

Meeting the Maritime Manpower Challenge The Nautical Profession

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NOTE: This is a personal perspective from two long-serving members of the Nautical Institute and does not necessarily reflect the policy or priorities of its Council and wider membership)

GOOD NEWS NOW – DANGER AHEAD

Goods news travels fast and all of us at recent conferences, in many sectors of the shipping industry, have been enjoying the good news about 1000 plus new ships coming into service each year for the next few years and the increased income they will generate.

At the same time, the world economy has been changing the lifestyles of many of the young people who in past years might have been expected to seek jobs as seafarers. More Ships + Fewer Seafarers = A Major Problem. With some exceptions, the shipping industry does not have a great track record for careful planning for its future manpower requirements or of careful nurturing and corporate responsibility for the people who are serving at present. Seafarers – particularly experienced shipmasters and chief engineers cannot be instantly produced. It takes time and in the interim, they will become a rarer breed than they are today. Sea service will become a “sellers’ market” and key staff will be able to demand higher salaries and better conditions. Already, there are stories of officers being “poached” with offers of higher salaries. So the sooner the industry starts planning the better.

Professional bodies have a role to play. We will review past successes and limitations of Nautical Institute initiatives in setting, monitoring and improving professional standards including, publications, courses, diplomas, Seaways, seminars, participation in quality assurance etc

THE NAUTICAL INSTITUTE

Those that have read Michael Plumridge’s excellent history of the Institute “A Nautical Odyssey”¹ will understand that, in the early 1970’s the seafaring world was changing. Some of the best old established companies, which had recruited, trained, employed, mentored, guided and developed the careers of senior sea staff for their whole working lives were being replaced by a much more money-orientated system of almost “casual” employment. The main bastions against unfair treatment were the

¹ 2003 Plumridge M J “A Nautical Odyssey” A history of the Nautical Institute’s first 30 years. Published by the Nautical Institute

Trades Unions, but they were weakened by the flagging out of fleets beyond their sphere of influence.

On 26th April 1969 a meeting was held in Liverpool at which it was decided to ask deck officers and masters whether they would welcome the formation of a nautical professional body to “raise professional standards”. The members of the profession welcomed the idea. The shipowners through the British Shipping Federation and the Trades Unions objected to its formation – seeing it as another player in an already crowded industry, needlessly complicating their dealings.

The maritime world owes a lot to Captain Malins of the Marine Society who put forward the concept of a nautical professional body in 1969, Captains Frank Main and Robert Smith who grasped the idea and were determined to make it work, and all the hundreds of other masters and officers who put their weight behind it and have spent many years of their own time making it what it is today. Another person who deserves special mention is Julian Parker, the first Executive Secretary, who steered the energy of volunteers into productivity and progress.

Working with Shipowners and Trades Unions

Nearly 40 years on, shipowners and trades unions recognise the value of a good professional body. The Nautical Institute has established a niche for itself promoting professional education, sharing and circulating up-to-date information and publications, offering advice to members, to Governments and others, encouraging continuing career development and many other activities that support the raising of professional standards at sea.

The Wider Maritime Sphere

Through its members, it has a major presence in seafaring, ports, pilotage, surveying, management, maritime law and insurance and not least maritime education where it influences the education and training of future seafarers.

NAUTICAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

There are two major sources of nautical expertise

1. Knowledge of principles, regulations, theory and underlying concepts which is the province of nautical college lecturers, and
2. Practical experience, which rests with senior deck officers and masters at sea.

The problem, which we all face for the future, is to pass that expertise on to the next generation. What part can the Nautical Institute play?

Working with the International Maritime Organization

Since the Institute was formed, some people who have been delighted with its progress have been the Secretaries General of IMO. The regulations, codes and resolutions which flow from IMO will be effective only if the Governments implementing them have the will to do so, and also the means. The Nautical Institute helps to bridge the gap between a line in a syllabus or regulation and its application in the workplace.

Publications

The Nautical Institute, through its publications, has helped IMO inform and develop programmes in developing countries. Mr William O’Neil was and is very supportive

and has written forewords for a number of NI publications. With headquarters within a few yards of one another, continuing a close working relationship is vital for the future. The current Secretary General, Mr Mitropoulos shares with the Nautical Institute the desire to raise standards in shipping.

Seaways and Electronic Media

The Journal “Seaways” is the lifeblood of an organisation which has members scattered across the world in hundred of countries and at sea on all the world’s oceans. The Institute has been lucky to have contributors who have provided relevant and high quality reports and articles and editors who have been skilled in editing and presenting them.

In more recent years the gap between branches and members has been reduced through more instant means of communication such as email and the Internet. As more ships get access to broadband, this must improve still further. Good communications help to bind the profession together.

Nautical Colleges

Early meetings of the Institute were often held in colleges, where serving officers were studying and staff members were keen to keep up to date and close to current practices at sea. There have always been strong personal links with the World Maritime University, where the late Professor Zade was a great enthusiast. Continuing professional development for college lecturers can take many forms, seeking higher qualifications, carrying out research, returning to serve at sea, etc In today’s cost-conscious, poorly paid, short-staffed colleges these ideas might be regarded as “over the top”, but the least any lecturer can do is to keep up-to-date and in touch by being a member, reading the Journal “Seaways” and mixing with seagoing colleagues who are at the forefront of operations in industry. The lecturers owe it to their students to prepare them for the future.

Formal links, where the local Nautical Institute branch nominates a member or members of the Governing Body or Advisory Board of a college have also been tried but tend to be less effective than informal personal involvement of members.

Learning from Mistakes: Working with Insurers

Everyone learns from their mistakes, but it would be a safer and better world, if we all learned from everyone’s mistakes. Through the pages of the journal, through conference proceedings and in particular from MARS (Marine Accident Reporting Scheme) the Institute has brought to light the lessons learned from casualty investigations and the lessons learned by the brave few who have shared the near-miss situations with others, so that all may learn. The Institute has a mutually beneficial relationship with marine insurance and P&I staff, each side learning from the other.

Working with Accountants and Lawyers

Two other professions that seafarers need to communicate with are Accountants and Lawyers. Understanding accountants is relatively easy – if you cannot put a monetary value on it and count it, they think it is worthless. So much for loyalty, ethics and a sense of professional pride. Dealing with lawyers is more complex. Anyone who has had to provide evidence or give statements in court will realise that lawyers think in a different way from the rest of us. Most legal battles are just that – battles. They are

confrontational and the ammunition is evidence, so you need to make sure to “keep your powder dry” and not give the opposition easy targets. The “Mariner’s Role in Collecting Evidence” has helped the innocent seafarers understand their possible roles. The Institute has shared many conferences with lawyers and the working relationship improves all the time.

WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS

The governing bodies of many professions actually establish the curriculum and training programmes and examine candidates for qualifications. With many thousands of cadets and officers in the world fleet, this was not something that could be contemplated by a small group of founding members. A system of government examinations and certification already existed and levels of membership were based upon that in the first instance.

Setting Professional Examinations?

Despite the fact that governments set only minimum standards and the Institute wants to raise standards above the minimum, the statutory certificates remain the criterion for membership. The opening paragraph of this paper indicates that there are going to be problems in meeting minimum standards in the future, so perhaps the best the Institute can do is to work with governments in establishing and implementing proper minimum standards at the basic level, and use other ways to raise standards above that level through supplementary courses, publications, lectures, Continuing Professional Development etc. One local example of cooperation is the fact that the Nautical Institute Square Rig Sailing Ship Certificate is required for the issue of a sailing ship endorsement to Australian Certificates under Marine Orders Part 3.

WORKING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONAL BODIES

The Marine Engineers

From the early days many people thought that the Deck and Engineering Officers should have one professional body. In the 1970s, the Institute of Marine Engineers was keen to align itself with other graduate branches of engineering and was not really representative of the body of experienced non-graduate seagoing engineer officers. Working relationships with the Institute of Marine Engineers have always been good, and in its new guise of the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST) they are even better. The recent NI AGM saw the signing of a formal agreement between the two bodies.

Naval Architects

This is another graduate profession, with a distinguished history of academic excellence and innovation. Relationships between ship design and operation are always better when the designer understands the practical operation of the ship he or she is designing. Most seafarers will be aware of design faults, most naval architects will already be working on their next commission and may not want to hear about them. It will be more difficult in a world where ships are owned in one country, designed in another, built elsewhere and operated by a manager in another. For the future, the lines of communication must be kept open leading to better understanding between designers and users. In this the Classification Societies have an important role to play, and the Nautical Institute Lloyds Register “Alert” programme is a superb example. To ensure continuing and strengthening co-operation in the future the Nautical Institute and the Royal Institution of Naval Architects (RINA) are about to

sign a formal agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) similar to that with IMarEST. This is part of the strategy to develop a single, inter-disciplinary, professional voice for the industry.

Looking to the local scene in Australia, the November meeting about the salvage of the “Pasha Bulker” indicates that the local branches of RINA, INMAREST, CMMMA and NI are well on this road

THE BRANCH NETWORK

One of the greatest assets of the Nautical Institute and a key to the future is the Branch Network. Being able to meet with like-minded people and exchange professional views and information in a local as well as an international context is vital if the organisation is to be a truly global body. Having started in the UK and British Commonwealth, it is not surprising that some people used to think of it as a “British Club”. It might have developed that way, seeking royal patronage and looking inward, but it didn’t. The expanding of branches into the USA, Greece, The Philippines, Ukraine, etc set the trend for the future. There are now too many branches to mention them all here.

The South East Australia Branch, “your Local Branch” has quarterly meetings in February, May, August and November and has a strong working relationship with shipping companies, port authorities and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority www.nisea.org

Some countries, such as Japan, already had strong shipmasters’ and officers’ associations and others such as Singapore decided in the early days to “go it alone”. Relationships with these countries have always been positive and some things, such as publications, have been widely shared but it would be better if the profession spoke with one professional voice internationally and shared resources – everyone would benefit.

WORKING WITH COMPANIES

Videotel Marine International was formed in 1973, about the same time as the Nautical Institute was developing. Videotel shares many of the Institute’s aims. Both are based in London, with representation overseas, both work closely with IMO in trying to raise standards in colleges and training centres across the world. Both are interested in professional training at sea, the Nautical Institute through senior members mentoring trainees and young members and Videotel with the provision of high quality training materials and courses on board thousands of ships.

A Corporate Affiliate Scheme provides organisations with the opportunity to become closely associated with Institute. It has many benefits, including access to knowledge, contacts and resources through the Institute’s network of over 40 branches worldwide and members in over 110 countries. Videotel was pleased to become one of the first corporate affiliates.

Working in Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Whilst it is important that the Institute works closely with other players in industry, it is even more important that it keeps its independence as an acknowledged and unbiased centre of reference for quality standards in the industry. The Nautical

Institute is already established in monitoring dynamic positioning and oil cleanup courses. More recently it explored with SIGTTO the monitoring of training and competence standards for gas carriers, and is now an accreditor on behalf of SIGTTO. The Nautical Institute also accredits a growing list of other specialist courses.

POSSIBILITIES

Every five years the Institute formulates a strategic plan, the most recent, initiated by Dr Phil Anderson as President, covers the years 2006 to 2010, ensuring that the Institute addresses the real issues which concern the shipping industry, the naval service and our profession and to ensure that the Institute continues to provide the kind of service required by its members.²

Becoming a Major Training Centre?

The Institute has for many years acted as a distance-learning centre, adding diploma schemes to its authoritative books. Run by volunteers on a very low budget, they have not had the wide influence they would have had, if they had been commercially managed mainstream courses. Perhaps the best way to influence and raise standards is to monitor and accredit the courses provided by others. Nevertheless, the Institute's courses are now being recognised as foundation qualifications by some academia and sector bodies such as harbour and pilotage authorities.

KEY FACTORS FOR THE FUTURE

Increased Membership

The Institute will only provide more and better services if more people share the ideal of raising standards and become members. Compared with the benefits of membership, the cost is minimal, and should be an accepted part of being a recognised member of the profession.

More Branches in Centres of Manpower Supply

When the Philippine Branch was inaugurated, it was immediately evident that there was a huge thirst for nautical knowledge in the colleges and manning agencies in Manila and elsewhere. The same thirst for knowledge is evident in other developing centres of manpower supply. Forming local branches with experienced seafarers and organising the supply (and if necessary translation) of Nautical Institute textbooks is an ideal way to quench that thirst.

Publications, Conferences, “Seaways”, Electronic Media etc

The future should build upon past successes with publications and conferences, often working alongside other bodies with similar interests in achieving high standards. In particular further links with the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST) and the Royal Institution of Naval Architects (RINA) will be explored.

² Nautical Institute website: www.nautinst.org

Continuing Cooperation with Other Industry Bodies

There are no longer any industry bodies standing on the sidelines criticising the formation of the Institute. It is seen as 100% useful and positive in its efforts. It is still an organisation of individuals with the ideal of raising standards in the profession, and will work with all those who wish to join them in achieving that goal.

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