

New Academy Asks Education For Help To Pass Big Tests

The UK Oil and Gas industry's core purpose is to develop a safe and sustainable future for exploration and production of oil and gas on the UK's Continental Shelf. To support this objective Oil and Gas UK was formed in spring 2007. This new body incorporated the operating companies, which had formerly belonged to UKOOA and added to them drilling, well service and subsea companies. Following its launch, Oil and Gas UK sought to consolidate industry's efforts and resources by restructuring the existing, well intentioned but fragmented approach to a number of issues including the industry's skills and knowledge agenda.

It was decided that the best course of action would be to unite all effort, assets, resources, knowledge and skills into a single entity, which would be owned and directed by the industry. This resulted in the creation of OPITO - The Oil & Gas Academy with a remit from the industry to deal with all aspects of workforce capability, skills, competence, and behaviours that underpin safe and successful operations now and in the future. "Having a skilled and motivated workforce is critical for the continuing success and sustainability of the UKCS and the global supply chain it contributes to, therefore, the Academy will play a pivotal role in facilitating the connection between industry and the organisations that can prepare and develop its workforce" (David Doig, OPITO – The Oil & Gas Academy Chief Executive).

As a focal point for the whole industry to come together to identify workforce issues, set an agenda and agree what action should be taken, the Academy will support and enable the delivery of a workforce with appropriate and relevant skills. This will be achieved through three distinct areas: Firstly, working with schools, colleges and universities on a shared agenda to promote teaching and learning in science, engineering and maths to support the long term feedstock of the industry. Secondly, it will work with the learning supply chain to build a world-class provision to support the industry's technical and safety standards, thus supporting a world-class business. Finally, the Academy will create relationships with alliance partner organisations that have skills and development remits that can add value to the industry's efforts.

So how does OPITO – the Oil and Gas Academy hope to work with education?

Business Development Director, Annette Thomas, feels that "the industry has gained some excellent learning from its long standing and successful work with ESEU and ESTA, which highlights the real value of working in genuine partnerships and the Academy, on behalf of the industry, will continue to build on these principles going forward".

In the short term this includes a continuation of the successful work started in 1999 by UKOOA and now supported by Oil and Gas UK through the Earth Science Education Unit. Exciting developments are the new workshops and materials developed for primary which are to be piloted in September 2008.

A joint venture with the Institute of Physics has been agreed which will see material being developed with physics teachers to encourage them to teach aspects of existing GCSE and A-level Physics specifications using earth contexts. Discussions are underway to explore ways of developing materials and support for teachers supported by data, simulations and case studies of practising scientist from the industry.

In Scotland changes being driven by the Curriculum for Excellence initiative give a great opportunity for partnership working. Once the final details of the proposed changes have been confirmed workshops are planned to develop continuing professional development for teachers along with curriculum support materials that draw on the science and technology employed in oil and gas contexts. This full-scale review will create a number of challenges for teachers seeking to implement its requirements for interdisciplinary themes and relevance to work and society. The Academy will work with teachers, ESEU and SESEF to identify and develop appropriate materials to support the delivery of this new curriculum using real life industry examples of the application of science in an earth context.

The creation of its own Academy is an ambitious step for the oil and gas industry, it has lots to do and some big tests to pass which means it will need help and support from a many professions and professionals – to achieve its goals with education will require the support from teachers through organisations like ESTA.

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