



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Tuesday 22 March 2022

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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NET ZERO, ENERGY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
10th Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

*Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Chris Brodie (Skills Development Scotland)

Jamie Brogan (Edinburgh Climate Change Institute)

Robbie Calvert (Royal Town Planning Institute)

Pam Ewen (Heads of Planning Scotland)

Simon Hewitt (Colleges Scotland)

Jane Tennant (Scottish Young Planners Network)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Peter McGrath

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Tuesday 22 March 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:31]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Dean Lockhart): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 10th meeting in 2022 of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, which we are conducting in hybrid format. We have received apologies from Natalie Don MSP.

Agenda item 1 is consideration of whether to take agenda items 3 to 5 in private. Item 3 is consideration of the evidence that we will hear today on skills and training; item 4 is consideration of new evidence that the committee has received on carbon capture, utilisation and storage; and item 5 is consideration of P&O Ferries Ltd's announcement last week on staffing and services, and the correspondence that the committee sent to P&O last week. Do we agree to take those items in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Role of Local Government in Delivering Net Zero

09:32

The Convener: Our next agenda item is an evidence session as part of our inquiry into the role of local government and its cross-sector partners in financing and delivering a net zero Scotland. In the inquiry, we are also considering the role that the Scottish Government and its agencies can play in supporting local government to deliver net zero targets.

In January, we heard from local authorities, public sector leaders, community development bodies, the business sector and major private financiers. For the next part of the inquiry, we are looking at the key themes that emerged from the first half of the inquiry.

One of those themes is the role of the planning system in achieving net zero. To discuss that theme, I am pleased to welcome our witnesses: Robbie Calvert, policy, practice and research officer at the Royal Town Planning Institute; Jane Tennant, chair of the Scottish young planners network, which is part of the RTPI; and Pam Ewen, chair of Heads of Planning Scotland. I thank all the witnesses for being with the committee this morning. We have allocated about 75 minutes for the session. We will move straight to questions.

In its submission, the RTPI says that its research highlights that nearly a third of planning department staff have been cut since 2019, and the committee has heard about the practical difficulties that have arisen from the shortage of planning officers. We heard from Scottish Renewables that it can take up to seven years for a planning decision to be completed, which obviously has a significant impact on projects being developed. The RTPI has estimated that, over the next 10 to 15 years, the planning sector will have demand for an additional 680 to 730 entrants into the sector. Is it realistic to expect that that figure will be achieved? What needs to happen for the target to be achieved?

Robbie Calvert (Royal Town Planning Institute): Good morning, everyone. Thanks for having me. In relation to the pipeline of planners, we need 680 additional entrants over the next 15 years. Whether we achieve that will very much depend on processes and other things being put in place now. The research identified that about 100 planning graduates a year come out of our schools in Scotland. That output has very much remained at a steady state over the years, so we need to think creatively about how we bring more entrants into the sector.

Compared with other sectors, bringing 680 additional people into the sector is not that significant, but Scottish Renewables, which you mentioned, and many other private sector organisations flag up planning as one of the crucial means by which we can deliver our net zero ambitions.

I was a little disappointed when I responded to the onshore wind policy statement and the climate emergency skills action plan. In relation to identifying and flagging up the green jobs that we need, both of those documents are very much based on the manufacturing side of onshore wind turbines, for example, and issues around that. Although they briefly touch on the fact that we will need more people in professional services, including planners, there is no mention of the means by which we will achieve that.

We could draw on the national transition training programme or potential funding through energy skills partnerships to bring much-needed funding for planning. We need to explore the establishment of an apprenticeship scheme in that regard. Such a scheme has been established successfully down in England, and we are in the early stages of exploring a scheme for Scotland. We have been jointly commissioned, alongside Heads of Planning Scotland and the Improvement Service, to undertake research on the matter. It is called the future planners project, which is looking at how to increase the pipeline of planners; how to raise awareness of planning as a career; scopes into the profession; effectiveness; and, of course, a potential apprenticeship scheme. That work is due to be published in May and June.

I will quickly touch on another point that it is important to discuss. Research by Partners in Planning and Skills Development Scotland identified not only the issue of additional planners coming into the sector but the issue that planning authorities have with succession planning. A lot of planning authorities have an ageing workforce. With just 9 per cent of the workforce under 30 and 35 per cent over 50, we need to consider in the short and medium terms how we do succession planning.

That is particularly important in relation to net zero because there is high demand for middle-tier planners—team leaders and senior planners. Those are the planners who deal with major renewables infrastructure projects that need landscape capacity studies, zones of visual influence and landscape and visual impact assessments. A relatively unique range of development issues need to be considered by those planners, including unique ecological impacts, construction on peatlands and aviation concerns. More senior planners in planning authorities are often required to deal with such

applications, so, in the short term, we need to plan effectively for the large-scale retirement that we will see over the next five to 10 years.

The Convener: Thanks very much. I know that my colleagues will want to follow up on a couple of points that you made—for example, on apprenticeships.

I will ask one follow-up question before I hand over to the other witnesses. You mentioned that a number of planning officers are reaching the end of their careers, and there has been significant attrition levels. Does that overall target of between 680 to 730 new entrants take into account the expected attrition rate over the next 10 years?

Robbie Calvert: Yes, it does. I am sure that we will discuss this later on, but the target might not take account of additional work coming up relating to, for example, the draft national planning framework 4. Many additional assessments, new and expanded policies and additional and unfunded duties will be introduced through the provisions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. That will increase the burden on planning authorities, so more planners will be required to undertake the increased workload. Therefore, the figure could, in fact, be an underestimate.

The Convener: I am sure that we will look at that issue again. Thank you. We will come back to you later.

I pose the same question to Pam Ewen. Feel free to pick up on any of the issues that have been discussed so far.

Pam Ewen (Heads of Planning Scotland): Good morning. Planners have a really important role in helping to achieve net zero across Scotland, so there is the need to provide the proper resources and skills. It is not just about having the numbers; it is about having the skill sets in the right places.

Robbie Calvert touched on the on-going future planners project, on which we are working with Tom Arthur, the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth. That project, which is going very well, is looking at recruitment, retention and the promotion of planning as a career.

One of the challenges is that many people are not aware of planning as a career. Fundamentally, planning is part of the construction sector in Scotland, but it also sits fair and square at the heart of the green recovery agenda. As well as ensuring that we have the number of people and the resources to take forward planning applications and the national planning framework 4 policies, we need to have the right skill sets.

I am sure that we will touch on the draft national planning framework 4 as we go through the

session. Heads of Planning Scotland was very disappointed that there was not a delivery plan alongside NPF4 for consultation and comment. We expect and hope that that plan, when it is produced, will look at the proper resourcing of planning authorities, which is a point that has been raised, to ensure that the national policy intentions are deliverable.

The Convener: Thank you, Pam. You, too, have made a number of points that we will explore in more detail.

I turn to Jane Tennant. Please feel free to address whatever issues you want to, but, as chair of the Scottish young planners network, do you see a lot of interest from young people in choosing planning as a career, or is it a bit of a challenge to recruit younger people into the sector?

Jane Tennant (Scottish Young Planners Network): Awareness is definitely a key matter. Although I am a young planner, I did not find out about planning until I went back to university at 28, and I was probably 30 by the time I had a properly formed concept of planning as a career and an area that I could work in for the rest of my life.

I think that there is an issue with the careers advice that is out there. Even people who have come up behind me or who are younger than me have also done a geography degree. Although that makes sense, they have not found out about planning until they were part of the way through that degree; there are undergraduate town planning degrees. There is definitely an awareness issue. I recently went to a geography society at one of the universities. A lot of people attended our session for the RTPI, and they included politics and geography students.

On top of that, universities are made up of international and United Kingdom students. Keeping in the country people who have been skilled up here might be an issue. A lot of the people with whom I did my masters degree went back to their respective countries. Getting the people we attract to Scotland to stay here to work in the planning system is another potential issue when it comes to the head count.

09:45

The Convener: I have a follow-up question. With regard to attrition rates among members of the young planners network, are you seeing people leaving the sector or is the position fairly stable?

Jane Tennant: I think that it has been fairly stable. You have to remember that, when we come out of university, a lot of us go into the private sector and some go into the public sector. In general, I think that planners tend to flip

between the sectors, especially in their early careers. Some people might have gone into the private sector or economic development or related areas, but I have not seen attrition among young people. I think that our biggest problem is losing knowledge and understanding of the major applications environment.

The Convener: I have a very brief follow-up question for Robbie and Pam. Hiring planning officers is primarily a decision for individual local authorities. Given the challenges that you have outlined with regard to budget, resource and expertise, would there be any merit in pooling planning resources across more than one local authority area so that budget, resources and expertise could be maximised?

Robbie Calvert: I am not sure about pooling budgets when it comes to hiring staff. There is definitely a point there about regional planning, which we will probably come on to.

Thinking about resources more broadly, if we start with the question of how much money planning needs to be effectively resourced, we did a piece of work on that ahead of the budget last year. We established that, over the parliamentary session, we needed £86 million to be put into the system for planning to be able to undertake its statutory duties. A lot of that funding gap will be met through an increase in fees. The regulations to increase fees have been lodged. Of course, that is welcome and will bring much-needed resource into the system. However, our work did not establish that that would be enough to enable the planning system to undertake its statutory functions.

We need to be creative about how we bring funding into the system. With the local government block grant arrangements, it is not for Parliament to say how local authorities should spend their money, but there are other means by which we could bring other funding streams into the planning system. Our work identified the need for £24 million of that £86 million to come through such other funding streams. That would fund, for example, the office of the national planning improvement co-ordinator, local place plan funding—that is another issue that I am sure that we will come on to—an apprenticeship scheme and some of the additional duties that arise from the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. For example, funding for the apprenticeship scheme would undoubtedly benefit all planning authorities.

I do not know whether Pam Ewen wants to come in on that.

Pam Ewen: Heads of Planning Scotland does a lot of sharing of knowledge and expertise. On occasion, resources can be used to assist with work on a cross-authority basis, but more

recently—in the past two or three years—that has not proven possible. That is not to say that we have not tried a cross-authority approach, but there are simply no spare resources available in authorities to facilitate that.

At the moment, there is real pressure on planning authorities across Scotland. There has been a very significant increase in the number of planning applications over the past 10 years, both in what we call householder applications—applications for house extensions and minor applications—and in big, major applications for larger developments. I have noticed across authorities that more people are choosing to retire a bit earlier than they otherwise would have done, and I certainly think that the pressure of workload has had a role to play in that.

It is not that we do not consider the pooling of resources; we do look at that. Planning is quite different from other systems, such as the building standards system, where there are opportunities to take a national approach for part of the work, but I assure you that expertise and knowledge are shared across planning authorities.

The Convener: I thank members of the panel for raising a number of interesting points, which I am sure that my colleagues will want to explore. I will hand over to Fiona Hyslop.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Good morning. Thank you all for joining us.

Robbie, you mentioned the draft national planning framework 4, which will place a number of new net zero-related commitments on developers and planning authorities. I am interested to find out whether you think that the profession is prepared for such changes and what you think needs to happen. What should planners be doing to help to deliver net zero?

Robbie Calvert: When the Scottish Government published its position statement last year, it went on record as saying that NPF4 would radically address climate change. In many regards, if we get the important stage of the consultation process right, that could be the case. To do so, we need to have an effective consenting process. Like a number of stakeholders, we have concerns about the clarity of the framework as regards the wording for the decision maker and the clarity of the process. For example, the policy relating to zero waste mentions the use of decarbonisation strategies, but no more information is provided on what those are or how they will be assessed.

A number of additional duties and assessments are coming through, some of which—such as the carbon life cycle assessment—will be beneficial in achieving net zero. However, to support planners to be able to process planning applications and to

deal with such assessments, we need to set out guidance on how they do that and to provide clear frameworks for applicants on how to submit such information.

If we think more broadly about how planning should address net zero, fundamentally, planning is a tool for local government in delivering a place-based approach to decarbonisation and to climate change adaptation. That needs to be driven by a robust evidence base that looks at climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as carbon reduction targets. Through such plan making, and by front-loading that evidence base, planners can identify the infrastructure needs, allocate the right sites for development and provide the right strategic framework to achieve our net zero ambitions.

Touching on the previous question, there is a really important role here for the Scottish Government's digital planning strategy, in which £35 million—a significant sum—is being invested over the next five years. A number of efficiencies could be derived from that strategy, and we hope that it could support planners in building evidence bases to support the preparation of local development plans.

Once we establish the evidence base, planning can determine the location, the scale, the mix and the character of developments and ensure that the density, the layout, the building orientation and the landscaping can reduce carbon dioxide emissions and make developments more resilient to climate impacts. Planning can encourage a wide range of behavioural change—for example, by encouraging people to use active travel by creating walkable green neighbourhoods. That is the premise behind the 20-minute neighbourhood policy that we see in NPF4.

In addition, through development managing planning, we can ensure that the right low-carbon technology is delivered in the right place. That involves consenting renewable developments, restricting fossil fuel extraction and supporting the green industrial revolution. I think that we can see that coming through if we look at the national developments that are promoted in the draft NPF4, which have the theme of green growth running through them.

There are tensions between net zero ambitions and climate change adaptations. Reducing travel by private car, connecting to existing heat networks and avoiding flood risk areas are all things that we need to do on the journey to net zero. However, some of those things might conflict and contrast, and they often need to be taken on a case-by-case basis. Development management plays a really important role there.

Most importantly, planning is about seeking those magical moments in which action on climate mitigation and adaptation also delivers a wide range of other benefits—for example, on health and wellbeing or tackling inequality, because, as we know, some of the most vulnerable people in society will be affected by climate change the most. I will stop there.

Fiona Hyslop: That was a very comprehensive answer on NPF4 and what we need to do in that regard.

I want to ask about the profession itself. Are you saying that it is just a case of having the right evidence, the right guidance and so on? As a profession, do planners not need to change and develop themselves? Are you saying that no upskilling is required for existing planners in relation to net zero? Could they just hit the ground running now, or will they need to develop professionally?

Robbie Calvert: I would say that that is partially the case. For a long time, planners have worked with sustainable development—they have done that since the early 1990s, so there is nothing new in that respect. Now that we have a stronger central policy framework, that will give planners the confidence to—for example—refuse a development that is not in line with net zero ambitions.

There will definitely need to be some upskilling in climate literacy. I refer back to the carbon life cycle assessments, which are new. We will have to upskill planners to be able to handle those. We might not have to look that far, as such frameworks and processes are available elsewhere—for example, in London.

Fiona Hyslop: Pam, you talked about the importance of and need for a delivery plan for the draft NPF4. However, that plan is not there. What would you like to see in it?

Pam Ewen: Perhaps I can set the context for the delivery plan. Some upskilling is needed for planning and related professionals—[*Inaudible.*]—when it comes to the tools. You can have the people with the skills, but you also need the tools to effect national policies and make the intentions behind them happen.

We need two things, the first of which is very strong, robust, clear and deliverable national policies, and the fact is that we still have some way to go in the draft NPF4 to ensure that the policies are robust and deliverable. Secondly, any delivery plan should not just address place making and the national developments in the draft NPF4 but look at the capital and revenue funding required to deliver the intentions behind those policies.

The net zero and wider climate change agenda is a fundamentally important part of NPF4—and rightly so—but what we need in that tool or key policy document are policies that actually require change to happen and use words such as “must” rather than “should”. That sort of wording is very important to a planning officer who is sitting with a planning application in front of them and having that dialogue with the developer proposing the development. It is very important that we having that kind of strong national policy. As I have said, we would want the delivery plan to cover both capital and revenue aspects, and we have touched on some of the revenue policies already.

Heads of Planning Scotland also wants what we would call a spatial expression of energy—in other words, the energy plan set out in spatial form. Lots of different documents are coming out on local heat energy systems, wind energy and so on, but what we need is a comprehensive energy plan in spatial form that shows what can be achieved in Scotland to help that planning process. All of those things would put us on a much more solid footing.

Heads of Planning Scotland very much welcomed the draft NPF4. However, although it is a good document, we think that there is some way to go. We need the delivery plan brought forward as well as more concise and deliverable policies.

10:00

Fiona Hyslop: Going back to the people aspect, how will the shortfall in planners and funding impact on planning authorities’ ability to help deliver net zero commitments? The fact is that planners are going to be at a premium in not just the public sector but the private sector. Could there be a brain drain of planners from the public to the private sector as the private sector itself tries to do more about net zero?

Pam Ewen: It is happening now. There is a shortage of planners, and some rural local authorities are finding it particularly challenging to recruit. In the on-going future planners project that both Robbie Calvert and I have touched on, we are undertaking—[*Inaudible.*]—but also with the young planners network, and we are getting a very positive response to that. We are analysing those returns just now.

It is really hard to recruit in the public sector at the moment, and that is not just the case for local authorities. The situation is very challenging. Until certain changes are made—we have not defined what those changes should be, but Robbie Calvert has touched on apprenticeships—we need to promote planning as a fundamentally important career, particularly as part of the green agenda in Scotland. [*Interruption.*]

Fiona Hyslop: I am not sure whether you have finished, Pam. You have frozen.

Pam Ewen: Can you hear me okay?

Fiona Hyslop: You are breaking up slightly, but carry on.

Pam Ewen: I apologise. What I was saying is that we need to promote the planning profession as a fundamental part of the green agenda.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you very much for that.

Jane, can you comment on the draft NPF4 and your views on the role of planners in particular? Does the young generation of planners see itself as leading on net zero within local authorities?

Jane Tennant: I think so. University courses are changing, year on year, to keep up with what we need to do. Indeed, at a recent round-table session that we had on the draft NPF, I had the chance to ask a student whom we had brought along whether they felt that the universities were gearing them up properly with the required skills, and we heard that a lot of practical elements were being brought into the courses.

As part of their chartered membership, planners need to carry out 50 hours of continuous professional development every two years. Generally speaking, though, I think that people in planning want to upskill, get on to courses and do what they need to do so that they can carry out their job. It is crucial that that happens, but development management planners, for example, will also have 30, 40 or possibly more applications to their name, enforcement cases and pre-application inquiries to deal with and maybe some other things on the side. While they are working on all that, they are trying to build up their skills. Maybe if we were better resourced and a planner had, say, only 20 planning applications to their name, they could do a lot more about getting those skills embedded more quickly. There could even be some time to set up and operate some sort of mentoring system.

I have worked in development management, and you feel as though you are on a conveyor belt. You are learning new things every day, but sometimes you need a wee bit of time just to let some of the knowledge bed in. You do not always get the chance to do that when you are under the cosh.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you very much indeed.

The Convener: Monica Lennon has a supplementary question in this area.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Good morning, panel. I was just listening to the answers to Fiona Hyslop's questions, and I thought that Robbie Calvert was right to say that this sort of thing is not new to planners and that

planners have been working with sustainable development since the early 1990s. With regard to climate and nature issues, do you think that sufficient weight is being given to the net zero agenda or are planners being expected to take everything into account and try to be all things to all people, which means that we are still not getting that clear emphasis? From a development management point of view, where does net zero sit for most planners in the pecking order of material considerations? That question is for Robbie Calvert first and then Pam Ewen.

Robbie Calvert: That is a really good question. There are some issues with how decision makers will use NPF4, especially with regard to prioritisation. The climate emergency and the nature emergency policies sit in the universal policy section of NPF4, which is the first section of the national planning policy handbook part of the document, and are therefore to be applied to all planning applications. However, as the Scottish Government has set out, all relevant policies are to be applied in the decision-making process.

A number of stakeholders are therefore a bit concerned about how planners will prioritise climate and nature over, say, economic development or other policy considerations. Of course, the devil is in the detail, and the document does drill down into this a little bit. For example, according to the climate emergency policy, "significant weight" should be applied to the climate emergency in determining applications. As far as I am aware, that is the only time that the word "significant" is used in that sense in the document, so it provides a steer for planners to give extra weight to that in the process. Whether that is clear or helpful enough for a decision maker, though, is a point of contention at the moment.

Monica Lennon: Thank you, Robbie. Do you want to comment, Pam?

Pam Ewen: I think that my camera has been turned off—I have been having a few connection problems.

In Scotland, we already have sustainability policies in our local development plans, but, as Robbie Calvert has highlighted, the policies proposed in NPF4 really need to be strengthened. As I have said, we need policies that talk about people being "required" to do something or which use the word "must", not policies that use words such as "should" or "could". That type of policy language will be important.

We need that fundamental step change. Climate change and net zero are almost ingrained in how planners work and in a lot of policies just now, but what we are asking of the planning system—and not just the planning system, because this is about

not just local government but national Government and the key agencies all working together—is a fundamental step change if we are to achieve the net zero targets.

Monica Lennon: Would you like to add to that, Jane? I guess that, as someone who works on the front line of planning, you are very familiar with applicants pushing back when they look at all the policies and saying, “Ah, but this will mean extra jobs,” or, “We cannot afford to put this into the scheme.” Is there a lot of pressure on planners to let things slide sometimes?

Jane Tennant: That is just the nature of development management and what happens when somebody proposes a development. The policy should provide certainty for one side and clarity for the other, but you need only look at planning law to see how a particular point can be argued in both directions. Up to a point, that is perfectly acceptable, because you are dealing with, on the one hand, the public interest and, on the other, a vested interest with regard to the private sector. Planning is about finding that balance and looking at everything in detail and in the round. That is part of a development manager’s job, but the wording of the policy is crucial in our being able to draw a line in order to achieve these net zero targets and the different things that are being asked of us now.

Monica Lennon: Thank you.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I have a number of quite specific issues to ask about. The first is on full cost recovery for development management functions. Given the funding difficulties that planning departments have at the moment, where do you see full cost recovery sitting, and how do you think that that can be delivered equitably between minor and major applications? I will start with Pam Ewen.

Pam Ewen: Heads of Planning Scotland welcomes the recently published increase in national statutory fees for planning, most of which will commence on 1 April. We have been seeking full cost recovery for some time now, and we continue to have those discussions with Scottish Government colleagues. We are currently looking at how full cost recovery should be defined, and we are very keen to explore that going beyond planning application work itself. When you get a planning application for a wind farm for example, many people are involved, not just the planning officer that is leading on that application. It is really important that full cost recovery considers that.

Another aspect is that planning authorities are not—[Inaudible.]—funded. Local government is not funded to produce a local development plan. That considerable piece of work often costs about

£500,000. There are also planning enforcement and other areas to consider in that regard.

Part of the conversation that we are having with Government is to determine what full cost recovery is. We certainly hope that the outcome of that will be to widen its current scope.

Robbie Calvert: I will reiterate some of the things that Pam Ewen has said. I know that work by HOPS in 2018 showed that cost recovery was about 66 per cent of core application processing costs. We would definitely support that moving towards 100 per cent. We will see whether the fee increase does that, although there is varying control across planning authorities in terms of how fee income is reinvested into the service, which will vary.

I will stress Pam Ewen’s point on local development planning. Unfortunately that is one of the areas that might suffer in a resource-deficient environment. A lot of that place vision and that creative work is needed to set out the framework for net zero if planning authorities are simply treading water, undertaking statutory functions and focusing on development management.

We have additional concerns. Alongside the draft NPF4 consultation, there are draft local development plan regulations and guidance. There is a lot of additional work within that for development planning teams, which concerns us. That is twinned with potential concerns that increases in planning application fees will simply be invested in the development management service, so we might have acute resourcing issues in development planning teams specifically.

Mark Ruskell: The engagement work with LDPs is critical to them getting the right development applications later on.

Robbie Calvert: Absolutely—and meaningful and community engagement is expensive.

Mark Ruskell: Jane, do you have anything that you would like to add to those points?

Jane Tennant: I echo what Robbie Calvert and Pam Ewen have said. The issue of cost recovery on the planning side has been brought up, and that aspect needs to be supported. We must also be mindful that development management is a customer service. People pay fees to get their planning applications determined. There are statutory timescales in which to determine them, and authorities are measured on their performance.

Going back to my point about development management planners having a caseload of 30 to 40 planning applications—along with other things—the question is how much quality you can build into every single one of your applications when you are in that position. Also, how much

investment is there from the private sector side, house builders and so on? Customer service is important. You do not return to a restaurant if you do not get served properly, so I think that we must be mindful of the whole system and what it is trying to achieve.

10:15

Mark Ruskell: I will move on to permitted development rights. Do you have views about how, or whether, permitted development rights should be extended in certain areas? If you think that they should be extended, how would that relate to policies to protect the historic environment?

I get a lot of constituents contacting me who live in conservation areas and who are struggling with decisions around whether their double glazing should be 3mm or 6mm thick and on issues about astragals and windows, and all the rest of it. They feel that getting planning approval to upgrade their homes in historic areas can be a bit of a minefield. Do you have thoughts about particular categories of permitted development? Where should we draw the line in protecting the historic environment? Those are two big issues. I will start with Robbie Calvert. What are your general thoughts on that?

Robbie Calvert: First—this will be useful for your constituents—I want to flag that Planning Aid Scotland provides a free, impartial planning advice service. I volunteer for the service and regularly take on cases.

There is definitely an issue with supporting people to navigate through the system, and we need to look at the draft NPF4 in that regard as well. The public will have to engage with that document, so we need to be careful that there is not too much jargon in it and that it is not inaccessible. That is especially important considering that members of the public might have to read the draft NPF4 alongside local development plans and, potentially, local place plans as well.

We advocate cautiously exploring the use of permitted development rights. You can look to England to see that there have been some difficulties with permitted development rights. An example of that is office-to-residential conversions, which have circumvented the planning system to some degree, leading to very poor-quality accommodation being delivered, which is a concern.

On whether we can take some of the more non-contentious applications out of the system and allow planners to focus on the bigger, more important applications, we would broadly support that.

Mark Ruskell: Jane, do you have any thoughts on that?

Jane Tennant: I echo what Robbie Calvert said. You could debate the permitted development rights for quite a while, and caution would be the right approach to take, particularly around certain things.

It depends on which sector you are talking about, because there are household permitted development rights and telecoms permitted development rights. The latter are slightly more restrictive in, for example, national parks, because there are landscape concerns. I think that we all support the landscapes in a national park being protected, so that we have somewhere nice to go; they are also good for tourism. Therefore, it also depends on which areas you are talking about.

Mark Ruskell: The context here is very much the decisions that local authorities must make around household developments such as energy efficiency improvements or the installation of solar panels on roofs or whatever, or decisions around electric vehicle charging points or whatever infrastructure is important.

Jane Tennant: You mentioned the historic environment. When we are talking about protections, I am not quite sure where you would draw the line, because we want to protect our historic environment but we also need to take account of the net zero ambitions. It is hard to know where to draw the line, but that could be debated for probably a number of—[*Inaudible*.]

Pam Ewen: In terms of built heritage, Heads of Planning Scotland would not support increasing those permitted developments where you have designated areas, whether those are conservation areas or properties that are listed. Those designations are there for a purpose—[*Inaudible*.]—and enhancement of those areas and properties are maintained. Therefore, it is important that the permitted development rights are removed in many of those areas and instances.

Beyond that, in our wider urban areas, yes, there is scope to look at some minor development, some of which could be energy related. You gave a good example of charging points and how they might be rolled out. Heads of Planning Scotland is very happy to look at those aspects of potentially additional permitted development, and that is an on-going conversation with colleagues in the Scottish Government.

Mark Ruskell: My last question is about where decisions are made. Where is it appropriate to make decisions? Robbie Calvert spoke earlier about some of the challenges that departments have, particularly given the loss of senior managers and specialists in, for example, visual

impact and ecology. For renewables development, is the current boundary between determination at local authority planning department level and determination at national Government level drawn at the right threshold? I am talking about section 36 applications under the Electricity Act 1989.

I am aware that some councils could receive an application for a hydro power scheme with an enormous environmental impact assessment. That would be hugely technical, with a huge amount of ecological work required around the hydrological assessment, but that might end up on the desk of a relatively junior planning officer. Is that a live issue? Does section 36 set the right level for determination?

Robbie Calvert: I think that, under section 36, the threshold is set at 15MW.

A planning authority would be a consultee, obviously. From the perspective of planning authorities—I think that Pam Ewen will be able to support this point—about 50 per cent of the application fee goes to them, and I think that that is contested a wee bit.

As you said, a lot of planning authorities must more or less determine the planning application afresh, even if they are the consultees, which requires them to undertake a lot of resource-intensive community engagement work alongside that. That much-needed resource has to come into the planning system to support programmes of upskilling, to ensure that the officers have the right expertise to deal with some of those assessments.

Another important part of that puzzle is some of the other professional services in local authorities. For example, authorities need to ensure that they have enough landscape officers, because they are an important part of determining applications for onshore wind. Providing that internal expertise to the planning officer in a reasonable timeframe is another important part of achieving decisions in a good timeframe.

Pam Ewen: Building on what Robbie Calvert has just outlined, I think the section 36 fees could be looked at again, to see what proportion local authorities get. In those instances, planning authorities are not just sitting on their own. Heads of Planning Scotland provides a good network, and people reach out if they have a particular question or want to know whether somebody has dealt with X, Y or Z. That knowledge and expertise is shared. It tends to be planners with more experience who deal with those types of applications, and a number of planning authorities have planners with experience of energy applications and energy consents.

Mark Ruskell: Jane, do you want to add anything?

Jane Tennant: No, thank you.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): My first question is for Jane Tennant. You talked in your opening remarks about how you found planning as a new career. What options and support are available for those who wish to change career and work in planning? What can be done to encourage more people to make that move?

Jane Tennant: I do not really know. I found planning through an environmental management course. I did that because everything was going environmental at the time, and I wanted that skill set. It was a well-rounded course that covered the social, physical and renewable side of things as well as economics, so it attracted me. I recently spoke to some geography students. It is a logical step to come out of studying geography and go into planning or a related specialism.

We need to make sure that people are aware of planning as a career and what exactly it involves. Sometimes, people think that planning is just about dealing with a house extension, perhaps because their mum and dad had an extension. If people's parents were in planning or architecture or something, that seems to be how they became aware of planning. More needs to be done in geography courses in school to point towards planning as a career and let it follow on from there. It is at school, before people start to go to university, that they make up their mind about what to do or think about what they could do.

Liam Kerr: Sticking with skills, I will direct a question to Robbie Calvert. In your opening comments, you said that people in England can do a planning apprenticeship but that such apprenticeships are not yet available in Scotland. Can you help the committee to understand why that difference exists? You also talked about work that you are doing to introduce an apprenticeship in Scotland. When will there be a decision on whether that will happen, and in whose gift is it to bring in an apprenticeship here?

Robbie Calvert: I will work backwards through your questions. We are working alongside Heads of Planning Scotland and the Improvement Service on the future planners project, which Pam Ewen discussed. A report is due for publication in May or June.

On the apprenticeship, there is an issue in that skills development is a numbers issue. In England, there is a larger population, so there is a significant extra requirement for planners there. There is a threshold for the number of people who would go through an apprenticeship scheme per year—Skills Development Scotland will not assess something as an individual option for an apprenticeship below that threshold. There is an

opportunity to have planning alongside other built environment areas as part of a joined-up built environment apprenticeship, but, to run an individual apprenticeship, we would need at least 100 people per year, which is above the number that the profession needs or would be able to maintain.

Compared with other sectors, the number of additional entrants that we need is relatively small, but planning is vital in achieving net zero. It is not a huge number, but it will have a massive impact on whether we can achieve net zero.

Liam Kerr: That is a fair point.

My next point is also for you, Robbie, although Pam Ewen and Jane Tennant can come in if they wish to add something. It sounds as if demand for planners will be huge and, as you say, it will be vitally important. Are you aware of what impact local authority funding settlements from the Scottish Government have had on the number of places to train and get skills, and on local authorities' ability to hire more planners? Do you have any sense yet of what this year's settlement, which I think the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said was a £100 million cut to local authority budgets, might have on the number of places to study and local authorities' ability to hire the planners that they need?

Robbie Calvert: That goes back to the support that we provide for planning education. There is a limited run of bursaries—for example, the Jim Boyack Memorial Trust has a small amount of funding each year—but that could certainly be expanded. I know that many people who are now senior planners were paid to study planning many years ago, so we could look at that again.

It might be better if Pam Ewen answered the question on local authority budgets. Again, the amount invested in planning services will vary across local authorities. Quite a few planning authorities have had significant recruitment drives recently. I note that the base wage has gone up—the salary has increased—so maybe that is indicative of a shortage of planners entering the sector.

10:30

Liam Kerr: Pam, would you like to add to that?

Pam Ewen: There are challenges with recruiting planners in planning authorities, many of which we have touched on. It starts with getting more people into the profession at undergraduate level and at postgraduate level, which may be a quicker route for people who are interested in coming into the profession. The impact on funding has been considerable, particularly over the past decade, and services such as planning have been, in

HOPS's view, particularly affected by previous settlements.

Statutory planning fees are the main income for planning authorities. As I have touched on, we welcome the increases that are about to be implemented from 1 April, but they will go only so far. I stress that fees are not the total answer to how to properly resource a planning authority. We would like consideration to be given to how funding can come into planning authorities directly to assist with delivering the skills that are required and the number of people who are required to achieve the Scottish Government's intentions as they are laid out in national planning framework 4 and other key documents.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Good morning, panel. I will follow up on a couple of points that have already been touched on.

Jane Tennant has spoken about planning as a career and mentioned that we should try to ensure that school pupils are aware of planning as a career. What more could schools do to ensure that that happens? There are still career days and so on, but I am sure that, for people in S3, for example, becoming a planner might not be top of their list. What could schools do to encourage young folk to come forward?

Jane Tennant: I am a long time out of school, so I might not be able to reflect too well on that, but careers days are a good opportunity. If somebody is doing a geography course and particularly enjoys it, maybe their careers adviser or teacher will push them towards doing a geography degree and then being a geography teacher. However, lots more jobs can come out of a geography degree, such as jobs in planning and other specialisms, although that might involve doing a master's degree.

Teachers need to be able to tune into what jobs their subject can offer and explain that to pupils who are interested in the subject. That is true for any career. Teachers should be able to point pupils towards all the possible options that arise from subjects and where they can take people in life. That is really important. That was not the case for me, and I have spoken to someone who came 10 years behind me, and it was not the case for them, either. There needs to be a wee bit more thinking about how a higher or other course translates into a potential career for a pupil who is interested in the subject.

Jackie Dunbar: From what you say, we need people in local authority planning departments to step across the corridor and speak to people in the education departments and ask them to plug the planning department.

I think that Robbie Calvert talked about skill sets needing to be in the right places. Is it doable for

local authorities to grow their own, especially if we could get apprenticeships off the ground? In my local authority, we grow our own environmental officers. Could local authorities do that for planning?

Robbie Calvert: Yes. We are seeing that in England with the apprenticeship scheme there. The educational component can be about one day a week on a day-release arrangement over a number of years. A grow-your-own approach would be useful, particularly for rural planning authorities such as those in Shetland or Orkney, which have trouble hiring graduate planners because they are far away from the planning schools, which are predominantly in the central belt or Dundee. Pulling in people from lower-income backgrounds, who may not go through the university route, through an apprenticeship scheme would bring more diversity into the profession.

To touch briefly on the previous question, a wider point about educating younger people about planning is that it is also to do with civic participation. We know that young people are not getting involved in consultation processes in the planning system or engaging with applications. There is a broader point about educating young people on planning and place making considerations. We need to mobilise people in the school strike and the young green movement into professional roles in which they can make a difference throughout their careers.

Jackie Dunbar: Pam, you spoke about local authorities sharing expertise in best practice. Will you explain briefly what arrangements are in place and what could be done to improve sharing of best practice among local authorities?

Pam Ewen: We have a strong network across Heads of Planning Scotland and that is continually built on. If somebody receives an application and thinks that they do not have any particular expertise in that area, or if they have a range of questions about it, there are mechanisms for them to draw on the network.

The reality is that our profession is quite small in Scotland and there is already a good network here, and it provides training. The RTPI Scotland also has a chapter network that holds events. All those things are important, particularly for young people who come into the profession and who are building their careers and networks.

Planning needs to be seen as part of the construction sector and the green economy. We need to raise awareness of the sector. Mention was made of the need to chap on the doors of our education colleagues. Some of the responsibility sits with the Scottish Government. Heads of Planning Scotland, as part of the future planners

project, is raising the issue of what can be done across Scottish Government directorates to build in recognition of the profession as part of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics programme in schools.

There is also a role for positive publicity. That is not just for planning authorities; it is for lots of people, including elected members at local and national levels. How do we better celebrate the fantastic places that are being shaped and built across Scotland and what has been achieved with planning and planners at the heart of it? There is much to do.

Through the future planners project, we are looking at the issues that have been raised, including the sharing of expertise and how we build on that. We also are looking at what could be done to create more short-term opportunities for people to get some experience. A wide range of actions are being taken.

Jackie Dunbar: I am not sure who would be the best person to answer my last question, so whoever thinks they are best placed should shout out.

We saw in the Covid-19 pandemic that decisions were made and things were put in place in super quick time. What lessons can we learn from that as we try to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions?

Pam Ewen: Lots of things had to change super quick as we all started to change the way we were working and adapt systems when the pandemic came along.

Planning authorities have reflected on that. Annually, we prepare a planning performance framework and in the past two years we have reflected in that on the lessons learned and the positives in terms of driving improvements forward. I think that there has been a lot of improvement in the digital capability of the system. The Scottish Government is taking forward a digital programme to enhance that further over the coming year. That will be important. Those are the key changes and lessons to be learned. It is about how technology can assist us in making the job of the planner easier, without a cumbersome process.

A decade or so back, the discussion in Heads of Planning Scotland was about the need for a simplified and streamlined planning system, and we have moved well away from that. We have a much more complex planning system now and we cannot see the complexity reducing. That complexity means that it takes time to work through a planning application, develop a local development plan or be part of delivering a project. It is important to recognise that planning has become more complex. It comes down to the

strength of policies. We can deliver more quickly and better if our national policies are clear, concise and deliverable, if the submissions that we receive are of very good quality—[Inaudible.]—and if our communities have been engaged at an early stage and feel involved in many of the applications that are coming forward.

The Convener: Monica Lennon has the final set of questions.

Monica Lennon: This has been a very interesting session. I say that as a former young planner and former planner, but it is great to be talking about the future of planning today.

It will be no surprise that I believe that planning jobs are the ultimate green jobs and also that the profession and the opportunities for planners need more visibility.

Going back to the point about routes into the profession and universities, I am old enough to say that I studied planning in the late 1990s at the University of Strathclyde. That is no longer an option for planners, but there are two universities in Scotland where you can study planning as an undergraduate: the University of Dundee and Heriot-Watt University. Thinking about what Robbie Calvert said about being more diverse and thinking about people from more working-class backgrounds, I know that, when I go to schools, lots of young people want to talk about planning even if they do not know what the planning profession is, because they know that planning is all around them. This generation is more aware of and more passionate about environmental, social and economic justice.

What would I say to young people in Central Scotland, for example, who cannot afford to move away to Dundee or cannot even travel to Heriot-Watt because public transport is very expensive in this country? What routes are available to them right now and do we have enough planning schools in Scotland?

Jane Tennant: I touched on the course that I did and courses that I recently interacted with at the geography society at the University of Glasgow. An environmental management course at Glasgow Caledonian University offers planning content as well as strategic choice approach work and EIA work—that side of things. It has a good broad brush and there are most likely other courses beyond geography out there at the University of Glasgow and the course that I did at the Caley. Those courses can feed into planning. You can also build yourself a planning role—although I do not know much about it—through the associate route in the RTPI, through which you can still end up chartered, and there is potentially an apprenticeship route forthcoming.

10:45

I see courses in environmental management, geographic information systems or other geography-based subjects as easy feeders into planning, because they build up a lot of the required skill sets and general knowledge about the built and natural environments. I did not do an undergraduate course in town planning; I did a town planning masters. That was my route, coming through the assessment of professional competence with an accredited degree, but there is an associate route and there are other courses that can give someone that foundation of knowledge.

Pam Ewen: Thank you for your support for the profession. It is very much welcomed.

Some of this is being looked at through the future planners study that we are getting our teeth into just now. We recognise that we are too dependent on people coming from school into university and then into a planning authority. We need to be looking at how to widen the pathways and open different pathways, so that we can take people from school and give them some work experience and link planning into colleges. How do we get those different networks and pathways coming through?

It is not only planners who have a degree in planning and are members of the RTPI who work in our planning authorities. That is the predominant resource in a planning authority, but there are roles for technicians and other professionals working alongside. Looking at the net zero agenda and climate change overall, how do we get all those complementary professionals working together and, in the context of the discussion this morning, supporting the planners to deliver applications, local development plans and projects? We need some fundamental shifts to make that happen. I have found being involved in the future planners project very interesting. There are so many different funding streams, but none of them is jumping out as a route to planning, yet planning sits in STEM and is part of the construction sector. Do we need to reprofile the profession and the need for it as we move forward? We also need to look at the funding streams that can help planning authorities bring individuals in directly from school and provide for them through internships and university or school placements, or give members staff the time to get out into schools to reach out and help young people to think through what they would like to do. A range of things is being looked at, but, fundamentally, some of them will require additional revenue funding for local authorities.

Robbie Calvert: Addressing directly the question of how to advise someone living in the central belt, I want again to flag the Jim Boyack

Memorial Trust for students who may have financial hardships. Funding is available for them. That may be a more immediate approach.

I agree with everything that Pam Ewen and Jane Tennant have said, but I think that there is another opportunity in community engagement and how we planners can bring the planning system to the attention of young persons.

As part of my voluntary role with Planning Aid Scotland, I did a bit of work at Culloeden high school about the Inshes junction upgrade. First, we were engaging young people about decisions on that big piece of transport infrastructure. It was interesting, because it was getting their interest away from the private vehicle—a lot of them were getting buses or walking to school—and planners from Highland Council set out what the planning system was to maybe 300 high school children. It was a good example of an opportunity for community engagement. There is a lot in the planning act about engaging young people, and we need to use that opportunity to promote planning as a career.

We have not touched on local place plans today, but if we could involve younger people in them and increase civic engagement and involvement with the planning system, we could hope to pull more young people in through that route.

Monica Lennon: Thank you for mentioning the Jim Boyack Memorial Trust. I was a trustee many years ago and I am glad that it is still going from strength to strength. The last time I checked, the annual grant was about £1,500, or maybe just over £2,000. Is there an opportunity for that fund to be supported by the Scottish Government and other stakeholders? Does that already happen, or is it mostly made up of individual donations?

Robbie Calvert: I am not sure. I do not think that it is supported by the Scottish Government, but we would certainly welcome that. I know that other professions are supported. This is a bit off topic, but funding is available for dentistry education, for example, and as part of that scheme graduates have to work for the national health service for a number of years. Could we establish a system like that, in which graduate planners work for a planning authority for a number of years? If funding was available centrally from the Scottish Government, it would be very welcome.

Monica Lennon: That is interesting and a point that we could push through. In the past, this committee has asked Scottish Enterprise to define a green job, which it was not able to do, but having planning given as an example of a green job could open some doors.

I have a final question—I know that we are pushed for time, and I am trying to catch the convener's eye. I want to ask about 20-minute neighbourhoods. Previous generations of planners could say that they had helped to create new towns. When we look at the challenges and opportunities ahead now, we want to see planners at the heart of creating 20-minute neighbourhoods, which in many cases would involve working with what we already have. Is that a way to encourage people into planning and motivate the current planning workforce? What are the main opportunities and barriers? Perhaps we could come to Pam Ewen, Jane Tennant and then Robbie Calvert if there is time, convener—I am getting the eye, so could you be very brief, panel?

Pam Ewen: I will be quick. The concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods is not new, but it is very much central to the draft national planning framework and is welcomed. There are challenges in how it could be rolled out in rural areas. It would have an urban focus.

You are highlighting the place-shaping part of the planning profession. We talk about planning and planners, but should we be talking about place makers and place shaping, because sometimes it is about the language? If we talked like that about planning, we might engage more young people than we do by talking about going to study town and country planning.

Monica Lennon: Thank you, Pam, for that very good and brief answer.

Robbie Calvert: I agree with Pam Ewing. I do not think 20-minute neighbourhoods are new, but they are a great opportunity to get across the value of planning and place making. Especially after Covid and the focus that we all had then on our neighbourhoods, it is good to seize the opportunity to say that this is what positive, proactive planning can do and bring younger people into the planning profession. I very much support the 20-minute neighbourhood and living well locally as well.

Monica Lennon: And the last word goes to the future of planning, Jane Tennant.

Jane Tennant: I echo everything that Robbie Calvert and Pam Ewen said. Ultimately, where people engage most is within their local areas, so if we can get schoolchildren, teenagers and staff engaged in their local places through the 20-minute neighbourhood concept, it is highly likely that it could get more people into planning as the bits click into place about how it sits with how the world comes to pass and what happens on the ground.

The Convener: Thank you, Monica, and thank you to the panel for joining us this morning. We very much appreciate your insights into the

challenges and opportunities in the planning sector and beyond.

That brings us to the end of our allocated time. The committee will have a private discussion of the evidence from this panel after we hear from our second panel. I will now briefly suspend the meeting for the next panel to set up.

10:55

Meeting suspended.

11:01

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back, everyone. After focusing on the role of planning with our first panel, we will now explore skills and vocational training. I welcome our second panel, who are joining us remotely. Chris Brodie is the director of regional skills planning and sector development at Skills Development Scotland; Jamie Brogan is the head of climate partnerships at the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute; and Simon Hewitt is the principal of Dundee and Angus College and the lead principal for climate emergency at Colleges Scotland.

Thank you for joining us this morning. We have around 75 minutes for this panel and will move straight to questions. You may have been following our evidence taking. We have heard that skill shortages in key areas in local authorities will limit their ability to meet their net zero targets. Do you share that concern? Is it something that you recognise? If so, are there particular areas where the skill shortages are most acute? What steps do you think need to be taken by you, the Scottish Government, Scottish Government agencies and local government to address those skill shortages.

I will start with Chris Brodie and then move on to Simon Hewitt and Jamie Brogan.

Chris Brodie (Skills Development Scotland): Good morning, and thank you for the invitation to give evidence today.

The point that you make is correct—there are skill shortages right across the economy. We are currently facing significant labour shortage challenges due to a number of factors. Some of it is down to the very hot labour market, which has resulted partly from the economic bounce-back after Covid and partly from changes in freedom of movement that are impacting some sectors. An underreported story is the change in the number of people who are available to work, which is being driven partly by demographics and partly by a rise in economic inactivity. All of that context is important, because it tells us that there are

challenges not just across local authorities but right across the private sector.

At the heart of the question is what we can do about those things. It will come as no surprise to hear me say that I do not think there is a single silver bullet or simple answer to the multitude of challenges that we face. One of the primary things we are doing at Skills Development Scotland is working with employers to understand where the pinch points are. We have active engagement across a range of industry sectors. Critically, we are looking at where there are opportunities to align the £1.9 billion that we invest in education and skills with the economic opportunities and good jobs. That has to be a critical component of what we do.

More broadly, we need to look at what steps we could take to grow Scotland's workforce. It is all very well to have skills aligned with where the skills requirements are, but we also need to get more people back into the workforce. We must recognise that the economy and the labour market have been through a period of significant challenge as a result of Covid, in particular, which has caused a lot of turmoil in the labour market. We need a skills system and routes to training that include a big focus on upskilling and reskilling.

I will pause there. I realise that that was a quite general answer. We will, no doubt, pick up on some specifics as we go on.

The Convener: Thank you. You have set out a very good overview of the challenges that you face and some of the unique factors that are at play in the labour market following the exceptional couple of years we have just had.

Simon Hewitt, I will pass over to you with the same question.

Simon Hewitt (Colleges Scotland): Good morning. I will build on a few points that Chris Brodie made.

It has been an extremely difficult two years for everyone in Scotland and beyond. Colleges have been challenged significantly, albeit that their agility and responsiveness throughout the period has been quite refreshing to see.

Colleges Scotland sees skills gaps emerging throughout the sector. One of the key steps, and one of the things that has worked—one of the positives to have come out of the pandemic—is how we have all worked together towards common aims and the common good, and that has been no different in our sector. Earlier, Robbie Calvert mentioned the Energy Skills Partnership. ESP has been established to bring industry partners and Scottish colleges together to look hard at the skills needs, focusing on training in wind and marine, hydrogen, advanced manufacturing and so on,

and on how we can work together to effectively plug the skills gaps that we already have. Colleges play a vital role in that, and there are already some excellent examples of good work happening across Scotland.

We are aware that there is more to be done, but that will require more targeted and specific funding and strategic intent similar to what we saw with the focus on early learning and childcare in 2019. As a sector, we have the infrastructure, albeit that it needs investment; the key step is in how we work collectively to address the challenge.

The Convener: Thank you, Simon.

Jamie Brogan, I put the same question to you. Feel free to pick up on any particular issues that are most relevant to your work.

Jamie Brogan (Edinburgh Climate Change Institute): There are several questions there. You are asking specifically about skill shortages in local authorities. I agree with your statement and with Chris Brodie's observation that we see those shortages across the wider economy.

You asked about skills gaps. This is not going to be a comprehensive assessment, but we see both technical skills gaps and softer skills gaps. The technical skills are in areas like accounting and climate finance, in making sure that climate impact is embedded into all the decisions that we make. The softer skills are more about behaviour change and enabling partnership building and stakeholder engagement.

You also asked what we need to do about those gaps. Part of it is about putting more people with climate skills into roles where they can influence and drive change. Part of it is—Simon Hewitt touched on this—about building knowledge networks and thinking about where capacity and capability is best built. Without having to reinvent the wheel, it is about sharing best practice through knowledge networks across both the public and the private sectors. There is a lot in that that we can unpick as the discussion unfolds.

The Convener: Thank you for those opening remarks, though they were necessarily general because the question was quite wide.

I want to focus on one of the key challenges that local authorities will face in meeting net zero targets. The heat in buildings strategy will require 200,000 homes a year to be retrofitted and new heating systems to be installed by 2030, but with the work beginning in a few years. To put that into context, the current run rate for the installation of new heating systems is approximately 3,000 a year, so there will have to be not an evolution or incremental change but a revolutionary step up in the number of buildings being retrofitted.

Do we have anywhere near the number of qualified engineers and project teams required to meet those targets? I appreciate that that might not be directly relevant to what you all do on a day-to-day basis, but I would appreciate your views.

Chris Brodie: That is a terrific question. Just to put some scale on the challenge and picking up on decarbonisation and the installation of heat pumps as part of the challenge that you have outlined, about 2,000 people are in installation roles in the sector. All those individuals are not necessarily entirely focused on heat pumps; some will be fitting gas boilers.

Some work that we did a couple of years ago suggested that there are no immediate skill shortages, but there is a moving challenge in terms of the rapid scale-up of heat pump installation that will need to take place.

It is not just about heat pumps; it is also about thermal insulation. Some estimates suggest that we might need to double or triple the workforce in a short space of time, and the challenge then becomes about how we do that. I think we need to look along at least two axes, one of which is about getting more people into related trades, and that is absolutely part of the challenge. The biggest part of the challenge will be the reskilling of the existing workforce.

There is a third dimension to the challenge, which is the timing of the upscaling of investment in retrofitting housing and installing heat pumps. You will see a very large peak before the climate begins to stabilise, in about eight to 10 years. That presents difficulties with directing people into what might be perceived to be relatively short-term jobs or activities. Again, the challenge is in ensuring that our colleges and other training providers provide the right upskilling and reskilling to meet that demand.

We are working to move that away from the national level and look specifically at what we need to put in place across different parts of Scotland. We are working with Glasgow City Council not just to quantify what we think will be needed in the Glasgow city region but to understand the extent to which provision is not in place that could be in place. I had to cancel a visit to Borders College today. We were going down there to have a similar conversation about how we can invest in skills to support the programme of investment that is anticipated for housing associations in the south region.

The Convener: Thanks very much, Chris. That is good context. I am glad that you were able to address that question directly, because it was quite specific.

You just talked about the potential need to double or triple the workforce in this area and how that will need retraining or reskilling. I imagine that it will take two, three or, in some cases, four years to achieve the necessary level of skill or training, and I guess that that means that we need to start now if the work is to begin in 2025 or 2026. That means that courses and places on those courses need to be available now, or at least in the next 12 months. Where are we with that massive upscaling of training that will be required?

Chris Brodie: I will maybe ask Simon Hewitt to come in on that with a bit of detail about his role in the Energy Skills Partnership and Colleges Scotland. He will have a better handle on where some of the college system is with this.

You talked about upskilling and reskilling taking two to three years, but I think that the upskilling and reskilling period will be much shorter than that. We are looking at designing reskilling approaches to deliver in 12 weeks or 16 weeks rather than three years.

We need to look at another component. I know that Simon Hewitt and his colleagues are looking at this in the college sector, and we are also looking at it in connection with apprenticeships. The qualification frameworks that we teach need to reflect the skills of the future, not the skills of the 1990s or the early 2000s. We therefore have an active programme of work looking at the components of our apprenticeship frameworks and our graduate apprenticeship frameworks so that the qualifications catch up with where the market is heading.

11:15

The Convener: That brings us neatly to Simon Hewitt. Simon, I would appreciate your thoughts on that.

Simon Hewitt: I echo Chris Brodie's points. The issue is very much on the radar. The sector is already tackling it as part of the construction needs forum through the Energy Skills Partnership.

A number of colleges within the space are already delivering the necessary upskilling and reskilling. Chris is right to say that we recognise the scale of the challenge and that shorter, sharper elements of upskilling and reskilling are the only way to tackle this and other skill shortages. The curriculum needs to shift and change; indeed, it has changed to be much more focused. We are pleased with how we have been working with other training providers, national bodies and qualification agencies to ensure that qualifications are fit for purpose.

Upskilling and reskilling are clearly a significant part of what is happening, but Chris Brodie also touched on apprenticeships. The college sector is the biggest delivery agent for apprenticeships in Scotland, with around 11,000 apprentices year on year. We know that we need to inspire more people to take those pathways. I picked up on the evidence this morning that there needs to be more information and guidance around what the careers are, what the pathways into these careers are, and how colleges, schools, and universities can work with SDS and others to help people to understand the career, pathways, and various different upskilling and reskilling opportunities that there are to get into those areas.

A lot is happening already, but we recognise that the pace needs to pick up, which is why we are speaking to the Scottish Government and others about specific funding to allow that to happen.

The Convener: Thanks very much, Simon. That is helpful. It would help the committee to understand the wider context and the trend in the number of college places, university places and apprenticeships that are available in this area if you or the appropriate person could write to us just to give us a sense of the trend over the past couple of years and the projected increase in the number of courses that will be available in the next two or three years. We would then be able to put that into some kind of context and look at some hard numbers when we take a look at this issue.

Jamie Brogan, let me bring you in on the same question.

Jamie Brogan: Simon Hewitt covered it very well, so I will just emphasise what he said about needing to match labour market supply and demand at a more local level. We are about to start doing that with some of Colleges Scotland's members through the Edinburgh Climate Commission. Skills and labour supply are just one part of the complex system problem that is climate change. We need to localise supply and demand so that it is commensurate with the other elements of the climate challenge, such as 20-minute neighbourhoods and reducing our requirements for transport. If the labour market is not matched up with point-of-service need, you are going to have work against some of those things.

The Convener: Thanks very much, Jamie. I will bring in Fiona Hyslop who will follow up on some of the issues already raised.

Fiona Hyslop: I want ask Jamie Brogan for his overview: is there a demand for reskilling and upskilling in local authorities? I would like to focus on local authorities, in particular, because they and their partners are the focus of our inquiry. Is there a demand for that training and are there any

bottlenecks that might constrain it? If there is not sufficient demand, does it need to be stimulated to make sure that the upskilling and reskilling happens right across lots of different areas of staff and professions within local authorities?

Jamie Brogan: It is a complex question. Is there a demand? Yes, local authorities recognise the need to build capacity in the area, but they need to build capacity as well as capability. They need to bring in more staff to create that demand and skills requirements.

The challenge for local authorities now is not just to rebuild a bigger sustainability team but to embed sustainability and net zero knowledge across everything that they do. I could give you some statistics on the importance of the role of local authorities and their control and influence over area-wide emissions.

The need is there but it exists on all levels. As I say, you need specialists with particular technical skills, but you also need to go through the change process of embedding climate as a critical part of everything that a local authority does and in every decision that it makes from senior level to operational level.

Fiona Hyslop: How far have we gone on that journey? Is it the same across all of Scotland or are some local authorities better at doing this than others? Are there any good examples you might want to give us?

Jamie Brogan: We have worked closely with the City of Edinburgh Council because that is where we are based, and we see ourselves as a critical and responsible city partner. We have lent our own knowledge and capacity to help the council to build its own, and it has been good at drawing on the knowledge of the university and the Climate Institute to support its net zero ambitions and engage with city partners.

I would highlight City of Edinburgh Council as an example of good practice, but it is not the only one. We are working with the Scottish Cities Alliance, which represents the seven Scottish city local authorities, and I could go into the specific areas that we have highlighted where they need to build capability and capacity. The alliance recognises those areas, and some recommendations that we have made about how they will be implemented are sitting with the Scottish Government.

As I said in response to the previous question, there is a question about where that capacity should be best built, whether it should be done seven times or 32 times across Scotland or whether it would be better done at the national level, so that you are not reinventing the wheel across different local authorities.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you. Is there more of a challenge for rural local authorities in the agenda of embedding climate change skills, upskilling, reskilling or whatever right across all aspects of local authority delivery?

Jamie Brogan: Yes. That is my short answer to that question.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you, Jamie. I will move on to my question for Chris Brodie. Skills planning clearly focuses on the anticipated needs of industry to deliver green jobs, but we are focusing on local authorities and the transition to a net zero society. What modelling have you done in relation to local authorities that are major employers, apart from anything else, and are, as we know, key to the delivery of net zero? What assessment have you made of local authorities' staffing and professional needs for the transition?

Chris Brodie: You are right that our primary focus has largely been on understanding skills requirements for Scotland's private sector employers, but we have been engaged with local authorities in a number of ways. The Scottish Cities Alliance, which Jamie Brogan has just referred to, was part of the group of public sector partners that developed the climate emergency skills action plan.

I attend the Scottish Cities Alliance's chief executives group each quarter. One of the messages that comes out of that forum is that local authorities have an important role in delivering the transition to net zero and that they are already taking important steps to develop skills among their workforce.

In relation to the specific question that was raised with the earlier panel this morning, we supported the RTP1 planners' study to look at the bottlenecks and challenges in the recruitment of planners. I am not going to rehearse the evidence that you heard this morning, but, as a former planner myself, I offer the observation that one of the challenges that local authorities face is the retention of staff, and that plays out across a range of disciplines.

Countless colleagues who started their careers as planners in local authorities are now working in a range of settings that are not related to the initial part of their career, from wind farm development to property development and finance. That is a challenge for local authorities, and we know that they faced it in relation to early years learning and childcare, when there was a significant expansion of concerns about people moving out of local authorities into the private sector. I suspect that we will see that play out across the transition to net zero in the next three to five years.

Fiona Hyslop: Is Skills Development Scotland working with the Scottish Funding Council to feed

into Government where you see potential bottlenecks? You talked about more than £1 billion of investment in the wider education aspect, and, on top of that, there is other green funding, green investment and net zero funding from the Government. Are the bottlenecks that you describe, which we heard about from the earlier panel, an area in which we might get best value? If we want to enable things to happen, should we look at planning and other areas in local authorities to enable that net zero agenda to be fully realised?

Chris Brodie: One of the major pieces of work that we are doing with the Scottish Government is the pathfinder project. We are looking at the entirety of the skills that will be required for the transition to net zero in the next 10 years. That is focused on understanding where jobs are likely to materialise and when. Do we have sufficient insight into what the specific skills requirements will be and, critically, do we have a clear understanding of the extent to which that provision is in place across private training provision, colleges and universities? The way I described that there it sounds breathtakingly simple, but it is a very complex piece of work that is well under way at the moment.

That will allow the Scottish Funding Council and the SDS, working with regional partners, to look specifically at where those bottlenecks are beginning to appear and to ask the question of the skills system, particularly our colleges and universities, about the extent to which they can respond to that.

Of the £1.8 billion that I referred to for the post-16 education and skills investment, about £100 million is provided through apprenticeships. The vast bulk of that resource came through our college and university sector. I am not for a second suggesting that there might not be a requirement for additional resource to meet the scale of the challenge that we face, but it is contingent on us to make best use of the resource that we actually have in the system at the moment.

Fiona Hyslop: Simon, you talked about the need to scale up net zero skills and training as happened when we had the big expansion of early years educators, and I would like to hear more about that.

We have also heard that supply and demand are very locally planned. Colleges are very well placed to do that, and they are very adaptable and flexible in that respect. For example, West Lothian College in my area is, with funding from the Scottish Government and councils in West Lothian, working with private builders on building a traditional house for retrofitting and a Passivhaus in order to provide skills and retraining. Is that sort of thing happening in all colleges, and what more

can be done to make sure that that agenda is properly seized?

Simon Hewitt: Yes, there are excellent examples of that sort of thing right across the country. One thing that colleges do particularly well is work with small and large industry partners. Some examples of that include Dumfries and Galloway College's green skills academy, Ayrshire College's wind turbine technician programme and West College Scotland's work on microgeneration. Indeed, my own college—Dundee and Angus College—is working closely with the Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc. A lot of strong partnership working and local regional planning is happening in that space. For me, though, one of the big catalysts—and, indeed, the catalyst that has been good for our region—has been the introduction of city deals. The green agenda and green skills are absolutely at the heart of the regeneration approach that is being taken in those deals.

We have brought key partners around the table to understand the supply side, because we also have to be realistic. There are a lot of knowns as far as skills are concerned, but there are also a lot of unknowns with regard to the direction of travel, what will be needed and how that will be delivered. The key is to work in partnership on supply and demand; it should not be provided by a college, university or a training provider alone. If you do not have a joined-up approach, you risk duplication of funding and effort. The great examples that I have mentioned are definitely helping in that respect.

11:30

I would also say that the colleges are playing the role of what you might call anchor institutions and really know their communities. They already have great infrastructure in place, with apprenticeships reaching into schools and so on. Indeed, around 12 per cent of school kids in Scotland are undertaking some education in colleges. There is a good opportunity to start blurring the lines, so to speak, between who does what and to work together properly in a joined-up fashion.

Fiona Hyslop: You mentioned city deals and alluded to what has happened as a result of the Tay cities deal. Do you think that, because that deal was one of the later ones, it perhaps has more of a focus on delivering net zero skills than some of the earlier city region deals?

Simon Hewitt: Given what has happened over the past few years, particularly with the climate emergency and the launch of the "Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025", it was absolutely inevitable that the deal would have more of a focus on that issue. That said, as a

result of the pandemic, there has been in the past few years a massive shift in how we work together. Over the period from my early involvement in the Tay cities deal to where we are now, there has been a shift and change in attitude, focus and approach.

As for your earlier question about what more can be done on this agenda, it is my honest opinion that funding drives behaviours, as do competition and duplication. With the likes of the city deal and indeed some higher-level initiatives, there is a real drive for partnership and a real focus on working together. When that sort of thing happens, we see the best coming out.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you very much.

Mark Ruskell: Good morning to you all. First of all, I want to ask Chris Brodie about the “Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025”. Obviously, the plan has a longer-term outlook—over the next 25 years, I think—but it specifically relates to the period from 2020 to 2025. Now that we are coming up to its midpoint, can you tell us how the plan will be evaluated? How will you know whether it has been successful in delivering its climate objectives?

Chris Brodie: You are right to say that the action plan takes a relatively long-term view of skills, with a focus that goes all the way up to 2030.

The plan was published in December 2019, I think. I forget which year it was, because of the pandemic, but I am pretty sure that it was 2019. I apologise—it was 2020. We published the plan in December 2020, and we have been focusing on what has been described as an initial and quite broad-based three-year plan of action. An element of the plan addresses some of the issues that we have heard this morning such as engaging young people and future careers in the light of the climate emergency. Just a few moments ago, I described to Ms Hyslop a significant piece of work that is under way to understand what we are currently investing in green skills and the scale of what we need to close out in order to meet future demand. There is also a significant focus on upskilling and reskilling through the national transition training fund programme and the green jobs workforce academy.

I should say that, although the plan has been developed by SDS, it is not an SDS plan. We see it as having been very much co-developed with Scotland’s colleges, Scotland’s universities, the Scottish Funding Council and other agencies. I get regular progress reports from the implementation steering group overseeing the plan on the measures that are in it, and we are expecting it to be evaluated towards the back end of 2025.

Of course, I would say this, but I think that we have made a good start. However, the challenge ahead of us is pretty significant, and I hope and expect to see activity being ramped up over the next three years. For those reasons, the evaluation of the plan has not been commenced—we will commence that at the right and appropriate time.

Mark Ruskell: How responsive is the plan to changing Government policy or changing circumstances? We now have, for example, a massively ambitious heat in buildings strategy, although inevitably there are questions around its delivery. Does that not provide quite a new context in which the plan should be reconsidered?

Chris Brodie: The action plan implementation steering group is alive to that. We have just created a decarbonisation heat in buildings subgroup of the ISG, which is looking specifically at opportunities and challenges in that respect, and we have created similar groups of interest, which include employers, around issues such as transport.

Nevertheless, your point is very well made. The plan cannot be a straitjacket in which we focus slavishly on delivery. This is an emerging area of the Scottish Government’s policy commitment; the fact is that skills will be driven by investment and demand, so we are very alive to the need to be very close to Government policy and the need for the plan to respond to it.

We do not want to be rewriting the action plan every 12 months. We expect it to be refreshed in about 2023 or 2024, but we will keep it as a live document to respond to emerging policy changes and other changes in the landscape.

Mark Ruskell: I am sure that, as a former planner, you caught some of the previous evidence session this morning. When I looked through the action plan, I found only one reference to planning and planning jobs, which was in a list of potential areas for skills development. There did not seem to be a particular focus on planning and planners. Do you recognise that that needs to change, particularly given the amount of infrastructure we will need to build, the amount of place making that we will need to do and the other changes that are going to be needed in communities?

Chris Brodie: That is a fair point. I have not gone through the action plan with a planner’s eye to note the number of references to planners, but one of the challenges that it highlights is the impact that the transition to net zero is going to have right across the economy. It is going to impact the hospitality sector, the food and drink industry and so on. The lack of any namechecking

of planners in the plan is not a reflection of its importance as an area of work.

As I said a few moments ago, in 2020—I might have got my years wrong again, but I am pretty sure that it was 2020—we co-commissioned with the RTPi some work on specific challenges in recruiting planners and what might be done to address them. I have already rehearsed some of the issues that that work has uncovered, including the contraction in the supply of planning provision and planning schools. Planning is now largely a post-graduate endeavour, whereas, in my day, there were two or three planning schools offering undergraduate courses in it. The planning profession has changed significantly since then. Looking back at my experience as a planner at Strathclyde in the late 1990s, I recall that a number of people on that degree course were reskilling and retraining; they were technicians based in building control departments or planning departments in the local authority and were upskilling. I absolutely think that we need to look at some of those upskilling and reskilling routes for planners.

Mark Ruskell: Thank you. My final question is for Jamie Brogan. You are working on developing partnerships with local authorities to tackle climate change and I imagine that there will be some big areas there around heating and energy, alongside transport.

Who do you see as being the biggest partners for local authorities to engage with? Where is that big workforce for delivery going to come from? Thinking about energy, are the utility companies going to come in and do street-to-street retrofitting, investing in district heating schemes, installing household insulation and whatever? Where is the big workforce? When I look at housing departments in local councils, I do not see a vast workforce to be deployed to retrofit and change entire communities. Where is the partnership? Where is the bulk of that workforce in, say, an area such as energy that can engage in partnership working with councils to make the shift to net zero?

Jamie Brogan: You have touched on a lot there. The context for this is that, in setting area-wide targets for emissions, local authorities are taking on a huge challenge. They have direct control of maybe 6 per cent of emissions in their local areas. They cannot deliver on those targets alone and need to find ways to bring in local planners to help. So far, we have seen closer links with other players in the public sector, because they all have reporting and targets to meet. We are helping through things such as the Edinburgh climate compact to bring them into partnerships with the private sector.

Coming to your question, what we see that might be more innovative is new players are coming into the market, new energies that have different business models, different ways of working and different experiences from other countries. You mentioned district heating schemes. We are seeing business models that might work and people who might have experience in delivering them that are not necessarily from the UK. Organisations such as Vattenfall, with whom we are working, are looking at models for how to introduce district heating into Edinburgh. That is complicated and needs a completely different skill set.

We have spent a bit of time talking about planners and the need for planning skills. You are not going to turn planners into carbon accountants, but you do need to build that sort of capacity in local authorities and the private sector to ensure that the climate impact is properly assessed in whatever decision is made by whatever department, and planning is a big part of that. That might involve people working together rather than a development in planning skills.

I have gone slightly off beam from your question. You are right to say that we are developing partnerships with anyone who interacts on that critical piece. One of the big obstacles that we face is finance. We have done some work on an economic assessment of the measures we need to take to get to net zero. That shows—we hear this consistently—that investment in climate is a good investment and one that pays for itself but that there is a gap between the number of good climate projects being brought forward and those reaching institutional investment. There is a specific skill needed there to bridge that gap, aggregating projects, articulating business cases and presenting them to the investment community. If we can get that right—if we can bridge that gap by working with that community—we can unlock a lot of economic potential and latent, pent-up demand for investment and project delivery, which we are seeing on both sides.

There is a lot in that, but it is a pretty critical part of industry that we should work with. Industry says it wants to work with us. The challenge is in finding the right kind of mechanics to make it work.

Mark Ruskell: Can you give examples of where that kind of expertise and capacity to manage and develop those kinds of new partnerships is working well in local authorities?

Jamie Brogan: I wish that I could say yes. We see models where the knowledge and capacity are being built, and there are organisations and different forms of investment companies that are bringing those innovative models forward, but there is not enough. There is still a big gap. I wish that I could say that we can see it being done in a

certain place in a way that we can all learn from, but there is a missing middle in building the pipeline of investable climate projects and linking them up with institutional investors in a way that makes it all flow much more easily. Some of the Scottish Government agencies such as the Scottish National Investment Bank might have a supporting role in that.

11:45

Liam Kerr: Good morning. I will direct my first question to Chris Brodie. The number of green jobs in Scotland has been declining in recent years. Last week, in a response to a parliamentary question that I submitted, I saw that the Scottish Government is considering changing the definition of what constitutes a green job. Has Skills Development Scotland been involved in discussions and planning about that, given the impact on skills development that would presumably occur?

Chris Brodie: Yes, we have been involved in those discussions. I can refer you to a part of the climate emergency skills action plan where we talk about the importance of having a clear understanding and definition of what a green job is and how there is not one out there. We looked across international standards and did not find a definition that fits the purpose, particularly in terms of skills.

In the climate emergency skills action plan, we talk about three types of job. We talk about existing jobs that we know that we are going to need more of, and we have heard this morning that we need more planners; we talk about jobs that already exist but that will require significant upskilling and reskilling, and we have had a conversation about the conversion of gas boiler engineers to heat pump engineers and that could play out across other disciplines; and we talk about new jobs in emerging technologies that do not exist yet.

The work that we did suggested that a lot of attention is focused on that third that group. In reality, the delivery of the transition to net zero, particularly in the early years, is going to be delivered through that second group: through upskilling and reskilling people with existing jobs to be able to address some of the challenges. That is a very contextual answer.

We are working with the University of Warwick and the University of Strathclyde to look at how to translate the framework into a measurement definition that helps to better capture the demand side—when we expect green jobs to appear and what type they will be—and, critically, the provision side. An issue that I raise regularly through the climate emergency skills action plan

and raised again this morning is that we need to understand the extent to which the significant investment we are already putting into the skills system relates to those three measures. To what extent are we well equipped to provide the planners of the future? To what extent is that investment bent towards upskilling and reskilling? What capacity is there in the system to be able to develop training provision for jobs that do not exist yet?

That work is due to be completed in the spring. I do not have an exact date now but I can provide it later. We expect the definition to be the subject of some refinement and discussion among the partners who will be using it to inform the work on demand and on understanding the extent to which investment already plays into green jobs.

Liam Kerr: Thank you. I would be grateful if you could provide that information later.

Simon Hewitt, on the upskilling and reskilling that Chris Brodie has just talked about, the convener asked earlier on about the training that will be required. In a previous session of Parliament, I sat on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee and I seem to recall that the number of college places has been cut significantly in recent years by more than 150,000 places. I also recall reading in January, in one of the newspapers, that colleges were facing a £51.9 million cut in funding.

Simon Hewitt, does that landscape have an impact on our prospects of achieving net zero? If so, is there any sign of the Scottish Government recognising and addressing the need for greater funding and more college places?

Simon Hewitt: That is an important question. First, building a little bit on Chris Brodie's point about upskilling and reskilling, the challenge exists across all sectors. Thinking about low-carbon transport, we need to upskill about 36,000 existing motor vehicle technicians, and that is before any new roles come in. There is a significant job to be done in a multitude of sectors to prepare us for net zero.

Yes, most definitely, there have been challenges. As you have mentioned, the draft budget will have a significant impact. Colleges will now have to step back and make some pretty difficult decisions about what they do or do not prioritise, and there will be some knock-on impact. If you prioritise the transition to net zero, something else will not be prioritised. That is the reality of the difficult decisions that will have to be made. What we need to deliver requires investment. On college infrastructure, for example, investment will be required to support improvements to a significant amount of infrastructure in college buildings and the provision

of the sort of equipment that will be needed to get up to industry standard. The draft budget is likely to have an impact on the delivery of net zero. We should be calling for investment in this area and some ring-fenced funding to allow colleges and others to tackle the challenges that we are all about to face.

Liam Kerr: I will ask one more question, if I may, convener. As I am joining you remotely, I am just going to do it.

Chris Brodie, something occurred to me as you were speaking. In an earlier response, you talked about there being a trebling of the workforce to achieve net zero. Is there a straight correlation here, such that a trebling of the workforce requires a trebling of the budget that is available for funding the sorts of courses that Simon Hewitt has just been talking about, or does it not work quite like that?

Chris Brodie: That is a great question, but no, to be honest, I do not think it works like that.

The reality is that, as a nation, we invest very heavily in post-16 education, and Simon Hewitt is right that we need to ensure that some of that investment is invested in the system to support it to change. We need to be able to ensure that we are making the best use of the £1.8 billion investment in post-16 education and know the extent to which it is supporting our economic growth ambitions, whether they be around green skills or whatever. A focus on skills is the centrepiece of the national strategy for economic transformation. We recognise that public sector funding settlements are unlikely to treble over the next 10 years—I would hazard a guess that they will not—so we have to ensure that we make effective use of existing resources in the system and that we apply additional resources where they are available to effect change. That needs to be the answer. There is no straight correlation. We cannot say we need to treble this budget or that budget.

Liam Kerr: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Monica Lennon: It is probably best for Chris Brodie to pick up my first question, which is about the green jobs workforce academy. I admit that I have been a little sceptical about the academy, because it seems to have a very fancy website but I am not sure how much value we are getting out of it. I know that it is only six or seven months since it launched, but will you give us a flavour of how it is helping local authorities and their workforces with technical skills and the soft skills that Simon Hewitt talked about? You mentioned evaluation in 2025, but how will we be able to check in and see whether it is having practical

benefits for local authorities in the months and years before then?

Chris Brodie: That is a really good question. It may be helpful if I give you a bit of context about what the green jobs workforce academy is and what we want it to be.

The initial iteration of the green jobs workforce academy—phase 1—was part of the Government's 100-day commitment. A number of underlying principles informed the development of both the first phase and the future phases, and I have referenced some of them today. The first is the recognition that upskilling and reskilling are going to be really important parts of our armoury in getting skills out to people for the transition to net zero.

The second principle is that the transition to net zero will play out across the entirety of the economy, but it will play out in some areas first.

The third principle is that we must recognise that Scotland has a significant world-class asset in the shape of 45 further and higher education institutions that are delivering higher national certificates and higher national diplomas and degrees and that are also upskilling and reskilling. Allied to that is the move to online learning and delivery, which emerged rapidly as a result of Covid.

All those components informed the first phase of the green jobs workforce academy. It does not have a physical presence, but the courses that have been developed can be accessed either online or in colleges, universities and other institutions.

Our ambitions for the green jobs workforce academy—work is under way on all of this—cover a number of areas. First, we want to ensure that it is communicating information about employment opportunities as they emerge right across the transition.

Secondly, we want it to better educate people who might want to reskill or upskill about where and how they can do that. We are developing a further iteration of the skills discovery tool, which will allow people to say, "I fancy a job in area X and my skills are Y." They will get a dedicated report that articulates where they need to upskill, where that upskilling is available and where some funding is available. We are also building functionality that will engage people with our army of careers advisers. We have 800 careers advisers working across schools and providing adults with careers information, advice and guidance. In time, people who engage with the workforce academy will be able to book an appointment with an adviser.

Finally, we are exploring the concept of a green skills wallet whereby funding will be attached to individuals, potentially on a graduated basis, in the sense that people with lower skills will potentially get additional funding to undertake upskilling and reskilling.

The academy is a piece of work that will continue to grow and develop over the coming years. You are right to point out that it has been running for only six or seven months, and at the moment I do not have detailed performance information for you. As that information becomes available, we will share it with the climate emergency skills action plan implementation steering group, and in time it will, of course, be available to share with colleagues in Government and the Parliament.

Monica Lennon: I appreciate that it is early days for the production of data, but will you collect data on how many local authority workers have accessed the academy and gone on to undertake training? It would help the committee to know about the interaction between local authority workers and the academy.

Chris Brodie: I do not have a direct answer to that at the moment. As with all our training programmes, our training support is agnostic with regard to whether someone is working in a small or medium-sized enterprise in Shetland, a local authority in Glasgow or a big bank in Glasgow or Edinburgh. I will need to confirm with the team that is operating the academy the extent to which that information is available and what some of the challenges might be in collecting it, but I am happy to undertake to respond to the committee in more detail on that.

Monica Lennon: That is great. Thank you. As we are pushed for time, I will move on to my other question, which is about planning. That will not surprise you, given the questions that I asked in our previous session. I feel that I am putting Chris Brodie under the spotlight, but he told us that he is also a former planner. Some points were made about planning apprenticeships, which exist in England. Is Skills Development Scotland looking at that?

I was also interested in what Simon Hewitt said about colleges being anchor institutions. We have talked a lot about routes into planning, especially through universities, but we have not really heard about opportunities in further education. Are there routes for planning technicians, for example? It would be great to hear a few words from our panellists about that and about planning apprenticeships.

12:00

Chris Brodie: The recommendation that planning apprenticeships be explored was one of the recommendations in the report that we co-published with the Royal Town Planning Institute. I think that the issue is less about an apprenticeship framework per se and more about workplace learning and training. In that regard, I refer back to the comments that I made a few moments ago. When I trained as a planner at the University of Strathclyde, there were two or three colleagues on my course who were embedded in planning departments and were doing their training part time.

We are exploring the best route to broaden the opportunities for people to go into the planning profession. Is it about having a new planning apprenticeship—a graduate apprenticeship—or is it actually about amending the format and content of existing courses? The critical thing is to recognise that the planning profession is quite different from what it was, certainly when I trained. There is an underlying piece about ensuring that we have the right planning education and routes, but also that the education is up to date.

I now wish that I had not outed myself as a former planner. *[Laughter.]*

Monica Lennon: It is okay—welcome to the club.

Simon Hewitt: A particularly useful thing about further education and colleges is the ability for courses to cover a breadth of different skills and subjects. We begin at Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels 1, 2 and 3 and we move upwards from there. The college sector can play a key role in providing initial understanding, early-level skills and awareness of not just planning, but a wide range of sectors and job roles. Our sector has about 340,000 students every year, so we have a role and a responsibility in helping to raise awareness of the climate emergency and the transition to net zero, as well as the potential roles in the response.

Some colleges have planning units. My college has a tie-in with the University of Dundee and there are specific elements of planning within that, although they are at early awareness-raising stage. That is where colleges are contributing at present, not just on planning but on a wide range of other subjects. We are really keen to use the size and scale of the college sector to ensure that as many people as possible are aware of the climate emergency and the broad pathway into the routes that they can go down.

Jamie Brogan: Simon Hewitt has answered the question. As well as providing training for specific careers, the challenge is to embed climate impact and knowledge across all professions and all

courses so that everyone who enters the labour market sees it as a critical part of delivering whatever job they take on.

Monica Lennon: That is great. Thank you for your answers.

Jackie Dunbar: Simon Hewitt said that we need to blur the lines of who is responsible for what in education and training. I could not agree more. I said earlier that education on the subject should be started at primary school level. What are local authorities doing to work with you to make sure that that happens? Are they informing you of their priorities when they set their budgets so that you know what to expect from them?

Simon Hewitt: That is an excellent question. At times, education can be very good at siloing itself, not just at the level of colleges and universities, but even within institutions or departments. In future, multiple skills will be needed across multiple roles. For instance, a computing course is no longer just a computing course. Computing is now embedded in almost every course. Perceptions need to change. We need to look much more broadly at the soft skills that prepare young people and, indeed, adult returners to go into the job market.

My local authority has been heavily involved and we have been able to influence some strategic priorities. We have put a real emphasis on school and college partnerships. The College Development Network and Colleges Scotland recently launched a report on the role of colleges in school and college partnerships and how we can help to build capacity. We know that there are challenges for teachers in specific areas and challenges to do with equipment and infrastructure. We need to be able to blur the lines between college education and school education. Actually, it is just education. It is an option, a choice and a pathway. It should not matter whether it is undertaken in a school or a college.

There is a realisation and an awareness of that, but it varies between local authorities. There are some very different approaches, even to simple things such as the basic challenges of aligning timetables in the school day. It is simple things that cause some of the bottlenecks. We could make a significant impact by recognising the importance of joint working between schools, colleges and universities, with clear strategic priorities in each region and people working together properly to tackle the issues. We need to take a whole-system approach to allow that to happen.

Jackie Dunbar: Chris Brodie mentioned that we need more folk to move back to work and that we need more routes for training, upskilling and retraining. I have a really simple question. What do

you mean by retraining? Is it about folk who are already in an industry or folk who are coming into an industry for the first time? I ask that question because, putting aside the just transition stuff, folk out there may not know how to find out whether they need to retrain or upskill, or what the difference is. I hope that that makes sense.

Also, what can our local authorities do to build the capability and capacity that we have talked about, not only in their own workforce, but also to help the private sector?

Chris Brodie: You are absolutely right to distinguish between upskilling and retraining. In simple terms, an example of upskilling would be someone building on their existing skills in a job or in a company in a way that allows them to be more effective in their job. As I have said several times, that is going to be important in the transition to net zero. Retraining is more about someone moving from one job, sector or company into another—it involves a fundamental shift. An example would be someone moving from being a civil servant, like me, to being an engineer. That will require them to be not just upskilled, but significantly retrained.

The reality of our training, education and skills system in Scotland is that, for a long time, we have quite rightly been focused on the transition from school into the labour market. A huge proportion of our investment—I include our modern apprenticeships in this—has been focused on people aged 18 to 24. One of the challenges that we are wrestling with is how to create space in the system to focus on the challenges of the next 10 years, not the past 20. We have heard Simon Hewitt use the phrase “difficult choices” several times today. Part of the issue that the system needs to wrestle with is how we rebalance the investment to create a more balanced portfolio of training routes that will meet the labour market and skills needs of the future.

What has happened as a combined result of the UK’s decision to leave the European Union and the Covid pandemic has brought that into sharp focus. We have had a choke on labour supply, for want of a better term. We have had fewer people coming into the country and many people who came in previously may have gone home. As I mentioned at the outset, we have also had a significant increase in economic inactivity. Nearly 823,000 people are classed as being economically inactive and not available for work. At a time of significant labour shortages, we need to think quite hard about bringing some of those people back into the labour market. Retraining will be an important part of that.

The Convener: We are up against the clock, but I have a brief follow-up question for Chris Brodie, given what he said in response to Monica

Lennon's question about the green jobs workforce academy.

Chris, you will appreciate that there has been a bit of confusion about what the academy is about, but you helped to clarify that. Is there a dedicated budget for the academy? If so, I ask you to say what it is, just to give us some context and a sense of the scale of the resource that is being put in.

Chris Brodie: We will provide a written answer to that question. If I answer it now, there is a danger that I will misstep on the statistics. It is not necessarily a straightforward question to answer, and I will explain why.

There is a dedicated budget for the delivery of the green jobs workforce academy as a site and as a concept, and we can provide details in due course. However, I am not in a position to track the extent to which training is undertaken through the academy. If an individual goes in through the academy to a course at Lews Castle College or Simon Hewitt's college, we are not at present routinely tracking the financial contribution towards that.

We will be able to provide an answer about the dedicated budget for the workforce academy, but it is designed in such a way that it draws on existing resource that is already in the skills system. I hope that that makes sense and explains the challenge in answering the question directly.

The Convener: It does. If you could provide what you suggested in writing to the committee, that would be very much appreciated.

That brings us to the end of our time. I thank the panel. We have covered a significant number of issues. Thank you very much for your insights and for setting out your views on some of the challenges in this area.

That brings us to the end of the public part of our meeting.

12:13

Meeting continued in private until 13:03.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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