Publishing Scotland Environmental Sustainability Plan 2024-2028

Introduction

We're pleased to introduce this plan, developed in conjunction with our Environmental Sustainability Group (the ESG) and Black Skies Blue consultancy, and informed by our sustainability survey of members.

In a nutshell –

- **Our vision is for Publishing Scotland to play a leading role in the Scottish publishing sector achieving net zero and resilience to climate change by 2045.**
- **We will set the gold standard for an economically viable sustainability journey – leading, influencing and empowering publishers, and leaving no member behind.**
- **We aim to be the known and trusted place to go for accessible resources on sustainability.**
- **We want our members to be confident that 'they know where they're going on environmental and sustainability issues'. We also aim to influence the supply chain, where possible.**

The context - climate change and sustainability issues for publishing in Scotland



Scotland declared a climate emergency in 2019. It has statutory targets in place to reduce dangerous greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2045. Annual targets are set in batches in Scotland, and the Government publishes regular plans on the actions it will take over fifteen-year periods.

These targets and plans will have implications for all sectors of society: businesses, third sector organisations, and local councils will all have to change the way they do things.

The Government has committed to a just transition to decarbonisation, meaning this shift must be done in as fair a way as possible. There are many policies that will affect the sector, from manufacturing processes and logistics through to how buildings are heated and cooled.

The climate is already changing and the effects are being felt across Scotland. Extreme weather has already caused flood damage and coastal erosion as well as interruptions to energy, water, communication, and transport systems. These changes, along with sea level rise, have **major implications for publishing**. Developing resilience through adaptation actions is essential.

The environmental impacts of publishing

The main impacts stem from printing, paper production, and the complex supply chain which involves the shipping of printed titles nationally and internationally, from printer to warehouse and then out to retailers. Book production is energy and water intensive, with extensive use of ink, special metallic finishes, bleaching agents, and other chemicals. There are also impacts from the digital production of books, from the consumption of eBooks on readers, and audiobooks.

Deforestation is a major concern but the use of paper approved by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is widespread. There are also impacts from packaging, travel, freight, and logistics.

How our members are doing on sustainability

We surveyed our publisher members in early 2024. 50% of members responded, and some highlights are:

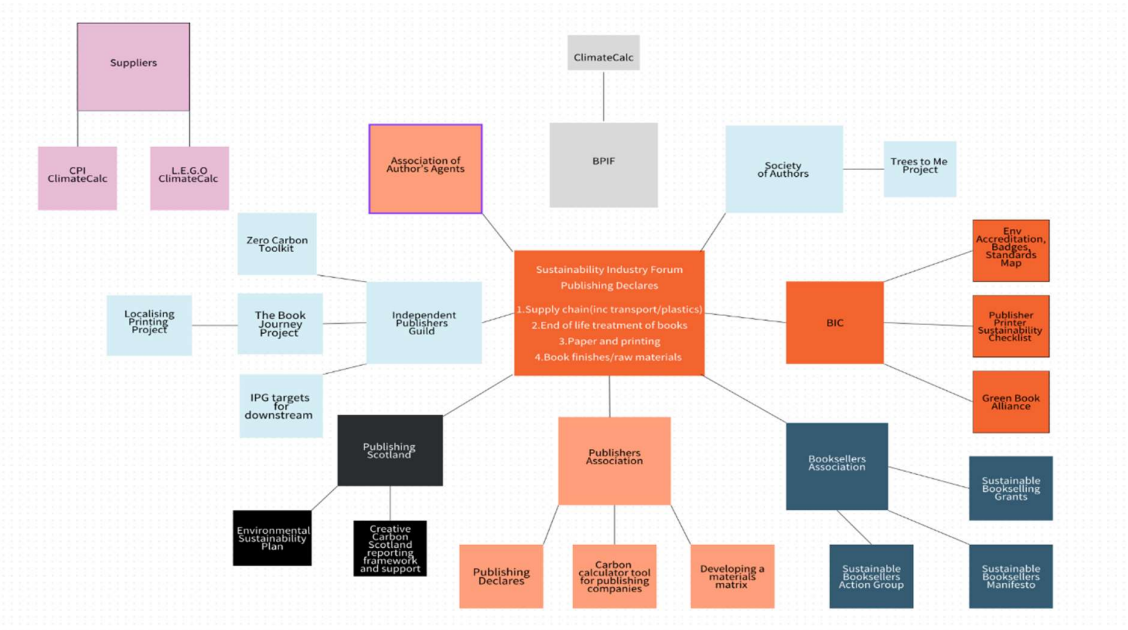
- 95% of respondents said sustainability was important or extremely important to them
- 'A supply chain that wasn't changing fast enough' was a significant issue, suggesting that PS can play a role in advocating for members on industry forums
- 'Affordability' and 'lack of time' are the main barriers to tackling sustainability
- Only 13% have a plan in place to mitigate the risks associated with climate

However,

- Over 80% of the respondents indicated they had begun to take some action
- 27% of respondents are doing at least some measurement of their carbon footprint, although this is more likely to be of their own operations (energy use, travel, waste) than emissions from book production
- 78% of respondents use 75-100% FSC certified paper
- Publishers have moved 50-75% of their meetings online, and 60% have changed their business travel due to sustainability concerns
- Most publishers wanted peer learning and website resources to help them act

What's already being done in the UK sector

There are many initiatives underway, some led by the Sustainability Industry Forum, launched in 2022, which is a grouping of the UK Book Trade Associations. One output is Publishing Declares. We have also signed the Sustainable Development Goals Publishers Compact, an initiative from the International Publishers Association and the United Nations. We plan to build on these activities and ensure our members can benefit. Not enough work has been done on building resilience to climate change in the sector.



WHAT PUBLISHING SCOTLAND WILL DO FOR MEMBERS			
Pillar	**Initiative**	**Activities**	**Timeframe**
Programmes	Annual programme of activities	Sustainability days and half days to encourage peer to peer learning.	All year
		Members' Forum to allow knowledge exchange. Leadership from green champions.	All year
		Session on sustainability at annual conference.	Annual
	Co-create a step-by-step sustainability journey map for publishers.	Provide guidance and practical checklists, including what to ask supply chain stakeholders.	2025
Communications	Provide information, guidance and tools on sustainability for members.	Identify case studies, toolkits, and resources and share them via PS website. Update quarterly.	All year
Resilience to climate change and regulatory framework	Support members to understand climate risks and prepare for them.	Provide a climate resilience package to members, including tools for assessing risks, contingency planning and resources for how to adapt to the changing environment.	2024- 2025
		Support members to prepare for and respond to regulatory changes that will affect their businesses.	2024-2025
Sparking change across the supply chain	Assist members to understand the carbon footprint of their activities.	Gain access to a carbon measurement tool for members. This will help members establish baseline emissions from their own operations (offices, staff travel, energy, waste), and begin to understand the impacts of their books at different points in the supply chain.	Coming soon
	Support members and programmes to reduce carbon emissions.	Develop guidelines and offer support for members to reduce their emissions from travel, energy use and waste.	2024 onwards
	Increase awareness of digital options.	Increase awareness of digital/audio-only publications. Provide metrics to support decision making.	2025
	Support members to reduce overprinting.	Provide training on how to incorporate sustainability into project financials. Support members with the process of print run right-sizing and identifying options available to reduce waste. Provide examples of best practice.	2026
	Support members to reduce sale or return to reduce waste.	Record trends in returns volumes via BookSource and raise awareness across the industry.	2026
	Support members to reduce impact of marketing.	Review the manufacture and carriage impacts of marketing materials including advance reading copies, catalogues, mail outs. Provide tools to help members to calculate impact of marketing.	2027-2028

	Support members to design for sustainability.	Provide seminars on sustainable book design and production to reduce waste and increase recyclability.	Annually
WHAT PUBLISHING SCOTLAND WILL DO FOR THE INDUSTRY			
Pillar	**Initiative**	**Activities**	**Timeframe**
Lobbying and advocacy	Accelerate the pace of change across the industry.	Participate actively in industry-wide forums including the Sustainability Industry Forum.	All year
		Talk on panels and plenaries at conferences and events	All year round
	Keep publishers abreast of opportunities and threats in the sector.	Create a risk monitoring document and identify recommended actions to respond to changing regulations and standards.	2025
Communications	Gather and disseminate information on sustainability progress in the sector.	Sustainability survey of members.	Annual
	Support publishers to communicate to stakeholders.	Develop a framework and tools for reporting and discussion of publishers' greening activities.	2025 onwards
	Review Publishing Scotland programmes and embed sustainability awareness and practice into them.	Document lessons learnt from each review and use for other programmes. Communicate information to members.	2026 onwards
WHAT PUBLISHING SCOTLAND WILL DO INTERNALLY			
Reducing our footprint		We will measure and report on our carbon footprint annually, starting with our own emissions and over time building an understanding of the impact of our procurement.	Ongoing
		We will implement our carbon-reduction plan for our energy, waste and transport.	Ongoing
		We will measure and do our best to reduce the carbon footprint of audience and participant travel to our events and programmes.	Ongoing
Review and report on this plan		Adjust the plan in response to members' feedback, staff capacity, and data gathered over time through the survey.	Annually