

Energy Training Academy delivering renewable training for former military personnel

Edinburgh's Energy Training Academy (ETA) is stepping up its bid to close the renewables skills gap by offering Scotland's first direct route to becoming a low carbon heating engineer.

Working in conjunction with accreditation body the National Open College Network (NOCN), the education centre will become the first training provider in Scotland to offer the NOCN Level 3 Diploma in Low Carbon Heating Technician.

Thanks to a partnership with the Ministry of Defence's Enhanced Learning Credits (ELC) Scheme, the ETA course will be available initially to those looking to retrain after leaving the Armed Forces, a transition successfully completed by ETA co-founder Andrew Lamond, who embarked on a career as a gas engineer after leaving the Royal Navy at the end of 2008.

It is planned that the course will be over two years blended with work experience. On successful completion, learners will have developed an understanding of how to plan, select, size, install, commission, service and maintain (including fault finding, diagnosis and repair) low carbon central heating and hot water systems, for working in the low carbon heating industry.

Andrew said: "The course is currently available in England but none of the colleges or universities in Scotland offer it. By making it available at the academy, we are giving people pathways directly into low carbon heating jobs without the need to go through a traditional plumbing and heating apprenticeship.

"We know there is going to be a huge skills shortage when it comes to renewables. The plan has always been to upskill existing gas engineers but it is an ageing workforce who are generally not interested in retraining at the later stages of their careers.

"Currently, you have to be a heating engineer before upskilling into low carbon technology but this will be a complete programme providing a path into that sector, specifically installing air source heat pumps."

Given his own professional journey, it's particularly pleasing for Andrew that service leavers will be the first to benefit from the new course, which is set to launch in the coming months.

"Each year there are approximately 1,200 service leavers in Scotland who will be transitioning into civilian life and they are the type of characters who make good quality candidates," he said.

"Thanks to the MOD's Enhanced Learning Credit Administration Services (ELCAS) funding is available to help service leavers on the next stage of their professional journey. I started out with Scottish Gas six months after leaving the Navy after going through a managed learning programme for gas. We're offering similar but for low carbon heating to meet the industry changes as we transition towards a greener, more sustainable future.

"It's a 12-month notice period to leave the MOD. With this available at the academy, leavers will be aware of what is out

there and hopefully influence their decision going forward.”

Barry Sharp has fitted more than 1,000 heat pumps in his 20-year career and founded Renewable Heat in 2015 alongside business partner Richard Hailstones, the Falkirk-based company now one of Scotland’s leading heat pump installers, and he welcomed the development.

“Credit to Mark and Andrew at the academy for having the vision to take the lead in this,” he said. “The course has been driven and guided by the industry so we will get a product that is useful for us. This is something that the industry has been crying out for ages.

“We all sit and complain that we can’t get the right people but don’t do anything about it. We have been searching for a way to unpack this puzzle and this might be it thanks to the work of the Energy Training Academy.”

He added: “Now is the time for transitioning but the industry isn’t ready. The current roadmap to get into heat pumps is to do a four-year apprenticeship, and then train on top of that so it could take six years for a young apprentice to be properly ready. That is not the roadmap for an industry that is growing exponentially. We need a pathway for experienced workers looking to change careers to come into heat pumps and help fill the gap.”

ETA co-founder Mark Glasgow said: “Innovation was one of the key drivers behind establishing the academy and as an independent training centre we can pivot quickly to reflect the growing industry demand.

“We will be the only approved provider of this course in Scotland and it’s pleasing to lead the way in this manner. Initially open to service leavers pursuing new careers due to the funding available, we want to grow it and have it available to more people.

“With the support of the employers, it will bring more people into the trade which has to happen if we are to stand any chance of meeting the national target of decarbonising by 2045. There are real challenges ahead but we are at the forefront trying to come up with solutions.”

Image shows Barry Sharp (l) with Mark Glasgow and Andrew Lamond.



Barry Sharp, left, with Mark Glasgow and Andrew Lamond.

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