



Scope 3 Emissions of Business Schools

What are Schools reporting?

Abstract

This paper analyses the reporting of Scope 3 greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by business schools, focusing on the 83 institutions included in the Financial Times Carbon Footprint ranking. Our findings reveal significant heterogeneity in reporting practices, reflecting differences in methodologies, system boundaries, and categories covered. While 84% of schools disclose some Scope 3 emissions, only 47% report at the business school level and 53% at the university level. The GHG Protocol is the dominant standard, applied by 86% of schools. Reporting is strongly concentrated on transportation-related categories, with business travel (85.7%) and employee commuting (81.4%) most frequently disclosed, followed by student travel (52.9%) and commuting (48.6%). However, only 12.9% of schools report comprehensively across all major Scope 3 categories, and just 30% include the two largest contributors: purchasing and mobility. These gaps highlight the fragmented nature of current practices and underscore the need for more standardized and transparent reporting frameworks in higher education.

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The AERO network

Founded in Spring 2025, the aim of the network is to exchange, share, promote, and advocate decarbonization of business schools.

AERO (Alliance for Environmental Response in Business Schools) focuses on environmental sustainability in business school operations. It does not focus on research and teaching on sustainability.

The founding members of the network are Bocconi University, ESADE, ESSEC Business School, Kozminski University, University of St.Gallen, Stockholm School of Economics, Vlerick Business School, and WHU Otto Beisheim School of Management.

AERO is inclusive and new members are welcome. For more information visit the website www.aero-network.eu.

Bocconi



Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to outline key standards and dimensions that are most reported for Scope 3 emissions in business schools. By identifying commonly used frameworks and high-priority emission categories, the paper offers a foundation for more consistent, transparent, and comparable practices across institutions.

This article complements the paper entitled “Scope 3 Emissions of Business Schools: A unified GHG protocol-based accounting framework”. Whereas this paper outlines the relevant reporting categories, the complementary framework provides a practical methodology for measuring and implementing Scope 3 accounting in business schools.

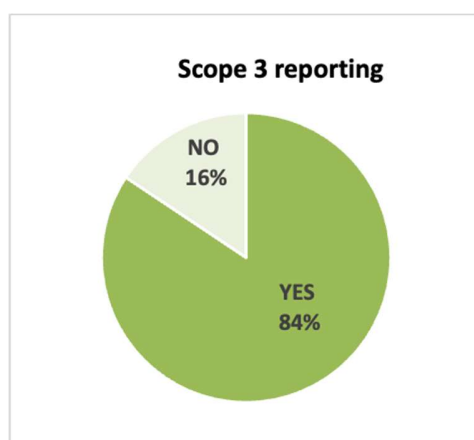
Together, these two documents aim to support business schools in strengthening their sustainability reporting and advancing their role as responsible actors in the transition toward a low-carbon economy.

Reporting practices of scope 3 emissions: a survey

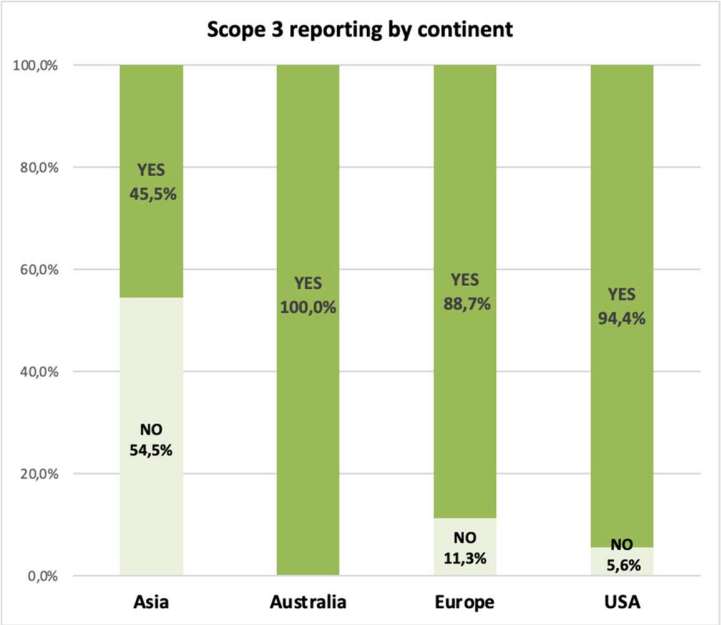
We recently conducted a study on the environmental reporting practices of top business schools, focusing specifically on how they account for their climate impact. Our analysis examined the top 50 institutions featured in the Financial Times Carbon Footprint category for both the 2024 Masters in Management and the 2025 MBA rankings. After consolidating and removing duplicates, we arrived at a final sample of 83 business schools across four continents. This approach allowed us to identify institutions that are recognized for their efforts in sustainability and carbon emissions reporting.

Are scope 3 emissions included in their reporting?

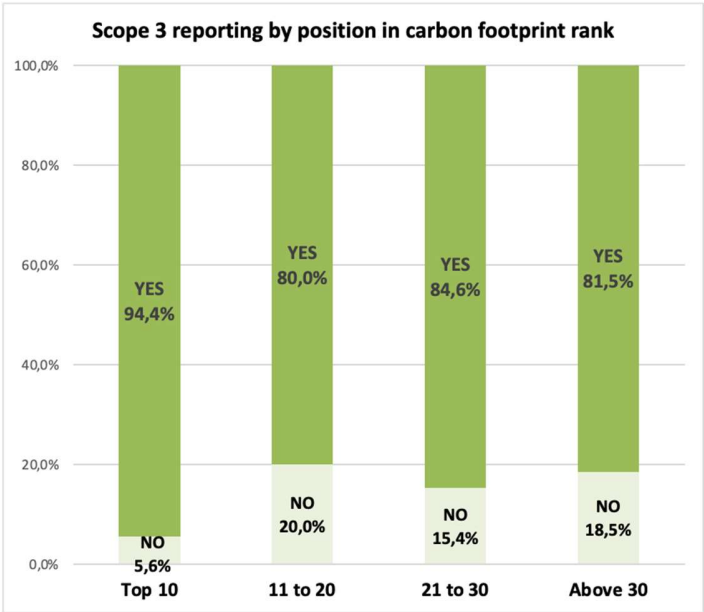
Of these 83 institutions, 70 schools—**representing 84% of the total**—**reported some measurement of Scope 3 emissions**.



An analysis of reporting practices across continents reveals notable differences. **Most North American and European business schools include Scope 3 in their disclosures**, whereas fewer than half of the Asian schools in the sample report on these emissions.

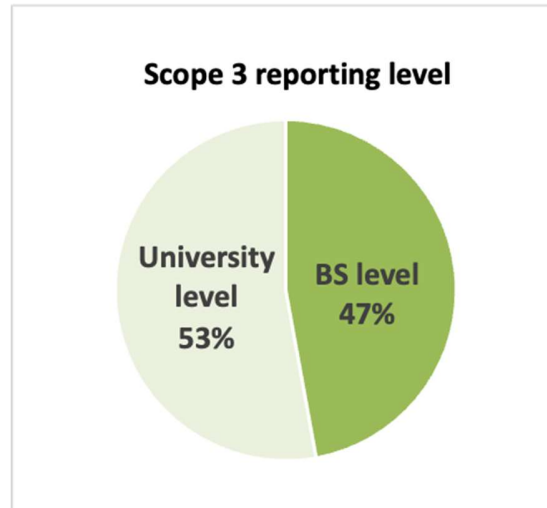


An analysis of measurement practices across the carbon footprint ranking shows that **Scope 3 reporting is not linked to a school’s position**, as disclosure rates remain fairly consistent across all levels. Interestingly, even one of the top ten ranked schools does not measure Scope 3 emissions.

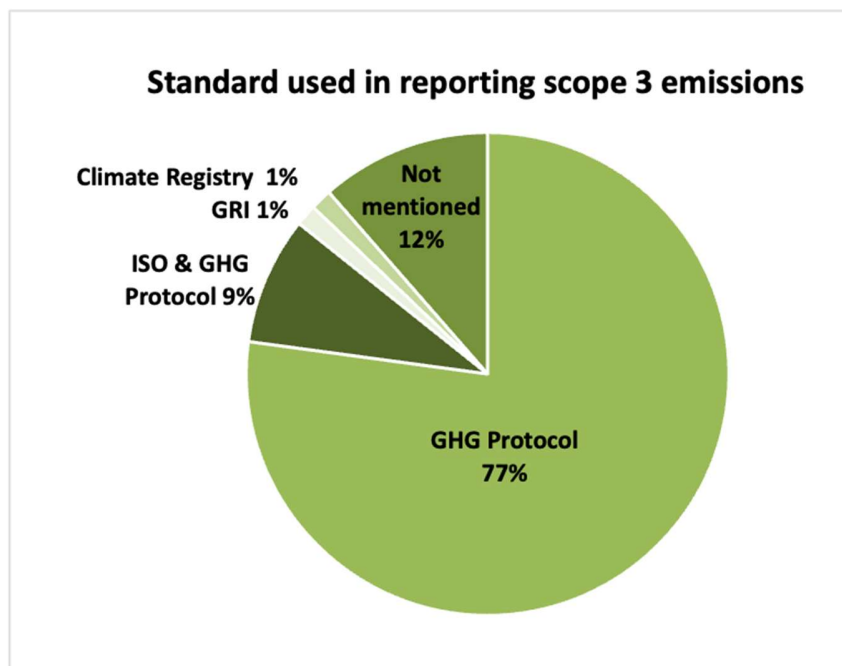


How are scope 3 emissions reported?

Among the 70 schools reporting Scope 3 emissions, **47% do so at the business school level**, while 53% report at the university level.

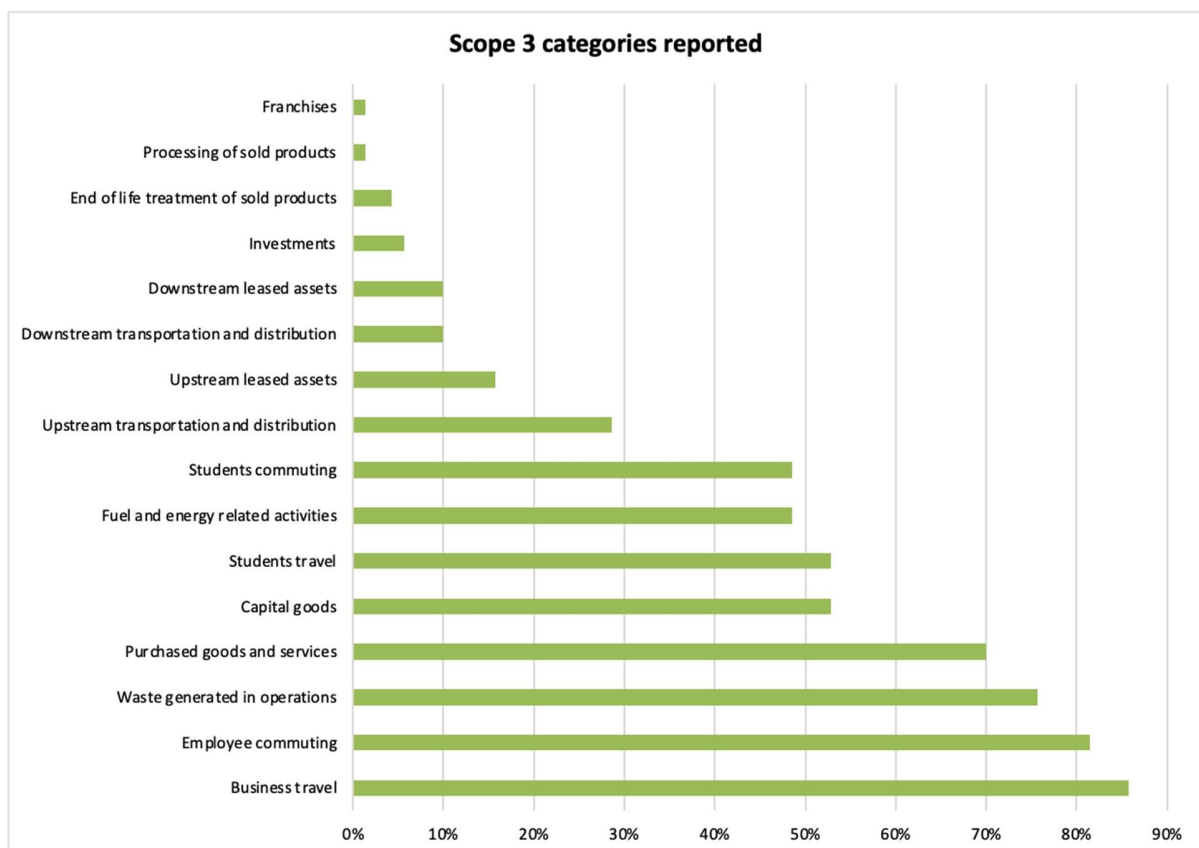


The **GHG Protocol** clearly dominates as the standard for Scope 3 reporting, with 86% of institutions applying it either alone (77%) or in combination with ISO standards (9%). In contrast, the use of alternative frameworks such as the GRI or Climate Registry is minimal (1% each). Moreover, 12% of reports do not specify the standard applied, revealing gaps in transparency.



What categories of scope 3 emissions are reported?

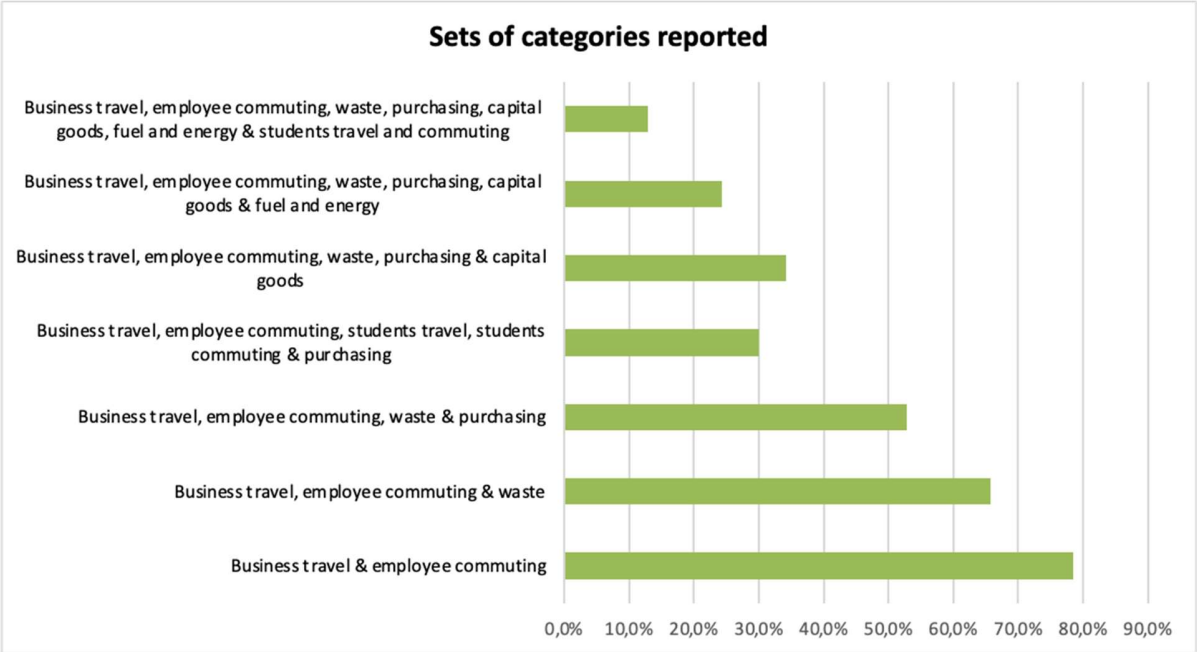
Business schools are putting a strong emphasis on transportation-related categories. Transportation emissions, which include business travel (85.7%), employee commuting (81.4%), student travel (52.9%), and student commuting (48.6%), are the most frequently reported, highlighting the **sector's focus on mobility-related impacts**. Other significant categories include waste management (75.7%), purchased goods and services (70.0%), capital goods (52.9%), and energy-related activities (48.6%).



Despite increasing awareness and research on the most impactful Scope 3 categories in higher education, the lack of a standardized reporting framework allows each business school to decide which dimensions to include, resulting in wide variability in reporting practices. For example, while 78.6% of schools disclose data on business travel and employee commuting, only 12.9% report comprehensively across all major Scope 3 categories.

It is striking that **only 30% of schools report on the two largest contributors—purchasing and mobility**—despite evidence from a recent study of the UK higher education sector showing that Scope 3 emissions are primarily driven by Purchased Goods

and Services (36.3%) and Transportation (24.4%), including business travel, commuting, and student mobility (The Royal Anniversary Trust, 2023). See below for more details.



Guidelines for addressing Scope 3 emissions

For business schools, engaging with Scope 3 not only contributes to reducing their environmental footprint but also reinforces their role as frontrunners in sustainability education.

The sector is characterized by the **absence of a standardized framework** tailored to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), combined with substantial variation in calculation methodologies, system boundaries, functional units, emission inventories, and published emission factors (Valls-Val & Bovea, 2021; Helmers et al., 2021; Herth & Blok, 2023). Our findings corroborate this disparity, as we also observed pronounced differences across the institutions analysed—not only in the categories of emissions reported but also in the level of detail, the treatment of Scope 3 categories, and the transparency of underlying assumptions. This heterogeneity—particularly in the reporting of Scope 3 emissions, which are often only partially disclosed—represents a major obstacle to achieving consistent benchmarking and meaningful comparative analysis across institutions.

To support the development of a standardized framework for Scope 3 emissions in business schools, it is first essential to identify the most relevant emission categories—referred to as “dimensions.” For each of these dimensions, specific criteria and

measurement guidelines must be established to ensure consistency, transparency, and applicability across institutions.

Based on our analysis, the most commonly reported dimensions—covered by more than 50% of business schools that disclose Scope 3 emissions—are the following:

- Transportation (including business travel, employee commuting, student travel, and student commuting)
- Purchased Goods and Services
- Waste
- Capital Goods
- Fuel- and Energy-Related Activities

We recommend including the following dimensions in Scope 3 emissions reporting: **Transportation (including business travel, employee commuting, student travel, and student commuting) and Purchased Goods and Services.** These two categories account for the largest shares of total emissions in the higher education sector—24.4% and 36.3% respectively—according to a sector-wide study commissioned by The Royal Anniversary Trust and developed in collaboration with EcoAct, SB+CO, and EAUC. The study involved 21 Higher Education Institutions across the UK and provided one of the most comprehensive carbon footprint estimates for the sector to date.

In addition to these two major categories, we also recommend including **Waste, Capital Goods, and Fuel- and Energy-Related Activities** in reporting frameworks. Although these categories represent a smaller proportion of total emissions in the higher education context, their inclusion is essential. Universities and business schools play a formative role in shaping future leaders, and incorporating these dimensions reinforces the message that sustainability must be embedded across all aspects of institutional operations. By reporting on these categories, we lead by example—educating not only through curriculum, but also through institutional behaviour and accountability.

To build credibility and enable collective progress, business schools need to adopt a shared framework for Scope 3 measurement—one that establishes a common set of emission categories and offers clear, practical guidelines tailored to the higher education context. The paper “**Scope 3 Emissions of Business Schools: A Unified GHG Protocol-Based Accounting Framework**” published by AERO advances this goal by providing detailed guidelines for Scope 3 measurement, with the aim of harmonizing reporting practices, improving data quality, and strengthening accountability across the sector.

Conclusions

Our analysis confirms a **high degree of heterogeneity in how business schools report their scope 3 carbon footprints**. Differences in system boundaries, calculation methodologies, and the categories included mean that reporting practices are fragmented and difficult to compare across institutions. This lack of consistency hampers benchmarking and limits the sector's collective capacity to demonstrate progress.

Focusing on the 83 business schools ranked in the Financial Times, we found that 84% report some measurement of Scope 3 emissions. The GHG Protocol is the dominant standard, used by 86% of institutions. Reporting is heavily concentrated on transportation-related categories, with business travel (85.7%), employee commuting (81.4%), student travel (52.9%), and student commuting (48.6%) being the most frequently disclosed. However, only 12.9% of schools report comprehensively across all major categories, and **just 30% cover the two largest contributors: purchasing and mobility. This narrow focus underscores the uneven and incomplete nature of current practices.**

Based on these findings, we recommend that Scope 3 reporting in business schools systematically include transportation (business travel, employee commuting, student travel, and student commuting) as well as purchased goods and services. In addition, waste, capital goods, and fuel and energy related activities should also be incorporated, even if their relative weight is smaller, to reinforce the principle that sustainability must be embedded across all aspects of institutional operations. By broadening the scope of reporting, business schools can lead by example, **demonstrating accountability not only through teaching and research but also through their own practices and operations.**

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