

## **Net-Zero and Scotland's green recovery and future**

- To provide RKEC with an update on a range of developments relating to the response to the climate emergency.
- To invite RKEC to consider the role for universities and colleges, relating to research and innovation, in achieving the Scottish Government target for net-zero.

## **Recommendations**

- Note update on recent UK and international policy developments.
- Consider the role for universities and colleges in supporting Scottish Government to meet net-zero targets.
- Consider how SFC's Review can help us embed climate change action in our approach.

## **Financial implications**

- None at this stage.

## Climate Emergency/Net-Zero

### Purpose

1. The paper provides RKEC with an update on a number of recent developments relating to the climate emergency and invites the committee to recognise that this will be a considerable theme for SFC's Review.

### Background

2. In December 2020 the Scottish Government published its updated Climate Change Plan.<sup>1</sup> This plan “sets out the Scottish Government's pathway to [...] new and ambitious targets set by the Climate Change Act 2019. It is a key strategic document on our green recovery from COVID-19.” This is a comprehensive document (255 pages) which outlines a number of policies across each relevant sector and the related activity or funding. The committee should be made aware of the following overarching elements:
  - The update recommits to the emission reduction targets of 75% by 2030 and net-zero by 2045. The scale of meeting the 2030 reduction is significant and the document highlights this will only be achieved through further innovation, adoption and action.
  - Commitment to delivering a place-based approach to green recovery including new approaches such as “20 minute neighbourhoods [that] will prioritise quality of life and health as well as our net zero ambitions”.
  - The document aligns to the Programme for Government which committed to a £2 billion Low Carbon Fund. This spans a range of interventions from emerging energy tech, decarbonising transport, active travel and land use and regeneration.
  - The role of universities and colleges is not particularly well defined in this document, often referring to skills support or working in broader collaborations. This could be seen as an opportunity to help shape and better define the role for the sector or a threat that this role is not yet understood.
3. To complement this update Skills Development Scotland published the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025.<sup>2</sup> This reflects the ongoing recognition that the transition to a low carbon economy will require a considerable change

---

<sup>1</sup> *Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero: climate change plan 2018–2032 – update*  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/47336/climate-emergency-skills-action-plan-2020-2025.pdf>

in the types of skills required in the workforce and the method of acquisition of those skills, with increased focus on upskilling and re-skilling from one sector/technology type to another.

4. In addition to these significant new plans there are numerous policy documents and actions being generated. These include but are not limited to:
  - Scottish Government's Inward Investment Plan<sup>3</sup>, with a focus on Net-Zero as a core theme with energy transition, decarbonisation of transport and transformation of chemical industries listed under the nine opportunity areas.
  - UKRI's Environmental Sustainability Strategy<sup>4</sup> which commits UKRI to net-zero by 2040 (10 years ahead of UK Gov) and will embed environmental sustainability across all investment decisions by 2025.
  - UK Government 'Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution'<sup>5</sup> which identifies key sectoral opportunities to transform the economy and tackle climate change.
  - In July 2020 the Just Transition Commission published their advice on a green recovery<sup>6</sup> which sought to embed climate justice and equity of opportunity in the response to climate change. They highlighted groups at risk including young people, rural communities and oil and gas workers. They also recommended policy actions to support these groups including retain and retrain, investing in nature based solutions and condition based funding models.
  - Climate will be a key priority in Horizon Europe<sup>7</sup> and we understand that a missions-based approach will be launched in 2021 covering such areas as climate-neutral cities and adaptation and societal transformation. We need to understand what opportunities there will be for Scotland in the context of the UK's participation/association with Horizon Europe.
5. In November 2021, Scotland will host the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow. This will act both as a critical opportunity for global politics to reinforce commitments to tackling the increasing challenges of climate change

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/shaping-scotlands-economy-scotlands-inward-investment-plan/pages/6/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-050920-SustainabilityStrategy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/936567/10\\_POINT\\_PLAN\\_BOOKLET.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936567/10_POINT_PLAN_BOOKLET.pdf) The ten areas are: advancing offshore wind, growth of low carbon hydrogen, new and advanced nuclear power, zero emission vehicles, green public transport, cycling and a walking, jet zero and green ships, greener buildings, CCUS, natural environment, and green finance and innovation

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-commission-advice-green-recovery/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe_en)

and for Scotland to demonstrate our ability to act as global leaders in this space.

## Opportunity

6. In recognition of this significant opportunity we have already seen SFC funded programmes taking the initiative. The SFC funded Innovation Centres successfully convened the 'Countdown to COP' conference in November 2020 to inspire and galvanise public, private and academia to take action. SFC has also funded smaller scale climate projects related to retrofit and energy use.
7. Universities and colleges have been proactive in developing institutional plans and through organisations such as Universities Scotland and EAUC are building sectoral strategies. Our universities and colleges have been ahead of legislation for a considerable period of time through the decarbonising of their own estates, utilising significant capital funding provided through SFC. We should consider how to maximise this best practice and build on/support numerous emerging clusters of excellence where universities and colleges are taking a critical role such as the Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc in Dundee and the Edinburgh city partnership<sup>8</sup>
8. Universities and colleges have a significant opportunity to drive the acceleration towards net-zero. This will require us to utilise our leading research capability, innovative partnerships and develop clarity of purpose. As is clear from the multiple documents and context provided there is no option but to create a low-carbon economy and indeed this will be one of the significant drivers of policy, funding, and finance. The "low-carbon economy" as we call it today will simply become "the economy". We should therefore consider how best to position and support our universities and colleges to drive this change.
9. In trying to articulate a vision for the future and related to the ongoing Review we will consider net-zero as an overarching theme and as a strand of activity. This enables us to identify the big picture but also focus on key activity we can initiate. In addition, much of this paper has focussed on the challenge for Scotland but this should also note that we face a global climate emergency. This will require us to work internationally and approach the challenge with a global mind-set.
10. The following summarises the themes we will explore through phases-two and three of our Review – from the perspective of both the emergency years and longer-term timeframes. **RKEC is invited to provide its views on these and any other relevant issues at the meeting.** The breakout sessions planned for this meeting and the proposed February workshop (date to be confirmed) are further routes to gain RKEC's input.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/2020/city-partnership-set-to-boost-climate-action>

- Embedding net-zero in our strategy and policy – via funding, conditions of grant, outcomes, directed funds etc.
- Fostering sector-wide, multi-disciplinary collaborations on priority areas e.g. renewables, nature based solutions (NBS), low emission vehicles and infrastructure.
- Establishing robust and meaningful success measures and metrics – reduced emissions, green jobs, green commercialisation and company creation, societal and cultural outcomes etc.
- Exploring strategic partnerships with relevant organisations, leveraging UK and international funding opportunities etc.

### **Risk assessment**

11. There are no risks directly associated with this paper.

### **Equality and diversity assessment**

12. No assessment has been undertaken at this time. As the Just Transition Commission document highlights, there are a number of groups that will be disproportionately affected and this should be a fundamental consideration of our approach.

### **Financial implications**

13. There are no immediate financial implications associated with this paper.

### **Recommendations**

14. RKEC is invited to:

- Note update on recent UK and international policy developments.
- Consider the (research and innovation) role for universities and colleges in supporting Scottish Government to meet net-zero targets and how SFC's review can support this.

### **Publication**

15. This paper will be published on the Council website.

### **Further information**

16. Contact: Robin Lee, Senior Policy/Analysis Officer tel: 0131 313 6589, email: [rlee@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:rlee@sfc.ac.uk).