

New Oil and Gas Academy welcomed by Scottish First Minister and UK Energy Minister

The UK oil and gas industry recently announced the creation of a new nation-wide, employer-led Oil and Gas Academy which will allow the industry to secure the skilled workforce it will need to sustain the long-term future of the UK continental shelf (UKCS).

The academy, which will officially be known as OPITO, The Oil and Gas Academy, will be funded by the industry to provide support for the investment that oil and gas employers throughout the UK are making in workforce development to ensure that the UKCS remains at the forefront of offshore expertise and technology.

Malcolm Wicks, the UK's energy minister, says: "It is essential that a workforce with the right skills and experience is maintained so that this vital industry can continue to make a significant contribution to energy production in the UK and to the export of oilfield goods and services around the world."

The First Minister of Scotland, the Rt Hon. Alex Salmond MSP, also welcomed the announcement saying: "This is a fantastic time to be working in the oil and gas sector. Not just because the price of oil is almost \$100 a barrel, although that helps. It's because Scotland is at the heart of a truly global sector with new markets emerging, such as China and India, and rapid technological change bringing us exciting opportunities such as carbon capture.

"The skills and dedication of our young professionals are crucial to our competitiveness and our ability to attract new investment. That's why I am delighted to welcome the launch of the oil and gas industry academy. Its work will help us to build the world-class skills required for the industry to thrive in Scotland and beyond."

The Oil and Gas Academy combines the financial resources of the Offshore Training Foundation (OTF), the charitable trust which was formed to promote education and training in the industry, with the professional expertise of the OPITO (Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation) team which has an established track record in developing workforce standards and skills.

OPITO's chief executive, David Doig, comments: "Becoming an industry-owned body and combining with the OTF will enable the academy to focus entirely on the skills needs of our industry. While it will be headquartered in Aberdeen, employers throughout the UK will, for the first time, have a single, industry-led body focused on the development and delivery of the workforce capability needed for business success in the offshore oil and gas industry."

"One of Oil & Gas UK's key priority areas is skills, which is indicative of the importance the industry places on the issue. I am delighted that the industry now has an academy through which to channel its enthusiasm for developing talent so that a sustainable future for the UK offshore oil and gas industry can be assured."

David Doig adds: "Employers will have direct influence over every aspect of the corporate governance and strategic management of their academy. They will be able to bring about real improvements in business performance by setting standards and identifying the specific skills needs of this vital industry. The academy will respond by designing and delivering a comprehensive and integrated suite of skills and training standards to address those needs."

The new academy will work with schools, colleges and universities on a shared agenda of encouraging greater uptake of mathematics, science and engineering subjects. It will also support the continued development of safety, technical and leadership skills within the industry in response to identified need. Training standards and quality assurance on training delivery both here and around the world will also be advanced through the academy. The new organisation will initially create around 10 new jobs, and intends to double in size within three years.

The Oil and Gas Academy will continue to contribute to the wider national skills and education policy agenda and share good practice through continued links with Cogent, the Sector Skills Council (SSC).

David Doig says: "The oil and gas industry acknowledges and thanks Cogent for its support and encouragement in this new venture. The Oil and Gas Academy will of course remain linked to Cogent through membership, participation on its Board and financial support and will work co-operatively with the Council to streamline activities and avoid unnecessary duplication of work. In return, Cogent will hold a ten per cent ownership stake in the industry's academy and have the opportunity to make two appointments to its board."

Dr John Beacham, chairman of Cogent, says: "We are delighted that the oil and gas industry has taken the initiative of establishing a skills academy. This will join the recently announced nuclear and process industry academies within the Cogent family. These Academies will be much needed centres of excellence for employers in the Cogent family in learning, training and education." ■