Quarterly Policy Briefing: Environmental Sustainability

January 2020

This document outlines the main policy changes seen in the last quarter that will affect EAUC-Scotland and Scottish institutions.

Scottish Policy Updates

- The Scottish Government has released an update to their Climate Change plan and has put the changes out for consultation. Essentially this document is updating many of the emissions figures based on recent data and adding new and better targets. They also highlighted several notable points:

    - Energy Strategy to be updated in 2021;
    - Any building built after 2024 will have to have zero emissions heating systems by law;
    - 20% reduction in car travel by 2030 with public bodies to lead by phasing out the need for new petrol and diesel cars and light commercial vehicles by 2025;
    - Increasing the woodland coverage target, from 12,000 hectares (current target) to 18,000 by 2025 alongside increasing the woodland carbon (offsetting) market by at least 50% by 2025.

    Importantly, the government has not given a definition on net zero or clarified their position on offsetting which is what the sector requires most, particularly in regards to public bodies reporting. Along with the update the Scottish Government published a Public Engagement Strategy Consultation and a Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025.

- The Scottish Government has said it will not progress the Circular Economy Bill due to Covid-19. Instead, Scottish Government has outlined in the updated (December 2020) 2018-2032 Climate Change Plan that it will presently deliver circular economy objectives through other mechanisms, including:

- implementation of the Deposit Return Scheme (from 1st July 2022)
- the introduction of market restrictions on single use plastic (SUPs) items (to be legislated in 2021)
- further development of the UK-wide Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme for packaging
- delivering the Food Waste Reduction Action Plan (33% reduction in national food waste by 2025).

- The Scottish College of the Future report has been released. The report features 3 key elements which can be viewed here. The reception across social media and websites has been very positive on this report so it seems that colleges are supportive of it.

UK Policy Updates

- The Quality Assurance Agency and Advance HE have set out new guidance on education for sustainable development. This is currently open to consultation and EAUC Scotland will be working with the sector on a response.

- The Climate Change Committee published their sixth carbon budget which sets out a pathway to net zero carbon emissions for the UK. This report is what the UK government and other external bodies are likely to base their climate change plans around and so it is extremely important. The report is extremely long however the key message is a 78% reduction in emissions in 2035 compared to 1990. This is achieved in 4 main ways which are:

    - **Take up of low-carbon solutions.** People and businesses will choose to adopt low-carbon solutions, as high carbon options are progressively phased out. By the early 2030s all new cars and vans and all boiler replacements in homes and other buildings are low-carbon – largely electric. By 2040 all new trucks are low-carbon. UK industry shifts to using renewable electricity or hydrogen instead of fossil fuels, or captures its carbon emissions, storing them safely under the sea.
    - **Expansion of low-carbon energy supplies.** UK electricity production is zero carbon by 2035. Offshore wind becomes the backbone of the whole UK energy system, growing from the Prime Minister's promised 40GW in 2030 to 100GW or more by 2050. New uses for this clean electricity are found in transport, heating and industry, pushing up electricity demand by a half over the next 15 years, and doubling or even trebling demand by 2050. Low-carbon hydrogen scales-up to be almost as large, in 2050, as electricity production is today. Hydrogen is used as a shipping and transport fuel and in industry, and potentially in some buildings, as a replacement for natural gas for heating.

- **Reducing demand for carbon-intensive activities.** The UK wastes fewer resources and reduces its reliance on high-carbon goods. Buildings lose less energy through a national programme to improve insulation across the UK. Diets change, reducing our consumption of high-carbon meat and dairy products by 20% by 2030, with further reductions in later years. There are fewer car miles travelled and demand for flights grows more slowly. These changes bring striking positive benefits for health and well-being.
- **Land and greenhouse gas removals.** There is a transformation in agriculture and the use of farmland while maintaining the same levels of food per head produced today. By 2035, 460,000 hectares of new mixed woodland are planted to remove CO2 and deliver wider environmental benefits. 260,000 hectares of farmland shifts to producing energy crops. Woodland rises from 13% of UK land today to 15% by 2035 and 18% by 2050. Peatlands are widely restored and managed sustainably.

Other UK Updates

- The University of Glasgow was named University of the Year by Times Higher Education for their anti-racism work throughout 2020.

- The UK Government has announced it will no longer fund fossil fuel projects abroad.

- EAUC are trialing a sector wide offsetting scheme and have a webinar on the 28th of January to announce it. This will be piloted in several institutions, including the University of Strathclyde, and could be a very significant initiative.