



Cross Training

An EU-funded project aims to bring together maritime training standards to make life easier for trainers, employers and seafarers. **Mike Gerber** examines how it might help raise safety standards.

European maritime colleges and partner organisations are collaborating on developing education and training programmes that promise to raise shipping safety standards in coming years. The core objective of the EU-funded UniMET project consortium is to harmonise standards of maritime education and training (MET) above those laid down in STCW 2010 - the amended IMO Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers. By harmonising standards, the consortium that is driving UniMET reasons that it can improve employment prospects for seafarers.

To support this effort it is developing a quality assurance and control system for delivery of the harmonised UniMET standards and also other vocational programmes, based on the internationally recognised Edexcel BTEC system for accrediting qualifications.

The UniMET project, which began life in December 2010, is compliant with the 2007 Lisbon Treaty and Bologna Accord on harmonisation and standardisation of higher education in Europe. It is coordinated by the Centre for Factories of the Future (C4FF), which is based at the University of Warwick Sciences Park in the UK. Since its inception in 1984, it has worked on a large number of EU projects and lately has expanded into the field of maritime education and ship management, including spoken English on vessels (see SAS Jan 2010, p33). The other partners in UniMET are Polytechnic University of Catalonia (Spain), Tudev Institute of Maritime Studies (Turkey), Maritime Institute Willem Barentsz (the Netherlands), Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (Finland), the Lithuanian Maritime Academy, Italian shipowners' research consortium Consar, the Centre for Development Works (Poland) and Spinaker, Slovenia's largest maritime education company.

The spokesman for the UniMET project is Professor Reza Ziarati, the principal of Tudev Institute and chairman of C4FF. "The overall aim of the project is to improve safety at sea and in ports, and address a shortage of officers by enabling MET institutions to seek higher standards than those minimum standards set by the IMO, and that these institutions and seafarers are aware of good practices in MET," Ziarati informed SAS.

Several key programmes were developed before the project was launched, with many of them originating from an EU maritime education partnership (involving C4FF, Tudev and other nautical schools) called MarEDU. These are now being promoted under the UniMET umbrella because they contribute to best practice. They include Safety On Sea (SOS) programmes, which are designed to improve maritime safety through education and training at colleges based on syllabuses that satisfy Edexcel requirements for the award of a higher national diploma (HND). Upon successful completion of an HND, students have enough credit to enrol on the final year of a maritime degree course.



There is also a complementary UniMET mobility programme - Train Merchant Navy Cadets for Certificate of Competency (TRAIN4Cs) - that opens the way for cadets from the SOS project to acquire UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) certificates of competency that are recognised throughout the European Union and worldwide. "The MCA allows non-British cadet officers to take the exam if they have the prerequisite qualifications, as is the case with UniMET," Ziarati explained.

Talking training

One prerequisite is clearly a high degree of competence in using maritime English, and various UniMET partners, together with institutions such as Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, the University of Strathclyde (both in the UK) and the University of Tromsø (Norway), have developed the MarTEL series of programmes to address this. These programmes help seafarers overcome deficiencies in maritime English through online tests that assess language competency. There are tests for cadets, and there are deck- and engineer-specific tests for officers and senior officers. Examiners will conduct an enhanced oral test face to face, and tests are also planned for ratings. Also in development is a project called Communication and Practical Training Applied in Nautical Studies (CAPTAINS), which will address the safety issues and critical real-life situations at sea that arise from English communication problems.

Other UniMET-backed MarEDU programmes are assisting seafarers acquire greater competence. They include: Short Course Programmes in Automated Systems in Shipping (SURPASS), which provides training on ship automation; Maritime Aids' Development for Emergency Responses (M'AIDER), which, through simulators and e-learning, provides training in responding to maritime accidents based on real-life scenarios; and two GMDSS e-learning services (EGMDSS and E-GMDSS VET) that are accessible in multiple languages via the internet.

One successful UniMET beneficiary is 28-year-old Ugurcan Acar, from Turkey. He graduated as a navigation cadet at Tudev on an SOS programme and also undertook the MarTEL and EGMDSS programmes. After attaining a Turkish certificate of competency, he worked as a deck officer on Turkish ships.

His HND from Tudev helped secure him a place at Plymouth University, where he gained a BSc in marine studies. He later gained his UK certificate of competency and now works as a project officer at C4FF.

Another individual who is enthusiastic about the dialogue created by UniMET is Paul Russel, MD of marine engineering and education specialist. He attended the first UniMET conference in London on 16 December. "I think that sharing the ideas and thought processes of the different European systems is an excellent objective," Russel told SAS. Nevertheless, he noted some potential obstacles to success. "Two things spring to mind, which will only be answered after completion of the project. These are: how much real influence for change do the chosen delegates have, and do they listen to what other administrations have achieved rather than continuing to believe that their system is the best?"



Ziarati was more optimistic about the project's long-term prospects. He conceded that UniMET was intended, initially, for MET institutions in the EU. "But MET is a global issue and we have no reason to exclude any MET institutions in the future," he reasoned. " We are already collaborating with major international/European organisations such as the IMO, EMSA, IMLA, IMEC and IAMU."

EU funding for UniMET is due to expire in November, but Ziarati is confident that funding will be granted to extend the project. UniMET's first conference was a success, and it looks likely that new partner organisations and individuals will come on board.

Main aims of UniMET

The chief aim of the UniMET consortium is to improve shipping safety and address officer shortages by harmonising maritime education and training standards above the minimum standards set by IMO. This includes development of college-based and online maritime education and training programmes, and identifying and promoting current best practices in training seafarers.

Further information on UniMET: www.unimet.pro

Further information on the various projects created by the MarEDU network: www.maredu.co.uk