

Conservative Party Conference 2021: Employing the change: Putting green jobs at the heart of the economic recovery 3 October 2021

Speakers

- Ben Houchen, Mayor for Tees Valley (Chair)
- Alex Burghart, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education
- Bim Afolami (Con, Hitchin and Harpenden)
- Natasha Clark, political correspondent for The Sun
- Rhian Kelly, National Grid

Overview

Preparing the system

Alex Burghart, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education said Government was altering the energy system because it was the right thing to do.

Government had seen developments in carbon capture; and now, skills devolvement was necessary to ensure that there was a workforce ready. The question then was how to get to a position where people were ready to do the qualifications and apprenticeships required for these types of job.

Burghart said Government had to ensure that people were able to take advantage of level 3 skills. DFE was trying to reconcile the individual's desire for work with the industry's need for certain skills. The hope was to build a system which could identify which skills were needed in three to five-years' time, and to ensure that the skills education was available now.

Green jobs

Bim Afolami (Con, Hitchin and Harpenden) said that by merely calling jobs 'green jobs' was not necessarily a win in of itself. The important thing to remember was that people were concerned with their own economic security. Thought had to be given to how this idea was communicated; and focus given to areas where jobs were lost due to the movement away from carbon intensive jobs.

There had to be more nuclear power stations, both for environmental reasons and the benefits of energy security, Afolami added.

Afolami said Government should aggressively fund FE options which were relevant to the green transition, and remove the funding from university degrees which did not result in graduate level employment. Consideration had to be given to a social security model which allowed people to retrain without experiencing a drastic fall in income.

Natasha Clark, political correspondent for The Sun said that in the future, 'green jobs' would simply be referred to as 'jobs'.

Net zero was only way of growing the economy, and the scale was huge whilst the time frame was short. Clark pointed to the challenges associated with gas boilers, and the opportunity which would be presented by installing heat pumps.

Green growth was not yet imbedded in government thinking, however hopefully the chancellor would help change this. Responsibility for this area falls across many different sectors including DEFRA, the Treasury and DLUHC.

Rhian Kelly, National Grid, explained how her organisation's research showed the UK would need 400,000 new jobs in the energy sector by 2050, and 125,000 of those by 2030.

The roles, if they were to be filled, had to attract a diverse range of people. This was where organisations such as the national grid and other businesses could help. They had established 'Grid for Good' which helped economically social disadvantaged people aged 16-25 with a series of relevant training. She also raised the point about having a 'just transitions', which meant that those who worked in carbon intensive sectors would need support when transitioning towards low carbon jobs.

Q&A

Afolami suggested that local authorities could receive money to fund the just transition by increasing taxes on carbon intensive behaviour to disincentives it and use the revenues to fund environmentally beneficially actions. Ben cited the landfill tax as one way by which this could possibly be done.