**BEIS Commons Select Committee consultation – Impact of Brexit**

**Nuclear Skills Strategy Group consultation response – Skills element only**

The Nuclear Skills Strategy Group is an industry-led strategic group working with employers, government and trade unions. It comprises:

• major employers who have the plans and the expenditure to drive the major developments in the nuclear sector

• government departments responsible for nuclear development and skills leadership

• a representative of the trade unions in the nuclear industries

It is the UK’s lead strategic skills forum for the nuclear sector, representing both the civil and defence nuclear sectors, and is accountable for developing a strategic approach to nuclear skills, addressing the skills infrastructure, processes and training provision needed to secure the required supply of qualified and competent people.

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| Please note that this response is from the industry members of the Nuclear Skills Strategy Group and does not necessarily represent the views of government departments and bodies who are members of the Group.  The NSSG is a skills-related group, so we are responding only to the skills questions. |

***Q1 – How dependent is the sector on workers from EU countries at all skill levels?***

***1.1 Nuclear Workforce Assessment*** *-* We have undertaken extensive labour market analysis for our sector[[1]](#footnote-1), although importantly none of our data includes employees’ nationality. We are therefore not able to specify the proportion of EU workers in the civil nuclear sector.

1.2 We do know, though, that organisations in our sector do employ people from other EU countries, whether in specific pinch points or simply because the current freedom of movement allows EU nationals to apply and be recruited alongside UK citizens.

1.3 All of the nuclear new build projects currently planned for the UK are designed and financed by foreign firms, with Hinkley Point and Sizewell developed with French technology. As a consequence, we would expect French workers throughout all stages of construction and operation.

***1.4 Subject Matter Experts*** - Our sector also needs subject matter experts; often individuals with a strong research based academic pedigree. The wider the pool, internationally, that we can draw upon for recruitment, the more likely we are to address the needs for these experts.

***Q2 – What is the potential impact of restrictions on freedom of movement?***

2.1 Freedom of movement would clearly be essential to maintain the sector’s current position in employing people from elsewhere in the EU. By definition, any restriction has the potential to prevent us from doing something we do currently.

2.2 The extent of the impact is impossible to predict, partly because as stated above, we do not have numbers, but also because there is no model for what flexibility there might be after Brexit, so we do not know what future situation we are comparing to. We understand that the government’s current proposals are that EU citizens with over 5 years’ UK residence will be able to remain, which suggests that any immediate impact might be limited. On the other hand, the uncertainty may prompt some of our existing employees to decide to return to their home countries.

2.3 Membership of Euratom promotes mobility of resources into and outside of the UK with respect to its nuclear programme. It ensures the UK can attract and retain international scientists and engineers, as well as international academics and students. It also positions the UK as a global centre for nuclear R&D.

2.4 Leaving Euratom completely means the UK runs the risk of not being able to access the skills needed for the nuclear new build programme and future research into new reactor technologies/ materials, including collaborative nuclear fusion research, currently one of the most promising options for generating large amounts of carbon-free energy in the future.

2.5 We would also make the point that, as restrictions on Freedom of Movement will presumably work both ways, they would prevent UK citizens from working in other EU countries as they can now. This will affect the opportunities for individuals, and also reduce the expertise that is available to the sector when these people gain skills abroad and then return home to enrich the UK civil nuclear skills base.

***Q3 – How far can gaps be filled by UK workers?***

***3.1 Identifying skills shortages:***

The Nuclear Workforce Assessment 20171 highlights the following occupations with potential demand/supply pinch points:

Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Construction and Decommissioning Trades, Control and Instrumentation, Project and Programme Management, Steel fixers, Concretors, Civil Engineering Operatives, Scaffolders

3.2 Other resource vulnerabilities, where monitoring is required, exist in:

Safety Case Specialists, Commissioning Engineers, Heavy Electrical Engineers, Chartered Administrators in Purchasing/Supply, Regulators, Physicists, Radiation monitoring & management

3.3 The fact that we have these issues even with existing EU Freedom of Movement suggests that there is not currently a ready supply of UK nationals with these skills. It is anticipated that the initial new build stations will require a large number of non-UK workers.

3.4 We are already taking action to address these issues (as set out in our Strategic Plan[[2]](#footnote-2)). However, it would be helpful to have the greatest possible flexibility while we see whether the UK’s skills and education system – and transfers from other sectors - can provide entrants to the sector that we need.

1. Nuclear Workforce Assessment 2017 (NSSG): <http://www.cogentskills.com/media/76525/nwa2017_public.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Strategic Plan 2017 (NSSG) <http://www.cogentskills.com/nssg/strategy/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)