



For the future you want

Edinburgh College Climate Change and Sustainability Leadership Summit Summary

Members of the College's Executive team hosted a Leadership Summit following COP26. The summit provided an opportunity for reflection on the progress the College has made in achieving the goals set out in its Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2019-2024, but also to acknowledge the size of the challenge ahead for the College if we are to achieve the goals outlined in the strategy.

To achieve the goals of the strategy, much work must be done.

To date we have achieved some great results in terms of reducing carbon emissions. We have reduced emissions by 57% against our baseline – however this has been achieved through major operational projects across our estate, and now we must look at other ways to hit our targets.

It is worth noting that during COVID-19 pandemic, our estate was not fully operational and may have had an impact on our carbon emissions.

The summit identified many areas where work could be done, some of which are listed in themes below.

Leadership and Governance

- The summit agreed that Sustainability should become embedded in the culture of the College and flow as a thread through all work including main strategic documents to support a whole-organisation approach.
- The College should continue to influence the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government to provide, not only capital support, but also additional staff capacity in areas including project management, procurement, technical and energy management.
- The College should implement Carbon Impact Assessment for all projects/strategies.
- The College should introduce SMART targets in relation to sustainability including in KPIs at board level and objectives for senior staff.

Resourcing

Areas of investment discussed and identified as desirable by the summit included:

- Ongoing investment and funding for sustainability work and projects.
- Funding to continue ECSA's Go Green projects – (Sustainable and Active Travel, Community Fridges and Swap Shops, Student Engagement).
- Introducing a Sustainability in the Curriculum staff resource.
- Funding for major long-term energy projects to match target ambitions.

Sustainable Education and Student Experience

The summit recognised the importance of fully integrating climate education and sustainability into the curriculum – providing contextualised learning for students and implementing it in a systematic way. Other key areas of work which was discussed includes:

- Looking at introducing standalone climate change and sustainability modules.
- Assessing the possibility of integrating sustainability into student induction.
- Embedding the UN Sustainable Development Goals into the curriculum.
- Adopting a 'living lab' approach by further involving students in campus operations – for example - involving engineering students in campus operations, ACE in our community gardens and others.

- Potential for working with the SQA to make the existing sustainability unit available for all levels.
- Scoping the development of courses related to green jobs.
- Launching the new Renewables Centre for Excellence at Granton Campus.
- Ensuring sustainability content/activities in teaching is captured for annual reporting, audits and awards.
- Ensuring all staff are involved from curriculum and support.

High profile issues

The summit discussed the following points in relation to high profile issues:

- Going plastic-free – removing unneeded plastics from campus.
- Food – reducing meat consumption on campus by introducing more vegan and vegetarian options in catering outlets.
- Coffee cups – removing single-use cups at campuses.

Awareness and Engagement

The summit discussed the following points in relation to awareness and engagement:

- Raise awareness through a scheduled sustainability events programme including annual sustainability week.
- Providing higher visibility to sustainability around all campuses – perhaps theming by the Sustainable Development Goals and including relevant logos and campaigns.
- Recognition of work being done.
- Create more internal and external content to engage our community with events, work going on and progress/achievements.

Energy

The summit discussed the following points in relation to energy consumption:

- Develop an Energy Masterplan – including a route map to net zero heating.
- Retrofitting of campus buildings to exemplar standards.
- Maximise renewables (currently on 1.8% of electricity from onsite photovoltaic panels).

Staff

The summit discussed the following points in relation to College staff:

- Introducing Carbon literacy training for all staff.

- Integrating sustainability into staff job descriptions and induction.
- Ensuring sustainability is embedded in operational plans.

Biodiversity and Community Growing

The summit discussed the following points in relation to biodiversity and community growing:

- Green areas outside campuses (including meadows and growing opportunities) - high visibility, used by curriculum and benefit biodiversity, sequester carbon, mental health benefits.
- More food growing options.

Waste and Recycling

The summit discussed the following points in relation to waste and recycling:

- Promote circular economies to reduce waste and encourage upcycling and reuse.
- Encourage better food waste and packaging solutions – including all-compostable take-away containers and focus on reusable options.
- Lock in some changes which have arisen from COVID-19, for example, measures to ensure continued paper reduction.

Sustainable Travel

The summit discussed the following points in relation to sustainable travel:

- Review of on-campus car parking management.
- Investigate moving to all electric fleet, including all vans.
- Push to make travel bursaries the most sustainable option, rather than cheapest.
- Scope out providing a pool of electric bikes.
- Promote free bus travel for all under 22-year olds from January 2022 (and lobby to get it extended to all students).
- Comprehensive travel survey for staff and students.

Procurement

The summit discussed the following points in relation to procurement:

- Aim to deliver a procurement climate action plan – including focusing on student uniforms, palm oil-free products, locally sourced food, and using ethical suppliers.

What progress has been made so far?

From reading above, it may seem like the College is far away from becoming net zero. The reality is, we are. But we can take heart from the fact we have already made great strides.

We have already made a carbon emissions reduction of 57% from 2013-14 to 2020-21. But we do face a sterner challenge to reach 100% than we did to reach 57%.

In addition to the headline carbon emissions reductions, the College and ECSA have also made the following significant achievements in our sustainability mission.

- We have signed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Accord and other national-level commitments. This includes the Edinburgh Climate Compact, and the College Development Network's Scottish Colleges Statement of Commitment on the Climate Emergency.
- ECSA's GoGreen projects have been a great success, with phase one focusing on Sustainable and Active Travel and immersing itself into class time by contextualising sustainability into course-specific class presentations. Phase two has seen the introduction of very visual GoGreen Hubs on each campus – comprising Swap Shops for clothes, books and accessories, and Community Fridges designed to minimise food waste across, and alleviate food poverty in, our communities.
- Carbon literacy training has been introduced for staff and is being rolled out further across the organisation in 2022.
- We have also seen increased sustainability activity in our curriculum, in particular during October's Sustainable EC learning and teaching week, and COP26 – which also saw staff engagement about sustainability – including the submission of Climate Change Pledges.

It is now incumbent on the whole College – leadership, staff and students – to get our College to where we want to be, net zero by 2030.

The Sustainability Steering Group will continue to meet throughout 2022 to discuss the wide range of ideas listed above – and to formulate plans for moving forward. We hope you will join us on the next step of our Sustainability journey.