

# Cross-Party Group on Skills

Friday 30 May 2025 (0900-1000)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Dr Pam Gosal MSP  
Stephen Kerr MSP  
Miles Briggs MSP  
Paul Sweeney MSP

Invited guests

Kirsty MacAulay, Thistle Wind Partners  
Kirstin Gove, Thistle Wind Partners  
Jim Brown, Energy Skills Partnership  
Andrew Aveyard, Edinburgh Innovations, University of Edinburgh

Non-MSP Group Members

Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland  
Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland  
Wendy Burton, Scottish Trade Union Congress  
Andy Witty, Colleges Scotland  
Siobhan Wilson, City of Glasgow College  
Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation  
Fiona Harper, Scottish Electrical Charitable Training Trust  
Nicola Smith, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework  
James McKean, Colleges Scotland  
George Brown, Scottish Qualifications Authority  
Robert Bruce, Enginuity  
Joshua Farnham, The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)  
Ibiyemi Omeihe, University of the West of Scotland  
Derek Young, Institute of Physics  
Jack Norquoy, Scottish Renewables  
Victoria Manson, Federation of Small Businesses  
Kellie Zdanowicz, JBM  
Simon Shedden, Office of Ben Macpherson MSP  
Rachael Nicholls, University of Strathclyde  
Elodie Lemaire Nowinski

Calum McNairney, Scottish Funding Council  
Steven MacLennan, CLD Standards Council  
Kevin Kelman, NHS Education for Scotland

## Apologies

Michael Marra MSP, Scottish Labour  
Lauren Pennycook, Construction Industry Training Board  
Nathan Tyler, West College Scotland  
Marie Hendry, College Development Network  
Stuart McLaren, Scottish Qualifications Authority  
Liz-Barron Majerik, Lantra Scotland  
Keith Robson, Open University  
Dr Paul Little CBE, City of Glasgow College  
Shona Matthews, Chartered Banker Institute

## Welcome

The group's Convener, Dr Pam Gosal MSP, opened the meeting and noted apologies.

## Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February were approved.

## Presentations

The topic for this meeting was Offshore Wind Skills and presentations were heard from:

- Kirsty MacAulay, Stakeholder Engagement Manager and Kirstin Gove, Communications Manager, Thistle Wind Partners (TWP)
- Jim Brown, Director, Energy Skills Partnership (ESP)
- Andrew Aveyard, Business Development Executive for Energy, Edinburgh Innovations, University of Edinburgh

## Discussion

Kirsty MacAulay and Kirstin Gove of Thistle Wind Partners provided the first presentation to the group, beginning with an overview of their organisation and their two current ScotWind projects, entitled Ayre and Bowdun, located east of Orkney and Aberdeenshire respectively. Kirsty and Kirstin provided an overview of the work being progressed by TWP in relation to STEM and academia, in addition to that activity in relation to supporting the Supply Chain. In doing so Kirsty and Kirstin highlighted the need for far greater investment in skills to support this activity and ensure maximum opportunity for learners, employer and regional economies. Both were clear that skills needs have to be coordinated and that investment needs to

take place now in order to create the additional courses required to deliver the workforce.

Kirsty and Kirstin also touched on the workforce challenges within the Highlands and Islands, against a context of an estimated £75bn additional investment by 2040 in the Highlands and an ageing demographic, but wherein existing skills development was at maximum capacity.

In closing Kirsty and Kirstin underlined the role of TWP as a responsible developer in supporting STEM activities to encourage the development of the future workforce, whilst highlighting the critical looming skills gap which requires addressing.

Jim Brown from Energy Skills Partnership delivered his presentation with a focus on the role of the Offshore Wind Skills SLWG as led by the Scottish Government in focusing on identifying and addressing skills gaps in the offshore wind sector to ensure a skilled workforce for the industry's growth. Jim gave an overview of the work to date in focusing on skills priorities and skills alignment and as part of this touched on the Offshore Wind Skills Programme as being progressed by ESP and the college sector, following investment from the Scottish Government in the 2025/26 Budget. In concluding Jim evidenced the future skills opportunities alongside the critical college sector role in delivery, starting with the Offshore Wind Skills Programme.

Andrew Aveyard of Edinburgh Innovations focused his presentation around the existing Offshore Wind Skills Gap and the considerable sector resource requirements in terms of skills and jobs. With reference to the Offshore Wind Industry Council Wind Skills Intelligence reporting, Andrew evidenced the projected rapid growth in jobs, across a range of categories including technical and professional roles, electrical and mechanical roles. This also included a focus on the Clean Energy Job Estimates and skills gaps between 2025-2035, with University of Edinburgh research indicating that £86.5bn investment in clean energy would require up to 65,000 new jobs over the next five years, with a demand for both Higher Education and Further Education level skills.

Andrew also gave the group an overview of the opportunities and challenges associated with the Forth Green Freeport in relation to generated roles and skills provision and directly generated jobs, from which it was advised that whilst Scotland had the capability, it did not currently have the capacity required to fully seize the opportunities provided through the Freeport.

In concluding, Andrew outlined potential initiatives that could close the skills gaps, including Cross-institute National Course Delivery / micro credentials, Building Higher Education Capacity and Capability, Integrated Skills and Innovation Delivery, Increased diversity, pathways and connections with FE and Enhanced Sector Attractiveness and Inspiring the Future Workforce.

A Q&A followed. Kellie Zdanowicz asked the question of Thistle Wind Partners as to what engagement they had had with independent training providers, as a mixed economy would be required to deliver the skills requirements for the Offshore Wind sector and given the performance rates delivered by independent training providers.

Kirsty advised that TWP would be keen to engage further, with Kirstin adding that TWP recognised the value of independent training providers and that a collective solution would be required to deliver the talent pool required by industry and to address the socio-economic challenges facing Scotland. Jim Brown also advised that ESP was encouraging colleges to link in with independent training providers as required.

Derek Young made the ask as to what work was being progressed by stakeholders to diversify the apprenticeship base, with Jim Brown advising that the Offshore Wind Skills Short Life Working Group had a focus on Sector Attractiveness, including a campaign plan to shift perceptions. Andrew Aveyard also advised that given the range of job roles that would be required within industry that there would need to be a shared focus on encouraging young people to enter the sector, given the well paid and successful opportunities of work this would be offering, including through the use of industry role models. Rachel Nicholls advised as a parent that information around these opportunities was not getting through to young people and their key influencers, with member agreement that there needed to be targeted approaches to challenge this position.

In concluding the discussion, the Convenor asked the presenters what their top asks of the Scottish Government would be, to inform correspondence to the Scottish Government on behalf of the group. Kirsty and Kirstin from TWP advised the need for investment in, and the co-ordination of, skills delivery for the sector to support the home UK and Scotland skills based, and to develop greater public clarity and awareness of the current skills gap and the opportunities to close this. Jim Brown focused on the need for early intervention funding to support increased sector attractiveness and to significantly increase funding in Modern Apprenticeships, with Andrew Aveyard adding that big decisions needed to be made and action had to be progressed by the Scottish Government. In response the Convenor noted that there were huge opportunities for Scotland through Offshore Wind however a skilled workforce would be required to seize these, alongside encouraging the workforce of the future to move into the sector

## Close

With no other business to conduct, the meeting was brought to a close. It was noted that the next meeting would be scheduled after the summer recess, with further details to be provided in due course.