

WBG submission to Labour National Policy Forum Consultation 2023

1. How can science and technology policy support growth in all regions and nations of the UK?

Addressing the climate and ecological crises provides an opportunity to reorient our economy around wellbeing, rather than profit. As the Women's Budget Group [Commission on a Gender Equal Economy](#) found, economic growth today is associated with rising inequality and environmental degradation rather than rising living standards. The focus on GDP growth has been increasingly challenged, including by [the OECD](#), and a [2020 inquiry](#) found that just one in five UK adults thinks the government should continue to prioritise growth as the ultimate economic objective. Of course, growth is required in some sectors that necessary for a green and caring economy, but we challenge the overriding focus on growth in its own right.

Instead, the next government should take steps to phase out unsustainable production, support carbon-intensive businesses to retool to low-carbon activities, and invest in the physical and social infrastructure required to meet everyone's needs in a low-carbon economy. Central to this will be rebuilding key public services that have been gutted by austerity and further undermined by the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring everyone has access to the services that they need to thrive. More appropriate measures of economic success should be identified, for example the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), which is designed to take fuller account of the wellbeing of a nation. It includes income inequality, the value of non-market household and volunteer labour, and the social and environmental costs associated with market activity.

We do clearly need massive investment in the green economy, including in science and technology sectors to expand low-carbon energy and infrastructure and to skill

people up for green jobs. The next government should reduce occupational segregation and enable women to take advantage of the new jobs created. Funding for programmes in schools, universities and vocational education should support women and girls, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, into STEM roles, including green STEM roles through training and apprenticeships. This should be accompanied by financial support including subsidised training and paid education leave to support women, low-income and people from other marginalised groups to access training and development programmes and enable access to well-paid, fulfilling work in the new green economy.

2. How can improvements to transport deliver growth across the country, including in rural areas?

Expanding and improving public transport is crucial in decarbonising our economy and it would create green jobs which could be prioritised for those moving out of shrinking sectors such as retail, aviation, car manufacturing and servicing. We need public investment in a well-connected, integrated, affordable and widespread national public transport system, with an emphasis on improving bus services and walking and cycling routes. This should include rural areas to counter car dependency in so-called “public transport deserts”. As Labour’s green prosperity plan has acknowledged, public ownership can improve public transport routes, service reliability, affordability and accessibility as funds are reinvested in services rather than siphoned off to shareholders. Bringing privatised sections of public transport, such as bus and train networks, back under public control is vital.

Electric vehicles (EVs) are part of the solution, but they are not a panacea. Firstly, while they do not produce greenhouse gas emissions themselves, they still largely run on electricity generated by fossil fuels. Furthermore, the production process for EV batteries is carbon-intensive, and they require mining raw materials which exacerbates global injustices as materials are concentrated in countries within the global South, whilst consumers are largely in industrialised countries.

There does not appear to be anything in the green prosperity plan on aviation. It is crucial to change consumer habits away from excessive flying, particularly for the

wealthiest among us. In the UK, [70% of flights are taken by a wealthy 15% of the population](#), while over half the population does not fly at all during a year. As the Climate Change Committee has made clear, the current approach of waiting for technological change and “sustainable” fuels [will not reduce aviation emissions](#) in line with the UK’s climate commitments. Instead, the next government must stop airport expansion and urgently manage demand. It could do this equitably with [a frequent flyer levy](#) that rose progressively with the number of flights a consumer took each year as well as banning private jets and the most damaging short-distance flights where alternatives are available, as France has recently done.

4. What policies can help deliver Labour’s existing pledges on green growth, particularly the Green Prosperity Plan?

As above, we are concerned that an overriding focus on economic growth is not the best way to address the urgent climate, ecological and inequality crises. Instead, we need to reorient the economy around wellbeing, rather than profit. This means investing in social infrastructure on the basis that care, education and health jobs are not only inherently low carbon but are also urgently needed to improve wellbeing across society (see q.5 for more detail).

Labour’s Climate Investment Pledge is encouraging, but it should be accompanied by an equivalent commitment to expanding social infrastructure. Labour should also democratise natural resources and basic services, bringing the energy system back under public ownership, ending the creeping privatisation of health and care, and ending the sell-off of public land and thereby improving everyone’s access to nature, green spaces and food growing opportunities. The latter could be done, for example, by empowering local authorities to buy and develop land in the public interest. This could be funded by a progressive tax system that incentivises land use for social and environmental goods, while disincentivising the private ownership of land for tax avoidance, money laundering, rent and financial speculation.

While we certainly need significant investment in low-carbon physical infrastructure, Labour should acknowledge that simply replacing like for like when it comes to cars, aircraft and even energy systems will involve increased extraction of minerals, often

at enormous human and environmental cost and disproportionately affecting the Global South. Labour should support a [“fair share” approach](#) to climate action, would mean the UK taking much faster action to decarbonise our own economy, while supporting poorer countries with climate finance and technology transfers to help them mitigate further climate damage, deal with existing impacts, and address inequality. Crucially, the UK should use its powerful position in trade, finance and diplomatic fora to push for a reordering of the global economy around a reparative climate justice, for example through debt relief, reforming international financial institutions, clamping down on tax havens and ending exploitative treaties such as the Energy Charter Treaty.

Labour must also have a plan for *reducing* and rebalancing consumption. Labour’s commitment to a national retrofitting programme is a good start in improving energy efficiency, but it should also commit to policies to help people adopt more sustainable lifestyles: this means making it easier and cheaper to take public transport and active travel options, buy durable and repairable products and eat sustainable foods. Against a background of improved and expanded childcare and care provision, reformed parental leave, greater job security and higher minimum wages, a shorter working week could free up time for less carbon-intensive behaviours as well as addressing gender inequality. In the UK, introducing a four-day week without loss of pay could reduce the UK’s carbon footprint by [127 million tonnes per year by 2025](#), equivalent to taking 27 million cars off the road. Labour should also support a [comprehensive social security package](#) as part of a new social contract between government and citizens to give people confidence that they will be supported if they can’t work or are otherwise affected by economic change.

Interventions should be accompanied by a public education campaign that communicates the benefits of consuming less and differently as a society. Power and resources should be devolved to local and regional level, with local people involved in decision-making processes that revitalise their communities. This is particularly important for women and other marginalised groups who are often excluded from decision-making spaces.

On energy, expanding nuclear power is expensive and will take too long to come online in time to meet our urgent climate commitments. The nuclear industry's record is one of astronomical rising costs and project delays, which we simply cannot afford when we have the cheaper and quicker to build alternatives of wind and solar power. Furthermore, there is still no known method of safely storing the waste which will remain radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years, creating problems for future generations.

5. What policies can help contribute to the four missions outlined in Labour's industrial strategy?

The mission to decarbonise power by 2030 is a positive one and the plan for a public renewable energy company is an important first step in achieving this. However, there must also be a plan to decarbonise the entire energy system, including heating, which is a much larger source of greenhouse gas emissions than power. To facilitate this, the next government must end all new oil and gas licences and, crucially, end the regime of tax breaks and subsidies for oil and gas companies and instead invest these funds in renewable energy expansion, notably onshore wind and solar, and energy efficiency measures including through a mass retrofit programme.

Ensuring fast and equitable decarbonisation of the energy system requires public ownership of strategic assets. The government has already decided to bring part of National Grid back into public ownership. Buying back the rest of the grid could save [£3.7bn per year](#). It is important to avoid simply funding private companies to develop green technologies that they can later use to generate profit from public consumers. Instead, the next government should transfer assets currently in private ownership which are necessary for decarbonisation into public ownership so that they can be rolled out fairly across the UK and shared with other countries.

We are encouraged to see caring for the future as a key mission in Labour's industrial strategy. Investing in social infrastructure would not only improve social wellbeing and address inequality but is also an overlooked source of green jobs. There is certainly more work to be done to decarbonise the health and care sectors, but as it stands the average job in health and care produces 26 times less greenhouse gas than a manufacturing job, over 200 times less than an agriculture

job and nearly 1,500 times less than a job in oil and gas.¹ The adult social care and childcare systems are not working for care receivers, workers, parents or children.

The Women's Budget Group has called for [free universal childcare](#) for all children in the UK between the age of 6 months and primary school and a [universal quality social care service](#) that would address the staffing crisis, relieve the burden on unpaid carers and promote care-receivers' wellbeing. These interventions would create 2.5 million jobs into which workers transitioning from shrinking or precarious sectors could be retrained. Improving pay and conditions in the care sector would help close the gender pay gap and make care work a more attractive prospect for women and men.

On the mission for a more resilient economy, we agree that supply chains should be shortened and that we should produce more of the products we need, particularly food, in the UK. However, as the [IPCC recently made clear](#), we also need to reduce and rebalance consumption, and interventions to do so are "consistent with improving basic wellbeing for all". In a green and caring economy, everyone would have access to the goods they need: these would be high quality, durable items designed to be reused and repaired.

Consuming less would mean shrinking parts of the manufacturing and retail sectors and improving the remainder, which should be done in consultation with trade unions. A genuinely just transition would ensure that workers have a say in the decisions that affect them and receive fair compensation and retraining. The economic impact on producing countries must be carefully managed to prevent pushing marginalised workers into jobs with even worse pay and conditions. Environmental and worker protections could be mandated in binding clauses in trade agreements. Remaining production must prioritise sustainable and recycled materials, shorten supply chains, improve working conditions across the supply chain, and guarantee environmental, human and animal rights protections. At the same time, the next government should foster new and widespread services in repair, re-use, recycling, and rental.

6. What are the specific implications of policy proposals in this area for (a) women, (b) Black, Asian and minority ethnic people; (c) LGBT+ people, (d) disabled people and (e) all those with other protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?

¹ WBG analysis of ONS Emissions Inventory and Business Register and Employment Survey, 2019

All policies must be assessed on their potential to address inequality as well as decarbonisation, or they risk reproducing or even exacerbating existing inequalities. In particular, industrial sectors must be desegregated to ensure equal access to women and other underrepresented groups in newly created jobs.

It is crucial to support those on low-incomes, disproportionately women and racialised and other marginalised groups, to make greener choices, such as installing home insulation, swapping the gas boiler for a heat pump and buying more sustainably produced products. Making such choices, which often require expending more time, disproportionately burden women with more unpaid work if made in the absence of structural changes including a shorter working week and a dramatically improved childcare system.

Public transport design must move away from serving a default white, able-bodied, middle class male user, which can exacerbate inequality. Instead, it should enable a diversity of journeys, including care-related trips which are disproportionately taken by women using buses. To ensure that walking and cycling infrastructure is fairly distributed, design must involve underserved communities with education, outreach and peer support to promote cycling among underrepresented groups. It must be adapted for disabled people as much as possible and must not obstruct or stigmatise disabled people who need access to a car.

Further Climate insight from WBG:

- [A Green and Caring Economy \(final report\)](#)

Feminist Green New Deal briefing papers:

- [Gender and the 'Green New Deal'](#)
- [Macrofinancial policies for a green and caring economy](#)
- [Towards gender inclusive and sustainable transport](#)
- [Revitalising local communities](#)
- [Labour market changes for a green and caring economy](#)
- [A shorter working week as part of a green and caring economy](#)
- [Social security's contribution to tackling climate change and gender inequality](#)
- [Sustainable lifestyle changes for a green and caring economy](#)

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