Notes on the SAFESPUR Workshop on International Skills Links
Manchester, 15 May 2007

BACKGROUND

This was the fifth SAFESPUR event and focussed on the opportunities for utilising skills gained internationally in UK decommissioning and clean-up. The event considered the following circumstances:

- Build up of business activity in decommissioning and clean-up
- Loss of skills as older employees leave the industry and are not replaced by younger people
- Training initiatives can take a long time to bear fruit
- NDA are keen to go wider than the UK & include international experience

Representatives of 17 companies attended the event and participated in discussions. The first half of the meeting consisted of four presentations to set the scene and highlight questions that were likely to be of interest to participants. The second half of the event used facilitated discussion sessions to address the following three key questions:

1. What are the key drivers and opportunities for utilising skills gained internationally?
2. What are key challenges for using international experience, e.g. language, different regulatory regimes?
3. What can be done to meet these challenges?

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION (Andy Thomas, Future Solutions)

To kick-off the session the chairman summarised the background to the event (see above) and reminded those present of the SAFESPUR Forum's aims:

- To drive in good practice from SAFEGROUNDS and SD-SPUR, via consultants and contractors
- To assist in building effective supply chains
- To support companies for business benefit

Mark Hannan (N-Ovation) also noted that Areva and Fluor had declined to attend or speak and had been clear that this was because they were both focussing on Tier 1 issues. They remain interested in the outcomes of the SAFESPUR Forum.

CAN INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES BETTER EXPLOIT EXISTING OVERSEAS LINKS TO BRING NUCLEAR SKILLS TO THE UK?

Martin Bjerregaard, Golder Associates
Martin Bjerregaard, Project Manager at Golder Associates [and an import – he's a Dane] drew on his experience of bringing together international teams to deliver work in the nuclear decommissioning and other sectors. Martin is a 'demolition man' and thinks that the nuclear sector has things to learn from others e.g. oil and gas.

Golder Associates are experiencing considerable demand in the UK and so are tapping into their international internal labour market [Golder have employees spread over 5 continents]. A wider pool of skills enables the company to react more effectively to market opportunities. In addition, many of these people have nuclear sector experience which is ahead of the UK. For instance Golder recently completed work at Bradwell using a GIS scheduling project developed in Sweden. US colleagues have other simple but equally innovative approaches.

As an international company Golder finds that contractual and cultural differences are not necessarily a barrier. Challenges do exist. For instance, US demolition consultants tend to work more remotely from the demolition contractors than their UK counterparts, but these can be overcome by identifying and addressing cultural and contractual issues at an early stage. Language, although often stated as a barrier, tends not to create many problems. In fact, the English used in an international team is often simpler and more productively direct.

Radiological Protection standards are pretty universal, so as long as one or two UK trained people are incorporated in the team the challenge of working under a different regulatory regime should be easily addressed.

With an international team, more effort is needed to create team identity. Socialising is an important aspect of building the team, especially when people are away from home. When working with other organisations it is important to find the right partner(s) with complementary skills, approaches, resources. If it turns out to be rather “elephant and mouse” then the “elephant” needs to be considerate. Need to keep a weather-eye open for international partners simply using the consortium as a way into the market.

UK buyers may be wary of buying a multinational team and this can act as a barrier. This may result from a lack of experience of buying such teams, a fear that the process will be too much hassle or perhaps it is because we are too UK proud?

Benefits to Golder accrue in overseas offices from UK experience. For instance the Golder Operation in Sweden have benefited from working with UK staff with greater experience with PCB’s. Similarly, employees from Spain have been able to gain decommissioning experience in the UK in advance of the start of decommissioning activities back at home.

Tim Manners, Jacobs

Tim Manners, Technical Director at Jacobs focused on their approach to bringing staff together from across the company (including from across international boundaries) to ensure that the right skills sets are in place to meet client needs. Jacobs is a huge company with 45,000 staff worldwide (10% in UK) working across diverse markets (inc. Oil & Gas, Pharmaceuticals, Defence). Jacob’s approach is based on the 3 core values:

- growth is an imperative (15% p.a)
- relationship based company
- people are the company’s greatest asset (very little plant or property)

Efficient identification and deployment of resources from within such a large company presents considerable challenges. Unless resources are managed effectively problems such as failing to recognise opportunities, resistance to sharing work and

under and over utilisation can occur. The use of a common IT system (e.g. searchable for CVs), clear lines of communication through the management hierarchy and a bidding strategy led by sales professionals are important mitigators. Softer aspects, such as internal staff networks built around particular interest areas (Jacobs have one for 'nuclear') also aid the sharing of information, opportunities and skills.

Jacobs have developed International and European exchange programmes as part of a flexible approach to deployment. Jacobs intend to use international nuclear engineers in the UK, but this approach will be backed by a UK graduate scheme to develop local and home-grown talent. UK graduates entering Jacobs are encouraged to work across different sectors. The Jacobs College is also playing a role by supporting cross fertilisation.

Recent experience of bringing skills from the US to the UK includes the involvement of Ken Powers in work at Hinkley and Dick Davis at AWE. However, there are risks attached to this approach e.g. Ken Powers transferred to British Nuclear Group.

At the end of the presentation Huw Morgan (Nexia) commented on re-instating nuclear skills in UK, saying that the Government are working hard at this including in Cumbria.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPLY CHAIN CASE STUDY

Simon Bremer, BNG Sellafield Ltd.
Simon Bremer, Waste Characterisation & Clearance Programme Manager at BNG Sellafield introduced BNGs approach to utilising overseas skills and illustrated this with a number of example projects. Simon has worked at Sellafield for 18 years, with the last 3 spent working on programme management for characterisation and clearance. He works with 50 people in a technical team linked to the Sellafield clean-up group. The work of the team is largely focussed on the application of the waste hierarchy, i.e. avoiding the generation of waste through thoughtful decommissioning and opening up new waste routes.

Simon highlighted the following issues that impact on the availability of decommissioning and clean-up skills in the UK:

- Ageing workforce [Nigel Couzens, NDA, pointed out that the average age in the Nuclear Industry is 41. In 2010 there will be 600k fewer school leavers than today]
- Demographics of local population
- Traditional focus on operational skills
- Change of focus to decommissioning and clean up.
- Competition and supply chain engagement
- Long term skill needs - standards

The Sellafield team are no longer focussed on delivering all the work themselves. They are keen to draw on the wider experience of the supply chain. Work at Sellafield to identify contractors to support the decontamination, recycling and disposal of lead and radioactive residues provides a good example of this. BNG SL initiated this process, by writing a series of open scope statements and advertising these through the OJEU system. This enabled them to assess the supply chain and allowed suppliers who are not traditionally 'nuclear' suppliers to enter the market. The

supply chain responses were assessed through a Source Evaluation Board comprising technical, operational and commercial personnel from BNG SL. The successful vendors, Studsvik with MHF Logistical Solutions were then engaged via a series of waste processing trials.

Johan Langham, Studsvik
Johan Langham, Studsvik Project Engineer, provided a supporting presentation which highlighted how Studsvik won the award to undertake the lead trial. The trials were set up with the NDA as ultimate customer, BNG SL as day-to-day customer and Studsvik (with a UK subsidiary) holding the main contract. MHF Logistical Solutions from the US were brought in by Studsvik under a subcontract because of their core competence in packaging and bulk transport of radioactive materials. [In the future BNG anticipate that the various parts of the contract will be tendered out separately]

Studsvik have offices in Sweden, the US, the UK, Germany and Japan. They have treated radioactive materials, including steel, lead and copper, from all around the world (inc. large steam generators up to 300 tonnes). Studsvik rotate their staff around their foreign offices to increase experience and skills.

Johan set out the following drivers for overseas processing of lead:

- No current facilities in the UK that can process metal via melting.
- Currently around five melting facilities abroad (inc. one operating in the US and another in Germany).
- New Defra LLW policy with new section on import and export (i.e. allows waste to go overseas for treatment if there is no sensible UK alternative and the treatment makes the subsequent storage and disposal of the waste more manageable)
- NDA strategic BPEO to use overseas treatment facilities, which showed it to be the best short-term and long term solution.

The Studsvik Treatment Concept is based on recycling the treated material and minimising the volume of contaminated material that is returned to the customer. Typically more than 95% incoming material to Studsvik is recycled (for lead up to 97% is recycled).

The release of ingots for re-melting is made in accordance with the European Commission's Recommendations in RP89. There is a network of metal producers in Sweden familiar with the ingots as a feedstock for the re-melting of the ingots. The secondary wastes from the processing (slag, blasting residues, filter dust etc.) are conditioned, packaged and returned to the country of origin for disposal.

The trial involved a significant amount of teamwork which was based on the core competences of each company involved with the project. This has contributed to the success of the first trial and there is further scope for working together in future.

Q & A

- Would you [BNG] have contracted Studsvik without them having a UK subsidiary? – *Yes*
- Did many companies express interest in the lead trials? – *Yes, but only three companies had relevant capability. These were all foreign.*

- What other metals have BNG looked at for recycling? – *Ferrous metal. BNG will look to develop other waste route options for other materials that can be easily decontaminated,*
- What have you [BNG] learnt about working with Swedish and US companies? – *It hasn't been a problem, a small number of cultural challenges but no contractual ones.*

FACILITATED DISCUSSION

What are the key drivers and opportunities for utilising skills gained internationally?
The following drivers and opportunities were identified:

- Ability to meet the client's tight time constraints for delivery of work
- Reduce costs through more efficient delivery
- Take advantage of skills/ experience not present in the UK
- Manage an increasing volume of work
- Foster innovation by introducing varied skills and backgrounds
- Skill-up UK and overseas staff through exchange
- Enhance reputation in the UK and overseas

What are the key challenges to developing and maintaining international skills links?
The following challenges were identified:

- Cultural differences, including ways of working, and reluctance to adapt.
- Client inertia – parochialism
- A lack of buyer recognition of overseas skills, experience and qualifications
- Paranoia – prejudice, fear of loss of control and fear of unknown
- Economic perspective – the numbers do not necessarily add up, i.e. the costs of bringing in international skills may adversely affect the tender, even if the long term benefits add value
- Liabilities and contractual obligations – N.B. legal case law changing all the time in different countries with different legal regimes
- Public concerns – loss of jobs, a lack of accountability and impacts on safety/security
- Personal mobility – disruption to individual careers
- Client's packaging of work e.g. fixation on having work done by manpower substitutes instead of packaging the work for contractors to supply
- Labour relations – trade union restrictive practices
- Visibility of opportunities – making overseas companies aware of the opportunities

The following general comments were then raised in response to the challenges identified:

- The challenges raised are not technical
- The project acceleration "mantra" is tough and does not allow organisations or consortia to put together "dream teams".
- The NDA 1-year budget cycles (currently under review) make long-term planning difficult

What can be done to meet the identified challenges?
The following general solutions/ mechanisms were suggested:

- Trade missions: UK group going overseas. Could be approved by the NDA and the involvement of smaller companies could be enabled through funding.
- A properly constituted team, including host country expertise in key roles, will help to address a number of the challenges faced
- Educate clients – show them other ways of working.
- Greater certainty in long-term funding will provide Tier 1s, and consequently the rest of the supply chain, with greater stability in the marketplace and support investment in skills.
- Leave room in specifications for consultants and contractors to come up with innovative programmes/ tenders. [This needs to be balanced against the problems caused by vague specifications]. There are examples in the oil and gas sector of clients paying contractors and consultants to prepare tenders.
- There are some good examples in the defence sector of working with international supply-chains.
- Improvements could be made in the way Tier 1s package work and the time allowed for improving the scope of work.
- The tender evaluation criteria used by Tier 1s could be revisited to check that they are supporting the right approaches e.g. enabling contractors and consultants to draw on international skills and experience.
- This is in part a stakeholder issue for the NDA. There needs to be a systemised approach to Unions, regulators, communities etc, to provide the right framework for utilising international skills and experience.
- The NDA are looking at international apprenticeships, graduate schemes and secondment opportunities.

FEEDBACK

CIRIA invited feedback on the event and on the proposed forward programme. The following points were made:

- To make it easier for people to attend, the events could be shortened by reducing the number and length of presentations. The length of time for discussion should remain the same as this is very valuable.
- A venue that was easier to get to would have attracted more people and allowed more to stay until the end of the day.
- It would be useful if the note from the meeting could be structured to support dissemination to colleagues who were unable to attend.
- SAFESPUR would benefit from a greater focus on influencing key players/ forwarding key messages.
- Other Interest Groups are beginning to want to understand how SAFESPUR relates to Tiers 2 & 3 and are starting to communicate with SAFESPUR (CIRIA have recently met with NIA and NDA).
- There was support for an event providing a yearly update on the shape of the market and likely future opportunities (pulling together information from procurement plans)
- It was suggested that there could be events taking SAFESPUR members through the relevant regulations and good practice for the management of contaminated land and decommissioning wastes on nuclear and defence sites.

CLOSING REMARKS

This meeting highlighted the many and varied opportunities in the UK nuclear decommissioning sector for working with people from overseas to address skills gaps and to benefit from particular overseas skills and experience. The development of international skills benefits both the host country and the provider through the sharing of ideas and experience of different working environments. It was clear from the facilitated discussions that many of the challenges faced by those looking to utilise international skills are cultural rather than technological or contractual. Clients need to be challenged to overcome parochialism and to recognise overseas skills, experience and qualifications. Equally, providers need to consider how best to constitute teams, blending overseas skills with key UK experience.

CIRIA
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