

## Business Forum

# Staff must be kept onboard

Safety in the North Sea is paramount, but as the industry faces a challenging future, key figures came together for an Insight Forum to discuss the situation

By **Barry McDonald**

**T**HERE WAS A LOT TO DISCUSS IN Aberdeen last month. At an event that took place in front of an audience of invited industry guests at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at Aberdeen Airport, the panel of experts weighed up the obstacles facing a sector that has seen many redundancies and the very future it has been built on for the past 50 years put in doubt.

Trust, they concluded, had to be maintained and a serious attempt made to communicate the reasons for a raft of changes that range from the need for global competitiveness to vital health and safety issues.

### How important is communication during a downturn?

Matt Rhodes of the Bristow Group believed communications, both external and internal, is one of the biggest challenges facing the oil and gas sector. "We need to make sure we communicate effectively to all our employees to understand the situations we're having to deal with," he said.

"These are difficult times for everybody and there have been a lot of redundancies. We have to manage individuals and make sure they fully understand the reason behind the decisions that are being made and understand the situation the industry is facing."

Mr Rhodes' colleague at Bristow, Steve Harris, pointed out that many employees are feeling uncertain about their future careers – and communications strategies need to focus on the needs of the individual.

"Across the organisation, people have different needs and requirements," he said. "The guy in the workshop needs to know different things from a pilot or a general manager. We've been trying with a multi-tiered strategy to communicate different messages at different levels of the business."

Dr Philip Bryson, International SOS, argued that any communications strategy also needs to encompass healthcare providers. He added: "In the diving industry a lot of companies are trying to find work globally if they can't find work in the North Sea.

"That means the companies are stretched, their healthcare provisions are stretched, and they're working in environments that are no longer particularly safe or secure. When your company is stretched you need to focus on communication to make sure your healthcare providers are working with you in unison to make sure your workers are protected at all times."



Pictured, left to right: Dr Philip Bryson, Lawrie Campbell, Steve Harris, Matt Rhodes, Scott Graham, Jim Creighton, Tim Cheshire pictured at the forum at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at Aberdeen Airport

### What guidelines should be followed so the 'fair culture' can be promoted?

Wherever there is man and machinery there is risk, argues Steve Harris. The challenge for the industry, he says, is to protect a culture of trust and develop a fair culture. "There's an inherent distrust toward management," he says. "In aviation we've been institutionalised by compliance. The world is changing so our regulators are asking for more demonstration of effectiveness as proof of performance.

They don't come in and ask you the tick-box questions anymore. We need more data, so maintaining the trust of our people to provide that data is absolutely critical. We're trying to build trust within our people to enable us to demonstrate there is tangible evidence that we will respond appropriately if they report. I'm proud to say over the last few months we've seen a massive increase in reporting from our people."

### How should health performance and efficiency be improved in a cost-cutting environment?

According to Lawrie Campbell of International SOS, it's possible to improve healthcare performance by applying standard and well-tried solutions. "We are sitting in a very mature market so

you assume we have very high standards that must be met," he says. "The industry has been criticised since the downturn for over tailoring solutions.

When you look at that from a health and wellbeing perspective what I see is everybody engineering and re-engineering their own solutions. But we know enough and we know what works. And we know that a healthy workforce will make our operations more cost competitive."

### What measures should be taken to improve commercial diving safety and what lessons should be learned?

Tim Cheshire of the National Hyperbaric Centre (NHC) had some sobering statistics for the panel and invited guests. "Sadly, the diving industry is not as clever as the aviation industry," he said. "In the mid 1970s we started a 10 year period in which 60 divers died. That led to a huge change in legislation and is the basis of what is a relatively safe diving industry in the North Sea now."

However, that isn't a scenario replicated globally. In 2010, 70 commercial divers died; in 2011 the industry lost a further 75 and in 2012 another 66 lost their lives. "Globally, we are killing a commercial diver once a week," Mr Cheshire continued. "We have not learned from the past and not invented

a new way of killing divers. It's the same old accidents. We are repeating the same mistakes and not learning lessons."

Matt Rhodes suggested there may be learning from the aviation industry, emulating their procedures and processes. Jim Creighton believed that closer working links between the diving and aviation industries could reap rewards and recalled a previous diving incident where the expertise of the aviation industry was called upon to improve safety procedures.

"We instigated a relationship with an aviation company and the aim was to see if they could sanitise all their operational procedures. Safety documents were streamlined, simple to follow and written with the competency of the operators in mind. In terms of liaison with industries, that's a classic example of how aviation can help the diving industry."

"It just doesn't happen enough," added Dr Bryson. "We're not learning the lessons from the past."

### What role can the National Hyperbaric Centre (NHC) play in offshore safety in general and within the diving industry in particular?

The key driver from the NHC is to have a three-tiered approach in terms of diver safety and evacuation to a reception facility, said Operations Manager Jim Creighton. "Hyperbaric lifeboat and reception facilities are quite globally fragmented, and JFD would like to standardise the whole approach to hyperbaric reception. The vision is to be able to offer reception facilities anywhere on the UK mainland and also the ability to use this recovery facility and go out and pull the lifeboats from the

open water. If they could replicate that globally that would be the icing on the cake."

### Operators and service companies are being forced to change the way they work in today's challenging economic climate. How are medical service companies responding?

Scott Graham of the NHC argued that it's about continuing to provide the best healthcare service to the divers regardless of the economic downturn.

"That's done by providing access to information, equipment or personnel as quickly as possible," he says. "Knowledge is vital. The medic on a dive vessel working anywhere in the world does not have to know anything about diving or the effects of pressure on the human body. We're looking to increase that knowledge so every medic is aware of the diving environment."

### What are the benefits from investing in safety performance?

The concept of safety and maintaining its performance on a global scale is extremely challenging, argued Dr Philip Bryson of International SOS. "It's demanding to make sure you have centres that can train. If the places that are doing the training are folding and the people who are good at it, and have learned the lessons from the past, are being made redundant or retiring, then maintaining the safety performance becomes very difficult," he said.

"When I came into this sector the first thing I thought was, why hasn't the diving industry learned from the aviation industry? We should be working more with each other where it's common ground."

## Around the table

The Business Forum was chaired by Insight's **Alasdair Nimmo**, who was joined by:

- **Tim Cheshire**, NHC
- **Jim Creighton**, NHC
- **Scott Graham**, NHC
- **Steve Harris**, Bristow Group
- **Matt Rhodes**, Bristow Group
- **Lawrie Campbell**, International SOS
- **Dr Philip Bryson**, International SOS