



Renewable Energy in the UK

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Titles:

Countries like Germany are speeding ahead developing their renewable energy sector but the UK risks being left in the slow lane.

Should the UK follow Germany's lead or choose its own path?

Dr Ulrike Lehr, GWS Institute of Economic Structures Research:

Germany might provide an interesting case study for Europe because it started in the late 90s, there was legislation to support renewable energy.

The first step was the ecological tax reform, which increased the price of energy and decreased the price of labour. The feed in tariff law has been introduced in the late 90s, and has proved to be a tremendous success. The principle of this thing is fairly easy to understand; you decrease the risk for investors in renewable energy by guaranteeing them, for 20 years, a fixed rate for the electricity.

So whatever electricity they generate, they may feed it into the grid and they get a fixed rate of money for this. Germany historically, even in the 80s and also coming, was this Green Party movement, had a strong point against nuclear power, mainly because it was worried about nuclear waste management. In 2001, the 'red and green' government came up with an energy consensus with the four big electric utilities to phase out of nuclear by 2023. In the aftermath of the Fukushima earthquake and the nuclear power plant problems they had in Japan, the first 7 power plants have been switched off immediately. And the schedule has been sped up by 2 years, and now is really set in a law.

Dr Jeremy Leggett, Solarcentury & SolarAid:

There's definitely a risk of a country like Britain being left behind by, by people who smell the coffee and the Germans are the classic example. For all these years one of the arguments that was used to shut me up on being over-enthusiastic about renewables, was: Oh Jeremy, you know, renewable energy will never run the railways. Well now you look at Germany, and Deutsche Bahn who run the German railways, have targets and timetables, if you'll forgive the pun, for running the entire railways system on renewable energy. And they're Germans. They're engineers. You know, there's a fighting chance they're gonna do this.

It's not just about solving climate change, it's about keeping up with more farsighted neighbours and getting our disaffected, disenfranchised youth back to work in meaningful jobs in a society where, you know, they're being given hope of a future because we're dealing with climate change as well. Because if they know the first thing about climate change, they will know that that problem is likely to dominate the later years of their existence on this earth in a really horrible way.

Charles Hendry MP, Former UK Minister of State for Energy:

I think we need to look at what other countries have done in this space. Not just in Europe, but further afield. Because people often say to me: Well, why is Britain doing this on our own? Well we're not. We're still one of the lowest performing countries in the EU in terms of our use of renewables and we do have the best tidal reach in Europe; we do have some of the strongest winds, particularly offshore in Europe. So we must be doing better. And people also say: Well if it's so right, why isn't China doing it? Well last year China built a third of the world's wind turbines. China is heavily going down the renewables route, and this is an area where China has seen an incredible market opportunity. Doesn't just want to be a follower, doesn't just want to take other people's technologies and cheapen them and mass produce them and sell it back, it wants to lead in developing the technology. And so if China can see those opportunities, then we really must as well.