# Defining Workforce Skills Action Plan

## Introduction and context setting

Career pathways across the offshore energy sectors are unclear and fragmented. There is a lack of integration and options that enable transferability and the identification of re-skilling opportunities. Given this gap, there is a clear case for identifying and prioritising future skills requirements across technical, digital, safety and business disciplines and to align the contributions from industry, government, and academia.

The mapping and alignment of training and standards is vital. OPITO, in its UKCS Workforce Dynamics report, stressed the need for closer collaboration between industry and training providers to upskill and reskill the workforce, enhancing technology skills and capabilities across the industry. On-the-job training is likely to play an important role in delivering this aspiration as is the development of an aligned standards framework. Additional funding for training will be required to support the transition.

This Action Plan forms part of the wider North Sea Transition Deal (NSTD) Integrated People & Skills Strategy which highlights a series of strategic priorities that will help to create a diverse, integrated offshore energy workforce.

## Current situation

The UK has a mature and highly-skilled oil and gas workforce; however, this has been in decline, losing around 70,000 jobs over the last five years. In contrast, the offshore wind sector has seen major growth, reaching 31,000 jobs in 2022, with further increases forecast across all skill areas. The hydrogen and CCUS sectors are at a much earlier stage of development with their respective skills frameworks currently in the design phase.

Concerns have been raised that the tight timeframes of projects being commissioned in the 2020s may present difficulties for recruiting and training the new talent needed to deliver them. It is recommended that potential skills gaps be addressed by retraining the current workforce through accelerated learning programmes and exploiting the similarities between the oil and gas industry, hydrogen and CCUS. Managing the demand profile will be critical so that training and funding is provided at the optimum point in the cycle. In the case of the ScotWind offshore windfarm leasing round, for instance, construction over a three-to-five-year period, will be followed by operations and maintenance.

## Stakeholders in the Developing Workforce Skills Action Plan

There are several key stakeholders whose input will be crucial in order to ensure that all objectives of the Defining Workforce Skills Action Plan are realised. These include governments, funding bodies, awarding bodies, employers, trade unions, academic institutions and industry training providers. As with the other action plans, cross-sectoral collaboration will be necessary on a scale which has not previously been attempted. Strong leadership and an importance on placing the industry (and workforce) first, will be required to enable a workforce transition at pace that meets the intended net-zero targets.

# Action Plan Activities

## Strategic Priority 10 from the Integrated People & Skills Strategy

### Define clear career pathways across each sector of the industry, making visible the careers opportunities across the offshore energy sector

Traditionally, workers in the offshore energy sector have remained within the same sub-sector throughout their career, with movements between sectors being a relatively uncommon occurrence.

However, as the journey towards Net Zero continues, the workforce will adopt a more fluid approach, causing disruption to the labour market and driving a need for re-skilling and multi-skilling. People will move more frequently between sectors as career opportunities become more readily available in emerging sectors such as Offshore and Floating Wind, Hydrogen and CCUS.

Therefore, it is vitally important for the workforce to understand the potential career pathways across each sector of the industry to be able to make informed choices on those opportunities at various stages of their careers. It is also important for employers to be able to undertake effective workforce planning across sectors as their portfolios diversify, so that they can transition workers safely and effectively from sector to sector, where appropriate.

It has become clear that this can best be achieved through the development of step-by-step guidance – a pathway, or map – which defines how workers in particular roles can transition from their current sector to another. This strategic priority specifically looks at the creation of clear pathways that outline the steps needed to enable this.

Work which is already underway among standards bodies to identify and map existing qualifications and training for key technical roles within each sector can be built upon. Activity can be extended to develop clear pathways for those technical roles both within and across sectors by identifying the appropriate points in a worker's career where they can most realistically change from one sector to another.

This Strategic Priority will require employers and standards bodies to work closely together in order to prioritise high demand and high growth roles in each sector. The current career pathways within each sector will be mapped to understand how they can integrate with each other in order to create robust and sustainable cross sector career pathways for the chosen disciplines. Those pathways then need to be made visible and accessible to all stakeholders to facilitate greater flexibility for both new industry entrants, and the existing workforce.

## Activity Plan

| ACTIVITY | DATE |
|---|---|
| **Agree roles/disciplines for which cross sector career pathways will be developed, including priority high demand/high growth roles** | Q4, 2022 |
| **Develop and publish career pathways for agreed initial high demand/high growth roles** | Q1, 2023 |
| **Develop and publish career pathways for remaining roles/disciplines** | Q4, 2023 |
| **Create mechanism to highlight and signpost pathways for future priority roles** | Q4, 2023 |

## Strategic Priority 11 from the Integrated People & Skills Strategy

### Identify and prioritise future skills requirements across technical, digital, safety, and business disciplines and create alignment across industry, government and academia

Understanding and defining future skills requirements and associated career pathways will help to determine future direction. This will crystallise the skills and qualifications required and achieve a common understanding of the need for a co-ordinated approach to upskill the existing and future workforce. It will be a significant and ongoing task.

However, having the ability to map future needs back to today's technical, digital, safety, and business disciplines is essential if industry is to achieve its future goals.

This priority aligns with Strategic Priorities 16-18 under the Improving Skills Data Intelligence Action Plan, which will create a baseline of current skills across the offshore energy sectors, together with forecasts on future skills needs based on project investment pipelines. From this intelligence existing and future skills and qualification requirements can be identified, including the quantification of any gaps or shortages, together with potential initiatives and interventions as required.

Under the Energy Skills Alliance (ESA), a Future Skills Working Group will be created, comprising industry, academia, and skills development bodies, and ensuring representation across the offshore energy sectors. The Working Group will lead on the translation and interpretation of the skills data and intelligence, clearly identifying specific future skills needs, volumes, and likely geographic distribution based on project locations. This will support the development of appropriate interventions across technical, digital, safety and business disciplines.

## Activity Plan

| ACTIVITY | DATE |
|---|---|
| **Create ESA Future Skills Working Group, initially via ESA membership and then expanding to wider networks if required** | Q1, 2023 |
| **Develop and Agree Terms of Reference for the Working Group** | Q1, 2023 |
| **Conduct first meeting of the Working Group** | Q1, 2023 |
| **Publish initial findings from Working Group meeting and use findings to inform the work of the Energy Skills Intelligence Hub** | Q2, 2023 |

## Strategic Priority 12 from the Integrated People & Skills Strategy

### Adopt a digital-first approach to deliver training, development, and life-long learning to enable the workforce to develop cross-industry skills and careers

Historically, training and development for workers employed in the energy industry has primarily been delivered by traditional means; through off the job, attendance-based training programmes.

This approach has served the various sectors effectively over the years and has contributed significantly to developing a safe and skilled workforce. However, the rapid advances in technology in recent years, aligned with the changing expectations and learning behaviours of learners, presents an opportunity to revisit this traditional approach and develop new approaches and new learning frameworks. These will enable learners to develop skills in a more flexible way and by embracing the available and emerging technologies.

This blended approach will be aimed at providing learners with choices regarding how they can access knowledge-based learning in ways and at times which suit their working patterns and lifestyles. It will also rationalise the time spent off the job attending centres to complete necessary and safety critical practical training which cannot be safely or effectively delivered in the workplace. Existing practical training approaches will also be reviewed, and technological solutions integrated where appropriate and relevant. This digital evolution will need to be carefully and continually assessed to ensure that associated upskilling will support the workforce transition to roles that have longevity throughout the sector.

In order to achieve this, it is proposed that – in the short term – a coalition of industry standards bodies is formed to agree consistent, cross-industry changes to existing technical and safety training standards. This will ensure alignment and maintain recognition across sectors, including agreement of a timeline for these changes to be implemented into respective sectoral training programmes. Strong connectivity between this coalition and training providers will also be crucial to ensure proposed changes can be implemented effectively in practice.

It is also proposed that current industry technical and safety standards are formally reviewed by relevant awarding bodies to identify opportunities to deliver content through digital means or via the use of technological solutions such as simulation, virtual reality or augmented reality, where appropriate, in order to enhance the learner experience.

In the longer term, the coalition of standards bodies will develop and publish a cross-industry agreed set of training design principles that will establish a digital first approach to the development of new training standards and the review of existing training standards. This will ensure that digital solutions remain at the forefront of all future standards developed to support all sectors of the energy industry.

## Activity Plan

| ACTIVITY | DATE |
|---|---|
| **Form coalition of standards bodies and agree associated terms of reference** | Q1, 2023 |
| **Publish industry case studies demonstrating illustrative and innovative examples** | Q2, 2023 and ongoing |
| **Review existing technical and safety training and identify opportunities to deliver through digital/technology on a prioritised basis** | In agreed blocks to Q4, 2024 |
| **Obtain cross industry agreement on changes that can be made to existing standards and agree a timeline to implement these into training programmes** | In agreed blocks to Q4, 2024 |
| **Create a set of training design principles that establishes a digital-first approach to new and revised training for the industry** | Q4, 2024 |

## The industry input to support the successful development and delivery of the Action

As the Integrated People & Skills Strategy sets out, this is a complex cross-sector strategy which needs the industry to work in different ways to achieve strategic priorities. The areas below set out the key factors that will enable the delivery of the Action Plan:

- **Create clear career pathways across each sector of the industry, making opportunities visible – building on the work already underway among standards bodies to identify and map existing qualifications and training for key technical roles within each sector.**
- **Prioritise future skills requirements to create alignment across the industry, government and academia – understanding and defining skills requirements to determine future direction.**
- **Create a Future Skills Working Group, comprising industry, academia and skills development bodies – ensuring representation across the offshore energy sectors to lead on the translation and interpretation of the skills data and intelligence, clearly identifying specific future skills needs.**
- **Enable learners to develop skills flexibly and provide choices regarding how they can access knowledge-based learning to suit their lifestyle.**
- **Review current industry technical and safety standards to deliver content digitally or via the use of technological solutions such as simulation, virtual reality, or augmented reality where appropriate, to enhance the learner experience.**

## Outcomes

**Collaboration:** sectors will work collaboratively to define future skills requirements and associated career pathways to determine future direction.

**Alignment:** industry, government, and academia will align to enable transferability and create clear identification of re-skilling opportunities.

**Digital:** existing practical training approaches will be reviewed, and technological solutions integrated where relevant.

**Clear pathways:** current career pathways within each sector will be mapped to understand how they can integrate to create robust and sustainable cross-sector pathways.