

Harnessing the Energy of Youth

BY DR PIERCE RIEMER

DIRECTOR GENERAL, WORLD PETROLEUM COUNCIL



The previous World Petroleum Congress in Madrid in June 2008 provided us with an exhaustive picture of our industry, its achievements, as well as a range of solutions for the current and future challenges. We are not looking for short-term approaches but concentrating on the long-term sustainable future of our industry and the future energy transitions that we face.

With the focus on the future and what is required from a technological point of view, we often forget that we will need more people on the ground to do the required work. This is now becoming a real and pressing issue. With 50 per cent of the existing workforce about to retire in the next ten years, the oil and gas industry now faces a massive challenge to attract enough young people to the sector. Who will be replacing the expertise that is leaving the industry? Not only does the industry have to deal with its environmental and societal reputation, but it also has to face the large reduction in young people choosing sciences for their career. But without more scientists and engineers it cannot sustain the levels of operation needed and will not be able to deliver enough energy for the future. This growing skills gap may impede the industry's very ability to operate, especially with respect to major exploration and production projects. This challenge is particularly significant in the context of the world's rapidly growing demands for energy and calls for greater adherence to responsible social and environmental practices. It is crucial therefore to address the young generation directly and introduce them to the wide breadth of areas and activities that make up the petroleum sector. In keeping with WPC's mission to promote the attraction and retention of young people for the petroleum industry, we started that process a few years ago.

Young people are looking to industry leaders for solutions to global energy challenges. This publication will take a step forward towards achieving greater understanding and a closer engagement between the generations

In response to this challenge, the World Petroleum Council formed its youth policy, creating a Youth Committee, to bring a higher profile to the issue and form an alliance with young people themselves in order to find possible solutions to our challenges. We feel that it is important that young people are at the forefront of resolving the issues as they are the ones who will inherit this industry, and should be involved in crafting its future.

The number of the Youth Committee has steadily risen to now 20 representatives of the WPC's National Committees active in its operations. Their first task was to prepare a programme of activities for young people at the 19th World Petroleum Congress in Madrid in 2008. From a central Youth Stand they acted a gathering point for the young attendees of the Congress and offered a host of information about the industry and the role of young people in it. A highlight was the special round table with industry leaders to discuss the question of "Does the industry need an image makeover?" The success of the activities at the Madrid Congress has inspired the team and they look forward to offering an even more extensive programme at the 20th World Petroleum Congress in Doha next year.

In October 2004 China hosted the 1st WPC Youth Forum in Beijing, with over 500 young delegates focusing on 'Youth and Innovation – the Future of the Petroleum Industry'. It played an important role in implementing the WPC's strategy to attract more young people to WPC activities and the petroleum industry. Last year it was the turn of the French National Committee who managed to gather 1200 young attendees in Paris where they hosted our 2nd WPC Youth Forum under the theme of 'Energise Your Future'. The Youth Committee was given full responsibility for the programme of the event. As part of their innovative approach to presenting the challenges and opportunities facing the oil and gas industry in the future, an online network was set up to start the discussions amongst young people from around the world and to prepare questions for the high-level industry leadership at the Youth Forum. They took full advantage of this unique opportunity to present their issues and concerns to the decision makers and engaged in an interactive exchange of ideas and solutions for our future.

In November this year India plays host to our next Youth Forum. We are inviting students and young people from the industry to participate and showcase their issues and knowledge at the event held alongside the well-established Petrotech conference in Delhi in November. The results and outcomes will then find their way to Doha and the 20th World Petroleum Congress just over a year later, where youth will be an important and integrated partner in the proceedings.

Young people are looking to industry leaders for solutions to global energy challenges. This publication will take a step forward towards achieving greater understanding and a closer engagement between the generations.

We need to move forward to engage young people in our industry and I call on everyone in the petroleum sector to give their full support to this endeavour and to mobilise their students and young professionals in order to energise all our future! □