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All education institutions face a constant battle to contain and where possible reduce their overall energy spend. This can prove to be particularly challenging where they occupy buildings which were constructed in times where energy efficiency was not a primary concern.

Many universities have energy management and environmental sustainability policies which aim to reduce fuel consumption through the introduction of energy-efficient measures, increasing awareness of energy issues, ensuring that all new builds meet the highest energy-efficient standards, etc.

It has become particularly apparent since the change of government in May that the government's former willingness to spend money supporting renewables and the introduction of energy efficiency measures was primarily a Liberal Democrat idea. Once the Conservatives won the mandate to govern alone many of the Coalition's energy policies have been dropped or are under review.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore that whilst the macro energy issues are addressed in the Autumn Statement to the extent necessary to stop the lights going out (nuclear power, fracking etc.), what could be described as the "micro" end receives little coverage, ostensibly as everything is already under review and/or consultation and the Chancellor would not wish to comment on these until those reviews/consultations are concluded; but you would be forgiven for also concluding that the government is not really all that interested – especially if it will cost money. "The government will prioritise energy security, whilst making reforms to meet our climate goals at lower cost" more or less sums it up.

As a result, there is not much to report that specifically affects universities. However, the most relevant announcements are outlined below.

The Chancellor confirmed that the government will shortly publish a response to the consultations held in relation to changes proposed to the Renewables Obligation (RO) and Feed-In Tariff (FITs) schemes detailing how to implement cost control on these schemes. This should be good news for energy consumers generally, but bad news for those universities yet to install your solar panels or wind turbines.

In relation to climate change, the Autumn Statement reaffirmed that "the UK will continue to play a leading role in international research efforts to reduce the costs of low carbon energy, working with other countries to strengthen international collaboration and transparency in clean energy research, development and demonstration". This is good news for universities participating in energy research and innovation programmes; although other climate change policy announcements, particularly in relation to renewables, could hinder these programmes.

The Autumn Statement also announced restrictions on the eligibility of tax-advantaged venture capital schemes. Changes to the excluded activities of the Enterprise Investment Scheme, Venture Capital Trusts and Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme have been extended to reserve energy generating capacity from 30 November 2015, whilst the generation of renewable energy benefiting from other government support by community organisations will no longer be qualifying activities. Additionally, these activities are not eligible for Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) when SITR is enlarged. All remaining energy generation activities will be excluded from the scheme from 6 April 2016, as well as from the enlarged SITR, and the government will also introduce increased flexibility for replacement capital within the Enterprise Investment Scheme and the Venture Capital Trusts scheme, subject to state aid approvals.

Whilst the ongoing commitment to re-consider some flexibility for replacement capital is encouraging (though we understand that this will remain subject to a growth and development matched funding requirement), the news on all energy generation activities being excluded from 6 April 2016 is disappointing, and will be seen as a blow to universities which may be contemplating making parts of their campuses available to private investment for energy generation activities.

So, all in all there's not a lot to get excited about in the Autumn Statement this time around as far as energy related issues are concerned. However, the current lack of policy certainty is a cause for concern; nobody is quite sure which way the government is going to jump, and this makes it very difficult for investment decisions to be made.

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