



Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

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The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP

President, COP26 and Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

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Dear Alok

Special Report: COP26: Principles and priorities — a POST survey of expert views

The BEIS Committee has today published a Special Report into expert views on principles and priorities for COP26. The report is the result of a survey of over 500 experts on international climate policy, which we commissioned from the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) to assist with our inquiry into Net Zero and the UN Climate Summits. We asked for views on three areas: what the Government should prioritise in its preparations for COP26; the issues on which parliamentary scrutiny of the conference should focus; and the lessons which parliaments and governments across the UK can take from the COVID-19 crisis to apply to preparations for COP26.

The survey is the only exercise of its kind. The report provides rich insights into experts' views on what is needed to deliver an ambitious and successful summit, as well as their perceptions of the Government's early-stage preparations. I hope it will prove a useful resource to the Cabinet Office COP26 Unit and broader Government teams working on the Summit, as well as to parliamentary colleagues and other interested stakeholders.

I would like to draw your attention to the report's findings across three areas:

Conference aims

Experts suggested that the Government has not been sufficiently clear about what it is seeking to achieve at COP26. They recognised the significance of the five COP26 policy campaigns, but they most frequently spoke about need for Government to focus on broader, cross-cutting themes, notably: raising the ambition of international emissions pledges; including diverse stakeholders; promoting international cooperation; using UK climate policy and diplomacy to provide leadership; and engaging the public. Some references to these issues have been made in speeches by the COP26 leadership team, but it is not clear from public communications what the Government's cross-cutting strategic aims are, nor have these been published in a readily accessible form (e.g. on the COP26 website).

International cooperation

Experts highlighted the importance of using the UK's diplomatic powers to promote international cooperation and raise the ambition of commitments set out at previous summits, in particular to increase the ambition of Nationally Determined Contributions and international deadlines to achieve net zero

emissions. They suggested that early diplomatic activities will be a deciding factor for the Presidency's success on these issues and emphasised the importance of ensuring that all countries feel invested and included in the agreements reached.

Experts noted that if the Presidency is to be credible and effective, the UK will need to lead by example, with ambitious domestic policy and a united approach across the four nations. They expressed concern that there has been a lack of transparency on the Government's use of research and the development of policy to deliver the net zero target. The Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution has helped clarify the Government's intended direction of travel. My Committee welcomes the ambitions set out in this and we look forward to seeing the Government's detailed plans to deliver on these new policy goals, alongside the climate action plan which is required to accompany our own nationally determined contribution.

The results of the US election, together with recent net zero commitments by China, Japan and South Korea, have increased international optimism for COP26. Nonetheless it will be challenging to substantially close the gap between existing national pledges and the aims of the Paris Agreement. Major partners are likely to have a strong influence on the Summit's outcomes, with China especially important, given its role as Presidency of the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15).

Engagement and diversity

Experts called for COP26 to prioritise inclusivity and diversity of voice, with marginalised and underrepresented groups, including the global south, given meaningful opportunities to influence the negotiations. Greater prominence should be given to those who are already living with climate impacts, as well as groups who will experience climate impacts sooner and/or more severely. Tensions about the lack of opportunity for such communities to engage meaningfully with the negotiations has been a significant source of disagreement at recent COPs, and experts see this as a top priority for COP26.

Experts emphasised the need for greater public engagement during COP26 and with climate policy. This was also one of the overarching recommendations of Climate Assembly UK. Assembly participants called for Government to provide "information and education for everyone" about climate change and the steps needed to tackle it. Since COP26 is expected to be the world's largest ever event on climate change, it provides a unique opportunity to engage the public on anticipated national and regional climate impacts, and to lead a national conversation about what net zero could and should mean for life in the UK. My Committee will also be interested to understand what ambitions the Government has to build on the recent mass adoption of online technologies for engagement, alongside the traditional offline events at COP.

In light of the above, please could provide the following information by 4 January.

1. When will the Government publish its cross-cutting strategic aims for COP26?
2. What actions are you taking to ensure that cross-cutting goals are embedded across the five policy campaigns?
3. What actions are you taking to prepare for the new US administration, so that you can commence proactive, constructive cooperation on climate change and COP26 from the first day of the new Presidential term?
4. How are you working with China to support its Presidency of the Biodiversity COP15 and to encourage Chinese support for an ambitious Climate COP26?

5. Will the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) be aligned with the Climate Change Committee's advice for the Sixth Carbon Budget? Will you publish a Climate Action Plan that sets out a clear strategy to deliver on the NDC by February (nine months before COP26), as requested by the UNFCCC?
6. How is the Government engaging with marginalised and underrepresented groups in the run-up to COP26? To what extent are you prioritising diplomacy with countries in the global south?
7. How does Government plan to leverage COP26 as a focus-point for public education and engagement on climate change and the net zero transition? What are your target outcomes for this?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Darren Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D' and 'J'.

DARREN JONES MP
CHAIR, BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE