ICR The Institute of Cancer Research

Sustainability Report

2024/25

Executive Summary

The ICR has continued to reduce it carbon footprint in line with its target of achieving net zero across all three Scopes by 2040, and achieving an interim reduction of 42% by 2030. This work covers Scopes 1, 2 and 3 and has involved contributions from all areas of the ICR. This annual report provides a year in review of sustainability activities from 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025 and reflects the work that has been taking place to reduce the ICR's carbon emissions against our baseline year of 2018/19.

The ICR's emissions for Scope 1 (direct sources) and Scope 2 (indirect sources) have decreased by 22.4% since the baseline year, and by 6.4% compared to 2023/24. Both Scope 1 and 2 emissions are trending down in line with the ICR's science-based reduction target, with Scope 2 emission reduction exceeding the annual target.

Initial infrastructure improvements to achieve Net Zero carbon reduction target have included installation of solar panels on two further building roofs, replacement of fluorescent tube lighting with smart LED systems and the increase in operating temperature of ultra-low temperature freezers. Further detailed decarbonisation assessments will be carried out over the next year to confirm the next priority decarbonisation projects.

The largest decrease in carbon emissions has been in Scope 3, specifically from purchased goods and services, and the ICR's Scope 3 emissions have reduced by 42.5% compared to the previous year. This has been due to improvements in the calculation methodology, moving further away from spend-based procurement carbon emissions calculations. More suppliers are able to provide actual embodied carbon data for products, and hybrid calculations for our largest suppliers has been expanded. This has been supported by changes in the sustainable purchasing strategy.

Total waste generated by the ICR's research activities has fallen by 7.9% against the baseline year. There has been a 5.9% decrease in hazardous waste sent for incineration compared to the previous year, this is the waste stream with the largest carbon emissions and there are projects being implemented over the coming year to reduce this further. The ICR has continued to meet its pledge of zero waste to landfill.

93% of the ICR's laboratories have achieve sustainable laboratory certification under GreenDiSC, My Green Lab or Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF), 90% reaching silver or above. This exceeds the ICR's target of sustainability certification for 80% of laboratories by 2030.

The ICR's Clinical Trials and Statistics Unit has led a project to develop the methodology and guidance for mapping the carbon footprint of clinical trials. Additional funding has been awarded to them for training out this methodology nationally and internationally.

Following the implementation of a new ICR travel policy domestic flights have reduced, supporting business travel carbon reduction and supporting more sustainable alternatives.

Targets:

2040

Net Zero across all three Scopes

2030

Achieve an interim reduction of 42%

Contents

Foreword

Professor Kristian Helin – Chief Executive

It is great to see the progress that our research labs have made in gaining lab certification through LEAF, My Green Lab and Green DiSC this academic year. This not only reduces our carbon footprint and helps to build a culture of sustainability, but it also demonstrates our commitment to sustainability as an organisation.

From January 2026 LEAF Silver, My Green Lab or equivalent will be a requirement for grant funding from Wellcome and CRUK. Teams across professional services and our scientific divisions have been working together to ensure that this requirement has been met or exceeded.

Stakeholder engagement has been crucial to build the foundations of sustainable procurement. Awareness, education and engagement enables everyone at the ICR to make more sustainable choices in what they buy and consume, regardless of their role.

We have continued to make reductions in our Scope 1 & 2 emissions, and in Scope 3, academic travel, water and waste, and hope that the policies and strategies put in place this year will deliver a carbon reduction benefit in the years to come, which aligns with our environmental commitments.

Kind Regards

Professor Kristian Helin
Chief Executive and President

Richard Woods – Head of Sustainability

I'm really proud that 93% of the ICR's laboratories have received sustainable laboratory certification for LEAF or My Green Lab. This has exceeded our target of 80% of our laboratories achieving this by 2030. This has taken a lot of commitment from researchers and the Sustainability, Health & Safety team; and provides a solid foundation to build on.

Carbon emissions from Scope 1 & 2 have reduced by 6.4% against our predicted energy usage. Initial infrastructure decarbonisation projects have included installing new electric autoclaves and solar panels on two further roofs at Sutton.

'Sustainability at the ICR' has become a mandatory induction course for all new starters to ensure awareness of the ICR's commitments, targets and projects.

The ICR has again used a hybrid methodology to calculate carbon emissions related to our procurement. This has shown a significant reduction in these calculated emissions.

Richard Woods
Head of Sustainability

Introduction

What does sustainability mean for the ICR?

In this third report, we will show our progress in implementing our sustainability plans and our actions in addressing the environmental impact of our science, all while keeping our primary focus on our core mission: Defeating Cancer.

We recognise the importance of integrating sustainability principles into our work and to achieve our sustainability vision, we require a determined approach involving all members of our institution, from our research scientists to professional services personnel and all other stakeholders.

ICR and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

The SDGs were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental protection peace and justice.

Sustainable Discoveries

The ICR's Sustainability Action Plan

Sustainable Discoveries represents our commitment to align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges locally and globally.

This initiative, part of our strategy, aims to integrate sustainability principles into our work at the ICR.

Sustainable Discoveries has 4 pillars:

Sustainable Operations:
- The transformation of our estates and facilities
- Supporting our people across the ICR

Sustainable Science:
- How we undertake our research to defeat cancer whilst reducing environmental impacts

Sustainable Procurement:
- Refers to how we improve the environmental and social impacts from our supply chain - the largest share of our carbon footprint

Sustainable Foundations:

• Governance • Accountability • Training • Awareness
• Systems to Support Sustainability

Pillar 1
Sustainable Foundations


Photo by Suho Media on Unsplash

Under the Sustainable Foundations Pillar, we establish the groundwork for implementing our plan. We involve and educate our colleagues on sustainability topics, closely monitor our progress, while sharing our accomplishments.

In this section of the report, we will outline our sustainability strategy and our commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2040.

ICR's Climate Impacts

- Net zero emissions by 2040
- 42% reduction in our carbon footprint across Scopes 1, 2, and 3 by 2029/2030

The climate crisis stands as one of today's most fundamental global challenges. The Climate Change Act 2008 mandates that greenhouse gas emissions must reach net zero by 2050.

In a determined effort to lead by example, the ICR has set an ambitious goal to achieve net zero emissions by 2040, requiring a reduction of emissions by a minimum of 90% by that deadline. We have established an interim target based on the methodology from the Science Based Targets Initiative, aiming for a 42% reduction in our carbon footprint across Scopes 1, 2, and 3 by 2029/30.

Our emissions fall into 3 main areas:

Scope 1 – emissions from combustion of gas in heating boilers, emissions from burning fuel for back-up generators, leakage of cooling system refrigerant gases and emissions from our own vehicles.

Scope 2 – emissions associated with the consumption of purchased electricity from the national grid.

Scope 3 – our wider value chain, including emissions from procurement, waste management, commuting and business travel (Scope 3 is by far the main source of emissions)

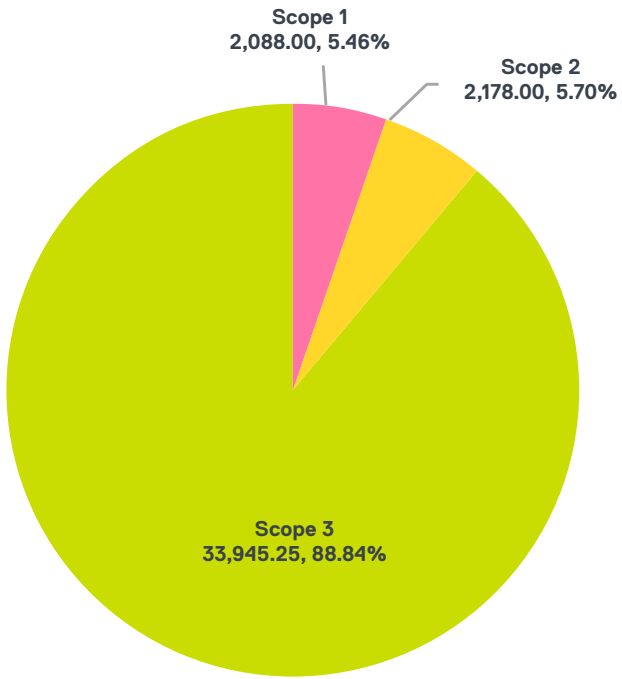
This was an overall decrease of 42.5% compared to the previous academic year. This is mainly due to a reduction in the calculated Scope 3 procurement emissions, where we are using a hybrid methodology for calculating these rather than just basing carbon emissions on spend and a significant change in the emission factors for some procurement categories. Other factors that have also resulted in this lowering of carbon emissions are reductions in waste, electricity, commuting and business travel related emissions.

ICR Carbon Footprint 2024/25

Summary data

Our carbon footprint is calculated for each academic year, August'24 to July'25. In 2024/25 the total ICR carbon footprint was 38,211 tCO_2e (tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent).

2024/2025 share of emissions tCO_2e



Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions:

Across 2024/25, the ICR has continued to make strong progress towards our sustainability objectives. Scope 1 (on-site natural gas) and Scope 2 (electricity from the national grid) carbon emissions have been reduced by 6.4% compared to expected usage (this also includes other CO_2 emissions directly from the site). This reduction brought our total Scope 1 and 2 carbon footprint to 4,266 tonnes of CO_2 emissions. These savings, achieved through ongoing energy efficiency measures, resulted in a reduction in energy costs of £341,000.

Energy savings across 2024/25 have again mainly been due to energy monitoring, Freezer Challenge and energy reduction awareness.

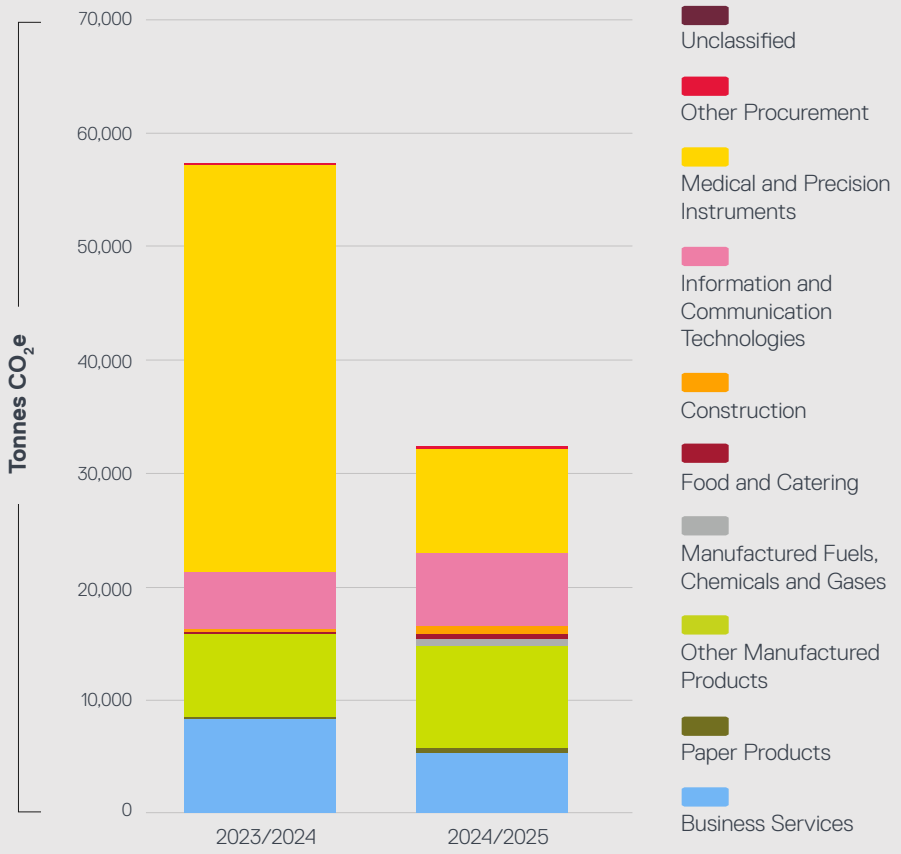
Initial infrastructure changes to decarbonise our buildings has included installation of solar panels on the roof of two additional buildings and installation of new electric autoclaves at the Sutton site.

Scope 2 accounted for zero emissions under the market-based approach. This was because purchased electricity was supported by certification demonstrating the ICR's acquisition of nuclear energy through the grid. Our Scope 2 is on track to reach our near-term and net zero targets.

Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions:

Emissions from purchased goods and services represent 88.84% of our total carbon footprint in 2024/25. For the past few years our procurement activities have constituted the majority of our carbon emissions. Significant efforts continue into making our supply chain more environmentally friendly.

Procurement Carbon Footprint – Comparison with Previous Year

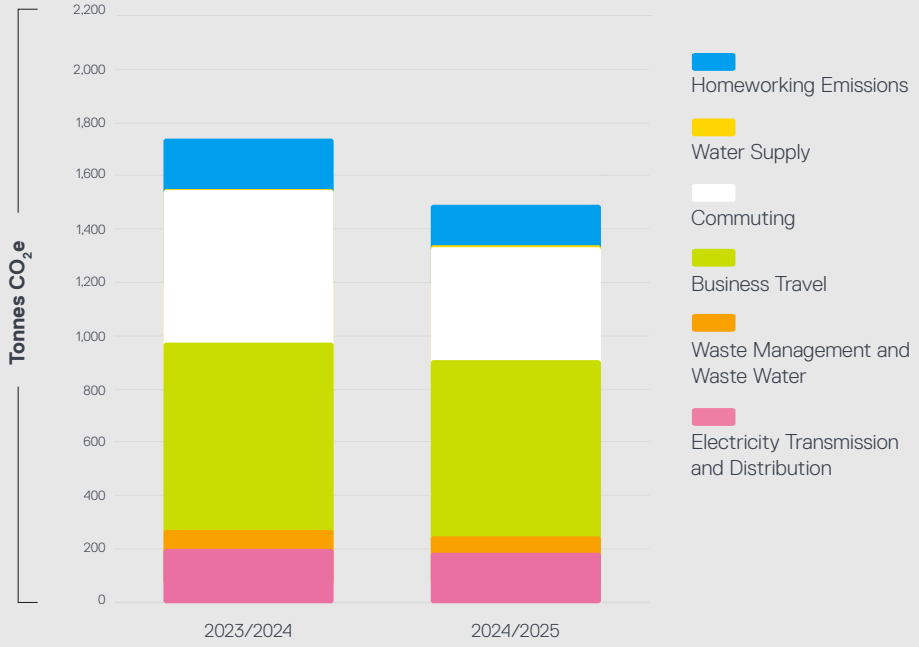


Other Scope 3 categories:

Scope 3 emissions without procurement are lower in 2024/2025 compared to 2023/2024, mainly due to the decrease in commuting emissions. Emissions from Business travel have decreased overall by 5.77%. Emissions from Waste Management and Water have decreased from 76.5 tCO2e in 2023/24 to 69.5tCO2e in 2024/25.

The emissions from water supply remain low due to previous and current work undertaken by Building and Maintenance.

ICR Carbon Footprint – Comparison with previous year Scope 3 (excluding procurement)



Sustainability Training and Capacity building

The sustainability induction course has been made mandatory for all new starters, there has also been a steady increase in existing staff and students completing the course. Currently over 20% of ICR employees have undertaken this on-line sustainability training. The role that training plays in raising awareness and engaging staff and students with sustainability cannot be under estimated. It has been important for engaging researchers in lab certification and serves as a platform from which to build in laboratory sustainability best practice and the embedding of sustainability in experimental design.

Again, this academic year we have offered Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP) (formally IEMA) accredited courses, these included Environmental Sustainability Skills for the Workforce and for the Manager. Course content which is 30% ICR specific was updated to include the most recent data, progress against our sustainability targets and practical projects and initiatives being carried out across our sites. After completion of the course an optional short multiple-choice test leads to certification by ISEP, certified by one of the country's leading sustainability institutes.

As part of My Green Lab® certification on our Sutton campus members of Procurement and Waste & Logistics Teams as well as lab scientists have taken My Green Lab® accredited professional training modules in the areas of procurement, waste, green chemistry and engagement. This on-line training builds knowledge and best practice in discrete areas of sustainability, which can be shared with the wider ICR community.

'Climate Fresk', climate literacy training and much more.

This fun and collaborative workshop helped raise awareness and inspire staff and students to take action around climate change. There is significant evidence indicating that in-role sustainability actions are the most impactful, and key in driving the transition towards organisations becoming more sustainable.

For members of the ICR's Sustainability Advisory Group, this provided a much-welcomed opportunity to work together outside of everyday commitments to refresh knowledge related to climate change, acknowledge our feelings regarding this and most importantly take away specific actions to progress sustainability at the ICR.

This workshop has helped to re-energise and focus the group to really driver sustainability within the organisation in order to meet our sustainability target and reduce the environmental impact of our science.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

At the ICR, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion continue to sit as the foundation upon which we build a successful working community, where students and employees can flourish as we pursue the single mission of making the discoveries that defeat cancer.

Progress requires consistent, multifaceted effort, and engagement from all levels. We are moving in the right direction and have some results for which we are incredibly proud. Now we must build on that momentum.

Athena Swan

The Athena SWAN Charter, administered by Advance HE, provides a framework to drive and embed gender equality across higher education and research institutions. It recognises and celebrates commitment and progress in creating fair, inclusive environments that support the representation, progression, and success of all genders.

The ICR is delighted to have received a renewal of our Silver Award in June 2025 which sets our gender equality objectives for the next five years. This is testament to the continued hard work and commitment by The Athena SWAN Steering Group, chaired by Professor Christina Yap and the wider institute.

In 2025, the Athena Swan Steering Group have worked on:

- Understanding the intersectional components of driving equality and inclusion
- Gaining an in depth understanding of the factors impacting our Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap
- New training to address legislative updates round sexual harassment.

Annual equality objectives 2025

Equality objectives are established by the ICR's Equality Steering Group, for approval by Management Committee, and reported annually through our published Equality Report.

In 2025 we have achieved:

- Reduced Gender Pay Gap from 21.3% to 18.5% and reduced Ethnicity Pay Gap from 19.8% to 16.5%
- Developing a single EDI Action Plan
- Growth of our EDI networks with new Networks added including Neurodiversity Network
- Beginning to explore the impact of socioeconomic status on success.

2026 is set to be an exciting year full of step changes that will support EDI progress. This includes:

- A new ERP system that will provide better real time people data to enable better reporting and career tracking
- New frameworks that will help align our culture and day to day behaviours
- A new EDI Strategy that will simplify our progress and future direction
- Continuing to grow our employee networks so we can continue to have meaningful two-way dialogue to better understand the needs of our students and employees and we can better connect them with the diversity of support available
- Combining our Athena Swan Steering Group and Equality Steering Groups to reduce duplication and focus on action.

Pillar 2
Sustainable Operations

Waste at the ICR

- Reduce Waste by 4.2% per annum
- Recycle at least 50% of site waste by 2024/25

In 2024/25, the total waste weight generated fell by 16.07 tonnes compared to 2023/24 and by 20.572 tonnes from the 2018/19 baseline – a 7.97% overall reduction. Waste levels remain above the target despite the 4.2% year on year decrease target.

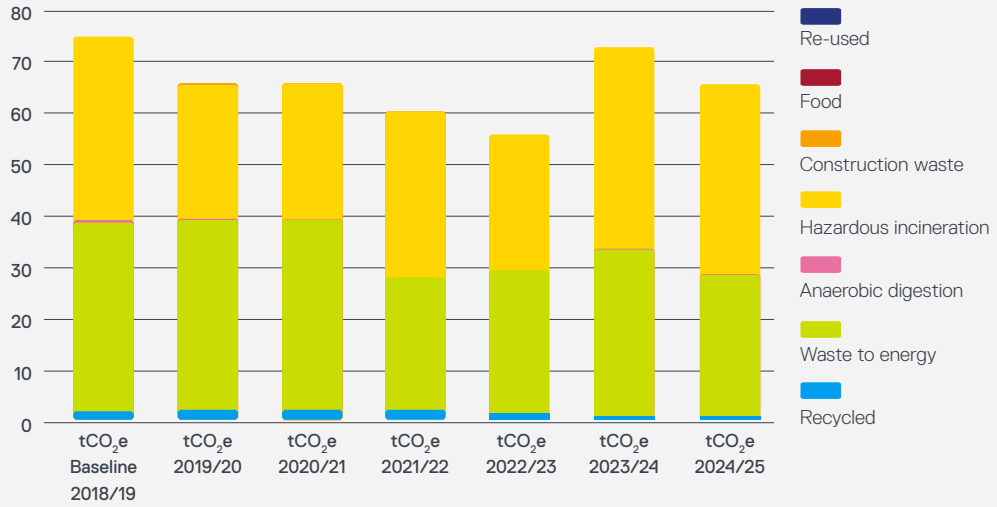
The overall weight of recycling has decreased to 84.034 tonnes compared to 88.351 tonnes in the previous year. The decrease in weight was due to less recycled construction material during the year, this decrease being offset by increases in pallet (10.412 tonnes), cardboard (18.16 tonnes) and digital computer waste (2.2 tonnes). The overall recycling rate for the year was 35.43% a slight increase on the previous year.

The weight of hazardous waste was 68.906 tonnes compared to 73.245 tonnes in the previous year. Most of the waste being made up of clinical waste at 58.160 tonnes (2024-25). Initiatives are being worked on to reduce this figure in the coming year.

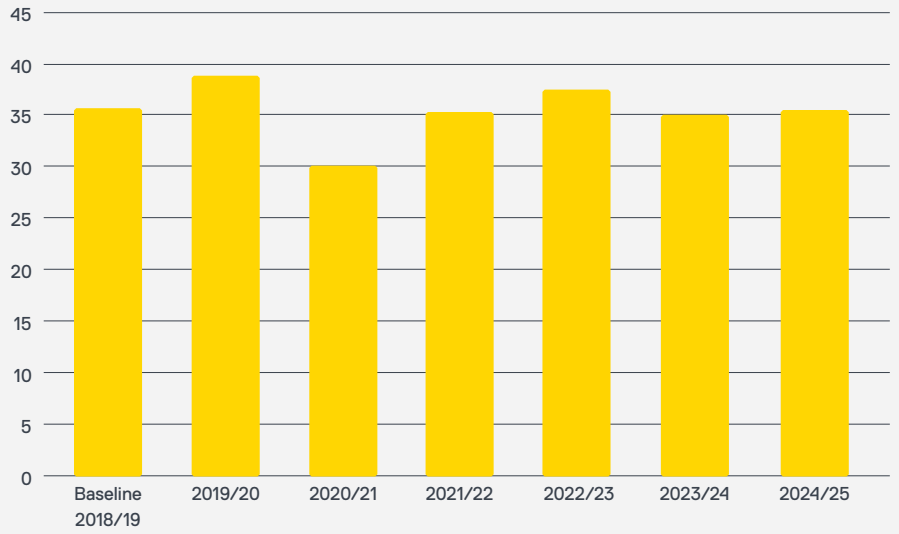
The total waste in tCO_2e decreased to 65.34 tonnes.

The waste disposal services contract was retendered in the academic year 2024/2025, with the new contracts commencing at the beginning of September 2025. The ICR now has two suppliers one for hazardous waste and the other for recycling and general waste. Improvement discussions have commenced with both suppliers to explore options to decrease the carbon footprint of waste generated.

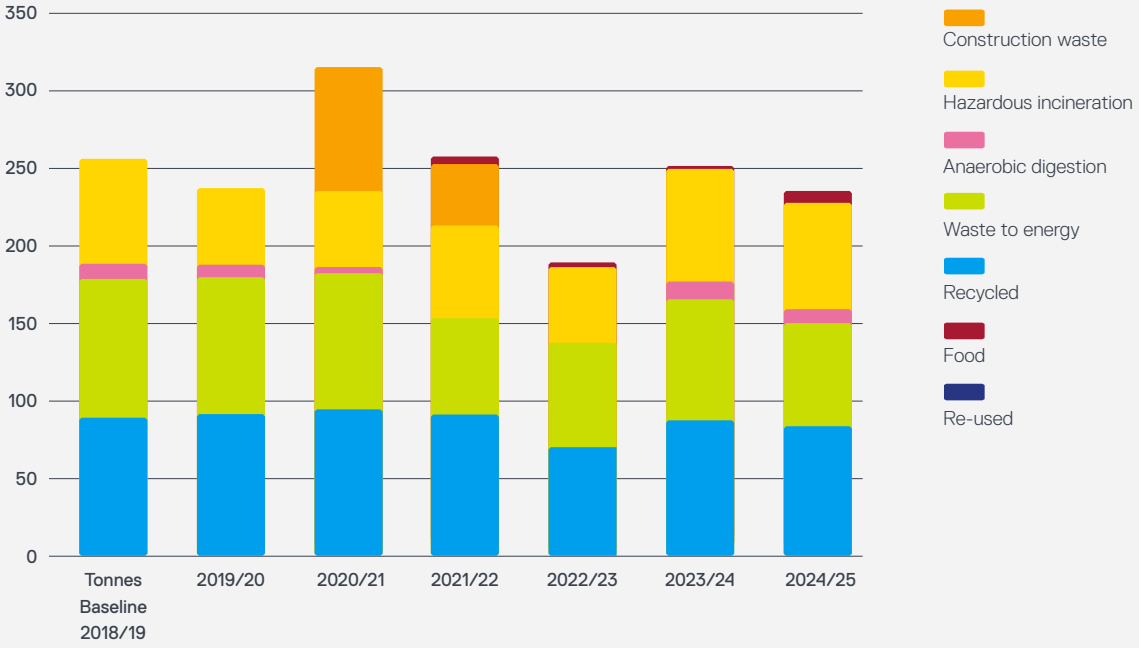
Waste Comparison by Type (tCO_2e)

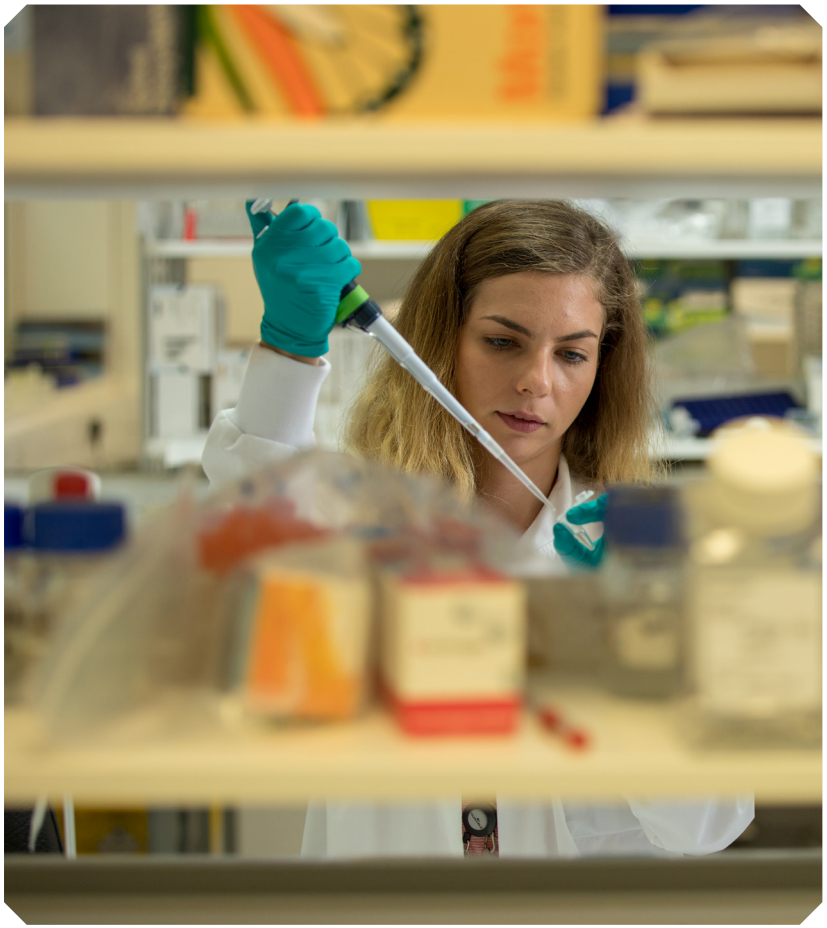


Total Recycling Rate (%)



Waste Comparison by Type (Tonnes)





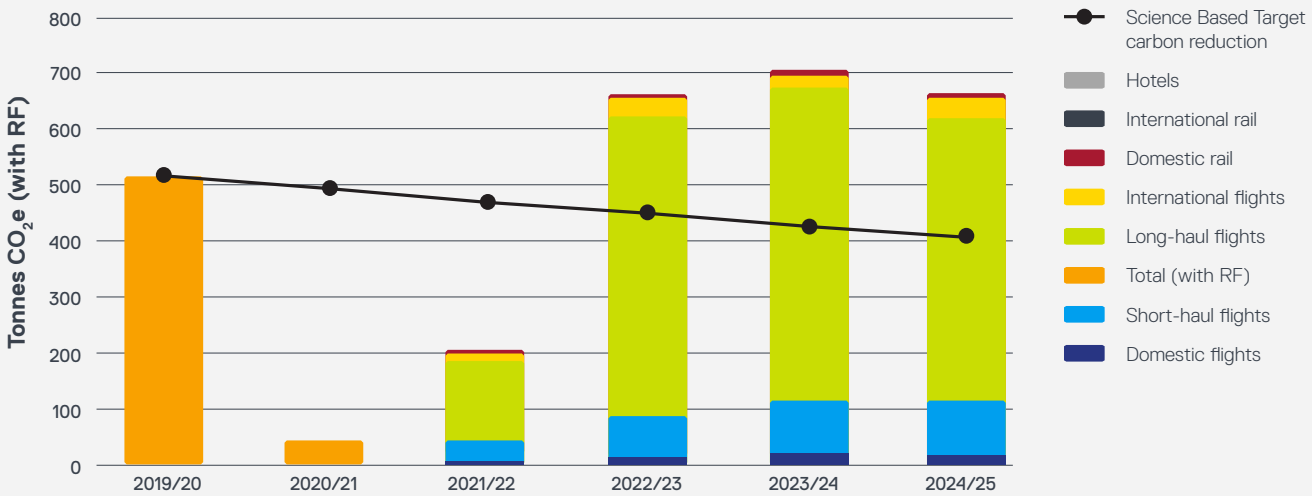
Business travel

In the 2024/25 reporting year, the Institute of Cancer Research recorded a total of 660 tonnes of CO_2e from travel-related emissions, based on data from ClarityGo bookings. This marks a 5.85% reduction compared to the previous year's 701 tonnes, indicating modest progress in sustainability efforts. Flights remained the dominant source of emissions, with long haul flights alone contributing 503 tonnes, accounting for 76% of the total. Short haul flights added nearly 100 tonnes, while hotels and rail travel contributed 7.7 and 5.5 tonnes respectively.

Despite an increase in total bookings, emissions were reduced through targeted changes in travel behaviour. Notably, domestic flights were discouraged, resulting in a drop from 89 flights, contributing 13.05 tonnes, to 63 flights, contributing only 6.77 tonnes, saving over 6 tonnes of CO_2e. Long haul flights increased in number but saw lower average emissions per flight.

Overall, the report underscores the need to continue promoting sustainable travel choices, especially within high-emitting divisions and among frequent flyers.

Cumulative carbon emissions from business travel



Travel to ICR sites

Commuting to the ICR.

In this year the ICR have:

- Installed a new drying rack at Sutton
- Allocated additional bike spaces at Chelsea
- Initiated a first come first serve bike storage system at CBL on the 4th floor patio bike spaces

The number of known Bike users across both sites is over 100, with the Teams Bike User group having 87 members.

The number of staff taking up the offer of a cycle to work loan is 17.

Facilities for Electric Vehicles

Since the implementation of the salary sacrifice scheme for an Electric Vehicle uptake has been low with only 3 members of staff taking up the offer. There are however 69 people registered as users of the EV charging points. The EV charging points are now on an annual maintenance service contract. Investigation work is underway to have the EV points linked to a Mobile App.

Season Ticket loans

The take up of an interest free season ticket loan is considered low at 25 persons. This may in part be due to personnel working hybrid and the purchase of season tickets no longer making economic sense.

Carbon Emission

The calculated emissions from commuter travel in 2024/25 were 467 tonnes compared to 568 tonnes for the previous academic year. The greatest emissions come from usage of cars at 326 tonnes.

The car permit data indicates there are 494 persons at Sutton using a car as part of their daily commute.

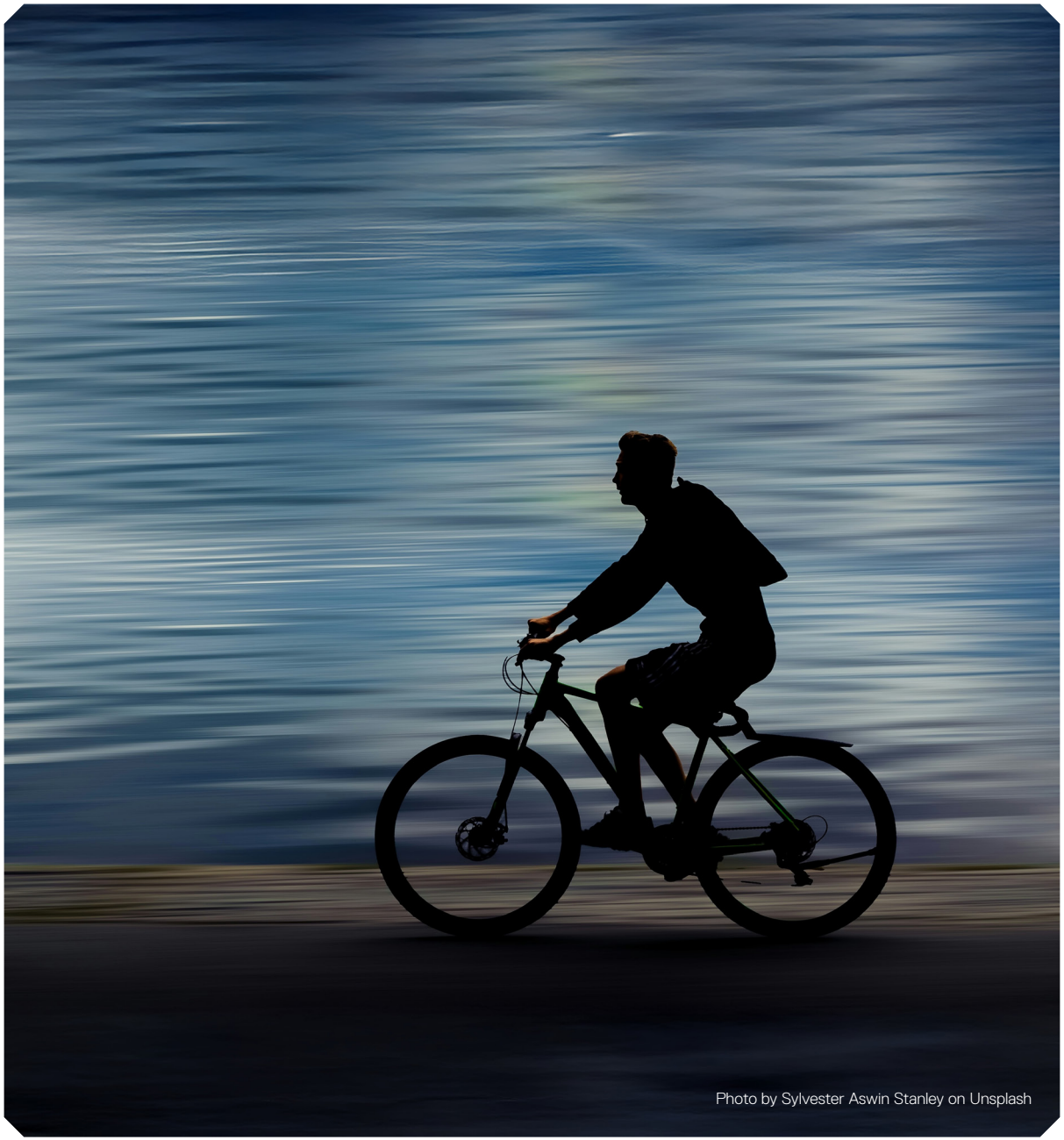


Photo by Sylvester Aswin Stanley on Unsplash

Biodiversity

- Improving biodiversity on our sites
- Commission new site biodiversity plan
- Develop habitat relevant to London Borough of Sutton Local Biodiversity Action Plan at Sutton site.

After a successful tender the new grounds maintenance company commenced work at ICR Sutton in September 2024. With reference to the Sutton expanded Biodiversity Action Plan they have undertaken work to remove unwanted plants from ornamental planting areas and reduced the height of trees in the car park areas. Work has just started to reduce the encroachment of scrub along the boundary areas and remove unwanted non-native species.

Areas for future improvement include the wildflower meadow and the CCDD green roof along with the thinning out of some of the invasive sycamore trees along the north site boundary line.

Pollards Wood

A commissoned report of the ICR sites and properties proposed several options for future use, including that of Pollards Wood.

Biodiversity Event

In September 2024, ICR staff and students supported the Sutton Council Biodiversity Team at Belmont Pastures removing the cut hay by use of hand rakes thereby allowing the native wildflower seeds to be retained. Our efforts are starting to show results with an increase in wildflowers and insects seen in the summer of 2025.

Butterfly Event

ICR again surveyed the wildflower meadow as part of the UK Big Butterfly count recording sightings of Meadow Brown butterflies.

Photo by Lee Peterson on Unsplash

Pillar 3
Sustainable Science

ActNow sustainability working group

ActNow is the ICR's sustainability working group. It provides an opportunity for passionate and driven staff and students to contribute to sustainability at the ICR.

ActNow holds senior leadership at the ICR to account in meeting its sustainability commitments. It also champions and shares best practise approaches in sustainable science at the practical and strategic level. As Mike Berners-Lee might say 'there is no planet B' … so ActNow!

ActNow Meetings

Chaired by a member of ActNow with support from the Sustainability Advisory Group (SAG), Sustainability, Health & Safety Team (SHS), Estates & Facilities and Procurement as appropriate.

Meetings are held monthly and topics covered ranged from Green DiSC launch and sustainable digital services to activism in science.

Meetings are recorded and informal minutes and actions assigned where appropriate.

Being an ActNow member

This is a flexible volunteering role which should be undertaken during working hours and supported by your line-manager.

The commitment time is flexible but typically we envisage this to be 2-3 hours a month.

Joining ActNow will provide ICR staff and students with opportunities to learn about sustainability, behaviour change methods as well as leadership, project management and communication skills.

ActNow advocates that members take part in sustainability training, through the ICR's on-line training, My Green Lab Ambassadors program, ISEP Sustainability for the Workplace or equivalent.

Members of ActNow actively drive sustainability certification schemes across the ICR, including laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF), My Green Lab and more recently Green DiSC a sustainable computing framework for our informatics laboratories.

ActNow members represent the group on operational and strategic committees which include the Royal Marsden Hospitals' Green Matters group, the ICR's Sustainability Advisory Group and the Institute Health, Safety and Environmental Committee.

Email ActNow@icr.ac.uk to join today.

World Environment Day 2025

For the fourth year in a row, ActNow, in collaboration with the Royal Marsden Hospital's Green Matters group, organized activities for World Environment Day (June 5th).

This year's theme was reducing plastic pollution, a topic that is incredibly important and that allowed the ICR to showcase how it's reducing plastic in the workplace, both within laboratories and in its catering outlets.

In the lead up to World Environment Day the ICR hosted a premiere screening of 'Plastic People', followed by a discussion over pizza, and the number of attendees for this year's screening tripled from previous years.

The World Environment Day event itself was marked by hosting a BBQ at RMH Chelsea and ICR Sutton, alongside stands featuring alternatives to plastic products for home use, information and a quiz on plastic pollution statistics. Several of ICR's lab suppliers, Mettler Toledo, Sarstedt and Thermo Fisher Scientific showcased their more sustainable products, and the Sutton site hosted a zero-waste shop.

The day was a huge success with a lot of staff getting involved across both sites and ended in a raffle with prizes that consisted of sustainable products, all of which had been displayed on the stands throughout the day.

Sustainable Science

LEAF, My Green lab and Green DiSC

- Sustainability certification for 80% of labs by 2030

At the end of the academic year 2024-25 90% of ICR Laboratories* had gained Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) silver/gold or My Green Lab certification (see the ICR website for a full list of lab certification status). In addition to this and in recognition of the carbon impact of computational orientated research science, 3 teams have gained Green DiSC certification.

Certification schemes provide a clear framework for raising awareness, generating data from which to make informed choices, and most importantly practical reductions (energy, water, waste) in the environmental impacts associated with scientific research.

The move from My Green Lab 1.0 to 2.0 and working towards LEAF gold has really raised the ambitions for lab sustainability and the requirements needed to satisfy each certification. To achieve My Green Lab 2.0 labs must practically demonstrate reduction in waste, energy, water and chemicals to achieve certification at the highest levels. Labs who have achieved LEAF gold, have demonstrated and evidenced lab specific activities which have led to a reduction in carbon emissions. These included re-use of labware, bulked packaged or refill options for lab consumables and improved lab waste segregation.

*Physical wet lab space of an ICR academic team or group

Research Sustainability

In March 2025 the ICR were awarded their first sustainable laboratories grant from the Royal Society of Chemistry.

The project 'Glove recycling - Hearts, minds and carbon reduction' investigates the feasibility of glove recycling.

Aims include:

- A review of laboratory glove recycling schemes within the UK,
- Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) of the end-of-life options for nitrile gloves,
- Cost vs carbon reduction benefits of glove recycling compared to alternative sustainability projects & initiatives
- Identifying best practice in Health and Safety and logistics with respect to glove recycling
- Literature review and focus group discussions to investigate the merits of glove recycling to promote pro-environmental spillover within laboratories.

freezer challenge.

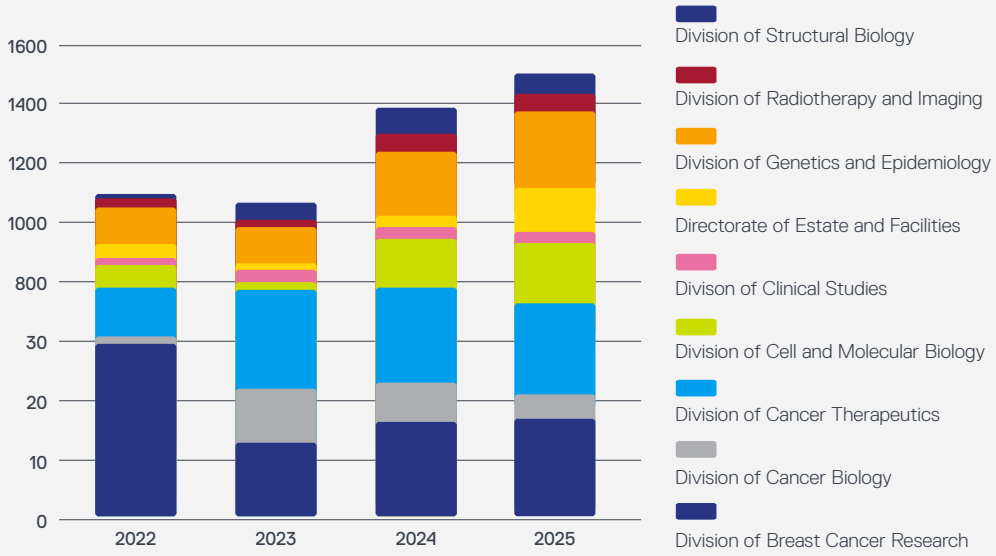
Freezer Challenge 2025

The ICR has taken part in the international freezer challenge for the fourth consecutive year. This global cold storage competition is aimed at enhancing lab sustainability through cold storage optimization, saving energy and improving efficiencies.

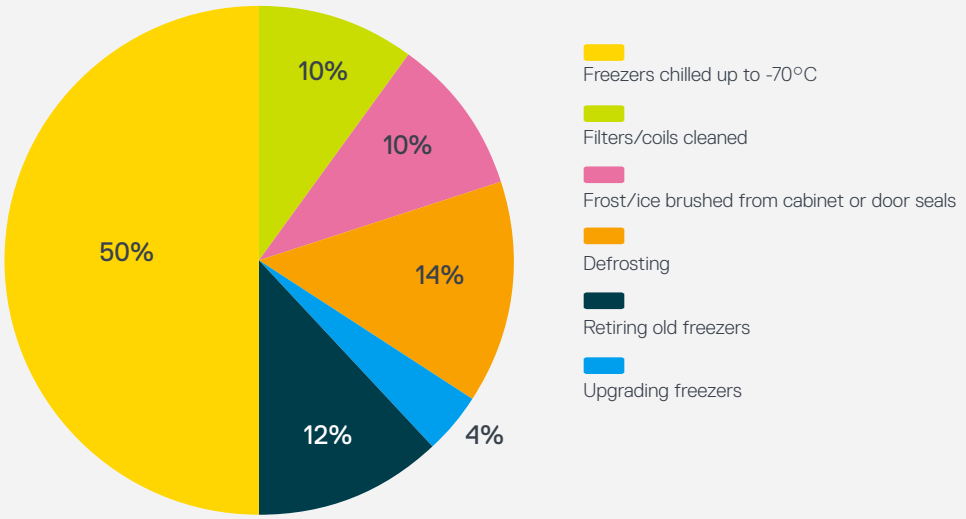
Did you know that a single ultra-low temperature freezer (ULT) consumes as much energy as a medium sized family home?

Cold temperature storage in general is very energy intensive, but there are things that you can do to reduce energy consumption without compromising sample quality and integrity. Tuning your ULT up to -70°C can save approximately 30% energy, and an annual defrost a further 10%, as well as prolonging the lifetime of your unit. Regular de-icing and maintenance, an inventory of samples, and the removal of unwanted or non-viable samples are also good practice.

Freezer challenge estimated energy savings by division



Estimated kWh savings per day



Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice

In June 2024 the ICR became a signatory to the concordat for the environmental sustainability of research and innovation practice.

This collective vision and strategy, put together by organisations across the sector, outlines actions that will reduce and eliminate negative environmental impacts and emissions associated with carrying out research and innovation. The six priority areas include leadership and system change, sustainable infrastructure, sustainable procurement, emissions from business and academic travel, collaboration and partnership, and environmental impact and reporting data. After completing a gap analysis, we have aligned areas of the concordat with sustainable discoveries our sustainability action plan. Furthermore, we will report progress against these areas, as part of this, our annual sustainability report. Each section will contain case studies, projects and initiatives that align with progress towards priority areas addressed in the concordat.

Pathways to a Sustainable Laboratory Supply Chain

Members from the Estates & Facilities Directorate were involved in the initial planning, development and delivery of the Pathways to a Sustainable Supply Chain Symposium. This action-orientated workshop hosted at Imperial College London's White city campus in October 2024, brought together funders, suppliers, purchasing consortia, purchasers and industry to explore how to make lab purchasing and supply chains more sustainable.

The ICR are part of the resulting work streams focusing on how lab purchasers make decisions, a shared question set for lab invitations to tender, training material, guidance & case studies for lab, sustainability, administration and procurement teams and the identification of the 10-100 products by LCA volume/spend (reagent, consumables and gases/chemicals).

With Scope 3 purchased goods & services making up a significant majority of life science sector organisations carbon footprint, initiatives like this are key to raising awareness, understanding and progress in making the reductions needed to meet our net zero commitments.

UK Lab Management Biosciences Conference champions sustainability in science

This inaugural conference brought together laboratory managers and bioscience professionals from across the UK to discuss and promote sustainability in scientific research.

The theme of the conference was 'Sustainability in Science' and served to highlight the importance of green laboratory practices and career development within the biosciences and research sector.

The ICR's sustainability group presented at the conference focusing on drivers to embed sustainability, maintaining momentum for lab certification, experimental design with sustainability in mind and making more sustainable procurement choices.

LONDON HIGHER

Sustainable laboratories group

The last academic year saw the launch of the London Highers sustainable network laboratories subgroup. This group was co-chaired by ICR. Looking to raise the bar, share best practice and think outside-the-box regarding lab sustainability sessions have included,

Engagement with sustainability

- Staff and student engagement with sustainability Group Leader and Team leader engagement through the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice
- Training, performance, and objective setting.

Sustainable procurement in practice

- Purchasing Lab Equipment
- Using Eco-labelling, Frameworks and Accreditations
- ACT Label Application.

ICR-CTSU

The Institute of Cancer Research Clinical Trials and Statistics Unit (ICR-CTSU) translate cutting-edge science into quality clinical trials that can transform cancer care. However, clinical trials also contribute to healthcare related greenhouse gas emissions responsible for 4-5% of anthropocentric climate change.

As the first step towards mitigating the environmental impact of clinical trials, ICR-CTSU led the development of the NIHR-funded method and guidance to carbon footprint clinical trials. Further collaboration with 10 international and UKCRC Clinical Trials Units resulted in application of the guidance to 12 trials, and their carbon hotspots identified.

The ICR-CTSU sustainability team have been awarded funding to disseminate and promote the method and train UK and international academic trialist community in clinical trial carbon footprinting. This is achieved via the ICR-CTSU team running monthly drop-in clinics open to the academic trialist community, recorded webinars, engagement presentations and workshops.

Recognising the growing interest in this area and support from the academic clinical trials community, the NIHR MRC Trials Methodology Research Partnership (TMRP) convened the Greener Trials group. The multi-disciplinary group is led by ICR-CTSU's Assistant Operations Director Dr Lisa Fox and aims to disseminate greener research practice and facilitate collaboration between stakeholders to drive the paradigm shift to lower carbon clinical trials. The group has over 150 members from across the world, representing trialists, funders, policy makers, regulators, patients and the public and healthcare providers to name a few.

Now a carbon footprinting method is available, the priority moves to building the evidence base identifying where carbon hotspots lie across different disease areas, trial designs and interventions to inform lower carbon trial design and develop, test and implement mitigation strategies. To address this, the ICR-CTSU team along with collaborators from the University of Liverpool and University of Aberdeen have been awarded funding from Wellcome entitled "Greener Trials: Building the evidence base to improve the environmental sustainability of healthcare and healthcare research"

The ICR-CTSU will lead Workstream 1 of the grant which aims to speed up and simplify the data collection and evidence collation required to inform lower carbon trial design. The Greener Trials Toolkit, currently in development, will be an online, free to use, open access carbon calculator fit for purpose for publicly-funded trialists. The Toolkit will also include an open access, publicly accessible, annotated and referenced database of publicly funded clinical trial activities and emission factors.

The ICR-CTSU team have also been awarded funding as part of the 'UK Hub for One Health Systems: Creating Sustainable Health and Social Care Pathways' led by the University of Exeter. ICR-CTSU's work within the hub will be to align and integrate carbon footprinting of publicly funded clinical trials with work ongoing in the NHS to footprint routine care pathways.

In addition to the Greener Trials work, ICR-CTSU have established a Sustainability Working Group and implemented initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of the department activities, reduce waste, encourage recycling and educate and increase awareness. We presented our experience of setting up a sustainability working group at the International Clinical Trials Methodology Conference (ICTMC) in 2024 and this will be written up to share with the academic clinical trials community.

ICR-CTSU are also working towards a de-centralised approach to clinical trials by using remote patient visits and routine data collection where possible, reviewing on-site monitoring processes and increasing the use of electronic systems.

Pillar 4
Sustainable Procurement

Sustainable procurement 2024/25

- Revision of sustainable procurement strategy and risk matrix
- Sustainable procurement guide
- Sector engagement (HEPA working group, Sustainable labs supply chain group, South KenZen)
- Circular economy initiatives – UniGreen scheme, supplier take back schemes etc and identification of GREEN products
- Stock consolidation project

Our vision:

To reduce carbon emissions associated with our purchased goods and services through, understanding the resource intensive requirements of our science, engaging with suppliers to provide, sustainability metrics and product data, and the upskilling of procurement stakeholders to enable informed purchasing choices with reduced impact.

The ICR has revised its sustainability strategy to more effectively manage and reduce its Scope 3 – purchased goods & services emissions. This includes upfront requests for data, and the inclusion of Key performance indicators (KPI's) to make informed purchasing decisions with a reduced social and environmental impact.

Understand: We will build supplier frameworks to facilitate the collection of supplier sustainability metrics and product emissions data, to accurately calculate supply chain emissions and to focus resource on projects that can deliver meaningful carbon reduction.

Update: The procurement team will adapt its processes and management of suppliers, specifically in carbon hot spots, identified in the previous academic year. This will improve data transparency, legislative compliance, meaningful reductions, and category specific management plans that include sustainability as a key element of the procurement lifecycle.

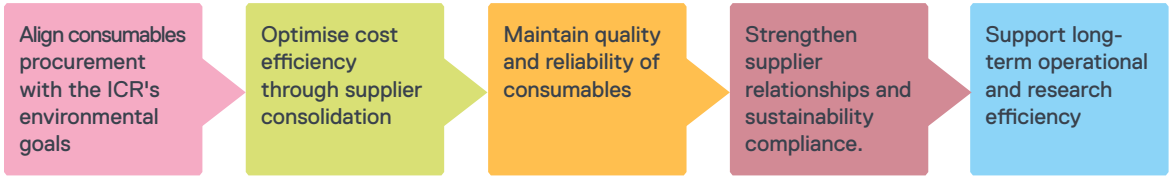
Upskill: We will increase the knowledge of ICR stakeholders, including category managers and those responsible for the purchase of goods and services. This will take the form of active workshops, guideline provision and supplier forum.

Laboratory consumables consolidation in ICR stores

Project Overview
This project focuses on consolidating purchases in ICR stores to fewer suppliers who offer both strong sustainability credentials and best value for money, contributing to the ICR's net zero 2040 goal.

It initially focused on laboratory consumables: serological pipettes, flasks, multi well plates and tube.

Strategic Objective



Key Benefits

- Environmentally friendly
- Reduced deliveries and carbon emissions
- More sustainable product selections

Commercially

- Cost savings from bulk buying
- Improved supplier management
- Simplified procurement process

This project delivers a scalable, cost-effective, and environmentally responsible procurement strategy, ensuring the ICR maintains its leadership in sustainable scientific research while optimising financial efficiency.

Looking Ahead

Supplier Engagement

Supplier forums are planned for quarter one 2026, which will facilitate much needed two-way communication. It is important for suppliers to understand the ICR's sustainable procurement aims, and for the ICR to understand where individual suppliers are on their own sustainability journey. Product and supplier data, life cycle assessment (LCA), frameworks, accreditations and other KPI information, is vital to drive reductions through supplier choice and mitigating product selection to ensure the procurement of the most sustainable products.

Proposed training

ICR procurement professionals and key personnel involved in major procurement decision, including lab managers, estates and facilities and digital services, will be trained through the Higher Education Procurement Association (HEPA) Sustainable Procurement workshop sessions and Oracle system.