



THE PRINCE OF WALES'S  
CORPORATE LEADERS GROUP

Business Briefing

# Briefing series: The UK's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)

Part 1: The significance of an  
ambitious NDC for the UK

## The significance of an ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for the UK

This short briefing explains what an NDC is and the significance of an ambitious UK NDC ahead of the 26th United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) next year.

The UK Government has historically demonstrated strong climate leadership. The UK was the first country globally to set a legally binding climate change mitigation target, committing in 2008, as part of the Climate Change Act, to reduce emissions by 80 per cent based on 1990 levels.<sup>1</sup> While the UK has since made progress on reducing its emissions,<sup>2</sup> further action is still required, with more recent recognition that this original target did not go far enough. As a result, in 2019, the UK became the first major economy to set a legally binding net zero emissions target,<sup>3</sup> a move supported by business.<sup>4</sup> This new target requires the UK to ensure all greenhouse gas emissions reach net zero by 2050 at the latest.

Due to these domestic policies, the UK has been noted for its international leadership on climate action.<sup>2</sup> It has used its diplomatic resources to support global ambition, including to make the case for a global agreement, which bore results in December 2015, when the Paris Agreement<sup>5</sup> was negotiated by 195 nations. The Paris Agreement, which sets a long-term aim of keeping warming within 1.5 to 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels, was agreed at the 21st UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP21). The COP is a significant global event, as it brings together global leaders with climate experts and campaigners to agree co-ordinated action to tackle climate change.

In 2019, it was confirmed that the UK will host COP26.<sup>6</sup> Originally due to take place in November 2020, COP26 was to be in a significant year, as 2020 is the first time countries are required to submit new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)<sup>7</sup> since the Paris Agreement was reached. The NDCs are critical to achieving the Paris Agreement, as they set out individual countries' targets for achieving national emissions reductions and adapting to climate change. However, in early 2020, a global health crisis of unprecedented scale emerged that has led to previously unimaginable social, economic and political change. In this new context, where governments have quite rightly taken action to address the immediate health crisis through actions that include the cancelling of mass gatherings, the decision was taken to postpone COP26 to November 2021.

While COP26 has been postponed, the UK Government still recognises the need for setting long-term targets and ramping up ambition. In July 2020, the COP26 President, Alok Sharma,<sup>8</sup> set out the UK's ask for countries to submit more ambitious NDCs and supporting long-term strategies, which can lead to increased emissions reductions by 2030, on the road to net zero emissions. The UK is now encouraging countries to present NDCs with a raised ambition level at a special global climate summit being held in December 2020. Announced in September 2020 by the Secretary-General of the UN and the UK Prime Minister, the summit will take place on the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement and aims to drive momentum towards higher ambition and greater climate action.<sup>9</sup> It will seek to bring together leaders from governments with civil society and the private sector to "present new measures, boosting ambition and action".

While it is encouraging other countries to submit ambitious NDCs, the UK itself is looking to announce its own increased NDC. When the Paris Agreement was negotiated in 2015, the UK was an EU member state and therefore part of the EU's NDC. The EU set a combined binding target, which would be jointly achieved by all 28 member states through their own domestic targets.<sup>10</sup> Following the UK leaving the EU in January 2020,<sup>11</sup> the UK Government has committed to setting its own, increased NDC ahead of COP26.<sup>12</sup> While the UK has a current target of reducing emissions from 1990 levels by 57 per cent by 2030, this was set before the UK set its net zero target in law and therefore requires updating to ensure it is in line with this.<sup>13</sup>

Setting an ambitious UK NDC that is at a minimum aligned with the UK's domestic net zero target would demonstrate strong leadership and support the UK's international diplomacy. As Presidency of COP26, the UK has significant responsibility in ensuring efficient and effective outcomes from the summit in advancing collaboration on international climate agreements.<sup>14</sup> Countries submitting ambitious NDCs would help to raise ambition globally and be a significant measure of success for COP26. Already there are moves from the EU, China and other countries to raise ambition, so the UK's leadership has the potential to have significant impact and catalyse action from other countries to submit strengthened NDCs.

Strong domestic policies are seen as a clear way the UK can make its negotiations with other countries more effective.<sup>15</sup> Another clear signal is through setting an ambitious new NDC. Given the significance of this year for countries submitting new NDCs, the UK has a unique opportunity to lead and influence how ambitious these are by ensuring its own new NDC sets an ambitious emissions reduction target for 2030.

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### Authors and acknowledgements

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