

Scottish Government draft Environment Strategy consultation summary

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1. Purpose of the strategy

The [draft Environment Strategy](#) for Scotland sets out a vision for 2045: “One Earth. One home. One shared future.” Its ambition is to restore nature, end Scotland’s contribution to climate change, and tackle pollution while ensuring that this transition delivers social justice, wellbeing and economic opportunity.

The strategy fulfils requirements under the Continuity Act (2021) ¹and provides the framework for environmental objectives, the policies and proposals needed to achieve them, and the arrangements for monitoring progress.

This has direct implications for how schools and early learning settings, colleges, and universities embed sustainability in teaching, research, estates and community engagement. This is an opportunity to ensure that pan-sectoral educational priorities are reflected in national policy, and to promote, recognise and influence the role of education as a key enabler of Scotland’s sustainable future.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2021/4/contents>

2. Implications for educational settings and public bodies

Education provision that embeds education for sustainable development across **all sectors** is central to delivering a just transition and tackling the many challenges facing our world. Scotland's educational systems – formal, non-formal, and informal – are already responding to this.

In schools and early learning settings, 'Learning for Sustainability' is an entitlement for learners aged 3-18 and the responsibility of all teachers; as outlined in the national 'Target 2030: a vision for people, planet and prosperity'² action plan, GTC Scotland Professional Standards for teachers³, and key legislation such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴.

Colleges are already developing regional net-zero skills centres and retraining workers for emerging green sectors, while sustainability is part of the GTC Scotland Professional Standards for Lecturers⁵ and LfS is part of the SQA's NextGen HN programme⁶. Many examples from the college sector highlight how colleges are key to changing both behaviour and meet skill demands around environmental challenges.

Universities contribute world-leading research and innovation, as well as international partnerships that can support sustainable trade and climate justice. In teaching contexts, sustainability is a strand of the renewed QAA Subject Benchmark Statements⁷ as well as the QAA Quality code⁸, and staff and student led sustainability initiatives highlight how universities contribute to a greener future.

Non-formal learning sectors such as youth work already contribute to a fairer, more sustainable Scotland; with youth-led community action projects, climate

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/target-2030-movement-people-planet-prosperity/>

³ <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/knowledge-base/articles/what-are-the-cross-cutting-themes>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/united-nations-convention-rights-child-incorporation-scotland-bill-leaflet/>

⁵ <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/knowledge-base/articles/the-professional-standards-explained-college-lecturers>

⁶ <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/100550.html>

⁷ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

⁸ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code>

education and environmental volunteering all well-established parts of youth work practice.⁹

All sectors have a key role to play in embedding sustainability across teaching, learning, and qualifications so that learners, educators and employers alike – now and in the future – can develop, enhance and recognise the skills, knowledge, values and attributes needed to respond to the complexities and challenges of issues such as climate, biodiversity and pollution in an integrated, holistic way.

Public Bodies Climate Change Duties are another important dimension. Universities, colleges and local authorities already report annually under these duties, but the draft strategy does not yet fully recognise how these reports can support delivery and monitoring. Greater integration of this existing mechanism would ensure accountability while also sharing good practice across the sector.

More broadly, **education institutions act as exemplars for communities**. Their estates and procurement practices can demonstrate circular economy approaches, biodiversity restoration and net zero technologies. Their learner and staff populations offer reach into wider society, supporting behaviour change and community engagement. And their role in lifelong learning means they can enhance and support learners and educators of all ages with the skills, knowledge and values needed to make 'sustainability' part of the everyday for everyone.

It is, however, worth noting that although the draft strategy mentions education 27 times, references are concentrated on **schools and children's outdoor learning**. There is much **less recognition of post-16 education** and of the leadership role of public bodies more generally. For universities and colleges, the consultation is therefore an opportunity to emphasise their unique contribution.

By engaging in this consultation, all educational sectors – formal, non-formal and informal - can secure stronger recognition in the final strategy: helping to enhance the policy support and resources needed to embed sustainability across learning and teaching; particularly when budgets and staffing are under pressure.

⁹ <https://www.youthscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Youth-Work-Scotland-Bill-consultation-response-Youth-Scotland.pdf>

3. Overall direction

The strategy recognises the scale of the global environmental emergency. It states that if everyone consumed resources at the rate that Scotland does, almost three planets would be needed. It calls for a just transition to a net zero, nature positive, circular economy that also delivers benefits for people and communities.

The Framework contains eight outcomes:

- Scotland's biodiversity is restored and regenerated
- Scotland has ended its contribution to climate change
- Pollution and waste are minimised
- Scotland's global environmental impact is sustainable
- Society is transformed by living sustainably, in harmony with nature
- A net zero, nature positive and circular economy thrives
- Scotland's resilience to climate change and global risks is strengthened
- Transformations are achieved through a just transition and support for climate and environmental justice

4. Pathways to outcomes

Each outcome is supported by a pathway, which draws together current policy and identifies future priorities.

- **Biodiversity** – halt nature loss by 2030 and restore ecosystems by 2045, through statutory targets, delivery plans and a Natural Environment Bill.
- **Climate change** – meet the 2045 net zero target through five-year carbon budgets, climate change plans and a strengthened National Adaptation Plan, with behaviour change as a central element.
- **Pollution and waste** – improve air and water quality, phase out problematic plastics, and accelerate circular economy legislation.
- **Global responsibility** – reduce Scotland's ecological footprint, especially in food, textiles and transition minerals; maintain Fair Trade commitments; end exports of plastic waste to non-OECD countries.
- **Society and behaviour** – support sustainable choices on food, housing, transport and consumption; expand access to nature-rich places; ensure fairness in access and affordability.

- **Economy** – link the Green Industrial Strategy with just transition plans; support SMEs; invest in green skills, research and infrastructure; embed environmental wellbeing in measures of economic success.
- **Resilience** – align with the National Adaptation Plan to address unavoidable climate risks.
- **Just transition and justice** – make sure the benefits of transition are fairly shared within Scotland and internationally, including support for climate justice funding.

5. Impact Assessments

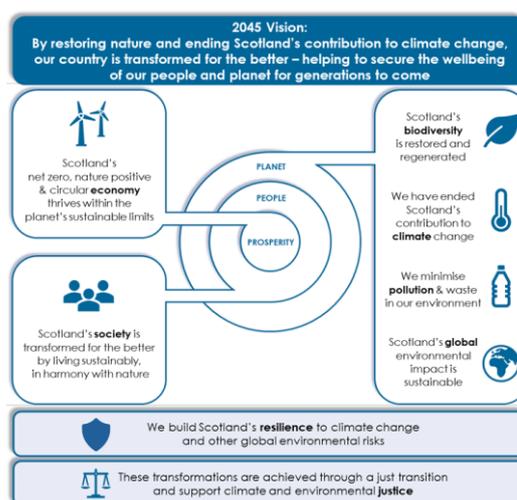
The Scottish Government have also published a set of draft impact assessments to evaluate the impact of the draft Environment Strategy on a range of matters, which we are encouraged to give feedback on. Unless otherwise stated, the full documents for each of the assessments can be found at the bottom of this [page](#).

Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA)

- Land Use Consultants were commissioned to conduct as SEA to evaluate the environmental impacts of the draft Environment Strategy. The [report](#) indicated that the Environment Strategy is expected to deliver mostly positive environmental effects across SEA objectives by consolidating existing policies. However, some indirect impacts may occur, such as minor effects on landscape and cultural heritage from green infrastructure.

Draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- This was carried out to assess the impact of the strategy on individuals with protected characteristics. The assessment summarised that there was no evidence to suggest that there will be a negative impact on any individual with a protected characteristic, but rather that there will be positive impacts.



Draft Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)

- This was conducted to consider the impact of the draft Strategy on island communities. The assessment concluded that a full Islands Community Impact Assessment is not necessary, as the strategy is expected to affect island communities similarly to the mainland (though unanticipated positive or negative impacts may still occur).

Draft Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment (FSDA)

- This assessment was conducted to assess whether the strategy can reduce inequalities caused by socio-economic disadvantages. It summarised that the Strategy will provide a positive impact on everyone in Scotland, with a specific benefit to individuals living in more deprived areas, due to greater access to greenspaces and improved air quality.

Draft Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA)

- This assessment was carried out to examine the impacts of the strategy on children's rights and wellbeing. It concluded that the draft strategy will benefit all children and young people through improved air quality and increased access to clean, environmental spaces. These improvements will improve children's physical and mental health and strengthening nature-based education will also help benefit children's health, wellbeing and educational attainment.

Draft Consumer Duty Impact Assessment (CDIA)

- This was carried out to assess the impact of the strategy on consumers. It summarised that the impact is expected to be positive for consumers, especially vulnerable people. This is due to greater access to greenspaces and improved air quality, which will create significant health benefits and help to tackle inequalities. These positive impacts are also expected to help transform towns and cities into more enjoyable, attractive and safer places to live, and reduce the level of demand that is placed on the National Health Service.

Business Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA)

- A partial BRIA was conducted in order to start assessing the impacts of the strategy on businesses. The draft strategy is expected to deliver widespread benefits for Scotland's environment, society, and economy while creating new opportunities for businesses, particularly in 'green' industries. However, some policies could introduce potential impacts and costs for businesses, including compliance, investment, and competitiveness challenges, especially where significant changes in technology or practices are required.