

# Planning a just future for Scotland

Catherine Early meets a member of the Just Transition Commission

Scotland's generous natural resources have enabled it to power ahead on the low-carbon transition, with 76% of energy sourced from renewable technologies in 2018, some 58,000 people employed in the low-carbon sector, and an ambition to reach net-zero emissions by 2045.

However, Scotland's oil and gas industry employs 135,000 people. In 2016, employment in manufacturing, of which energy-intensive industries such as iron and steel, cement and chemicals formed the core, was almost 180,000.

How can Scotland ensure that, as its economy moves to become ever lower-carbon, its people are not left behind, or communities hollowed out? That is exactly the question the Scottish government has sought to answer with its creation of the Just Transition Commission, one of the first such bodies in the world.

The commission includes representatives from industry, academia, civil society and trade unions. It is holding meetings with different sectors of industry, including transport, oil and gas and infrastructure, and a series of public meetings, to gather views from as wide a range of the economy and society as possible.

Charlotte Hartley represents young people on the commission as trustee of the board at 2050 Climate Group, which educates and empowers Scotland's young people to take action on climate change. She leads the group's engagement with the oil and gas industry, and also works for Pale Blue Dot Energy, the developer behind the Acorn carbon capture and storage and hydrogen projects in Aberdeenshire.

The commission started work in January 2019 and is still at the information-gathering

stage. "The only thing we know so far is that we don't want it to look like the phase-out of the coal industry, because that was quite traumatic," Hartley says.

The commission held a session in Kincardine, a town in the south of Scotland, on the north shore of the Firth of Forth. Two coal-fired power stations had been located in the area – Kincardine, which closed in 1997, and Longannet, which was decommissioned in 2016.

The Longannet plant had been the biggest employer in the region, but following its shutdown the largest employer was the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, which employed only 11 people, Hartley says. "There was a consensus across those providing evidence to us that there hadn't been enough support for the individuals – people hadn't been upskilled. The operators knew they would be closing the plant, but there was no effort to prepare workers for future careers. That had a knock-on effect on employment opportunities for those people."

At an event held by the commission in September 2019, young people from the oil and gas industry said they could see both opportunities and risks from the transition. While new jobs could be created in the carbon capture and hydrogen sectors, the audience highlighted the difficulties in preparing for a jobs market with no clear idea in which sector future jobs would be available.

A strong theme that came out of the meetings with the 2050 Climate Group and the oil and gas employees was the need for young people to be involved in discussion, Hartley said. R

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