

Quality not quantity?

Five exploration and appraisal wells are currently operating on the UKCS from two semisubmersible rigs, two jackup units and a single drill ship. In the year to date, eleven wells comprising 3 exploration spuds and a sidetrack and 4 appraisal spuds and 3 sidetracks have commenced.

A marked differential is observed between the number of mobile rigs on E&A activity vs. production/development drilling with almost four times as many mobile units, some 19 rigs, on the latter. Only about 10% of current production/development drilling is being conducted from platform-based facilities – in marked contrast with times past.

In the deepwater West of Shetland area, Chevron's Lagavulin Prospect, Well 217/15-1 is belatedly confirmed as a mechanical sidetrack, kicking-off on 22 January from the Stena Carron drillship. The initial hole was abandoned after 110 days and the sidetrack has already been active for 90 days.

In the Northern North Sea, semisubmersible Sedco 714 remains on station on Total's 3/15a-14 on the Oban Prospect, one of two 2010 well starts still active, having spudded on the penultimate day of 2010 and the Transocean Prospect semi continues operations for Sterling on Cladhan where Well 210/30a-4 was P&A'd as a successful appraisal prior to commencing geological sidetrack 210/30a-4Z in mid-April. The rig was located so as to reach three targets from a common surface location with the initial leg looking to test an eastern extension but failing to establish the elusive oil-water contact so that the effective vertical oil column remains for the time being at a minimum of 1,228ft.

With completion of EnCore's Well 28/9-4Z and subsequent release of the Galaxy II jackup, Central North Sea activity currently stands at two wells. That Burgman appraisal leg was abandoned after 7 days after which initial estimates of oil in-place were indicated at between 80 and 100 mmbbls. Maersk's completed its initial geological sidetrack on the HPHT Culzean accumulation and initiated a second geological sidetrack, Well 22/25a-10Y, towards the end of March again with jackup Ensco 101. BG Well 30/2a-8, an appraisal of Jackdaw and utilising the Gorilla VI jackup, is understood to have been operating at total depth for some weeks. This is the second of the two still active 2010 well starts, spudded back in early August, more than 260 days ago.

Temporarily devoid of E&A drilling is the Southern North Sea following the abandonment of Sterling's unsuccessful Grian Prospect Well 48/28b-2 with the Ensco 80 jackup, which subsequently moved to port.

During the first quarter of 2010, no activity was recorded in the west of Britain in the East Irish Sea Basin and that remains the current status.

Whilst starts to date are markedly lower than at this time last year – by which time twelve spuds were noted – positive results and successful delineations are relatively abundant with further positive outcomes expected from currently active wells. E&A technical success rates for 2010 are already in excess of 50%. Quality not quantity might be an appropriate moniker. A raft of rig contracts and drilling programmes is also feeding through which is set to result in a notable jump in activity levels as the year progresses although day-rates could yet firm-up as utilisation increases, given the increasing requirement for mobile units on production and development duties.