



UK Research  
and Innovation

# UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy

2025–2030



This strategy outlines the ambition for the next five years, balancing the needs of research and innovation with the imperative to reduce our environmental impact.

Through individual, institutional, and collective action, UKRI aims to lead by example in the global research & innovation scientific community.

This strategy will be supported by an action plan, with input from UKRI councils. UKRI will track the delivery against this action plan and update and revise actions as needed.

# Foreword

UKRI exists to make a better future for our citizens, and that can only be done if we deliver a sustainable future. Our actions must not only support transformative ideas that advance our knowledge of the world, drive economic growth and improve lives through research and innovation, but we must do all of the above whilst continuously improving our sustainability.

I am passionate about sustainability. I have devoted my professional career to researching new low-carbon energy sources. Twenty years ago, I sold my car and exclusively ride a bike and use public transport – if you believe in something you have to walk the walk. So, whilst it is difficult for UKRI to reduce our emissions and simultaneously deliver the outcomes from our investment we require, we must still strive to do so, step by step. This strategy sets our ambition – we don't yet know how we will be able to achieve some of these aims, but we work in research and innovation and in our field if you don't set big goals even in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity, you will achieve nothing. We commit to developing and delivering plans that follow to substantiate our ambitions.

**Sir Ian Chapman**  
Chief Executive, UKRI



# Our Vision

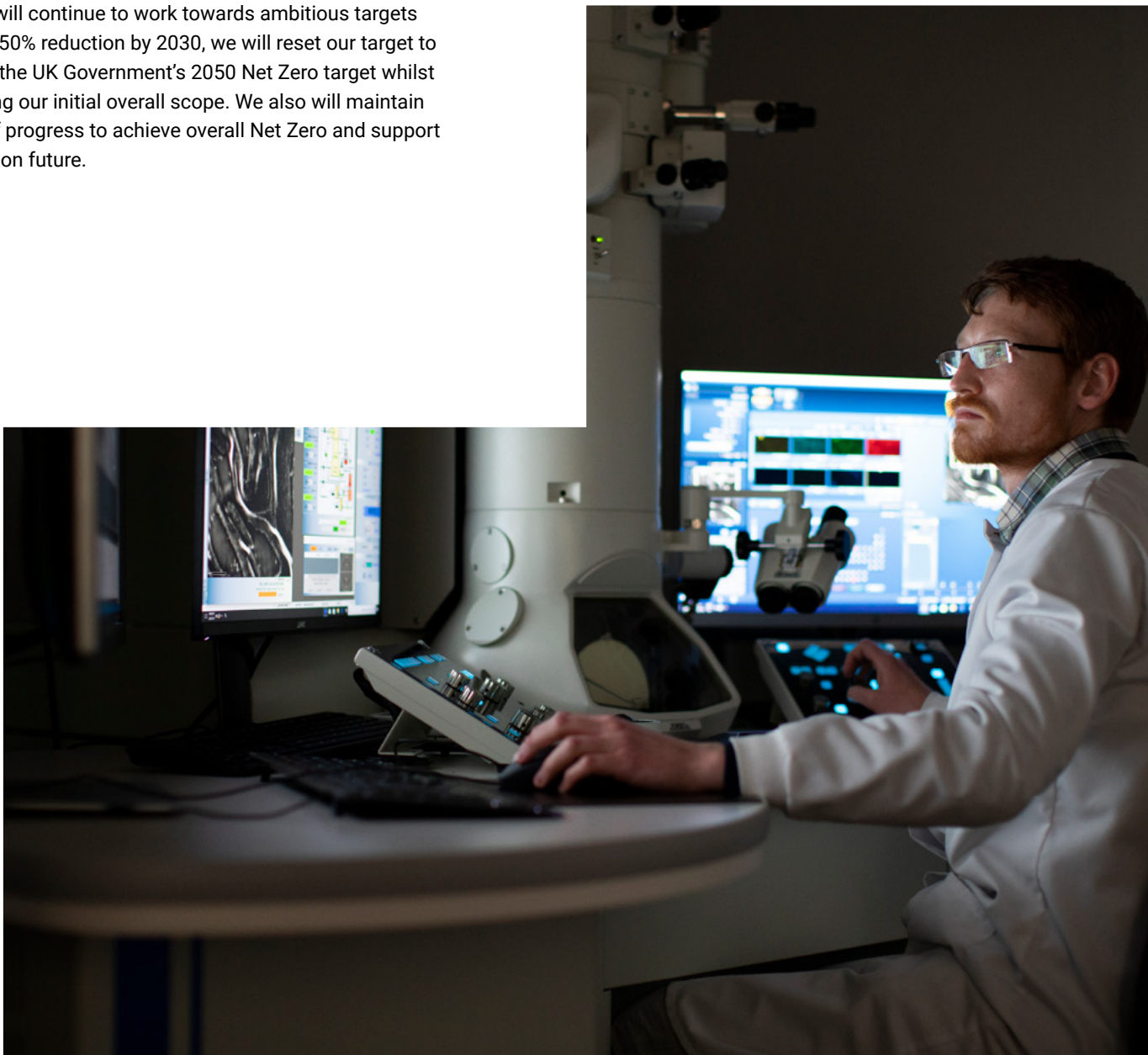
Our vision is to lead by example by embedding environmental sustainability across all aspects of research and innovation. UKRI aims to enable a thriving, climate-resilient future within healthy and biodiverse ecosystems, through the responsible use of resources, adoption of circular economy principles, protection of natural capital, and the sustainable procurement of materials.



# Introduction and Current Context

As an organisation we set an ambitious target of Net Zero 2040, including some of our international operations. This enabled us to develop plans to decarbonise and make significant progress but also highlighted complex areas where more enabling research is needed.

While we will continue to work towards ambitious targets such as a 50% reduction by 2030, we will reset our target to align with the UK Government's 2050 Net Zero target whilst maintaining our initial overall scope. We also will maintain our rate of progress to achieve overall Net Zero and support a low-carbon future.



UKRI's focus will expand to the delivery of other priorities highlighted in this strategy. Each of the priorities highlighted in this strategy has targets set out, the delivery of which is reflected with a detailed Action Plan. Strengthened governance arrangement will ensure oversight of the organisation's progress to our targets.

UKRI's Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2020-2025 laid a strong foundation to meet the urgent demands of the climate emergency that UKRI-funded researchers continue to identify and describe. This first five-year strategy was an enabler for important and ongoing programmes across the organisation and sector. These included, but are not limited to:

- The development of a transformation programme for the UKRI owned and operated research facilities to modern, climate-resilient, and low-emission facilities that enable and attract world-leading science.
- Established a 'carbon reduction fund' that enabled the detailed transition planning but also increase of renewable energy at our sites.
- Incorporated environmental sustainability in our executive leadership's responsibilities.
- Completion of biodiversity surveys across our facilities and implementation of plans to improve biodiversity.
- Achieved a 33% reduction of our operational emissions compared to baseline 2017/18.
- Achieved significant reductions of overall business travel (24% compared to baseline 2017/18), in particular from domestic UK flights (reduction of 54% of emissions to baseline year 2017/18).
- Achieved a reduction of overall waste produced by our operations by 15% and less than 5% of the waste is going to landfill with 70% of our waste being recycled or reused.
- UKRI's contribution to the development of the UK Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice, of which UKRI is now a signatory.

We have achieved much over the last five years, in particular, building the foundations for delivering UKRI's ambitions to be a [world-class organisation with world-class places](#), but we have also met challenges that resulted in some of the targets of our first strategy being delivered late.

Our commitment as a signatory to the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice shall provide focus and direction for us to work with and align with the sector moving forward.



# 1. Organisational Leadership

## Objective:

Visible and credible leadership and ambition for environmental sustainability at all levels within UKRI and externally within the national and international Research & Innovation (R&I) community.

All UKRI employees, including senior leaders, will demonstrate active commitment to sustainability, and in doing so be role models for the sector and beyond. Employees will be expected to take environmental sustainability considerations into account when delivering their roles.

Everybody matters and everybody can and should contribute. To support colleagues to embed environmental sustainability, we will deliver training to improve environmental literacy and will enable and support the sharing of knowledge and good practice within our organisation and across the R&I sector. UKRI will regularly communicate sustainability progress through impactful stories, inspiring employees, clarifying expectations, and celebrating collective achievement.

UKRI will demonstratively showcase positive action from individuals, teams and organisations from within and outside UKRI and proactively engage with such leaders to share good practice and support the wider sector in meeting the challenges of environmentally sustainable R&I practice.

As a key national asset for R&I, UKRI will proactively develop ways to organise and validate community knowledge using UKRI's research and stakeholder wealth of information, to create an easily searchable and trustworthy resource that researchers will feel confident in building into their R&I practice. UKRI will continue to collaborate with national and international funders and research organisations to ensure the resource is relevant, effective and sustainable.

## Ambition:

2026

Establish a biennial sustainability award to recognise exceptional contributions to delivering this strategy and share knowledge.

2027

Implement training on responsibilities under the Concordat.

Design, develop and transfer the knowledge platform (SPARKHub) to a host for launch.

# SPARKHUB

Is a resource to support the research & innovation community with practical solutions on improving the sustainability of their work. Short for Sustainable Practice and Research Knowledge Hub, it provides certification and guidance and is supported by multiple research funders.

## 2. Sustainable Infrastructure

### Objective:

UKRI will continue to transform our owned and operated infrastructure to be low impact on the environment, efficient, climate adapted and resilient, and to support biodiversity. We will set out conditions for any new infrastructure to be designed and delivered with the same criteria.

UKRI will follow the government mandate for the reduction of our emissions and environmental targets from our owned and operated facilities. We will deliver a controlled reduction of carbon emissions arriving at a 50% reduction by 2030 based on the assumptions shown below.

UKRI's diversity of research expertise and specialist knowledge offers opportunities to harness research outcomes to improve our own facilities and those of the sector as a whole. UKRI will use its R&I outcomes to support the progress on the transformation of our existing facilities.

Funding of any new infrastructure investments will require minimising operational costs and exploitation of natural resources, as well as being capable of withstanding the increasing impacts of climate change for the duration of their operations.

UKRI infrastructure covers more than buildings. Some of our scientific equipment and computing infrastructure are significant contributors to the consumption of energy and other natural resources such as water. Future investments and procurement of such equipment must consider these impacts as an element of the assessments, as well as their impact on the emissions trajectory of UKRI.

### Ambition:

2030

UKRI to achieve a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from our direct scope 1, 2 and 3 (business travel) compared to a 2017-18 baseline.

### Assumptions:

- Continued decarbonisation of the UK power grid as per UK government Clean Power 2030 Action Plan targets
- UK electricity emission factors applied to some overseas consumption
- New facilities being designed and built must achieve Net Zero for scopes 1 & 2

## 3. Supply Chain & Resource Management

### Objective:

Reduce the environmental impact of the resources UKRI utilises, including improving efficiency of use and methods of disposal.

Carbon emissions from our Scope 3 - supply chain exceed the emissions from our own operations (scope 1, 2 and 3 business travel)<sup>1</sup>.

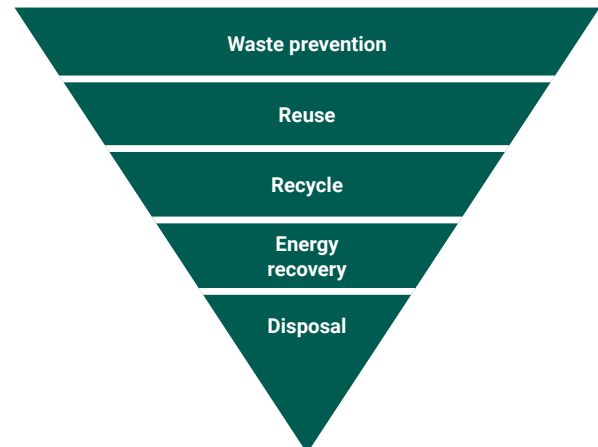
UKRI's supply chain spreads over a wide range of sectors and capabilities. With the development of our Responsible Procurement Charter, UKRI has taken the first steps towards more environmentally sustainable procurement. We recognise that sustainability can relate to many different considerations including the quality and lifespan of products, how they are packaged, whether they can be re-used, repaired, or recycled, and delivery methods. UKRI considers all these elements as part of a "value for money" definition.

Collaboration amongst colleagues within UKRI and the wider sector must promote circular economy principles, particularly extending the life of research equipment and consider increasing use of refurbished/re-built equipment. Stronger focus will be on reduction of single use of materials by implementing an effective waste hierarchy.

UKRI will strengthen the expected environmental standards in our contracts, to align with our environmental sustainability ambitions, whilst enabling organisational benefits and efficiencies for UKRI.

Supply Chain engagement will allow to exchange knowledge, good-practice, and a better understanding of the respective needs. This will result in the improvement of products and services including the reduction of natural resources, waste reduction, and more benefits.

UKRI will improve the methods of measuring the environmental impacts of our supply chain to find meaningful ways of assessing the impact of the actions we take.



### Ambition:

**2030**

Mandated reporting assurance tool for all UKRI suppliers.

Establish an annual reporting and tracking for supply chain emissions.

<sup>1</sup> Based on UKRI Spend, applying SIC based emissions factors, determined by DEFRA.



# 4. Investments & Collaborations

**Objective:**

Use UKRI leverage as a funder and collaborator to drive environmentally sustainable principles in research and innovation practice.

UKRI’s support of and investment in the R&I sector represents the overwhelming majority of our emissions<sup>2</sup>. This provides leverage and opportunity for wide-ranging collaboration and coordination of efforts to reduce the environmental impact of research and innovation.

UKRI will improve the net benefit of research by making environmentally and resource-conscious decisions in the R&I that we undertake and fund, whilst maintaining research excellence.

Consultation internally and with other funders will lead to aligned expectations on environmental sustainability in funding applications and assessments while balancing the burden of administration with positive impact.

This will include the requirement to share equipment funded (or partially funded) by UKRI and to provide meaningful access for the wider science community as well as extending the lifecycle of equipment.

UKRI will ensure that our aspirations and ambitions for environmental sustainability are reflected in our approach to new funding schemes, collaborations and partnerships.

UKRI will work with our current investments, collaborators and partners to learn from their best practice and share our experience and expertise. A collective approach with strong support for each other will move the sector faster and is aligned with the spirit of the Concordat for Environmental Sustainability of Research & Innovation Practice to which UKRI is a signatory.

**Ambition:**

2029	Develop generic requirement for environmental sustainability measures that are appropriate for all UKRI investments across the R&I sector.
2030	Roll-out of SPARKHub assessment tool for environmental sustainability measures in research calls.

<sup>2</sup>Based on report, dated August 2024. Open grant calls excluded, RE block grants included.

## 5. Climate-Conscious Travel

### Objective:

Reduce business travel emissions while maintaining collaboration and outreach.

Meeting with academics, industry representatives and the public to collaborate and exchange knowledge is an important aspect of R&I activity. UKRI recognises the importance of travel for creating strong networks as well as for career development, but we also recognise the need to minimise travel via the most carbon-intensive modes. We will do this by implementing the travel hierarchy which ranks travel options from the least to most carbon-intensive, with air travel permissible as the last resort.

UKRI will review its policies to promote and support climate-conscious travel, increasing the drive to consider the value of in-person vs virtual participation at meetings and conferences and aiming to align requirements with those of other funders. The intention is to use climate-conscious travel principles to minimise travel, ensure any travel undertaken uses the least carbon-intensive mode available, and to raise the threshold above which flying is considered appropriate.

UKRI sets out to reduce business travel emissions with a focus on reduction of emission-intensive transport (flights, particularly short-haul and business/first class and car travel) aligned with the required reductions through the Greening Government Commitments (GGC).

By working with our travel providers UKRI will provide better information for climate-conscious travel decisions during the booking process and review existing policies to ensure clarity and parity across all parts of the organisation. Healthy and environmentally sustainable commuting approaches (walking, cycling) will be promoted.

UKRI will use accessible and transparent data to inform decision-making and/or adjust behaviours.

### Ambition:

2027	Incorporation of emissions information during the travel booking process, international rail travel bookable through travel provider.
2029	Policy reviews on UKRI business travel and commute, policies regulating travel in relation to grants and coordination with requirements by other funders.

## 6. Environmental Impact and Reporting Data

UKRI publishes its performance on the environmental sustainability of its operations in the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA). The data included in the ARA follows the HM Treasury and GGC requirements on reporting but also includes data outside of the scope of each, where material, to ensure we are fully transparent about UKRI's environmental impact.

Executive boards and committees in UKRI will be regularly informed of the UKRI environmental performance against GGC targets and the ambitions of this strategy.

Environmental risks to UKRI activities and strategic priorities will be assessed and highlighted in the TCFD (Taskforce for Climate-related Financial Disclosure) reporting.

UKRI will continue to be fully transparent regarding our environmental performance and will provide more detailed and up-to-date information via alternative channels, such as the UKRI website. To demonstrate progress against the commitments in this strategy, we will also provide regular updates on the delivery of the associated action plan, publish case studies, successes and failures, and our work with the wider R&I community, to share knowledge and experiences.

## 7. Governance and Implementation

The UKRI Chief Executive is ultimately accountable for environmental sustainability within UKRI, with the Audit Risk and Assurance Committee supporting the UKRI Board on performance and risk issues in relation to the delivery of this strategy. Our Executive Chairs and corporate Directors are responsible for the delivery of the strategy established in our Integrated Governance Risk and Assurance Framework (IGRAF).

To embed the ambitions and targets set out in this strategy, UKRI will use the Senior Leadership Group to build an organisation-wide, collaborative and cohesive approach.

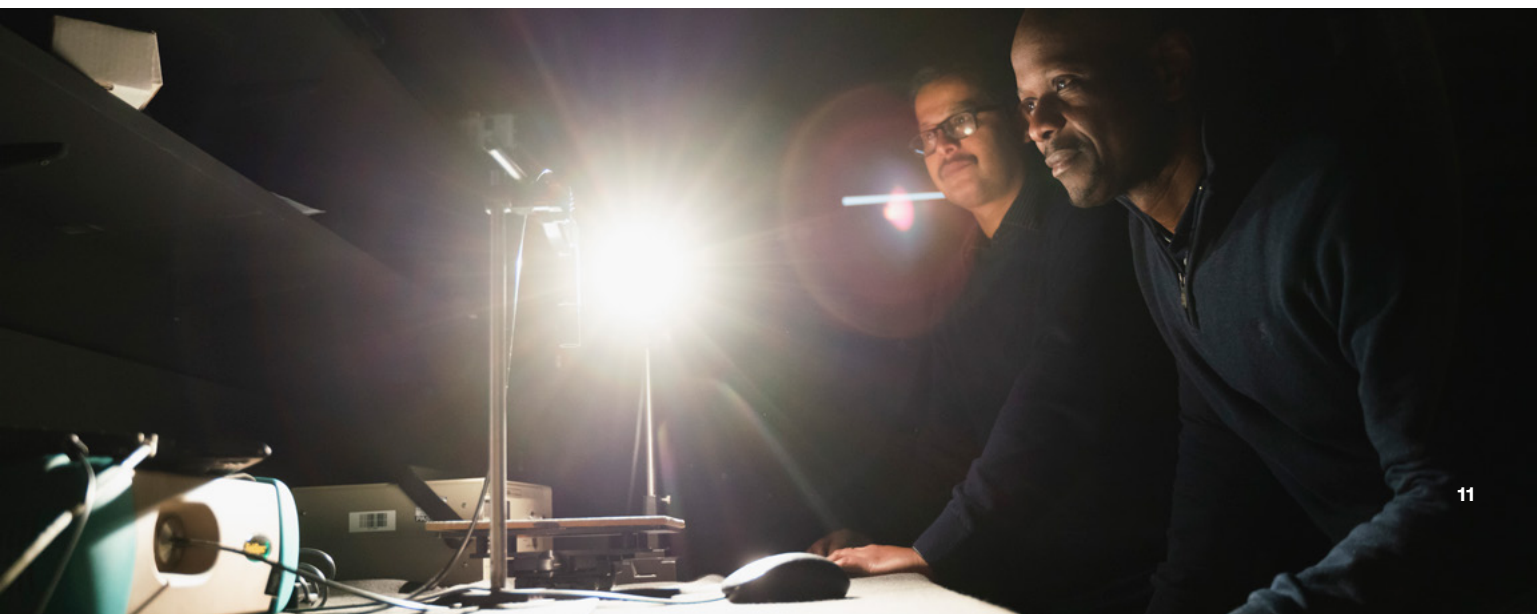
Delivery of the strategy will be coordinated by the UKRI Environmental Sustainability Programme with input from and driving implementation by the Senior Leadership Group.

UKRI will reach beyond UKRI, learning from good-practice, and enhancing collaboration on environmentally sustainable practice across the sector to harness the expertise and experience that is available to us.

UKRI will publish progress on the strategy through the Annual Report and Accounts and via an annual impact report.

This UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy is delivered using the UKRI Environmental Sustainability action plan. This plan will frequently be reviewed and updated to ensure an agile approach to changing environments and circumstances.

The UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy will be reviewed in 2030 and set out detailed goals for 2031–2035.



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