

Business in the Parliament Conference (BiPC)

25 April 2025

Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 1

Panel Session 1:

Grasping the opportunity: How the evolution of Green Jobs will help to grow the Scottish economy?

Panel/Attendees

- Catherine McWilliam (Institute of Directors) [host]
- Michelle Thomson MSP (Economy and Fair Work Committee Member) [panel member]
- Adam Morrison (Ocean Winds) [panel member]
- Claire Mack (Scottish Renewables) [panel member]
- Maggie McGinley (ETZ Ltd) [panel member]

Plus

Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy, Gillian Martin MSP
and supporting Scottish Government Officials

And

A number of attendees from across a range of sectors in the audience.

Key Themes

- Investment and policy consistency are crucial.
- Leveraging existing skills and resources for renewable energy.
- Importance of education and training for future green jobs.
- Infrastructure development and strategic planning are essential for achieving Net Zero goals.

Please see Annex A for the briefing note which was shared with attendees in advance.

Note of session:

OPENING SECTION

Michelle Thomson MSP

- The session began with a series of introductions, as well as an outline of how the session would work.
- Invited panel members to make some opening remarks.

Catherine McWilliam

- Highlighted the Green Industrial Strategy focus on supply chains, new ways of working, and innovation in the transition to Net Zero.
- Questioned what does green skills and jobs actually mean and how does it fit into economic prosperity.

Claire Mack

- Scotland has abundance of potential clean power. Highlighted opportunities of North Sea transition from Oil & Gas to renewables. Calls attention to the issue with how Green Jobs are calculated and data behind that. Scottish Renewables working to understand how clean energy is changing & understand changes in supply & demand.
- 42,000 total jobs but expecting huge uptick and this is where opportunity lies. Scotland has amazing natural resources which can be taken advantage of.
- This opportunity needs to be serviced by capital and we must be an attractive place for investment and supply chain development.
- Need to service that pipeline with the appropriate people, skills & tech.

Maggie McGinley

- Highlighted that 1 in 5 people in NE are engaged in offshore energy.
- Managed transition is a chance to grasp economic opportunity for NE and beyond.
- Hydrogen, Carbon Capture, and Off Shore Wind are all opportunities in Scotland.
- People in Oil & Gas sector need to see that their skills can be used in renewable sector.
- Not currently enough consistency in supply chains.
- SG & UK need to work to ensure this pipeline is secure.

Adam Morrison

- Green jobs are an opportunity for Scotland.
- A managed workforce transition is vital but presents many opportunities.
- In North East Scotland the skills are there compared to other regions due to existing industries present in the region.
- These skills can be leveraged in the renewable space.
- Existing businesses can be anchored but they need to diversify and pivot.

AUDIENCE Q&A SESSION

Questioner 1

- Asked a question focussing on technology in supply chains. How do we help businesses maintain capacity in periods of uncertainty? How do we get appropriate funding at the right time for companies to expand?

Claire Mack

- A problem we have repeatedly had is inconsistency in policy in the past.
- Highlighted how perilous it is to get projects off the ground.
- We have a range of talent in NE Scotland already
- We need to focus on smaller projects that can develop and utilise innovation

Adam Morrison

- Referenced an example of subsea cables being made abroad instead of Scotland.
- Stated that pressure from SG has influenced UKG to set out a plan for investment enablement.
- Acknowledged there is now a cable factory in Scotland with the potential of a second to come.

Maggie McGinley

- Talked about the need to develop robust supply chains and the need for business support at critical times

Questioner 2

- Emphasised that the South of Scotland creates a lot of wind energy, but has less access to energy due to issues with grid infrastructure.
- Pointed out the cost of manufacturing remains linked to the cost of energy.

Claire Mack

- Agreed that the South of Scotland has not had sufficient grid infrastructure investment for decades.
- Flagged SSE business plan of £22 billion in investment which will create jobs.
- Stated zonal pricing has challenges in terms of not taking into account the costs of grid maintenance.

Questioner 3

- Scotland used to have scholarships which encouraged students to stay and work in industry or set up companies post-graduation. Could targeted scholarships be brought in to help keep talent within Scotland? Suggests underwater robotics as a potential area where Scotland could lead in innovation.

Questioner 4

- Highlighted that Scotland has the least energy efficient building stock in Europe. A focus needs to be on insulating buildings. 100,000 buildings in the North East need retrofitted and this could create 4,000 jobs. The workforce is not there and people need to be retrained.

Maggie McGinley

- A focus for Scotland needs to be on attracting talent and making sure that talent is focused in the right areas.
- We need to ensure that the right environment and skillsets are present to keep established companies in Scotland and the right students here to fulfil that.
- Retrofitting our built environment is vital.

Claire Mack

- Highlighted SG Regional Growth Deals and UKG Clean Industry Bonuses
- In leasing rounds businesses now need to answer about what they are doing to promote localised skill development and supply chains
- Scotland has an abundance of talent and knowledge in the field of robotics and offshore wind which presents opportunities

Questioner 5

- Demand is essential for new tech to succeed. How do we give investor confidence as well as consumer confidence regarding energy prices?

Questioner 6

- Highlighted challenges in the hydrogen sector in terms of skills shortages.

Questioner 7

- Asked a question regarding supply chains. Stated that retrofitting old turbines with new parts is how supply chains will be moving over the next 5-10 years. Scotland could be a world leader here- how do we seize this opportunity?

Adam Morrison

- Both Governments have made progress with retrofitting and things are happening organically in this space.

Claire Mack

- There is a lack of consumer awareness in the energy sector which is a big issue as people do not understand the pathway to cheaper power.
- People understanding when and how they use power is vital.

Maggie McGinley

- We need to understand skills, demands and timings in the Hydrogen sector
- Universities and colleges need to be helped to plan so that when Hydrogen demand picks up they can be ready

Questioner 8

- Questions what can be done so businesses have better infrastructure and planning so that public transport can achieve Net Zero.

Claire Mack

- Agreed that we need to focus on demand and freight transport and to speak to people with big fleets. We do need to get better at strategic planning.
- Highlighted how the energy can be made in remote areas and brought inwards, which is the reverse of most sectors.

Questioner 9

- Stated that development of infrastructure is needed to convert to electric vehicles.
- Pump storage Hydro is an opportunity for Scotland.
- We need more engineering apprenticeships in Scotland to create jobs for Scottish people.
- We also need more affordable housing in H&I for these workers.

Questioner 10

- Customers are unaware how energy inefficient their homes are.
- How do we incentivise people to make homes more energy efficient and thus reduce energy output?

Adam Morrison

- Stressed that a Just Transition is multifaceted and there are jobs in retrofitting homes etc

Maggie McGinley

- We need to educate young people in this via outreach to secondary schools.
- Young people need to understand the types of jobs available to them.

Claire Mack

- People are wanting to make changes to their home but don't necessarily know what to buy.
- Retailers can play a role in giving information to consumers.

CLOSING SECTION

Closing comments by Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy

- We are working across Government to address the issues highlighted in this session.
- 'Green Jobs' can mean many things and there are a diverse range of jobs in the field of decarbonisation. This process is a transition for workforces.
- The energy industry needs diversity, not just workers in engineering and maths fields.
- We need to provide opportunities in former industrial areas and there are opportunities in economically inactive areas.
- We must work with higher education to provide the right courses and skills to get these jobs.
- Points out the role Local Authorities will play in these transitions.

Michelle Thomson MSP

Thanked the Cabinet Secretary for her thoughts and attending the session and extended her thanks to panel members and audience members for an excellent discussion.

[session ends]