

Competent maritime teaching staff?!

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The global shortage of seafarers continues, despite influences resulting from the economic downturn, such as scrapping and laying up of vessels and cancellation of newbuilding orders. So all efforts for retention of seafarers and recruitment of new intake, are as essential now, as in the past.

A shortage of seafarers however, will also result in a shortage of competent seafarer teaching staff, especially for the professional subjects.

Usually and preferably, seafarer teachers will be recruited among seafarers. But as this is becoming difficult, many shortcuts and ad hoc solutions are observed, to try and overcome the existing shortage of qualified teaching staff.

New initiatives are required to recruit potential educators and enhance the professional expertise of those wishing to pursue a career in maritime education and training (MET). Offering in-depth knowledge on maritime subjects including their pedagogical and didactical implementation should be the least.

But just as important will be to develop and offer an attractive career path, professional and academic recognition and, last but not least, a realistic salary comparable to that of the seafarer. Education is at the root of all progress and deserves to be rewarded. Having to go back to sea, just to make a decent living, will never assure the continuity of quality MET we are in need of.

The required characteristics of the maritime educator are many, but some of the essential ones can be described as follows:

- **Subject matter knowledge**

The educator should hold at least the same qualifications as the trainees he/she is supposed to instruct. But the higher or more specialized the training, the more difficult it becomes to find educators holding the same qualifications as the trainees.

- **Experience**

Like with any teaching programme it is necessary to achieve the skills to organize a lesson, transfer knowledge and ideas, relate to people. As in any public address it is essential to communicate remarks or criticism in the appropriate way. The trainees background, culture, personality, age, peer group, all have influence on what is appropriate and how sensitivities should be dealt with.

- **Motivation**

The enthusiasm of the teacher for the training programme, exercises and equipment, is a crucial element in the success of a course. He/she should

genuinely recognize the importance of the training and convey this to the students. A word of caution is relevant here on instructors becoming over-experienced. This could result in teaching material becoming so familiar, that the importance for the trainees, who encounter the subject for the first time, is completely overlooked. Even worse is when the routine leads to de-motivation of the teacher, due to loss of a new challenge.

Where STCW puts emphasis on the qualifications of instructors and assessors, it gives very little specific information on how this shall be achieved.

Annex: Regulation I/6 Training and assessment

2. Those responsible for training and assessment of competence of seafarers are appropriately qualified in accordance with section A-I/6 of the STCW Code

Code Part A: Section A-I/6: Training and assessment

3. Each party shall ensure that instructors, supervisors and assessors are appropriately qualified for the particular types and levels of training or assessment of competence of seafarers, either onboard or ashore.

Appropriately qualified, besides properly educated, probably also implies knowing the present situation on board. Refresher sailing periods are the best way to assure this. Then there is the issue of competence-based rather than knowledge-based training and education. It makes little sense if a graduate knows how to write about a shipboard operation, if he cannot perform it. Needless to say that most seafaring competences can really not be demonstrated in a written exam!

It will depend heavily on experience and expertise in the training institute and of the staff, how the quality of instruction will be. That means, that despite the global acceptance of STCW, there will still be considerable differences between the various institutes and thus of the product of their educational efforts.

But above all, how to attract teachers and what conditions are available for them is crucial to consider in assuring that qualitative MET will still be here in future.