

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

Oral evidence: [Revisiting the nuclear roadmap](#), HC 735

Wednesday 25 February 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 25 February 2026.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Bill Esterson (Chair); Lizzi Collinge; Torcuil Crichton; Wera Hobhouse; Melanie Onn; Claire Young.

Questions 59 - 140

Witnesses

[I](#): David Cunningham, Chartered nuclear engineer; Mark Rouse, Skills Director, Nuclear Sector Skills Team; and Sue Ferns, Senior Deputy General Secretary, Prospect Trade Union.

[II](#): Councillor Richard Rout, Chair of the New Nuclear Local Authorities Group, Suffolk County Council; Councillor Struan Mackie, Highland Councillor, Thurso and North West Caithness, and Chair of Dounreay Stakeholder Group; and Zion Lights, Science communicator.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Prospect Trade Union](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: David Cunningham, Mark Rouse and Sue Ferns.

Q59 **Chair:** This is our session on revisiting the nuclear roadmap. Today we will be looking at the nuclear workforce and skills pipeline in our first panel and, in our second panel, balancing national interests and community voices. Welcome to our first panel. We are looking forward to your evidence. We will start with introducing yourselves.

David Cunningham: Good afternoon. My name is David Cunningham, a chartered nuclear engineer. I have 43 years in the industry, currently working in the middle east on new build projects. I have been doing new build now since 2013, in the middle east predominantly.

Sue Ferns: I am Sue Ferns. I am the Senior Deputy General Secretary at Prospect Trade Union.

Mark Rouse: Good afternoon. I am Mark Rouse, Director for the Nuclear Skills Plan and Co-Chair of the Nuclear Skills Delivery Board, also with about 40 years in the nuclear sector, one way or another.

Q60 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed for joining us this afternoon. Mark, I will start with you. I am sure that all of us have noted the very much stop-start approach to nuclear industry in the United Kingdom. How has that approach affected the development and retention of skills within the nuclear workforce and what is the future strategy that we need to prevent a repeat of this pattern?

Mark Rouse: It has stopped us investing in the future. We have become quite short term and quite inward looking and the industry is too full of people who are a bit like me, who have been around rather a long time and are of a certain demographic. We have run the taskforce, we have had a good look at the sector and we have looked at the ambitions that Government have and have now followed through on. The taskforce led to the group that I am leading. It led to a group where Government have invested money, they have invested people, they have taken people like me. I was managing director of Dounreay before I had a tap on the shoulder and was asked if I would be part of a cross-sector team.

That is the other part of it, joining together the civil and the defence side. We have money and the focus that came from the taskforce. We are busy turning this into a project of delivery, not of discussions about the future and about what might be, but delivering some things, very much with the mantra of failing fast, learning quick. Let's do some things, let's try some things in a way that we have never done before, and learn from them as we are doing them. I am pleased to say that we are nearly two years into operation and doing just that.

Q61 **Chair:** Thank you very much. David, on your experiences from a number of countries, are other countries doing better at maintaining their nuclear construction skills?



David Cunningham: You can look at the countries that are leading the way in the nuclear industry—China, South Korea—where they have had a continuous build programme for 40 years. South Korea started building nuclear power plants in 1986. It now has 24 in operation and two in build, two in planning. It has this continuation throughout and its workforce sees a career that is stable, and they are mobilised around the country where they need to be to follow the build programme. Interestingly, it has just started a decommissioning programme where the first two reactors shut down, so it is starting to develop those skills as well.

Other countries tend to buy it, which is a difficult challenge. I was in the UAE for five years and it brought in the workforce. At the same time as building, it upskilled the local population such that now it has four units on the grid and it is starting to take over with Emiratis in leadership roles.

Q62 **Chair:** Thank you. We will come to questions of competition between countries for skilled workers shortly. Before we do that, Sue, I do not know if it is directly from you, but Prospect in written evidence said, “The industry is well positioned to deliver another generation of these [nuclear] jobs if the Government make strong commitments to sector”. What commitments would you advocate for?

Sue Ferns: Some good measures have already been taken with the climate investment decision on cycle LC and the decision to invest in SMRs. However, we are still lacking certainty. We have a nuclear roadmap that tells us why we need a nuclear roadmap, but it does not tell us exactly what we need, how it will be built and who might build it. It is that lack of certainty. The mood music is positive, but we need greater certainty about what the delivery programme is because we see, for example around Hinckley Point C, that where there is greater certainty you get the skills development, the commitment from younger people to the industry and they know that they can get good local jobs. That is not evident everywhere and there are still a lot of pieces to be put into the jigsaw as far as we are concerned.

Q63 **Chair:** We recommended that the Government commit to a fleet approach in our report last year on the national policy statements, as you all know, and you gave evidence to us on that occasion. Is that the difference that you are looking for?

Sue Ferns: Yes, absolutely. We need the long-term certainty that allows investors to be confident to invest in the kit and the skills. We all know that investment in nuclear skills is not a short-term fix. It needs some certainty, some long-term planning and collaboration between Government and industry. For the people who are thinking about their futures, there is competition for skills. The members we have, the younger members we have, can choose to go into nuclear but their skills are also in demand in other parts of the sector. They need to know that if they commit to nuclear, there will be a good long-term future for them.



Q64 **Chair:** Do you have any particular recommendations on sites for either large-scale or further SMR?

Sue Ferns: We advocate for a mixed economy of large-scale and SMR sites. We would have liked to have seen a large-scale reactor at Wylfa. It is good that there is commitment to investment there. We feel that it is a bit of a wasted opportunity. One of the other things that we would like to see is a better joined-up approach between the decommissioning sector and the new build sector. We know that there are sites that are due for decommissioning that, with timely decisions, could also be new build sites, whether that is gigawatt or SMR. I am thinking, for example, about Hartlepool, Heysham and so on.

Chair: Using existing sites for new sites by having a more strategic approach.

Sue Ferns: A more strategic approach and a timely approach that allows skills transition that is already there to be retained within the industry and repurposed for a new build.

Q65 **Chair:** David, is that what is happening in other countries? You mentioned decommissioning briefly in your comments.

David Cunningham: It is early. The two main countries that do most of the building are China and South Korea. There are others that are building ones and twos, and they are in the same position as the United Kingdom is, where they are trying to figure out how you get certainty in long-term career prospects to maintain a workforce.

Q66 **Chair:** Mark, before I hand over to Lizzi, what specialist skills in nuclear do we lack compared with the wider construction sector? How long will it take us to develop those skills?

Mark Rouse: We are focused on health physics monitors, specialist scientists, people who need PhDs or specific training. We estimate that that is about 20% of the population, though, so most of the population has skills for nuclear that can come from many places and be used in that environment. We are running programmes to try to accelerate these things. Does it take seven to 10 years to get somebody into a productive place or can we get their brain power engaged more readily by using other experts who will bring them in and bring them up to speed in the sites a lot quicker? There are scarce skills in nuclear and we are very focused on recruiting those.

Q67 **Lizzi Collinge:** As it came up, Chair, and as we have some expertise here, I want to ask about the semi-urban population density criteria. As it applies to Heysham currently, we have two operating nuclear power stations but we cannot build SMRs there because of that. That has been recommended for review in Fingleton. I am trying to join all the dots here between making sure that the workforce in Heysham and elsewhere around the country has that pipeline through and those skills. Does the panel have any comments on how important that regulatory review is to



building the skills pipeline? Are there any comments in particular on the semi-urban population density criteria? I am thinking particularly of you, David, given your professional background, and what we should be doing with that instead.

David Cunningham: The thing to look at is that our ability and our skills in developing safety cases has advanced significantly since the population density criterion was set. We now do much more advanced safety case analysis around probabilistic and deterministic failures. With the generation 3 plants, the giga plants—I have to be careful how I say this—it is more possible to demonstrate safe operations within urban populations. I have to qualify that the two new builds that I have done in the two countries that I have worked in are very remote.

Q68 **Lizzi Collinge:** We have our two operating nuclear power stations already there, safely operating for decades. We have nuclear submarines that I presume come quite close to large population centres.

David Cunningham: Yes.

Chair: Mel, you have some questions on national and international competition for skilled workers.

Q69 **Melanie Onn:** Sue, how significant is the competition for skilled workers across different sectors, whether it is energy, defence, transport, other major infrastructure projects? Do you think that there is a risk to the timeline and timeframe for delivery of the nuclear programme, given that we have already seen quite extensive delays in the nuclear programme?

Sue Ferns: Yes, I do. In Prospect we represent people working across energy, defence, transport and other major infrastructure. At the moment, they can absolutely choose where they take their skills, a whole range of skills, some specialist skills, project managers. We also need to be clear that these are not all high-level skills. Competition for construction and craft skills is very high as well. We have seen, for example, people transitioning out of oil and gas who have chosen to take their skills overseas because it is more beneficial for them to do that. We have to be very careful about competition for skills, but if we can be clear about the long-term certainty, nuclear creates good jobs. It creates good local jobs for communities, skilled jobs, jobs with an opportunity for a career. There will always be market competition for salary, but we need to look more holistically about what nuclear is offering to people. Primarily it has to be about the certainty of the career and the ability to get on in the sector.

There is a lot of commitment to it. It is important for communities, but we have to be very clear not to be complacent that people will come into nuclear, because they do have other choices. There are some very competitive packages being offered particularly in the private sector. Partly as well there is an issue about where people are in their career cycle. It may be younger people without other commitments who are more attracted to go and work elsewhere.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q70 **Melanie Onn:** I will draw that to a close now, Sue, because I have a couple of other questions for the other panellists. Thank you so much for that.

Mark, we have had some evidence from other witnesses to this inquiry talking about the UK's siloed approach to skills development and the different projects and different areas of delivery of big projects. Is there any hope of an integrated skills model that would help?

Mark Rouse: There is a lot of hope for integrating the skills model to create a thing that is a sophisticated, integrated skills model that covers all the various projects. I do not think that that will ever happen, but we are putting a lot of effort into it.

Q71 **Melanie Onn:** It is not an achievable outcome?

Mark Rouse: Not in its fine detail, but joining things together within the nuclear sector, starting with civil and defence, joining them together, going into clean energy and working with the Office for Clean Energy Jobs, then working with Skills England and other devolved skills.

Q72 **Melanie Onn:** Are there too many bodies, too many groups? Might that be part of the problem?

Mark Rouse: There are a lot of groups. This thing has evolved like mad for a lot of years, but we are sitting in the middle of this and starting to glue things together, because they are all doing great things but they are not as connected as we would like, and we are certainly bringing that to it.

Q73 **Melanie Onn:** Sue touched on it not being all about salaries, but are UK salaries career pathways—perhaps even entry pathways into work, different working conditions, patterns—suitably attractive, suitably visible compared to the international nuclear markets? Is there more that could be done?

David Cunningham: There is always more that can be done, but at the entry level we are starting to attract the right people. We are setting up apprenticeships, we are putting graduate programmes in place. I spoke to Mark a couple of weeks ago and universities are starting to get engaged.

Q74 **Melanie Onn:** Does it all have to be about apprenticeships and graduate programmes? Are there other base-level training and entry routes that could be open?

David Cunningham: You can enter at any level, but if there is a career path and you have the right skills and aptitude, you will grow through that. I started life as an apprentice and now I am a very senior nuclear engineer.

Q75 **Melanie Onn:** I take a view on apprenticeships that they are harder to get, that the expectations of levels of qualifications are that those levels



are even higher. If you are not meeting those requirements, you cannot even get a look in.

David Cunningham: In our industry there is a requirement to demonstrate that you are suitably qualified and experienced. You have to have the base competency that is demonstrable. Then you have to build on top of that the experience. One of the challenges is that you do apprenticeships and they get a certificate, that is not the end of the road. They then have to go on what I term journeyman's time, the old-fashioned apprentices that did indentured apprenticeships, then did journeyman's time, became masters in their craft and continued to grow. But there is no reason why you should not start as a mechanic, get a mid-career apprenticeship and move through that way. There are lots of different ways to do it.

Q76 **Melanie Onn:** Mark, is the National Nuclear Strategic Plan for Skills—catchy title—on track to deliver the supposed 40,000 additional workers who are required by 2030? If it is, who is responsible for making sure that that target is met? Who is accountable for that?

Mark Rouse: A simple answer is yes, from the early evidence. We have moved from needing 40,000 extra jobs by 2030 to now 24,000, so the dial is moving significantly, but it does not get easier. We have a lot of tests to—

Melanie Onn: We have recruited 16,000 people?

Mark Rouse: Yes.

Melanie Onn: Directly?

Mark Rouse: Yes, that is from last year's nuclear workforce assessment carried out by Cogent Skills. Independently, it has gone to all the companies and asked, "What are the numbers? What has moved?" I am not kidding myself that that is the end of the equation and that we just keep ploughing on to that. We are governed by a group called the Nuclear Skills Executive Council. I should say that we have dropped the long title. It is the Nuclear Skills Plan. It is too big a mouthful.

The executive council is chaired by DG level in MOD and DESNZ and is made up of the chief executives of the prime nuclear companies. That is the real game changer. Suddenly you have the leaders of these businesses doing what is needed and supporting a funded team to go on and drive all the initiatives to try to get the skills in. They are ultimately accountable, the people who pay the money into the system and the people who run these businesses. We are not forgetting the supply chain, but we are bringing them in now that we have this council established and leading the way.

Q77 **Melanie Onn:** How are they accountable?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mark Rouse: They are accountable into Government. The Government chair those committees. We have turned this into a project of targets and metrics and numbers, not just aspirations and wish lists. They monitor against that. We look at who is leading, who is following, who is achieving what.

Q78 **Melanie Onn:** Can people be removed if they are not achieving?

Mark Rouse: I guess the chairs could choose to do that, but we want all of those companies involved. This is about proving that a collective can do more than the individuals, and that is what the numbers are suggesting so far.

Q79 **Melanie Onn:** How are people accountable if nobody will be removed if this 16,000 does not materialise up to 40,000?

Mark Rouse: There will be pressure applied to the system, as there is now. We do not hit every target every time at the moment, so there is pressure applied.

Q80 **Melanie Onn:** Sue, what more should Government and industry do to strengthen the nuclear skills pipeline at every level, including apprenticeships, undergraduate programmes and PhD training?

Sue Ferns: The Nuclear Skills Plan is a welcome contribution and is making a contribution. If we are going to meet those targets, we have to be looking at people who are not currently in the nuclear workforce. That means diversifying the workforce. It means, as you have just touched on, attracting people in who cannot meet the academic requirements for apprenticeships. It means thinking about the energy transition and do we have a proper strategy to ensure that people moving from other sectors can move into nuclear. There may be initiatives in each of those areas. I do not think that there is a joined-up programme that is visible to everybody. There is a lot that the private sector can do, but given the level of Government investment in this sector, there is probably more leverage that Government could apply in training requirements when it is providing funding for new projects.

Q81 **Melanie Onn:** Thank you. Mark, the Nuclear Skills Plan is meant to be increasing academic places, but they seem to be decreasing those as well as the centres for doctoral training. Why is that?

Mark Rouse: I cannot announce it in this Committee, but there are some things coming along where Government have invested significant money in the centres for doctoral training. Our target is to quadruple the number and we are on target and we will announce that at the end of the month.

Q82 **Melanie Onn:** Why has it fallen over in the last three years? Was it just a funding issue?

Mark Rouse: Lack of investment, the cycle that the CDTs have gone through themselves—some were on the up and some were coming to a natural conclusion.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q83 **Melanie Onn:** Industry has not felt the need to keep that steady, for its own sake?

Mark Rouse: The whole process is based on match funding. Going forward, we have significant match funding from industry, so we are pretty pleased with the way things will develop but I do accept that there was a bit of a lull while we got ourselves into action and leveraged a significant amount of money.

Q84 **Melanie Onn:** What does a bit of a lull mean?

Mark Rouse: The industry was getting the funding in place, getting the spending reviews in place.

Q85 **Melanie Onn:** What does the impact of that lull mean? What did the decrease look like?

Mark Rouse: We stayed flat. We did not reduce the CDTs. We found money when we thought that one of the CDTs might slow down. We maintained the numbers and we are now quadrupling going forward from next year.

Q86 **Melanie Onn:** You did not maintain the numbers, because they went down. They fell over a three-year period. What did they look like three years ago and what do they look like now?

Mark Rouse: On the numbers, I have to say that we stayed steady. We were worried about one of the CDTs closing and we found the money to fund it.

Q87 **Melanie Onn:** The Nuclear Futures Institute at Bangor University says that, "undergraduate students, the number of Centre for Doctoral Training in fission-related subjects has fallen over the last 3 years". That is not the same as your information. Why is not it the same?

Mark Rouse: I am not sure. I would have to go and check those numbers.

Q88 **Torcuil Crichton:** Thank you all for coming in and for your evidence. Before I move on to my own questions, I will pick up on what Mel was saying about skills, particularly in Scotland where we have Torness and Hunterston running down. Perhaps, Sue, you are best placed to give us a picture of what happens to that workforce and what happens to regenerating that workforce should Scotland have another nuclear plant?

Sue Ferns: There is a great deal of concern among the workforce and their communities. These are good jobs and they are worried about what will happen to them in the future and the impact on their own careers and their communities as well. There is a joint trade union campaign that is designed to influence the Scottish Government, whatever the Scottish Government are after the election, to keep the nuclear auction open. It is an important contributor to the Scottish economy, but we are very concerned about it at the moment.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q89 **Torcuil Crichton:** David, you mentioned earlier that there were two kinds of countries that do nuclear, those that build and those that buy. With SMRs and advanced module reactors, some of that will be bought off the shelf, I am guessing.

David Cunningham: What are we talking about, sorry? Buy in terms of the people and the technology?

Torcuil Crichton: Will the jobs be here in the UK or will they be international jobs?

David Cunningham: Both. If we were to choose to build—the best example is the AP1000 from Westinghouse. It is American technology. A lot of the supply chain is already in existence. There are 16 of those plants in construction around the world, so you would be buying a lot of it from outside. The operating of the technology and the construction could be largely done in the UK, but it will require a significant uplift in skills. The way to do that, my experience shows me, is that you have a broad approach where you upskill your local communities and you bring in some external support.

Q90 **Torcuil Crichton:** Sue, these nuclear reactors will involve fewer people in construction and in running, won't they? We will have fewer nuclear jobs at these sites.

Sue Ferns: Yes. Until we get these new reactors built, it is difficult to be precise exactly about how many jobs there will be. It also depends how they are done. For example, at Sizewell C, there are 10,000 jobs for 3 GW of generation. The projections for Wylfa are 3,000 jobs for 1.4 GW, which tends to suggest that SMRs are around 30% less jobs-rich than large-scale reactors. That is not to say that those jobs are not important, but they do appear to be less jobs-rich. Of course, it also depends on what commitments are given about supply chain, for example, for steel, pressure vessels or nuclear fuel. All that has the opportunity to increase UK jobs but we do not know that that will happen yet. As I understand it, those commitments have not been made as yet for Wylfa. There are welcome jobs but it is less jobs-rich than large-scale reactors.

Q91 **Torcuil Crichton:** Understood. Mark, when you were responding to Mel earlier, you talked about a financial lull in the sector. What can be done to incentivise private money to come in so that you have a consistent flow all the way through?

Mark Rouse: It has been mentioned already that they need that certainty, and certainty to a certain level that will allow people to invest, and seeing it as something that is not just locked into the nuclear sector. As I said earlier, we are trying to work with other sectors, other parts of our sector, so that we create a pool of people that the country can move around. What I would hate to do is create this huge nuclear workforce and then just wrap our arms around them and trap them, especially as projects and programmes move around. They are a skill base to be used



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and because they are 80% skills for nuclear, they can be moved around. They can do rail infrastructure and civil infrastructure.

Q92 **Torcuil Crichton:** That is one of the biggest resentments of host communities, though, isn't it? The money flies in on Monday and flies out on a Thursday to go and live either internationally or in London or far away from the host community. What can we do to stop that?

Mark Rouse: A lot of our work is through our regional skills hubs. We recognise that we are running a national programme with national imperatives, but that it happens in the various regions and devolved nations. We are trying to understand what the pattern of work is there. Not everybody is on the same lifecycle and not all the same things happen. It is never as convenient as you would like. When you want everybody to finish at Hinckley C and move to Sizewell, it will not happen like that. We need to map those individual areas and understand what else is competing so that you have a community of people who can do a range of tasks.

Q93 **Torcuil Crichton:** Sue, you must see that pattern as well among your members who work in one place but live in another place. Certainly we know Scottish workers who are going south every week and coming back.

Sue Ferns: Absolutely, yes.

Torcuil Crichton: What effect does that have on the workforce, workers and their families, and on host communities? What can be done about it?

Sue Ferns: Some people are obviously willing to do that, but it does put stress on individuals and their families, with a large degree of separation. We have had incidents of younger workers with extreme mental health issues and monitoring suicides from prolonged absence away from home. It is the way it is because those are the skilled workers that we have at the moment, but it is not ideal. A lot of people would like to see a nuclear roadmap that allows their skills to be used within range of their own home communities.

Q94 **Torcuil Crichton:** Are there any international lessons of comparators or does this industry work the same way globally? Is there anything we can learn from existing sites in the UK or abroad?

David Cunningham: Where the nuclear industry is moving, it is a global industry now and the skills will move. It is not just professional engineers, it is welders and health physicists. They go where they are attracted. I am sympathetic to Scotland. I grew up on the west coast of Scotland and I am worried about what happens when the skills move away from Hunterston, because how do you keep them, how do you get them back? Once they have moved, they settle and their children settle and there is an ongoing effect.

The United Arab Emirates, where I spent five years, is a much smaller country but physically the size of Wales. If you imagine that the power



HOUSE OF COMMONS

plant was the equivalent of where Cardiff is and a lot of the people lived in the north of the country, in the northern Emirates, which is probably about the same distance as Wylfa, they are showing now the difficulty in retaining people because they just want to go home. They have attracted them during the build phase but they are now struggling to maintain those operators because they get fed up travelling. That is just human nature. They want to be with their families.

Q95 **Torcuil Crichton:** Is that something we should look out for here?

David Cunningham: Yes. You mentioned the Scottish Government's current policy. With Hunterston running down, that is an ideal site for an SMR project, or Heysham as well. It retains the skills and it gives the long-term certainty that Mark was talking to, which allows people to plan their career and say, "There is a future in this for me, so I will stick with it".

Torcuil Crichton: Mark, do you want to come in here?

Mark Rouse: It is a reminder to us all, when we bandy around some great big numbers, whether people or regions or money, that there are real people behind these. We have to take into account when we are just moving the numbers around that these are real people, the experience they have, and try to factor that into the grand strategies.

Q96 **Chair:** David, I want to come back, because I missed it earlier when you answered Torcuil, to the potential for job losses in the UK through factory construction, and we heard in our last session, likely in Korea. To what extent should we be concerned about that for SMRs and AMRs?

David Cunningham: I was talking to a former colleague at the weekend. He and his wife are both experienced nuclear professionals currently working in Vienna on IEA work. They are looking to where to go next. Ten years ago in new build they had one choice and it was in Abu Dhabi. Now there are 67 power stations in construction, from the IEA figures this morning. People who are willing to move have tremendous opportunity to do that.

Q97 **Chair:** What about factory construction?

David Cunningham: On the factory construction element of the supply chain, Westinghouse is building in multiple countries. It will build a supply chain in one place and form it elsewhere. Korea did the same. Korea's supply chain came from Korea to the Emirates, and that has now been lined up to supply the Czech Republic because the Czechs are building a modified version of the Korean plan.

Q98 **Chair:** Are those jobs that are likely to stay in other countries rather than coming here?

David Cunningham: Yes.

Q99 **Claire Young:** I want to ask a few questions about how the Government



HOUSE OF COMMONS

can stimulate lasting private investment in nuclear skills. Sue, you have already talked about the need for a long-term plan for the certainty, but are there any other things that the Government can do to incentivise private sector investment in nuclear skills and workforce development beyond 2030?

Sue Ferns: As I said, there is a lot of Government money here. We have Great British Energy Nuclear and the National Wealth Fund and we need also to think about what an active industrial strategy means for government incentivisation and directive. The Government are spending a lot of public money. It is perfectly reasonable for them to have expectations of investment, not just in the plan but in the skills as well. Who gives something for nothing? Nobody does. It is in our national interest for Government to set expectations, for example percentage of workforces that are on apprenticeships, the quality of jobs being created, the contribution to social value. I do not think that there are perfect instruments to do that at the moment, but we have the foundation. I know that the Government are looking separately at public procurement and what the strategy might be for public procurement. There are various opportunities there to make sure that if we have a roadmap that provides the long-term certainty, the private companies who will invest in it but also benefit from it give back their fair share to the workforce, to the skills and to the community.

Q100 **Claire Young:** How can you secure that commitment? Is there a particular formal mechanism?

Sue Ferns: There are contracts to be signed, aren't there? For example, there is a contract to be signed for the Rolls-Royce development at Wylfa. As trade unions we have just been involved in discussions with the employers in a different sector, offshore wind, and Government about a fair work charter whereby the employers give commitment to certain standards of employment, creation of good opportunities for people. There is an opportunity for initiatives like that to be rolled out more widely as well. There is a number of opportunities but we need to turn our minds and focus on those. Now is the time to do it before those investments are being made.

Q101 **Claire Young:** Mark, we have talked about Monday to Thursday jobs and that has historically been the situation for many of the elite jobs. Should all major projects be obligated to secure lasting community benefits so that the local community is securing some of these jobs? If so, how?

Mark Rouse: Yes, I think that everybody in the nuclear sector and the industry is committed to that local footprint. We know that we get a huge permission from our local communities to do what we do in the industry, but it is a balance that is being talked about. You want to feed the local community and you want to have the hotbed of skills there that respect nuclear and do not fear it. I have never seen fear in local communities, but a lot of respect, a lot of understanding. But then you have people



HOUSE OF COMMONS

who want to move around and they cannot always further their careers in the local area. It is getting that balance and seeing what is possible.

We mentioned pathways and curriculums. It is being able to explain, in a sector that is probably one of the least understood and closed shop, what is possible. Nuclear, in my experience, is a normal community of people. There are some very, very clever people. There is a whole community of people who work on a nuclear site or on nuclear projects. We need to paint to people that there are ways into that, there are ways out of it, there are ways back in it again. You are not stuck and following one path.

Q102 Claire Young: Is there a danger sometimes that the focus on local jobs is on the lower-paid ones requiring fewer qualifications?

Mark Rouse: Not in my experience, and a lot of my experience comes from running the facility in Dounreay. Thurso had the highest IQ in the UK for a lot of time. It called them the atomics. It attracted people there. I am sure if we look at other communities, it drives high IQ. As Dave said, some of those people are very in demand. People will wave money in front of them, opportunities to broaden themselves and they will like to move. That might create a certain difference but I do not think it creates that difference in itself.

Q103 Claire Young: David, do you think there are any lessons that can be learnt about developing a workforce pipeline for future sites, either from the current UK nuclear sites or international projects?

David Cunningham: I have some notes here. I spoke to the talent acquisition manager for Barakah, which lifted from nothing to four operating power plants. That is effectively like taking one of our UK sites, let's say Wylfa, and how you get people. He talked about, high-impact teams, streamlined recruitment, moving quickly, getting the salary base real so that it was attractive, promoting the project globally so that you are attracting people from all over, making it attractive for people to come, and using innovative strategies in how to recruit and how to attract and then retain. It is the retention that is the problem. We should not be scared about the fact that people move, because people moving for their careers allows that growth. You are always going to get it. I have found that when people move, the person who comes in might bring new ideas that help promote a better way of doing things.

The Koreans are much more stable because they started in 1986 and they have had a continuous build programme throughout, so that is great. If you look at what is happening in Turkey and in Egypt, where they have bought VVR plants from Russia, they are bringing people into technical colleges and then they are sending them to Russia for two or three years to get their skills on plant and then bringing them back again. The Poles are looking at buying people in. The Czechs, because they have an established nuclear programme, are looking at doing it themselves in-house without using the global market.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q104 **Claire Young:** Given we have had this long gap, we are stuck in the middle, aren't we, in that we have a history of nuclear but we have had a long break?

David Cunningham: There is a black hole behind me, because I came into the industry in the 1980s and then we stopped building and the recruitment opportunities, the career opportunities, fell off after we built Sizewell B.

Q105 **Claire Young:** Are there other examples internationally?

David Cunningham: Where it has dropped and picked up again?

Claire Young: Where it has dropped and picked up and how they have done the picking up.

David Cunningham: You will see similar in America. That is starting to happen because they are starting to reopen plants. It has just opened Palo Verde recently, commissioned Palo Verde. It is the Canadians as well after they have had a dip. There are similarities; I do not think that there is anybody further ahead than we are. We are all in the same challenge.

Q106 **Claire Young:** I represent an area that has a decommissioning power station. Sue, often the political focus is on the new reactors because we all like new and shiny in politics, don't we? But nuclear obviously requires skills across that entire lifecycle. Do you think that that focus has overshadowed the needs of decommissioning, waste management and regulation?

Sue Ferns: Yes, I do. If you look at the focus on new build, it is a largely very positive story, and then you look at decommissioning. You will know in your own constituency and across the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, they are in the process of downsizing jobs by 1,200 or so. I have asked and I do not think that there is any monitoring or check about what skills are being lost as a result of that. There should be clearly a much better joined-up approach there.

Completing the decommissioning mission is essential for a vibrant new build sector. We do not say that enough. We do not value the decommissioning mission sufficiently. On current experience, neither do we value the decommissioning workforce sufficiently. They are getting one story, the new build workforce is getting a completely different story, but it is all part of the same cycle. When we are thinking about how we use skills, how we value people, we need to be much clearer and more joined up in the way that we do that. There is a huge gap there at the moment.

Q107 **Claire Young:** Presumably there will be the same dip but shifted decades on, in that there will be a period where we were not building. Given that we are extending lives of power stations, there will be a period where we will not be adding to the number being decommissioned as much. There is a period where we are, which is now, but then there will be that same



dip, won't there? Can people freely move back and forth between the two, or are they seen as distinct workforces?

Sue Ferns: At the moment they are seen as distinct workforces. The decommissioning workforce is ostensibly a public sector workforce. It is easy to talk about people moving from one area to another, but in practical terms you have to think about their contracts of employment and what barriers exist to movement. The industry is not very good at thinking about ways of reducing or removing those barriers. There are lots of practical things to think about there, and we need to be better at that.

Q108 **Claire Young:** Mark, is the UK preparing enough skilled personnel for the long-term decommissioning waste programmes or will we have a shortage in this?

Mark Rouse: We have a challenge ahead. We have recognised that we have a hell of a challenge ahead and we are starting to act on it, but it is a big ask to create those numbers given the gaps that we have had, given the different phasing of the different projects. That is why the approach is to act as that collaborative sector, to start saying, "You have this wonderfully skilled workforce who do difficult and challenging things in decommissioning, they can be used in other areas". We have people with ex-military backgrounds who have led really dynamic and interesting lives. How do you find them roles in these projects? We are only 18 months, nearly two years in. Destination Nuclear is the first visible sign of it, but that is the first time we have ever operated as a sector where we have sat down—I have a strong background in safety from the nuclear sector—and I saw no barriers. Everybody shares, everybody opens up and says, "I have a problem here, can you help me?" I am just beginning to see the beginnings of that in our group.

As you said, there are downturns in some areas but where are those skills going? Where could they be used? They have already gone up the learning curve. How could they find somebody else who is in a trough? But then you take into account different wages, different locations. We are trying to sit in the middle, have our databases, understand the people and who will fit where, which is where certainty comes back again. It is very hard to do that if everything is a variable. If you have some fixed bits, you can start making some big decisions.

Sue Ferns: I agree with that. Let's be clear—we have talked about it—it is a competitive market. Industry will talk about collaboration and I would love to see more collaboration but what I am seeing now is a competitive market, companies acting—I am not saying that they all do it all the time, but the imperative, if you are accountable to shareholders, is to act in the interests of the organisation that you are running. Collaboration is absolutely a great objective. The reality can be shareholder returns, "We need these people now, we will compete and we will get those people".

Q109 **Claire Young:** Should you be getting that decommissioning capability in



place before committing to further new builds?

Sue Ferns: What we need to do is commit to new builds so that the workforce who are currently in the decommissioning sector can see a pathway to their future employment. That is absolutely what we should be doing. That is why we need the roadmap, a clear roadmap, and certainty now. That way we will keep the skills in the workforce and those people on decommissioning sites will not have to move halfway across the country. They should be able to move on to a new project on the site where they are already working.

Claire Young: David, you look like you want to say something.

David Cunningham: If we take this as a long-term programme—the roadmap takes us out to 2050—if you take that view, you will get a cycle, you will have new builds, they will go into operation and then they will go to decommissioning. Eventually you will get a stability and a stable throughput. As Sue said, you can then take the workforce and use the decommissioning skills and put them back into new build. Decommissioning and commissioning are very similar in the skills that are needed, so they can be repurposed, reprogrammed.

Q110 **Claire Young:** Sue mentioned the division between the public sector for the decommissioning versus the competing private sector companies building the new power stations. Do you see that distinction as being a problem and do you have any suggestions for that?

David Cunningham: Decommissioning is not attractive because it is seen as the end of life. If you are an enthusiastic engineer, you want to be doing new stuff, you want to be building stuff, not making sure it is safe as you take it apart. But it is part of a career because, as Mark said, the whole focus of the nuclear industry is on safety and understanding safety and that everything you do is safe. You can learn a lot about safety working in decommissioning and it can be brought back into new build. Equally, working in new build operations you have that safety culture embedded. If you use it as part of a career path, if you are managing careers, you go off and do a little bit here, a little bit there.

I was in the Navy for 30 years. My career was managed. I was sent to do the jobs that I needed to do as I moved up the ladder. There is no reason why in a nuclear industry you cannot say that you need these skillsets to move up in seniority. You do a little bit of decommissioning, a little bit of new build, a little bit of operations, a little bit of research, the professional careers. The technical careers, the technicians and the workforce, equally can bring skills across all sectors.

Q111 **Claire Young:** Is there a formal mentoring role or something that the industry needs to be managing its workforce?

David Cunningham: There is an opportunity. I was reading about this. In Japan, when people get to my age—I am 60, about to come out the top—they get repurposed—or rather, not repurposed; they are very



HOUSE OF COMMONS

unfair words. You become a mentor, you go into coaching so that you are not losing the skills as they retire into the sunset. France has problems at the moment because a lot of the people that built its fleet are now in their 70s and have long since retired. The opportunity for us, as we see the people of my generation come to this age, is to bring them back in to help mentor in the middle. It is the hollow middle that is the problem at the moment.

We have talked about bringing people in at the bottom, and that is great: more apprentices, more graduates, more different ways of getting people in. If you are not academically clever enough to get an apprenticeship, go and demonstrate skills through experience. That is how I got my master's degree, through skills and prior knowledge. Then use the experienced people to help mentor and grow them so that you have this cycle with nuclear skills. That works in all industry, by the way. That is not just particular to nuclear. That can work in any industry.

Claire Young: The peculiarity with nuclear is the way it is had the dip.

David Cunningham: Yes.

Q112 **Claire Young:** Do you want to add anything on that, Mark?

Mark Rouse: We call up sector experts into training as one of our programmes to try to do that to, and it has two benefits. First, it gets those sector experts to go and train people, and it creates a gap to pull people through. I used the phrase that I needed to get out of my own way at Dounreay, because I am sat there at the head of the organisation stopping people coming through. Often there is quite a big age gap, so you look at it and you say they can't possibly. Of course they can. People had faith in us. We were good enough when we were younger, they are good enough now. But if we are all sat there just running the organisations rather than stepping aside, giving our guidance and our support, the whole thing deadheads. It is a challenge, isn't it? It is a dip. There is a big gap in there that you have to acknowledge and work with.

Chair: Melanie, you want to come back to the one of your earlier questions.

Q113 **Melanie Onn:** I do, yes. Mark, I want to check on some numbers. You said that over the last year 16,000 people have been recruited towards this additional 40,000 target, but the NIA says 11,000. Why is there a 5,000-person discrepancy?

Mark Rouse: We work with NIA. It is looking at different things through a different lens. Our data comes from talking directly to the companies themselves and asking them how many people they have in their company at this moment and how do we judge it against the demand figure that they create. That is where the 40,000 originally came from. It is measuring that difference.

Q114 **Melanie Onn:** You do a survey of the companies. Do you get 100%



HOUSE OF COMMONS

return on the survey or do you have to extrapolate some of the numbers?

Mark Rouse: We get 100% from our primes. We are having to extrapolate a little bit on the supply chain and we are currently working with the NIA to improve that.

Q115 **Melanie Onn:** Do you include supply chain in this 40,000 figure?

Mark Rouse: The way we describe it is we model it, based on some discussions.

Q116 **Melanie Onn:** How far down the tail of the supply chain do you go?

Mark Rouse: The modelling makes assumptions about the very big companies and the very small companies. As I say, we have just initiated some work with NIA and ADS on the defence side to refine that data.

Q117 **Melanie Onn:** Do you know what model the NIA uses compared to yours?

Mark Rouse: I don't personally. I know that the team have talked to the NIA.

Q118 **Melanie Onn:** On the basis that I also used to do these surveys of companies and businesses and it was never that easy to get the data and get it in a timely fashion and accurately, and given that some jobs were on a part-time basis or a contracted basis or whatever it might be, how confident are you in that 16,000 figure compared to the NIA, which presumably would be very confident in their 11,000 figure?

Mark Rouse: I am confident in where it comes from. I am confident that it is not perfect to decimal places. It is why we see the data as one of our big areas of investment. We need to understand the nuances of our sector. If I get this right to decimal places, I am probably missing the point. There are some big numbers here, there are some big shifts in the number of people that we need to attract in the demographics.

Q119 **Melanie Onn:** Given that one of the questions was who is accountable for getting these additional 40,000 jobs, and we have lost 5,000 in half an hour, which is not really very good—

Mark Rouse: It is a different basis of counting. We are confident for the questions that we have asked.

Q120 **Melanie Onn:** It is a spreadsheet rounding error between different methodologies; 5,000 is not a decimal point, is it? It is quite a lot.

Mark Rouse: Different measures for different reasons.

Q121 **Melanie Onn:** Sue, do you feel confident in saying that this 40,000 are 40,000 potential new members of Prospect?

Sue Ferns: That would be fantastic. No, I am not confident in the number. I do not know exactly what each organisation is measuring. I do



HOUSE OF COMMONS

not know whether they are measuring what is going out at the other end as well.

Q122 **Melanie Onn:** It would be helpful to have a single stat that everybody can come together and say that this is definitely the number and that we are making progress and are not extrapolating down, even the percentage between what are your primary employers versus what is your supply chain. If your supply chain is 80% of your numbers versus 20% of the primary, potentially your extrapolation is on 80% of the figures, which would not be accurate.

Mark Rouse: Agreed. Absolutely.

Chair: Thank you. That brings us to the end of the first panel. Thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon. We will take a short break while we convene the second panel.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Councillor Richard Rout, Councillor Struan Mackie and Zion Lights.

Q123 **Chair:** Welcome back to this afternoon's session of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee, revisiting the nuclear roadmap. Welcome to panel two, on balancing national interests and community voices. Can you introduce yourselves, please, starting on this side?

Zion Lights: My name is Zion Lights. I am a science communicator. I have been involved in nuclear communications for quite a long time, but I am not part of the industry officially.

Councillor Mackie: Good afternoon. My name is Councillor Struan Mackie. I represent the Thurso and North West Caithness ward on the Highland Council, and I am also the Chair of the Dounreay stakeholder group, which is the statutory site stakeholder group for the Dounreay civil nuclear site as well as the defence site at Vulcan.

Councillor Rout: Good afternoon. I am Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. I am also the Chair of the New Nuclear Local Authorities Group, or NNLAG.

Q124 **Chair:** Thank you. You are all welcome and we look forward to your evidence. Zion, nuclear development can be highly disruptive. From the experience of Hinckley and Sizewell, what are the most significant impacts on local communities as far as you are concerned?

Zion Lights: I have been down to visit those communities several times, and other communities like Wylfa, and I find that there is quite a lot of support and not concern about impact. You can talk about noise and more vehicles on the road, small things, but most people tend to be quite supportive and not concerned. I find that the loudest voices tend to be people who either do not live in the area or in some cases have a second home there and so they want it to be a nice quiet place and then that is disrupted, but local support is usually quite high. People are very supportive, particularly because of the jobs aspect.

Q125 **Chair:** Thank you. The Committee heard some very similar comments when we visited the Sizewell C site and we will come on to some of that. Struan, are these impacts inherent to the development process, where we get some opposition at least, or can they be better mitigated through planning and early engagement?

Councillor Mackie: Early engagement is really important. In many respects there is a lot of consultation with the community at the tail end of the planning process. When we are talking about siting, the vision for these installations and how nationally important they are, that is when we need to be having as much dialogue with communities as possible. I agree with the point that particularly nuclear communities that already have sites, we understand what disruption looks like, we have seen it



over decades and we have seen different degrees of development. In addition to that, we are in a position where the type of development going forward is slightly different to some of the legacy stuff. That is where we need to look at what the fleet approach looks like and also the SMR.

Q126 Chair: Richard, to pick up on that point, do you think that with the development of different types of technology, that brings additional challenges for communities, who are perhaps less familiar or have a different set of concerns to what has been there before?

Councillor Rout: First I will pick up on one of Zion's points, because her reflection on Sizewell was interesting. It depends on how you look at the geography. In Leiston, a community that is used to hosting a nuclear power station, yes, within the town it is welcoming, but when you get a little further away, that is where the opposition is. With new technologies, it depends on the communities that will be hosting it. Former industrial areas that are used to or have lost industrial sectors would be quite welcoming. Nuclear brings with it fears, many of which are unsubstantiated, and that is where the early engagement is key. Perhaps we might come to engagement and consultation later.

Q127 Torcuil Crichton: Thank you all for coming in. Zion, I am interested in what you said there about the loudest voices are often not from the host community, they are from people who have come in—you seemed to say—and from holiday home owners. In fact you might have been one of these yourself; your story is quite interesting. You went from being anti-nuclear to pro-nuclear. Tell us a bit of that journey as well.

Zion Lights: I went down to Sizewell to have a look and to look at the waste casks and speak to the residents. There was overwhelming support for nuclear there, in my experience. I was really surprised at how supportive people were. They said they often had anti-nuclear groups having stalls exactly where we had our stalls, and they said, "We're sick of seeing them here. They're not welcome here. Who are they? They don't live here." This is what the residents were saying: "They don't live here, they are coming from London, they have second homes. This is where our home is." Right after that there was another protest, a local protest, and a celebrity who came down from London was quoted in the press as saying, "This is will disrupt my lifestyle here". He bought a second home there to have a nice quiet, peaceful place away from London and felt that the noise would be disruptive.

You could argue there is definitely an element of there will be disruption, which is quite loud—he had quite a big protest, and because he is a celebrity he had quite a lot of people, much more than I was able to gather when I went down there. But the local voices tend to be ignored, in my experience. They were quite frustrated when I spoke to people because they said, "He gets quoted in the press and we don't get asked".

Q128 Torcuil Crichton: Interesting. There is a long experience of hosting



down generations. There are pluses and minuses of that. Can you tell me what these are and tell me what the red lines are, where the needs of the community perhaps have to trump our need for clean energy?

Councillor Mackie: Absolutely. Our community in Caithness and North Sutherland has been part of various national missions, whether it was fast reactor research technology or the submarine delivery programme or indeed now going into decommissioning. Over successive decades, and indeed generations, we have seen a part of the UK that has struggled massively with depopulation be able to attract some of the top talent anywhere in the Commonwealth.

That has been a fantastic place to grow up with access to first-class education and the fact that there was a very competitive spirit when you were growing up. I was alongside somebody whose dad was literally a nuclear scientist, and somebody else who had some experience as well. There was a real drive. We have seen for decades a huge economic benefit that has come with the nuclear industry, but at times we have also had to deal with what has been a legacy project and programme. The rules, regulations and practices of the '50s, '60s and '70s are not acceptable today.

For that reason, we continue to have to challenge the site and continue to engage with regulators to understand what decommissioning looks like. There are quite clear red lines about some high hazards and making sure that ultimately the site's primary role is to keep the community safe while delivering the national mission. That is where that dialogue needs to continue.

Q129 **Torcuil Crichton:** You talked about some unfounded fears in communities, but there are risks obviously, not just nuclear ones but social ones and environmental ones for host communities. These have to be balanced against national need, and I am sure that some of you wrestle with this as a council. Where is the line? Is it right to put national ahead of local?

Councillor Rout: I think the mistake that Zion is making is talking to communities immediately around a power station. The benefits are not necessarily felt where the impacts are most acutely felt. If I am talking about transport corridors, park and ride sites, thousands of HGVs going through communities that are not ordinarily used to them, and very often communities where the demographics are quite different to the town adjacent to the site, so they will not be looking for jobs or employment there.

It is that distinction between where impacts are felt and where benefits are felt. But I am clearly pro-nuclear. We need to roll forward the programme, and I think it is important not to shy away from the fact that impacts will be felt locally. I think you need to be honest about that. When we come to consultation later, there are two sorts of consultation. You can look at should this project happen or how will this project



happen. We need to be very honest with communities that when something like a nuclear power station is proposed it is very likely going ahead and, therefore, it is how it should go ahead.

Q130 Torcuil Crichton: On some evidence we heard earlier, there is a Monday to Thursday economy. Do you see that in both your areas?

Councillor Mackie: In Caithness and North Sutherland we are very fortunate. Sometimes we think of our remote location as being a detractor. Once you are up in my neck of the woods, it is quite hard to get here and there is a benefit in that the permanent workforce is very permanent and very sticky. The nature of the industry means that there are contractors going across all different types of the nuclear estate, whether that is decommissioning or new build.

One of the things we have a little bit of a concern about is that when you are looking at new development, thousands and thousands of transient workers will be required and there is the impact that will have on the communities. When Dounreay was being established there were multiple workers camps, an apprentice lodge and a whole load of infrastructure that was put in very early on to support the development. Even as we are trying to deliver nationally critical missions for either decommissioning or continuing to operate existing power stations, new build will effectively add an additional layer on top and that is when there is a very substantive impact.

Councillor Rout: Looking at Suffolk I think the key thing, particularly when we are trying to encourage communities to at least be at ease with these projects, is to secure the local legacy and employment benefit. Struan is absolutely correct that a lot of the time that is imported workforce. We have been working with Sizewell C and Nigel Cann, the new CEO there, on how we can have the legacy benefit, whether that is a centre of excellence for operations and maintenance. You need to make that pitch for longevity because this is a community that has experienced nuclear before and experienced the boom and bust. During construction there is a huge amount of employment and a huge amount of money coming into the area. When construction stops that can go, so how do you give it that longevity and legacy?

Zion Lights: Can I add something? I think there is something a little bit wrong with that framing of national versus local interest because no one talks about the risk to the communities of losing nuclear once they have had it, and that is important. I have been down to Wylfa and interviewed people for an article I wrote there. I was so touched—and this is someone who came from being anti-nuclear, so I did not have the great perception of the industry; not necessarily the workers, but as a whole—when I spoke to grandparents who said, “I spent my whole career at Wylfa. I started out as a cleaner.” This is not an exaggeration, the stats reflect it—I got apprenticeships, I got training, we had a community because we had regular dances. All of that has gone and all of my children have



had to move away, mostly to London, because they cannot find work here.”

No one is talking about the risk of the loss of not bridging that gap of, “Fine, we are decommissioning, but what is next for these communities?” They do not want to leave. I spoke to a young person there who said that because there was a promise that Wylfa would go ahead from the previous Government, she went to do a PhD in nuclear engineering. There was no job for her at the end. She moved to London and still lives there. She said to me, “I am a first language Welsh speaker, I wanted to stay in Wales and I will come back to Wales when there is an opportunity here.”

Q131 Lizzi Collinge: That is interesting for me, coming from a perspective of Heysham where, even with extensions, we are moving towards defueling and then decommissioning. What I am trying to work out is how to make that a bridge into the next generation of nuclear in Heysham. I want to talk about consultations. It was interesting, Struan, what you said before about the timing of consultations. Quite often in the planning process people are consulted at the end of the process rather than the beginning. What would you change about that when we are talking about nuclear projects? Would it be different for existing host communities versus new communities, or outer communities, as Richard pointed out?

Councillor Mackie: One of the things we need to acknowledge is that, looking at the roadmap and looking at the UK Government’s ambitions, it is relatively inconceivable that we are talking about new communities in the short to medium term. The discussions that we will have are with communities that already have nuclear installations.

I was incredibly impressed by the UK Atomic Energy Authority with their STEP programme. That was as close as I have seen to an open call to the community saying, “We have a nationally important project and we are looking for sites that have the experience, the knowledge, the land and the capability of being able to do stuff”. That allowed the earliest form of engagement that I have personally seen in my time as a councillor, and it was something that I got heavily involved in as a local councillor, putting it through the Highland Council and getting community support.

Consultation will always be flawed unless you have the idea of community consent sitting right at the heart at the very start. A lot of nuclear communities feel that there is community consent for new nuclear but we do not have a vehicle to get there, which is very frustrating, particularly if you come from Scotland and there is a devolved issue sitting in the way. But there is also a layer that sits underneath that, which is that we are very focused on getting the plan operational and getting everything ticked and the first person hitting that button on the reactor. This is realistically a commitment that we are talking about for a century.

When we are talking about consultation we need to be taking people through the generational outlook of these operations and talking—as Zion



said earlier—about the opportunities that will exist right the way through, including the decommissioning bit. Historically, in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, that was not a fundamental part of what people looked at and that is why we are dealing with the legacy elements today.

Q132 Lizzi Collinge: That is interesting because I want to ask about lengthy consultations and how they can potentially strain communities. I thought your delineation was interesting, Richard, between inner host communities and slightly further away ones, and I potentially recognise that from my area. Richard, do you think consultation can be designed to keep engagement over the life cycle of a project—which can be quite long if we are talking about new build but also if we are talking about defueling and decommissioning—and avoid some of the frustrations that might come from the communities?

Councillor Rout: The starting point—and Struan touched on this—is engagement and establishing trust. If you look at Sizewell C, I am sure you are familiar with Julia Pyke, Nigel Cann, and somebody else worth speaking to is Tom McGarry, their former head of coms, now with National Grid. They did a very good job of building community trust early before consultation started, even with groups that were fundamentally opposed to nuclear. That is a key step.

Consultation is essential and I am quite concerned about the proposal to withdraw the requirement for statutory consultation. Section 42 is proposed to be withdrawn from the Planning Act 2008. It is a fundamental building block. People like John Fingleton have pointed the finger at local authorities saying, “You are taking all of this money and trying to frustrate the consenting process”. That is fundamentally untrue. The problem is the fear of judicial reviews on the part of developers and their consultants, which then result in very lengthy documents for consultation. If the Government is focusing on anything it should be defining projects of critical national priority that are perhaps not subject to judicial review. I think that would see a much more efficient consultation process.

To your point about consultation lasting throughout the lifetime of the project, absolutely. That is where community engagement groups are key. We will have site-specific groups, different transport area groups, and keeping that dialogue open is essential but it is all founded on the initial engagement and establishing trust.

Q133 Lizzi Collinge: I want to come on to communicating about nuclear more generally in a moment, but to stick consultations I will come to you, Zion. You have campaigned both for and against nuclear, which is such an interesting story. I need to say for transparency, Chair, that I have read and endorsed Zion's latest book publicly. I find it very interesting. Zion, have you engaged with consultation processes around nuclear projects directly? If so, what was your experience of that, or have you gone down a different route of engaging around nuclear?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Zion Lights: I have taken a different route. I have a slightly different view as a non-councillor, although I used to be a councillor, and I think the word “consultation” can be damaging. Where I live we had an LTN and—

Lizzi Collinge: Low-traffic neighbourhood?

Zion Lights: Yes, and it was right in my neighbourhood. I was a councillor there, I went to numerous open events to discuss it and every time they were taken over by a small faction, to the extent that people had to be removed with security. That LTN was in a trial period so we were supposed to run it for nine months to get the data before a decision was made, but there was so much opposition at these events that they cancelled it early. I do not think this is just a nuclear problem; there will always be those groups. What I found sad at those events was I was there talking about air pollution, the reasons we were doing it where these specific roads were closed temporarily because the air pollution was above legal limits in those roads. That never came up, no one talked about that. It was all about people saying, “You are doing this to control us, this is a 15-minute city”, all the usual stuff. There was no good conversation out of that.

There is research on this, that sometimes debate formats can entrench people more. People turn up in groups and I do not think it is necessarily always the best way to communicate, especially—I was going to say heated issues like nuclear but, like I say, that LTN issue was heated and it was scrapped in the end. I made a comment at one of these events when I had a few people shouting at me, where I said, “There are no children here, there are no young people here, there are no vulnerable people, there are no elderly people here who are most impacted by the air pollution on their roads where they were consulted and they agreed to have it, but the surrounding areas did not want those roads closed, they did not want to have to go around”. It was as simple as that and, as I say, we had to cancel it. They moved the bollards out of the way, a complete waste of money, frankly, and it would not happen again. Now the council has to come up with a way to bring down the air pollution in those areas without closing the roads, which is the proven method.

I think that can also happen in the nuclear communities. I am not involved in the consultation process now but I used to go to events. That was exactly our tactic, and it worked time and time again.

Councillor Rout: May I comment on that? I think Zion’s point is valid but she is grossly oversimplifying consultation and throwing the baby out with the bathwater by saying public events do not work, therefore consultation is bad.

Zion Lights: No, I am not saying—

Councillor Rout: This is one element of it and, yes, they are normally quite forthright events and they can be counterproductive, but I think



HOUSE OF COMMONS

there is a sense of being seen to do that. It is about part of establishing trust, that you open yourselves up as a developer to that sort of scrutiny. There are others where consultation can work, whether it is written or more formal hearings. Through that you can make the effort to reach the hard to reach groups that would not necessarily attend an event like that. That is one small aspect of consultation but not a reason to damn the whole thing.

Zion Lights: I was not saying we should not do consultation, to be clear. I was saying that format can be very counterproductive.

Lizzi Collinge: So it is about how to do it and how to think about it.

Zion Lights: I think there should be better, different ways.

Q134 **Lizzi Collinge:** This brings me on to my next thing, about talking more generally and communicating around nuclear, and particularly around public safety. Communities like mine that host nuclear do not have any concerns about safety because we have lived there with no concerns, we understand the industry, the safety culture and quite a lot more about the actual effects of radiation than people who do not live near nuclear power stations. However, when we talk about nuclear a lot of the time people do say safety concerns, or there are groups who are fundamentally opposed to any use of nuclear power and they say on safety grounds. Zion, what communication approaches do you think are most effective in addressing the sort of concerns that ordinary members of the public might have about nuclear projects, about countering misinformation and building informed public support for nuclear?

Zion Lights: Having events is a good idea, where communities can come and ask their questions. When I started campaigning for nuclear several years ago we held stalls around cities in the UK and we handed out bananas, we had loads of leaflets, something on radiation, something on meltdowns, everything was covered. We literally had queues of people at one point. I have some pictures showing queues of people waiting to ask questions of about 20 of us—a lot of them were volunteers from the nuclear sector. We had queues of people with questions. I thought, "Isn't that interesting?" A lot of them were quite simple questions that you could answer, but they did not have anywhere else to go and they did not feel they knew—I think you see this with almost all areas; you have it with vaccines and with LTNs.

People do not know where to get their information. They go to the loudest group, usually the one with the best communication, the one with the posters up, the one that has been quoted on the news. That is where they will then get their opinion, but what I found was that most people were kind of interested and on the fence. This was in Bristol, Brighton and we did quite a few in London. It was not all nuclear communities; 99% of people had questions—

Q135 **Lizzi Collinge:** I am running out of time—so, having a space where



people can come and ask questions?

Zion Lights: They can freely ask the questions, yes. This has been shown to work with research, it works with vaccine research as well, but when you have like doctors that are trained in communication who you can go and ask questions to, the vaccine intake goes up because they feel they were heard and their concerns were addressed.

Q136 **Lizzi Collinge:** Thank you. Richard, on the communication thing again, the Nuclear Regulatory Taskforce said the sector shows “extreme risk aversion”, with regulators making overly conservative, costly decisions disproportionate to the actual risks and disproportionate to any other risk assessment in any other industry. They concluded that regulation needed to change, but obviously that raises questions about trust from the public. How do you think changes to regulation can be communicated with the public and keep the trust that there is in regulation and in the nuclear sector?

Councillor Rout: It is a challenging question because a lot of the fears around nuclear—and a lot of fears generally—are irrational. It is a fear. I used to be afraid of flying; now I am not, I got over it. A lot of it is talking about the piece that Zion has talked about, around pitching the benefits of a scheme or a project to help people overcome those fears. Things that manifest as fears are often products of other frustrations, whether that is the changing face of their community, noise, disruption. These projects can permanently change the places that people live in and the places they live. The fear is often a manifestation of other things.

Absolutely, there are those who are across nuclear regulation and would want to be briefed and informed on any changes, but I think they are few and far between. I think the fears are very often irrational and it is about pitching the wider project. You could get bogged down in the weeds of trying to talk about too much detail with communities that cannot necessarily understand those, and in some cases do not necessarily want to.

Q137 **Lizzi Collinge:** I have a couple of minutes left to talk about sites approaching the end of their operational life, such as Heysham, and the experience of communities going through the transition. Struan, what support do you think impacted communities might need?

Councillor Mackie: We are very fortunate in the UK to have the Energy Act and the NDA with, in my opinion, a very clear reason to exist and very proactive people involved who have helped massively in understanding what decommissioning is. If you compare that back to the '80s and '90s at the beginning of the UKAEA period, it is night and day. The NDA has put in place protecting things like social economics and ensuring that communities are not left behind, not just because we do not want them to be but there is a legislative imperative to make sure that they are looked after. I think we should be looking to continue that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and to double down on it. When we are doing good stuff we need to do more of it.

As more and more sites for the AGR fleet are coming on board, they will be taken as part of the NDA family effectively. The communities that will be entering decommissioning should be hearing from communities like mine that are in decommissioning that it is quite scary to go from operation to being in decommissioning. I cannot imagine if you have looked after a bit of plant and equipment for 25 years how it feels to shut it down for the last time and then be told you are not maintaining that any more, you will be tearing it down. That is quite a hard thing, so it is trying to make sure that communities understand that support is there.

The second thing from a UK-wide perspective is that we do not fall into the trap of thinking that decommissioning is inferior to new build and new operations, because unfortunately I feel that is the case. I represent constituents who are quite attracted to the idea of operational plant equipment either in this country or, as we heard earlier today, around the world. We need to make sure that the pathways are there to say that the site may be closing but there is a future not just in the decommissioning industry but there may be a potential future in new build as well.

Q138 **Chair:** Thank you. Struan, do local authorities have the capability and support if needed to carry out planning and regulation oversight of nuclear?

Councillor Mackie: There is a dynamic that I am very aware of in Scotland with the devolved Government. One of the frustrations that we have, Chair, is there is sometimes slightly different regulation in England and Wales than in Scotland, when actually that regulation might only affect my community in the far north of Scotland. Local authorities sometimes struggle to overcome barriers that might be put in place by a devolved Government.

Broadly, I feel that local authorities that host nuclear sites have been proactive in ensuring that they have the knowledge within the local authority to support that. This is a broader point, but I personally believe that local authorities are becoming less and less local. I represent a local authority in Highland that I believe is similar to the size of Belgium, so the idea that I am a local councillor is slightly laughable. When you are looking at policy and things like the planning framework when we were going through, for example, storage of nuclear material, you are trying to have a conversation with somebody who might be hundreds of miles away but in the same local authority.

That is a challenge that we need to overcome. That is why I think trying to have as much decision-making power done locally as possible in the first instance, and then potentially having that validated elsewhere, is a very sensible way of dealing with it. If you are able to get those knowledgeable about something that have a community consent to build



something and then be able to get it approved, that is a sensible way to streamline it.

Q139 **Chair:** That is very helpful. Richard, with the move to criteria-based siting, we could see nuclear proposals in areas with no previous nuclear experiences. What sort of challenges do you think that will bring for local authorities? You are chair of the local authorities group on this.

Councillor Rout: There are a couple of elements to this. First, it very much depends on the community that will be hosting it. As I said earlier, if it is an area with a former industrial background you will find it is far more welcoming. If it is somewhere like Sizewell that has not seen anything like this before, it is altogether more challenging at the emotional and community level. From a resourcing point of view as well it is deeply challenging if they have not done this before. That is where planning performance agreements are key, the funding from the developer to the council to resource up for this. But I do not think you can downplay the expertise that sits within local authorities and how essential that is to things like the discharge of requirements.

Recommendation 30 from John Fingleton was something around the fact that between DESNZ and the MOD they should be responsible for discharging nationally. I do not see how nationally you could have the local knowledge to discharge planning conditions. With proper funding and resourcing local authorities are the right place to do this, but it is challenging to upskill quickly.

Q140 **Chair:** Are there examples of good practice now in local authorities?

Councillor Rout: I would say this, but Suffolk is a centre of excellence for nationally significant infrastructure projects, and because we face not just nuclear but a myriad of offshore wind farms, interconnectors, and solar, you establish the expertise. Groups like NNLAG, the LGA and others can ensure that expertise is shared across local authorities.

Councillor Mackie: One of the areas of concerns we have seen—because I think the point about other nationally important infrastructure happening alongside new build is well made. I think we will be in a very tricky position, and you represent constituents who will be in a tricky position, if constituents feel that planning time and priority is only focused on some of the national things and your constituent down the road is taking two years to get their extension. I know it sounds quite trivial in the grand scheme of things but we all know from casework that that is fundamental. It comes back to the idea of community consent, people believing in something and knowing that there is a degree of equilibrium about it. That is where we need to make sure it is fair and where the funding element is absolutely key to ensure that the day-to-day can absolutely keep on going, but the strategic stuff has its proper resource as well.

Chair: Thank you. The point about rebuilding the capacity in local



HOUSE OF COMMONS

authorities has been well made oftentimes, including to us. Thank you for your evidence in this relatively short session. It is very helpful to us. That is the end of today's proceedings.