

Press release: Second phase of assessment on new nuclear reactor for UK begins

The Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) and the Environment Agency announced today that they are progressing to the next phase of their assessment of a new nuclear reactor design for the UK.

The assessment follows preparatory work by General Nuclear System Ltd (GNS) and the regulators. The process, known as Generic Design Assessment (GDA), allows the regulators to begin assessing the safety, security and environmental aspects of new reactor designs before site-specific proposals are brought forward.

In addition, GNS will be launching a [comments process](#), which enables anyone to submit comments and questions about the reactor design to the company for their response.

Mike Finnerty, ONR's Deputy Chief Inspector and Director of ONR's New Reactors Division said:

The purpose of GDA is to determine whether the design meets the robust safety and security standards to make it suitable for use in the UK. I am satisfied that there are adequate project management and technical provisions in place to enter Step 2 of the process and, as regulators, we can begin our technical assessment phase.

Steve Hardy, Environment Agency Nuclear Regulation Group Manager said:

In this GDA we're assessing the environmental acceptability of a new reactor design from China, the UK HPR1000. We'll identify any issues or concerns we have with the UK HPR1000 and work with GNS, CGN/EDF's company bringing this reactor to the UK, to make sure it understands our expectations and delivers a design that meets them.

We are beginning a process of robust scrutiny on which we will report our progress and findings. People can contribute to this work through the comments process that can be accessed from our websites.

ENDS

Notes to Editors and contact details Generic Design Assessment (GDA) is a joint process between the Office for Nuclear Regulation and Environment Agency.

GDA enables the nuclear regulators to assess the safety, security and environmental impacts of any new reactor designs at a generic level, before receiving an application to build a particular nuclear power station design at a specific location.

Due to the complexity and the level of scrutiny required in the GDA process it is expected to take around four years to complete, provided General Nuclear System Ltd meet the timetable for submissions and the submissions are of sufficient detail.

Bradwell Power Generation Company Ltd, a joint subsidiary of China General Nuclear (CGN) and EDF, proposes to construct a new nuclear power station at their site next to the existing Magnox site at Bradwell in Essex

Read more about the GDA process on the joint regulators' [website](#).

Read more about General Nuclear System's UK HPR1000 [website](#).

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[Press release: Climate Change Minister Claire Perry launches Powering Past Coal Alliance at COP23](#)

An alliance of nations and states committed to moving the world from burning coal to cleaner power sources was launched today (16 November 2017) by more than 20 partners at COP23, the United Nations climate change talks.

The UK was one of the first countries to commit to ending unabated coal power generation by 2025. In July 2012, our generation profile still included 40% coal. In July this year, this fell to 2% and in April, the UK had its first full day when no coal was used for 135 years.

The Powering Past Coal Alliance plans to grow to 50 or more members by this time next year. Its ambition is to lead the rest of the world in committing to an end to unabated coal power. The members of the alliance commit to taking action such as setting coal phase out targets, committing to no further investments in coal-fired electricity in their jurisdictions or abroad.

Unabated coal is the generation of electricity from a coal plant without any treatment to reduce substantially the emissions of carbon dioxide. It emits twice as much CO₂ as gas per unit of electricity.

The announcement comes as the UK government prepares to launch its flagship Industrial Strategy to get the economy firing while building on its strengths like clean growth and embracing the opportunities of technological change.

Claire Perry, Minister for Climate Change and Industry, said:

Reducing global coal consumption should be a vital and urgent priority for all countries and states. Unabated coal is the dirtiest, most polluting way of generating electricity.

The Powering Past Coal Alliance will signal to the world that the time of coal has passed. The UK is committed to completely phasing out unabated coal-fire power generation no later than 2025 and we hope to inspire others to follow suit.

Catherine McKenna, Canada's Minister of Environment and Climate Change, said:

Phasing out coal power is good news for the climate, for our health, and for our kids. Coal is literally choking our cities, with close to a million people dying every year from coal pollution. I'm thrilled to see so much global momentum for the transition to clean energy – and this is only the beginning.

The new coalition will work with businesses, civil society and governments to offer technical and practical help to accelerate the transition away from coal. However, it recognises that not all countries can completely phase out the use of unabated coal at the same rate.

To stay below the 2C target agreed as part of the Paris accord 2 years ago, OECD countries across the world need to phase out coal by 2030 and global use will need to reduce by two-thirds by 2040.

Today's launch of the alliance comes after British Prime Minister Theresa May

reiterated the UK's commitment to phase out unabated coal by 2025 in a joint press conference with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in September.

In its first meeting, the alliance agreed that transitioning away from coal-fired electricity is one of the most important steps the international community can take to meet the aims of the historic Paris agreement – at which the UK played a leading role 2 years ago.

The UK has already begun its transition away from coal, in part as a result of renewable energy sources becoming cost effective. Offshore wind, for example, is now half the cost it was 2 years ago. Since 1990, the UK has reduced its emissions by 42%, while growing our economy by 67%. This is in no small part due to the 85% reduction in coal use we've seen in that time.

However, domestic action alone is not enough. It is important that we restrict financing for coal projects abroad. The UK government announced in 2014 that it would end support for public financing of new coal-fired power plants overseas, except in rare circumstances. UK Export Finance has not supported a coal project since 2002.

[Speech: Anne Milton: speech to Association of Colleges Conference](#)

Thank you to all of you for giving me the opportunity to speak here today.

My professional background before I entered politics was in the NHS: I trained as a nurse and worked in the NHS for 25 years. But I have to say that it is hard to think of a group of professionals delivering a more important public service than the people in this hall today. A profession caring for young people and old people – changing lives.

I would like to start by briefly sharing some of my memories from the WorldSkills competition which I attended a few weeks ago. I have to be honest, I was completely blown away by Team UK. They did fantastically well – competing on the world stage for skills and achieving great things. And I came away thinking that WorldSkills is probably one of our best kept secrets – and in all my time in politics there are few things that have impressed me so much, and on so many different levels.

One story – but I could mention many that I heard while I was there – was about Ashley who nearly didn't become an apprentice. At school, his teachers encouraged him to go to university – apprenticeships were never mentioned as an option. Ashley was fortunate that his dad employed apprentices so he could see the benefits of training on the job. He secured an apprenticeship with Redrow, one of the largest house builders in the country. And Ashley went on. He was named the world's best young bricklayer at WorldSkills Leipzig in

2013. He went on to complete a degree in Construction Project Management at the University of Salford. And he is now senior site manager at Redrow, managing his own team of apprentices – as well as continuing to volunteer, training members of Team UK in bricklaying.

It really matters to me that the young apprentices who did so well to get to Abu Dhabi are able to follow in Ashley's footsteps, and become an inspiration to others.

Ashley's story, and those of others like him, are why this job matters to me on a very personal level. They are why I am here today, why we are all here today. Our commitment to a public service that transforms the lives and life chances of young people and adult learners. Our commitment to the sector, and a desire for it to get the recognition it rightly deserves.

High quality, resilient and confident institutions with a clear mission and values, and outstanding leadership. Colleges embedded in our communities with excellent teachers that change the lives of others through learning, and give the country, business, industry and the public sector the skills that we need.

But our aim is not just about great colleges. It's about how those colleges – your colleges – can respond to the most critical social and economic challenges that we face as a country today: tackling disadvantage, and making a success of whatever changes and challenges our country needs. I am going to mention Brexit. You know, and I know, how powerful further education can be as an engine of social mobility. That is also at the heart of the DfE's mission: extending opportunity, and unlocking ambition for everyone.

For young people that have struggled at school, and who lacked access to the support and opportunities enjoyed by many of their peers. For those that want to take a high quality and challenging technical route. For those that want to get a degree in their local community. And for those whose path to learning has taken a different route, or who need to retrain to develop their careers.

You know and I know that the work you do meets the needs of all those people. And I know, and you know, that further education is central to the challenge of delivering a prosperous future for this country after Brexit. Ensuring that we have an adaptable workforce with the skills and opportunities to thrive. Supporting the growth of innovative, productive business. And making the most of local strengths in communities right across the UK.

The reform of technical education will be at the centre of our response to those challenges and we will be saying more about that later this month, including as part of the Government's industrial strategy. Irrespective of Brexit, we also face a skills shortage. For the few of you who were there in Abu Dhabi, we are not alone – the world is suffering a skills shortage.

For me, meeting the challenge of both making sure people are, and feel, they can change the direction of their lives – becoming socially mobile – and tackling those skills shortages are at the core of what I want to help you

with.

We all need to be focused on meeting those challenges – colleges, government, the wider FE sector, and indeed employers as well. You want to do that within your institutions, within your communities. I want to play my part within government, by acting as your champion. And I will always bang the FE sector drum. But having a shared purpose is not sufficient on its own. We will only succeed in meeting those challenges by working together.

At the Skills Summit later this month we will be focusing on developing our partnership with employers. Today, I'd like to talk a little bit about our partnership with you.

I know that words like “partnership” and “working together” come with historical baggage. There have been times in the past when our partnerships have been tested. I can understand that, given the changes that we have faced in recent years. And I can also see that the drive for freedom and autonomy has, on occasion, put too much distance between you and Government.

Looking to the future, we need to build on what works well at present. But as we face new challenges, the way in which we work together will also need to change.

I am not coming to you with a blueprint for how our partnership should work from now on. Instead, in a spirit of dialogue, I want to talk to you about what I think are the three emerging themes.

The first of those is support: from Government, for the sector.

We are, and will be, asking a lot of you over the next few years. It is only right to make sure that you get the support that you need.

Wherever we can, we want to deliver that support by harnessing the capacity within the sector. Improvement through collaboration, rather than competition alone. That's what we are doing with the National Leaders programme, and through the new Strategic College Improvement Fund.

Where that capacity for support does not already exist within the sector, or needs to be strengthened, we will invest, strategically, in its development.

You want more money – everyone wants more money. And my job is to be your advocate within Government, making the case for why colleges matter. Money is coming in, but I recognise the challenges you face.

Second, I want Government to be playing an active role.

To be clear, I don't think that Government always knows best, or can do this on its own. But just as an active role for Government is central to our approach on the industrial strategy, we need to adopt the same mind set when thinking about how we achieve the world class FE provision that we need. “By the sector, for the sector” is not, on its own, always the best response to many of the biggest challenges we face together.

As set out in the Government's manifesto, we want to introduce a dedicated programme to help industry experts join the profession – building an ever closer link between business and education. Some colleges and employers are doing this already and it is good to hear about where that is working well. Because, when we come to develop the programme, we won't be saying "we know how to get industry professionals into colleges, and this is what you must do". We will be asking: "what can we do to help meet the very different needs of the sectors, employers and local economies that you work within?" And different areas have very different education and business communities – no one solution will work – you need to tell us what you want and what you need.

There are also some issues where Government has a unique set of levers and resources that can help find solutions to shared problems. We can see that in the positive changes coming out of the area review programme, and support for restructuring. It is why Richard Atkins, the FE Commissioner, is working with more colleges to ensure that the right support for improvement is in place. I meet frequently with Richard and indeed many local MPs, to make sure I keep closely in touch with what's going on.

The third building block is looking at the whole system.

We need a better co-ordinated approach, both within Government, and between the Government and the sector. I am looking to the new College Improvement Board, chaired by the FE Commissioner, to help deliver that in strengthening quality, for example.

We need to ensure that targeted support for quality improvement works in tandem with wider support for FE teachers and leaders. We need to harness the insights from inspection by Ofsted to help identify improvement needs. We need to reform the accountability system to make it work better. And we need to ensure that our ambition is matched by providers who are financially resilient.

Partnership is a much over-used word. But, if meant, if felt by both sides, if it is meaningful, genuine and balanced, it does work. It is not always easy – partnership is never easy – and we sometimes fear that partnership will dilute our own unique contributions, or that one side will subsume the other. But when it does work it can be a phenomenal force for good.

This is a hugely exciting and challenging time for colleges and for FE, as it is for Government. You want more money and I will always lobby for that. But what I do know is that together, in that partnership, we have a shared ambition for all of our learners, for all of our communities and for our country.

When the Prime Minister appointed me to this post, I don't think she was fully aware of my heartfelt beliefs about further education. (And just as an aside, I am also Minister for Women, and as a self-proclaimed born again feminist – and that's what politics does for you – I'm delighted to have that as well.) But somebody – and this is very personal – who has always said that university is not the right thing for everyone – irrespective of high grades it is still not always the right choice. And someone who probably didn't do

as well as I should have done at school, who believes that everyone whatever their age deserves a choice, a second chance. Ladies and gentlemen, I got mine.

We together have a determination to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities that lie ahead.

Together – in partnership – I know that we can make this happen.

Press release: Waste site operation to protect workers and environment

The Environment Agency has joined forces with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the North East to carry out combined visits to check waste sites aren't flouting important legislation.

This ongoing multi-agency approach aims to improve working practices on regulated sites.

The joint initiative, named Operation Hercules, focuses on sites that recycle, process or store waste, from scrap vehicles to general household waste. Operators use a variety of processes and equipment to store, sort and process waste which have the potential to expose workers to risks to health and safety.

The aim of these visits is two-fold; to make sure the sites are operating within the conditions of their Environmental Permit to protect the environment and community, while ensuring the health and safety of workers isn't put at risk.

Carla Metcalf, Waste Specialist for the Environment Agency, said:

We manage our permitted sites every single day to ensure they are operating within the law, to protect the environment and to minimise impact on the local community.

Health and safety is paramount when our officers are visiting sites and officers regularly contact HSE if they feel a site is unsafe.

These joint operations are a really good opportunity to share knowledge with other agencies and mean we look at the site from different perspectives, ensuring any issues impacting on the environment and community can be looked at together with site safety.

Inspector Victoria Wise from the Health and Safety Executive added:

In the last five years 39 workers and 11 members of the public have been killed because of work activity in the sector. The main causes of death are people being run over or struck by a moving vehicle. A high number of workers in this industry are also exposed to processes that cause irreversible ill health conditions.

During the last joint regional initiative HSE found all eight sites visited to be in significant contravention of health and safety law. HSE and the Environment Agency have therefore agreed to run the initiative again throughout this region in November.

Joint operations such as this mean we can work alongside the Environment Agency to make sure those responsible for the sites are not exposing workers, members of the public and the environment to harm from the operations they undertake.

During the last series of joint visits at the back end of 2016, HSE and the Environment Agency attended eight sites across the region.