Developing Russian Talent in Petroleum Geoscience - An International Collaboration Between Industry and Academia

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SUMMARY
Oil and gas exploration and production forms a significant part of the Russian economy and has been one of the most important factors driving economic growth. Sustaining such an industry requires a regular supply of new recruits. Traditionally these have come from specialist universities that provide large numbers of highly trained graduates, creating a ready source of talent for the wide range of companies operating in this sector.

However, a number of challenges exist. The Russian oil industry has undergone a period of rapid change which has seen the introduction of many new technologies and the development of international business partnerships. At the same time, low levels of investment in the higher education sector have made it hard for Russian universities to keep pace with these changes. In addition, the Russian higher education system produces graduates that are highly trained in a single specialism, while new working practices require graduates with a broader training that enables them to operate more effectively in multidisciplinary teams.

In order to meet this challenge, TNK-BP has acted as a catalyst to create a partnership between Tyumen State Oil and Gas University in Siberia and Royal Holloway, University of London, to enable delivery of a masters level Petroleum Geoscience training programme that aims to provide an indigenous pool of talent with the skills required by companies operating in Russia.

The new programme is based on the existing Royal Holloway Petroleum Geoscience MSc and is delivered in a dedicated training centre at TSOGU equipped with state of the art computing facilities and industry standard software, the refurbishment of which was funded by TNK-BP. The adoption of a problem-solving, student-centred approach to learning, different to traditional Russian styles of Higher Education, means that students are receiving a high level of vocational training which combines skills training with the development of technical expertise across a range of petroleum geoscience disciplines.

Critical success factors have been:

- The high level of commitment of all three parties, both at senior management level and amongst those charged with day to day running of the project.
- The willingness of TNK-BP to support the project with high levels of investment to ensure that training facilities at TSOGU match the aspirations of the project.
- A willingness by TSOGU to adopt new styles of degree programme and approaches to learning.
- The recognition by Royal Holloway of the importance of developing international partnerships with other universities that allow their programmes to be taught in a number of locations around the world.

Having made a successful start, it is important that the project evolves by continuing to develop the expertise of TSOGU staff so that they can take increasing responsibility for the delivery of the programme, and by involving a wider range of companies so that support for the project, and the benefits derived from it, are spread more widely across the Russian hydrocarbon industry.