



Marking the Government's Progress on Climate Change

Another year... another progress report...

The annual Climate Change Committee (CCC) progress reports to parliament are effectively a way that government's homework on tackling climate change is marked. If [this year's report](#) could provide an overall grade to government, it would be a D – must do better.

The report, coming in at a mammoth 619 pages, provides a pretty bleak assessment of the overall state of the government's progress over the last year, but where is the government going wrong, and can they pull this grade up in time?

Not all doom and gloom

So first, the positives.

The government has set some very strong targets which are compatible with the Paris agreement to limit warming to well below 2°C and preferably 1.5°C. The [Net Zero Strategy](#) published late last year was singled out as a particularly strong indication from government as to their intent to fully decarbonise the UK economy by 2050 and outlined a pathway to do so. This strategy is highly complementary to the overall 2050 net zero target and interim carbon budgets and now includes other specific targets, such as a net zero power system by 2035, 50GW of offshore wind by 2030, and 5MtCO₂ of negative emissions from Greenhouse Gas Removals by 2030.

The government is on track to deliver enough progress across several key indicators including the sale of Electric Vehicles and the installation of Offshore wind. These key indicators have meant that pathways for *most* of the decarbonisation of the power sector, and a good chunk of the surface transport sector are clear and on the right path.

The UK also successfully hosted COP26 which strengthened long-term global ambition and introduced new mechanisms to support delivery, and the event continued to highlight the UK's role as an international climate leader. Overall, UK emissions are down 47% on 1990 levels, with particularly strong progress in the power sector, however, more needs to be done if we are to meet our ambitious targets.

Easily Distracted

Despite some positive progress, particularly in the target setting category, the pace of progress across almost all areas remains far too slow to have a significant impact on the strong targets set by the government. While some of the key indicators for progress remain on track, of the 50 indicators only 8 of these are on track to deliver a pathway compatible with net zero.

Particularly weak across the board is the development of robust policy mechanisms to enable and support the delivery of the ambitious targets set. The deployment of Engineered Greenhouse Gas Removals (GGR) provides a good example of this.

There are currently no large-scale projects deployed in the UK, but UK government has set an ambitious target of 5MtCO₂ of negative emissions from these projects by 2030 with over 50MtCO₂ needed by 2050. Several projects are in development to support this ambition, for example Drax's BECCS project which could deliver up to 8MtCO₂ of negative emissions by 2030. However, policy development in this space has been slow with a lack progress on



supportive policies for deployment including GGR business models, and monitoring, reporting & verification (MRV) development. This example can be replicated across numerous different sectors i.e., strong targets but no firm plan for delivering on these.

The problem seems to stem from a lack of coordination at the very top levels of government which has been paralysed by political scandals and a deep focus on other issues such as the cost-of-living crisis. It will be important that the government refocuses on net zero over the next year to ensure that its ambitious targets do not become out of reach.

Top Marks?

If translated into a school report, the CCC's assessment into the government would read "Bright and capable with strong ambitions, however, can be easily distracted and is not fully delivering to the best of their ability".

The next couple of years will be a critical point in the UK's journey to net zero. The UK government faces a choice. Either they can continue to build the UK's reputation as a climate leader, deploying innovative technology, and reducing costs to consumers, or they can sit back and watch target after target be missed due to inaction.

It is my hope that the government chooses the first route and that the CCC's progress report galvanises the government into accelerating action. Tackling climate change has been shown to be a key priority across the majority of voters, with concern over climate change at record levels and growing. It's therefore not only necessary to ensure that the worst impacts to our planet are mitigated, but it's also a real vote winner.

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