

Environmental impact update 2025/26



CANCER
RESEARCH
UK

Together we are
beating cancer



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Our highlights in 2025/26

9.4%
reduction

in emissions compared to 2024/25

17.1%
reduction

in emissions compared to our 2022/23 baseline

130+ members

in our Cancer Research UK Sustainability Network

LED rollout

completed in our retail stores

119 of the 200 labs

housed at our core-funded institutions have now achieved LEAF silver accreditation

100%

renewable energy across our retail estate

85% of new grant applicants

met LEAF silver certification

Around 12,000 fewer t-shirts

ordered for our fundraising events in 2025

Our commitment to sustainability

Cancer Research UK exists to beat cancer. We believe environmental sustainability plays a key role in helping to achieve our vision of a world where everybody lives longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.

Since launching our environmental sustainability strategy in 2024, we've taken important steps to reduce our carbon footprint. In 2025/26, we developed a clear and actionable plan setting out how we'll achieve net zero by 2050, alongside near-term targets that guide our progress.

Our strategy is focused on reducing emissions, embedding sustainability across our organisation and using our influence to drive wider change. While this is a long-term commitment, we're already seeing tangible progress.

Beating cancer is a long game and so is delivering on our environmental commitments. We strive to be operationally leading in sustainability within the UK charity sector.

Our environmental sustainability strategy focuses on five objectives

- 1

To reduce our direct and indirect carbon emissions by 50% by 2030 from our 2022/23 baseline
- 2

To achieve net zero emissions by 2050
- 3

To achieve a 7% average year-on-year reduction of our emissions from 2023/24 until 2030
- 4

To embed environmental sustainability in all that we do and influence our partners to do the same
- 5

To set further goals beyond emissions reduction as we progress



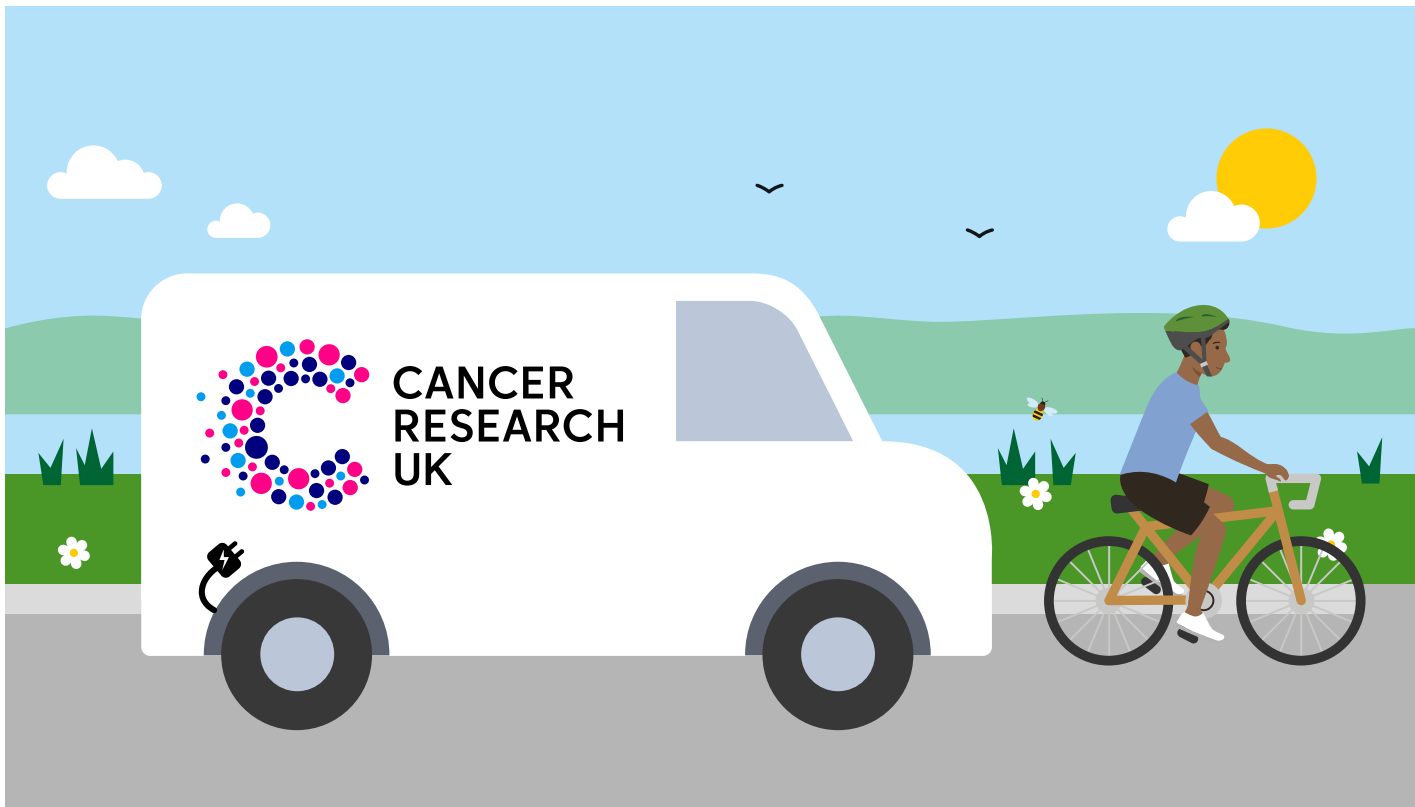
Our approach to being a responsible organisation



Our people

We champion progress for people, addressing cancer inequalities, fostering inclusive research and creating a culture where staff are engaged, included and feel they belong.

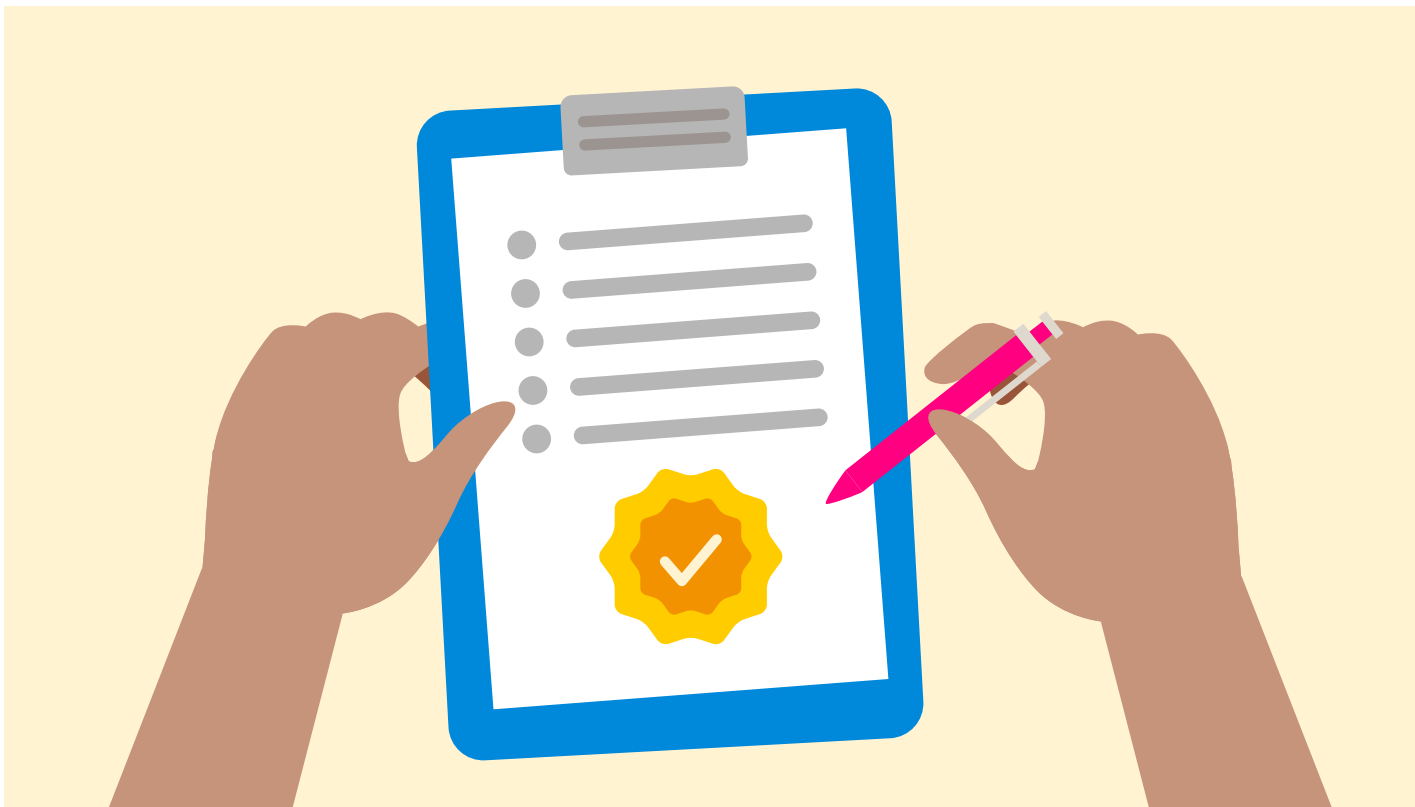
Read our refreshed [EDI strategy](#)



Our planet

We minimise our carbon footprint, taking action to protect the health of our planet for the generations we serve, today and tomorrow.

Read our [environmental sustainability strategy](#)



Our practices

We embed responsible practices into our actions, ensuring we continue to make decisions for sustainable impact.

Read our [Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics](#)

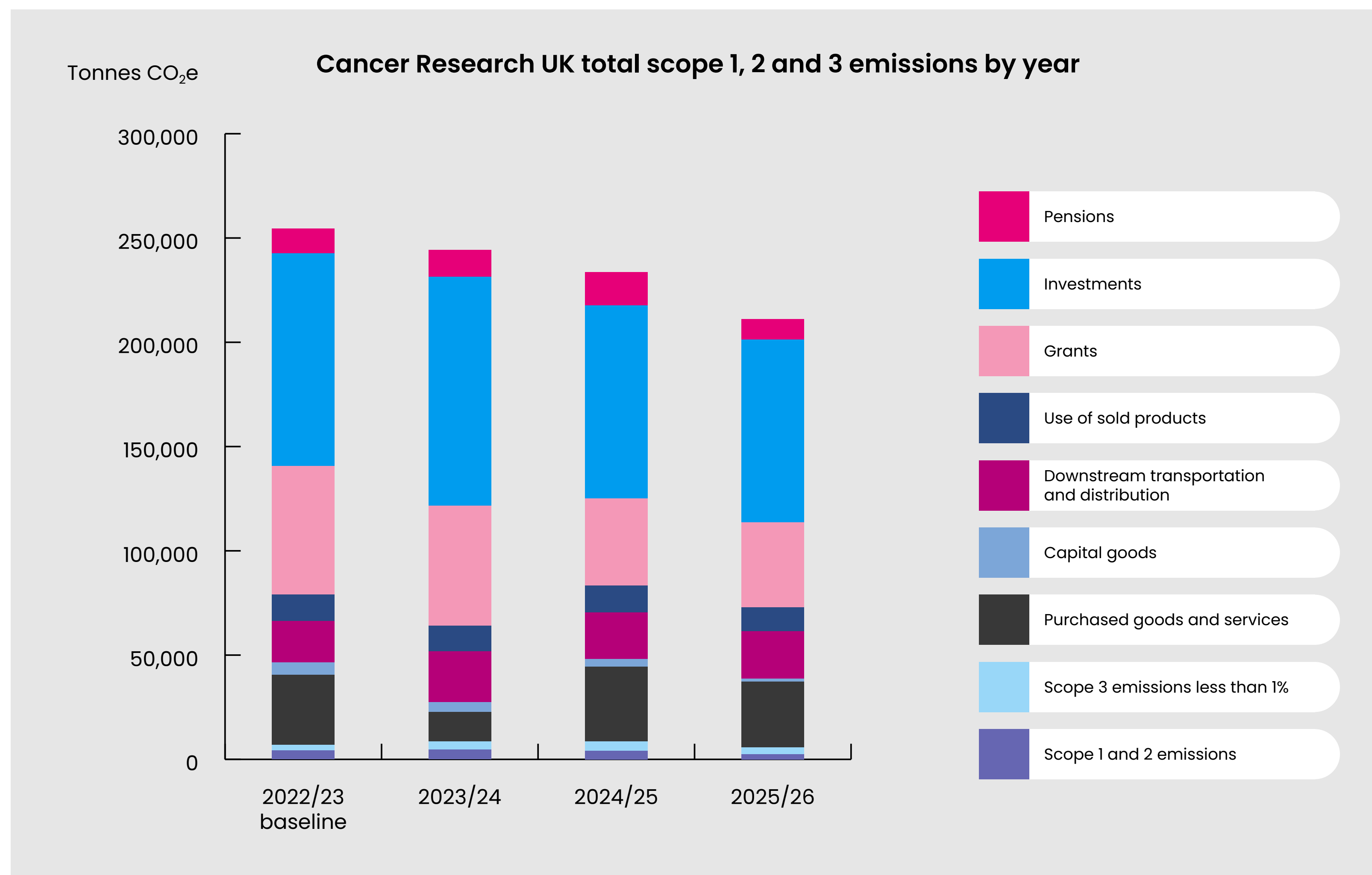
Our progress this year

We're pleased with the progress we've made across the focus areas of our environmental sustainability strategy.

We've seen a 9.4% reduction in emissions compared to last year and a 17.1% cumulative reduction from our 2022/23 baseline. Reductions in several key emissions categories last year reflect both targeted operational changes and wider decarbonisation across the areas we operate within.

We also recognise there's more to do. Based on modelling completed with the Carbon Trust, our current projections indicate a 31% reduction in emissions by 2030, leaving us 19% short of our target to reduce emissions by 50% by 2030.

As we continue to implement our carbon reduction plan and embed sustainability more consistently across our operations, we expect to see further progress towards our 2030 target. We remain committed to the ambitions in our environmental sustainability strategy and will look for further opportunities to reduce emissions and close the gap to our target in the coming year.



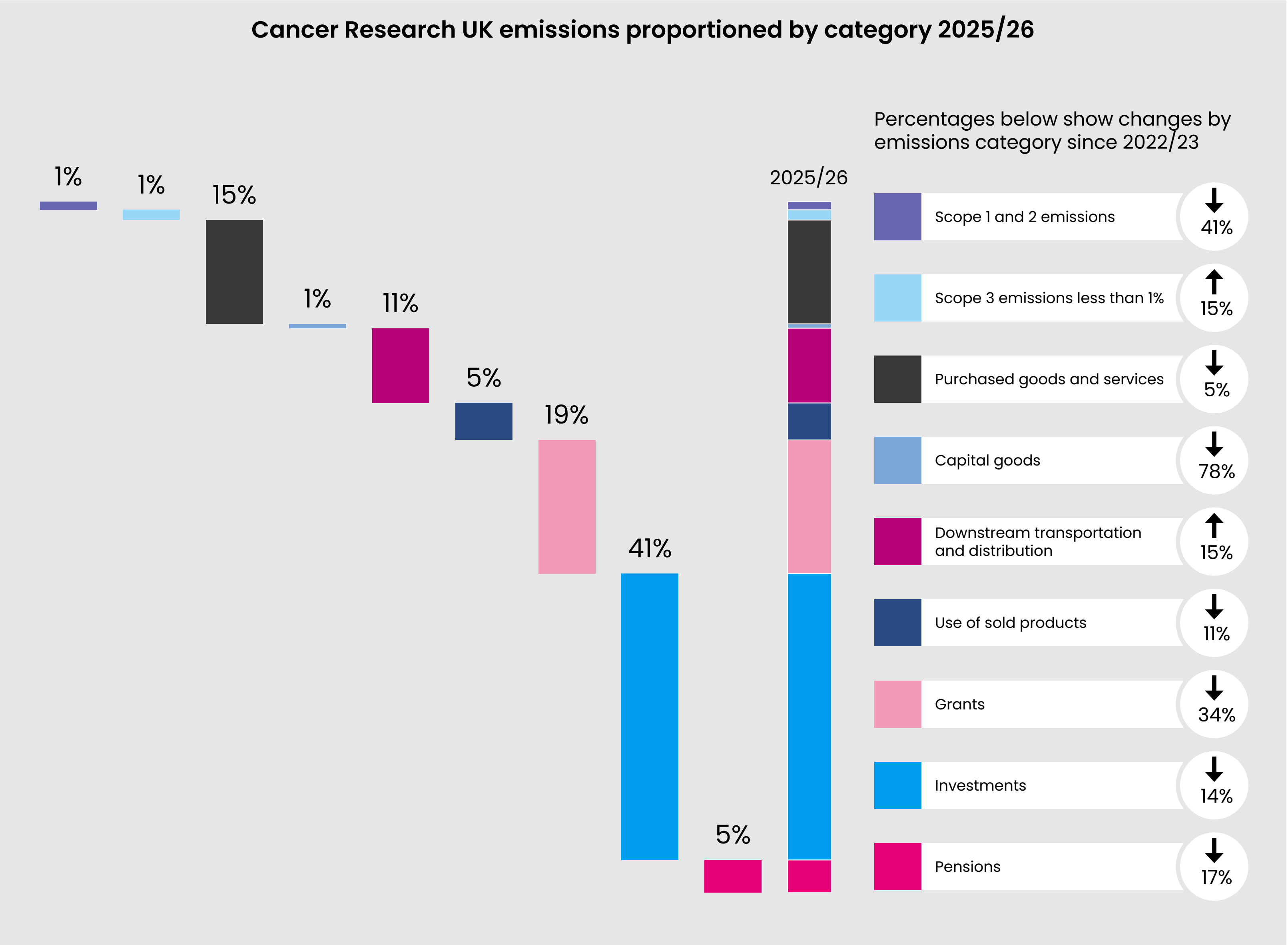
Our full scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions for 2025/26 are 9.4% lower than at the end of 2024/25, exceeding our year-on-year reduction target of 7%. This reflects continued progress across our most significant sources of emissions.

Our scope 1 and 2 emissions have decreased substantially, falling by 34% compared to last year and 41% against our 2022/23 baseline. The scope 1 and 2 reduction makes up 1% of the total emissions reduction since 2022/23. This reduction is due to the closure of our online marketplace and a number of shops following a comprehensive strategic review of our retail estate.

As in previous years, the majority of our carbon footprint lies within scope 3, accounting for over 98% of our total emissions. In 2025/26, our scope 3 emissions decreased by 9%. This improvement was primarily driven by a decrease in emissions intensity from our investments and pensions – one of our key strategic focus areas – which fell by 5% and 37% respectively compared to last year. This means fewer emissions are associated with each £1m invested compared to the previous year.

External factors contributed significantly to our scope 3 emissions. Emissions intensity across our supply chain, grant recipients and product use declined, largely due to the continued decarbonisation of the UK electricity grid.

 For more detail on our emissions and methodology, read our [annual report and accounts](#).



Developing our carbon reduction plan

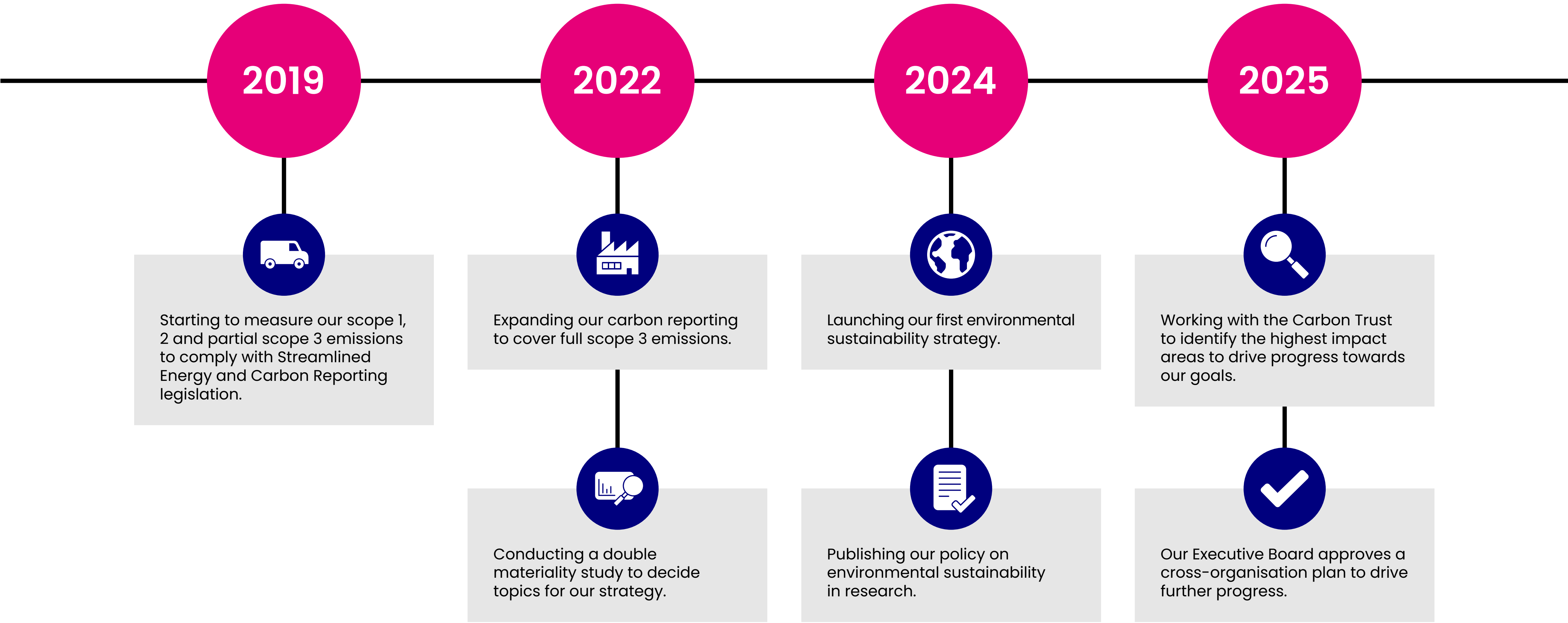
Working in partnership with the Carbon Trust, we've developed a comprehensive and actionable implementation plan for reducing our emissions.

We identified a wide range of opportunities to reduce emissions across the priority areas of our environmental sustainability strategy, bringing together subject matter experts from across the organisation to assess each opportunity in detail. We prioritised actions based on a combination of factors, balancing the potential for emissions reduction with cost, resource requirements and ease of delivery to ensure alignment with our core mission.

The result was a clear and prioritised roadmap, which was approved by our Executive Board. We've also established a dedicated delivery group to drive progress, supported by quarterly reporting to our environmental sustainability strategy steering group. The group reports to our Executive Board and our Council of Trustees.



Our journey so far



Our Sustainability Network

Our Sustainability Network has been in place since 2018, engaging staff, shaping internal thinking and supporting initiatives that drive meaningful change. Last year, we refreshed the network to strengthen its impact and future direction.

This included the appointment of three new chairs, who are working collaboratively with our Sustainability and ESG team to help guide priorities and align activity with the charity's broader strategy. With more than 130 members across Cancer Research UK, the network continues to grow as a space for connection, idea-sharing and action.



“ We’re proud to work for a charity that’s committed to reducing its carbon emissions and to giving staff passionate about sustainability a voice. We believe every individual and organisation can play a part – and that’s what the network is for. ”



Finbar Sheehan, Grace Francis and Sinead O’Byrne
Sustainability Network Co-Chairs

“ The network has provided a forum for like-minded colleagues to do something tangible about sustainability. It’s been especially powerful in turning ideas into action for reducing waste and increasing recycling. We’re really proud of the efforts that have produced such positive results across multiple locations, and we’re looking at how we can include even more people to build on that impact. ”



Tom Alexander
Taxonomy Manager, Cancer Research UK

Progress on our focus areas

In our environmental sustainability strategy, we identified six focus areas to concentrate our efforts and help us achieve our emissions targets. In 2025/26, we made progress across all of these areas.



Research and laboratories



Investments and pensions



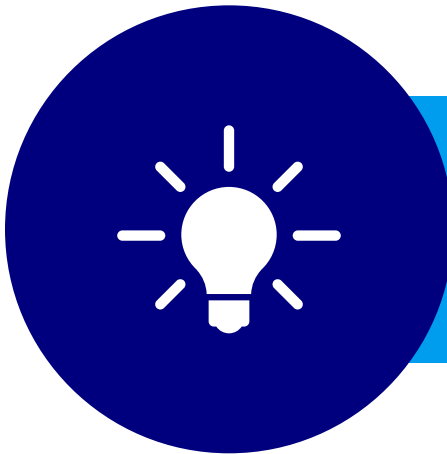
Procurement



Fundraising events



Retail shops



Electricity and travel



Research and laboratories

Research remains one of our largest sources of emissions, accounting for 19% of our total emissions. Emissions associated with our grants reduced by 2% in 2025/26 compared to the previous year and 34% compared to our baseline, despite an increase in the grant funding we awarded. This reflects a reduction in emissions intensity as the institutions we fund continue to decarbonise their operations.

Operating our laboratories is essential to advancing our mission but also contributes to our carbon footprint. We aim to manage the environmental impact of our own labs while influencing change across the research sector.

LEAF Certification

Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) certification recognises labs that are improving sustainability by reducing energy, water and waste. Last year, we updated our policy on environmental sustainability in research to require that all new grant applicants eligible for our regular funding rounds must each hold LEAF Silver certification or higher. In our first funding round of 2026 with the new requirement, 85% of new applicants met the standard, demonstrating encouraging early progress.

Beyond compliance, LEAF is helping to drive a broader culture shift, encouraging our research community to actively consider and embed environmental sustainability within their day-to-day work.



“ The impact of Wellcome and Cancer Research UK requiring LEAF certification for grant funding from January is immense. I cannot thank you enough for having the conviction and perseverance to put this in place. ”

Lisa O’Fee,
Sustainability Advisor,
The Institute of
Cancer Research



Our progress this year

- **We've so far achieved LEAF Silver accreditation at 119 of the 200 labs housed at our core-funded institutions.** We're supporting culture change and continuing to facilitate practice-sharing between them.
- **We collaborated with other funders on a joint assurance project.** Currently in its pilot phase, we're assessing host institutions against a set of policy criteria that include environmental sustainability. Within this assessment, we expect organisations to have an environmental sustainability policy or strategy that sets out how they will mitigate emissions from travel. If this isn't yet in place, organisations should be in the process of developing one. They should also provide guidance and support to staff on reducing the environmental impact of their activities, including promoting sustainable alternatives to travel and resource use.
- **We've contributed to events and forums on environmental sustainability,** using our voice to support and influence action through our grantees, other funders and our cross-institute working group.
- **We hosted a sustainability-specific roundtable at our Data-Driven Cancer Research Conference.** Chaired by Loïc Lannelongue, a leading expert on sustainability in research, the session invited registration to an environmentally sustainable data interest group.
- **We successfully encouraged the temperature of freezers to be raised from -80C to -70C,** reducing energy usage across all our core-funded infrastructure.
- **We strengthened our approach to travel emissions** by updating committee and speaker policies to embed sustainability considerations into research travel and expenses.
- **We collaborated with major funders** to facilitate an improved approach to measuring research-related emissions and share emerging best practice.





Investments and pensions

Our investments and pensions represent the most significant proportion of our overall emissions (46%), so making progress in this area is critical. Emissions from our investments decreased by 5% compared to last year and by 14% against our baseline, reflecting a reduction in emissions intensity across our portfolio.

Carbon performance remains an important consideration in our investment decisions, alongside delivering strong financial returns to support our mission. Emissions associated with our pension fund decreased by 37% compared to last year, following a change in February 2025 to default funds with significantly lower carbon intensity.

Our progress this year

- **We transitioned to a new fund manager aligned with our sustainability objectives**, engaging them on our ambitions as part of selection and onboarding. Our new fund manager will work with us to identify further opportunities to reduce the emissions associated with our investments and improve the visibility of our progress through refined reporting.
- **We communicated to our staff about their pension options.** Our transition to a lower intensity default fund supports our commitment to align our pensions with our environmental goals, while maintaining our longstanding policy of avoiding tobacco-related investments.



Photo: Laura Ashman



Procurement

Procurement continues to be a major driver of our emissions, making up 15% of our total footprint. This reflects both the breadth and complexity of the goods and services we source. Emissions from purchased goods and services reduced by 2% compared to last year due to ongoing decarbonisation across our supply chain and the organisations we work with. Strengthening partnerships with suppliers who share our environmental sustainability ambitions plays a crucial role in reducing our overall footprint.

Our progress this year

- **We began work to deepen our understanding of supply chain emissions.** This includes mapping our highest-carbon-emitting and highest-spend suppliers, identifying those with climate disclosures or targets and using these insights to prioritise a focused engagement plan for the coming year.
- **We identified opportunities to improve the quality and availability of carbon emissions data** by engaging directly with key suppliers. This will enable us to better understand the impact of our purchasing decisions on our emissions.
- **We laid the groundwork to embed carbon into contract-management and supplier-selection processes,** through strengthening the collaboration between our Procurement and Sustainability teams.





Fundraising events

Our events raise vital funds to help us beat cancer. Our in-house events include Race for Life, Pretty Muddy®, Shine Night Walk and Big Hike, which engage hundreds of thousands of supporters with our mission. Though our events only make up 0.3% of our carbon footprint, we’re actively working to reduce this further by using more sustainable materials, minimising waste and working with responsible suppliers.

Our progress this year

- **We reduced material use across our events** by relying less on shrink wrap and replacing it with reusable containment systems, as well as expanding our use of alternatives to plastic tape.
- **We minimised losses and repeat purchases** by introducing reusable cable ties, storage systems and alternative fastening methods.
- **We encouraged and expanded on-the-day registration for events**, reducing printed materials, postage emissions, waste and cost.
- **We collaborated across the events sector to drive wider change.** As part of the Mass Participation Sports Organisers sustainability group, we worked with major event organisers such as the London Marathon and Great Run to share best practice and accelerate improvements in sustainability across large-scale events.
- **We ordered around 12,000 fewer t-shirts for our fundraising events in 2025** by enabling participants to opt out of receiving a free t-shirt when they sign up. 27% of Big Hike participants and 10% of people taking part in our social fundraising challenges opted out of a t-shirt.



Upcycling at our events

Since 2023, we’ve partnered with Calluna Upcycling to extend the lifecycle of textiles and materials used at our events. In 2025, we repurposed old event materials into 197 stake bags and 42 flag bags, with a further 213 bags produced for upcoming events in 2026. This cut down on waste and reduced the need for new materials.

Any additional materials that couldn’t be turned into bags have been recycled through Project Re:claim, a joint venture between Project Plan B and The Salvation Army to recycle polyester textiles back into raw material. In the last 12 months, 10 pallets of textiles and leftover medals were processed. We’ll continue to invest in longer-lasting, recyclable signage materials, and work with partners to recycle legacy signage through closed loop systems.



Retail shops

Our shops and superstores connect us with communities across the UK whose purchases support our life-saving work. In 2025/26, emissions from our retail operations decreased by 7.9%. This was primarily due to the implementation of our trading strategy, which we announced in October 2025. This saw us close 84 shops by 31 March 2026. Emissions associated with the use of sold products decreased by 13%, supported by wider decarbonisation of the grid and reduced emissions associated with the use of our products.

Our progress this year

- **We responsibly managed any waste from shop closures**, recycling 88% of it through our waste management providers.
- **We continued to retrofit building management systems in our superstores** to monitor and optimise energy use across heating, cooling, ventilation and lighting.
- **We identified ways to improve the accuracy of our emissions reporting.** This more detailed product- and activity-level information will help inform our buying decisions and engage suppliers on reducing our shared footprint.



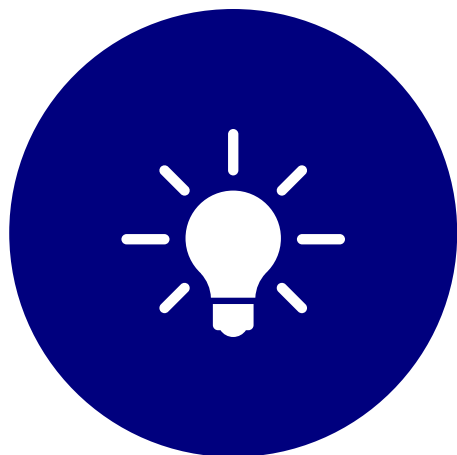
Sourcing quality donations

When our supporters' generous donations are sold in our shops, they don't just help us beat cancer. They're given a new lease of life, passed on to new owners and kept in use for longer.

Unfortunately, we're not able to sell all the donated items we receive, often due to issues such as poor quality, damage or staining. Improving the quality of donated stock is key to using our resources more effectively and increasing income for the charity through reducing waste and the cost of sorting.

Over the past year, we've deepened our understanding of donation quality and the impact that low-quality items have on our operations. We're now exploring how we can work with our partners and the wider charity sector to influence donation behaviours and improve stock quality at source. This could be done through encouraging more thoughtful donations and providing clearer guidance on what items will have the greatest value and impact.

Together, this work aims to reduce waste, increase contribution and maximise the value of every donation.



Electricity and travel

Electricity use and travel across our operations continue to be key contributors to our carbon footprint, making up 13% of our total footprint, up from 11% last year.

Our progress this year

- **We incorporated five new superstores into the 100% renewable electricity tariff**, which is in place across our retail estate and head office.
- **We ensured the completion of our LED lighting rollout.** Once our trading strategy is delivered, all of our remaining retail shops will be fitted with LED lighting, improving energy efficiency across our retail estate.
- **We procured two fully electric vans** to support our transport operations, helping us assess opportunities to further electrify our fleet while maintaining a fully electric or hybrid company car fleet.
- **We continued using Lightfoot’s telematics** to monitor the performance of our commercial fleet, supporting more fuel-efficient driving and reducing emissions.
- **We added communications prompting our staff to consider their footprint alongside cost** when organising business travel via our travel booking system, in line with our updated staff policy.



What we're doing in 2026/27

We're focused on delivering against our plan and closing the gap to our emissions reduction target.

Following this year's progress and the projected 19% shortfall to our 2030 target, our priority is clear: drive measurable emissions reductions in the areas where we have the greatest impact.

Our environmental sustainability strategy remains our framework, but in 2026/27 we will place a stronger emphasis on high-impact interventions – particularly across investments, procurement and collaboration with our partners.

Our carbon data insights project

Our progress in 2026/27 will be supported by our carbon data insights project. As part of a wider review of our emissions reporting methodology, we will identify areas where we can move to activity-based carbon reporting. This will increase the accuracy of our emissions reporting and support us to better identify decarbonisation opportunities.

Our priorities for 2026/27



Driving emissions reduction through investments

We will accelerate work to understand and reduce the emissions associated with our investment portfolio, using our influence to encourage better environmental performance and align with our net zero ambition.



Embedding responsible sourcing into procurement

We will strengthen our responsible sourcing programme to make sure environmental impact is considered in supplier selection and contract management. This includes actively engaging our highest-impact suppliers to set expectations, improve transparency and drive emissions reductions across our supply chain.



Targeting emissions hotspots through collaboration

We will work more closely with key external partners, including in the research we fund, to identify and deliver joint opportunities to reduce emissions in high-impact areas.



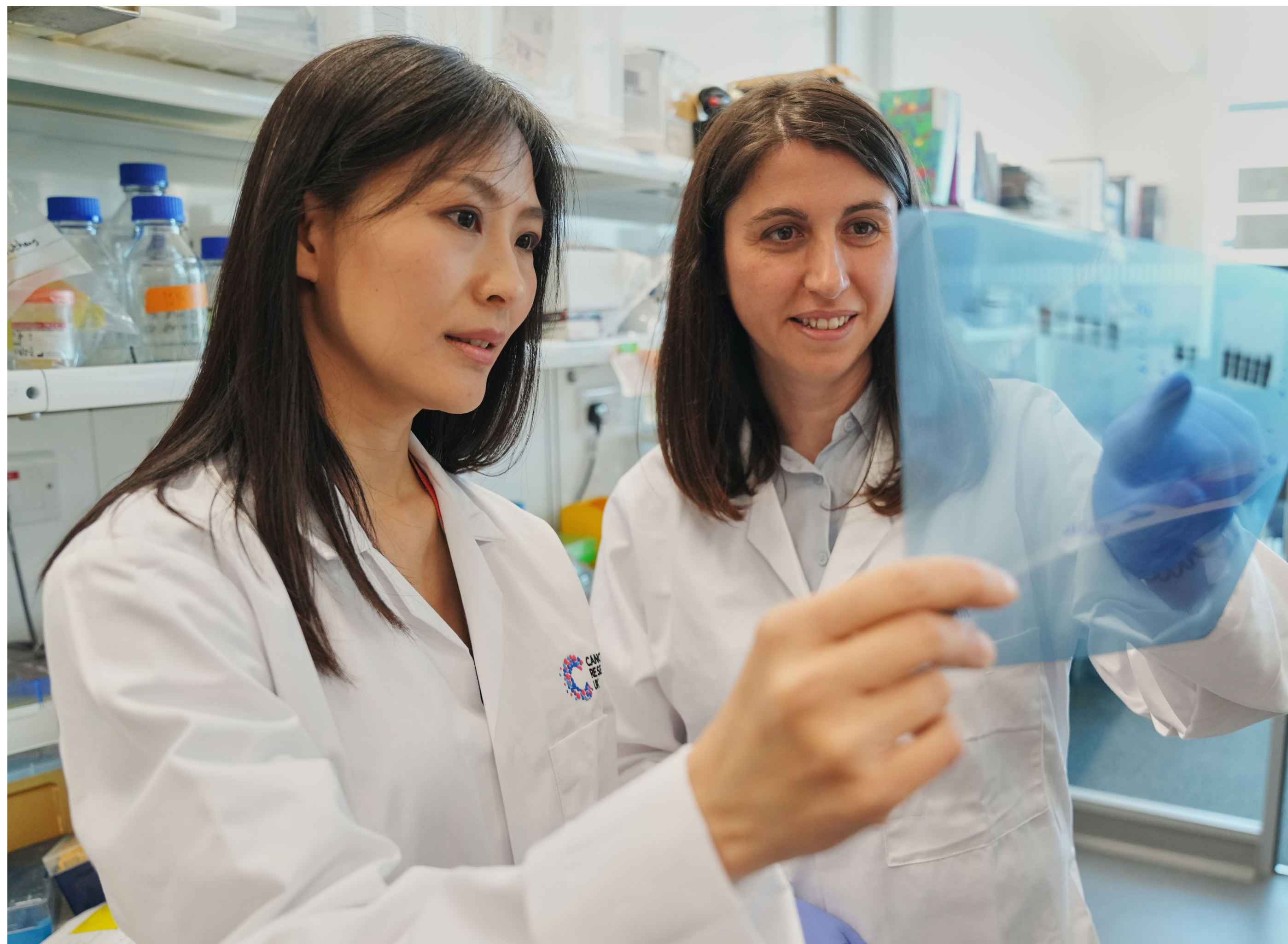
Turning strategy into everyday decision-making

Internally, we will focus on embedding environmental sustainability into business planning, supported by targeted engagement to enable staff to drive behaviour change.

Our concordat action plan for 2026/27

In April 2024, we committed to reducing the environmental impact of our research activities by becoming a launch signatory of the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice.

The concordat is an agreement developed by the UK research and innovation sector. By signing, we've pledged to work with other UK-based organisations to manage and reduce how research and innovation affects the environment. We also share data, ideas and solutions with each other.



The concordat provides a framework to guide our activities across the following six priority areas.



Leadership and system change

We will:

- monitor how our environmental funding policy is working in practice, supporting researchers and institutions and tracking compliance
- continue working with partners across the research sector to inform and improve environmental policy approaches
- use our influence to raise awareness of the environmental impacts of cancer research and promote best practice
- increase the visibility of sustainability tools, resources and training available to the research community, including through our communications channels
- explore opportunities to include sustainability content at the conferences and events we lead



Sustainable infrastructure

We will:

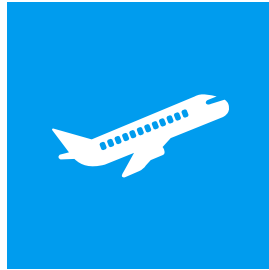
- support our core-funded institutes to achieve and build on LEAF accreditation, progressing towards gold where possible
- continue to bring institutes together and embed sustainable lab practices through regular forums to share learning
- work with partners to better understand and meet sustainability training needs across the research community



Sustainable procurement

We will:

- encourage more sustainable procurement practices and reduced waste across the research we fund by sharing tools and case studies that support more sustainable purchasing decisions
- support clinical trials to reduce waste by sharing tools, guidance and best practice



Emissions from business and academic travel

We will:

- strengthen how we consider environmental impacts when planning events and research-related travel
- continue to identify opportunities to reduce emissions from travel linked to our research activities



Collaboration and partnerships

We will:

- reference environmental sustainability in partnership negotiations, emphasising shared goals and data transparency



Environmental impact and reporting data

We will:

- stay aligned with sector approaches to measuring research-related emissions and be ready to adopt emerging best practice
- begin developing our approach to addressing the environmental impacts of data and AI, both in the research we fund and our own operations



Photo: Laura Ashman



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