

In conversation with Amanda Grimm, Scottish Green candidate for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh

The Student

Reading into your background a little bit you've done a lot on events and campaigning, what made you make the switch into frontline politics?

Amanda Grimm

Yes, so I've done a lot of campaigning in my free time since university, but I was working in the arts, culture, festivals etc. I think I just got to a point where I felt like I wanted to be doing something on climate and the environment more full time, like in my day job, so towards the end of lockdown 2022 I think, I got a job with a green MSP so started working for her in the Scottish Parliament. I've been doing that for about 3 years now and then this election was called, and then it just felt like the right time to put into practice what I've learned working for the MSP and be part of the debate around the election. Because, like, without greens standing, climate doesn't really get mentioned.

Both the Tories and Labour are quite similar in their taxes, justice policies and I wanted to stand to shift the terms of the debate and get people thinking differently about things. So that's why I grasped the opportunity I guess.

The Student

Talking about climate there, how would the Scottish Greens tackle the climate crisis?

Amanda Grimm

Yeah. First of all, we would stop issuing licenses for new oil and gas like that's the first thing. We can't keep extracting fossil fuels when scientists say we've already got too many extracted and were we to burn them all we will go past the Paris Agreement goal of 1.5 and cause planet catastrophe. We'd stopped that. We've got actually in the manifesto that's going to come out on Thursday, we've got a 5 point plan to transition to fully 100% renewable energy, not relying on carbon capture and storage or hydrogen and that's a really good opportunity for Scotland because we have such abundant wind, tidal and wave energy here and we want to make sure that, like, not just working in those industries, but the supply chains. So manufacturing the turbines and the jackets and all the skills and electrical engineering and design, that's all done in Scotland. So it's not offshoring these jobs to other countries that can do some more cheaply and then buying it in here, which is what labor is proposing to do with GB Energy. We want to build like a home grown industry. We also do have to talk about reducing demand for energy and we can do that in ways that benefit people as well. So insulating cold, drafty homes, having

better transport so people don't have to drive everywhere. We've already secured record funding for, like, actual travel routes around Scotland and we want to do things like that.

The Student

You bring up no new licenses. The SNP have not ruled that out because they worry about the impact that could have on North Sea communities that rely on those industries. How do you respond to that?

Amanda Grimm

Well, I think we're the only party that's serious about a just transition for workers because no matter what the SNP does, oil and gas is not going to continue indefinitely. Global markets are moving away from it, moving towards renewables, it is a dying industry and it's limited because there's a limited amount of oil there, right? We're saying we need to start planning now for a transition and it should be government and worker-led rather than private company-led. They need to be giving these workers the skills to transition into those jobs in the supply chain like I was talking about. But it's not just jobs and renewables, there's going to be jobs in nature, restoration, tree planting, people restoration like civil engineering. And then we should also be helping people transition into other low carbon jobs like in arts and culture or like hospitals or education. There's all these things that people can be doing. They don't need to stay in the same industries but definitely those pathways need to be there to support them. I think friends of the earth wants like a job guarantee for every worker and we'd support that as well.

The Student

I guess on the flip side of the SNP's plans are Labour. Edinburgh East and Musselburgh is really a toss-up between Labour and the SNP. Why should somebody vote for the Scottish Greens over Labor when they're calling for a windfall tax, home insulation, no new oil and gas licenses...

Amanda Grimm

OK, well they say they won't revoke oil and gas licenses that the Tories have granted in the last days of their dying government. Scottish Greens want to put pressure on them to do that. They are talking about windfall tax, but they're not talking about stopping the tax breaks to companies for new drilling. Like currently Equinor, who's going to do the massive Rosebank oil field, they're getting tax breaks which counteract what they'll pay in windfall tax so we would crack down on that as well. What was the other labor thing you mentioned?

The Student

Home insulation.

Amanda Grimm

Oh insulation yeah, I just say we need to roll that out quicker and on a bigger scale. I haven't read what they were saying that but I mean we support that as well. But we'd probably say we could raise more money for it than labor are proposing because we are proposing a wealth tax on the top like 1% of the population. We're proposing a fair more progressive tax system in general, rather than just closing tax loopholes, which is what labor is basically promising. So we could raise more public funds to invest in that rollout.

The Student

Moving from the climate crisis to the cost of living crisis. NUS Scotland report last year that half of students had skipped a meal and a 1/3 had not been able to pay their rent in full. How would the Scottish Greens tackle the cost of living crisis?

Amanda Grimm

Yeah. First of all, in Scotland, when Scottish Greens were in government, we did a lot of work to develop the system of. Rent controls which is going to be brought in through the housing bill, so that's going to come in, it's going to cap the rent that landlords can charge and that would be one big way to reduce the cost of living crisis. We'd want to see something like that nationally but Labour has ruled out rent controls but we're trying to pressure them to bring that in.

Also, we're going to be talking about capping the cost of food like they've done in France. Because, like the cost of living isn't just a law of nature that the cost of living has risen, it's companies profiteering off the fact that, yes, oil prices rise, but then they remain. They kept those prices high, including like big super markets or food retailers. We're going to say you don't deserve to make so much profit on this when people can't afford to eat. So the government could cap food, they can also cap the price of energy like they've done in Spain and Portugal and also just fix the Social Security system, which Tories have completely decimated and currently keeps people at the poverty line and doesn't let them get any higher because you can't earn more benefits than that.

We want to give people genuine security and a genuine safety net. The Greens have long called for a universal basic income so we will have that basic level of security. It gives them an opportunity to say, change their job, find a job that suits them better, which benefits everyone in society and allows people to fulfill their potential. They've had universal basic income trials. The largest one they did recently shows that nobody just like became lazy and didn't work. Everyone starts being more entrepreneurial. So people founded businesses, they're doing what they love and that brings benefits to society. So we'd definitely push for that because that can only be brought in by Westminster, we can't do that here.

The Student

Talking about Westminster, the conservatives there have been cracking down on international students as part of their way of bringing down immigration, but that's viewed by many as kind of problematic when the university sector is highly dependent on these international students. What are your thoughts?

Amanda Grimm

Yeah. Well, the Greens completely reject the Tories anti migration policy. It's cruel and we should be welcoming people here, especially in Scotland. We need more people to fill jobs and it's not just about jobs, it's about the benefit you get from people with different backgrounds and experiences coming and living here. It enriches us all. Especially at university, like when I was at the University of Edinburgh, I was friends with people from all over the world, it's great. I know that the Tories last year changed the rules so students could bring their family right? We would push for a reversal of that. And they also recently increased the salary that you could be earning if you're a British citizen to bring dependents. We would also push for a reversal of that.

We hope labor is going to reject that cause it basically means if you're not earning enough, like about half the population don't earn that salary, so you're like, not allowed to fall in love with someone from another country and marry them and have them move here. That's just, yeah. That's not something the government should be deciding they should be letting people live with their families.

The Student

Do you think the current university funding model is sustainable? I know Peter Matheson has called for a "calm consideration" of the model.

Amanda Grimm

Does he want to privatize it?

The Student

I think a lot of it was about funding for Scottish students being too small.

Amanda Grimm

OK, so increasing that, yes. I do think that government should be investing more in universities. Especially not just focusing on like the technical skills that are bound to get your job in the sector. Rishi Sunak has said that they're going to stop funding 'rip-off' degrees with poor job prospects but you get so much enrichment from learning how to think critically at university.

I did linguistics and it has been helpful for my adults, but it didn't lead to me becoming a linguistics academic, but people should have the right to study what they're interested in, which makes you a better and well-rounded person. We shouldn't be focusing on science and maths. The government needs to support the arts and humanities and performing arts degrees.

The university shouldn't be so reliant on foreign students. Yeah, as you say, it's not fair. There's a limited number of places for Scottish students, and this is a country where we sort of founded the principle of free education and that should continue not just for a lucky few but for everyone.

The Student

On the topic of the university you visited the encampment and you've spoken in support of the students. Do you think the university, and I mean other institutions all the way up to Westminster, are doing enough in their response to the Gaza conflict?

Amanda Grimm

No, they're not doing enough. Yeah, it was great to visit the university encampment, and it's great that students and staff are calling for a boycott, divestment and sanctions as part of a much wider movement.

I know that the university is where Jeremy Balfour signed the declaration, which carved out Israel within Palestine. So it has a responsibility to take responsible action and stop investing in companies that are enabling the Israeli military and government to carry out genocide. So yeah, divesting is the least it could do.

I've been involved in lots of divestment campaigns in fossil fuels and the arts, and it really does work. We've got a couple of festivals to stop accepting funding from the fossil-fuel companies and got the Edinburgh Council to pass declarations saying they're going to divest from fossil fuels because we're cutting off the money supply for companies.

As well, first of all, Westminster invests in the Israeli military, so they should divest from that as well. And the UK is still manufacturing weapons which are going over to Gaza, we should definitely have an arms embargo. The Greens have been calling for that since day one of the conflict. And longer term – because this isn't just something that happened out of the blue, it's part of decades of oppression and apartheid over there – the UK should withdraw its support from Israel's politics and military until they stop settling and occupying Palestinian territory.

The Student

In kind of relation to that, the Scottish Greens are against Trident, and they're opposed to NATO. How would you respond to people who say that in the current geopolitical environment, that these institutions and weapons are vital for maintaining international security?

Amanda Grimm

OK, first of all, nuclear weapons are absolutely immoral, but will also waste a lot of money. I don't think they maintain our security. Most states say they could never use them anyway and actually people living near Faslane in Scotland, where the nuclear weapons are stored, feel like they're more of a target because if a country wanted to bomb Scotland, they could bomb right there and they don't want them there.

Second, I'd say let's take a step back and look at like the real threats to our society, they are not foreign countries coming and invading. Climate change is a major threat, not being able to afford your food is a major threat, and then like cybersecurity attacks are, so we should be diverting resources from nuclear weapons and scaling up the military into protecting us from cybersecurity, from cyber threats and these other things which make their lives less secure.

And apart from that, I mean, we already do a lot of sort of international peacekeeping diplomacy and I'm all for it investing more in that and scaling that up and getting back into the EU because that provided security as well.

The Student

Speaking about rejoining the EU, how do you envision that process happening?

Amanda Grimm

Well, first, I mean I think the most direct way to do it is, well, maybe not direct, but most surefire way is for Scotland to become an independent country and then we could get back into the EU, which many EU top dogs have said they would welcome Scotland back.

But then you may ask how we get Scottish Independence. I think we just need to gradually keep building support. Support is gradually rising, it is around 50% now and more and more young people are wanting to vote for independence so overtime it will happen. I do think that the UK Government has to grant us a legal referendum and that's what we keep pushing for and until then we need to be calling for more devolution of power.

Getting back to the EU, I think just people have to put pressure on the incoming Labour government and say that's what they want. I did read something saying that maybe

Starmer, once they're in with a big majority, they will be bolder and they will say actually we can look at getting back and we would support that. But I think the fact that Scotland was dragged out of the EU against its will shows how undemocratic the current system is and how what Scotland votes for is never reflected down at Westminster.

Again, that's why the Greens are standing. You don't have to vote for one of the two parties that benefits from first past the post system. There are alternatives, so you can vote Scottish Greens to show you're not happy with this.

The Student

Are you concerned that people voting for you and rather than the SNP will mean that the unionist Labour Party will get in? That that will kind of dampen the influence of independent movement in Westminster?

Amanda Grimm

No, I'm not concerned about that because the polls show that labor is going to get a landslide. Also, the seat I'm standing in Tommy Sheppard is the current MP. He very popular, I mean, it might go Labour, but yeah. I just think, first of all, the climate emergency is so urgent. The Greens are standing because we're saying this is the top issue people should be concerned about. And we're also saying people can vote for the party whose policy they most want to see. Tactical voting has its place, but we know the Tories aren't going to get in. We just don't think it should be messing around with that. You should go positively for the vision for the people that you want because otherwise, how are you ever going to get that your mark?

The Student

Talking about Labour, back when Robin Harper resigned he said you had your priorities wrong, and now he's supporting Ian Murray. He said that you weren't giving independence the priority it needed, and then also the well...

Amanda Grimm

Independence, no. He doesn't support independence.

The Student

Does he not? Oh sorry, I've mixed that up...

Amanda Grimm

He didn't before, maybe he said we're not giving the environment the attention...

I think that's right, he definitely said you've been distracted by trans issues.

The Student

Amanda Grimm

Yeah, I bet, he said we're not giving the climate and environment the attention it deserves.

OK, so I think trans issues and equality has dominated the headlines a lot, mainly because of the media like the right wing media is trying to stoke culture wars. The Greens are standing up for the most vulnerable groups in our society and there is a majority in the Scottish parliament voting for the gender recognition reform bill, which would have made a minor change to make it easier for trans people to get legal recognition of their new gender. There had been scaremongering by people like it's going to lead to reduction of safe spaces for women, which is not true because currently you don't have your gender certificate checked when you go into the bathroom and you know that's not going to change feminist groups like engender have said that that bill wouldn't have an impact on women's rights. It's not my area of expertise, but I'm confident that we are doing the right thing and it has not distracted from working on climate, environment, and independence. The green MSP I work for Arianne Burgess, she's 100% committed to gender recognition and the climate. We focus on that in our daily job and I think you can do both as well, but it seems like it's dominated because of the media.

The Student

Kind of looking at the green movement and the Scottish Greens more widely: you've increased your number of candidates to 44 from 19. How are you going to maintain that momentum? What are you going to do with that?

Amanda Grimm

That's a good question, well, I think lots of parties see this election as a sort of trial and run up to the Scottish Parliament elections in 2026. It's great, as you say, that we're standing more candidates than ever before because then those candidates and the local teams supporting them are gaining all this experience and practice for 2026, when we're projected to get double the number of MSPs as we have now. Then in the 2027 local council elections I'm planning to stand to be a counselor if I'm not elected to Westminster.

And what are we going to do with it? Well, we're just gonna keep holding the UK government to account. That's why we're standing. To influence the incoming Labour government in certain ways and perhaps we'll get back into government in Scotland, depending on which party is in majority after 2026 elections here in the Scottish Parliament. We're willing to work with any party that shares our values and policies on things, whether in government or out, with a sort of confidence and supply arrangement. So yeah, I think the party keeps growing and growing in strength is strength, despite the right wing being very anti-Green, we'll keep trying.

The Student

How do you kind of make your voice heard? I mean, I know the Liberal Democrats are doing crazy stuff, how are you kind of finding it walking around the constituency like what are people telling you?

Amanda Grimm

Well, I've been doing a lot of canvassing because we know that that is the best way to win votes and change voters minds - talking to people and finding out what they care about and telling them what you'd do.

I've got five hustings coming up soon, I'm sort of working with local groups in the area and using my candidacy just to build relationships. Earlier today I was at a Yes Musselburgh stall on the High Street with the Yes for Independence Group and a couple weeks ago I was working with sustaining Musselburgh - a local sustainability group - on an event about insulating cold, drafty homes. Building those relationships in the community makes people see that you do care about the locality and you're more than just a career politician or something. So I've been doing that, doing a lot of social media through my candidate accounts and more interviews coming up. So that's how I'm getting my message out there, writing a lot of as well. Yeah. You don't have to resort to silly stunts like the Liberal Democrats!

The Student

What would be your message to students?

Amanda Grimm

I think it must be a scary time to be a student and a young person, with the cost of living crisis, the climate emergency, the housing emergency. Please don't get disillusioned with politics. If you want things to change, you have to get involved, if you vote you could even consider standing in yourself or being a campaigner and I think the Greens are offering the most positive vision of the future and policies that will genuinely protect young people and give them a good future. New good green decent jobs, you know, funding for the humanities and social security, universal basic income, rent controls. Peace, standing up to and being a voice for peace and justice on the global stage like I think students care about that, so I would hope that many would see the Greens as their natural party.

Is there anything else you'd like to touch upon?

Amanda Grimm

I think we've covered it all. Yeah, that's it. Thank you. Yeah, I guess you could say I did both an undergrad and postgrad at the university and I've also worked there. I worked in

The Student

the school of informatics for a while so I feel quite attached to it, and it's nice that I'm the candidate for the area that the university is in.

The Student

Did you write to the student?

Amanda Grimm

I did just like briefly, maybe one or two articles. Yeah. And then I did an internship at the journal.