



Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

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Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
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Dear Alok

Participation at COP26 and the role of business

Members of the ‘Committee on COP26’ were pleased to take evidence on 23 June from Nigel Topping, High-Level Champion for Climate Action, and Andrew Griffith MP, UK Net Zero Business Champion, about the role of business, the public and civil society in COP26. I am writing to seek further information on some of the issues raised during the session.

Participation at the Glasgow Summit

The Government’s commitment to ensure that all UNFCCC-accredited observers are able to access covid-19 vaccinations in time for COP26 is extremely welcome. Uncertainties remain, however, about the extent to which non-accredited groups will be able to access and engage with the conference. If the Summit is to fulfil your target to deliver “the most inclusive COP ever”, it will be essential to promote participation beyond those who have historically had direct involvement in the conference.

Engaging business in COP26

The Government has made good progress in securing net zero commitments from major UK businesses to support the Summit, with 45 of the FTSE 100 signed up to the Race to Zero. Nevertheless, there are significant segments of the business community with whom further engagement is required.

Andrew Griffith MP said there is a “good level of awareness” of climate change amongst SMEs, but my Committee has heard from the British Chambers of Commerce that the majority of small companies do not understand the relevance of climate change to their business, and that the COP26 campaigns do not provide enough proactive support to help them to take action. These concerns are borne out by the relatively small proportion of British SMEs that have so far made net zero pledges: at the time of writing 1,179 have joined Race to Zero, representing just 0.2% of the six million SMEs active across the UK. Whilst the Presidency’s decision to launch a dedicated climate hub for SMEs is welcome, I would suggest that further, more proactive, engagement is needed to ensure its success.

Business commitments to Race to Zero are also unevenly spread around the globe, with the UK representing 35% of all commitments. The enthusiasm of the British business community is commendable and strengthens prospects for delivering our national targets, but this share of global pledges is disproportionate and indicates that the Race to Zero campaign has not been wholly successful

in engaging businesses internationally. This must be rectified if the Presidency is harness the influence of the business community to encourage governments around the world to raise their own ambitions in turn.

With regards to the legacy of COP26, I welcome the High-Level Champions' intention to create a "permanent infrastructure" to drive international climate action by non-state actors. Andrew Griffith MP explained that the intended UK legacy is for "thousands of UK businesses having signed up and made a commitment". This is a worthy aim ahead of the Summit, but if the UK is to achieve longer term climate targets it will be necessary to continue growing business interest beyond November, and to ensure that pledges are translated into measurable emissions reductions. This is likely to require ongoing support.

It is welcome too that the Principal Partners of COP26 have joined the Race to Zero, and that some are acting as advocates for the campaign. However it is not clear what expectations the Presidency has set for the Partners' wider involvement, nor how they will be compensated for their contributions. Further information about this would improve the transparency of arrangements for the Summit.

In light of the above, please could you provide the following information by the end of August.

1. Does the Government intend to offer vaccines to non-accredited civil society organisations from the global south to attend Glasgow? If not, what are your plans to ensure that these groups can contribute meaningfully to the conference?
2. By what date do you expect the COP Bureau to announce its decision on the aspects of COP26 that will be held in-person, online, or in hybrid format?
3. Will parliamentarians other than Ministers be included in the UK delegation to COP26? What level of access, including to the blue zone, will be made available to UK parliamentarians?
4. From which countries and sectors is it proving most challenging to secure Race to Zero commitments by businesses? How does the Presidency plan to secure a more distributed spread of commitments across the global business community?
5. What number of UK SME Race to Zero pledges would you consider a successful outcome to achieve by November? What are your plans to increase the reach of the Race to Zero campaign amongst UK SMEs, and to improve the support offered in setting and delivering on pledges?
6. What are the Government's plans to ensure that COP26 has a lasting positive legacy amongst the UK business community? Will the role of the UK Net Zero Business Champion be continued beyond the Glasgow Summit, and beyond the handover of the UK Presidency at COP27?
7. What specifically have you asked the Principal Partners to contribute to COP26, beyond financial support and/or payment in kind? What are the Principal Partners receiving in return for their sponsorship, in terms of access to the conference, visibility, and event space at COP26? Are they receiving any benefits that will not be clearly visible at the Summit?



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