

Working in ENERGY

A SPECIAL REPORT

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Surging sector faces severe skills shortage

Sylvia Pfeifer reports on the range of measures companies are taking to plug the gap in expertise

At HMS Sultan, the Royal Navy base in Hampshire, near the south coast of England, 65 young men and women recently embarked on a four-year apprenticeship scheme that will put them at the forefront of one of the most ambitious nuclear building programmes in the developed world.

The nuclear apprentice scheme is run by EDF Energy, the UK subsidiary of the French utility EDF, which is spearheading the country's programme to construct up to 12 reactors over the next decade. EDF Energy plans to install four reactors at two sites in the UK, starting with Hinkley Point in Somerset.

But the last time Britain built a nuclear reactor was more than 20 years ago – so if EDF and its partner, Centrica, are to be successful they need to be able to call on a workforce with the right skills. The apprentice scheme is one of several initiatives launched by EDF to make sure it has the right engineers and technical experts.

The crisis at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan in the wake of a devastating earthquake and tsunami has delayed and even suspended plans for new reactors in several countries, including Germany. The UK, however, is among those that have remained committed to new nuclear power, which is helping to drive a surge in demand for recruits into the industry.

In the UK, nuclear power is part of a bigger plan to renew the country's ageing energy infrastructure and meet tough carbon reduction targets. The overall investment, estimated at around £200bn, will require labour intensive investment projects and create jobs.

Recruitment specialists say the global energy sector as a whole – from nuclear to renewables to oil and gas – is experiencing a huge upsurge in demand. Even in countries such as Germany, which has decided to phase out nuclear power, more investment will have to be ploughed into other low-carbon sources of energy such as renewables – and corresponding new infrastructure – if the lights are to stay on.

“We see a severe skills shortage in the energy sector and a lot of movement as companies poach staff and, as a result, drive up salaries,” says Darren Montagu, managing director at Hays Energy, the recruitment specialists. All areas of the industry are seeing wage inflation at the moment, he adds.

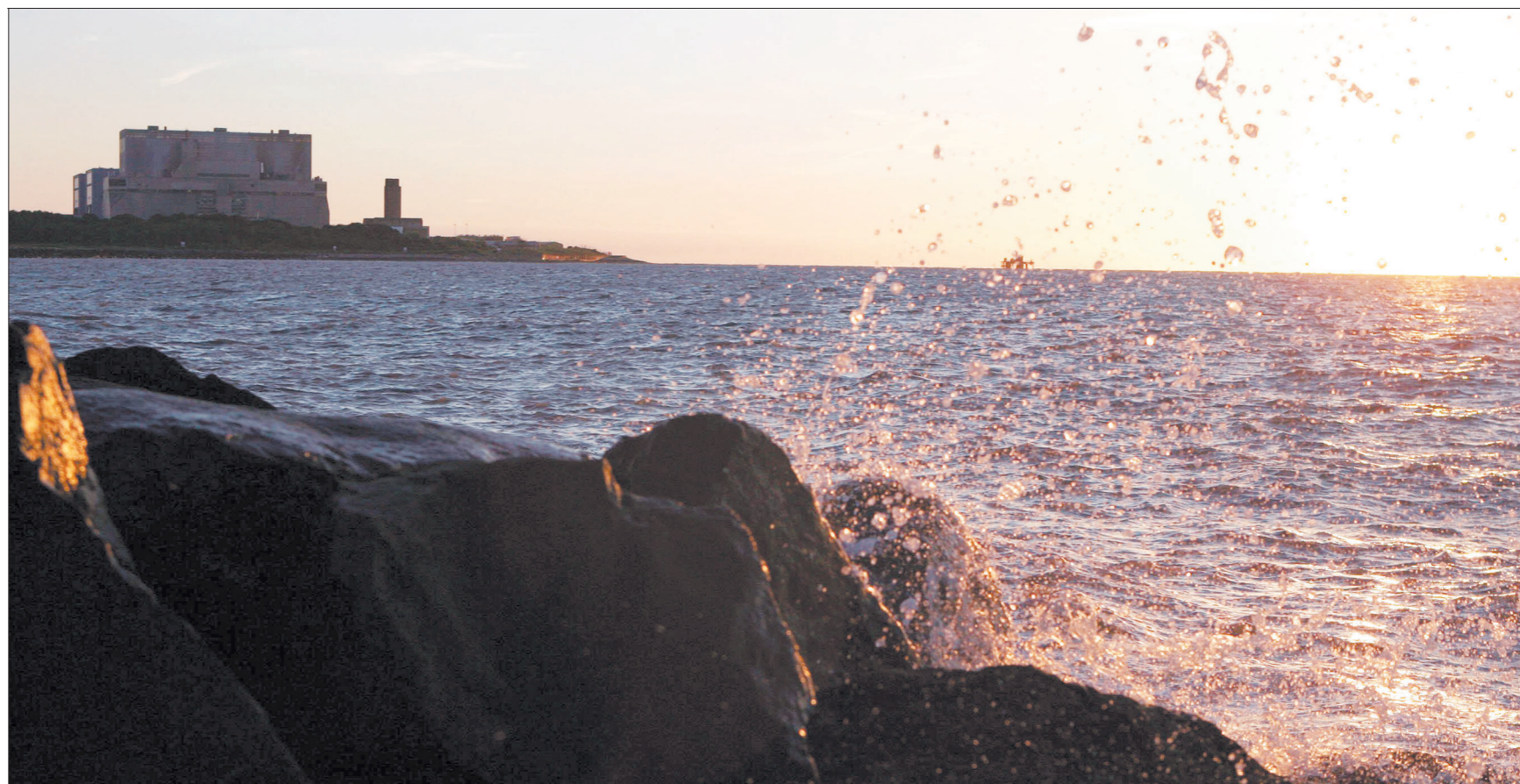
Gwen Parry-Jones, campus project director for EDF Energy, admits the “potential skills gap facing our business is an important challenge for us”. More than 20 per cent of the company's workforce is over 55 years of age and new recruits are urgently needed.

The Engineering Skills Balance Sheet of 2009, a report which assesses the relevant skills in the labour force, predicted that by 2014 the demand for science, engineering and technology-related jobs would rise by 2.4m.

For companies active in the energy business, it's a case of training and investment. Mr Montagu cites areas such as mechanical and electrical engineering, and health and safety management, as well as project management as experiencing high demand from employers.

The focus is not only on nuclear. In the UK alone, companies are responding to the changes in the energy sector by diversifying their investment plans to include renewable energy sources and clean technology.

Today's plans range from biomass plants to wave and tidal projects, from combined cycle gas turbine stations to onshore and offshore wind



Out of practice: EDF Energy is to build nuclear reactors, starting at Hinkley Point – but it is more than 20 years since the last plant was built in the UK

Getty Images

farms and solar power plants. Existing grid infrastructure is being upgraded to include smart meters and smart grids.

According to Ernst and Young, the consultancy, the power and gas sector was one of only a few in the UK economy which created jobs over the past two years. While the recession resulted in an overall fall in the total UK workforce between 2008 and 2010,

Given the rampant demand from the oil and gas industry, salaries have seen a corresponding uplift

the power and gas sector created employment over the same period.

“If you look at how the UK is going into a period of renewing existing types of infrastructure and developing low-carbon technologies, there will be a need for more research-level jobs,” says Tony Ward, partner and head of the power and utilities team at E&Y.

Demand for new hires is just as strong in the oil and gas industry.

Buoyed by high oil prices of more than \$100 a barrel, the world's international majors plan to spend tens of billions of dollars on new projects over the coming years. With easy access to oil and gas resources a thing of the past, the companies are having to drill ever deeper. Brazil, Angola and the Gulf of Mexico are all areas looking for deep-water drilling expertise.

The industry is also focusing on unconventional sources of oil and gas, such as shale gas and coal bed methane, as well as developing new ways to get more out of mature fields. Oil sands activity in Canada is seeing more investment.

Australia, where several new capital intensive projects have recently been given the green light, is grappling with concerns over a skills shortage.

All this activity has increased demand for service companies which are themselves consolidating as a way of expanding their offerings. Sub-sea companies, which specialise in operations on the sea bed and in the water column between the sea bed and the surface, are among those seeing more activity.

Technip of France became the latest services group to join the acquisition

path, beefing up its growing sub-sea pipeline business by buying Global Industries, a US rival, in September. The deal followed soon after General Electric's purchase of the UK's Wellstream, Technip's biggest rivals in providing flexible pipelines which are used to connect floating oil and gas or onshore installations.

Jon Tait, head of global attraction at BP, the UK oil major, says the company plans to hire about 6,000 people this year globally. Of those just over 500 will be graduates. The company, which has revamped its exploration and production business in the wake of last year's devastating Gulf of Mexico oil spill as well as increased its focus on safety, is still managing to attract top talent, says Mr Tait.

With the company investing in 32 projects over the next few years, the need for engineers is high. Experienced exploration people with a petro-technical and geoscience background, as well as those with sub-surface and drilling capabilities in deep water, are in demand. The design of wells is becoming ever more complex and BP, says Mr Tait, is hiring more PhD graduates with mathematical capabilities to develop drilling models to help the company drill more effectively.

Many of the oil companies, including BP and Royal Dutch Shell, are also investing in biofuels, sparking a need for chemists and agribusiness specialists.

Experienced health and safety professionals are also sought after, both by companies and industry regulators, in particular after the BP spill.

Given the rampant demand from the oil and gas industry, salaries have seen a corresponding uplift. According to Hays' Global Oil and Gas Salary Guide for 2011, more than 20 per cent of employers expect salaries to increase by more than 10 per cent in the next 12 months. The average global salary for those entering the industry is between \$35,000 and \$45,000.

The industry slowed its recruitment in the early 1990s and most industry executives say there is a gap that needs to be filled. With a spike in retirement expected in the next few years, especially in the US, some fear the industry is facing a generational time bomb. BP's Mr Tait, however, says he doesn't expect “a cliff”.

“I'm not sure all of these people will suddenly leave the industry, but we do need to make sure we are bringing in the talent.”

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Financial Times Special Report:
Working in Energy

A surging sector faces severe skill shortages

This report looks in-depth at recruitment and careers in the energy sector. It is more than 20 years since the last nuclear reactor was built in the UK – which means the country is out of practice as it launches a big building programme. With skills around the world urgently needed and oil and gas reserves depleting, what measures are companies taking to plug the gap in expertise? Which locations are key destinations for overseas postings?

Also discussed are the 'supermajors' - how do the big players recruit, the sort of people they need, and who ends up getting to the top in these businesses.

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Evacuations reassure staff working in trouble spots

Geography

Energy giants operating in far-flung regions need workforces to travel. David Blair reports

Three times in the last three years, employees of BP have packed their bags for emergency evacuations: Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, the unrest in Egypt earlier this year and the onset of Libya's civil war in February. Each forced a hasty exit for expatriate staff of the British oil giant.

In Libya, every international energy company froze operations and withdrew employees, some from remote camps deep in the Sahara.

But these incidents have done nothing to diminish the necessity for staff to work outside their home countries, nor – in general – their willingness to do so. International mobility remains a key requirement for any career with a big energy company.

BP's human resources department believes that, if anything, the speed and efficiency of the recent evacuations served as an important reassurance for the company's expatriates.

"BP was able to take very swift and immediate action to look after our employees," says Amanda Chilcott, vice-president of human resources for BP's North Sea operations. "People thought 'it's OK to go to these locations because I see how quickly and effectively BP can respond if necessary'."

This reassurance will have been all the more welcome because anyone working for an energy company has probably become more mobile over the last 20 years. Dur-

ing the cold war, large areas of the world were, in effect, off-limits for western oil majors. Until the early 1990s, even the biggest energy companies tended to have a relatively concentrated array of production assets, found generally in the North Sea, Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico.

Today, new terrain has opened up, leading the oil giants to deploy their staff much farther afield. A couple of decades ago, few would have imagined that western energy giants would be able to operate big oilfields in Angola and Azerbaijan. When the senior employees of these companies began their careers during the cold war, Angola was torn by conflict and Azerbaijan was a Soviet republic, locked firmly behind the Iron Curtain.

While the scope of international travel has widened, however, some general rules remain.

First, the biggest companies still have established hubs which serve as acknowledged training grounds for essential expertise. In the case of BP, the North Sea plays this role. Of the 20,000 people employed in BP's upstream functions worldwide, 3,500 work in the North Sea operation, which spans the maritime boundary between the UK and Norway.

This is where upstream staff cut their teeth and gain valuable experience, before being deployed elsewhere. The North Sea operation is a "fertile recruiting source for high calibre staff for other parts of the organisation", says Ms Chilcott. "We are definitely a net exporter of talent. We recruit a lot of people, not because people leave us for other companies or through natural attrition, but because they get re-deployed around the world."

Visit a BP-operated platform in the Caspian Sea or the Atlantic waters of Angola, and the engineers and technicians are likely to have begun their careers in the



The North Sea: an acknowledged training ground

epa

North Sea. Many will probably have lived in Aberdeen. "I don't think there's a single region of BP you can go to and not find someone with North Sea experience," adds Ms Chilcott.

The US – particularly Houston, Texas – serves as the other great centre of upstream expertise for BP and the other oil giants. This reflects the historical and current importance of Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico as production hubs.

The oilfields found in the North Sea and the US have key features in common. Both include a diverse range of geological features and technical challenges. Both also have production assets at every stage of their operational lives, from new discoveries to mature fields. The skills learned in these regions can be applied to almost any other operation elsewhere.

The second general rule is that no long-term career with a big energy company is possible without international travel. Upstream engineers may, in general, be more mobile than staff who perform other functions. But the impression that executives lead relatively predictable lives while technical experts are constantly on the move is mistaken.

All companies place great emphasis on understanding the political, legal, regulatory and environmental differences across national frontiers. Executives will have spent much of their careers as engineers or seismologists, during which they will have travelled widely.

To climb the ladder requires knowledge and experience of a wide array of countries. As the barriers to investment across borders have come down, so the premium placed on this kind of international expertise has become greater. Executives "will struggle to be successful if they haven't had some kind of international exposure", says Ms Chilcott.

Will this year's unrest in the Middle East deter people from a career that might involve living in a volatile country? Privately, insiders say that anyone tempted by a career of this kind is unlikely to be put off. They will understand the risks – as well as the benefits – of taking a job in this field.

And hasty evacuations from the Middle East are nothing new. BP started life as the Anglo-Persian oil company, based in Iran. As long ago as 1951, it was forced to evacuate all staff when the Iranian government seized its assets.

Oil and gas The view from the recruiters

As more of today's oil and gas supplies are hard to reach, there is an increasing need to develop and operate technology that can get to sources under the sea bed or in harsh conditions, such as Siberia. Add to this the development of future energy sources and so called "fuels of the future" and there becomes a significant skills gap to be filled, writes Janina Conboye.

So how do the oil majors, such as Shell and BP find the people with the right skills?

BP seeks a range of experts: those needed for petrotechnical solutions, such as petrophysicists; geologists, engineers and scientists for deep-water exploration; and chemists and agribusines people for the development of bio fuels and advanced lubricants.

"There are three ways BP attracts the skills it needs in the technology advancement sector. First, we grow our own – we hire graduates. Second, we hire professionals with the relevant experience, and third, we partner with academic organisations," says Jon Tait, head of attraction at BP.

The group is a leader in enhanced oil recovery, which includes a process called water flooding. The method is used as a secondary recovery technique: water is recovered from the water table and injected into an oil reservoir, displacing remaining oil towards production wells.

"This additional 2 or 3 per cent from an oil reservoir makes a real difference financially, so it's important we find the people that can make this happen," adds Mr Tait. "Globally, we hire 650 graduates a year. In the UK we hire in excess of 150 and 15 per cent of these are PhD students. We are a leader in investing in the talent of tomorrow and with 45 per cent of our research and development budget spent in the UK, this money finds its way to the universities, helping with the development of capability."

BP also has a lot of boomerang hires: "People like working at BP because it is a collaborative environment providing a global resource," adds Mr Tait.

Royal Dutch Shell uses various networks to attract talent, including employee referral, a common route into oil and gas companies, and social media. It also draws people via its website, where all jobs within the group are advertised.

Like BP, Shell is investing in exploration ventures. "Increases in production are creating increased hiring demands in areas such as production technology, drilling and reservoir engineering," says Sander Nieuwenhuizen, Shell's vice-president of recruitment. The group also takes on many graduates, recruiting 1,000 every year and putting them on a three-year development programme.

Mr Nieuwenhuizen also says the breadth of Shell provides the opportunity to change jobs and, in effect, gives the opportunity for multiple careers in one company. "This contributes to our high staff retention rate."

Some oil majors also use recruitment agencies with global networks within the sector. Mark Stuart, business manager for energy, engineering and construction at Reed, and who was himself a wellsite geologist at Baker Hughes Inteq, an oilfield services company, says old fashioned networking and headhunting is often the most effective way to draw talent.

"Currently there are plenty of graduates and the senior managers are in place, but in the technical areas of the oil and gas sector, there is a significant skills gap of about 10 years in the middle, which makes these very interesting," he says.

"The people we need to find are usually not the ones looking for the jobs and they are well looked after, so we need to dangle the carrots, so to speak."

Matthew Gribble, managing director for Michael Page Middle East says the sector is more global than any other industry and has a worldwide candidate base that can provide the specific skills needed in areas such as technical engineering. "A person can be on a job in Aberdeen and then their next position could be in Kazakhstan."

"We have dedicated consultants working across oil and gas recruitment hubs, such as Brazil, Singapore, Dubai and Aberdeen. We essentially capture candidates and share these with our clients."

He adds that the whole industry is essentially driven by technology and the need to produce oil in a more efficient, cleaner way. He also reiterates the need to gain access to hard-to-reach areas safely and cites the Gulf of Mexico disaster as an example of the risks involved and the need for skills to develop safer techniques.

"Service providers, drilling companies and product companies are also seeking the best-in-class candidates," he says. "We provide specific skill-driven recruitment, hiring people for operators such as BP or Abu Dhabi National Oil Company."

The recruitment agency Barclay Meade, part of the Matchtech group, also uses similar networking techniques, such as LinkedIn. "We recruit by knowing the market place, knowing where people are, what level they're at," says Russell Soan, the company's associate director for procurement and supply chain.

Mr Soan says the skills shortage is not helped by barriers into the gas and oil industry. "Some companies often don't take people from other industries, such as the automotive sectors, which means those who are employed within oil and gas are in demand and have less competition."

When it comes to the very senior positions, people are recruited from both business and technical backgrounds. Mr Stuart continues: "It's a fairly equal split with numerous VPs [vice presidents] and directors coming from backgrounds such as geoscience or petroleum engineering as well as those people from business backgrounds. "There is nothing to stop the technical guys getting up the tree."

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