

Cross-Party Group Minutes

Meeting Minutes:

Cross Party Group Title:	Cross Party Group on Construction
Date of Meeting:	13.03.23
Location:	MS Teams

In attendance:

Name:	Title:
Joyce Watson MS (JW)	
Nitesh Patel (NP)	
Tracey Jones, Welsh Government (TJ)	
Heather Davidson, Welsh Government (HD)	
Malcolm Davies, Welsh Government (MD)	
Catherine Williams, CEW (CW)	
David Kirkby, CIOB (DK)	
Jill Fairweather, Welsh Government (JF)	
Gareth W Evans, CWIC (GE)	

Gareth Williams, CITB (GW)	
Emma Link, CITB (EL)	
Ifan Glyn, FMB (IG)	
Mark Harris, HBF (MH)	
Julia Stevens, CITB (JS)	
Keith Jones, ICE (KJ)	
Ken Pearson, Bluestone Builders (KP)	
Gordon Brown, TFW (GB)	
Mark Hennessey, ASD Build (MH)	
Matt Kennedy, CITB (MK)	

Apologies:

Name:	Title:

Summary of Meeting:

Meeting started at 13:39. JW welcomed everyone to the meeting, recapping what happened at the previous meeting, outlining that the focus had been on the further education system and attracting and retaining apprentices. JW reflected on a visit undertaken during National Apprenticeship week to a roofing contractor, noting the impact an apprenticeship had for individuals from sometimes challenging backgrounds.

JW introduced the topic of the meeting – Net Zero skills and said about the huge challenge this represents to the industry, but also the massive opportunity to upskill existing workers and attract new talent.

JW welcomed and introduced HD.

HD welcomed the opportunity to present an outline of the plan to the group and highlighted that there is plenty more detail available in the plan itself as well as the supporting documents. (Available [here](#) in English, neu yn Gymraeg [yma](#)).

HD outlined that the team have been working with internal and external partners to get a better picture of the Net Zero skills landscape in Wales, focussing on where the barriers exist and what actions could therefore be included in the plan.

HD said that the Wales Centre for Public Policy had been commissioned to support the development of the plan, undertaking a rapid literature review which included a focus on the 8 emissions sectors identified by the plan.

HD said the focus had been on an economy-wide approach given that the transition to Net Zero has the potential to impact a wide range of jobs. They started therefore by identifying gaps and any duplications within existing programs and looked at how provision could be better coordinated across government departments.

HD highlighted that the plan sets out 36 actions across 7 priority areas. HD said that there was clearly a lot of good work taking places across all sectors but the plan is attempt to bring the good practice together and share some of that learning through a more coordinated approach. HD said that construction as a sector was already quite clear in its direction of travel for the future.

HD outlined that at it's core the plan is attempting to ensure that there's a pipeline of talent here in Wales to meet demand. A key priority of the plan is to understand Net Zero skills. By this HD explained that it's about developing a shared understanding of these skills, what Net Zero means in terms of skills and careers more broadly. HD highlighted that the work the ONS is doing around a definition could potentially help inform the approach here in Wales.

HD said that Welsh Government have started developing a Net Zero webpage to help clarify what the offer is for people and how jobs/lives will be impacted. Added to that, a communications group has been established to help develop consistent, clear messaging.

The next priority is that of a skilled workforce – HD explained that this is about growing a diverse workforce where people are resilient to the changes needed and can access appropriate training and resources to upskill when required. HD elaborated that this could involve looking at types of learning undertaken and how this lends itself to supporting the workforce.

HD said that feedback from employers had been positive, but many were unsure of how to access support. Therefore, a key focus will be pulling together what support is in place for employers with the government recently investing £3.5m to support a pilot for green personal learning accounts. For this, the salary cap has been removed and an expert group has helped establish a list of courses and qualifications that are eligible for support.

To make things as clear as possible for individuals entering the industry HD explained that there will be the development of a route to competence to help people understand the pathways to becoming qualified and what that could involve across different roles.

HD highlighted that to deliver on the plan the skills system would need strengthening to deliver the right qualifications. This will begin through the ongoing review of the existing content in apprenticeship frameworks and pathways. Including looking at short courses to supplement the skills of young apprentices and act as a top-up for those who may not have gained sufficient knowledge during their initial learning experience.

HD highlighted the importance of promoting the opportunities available to children and young people to help gain interest from an early age in the types of opportunities available within the Net Zero space. This has already been identified by the Minister as a key focus and HD will be holding further meetings with Careers Wales to explore progressing this further.

HD said that in developing the plan over 200 individuals had been engaged and this partnership approach would continue - recognising that developing and delivering the plan isn't something that can be done in isolation. To that end an internal group had been established, an external steering group would be established and a four nations group to share learning have already met.

HD highlighted that the final focus for the plan would be the transition to Net Zero and the process of ensuring everyone has the opportunity to benefit. Within this the challenges of losing knowledge from industries as people retire will be considered and the Welsh Government is working on a behaviour change programme to support the transition more broadly.

HD said that in the coming months further consultations linked the emissions sectors to better understand what needs to happen next and some of the sector specific requirements. These will also look at the cross-cutting themes of the plan including digital, procurement, Welsh Language and equality.

JW thanked HD for the presentation and overview of the plan and asked about how the plan would benefit and support smaller employers.

HD outlined that one piece of work the department is keen to do is to look more in-depth at the barriers employers of all sizes face in accessing training. They know from talking to industry that many smaller employers can't afford to release staff and that has sharpened thinking around provision of shorter courses and more flexible learning.

JS highlighted that CITB are also looking to understand employer's training needs in this area and offer a range of funding options to support this and said that CITB has an Employer Network established in South West Wales which gives employers greater flexibility to target funding at training on new areas, such as Net Zero and help develop training that doesn't exist at the moment.

MD said that he's working on the Optimised Retrofit Programme which is working with Registered Social Landlords and local authorities which will look to improve 230,000 homes in Wales. MD explained that the challenge is often in raising awareness within every role at an organisation and is therefore working with Business Wales and exploring avenues to support social landlords with their procurement activity.

MD highlighted that the approach needs to consider manufacturing too and cited the example of ground source heat pumps where 70% of existing products do not originate in Britain meaning there's a big opportunity in this space for skills development.

KJ highlighted that the Institute of Chartered Engineers have moderators working at University level to accredit courses, and help ensure the content is fit for the future as broader work through the Welsh Apprenticeship Alliance.

KP added that at present just having enough time to train staff is an ongoing challenge. He highlighted the Cyfle shared apprenticeship scheme as being particularly successful, flagging the reduction in funding this had received from Welsh Government as limiting the number of apprentices it can take on at present.

For workers over 55 KP suggested an incentive would need to be offered to recruit these people as mentors to bring new entrants through initially. And that this could create a more hands-on and a better targeted learning experience. KP suggested financial incentives could work well for people at this point in their careers.

KP raised concerns that he had already seen evidence that some heat pump installations were already being reversed following the lack of adequate surveying of properties to ascertain the correct interventions to increase energy efficiency. KP suggested a clear survey should be a pre-requisite to any work being carried out. KP added that in the case of heat pumps further work is needed to train assessors, and those fitting pumps to ensure standards and adequate competence.

GB asked HD about the Green PLA and whether the individual or the business would apply for this directly.

HD explained that the individual could go through the college and that businesses could also apply for support through the Flexible Skills Programme (which is 50% funded – whereas the PLA is 100% funded).

HD added that the mentoring is something that the government are keen to look at to ensure skills don't leave the industry when there's a chance to have an impact on those coming in. HD suggested speaking with MK and JS at CITB about this further.

JW raised the issue of accessibility of courses – particularly in more rural part of Wales.

HD said that this is a big challenge that was being looked at with the curriculum team to consider closer partnerships with schools so that young learners realised the huge potential of a career in industries like construction. HD said that this would also be a focus of the Routes to Competence work, to make it clearer what was needed to work in different trades and become fully active and operational.

JW highlighted that a holistic approach should be considered at the same time, looking at what communities need around things like sustainable transport too and new methods of constructing homes off-site.

HD said that further thinking is needed on that front and that the consultations coming out imminently would help piece those things together. Part of this would be ensuring that all policies and plans start with thinking about the skills needed to deliver, if these exist in Wales and if not, working with FE providers to meet the demand.

MH explained that ASD Build constructs 40-50 social homes per year and that a focus of their work is looking at the change over from gas to air source heat pumps. He explained that given the gap in knowledge and understanding on how the technology operates in a home it can be a difficult conversation to navigate, even in building new homes, rather than retrofitting.

MH asked if there'd be an opportunity to bring people together from academia, manufacturers, installers, builders etc. to shape the workforce based on what is being designed and specified. MH felt that this would be a longer-term step to addressing the skills/knowledge gap.

HD suggested a separate conversation for MH to feed into some of the work around how Welsh Government would engage with industry in implementing the plan but that the external steering group would initially do the thinking around who to bring in and on what parts of the work so that the group doesn't become too large in membership.

KP agreed that bringing in people with the right knowledge to fit equipment is important and highlighted that battery installation is likely to be one of the fastest areas of growth. KP explained that there is an ongoing issue and challenge around taking energy back off the grid and provided the example of Octopus energy having negotiated some compensation for households taking energy back in times of over-supply.

KP also said about a couple of pilots being run locally working in schools and colleges to provide talks and offer the chance to gain some work experience on-site. This had led to a positive outcome for one young apprentice who KP has put forward for a national award. KP raised concerns that the current system is geared against learners who have vocational skills.

MK said that in terms of the plan there's lots of important detail to digest and highlighted the government's Just Transition consultation as being key for members of the group to consider responding to. MK asked about future arrangements to review and revise the plan as implementation got underway, new evidence emerges and new trends take root within industry.

HD responded to KPs point providing assurances that they're working closely with Qualifications Wales to ensure that people will a mix of skills and of different abilities engage in the transition. On the review point HD pointed out that a review of vocational qualifications is already ongoing and that would include an element of Net Zero focus - whilst the broader plan around reviewing the plan and its elements should come further on, once steps to implement the activities have been clearly identified.

JW asked about timescales linked to the plan. HD suggested May time to publish the next phase with a 3-month consultation with the final roadmaps being published towards the end of this/start of next year.

JW thanked HD for coming and presenting to the group and asked if there was any other business - none was forthcoming.

JW closed the meeting.