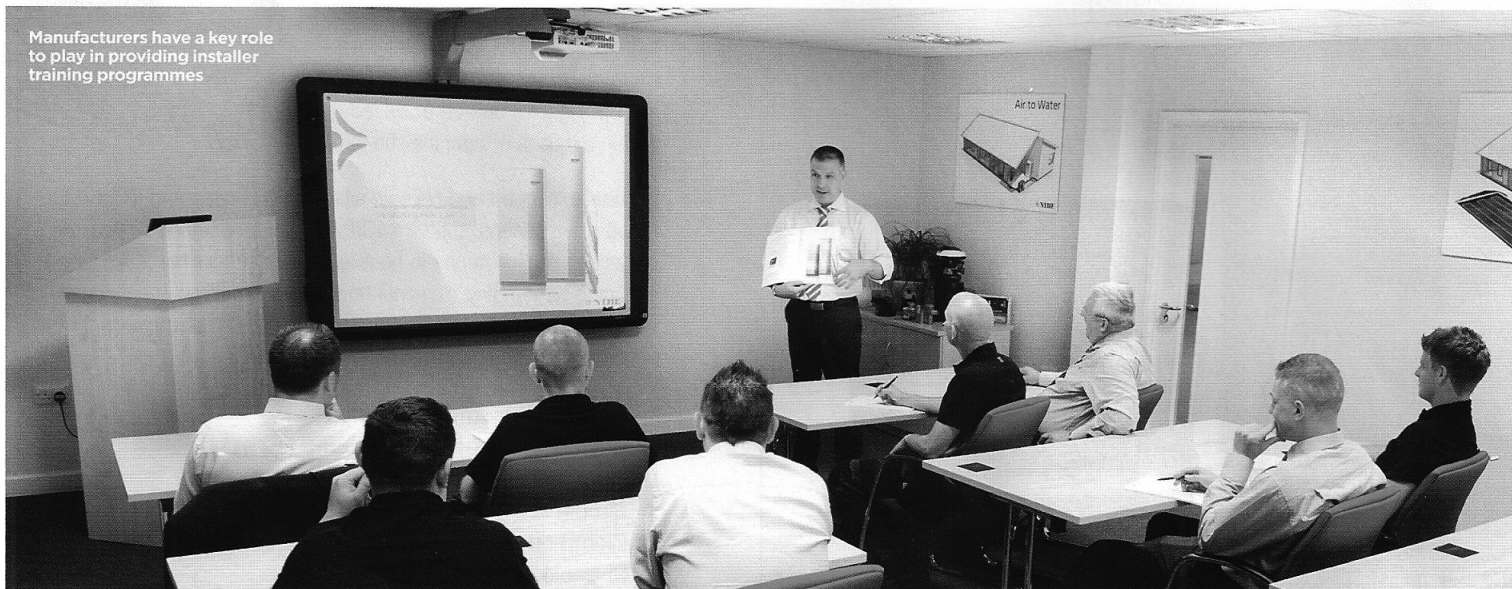


Is it all about the money?

Phil Hurley discusses the role of government incentives in boosting the uptake of renewables – and the importance of other key drivers in the switchover to more sustainable heating

Manufacturers have a key role to play in providing installer training programmes



The government's decision to postpone the introduction of the domestic Renewable Heat Incentive until March

2014 was met with understandable concern in the industry, and the lack of clarity into the specifics of tariff support was also viewed as a further setback. However, against this backdrop of uncertainty, recent news of increases to RHPP incentives for heat pumps and other renewables has been increased have been strongly welcomed as a much-needed interim measure for driving continued uptake. These debates raise an important question for both the domestic and commercial markets – are incentives enough?

With a third of all UK carbon emissions currently coming from the energy used to produce heat, and stringent carbon reduction targets looming, we know that heat pumps and other renewables are set to form a vital part of the UK's future heating landscape. With this in mind, there's no denying that we need to bring this technology to the mass market. While short-term schemes like the RHPP will undeniably continue to be a key driver to encourage widespread investment in renewable heat, it is important we don't overlook the other influencing factors that are

set to build a strong future for this market – both now and in the years to come.

Cost dominant influence

In the current economic climate, cost is very often the dominant influence behind the day-to-day decision-making process for everyone – in the domestic and commercial markets – and there is concern that uncertainty about the support on offer will deter people from buying. However, despite renewable heating solutions costing more to buy up-front than traditional heating systems, it's important to take a long-term view. By investing in the right technology now, people will benefit from savings long into the future.

While the prospect of financial support certainly goes a long way towards influencing investment in renewables, it can only be truly effective when backed up by high quality, reliable products. Regardless of the short-term drivers, it is up to manufacturers to develop renewable heating solutions that can effectively meet demand for years to come. This is the best way to build confidence in renewables and their capabilities, and it means continuously investing time and money in

technological development – which will undoubtedly see the industry benefit in the long run.

When it comes to building overall confidence in renewables, in order to stand up against conventional heating systems, high performance technology also needs to be matched with a skilled workforce. In a burgeoning industry where technology is constantly evolving, it is critical that specifiers, installers and engineers stay ahead of the game – and those who have the right knowledge and expertise for the job at hand will naturally be best-placed to step up to the challenge.

Correct specification

As with any piece of equipment, renewable technologies must always be correctly specified, installed and operated to enable them to perform to their full potential. The only way to guarantee this is by ensuring the highest level of expertise at every stage of the process – from initial system design right through to ongoing maintenance. For instance, it is essential that all heat pump installations are carried out to the necessary Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) requirements (MIS 3005), including correct heat loss calculations and

accurate sizing of both units and distribution systems.

As well as developing the technology to do the job, manufacturers also have a pivotal role to play in upholding these industry standards. In recognition of this, at NIBE we offer a range of installer training programmes to suit a variety of skill levels. What's more, we have made MCS accreditation mandatory for all installers working with our products, and have even made this a part of our warranty.

We would love to see heat pumps selling on their own without the aid of subsidies – and remain confident in their capabilities to do so in future. However, we recognise that for now, it takes more than just a well-engineered product to drive uptake. It is equally important that we look to the long-term and don't lose sight of the other key influencers for the future success and integrity of the industry. By bringing together the best products with a capable workforce and confidence in long-term financial benefits, we can rest assured that the market will grow in line with targets. ●

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