Net Zero Governance Programme
Terms of Reference for Discussion Papers (Strand A)

May 2024

1. Introduction

This British Academy policy programme on net zero governance has recently published an initial report – Governance for Net Zero – that warned urgent and decisive action is needed for the UK to achieve its net zero goal. The programme marshals SHAPE (Social Science, Humanities and the Arts for People, Economy & Environment) research and expertise to support net zero delivery, with a focus on governance.

As the programme now enters its second phase, it will build on this foundation to clearly articulate how, why and when governance matters on net zero by exploring relevant governance systems, structures and approaches, including the role of a range of actors embracing government, businesses, publics and civil society. It will examine how good quality, place-sensitive, multi-level governance can provide the tools to effectively direct, oversee and create accountability for organisations and institutions that have taken responsibility for reaching net zero. Its contribution will be to develop practical policy outputs to support policymakers with insights into what they can do to apply good governance principles around net zero delivery.

This document sets out terms of reference for short discussion papers as part of a series that will be produced for the programme. It provides an overview of the wider programme context and aims, along with specific guidelines on the framing of the discussion papers, the deliverables required, how to respond and a timeline.

2. Net Zero Governance Programme: Context

The UK government is one of a few in the world to be bound to a legal commitment to reach 'net zero' carbon emissions against 1990 baselines by 2050, and has released a Net Zero Strategy in 2022 on how the country will meet this target. This is matched or bettered by parallel commitments from the four UK nations, most local authorities, cities and swathes of organisations

and institutions, including significant chunks of the economy.[1] These commitments reflect evidence of broad concern and support by UK citizens for stronger action by government at all levels on climate change,[2] sentiment broadly reflected globally.[3]

The scale and speed of change required by these net zero commitments lock in the need for urgent and unprecedented transformation of almost every decision undertaken within the UK.[4] Despite these commitments, the UK's Climate Change Committee (CCC), stated in 2022 that the current plan and suite of policies will not deliver net zero as required. [5]

SHAPE research and insights highlight the challenge of such a transformation in the timescale required. They also emphasise the complex set of intersecting, urgent and important issues that simultaneously need to be addressed and the tendency for the transition to accelerate existing trends in related geographical and household inequalities, and remodel employment, skills and social norms.[6] This complex picture demonstrates that technological solutions alone are not enough to address the crisis. *The way the transformation is conducted will have a material impact on the chances of success*, with respect to the other social, environmental and economic systems which also need urgent attention.

No single action and no single organisation (public, private or third sector) can solve this problem. The Academy's recent report, Governance for Net Zero illustrated this. Only careful decision-making, coordinated across sectors, places and scales, calibrated against the strong and binding legal net zero commitments made by government, cognisant of the complexities and interconnectedness of the issues, and with an emphasis on people, can navigate this complex and shifting agenda. Therefore, **the approaches to governance that direct, oversee and account for these decisions are critical** to the collective effort across public, private and third sectors to deliver on net zero goals and to fulfilling the commitments being made on net zero. As a reference, ISO37000 provides a practical framework for how organisations – including government – can put in place high quality governance.[7] This also provides a definition of governance of organisations that is supported by a broad consensus through the ISO process, and could be a useful framework for government.

However, governance often falls short of the challenge that leaders seek to address. The Governance for Net Zero report highlighted a range of these issues, for example: resource constraints, legal and regulatory factors and conflicting policy objectives, the impact of party politics in prioritisation, ambiguity over leadership, and managing both expected and unexpected disruption. There are examples of good practice, but other cases of insufficient or inadequate approaches. For example, there is an increasing awareness of the need to facilitate the participation of a wider range of publics to better embed fairness in the delivery of net zero policies and to sustain a democratic mandate for net zero within a system of effective accountability.[8] Currently, the effects of governance issues also show up in a range of knock-on challenges, for example: lack of institutional trust; institutions passing the buck (issues of roles & responsibilities); rapid ministerial change; people, communities and groups feeling excluded; a severe lack of resources; poor coordination; inadequate preparation of affected publics for the costs and consequences for their consumption and household budgets as the transition rolls out; and major concerns around basic principles of justice and fairness. This all sits against a backdrop of widening inequalities in people's life chances and living circumstances, and increasing pressure on public services – separate but closely connected policy challenges.

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[1] www.netzerotracker.net; NAO (2020); UK100 (2021)
[2] For example, illustrated by the DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker which collects a range of opinion data.
[3] For example, illustrated by a 2021 UNDP/University of Oxford poll showing 64% of people believe climate change is a global emergency; or a 2021 Pew Research Center survey with similar findings.
[4] While we focus on the UK's transition to net zero, we acknowledge that the UK is part of a global transition and the UK's international commitments and relationships have an impact within the UK and internationally.
[5] Climate Change Committee (2022), 'Current programmes will not deliver net zero'.
[6] Bedford *et al.,* 'Going down the local'; Zhao, 'Implementing net zero affordable housing'; Gazze, 'Achieving net zero goals in residential buildings'.
[7] ISO37000 provides a clear framework for thinking about the governance of organisations that we are drawing on in this project.
[8] Verfuerth, C., Demski, C., Capstick, S., Whitmarsh, L. and Poortinga, W. (2023), 'A people-centred approach is needed to meet net zero goals', Journal of the British Academy, 'Governance Factors on the Road to Net Zero', 11 (2), pp. 97–124; **and** Institute for Community Studies (2023), 'Our journey to net zero: Understanding household and community participation in the UK's transition to a greener future'. Available here.

3. Programme scope

The report and our analysis of the stakeholder insights and research funded by the programme focused on two enablers, which this phase of the programme will explore in more depth through two strands of work:

- Strand A: Perspective of leaders (including policymakers across layers of government) who direct, oversee and create accountability for an organisation's (including government departments and public bodies) net zero commitments and create an enabling environment for private and third sectors to support those efforts.

- Strand B: Perspective of publics (including citizens, communities and groups) who elect leaders to direct and oversee the state, hold those leaders to account, and who are affected by and participate in the net zero transformation and its governance. There is no singular 'public', hence achieving a net zero transition is further complicated by a range of intersecting, urgent and important issues impacting a range of publics.

Both strands will also explore the relationship with intermediary organisations (or middle actors) and institutions that are responsible for parts of the delivery and governance around net zero policy.

These terms of reference specifically refer to Strand A and the next section goes into greater depth on the specific questions and gaps we expect researchers to explore in the discussion papers. Researchers interested in the other strands should refer to the Strand B terms of reference. Strand C will be considered later in this phase.

4. Strand A discussion papers objectives: The perspective of leaders

Strand A discussion papers should focus on the perspective of leaders (including policymakers across layers of government) who direct, oversee and create accountability for an organisation's (including government departments and public bodies) net zero commitments and create an enabling environment for private and third sectors to support those efforts.

Below, we provide illustrations of the types of questions we are looking to answer in this strand. It is anticipated that researchers will pinpoint those elements they are most able to respond to within this range of relevant questions and considerations. A holistic treatment of all the elements is not expected.

1. **Why and how governance matters for net zero and which leaders are accountable?** Papers covering this dimension may for example, explore the role of leaders directly – who are they, when, how and why do they lead? They may also consider the link between governance and reducing emissions in a way that is fair and just – to what extent does research currently make this link, how strong is the connection, and how clearly are fairness and justice accounted for? Or they may explore the roles and responsibilities of different institutions and organisations and how they are connected across scales and places.

2. **What practical governance tools support direction of, oversight of, and accountability for net zero policies and strategies?** Papers covering this dimension may for example:

    - Consider what leaders expect of publics and peoples (and vice-versa), and how they should lead.

    - Explore how delivery of net zero policies and strategies is coordinated at different levels of government (also considering examples of collaboration).

    - Draw on research that analyses the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms at different levels of government and/or outside of government.

- Draw on research that analyse how different models of accountability enhance or detract from the delivery of policy outcomes.

Each of these questions may also be more specifically framed by target groups (who is affected), times, scales and places.

3. **Case studies illustrating practical insights**. All papers should include case studies and examples of different net zero policy interventions in relevant policy areas such as transport, energy, non-residential buildings (note that examples from domestic housing were covered in our first phase), agriculture, land use and/or food, and consumption more broadly. These may also link to connected challenges facing publics, including cost of living. Examples illustrating the roles and responsibilities of organisations of institutions of different levels of government, and the relationships between them are also of interest (in particular devolved governments, mayors & combined authorities, and national government; noting here too that local authorities are being closely examined by a pre-existing research project we have funded).

Across all of these, initial research has indicated a range of cross-cutting elements to consider: fairness and justice in the net zero transition, the links with interconnected environmental and social challenges, the role of intermediaries, relationships between & within different scales of government in a multi-level governance system, and place-sensitive and people-centred policymaking.

Acknowledging the complexity of this picture, we welcome requests to discuss the framing in advance of proposals being submitted. Please contact Tuisku Kolu (t.kolu@thebritishacademy.ac.uk) or Henry Richards (h.richards@thebritishacademy.ac.uk).

5. Audience

This programme focuses on UK policy and policymakers; as such, the discussion papers should be policy-relevant, focused on practice and presented in a form that is accessible for policymakers while still rigorous and evidence-based. This means limiting the use of academic or technical terminology, including relevant examples and adopting a concise and well-structured writing style. The British Academy policy team will provide some guidance and feedback on this through the process.

We note that policy can be defined as the system of ideas and processes which govern behaviour and practice to achieve defined goals, within an organisation or community. Policy and policymaking is therefore not confined to decisions made by governments, but can include those made within business and civil society, and within international and supranational organisations.

In terms of place, while climate change is a global issue, this programme targets UK policy and policymakers and this should be the focus of discussion papers. Experience, evidence and knowledge from other parts of the world can be drawn on, where relevant to UK policy.

6. Deliverable

Reflecting the objectives listed above, the expected deliverable is **a concise, robust, evidence-based, well-referenced, contextualised and balanced discussion paper that responds to the framing and objectives, and addresses the audience identified above**. As a guide, the length of the paper should be around 4,000 words and no more than 5,000, excluding references. It should also be evidence-based and meet high academic standards. All papers will be subject to peer review which will be facilitated by the Academy. Assuming they meet the expected standards, papers will be published on the programme evidence hub in the author's name.

For clarity, the expectation is that this work will be based on existing knowledge, research, and analysis on these topics rather than involving new field research. Authors can draw on their

existing published material as well as a wider evidence base, but the paper should be an original work that has not been published elsewhere already.

As highlighted above, these are not opinion-pieces, but **should include case studies, useful conclusions and where appropriate, proposals, areas for further discussion, or gaps and opportunities for consideration**.

7. Author profile

The author or authors of the paper (jointly authored papers will be accepted) must have demonstrable expertise linked to academic or policy knowledge that enables them to contribute authoritatively to the public debate on this issue.

The nature of this programme means that a range of perspectives and backgrounds are welcomed and expected. We welcome applications from researchers at all stages of their careers, including independent researchers.

The framing of the programme is around the SHAPE disciplines and as such the papers should draw on evidence from them. However, it is important to highlight that relevant non-academic expertise is welcome.

8. Responding to this call

To respond, please submit a proposal (comprising a brief CV, an outline that describes the paper you would like to contribute to this series and the date you will submit the finished paper). These should be sent to Tuisku Kolu by email (t.kolu@thebritishacademy.ac.uk cc'ing policy@thebritishacademy.ac.uk). See timeline below for deadlines.

Please ensure your outline / abstract describes how your paper will respond to the objectives and the framing set out in these Terms of Reference.

Your proposal will be evaluated by the programme's Working Group. If it meets the requirements, we will request a short follow-up call. Assessments of proposals will be based on the following criteria:

- relevance of the paper to the framing and objectives set out in these Terms of Reference (particularly the shaded box above);

- quality of the proposed approach and robustness of the ideas presented;

- relevance to the policy and research landscape; and,

- the alignment of the delivery date with our timetable below.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this or ask questions in advance of submitting your proposal, please contact Tuisku Kolu on the details above.

9. Fees

This is a paid commission with fixed terms. The fee paid for each paper will be £4,000. Payment will be made in two tranches, with 50% upon signature of the contract and 50% on completion. Please note that this is a commissioned paper, not a grant and therefore it may be subject to VAT.

10. Timeline

Proposal deadlines: the final deadline for submission of proposals will be 7 June 2024.

Appointment: We will aim to appoint authors within 10 days of the deadline.

- **Delivery deadlines:** First drafts are expected 6 weeks after appointment (expected as the 29th of July). Reviews and revisions will follow.

Engagement opportunities: Knowledge exchange and practitioner workshops, organised by the British Academy as part of the programme will provide opportunities to discuss the papers. Appointed researchers will be invited to those workshops.

Final delivery and publication: A revised final paper should be submitted for peer review in August before the first workshop (likely to be in early September). Additional revisions may be required following peer-review, with opportunity to refine the paper alongside engagement opportunities.

11. Questions and wider context

If you have questions, please contact Tuisku Kolu (t.kolu@thebritishacademy.ac.uk or policy@thebritishacademy.ac.uk). We are happy to discuss the framing and offer further guidance if required.

Further detail supporting the framing for the programme and the findings of the research projects can be found on the British Academy website:

- Governance for Net Zero report (2024)

- British Academy Journal, supplementary issue: Governance Factors on the Road to Net Zero (2023)

- Net Zero Roundtable summaries: Considering the role of people and institutions in net zero policy in the UK (2023)

- Shared Understandings of a Sustainable Future research project policy summaries (2023)

In addition to this, the British Academy has complementary policy programmes on environmental sustainability. These will also be relevant to consider within the discussion papers. In particular:

- Where We Live Next: a programme looking at how place-sensitive policymaking can support environmental sustainability.

- Just Transitions: a programme bringing together evidence of policy interventions and actions on environmental sustainability in different sectors and regions outside the UK.

- A 2022 British Academy project on Lessons from the History of UK Environmental Policy.

The intersectional nature of the issues we are exploring mean that a range of other frameworks are of value. For example:

- ISO (2021) 'ISO 37000:2021 Governance of organisations'. https://www.iso.org/standard/65036.html

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. https://sdgs.un.org/goals

- Raworth, K. (2017) Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist. London: Penguin.

- British Academy (2019) *Principles for Purposeful Business*. https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/future-of-the-corporation-principles-for-purposeful-business/