



INSIGHTS

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COULD INDUSTRY TRAINING HELP SOLVE GLOBAL OFFSHORE WIND BOTTLENECKS?

Increased government focus on meeting net-zero carbon targets is shining a light on existing challenges for Offshore Wind. However, for developers and regulators alike, deepening your knowledge with industry training on the sector and its processes could ease the pressure.

Pressure #1: permitting bottlenecks in offshore wind development

The ability to move development projects through the offshore wind regulatory process and to achieve 'speed to market' has always been important. However, some of the challenges of this fast-growing industry are becoming even more evident. As governments push to meet their net-zero carbon ambitions, the presence of 'bottlenecks' – slowing approvals and ultimately delaying project deployment – means that meeting these goals is at serious risk.

Permitting (otherwise known as consenting or approvals) is one such problem. Challenges arise because of the length and complexity of permitting rules and procedures. In Germany, for example, permitting processes that once took around ten months now take up to two years.

As the Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC) put it, "...we need to create a sense of urgency by being honest about where we are right now and the gap between aspirations and progress on the ground... red tape and antiquated planning and permitting systems are slowing down the Energy Transition all over the world."^[1] The industry (and governments) must swiftly address the barriers to protect its project pipeline and investment.

Some of the reasons permitting bottlenecks occur include:

- 1) Overcomplicated and lengthy permitting regimes, often based on or inherited from different sectors or disciplines
- 2) The challenge of mobilising government resources to meet the demands of the permitting process – including the entry of new decision-makers who have limited knowledge of the industry/consenting
- 3) Requirements for a multitude of different consents, granted by multiple different government agencies and involving consultation with multiple stakeholder groups.

Solution #1: working with governments and regulators to ease the bottlenecks

Permitting/consenting is highlighted as one of the big four “critical areas to unlock project deployment and investment at scale” [2]. It is a particular concern for offshore wind farm developers and project managers, but also, increasingly, for governments.

“Friendly” legislation and leadership, with an integrated approach to permitting, will help to develop and future-proof the industry. Countries such as the UK, for example, operate a ‘One Stop Shop’ in which one agency coordinates interests regarding local residents, defence, visual impact and so on, awarding all of the relevant permits/licences.

Another solution is to help decision-makers enhance their knowledge of the consenting process, including giving them tools for rapid and effective onboarding. [RPS is soon to deliver a suite of digital learning materials for the UK Offshore Wind Industry Council \(OWIC\)](#), a senior government and industry forum; these e-Learning modules will include subjects such as permitting to support those new to offshore wind consenting in Government, advisory and regulatory bodies and industry. This training is part of the UK’s [Offshore Wind Sector Deal Pathways to Growth \(P2G\)](#) workstream, a partnership between the industry and the government. P2G’s aim is to navigate the key consenting challenges to meet the Sector Deal commitments to achieve 40GW by 2030 and Net Zero by 2050 (2045 in Scotland).

Andy Kirchin, Managing Director – RPS Technical, Training and Advisory, says, “It can be difficult for entrants into Offshore Wind to get up to speed quickly in an industry that has many complexities. We are proud to be able to offer a solution and excited to be providing customised, online e-Learning for clients like OWIC.”

Solution #2: information-sharing and learning from other regions

In the US, offshore wind power is at a much earlier stage. Its first utility-scale wind farm, developed by Vineyard Wind, has only recently received approval for its Construction and Operations Plan; this was after a challenging environmental review and lengthy delays. As with other regions, the US permitting process is still evolving, yet the [start of the Biden administration and pledges to strive for Paris Agreement targets](#) adds extra pressure along with new hope.

For the US offshore wind regulator, BOEM (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management), it has been a case of finding the most suitable permitting process/regime. [RPS completed a one-year study on this question](#), exploring learnings from the more established UK offshore wind sector. As part of the consultation, we ran workshops to allow BOEM to experience a hypothetical wind farm scenario, assessing maximum potential impacts on birds and mammals. This training and practical exercise allowed them to see how their development approach would work in practice.

South Korea is an even younger offshore wind industry, yet one with equally high ambitions to expand offshore wind capacity to 12 GW by 2030. It currently operates with a large number of agencies involved in permitting, yet streamlining the process would prevent bottlenecks. South Korea has many of the same challenges faced by the US, the UK and elsewhere, such as local opposition from special interest groups (e.g. fishermen); the industry must learn how to meet the needs of all relevant groups to ensure smooth progress and development. For outward-looking South Korea, there is much that could be gained by delving into the industry’s history and comparing with other regions, and in turn feeding their own experience and learnings back into the wider industry.

Where to turn for permitting guidance and offshore wind training

It is a given that those offering offshore wind consultancy and indeed training should have real-world offshore wind experience. Consultants need to have both local and international knowledge, and often, an awareness of national and local differences; this will help developments stay compliant and satisfy the rules of international investors.

In the case of offshore wind training, it might be easy to overlook the importance of learning design. In a rapidly expanding industry, it is essential that training is comprehensive and accessible whilst addressing the needs of the modern learner. At RPS, we have a track record in establishing and delivering learning and development programmes focussed on the needs of the individual, correlated to the goal of the organisation. Integrating demonstrable industry expertise is key to this success.

Seeking out bespoke formal training on offshore wind development and permitting issues has several key benefits:

- 1) Access to guidance information that has been curated and designed for effectiveness
- 2) The ability to access tailored guidance, e.g. personalised modules or relevant exercises
- 3) Practical exercises offer a 'safe space' to explore permitting processes and scenarios, rather than having to learn under pressure on the job. An example is the workshops we designed for BOEM, allowing them to investigate hypothetical situations before they needed to employ them 'in anger'.

As a new and evolving industry, offshore wind is at risk of a 'knowledge gap' that needs to be filled. In some cases, a direct link can be made between inexperience/knowledge gaps and the speed of permitting approvals. Seeking out the relevant coaching and consultancy will make the industry more operationally efficient, helping to answer technical challenges and preventing mistakes – potentially, making an immediate impact on the bottom line. Keeping abreast of industry developments is useful in most roles, but for offshore wind, it is vital.

If you would like to find out more about offshore wind industry training from RPS, please contact:



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Notes:

[1] GWEC Global Wind Report 2021

[2] Making Clean Electrification Possible: 30 Years to Electrify the Global Economy (Energy Transitions Commission, April 2021)