Spring 2017

Rampion Offshore Wind

Becoming a wind turbine technician

The construction of Rampion Offshore Wind Farm is a huge endeavour with hundreds of employed personnel and consultants working directly with E.ON or with their contractors. A vast array of skillsets is required during this phase, ranging from environmental surveyors, engineers and construction managers to vessel crew, welders and marine coordinators. However if it's longer-term career opportunities with the wind farm that are required, it's the operation and maintenance roles that present the most opportunity.

To operate and maintain the wind farm, approximately 60 people will be part of a team working from a new modern base at Newhaven Port, with wind turbine technicians making up a significant proportion of the workforce. At least 25 per cent of the wind turbine technicians will be apprentices with two apprentices being taken on each year to undergo specific technical training enabling them to work on the inspection and overhaul of operational wind turbines.

Scroby Sands Offshore Wind Farm

Pacific Orca (c) of Ian Greenwood

What does an apprenticeship involve?

Rampion Offshore Wind Farm utilises the training programme provided by Uniper Engineering Academy, part of Uniper Technologies Ltd, formerly known as E.ON Technologies Ltd.

The programme is a four-year apprenticeship scheme to train technicians for the power, renewables, utility and heavy industry sectors. It is currently delivered through an existing apprenticeship framework but it will soon be aligned with the government's new Maintenance & Operations Engineering Technician (MOET) apprenticeship standard, and as of May 2017 will be eligible for the Apprenticeship Levy.

Rampion is one of four offshore wind farms operated and maintained by E.ON Climate & Renewables in the UK. In response to the need to double the number of trained technicians in the next four years, E.ON and the Engineering Academy have tailored the programme's curriculum to ensure a sustainable flow of new technicians with specialised offshore wind knowledge and site-based experience. New modules covering hydraulics have now been included, along with turbine-specific technical training.

"I've enjoyed all courses during my apprenticeship so far. If I had to highlight what has been the most enjoyable I would say my first time up on a wind turbine, performing tasks and getting a feel for what my job will entail. My trip to Denmark was a great experience. I was taught by Vestas, and learnt about various practical and written tasks such as servicing and finding documents to enable me to perform the role."

Tony Walker (year two apprentice)

Crew about to board a transfer vessel at Newhaven Port

The opportunity

An apprenticeship is a ticket to a development path that includes not only first-rate training and mentoring but also a significant hands-on experience and qualifications. Apprenticeships are both a real alternative to university, and also a genuine chance to learn and grow at one of the largest power and gas companies in the world. Wind turbine technicians travel offshore each day with other technicians to keep the turbines turning to produce low carbon electricity for the UK market.

Requirements to work on a wind farm

Candidates interested in the offshore wind apprenticeship must have at least three GCSEs at grade C or higher, which aligns to both the current apprenticeship framework and the government's new Maintenance & Operations Engineering Technician (MOET) standard entry requirements.

On a personal level, the company will seek applicants that are passionate about offshore wind energy, have a strong focus on safety, and are adventurous in spirit. They must also be comfortable working offshore in a marine environment, and be able to work at height. The work requires a good deal of self-motivation and enough maturity to manage people and potentially difficult circumstances.

Qualifications

At the end of an apprenticeship, graduates will have a BTEC National Diploma Level 3 and an NVQ Level 3 along with specific qualifications from wind turbine suppliers and the necessary training required to work safely offshore. It's a rounded experience that could open up career opportunities including support for further education – even a degree.

Accessing a turbine

"I'm both proud and excited to be involved in the Rampion project. I believe renewables are a vital part in our commitment to reduce climate change and it's something I've always personally supported. To be a part of one of the largest offshore wind farms in the world based off the coast of my home town is a privilege."

Alex Reah (year one apprentice)

How to apply to become an apprentice

The entry assessment to become a wind turbine technician at Rampion involves submission of a CV and an online application form, followed by a basic online psychometric test.

There will be an interview and finally, applicants must also complete a mechanical and electrical practical assessment on site at the Engineering Academy, which involves using tools in a workshop and wiring up a circuit.

Applications for apprenticeships open each September, so individuals can register their expressions of interest online at that time.