

Scottish Parliament Debate on The Need for an Offshore Training Passport

Workers case studies for MSPs

28th October 2021



The following case studies have been anonymised in order to protect the identity of those sharing their experiences and issues with training in the energy sector.

Paul

The biggest problem that faces the energy work force wanting to make the transition from offshore oil and gas to renewables is the cost of the extra training needed. Some of the GWO (renewable training governing body) training is essential but most of it is a duplication of the courses used in offshore oil and gas.

Being a rigging supervisor in the energy industry onshore and offshore I have to complete three banksman slinging courses every two years. I have to do a OPITO level 3 banksman slinging assessment, also a banksman slinging course for GWO wind turbines and when I obtain an onshore position. I then have to complete a CSCS Banksman slinging certification at a cost of £2500. This course is the most basic course in my trade and being at a supervision level I very rarely perform the duties of slinging the load as this is down to the riggers under my supervision.

Most of the contracting workforce now have to pay out thousands of pounds every two to four years to keep up both sets of certifications due to most renewables contracts being seasonal. I myself have to keep up all my certifications in oil and gas and offshore wind so I can fall back onto the oil and gas platforms later in the year.

It is not just the price of the training but the standards and contents.

To work in both offshore oil and gas and wind you have to have no less than three medicals every two years, every year if you are over 50 years old. You need to pay for the OGUK oil and gas medical, a medical to train and the GWO chest stepper occupational health assessment. Surely if personnel are fit enough to go offshore they are fit enough to do the training.

The courses needed for offshore have gotten so out of control that it has got to the point that I have to pay £75 for someone to measure my shoulders to tell me what seat I can sit on in the helicopter so if an emergency situation should arise I could escape out the window I was situated at. I have to get my shoulders measured every two years, just for offshore oil and gas.

Contractors like myself are also made to pay for a trade test every year even if they are employed by the same company doing the same job over a period of years. No offshore contracting company will pay for any contractors' training unless you have a core crew position on a platform.

To assist the workforce to make an easier transition from oil and gas to renewable energy, we need to look at combining GWO and BOSIET courses along with the medicals needed. These courses are the biggest hurdle to get over for the workforce.

Scottish Parliament Debate on The Need for an Offshore Training Passport

Workers case studies for MSPs

28th October 2021



Another big problem for the contractors in the energy sector is that many of us are now being employed by an in-house agency for the contracting company instead of being directly employed. This is so you are on a zero hour contract and can be finished at any time, it leaves us with no job security.

Being in the industry for 20 years I myself have seen a massive decline in the standard of the workforce due to the lack of apprenticeships. The younger personnel are relying on very expensive low standard training courses. I, like many other tradesmen, completed a three year apprenticeship in a fabrication yard with a mentor. Now you can do a four day course, go away for one year, get someone to fill out a book, then go back and do a level 3 assessment. Then if you're lucky, you'll get a job offshore but with next to no experience.

The energy workforce would also like to know why the turbines are not being fabricated in Britain. The fabrication yards around the British coast are only being opened up to be used as storage facilities for the turbines before they are transported offshore.

If renewables are going to be a long term solution to our high carbon footprint, why are these yards not being used to fabricate the turbines the way they were for the oil and gas platforms? Surely this should be an in-house project.

Lewis, 64

Lewis, aged 64, is a drilling consultant from Aberdeen who has 40 years' experience in the oil industry. In the last two years he's spent £1,400 on training costs, but during the pandemic has been furloughed. His certificates have lapsed over that period and it would cost him £2,100 to complete the training needed to get back to work.

Lewis said: "It's a pain, to be honest with you. Since I've been on furlough I knew there'd be no work, so I let my certificates expire, but it'll cost me £2,100 to get back in.

"I started off in construction but made the decision to move across to drilling. I saw that the industry was changing, with more and more preference for graduates. And they're very smart people, but they do lack a certain level of experience, which is important to have. I didn't think it was for the good or for the better.

"When it comes to training the courses used to be taught by ex-military, ex-marines, but these days they'll be taught by PADI [scuba] instructors who are used to warm water, and it'll be in a brightly lit pool, which doesn't really prepare you for survival offshore.

"When you do a training course, it's meant to cover you for two years, but you'll get eight months' work out of it, which ends up being four because it's two weeks on, two weeks off.

"The government will say they're 100% behind wind, or 100% behind tidal, but if you're a worker who wants to work in these sectors, you can finance it yourself.

Scottish Parliament Debate on The Need for an Offshore Training Passport

Workers case studies for MSPs

28th October 2021



“Then it’s down to the workers to find a way to do it, whether that’s a bank loan, or anything. The workers will always find the cash one way or another, if you want to put food on the table for a family of four.

“The training itself is a cash cow, though. It’s a money making exercise for those who are running it. Some courses like survival or firefighting, it’s repetitive, it’s same old, same old. But you need to do it, because without it, there’s no work.

“An offshore passport would be a good thing. I think it’ll be brilliant. It has got to be a government issue, if the private sector are involved it really needs oversight.

“Norway is so advanced and so far ahead of us, and they have been since the 1980s. In Norway you’ll be taken off the rig and put into school and still get paid.”

Jack, 39

Jack, 39, a father-of-two from Fife, has worked in the industry for 12 years. He works as a Loler Focal Point for rigs, having worked his way up from being a trainee rigger. He’d be open to working in renewables but can’t afford to keep two sets of training certificates up to date, which he’d need to access both industries.

Jack said he’d support the idea of an offshore passport because it would put all employers on the same level and force them to abide by the same rules. In the past two years he’s spent £3,000 on training costs with no help from employers.

Jack said: “The companies used to pay for your training costs. So you’d have to cover your first lot of training yourself but after that, once you were established with a company, they would pay for your training because they want you to work for them.

“Now it’s very different. You’ve got to cover all these costs yourself, and they need redoing every couple of years so you’re in this constant cycle, and often the courses do overlap. And some of these agencies are making you pay for your own Personal Protective Equipment that you need to work on an oil rig.

“I have thought about working in renewables, but that’d be thousands of pounds you’d have to pay to work in both industries. It’d just be too much, it costs an absolute fortune just to stay in one sector.

“I was paid off last year, so my certificates lapsed. I ended up having to pay £3,000 for training to only get four months of work.

Scottish Parliament Debate on The Need for an Offshore Training Passport

Workers case studies for MSPs

28th October 2021



“Shelling out all this money does cause stress, and it does have an impact on your family and your living costs. There’s lots of people worrying about how they’re going to pay the mortgage. I know people who’ve packed it in altogether because working offshore is just too expensive.”