

# ENERGYEYE

## DOUNREAY CONTROL ROOM FOR MUSEUMS

THE CONTROL room of a nuclear power plant in Scotland has been dismantled and is to be rebuilt in two national museums.

The historic nerve centre of the nuclear “golf ball” dome at Dounreay will first go on display next year at the Science Museum in London and then later at the National Museums of Scotland.

Dounreay’s experimental fast breeder reactor once led British nuclear research. Housed inside a steel sphere, it was built to test the fast breeder concept, and started operating in 1959. In 1962 it became the first fast reactor in the world to provide electricity to a national grid and operated until its shutdown in March 1977.

Operators controlled the reactor systems from a room next to the sphere (*inset*).



DSRL & NDA

# Prospect launches check-off challenge in the nuclear estate

THE GOVERNMENT’S Trade Union bill aims to tie up unions in red tape and make it harder to look after members.

One way is by abolishing check-off in the public sector and other bodies that receive public funding.

Prospect is in the process of getting members in the nuclear estate to change the way they pay union subscriptions – moving from check-off, where the employer makes deductions from the pay roll, to direct debit.

This is in response to the proposals in the Trade Union bill to end such arrangements in the public sector that Prospect deputy general secretary Garry Graham says, to the surprise of many, includes the nuclear estate.

“Persuading members to change to direct debit is crucial to us being able to represent their interests effectively,” says Graham.

“The proposals in the bill to introduce challenging thresholds on industrial action ballots in nuclear decommissioning look and feel like a concerted attack when taken against other bombshells we know are in the pipeline.

“For example, the end of check-off coincides with proposals to cap severance payments (see page 6) and the fact that the government is considering legislating to end

the 2004 Energy Act pension protections.

“Against this backdrop it is vital that we organise and persuade members to make the switch. It’s simple and easy to do and only takes a few minutes.

“What we cannot allow is professional



workers in the industry to be denied a voice by the government deciding to cancel their union subscriptions.

“That way your relationship with Prospect will remain independent of employer or government interference. Don’t wait until it’s too late!”

Prospect prefers dialogue to confrontation minister seeking a meeting on pen-

has yet to receive a substantive response.

The union is urging all members who pay subs by check-off to switch now to direct debit – see our animated video pictured left – <https://vimeo.com/140823215>

Members can switch at [www.prospect.org.uk/dd](http://www.prospect.org.uk/dd) or by ringing the dedicated membership number (see box below).

A new leaflet, “Your subs made easy by direct debit”, has been uploaded to the library at [bit.ly/CheckOff](http://bit.ly/CheckOff)

This contains two forms – one to tell your employer to remove you from check-off and the other is a direct debit mandate. Email it to [membership@prospect.org.uk](mailto:membership@prospect.org.uk) or post it to **FREEPOST PROSPECT MEMBERSHIP**

## NEW LINE FOR YOUR MEMBERSHIP QUERIES

A dedicated number has been allocated to deal with membership queries.

Any member with a query about their union membership should dial **01932 577007** to reach the Prospect membership team in Chertsey directly. You can also check whether the details of your branch officials held by Prospect are up to date via the members’ section of the union website.

Latest revision of this document: <https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2015/01351>

This revision: <https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2015/01351/2015-11-04>



## No silver bullet for energy, Graham tells Conservative party delegates

A PACKED audience at a Conservative party conference fringe event heard deputy general secretary Garry Graham call for political consensus on a balanced energy policy for the UK, or risk losing the confidence required to deliver future generating capacity.

Speaking at a meeting organised by Trade Unionists for Safe Nuclear Energy, Graham explained that Prospect's political neutrality meant that it could take an active part in all the main party conferences.

But he voiced concern that the political consensus, built up as a result of painstaking years of work, could not be taken for granted in the current climate.

"There are those at the polar extremes of politics who would like to tell you that they have discovered the silver bullet – whether wind or fracking.

"These energy sources may have a contribution to make, but those who tell you they are the solution to our energy needs are not selling you a solution, they are selling you snake oil."

He called for wider public debate and engagement on energy policy than in the run-up to the general election, and reminded delegates and MPs that there are no energy generation decisions without controversy.



NEHELO JENNY

"Those who are keen to point out what they are opposed to have a responsibility to indicate what they believe the solutions and options are," he said.

While supporting nuclear new build as part of the low-carbon energy mix, he also made a plea in advance of the government spending review.

"We have to show that we have a long-term strategy for dealing with waste and our nuclear legacy, as well as champion a long-term storage solution – based on the most up-to-date science.

"If we cut investment now, we pile on costs for future generations, lose the opportunity to be a world leader and play into the hands of our detractors."

Summing up, Graham raised a laugh by saying that it would not be a trade union presentation if it did not end with a list of demands.

In all seriousness, he

added, these were to:

- continue to support the case for nuclear new build
- invest in decommissioning and waste management
- end the proposals in the Trade Union bill to withdraw union check-off arrangements in the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority nuclear estate.

## IN DEFENCE OF UNION RIGHTS

AS *Energy Eye* was going to press union members from all over the UK were preparing to gather at Westminster on 2 November for a rally and mass lobby organised by the TUC against the Trade Union bill.

Prospect has raised many concerns about the bill in its response to the government consultation on three aspects – strike ballot thresholds for people in "important" public services; hiring agency staff during industrial action; and intimidation of non-striking workers. The union also opposes the bill's aims to:

- limit the check-off system for collecting union subs direct from salary
- make members opt into rather than out of contributing to union political funds, and rebalot every five years
- limit facility time for union reps in the public sector
- increase the seven-day notice period for industrial action to 14 days
- increase reporting requirements to the certification officer and give the Certification Office new investigatory powers and the ability to fine unions.

The extreme proposals in the bill have even come under fire from Conservative MP David Davis. He told Sky News that while he agreed with most of it, some bits "look OTT, like requiring pickets to give their names to the police force. What is this? This isn't Franco's Britain, this is Queen Elizabeth II's Britain".

Prospect parliamentary and campaigns officer Graham Stewart stressed the importance of keeping up the pressure on politicians and urged individual members to write to their MPs to express their concern.

- **Download a PDF of Prospect's Employment Law Update on the proposal to end the right to check off in the public sector at <https://library.prospect.org.uk//download/2015/01310>**
- **TUC analysis of the bill and advice on writing to your MP is available at [www.tuc.org.uk/protect-right-strike](http://www.tuc.org.uk/protect-right-strike)**
- **Follow the bill via the Parliament website <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/tradeunion.html>**

# Ofgem to spark more competition in onshore electricity infrastructure

OFGEM IS consulting on putting new onshore electricity transmission infrastructure projects, worth £100m or more, out to tender, with 2017 earmarked as the first date for bids.

Links to offshore wind farms have been competitively tendered since 2009, with Ofgem claiming consumers have been saved between £200m - £400m. Now the regulator wants to apply this formula to new onshore projects.

It means the three monopoly transmission companies in Britain – (National Grid Electricity Transmission, Scottish Hydro Electricity Transmission and ScottishPower Transmission – will have to compete against other firms.

The current price control regime for the companies runs from 2013-2021. The regulator is currently consulting on how onshore tendering

would work, including how eligible projects would be identified and what revenue the winning bidders could expect.

Projects will only be tendered if it is possible to clearly delineate ownership boundaries so that it is clear who is responsible for each asset.

As the British transmission system operator, National Grid will recommend to Ofgem which projects meet the criteria and the technical or economic need for it, leaving Ofgem to make the final decision.

The regulator proposes that successful bidders should receive an annual revenue stream fixed over a 25-year period.

Ofgem is also working with the government to explore potential legislative change to support onshore competitive tendering.



## REFORMS HASTEN END OF COMPANY DEFINED BENEFIT PENSION SCHEMES

STATE pension reforms due in April 2016 are being blamed for an increasing number of energy sector companies closing their defined benefit (DB) pension schemes.

The reforms will end “contracting out” of the State Second Pension (which used to be called the State Earnings Related Pension, or Serps) and the National Insurance rebate enjoyed by members of DB pension schemes and their employers as a result.

The new legislation allows employers to pass the higher National Insurance costs on to members (except in the case of members covered by statutory protections such as those provided for under various electricity acts or the Energy Act 2004).

However, a growing number are starting to

cite this as a reason to close their DB pension schemes entirely.

In the space of one week Tony Hammond, Prospect negotiator in Liverpool, was told two companies – United Utilities and Amec Foster Wheeler – had started formal consultation on ending DB pension provision for everyone not covered by statutory protections. Other companies in the sector have made similar noises.

Pensions officer Neil Walsh said: “Prospect warned that the reforms would hasten the end of defined benefit pension provision in the private sector. Now members have to deal with the consequences. The union will represent all members affected during the consultation periods and will fight to retain the best provision possible for all.”

## Member recruit member extended

DO you have any colleagues who are worried about their pension but are not a member of the union? Now would be a good time to tell them about the work the union is doing to try and protect their pensions and potentially reward yourself or a charity at the same time.

Figures for Prospect’s member recruit member scheme shows it has been a success prompting the union to agree to extend it for another 12 months.



By the end of June 2015, 1,380 new members had been recruited using the scheme over the previous 12 months. Many branches came up with inventive ways to use MRM by donating their reward vouchers, or a cash equivalent, to local charities.

Head of the national organising and recruitment department, Mike Graham, said: “Our reps are champions. Not only have they embraced the recruitment message, that more members means greater influence, but their compassion means greater engagement with the local community while local charities benefit.

“All this sends out a positive message about the value of union membership today and the wish to see fairness for all.”

Under the terms of the MRM scheme each member who recruits a colleague will be able to choose from a £10 shopping voucher or a donation to charity.

● To find out more, visit [www.prospect.org.uk/mrm](http://www.prospect.org.uk/mrm)

# New plant to create thousands of jobs and provide 7% of UK's energy

It may have been a long time coming, but Wednesday 21 October marked a pivotal moment in the drive to start a nuclear renaissance in the UK

TEN YEARS after then prime minister Tony Blair announced a review of the UK's energy supplies, which opened the door to the possibility of a new nuclear fleet, representatives of French and Chinese energy heavyweights signed a deal in the UK paving the way for the first reactor in a generation.

The deal between EDF Energy and the China General Nuclear Power Corporation (CGN) paves the way for a final investment decision on new nuclear plant at Hinkley Point C, Somerset, and other UK infrastructure projects.

Confirmation that the Chinese energy giant had agreed to take a 33.5% stake in the project was announced during Chinese President Xi Jinping's recent four-day visit of Britain.

It is understood that the deal

between EDF and CGN is five-fold, setting out the terms of their cooperation on Hinkley; on a second EDF-led plant at Sizewell; on a Chinese-led plant at Bradwell, Essex; on cooperating to get Chinese reactor technology approved for use in the UK; and on projects elsewhere in the world.

Responding to the news Prospect deputy general secretary Garry Graham said: "The building of the new Hinkley nuclear plant will create 25,000 jobs in construction and provide 1,000 jobs in operation.

**Graham – Investors will bear all the construction risk from the day the final investment decision is made**

"These will be high-quality skilled jobs that will create a positive legacy for major infrastructure projects for the future. The plant will also provide 7% of our electricity needs when completed."

Tackling critics of the project who cite concerns over safety and security,

he said: "The nuclear sector in the UK is the most highly regulated in the world and, quite rightly, sets the most exacting safety standards.

"In terms of Hinkley and Sizewell the Chinese will be investment partners – though they have longer-term aspirations to prove Chinese technology in that regulatory environment.

"They won't be able to achieve that without the practical knowledge and expertise of UK specialists, scientists and engineers, overseen by our members in the Office for Nuclear Regulation. It will also require the use of the UK supply chain to the most exacting standards."

Graham also responded to criticism that the "strike price" agreed for power produced by Hinkley Point C is too high. "Customers will only start paying when HPC is up and running in several years time, with guarantees to ensure EDF refunds customers the difference if the price of electricity is above £92.50 per MWh from Hinkley.

"Not only does the strike price



Work on the Hinkley Point C construction site with existing power stations in the background

## HINKLEY POINT C: THE STORY SO FAR

### 2005

**NOVEMBER** – Then Prime Minister Tony Blair announces an energy review.



JOHN HARRIS/REUTERS/DIGITAL.COM

### 2006

**MAY** – Not replacing Britain's nuclear plants would be a "dereliction of duty" – Blair  
**JULY** – The review concludes that nuclear can make a "significant contribution" but then industry secretary Alistair Darling says the private sector must "initiate, fund, construct and operate" the plants.

### 2007

**FEBRUARY** – EDF Energy says it hopes to build Britain's first new nuclear plant in time for the UK to roast its 2017 Xmas turkeys with nuclear power.  
**AUGUST** – EDF and Areva submit their European Pressurised Reactor designs to the regulators.



### 2008

**JANUARY** – Then business secretary, John Hutton, formally backs new nuclear with completion "before 2020".  
**SEPTEMBER** – EDF buys British Energy for £12.5bn and unveils plans for four new reactors.  
**OCTOBER** – EDF consults with local residents over plans to build at Hinkley Point C (HPC).  
**DECEMBER** – EDF tells investors the average cost of four reactors – two at Hinkley and two at Sizewell – should be £45 per MWh with the first generating by 2017, the second 2018, and Sizewell's two reactors by 2021 and 2022.



### 2009

**MAY** – Centrica takes a 20% stake in EDF's UK nuclear fleet as well as an option of a 20% stake in any new nuclear build.



### 2010

**NOVEMBER** – EDF defends its environmental record and relocates badgers from HPC land.

### 2011

**FEBRUARY** – EDF chief Vincent de Rivaz says HPC could be ready in 2018 with market reform.  
**MARCH** – Japan's Fukushima disaster leads then energy secretary Chris Huhne to commission an urgent safety review, delaying the Health and Safety Executive's and Environment Agency's assessments of the new reactor designs.  
**MAY** – The safety review gives the green light, subject to adaptations in light of Fukushima.  
**JULY** – The government unveils its "electricity market reform" plan including "contracts for difference" – new long-term contracts that will support new nuclear plants.



compare favourably with other forms of low-carbon generation, we would need a crystal ball to know what the market price will be when Hinkley is actually operational. Yet the investors will bear

all the construction risk from the day the final investment decision is made. Nuclear is the only form of reliable low-carbon baseload generation, so it must be an essential part of our energy mix.”

## THE DEAL IN NUMBERS

**£18 BN** – EDF’s estimate of construction cost

**3.2 GW** – Capacity of plant

**5.8 MN** – Number of homes it could power

**5,600** – People to be employed on site at peak construction

**25,000** – Total number of jobs that could be created

**£92.50** – Price to be paid (in 2012 money) for each MWh unit of electricity – more than double the current market price of power

**35 YEARS** – Duration of subsidy contract agreed by ministers

**2024** – Earliest expected date for first power to be generated

## Joint research bid

ANOTHER OF the investment deals agreed with the Chinese will see the National Nuclear Laboratory and the CGN establish and run a new Joint Research and Innovation Centre (JRIC).

Both countries have committed £50m to the project over a five-year period. The new JRIC will focus on work across the whole nuclear fuel cycle.

**OCTOBER** – EDF submits a 55,000-page planning application and sets a 2012 target for the final investment decision (FID).

**DECEMBER** – The government admits the first new reactor will not start generating until 2019.

## 2012

**FEBRUARY** – Preparatory site works begins.



**MAY** – Then energy secretary Ed Davey opens talks with EDF over HPC subsidies, with EDF receiving a fixed “strike price” guaranteeing the cost of each unit of power, irrespective of the market price. Any difference between the market and guaranteed price to be met by consumer paid subsidies.

**AUGUST** – EDF seeks investors.

**DECEMBER** – EDF’s reactor design gains safety

approval, but de Rivaz says the FID will not be agreed until the end of the year.

## 2013

**FEBRUARY** – Centrica pulls out, citing spiralling costs and delays.

**MARCH** – Talks over subsidies stall after the Treasury offers EDF less than it wanted. EDF starts laying off staff. De Rivaz says talks are challenging. HPC’s planning permission granted.

**OCTOBER** – The government announces the provisional subsidies agreement with EDF has increased the project cost to £16bn and agrees a strike price of £92.50 per MWh over a 35-year period.

EDF to retain a 50% stake, Areva will take 10%, two Chinese groups a combined 40% stake and 15% to other parties. EDF confirms HPC will not be operational until 2023, and only if the FID is made by July 2014.

**DECEMBER** – The European Commission launches a state aid investigation.

## 2014

**MARCH** – EDF admits July FID deadline will not be met.



**MAY** – EDF begins a second stage of preparatory works building roundabouts and roads.

**OCTOBER** – The European Commission gives HPC state aid approval. Estimated cost now £24.5bn.

**DECEMBER** – EDF says FID will be agreed by March 2015.

## 2015

**FEBRUARY** – The March deadline is abandoned.

**JULY** – Energy secretary Amber Rudd says a decision likely later in the year.

**SEPTEMBER** – EDF abandons the 2023 operational date. A new date will be set when the FID agreed, based on solely on EDF and Chinese investment.

**SEPTEMBER** – The chancellor announces a £2bn loan guarantee for HPC.



■ **Members in ScottishPower celebrate the union's successful defence of the protected pension rights gained on privatisation at their annual delegate meeting in 2014. Prospect is seeking a meeting with the energy secretary amid fears those protections could be under fire again**

## When the cap doesn't fit

The union remains committed to fighting plans to extend a proposed cap on exit payments to nuclear workers, explains Prospect's pensions officer **Neil Walsh**

THE GOVERNMENT has rejected arguments made by Prospect, and hundreds of individual members employed on the NDA estate, that they should be excluded from the scope of a proposed cap on exit payments for public sector workers.

With the legislative process already under way only strong lobbying of Parliament is likely to result in improvements to the proposals.

The government's aim is to cap exit payments at a maximum of £95,000. This will include redundancy payments, payments in lieu of notice and also the cost of ensuring members still receive a full pension even if they are made redundant at the minimum age they are eligible for retirement.

In August's curtailed consultation period, Prospect argued that the scope of the proposal was far wider than envisaged in the Conservative Party's manifesto commitment to cap payments for "public sector workers".

Applying the cap to the employees of companies operated by private sector owners extended the scope beyond what voters would have reasonably expected.

The union also argued that the proposed cap interfered with statutory protections and

negotiated agreements covering workers across the nuclear sector, and that any cap would significantly impact on companies' ability to retain essential skills and successfully decommission sites.

The government issued its response on 17 September, just three weeks after the closure of the consultation, despite having received over 4,000 responses. It made no reference to Prospect's arguments.

Part eight of the Enterprise bill 2015-16 is intended to give the statutory basis for the cap, bringing it into effect by secondary legislation after the bill receives Royal Assent.

The bill was introduced to the House of Lords on 16 September and had its second reading on 12 October, where many opposition peers spoke against the cap.

Prospect is concentrating resources on seeking amendments to the bill, and consequent secondary legislation, that will remove nuclear workers from the scope of the proposed cap as well as measures that lessen the impact on those it eventually does affect.

■ It is important that members support this lobbying work by writing to their MPs. Guidance is available via [bit.ly/lobbying\\_resources](http://bit.ly/lobbying_resources).

■ The union's submission on the proposed cap is available at <https://library.prospect.org.uk/download/2015/01060>

■ Details of the progression of the Enterprise Bill can be found at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/enterprise.html>

## IN DEFENCE OF NUCLEAR PENSIONS

PROSPECT has written to energy secretary Amber Rudd to request a meeting to discuss the future of pension protections in the nuclear industry.

If follows speculation that protections for workers in the nuclear estate, legislated for in the Energy Act 2004, could be offered up to the Treasury as part of the current spending review process.

The protections ensure that anyone covered by the act, who has been transferred from a relevant public sector pension scheme, is provided with access to a pension scheme no less favourable than the terms they enjoyed in the public sector at the time they transferred.

Thousands of nuclear sector workers transferred from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's Combined Pension Scheme (CPS) to the Combined Nuclear Pension Plan (CNPP) and are covered by the protections of the act.

Reforms have already been made to the CPS and other public service pension schemes, and the speculation is that legislation could be introduced to allow similar reforms, affecting workers covered by the protections.

This could involve higher member contribution rates, aligning pension age to state pension age and moving to a career-average structure.

Garry Graham, Prospect deputy general secretary, said: "The speculation, and resulting uncertainty, is deeply unhelpful and extremely concerning.

"The secretary of state has a duty to explain to Prospect members, and others, what her plans are. Prospect has defended the protections of the Energy Act against attack before and will do so again if necessary."



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EnergyEye editor: Katherine Beirne  
E: [katherine.beirne@prospect.org.uk](mailto:katherine.beirne@prospect.org.uk)  
T: 020 7902 6625

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# UK network needs some smart answers

A perfect storm that could bring the network to its knees is being created by crumbling infrastructure, due to a chronic lack of investment, vacillating political direction and the technological and financial challenges involved in building a low-carbon, flexible, fair and future-proof transmission and distribution system.

## A different past

PROSPECT HAS highlighted the failings of the current out-dated networks, designed to carry large quantities of high-voltage electricity across long distances.

Responding to the energy and climate change committee's inquiry into the future of the UK's electricity infrastructure, it listed members' concerns outlined in a motion to this year's Energy Supply Industry sector conference.

At up to 400kV, the electricity is too powerful to go directly to consumers and requires voltage control at substations before it enters local distribution networks supplying homes and businesses.

Coupled to this, asset sweating since privatisation means the current system has not been maintained as it should have been. Smart grids are seen as an answer to the problem of integrating renewable electricity supply and load balancing.

But Energy UK estimates that modernisation will cost £30bn for a smart grid able to:

- transmit electricity more efficiently
- restore electricity after disturbances more quickly
- enable a reduction in peak demand
- integrate renewable energy generation – on both a small and large scale.

This would include measures to mitigate against the greater risk of floods due to climate change.

This could include the use of insulated overhead line conductors; rebuilding lines to a heavier construction specification; increasing lightning surge withstand capability; and automated switching to isolate faults and restore supplies.

Prospect also stressed the need for major upgrades and new lines, including from north to south to

connect Scottish renewables with demand centres in the South East and reinforcements for any new, bigger nuclear plant.

## Intermittent generation

On the issue of the intermittent nature of renewables, and the need to counter large fluctuations over timescales ranging from seconds to years, Prospect said there is a lack of strategic thinking.

Connecting embedded generators to a network designed to connect a few large power stations presents unique problems, as demonstrated by 2012 research by the German Fraunhofer Institute into solar and wind energy fluctuations.

It found: "On a countrywide basis, the output varied over more than two orders of magnitude from a minimum of 0.115 GW to a maximum of 24 GW."

Added to this is a muddled and sometimes seemingly contradictory policy and regulation framework.

Since May 2015, the Conservatives have reversed at least 10 key green energy and energy efficiency policies, with no replacement in sight.

Examples include:

- ending enabling policy and funding schemes such as feed-in tariffs and the climate change levy, and replacing the renewables obligation with contract for differences.

This has sent a mixed signal about the political will to address issues of cost, security and decarbonisation

- Northern Ireland's separate regulation system
- the untested outcomes of Ofgem's RIIO price control framework.

Prospect noted that while the Offshore Transmission Regime and the Integrated Transmission Planning and Regulation (ITPR) may offer some solutions, they also raise concerns over sovereignty and ownership of the national asset.



MARCUS ROSE

## People and skills

Citing the government's own figures, the union said smart grids could employ 9,000 people and contribute £5bn to the economy.

Similarly the National Skills Academy (Transmission and Distribution) 2015 report predicted an increase of 62% on the current workforce of 12,600 plus, to ensure supplies are maintained. The Energy Networks Association put the figure at nearer to 74%.

Prospect also pointed to the large number of jobs that an ambitious roll-out of carbon capture storage technology would create – a market worth £15-35bn by 2030 – which could also reduce household bills by £82 a year, according to the TUC and the Carbon Capture and Storage Association.



**Energy UK estimates that modernisation will cost £30bn**

## The engineering challenge

Finally, on the issue of delivery, the union's submission referred to the Royal Academy of Engineering's report, *A critical time for UK energy policy* – which calls for a four-pronged approach using:

- smart grid/networks – providing a continuous data loop
  - smart meters
  - distributed generation/connectors
  - interconnectors (UK/EU) – current capacity of up to 9GW.
- **To view the full submission visit [bit.ly/DifferentPast](#)**
- **To see the Royal Academy of Engineering's report go to [www.raeng.org.uk/publications/reports/a-critical-time-for-uk-energy-policy](#)**



■ *The Magnox Swarf Storage Silo at Sellafield*

# Sellafield director hails scientists' waste management breakthrough

A REVOLUTIONARY breakthrough in the management of nuclear waste looks set to accelerate progress at Sellafield and slice hundreds of millions of pounds off the bill for cleaning up the site.

Scientists studying intermediate level waste (ILW) in one of the site's historic waste stores have unearthed previously unknown information about the material's long-term behaviour.

The discovery has allowed the site to take a radically simplified approach to the packaging and disposal of ILW that could see significant reductions in the timescales and costs associated with decommissioning redundant nuclear facilities.

The research focused on the chemical behaviours of ILW stored in the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo (MSSS) which was built in the 1960s and has been prioritised for clean-up by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

Previously, a 22-step mechanical treatment and encapsulation process was thought necessary to manage and ultimately dispose of ILW stored in the building. But the study's findings have swept away that theory and provided the underpinning for an alternative three step solution which stores the waste in a raw form, without the need for a downstream treatment and encapsulation process.

This approach produces a waste package suitable for interim storage at Sellafield for several decades. Only a simple cap will need to be added before final disposal in any future UK



■ *Sellafield managing director Paul Foster: Genuine breakthrough in the science behind nuclear decommissioning*

underground repository.

Switching to this new method could speed up the decommissioning of the silo by four years and provide huge savings to the taxpayer. The technique could also be applied to other redundant nuclear facilities in the UK and around the world.

Sellafield managing director Paul Foster said: "The adoption of this new approach marks a pivotal moment in the journey of Sellafield Ltd.

"I am extremely proud of the role Sellafield Ltd has played in the collaborative research project, which has delivered a genuine breakthrough in the science behind nuclear decommissioning."

The adoption of a new approach to MSSS decommissioning means the winding down of the previous baseline approach, being led by contractor a.m.a.

Foster said: "As we enter an exciting new phase in the decommissioning of MSSS, I would like to pay tribute to those who carried out the pioneering work that made this possible.

"a.m.a. has demonstrated excellent leadership throughout the project. They brought together three world-class companies and quickly formed an integrated leadership team that proved to be agile, flexible and focused.

"a.m.a. brought real innovation, skills and knowledge from the beginning of the project, sharing best practice from major infrastructure projects from around the world."

The four-year study was led by the NDA, Sellafield Ltd and the National

Nuclear Laboratory, with academics from UK universities. It focused on the corrosion behaviours of magnesium and uranium and shed new light on the long-term hazards these materials pose to people and the environment.

Its conclusions suggest that previous estimates about the level of treatment required to form protection against the dangers posed by these waste were overly conservative.

Scientists now believe a safe and secure waste package suitable for interim storage at Sellafield and final disposal in an underground repository can be produced using a far more straightforward approach.

Radioactive Waste Management Ltd, the organisation responsible for designing and operating an underground repository for higher-activity wastes, has confirmed these waste packages would meet the acceptability criteria for the facility.

An added benefit of the alternative approach is the reduction in "secondary wastes" created during the treatment phase, resulting in an estimated 10% fewer waste packages being produced during the decommissioning of MSSS.

The previous plan for the safe management of this waste involved the development of the Silos Direct Encapsulation Plant (SDP).

This project has already been ramped down to essential spending only, as the new strategy matured. Now that a final decision has been taken, the SDP project will be terminated.



# ENERGYEYE



The UK's crumbling distribution network and the urgent need for investment in new generation capacity were among the topics Prospect energy representatives from across the country tackled when they met in June for the biennial Energy Supply Industry sector conference

## Call for action to avert network 'perfect storm'

Lack of investment in the UK's distribution network; the challenge of connecting renewable technologies and tight price controls set by the regulator are building a perfect storm that could bring the network to its knees.



That was the warning from **Western Power Distribution** rep **Mark Baxter** (left) as he moved an emergency motion on threats to the network's safety and efficiency.

Among them is British Gas' decision to refer Ofgem's price settlement for five electricity networks to the Competition and Markets Authority on the grounds that it is too lenient. Baxter said this could exacerbate pressures on safety if investment is reduced for network reinforcement and engineers to operate the system. Added to this, government incentives have led to an increase in embedded generator connections, (wind, solar and biomass), raising further issues over voltage control and maintenance.

"The whole network is falling around our ears. We have already seen what's happening in the coal side of our industry, with power stations being closed down. We will soon be in a situation where the network will

have burned out because of equipment failure."

Support came from **Magnox** rep **Neil Griffiths** (right) who said warnings voiced 15 years ago about embedded generation were coming home to roost. "They're subtle and cannot be easily understood by people who don't have the technological understanding that we have in this room," he said. "But it worries me that we are in a position where the voltage control on local networks has pretty much gone because of embedded generation.



"You have embedded generation actually using circuits which you thought were isolated, creating safety hazards. Fires have even started in people's houses because voltages are going out of control."

Griffiths said short-sighted decisions were being made without a full assessment of the potential consequences and he urged delegates to back the call for the union to lobby:

- Ofgem, and other bodies, for a consistent and manageable approach to embedded generation
- the Health and Safety Executive to ensure closer co-ordination between the economic and safety regulation.

### The union that gives you Extra

PROSPECT members now have exclusive access to a service that will help them to save money and get great deals on utilities, entertainment and purchases.

Prospect Extra was launched at the end of July and more than 500 members signed up within six hours.

The service is a cash-back and comparison website exclusively for members. After



registering, members will be able to:

- Compare prices of household energy, insurance and other products
- Access financial advice from consumer champion Sarah Willingham (of Dragons' Den fame)
- Get exclusive promotions, bonuses and packages
- Receive cash-back on special deals.
- Sign up at: [prospectextra.org.uk/signup](http://prospectextra.org.uk/signup)



### GREAT NEED TO RECRUIT

SUCCESSION planning for branches and the need to encourage younger workers into the union were behind a motion from **EDF Energy** moved by **Michael Zodiates**. Telling conference that 20% of union members are due to retire in the next five to 10 years, he said the need to identify and recruit younger members has never been greater.



2015  
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### PAY BENCHMARK

A call for a salary survey of transmission and distribution branches was carried unanimously. Mover **Kevin Garside** (Northern Powergrid) said it was a straightforward benchmarking exercise that would help smooth pay negotiations.





■ *Poorest, most vulnerable and oldest likely to engage with the market*

## CMA report busts myths

PROSPECT HAS welcomed the provisional findings of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) investigation into the energy sector.

While the findings are subject to a further round of consultation, it is hoped that they will pave the way for an informed debate about the challenges facing the energy sector.

Although Prospect welcomed the referral to the CMA by Ofgem, like many stakeholders in the industry it did so in an effort to challenge some of the myths being propagated and to try to prompt an evidence-based discussion and analysis.

Deputy general secretary Garry Graham said: "It is good that the report rejects further break-up of the industry and recognises that vertical integration can have benefits for businesses and consumers without presenting an undue barrier for others to participate in the market.

"There are, however, no grounds for complacency and Prospect has long championed the need for openness and transparency in order gain public trust."

The report also warns about the impact of unintended consequences in relation to regulatory changes, such as the enforced reduction in the number of tariffs companies are able to offer, and raises questions about the levels

of customer participation.

"The poorest, most vulnerable and oldest are least likely to engage with the market so ensuring that these less active consumers are not exploited, and their position protected, is a real challenge for the industry. How that is achieved is another issue," said Graham.

"There is also a concern that the regulatory model is based on a model of the consumer which exists mainly in the minds of regulatory economists and, as we know, show a regulatory economist something that works in practice and they will tell you in theory why it shouldn't.

"Of more pressing interest to consumers and the industry is the recent announcement by National Grid over declining energy margins. This will not come as news to our members and is something we have been warning of for a number of years – emphasising the need

for investment in generating capacity and infrastructure.

"The regulatory economists will tell you that theoretically, through the use of capacity mechanisms and demand-side measures, everything should be fine.

"In practice, it may come down to how cold the winter is and whether the wind blows."



**Graham:**  
*The poorest, most vulnerable and oldest*

*are least likely to engage with the market so ensuring that these less active consumers are not exploited is a real challenge for the industry*

## Guarantees sought over waste funding

PROSPECT is seeking a meeting with the energy minister in advance of November's comprehensive spending review to seek assurances over the funding for nuclear decommissioning and waste management.

Since the general election there have been rumours of significant planned cuts to government departmental spending, with speculation that non-protected departments could face cuts of between 25-40%.

A reduction of this magnitude could impact severely on the work of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and the funding of decommissioning and waste management.

Deputy general secretary Garry Graham said: "As we stand at the edge of what will hopefully be a renaissance in nuclear new build we need to maintain the impetus behind dealing with our nuclear legacy.

"The public will rightly question our nuclear future if we do not maintain efforts to deal with our past.

"When nuclear new build gains momentum skills will be at premium across the industry. There is always the temptation to save money in the short term and defer work, or put projects on a care and maintenance basis, when budgets are tight.

"But the long-term higher cost to the taxpayer means this not in the interests of the public or the industry as a whole."

## Green light for NuGen land deal

UK NUCLEAR new-build developer NuGen has signed a deal with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority for the land contract at Moorside, near Sellafield in Cumbria, bringing the company's proposed £15bn project to build three new nuclear reactors a step closer.





## STRIKE BALLOT THRESHOLDS TO AFFECT ENERGY WORKERS

PROSPECT members employed by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority are among those required to meet new strike thresholds contained in the recent trade union bill.

The bill will require at least 50% of the membership of any branch to take part in any strike ballot for it to go ahead.

In addition, certain public sector workers, including NDA employees, are required to meet an additional target of 40% of the entire membership voting in favour for a strike ballot to be valid.

In response, Prospect insisted that it always seeks the strongest possible mandate for strike action, and that a walkout

remains an option of last resort.

However the union has raised significant concerns over other proposals including:

- a joint levy of unions and employers' associations to fund new powers of scrutiny which Prospect fears will be an additional administrative and financial burden that may prevent union recognition
- further attacks on facility time
- the ability to draft in agency workers to cover striking personnel.

■ See general secretary Mike Clancy's latest blog post on the new bill at [www.prospect.org.uk/news/id/2015/July/30/The-trade-union-bill](http://www.prospect.org.uk/news/id/2015/July/30/The-trade-union-bill)

■ Employees, such as those in Amec Foster Wheeler's clean energy division, pictured here during their recent pay strike, met the threshold of at least 50% of the membership taking part in any strike ballot. The specialist staff employed by Energy, Safety and Risk Consultants Ltd held a one-day strike on 10 July with walkouts at the company's sites at Warrington and Knutsford, Harwell, Dorchester and Quedgeley. Further action is being planned.

# Ofgem must stop interfering in pensions, Prospect warns

PROSPECT HAS warned the energy regulator Ofgem against interfering in discussions over pension deficits between distribution network operators and their employees.

The caution is contained in the union's submission to Ofgem's consultation on the policy for funding network operators' pensions.

While welcoming proposals to extend the period scheme deficits can be eliminated, as long as it does not weaken commitments to fund any deficits, Prospect has cautioned against attempts to use benchmarking reviews to influence employers to make detrimental changes.

Detrimental changes would, it said, be subject to legal challenge, particularly based on the protected person status provisions contained in some schemes.

However the union has reasoned that as these schemes are closed to new joiners, the ageing workforce means the number of employees covered by these provisions is diminishing.

It also emphasised that with 80% of employees due to retire in the next 15 years, quality pensions are a significant tool in retaining the older tranche of the workforce and avoiding a skills crisis.

Under Ofgem's current approach, which was set in 2010, deficits relating to pensionable service before a cut-off date are passed through to customers. Companies are incentivised to manage any deficits relating to service after the cut-off dates.

The cut-off date is 31 March 2010 for distribution network operators; 31 March 2012 for transmission operators and system operators; and 31 March 2013 for gas distribution networks.

The deficits are to be paid down over a 15-year period from the relevant cut-off date. Funding is monitored through triennial reasonableness reviews, which benchmark operators against each other. Outliers will be investigated and fined.

Ofgem is concerned that the size of the remaining deficits after the current 15-year period might encourage network operators and scheme trustees to be overly cautious in valuation assumptions, causing pension costs to be unfairly spread between current and future customers and, potentially, overfunding schemes

The last actuarial valuations for network operators' pension schemes (31 March 2013) showed a deficit of around £7.5bn, with £5.9bn

attributable to members employed in regulated activities. The current figure is likely to be much higher.

As a result, Ofgem is consulting on:

- additional periods over the cut-off date, if the amount of deficit has changed
- reasonableness reviews that focus on things the network operators (rather than scheme trustees) can control and the specific circumstances of each operator
- obligations demanding network operators to report to stakeholders on their scheme's governance and good end results for customers.

Prospect pension officer Phil McEvoy said: "The proposals contained in the consultation are relatively minor compared with the changes introduced by Ofgem in 2010.

"Nevertheless, Prospect continues to warn Ofgem off exerting undue influence over workers' pensions, as this is a matter that should be negotiated directly between the union and sector employers. We will remain watchful of any proposals that seek to undermine quality pension provision in the sector."

■ To read Prospect's submission visit: [library.prospect.org.uk//download/2015/00895](http://library.prospect.org.uk//download/2015/00895)



**McEvoy:**  
*Workers' pensions, are a matter that should be negotiated directly between the union and sector employers*

# Challenging times ahead

OPENING THIS year's Energy Supply Industry sector conference, deputy general secretary Garry Graham said the past two years had posed significant challenges, not least the coalition government's attempts to unpick pension provision.

While thanking reps for their contribution, Graham warned that more lay ahead. "I would like to say it will get easier, but I fear the pace of change will only get faster and the challenges greater. But that means there has never been a more important time to be a union member."

Post-election the biggest structural challenge facing the sector is, he said, the pressing need for better generating capacity and energy infrastructure.

"We need an energy policy that is fit-for-purpose. I was very disappointed over what counted for debate on energy in the run-up to the general election.

"Some politicians show wilful ignorance of the physical challenges surrounding the energy sector with political debate going no further than issues of cost," he said, adding that comments made by members of the energy select committee after the St Jude storm showed a "startling lack of understanding".



MARK THOMAS

"It is perverse that we, the customer, are paying manufacturers to come off supply at peak times – energy intensive companies contributing to the UK economy.

"Sometimes companies self-supply but you can bet it is not low carbon energy. If that happened in any other country in the European Union we would have very particular words to say about it."

But investment in plant and infrastructure is not the only problem,

*'It is perverse that we, the customer, are paying manufacturers to come off supply'*

he said, pointing to the growing skills crisis and the sector's aging demographics.

"Over the next 15 years two thirds of the skilled workforce will be lost to the industry. The challenge facing the economy, the industry and the union, is to champion skills and high quality jobs, and to get these into Prospect membership."

■ Conference pictures by Joanne O'Brien

## Revolving door recruitment

THE PRACTICE of re-recruiting staff who have left on early or normal retirement is restricting opportunities for younger employees, according to a motion from the **Scottish and Southern Energy** branch.



Mover **Nick Brown** (left) said the use of retired personnel also meant that pensions schemes are subsidising the companies' salary costs – something which is morally wrong and risks undermining the terms and conditions of other employees.



While sympathetic, the SEC felt the instruction – to reduce the practice – would be impossible to implement.

Speaking on its behalf **Henry Szymonski** (above) said that while the motion aims to encourage the development of younger members it also conflicts with members' rights



to work. "We cannot discriminate against retirees coming back to work," he said, adding that the SEC would need to determine how widespread the practice is.

**Tasso Zodiates** warned that without a set retirement date the issue could become more prominent.

"There must be an incentive for staff to retire to create space in the organisation," he said before blaming companies for failing to prepare for the loss of expertise.

"Sometimes we need that expertise, even if only for one or two days a week, in order to train the young engineers that are coming in."

Urging delegates to remit the motion Zodiates said that if, as the motion asked, retired staff were prevented from returning to work, companies would turn to contractors.

## JOB EVALUATION IGNORES KEY SKILLS

CONCERNS over the failure of job evaluation schemes to recognise technical skills were outlined by **Scottish and Southern Energy** branch rep **Jeff Rowlinson** (below).



Recalling the experience of his own employer he said it soon became evident that the schemes valued fiscal or management responsibility above issues such as safety or the responsibilities attached to issuing permits. "I've seen various schemes come and go across the industry, but the general view is that they are not for people with an engineering or technical background."

Ensuring scheme owners take into account technical or safety issues would, he said, mean sector engineers would be more fairly evaluated.



However negotiator **Tony Hammond** (left), on behalf of the executive, asked delegates to remit the motion to allow the SEC time to investigate which schemes might be willing assist.

But Rowlinson urged the executive to "at least have a go".

## 'We must keep Ferrybridge open'

SCOTTISH and Southern Energy's decision to close Ferrybridge C power station means the loss of the UK's only carbon capture plant and a 2% tighter capacity margin, potentially raising the cost for consumers of keeping the lights on.



That was the warning from **Chris Hardy (SSE)** (left) as he moved the first emergency motion instructing the SEC to lobby

for a selection of energy sources, including investment in advanced supercritical generation, co-firing biomass and coal and carbon capture and storage, to protect consumers from over-reliance on one technology.

This would secure a sustainable role for coal by matching carbon tax payments with support for clean coal technologies and domestic coal production, and keep Ferrybridge operational.

# Investment in new generating capacity is now critical

THE URGENT need for investment in both new generating and additional network capacity, not least because of the acceleration in renewable generation, was the subject of an **SEC** motion reaffirming Prospect's call for a balanced energy policy.



While some network expansion has happened "it tends to be too little too late," he said stressing: "This is no reflection on network staff, but rather the regulatory regime under which they work."

The intermittent nature of renewable generation logically lent itself to investment in means of storage, but the UK regulatory regime prevents this and the introduction of decarbonisation technologies, resulting in the closure of coal plants such as Longannet.

Expressing frustration at the "glacial progress" towards new nuclear generation, Simpson warned against the failure to grasp the importance of a reliable supply.

"I would argue that the current market model may well prove unfit for the purpose of delivering security of supply, and we need to find a way of convincing government just how angry our industry, consumers and the voting public will be when, and I believe it is now when rather than if, the lights go out."



Mover **David Simpson** (left) said: "When the ESI industry was privatised in the 1990s the UK had one of the youngest generating fleets in Europe.

"A quarter of a century later and we have one of the oldest.

There has been welcome progress on introducing new renewable generation but this is inevitably sited inconveniently for the distribution and transmission networks.

Much of the power renewables generate is regularly lost and potential new renewable generation can not be accommodated."

## Longannet key to energy security for Scotland

THE DECISION to close Longannet power station (left) in Fife, after its owners ScottishPower failed to win a crucial contract to provide peaking power capacity, will see not only the loss of 500 jobs but concern over Scotland's electricity supply.



He said that, aside from the jobs and 2.4GW of capacity lost to the grid, Longannet is the backbone of North Scotland's blackstart plan –

the emergency measures to get the electricity system running again after a blackout.

"While all agree that the likelihood of a complete grid shutdown is rare, the problem is that many sections of the grid have no controllable generation and would need interconnection to power up again after a blackout. If the lights do go out we may have extreme difficulty getting the plant back online again as renewable plants don't have self-starting technology."

The call to lobby for an effective capacity mechanism that would encourage investment in upgrading coal and gas plant, and keep Longannet open, was carried.

■ Motions 12 and 13 were lost as no one was available from the proposing branches to move them.



Moving an emergency motion on the subject **Bruce Anderson, (ScottishPower)** (left) said the transmission charges and carbon tax facing the plant were far higher than those faced by EU comparators.

Added to that the current capacity auction process does not set a price for peaking or back-up capacity that would encourage investment in the plant, he said, despite the role coal and gas-fired plant could play in underpinning a future energy mix.

Support from the executive came from out-going president **Alan Wales** (above) who highlighted Longannet's pivotal role in Scotland's power supply.





## A SINGLE PROSPECT INDUSTRY BODY TO BE EXPLORED

A motion calling for a report on the pros and cons of bringing Prospect's Energy Supply Industry sector and its Nuclear Development Group into one body divided opinion.

While acknowledging the benefits outlined by incoming sector president **Neil Thomson** (above), who moved the motion on behalf of the **SEC**, **Neil Griffiths** (Magnox) expressed concern that, with the exception of members working in nuclear new build, there was not enough overlap between the two groups.

Historically, he said, the NDG's focus had been the interaction between Prospect and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, while the merged group would report to two different regulators.



**Tasos Zodiates** (EDF) (left) asked if individual branches, rather than the whole group could become sector members.

"I think there are merits in investigating the possibilities – there are synergies with some branches currently in the NDG but I do not think it will be carte blanche for all." He said

he supported the motion with some exceptions.

Exercising his right to reply, Thomson agreed that there were elements that needed consideration but said the motion merely called for a paper exploring the options to be presented to the next sector conference.



**Deputy general secretary Garry Graham** (left) also disputed the idea that there is not enough common interest between the two groups.

"It is incorrect to suggest that members of the NDG have little to do with nuclear generation and, hopefully, the nuclear renaissance of the future.

We have stakeholders such as the National Nuclear Laboratory who have a clear role to play in decommissioning and developing," he said.

"If we are to convince the country to build new nuclear as part of a balanced energy policy we have got to convince politicians that we can do it safely, expeditiously and in a cost-effective manner.

"We have to prove to the public and politicians that we have a long-term solution for nuclear storage and nuclear waste. I don't necessarily see the dichotomy that some see between nuclear regeneration and how we deal with the waste issues."



# Backing for coal-fired power stations despite end of state aid for pits

THE MAIN instruction in a motion from the BACM branch, calling for a balanced energy policy including deep-mined coal, had been overtaken by events conference heard.

Mover **Steve Straw** said the government's decision not to grant UK Coal state aid had effectively signified the end of domestic coal mining.

"I have 19 more shifts to work before I become a statistic," he said. "My colleagues, who work at Kellingley colliery, will be finished in December while Hatfield colliery will close next year. So the work started 30 years ago by Maggie [Thatcher] will be complete by 2016."

However, Straw asked delegates to support the second instruction in



■ **Straw – 19 shifts before I become a statistic**



■ **Hind – No proper energy policy for UK**

the motion, which sought backing for coal-fired power stations and the development of carbon capture and storage technologies.

Seconding, fellow BACM rep **John Hind** described the current position as evidence of the lack of a proper energy policy for the UK.



## Scotland needs secure supply

A CALL for action to ensure a balanced energy policy for Scotland, that would guarantee security of supply, was endorsed.

**EDF Energy rep David Hoare** (right) asked the union to work with all political parties in the run-up to the 2016 Scottish elections as a change of government could see a switch from the current renewable-based approach.

On behalf of the SEC, deputy general



secretary **Garry Graham** said Prospect



would be re-forming the union's Scotland committee, set up in the run-up to the Scottish referendum, to represent members in Scotland working across all industries. However, he said, the reformed committee would need an ESI representative and he invited volunteers.



## Mr Frostbite accentuates the positive

ELECTRICAL control engineer Nigel Vardy, who is a keen mountaineer, addressed delegates on the theme of coping with change.

Nigel, or Mr Frostbite as he is known, experienced massive changes in his life after he lost his fingers,



toes and nose in a mountaineering accident 16 years ago.

Following rehabilitation his return to work was far from plain sailing either as, during his time in hospital, the industry had changed radically after being privatised.

Nigel uses his experiences to give motivational talks to encourage people to seek out positive points in every situation.

■ A full interview with Nigel will appear in the next issue of the union's magazine *Profile*. In the meantime find out more at [www.mrfrostbite.com](http://www.mrfrostbite.com)

# Concern over rising stress levels for industry staff

INCREASING LEVELS of stress and the impact they are having on employees in the industry was the topic of the first motion put to conference.



**Doug Sene (Scottish and Southern Energy)** (left) said that in the last three years three senior authorised personnel had left his section and had not been replaced leading to substantially

increased work and stress levels.

"I feel that my health in this health and safety drive is being ignored," he said.

On behalf of the SEC, **deputy general secretary Garry Graham** said Prospect is seeking to tackle the issue with employers via the Powering Improvement initiative, while supporting members and helping them gain the confidence to raise the issue, either individually or collectively, with their employers.

## More backing sought for PI initiative

A CALL for greater involvement in the Powering



Improvement (PI) initiative, particularly among generators and contractors, was moved by **Northern Powergrid** rep **Ryan Bell** (right).

The motion instructed the SEC to inform all sector reps about PI; promote its work

through Energy UK and the Energy Networks Association; and encourage wider participation.



Voicing the support of the SEC, deputy general secretary **Garry Graham** praised the

companies for coming together to share best practice when they are normally fiercely competitive. But he said more needed to be done to ensure all guidance contained the campaign's branding. "If we are serious about health and safety, if we are serious as an industry, then there should be a common approach across the sector."



## Other industries could be key to skills crisis

A DIRE warning over the looming skills gap facing the industry was delivered by



**Charles Loveday (Scottish and Southern Energy)** (below).



Highlighting how two thirds of industry staff will leave within the next 10 years, he said it would leave a huge hole that needs to be filled.

Loveday called for urgent action to train replacements from other industries quickly and to the necessary standard to ensure that they are able to deal with "what is thrown at them".

Voicing the support of the **SEC negotiator Mike Macdonald** said: "Training is key to what we do as professionals ... it improves safety, how much we enjoy our career and, hopefully, improves pay.

"The motion asks us to move away from the traditional model where people joined at 16, 18 or 22 and trained from scratch, to one that recognises that we are increasingly taking employees from other employers and need to develop their existing skills."

## Delegates back retraining plan

MEMBERS MADE redundant from one part of the energy sector could transfer their skills to another if the union secured government-retraining funding, **BACM rep Andy Mortimer** (below) told the conference.



Mortimer said the issue had gained even more momentum since the motion was drafted because the government's refusal to support UK Coal's application for state aid meant coal-mining members are facing imminent

redundancy – the colliery where he works is set to close in weeks.

SEC support was given by **BACM rep John Hind** who said the UK's last deep mine will close by the end of next year.

Yet the industry, he said, is staffed with "specialist managers, technicians and engineers and it would be a travesty if those skill sets are lost today."

Hind stressed that retraining opportunities could benefit many members including those in the coal and gas-fired power stations.



Prospect health and safety officer **Sarah Page** stressed the continuing and vital importance of implementing the industry safety plan, Powering Improvement and the crucial role of unions in this process as new challenges arise



# Government policy and more contractors mean there are ‘turbulent times’ ahead

“IF YOU’RE involved, or have a voice in health and safety, your workplace will be a healthier place,” Prospect health and safety officer Sarah Page told delegates to the ESI sector conference in a speech entitled “Your health and safety, whose price?”

ESI reps, said Page, have and continue to play a vital role in emphasising the importance of safe practice and disseminating the findings coming out of Powering Improvement (PI), the industry’s plan to be a world leader in health and safety.

But she warned of turbulent times ahead, not least because of the prime minister’s declaration that health and safety regulation is a ‘monster’ and in his ‘crosshairs’.

Prospect, said Page, has been a passionate advocate of PI since it started five years ago, at a time when the industry had suffered a spate of fatalities with companies often blaming workers.

As a result the companies worked

with the Health and Safety Executive to find out what was going wrong.

The findings revealed that good leadership was of paramount importance, along with competence and worker involvement.

Since then the corporate memory category has been added as “it became apparent that the reasons behind particular health and safety precautions were being forgotten,” said Page.

“We have been making the point that unions provide fantastic continuity – it’s one of our strengths. Union involvement on National HESAC – the industry’s overarching health and safety committee – has remained constant against significant churn among company representatives.”

But PI has not been without its frustrations. For example, Page said, the reluctance of some employers to use the PI branding meant it is often difficult to tell whether everyone is ‘on-message’ and communicating both up

and down the chain.

This year’s focus on collaboration with contractors presents challenges, not least because fragmentation of the industry has increased their involvement, potentially opening up new gaps in health and safety standards, she said.

Non-unionised contractors often delegate the health and safety role to company champions. That means, said Page, that “there is always the suspicion that champions, who are not union reps, are put there by the company. But the reality is we have to work with them.”

With this in mind the term advocate has been adopted for all involved in the PI drive.

While last year’s health and safety reps’ survey showed that 93% of respondents felt health and safety works, Page said she suspected the emphasis was on safety rather than health despite the rising incidences of stress – the subject of an earlier motion.

*Unions provide fantastic continuity – it’s one of our strengths*

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN OUR WARNINGS ARE IGNORED

DELEGATES were shown pictures of an indicator light, a padlock and a kitchen timer, to reinforce the messages over leadership and communication.

The **indicator light** because crew members on the cross-channel ferry the Herald of Free Enterprise, on which 193 people died in March 1987 because loading doors had been left open, had repeatedly asked for an indicator light to be fitted on the bridge so the captain

would know when the doors were shut.

But the owners considered this a frivolous request. Their focus on getting passengers on and off the ferry as quickly as possible, ignored problems with communication, fatigue levels and poor staffing, and was described by the investigating judge as a culture with a disease of sloppiness.

A **padlock** was connected to warning



systems at the Buncefield oil depot in Hertfordshire – scene of a massive explosion in December 2005 – so containers could not be overfilled. All three levels of warning system were dysfunctional with the final system needing a padlock to keep it in a position so it worked.

Yet none of the companies that manufactured, fitted or oversaw safety devices throughout the depot actually understood how safety-critical that

padlock was.

The **kitchen timer** – a Buncefield control room employee, frustrated that no action was ever taken despite repeatedly reporting the dysfunctional warning systems, bought the kitchen timer to warn control room staff when they needed to act to stop the containers overfilling.

The investigation into the Buncefield explosion, the biggest in the UK since 1974, found problems with leadership, poor accountability and that the voice of employees had been ignored.

