



# OUR POWER

Demand Briefing Paper

96%

of 1092 offshore workers surveyed support this demand

# A TRAINING REGIME BUILT TO KEEP WORKERS SAFE INSTEAD OF FOR PROFIT

## SUMMARY

Training in the energy industry is a racket, despite it being dangerous work. OPITO, GWO and the other standards bodies need to align their training standards so workers aren't paying the price to transition. On top of an Offshore Training Passport, an overhaul of the system is needed, with training designed around

workers, skills and industry needs, rather than the convenience of training providers or accrediting bodies. We need properly regulated, central coordination of training with transferable skills recognised, rather than profit-motivated industry and training bodies setting the standards.

## CONTEXT

A survey of 610 offshore workers conducted by Platform, Friends of the Earth Scotland and Greenpeace in 2021<sup>1</sup> found that:

- 97% were concerned about the UK's offshore energy industry training costs
- 69% spent over £2000 of their own money on training including safety and trade-specific costs in the last two years, which is up 15% from before 2015.
- 65% said their employer contributed 0% to their training costs including safety and first aid training in the past two years.

The underlying structural problems are the heavy casualisation of the workforce on the one hand, and the for-profit structure of qualifications on the other. For formally self-employed workers, employers have no legal responsibility to provide training.

Qualifications required to work in offshore oil and gas on the one hand, and in offshore wind industries on the other, are aligned to standards set by different industry bodies, respectively, OPITO (Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation) and GWO (Global Wind Organisation). These organisations give accreditation to training providers.

Because the two sectors' standard-setting bodies are separate, workers wishing to switch between offshore oil and gas and offshore wind sectors must carry out training with duplicate content containing only minor differences. This can cost upwards of £1,000 for each course. For example, divers cite being required to complete the entire GWO First Aid course despite holding a more rigorous International Marine Contractors Association (IMCA) Diver Marine Technician Course or three-day First Aid at Work course quali-

“ If the cost of the training courses was returned to the companies then you would see a reduction in courses. ”

– Phil, Marine Technician

This briefing paper forms part of a collection of resources on **Our Power: Offshore workers' demands for a just transition**. A full report detailing the 10 demands created by offshore workers is available to read online and contains technical information, costs and a complete series of recommendations for decision makers.

A methodology paper is also available for more information on how the demands were created.

To protect their anonymity, all the names of workers quoted have been changed.

<sup>1</sup> <https://platformlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Training-Costs-Survey-Results.pdf>

# OUR POWER

Demand Briefing Paper

## A TRAINING REGIME BUILT TO KEEP WORKERS SAFE INSTEAD OF FOR PROFIT

cations. Previous analyses of the course content showed that the GWO first aid course had “little (if any) value added” for a worker who completed the three-day First Aid at Work course.<sup>2</sup> Trade unions representing offshore workers, including Unite and RMT, have been raising issues related to training duplication for years as standardisation would allow for more transferability to the offshore renewables and onshore sectors.

In May 2022, OPITO published an action plan to ‘Align Offshore Energy Training Standards’, including commitments to implement an industry-led digital, transparent and transferable offshore training passport, working alongside GWO and the IMCA as part of the Energy Skills Alliance.<sup>3</sup> However, it is unclear to what

extent GWO and OPITO are committed to a scheme which will comprehensively address the full extent of duplication in training across the offshore energy sector. GWO have previously published material outlining their view that there is little duplication based on the existing separate training modules of basic safety courses for GWO and OPITO and have impeded progress towards the creation of an offshore training passport.<sup>4</sup>

An approach based on the existing training courses, rather than a more holistic view of the skills and competences required to work safely in offshore energy, will not remove the extensive duplication in courses. The scheme also does not purport to tackle the issue of workers having to pay for training out of pocket.

2 <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/publications/dog-news-march-2022/15660-dog-news-special-feature-rev1.pdf>

3 <https://www.offshoreenergypeopleandskills.co.uk/public/img/docs/Aligning-Offshore-Energy-Standards-Action-Plan-FINAL.pdf>

4 <https://www.globalwindsafety.org/statistics/ensuring-a-safe-and-renewable-future>

## PATHWAY

An ‘Offshore Training Passport’ would licence accredited workers to work offshore in any sector through a cross-industry minimum training requirement. The passport should:

- Eliminate duplication of qualifications, ensuring that certification (including ‘micro-certification’) with one body is fully recognised by the other(s) and no duplication of training or assessment is needed including recognition of prior certificated learning (RPCL).
- Provide proportionate, efficient and robust individual assessment and recognition of competence for experienced workers so that they do not have to attend training in areas where they are already proficient but lack certification (recognition of prior experiential learning, RPEL).
- Guarantee that training is up-to-date, while ensuring that no worker has to redo a course that is still in date.

- Be digital, so that the training and certification record of workers can easily be checked.
- Be accepted as the minimum standard required by industry operators.

Necessary training costs should be borne by employers, including for self-employed and off-payroll workers who spend a significant amount of time with the same employer.

The overall responsibility for maintaining the Offshore Training Passport scheme should lie with a public sector or publicly regulated organisation, with a governing board for the scheme that includes industry bodies, the Health and Safety Executive, and trade unions. Various options are possible for this including a public-sector agency or a joint board, or potentially oversight by a body such as Skills Development Scotland (SDS) or the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). The hosting

organisation should not have a financial interest in the uptake of training courses or any other specific route to passporting.

The governing board for the Offshore Training Passport should establish principles and processes for recognising prior learning including crossover between GWO certified and OPITO certified qualifications. This needs to have two elements:

A comprehensive database of training and certification requirements, cross-referencing those where full and partial recognition must be given automatically (RPCL). Operational arrangements for RPCL are an administrative matter and once the database is set up it should not incur any additional cost to apply per person. The frequency of required recertification should be assessed for each qualification individually, depending on the risks involved, the type of competence, and whether the person is likely using the skill continuously or only occasionally.

# OUR POWER

Demand Briefing Paper

## A TRAINING REGIME BUILT TO KEEP WORKERS SAFE INSTEAD OF FOR PROFIT

A common protocol for individual assessment and recognition (RPEL) which enables workers with recent experience, as well as those with training not covered by the RPCL arrangements, to have their current levels of proficiency certificated directly where they correspond to full training elements, or recognised and credited against the training needed to complete an element. Operational arrangements for RPEL are likely to be contracted to colleges and training providers. They should be proportionate and provided at the minimum cost compatible with ensuring the validity and robustness of the certification.

### THE UK GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- Update the North Sea Transition Deal to:
  - Delegate overall responsibility for Offshore Skills Passport to the new arms-length body, hosted by a public sector body such as the IfATE or SDS.
  - Establish a training fund to directly support workers rather than companies, which can be accessed by individual, self-employed and off-payroll workers rather than only through employers. Funding should be open to self-employed and off-payroll workers and cover wages lost as well as training costs.
- Raise funds for offshore worker retraining through a levy on energy companies, which would incentivise employers to eliminate redundant training requirements, and invest in training their own workforces including self-employed and off-payroll workers. Modelled on the Apprenticeship Levy but applying specifically to industries in transition, the levy would create a training costs buffer that can be spent by the companies internally or fund training for others if unspent.

### THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- Use its role on the Energy Skills Alliance to steer the passporting scheme towards the model proposed here.
- Offer offshore workers in Scotland training support to meet the requirements of the Offshore Passport if needed for transitioning from oil and gas to other offshore industries (or prior to its setup, to meet existing training requirements for oil and gas workers seeking to work in renewables). This would form part of its commitment to a Skills Guarantee to workers in carbon-intensive industries.<sup>5</sup> Funding should be open to self-employed and off-payroll workers and cover wages lost as well as training costs. This should be part-funded by a transition skills levy.
- Establish a programme under the Green Jobs Workforce Academy to support individual workers to access training pathways that suit them, alongside a programme to support workers from underrepresented groups or backgrounds to access opportunities within the offshore energy sector.
- Support Scottish Further Education colleges in receiving industry body accreditation for delivering Offshore Training Passport aligned courses and carrying out RPEL assessments.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/pages/7>

# OUR POWER

Demand Briefing Paper

## A TRAINING REGIME BUILT TO KEEP WORKERS SAFE INSTEAD OF FOR PROFIT

### COSTS

The annual costs of administering the offshore skills passport should be under £5 million, equivalent to the operational budget of OPITO, and should be co-funded by industry.

We estimate that 12,500-15,500 offshore workers and 10,000 - 16,000 onshore workers in the oil and gas industry and its supply chains would access retraining opportunities.<sup>6</sup> The estimated cost of retraining - including covering salaries for workers' time off to train is £320 million - £1.1 billion across the UK, including £192 million - £662 million in Scotland. The additional cost of targeted careers advice is estimated at under £3 million. Of the total training costs, the Government should seek to recoup half through a new skills levy, leaving £160 million - £550 million to be match-funded by the Government.

### HAS THIS BEEN DONE ELSEWHERE?

Recognition of prior learning is a widely-used principle in British further and higher education and apprenticeships. It is embedded in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework<sup>7</sup> and is a requirement for all official apprenticeships in England, where government guidance<sup>8</sup> states that "Apprenticeship funding must not be used to pay for training the apprentice does not need, or certify knowledge, skills, and behaviours the apprentice already has". For Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) a principle operates that candidates should be assessed directly in any area where they are already competent, without having to attend relevant training. Similar principles are used in other jurisdictions, for instance the statutory requirement for RPL in France (validation des acquis de l'expérience, VAE),<sup>9</sup> the voluntary RPL scheme used in the Netherlands (erkenning van verworven competenties, EVC)<sup>10</sup> and a general assumption of RPL in the Australian national qualifications framework.<sup>11</sup>

Industry certification tends to lag behind best practice in the vocational education and training sector, although there are some good examples of cross-recognition and RPEL. For instance the ECITB's Connected Competence scheme enables experienced workers to have their proficiency assessed directly, although currently only covers workers employed directly, and in workshops participants cited dissatisfaction with the scheme because too few employers recognise it.

6 The numbers of workers are estimated based on modelling conducted for the report *Sea Change: Climate emergency, jobs and Managing the Phase-out of UK Oil & Gas Extraction*: <https://platformlondon.org/p-publications/sea-change-climate-emergency-jobs-north-sea-oil>

7 <https://scqf.org.uk/guide-to-rpl>

8 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-recognition-of-prior-learning>

9 <https://www.vae.gouv.fr>

10 <https://www.evc-centrum-nederland.nl/wat-is-evc>

11 [https://www.ncver.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/file/0027/4986/nd2102g.pdf](https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/file/0027/4986/nd2102g.pdf)

# OUR POWER

Demand Briefing Paper

## A TRAINING REGIME BUILT TO KEEP WORKERS SAFE INSTEAD OF FOR PROFIT

### CASE STUDY



Pseudonym: ..... **Robert**

Age: ..... **55**

Job Title: ..... **Subsea Engineer**

Location: ..... **Aberdeen**

The basic survival courses are regularly renewed and must be fitted into my own personal time outside of work. I spend roughly £600 a year keeping them all in date. I live close to a training centre, if I did not it would cost me a lot more.

The training industry is a narrow, commercial enterprise without any concern for improving the knowledge, skill and experience of the people working offshore or, as a result, improving the effectiveness of the British offshore industry. The wishes of their shareholders are held as paramount, not necessarily their true interests. For Britain, meeting the simple standard of performance agreed between the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the offshore industry as cost effectively as possible is the politically sufficient single end goal. Completely unlike in Norway, the Netherlands, the USA and Europe there is no deeper, more intelligent agenda.

I have worked on project and operational compliance with national and industry standards in Britain and several other countries including Norway. As an example, the Norwegian Diving Regulations were originally based on the British version. Both systems have developed and been updated since then and in doing so they have widely diverged. In Norway the underlying principle retained during this evolution has been to ensure that the worker gets home to their family safely. In Britain, ensuring that the HSE and the Operating Company can prove on paper that 'we weren't to blame' is the underlying core principle. As a result, Norway now has a very good, modern and comprehensive set of Diving Regulations. Britain has an

Approved Code of Practice (basically guidelines), a very big difference in accountability and therefore bottom-line effectiveness.

I have built company competency systems and know that focusing on real competency is the right approach. You need to forget the bits of paper we use right now. Consciously developing, nurturing and maximising the real skills needed for each of the particular jobs in the offshore industry is key. If you get this right, the entire industry benefits across the board from a much more capable workforce.

Governance of the British offshore training system is the government's role. Only the British Government can ensure that everything works properly and coherently in the interests of British industry. All of us, from the operating companies, the contractors and the training providers to the workers in both offshore oil and gas and offshore wind are entirely reliant on a robust government with an acceptably strong spine working in the national interest.

But sadly, we are trapped in Britain's unique persistent, endlessly repeating cycle of failure of competent government governance of offshore industry. We have shown the issues that the British training system must address to achieve a just transition but it isn't the idea of training we're fighting against. We are fighting against the naive and arcane, uniquely British Government misinterpretation of what Britain's real commercial interests are for our offshore industry and the resultant, trickle down, negative impact that has on our training system.