

# Recruitment trends within the wind energy sector

Victoria Kenrick of international sustainable recruitment specialist, Allen & York explores current trends within the wind energy sector; including an in-depth look at where the latest job roles exist within Europe, which job types are on the increase and the transferable skills that exist for professionals wanting to make their career move into the industry.



Europe has a challenge ahead, in terms of renewable energy targets. Many governments have signed-up to a commitment which states that by 2020, 20 per cent of energy production will come from renewable sources. It's quite a target for any government to achieve, but in a climate where purse strings are being tightened, this challenge is ever more complex. However, the UK in particular has made incredible headway in wind power and in fact is now known as the flagship nation for harnessing the power of wind, on an industrial scale.

The wind energy sector is one of the key employment sectors in Europe, with the industry as a whole employing 154,000 people (Wind Energy Assoc. data). In 2015 this figure is forecast to grow to 212,000 and in 2020 to 328,000, the current top four EU member country employers are: Germany with 38,000, Denmark with 23,000, Spain with 20,000 and France with 7,000.

## **Recruitment in the wind energy industry will be significant in terms of accessibility to potential employers and employees**

According to research by RenewableUK, the number of staff employed full-time on large-scale offshore and onshore green energy projects increased from 4,800 in 2007 to around 9,200 last year. In addition, it is expected that there will be strong growth within the European wind energy sector over the next decade, with over 250,000 new jobs created. According to David Blake, Renewable Energy Manager at Allen & York: "This pattern could be attributable to

the increase in larger organisations setting up regional offices close to wind projects across Europe."

Therefore, more vacancies are becoming available – with the aim for improving the efficiency, quality, reliability and safety of each wind energy project. This development will benefit the renewable energy sector as a whole by raising the awareness and interest from stakeholders at a regional and national level; in turn this will itself increase investment within the sector, leading to more jobs and positive economic impact.

## **There is sizeable potential for development in wind energy in Central and Eastern Europe**

The looming challenge of the 2020 European Union directive on boosting renewable energy to 20 per cent by 2020 made the CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) countries take on the challenge of developing their indigenous energy sources. According to Christian Kjaer, Chief Executive Officer of the European Wind Energy Association (EWEA), it is onshore wind which is set to be the star technology in helping the EU's 27 Member States meet this mandatory target.

We have also seen large growth within Central and Eastern Europe and at Allen & York we have worked with major utility companies that have been hiring in this area, this is particularly in comparison to Western Europe. For example we have recently seen large developers in France withdraw greatly from the offshore wind energy market following an announcement of Grenelle2

founded on their research regarding environmental concerns for the preservation of the marine ecosystem.

Alternately, although there are many challenges to surmount within the market, Poland has seen the most expansion in the region, due to great wind potential and government support. It is the increase of the general awareness of Polish wind energy potential that has induced interest from investors and manufacturers. Banks and private equity investors are becoming more attentive to available possibilities, despite slowed-down activity produced by the financial crisis.

Likewise, all major European wind turbine manufacturers are active in Poland, as well as component manufacturers from western and northern Europe. However, Poland must overcome high stakes if it is to attain its 2020 renewable energy targets. The country will need to install 863 MW - 1,002 MW yearly until 2020 to achieve the desired 10,500-12,500 MW. Nevertheless, this looks achievable with the renewable energy market in the CEE region becoming more and more attractive to investors from Western Europe and the rest of the world.

In turn, wind energy professionals from Western Europe, such as Germany and France are recognising the demand for work within Eastern Europe and, if holding experience within offshore wind or onshore wind, they are able to take advantage of the growing number of job opportunities. It is interesting to note this reversal in migration

patterns; this is reflected by presence of some of the biggest infrastructure projects for wind energy in the world taking place in Eastern Europe, such as in Romania, which is host to Europe's largest onshore wind farm.

Barbara Szlajnda, at Allen & York, who focuses on recruiting for the Renewables market within Europe, has specifically witnessed an increase in engineering job opportunities within offshore wind energy across Central and Eastern Europe. As the cheapest renewable electricity technology, onshore wind will be the largest contributor to meeting the 34 per cent share of renewable electricity needed by 2020 in the EU, as envisaged by the 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive.

**The UK's wind power sector has seen employment rise by 91 per cent in three years**

A report commissioned by industry association RenewableUK and EU Skills, the Sector Skills Council for the power sector, revealed that the number of full-time positions at wind energy companies had almost doubled from 4,800 full-time equivalent staff in 2007/8 to 9,200 during 2009/10.

The European Wind Energy Association (EWEA) has also recently published its forecast for wind power installations in 2011, predicting the UK will closely follow Germany as the largest market this year. In the UK in particular, it has become clear that individuals, especially graduates, are seeing work in the wind energy sector as a 'stable' career move, and even going as far as to retrain in their spare time in further wind-related qualifications. It could be that wind power can help breathe hope into the UK's jobless recovery.

According to EWEA figures, the wind energy sector had employed 192,000 people in Europe by the end of 2009. Christian Kjaer, chief executive of the EWEA, said: "The European Wind Energy Association expects strong growth in wind energy employment in Europe over the coming years to 280,000 by 2015 and 450,000 by 2020. That's on average, 450 new European wind energy jobs per week over the next decade!"

More specifically, Renewable Energy Recruitment Consultant, Georgina Hurst, who specialises in wind energy recruitment identified that currently developers are recruiting in mass for Project Managers

due to a rise in wind farm sites being identified and in the planning stages. However, Georgina then comments that in the future "we expect to see an increase in the demand for Windfarm Construction / Operation Managers, rather than those involved in gaining planning consent" as more windfarms are granted planning permission.

Therefore, although there appears to be an increase in the number of roles available within the project development phase of wind energy, here at Allen & York we envisage a subtle change in demand over the coming years towards the construction phase of wind energy.

Another key trend within the wind energy sector is the increased demand for the grid integration of wind energy onto the network. The expected high levels of wind energy can impact on grid stability, congestion management, transmission efficiency and transmission adequacy. In many parts of the world, substantial upgrades of grid infrastructure will be required to allow for the levels of grid integration.

Grid operators in a number of European countries, including Spain and Portugal, have now introduced central control centres which can monitor and manage efficiently the entire national fleet of wind turbines.

Recruitment Consultant at Allen & York, Tom Wolsey, who specialises in Power Networks comments: "The transmission market is an increasing focus for many companies involved in the sector. Due to a shortage of suitably skilled people in the market, candidates in this sector are rare and highly valued. Managing the technical, regulatory and risk-related issues of grid integration projects are an essential part of any successful wind farm development. Design and engineering of transmission systems as well as management of grid code compliance are all key issues that must be addressed."

As these changes take place, wind energy practitioners may have to adopt additional skills in order to more closely match the job descriptions.

Currently, there is a candidate shortage within the wind energy sector in Europe and fierce competition exists amongst businesses for the best candidates. In turn, this is naturally having an affect on salary trends in the industry, but it also

means organisations have to be flexible and consider transferable skill sets to meet the growing demands of the sector. Therefore, suggesting compromise from both the candidate and organisation in order to best fill the job role.

Georgina Hurst, Wind Energy Recruiter at Allen & York goes on to comment that: "Candidates are able to best match job roles by emphasising their transferable skills. There are lots of useful skills gained within planning-related industry sectors as these candidates have key experience with local planning authorities. Therefore, if organisations are prepared to take into account non-specific wind experience then they are able to employ excellent 'all-round' candidates, enabling them to fill their vacancies more quickly."

With additional training it will also be possible to open up job opportunities to more people coming from declining and traditional sectors such as automotive, aerospace and shipbuilding. Meanwhile current workers within the wind energy sector should always keep up to date with the new technologies and training in the latest tools and regulations on the EIA side is compulsory.

Wind has been the world's fastest growing renewable energy source for the last eight years. As the costs of generating wind energy fall and the urgent international need to tackle CO2 emissions and prevent climate change grows, it's a trend that's set to continue. As the windiest country in Europe and world leader in off-shore technology, the potential exists to meet the UK's energy needs several times over.

Job opportunities within wind energy are predominately within the project development area, and with strong growth within the wind energy market (continuing within Central and Eastern European in particular) wind employment could withstand the recession. Meanwhile, offshore wind farm development, port refits and supply chain manufacturing are set to further boost sector employment in the years ahead. ■

As a market-leading energy recruitment consultancy, Allen & York are able to provide a huge selection of wind energy jobs throughout Europe and within onshore and offshore wind, and at all levels from Wind Engineer and Business Development Manager to Project Developer and Wind Analyst.

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