

# AN EMBEDDED BELIEF IN TRAINING

The history of Petans is intertwined with the development of offshore safety training in the UK.

**Petans, a Norwich-based organisation specialising in professional safety and survival training, has been a trusted partner of the offshore energy industry for almost 50 years.**

It all began on December 3, 1975, when the Petroleum Training Association North Sea (PETANS) was registered with the Charity Commission. Its objective was simply to provide training for all persons employed in the petroleum industry in the North Sea area.

The same year marked the beginning of commercial oil production from the Argyll field, located in the central North Sea.

At the time, Petans was one of two offshore training associations, along with the Scottish Office Training Association (SCOTA). A 1980 parliamentary report described their role: “identify training needs



common to member companies and develop resources to meet these needs”.

The first Offshore Fire Training Centre was also launched in Montrose, Scotland in 1978 by a group of 13 major operators and the Petroleum Industry Training Board, today known as OPITO.

Andie Marshall, business manager at Petans, said: “It’s clear that offshore training was a really big story at the time – there was lots of work being done to develop it.” However, it wasn’t until the Piper

Alpha disaster in 1988 – and subsequent Cullen Report in 1990 – that safety training became mandated by the industry.

This was despite previous disasters, such as the collapse of BP’s Sea Gem jack-up oil rig off the coast of Lincolnshire in December 1965, which resulted in 13 fatalities. It was only three months earlier that Sea Gem had made the first discovery of North Sea gas.

“Sea Gem was an early indication of the challenging conditions that operations in the North Sea would face,” said Andie. “Maybe it was clear at this point that safety training would be key to the success of this new and rapidly growing industry.”

## SETTING THE STANDARD

Over the years, Petans has evolved from an association that defined industry training



needs to an accredited provider delivering to the requirements of OPITO, City & Guilds and the Global Wind Organisation (GWO), to name but a few.

Its specialist training extends beyond the energy sector to the MOD, local authority fire and rescue services and industrial fire teams throughout the UK.

“There’s an embedded belief in training among our staff,” said Andie. “It feels like our DNA is different because we don’t see training as a means to make money; it’s an end in itself.”

Some of Petans’ longest-serving employees come from a firefighting or military background, including training and operations manager Ian Richards and training instructor Chris Watring.

Chris recalls doing his five-day basic survival and safety course in the early 1990s, culminating in a day of firefighting at Petans’ current site on the edge of Norwich Airport.

“Because Chris was employed by Petans as a fire instructor at the time, he actually

taught the course that he was on all week,” said Andie. “He wouldn’t be allowed to do that today!”

## AN INVISIBLE ASSET

Petans works hard to ensure everyone enjoys its programmes, which also include first aid, confined space and helicopter underwater escape training (HUET).

But it’s just as critical that trainees understand the importance of the training.

“There’s the old ethos that training is for the day when something bad happens, so it actually becomes an invisible asset,” said Andie.

“We have people coming through our doors today who have no idea about Piper Alpha,” she added. “We want them to recognise why the training was there in the first place.” ●

**For more information, please email [info@petans.co.uk](mailto:info@petans.co.uk), call 01603 891 255 or visit [petans.co.uk](http://petans.co.uk)**

## OFFSHORE SAFETY TRAINING – A POTTED HISTORY

**1965** – Gas discovered in the North Sea; followed by Sea Gem collapse three months later.

**1969** – Oil first struck in North Sea.

**1975** – Petroleum Training Association North Sea (PETANS) registered with the Charity Commission.

**1978** – Offshore Fire Training Centre launched in Montrose, Scotland.

**1979** – HUET/drill tank developed by the Offshore Survival Centre at Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology. HUET courses started in 1980.

**1984** – A reported 1,800 North Sea workers went through a five-day basic survival and safety course. At this point it was not statutory in the UK.

**1985** – Petans open helipad and simulated helicopter for firefighting in Horsham St Faith, Norwich.

**1988** – Piper Alpha disaster followed by the Lord Cullen Report (1990).

**1989** – New training identified under the Offshore Installations (Safety Representatives and Safety Committees) Regulations 1989.

**1992** – Environmental tank funded by Petans opened at Lowestoft College.

**1995** – Site at Horsham St Faith fully developed to enable the full delivery of what is now known as Basic Offshore Safety Induction and Emergency Training (BOSIET).



**Left:** Petans specialises in offshore safety and survival training. Image: RJ Hermann  
**Far left:** Andie Marshall, business manager at Petans. Image: Petans  
**Above:** Some of Petans’ longest-serving employees come from a firefighting or military background. Images: RJ Hermann