



Submission to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee's Enquiry into the Green Economy

The Wales Centre for Public Policy

1. The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) seeks to improve policy making and outcomes by enabling public bodies, the Welsh Government and other decision makers to access authoritative independent evidence to help them address the key economic, social and environmental challenges facing Wales.
2. WCPP is funded by the Welsh Government, the Economic and Social Research Council, and Cardiff University. It is a member of the What Works Network and is the Welsh partner for the International Public Policy Observatory.
3. This submission summarises research we have undertaken that bears on the topic of the Committee's enquiry. This research includes evidence reviews based on academic and 'grey' literature, as well as data collected through interviews with experts and workers in key industries.

Evidence

Within its devolved powers, what should be the Welsh Government's key priorities to maximise the potential economic opportunities from green economy sectors? To what extent does its current approach reflect these?

4. The Welsh Government has held responsibility for economic development in Wales since devolution. Under the reserved powers model introduced by the Wales Act (2017), it has general competence in this area. Certain functions including those relating to economic, fiscal and monetary policy; currency; and financial regulation, are reserved to the UK government. Maximising potential economic opportunities from the need to decarbonise both within and outwith the green economy sectors overlaps in a number of ways with efforts needed to maximise productivity and reduce inequality (Newman, et al. 2021).
5. Despite some key policy levers being reserved to the UK government, the Welsh Government has considerable powers in the policy areas of education and skills; important drivers of productivity which will play a critical role in growing the green economy. The Welsh Government has the leverage to coordinate investment in skills, transport, R&D, working places, and developing clusters with supportive supply chains; all essential components of a successful transition to net zero. These should be underpinned by a vision of economic development for Wales to build investor confidence. This should consider how different sectors can



mutually support one another, areas of comparative advantage and opportunities for regional collaboration and innovation (Tilley, 2022).

6. There are important pieces of legislation and supporting policies that have been established with devolved powers which have the potential to support the green economic transition. For instance, the Well-being of Future Generations Act provides the overarching framework; Corporate Joint Committees should enable regional collaboration; and the establishment of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) offers opportunities to embed partnership working, and to facilitate the tertiary education sector's response to the substantial demand for reskilling (Pember et al., 2021). The ongoing challenge is building the capacity for implementation.
7. Against the context of past economic performance, economic geography and local political economy; the creativity and strategy of leaders operating within the local governance structure is critical (Tilley et al., 2022). The interplay of economic institutions, leadership and networks is an important enabler of private sector capital, which in turn is required for the investment and innovation needed to develop the green economy. In Wales the availability of capital has been an historical constraint, although the establishment of the Development Bank of Wales has more recently facilitated SME access to finance (Henley, 2021).

What are the key barriers to Wales making the most of opportunities in the green economy, and what steps should be taken to overcome these?

8. Barriers partially include the limited capacity of the Welsh Government to borrow for investment and limitations in its capital budget. Under current rules and in the current financial context, councils are under pressure to prioritise their spending, including that on climate change policies. Decarbonising buildings and fleet, which are the second and third largest sources of local authority emissions, will involve large amounts of capital funding if local authorities are to meet the Welsh Government's aim of a net zero public sector by 2030. By fully understanding the emissions profiles of their area (beyond simply the direct emissions from their activities), local authorities could potentially better target their limited funds towards the opportunities for green investment which offer the best value for money emissions reductions (Notman et al., forthcoming-a).
9. Heat decarbonisation and electric vehicle chargers are two examples of projects which could be supported using pension funds, as they are likely to be long term and low risk. However, it has been suggested in evidence to the Scottish Parliament that there is a reluctance to invest given a lack of data and inconsistencies between smaller local level projects. Therefore, taking a collaborative approach and packaging several similar projects together in different areas could help encourage pipelines of guaranteed work which are needed to attract investors (Scottish Parliament Net Zero Energy and Transport



Committee, 2023; Notman et al., forthcoming-a). Collaborative procurement for electric vehicles has already been used to achieve cost savings in a Welsh context (Welsh Government, 2023).

10. In the development of energy infrastructure, Wales is limited by its lack of direct control over aspects of the energy system. For instance, while it has consenting powers for onshore developments under 350MW and all wind power projects, larger-scale projects and offshore generation are not within its devolved competences. This means that Wales is dependent on actions at a UK government level to deliver things like new nuclear power, and on the Crown Estate for offshore developments. This is particularly important for the transition to a green economy given the need to rapidly scale-up construction of low- and zero-carbon electricity generation capacity (Price, 2023).
11. Energy infrastructure is also limited by the fact that control over the grid is reserved. The Welsh Government are already working with the ESO and Ofgem to upgrade grid capacity in Wales, which is a critical limiting factor for new infrastructure particularly in rural areas. However, while the Welsh Government lacks direct levers to act, devolving the energy transmission system is unlikely to be an easy or desirable solution to this barrier (Regan, 2023). Co-ordination between governments; and between governments, the ESO and the regulator, will be important to ensure that infrastructure can be developed and delivered in appropriate haste.
12. A barrier to development is the current planning system. While the Infrastructure (Wales) Bill aims to speed up the process of consenting for major projects, we believe there are further lessons which can be learned from other countries to streamline and simplify the planning process (Notman and Price, 2023). For instance, the Netherlands has simplified its offshore planning process so that sites are pre-selected, grid connections and projects are authorised before they are put out to tender for construction. This has increased the build rate of energy infrastructure while reducing risk for investors. However, changes made at a Wales level would need to be carefully monitored to ensure that they do not reduce opportunities for public engagement and that they do not inadvertently create new administrative hurdles across other levels of the planning system in Wales and the UK.
13. The retrofit of residential buildings is one area where the green economy can deliver ancillary benefits as well as reducing emissions, with opportunities to lower household bills, reduce fuel poverty, improve health outcomes and create a significant number of jobs. However, slow uptake of heat pumps and energy efficiency measures to date means that these will need to be deployed at an unprecedented scale (Notman et al., forthcoming-b). Our review of international retrofit schemes suggests that innovation in policy delivery appears to be



outpacing evaluation evidence. Therefore, there is limited insights into the advantages and disadvantages of different policy approaches. This is a concern in the face of the huge scale of change that is required and means that to meet net zero targets, policymakers may have to make decisions on retrofit policies with limited evidence on what works (Coles-Riley et al., forthcoming).

What actions should the Welsh Government take to support development of Wales-based supply chains in green economy sectors?

14. The ability to develop Wales-based supply chains will differ by sector and by the nature of the skills and capacity needed. In some sectors, developing supply chains will be a matter of reskilling and upskilling existing workers, for example, in heat pump installation (Notman et al., 2023). In some sectors, however, bringing the supply chain to Wales will require more extensive intervention. This will be the case where domestic capacity does not currently exist or where new skills or jobs are required. Interventions in the skills system as well as incentives for businesses to establish themselves in Wales will be needed. In other sectors it may not be economically efficient to develop Wales-based supply chains as the scale of investment, capacity and skills needed may be prohibitive and the end result not competitive without extensive and ongoing public support. In such cases, UK or even international collaboration may be beneficial.
15. Of concern is the future of existing supply chains and whether they will be able to adapt to changes in their industry. For instance, the automotive industry currently has a large supply chain within Wales (Johnson et al., 2020). This includes small- and larger-scale manufacturers. However, with changes to car production resulting from the shift to electric vehicles, there is a risk that actors within the current supply chain may not have the skills or ability to retool production.
16. This is particularly relevant for roles such as car mechanics as electric vehicle engines operate differently from petrol engines and require different skills (including the use of computer-based diagnostics). If barriers to entry are raised, for instance through requiring new qualifications, this could limit a prominent source of employment for young men from working-class backgrounds (Silva et al., 2021). It would also have the potential to disrupt or replace an existing small business ecosystem within Wales. Therefore any changes should be accompanied by direct support for reskilling, as well as indirect support to encourage participation including providing affordable, accessible and flexible transport and childcare and ensuring that other factors such as access to social security benefits continue (Skeels, 2022).
17. Another risk is if demand for younger skilled workers comes at the expense of a large proportion of the existing workforce, which may increase unsustainable short-term and precarious jobs. For example, skilled workers may be recruited at scale for the installation of infrastructure, but then become unemployed when it is



installed, with only a small proportion of that workforce being required for maintenance (Notman et al., 2023).

18. Procurement legislation, ensuring there is sufficient capacity to effectively implement the legislation and supporting local businesses to tender are all critically important aspects of developing and maintaining local supply chains. Our work has highlighted capacity challenges within the procurement profession; and the importance of stewardship to maximise the public value of procurement (Tizard and Mathias, 2019; Johnson, 2019).

What skills challenges exist in relation to transitioning to a green economy? What actions should be taken, and by whom, to ensure the skills are there to meet the growing demands of a green economy?

19. While many job roles will change as a result of the green transition, in Wales this will mostly include changing skill sets within existing jobs rather than the creation of new job types (Silva et al. 2022; Valero et al., 2021). Skills challenges are therefore likely to include reskilling and retraining workers rather than adapting to wholly new job types, and changes to the education and skills system for new entrants to the labour market.
20. Skills needs are difficult to outline in detail in sectors where the technology is not yet proven at scale, or the future mix of different technologies is still unknown. There are some skills which can be transferred from high-carbon industries to green industries with support and adaptation, for example from the petrochemical industry to marine energy, however there will need to be coordination and dialogue to determine whether government, industry, or workers themselves will be responsible for financing this reskilling (Notman et al., 2023).
21. The education and skills system also currently lacks the capacity to reskill existing workers. Providers only deliver courses if there is likely to be sufficient uptake, meaning that provision is limited if there is a lack of demand. Funding also occurs in short-term cycles based on predicted uptake, meaning that providers are reluctant to invest in areas with emerging technologies which may be critical for net zero but are financially unviable. This creates a vicious cycle where courses are not provided due to a perceived lack of demand, but the lack of demand is somewhat rooted in the belief that there are no courses available. (Notman et al., 2023).
22. Responding to training needs requires long-term support, local access to courses and support at work. Partnerships between industry and education providers are developing in some sectors and regions, but better coordination could help industry and education providers plan their next steps (Notman et al., 2023). The establishment of the CTER offers opportunities to develop this, in particular by building on current practices such as regional skills partnerships (Pember et al., 2021).



23. Several of our interviewees highlighted the need for increased coordination within Welsh Government, as the transition is often thought about in policy silos, with skills needs and sector-related issues discussed, planned for, and funded separately. Sector experts stated that they often had held similar conversations around net zero and skills with several teams of officials in the Welsh Government (for example, between skills, climate change, and the relevant policy team) and that joined-up messaging from across the Welsh Government would likely provide a valuable signal to industry about Welsh Government's plans for the transition and how they can help develop skills in their own workforce.
24. Funding was also highlighted as a particular challenge, as European Union funds have previously been wholly or partially responsible for several key skills initiatives and training programmes, with worries about where new external funding may emerge from (Notman et al., 2023).

What will workers and employers need for a just transition to a Net Zero economy to be achieved, and what actions should the Welsh Government take to deliver the elements of this that lie within its devolved powers?

25. WCPP research has consistently called for the application of the Well-being of Future Generations Act to facilitate a just transition in Wales (Lesch, 2020; Price, 2020; Price et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2022). The Well-being of Future Generations Act offers a framework through which the requirements of a just transition can be embedded in the governance of Wales, in particular by focusing on long-term impacts; sustainable development; and the well-being of citizens in Wales.
26. However, developing a governance framework for a just transition does not by itself guarantee that a just transition will take place. Concrete action will be required to promote a just transition in response to specific events as well as as part of the policymaking process. In practical terms, this will mean planning for shifts in employment over the whole economy and working with partners to support those at risk of redundancy or industry closure.
27. Without any intervention, the market will dictate the changes within industry and in education and skills provision that are needed to reach net zero. This would be an undesirable outcome: not only is it unlikely to lead to a just transition, but it may result in certain industries leaving Wales and to the offshoring of future emissions. Intervention to support a just transition should therefore focus on supporting industry to decarbonise within Wales and on directly and indirectly supporting workers where they need to retrain or learn new skills, see paragraph 15.
28. It will be important to assess the current workforce's skills and future skills needs prior to the closure of carbon-intensive industries to ensure that retraining and reskilling opportunities are relevant and meet industry demand. The Welsh



Government and Business Wales already have resources in place that may be used to assess current skills, future skill needs, and provide effective training or upskilling opportunities. There are also opportunities for the Social Partnership Council, formed through the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act, to incorporate lessons from previous transitions and facilitate collaboration between the Welsh Government, employers and trades unions to develop, fund and implement effective policies for the transition (Silva et al., 2022).

29. The economic geography of the transition will be a key consideration in this area. Green industries will not necessarily be situated in similar locations to the industries they replace: for instance, renewable energy generation is not likely to occupy the same footprint as existing gas-fired power stations.
30. This offers opportunities for rural Wales where new industry and ancillary industries and services could develop through the transition. This could be encouraged, particularly through social value procurement and/or encouraging community-owned energy generating assets.
31. For existing workers and areas currently dependent on industry however, there is a less optimistic picture. With the closure of blast furnaces in Port Talbot, for instance, programmes retraining and reskilling workers are necessary but not sufficient to mitigate the employment and well-being effects this will have. To allow workers to move to skilled, well-paying jobs with as much esteem as steel working, businesses could be incentivised to site themselves close to closing or transitioning industries. This could include preferential access to workers as part of the transition arrangement alongside other incentives.
32. This will require bold, strategic thinking and a commitment to connect businesses sited in traditional industrial sites with 'new' industries, in partnership with bodies like Ofgem, the ESO and UK government.

How will the Welsh Government need to work in partnership with others to realise the potential of the green economy and deliver a just transition? To what extent is the partnership working that is needed being undertaken?

33. Previous industrial transitions demonstrate the importance of collaborative approaches: evidence shows that they can help to develop a shared vision for planning and policy approaches (Silva et al., 2022). The ability to form partnerships between national governments, local governments, citizens, and the business sector is key to ensuring that policies are successful, and will likely also be the case in Wales (Morgan et al., 2023).
34. At an institutional level, the Welsh Government will need to work with private sector employers; local authorities; trades unions; public services and the UK government, particularly as the UK government's ability to mobilise resources is orders of magnitude higher than the Welsh Government's.



35. However, no just transition measures will feel just if they are not accompanied by meaningful dialogue and input from affected workers. The politics of recognition are important alongside efforts to distribute opportunity more fairly, particularly where job losses are possible (Price, 2020). The need for active, collaborative dialogue has been highlighted by recent political controversies in Wales.
36. Policy responses in other transitions were more effective in supporting workers and communities where local and regional impacts were considered. Identifying areas at high risk from the transition and anticipating associated skills and investment needs will involve effective data collection and engagement with public and private actors at a local and regional level. Policy responses need to be inclusive and involve coordination across industry, unions, skills institutions and local communities, providing tailored and localised support (Silva et al., 2022).
37. Regional Skills Partnerships are established to address skills shortages by influencing skills provision in their regions based on employer-led insight and labour market intelligence. However, their remit is limited to full-time further education provision and apprenticeships, restricting their ability to develop and deliver green skills training across the education system (Silva et al., 2022).

The Welsh Government says it will face considerable budgetary constraints in the short term. How should it prioritise investment to support development of the green economy over the shorter and longer-term? What innovative approaches to financing could be considered to maximise potential investment and benefits?

38. There is substantial opportunity for the Welsh Government to work with local authorities to support innovative forms of finance for local decarbonisation projects. There are examples of public-private partnership at a significant scale in a number of UK local authorities, including Bristol City Leap, Greater London Authority's Retrofit Accelerator - Workplaces (formerly RE:FIT), Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) partnership with the Green Finance Institute, and Glasgow's Greenprint for Investment (Notman et al., forthcoming-a). While some options proposed by the Green Finance Institute, such as GMCA's examination of Property Linked Finance (PLF), have not yet been implemented in a UK context, others, like Local Climate Bonds (LCBs), have been trialled by a number of local authorities, with Blaenau Gwent committing in October 2021 to exploring a Green Bond launch (Notman et al. forthcoming-a; Green Finance Institute 2024). In most cases, however, public funding remains crucial to leveraging private investment at local authority level (see EY and GMCA 2023).
39. Analysis of local authority finance during the pandemic (National Audit Office, 2021) suggested that short term, ring-fenced funding opportunities provided by the government do not support good long-term financial planning. Evidence



produced by WCPP (Jones et al, 2015; Downe and Taylor-Collins, 2019) points to a need for a more strategic approach focusing on three broad categories of response to fiscal pressure: increasing efficiency; targeted investment; and renegotiating the boundaries of Welsh Government and council responsibilities.

40. There are several examples of exploration into the boundaries of council responsibility. Stoke City Council is developing its goal to become an energy sufficient 'Great Working City', pushing the boundaries of energy regulation and localism by moving towards local ownership of energy supply and reimagining the role of the council as a strategic broker of resources (Nesta and the Local Government Association, 2018). In Wales, Dr Edward Thomas Jones, of Bangor University has actively been exploring the growth of community enterprises and local ownership as examples of communities' own bottom-up solutions in the face of local challenges (Thomas Jones, 2023). Menter Felinheli is an example of a community-led social enterprise is attempting to take ownership of the 260-year-old harbour in the village of Felinheli (Gwynedd). Menter Felinheli have developed a funding strategy and will shortly launch a community share offer as part of a blended finance package to purchase the harbour.
41. Social Finance has created a framework for financing Nature Based Solutions (NBS) to societal, economic and environmental challenges (Wilk et al., 2020). Their governance, business and finance framework explores how to build a funding structure which takes advantage of the diverse benefits of NBS and the possible stakeholders involved. It contains aggregated examples and recommendations from across the globe to highlight innovations in paying for NBS.



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