



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

# The College's strategy for a sustainable future



May 2020

## Introduction

Acknowledging the detrimental effect of climate change on the people of the UK – most of whom become our patients at some point in their lives – is an important step towards reducing the negative impacts of pathology on the environment. In line with the first, second and third strategic aims of the College, we aim to encourage this both in our own operations in our London headquarters and among pathologists more broadly.

In this document, the College's trustees focus on how the College is responding to the growing concerns about, and responsibilities for, environmentally sustainable activities. The objective of this document is to clarify for both members and staff:

- the purpose of, and a proposal for, sustainable activities
- a College policy regarding the environment and sustainability
- a framework for action that contributes towards sustainability.

Our strategy is three-pronged, encompassing:

- the College – its operations, staff and the impact on the environment
- specifically, our headquarters at 6 Alie Street – making the most of the sustainability and energy-saving features of the College's building
- pathologists in the laboratory – how members and the profession can work in sustainable ways.

We will review and update our existing environmental policy and introduce a framework for activities in support of sustainability initiatives.

## The College's vision for sustainability

The College aspires to reduce and minimise the environmental impact of our activities and to advocate for the health of our planet. We will do this by collating and disseminating examples of good practice in pathology, educating and inspiring members to adopt these practices.

We have, in the past, developed responses to the growing awareness of environmental issues, including creating an informal working group and producing a Corporate Social Responsibility Statement in October 2017. Both these measures aimed to:

- develop relationships within the community in Aldgate and act in its best interests
- make environmentally sound decisions
- promote the health and wellbeing of staff.

We have also taken recent action: the new College building was built to high standards for long-term sustainability and energy efficiencies – it achieved an 'excellent' rating according to BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methods) environmental standards.

## Purpose of this strategy

This strategy sets out how the College will consider the impact of its work on the environment in the context of sustainability. It provides an outline for the reduction of the environmental impact of the work of the College and that of the wider pathology community.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that climate change will cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths globally each year between 2030 and 2050. Public Health England reported that in the past two summers, during which there were several heatwaves, there were nearly 900 deaths each year in the UK (863 in 2018 and 892 in 2019) accounted for by climate change. The Lancet Countdown report on health and climate change (2019) notes that 'in 2018 over 220 million heatwave exposure events occurred globally, compared to 1986-2005 baseline'.

More broadly, the health impacts of climate change affect occupational health, air quality, food security, floods and infectious disease. While no single organisation can alter the severity or pace of climate change, acknowledging its detrimental effects on both patients and society more widely is an important step towards improving the College's impact on the environment.

The central message of this strategy is to 'reduce, reuse, recycle'. If our goal is to reduce unnecessary consumption, and we are avoiding single-use materials, then we must also prioritise how to reuse or recycle existing materials wherever possible. We will also seek to reduce energy consumption and opt for more sustainable forms of energy.

## Sustainability priorities

We are committed to raising awareness of the activities that the College is undertaking – and will in years to come – to contribute to a sustainable future. These will be achieved through a collaboration of officers, members and staff. A ‘green team’ has been established to consider any specific actions and plans and identify how to enact them. A framework of initiatives and recommendations has been developed (see appendix 2) for the green team to oversee. This will be continually updated. The approach will focus on areas where the College can contribute to a more sustainable future by:

- considering the environmental impact of College functions, governance, staff activity, meetings and conferences
- detailing the environmental achievements of the new building and maximising the potential of the building’s features
- working with members (via SACs and other committees) to develop and share examples of how to reduce the impact of pathology practice on the environment
- working with industry colleagues, specialist societies and international pathology colleges to reduce the impact on the environment
- sharing and promoting innovative ideas at, for example, a sustainability conference, or as a stream within a wider College conference or a series of webinars
- promoting research by pathologists and scientists into topics related to health and environmental sustainability, for example, the effect on health of consuming microplastics.

Our priorities will focus on the following areas.

### Energy

#### Fossil fuel investments

Fossil fuels are a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Green energy options are increasingly supplying energy across the UK, but fossil fuels remain the largest energy source. Trustees approved the College’s divestment away from fossil fuels in 2019 and 2020. As of February 2020, the College has no direct investment holdings in fossil fuels.

#### Energy use at the College building in London

The design of the new College building optimises the efficient use of energy in many ways, for example through temperature control, lighting and water use. Solar panels on the roof generate electricity for use in the building. The building has a biodiverse green roof, which purifies the air, reduces the ambient temperature, regulates the indoor temperature, saves energy and encourages biodiversity in the city.

Individual actions can also help reduce energy use, for example using the stairs instead of taking the lift. This also has health and wellbeing benefits.

### Transport

Due to the central London location of the College, most staff utilise public transport. There is less frequent use of other modes of transport. However, the College has recently signed a contract with a green taxi service, which exclusively uses hybrid vehicles, for when College staff, guests or members require taxis.

College committees, councils and the Trustee Board rely on volunteer members often travelling to London or other locations around the UK to attend meetings. The College has installed video conferencing for use in large meeting rooms and is planning higher use of video conferencing for the future. However, face-to-face meetings are important in some circumstances and therefore, where long-distance travel is unavoidable, the resulting carbon footprint could be offset. There are many organisations offering services related to carbon offsetting via different routes, such as contributing to global green projects, supporting UK tree planting and managing educational projects with children.

### Food

One effective way to reduce our carbon footprint is to stop eating meat (or eat less of it). Intensive farming practices across the world, especially those involved in raising cattle and sheep, lead to greenhouse gas emissions greater than those generated by fossil fuels. At the College’s headquarters in London, our caterers are making efforts to introduce more non-meat options to encourage staff, volunteers and event delegates to reduce meat consumption.

The Events@No6 team incorporate a range of corporate social responsibility practices into their service. See appendix 1 for more details.

### Plastic use

Plastic is a versatile material used in a huge variety of ways, including the avoidance of wood usage, which contributes to deforestation. However, a lot of plastic is single use; some plastic can be recycled, but much cannot. Plastic contributes to pollution in several ways, including through the accumulation of debris on land and in the sea, and the release of microplastics – especially in the oceans. Plastics that are burned (for example, as clinical waste) contribute to air pollution.

The elimination of plastic is not currently feasible and is not the intention of this strategy. However, there are many ways College staff and the field of pathology can address and reduce plastic usage (see appendix 2). Additionally, there is a growing body of research into the impact of microplastics on the human body and health. Pathologists involved in this research should be supported and encouraged.

## Waste management

'Reduce, reuse, recycle': wherever possible, we aim to reduce consumption, relying instead on re-using or recycling existing materials.

Where new materials are required for College work, consideration should be given to sourcing responsibly. For example, the paper used in the Bulletin is from Forest Stewardship Council-certified sources. Paper usage should be avoided where possible, but when it is needed other than for official documents/letters, recycled paper could be considered.

Recycling bins are available throughout the College offices.

## Taking forward the vision

The following measures have been proposed and some have begun:

- a working green team has been established, composed of College staff and members, to explore ideas and confirm an action plan to reduce the impact on the environment
- the College environmental policy will be reviewed and updated
- committee chairs will add environmental sustainability to their agenda and will collate and share examples of pathology laboratory best practice
- corporate members and specialist societies will be contacted to encourage them to adopt environmentally friendly practices and to collate and share examples among members
- regular articles in the Bulletin will help members to report on good practice, educating and inspiring readers
- a College initiative focused on sustainability should be carried out in 2021, possibly incorporated into a College conference or series of webinars.

## Appendix 1: Sustainability and catering at the College

Parent catering company Vacherin has the contract to provide food services at RCPATH's London headquarters. Vacherin's [Corporate Social Responsibility \(CSR\) report](#) outlines all the initiatives that the company has taken, with some in the area of environmental sustainability covered here.

### Food waste procedures and standards at Vacherin

Vacherin has structures in place to reduce surplus food. They monitor all waste streams at every site and use this information to benchmark and identify improvements. They actively reduce surplus food by ordering and cooking only what is required. Vacherin's chefs have been trained to use all parts of an ingredient 'from root to fruit' and to think creatively about surplus food. They recycle all inedible food waste so nothing goes to landfill. Arrangements are in place to redistribute food to charitable organisations where possible. However, it is anticipated that this will happen infrequently, as the College's catering operation is relatively small in scale, and food production is targeted at the number of planned guests. (Use of food leftovers is governed by health and safety and food hygiene regulations.)

### Responsible sourcing and food miles

All Vacherin staff adhere to the company's ethical procurement policy. This means food is sourced as locally as possible. All of Vacherin's suppliers are headquartered in England and Wales, with the majority having London depots, so the food doesn't have to travel far. For items not produced in the UK (like coffee and tea), they work with suppliers who source to direct trade principles. They don't buy any 'Fish to Avoid', paying close attention to the Marine Conservation Society Good Fish Guide. All Vacherin's eggs and milk are certified free range and 90% of their meat is British, which is produced to much higher ethical standards than many other countries.

### Other sustainability projects that Vacherin is involved in

Vacherin is an accredited three-star member of the Sustainable Restaurant Association. Their environmental management system upholds the ISO 14001 certification. They have signed up to the Crown Estate's food waste pledge to reduce food waste by 25% by May 2020 and have also committed to 'Peas Please' – a pledge to increase the procurement of vegetables by 20% by 2020.

### Meat-free options for clients

Vacherin aim to increase vegetable consumption at 6 Alie Street. As well as red meat-free Mondays, which is standard across all Vacherin sites, they have increased both vegetarian and vegan options on menus in line with their public pledge to increase this. They are also listing the vegetarian option first on all menus, training chefs in vegetarian and vegan cooking, and marketing promotions to nudge customers into purchasing vegetable-led dishes.



## Appendix 2: A framework for sustainable activities

Many of the following are ideas that the College will consider implementing. Several of the initiatives listed here are already under way. For example, we have energy-saving features in the College building and have in place catering waste management and food sustainability measures.

	College (operations, staff)	Building	Pathologists (members, laboratories)
<b>Energy</b>	<p>The College has divested from fossil fuels.</p> <p>Move towards green energy suppliers.</p> <p>Energy efficiency should be considered whenever purchasing new equipment, e.g. sleep modes, auto-off.</p> <p>Ensure computers, printers, photocopiers, etc. are turned off at the end of the day (or auto-off functions are employed).</p>	<p>Use building management systems and staff awareness to ensure consumption is optimised, e.g. lights are turned off, heating and cooling systems are efficient.</p> <p>Take the stairs where possible.</p> <p>The energy efficiency aspects of the new College building will be discussed in an article in the Bulletin including considering how further improvements can be made.</p> <p>The green roof should be restored and sustained through future dry spells.</p>	<p>Energy efficiency should be considered whenever purchasing new equipment, e.g. sleep modes, auto-off.</p> <p>Laboratories should ensure use of methods to reduce energy waste, e.g. passive infrared control of lighting, making best use of the capacity of machines, auto-off functions, plug socket timer switches, etc.</p> <p>Develop and share examples among members of how to reduce energy use.</p>
<b>Transport</b>	<p>Utilise teleconferencing and video conferencing whenever possible.</p> <p>When air or long-distance rail travel is necessary, the College should calculate and offset the carbon footprint.</p> <p>Consider grouping meetings together where possible to reduce duplicate travel.</p> <p>Use public transport wherever possible.</p> <p>Electric/hybrid taxis should be sought if taxi use for College business is necessary.</p>	<p>Consider involvement in any environmentally friendly initiatives with the local neighbourhood as part of the College's Corporate Social Responsibility plan.</p>	<p>Pathologists should engage with specimen transport providers to influence the switch to electric vehicles.</p> <p>Develop and share examples among members of how to reduce transport use or choose green options.</p> <p>Promote use of technology within trusts for dial-in or video conferencing.</p> <p>Investigate the impact of digital techniques compared with physical transportation of specimens.</p>

	College (operations, staff)	Building	Pathologists (members, laboratories)
<b>Food</b>	<p>The College should switch to meat-free catering for all meetings, conferences and formal functions.</p> <p>Staff should be encouraged to have a meat-free day at least once a week.</p> <p>Catering should ensure responsible food sourcing (to include animal welfare and food miles) and incentivise meat-free menus.</p> <p>Food waste should be kept to a minimum.</p> <p>Participants should ensure they notify meeting organisers if they are attending to enable food planning and avoid wastage.</p> <p>Caterers should work with local charities to redistribute food leftovers.</p>	<p>Food waste should be segregated and placed in food waste bins.</p>	<p>Develop and share examples among members of how to reduce the impact of food packaging, purchase, preparation, consumption and wastage on the environment.</p> <p>Members should be encouraged to have a meat-free day at least once a week.</p>
<b>Plastic use</b>	<p>The College should opt for consumables with minimal plastic packaging.</p> <p>Promotional materials should not include single-use plastic items such as disposable plastic pens. Pencils or recycled pens are a suitable alternative.</p> <p>The plastic wrapping used for posting the Bulletin and similar publications should be plant-based and eco-friendly or use recycled paper wrappers.</p> <p>The College should consider going digital-only for the <i>Bulletin</i>.</p>	<p>Single-use plastics should be minimised.</p> <p>Plastic waste should be recycled.</p> <p>Promote the consumption of tap water over water in plastic bottles.</p> <p>Promote use of cups/mugs over single-use hot drink beakers.</p>	<p>The use of plastic in laboratories should be reviewed to reduce unnecessary use of plastic and to reuse or recycle where possible.</p> <p>Swapping plastic for cardboard or paper-based alternatives should be considered.</p> <p>Develop and share examples among members of how to reduce plastic use.</p> <p>Encourage research into the impact of plastics on health.</p>

	College (operations, staff)	Building	Pathologists (members, laboratories)
<b>Waste management</b>	<p>The College should reduce paper usage and consider purchasing recycled paper, e.g. for exam papers.</p> <p>The College could purchase branded reusable coffee cups for staff to reduce use of single-use coffee cups. These could also be available as merchandise for sale.</p> <p>Printing should be kept to a minimum, done only when necessary, and should be double-sided, to halve paper use. Papers for College meetings should not be printed.</p> <p>Consider adding a header to all College meeting papers: 'To reduce our impact on the environment, please do not print'.</p>	<p>Use of recycling facilities in office areas should be promoted.</p> <p>Waste should be segregated to maximise recycling and minimise landfill. Every effort should be made to avoid waste.</p> <p>Water use should be reduced by utilising the smart taps and reduced-flush toilets.</p>	<p>Develop and share examples among members of how to reduce, reuse, recycle.</p> <p>Promote use of reusable coffee cups for members to reduce use of single-use coffee cups.</p>

The Royal College of Pathologists is a professional membership organisation with more than 11,000 fellows, affiliates and trainees worldwide. We are committed to setting and maintaining professional standards and promoting excellence in the teaching and practice of pathology, for the benefit of patients.

Our members include medically and veterinary qualified pathologists and clinical scientists in 17 different specialties, including cellular pathology, haematology, clinical biochemistry, medical microbiology and veterinary pathology.

The College works with pathologists at every stage of their career. We set curricula, organise training and run exams, publish clinical guidelines and best practice recommendations and provide continuing professional development. We engage a wide range of stakeholders to improve awareness and understanding of pathology and the vital role it plays in everybody's healthcare. Working with members, we run programmes to inspire the next generation to study science and join the profession.

## **The Royal College of Pathologists**

6 Alie Street

London E1 8QT

T 020 7451 6700

E [info@rcpath.org](mailto:info@rcpath.org)

 [@rcpath](https://twitter.com/rcpath)

[www.rcpath.org](http://www.rcpath.org)

Registered Charity In England and Wales: 261035

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