

SUSTAINABILITY ESSENTIALS

No. 3 – What is Net Zero?

What does Net Zero mean?

The term Net Zero is regularly used throughout the media, the environmental and sustainability sectors but what does it mean?

It is widely accepted that human activity resulting in emissions of greenhouse gases are causing our climate to change. 2023 was the warmest year on record and the number of extreme weather events are increasing around the globe. To address this there has been widespread adoption of Net Zero commitments by a broad range of countries, states, cities and organisations.

Achieving Net Zero means that levels of greenhouse gases will have been reduced to as little as possible. Any remaining emissions will be balanced by removing residual emissions from atmosphere using carbon sinks, such as tree planting.

What has the UK committed to?

The UK became the first major economy to pass legislation committing the country to achieving Net Zero emissions by 2050.

This means the country will reduce net greenhouse emissions by 100% (relative to 2019 levels) by the middle of the 21st century.

What about the University of Reading?

We have an agreed target to reduce our carbon emissions to Net Zero by the end of July 2030, which is 20 years ahead of the rest of the UK.

We are currently rewriting our Net Zero carbon plan to broaden the scope 3 criteria to include areas such as procurement emissions.

What is our progress?

The University has a good track record of reducing its operational carbon emissions. In 2016 we met our 35% carbon reduction target (compared to the 2008/09 baseline). In July 2023 we achieved a 61% reduction, which far exceeds our July 2024 target of 57.5% and in 21/22 we made the largest reductions of any research intensive University.

Did you know?

There are now Net Zero targets covering around 90% of global emissions, but with many variations of deadlines and scope.

Visit our [Policies, Strategies and Reports](#) and [Energy](#) pages for more information.

