

Training the tanker industry

Proper recruitment and training of mariners is vital if the industry is to improve its safety record and reputation. Tanker Operator looks at how two organisations are working towards to this goal

Warsash Maritime Centre (WMC) has been one of the leading training providers to the shipping industry for over 50 years. Situated on the river Hamble, overlooking the Solent, 10 miles east of Southampton the centre has the perfect backdrop to fulfil the service it provides.

WMC has worked hard to develop a number of training areas that satisfy the modern tanker industry. Dr. Colin Stevenson, senior lecturer at WMC says: "With the realisation that STCW'95 only requires minimum standards there has been a growing requirement for training services that 'add value' to the competencies of ships officers. The area of 'professional development' is very important for industry to develop highly competent officers."

The Chemical Distribution Institute's 'Inspector Accreditation Course' is one such course that shows the range of training offered. The course, run once a year is the only accredited course to enable senior chemical tanker officers to inspect chemical tankers before they sail. Bearing in mind there are 1,300 chemical tankers worldwide and only 60 inspectors the course is seen as a very important part of the work WMC does for the tanker industry.

Another example of the work WMC carries out is a website run by a senior engineering lecturer and supported by WMC. The site provides cadets and senior engineers with another tool to aid their learning. It includes example examination questions and answers. The site has been well received and is seen as an important extra dimension to the directed learning requirements of a number of the courses.

Continual professional development

It has been a particularly busy year for the liquid cargo operations simulator, an area of training that whilst not mandatory has grown as tanker owners and operators place more emphasis on the officers to run operations both safely and efficiently. The simulator provides real-time flow control systems used in the storage and transfer of bulk liquids, and can represent the controls of eight carriers including LPG, LNG and VLCC. WMC also prides itself in being able to tailor courses to specific customer requirements giving the training further value to the operator and the course delegate alike. Specialised tanker training is also carried out at WMC, an area of bespoke training for liquefied gas, chemical or oil.

Another growing area reported by WMC is in ship handling. Training in this area is conducted at a second site to the west of Southampton in Marchwood, and includes a full mission bridge simulator with 13 acre manned model lake side by side, with seven scaled models including one for a 140,000 dwt twin screw shuttle tanker.

"We believe this to be the only site of its kind in the world with the simulator and manned models side by side," says Richard Vickery, marketing officer. "It means we are able to offer tailor made courses utilising both facilities."

The legislation surrounding the shipping industry still of course demands that the operators and managers are up-to-date in the training they put their crews through. This also puts demand on the training providers.

"We are constantly reviewing the training we provide," says Mr Vickery. "We have to make sure we meet the legislative requirements but also fulfil the specific needs of our customer."

One such example of new legislation is the International Ship and Port Facility Code. WMC has been developing a number of courses in accordance with this code, as the focus on this area of operations increases. Other new areas of training include a

suite of Management Short Courses, again designed to build on the requirements of the STCW code.

Attracting young people to the industry

As part of Southampton Institute of Higher Education, WMC is also firmly built around a research background, with one particular research project being carried out over the last 3 years into the recruitment and retention of seafarers.

Colin Stevenson, project manager for the research project, says: "A problem for the shipping industry is that over recent years school and college leavers have been attracted to university, although there are still vast numbers of graduates that leave university and have little idea of the career path they want to follow".

Mr Stevenson continues, "The NVQ structure in the UK is very suitable for the demonstration of competence required by STCW'95. The underpinning knowledge for the NVQs and the mandatory sea-time could be completed with two years. Surely a qualified watchkeeper in two years rather than the current 3 ½ years must be an attractive option to the shipping operators?"

WMC also runs a careers open day at the start of every year that attracts 16-19 years old from over the south of England. They are given the opportunity to speak to recruiting shipping companies as well as view the training facilities they can expect to use during their cadetships.

"We view the Open Day as an important event in our calendar," says Mr Vickery. "We know the shipping companies find it useful as part of their recruitment programme.

The youngsters that attend are genuinely interested in a career at sea."

Further information on the training, consultancy and research conducted by WMC can be found at www.solent.ac.uk/wmc. Email: richard.vickery@solent.ac.uk. The engineering website can be found at www.marinediesles.co.uk