



The UK has recently signed up to legally binding European targets, which will require us to increase our renewable energy production ten-fold in little over a decade. The Renewable Energy Association projects that this will broaden the focus beyond centralised generation like wind farms to a massive increase in building-integrated renewables. Philip Wolfe, the Executive Director of the REA, asks:

ARE YOU READY FOR THE RENEWABLES REVOLUTION?

The UK is way down in the relegation zone of the European league table with just 1.3% of our energy derived from renewables. Only Malta and Luxemburg keep us off the bottom. Within that sorry picture renewable energy in buildings is the most neglected sector. Germany, which has really promoted household systems like solar, employs nearly a quarter of a million people in its renewable energy industry – we have an estimated 15,000.

But all that is set to change.

Last year the EU's heads of government signed up to a package of energy measures including a target to get 20% of our energy from renewables by 2020. A few weeks ago each country's contribution was announced. We in the UK get 15%. This is the biggest hike of any European country and represents a ten-fold increase from where we are today. It won't get us into the play-offs, but at least up towards a more respectable mid-table position!

Renewables in buildings

To meet this ambitious target we will certainly have to beef up existing policies for renewables. The main ones are the Renewables Obligation, which supports large scale centralised generation like wind farms and hydro-power, and the new Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation for liquid

transport fuels. But we in the REA are also pressing for a major push on renewables in buildings – a hitherto neglected area for energy policy.

Prompted by the Sustainable Energy Manifesto, which the REA and others published in 2006, the government announced last year its 2016 zero carbon homes target for new houses. We are now advocating similar measures both for existing buildings and for non-residential properties.

The combined effects of these changes is likely to be an explosive growth in the use of a wide range of building-integrated renewable energy technologies – coupled with equally dramatic expansion of energy saving measures.

This will mean huge opportunities for companies with expertise in solar heating; ground-, air- and water-source heat pumps; biomass boilers and pellet stoves; photovoltaics; even small wind and hydro turbines. If you haven't yet looked at the potential these systems can offer your business, now is the time to start!

Consumer assurance

I have to say a few things about the REAL Code and the so-called Microgeneration Certification Scheme, before ending. The REAL Code is a

code of conduct sponsored by the REA to guarantee to consumers good service and support standards from those who sell domestic energy systems. It is now well established, growing fast and has achieved stage 1 approval from the Office of Fair Trading. For more details look at www.realassurance.org.uk.

The MCS is a scheme to accredit installers and certify products, currently administered by BRE. It has had its problems and some adverse press for being too rigorous and too expensive. We at the REA have been fighting with some success for improvements, and believe we have to get it right rather than try to bury it. Indeed one element of the new European Directive will be a requirement for such a national scheme.

My advice then? Join these schemes and then work from the inside to make them 'fit for purpose'.

The Renewable Energy Association is the industry body for providers of renewable energy. Our 500+ members cover all renewables technologies and the full spectrum from specialist installers to the national energy companies. We even have large users of renewable energy systems like Marks and Spencer, the Co-op and BSKyB in the association.