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Ymateb gan: ColegauCymru

Welsh Parliament
Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Green Economy
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Colegau Cymru response to the Senedd Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into the Green Economy

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Introduction

ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning. We also convene the further education (FE) Principals' Forum, which represents Further Education colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. ColegauCymru also undertakes research, policy development and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales, including on work-based learning (WBL) which is a key part of FE college activity. As the representative organisation of all colleges in Wales, we feel well positioned to be able to outline to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee the FE sector's views on the green economy in Wales.

- 1. 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?**
 - 1.1 The transition to a green economy presents Wales with significant opportunities but requires a coordinated and proactive approach from the Welsh Government. Firstly, it is imperative to establish a clear definition of what is meant by the 'green economy' and to provide clarity on the necessary (green) job roles. While the exact skills and professions may not be known yet, it is crucial not to delay action. Failure to do so would not only leave us unprepared for the opportunities presented by key and emerging green sectors, for example hydrogen and floating offshore wind but it would also have a significant impact on the climate.
 - 1.2 The Welsh Government needs to clearly map out the priorities for Wales, for colleges and their partners when it comes to developing the green economy. A clear road map is essential, to enable long-term strategic planning.
 - 1.3 Maximising potential economic opportunities requires an approach that not only targets key sectors for example renewable energy and housing, but one which also targets and supports other sectors in their transition to Net Zero. The Welsh Government needs to plan long term, over multiple government terms, for the sectors and technologies of the future as well as to mainstream 'green' skills and supply chain capacity across the economy. This needs to include key organisational functions, for example finance, procurement, information technology, human resources and estate management.
 - 1.4 As skills providers, colleges need a clear vision and guidance to shape their response effectively and to ensure that they are meeting the needs of employers and individuals. While colleges engage with employers, there is an increased risk that without clear regional guidance potential investors may focus elsewhere.
 - 1.5 As the green economy develops at pace, it is important that the Welsh Government identifies the existing roles and occupations that can be made 'green' and work to enhance transferable skills. Simultaneously, we must identify and develop new green roles and occupations to accelerate the transition to a green economy. Furthermore, initiatives like the '[Homes as Power Stations](#)' concept and retrofitting programs are essential in accelerating the transition to a green economy.

1.6 There is also a need and opportunity to seek greater alignment across sectors in terms of investment cycles and sequencing of projects, for example, the interdependencies between energy, digital, water, transport infrastructure. Aligning programmes on a place-based basis could be explored as an important enabler for the deployment of green infrastructure and provide critical mass and certainty on investment pipelines that are key for the planning and delivery of skills provision.

2. 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?

2.1 The current public finance environment remains very challenging, and reductions (for example to apprenticeships and the Personal Learning Accounts programme) pose a threat to niche 'green' provision, which is typically subcontracted, and may become an unviable option for some colleges to deliver.

2.2 Colegau Cymru continues to advocate for a vocational education and training strategy to link with Wales' economic and industrial priorities. Net Zero should be a key consideration in this plan to ensure that Wales has the skills provision it needs to meet the challenge. Sustainable funding for colleges to deliver the skills Wales needs is essential – including for apprenticeships and more flexible provision, for example, the Personal Learning Accounts.

2.3 One of the challenges in advancing towards a green economy lies in the variance of perceptions regarding its definition. Colegau Cymru is continuing to work with the Welsh Government to ensure the role of skills in the transition is well understood.

2.4 New approaches to upskilling and skills development are needed, including industry led updates of National Occupation Standards, curricula and new qualifications (including the potential for a unit within all qualifications that integrate sustainability and green skills – especially within leadership and management qualifications).

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

3.1 The Welsh Government should raise awareness of all key strategic projects in local areas at a national level. This would enable greater visibility of future investment pipelines meaning that colleges and partners can plan education and skills provision according to local opportunities.

3.2 The Welsh Government should map the supply chain of green heating, insulation, solar PV, and battery storage manufacturing to help identify opportunities for local supply chain development. This, coupled with mapping regional skills delivery against these opportunities, can help develop a talent pool to attract future investment and sector growth.

3.3 It is vital that industries are helped to develop the knowledge, skill and competencies of their employees and future employees, to become more innovative and responsive to the challenge of adaptation to the impact of climate change. Data driven approaches will be key to identifying areas where upskilling is needed, to meet future skills demands.

3.4 The Welsh Government should consider how best to support Welsh businesses to transition to more sustainable ways of working so that they can tender for supply chain opportunities. Support should be made available for smaller businesses to transition to a

greener way of working through bespoke support and actions. This could be done through supporting them to establish systems and processes to guide their businesses towards accreditation of industry-recognised standards such as [MCS](#) and [Trustmark](#), reinforcing their commitment to green excellence. This will increase their competitiveness in accessing tender opportunities on strategic projects.

- 3.5 The Welsh Government should ensure that every individual and entity in Wales understands their role in building a locally rooted supply chain. From local businesses to the public sector, raising awareness of the opportunities available within the green economy is vital.

4. 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?

- 4.1 The transition to a 'green economy' requires a jobs transition with a two-tiered approach. The first tier is reskilling for immediate skills gaps through employer training and flexible provision to enable individuals to respond to opportunities in the labour market. The second tier is developing future workforces through curriculum development in schools, colleges and universities. It is important we focus on support for both working age people and for those yet to enter the labour market. Without this twin-track approach we will not be able to meet both the immediate and future challenge. Currently, understanding what skills are needed, how many and by when in different areas is a challenge. The Welsh Government should develop a vocational education and training strategy for Wales to work to align vocational education and training needs with economic and industrial priorities.
- 4.2 Creating more entry-level opportunities for individuals to enter the green economy is essential. Furthermore, updating existing trade apprenticeships to incorporate green skills ensures that apprentices are equipped to work with both traditional and green technologies, emphasising repair alongside installation. Continuous professional development and short upskilling courses for the existing workforce are also necessary to facilitate the transition. As new technologies are implemented, skills for breakdown maintenance and repair will become increasingly a necessity. Therefore, additional training programs need to be developed to meet these evolving needs. Funding is a critical factor in upskilling efforts, as evidenced by the reluctance of some heating engineers to invest in courses without financial support. Therefore, adequate and sustained funding is essential to drive the necessary skills development initiatives in the green economy.
- 4.3 Enhancing awareness and understanding of job opportunities in the green economy must begin prior to learners reaching the post compulsory education settings. Independent advice and guidance is critical and must ensure that learners understand the opportunities available and the relevant pathway, for example, providing them with a roadmap illustrating the skills required to enter a specific sector.
- 4.4 Within the FE sector teaching staff skills need to be enhanced across all curriculum areas as every job has the potential to become green. Specifically, teaching staff need to update their skills and knowledge in sustainable engineering, advanced manufacturing and construction, including the requirement for low-energy homes to help deliver the skills and knowledge across the priority sectors. Initiatives such as the Welsh Government funded Knowledge Transfer Scheme for FE, which aims to develop the knowledge and skills of the FE teaching workforce have proven to be effective in this area.

- 4.5 When considering future skills needs it is vital that staff within the FE sector are enabled to deliver these new green skills through the medium of Welsh. This will aid in the development of a pipeline of bilingual workers within a green economy. Programmes like the Cymraeg Gwaith scheme are instrumental to support FE staff with their Welsh language skills and are an important contributor towards the Welsh Government's one million Welsh speakers by 2050 target.
 - 4.6 To meet the skills challenges that exist in relation to the transition to a green economy, we need technical occupationally specific skills in engineering, building services, the built environment, sales and marketing as well as semi-technical transferrable skills including customer relations, project management, change management and research skills.
 - 4.7 To ensure the FE teaching workforce is delivering the very latest knowledge and skills, regular continuing professional development for college teaching staff is needed, via, for example, industry updates, visits, placements/secondments, short micro-credential qualifications and formal higher qualifications. However, consideration also needs to be given to the logistics of releasing teaching staff (back filling their hours) and time for professional development and placements.
- 5. 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?**
- 5.1 Upskilling existing staff is vital in delivering the just transition, but it is important to reskill some staff into new skill areas at the same time, for example, in hydrogen, alternative energy, industrial decarbonisation, retrofit and modern methods of construction, sustainable performances and productions etc.
 - 5.2 To support workers and employers in a Just Transition towards Net Zero, the Welsh Government should:
 - **Incentivise skills development in green sectors** – by prioritising funding for training provision that enable companies to transition working in a green economy and ensuring that generic change management skills are encouraged.
 - **Provide financial assistance** – such as providing training allowances to individuals so that they are not at a financial disadvantage when having to take time off work to access fully – funded training courses, which gives them the knowledge and skills to be able to benefit from the transition to Net Zero.
 - **Fund (Re)training programmes** - through offering access to training and education programmes to equip workers with new skills that align with the requirements of emerging green jobs. Providers must work to ensure that provision is flexible and responsive to the needs of individuals.
 - 5.3 Ongoing commitment to fully funded and/or Welsh Government subsidised training programmes as technologies and practices evolve and for emerging sectors e.g. support for higher level apprenticeships and degree and professional apprenticeships
 - 5.4 Colegau Cymru welcomes the Welsh Government's moves towards greater coordination across the Net Zero agenda and will continue to support officials with this work.

6. 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?

- 6.1 The following groups are in place to support partnership working – MakeUK, ECITB, Green Jobs Taskforce, Cardiff Local Area Energy Plan meetings, Net Zero Wales: Skills Economies Advisory Forum, CBI Net-zero working group, Cardiff Capital Region Cluster Development & Growth Programme, Local Area Energy Planning Groups/Forums which exist in each of the local authorities.
- 6.2 Numerous organisations are actively striving to advance towards a net-zero future. There is a clear and evident desire among FE staff and learners to contribute to this cause. However, the affordability of transitioning to net-zero remains a significant concern and challenge, particularly when it comes to improving college estates. In addressing this challenge, it is essential to review incentives that can facilitate a smoother transition.
- 6.3 The Welsh Government should ensure that projects that have begun to tackle these issues are funded as part of their core offer to individuals and employers, such as the various projects which received funding initially under the UK Government’s Shared Prosperity Fund to support green actions e.g. [Green Digital Academy](#), [Hyfforddiant Net Sero Gwynedd](#).

7. 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?

- 7.1 The Welsh Government should grasp the opportunity to build on work that was initiated through the Personal Learning Account ‘Green Skills’ pilot, to continue to build the skills base and knowledge and understanding around decarbonising and developing the green economy. Apprenticeships are key to this transition as well as short courses and industry specific courses that develop decarbonising skills.

Summary

To conclude, the Welsh Government needs to establish a clear definition of what it sees as the ‘green economy’ in Wales, as well as define what it sees as the necessary ‘green’ skills and occupations that underpin it. In addition, the Welsh Government needs to clearly map out the priorities for Wales, for colleges and their partners when it comes to developing the green economy. For the FE sector in Wales, a clear road map towards a ‘green economy’ is essential, to enable long-term strategic planning, in areas such as curriculum design, programme development and workforce planning.

Colegau Cymru continues to advocate for a vocational education and training strategy to link with Wales’ economic and industrial priorities. Net Zero should be a key consideration in this plan to ensure that Wales has the skills provision it needs to meet the challenge. Sustainable funding for colleges to deliver the skills Wales needs is essential – including for apprenticeships and more flexible provision, for example, the Personal Learning Accounts.

Colegau Cymru welcomes the Welsh Government’s moves towards greater coordination across the Net Zero agenda and will continue to support officials with this work.

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