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# ATTRACTING AND RETAINING WOMEN IN OIL AND GAS ENGINEERING

A survey examining the gender talent gap

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Global Talent

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **It's not just a talent gap; it's a gender gap - Neil Tregarthen, CEO at NES Global Talent**

The global focus on attracting more women into the oil and gas industry is not just about creating a more diverse workforce, it is of vital importance if we are to continue to serve the world's growing energy needs. With demand for engineering expertise far outstripping supply and half the experienced engineering workforce set to retire in the next decade, the sector is facing a crippling skills shortage. In order to power future energy projects, the oil and gas industry must act now to fully tap into this enormous potential talent pool.



It has been widely reported that women have traditionally been underrepresented in the oil and gas engineering sector and while a great deal is being done to encourage young women to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the STEM subjects, this gender disparity continues to exist.

So, what should the sector be doing to solve this problem? The industry needs to find creative ways to attract women, not just at primary and secondary school level, but at an undergraduate and graduate level. It must also continue to work to attract women working in other industries to oil and gas engineering, shining a spotlight on what a welcoming and rewarding career it can be and highlighting the opportunities.

NES Global Talent is focused on solving the staffing issues that keep our clients awake at night. We are committed to sourcing and placing the female talent our clients so desperately need. We conducted this survey to find out more about women working in the oil and gas industry, their career path and the challenges and opportunities of working in the sector, in a bid to help highlight what the industry could be doing to attract and retain female employees.

Our survey flags many interesting points for further discussion. For instance, while it is great to hear that the majority of women feel welcome in the industry and would encourage other females to join, 45% say they do not get the same recognition as men. Understandably, this perception needs to change if the sector is to become more attractive to women.

Our survey also reveals that while a huge majority (95%) view mentors as important for career advancement, a large proportion (42%) said they were neither a mentor nor a mentee. In order to help women progress to senior positions in the oil and gas industry and become the role models of tomorrow, this also needs to change.

As a business, we understand the need to promote diversity within our own workforce. We recently launched a global graduate recruitment scheme – the NES Global Talent Futures Academy – where graduates will be mentored to become expert consultants. By providing inspiring role models companies can retain and nurture talent. After all, mentoring is important for all employees, both female and male.

Creative recruitment techniques executed with women in mind will also help with attraction, but it has to be more than the token 'women in hard hats' images that we so often see. Tapping into women's networks and using positive role models to give speeches at schools and universities will help to encourage more females to enter the sector. The industry needs to show that there is nothing stopping women with the right skills and qualifications from enjoying a successful engineering career.

Engineering is an exciting and dynamic profession and we look forward to supporting our clients and welcoming more women into the oil and gas industry in the future.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Three quarters (75%)** of the women that responded to the survey said they felt welcome working in the oil and gas industry yet **almost half (45%)** said they do not feel they get the same recognition as their male colleagues.
- **89%** said they would encourage a female friend to pursue a career in the industry now, with **82%** saying they would recommend a career in the sector to someone who is due to finish their studies in a decade's time. Some respondents said other energy industries such as nuclear and renewables could join oil and gas as attractive options in the future.
- **95%** said mentors were important for career advancement, with **74%** saying it was very important and **21%** saying it was slightly important, yet **42%** said they were neither a mentor nor a mentee.
- Respondents provided a diverse range of suggestions when asked what companies could be doing to attract and encourage women employees such as: educating women early (in secondary schools) about careers in the oil and gas industry; giving women a chance to take on more challenging offshore roles; and providing equal benefits and opportunities.
- **39%** said they would consider taking less money in return for more work flexibility, with many citing a better work life balance and spending more time with the family as the main reasons.
- **Over four fifths (82%)** said they planned to stay in the industry for the next 2 – 5 years.

## INDUSTRY INSIGHT

Averil Macdonald is Professor of Science Engagement in the School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences at the University of Reading. She also sits on the board of WISE, which is focused on increasing the gender balance in the UK's STEM workforce.



*“NES Global Talent’s report clearly identifies that it is not simply a matter of providing job descriptions that attract women in, but that retaining female talent is essential if the oil and gas sector is to continue to deliver over the next decades as the number of qualified engineers retiring risks a serious skills gap.*

*“This report shows that the sector already has a very dedicated and talented female workforce and their willingness to engage with this process has produced valuable insights for which they should be sincerely thanked.*

*“Oil and gas sector companies should seize the opportunity to put in place the excellent recommendations set out here, focusing on providing the reduction in hours, the level of recognition and the support, mentoring and networking opportunities that women identify as making a difference.*

*“Meanwhile, engaging with young women both at school and at university, providing role models and an opportunity to see for themselves what the sector has to offer through visits and paid internships, will ensure that oil and gas companies lead the way amongst engineering employers in benefiting from the untapped talent of those female engineers whose skills will, otherwise, be recognised and rewarded elsewhere.*

*“I commend this report and look forward to hearing of the positive strides taken in tackling this issue by the oil and gas sector in the coming years.”*

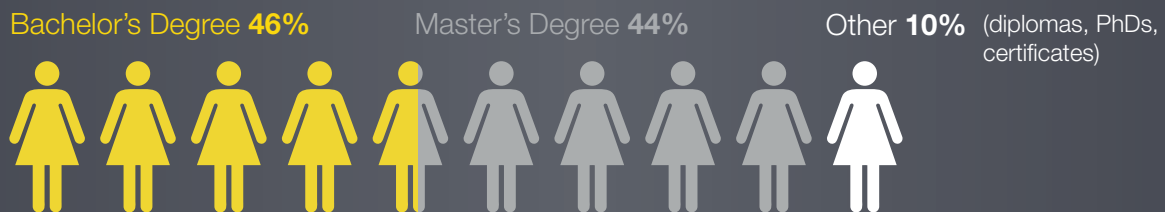




# PATH INTO OIL AND GAS ENGINEERING

# What is the highest qualification you hold?

Qualifications are important in engineering and will increase earning potential. The vast majority of respondents held a Bachelor's degree (46%) or a Master's degree (44%), with the remaining 10% achieving other qualifications such as diplomas, PhDs or certificates.



## Did you work in a different industry / profession before moving into oil and gas?



The ability to attract and cross train women from other industries and professions is vital if the oil and gas sector is to attract the talent it needs. Some 44% of respondents stated that they had worked in a different industry before moving into oil and gas. Unsurprisingly, many of these women came from related industries such as building and construction, power, technology, automotive, civil and structural engineering or chemical backgrounds. However, some came from various unrelated miscellaneous backgrounds including law, retail, sales, secretarial and retail, suggesting that the oil and gas sector could cast its net wider to attract women from non-traditional disciplines and professions.

# Why did you choose to work in the oil and gas sector?

It is important that we understand why women embark on a career in oil gas engineering in order to promote these benefits to young females. This open question invited a host of informative responses with key reasons including the challenging and interesting nature of the work, the salary benefits and the job and travel opportunities available.

*“Because it provides an opportunity to travel, offers interesting and varied work, good career prospects and earning potential.”*

*“I loved challenging myself right from when I was young. I grew up always wanting to compete with boys in maths and sciences, which I did. I was told that geology is a course for men, but that comment alone drove me to want to see what made it a career for men. Here I am, a female geologist in a man’s world.”*

*“It is an attractive sector in which I can expand my knowledge and meet different people. In the oil and gas sector, there are always changes and you don’t have to do the same task every day like a teacher for example.”*





# WORKING IN THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

# As a woman do you feel welcome in the oil and gas industry?



It is encouraging that when asked whether they felt welcome in the oil and gas industry, a majority of three quarters said they did. However, a quarter of respondents said they did not and it is important to understand the issues behind this.

When asked why they felt that way, responses were varied. Most acknowledged that it was a male dominated workforce. Some said it was a welcoming industry and that the equal opportunity policies in place were working well, while others said women were restricted to supporting roles and did not enjoy the same salaries and career opportunities as men.

*“This is without a doubt a male dominated environment, but the industry perception on gender diversity is changing for the better. The percentage of women in the market has increased. Unfortunately, the number of women in technical roles and field positions are still scarce. The general mentality that this is not a female oriented environment still exists. You may not feel welcome at first, but it is all a matter of conquering your space while presenting your talents and skills.”*

*“Generally, people at my company are welcoming of diversity be it ethnic, religious, or gender. I felt this was true even when working on-site in remote Alaska. You need to not be overly sensitive to traditional mind sets but you also need to be willing to challenge them in a constructive way.”*

*“I feel welcome for the most part, however, there have been occasions in the past - especially offshore - that I have felt regarded as a novelty and not taken seriously. People are usually surprised when they find out that I am an oil and gas engineer, both inside and out of the industry.”*

# Would you encourage a female friend to pursue a career in oil and gas engineering now?



Despite the challenges faced by many women in the oil and gas sector, it is encouraging that the vast majority of respondents (89%) would encourage a female friend to pursue a career in oil and gas, with reasons mirroring the reasons why they chose a career in the sector themselves – because its challenging, interesting and there are lots of opportunities available.

*“The oil and gas market is one of the most promising industries, offering a vast variety of opportunities. If you are a woman seeking a fast-paced and challenging environment, the energy industry is the right step into a rewarding career. As females, we need to be aware that women in the oil and gas industry occupy less senior positions and are more likely to experience career barriers in a male dominated work environment. Equal gender representation in the oil and gas industry is an important factor in determining career development for women. Holding a management position, I intend to lead by example encouraging women to seek similar opportunities.”*

*“If, as a woman, you have always felt the urge to break barriers and stereotypes and do something that challenges you in every way possible, then the oil and gas industry is the place to do that.”*

*“Even though there are some old fashioned people in the oilfield, if any of my female friends decided to work in this industry I would support them. Working conditions are getting better and better every day and we have an opportunity to make a positive statement. We are females, we also have skills.”*

*“I would support a female who had already decided it was what they wanted to do. However, I would also point out that it can be very hard and very lonely. Being a permanent member of staff is one thing, if you go contract as a female you are on your own. The staff female support networks are closed to you.”*



## Would you encourage a female who is due to complete her studies in 10 years' time to pursue a career in oil and gas engineering?



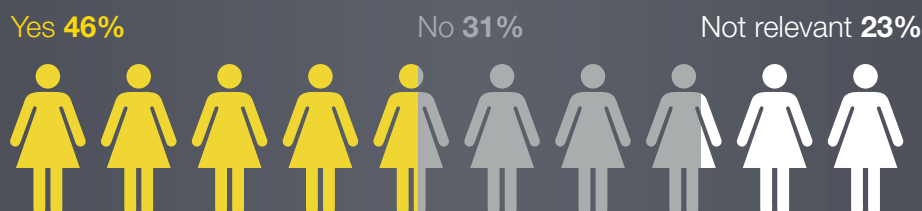
It is also encouraging to hear that the majority of respondents (82%) would encourage a female who is due to complete her studies in the next decade to pursue a career in oil and gas engineering, for largely the same reasons as the previous question. However, while most said the industry would offer challenging and interesting opportunities in 10 years' time, a number suggested that alternative energy sectors such as the renewable or nuclear industry could also be attractive in the future.

*"The future is still bright for oil and gas. Energy is essential to our survival; therefore there will always be room for someone with a background in this field."*

*"Even though there is still a lot of oil, the focus might shift to more sustainable methods therefore it might be safer to undergo a more generic technical degree than just oil and gas specific."*

*"There is a huge rise in the demand for oil and gas. We need to have all hands on deck. We need women who are able to make this resource available to come and join the moving workforce."*

## Does your work currently provide you with adequate benefits to meet the needs of you and your family (e.g. childcare, flexible work hours, telecommuting)?



Although the majority of respondents (46%) said that their place of work provided adequate benefits to meet their needs and those of their family, a significant amount (31%) said they did not. In order to attract more women into the industry, these concerns must be taken into account.



# What could your company do to be more welcoming and encouraging of its women employees?

In order to attract more females into the oil and gas sector, the industry needs to show that it welcomes and nurtures talent. When asked an open question about what their company could do to be more welcoming and encouraging of its women employees, respondents gave a variety of informative answers with providing equal opportunities, female role models, flexible working hours and more support to women with children, being among the most popular suggestions.

*“Reach out to potential candidates and show that there are already women in the company so you’re not alone. Inform people about the industry because many people still think of oil covered roughnecks when speaking of the oil and gas industry. Inform people about the benefits and the challenges of the industry. Support a women’s network so there are actually other women to go to if information is needed or problems have to be solved.”*

*“We need more senior female role models, both in technical and managerial positions. A lot of women drop out of the workforce before they reach those levels.”*

*“Increasing the field visits to develop our field backgrounds, enhancing women’s participation in leadership, giving women wider space in decision making and providing more accommodation for kids care during work time.”*

*“My company could try to educate young women in secondary schools of the possibilities and benefits of working in the oil and gas sector instead of introducing themselves in universities after they have already basically chosen a path to follow.”*

*“Currently, my company does not have adequate benefits for maternity leave, although flexible working is available within reason. That being said, I think the extension of parental benefits such as flexible hours, telecommuting, childcare to all employees, not just women, would go a long way toward removing the reluctance of some individuals to hire women. This applies to all companies and industries.”*



# MENTORSHIP

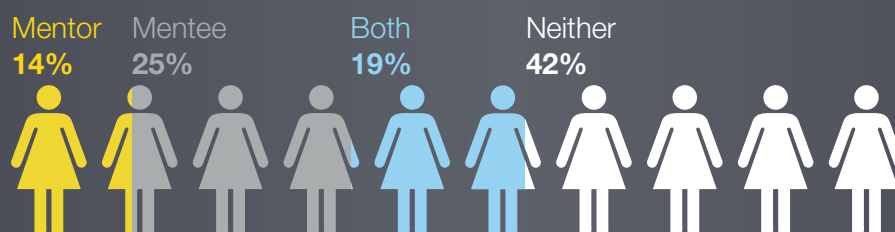
## How important do you think mentors are for career advancement?



One of the best ways to attract more women into the oil and gas industry is to provide strong female role models. An overwhelming 95% of respondents said they thought mentors were important for career advancement, with 74% saying it was very important and 21% saying it was slightly important.

This presents an area of opportunity for the oil and gas industry. By highlighting mentorship schemes and showing exactly how they have helped women to progress, the sector can show it is committed to nurturing female talent in a male dominated environment.

## Are you currently a mentor or a mentee?



Worryingly, despite the fact that 95% said that mentors were important for career development, a large proportion of respondents (42%) said that they were neither a mentor nor mentee.

This is an area that the oil and gas industry must invest in. By ensuring the women they currently employ receive the mentoring they need to progress their careers, oil and gas companies can help develop the female role models of tomorrow, which will in turn inspire more women to embark on a career in the industry.





# CAREER ADVANCEMENT



# Do you feel you get the same recognition for your work as male peers?



Responses were fairly split when the participants were asked whether they felt they got the same recognition as their male peers, with 55% saying they did and 45% saying they did not.

When respondents who said they did not receive the same amount of recognition as men were asked about the reasons why, a variety of answers were submitted with many citing a lack of equality, lower salaries and a lack of opportunities as key issues.

*"When you get hired it is because 'the company wanted diversity' when a man is hired it is just because he 'fits'. When a man gets promoted it is because he deserved it, when a woman is promoted it is because she has been 'helped and pushed'. When a man makes a mistake on the fields it is because 'nobody is perfect', when a women does it is because 'she is a woman'... Do I need to say more?"*

*"I find that women constantly have to prove themselves where male counterparts are taken to have already proved themselves with less experience and education. There is always an attempt to pay women less."*

*"Since most of the offshore work and activities are given to men and women are only given office based engineering works the males get more credit / recognition than females."*

*"It's not about gender, it's about what you know. Though I have found that I have had to prove myself prior to being accepted while my male colleagues have usually been accepted before they had to prove themselves."*

# Are you thinking of leaving the oil and gas industry in the next 2 – 5 years?



It is hugely encouraging to hear that the vast majority of respondents (82%) had no intentions of leaving the oil and gas industry in the next 2 – 5 years. However, it is important to understand the reasons why some females were looking to leave the sector so we asked them why. This open question invited a range of answers with family commitments, a better work / life balance and a lack of equality being among the main reasons why women were looking to leave the industry.

*“I need more time to concentrate on the family. I will find work that can accommodate family more.”*

*“The petroleum business is too demanding and you are required to work a 24 / 7 schedule. If I have children I want to be able to work Monday to Friday 8am – 5pm so I can enjoy my family time.”*

*“To look for opportunities in an industry where not wanting to be internationally mobile is not a hindrance to career advancement.”*

*“I have never truly been one to stay in the same place for too long, so I want to experience other sectors. Also, being an engineer in this sector means that the work sometimes overtakes your life. I haven’t experienced it but I have seen it happen.”*

# What are some of the challenges you see inhibiting your job growth / career trajectory?

This open question attracted a range of answers. The main challenges inhibiting job growth and career trajectory included family responsibilities and a lack of mentorship, career opportunities and suitable roles. Obviously these issues are not unique to the oil and gas sector, they are experienced by women working in many different professions. However, in order to create a truly diverse workforce throughout the sector, they need to be tackled.

*“A lack of mentorship - I would have been in a better position today if I had a mentor. Family - my current job does not provide a childcare facility. Lack of suitable roles - being a women, I have always felt this bias in every company I have worked for and also the remuneration for women is less than for men.”*

*“The most challenging aspect I find is getting an opportunity to work at restricted locations like offshore. These exposures and opportunities mean male peers are a step ahead. Another challenge is handling male peers or juniors who refuse to cooperate due to ego.”*

*“The lack of mentorship can be challenging. However, learning on your own is also a good way of being noticed by seniors due to the fact that you have to think purely for yourself. Starting a family may cause some problems in terms of child care etc. However, I think this is common for any industry and not just specific to oil and gas.”*

*“Narrow mindedness in the recruitment process. Recruiters, especially for larger companies, do not recognise transferable skills. Only if you have worked in a particular specific role, or completed specific industry training will you be considered for a certain position. I think this results in the loss of very competent people from the industry.”*

# Would you consider taking less money for more work flexibility?



As we are all aware, pay is just one factor when choosing a career. While the majority of respondents said they would not consider taking less money for more work flexibility, a significant proportion (39%) said they would. Although adequate pay is obviously essential in attracting and retaining staff, for some, other benefits are equally important.

When respondents who said they would consider taking less money for more work flexibility were asked why, the main reasons again included achieving a better work / life balance and family commitments.

*"I have worked for five years as an international field engineer in remote locations of the world, working more than 20 hours straight. The motivation? The challenge and of course the money. But there comes a point in your life where you need to weight priorities and look for a more balanced life. This change in life might require a cut in your pay. But like everything in life, we lose in one side but win on the other one. In the end it's a matter of doing what you love and being happy with what you have."*

*"Flexibility is not an issue for me as my husband's work is extremely flexible. More of an issue is certain personal preferences that do not align with gaining the experience executive leadership are expected to have. I will not move my family around internationally every three to four years and therefore I will not have the opportunity to gain the same level of experience as those who do. But, I also believe that if the industry only promotes individuals that make such personal sacrifice for advancement, they are committed to a set of leaders who have a similar way of working and approach to problem solving, one that is potentially very different from their workforce."*

*"Even though I enjoy working in the oil and gas sector I love my family time and being an engineer in this sector basically means that you don't have much of a social life unless you are a manager."*



# DEMOGRAPHICS

NES Global Talent surveyed a global database of female engineers registered with OilCareers in December 2013, receiving 272 responses.

- 18% of respondents had worked in the oil and gas sector for less than a year, 40% for 1 – 5 years, 26% for 6 – 10 years, 8% for 11 – 15 years, 4% for 16 – 20 years, 2% for 21 – 25 years and 2% for 25 years plus.
- 15% were aged under 25 years, 56% were aged 25 – 34 years, 17% were aged 35 – 44 years, 9% were aged 45 – 54 years, 2% were aged 55 years plus and 1% said they would rather not say.
- The majority worked in the UK (13%) followed by India (8%), Malaysia (7%), Canada (6%), Australia (6%), US (6%), UAE (5%), Iran (5%), Nigeria (4%), Romania (3%), Norway (3%), Indonesia (2%), Algeria (2%), Brazil (2%), Kazakhstan (2%) and Singapore (2%), with the remainder coming from a variety of countries worldwide.
- 37% were married.
- 25% had children.
- 35% were the primary wage earners for their family.

## CONCLUSION

The oil and gas industry is working hard to attract more women into the sector, but there is still a great deal more that must be done and done quickly.

Our survey shows that despite the vast majority of female employees feeling welcome in the sector and saying they would recommend a career in oil and gas engineering to others, females are still experiencing inequality in the workplace. Many respondents said they are paid less, have fewer opportunities open to them and have to work far harder than men to prove themselves. This has to change.

Of course these problems are not just experienced by women in the oil and gas industry, they exist in many sectors, and for those with children the challenge can be even greater. However, the oil and gas industry stands out from some other sectors as engineering is still such a male dominated profession.

In order to attract more women into the oil and gas sector, the industry must focus on improving its image. Mentorship is key in helping people progress with their careers and feel supported, yet a significant proportion of women that responded to our survey are neither mentor nor mentee. This is an area of real opportunity. Only by supporting women into more prominent roles can the industry create the female role models it needs to inspire others to join the sector. Our business recently launched a global graduate scheme - the NES Global Talent Futures Academy - where mentorship will be provided. We are working to attract graduates to the scheme by implementing a targeted advertising campaign, ensuring our intake, in terms of gender, is as balanced as possible. Perhaps similar initiatives could be launched with client companies, ensuring new starters are supported from the beginning of their careers?

Oil and gas engineering is an exciting and rewarding career. Many respondents said it was a childhood ambition to work in the sector, with many stating that the travel opportunities, varied and challenging nature of the work and salary benefits were among the key reasons for choosing to work in the sector.

The industry must work harder to show women that this is a career they can succeed in, support them in doing so and share honest accounts of life as a female working in oil and gas, to encourage more to join the industry. It is not just about being fair and equal in the workplace, with half of skilled engineers due to retire in the next decade, it is vital if the industry is to cater to our global energy needs.

NES Global Talent is committed to supporting women in the oil and gas engineering sector and working with its clients to help drive up the numbers of women working in the industry.

## ABOUT US

Established in 1978, NES Global Talent provides a complete range of manpower solutions to the oil and gas, power and infrastructure sectors worldwide.

Offering far more than a traditional recruitment service, our comprehensive set of guaranteed staffing solutions ranges from payroll administration to full recruitment process outsourcing. Our value proposition – guaranteed staffing solutions, engineered from the global talent pool by discipline specific consultants – demonstrates our commitment to delivering an exceptional service.

Our consultants are discipline specific, so fully understand the roles they work on, and our network of more than 40 offices in 25 countries, means we are on the ground wherever our clients, candidates and contractors need us.

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