

SQA Sustainability Report 2020–2021



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SQA is committed to using plain English. We will try to make our publications as easy and straightforward to understand as we can, and will, try to avoid all unnecessary jargon. If there's any language in this document that you feel is hard to understand, or could be improved, please write to Editor, Editorial Team, at the Glasgow address or email: editor@sqa.org.uk.

Introduction

SQA is a leading non-departmental public body operating in Scotland, the UK and internationally, providing products and services in skills, training, and education. SQA recognises that it has a responsibility to the environment beyond legal and regulatory requirements.

We work in an environmentally responsible way, minimising our impact on the environment and leading other organisations and the communities in which we operate by example.

We are committed to reducing our environmental impact and continually improving our environmental performance as an integral part of our business strategy and procedures, targeting a reduction in emissions towards net-zero by 2045, in line with Scottish Government targets.

We achieve this through the three pillars of our environmental strategy:

- ◆ continuous improvement
maximise opportunities to reduce environmental impact across all operational activities.
- ◆ engagement and influence
positively influence and engage with colleagues
- ◆ reporting and governance
collect, collate, and publish sustainability data to ensure accurate, valuable reporting

Under the reporting and governance pillar, and as part of our commitment to supporting the national climate change duties, we submit an annual report to the Scottish Government on our performance in this area.

This report summarises and provides commentary on the data provided in SQA's Public Sector Climate Change Duties Report for 2020–21 (please see Appendix 1: Statutory duties) and gives an outline of other information about SQA's environmental activities for the year 2020–21.

Governance

The Director of People has overall responsibility for environmental management within SQA. The Head of Facilities reports to the Executive Management Team and Board of Management on environmental matters, under which the Facilities Manager ensures that the organisation works towards the corporate environmental objectives (please see Appendix 2: Governance structure).

The Health, Safety and Environmental Officer is the focal point for environmental issues and facilitates the Environmental Working Group, which contributes to environmental projects and initiatives.

SQA's Environmental Policy clearly specifies SQA's aims and objectives for the management of environmental resources and outlines the roles of senior managers in the achievement of environmental initiatives and targets. The decision-making structure around environmental matters is not formally laid out but is determined depending on context, subject and impact.

In SQA's Strategic Plan, one of the key outcomes is 'We have a sustainable business operating model that is appropriately resourced to deliver our remit now and, in the future'. One of the deliverables relating to this outcome is to 'Develop SQA's Environmental Impact Strategy'. The strategy has been developed and was launched in August 2021.

The Health, Safety and Environmental Officer compiles monthly emissions figures and progress against SQA's emissions targets and these are communicated to the organisation in a quarterly summary.

Environmental Working Group

SQA has an active and prominent Environmental Working Group (EWG) which meets quarterly.

The EWG is chaired by the Health, Safety and Environmental Officer, and includes the Head of Appointee Management, Facilities Manager, and colleague representatives from across the business.

At the quarterly meetings, any relevant sustainability matters are discussed:

- ◆ emissions data — trends and changes
- ◆ legislative changes
- ◆ upcoming local/national/global campaigns and initiatives
- ◆ volunteering opportunities

EWG members are encouraged to demonstrate environmentally positive behaviours in the workplace and take the lead on campaigns and initiatives that raise awareness about sustainability.

This year, two significant tasks the committee contributed to were the review of our environmental policy and development of our environmental strategy.

Looking back at 2020–21

COVID-19

It is important to consider the context for the changes in our sustainability performance over 2020–21, which are detailed in this report. COVID-19 presented significant challenges to sustainability, for example, reverting to disposable packaging and the requirement for widespread PPE. However, it also provided the opportunity to drastically accelerate our move to a more sustainable way of working.

Measures that we would have liked to take, but anticipated would take a while to implement, have been quickly introduced as a matter of necessity to enable home working. SQA invested in new IT equipment and introduced video conferencing as the default for meetings. Business travel all but disappeared and commuting was not required. Energy, waste and water usage were all reduced.

We recognise that office-based emissions have not just disappeared, and that many have been moved to our colleagues' homes (please see Figure 1 Yearly CO₂ Statistics). We have accounted for this in our statistics, using the recommended metric for public sector bodies (please see Appendix 3: Figures and Appendix 4: Emissions factors and formulas).

We are confident that many of the measures implemented during COVID-19 will continue once restrictions are fully lifted.

Carbon emissions

A baseline figure on which to compare carbon emissions was set in 2013–14. This was 1,643 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent (tCO₂e). At that time, we set a target to maintain emissions at or under 2013–14 levels.

In the first six years there was an overall reduction of 38% from the baseline figure.

During the reporting year of 2020–21, there was a further 22% decrease on the baseline figure because of the changes in working practices forced by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we are required to account for a proportion of the emissions incurred by colleagues working from home, in line with guidance for completing the Public Sector Climate Change Duties Report for 2020–21. The homeworking emissions equated to 281 tCO₂e and reduced the decrease in 2020–21 from 2019–20 to 7%.

Homeworker emissions had not previously been included in our figures as the numbers were very low and problematic to quantify accurately, but as there has been guidance issued on how to calculate these for this year, they are included in Appendix 3: Figures. We intend to continue to capture this data for future years.

Flight emissions were not included within the scope of our carbon emissions between 2013–14 and 2019–20. They were considered a business necessity with no alternative available and were reported separately.

The decision was made to bring emissions from flights back into the scope of our carbon footprint from 2020–21 onwards. However, this has coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and the almost total reduction in business travel, particularly flights. Flight emissions decreased from 254.6 tCO₂e in 2019–20 to 0.8 tCO₂e in 2020–21.

We have surpassed our total emissions targets for 2020–21. Please see Figure 1 Yearly CO₂ Statistics, below, and Table 1 Figures in Appendix 3: Figures for the breakdown.

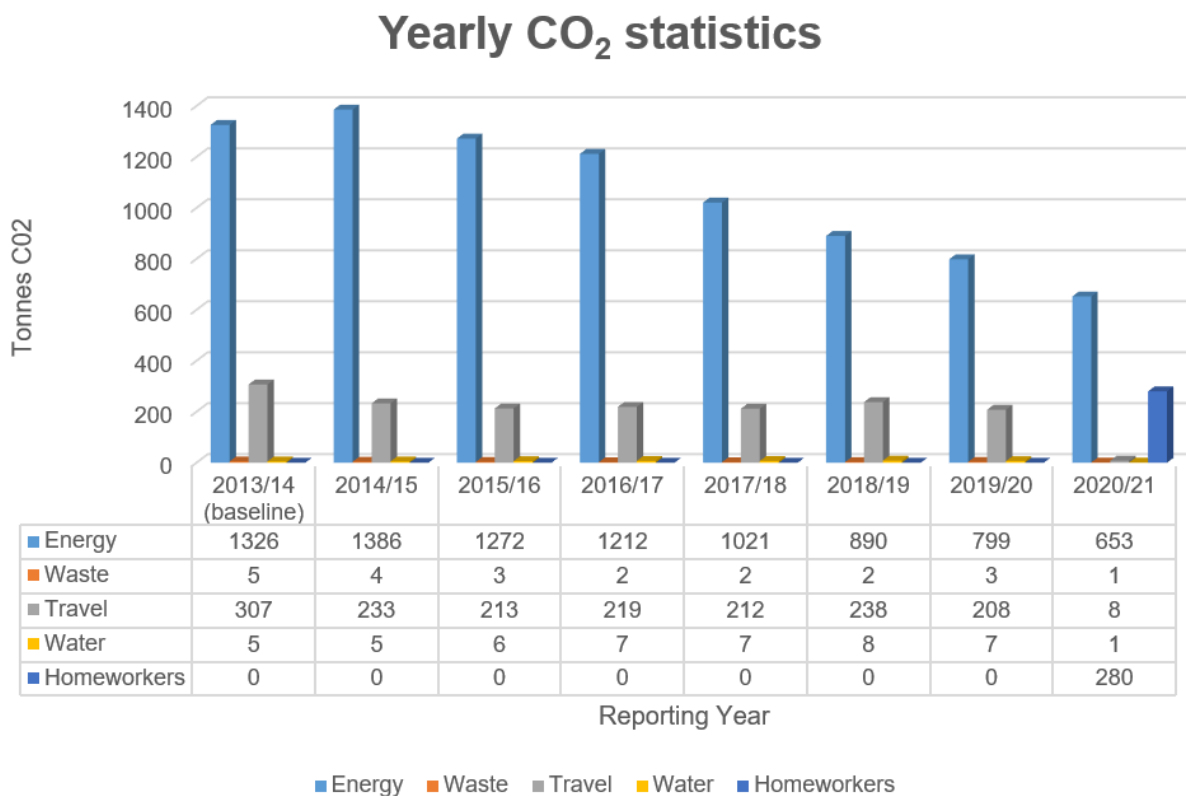


Figure 1 Yearly CO₂ statistics

We have introduced a new metric which shows our carbon footprint per employee. This is obtained by dividing our overall emissions by the full-time equivalent (FTE) figure, to get a per head figure (please see Appendix 3: Figures). This will reflect the influence of fluctuations in staff numbers on our emission levels.

Scope

Emissions reporting convention is to split emissions into three categories depending on the source of the emissions.

Reporting of those emissions from scopes 1 and 2 is mandatory. It is up to the individual organisation to decide what scope 3 emissions they include in their overall scope.

Our in-scope emissions include:

- ◆ Scope 1: direct combustive emissions — gas and fleet vehicles
- ◆ Scope 2: indirect emissions from purchased energy/heat — electricity
- ◆ Scope 3: supply-chain emissions — waste, water, business travel

We include waste, water, and travel in our scope 3 emissions, following the guidance issued to public sector bodies. We recognise that we have control over these aspects. Most other supply-chain emissions are difficult to control and quantify and are usually already counted by the supplier in their own operational emissions reporting.

We are considering how best to calculate commuting and homeworking emissions so that we can include those in our future scope and emissions data.

Benchmarking

We have compared our emissions data for previous reporting years to those of a selection of other public sector bodies. We have used the data from the climate change reports covering 2019–20 for this exercise as the figures from 2020–21 are not yet publicly available.

While all public sector organisations are supposed to use similar methods for calculating their emissions data, there can be variations in the collection methods and, as previously mentioned, the extent of scope 3 sources included in an organisation’s overall scope.

Nevertheless, the data shows that in comparison to our peers our emissions per full-time employee are higher than average (please see Appendix 3: Table 2 Public sector emissions benchmarking). We will investigate the reasons for this, identify where action can be taken to address the disparity, and monitor progress.

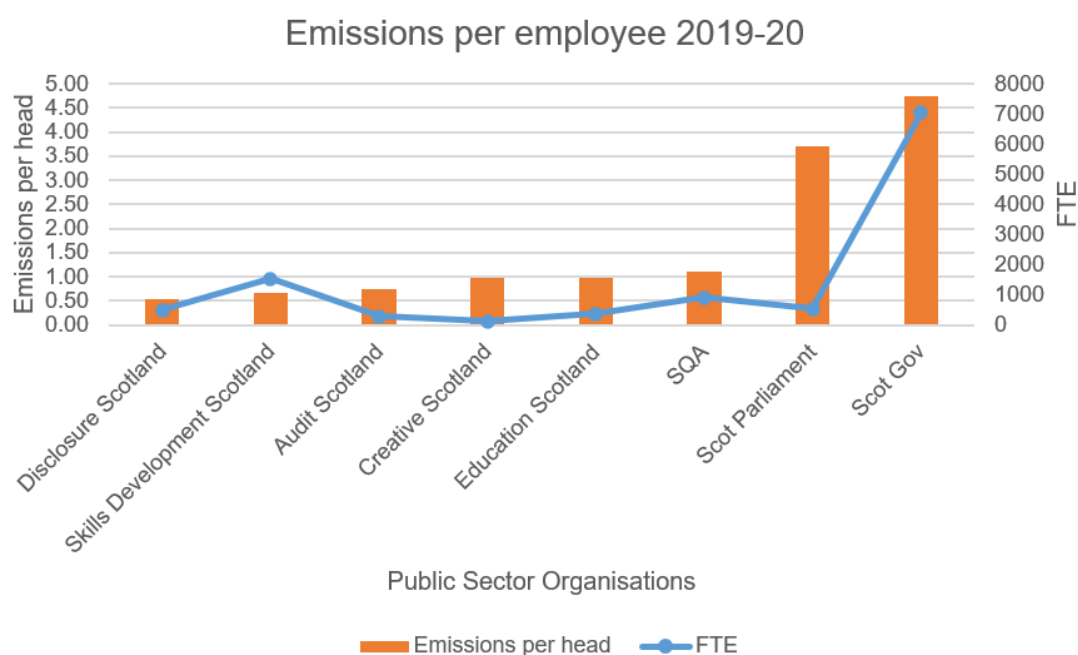


Figure 2 Public sector emissions benchmarking

Management and strategy

In 2020-21 we reviewed our Environmental Policy. This process included benchmarking with other public sector organisations and consulting with the EWG and senior management colleagues.

We also developed a corresponding Environmental Strategy (please see Appendix 5: Environmental Strategy). The strategy maps out what we want to achieve, and how. It specifies our objectives and details the activities we will do to achieve those objectives. It assists in establishing priorities, which helps us make decisions about what we do and when.

Adaptation

A qualitative risk assessment of threats to the organisation from the current and projected future climate has been undertaken. This allowed us to identify and evaluate the climate-related risks which may impact on our operations and ascertain the controls we have in place to mitigate these risks.

The current controls have been judged as sufficient, and an annual review will ensure most up-to-date information on projected climate and potential threats are considered at regular intervals. An in-depth review is scheduled for 2024.

In the event of any climate-related incidents our business continuity planning procedures would be invoked.

Articles, campaigns, and events

Several health and safety campaigns and initiatives were run during the year.

- ◆ Environmental Tips
 - Food Waste — tips on reducing food waste
 - Composting — how to start composting at home
 - Get Growing — how to start a kitchen garden
 - Home Energy — how to save energy with small changes
 - Entertainment — how to entertain ourselves without the use of electronics
 - Kitchen — how to do tasks and use appliances more efficiently
- ◆ World Bee Day — providing information on the environmental benefit of all types of bees
- ◆ Climate Week — articles and directory detailing online events and resources published
- ◆ Great British Bird Watch — how to identify birds, report their numbers, and encourage them to visit your area
- ◆ the UN's International Year of Fruits and Vegetables — raised awareness of fruit and vegetables in terms of both health benefits and environmental impacts of food waste
- ◆ Food Waste Action Week — articles and activities to 'wake the nation up' to the environmental consequences of wasting food

- ◆ Global Recycling Day — introducing recycling as the ‘seventh resource’ which can be used again and again
- ◆ Earth Hour — encouraging colleagues to turn off non-essential lights for one hour as a symbol for their desire for action on climate change

Some examples of campaign materials can be found in Appendix 6: Campaigns.

Achievements

Our Cycle Friendly Employer award was renewed for three years by Cycling Scotland at both Lowden and Optima (please see Appendix 7: Cycle Friendly Employer Awards).

The awards recognise our efforts to increase staff cycle rates, encourage workplace cycling and providing facilities to make travelling by bike easier.

Even with the vast majority of colleagues working from home, there are many clear benefits from cycling, not least the environmental benefits.



Looking ahead to 2021–22

COVID-19

As the pandemic persists, government guidance has been to continue working from home, where possible.

The implications of this on our emissions are that we expect lower than usual figures across the board, with gradual increases as we begin to return to the offices.

Business travel, energy, waste, and water are reduced and, while we predict a slow increase, we anticipate that these will all remain lower than previous years.

As homeworking is continuing indefinitely, we will follow a recognised methodology to track the associated emissions, which we expect to remain high. We are involved in ongoing discussions with other public sector bodies and the Scottish Government to agree a standard for calculating these on an ongoing basis.

Top 5 priorities

These are the top five activities that we intend to focus on, as mentioned in the climate change report:

1. Meet or exceed relevant legislative requirements.
2. Raise awareness of issues around climate change amongst staff to allow them to make informed decisions both at work and away from work.
3. Implement and communicate the environmental strategy, and carbon reduction targets.
4. Look at operational activities and make changes to reduce our environmental impact.
5. Promote ways to reduce environmental impact using a diverse range of topics.

Smarter Working

SQA's Smarter Working Programme is enabling us to rethink how we work in the future.

Remote working has posed various challenges for all of us, but it has also provided us with the opportunity to improve the flexibility and choice of where and when colleagues work. Consequently, we can make better use office spaces and minimise the need for business travel and commuting.

To quantify the environmental impact of the Smarter Working Programme, it will be necessary to monitor not only homeworking emissions but also changes in commuting habits. We will need to survey colleagues to gauge their average weekly distance, and take into account their methods of travel before the pandemic, and looking forward.

Procurement

As part of the procurement process, SQA stipulates that suppliers must meet set environmental standards. Where appropriate, suppliers are evaluated on these criteria as part of the tender evaluation process.

Incorporating sustainability into SQA's Procurement Policy aligns with SQA's Environmental Policy and highlights the importance of sustainable procurement opportunities:

'SQA is committed to develop additional opportunities for SQA to contribute to the achievement of SQA's environmental objectives by:

- ◆ *'developing environmentally friendly alternatives to the goods or services specified*
- ◆ *adopting sustainable processes, goods and services*
- ◆ *extending sustainability improvements throughout the supply chain*
- ◆ *provide suppliers with feedback and assistance to improve their own sustainable performance'*

A member of the Procurement Team is joining EWG to help procurement collaboration towards achieving sustainability objectives.

Appointee Management

In 2021–22 we have made a commitment that all markers' meetings will take place remotely (these have previously been physical events). This will avoid appointees having to travel across Scotland which should see a significant reduction in impact on the environment and our carbon footprint.

In 2019 we carried out a pilot of remote markers' briefings with approximately 350 appointees involved which resulted in a saving of around 2,000 kg of CO₂. We anticipate this to significantly increase in 2021–22 where there will be approximately 7,000 appointees participating in markers' briefings.

Environmental impact assessment

We are in the early stages of developing a process that will require business areas to consider at the earliest stage the impact on sustainability and the environment when they are introducing or reviewing policies, projects, or procedures.

The assessment will ask how the policy might impact on the environment by considering positive or negative impacts on energy consumption, use of natural resources, pollution and nuisances, travel, sustainable procurement, waste production, water consumption, biodiversity, and climate change adaptation.

Campaigns and events

The following campaigns and initiatives are planned for 2021–22.

- ◆ Digital Spring Clean — encouraging colleagues to delete unused files, to reduce data storage emissions
- ◆ World Bee Day — annual event celebrating the importance of bees
- ◆ International Day for Biological Diversity — introduce SQA's biodiversity reporting
- ◆ Bike Week — encouraging cycling in an environmentally friendly context
- ◆ Climate Week — highlighting events, webinars, and resources for Climate Week
- ◆ Climate Fringe — highlighting events, webinars, and resources for Climate Fringe
- ◆ Recycle Week — annual reminder of recycling resources, and highlighting any changes
- ◆ International Day of Awareness on Food Loss and Waste Reduction — food waste reduction tips
- ◆ COP26 — explaining what the Conference of the Parties meeting is and why it's important
- ◆ Scottish Workplace Journey Challenge — a competition encouraging a sustainable commute
- ◆ Food Waste Action Week — food waste reduction tips
- ◆ Global Recycling Day — looking at the effects of our waste globally
- ◆ Earth Hour — encourages colleagues to turn off their non-essential lights for one hour as a symbol of their commitment to the planet

Appendix 1: Statutory duties

The **Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009** is a statutory framework for greenhouse gas emissions reductions in Scotland. Included within the Act are the following requirements on public bodies in the exercising of their functions:

- ◆ *Act in the way best calculated to contribute to delivery of Scotland's emissions reduction targets;*
- ◆ *Act in the way best calculated to deliver any statutory adaptation programme;*
- ◆ *Act in a way that it considers most sustainable.*

The **Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Order 2015** requires public bodies to report annually on compliance with the climate change duties.

The **Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020** duties are as follows:

- ◆ *where applicable, a target date for achieving zero direct emissions of greenhouse gases, or such other targets that demonstrate how the body is contributing to Scotland achieving its emissions reduction targets;*
- ◆ *where applicable, any targets for reducing indirect emissions of greenhouse gases;*
- ◆ *how the body aligns its spending plans and use of resources to contribute to reducing emissions and delivering its emissions reduction targets;*
- ◆ *how the body will publish, or otherwise make available, its progress towards achieving its emissions reduction targets;*
- ◆ *how the body is contributing to Scotland's Adaptation Programme.*

These new reporting requirements support the priorities identified for climate change governance, management and strategy identified as part of this Sustainability Report and given in the previous section.

Appendix 2: Governance structure

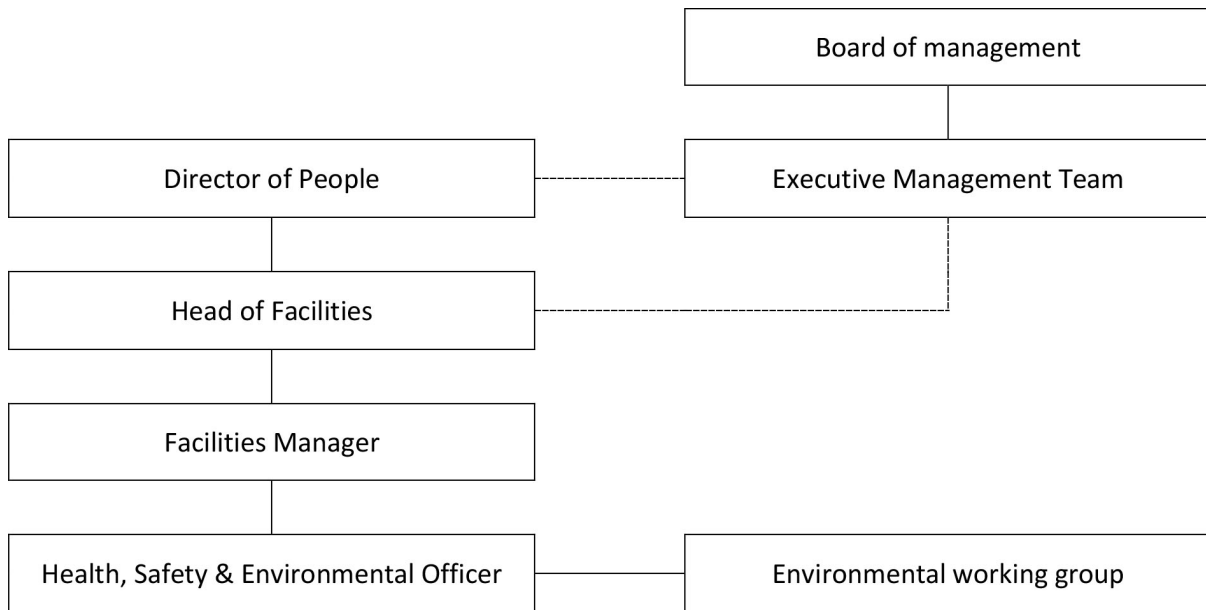


Figure 3 Governance structure

Appendix 3: Figures

Year	Gas and electricity tCO ₂ e	Business travel tCO ₂ e	Water tCO ₂ e	Waste tCO ₂ e	Home tCO ₂ e	Total tCO ₂ e	Change from baseline	tCO ₂ e per FTE
2013–14	1,326	307	5	5	19	1,643	-	2.09
2014–15	1,386	233	5	4	22	1,628	-1%	1.92
2015–16	1,272	213	6	3	16	1,494	-9%	1.78
2016–17	1,212	219	7	2	19	1,440	-12%	1.71
2017–18	1,021	212	7	2	22	1,242	-24%	1.35
2018–19	890	238	8	2	21	1,138	-31%	1.22
2019–20	799	208	7	3	17	1,015	-38%	1.12
2020–21	652	8	1	1	280	942	-43%	1.01

Note: Homeworking emissions not included until 2020–21.

Table 1 Figures (tCO₂e)

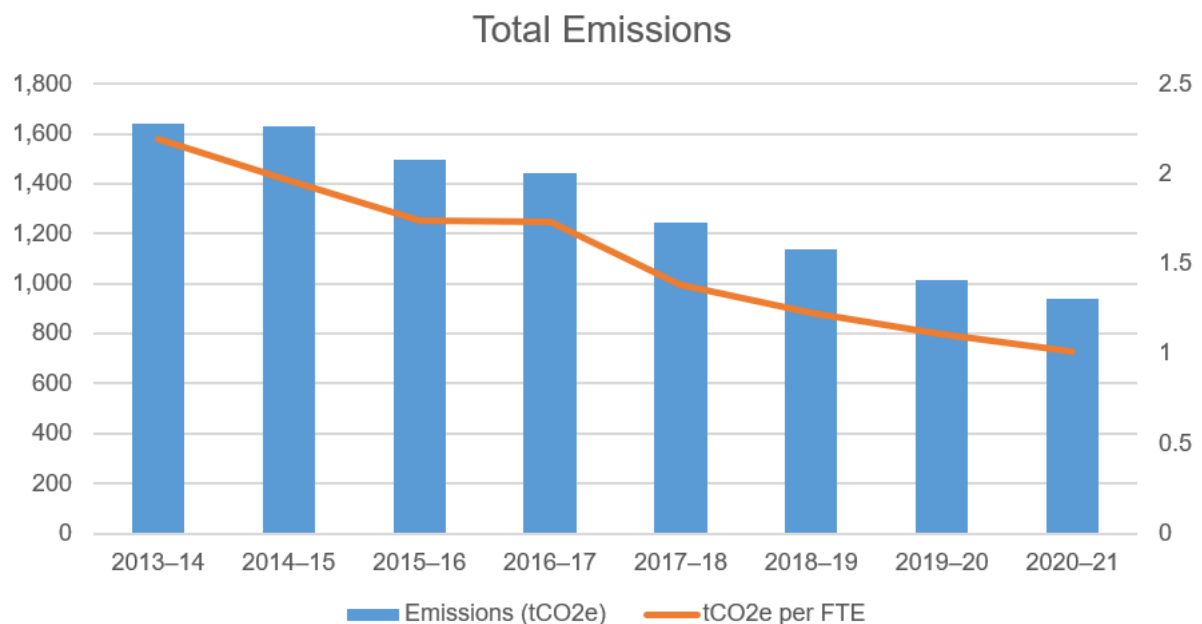


Figure 4 Total emissions

Public sector organisations	FTE	Baseline year	Baseline emissions	2019-20 Emissions	Emissions per head
Disclosure Scotland	495	2015/16	482	269	0.54
Skills Development Scotland	1529	2016/17	1315	1006	0.66
Audit Scotland	291	2014/15	343	215	0.74
Creative Scotland	129	2014/15	224	125	0.97
Education Scotland	369	2014/15	908	360.92	0.98
SQA	908.31	2013/14	1643	1014.1	1.12
Scot Parliament	543.6	2005/06	4377	2016	3.71
Scot Gov	7,049	2009/10	41,955	33,386	4.74

Table 2 Public sector emissions benchmarking (tCO₂e)

Appendix 4: Emissions factors and formulas

Each year the UK Government releases new emissions factors which are used to convert usage figures to the equivalent CO₂ emissions.

Some examples of frequently used emissions factors and formulae for calculating emissions are given below:

Natural gas emissions (tCO₂e)

$$= \frac{\text{Gas consumption (kWh)} \times 0.18387 \text{ (kg CO}_2\text{e/kWh)}}{1000}$$

Rail emissions (tCO₂e)

$$= \frac{\text{Distance travelled (km)} \times 0.03694 \text{ (kg CO}_2\text{e/km)}}{1000}$$

Homeworker emissions (tCO₂e)

$$= \text{Full Time Equivalent} \times \% \text{ home working} \times 0.3 \text{ (tCO}_2\text{e/FTE)}$$

Emission factor examples

Emission source	Units	Emission factor 2019	Emission factor 2020	Units
Grid electricity (generation + T&D)	kWh	0.2773	0.25319	kg CO ₂ e/kWh
Natural gas	kWh	0.18385	0.18387	kg CO ₂ e/kWh
Water — supply	m ³	0.344	0.344	kg CO ₂ e/m ³
Water — treatment	m ³	0.708	0.708	kg CO ₂ e/m ³
Refuse municipal to landfill	tonnes	586.5	437.4	kgCO ₂ e/tonne
Paper & board (mixed) recycling	tonnes	21.4	21.3	kgCO ₂ e/tonne
WEEE (mixed) recycling	tonnes	21.4	21.3	kgCO ₂ e/tonne
Glass recycling	tonnes	21.4	21.3	kgCO ₂ e/tonne
Rail — national rail	passenger km	0.04115	0.03694	kg CO ₂ e/passenger km
Car — diesel — average (unknown engine size)	km	0.17336	0.16844	kgCO ₂ e/km
Car — petrol — average (unknown engine size)	km	0.18084	0.1743	kgCO ₂ e/km
Taxi — black cab	passenger km	0.21176	0.20793	kg CO ₂ e/passenger km


Table 3 Emissions factors examples

Appendix 5: Environmental Strategy




Figure 5 SQA Environmental Strategy 2021–24


Appendix 6: Campaigns



Conscious Clothing Consumers
Fashion – The industry that needs a makeover We all...




Climate Week 2020 - Directory
We have a lot going on for Climate Week this year,...




Carbon Emissions Food Labelling
Food production accounts for a quarter of the plane...

Figure 6 Environmental Campaign Examples



Environmental Tip of the Day - Friday 1 May
Following nicely on from our Food Waste Tips last week, let's dovetail into Home Composting.



Environmental Tip of the Day - Thursday 23 April
With everyone working from home there are environmental benefits from the greatly reduced commuting

Figure 7 Environmental Tip of the Day examples

Appendix 7: Cycle Friendly Employer Awards

**Cycling
Friendly**

Employer



This is to certify that

Scottish Qualifications Authority

Lowden

Has achieved

Cycling Friendly Employer Award

Awarded
09/20

Valid until
09/23


Keith Irving
Chief Executive

**Cycling Friendly,
a Cycling Scotland programme**

Scottish charity SC029760

cycling.scot

Funded by



Figure 8 Cycling Friendly Employer Award Lowden

**Cycling
Friendly**

Employer



This is to certify that

Scottish Qualifications Authority

The Optima Building

Has achieved

Cycling Friendly Employer Award

Awarded
09/20

Valid until
09/23


Keith Irving
Chief Executive

**Cycling Friendly,
a Cycling Scotland programme**

Scottish charity SC029760

cycling.scot

Funded by



Figure 9 Cycling Friendly Employer Award Optima