

Debating Scotland's Energy Choices

Tuesday 24 October 2006 at The University of Aberdeen



Energy is vital to our national well-being and should not be allowed to become a political football. The concerns surrounding energy production, energy transfer and its efficient use affects all of us and the RSE is seeking to engage young people, as well as the general public through out Scotland, to debate these issues in order to better inform key decision makers.

On 24 October 2006 S5 and S6 students met at the University of Aberdeen to debate and discuss the following topics:

- Energy sources, supply and grid infrastructure
- Energy efficiency, savings and research and development
- The role of Government and the public

In the morning experts introduced the topics in a variety of talks, Dr Malcolm Kennedy covered the following points, that the four pillars of the supply of electricity are affordability, competitiveness (of supply), environment and security. Emissions, it appears, is driving the agenda today with carbon dioxide used as a proxy for all greenhouse gases. And that Scotland is part of a GB-wide interconnected system for electricity, although Scotland has its own characteristics, not least its potential in renewable energy sources.

Professor Maxwell Irvine covered energy efficiency and energy saving and the importance of these in terms of the environment, conservation of finite resources, and the economy. He explained how the principal uses of energy are for transport, heating and mechanical power and that there are opportunities for research and development in terms of energy efficiency and savings.

Professor Roger explained that the energy market is privatised and as such the market is driven to make a profit, although as energy has wider issues for society than profitability, the Government has a role to play. He also highlighted that there is also a need for an informed public debate.

Following the talks the students split into groups to and took part in workshops to explore the issues further their suggestions are summarised below.

Workshop group 1 Energy (Electricity) Sources, Supply and Grid Infrastructure

The students' greatest priority was security of supply and they believed nuclear should be an option. They said that more education on energy issues was required as there were misguided perceptions and that the affordability of energy and environmental impact were also very important factors.

Workshop group 2 Energy Efficiency and Savings and Research and Development

The students regarded industry, transport and the domestic sector as crucial from an energy efficiency point of view. The students thought there were a lot of opportunities for saving energy and using it more efficiently in the home, such as switching appliances off, rather than using stand-by. The students also believed that the Building Regulations should be more thoroughly enforced and penalties imposed if standards are not being met.

Workshop 3 The Role of the Government and the Public

The students felt that there was a lack of objectivity from politicians on the issues and that certain sections of the media were creating misconceptions on energy issues by focussing on controversial aspects. The students also suggested that a long term framework should be set out by Government to ensure security of supply.