



UNISON Response: Scottish Government Climate Change Plan Update

January 2021

Introduction

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Our members work in health, in local government, in care homes; we are the largest trade union in the gas and electricity sectors and we represent staff in the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency - to name just a few areas where UNISON members deliver vital services. If the Scottish economy is to recover by creating a greener, fairer and more inclusive society, then our members will be central to that process.

UNISON is a member of the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland¹ (SCCS) coalition, and of the Just Transition Partnership² (JTP) with the STUC, with other unions, and with Friends of the Earth Scotland and WWF Scotland. UNISON is also part of the coalition of over 80 civic organisations calling for a Just and Green Recovery from COVID-19³. And we are involved in the civil society UK-wide coalition, organising for climate justice around the COP26 UN climate conference in Glasgow⁴, now set for November this year. We also are longstanding advocates of Food for Good and part of the Scottish Food Coalition⁵.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee's Call for Views⁶. We are also submitting this to the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee, due to our emphasis on the need for urgent action for a green recovery. This is a limited response, focusing mainly on the Committees' green recovery question, to be read in conjunction with the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland submissions to all four committees reviewing the Climate Change Plan Update⁷ (CCPu) - the ECCLR and EEFW Committees and the Local Government and Communities and the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committees. UNISON also strongly supports the response from the Just Transition Partnership.

Overview

While the COVID-19 pandemic has rightly been prioritised above much other work, including by delaying COP26, it is important to note some really important lessons from the pandemic and that they are applicable to tackling climate change. These include that collective action for the common good can necessitate massive public investment and behaviour change – which can all be achieved at speed when the stakes are high. This is most effective when inequalities are properly addressed in all public policy responses. Public services are vital and must be properly resourced. The most vulnerable must be supported. Social justice must be prioritised.

¹ <https://www.stopclimatechaos.scot/>

² <https://foe.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/JTP-Manifesto-2021-final.pdf>

³ <https://www.justgreenrecovery.scot/a-just-and-green-recovery>

⁴ <https://cop26coalition.org/>

⁵ <https://www.unison-scotland.org/good-food-nation-legislation-consultation-response-april-19/>

<https://www.unison-scotland.org/proposed-right-to-food-scotland-bill-sept-2020/>

⁶ <https://yourviews.parliament.scot/ecclr/ccp-update/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/>

And acting early to limit the damage is far more effective, in saving lives and in financial costs, than delaying decisions and action to the last minute.

Of course, the ECCLR Committee referred to this in its Green Recovery Inquiry report⁸ in November, after hearing “consistently” that we should learn from the COVID-19 crisis and the national potential to take urgent action in response. Importantly, the Climate Change Committee in evidence to ECCLR said: “The COVID-19 pandemic has set a new context for all policymaking and will have a lasting impact on the way we live, work and travel... The pandemic has demonstrated how quickly social change can occur – and the role of government in driving that change. These are strong conditions for Government to reinforce the climate-positive behaviours that have emerged during the lockdown, including increased remote working, cycling and walking. Public sector leadership can play a key role in the forming of new social norms and expectations.”

The ECCLR Report said: “The Committee recognises Scotland has shown it can be bold in the face of a crisis. However, it must be equally bold in dealing with the climate and ecological crises and the need for a just transition. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government share the emergency response lessons from Covid-19 and set out how such lessons are being replicated across Government to respond to the climate and ecological crises and deliver a green recovery.”

Alongside these lessons, people are even more aware today of the very serious impact of cuts in spending on public services such as the NHS and local government, and of the importance of so many key workers whose jobs have been constantly undervalued. When, during the pandemic, we have been facing poor public transport options or the lack of public toilets when exercising outside, or when we have been grateful for the local government workers delivering vital services including cleaning schools, emptying bins, gritting roads, protecting public health and providing services for the most vulnerable, we can see that these workers (and thousands of others in retail, catering, distribution, hospitality, media and the arts – alongside many volunteers at food banks, which should not need to exist, and in a range of charities) have played a major role alongside dedicated social care workers, education and NHS staff and more in trying to keep us all as safe and physically and mentally healthy as possible at a time of crisis. Interconnected public services are lifelines in so many ways. They need to be properly resourced and cannot be expected to absorb ever more cuts⁹.

A key focus for trade unions - and currently widely recognised as essential - is rightly standing up strongly and quickly for members needing PPE and other vital health and safety measures, for proper staffing levels, for decent conditions including proper sick pay, key furlough and a range of financial and other much needed support for workers, for vulnerable groups and for businesses. This benefits all of society. As would putting a stop to profiteering and abuses over procurement, examples of which during the pandemic have caused widespread outrage, such as over scandals with PPE contracts¹⁰ and most recently, food vouchers¹¹.

⁸ https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Environment/Reports/ECCLRS0520R12.pdf

⁹ <https://www.scottishleftreview.scot/the-calamity-of-covid-that-was-avoidable/>

¹⁰ <https://bylinetimes.com/2020/10/25/500-million-government-ppe-deals-conservative-companies-donors/>

¹¹ https://twitter.com/jrf_uk/status/1348919225272950785?s=20 <https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2012/ag-schneiderman-announces-18-million-settlement-compass-group-usa-overcharging-4>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55628428>

COVID-19 was and is an emergency requiring instant action. Our politicians must accept that there are related lessons for the immediate bold, far-ranging actions needed to tackle climate change, which was correctly being widely seen as and described as an emergency shortly before the pandemic hit. **Public ownership and delivery of key services is essential, with an expansion of public ownership in transport and energy, nationally and at local levels, particularly important.**

Our members have long prioritised climate action and the need for a just transition to an economy that won't destroy the planet. We've said with trade unions internationally that this is a health and safety issue for the planet. And, as we said in our response¹² to the Just Transition Commission's interim report: "It is also clear that public and government initiative, direction and control was necessary when addressing the major challenge of the pandemic, and that private ownership proved a weakness in organising provision of care and supplies for care workers. Climate change presents a far greater threat to our way of life than COVID-19. However, we can create quality jobs and regenerate our economy if we mobilise the support of the population for a green industrial plan."

The four Committees asked common questions and we focus here on the last of these:

To what extent do you think the CCPu delivers a green recovery?

There would be much to commend in this update if some of the fine words were matched with the necessary actions, particularly on a just transition, key to a just and green recovery. There are also numerous funding issues at present, particularly for local government¹³. Our members across Scotland are clear that public services must not face further cuts¹⁴. Too many had been cut to the bone before the pandemic. Services must be protected and enhanced to deliver a green recovery and workers' pay must rise to provide decent living standards and support spending in local economies.

Unfortunately, the CCPu fails to map out and commit to the actions needed to deliver for workers. We agree with the Just Transition Partnership comment¹⁵ on publication of the CCPu last month: "Despite the frequent references to and the welcome aspiration for a just transition in the document, the updated Climate Change Plan does not set out how Ministers intend to support the workforce, employers and communities as part of the shift to a low carbon economy."

It is disgraceful, and says a lot about the Scottish Government's approach, particularly following on so soon after the scandalous lack of support for the BiFab workforce¹⁶, that the Scottish Government has ignored a hugely important Just Transition Commission

¹² <https://www.unison-scotland.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-WEBSITE-Just-Transition-30-June-2020.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.unison-scotland.org/wp-content/uploads/LGandC-Local-Govt-Finance-Inquiry-response-.pdf> <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scottish-communities-face-damaging-cuts-over-ps11bn-covid-funding-gap-3093776>

¹⁴ <https://www.unison-scotland.org/scottish-government-must-invest-in-public-services-says-unison/>

¹⁵ <https://www.stuc.org.uk/media-centre/news/1550/climate-change-plan-more-rhetoric-than-action-on-just-transition-say-unions-and-environmentalists>

¹⁶ <https://www.stuc.org.uk/media-centre/news/1545/stuc-workers-betrayed-by-government-and-corporate-failure-as-bifab-enters-receivership>

recommendation from its Interim Report¹⁷ last year, thereby delaying the legislative requirement for more detailed Just Transition planning at a time when Ministers themselves have declared a climate emergency. They have argued that the Just Transition provisions in the 2019 Scottish climate Act are about the next Climate Change Plan and that this update is under the earlier legislation. But in the section entitled 'Opportunities and the need for immediate action', under 5.13, the Just Transition Commission recommended that Ministers "should act in the spirit of the legislation and show that it is serious about ensuring just transition principles are central to its approach to tackling climate change". We urge Committee members to push for that recommendation to be followed. Further details of the impact of this failing are noted below.

But UNISON wants first here to emphasise the response from trade unions and environmentalists on the Just Transition Partnership, and some of what we want to see. STUC Deputy General Secretary Dave Moxham said: "We know from past experience that promises of green jobs are easily broken if they are not followed up with policy action. While the plan contains a number of references to green jobs forecasts from industry bodies, there appears to be little new analysis from the Scottish Government on how this plan will impact on workers.

"Although there is reference to environmental conditionality, there does not appear to be specific proposals to ensure that low-carbon and renewable energy companies actually deliver good quality jobs in the Scottish supply chain. Nor are there proposals to ensure that Scotland's public sector benefits from the green industrial revolution and the profits are not simply captured by multinational companies."

As the Just Transition Partnership stated in evidence¹⁸ to the Just Transition Commission in May 2020, ahead of the JTC's interim report, on implementing the Just Transition:

"It is the view of the Partnership that it will be necessary for the public sector to lead the transformation of the energy sector and that public ownership should be extended through a well-capitalised public energy company with powers to own distribution networks and generate energy, intervening in and leading the wider energy market in just transition. Municipal energy companies should also be developed.

"Industry-level plans drawn up between employers, trade unions and government will be essential, supplemented by agreements at enterprise and sectoral levels. Targets for investment and jobs created should be integral to them. Public sector procurement and licensing should build in these expectations, including licensing of oil and gas decommissioning and building of offshore wind installations. To ensure justice for affected communities, regional or local JT plans should be developed as well. There is a clear need to standardise terms and conditions, as well as training requirements, if workers are expected to transition from high to low-carbon employers.

"The Just Transition Commission should be established with a statutory remit, with an obligation to take evidence from a wide range of workers, communities, and interest groups. It should continue to work for the duration of legally binding emissions reductions targets, until the transition is complete."

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2020/02/transition-commission-interim-report/documents/transition-commission-interim-report/transition-commission-interim-report/govscot%3Adocument/transition-commission-interim-report.pdf?forceDownload=true>

¹⁸ <https://foe.scot/resource/the-just-transition-challenge-in-scotland/>

We and many others who supported strong Just Transition measures in the updated climate legislation are very concerned at these being missing from the CCPu. Stop Climate Chaos Scotland's responses to the Committees include this on Just Transition:

"In relation to 'recovery', SCCS has always recognised that addressing climate change will require changes to the economy – and we have promoted the concept of a 'Just Transition' to ensure that those changes are fair. We therefore warmly welcome that the CCPu states *"across all of the actions in this Climate Change Plan update, we are embedding a just transition, ensuring that we assess how green recovery actions address inequalities and deliver wellbeing outcomes for everyone"* (p42).

"It is also very welcome that the Just Transition concept is therefore fully acknowledged in introduction and in the Green Recovery chapter/context, which includes a specific 'box' headed Just Transition and refers to the recommendations of the recent Just Transition Commission.

"However, there is no commitment to a separate Just Transition plan or any commitment to revise/update the current Economic Strategy. There is no reference to continuing the (non-statutory) Just Transition Commission or placing it on a statutory basis. While there are references to the role of Enterprise agencies, growing the clean energy industry and the roles of public procurement, these are primarily all good intentions with unclear delivery pathways.

"Accordingly, we therefore recommend that the 'green recovery' aspects of this plan are (a) made genuinely 'green' by the strengthening of the actions to reduce emissions and (b) that the commitments to a just transition are underpinned by, for instance: -

- A clear commitment to a specific Just Transition Action Plan.
- A commitment to continue the Just Transition Commission (and place it on a statutory footing), as well as seek its advice on further steps.
- A commitment to a full revision of the current economic strategy to recognise the need for a green recovery (including major green investment supporting job creation, and strong skills action), as well as a just transition and a transition to a well-being economy."

UNISON believes too that the Scottish Government must ensure that the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan¹⁹ (being progressed by Skills Development Scotland), which is described as a "responsive and evolving document", is aligned expertly with the Just Transition Action Plan and that the vital role of trade unions is seen as essential, with unions fully involved and Fair Work principles paramount.

We are also concerned that there is insufficient reference to the need to adapt and mitigate against the climate change weather impacts being mapped out by SEPA, communities and local councils that evidence the need to have a climate change resilience local and national infrastructure programme. The CCPu makes no reference to climate justice, which we know is widely supported as a priority for increased support for the global south.

We have outlined some of our proposals, including on municipal energy, energy efficiency to help tackle fuel poverty and cut emissions, public transport and the importance of green

¹⁹ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/47336/climate-emergency-skills-action-plan-2020-2025.pdf>

workplace action, in many previous submissions and responses over the years. Some of these and other relevant areas are covered in a number of documents, responses and campaigns over the last ten months, including the response²⁰ in May to the Scottish Government's Advisory Group on Economic Recovery. (That also highlighted some of the ways in which inequalities – of the kind that will also see climate change impacting harder - have seen higher deaths among working class occupations such as care workers and bus drivers and health staff. UNISON has also called for action over higher infection and death rates among black, Asian and minority ethnic workers²¹.)

UNISON, sister unions and others have joined in campaigns such as “No going back to normal”²² but we have seen that phrases such as a Green New Deal, or Build Back Better (or Just Transition, as stressed in this response) can be widely adopted, including by governments, but with very different emphases from much more comprehensive campaigners' demands. We hope Committee members will look closely to see what real substance is required to ensure the CCPu can deliver a green recovery.

Failing workers will ultimately mean we fail to win public support for sufficient climate action to meet the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. It is already clear that without clear strategies to embed some of the benefits of behaviour change from lockdowns including on increased home working, more active travel, and reduced air pollution etc., those benefits will be at risk.

The very welcome aim in the CCPu of seriously seeking to reduce car use must not put ‘the cart before the horse’ and requires massively improved public transport if it is to work, instead of bus companies being given subsidies yet not obliged to protect routes²³. Yet if we are not careful, an outcome of the pandemic could be more car use, without a concerted effort to prevent that. This means more public ownership, to maintain services. UNISON is supportive of campaigns such as Get Glasgow Moving and its innovative Free Our City demands for free public transport, which will use the spotlight of COP26 to help make the case not just for Glasgow and Scotland, but internationally. The CCPu should at a very minimum be proposing pilot initiatives and research on this, as is happening in some other countries.

UNISON welcomes the CCPu support for investment in carbon capture and storage and hydrogen as we, with other unions, do believe there can be a role for these in future. While recognising there are justifiable criticisms of some aspects of Negative Emission Technologies (NETS), we want to see research and development continue to keep some options open²⁴, especially the potential for using hydrogen in the gas network.

²⁰ <https://www.unison-scotland.org/wp-content/uploads/UNISON-Scotland-response-Advisory-group-on-economic-recovery-group-2020-1.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.unison-scotland.org/wp-content/uploads/UNISON-Scotland-Black-Workers-and-Covid-19-x.pdf>

²² <https://www.nogoingbacktonormal.org/> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/sep/14/key-workers-and-public-services-need-more-support-say-uk-unions>

²³ https://theferret.scot/bus-companies-cut-routes-despite-bail-outs/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=RSS

²⁴ <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2019/06/nationalise-big-six-create-green-army-help-uk-hit-net-zero-says-unison/>
<https://twitter.com/UKHydrogenNow/status/1275758670115147777?s=20>
<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/b/unions-call-government-bring-forward-hydrogen-strategy-create-thousands-green-jobs> <https://www.unison.org.uk/motions/2019/energy/unlocking-the-potential-of-hydrogen/>

Conclusion

In relation to the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Just Transition Commission's July 2020 Advice on a Green Recovery²⁵ rightly identifies young people as being especially at risk. The general public can see this, as well as families who worry about their own young relatives. Young people are impacted very hard just now, from school children to students and young workers, worrying about their future, with political debates raging about how to best support them. The 'adults' worry about their future, but the older generations have dramatically let these young people down in a much bigger way.

They are the ones, the wise heads, who have been telling their elders, indeed demanding, that we act faster and follow the climate science. We have learned that following the science is of course necessary with COVID-19. It is absolutely necessary too on climate. UNISON and other unions have stood with and applauded the Scottish Youth Climate strikers (Fridays for Future Scotland) on the need for much deeper faster action on climate change²⁶. Striking young people worldwide have helped make us all wake up to the dangers. The Scottish Government must listen and act far more quickly and decisively on Just Transition, beyond the warm rhetoric, to deliver for workers and communities, for young and old, leaving no one behind.

We need a Just and Green Recovery - and Scotland at COP 26 in November this year has the chance to show the world we are really committed to a Just Transition, with real action to enact our much professed world leading climate legislation, that could then help encourage others and boost worldwide efforts. We urge the Committees to push the Scottish Government to make the CCPu live up to the professed ambition, as was recommended by the Just Transition Commission.

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²⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-commission-advice-green-recovery/pages/2/>

²⁶ <https://www.unison-scotland.org/unison-stands-in-solidarity-with-millions-of-school-students-on-climatestrike-greenunison/> <https://climatestrike.scot/>