

Nigel Wright primed to assist satellite office development as sector struggles with skill shortages

During the last decade energy companies have invested £43 billion in the UK sector and jobs have increased by almost two thirds. Around 600,000 people are now either directly or indirectly employed in the burgeoning industry. Analysts anticipate that demand in the sector will result in annual employment growth of over four percent up until 2020 and job creation estimates range from 15,000 to 70,000, depending on whom you read. Crucially, the energy sector as a whole is experiencing high demand and career opportunities are prevalent in nuclear, renewables as well as oil and gas.

However, despite this 'golden era' of employment there is a significant lack of qualified and experienced people available to fill vacancies. As a result, companies are struggling to identify and retain the talent they need to facilitate growth in the UK and overseas. The key reasons for this shortage are twofold; on the one hand the quantity and quality of graduates entering the sector is less than adequate, while at the same time the most skilled and experienced professionals are either being lost to international markets or retiring. Between 25-50% of the most experienced engineers are expected to retire over the next ten years.

It is a shortage of high level technical skills in particular that has lead to recruitment problems. Managing Consultant Anthony Broadhead explained that businesses are finding it 'difficult to grow, innovate and increase productivity' amidst this climate of talent scarcity. Across the different sectors, companies are competing to hire the best people and there is a high demand for a plethora of 'hard to find' profiles.

Broadhead noted that more needs to be done to make the sector attractive to new recruits. This is not only at graduate level (where there has been an increase in the number of students studying towards relevant subjects at University) but also to those coming from other industries, particularly 'heavy industry' and the military. 'The military is another increasingly popular poaching ground for energy companies as the engineering, project management and logistics skills developed in the armed forces are directly transferable.' In terms of attracting expats back to the UK, Broadhead suggested that 'the industry needs to raise its profile and persuade those living in Australia or the Middle East that the career and lifestyle opportunities here in the UK are worth considering.'

Satellite offices have been another emerging trend as companies in Aberdeen seek to take advantage of the local talent pools in other major UK cities such as Newcastle, Liverpool, Anglia, London and Bristol, which are ripe with people from industrial and engineering backgrounds. According to Broadhead, 'In Aberdeen talent is not freely available, the situation has been described as a 'recruitment war', competition for people is fierce and as a result, wages are increasing.' In the short term, Nigel Wright anticipates more companies based in Aberdeen to open satellite offices to alleviate immediate skill shortages.

In the last twelve months Nigel Wright has assisted energy clients with recruitment at all levels in the UK and overseas, identifying people with a broad range of backgrounds all with relevant 'in demand' skills'. Broadhead contents that Nigel Wright is well positioned to support the establishment of satellite offices because of its own national and international network of offices in the UK and Europe. One major subsea integrity business has already used Nigel Wright to hire staff for its office in Newcastle and Broadhead says Nigel Wright is anticipating more projects like this in 2013.