Nottingham Trent University

NETpositive FUTURES

Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool

Action Research Project:
6-Month Progress Report

Version 2, May 2024

Contents

1. Summary

The Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool (the 'Tool') Action Research Project (ARP) joins together over 100 sustainability and procurement professionals from 32 different UK universities to explore how the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool can drive sustainable procurement in higher education (HE).

The ARP is enabling partner universities to utilise the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool, to collaborate on common challenges and to share knowledge on sustainable procurement. Through capturing the shared journey of ARP partners, the project is developing guidance and tools that will help shape the future of sustainable procurement across HE.

The next 6 months of the project will focus on exploring how the Tool can support sustainable procurement decisions, guidance for carbon footprint calculations, and preparation to circulate the Tool to the HE sector and beyond.

2. Introduction

In November 2023, Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and NETpositive Futures launched a 1-year Action Research Project to collaborate with 31 higher education institutions across the UK and understand how the innovative Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool could support universities in building sustainable supply chains. This report summarises the progress made by the ARP at the halfway point of the project and looks ahead to the objectives for the next six months.

3. The Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool

The Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool was developed by NTU in partnership with NETpositive Futures to address the challenge of building sustainable supply chains and progress to net zero. After 18 months of testing and development, including beta-testing by 5 partner universities, the Tool was launched to the HE sector in September 2023.

The Tool is a universal, simple way to engage with suppliers on sustainability, helping them understand their carbon footprint and develop free bespoke carbon reduction plans. Through sourcing carbon data directly from suppliers, the Tool enables universities to develop a robust supply chain carbon footprint, in line with HE sector guidance, to inform their scope 3 reporting and help them meet their Net Zero ambitions.

The Tool is an online platform where invited suppliers can either calculate or upload their carbon footprint. The Tool can also provide suppliers with bespoke carbon reduction plans to articulate their commitments to net zero carbon as well as track progress on the actions required to meet this commitment. Suppliers only require one account through which they indicate which universities they supply, allowing the sustainability and carbon data to be shared to all relevant universities. Due to the large amount of shared supply chains, the Tool provides an easy and accessible way for suppliers to share their sustainability credentials across the HE sector.

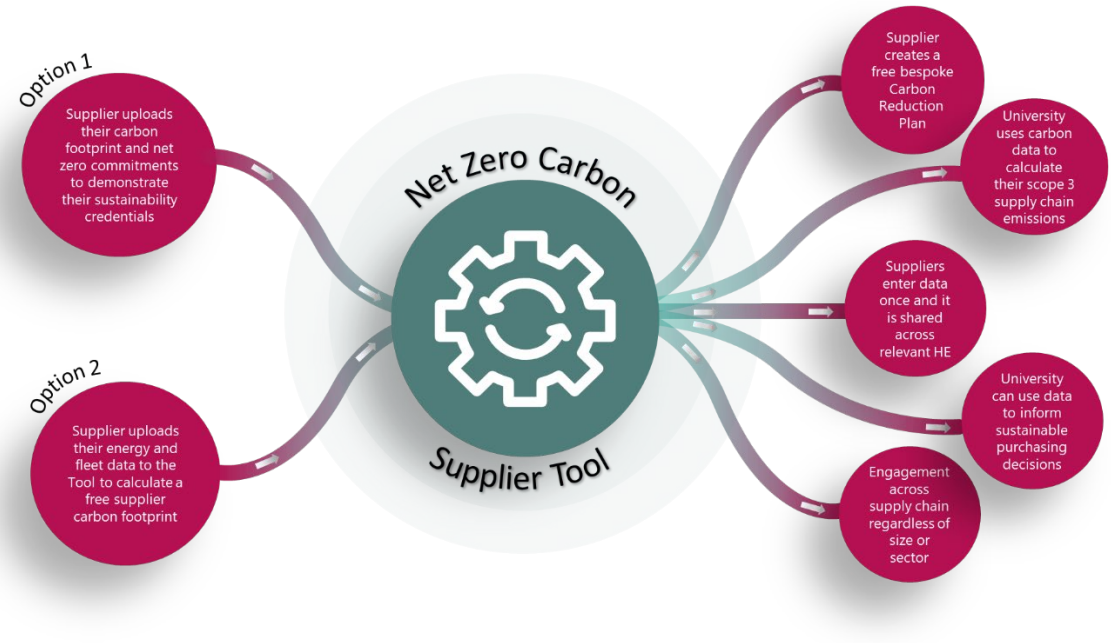

Figure 1: Overview of the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool process

The Tool subsequently provides universities with carbon data to calculate more robust supply chain emissions, decoupling emissions from expenditure and allowing universities to visualise the positive impact of their purchasing decisions in their carbon footprint for the first time. The Tool can also provide meaningful supplier information to support sustainable procurement decision-making. Through embedding the Tool into sustainable procurement processes, universities can make a step-change in the way they tackle supply chain carbon emissions and progress towards their ambitious net zero carbon targets.

4. The Action Research Project

The Action Research Project is a 1-year project led by NTU and NETpositive Futures with involvement from 31 partner universities from across the UK. The project is aiming to understand how the Tool can be deployed across HE institutions and influence the future of sustainable procurement.

The ARP brings together over 100 individuals from across the 32 Universities, encompassing professionals with expertise in Procurement and Sustainability. The project provides the opportunity to collaborate on sustainable procurement, tackle shared challenges and to share best practices.

The Universities involved in the project are:

The ARP has six key objectives:

1. **Support University Supply Chain Carbon Footprints:** Deploy the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool across the 32 ARP partners' supply chains, obtaining robust carbon emission data to inform Scope 3 supply chain emissions reporting and building knowledge of net zero and sustainable procurement

2. **Support Suppliers on Net Zero Carbon:** Increase the number of suppliers receiving a tangible benefit from the Tool through the production of free bespoke carbon reduction plans and helping suppliers understand and tackle net zero

3. **Guidance:** Develop guidance on how the Tool can support net zero supply chains through utilising the shared knowledge of Procurement and Sustainability professionals from across HE

4. **Functionality and User Experience:** Improve the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool's functionality and user experience for suppliers and ARP partners

5. **Data Driven Decisions:** Investigate how the Tool data can support sustainable procurement decision-making

6. **Stewardship:** Share the knowledge and learnings from the Action Research Project with the HE sector and beyond.

5. Progress Report

The following pages outline the progress of the Action Research Project against project objectives at the 6-month milestone date. Each objective has been given a RAG status, depending on the progress made towards achieving that objective and the amount of work still to be carried out.

Objective 1: Support University Supply Chain Carbon Footprints: Deploy the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool across the 32 ARP partners' supply chains, obtaining robust carbon emission data to inform Scope 3 supply chain emissions reporting and building knowledge of net zero and sustainable procurement		**RAG Rating:**	
Progress to Date:	ARP partners have been supported to utilise the Tool through the delivery of onboarding webinars, dashboard training webinars, 'getting started' sessions and monthly drop-in sessions. By the start of the 2nd quarter, 24 out of the 32 ARP partners had identified their priority suppliers and over half had started to deploy the Tool. It is estimated that over 1700 suppliers have been identified so far to be invited to the Tool. ARP Partners have been supported in embedding the Tool into their systems and processes, including several Universities incorporating it into their invitation to tender (ITT) documents. To ensure that universities have access to robust data from the Tool, suppliers have been contacted by NETpositive Futures to complete gaps in supplier data. In addition, 346 of the supplier data Scope 1 & 2 has been verified by the NETpositive Futures team. Due to shared supply chains across the HE sector, the Tool contains supplier data for 152 HE Institutions.		
Next 6 Months:	In the next 6 months, the project will: • Continue to support the ARP partners, with an aim for 100% deploying the Tool within their own supply chains. • Continue to review the data verification process to develop the future requirements for verification post-ARP. • Define the role of universities and NETpositive Futures in encouraging suppliers to provide a full data set to deliver largest benefit. • Realise opportunities for collaboration to target shared supply chains where possible and investigate targeting specific large cross-sector suppliers as a group.		

Objective 2: Support Suppliers on Net Zero Carbon Increase the number of suppliers receiving a tangible benefit from the Tool through the production of free bespoke carbon reduction plans and helping suppliers understand and tackle net zero	**RAG Rating:**	
Progress to Date:	To date, 502 suppliers have registered on the Tool. This has resulted in: - 233 suppliers using the in-built carbon calculator to estimate their Scope 1 & 2 carbon footprint; - 328 suppliers creating free, bespoke carbon reduction action plans; - Suppliers committing to 11,683 carbon reduction actions in their action plans, 2,811 of which are already complete. Of the 269 suppliers who have provided their own carbon footprint, 53.9% included at least 1 category of Scope 3. To support suppliers on net zero and increase engagement with the Tool, training has been delivered on Net Zero Carbon to 80 suppliers.	
Future Planning:	Over the next 6 months, the project will: • Deliver further training sessions on net zero carbon to suppliers, building their knowledge of sustainability and increasing engagement in the Tool. • Collaboratively review the action plan content to ensure it remains robust, comprehensive and coherent. • Develop a forward plan for how and when the action plan should be updated. • Support ARP partners to build the number of suppliers in the Tool, driving sustainability engagement across supply chains and increasing the number of suppliers getting a tangible benefit from the Tool.	

Objective 3: Guidance Develop guidance on how the Tool can support net zero supply chains through utilising the shared knowledge of Procurement and Sustainability professionals from across HE.	**RAG Rating:**	
Progress to Date:	A Microsoft Teams site has been set up to collaborate and engage with all ARP partners. Through this site, guidance documents, example templates, webinar recordings and how-to videos have been shared, including: - Full list of suppliers on the Tool, which is updated monthly. - Video guidance on accessing and personalising the Tool dashboard. - Example communications to send to suppliers, including branding. - Example wording to include in ITTs. - Recordings of all webinars and online support sessions. NTU delivered a Data Masterclass which outlines how the ARP partners can use the Tool to measure their Scope 3 Supply Chain emissions. This will form the basis of future guidance for this process. NTU consulted with ARP Partners to develop guidance on how to prioritise supply chains.	
Future Planning:	Over the next 6 months, the project will: • Develop a guidance document on how universities can use the data from the Tool to inform scope 3 supply chain emissions calculations. • Publish guidance on how to prioritise your supply chain. • Review and update the FAQ on the Tool platform based on supplier and ARP partner feedback. • Develop communication tools to support internal university stakeholder engagement, to build whole-institution support for the Tool and upskill key individuals/teams on the importance of supply chain carbon footprints. • Publish a public facing webpage about the Tool on the NETpositive Futures website to raise awareness of the project to both suppliers and universities.	

Objective 4: Functionality and User Experience Improve the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool's functionality and user experience for suppliers and ARP partners	**RAG Rating:**	
Progress to Date:	Based on user feedback, several functionality improvements have been made to the Tool to help enhance the user experience and increase functionality, including: • Restrictions in data entry fields to ensure that only valid data can be entered, e.g. business turnover. • Additional questions added, e.g. Company Registration Number, head office location, alignment to reporting standards, and confirmation that data is complete. • Improved wording to make the Tool clear and easier to understand by non-sustainability professionals. Additionally, several functionality improvements have been made on to university dashboards to help enhance the user experience and increase functionality. These changes focus on widget additions and improvements. Additional widgets have been created to allow university users to download their Tool data in a format that supports their needs, both for data analysis and for monitoring engagement. Improvements to existing widgets ensures that users can clearly interpret the data contained within. All changes have been based on user feedback and align to the objectives of the ARP.	
Future Planning:	NETpositive Futures will continue to develop and improve the Tool based on user feedback. The following functionality improvements are to be explored: • The ability for all university users to see all supplier data. • Allowing universities to identify verified supplier data. • Creation of a new page on all dashboards to host guidance materials. • Ensuring that suppliers can input multi-year activity.	

Objective 5: Data Driven Decisions Investigate how the Tool data can support sustainable procurement decision-making	**RAG Rating:**	
Progress to Date:	Initial scoping of this objective has been carried out to inform the next 6 months of work. The following priority areas have been identified: • How a supplier engagement scoring matrix will aid universities. • How the data collected by the Tool will enable us to support suppliers to learn best practice for their particular industry from their peers. • How the Tool can be embedded and scored in ITTs and Tender Evaluations. NTU have developed a draft Teams PowerBI to allow universities to see statistics for the whole supplier dataset which can be used to drive sustainability engagement in procurement. A short-term research project, carried out by Nottingham Business School will investigate how Tool data can be visualised to inform sustainable procurement decision making.	
Future Planning:	Over the next 6 months, the project will: • Deliver the PowerBI on the ARP Teams site to enable ARP Partners to access the data and ensure informed decision making within the project lifetime. • Investigate how providing ongoing access to all supplier data to all universities using the Tool can support informed decision making on sustainable supply chains. • Deliver a sub-group focused on supplier engagement scoring matrix. • Understand how suppliers can learn from peers to work towards best practice specific to industry and size.	

Objective 6: Stewardship Share the knowledge and learnings from the Action Research Project with the HE sector and beyond.	**RAG Rating:**	

Progress to Date:	The Tool won a Gold Award for Sustainability Impact Initiative at the 2024 Aude Awards. A press release on the project December 2023 was picked up by several national media outlets including Edie, Energy Manager magazine and Sustainability Beat website. Meetings with various organisations have taken place to share experience and promote the Tool including: • The Energy Consortium (TEC) • EAUC • NEUPC • Procurex Ireland • Environmental Strategy Working Group, made up of local authority representatives from across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire • Universities falling outside of the ARP group • Scope 3 Peer Group • NTU's Nottingham Business School (NBS) • Two EU universities The Tool has featured as part of the Edie Engage 2024 online conference in a webinar on "Top tips to collecting and utilising meaningful data"
Future Planning:	Over the next 6 months, the project will: • Continue to promote the project, its outputs and successes to the HE sector. • Share the 6-month report across the HE sector. • Feature in a session on Responsible Procurement as part of the EAUC Conference 2024. • Be featured as a conference session at the UCISA Sustainability Conference. • Explore how to the Tool can support academic objectives for sustainable business management. • Publish updated supplier guidance on the NETpositive Futures webpages. • Explore expanding the use of the Tool for public sector bodies across the UK. • Publish an end-of-project report.

6. Lessons Learned

At this milestone half-way point in the ARP, several themes are already emerging and informing the forward activity of the project.

Collaboration is key: Sustainability and Procurement Teams are all tackling the same sustainable procurement challenges, often across shared supply chains. The initial interest in the ARP was higher than originally estimated which shows that universities are keen to work together to tackle an issue that has often been labelled as 'too difficult'.

Universities need support to get started: Whilst there are number of universities who are already taking steps to address supply chain sustainability, many institutions require support to understand the first steps required to identify and prioritise their supply chain interventions. As prioritisation is not a one-size-fits-all process, guidance needs to fit differing user needs.

Users value a tool that is simple and adaptable: Not only is the scale of data significant, but variations in size of supplier and sustainability maturity needs accounting for. Feedback from both universities and suppliers is that the simplicity and adaptability of the Tool are highly valued, offering different completion pathways depending on data availability. Further work to support micro-SMEs and those without scope 1 and 2 emissions requires further development, but the core principle of ensuring an adaptable and simple system remains.

Any solution must focus on the supplier needs: Supplier due diligence can be arduous, yet supplier engagement is critical. To build this engagement there needs to be a tangible benefit to suppliers as well as no barriers to inclusion. From the start, the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool had to be free for suppliers to use to ensure it was non-exclusionary to smaller businesses. It also had to provide a benefit, whether that be through the creation of bespoke carbon reduction plans, allowing business to quickly and succinctly demonstrate existing sustainability credentials, or through sharing data across the HE sector and therefore significantly reducing reporting burden for the supplier. A particular focus on the needs of SMEs has been a key consideration of the project.

The Tool isn't a quick solution, but a long-term systematic change in engaging suppliers on sustainability and measuring scope 3 supply chain carbon emissions.

7. Looking Ahead

NTU and NETpositive Futures are looking ahead to what happens once the ARP concludes with both organisations keen to ensure the Tools' continued success. The outputs of ARP are being used to explore guidance requirements, data validation, stakeholder engagement and project management to build on the successes to date.

More specifically, the project team are:

- Exploring potential partnership with other sector bodies who can support ongoing cross-sectoral project management and communication.
- Responding to interest from public sector bodies keen to use the approach with their own suppliers.

- Reviewing the ongoing pricing structure for the Tool to ensure it is value for money to HE institutions and free at the point of use to suppliers.
- Developing an onboarding process for universities who are keen to use the Tool at the end of the ARP.

Any proposals for future delivery of the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool will be circulated to the ARP partners, enabling universities to shape the future use of the Tool before it is publicised more widely.

8. Get In Touch

For further information on the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool contact with NETpositive Futures at admin@netpositivefutures.co.uk

9. Appendix 1: Action Research Project Achievements

Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool

Now used by **over 30 universities** across the UK

Nottingham Trent University

NETpositive FUTURES

In November 2023, Nottingham Trent University and NETpositive Futures launched a 1-year Action Research Project for interested universities to use the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool with their supply chains. Thirty-two universities signed up and are using the tool.

The Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool provides suppliers with a carbon footprint based on energy and fuel use (Scopes 1&2), but it also supports them to develop bespoke carbon reduction action plans.

Universities are able to use the carbon emissions data gathered by the tool to help calculate their supply chain carbon footprint.

The data used in this infographic has been taken from the Net Zero Carbon Supplier Tool at the midpoint of the project.

502 suppliers registered

- **46%** have used the tool to calculate their carbon footprint
- **54%** have provided their carbon footprint
- **69%** are SMEs
- **11,683** carbon reduction actions have been committed to by suppliers
- **2,811** carbon reduction actions have been completed
- **2,061** individual pieces of evidence have been provided

The top 3 most engaged categories are:

- **Professional and Bought in Services** — **21.5%**
- **Estates and Buildings** — **20.4%**
- **Computer Supplies and Services** — **13.6%**

These categories have a total turnover of **£81,333,978,813**

And a total carbon footprint (Scopes 1&2) of **788,831.07 Tonnes of CO_2**

Supplier Scope 3 data is being collected on the tool, with a total of **51,548,101 tonnes of CO_2** (the facility was added after the launch of the project)

The top areas included in Supplier Scope 3 Reporting are:

- **Business Travel**
- **Waste**
- **Employee Commuting**
- **Supply of Goods and Services**

Commitment and Engagement

Most selected impacts:

We have made/are ready to make a commitment to reduce our carbon emissions **(63%)**

We will commit to monitoring and managing our sustainability commitments **(63%)**

We will improve engagement with employees on sustainability issues and principles **(59%)**

Most completed actions with examples of evidence:

Appoint a lead to drive the delivery of carbon reduction

"As part of our 2023 restructure a dedicated named leader has been established to champion our carbon reduction plan."

Commit to reporting progress on your carbon reduction journey annually

"Completion of netzero positive is considered to be our annual review tool from this point onward."

Publish your commitment to carbon reduction on your website

"We have partnered with Planet Mark which proves our commitment to carbon reduction. This information is published on our website with an explanation as to what it means."

Energy Management

Most selected impacts:

We have committed to/will explore purchasing renewable energy **(53%)**

We have optimised/will optimise energy efficiency across equipment **(47%)**

We have optimised/will optimise energy efficiency across our building portfolio **(39%)**

Most completed actions with examples of evidence:

Purchase 100% renewable energy

"100% of electricity used at our sites is renewable - we are REGO certified."

Replace lighting with energy efficient LEDs and controls (daylight or occupancy sensors)

"Each of our sites uses occupancy sensors to minimise energy waste."

We are committed to switching to a 100% renewable energy tariff

"We are seeking to change energy supplier from our current incumbent to one that offers renewable energy."

Travel and Transport

Most selected impacts:

We commit/will commit to reducing the impact of our business travel **(55%)**

-We have explored/will explore opportunities related to remote working **(54%)**

-We are committed/will commit to reducing the impact of our fleet vehicles **(47%)**

Most completed actions with examples of evidence:

Increase the use of video conferencing software

"All employees have the use of Microsoft Teams, which is used a daily means of internal and external company communication".

Review your software requirements to increase agile working

"The IT team ensure equipment provided is suitable for work required from home workers."

Identify ways to support and manage remote workers

"We always ensure that staff working from home have the equipment they need to ensure a healthy working environment".

Resource Use

Most selected impacts:

We engage/will do more to engage our suppliers with sustainability **(59%)**

We will ensure waste management is optimised on site **(53%)**

We want to reduce paper consumption **(53%)**

Most completed actions with examples of evidence:

Improve bin signage

"All internal and external bins are clearly identified, regular reminder emails are sent to employees"

Introduce internal and external segregated mixed recycling bins

"The IT team ensure equipment provided is suitable for work required from home workers."

Contract in place with Country style for segregated mixed Recycling collection."

We have an established policy for 100% only using recycled paper. Each purchase order must be signed off by a Director."

Heating and Cooling

Most selected impacts:

We have ensured/will ensure HVAC systems are optimised **(41%)**

We have optimised/will improve the insulation across our portfolio **(29%)**

We have explored/will explore reducing the impact of refrigerant gases on site **(21%)**

Most completed actions with examples of evidence:

Ensure boilers and HVAC systems are regularly serviced

"Our HVAC systems are serviced annually, we are able to provide certificates on request."

Set up manual heating control systems

"Manual controls are in place, and can be controlled in sections dependent on high/ low traffic areas"

Set up regular monitoring and leak testing for air conditioning systems

"We have a Facilities Maintenance contractor who regularly monitors and tests our AC systems for leaks."