

Green hydrogen industry ‘is not just a lot of hot air’

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In 2021 Boris Johnson boldly declared that “Britain will become the Qatar of hydrogen” as part of his government’s strategy for reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. The plan was for hydrogen to supply up to 35 per cent of Britain’s energy needs, but was the promise a load of hot air? No, according to key players in the country’s burgeoning hydrogen industry.

Already the government is investing in 11 big new hydrogen production projects, slated to support 700 jobs and to unlock £400 million in new investment. This week RWE, the energy company, announced plans to build a so-called green hydrogen plant in Scotland on the site of the Grangemouth petrol refinery. Meanwhile, Hydrogen UK, the industry body, claims that it is at a tipping point, poised to create 20,000 jobs and to contribute £26 billion in cumulative gross value added to the economy.

Put simply, the “green” technology splits water into hydrogen and oxygen using renewable energy. Using green hydrogen causes significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions than other forms of hydrogen and it burns more cleanly than gas and oil.

Advocates claim that it can help the drive towards net zero and will boost Britain’s energy sector expertise. “We’re at a critical juncture in the evolution of the UK’s hydrogen supply chain development,” Clare Jackson, the chief executive of Hydrogen UK, said. “Navigated correctly, we have the unparalleled opportunity not only to reap significant economic benefits, but also to achieve our net-zero objectives and to bolster domestic energy security. However, we must recognise that hydrogen is still a relatively nascent industry and as such necessitates a high degree of collaboration between government and industry in order to accelerate its growth and adaptation.”

Both the Hydrogen Energy Association and Hydrogen UK have more than 100 members each, with jobs being added in aspects of hydrogen supply chains including production, storage, network development and “off-taker markets”, which are the final customers for the product. In addition, Britain is experiencing significant growth in the number of makers of original equipment, from lorry manufacturers, such as Electra, to compressor producers, like Haskel.