

Ambitions for International Energy Academy set out at OE 07

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An ambitious initiative is underway to lay the foundations for an International Energy Academy in Scotland, a major conference and exhibition being staged in Aberdeen was told this month.

Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Forum (ACSEF) has been working with the public and the private sectors on plans to create one of the skills and knowledge powerhouses for the energy industry in the 21st century and an impetus for real progress in the area of skills for the next 30 years.

In revealing these plans, Dr Ian Heywood, director of growing business and skills at economic development agency Scottish Enterprise Grampian, said there were enormous challenges. However, such an aspirational plan for a centre of excellence was essential in the drive to overcome skills shortages facing the industry, build the talent pool and act as a showcase for excellence in developing people at a global level.

The concept behind the International Energy Academy (IEA) was born of the Next Generation process, an initiative driven by ACSEF to work with the private sector to identify projects aimed at securing the long-term future of the north-east's economy. Scottish Enterprise Grampian is leading on the International Energy Academy proposal for ACSEF.

In a presentation at OE 07, Dr Heywood said there were several excellent local and national initiatives underway to plug the skills gap but they were not of sufficient scale to address the demands of the global marketplace and remained ad hoc and fragmented.

“We have spoken in depth to leading industry figures to make sure we are working with them to get an end result which serves their needs and answers their demands. At the moment they are faced with an aging workforce and companies have to resort to fishing from the same pool.

“One of the major aims of the IEA would be to create a centre of excellence which promotes our strengths as a world leader in people development for the energy industry and inspires people to join the industry.

“We had looked originally at creating one energy academy for the industry as a whole but the feedback we have had is that different sectors would prefer individual academies at this stage, serving, for example, oil and gas, wind and wave, and solar and biofuels.”

Over the consultation period, it became clear that the idea of a single location for the IEA did not play to the strengths of the diversity of provision across a range of public and private sector organisations across Scotland and the idea grew of having bases at specific locations across the country where there are zones of expertise such as research centres or company groupings.

The next step, said Dr Heywood, was to progress the formation of a partnership that will take the project forward. Talks are already underway with key industry bodies about leading on specific areas of the project. He said the emphasis will initially be to build on the expertise and demand from the oil and gas sector. Once that was achieved, work would continue with industry to shape other parts of the IEA. ■