



Net Zero

2040 Strategy Executive Summary



Foreword

Since 1495, the University of Aberdeen has been open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others.

We still aspire to serve that original purpose. It defines our actions and underpins our ethos. We achieve our purpose through excellence in our core activities of education and research, which transform the world around us. Our commitment to Net Zero now forms part of that purpose. Our Aberdeen 2040 strategy established a high-level commitment to be Net Zero before 2040. This strategy articulates, for the first time, the anticipated scale of that task, the types of actions necessary, and the changes we will necessarily see in all aspects of University life.

As a public body in Scotland, we have a statutory duty to take a lead role in the national response to the global climate and nature emergencies. Alongside the contribution we make as a centre for world-class research and education, we recognise that the University's operations must also play a part in the national Net Zero journey, reducing and eliminating, wherever we can, the greenhouse gas emissions associated with how we operate.

This strategy outlines a series of decarbonisation pathways that will mean profound changes in how we conduct all aspects of our operations. Every member of our community, staff or student, has a part to play in that. Embracing and addressing the sustainability challenges we face cannot be optional; it must be at the heart of everything we do, it must inform every decision we take, and it will become integral to every individual's role.



The Net Zero Strategy itself is but a first step on a long and complex journey. We do not yet have all the answers. We may not even have all the questions. But the strategy provides us with a comprehensive baseline from which to start the process and to guide our actions. It will continue to evolve as our understanding of the issues improves and as our efforts to deliver change mature. We do not underestimate the scale of this challenge. The sheer scale of strategic investment required alone demands that innovative and creative solutions are explored and robustly scrutinised.

We will take this endeavour forward openly and transparently. Through our statutory duty to report as a public body, to our own commitment to reporting and sharing emissions data publicly, we will ensure we communicate our progress on the journey with stakeholders and public alike. This strategy has been supported and endorsed by the University Court of the University of Aberdeen and we welcome the opportunity to share it with you.

George Boyne
Principal & Vice-Chancellor

Julie Ashworth
Senior Governor

Executive Summary

Amidst the escalating climate and nature emergencies facing the globe, this Net Zero Strategy is the University of Aberdeen's first comprehensive effort to capture the breadth and depth of action likely to be required to deliver on its own Net-Zero commitments and to contribute to national climate change targets.

There is now little doubt that human activities have greatly increased the concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere, resulting in rising global temperatures, severe flooding, extensive biodiversity and nature losses, and increasingly extreme weather patterns.

Greenhouse gas emissions are generated from every aspect of modern life. Whether it is the energy used to heat and light our buildings, the fuel used to support global travel and trade, or the emissions embodied in the production and procurement of the goods and services we rely on, climate damaging emissions are generated in most activities.

As a consequence, significant and widespread changes in how our society lives and works are needed to mitigate the unfolding climate disaster. A fundamental rethinking of established norms is necessary if we are to have any prospect of complying with the aims of the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015 that the world needs to limit projected global temperature increases to well below 2°C (and ideally below 1.5°C). In 2023, the planet breached the globally significant 1.5°C threshold for the first time according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

The Greenhouse Gas Protocol has set the following definitions for each of the three emissions reporting scopes which have been adopted globally as standard reporting practice:

SCOPE 1

Emissions from sources that an organisation owns or controls directly e.g. natural gas.

SCOPE 2

Emissions that an organisation causes indirectly when the energy it purchases and uses is produced e.g. grid electricity.

SCOPE 3

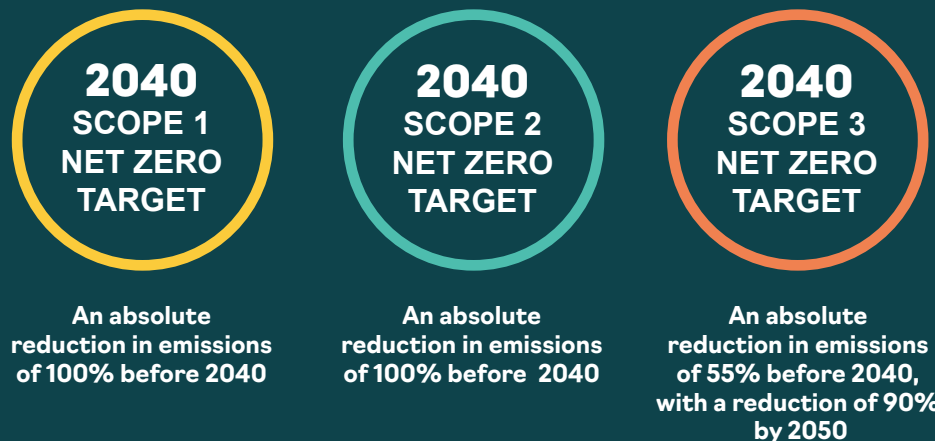
Emissions that are not produced by the organisation itself, and not the result of activities from assets owned or controlled by them, but by those that it's indirectly responsible for, up and down its value chain e.g. business travel and procurement.

Alignment with a National Commitment

With the effects of climate change becoming increasingly impactful, Scotland has sought to establish itself as a leader in tackling these issues head on. In 2009, through the Climate Change (Scotland) Act, it became one of the first countries to pass into legislation targets for the reduction of emissions and to set a Net Zero target of 2045, and in 2019 was in the vanguard of nations declaring a global climate emergency. Despite the decision in 2024 to abandon interim 2030 targets, the national ambition for emissions reduction by 2040 remains. Public bodies in Scotland, including universities, have been required to report on their progress in managing and reducing emissions under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duty (PBCCD) since 2016.

These commitments provide the national framework within which we as a University are required to develop our own Net Zero strategy, articulating how we will reduce our emissions as far as possible before tackling any remaining emissions through offsetting or other sequestration activities. In developing our Aberdeen 2040 strategy in 2019/2020, we took the opportunity to establish sustainability as one of four core themes and to make a high-level commitment to Net Zero, aiming to become Net Zero before 2040. This strategy expands on that high-level commitment and articulates and anticipates the targets, pathways, and other changes likely to be necessary to make that commitment a reality.

Our strategy envisages the absolute elimination of Scope 1 & Scope 2 emissions before 2040. In recognition of the complexities of tackling Scope 3 emissions, we have established a target consistent with the Science Based Target framework’s definition of Net Zero that envisages a reduction of 55% by 2040, with a longer-term target of 90% by 2050. All targets are assessed against our 2015/2016 PBCCD baseline. This differential approach acknowledges that the discussion around how best to track, manage and reduce Scope 3 emissions is still evolving.



While it is acknowledged that the journey to Net Zero is unlikely to track a linear reduction model, annual guideline reductions for each scope have also been established, in addition to 5-year targets:

Target	SCOPE 1	SCOPE 2	SCOPE 3
Annual	6.25%	6.25%	3.44%
5-year	31%	31%	17%
10-year	62.5%	62.5%	34%
15-year	94%	94%	52%

A Whole Institution Approach

This strategy has been developed with a whole University approach at its core. This approach requires institutions to recognise that sustainability, and Net Zero in particular, need to be seen as the responsibility of the entire community – with every student, staff member, academic School, and Professional Services Directorate having a crucial role to play in reducing emissions.

A critical part of this strategy has been the development of decarbonisation pathways which reflect on the actions necessary to reduce or eliminate emissions associated with eleven key emissions themes.

The pathways themselves have been developed and aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and will assist the University in recognising the breadth of activity required to support delivery of Net Zero.



Achieving Net Zero will require significant investment in both staff and the University's estate. Utilising the sector's "Cost of Net Zero" calculation tool suggests that headline direct investment costs for the University could be in excess of £100 million.

With sector finances under significant strain, alternative funding models will have to be explored and funding identified from a variety of sources, including from Scottish and UK-backed green loans and grants, as well as investigating opportunities for long-term private investment and partnerships to facilitate energy decarbonisation and to work with us to implement the infrastructure changes required to achieve Net Zero.

The intention is that this strategy will be reviewed annually, with targets and pathways adjusted to reflect the dynamic nature of Net Zero.

Particular attention will be paid to the rapidly evolving discussions around Scope 3 emissions. While Scope 1 and 2 emissions are more predictable and the methodologies for dealing with them better established, the management and treatment of Scope 3 emissions is subject to rapid and ongoing re-evaluation. Future iterations of this document will aim to keep track of and reflect those changes.

Aligning our Decarbonisation Pathways

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



- Decarbonised Heat
- Low Carbon Energy Generation and Storage
- Digital Sustainability
- Biodiversity
- Sustainable Labs
- Green Fleet
- Sustainable Procurement
- Behaviour Change and Empowerment
- Decarbonised Construction & Maintenance
- Sustainable Business Travel
- Minimised Waste

Find out more:

- [🔗 abdn.ac.uk/about/sustainable/net-zero](https://abdn.ac.uk/about/sustainable/net-zero)
- [🔗 abdn.ac.uk/about/sustainable/index](https://abdn.ac.uk/about/sustainable/index)
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