

Training centre expansion will launch space and robotics apprenticeships

Construction work to expand Oxfordshire Advanced Skills (OAS) and launch new apprenticeship programmes in space, robotics, data science, energy storage, power engineering and cyber security started at a celebratory ceremony yesterday.

The training centre's £13 million extension at the UK Atomic Energy Authority's (UKAEA) Culham Science Centre is funded by the Fusion Foundations Programme. This is a government initiative to enable the delivery of fusion, which has great potential to provide sustainable energy for generations to come, through the development of infrastructure, facilities, and skills in the UK.

The ground-breaking ceremony included OAS apprentices, who represent a total population of around 175 current learners employed by manufacturing companies across industries from motorsport to pharmaceuticals, maritime and fusion.

They were joined by representatives from UKAEA, training provider MTC Training and construction partner McLaughlin & Harvey. OxLEP also attended the ceremony and has awarded OAS a grant to fund specialist equipment.

David Martin, UKAEA's Director of OAS, said: "It is an exciting time for OAS as we look to build on our success of equipping the local community and employers with the skills needed to drive fusion energy and adjacent sectors forward.

"OAS aims to create the next generation of engineering talent and upskill the existing workforce. The new courses will empower UK manufacturers to adopt transformative technology in space and robotics, helping businesses to better compete in the global marketplace."

A group of apprentices joined the ceremony including: Harvey Black (UKAEA), Tommy Illingworth (Presto Engineering), Phoebe Wales (Williams F1), Sam Spencer (STFC), Jodi Bain (Owen Mumford) and Rhys Dawes (Williams Jet Tenders).

UKAEA apprentice Harvey Black, a Level 3 Engineering Technician, is helping to deliver fusion energy – based on the same processes that power the sun – as a safe, low carbon and sustainable energy source. He said he was excited by the potential of the extension.

Harvey added: "I am enjoying studying here and it is helping my career ambitions. This expansion shows that what is happening is working and will be growing. The additional space, tools and equipment will benefit even more people."

The three-year-old facility will be extended by 2,355 sqm and ready to receive its first cohort from September 2023, creating career-making

opportunities for an additional 90 apprentices.

Emma Johnstone, MTC Training's Operations Manager at OAS, said: "Since opening in 2019, our apprentice intakes have already doubled in size. The extension will help OAS to increase our impact even further by supporting more people and businesses with future skills.

"We're committed to working collaboratively with our employer partners to identify the skills gaps that are challenging their current and future business operations. As a result of this work, I'm pleased to announce our new Level 4 Space apprenticeship programme has already been approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and we are busy working on the curriculum delivery of our other new courses, to be launched later this year."

OAS is a partnership between UKAEA and the Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC). The two organisations have a history of apprentice training in science and engineering stretching back more than 70 years.

The extension forms part of OAS Phase 3, with the design being informed by an Access & Awareness report to ensure the training centre accommodates mental health, neurodiverse and physical disability needs.

This includes training of staff for increased awareness along with better access for people with physical barriers such as braille signposting, hearing aids and interior design.

To find out more about OAS and apprenticeships, visit: oas.ukaea.uk or for the latest fusion energy news and opportunities, visit: ccfe.ukaea.uk.