Scottish Energy Policy and Fuel Poverty

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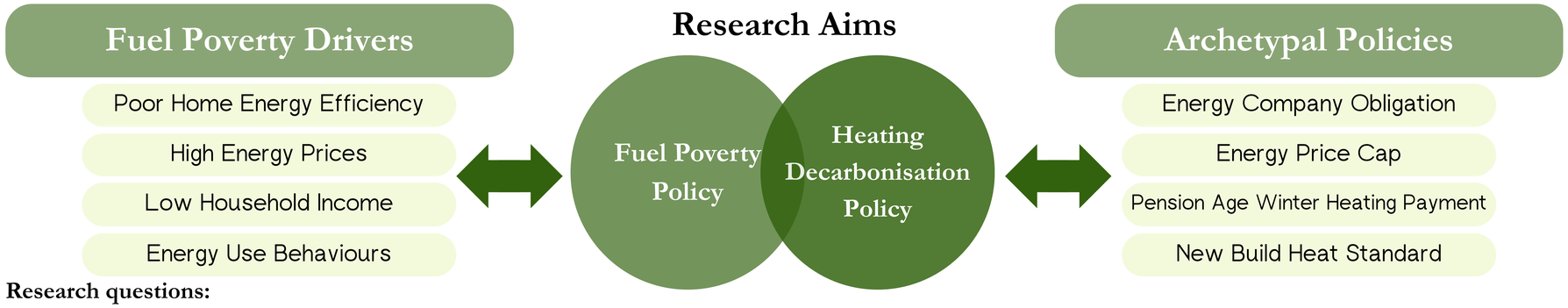

Research questions:

- Are the concerns, implementation challenges, policy aims, and drivers of fuel poverty addressed within the government policy documents reflected in the insights of stakeholders across academia, government, industry and the third sector?
- What are the key challenges and narratives as identified by these groups?

Methodology

- 16 participants across academia, government, industry and the third sector were interviewed
- Semi-structured interviews took place from November 2025 - March 2026 online and in-person
- Interview transcripts were anonymised and then analysed using inductive coding on NVivo software
- Lastly thematic analysis used the coded data to generate findings

Semi-structured interviews were used to identify stakeholder insights for the following: how key policies are funded, their target households, their measure and achieved impact, and how they align with wider net-zero and fuel poverty goals. The interview transcripts were then coded using an inductive and iterative coding method. This thematic coding allowed for a fluid but structured way of interpreting the datasets (Ahmed et al., 2025). Coded data was then grouped by theme to be compared to findings that had emerged during earlier document analysis stages of the research. This helped to support robustness of the research through triangulation across document analysis and stakeholder interviews by confirming findings across groups (Natow, 2020).

Table 1: Most Common Codes (Source: Author)

Code	Child Codes	Example Data
Challenges	data access, convulted processes, lack of knowledge, narrow eligibility,	"sometimes if you do one scheme, you can actually forfeit your chance of getting another part of the scheme, because then you are therefore not eligible."
Key Recommendations	foundational concepts, actionable interventions	"it would be good to have some kind of follow-up survey quite a while after the measures installed and being like, do you feel your house is warmer? Do you feel it's left draughty? How do you feel?"
Funding	regressive, progressive, spending public funds, mechanisms	"So maybe it was some kind of progressive way of thinking about that. Could we actually give free energy to some people and then charge more for the high users."
Targeting	universalism, means-tested, mechanisms, challenges	"What we come back to is what we've always come back to, which is just saying, well, you work through passport benefits. So is there a better way to do it than that? "
Trust and Perceptions	engagement, policy, government, energy suppliers, trust in institutions	"I think the succession of failed schemes creates such a consumer fear and apprehension that I think it is at risk of doing serious damage to this market overall"

Findings

- Multiple overlapping themes between document analysis and stakeholder interview data
  - challenges related to funding and targeting
  - potential of the energy transition to be leveraged to mitigate the drivers of fuel poverty in Scotland
    - primarily through using energy efficiency to address poor housing stock
- Wider funding issues need to be addressed with taxes as the clear preference for funding initiatives
  - windfall tax, social tariff or restructuring of the energy markets to decouple electricity prices from gas
- Key aspects of future policy packages should include:
  - follow-up with any interventions installed to help ensure consumer satisfaction
  - re-building trust between communities and the industries and governing bodies enacting interventions

Future research should consider a single point of contact to help households navigate the overly-complex policy landscape. Ideally combined with a restructuring of the funding system as well as de-coupling the cost of electricity from gas in order to make the energy transition not only feasible, but affordable.

Results

Table 1: Most Common Codes illustrates the codes and child codes (sub-codes) that emerged during the data analysis. This was an iterative process of coding the transcripts and going back to re-code as codes were added to the transcript. Child codes were used to categorise data. Challenges mentioned across interviews included the need for access to data for better targeting, the difficulty of navigating a confusing and often convoluted policy landscape, how taxes could be leveraged to fund interventions meant to address fuel poverty in more equitable ways, and how a constantly fluctuating policy landscape erodes trust in industry partners as well as consumers.

Overlapping themes between the interviews and document analysis include funding, challenges, and narratives about who is 'able to pay' and who is worthy of support. This includes fuel poverty narratives around the 'deserving poor' and the need for interventions to go past the 'easy cases' of intervention and the need to tackle the harder cases and drivers of fuel poverty head-on.

References

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