

Sustainable Futures Energy Workshop

The **Sustainable Futures Energy Workshop** in July 2022 brought together a group of young people (aged 18-25) with Ofgem – Great Britain’s independent energy regulator – to explore experiences, priorities, and concerns around energy, and discuss how young people could help Ofgem shape decision-making in the future. The workshop was held in partnership with Sustainability First and Ofgem.

The workshop included a mix of introductory presentations and breakout room discussions. Sustainability First Executive Director, David Murray, introduced the programme and Ofgem Chief Executive, Jonathan Brearley, introduced Ofgem’s role as the regulator and reflected on their current policy priorities and some of the key issues affecting the sector.

The ideas in this document are those of the young people in attendance. The note outlines participants’ views from breakout discussions on:

- The issues participants would like Ofgem to explore further with young people
- The outcomes participants want from the energy sector
- Discussions on what participants like about energy and want to keep for, or see in, the future; and what participants are worried or concerned about in energy and want to change in the future

What issues would you like Ofgem to explore further with young people?

- **Affordability of energy** – Vulnerable customers.
- **Energy efficiency and consumption** – Incentivising energy efficiency, rationing, and smart energy use.
- **Energy justice** – Looking at social, ecological, intergenerational, and intragenerational energy justice in the energy transition and governing the sector.
- **Engagement and involvement with energy** – How to engage people with net zero and what is Ofgem’s role in this? Including partnership opportunities and workshops, e.g. on different technologies, energy saving. In addition, ways to engage young people in energy and ignite interest in the sector, such as site visits, workshops, reaching out to schools and universities, and education.
- **Environmental awareness** – Environmental awareness fits in everywhere, it’s an issue young people come across daily, and something they want to get involved in.

- **Governance of the energy sector and Ofgem's role** – Including Ofgem's values and how they make trade-offs, e.g. between affordability, reliability, green energy. What is Ofgem's role in: engagement for net zero, promoting social support, and facilitating access?
- **Information, communication, and education on energy** – Increased education on energy and the energy sector, including in schools, and clear communication with the public, such as about domestic generation. Is there a role for an independent company to provide information without bias? Does Ofgem have a role in public education?
- **Opportunities for jobs and growth** – How are opportunities for jobs and growth in the energy transition communicated to consumers and the public?
- **Ownership and control**
- **Pricing and reliability**
- **Renewables and green technologies** – The rollout to greener tech and green energy generation has been slow. Who pays for major investment into new infrastructure for renewables? How can we speed up the transition to net zero?
- **Smart energy systems** – Cyber security, smart meters, and the digitalisation of the energy sector, including the communications around these.
- **Transparency** – Transparency, including where energy comes from and how green energy is, and concerns about greenwashing. The role and availability of open data for transparency was also discussed, in terms of helping people know more about the energy they use and supporting new solutions and ideas from the data.

What outcomes do you want from the energy sector?

- **Affordability of energy** – Cheap.
- **Circular economy** – Based solutions and transitions.
- **Clean, green, and renewables energies** – Increased renewable electricity usage (up to 80 – 100%). Should Ofgem be regulating renewables? What is renewable energy? Biogas, biomass, and natural gas aren't green. Don't have efficient systems in the UK for production of biogas.
- **Climate action** – Countries meet to discuss climate change but need to be more specific on where we need to get and how.
- **Consumer choice and control** – Consumers able to choose their suppliers and research who is best for them. The loss of energy suppliers and communications around that has not been good enough.
- **Consumer compromise** – Trade-offs between energy consumption and higher bills.
- **Energy transition** – Is regulated and managed, bridging fuels are getting us to where we want to be and not creating new fossil fuels, prices are fair and affordable, and communities are involved. Carbon offsetting is avoided and used only as a last resort.
- **Information, communication, and education on energy** – Everyone should have access to information they need. Clear and streamlined communication with more

accessible information about energy – which stakeholders are best placed to provide this? Also more education by the energy sector, such as in schools.

- **Investment in new technologies** – Particularly for government to get it going.
- **Microgeneration and local energy** – Consumers as producers and community-led energy, including to maximise the benefits from energy (ability to earn more from selling not just using). Local energy can offer more control. Might accept less supply with community energy – better than the unknown and being scared of the future.
- **Reliability and stability** – In the market, ensuring resilience of energy suppliers. Discussion on the measures needed to decrease market volatility.
- **Smart energy systems** – Every household has access to a smart meter, with live information, full transparency, reliable smart meter customer service, and integration with live data from the system operator to know when best to use energy. Keep provision and management of smart meters streamlined and simple for the customers.
- **UK-based energy** – National, more accessible, and less globalised.

Themes arising from activity one discussions:

Discussion on what participants like about energy and want to keep for, or see in, the future; and what participants are worried or concerned about in energy and want to change in the future

- **Accessibility, affordability, and the price of energy**
- **Circular economy** – Participants discussed wanting to see more circular economy energy systems, that demonstrate all lifecycle emissions.
- **Climate action** – Participants saw energy as one part of a whole picture of the climate crisis. All need to play a role in tackling climate change. Can't only be government, have seen examples of positive company engagement.
- **Consumer behaviour and energy consumption** – Participants discussed their own energy consumption and efforts to reduce usage. They liked that people are talking about energy, their usage, and getting to net zero, and that consumers can have a positive impact.
- **Consumer choice and control** – Participants liked having choice and being able to control their consumption. They were worried about rationing and limits on use. They wanted to be involved in discussions: 'we are currently looked on as outsiders even though we are the ones using energy'.
- **Energy as a choice or right?** – Participants discussed whether energy should be a choice or part of the package. It was believed that energy should be a right when you enter a new home.
- **Energy efficiency** – Participants identified need for more home insulation. Positive examples of new home and insulation initiatives were shared, such as in Scandinavia. Participants spoke about incentives for improving home energy efficiency, and the difference between provisions for homeowners and landlords, asking are current requirements for landlords enough?

- **Energy security** – Participants discussed diversifying the energy mix and reducing reliance on imported energy. Concerns about energy being inaccessible if too globalised. In relation to current crisis, participants discussed, are we risking our energy security? How do we help people that are struggling? Should we turn on the coal? Why didn't we engage in energy a decade ago – short-term solutions to the current crisis will lead to bigger crises in the future.
- **Engagement and involvement with energy** – Young people wanted agency with how they get involved with energy. Ideas included powershare projects, youth programmes, and community energy. Many people don't have time or the money to engage or take action. They wanted more sharing of knowledge, education, and advice. Key questions asked included: How can everybody be part of the climate solution? How can we talk about net zero issues with the public? What role can young people play?
- **Flexibility** – Participants liked the idea of flexibility and wanted to be more involved in demand and reducing consumption.
- **Fuel poverty and cost of living crisis** – Participants shared concerns about the high energy prices, rising living costs, fuel poverty, and struggle for people choosing between eating and heating, including impacts on wellbeing and mental health. Participants had been thinking and having more discussions about energy during the cost of living crisis as well as using appliances less.
- **Green energy and the transition to renewables** – Participants identified a lack of full scale transitions to renewable technologies. They wanted to see an exponential growth in renewables. The current crisis as a launch pad to properly invest in renewables. However, they were concerned that renewable energy and sustainable options aren't always accessible, and some unsustainable energy is being classed as green (e.g. biomass). They were also worried about government plans to open to coal mines. Can we transition to renewables in a gradual way (like seen in the phase out of polluting cars) in terms of investment in infrastructure?
- **Green jobs** – Participants liked the availability of more green jobs
- **Making decisions for the short / long term** – Participants were worried about short-termist thinking and focus on economic/financial costs, rather than looking at actions holistically, e.g. including nature. Short-term solutions to the current crisis will lead to bigger crises in the future. Participants discussed more powers to Ofgem, as data experts, to help make technocratic decisions for the long term – improve democratic safeguards and counter-weight government. And more local power – a combination of macro and local approaches.
- **Market reform** – Participants were worried about high energy prices, black outs, and unintended outcomes caused by market reform.
- **Microgeneration and local energy** – Participants discussed decentralised energy and would like to see more local and community-based energy and increased ability for communities, businesses, and consumers to produce their own energy and contribute back to the grid. Combination of macro and local approaches. They saw the potential for this to accelerate the renewable energy transition. They thought it would also give more power to local people and communities and strengthen ownership and engagement. Participants suggested community energy could ensure power is priced at a more equitable level, in the context of people living

through an energy crisis and CEOs getting big bonuses. They had questions about how to align new renewables and microgeneration with old systems in a stable way and how to share more energy information and knowledge with communities.

- **Nationalisation and privatisation** – Participants expressed need to nationalise energy suppliers to get to net zero, but also appreciated private sector offer around innovation. Examples of nationalisation in France and Scandinavia in lowering bills and fuel poverty were shared.
- **Nature** – Participants discussed the rights of nature and how nature factors into decision-making in short and long-term, as well as non-anthropocentric energy systems.
- **New technologies** – Participants were excited about new technologies, such as in clean energy and storage, but what is the right path? Is there a role for Ofgem in storage?
- **Reliability and stability** – Participants thought the reliability of the system was impressive. They liked having constant access to energy anytime, whenever it is wanted. Maintaining and improving reliability of the system was seen as important.
- **Remuneration** – Participants didn't agree that CEOs/Execs should make as much money in the current crisis.
- **Smart energy systems** – The use of smart technology and online billing was already seen as useful by participants; however they identified issues such as compatibility with some suppliers.
- **Transparency** – Participants wanted more transparency – to know where energy comes from. Concerned about greenwashing from energy producers and providers. Such as how information is presented to identify the greenest and fairest deal.
- **Who pays?** – Participants thought those who cause the damage should pay the price. Businesses should step up and pay for upfront costs. Easier to charge companies than individuals.

Sustainable Futures Energy Forum

Sustainability First will be continuing to work in partnership with Ofgem over the coming months to develop a **Sustainable Futures Energy Forum**. This will be an online forum to support young people (aged 18-25) to input into decision-making in the energy across 2022 – 2023. The forum will involve four online meetings across the end of this year and early next year.

For updates on the Sustainable Futures Energy Forum and opportunities for getting involved, visit the Sustainability First website: www.sustainabilityfirst.org.uk/sustainable-futures-energy-forum