



Department for the  
**Economy**  
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## KEY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ENERGY STRATEGY BUSINESS AND CONSUMER VIRTUAL INSIGHT AND AWARENESS CONSULTATION

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Consumers are asking for leadership. By this they mean an identifiable government department or agency which provides public engagement, support and guidance. DfE may wish to consider how best to provide these services. A one-stop-shop approach may be worth considering or a DfE managed portal through which consumers can easily engage with government.

Consumers need to be encouraged and enabled to become engaged in taking action instead of waiting for government to do it. They need practical and factual information to help them understand what they can do and how they can make the best choices. This advice and information could be provided as part of a one-stop-shop approach.

Consumers have a high level of confidence in information that comes from the experience of others. Consideration should be given to hosting an online system by which consumers can share and learn from each other's experiences in changing to lower carbon solutions.

The most immediate priority in public engagement is to convince the public of the urgency of taking action on carbon neutrality sooner rather than later. DfE may wish to consider how best to engage with the public to raise the level of awareness and urgency. This should be done through public education and practical information and not through doomsday messaging.

Given the high priorities that consumers place on health, education and the economy, public messaging needs to argue strongly that carbon neutrality is a key factor in maintaining and developing these sectors of society.

School children are seen as being key influencers and some point to children's influence on parents in successfully changing recycling behaviours. A programme of school visits should be considered to raise the profile of carbon neutrality in schools with the aim of getting the messages through to parents via their children.

There are differing opinions on how financial help should be delivered, but there is a high degree of consensus around a mixed model of means tested grant aid and low cost repayable loans. We recommend that further public consultation or survey be undertaken to test the population view of financial support models.

Consumers want safeguards against rogue installers or faulty installations. They also need protection against mis-selling or bogus claims about new technologies. They are looking for legislation to provide these protections and to The Consumer Council for help making claims.

Less than half of businesses recognise that they will have to make changes in the next five years and then mainly in terms of how the business is powered. There is clearly still a lot to do to inform and encourage business down a lower carbon route and to inform them of the wide range of ways in which they can contribute to lower carbon. DfE should consider a programme of business engagement that illustrates the full range of ways in which businesses can become active players in a low carbon economy.

As with the general public, the biggest barrier to business in going lower carbon is cost. Clearly, financial incentive is going to be a strong lever to promote change. The types of help required and the value of financial support needed is likely to differ sector by sector. We recommend that DfE should develop flexible and tailored solutions to delivering grant and other financial aid. These should have regard to business size and to the different barriers to change that may exist within different business types.

Concerns are relatively high about technological advance and the fit of current technology to business need. Government, along with business organisations, should take a proactive lead in showcasing and explaining current state of the art in carbon neutrality across the full range of Northern Ireland businesses.

Many businesses are waiting for new low carbon technologies before they make changes. Government should identify which areas of Northern Ireland business are waiting for new technology and assess what investment might be necessary to speed up technological advance.

Like the general public, businesses also have concerns about adopting the wrong low carbon solutions or being left behind by technological change. DfE should consider how best to allay these concerns, perhaps by underwriting potential losses if companies, through no fault of their own, adopt technologies that fail to deliver the right level of low carbon gains.

Businesses need confidence that the low carbon requirements demanded of them by government will not change unnecessarily. More than anything, they need stability in regulations and requirements so that they can plan for the mid and long term. DfE will have an important role to play in assuring such stability, through, for example, future proofing policies and providing early warning of potential change.