



Getting the engine running: David Pridden, chief executive of the UK's National Subsea Research Institute (NSRI)

Photo: NSRI

Ending on a high note in UK's subsea scene

David Pridden says that heading the NSRI — the UK's **subsea technology research** body — is a nice way to complete his career

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DAVID Pridden had just sold a business to Petrofac and was enjoying some relative peace and quiet when one more industry challenge came knocking. He could not resist taking it on.

In January Pridden, now 60, became chief executive of the UK's National Subsea Research Institute (NSRI) and was given the task of reinvigorating the organisation.

In his new post for just a few months, Pridden's association with NSRI actually goes back several years to the time he spent as the inaugural chief executive of industry body Subsea UK from 2004 to 2008, when he played an

instrumental role in transforming the idea for the body into reality.

Pridden told *Upstream* three years ago, when he handed the reins of Subsea UK over to Alistair Birnie, that the institute would be one of Subsea UK's biggest achievements.

"I do quite enjoy a challenge," Pridden says. "I had gone back into business with a company which I'd been part of before Subsea UK, called TNEL. I was chairman and a major shareholder and carried on developing it until last June when we sold to Petrofac."

"It meant I was semi-retired, so I was looking for something new."

His new role has meant a weekly commute from his home south of London to Aberdeen, something he says he does not find as easy as he once did, though any problems are outweighed by the

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satisfaction of seeing the organisation succeed.

The institute, based on the campus of Aberdeen University, brings together industry and academia in a centre of excellence aimed at developing subsea technology in the UK, something Pridden believes has been neglected for far too long.

Four universities — Aberdeen, Robert Gordon, Dundee and Newcastle — and Subsea UK are the principal partners.

A list of 20 member companies has also been built up, which take part in NSRI through regular meetings of the Subsea Technology Advisory Group (STAG), which allows them to advise on

what they want to see from research initiatives.

"It's something I have believed in for many, many years," Pridden says. "Fundamentally we do very little research in the UK in the oil and gas sector. In the subsea sector in particular, most of the R&D work has taken place outside of the UK — in Norway, Brazil and the US. "We here in the UK, to some extent, have been resting on the laurels of significant programmes carried out in the 1970s and 1980s mainly backed by European Union funding."

Putting NSRI on a firm financial footing that will sustain it into the future is now at the top of Pridden's priorities and he is hard at work formulating a business plan.

"The plan for the next three months is to finalise the overall funding requirement, then get out to government and industry and say this is what we want to do, how can we finance this," he says.

A ballpark figure involving "seven figures", Pridden says, is being looked for. "I am trying to make a case to government that we need support for R&D," he says. "I would

like government and public sector funding bodies to understand that although subsea is primarily a fossil fuel industry, it is not, and I include subsea developments on the UK continental shelf, a mature sector. It is therefore worthy of support."

"Just because we are dealing with fossil fuels and we are no longer considered to be in the vanguard of new and emerging industries, this does not mean we do not need help."

NSRI, Pridden says, is a "nice way" of coming towards the end of his career, though he does not see himself sticking around for too long.

"I'm not going to be here long term. I think it will need to be moved on by someone with an academic background. I've got no plans for anything else so I will stay as long as I am needed."

"I think my role is to put in place a business model and sort out funding, then hand over to someone else, but I've no idea how long that will take," he says.

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