

Cross-Party Group on Space

23rd May 18:00

Present

MSPs

Colin Beattie MSP

Jamie Halcrow Johnston MSP

Carol Mochan MSP

Beatrice Wishart MSP

Sharon Dowey MSP

Ivan McKee MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

Hina Khan

Julian Dines

Craig Clark

David Sandy

Kristian Von Bengston

Peter Guthrie

Peter Young

Malachy Devlin

Apologies

Warrick Malcolm

Grant Lewis

Lara Zanoni

Agenda item 1: Approval of the minutes

Convener (Colin Beattie) went through each page of the minutes from our last meeting. The meeting minutes were then approved.

Agenda item 2: Overview of the Space Sector

Hina Khan, the Executive director from Space Scotland presented giving an overview of the space sector. She described Space Scotland and what kind of organisation they are the work they do, and their background.

- Non profit set up in 2021
- Industry led initiative
- Supports entirety of Scotland's "end to end" space eco system and value chain
- Works with Scottish space stakeholders and organisations to identify challenges and opportunities in industry.

She then discussed their core values that came from industry and their vision which included: space economy, people, leading by example, upstream launch, downstream data, and research and academia.

Hina emphasised Scotland's uniqueness, being home to "end to end" space value chain. Describing that we have the facilities, capacity, and capabilities to be able to design space and test and manufacture at scale in Scotland. Hina described that Scotland fortunately have the ability to be green by design and input sustainable green manufacturing practice and green infrastructure. The key to this is communicating what we can do in Scotland, and promote that on a global scale, and UK scale.

She then described the size of the space sector and the growth over the past few years and then the Scottish space strategy and Scottish value chain including small satellites, launch vehicles, launch sites, downstream industry, and future applications, and how we make the Scottish space sector more sustainable via developing the sustainability roadmap. Finally, she emphasised the global impact of space in Scotland, and the need to use our own capabilities for Scotland.

Colin Beattie asked on skills capability for space in Scotland, where do we get the skills for?

Hina said that companies are bringing them in globally, but they are looking at increasing skills in space locally too and developing the workforce locally. They are doing some work on where the skills gaps are, and working with universities and colleges on how we get the skills we are looking for, so the question is still open.

Craig Clark commented that we have a great opportunity with space to encourage young people to come into engineering. Being on the board of the science centre, he mentioned we need to be mindful to encourage young people into careers in engineering and science to get them in the front door, and we must have a look at the spaces in universities for students interested in space. Do we have enough?

Hina agreed that we need a larger pipeline of skills coming through so there may be work that could be done with Scottish government or SDS, or programs we can lever to support us.

Beatrice Wishart mentioned the good work that SaxaVord are doing bridging the gap between school and adult life, but asked how do we make people aware what is available for a good career in space.

Hina responded saying it's about working with science centres, educators and industry, bringing them up to speed with what we have and building pathways throughout education with children

Kristain Von Bengtson gave insight for Orbex on the recruitment of young people and skills, having to spend a lot of money of visas to export work, and mentioned its about having the right programs in Universities in these high tech areas for the work. He also mentioned challenge on housing nearby by large space employers such as Orbex in the north which has an impact. Julian Dines reiterated the skills challenge but also shared they have part of the solution "we have the space so we should use it". We have the research and companies supplying subsystems into larger missions, we can use that for younger kids to inspire them, so we are part of the solution. Craig Clark agreed that once rockets are launching this will excite children.

On housing, Craig Clark asked whether we should also have housing projects in other areas across Scotland to ensure we can have housing and ways we can work together to achieve the same goal rather than region based for the North for example.

Colin agreed there are common issues across Scotland and having this group allows us to pursue that, tackling issues in bitesize sections, being realistic on what we can achieve.

Hina agreed with Craig wants to encourage all resources we have, both in the north, islands and cities. And pulling from other people from other domains with transferable skills.

Agenda item 3: Action Log

The convener went through the action list. Discussing APPG/CPG collaboration to move forward, agreeing site visits, and agreeing priorities were the themes that were discussed. No comments were made on the actions.

Agenda item 4: Priorities

Colin and the group Agreed to reduce the list of priorities to allow focus and impact. As a group, 6 priorities were discussed. It was agreed that Skills was one of the most important things facing the industry.

Another priority that was discussed was need to understand what is devolved and what is not devolved so that we know where to lobby, which will entail working with the APPG in London.

The third priority that was discussed was regulatory factors, which Colin stated that we need to understand what the regulatory factors are. The action was sent to group to send secretariat what they believe the regulatory issues are.

Peter Guthrie mentioned that The UK Parliament Science Innovation and Technology Committee are running an inquiry into UK space strategy in the UK satellite infrastructure. A lot of the debate is around UK space regulation, which highlights the issues in the UK at the moment on regulation. Colin requested he would still like to hear from the group on this challenge, to better understand.

Colin Beattie suggested that for priorities, initially they would focus on skills and understanding devolved and not devolved, regulation and housing.

Craig Clark said that with Scotland being in a great position in the market, one of our priorities is to make sure that we don't spend too much time overthinking what we're trying to do. Instead, get behind the companies and skills and push them forward as quickly as possible to be in line with our competitors like the US, rather than overthink about regulation. We should make sure that the focus is on the growth of the sector.

Colin then agreed that regulation may be dropped from priorities to focus on support for the sector, but asked how we do that.

Craig suggested we can use our expertise to focus on skills and housing. And that we should focus on skills by supporting educational establishments on what's needed in the sector, so they know what they can do. He also said that we can support infrastructure and common facilities where companies that start up can use.

Julian Dines seconded that opinion on regulation, saying there is already a lot of activity going on there, which is UK based. He stated he feels there are other areas that we could focus on that could be more beneficial, such as supporting growth. He shared we are growing companies from 1 person to 10, then 10 to 100 and at that point, that's where companies are to afford the big test equipment or clean rooms, and it becomes difficult to scale up and expansion. That is where regionally specific investment could be helpful. Scottish enterprise have given some help, and companies have a lot of help early on, but when they get big enough to sustain themselves that's where there is less support and they struggle, that's the feedback they get.

This was echoed by Craig Clark, stated he would also like to start running workshops where we raise awareness on the investment community in Scotland. The funding gap is one of the main issues in upscaling these companies, we have a lot of investors who would put money behind these great companies so we could do this. We need to find greater solutions to get innovation into companies. Business schools could play an important role in supporting these companies too.

Colin Beattie agreed we need to do a bit of work on that, and there is some capital available for the right business but its how we match them up because there is a problem in how we upscale companies. He took the action to do research to look at this before the next meeting.

Colin Beattie then touched on deep technology, asking for someone to describe what it is to move forward. Julian Dines stated it's a buzz word for a high tech company. Malachy Devlin describes it as the technology that is fundamental engineering that is specialist, its deep within the application in product development.

It was then stated by the convenor that the new focus areas and action points from this meeting were firstly, we will look at how we tackle increasing awareness on skills and bring a proposal to the next meeting on that. Secondly, we will look at housing and take it from there and come back to the scaling on businesses. The next meeting we will have something more solid.

Kristian mentioned the challenge of housing in terms of renting, that they require a credit history. Colin mentioned that this is not legalisation.

Agenda item 5: Closing of the session

Peter Guthrie mentioned that Scotland House are happy to host a session for APPG and CPG Meeting as a dinner and hear some key issues, so that can be considered. Colin set the action to circulate and see what members are interested in attending.

Meeting closed at 19:25