

Meeting of the Cross-Party Group on the Circular Economy

11th June 2024 – 6pm

Location: online via Microsoft Teams

Present

MSPs

- Maurice Golden MSP
- Douglas Lumsden MSP

Invited Guests

- Mary Michel – Ostrero
- Steven Kiakowski, Director, The Verdancy Group
- Caroline Carter – Barrhead High School

Non-MSP Group Members and Guests

- Alex Morrison – Keep Scotland Beautiful
- Paul Smith – Office of Maurice Golden MSP
- Catherine Gemmell - MCS
- Phoebe Cochrane – Scottish Environment LINK
- Kim Pratt – Friends of the Earth Scotland
- Donna Wood
- Susan Lechelt
- Angus Murdoch – Edinburgh City Council
- Melissa Maques-McEwan
- Toni Freitas – University of Edinburgh
- Lucy Wishart
- Michelle Kazil
- Matt Lewis – Circular Communities
- Ifeyinwa Kanu - IntelliDigest

Apologies

- Monica Lennon MSP
- Mark Ruskell MSP
- Mike Namara
- Suzanne Forup – Cycling UK

Agenda Item 1: Welcome

- Maurice Golden MSP opened the meeting and welcomed attendees to the joint meeting.

- Apologies and the minutes of the previous meetings for the Circular Economy CPG were proposed and seconded by Paul Smith and Phoebe Cochrane.

Agenda Item 2: Update on the Circular Economy Bill

- Maurice Golden MSP provided an overview of developments with the Circular Economy Bill, noting that:
 - We were in between Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the parliamentary process. Essentially there are two chances for parliamentarian to amend the Bill, first at Stage 2 and then at stage 3 (with that first stage of amendments already having passed). At Stage 2 of the Bill, amendments are voted on by the Net Zero committee whilst those at Stage 3 are voted on by Parliament as a whole.
 - There were more than two hundred amendments submitted at Stage 2. Maurice himself had submitted more than fifty-eight but had only been able to secure changing a single word in the bill from 'may' to 'must'. However, Maurice would be making another attempt at Stage 3 to include a purpose clause for the Bill as there is currently no definition of a circular economy in the bill.
 - Another theme Maurice had focused on was due diligence around public bodies taking cognisance of human rights and environmental rights internationally, which was, unfortunately, defeated at Stage 2. Maurice had also pushed the issue of managing waste as locally as practically possible. Again, this was voted down, but Maurice would try and raise them again at Stage 3.
- Toni Freitas asked if the Stage 3 debate would be broadcast online.
- Maurice Golden said that it would be with the debate taking place on Tuesday, 25th June. He noted this was an important moment as, even though very little in the bill would affect the current Scottish Government, it would instead impact the next government in 2026. As a framework bill, much of it would be implemented through regulations at a later date.

Agenda Item 3: Presentations

Maurice Golden introduced the evening's theme of education and skills. He noted that he had previously pushed for the circular economy to be included the Curriculum for Excellence but that the Scottish Government had said this wasn't possible. Maurice noted, however, that it was now more relevant than ever to introduce it.

Presentation 1 – Mary Michel, Director Ostrero - Setting the Scene with Making Circles

Mary noted that for eight years, they had gone between Zero Waste Scotland and Education Scotland and kept getting passed back and forth. This evening, she was going to speak about why it is so important to include circularity in education and in particular in schools.

Mary explained that to have a successful circular economy in Scotland, young people needed to know what it was, the opportunities it offered and be equipped with the skills needed to make the most of those opportunities. She noted there was currently no mention of education and skills in the Circular Economy Bill and only a fuzzy mention of them in the Route Map.

Ostrero had been running making circles workshops since 2018 all across Scottish schools. They were currently running their Zero Waste Schools programme, which hoped for long-term behaviour change in schools. The Scottish Government had pledged a fully circular economy embedded by 2032, but Mary argued that felt slightly unrealistic now.

It was noted that 39 per cent of 16-19 year olds would consider not having children due to the climate emergency. Of the 3,000 children Mary had worked with, fewer than five had heard of the circular economy.

It was noted that the Circular Economy Bill made no provision for education, which had been suggested in a report from the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. Although it was mentioned in the Route Map, it wasn't clear and Mary wasn't convinced it would lead to change. The two examples of circular economic projects in the Route Map were for specific sectors: retrofitting in the construction industry and business interns. With no mention of schools, this was regarded as a missed opportunity.

This is in contrast to Northern Ireland which sought to 'embed circular economy principles at all levels of education', and, as such, acknowledges the lack of education and skills as a direct barrier to a circular economy. Summed up, if there was to be a circular economy, the education and skills needed must be provided.

Mary explained that it was a lottery whether children had heard about the circular economy. There were some great organisations working in the space, such as Ostrero, Young Enterprise Scotland, Daydream Believers (in schools) and the Transition Stirling initiative.

Take-up in schools was really down to the teacher, and a vast majority of schools had no provision for circular economy education. Ostrero's three year ear programme teaches children why it matters, equips them with skills they will need and provides practical implementation of the circular economy in their schools.

An example of what this could look like was the work being done with Castleview Primary School. With packed lunches on a Friday producing a great amount of waste, lunch was redesigned, such as using less single-use plastic and more than 14,000 fewer plastic bottles. If such work were to be rolled out to every primary school in Scotland there would be a projected saving of 71 million single-use plastic items from just one meal a week.

Ostrero's asks:

- Adding education and skills to the Circular Economy Bill at Stage 3 with specific reference to schools.
- References in the Route Map should be fine-tuned to understand what they were trying to deliver, who would deliver it and what the funding provision would look like.
- Using what was already out there: there were lots of projects ready to go in schools, so there was a need to actually go and do it.
- The goal of ensuring every child in Scotland knew what the Circular Economy was.

Presentation 2 – Steven Kiakowski, Director, The Verdancy Group

Giving some background, Steven noted he worked in an advisory role with a range of partners from schools to the public and private sectors, including industry partners important to our energy transition need.

He worked closely with Skills Development Scotland to develop meta skills toolkits and examining systems thinking, innovation and creation. He noted the importance of giving young people opportunities to look at things differently and how good it was to see them talking about this and how it could affect their future.

Steven explained he believed sustainability was a more hearts and minds issue, and that this was clear in countries that had successfully rolled it out, such as in Northern Ireland and Singapore.

Learning for Sustainability and the principles of that were important and there were some strong projects that could help with this. There were challenges though, but there are a lot of people out there asking for the right thing to do, so there was a need to ensure infrastructure is in place and the resources are available to them to make the right decisions.

Steven discussed what Scottish Government was doing in terms of developing circular economy skills. He noted that other countries had changed the dialogue on this, such as in the Republic of Ireland where children were talking about the circular economy and net zero jobs.

Identifying gaps, Steven said the Verdancy Group worked with a lot of industry partners, such as on how they could support their own workforces and using their expertise to support mainstream educational providers. He argued that was critical in this space because, given lack of time and the pace needed to reach targets. He noted there was a need to utilise government levers to pull those industry providers into that skill space.

Responding to a question from Phoebe Cochrane, Steven spoke about government programmes, still in their infancy, and who they were being delivered to. Such as with a number of local authorities looking at energy transition plans. This, he explained, was a key reference point to look back on. Such as a local authority looking at a heat network as part of their energy transition model, which would be something the Verdancy Group could support with upskilling and access to awareness and engagement for people within that area.

Presentation 3 – Caroline Carter, Barrhead High School

Caroline explained she was a teacher at Barrhead High School, which was in its second year of the Ostrero programme.

The school was developing an interdisciplinary project learning opportunities for their students with learning for sustainability themes that include real world problems relevant to young people. One of the projects was based around the theme of the circular economy as a sustainable solution to the climate emergency. Now in the second year of the project, it included engagement with industry, creative partnerships, practical relationships and links across curricular activities and outdoor learning.

To develop the ideal programme the school had developed four bespoke capacities which were newly designed to reflect the curriculum of the future.

Learning about the circular economy introduced young people to a positive, practical solution-based approach to tackling the climate emergency. Such as Ostrero's three-year

pilot project to reduce waste throughout the school using circular economy principles with the goal of becoming a Zero Waste School.

Notable milestones have included securing speakers from local business and entrepreneurial engagement from Ocean Plastics Pots. In addition to which there has been engagement with the wider green jobs sector where there will be a predicted two million jobs by 2030.

There has also been development of cross-circular projects to learn about waste through art and geography as well as the school's eco club supporting a uniform swapping initiative.

Agenda Item 4 – Open Discussion

- Maurice Golden thanked the speakers for their presentation and opened the meeting up to discussion.
- Angus Murdoch asked Mary Michel about a project Edinburgh Council had funded through Change Works. He wanted to know if there was a way schools in Edinburgh could get in touch and how many schools in the city Ostrero was working with.
- Mary said the best way to get in touch was through the Ostrero website (ostrero.com), and noting they had five schools in the pilot with three of them in Edinburgh. In total, through their workshops, they had worked with around twenty-five schools in Edinburgh.
- Phoebe Cochrane noted she had attended a meeting with the Minister for Climate Action that morning where the issue of an education amendment in the Circular Economy Bill was raised. She explained there had been discussion of combining this with a Stage 2 amendment on behaviour change.
- Maurice Golden posed the question of what a meaningful impact would look like and what measures needed to be put in place to achieve it.
- Mary Michel argued there needed to be a strategic approach within the framework which would then trickle down. She noted there were a number of good projects in operation but with funding be a key obstacle. Noting there was a waiting list of schools keen to take part but that Ostrero was constrained by a lack of funds.
- Steven Kiakowski asked which sectors or subjects should be linked to the circular economy. He noted there was much “fitting into the curriculum” instead of “embedding into the curriculum”. He asked what levers there were to drive that full embedding of the circular economy into the curriculum.
- Caroline Carter noted that the circular economy wasn't embedded within the Barrhead high School curriculum but that they were now focussed on doing so. She found it interesting that the process involved working across subjects, such as business studies using it within their ethics modules. She highlight the importance of the Ostrero offering for providing this opportunity for the school.
- Matt Lewis spoke about the role of informal education and that there was a lot of activity at the third sector level. He asked whether eco-schools might be an appropriate model for such work to be carried out.
- Mary Michel responded by highlighting the Stirling Transition Hub which provided training for young people on how to repair things.
- Toni Freitas also provided a link to relevant material (<https://www.circle-economy.com/resources/decent-work-in-the-circular-economy>).
- Mary Michel highlighted the importance of not learning about the circular in a bubble and noted the need to embed it in everything we do. She argued that nothing would

change if we were to learn within the linear economy with the circular economy placed within its own bubble.

- Phoebe Cochrane asked Mary about the funding barrier she spoke about earlier, and suggested teacher training needed to be a focus with a query on whether this was happening.
- Caroline Carter explained she was a new teacher and hadn't found the circular economy had been mentioned during training but that learning for sustainability had been.
- Lucy Wishart noted UNESCO spoke about different types of learning: learning to do, learning to know, learning to be and learning to work together with the latter two often forgotten about. She said people were not working in silos and we were making connections across subjects. She wanted to hear more from Steven on how he was addressing ideas that people are operating in isolation.
- Maurice Golden explained that Zero Waste Scotland lead on the circular economy in Scotland, but that more had to come from the likes of enterprise agencies, public sector procurers, schools and universities. He said there was a need to completely change the paradigm from before where it had been all about waste with a focus on local authorities.
- Caroline Carter said Barrhead High School's journey was made possible by Ostrero and Young Enterprise Scotland and that having access to these had been valuable. She said it was about having access to free resources and knowledge in schools.
- Steven Kiakowski highlighted Singapore's efforts where their CSAP plan is a circular economy skills action plan. In contrast, Scotland's has been a climate emergency action plan, and he wondered if they both accomplished the same goals. The main takeaways from Singapore's success, he explained, was that they had five key initiatives: educational programmes, workforce training and upskilling, R&D, public awareness and industry collaboration. They prioritised educational programmes whereas Scotland has prioritised elsewhere. In Steven's opinion, there should be a drive for change in our awarding bodies to fully adopt the principles of the circular economy across all qualifications.
- Mary Michel pointed out that change had to come from the top down and bottom up at the same time. She wanted to see action in the Circular Economy Bill and the Route Map and then from bottom up through schools that want to participate with necessary resources provided. This shouldn't just be about teaching though; it should be about adopting the circular economy into school practices.
- Maurice Golden brought the meeting to a close.