

To meet future demands, the diving industry needs to ensure the right kind of training exists, says welding technologist David Keats

For those that can, "do", and for those that can't, "teach". How many times have we heard that one? Well, when it comes to teaching underwater welding skills, David Keats of UK-based Speciality Welds most certainly can both do and teach.

Keats, who is a fully qualified international welding technologist, senior welding inspector (Zurich Insurance approved), professional member of TWI and a qualified instructor, has been instrumental in developing the UK's only accredited qualification in wet welding. He has been involved with the industry since 1983, where he worked as a wet and hyperbaric welder for all the major offshore diving contractors of the day, including Subsea Offshore, Comex Houlder, Oceaneering and Wharton Williams Taylor (2Ws).

"The diving industry is somewhat unique in the way in which it operates with regards to employees," says Keats. "Unlike that of say an engineering employer, who sets on an apprentice and obtains government funding to send them to college. They serve their time and are rewarded with a national qualification.

"The diving industry mainly operates through sub-contract or self-employed routes and therefore, this 'standard' route to education and qualification is not available (unless already qualified). This places the emphasis for any qualifications firmly with the individual diver, not the employer."

Welder training - meeting future industry demands



Keats says for this reason it is absolutely essential that educational/industry recognition is available and provided. Welding is an important skill for the diving industry and such recognition/availability is essential, he adds.

Unfortunately, in welding, the term 'qualification' has a specific meaning, which tends to be simply understood as a 'coding', that is to say a practical weld test in which the welder demonstrates his physical skills and abilities. Of course, this element of the welder's ability is essential, after all, welding is a craft-skill and physical ability is a large part of the job.

STRUCTURE

"You must remember though, for the engineering industries, this physical skill is supplemented with a number of years at college and, most importantly, a management structure exists where foreman, senior engineers, supervisors and inspectors are also employed by the company – thus total responsibility for welding, does not lay with the welder," explains Keats.

This structure does not generally exist for the inshore diving industry, and even for offshore

the hands-on expertise can be limited. A diver-welder may well find himself the only competent welding person on site, and therefore has to have greater expertise on the subject of welding than simply being able to deposit weld metal.

Another problem for the diving industry is people are attracted to it from all sorts of backgrounds, with engineering bringing in only a small minority. Therefore, this physical skill factor, although crucially important, is not in itself sufficient to provide the industry with the next generation of competent, skilled welder-divers.

Keats says: "Because most divers are self-employed, thus solely responsible for their own training and qualifications, unless they put themselves through college, there is limited opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet future industry demands, or even progress and extend their knowledge base. As we all know, once you are in the workplace, it's very difficult to then attend college."

To this end, Speciality Welds has developed an 80-hour welding training programme called the Weldcraft-Pro. The course follows the International Insti-

tute of Welding (IIW) and European Welding Federation (EWF) guidelines for fillet welding and the qualification is issued by EAL (EMTA Awards), which is the UK's largest engineering and marine training authority, issuing more than 80% of all the UK's engineering qualifications.

In addition, the programme is also recognised by the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST). "I can confirm that the members of IMarEST Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Working Group were most impressed by the course and have recognised it as contributing to an individual member's professional development requirements," declares IMarEST spokesman Ben Saunders.

APPROVED

The course is the only competency assessed underwater welding course available that meets all of industry's current demands, according to David Keats. Training is provided through approved diver training schools, allowing training to take place, for new recruits, immediately after diver training, thus, eliminating the need to return to school. For existing divers, the training is as compact as possible, usually taking no more than ten and a half days.

"It's absolutely crucial industry attracts the right calibre of individual to our industry, but equally important, industry needs to ensure training exists to the right standard, so it can equip individuals with all the skills necessary to keep Britain with its head above water and hopefully, leading the field," Keats concludes.