carbon Emission Reduction Targets set out by the supplier adhere to minimum standards noted here, these would align with the Pathways.

Due to the timescale of near-term science-aligned targets (2030), the Pathway allows suppliers to “seek to reach science-aligned targets in the near-term”, with the view that suppliers would undertake all reasonable effort to realign emissions to long term, science-aligned targets. In this instance, interim targets should clearly show expected reductions, with detail on how the organisation will account for any discrepancies between these and a science-aligned decarbonisation pathway, and remain on track to achieve net zero by their target year.

While tools and resources exist to support the calculation and reporting of Scope 1 & 2 emissions, it is acknowledged that tools for calculating and reporting Scope 3 emissions may not be as advanced, depending on the supplier sector. Suppliers are requested to include narrative on the accuracy of the baseline and targets provided across all three scopes of emission.

Best practice

External verification of Carbon Emission

Reduction Targets: ISO 14064-3 and ISAE 3410 and Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) Corporate Net-Zero Standard are widely-used standards for the verification of GHG emissions reports.

Where possible, all supplier carbon emission reduction targets should be verified by a reputable scheme. However, it is acknowledged that there is a cost associated with this service. As such verification is best practice for suppliers rather than mandated.

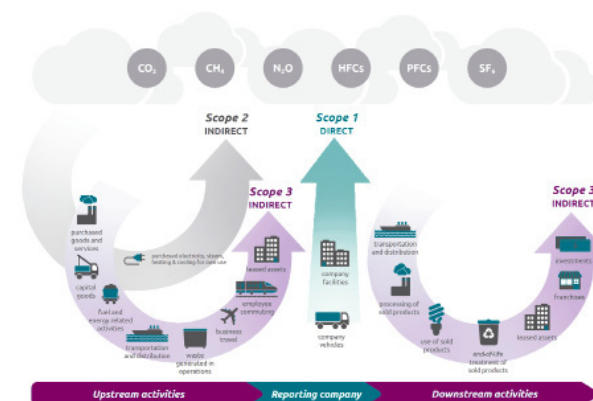


Diagram of scopes and emissions across the value chain, provided by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol. Available at: <https://ghgprotocol.org>



Publish carbon reduction targets seeking to align to science-aligned targets

By April 2027

Action 2: Supplier publishes carbon emission reduction target, and shares this with buying organisations

All carbon emission reduction targets will be published publicly by the supplier and shared with the buying organisation either directly or, where available, through relevant supplier management and sustainability assessment platforms.

Carbon emission reduction targets should be placed in a prominent place on the supplier's website.

Action 3: Suppliers carbon emission reduction target is discussed in contract management meetings

Suppliers commit to proactively raising their progress against the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions in existing contract management meetings.

Expectations are for suppliers to provide regular reports demonstrating progress towards carbon emission reduction targets. The format and frequency of this reporting will be agreed as part of contract negotiations. It is expected that these will be published publicly on the supplier's website, with direct links provided to the buying organisations.

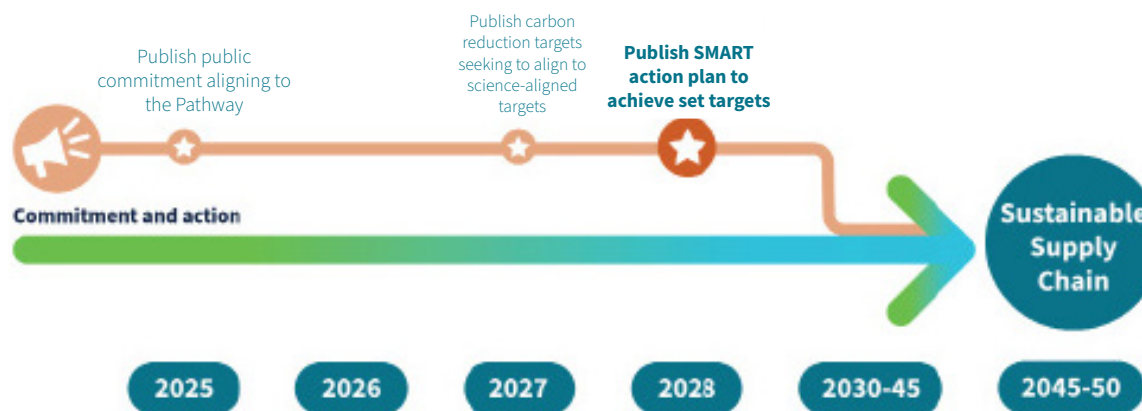


Publish SMART action plan, aligned to agreed targets

By April 2028

Pathway milestone supported: Publish SMART action plan to achieve set targets

Supplier to publish an action plan online and shared with the buying organisation. These must include SMART actions the supplier will take to achieve carbon reduction target, with these captured and updated through a suitable reporting process.



Actions overview for this step:

1. Develop an action plan that clearly demonstrates how the supplier will achieve the carbon emission reduction targets set out previously.
2. Supplier action plans are discussed in contract management meetings.

Use SMART to create your action plan:

S specific

M measurable

A attainable

R relevant

T time-based

Action 1: Develop an action plan that clearly demonstrates how the supplier will achieve the carbon emission reduction target

This action plan must be shared with the buying organisation either directly or, where available, through relevant supplier management and sustainability assessment platforms.

Action 2: Supplier action plans are discussed in contract management meetings

Where suppliers have credible action plans to achieve their set targets, discussions should focus on good practice and sharing of this across the supply chain.

Where suppliers do not have credible action plans to achieve their set targets, follow up action is required by the supplier to establish how this will be rectified in advanced of the next contract management meeting.





Data

Suppliers: data

At present, most supply chain emissions are based on spend, using carbon factors at a category or commodity level.

This allows a buying organisation to understand the high-level impact areas of its purchasing.

However, it does not allow for detailed assessments or comparisons of products with a suppliers catalogue, or between suppliers.

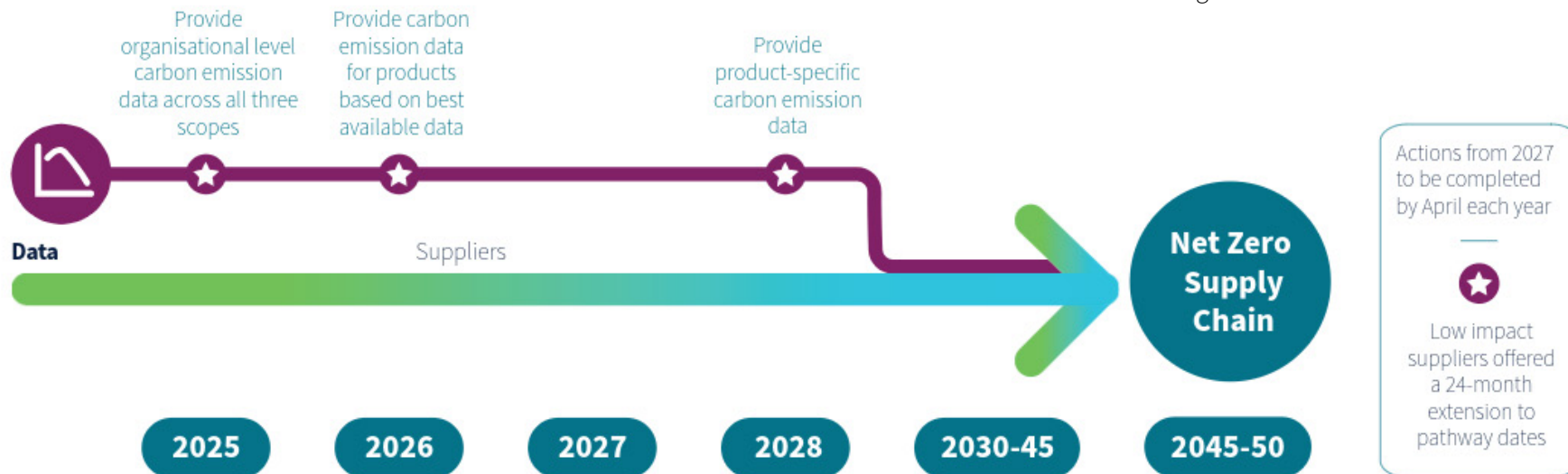
By increasing the quality of the data available from suppliers, buying organisations will be able to make better decisions on which products to purchase, and see this translated into direct reductions in Scope 3 emissions.

We understand that data maturity varies across sectors. The steps in this strand allow for flexibility where a data from a sector is less mature.

Supporting our suppliers

Adopting organisations commit to supporting suppliers along the Data strand by:

- developing research projects with relevant academic or professional teams to work directly with suppliers on improving data quality
- sharing supplier- or sector-specific best practice methodology, either directly or via the resource hub
- Ensuring that purchasing platforms are set up to share supplier data directly with our buying community
- providing a single platform for suppliers to share organisational level data with all adopting organisations

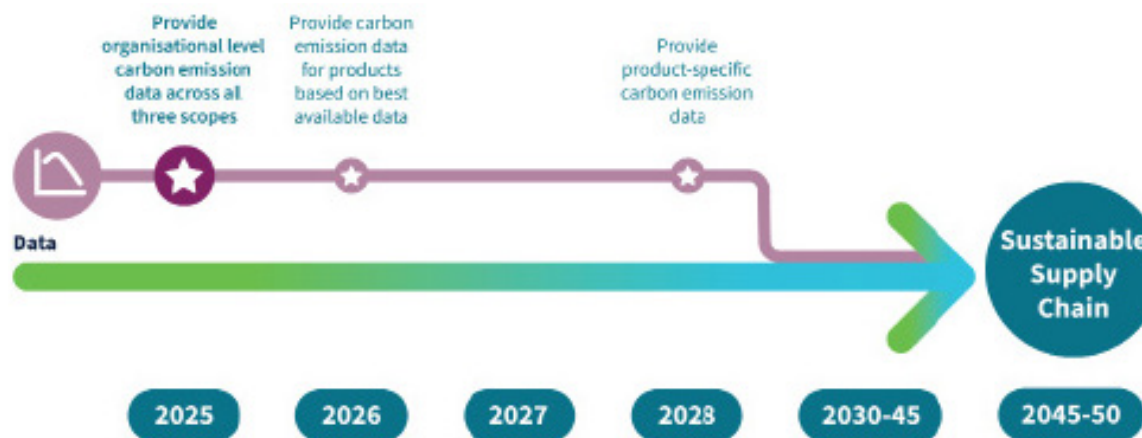


Provide organisational level carbon emission data across all three scopes

From December 2025

Pathway milestone supported: Commitment from suppliers & buying organisations to science-aligned targets

Carbon emission data is provided by suppliers for their organisation through an appropriate tool, and updated annually. This information will be coupled with organisational turnover to develop a supplier-specific carbon factor, providing a more accurate representation of emissions associated with this supplier and allowing for tracking of progress against targets.



Actions overview for this step:

1. Agree on a process for collating relevant data which will include carbon emission data and organisational turnover
2. Provide organisational-level data
3. Increase data maturity.

Provide organisational level carbon emission data across all three scopes

From December 2025

Action 1: Agree on a process for collating relevant data which will include carbon emission data and organisational turnover

Carbon emission calculations for the supplier will include Scope 1, 2 and material categories of Scope 3, with clear methodology which includes the boundaries and calculations used, as well as details of any assumptions included in these figures.

While tools and resources exist to support the calculation and reporting of Scope 1 & 2 emissions, it is acknowledged that tools for calculating Scope 3 emissions may not be as advanced, depending on the supplier sector.

As such, suppliers will be asked to provide narrative against their scope 3 categories as follows:

- Material categories which are calculated accurately, with details of methodology used
- Material categories which are not currently calculated accurately, with details of how this reporting will be improved
- Material categories which are not currently calculated, with details of steps to take to initiate this calculation.

Action 2: Provide organisational-level data

Directly to the buying organisation either directly or, where available, through relevant supplier management and sustainability assessment platforms. This must be updated at least annually.

Action 3: Increase data maturity

Where data provided by the supplier is known to be of low maturity (for example data is estimated and has a large margin of error – e.g. based on industry norms/estimated factors), suppliers will work to improve the quality of data collected.



Provide carbon emission data for products based on best available data

By April 2026

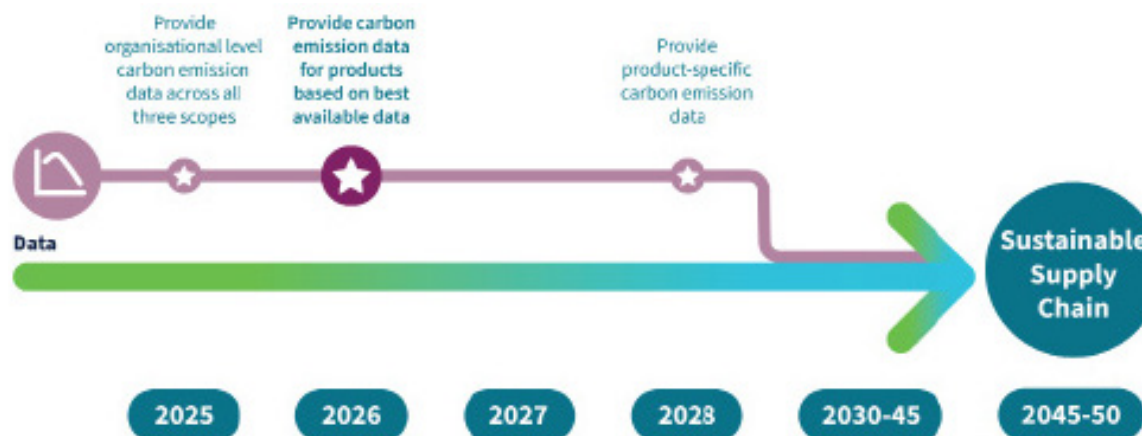
Pathway milestone supported: Stakeholders have knowledge & skills to make informed decisions

This step requires suppliers to provide carbon emissions for the goods, services and works provided through the contract in advance of the purchasing decision, e.g. on catalogues or as part of quotes or bids. It is expected that the carbon emission values provided in this step are based on the best available data for the products in question, which may be sector averages.

Transparent methodology is required, including the boundaries and calculations used, as well as any assumptions included in these figures should be provided alongside these carbon values. In addition, suppliers will be required to report actual emissions generated against institutional purchasing, provided on annual basis (or at the end of contract, where it is a one-off purchase).

Actions overview for this step:

1. Set up catalogues to display carbon emissions against individual goods or services
2. Provide contract-level carbon emissions to buyers as part of the contract OR when updating annual price lists. These should be to the standards set out above.



Action 1: Set up catalogues to display carbon emissions against individual goods or services

Support adopting institutions to make carbon emissions visible in their purchasing system. Any catalogues managed directly in these systems should have the functionality to display carbon emissions to buyers.

Where catalogues are managed directly by the supplier (e.g. punch-out catalogues), ensure that these also contain easily accessible carbon emission data and that these are kept up-to-date. It is recommended that these carbon values are reviewed at least annually.

Catalogues should clearly indicate the accuracy level of the carbon emission values provided, for example whether it is based on broad sector averages of product specific data.

Action 2: Provide contract-level carbon emissions to buyers as part of the contract OR when updating annual price lists. These should be to the standards set out above

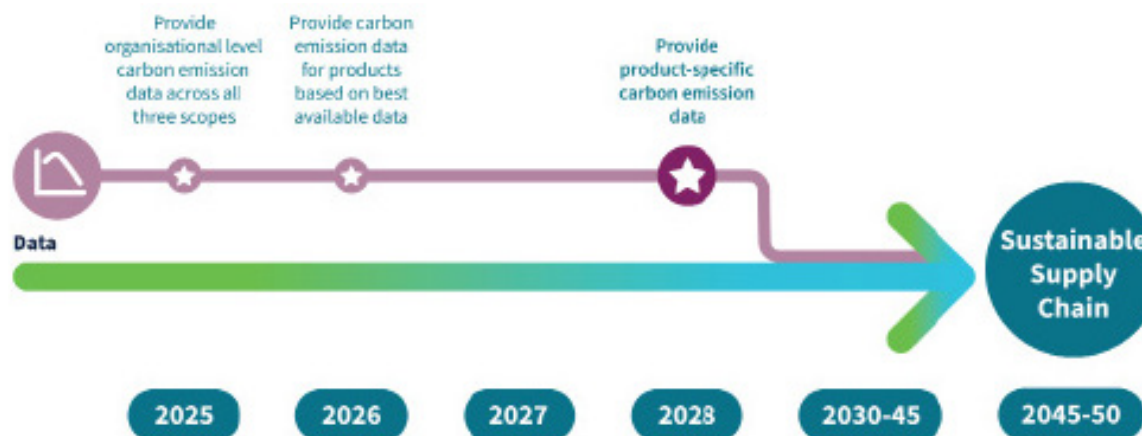
Where several smaller orders are placed with a supplier, contract-level carbon emissions must be included on quotes and invoices.

Provide product-specific carbon emission data

By April 2028

Pathway milestone supported: Buyers & suppliers collaborate to deliver innovative solutions

This step requires suppliers to calculate the carbon emissions for new goods, services and works provided. This must be specific for the product being provided within the contract, based on genuine data for that product rather than commodity or sector averages.



Actions overview for this step:

1. Undertake detailed carbon emission calculations for new products
2. Update supplier & buyer catalogues to reflect these new values
3. Continue to provide contract-level carbon emissions to buyers as part of the contract OR when updating annual price lists.

Action 1: Undertake detailed carbon emission calculations for new products

- **For goods**, the carbon emission values must include the emissions associated with the “cradle-to-consumer” stages of the product life-cycle. Where possible, a full life-cycle emission value should be provided (“cradle-to-grave”), clearly displaying the emissions associated to each stage of the product’s life-cycle.

- **For services**, the carbon emission values must include all material emissions associated with delivering this service which may include: transportation of materials; office operations; digital services; and business travel (e.g. to visit clients).
- **For works**, the carbon emission values must include all material emissions associated with delivering these works which may include: purchasing and transportation of materials; office operations; digital services such as advertising; disposal of waste (e.g. packaging); and business travel (e.g. to site).

Examples of good practice include:

ISO 14040 Life Cycle Assessment (Best Practice Standards)

Greenhouse Gas Product Life Cycle Accounting and Reporting Standard.

Action 2: Update supplier & buyer catalogues to reflect these new values

All carbon emissions values provided to buyers must clearly highlight the accuracy of these values provided, for example whether it was calculated through use of average factors or product-specific life-cycle data. These carbon emissions values must be reviewed at least annually.

Action 3: Continue to provide contract-level carbon emissions to buyers as part of the contract OR when updating annual price lists

Catalogues should clearly indicate the accuracy level of the carbon emission values provided, for example whether it is based on broad sector averages of product specific data.





Reporting and measuring

Suppliers: reporting and measuring

In order to ensure suppliers are on track towards their commitments, this final thematic area within the pathway sets out when suppliers are expected to provide accurate, meaningful reports against their actions.

This will allow buying organisations to monitor progress, celebrate successes and support suppliers to realign where they have diverged from set targets.

Supporting our suppliers

Adopting organisations commit to supporting suppliers along the Reporting and measuring strand by:

- working with suppliers to develop appropriate reporting templates
- providing a single platform for suppliers to share these reports with all adopting organisations



All suppliers report against action plans and targets where already available

From December 2025

Pathway milestone supported: Commitment from suppliers & buying organisations to science-aligned targets

Where suppliers are already aligned to the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions, relevant carbon emission reduction targets and associated action plans are provided to the institution either directly or, where available, through relevant supplier management and sustainability assessment platforms.



Action 1: Provide Carbon Emissions Reduction Targets and Action Plans

Suppliers with existing Carbon Emission Reduction Targets and Action Plans provide these to the buying institution as set out in the Suppliers: Commitment and Action section above.

Publish annual reports demonstrating progress towards targets

By April 2028

Pathway milestone supported: Publish annual reports demonstrating progress towards targets

Suppliers provide updates of progress against the Pathway action plan annually. Where necessary, action plans are updated to reflect opportunities and challenges. All annual reports are captured and updated either directly or, where available, through relevant supplier management and sustainability assessment platforms.



Action 1: Provide annual reports against the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions

Suppliers providing annual reports to the buying institution do so as set out in the Suppliers: Commitment and Action section above.

Suppliers complete action plans to achieve targets

2030 to 2045

Pathway milestone supported: Suppliers continue to complete action plans to achieve targets

From 2030 onwards, all managed suppliers are expected to have provided carbon reduction targets & associated action plans and be on track to deliver against these.

Action 1: Suppliers continue to progress against their action plans

Suppliers providing annual reports to the buying institution do so as set out in the **Suppliers: Commitment and Action** section above.



Adopting the Pathway

Adopting the Sustainable Supply Chain Pathway for Education and Research Institutions as a supplier

This document sets out the standards we expect of suppliers that adopt the Pathway. If you have been requested to adopt the Pathway by a buying organisation, please raise any questions directly to this buying organisation in the first instance.

If you are interested in adopting the Pathway as a supplier, to the standards set out in this document, but have yet to be contacted by a buying organisation, please contact the University of Edinburgh's Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability using the email address below.

Responsible.Procurement@ed.ac.uk



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