

## THE ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM COMMITTEE: GREEN RECOVERY

### SUBMISSION FROM ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH

**1** The Royal Society Edinburgh (RSE), Scotland's National Academy, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's call for views on a green recovery. Our response is predominantly drawn from our recent response to the interim report of the Just Transition Commission, which included consideration of the impacts of COVID-19 on the pursuit of a just transition.<sup>1</sup> We would be pleased to discuss our comments further with the Committee.

#### **Do the principles of sustainable development (as set out in the annexe), and those for a resilient recovery, as proposed by the UK Committee on Climate Change, provide a comprehensive framework for guiding an effective green recovery in Scotland?**

**2** The principles of sustainable development and those proposed by the UK Committee on Climate Change **provide a suitable framework for guiding an effective green recovery in Scotland.**

**3** Several of the principles (specifically, "Use climate investments to support the economy recovery and jobs", "Lead a shift towards positive long-term behaviours", and "Strengthen incentives to reduce emissions when considering fiscal changes") could be oriented towards **supporting the further development of a circular economy** as part of a green recovery. With respect to the latter principle, tax breaks could be introduced for companies that can demonstrate circularity in their product design and operations.

**4** One of the principles relates to **leading a shift towards positive long-term behaviours**. The national lockdown response necessitated the adoption of certain behaviours that ultimately gave rise to significant secondary benefits to both individuals and the environment. The key to sustaining these behaviours lies in constructing a positive narrative around them, one which emphasises what has been gained over what has been sacrificed. Some of these changes could be expanded upon to support still wider environmental objectives, such as promoting more home consumption of local and sustainably produced food and drink and the aforementioned circular economy benefits.

**5** **We welcome the suggestion of fairness as a core principle.** A green recovery should strive not only to avoid introducing new inequalities, but to alleviate those that already exist. Based on the requirements of achieving a green recovery and the distribution of existing inequalities, it is likely that those working in the oil and gas sector, industrial centres, rural communities, and people on the margins of society will be most vulnerable to adverse impacts.

**6** Our response to the Just Transition Commission interim report also explored the concept of **fairness as it relates to work**. For a green recovery to be just, the quality of the jobs created will be just as important as the absolute number. Specifically, it will be vital to ensure that jobs abide by the principles of 'fair work', as laid out in Scotland's Fair Work Framework.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Royal Society of Edinburgh (June 2020) Just Transition Commission Interim Report: A Response to Scottish Government [online] Available at: <https://www.rse.org.uk/advice-papers/just-transition-commission-interim-report/>

<sup>2</sup> Fair work describes employment which offers its employees job security; decent pay; skills development; agency; purpose; progression; mental health; peer support; employee involvement and engagement; and work-life balance. Fair Work Convention (2016) Fair Work Framework 2016 [online] Available at: <https://www.fairworkconvention.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Fair-Work-Convention-Framework-PDF-Full-Version.pdf>

7 We would add an additional principle that a **green recovery should also involve a move towards a wellbeing economy<sup>3</sup> and a more participatory democracy**. This can allow for creative and practicable green recovery solutions to flourish by ensuring a wide range of perspectives are heard and honoured. This would also help to alleviate existing social inequalities, which are often rooted in disengagement from democratic processes.

### What are the key barriers to delivering a green recovery (within your sector and / or community)?

8 A green recovery needs to show **sensitivity to not only potential effects on employment and income, but also people's communities, social relations, and lived environments**. The salaries, working patterns, and forms of cultural organisation which are shaped by carbon-intensive industries are deeply embedded in people's daily lives in locations such as Aberdeen. Examples include the effects of shift working on family life, and an urban landscape designed to support consumption.

9 Research indicates some trade unions still have concerns about the effect of rapid climate change action on jobs.<sup>4</sup> Counteracting this will require **more detail and quantitative evidence on the skills, salaries, locations, and working patterns that will characterise net-zero jobs** (for example, those in renewable energy, sustainable forestry, and manufacturing) and assessing these against the characteristics of the current workforce in oil and gas, petrochemicals, cement, and other carbon-intensive industries. This will help ensure retraining schemes are fit for purpose.

### What key policies, actions and immediate priorities are needed to deliver a green recovery (within your sector and / or community)?

10 In the short term, tackling increased disadvantage stemming from COVID-19 in an economically sustainable manner must be a priority for UK Government, using measures such as **welfare**

**reform** and **taxation**. Their business relief packages have been welcome and should be followed by **active encouragement of private and public investment** to increase resilience, promoting low-cost borrowing and other incentives.

11 Scottish Government should **support measures that make it easy for citizens to maintain the low-carbon behaviours that were adopted during the pandemic**, such as continued investment in active travel through expanded cycle networks<sup>5</sup> and increased pedestrianisation.<sup>6</sup> A place-based approach that is sensitive to the needs and identity of the local context will be essential. In order for the shift towards remote working and reduced travel to be enduring, Scotland will require a robust and expansive digital sector that can absorb this increased demand and is capable of reaching even remote and dispersed communities.

12 Scotland should support its **strong tertiary education sector in engaging in research-led innovation and developing fast routes to implementation, working in conjunction with the private sector**. This could be particularly helpful to the agricultural and tourism sectors where green innovations are most needed. Pursuing further circular economy gains will require the expertise of the agricultural, aquaculture, forestry, and emerging biotechnology sectors, creating further opportunities.

13 **Immediate steps to support reskilling, retraining, and research** will indeed be crucial. However, it will be important to ensure that such initiatives do not inadvertently **perpetuate or introduce disadvantage**. For example, initiatives geared at males employed by the oil and gas industry could exacerbate **occupational segregation** by converting one male-dominated industry into another. Retraining opportunities also need to be mindful of **potential barriers such as time and cost requirements**. Industry, colleges, and universities need to collaborate to ensure any retraining and qualifications programmes can accommodate different economic circumstances and working patterns.

3 Trebeck, K. & Williams, J. (2019) *The Economics of Arrival: Ideas of a grown up economy*. Policy Press.

4 Swennenhuis, F., Mabon, L., Flach, T., and de Coninck, H. (2020) What role for CCS in delivering Just Transitions? An evaluation in the North Sea Region. *International Journal of Greenhouse Gas Control* DOI: 10.1016/j.ijggc.2019.102903

5 Union Cycliste Internationale (February 2019) Seville's ambitious bike network plan: a success and growing [online] Available at: <https://www.uci.org/news/2019/seville%27s-ambitious-bike-network-plan-a-success-and-growing>

6 A notable international example is Pontevedra, Spain, which pedestrianised its 300,000 square metre city centre in 1999. Madrid, Spain and Helsinki, Finland are introducing similar schemes. Rapid Transition Alliance (December 2018) *Reclaiming the streets: the increasing trend of pedestrianisation around the world* [online] Available at: <https://www.rapidtransition.org/stories/reclaiming-the-streets-the-increasing-trend-of-pedestrianisation-around-the-world/>

## How should the 2021/22 Budget support a green and sustainable recovery and avoid locking in carbon; and what funding is needed in the ECCLR portfolio to deliver a green and sustainable recovery?

14 The 2021/22 budget should invest in actions that promise both economic returns through job creation and other benefits but that will also achieve significant and comparatively swift emissions reductions in sectors where further improvements stand to be made. These include investing in the **low-carbon heat transition**, the continued decarbonisation of **transport** (underlain by both electric and hydrogen systems), and **major renewables projects**. There should also be funding directed towards building and consolidating a circular economy for Scotland, including through mapping and the expansion of the evidence base to inform further innovation. This should occur in conjunction with continued progress towards enhancing **environmental resilience and adaptative capacity**. Flood protection measures, including the re-forestation of upper areas of catchments, are a major element of this.

### *Additional Information*

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Responses are published on the RSE website (<https://www.rse.org.uk/>)

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