

## **Nuclear Skills Strategy Group**

### **House of Commons Science and Technology Committee**

#### **Inquiry – Delivering nuclear power**

**September 2022**

#### **Introduction**

The Nuclear Skills Strategy Group is the UK-wide employer-led nuclear industry skills lead and provides ‘one voice’ to government.

Members include:

- Major employers in the nuclear sector.
- Government departments responsible for nuclear development and skills leadership
- Trade unions in the nuclear industries

The NSSG represents both the civil and defence nuclear sectors, and its strategy addresses the skills infrastructure, processes, and the training provision needed to secure the required supply of qualified and competent people.

Please note: This response is provided from the employer members of the NSSG, and not those representing government departments.

#### **Responses to the Committee’s questions:**

This response will relate to Q6 only.

#### **Q6 What support will industry need to meet the Government’s ambitions for delivery of new nuclear power plants in the next decade?**

The supply of suitably skilled and experienced people will be a key success factor in meeting the ambitions for new nuclear.

Nuclear sector employers report difficulty in recruiting in certain occupations especially in the fields of engineering, science, and information technology (details were included in contributions to the Kingman Review and to the Lords Science & Technology Committee).

The UK needs to remain competitive in attracting, developing and retaining people in the nuclear sector with high level specialist skills. There is a need for investment in facilities and programmes to develop high-level STEM skills across academia and industry.

Providing easier access to nuclear facilities and active demonstration facilities to carry out research would allow individuals to train in realistic environments that enhance skill development and provide opportunity for both industry and academia to work collaboratively to advance understanding and develop new solutions to industry challenges.

Employers in the nuclear sector find that there is poor awareness amongst young people of the array of STEM careers in the UK, and this is often mirrored amongst science teachers. We are told that students perceive STEM subjects at school to be “hard” and hence there appears to be less uptake of students taking all STEM subjects at A-level (or equivalent).

Degree apprenticeships are popular in the nuclear sector and employers believe it is important to retain full degrees within them, to maintain parity with academic graduate routes. Cultural influences, social media and influencers have a huge impact on young people. Nuclear employers feel that these media could be better utilised to educate young people on STEM subjects and the attractiveness of a STEM career. There is scope for collaborative efforts covering multiple sectors.

The nuclear sector spent some time developing an apprenticeship at PhD level, before this was prevented by ministerial policy. Support for vocational postgraduate learning has the benefit of aligning research with industry needs and offers practical experience and stability to early career specialists.

Public investment in long-term skills needs, based on sectoral labour market intelligence would be beneficial. Some specialist skills are not in constant demand and therefore there are gaps in the workforce entailing risks of shortages as people retire.