

Energy Voice – report by Michael Behr

Starmer's successor to cover crucial period for north-east's energy future

The next five years are a make-or-break period for the offshore energy sector.

The tenure of the successor to Keir Starmer as the UK prime minister will cover a crucial period to secure a positive energy future for the north-east of Scotland.

A new report from Robert Gordon University's (RGU's) [Energy Transition Institute](#) has said that the UK needs to maintain its oil and gas workforce over the next five years as renewable energy projects ramp up.

The report, *Delivering Positive Energy*, warned that poor policy decisions during this make-or-break period risks driving off a skilled workforce, eroding supply chain capacity and weakening the north-east's wider economy.

RGU director of the Energy Transition Institute and report co-author Paul de Leeuw said: "What we need is an energy policy that is suitable for a G7 country. The world has changed, our energy policy has actually not."

The report dubs the next five years as a 'Goldilocks zone', when declining oil and gas work must be matched by growth in renewables to avoid permanently losing skills and capabilities.

For the north-east of Scotland, which hosts around a third of the UK's 115,000 offshore oil and gas jobs and a quarter of its 154,000 offshore energy jobs, failing to do so could gut the regional economy.

And for the UK as a whole, it could jeopardise the energy transition as the workforce needed to build renewable projects migrates.

With around 90% of the regional offshore energy workforce employed in oil and gas, the sector is still reliant on fossil fuel work. This makes preventing regional offshore energy job losses over impact mitigations one of the report's key recommendations.

De Leeuw said: "The 'Goldilocks zone' is real and the window is closing. Once that skilled workforce disperses, it does not come back."

But right now, the report found that the offshore energy sector workforce in the north-east fell by roughly 14,000 jobs, from around 56,000 in 2016 to close to 42,200 in 2024. This [could drop](#) by a further 18,000 to 24,400 by 2035, depending on government action.

The report calls for a coordinated approach, combining private capital to build capability and scale with public investment to reduce uncertainty and give investors the certainty to commit, enabling the pace the transition demands.

De Leeuw added that "more pragmatism on the energy situation" is needed that avoids a polarised conversation.

"We will need oil and gas, we will need renewables and we will need to go as fast as we can. And there's only so many levers the government can pull on renewables. But we can't go any faster unless we change the rules."

[Michael Behr](#) is renewables reporter at Energy Voice. He's been reporting on energy globally for over 10 years, now focussing on the technologies driving the UK's energy transition.