



The College and sustainability

This article details the College's efforts to adopt a comprehensive carbon reduction and net zero strategy.

Published: 06 March 2024

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Read time: 6 Mins

In an era marked by increasing environmental concerns, organisations worldwide are recognising the need to address their carbon footprint and embrace sustainable practices. The College can take a lead and be part of the power of collective action to promote a culture of sustainability that transcends individual organisations.

Our achievements so far

The College aspires to reduce and minimise the environmental impact of its activities. We have been working on this for a while, albeit in an unstructured, piecemeal way at first, but more recently taking a much more focused approach. Our progress towards a more sustainable College includes the following initiatives and actions.

Investments

The College is fully divested from all direct and indirect investments in fossil fuels. Our investment portfolio comprises a single investment in the CCLA Charities Ethical Investment Fund. This fund has a wide range of ethical restrictions, including no direct or indirect holdings in fossil fuels, tobacco, armaments, alcohol, gambling, pornography or high-interest lending companies.

Meetings

Our meetings and events sustainability framework encompasses the following.

- All College events should be run either wholly virtually or, if face to face, should be on a hybrid basis with an option to attend the meeting using electronic video conferencing.

- Video conferencing facilities at 6 Alie Street were upgraded during 2022 and 2023. Dedicated audiovisual staff have been recruited to ensure that online or hybrid events run smoothly.
- We encourage those attending meetings to travel by public transport in favour of cars, planes and taxis. We provide a map of our location that details all public transport options.
- We only provide filtered tap water at events; we do not purchase bottled water.
- We only use reusable tableware; no single-use plastic, such as cups, plates or cutlery are used.
- We are trialling meat-free options at College meetings and are making these items more prominent on menu lists for organisers.

Office and College operations

- The College premises has a Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) rating of Excellent. BREEAM focuses on sustainable value and efficiency.
- We have secure bicycle storage facilities at Alie Street and have changing and shower facilities available for use by all visitors to the premises.
- We have installed solar panels on the roof of the building to generate electricity. We have a contract for electricity from renewable sources for the element that we can't generate ourselves.
- The premises are air-cooled rather than air-conditioned.
- We have passive infrared detectors that automatically switch off lights when rooms are not in use.
- We recycle rainwater collected from the roof.
- Since 2020, the College's Part 1 examination has been held online, which stops candidates travelling to examination centres far away from where they are located and no longer necessitates candidates flying to other countries for exams.
- The College has introduced a salary sacrifice electric car lease scheme for employees, at no cost to the College as an employer. This allows staff to acquire fully electric vehicles and thus remove petrol/diesel vehicles from the roads.
- The College Bulletin and Annual Report are now published only in electronic form. We also promote the policy of the paperless office to use less paper by adopting electronic means, such as scanning documents for filing and sending committee papers by email.
- We participate in a food waste distribution scheme, donating surplus food to charity, where possible.

Carbon reduction plan and net zero strategy

The activities described above are all well and good, and are great contributors to the College's net zero journey, but we need to go further. Trustee Board agreed in May 2023 the proposal that the College should develop a carbon reduction plan and net zero strategy. This has required a

thorough look at the College's operational processes to identify areas where the environmental impact can be minimised, including energy consumption, waste management, transportation and procurement practices.

The first stage of the strategy is to reduce the College's carbon footprint by 30% by 2030. In addition to carbon dioxide, we are including in our strategy other harmful emissions for the purposes of measurement and reduction/elimination, such as methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases, which are converted to carbon equivalents.

To measure our achievements, we have calculated our initial carbon baseline as of 30 June 2022, which incorporated scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions. Scope 1 includes the emissions that the College makes directly; scope 2 covers the emissions we make indirectly, such as buying energy produced by third parties; scope 3 includes all the emissions up and down our value chain, for example buying products from our suppliers and providing services to our members and other customers.

Working with an outside agency and led by me, we established a net zero project team of College staff, with a representative from each of the College's directorates, to assist in the quantification and to provide the data.

The report shows that 90% of emissions are scope 3, 6% are scope 2 and 4% are scope 1. Procurement of purchased goods and services is the largest single source of carbon emissions, accounting for approximately 72%, which includes the running of examinations, IT and telecommunications, food and beverage provision, venues and events, and accountancy, legal and professional and banking services. Travel is responsible for around 8% of emissions, home working and employee commuting for 4%, fuel and energy for 3% and capital goods for 3%.

Developing our action plan

Having measured our starting point, we held 4 brainstorming sessions in October and November to generate the ideas that could allow us to achieve the 30% reduction. The next crucial step will be for the Trustee Board to consider the ideas raised so that we can refine and prioritise them. This will entail evaluating each idea based upon feasibility, ease of implementation, potential carbon reduction impact and cost-effectiveness. We may also face the challenge of having collaborative discussions with other stakeholders, since some of the generated ideas may need regulatory approval, for example if we were to suggest changes to the way in which examinations are run.

Once the ideas are prioritised, we can develop an action plan. This will involve assigning responsibilities, setting timelines and establishing measurable goals. We will also need to consider if systems need changing or if different pieces of data need to be collected as part of individual College operations to facilitate measuring our carbon footprint more accurately. Trustees will also need to consider and agree a target date to achieve net zero.

Communication will play a pivotal role in fostering transparency and garnering support from our membership, staff and other stakeholders for our carbon reduction efforts and ultimately contributing to the success of the carbon reduction plan and eventual transition to net zero. We look forward to communicating progress with the membership in due course.

Meet the author



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