

gas industry? Home grown science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) graduates are desperately needed to plug the skills shortage but we need to go back further and look at the cohorts of young people leaving school.

The type of vocational skills the gas industry needs are not necessarily best nurtured or measured in a classroom environment or by lengthy paper exams where candidates get a pass or fail with little feedback on how to improve. We need to close the gap between education providers and employers. Time and time again we hear about the lack of work readiness in young people leaving education and the gas industry is no exception.

The problem a great number of our young people face is not knowing where they want to take their career. Pressure is put on them at school to make decisions that will ultimately

efficient, responsive and user-friendly for candidates, training providers and invigilators.

"The online account allows candidates to track their previous certifications and book online courses. It also offers online testing providing instant marking and resits and the ability to verify and issue certificates.

"There is flexibility for training providers and invigilators too; the secure platform easily lends itself to adaptations and enhancements to keep up with market changes and user feedback."

This system could be something that could be adapted to young people at an apprentice level in the gas industry, for instance. The adaptation of such a system may allow young people who want to go into a trade but are not necessarily sure which one. Enabling them to build up qualifications and skills through an

oil, electricity, pipework and so on, who are all highly skilled in their individual fields. But they have a lot in common in terms of their skills and the way those skills are trained and assessed. An 'omni-tradesperson' could be a tradesperson trained with a basis of skills that would enable him/her to adapt those skills to suit the industry they are employed in."

The omni-tradesperson concept is an interesting one, and there is huge potential to standardise some of the qualifications via e-assessment. Allowing people to build up e-portfolios of assessed qualifications that could be recognised and transferable from industry to industry could be a game-changer.

For this to take off properly we need to see to better communication and collaboration between sectors, looking beyond their own houses. If Ofgem were to team up with its counterparts such as Ofwat, it really could work.

Omni-tradespeople would also be able to cope with market demand and supply pressures. E-assessment by its very nature is much more flexible, allowing users to complete their training and assessment in their own time without the need of a classroom or exam hall environment. This means that qualifications can be gained much more quickly. A generation of qualified omni-tradespeople who then decide to adapt their core qualifications to focus on a certain industry specialism could help alleviate the widespread problems in British industry. This, in turn, could mean they adapt to the requirements of the market by focusing on whatever demands are prevailing.

This is clearly ambitious and this is not by any means the sole solution to the skills shortage in the gas industry, but some bigger-picture thinking is sometimes needed to plug the gap we are facing over the next 10 years.

So, the answer to that million-dollar question? Stronger alliances and communication between our sector and those around us could just be the key to solving the skills crisis. ■

■ **The e-Assessment Association (eAA) is a not-for-profit membership body that promotes better assessment of the knowledge, skills and capabilities of people through technology. For more information visit www.e-assessment.com**

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decide their future. The gas industry needs to scrutinise not just their qualifications but the whole picture - the journey our young people take when deciding their future - and see where it can get more closely involved in influencing this.

The e-Assessment Association exists to promote better ways of developing and measuring people's abilities. I hope that some of our members' case studies, from the gas industry and beyond, will serve to demonstrate that better teaching and learning technologies are already out there.

For example, one of our members eCom Scotland, in conjunction with the International Well Control Forum, has developed a new online administration and examination system to compliment the new five-tier system of well control training.

Wendy Edie, Managing Director of eCom, said: "In response to Report 476 from the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (IOGP), our client needed a training and assessment process that was more

e-portfolio that can be adapted and ultimately recognised at a national level rather than just an industry level, would break down barriers to entering a career in gas and may go some way to plugging the skills shortage gap.

Another of our members, Calibrand, is also seeing success in the utilities sector with teaching, learning and assessment programmes built around the candidate. Technology allows for a far more attractive qualification path, where candidates can resit tests whenever they need to, and take modules at their own pace online rather than being bound by the geographical constraints of the classroom and the time constraints of course terms.

Denis Saunders, Managing Director of Calibrand, believes in the concept of the 'omni-tradesperson' as one of the solutions the gas industry could explore in partnership with other related professions.

He explained: "The UK has a requirement for millions of tradespeople working with gas, water,