Cumbrian collaboration expands robotics training into new era

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- UKAEA provides state-of-the-art robotics equipment to equip the Cumbria facility.

UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) and the National College for Nuclear and Clean Energy have today formally launched CROSS (Cumbria Robotics Operations Skills Centre). The new facility and programme have been developed collaboratively to build the robotics-skilled workforce needed to deliver the UK's future fusion ambitions and nuclear decommissioning mission.

CROSS, established with funding from UKAEA's FOSTER (Fusion Opportunities in Skills, Training, Education and Research) programme, will embed robotics and automation skills across the workforce. It will combine UKAEA's expertise in robotics and industry engagement with the National College for Nuclear and Clean Energy's leadership in curriculum design and delivery.

Crucially, CROSS is not only a curriculum or a series of learning pathways, but a dedicated physical environment, based in West Cumbria, that enables hands-on, industry-relevant experience. It will bring together employers, educators and robotics experts, with the National College for Nuclear and Clean Energy designing and delivering training within the specialist facility.

Robotics is increasingly central to fusion energy, as well as nuclear fission decommissioning, and a range of adjacent sectors. However, success depends not just on technology, but on a workforce that can confidently develop, deploy and adapt it. CROSS has been developed to meet that need while supporting wider priorities around clean energy, productivity and workforce development.

Kirsty Hewitson, Director of RAICo (Robotics and Artificial Intelligence Collaboration), UKAEA, said:

> CROSS represents an important step in how we build the robotics-skilled workforce needed for the UK's nuclear and clean energy ambitions. Alongside advancing robotics and innovation, we must ensure that people have the skills to develop and deploy these technologies and innovations in real-world environments.
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> By working in close collaboration with the National College for Nuclear and Clean Energy, we are bringing together industry insight and education expertise to create something both relevant and impactful. CROSS will help embed robotics capability across the workforce, support regional job creation in Cumbria, and create new pathways into high-value careers.

The programme is built on a partnership model that connects industry directly with education providers, including Sellafield Ltd, and a wider network of employers. As part of this collaboration, UKAEA has provided more than £700,000 of state-of-the-art equipment through the FOSTER

programme to equip the CROSS facility. This ensures learners train using technologies and environments that reflect real operational settings.

Donna Connor, Managing Director, the National College for Nuclear and Clean Energy, said:

> CROSS is a powerful example of what can be achieved when employers and education providers work together as true partners. The National College for Nuclear and Clean Energy plays a central role in designing and delivering the curriculum, shaped by industry and grounded in real operational need.
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> Most importantly, it is learner-first. Whether someone is starting out, upskilling or changing direction, CROSS is designed to create accessible, high-quality pathways into meaningful careers.

CROSS will initially support apprenticeship delivery, including a significant first intake from Sellafield Ltd, while also offering modular training routes that enable individuals to develop targeted skills in response to industry demand.

Caroline Wood, Interim Head of Skills, UKAEA, said:

> CROSS is an ideal programme to receive investment from FOSTER. The skills that will be developed at CROSS reflect our strategic commitment to working collaboratively with the nuclear and other adjacent sectors, as well as enabling organisations such as the National College for Nuclear and Clean Energy.
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> Not only that, but we believe that the CROSS concept can be adapted for other areas of the country where similar skills are required.

The programme will play a key role in addressing skills gaps across nuclear decommissioning, fusion and adjacent sectors, while supporting regional growth, clean energy and industrial productivity. In the longer term, it is expected to act as a model for how industry and education can work together to deliver a more agile, responsive workforce.

A student using robotics technology at CROSS facility in West Cumbria.

Image credit: United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cumbrian-collaboration-expands-robotics-training-into-new-era