



Eighth meeting of the Just Transition Commission Skills and Education

15 June 2020, 10:15 – 15:30

Commission attendees

Professor Jim Skea (Chair)
Lang Banks, representing WWF Scotland
Professor Mike Danson
Richard Hardy, representing Prospect
Charlotte Hartley, representing 2050 Climate Group
Norrie Kerr
Rachel McEwen
Dave Moxham, representing STUC
Kate Rowell
Tom Shields
Colette Cohen

For agenda item 2 only

Chris Brodie, Head of Skills Planning & Sector Development, Skills Development Scotland
Jim Brown, Director, Energy Skills Partnership
Sandy Burgess, Chief Executive, Scottish Motor Trade Association
Professor Alan McGregor, Glasgow University
Gordon Nelson, Director, Federation of Master Builders Scotland

For agenda item 3 only

Dr Stuart Fancey, Director of Research and Innovation, Scottish Funding Council
Dr Eurig Scandrett, Just Transition Partnership rep, University and College Union
Kate Signorini, Deputy Director, Open University

Secretariat attendees

Gregor Auld, Scottish Government
Colin Seditas, Scottish Government
Lauren Begbie, Scottish Government
Jacob Greenhalgh, Scottish Government

Items and actions

1. Welcome and preparation for session one

1.1. Professor Jim Skea welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies from Professor Karen Turner were noted.

1.2. The Commission discussed topics and questions they wished to raise in advance of the first information gathering session.

2. Information gathering session one

2.1. The Chair welcomed guests to the session and started the questioning.

2.2. The group began by discussing the current skills system in Scotland. There was said to be a tendency for individual sectors to look at long-term trends in skills demand in isolation from each other. While the climate emergency was going to be a major issue for skills planning in the coming years, other factors such as Brexit and the rise of industry 4.0 would also have a significant impact on the labour market. The challenge for skills planning was said to be considering all of these long-term trends together and taking a holistic view of the system. Failure to do this would risk supply for key skills such as digital being unable to keep pace with demand.

2.3. There was recognition that Scotland's labour market was currently going through a period of profound uncertainty. This was felt to necessitate a more flexible and responsive skills system. The UK and Scotland were noted to have historically invested less on reskilling and upskilling in comparison with international competitors, with more focus instead being placed on the higher education system. Collaboration would be needed between the private and public sector to support greater focus on upskilling. While this was noted to be difficult in the face of uncertain market demand, particularly for SME's, some good examples were noted such as the Energy Efficient Scotland programme. A brokerage system, sign-posting SME's towards support services once a skills need had been identified was also noted as one intervention that could provide useful support.

2.4. Opportunities for the net-zero transition to address existing labour market inequalities were then covered. In relation to gender, it was noted that views on the gendered nature of work were often formed at a very young age and could be hard to address. While fewer women chose to pursue STEM subjects, it was also noted that those that do often faced worse labour market outcomes than their male counterparts. Industry commitments to improve gender balance, such as those contained in the offshore wind sector deal, were noted but would have to be monitored to evaluate their effectiveness. Employment opportunities resulting from the net-zero transition would exist across a number of sectors, but more could be done to raise awareness among young people. Emphasising the environmental aspect of jobs in construction, transport etc. was felt to be one promising way of engaging younger people getting ready to enter the workforce.

2.5. The Chair ended the session by thanking participants for their involvement.

3. Information gathering session two

3.1. The Chair welcomed guests to the session. The group began by discussing the relative value of higher education and the traditional degree versus other skills interventions, particularly in light of statistics seeming to show an under-utilisation of graduate skills in the workforce.

Whilst this might indicate that the HE sector was out of step with the needs of employers, it might also indicate that employers were failing to fully utilise the skills available in the labour market. There was caution placed on looking narrowly at the role of higher education being able to deliver a skilled workforce, when there are wider societal benefits resulting from having an educated population.

- 3.2. In addition to supporting a steady supply of skilled entrants to the labour market, higher education was said to also be able to help deliver a just transition through provision of lifelong learning and reskilling opportunities. The flexibility in provision offered by The Open University was said to be one model that had potential in this area; their online learning platform had been used to great effect to support upskilling both during the current crisis but also following previous large-scale redundancy events. The SFC had also begun to provide dedicated funding to institutions to support upskilling and reskilling, though this was said to currently be small in scale. For the support provided by higher education to be relevant for the net-zero transition, there will need to be close cooperation between institutions, businesses and communities. A key aspect of this was said to be ensuring academics were supported to take time away from their institutions and be involved in this type of engagement.
- 3.3. Finally the outlook for the sector in light of COVID-19 was discussed. Institutions had shown great resilience in shifting to online learning at short notice. There was potential to build on this and develop more innovative ways of delivering learning. Nevertheless, the fallout from the pandemic had left many staff worried about future funding given the pressure the sector was currently under. Universities could also play a role in supporting a green recovery through their research expertise. There were good examples of where the sector was engaged with large business clusters most affected by the transition to net-zero. More investment in this area could support innovation and opportunities for more resilient businesses as the economy emerged from the lockdown.
- 3.4. The Chair ended the session by thanking participants for their involvement.

4. Review of information gathering sessions and stock-take

- 4.1. The Commission discussed the evidence they had heard earlier in the day. It was agreed that both sessions had been productive and given a good overview of the role of skills and education in delivering a just transition.
- 4.2. There was then discussion on the possibility of additional engagement to support their work on green recovery. There was agreement that this would be useful, and the secretariat were asked to progress this as a high priority. Potential engagement with young people via YoungScot was also noted and would be explored further in the coming weeks.



4.3. Finally, there was discussion over the timescales for delivering the Commission’s final report to Ministers in 2021. With the impact of the pandemic and resulting work on green recovery, along with the delay to COP26, it was questioned whether the final report deadline could be extended. The secretariat were asked to explore possible timings for delivery of the Commission’s final report.

Action Point 1: Secretariat to arrange dates for engagement on green recovery

Action Point 2: Secretariat to explore timing of Commission’s final report in 2021