



## METHAR

### HARMONISATION OF EUROPEAN MARITIME EDUCATION AND TRAINING SCHEMES

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1. Introduction
2. Which main problems are addressed?
3. Why do these problems exist?
4. Which solutions are proposed to solve these problems?
5. Who are the expected users of these proposed solutions?
6. How can the proposed solutions be exploited?
7. Which benefits can be expected from implementing the proposed solutions?
8. Conclusion

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The METHAR project deals with the maritime education and training of ship officers (MET) in the 13 EU countries with MET, Iceland and Norway (METHAR countries). It began in April 1996 and will end in January 2000.

The METHAR project is carried out by a consortium of 5 institutions, of which 3 are MET institutions and 2 universities involved in higher education and research in maritime transport.

The METHAR consortium is supported by the Concerted Action on MET (CAMET) that will have met 11 times before the end of the project. CAMET serves both as information provider for the research and as discussion forum for findings and proposals

from the research. Ideally, the members of CAMET are also expected to act as "change agents" in their own countries and help implement METHAR proposals. In CAMET, MET institutions are represented as well as maritime and educational administrations responsible for national MET and a national shipowner association. Observers in CAMET are the European Community Shipowners Associations (ECSA), the Federation of Transport Workers' Unions in the European Union (FST) and the Confederation of European Ship Master Associations (CESMA).

#### 2. WHICH MAIN PROBLEMS ARE ADDRESSED?

The Right Hon Neil Kinnock, the former Transport Commissioner, answered the theme-question "Is the Seafarer an endangered species?" at an EU Conference in Dublin in December 1996 with "on present trends, yes".

METHAR is aiming at helping halt and revert these present trends by increasing the attraction, quality and competitiveness of MET, enhancing the employability and mobility of MET graduates and their contribution to safer shipping, cleaner oceans and the efficiency of sea transport.

It should be noted in this context that it takes three years from entering a MET

institution to obtaining an officer in charge of (a navigational/ an engineering) watch certificate of competency.

The supply of ships officers from the 15 METHAR countries is not meeting the demand for ship officers for METHAR country-flagged ships and for ex-ship officers for the shore-based national maritime industries of METHAR countries.

There exists an overcapacity of study places at the altogether 147 MET institutions at 124 locations in the 15 METHAR countries.

MET in METHAR countries is expensive compared to MET in non-METHAR countries from which ship officers are supplied for ships flying the flag of a METHAR country.

A similar cost difference applies to ship officers from METHAR countries and non-METHAR supply countries.

The mobility of ship officers between METHAR countries and within the national maritime industry of most METHAR countries is limited.

Taken together, MET in most METHAR countries has an attraction, a competitiveness and a mobility problem. Jobs on board ships as well as in the maritime industry ashore are lost. Jobs on board ships can be filled with ships officers from non-METHAR supply countries, jobs in the shore-based national maritime industry can not be filled with ex-ships officers from non-METHAR supply countries and today also not with national ex-ship officers from EU countries. The service quality of the national maritime industries will suffer.

### **3 WHY DO THESE PROBLEMS EXIST?**

The shortage of applicants for MET is mainly a consequence of a decline of interest in seafaring, a widely spread

development in mostly affluent societies. This decline is worsened by the bad image of the industry. The surplus of study places at MET institutions is also a consequence of the globalisation of shipping, the increased use of modern technology in shipping and the availability of ship officers from East European, Asian and other countries who are cheaper and sometimes considerably cheaper than ship officers from METHAR countries.

Repeated efforts have been made in METHAR countries to identify the reasons for the reluctance of young people to chose seafaring as a (temporary) career. Already some 20 years ago it was the "issue for the majority of seafarers (is) not whether to leave the sea but when" (Frank Main, Head, Department of Marine Studies, Liverpool Polytechnic, UK). Since then the development from choosing seafaring as a career until retirement to choosing it as a temporary career has further deteriorated to not choosing seafaring as a career at all. Discussions of expert on, and research into, the reasons for this development have concluded that the decline of seafaring as career objective is most distinct in so-called affluent societies (and that even growing youth unemployment in these societies does not have much of a counterbalancing effect). The main reason for this development is obviously an increased unwillingness to accept the separation from family and friends and a private life own choice, and this despite today's often fairly generous leave provisions. It seems to add to the staying away from seafaring that the image of the industry is not good, partly because publicity is mainly given to negative events, including the hardships seafarers may have to endure and sometimes difficult and poor working conditions.

The globalisation of shipping has provided ship operators with access to cheap labor from non-EU supply countries. Ship officers from METHAR countries are still employed if they are available although national ship operators' preference for

nationals can be expected to weaken if there is not an added advantage from the employment of these of these ship officers. Costs of ship officers from METHAR countries are further increased for ship operators if they are required to subsidize shipboard practice for MET students.

The mobility of ship officers between METHAR countries is rather restricted because of a limited mutual recognition of certificates of competency between national maritime administrations. The mobility of ship officers between deck and engine departments is today only possible for MET graduates in 3 countries. The mobility of ship officers to shore-based positions in the maritime industry is supported by MET in 7 of the 15 METHAR countries.

#### **4. WHICH SOLUTION ARE PROPOSED TO SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS?**

Although the meeting of the new international minimum regulatory requirements of STCW 95<sup>1</sup> does not seem to pose any major problem to MET institutions in almost all METHAR countries, the acquisition of new technology in the industry does pose a problem to many MET institutions. This problem could best be solved by a concentration of MET resources at a smaller number of MET institutions in the METHAR countries where many MET institutions and a surplus of study places exist. Such a concentration would also facilitate co-operation between MET institutions in different METHAR countries. The best response to societal developments, which resulted in a decline of interest in seafaring and ship officer MET, is the offer of a syllabus that provides for mobility in the shipping industry from on-board to on-shore positions where shipboard experience is essential or at least desirable. The best response to economic pressures on MET is again the concentration of resources at smaller number of institutions. These institutions could also make an own income from the offer of short intensive professional

development courses and the involvement in research and consultancy.

Economic difficulties of ship operators in METHAR countries to employ national ship officers should be alleviated by political decisions to provide indirect financial support or direct financial support from national and EU funds.

The insufficient supply of national ship officers in most METHAR countries could be overcome by the employment of seafarers from cheap labour countries although this would lead to a further loss of jobs in shipping in METHAR countries. The often held belief that ship officers from METHAR countries are better qualified than ship officers from cheap labour countries requires differentiation. Some of the cheap labour countries are producing ship officers of good quality.

Shipboard-confined MET should be maintained also in future for those who do not meet the higher general education entry requirements for ship-shore MET. These students should be given opportunities to obtain, after some time at sea, qualifications similar to their colleagues who graduated from ship-shore MET. Both types of MET should preferably be offered at the same MET institutions.

Provisions for the mutual recognition of certificates of competency among METHAR countries are a necessary prerequisite for the mobility of seafarers within these countries. It would facilitate this recognition of METHAR countries would reduce the number of "foreing-going" certificates to three each in the deck and in the engine department (in accordance with STCW 95). Today, not all of the 15 METHAR countries meet this condition.

MET should receive better national recognition by inclusion of its representatives in national round tables of those concerned with, and involved in, MET. National MET should be appreciated

as an equal partner in national efforts for its improvement.

Taken together, the best response to changes in the regulatory environment, to influences from technological and societal developments and economic pressures is the concentration of MET resources, the extension of MET activities and politically decided financial support for the employment of national cadets and ship officers. These measures will improve the quality and competitiveness of MET in METHAR countries, will maintain jobs for their nationals and ensure a supply of qualified nationals with shipboard experience to shore-based positions in the maritime industry.

#### **5. WHO ARE THE EXPECTED USERS OF THE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS?**

Changes in MET of METHAR countries will have to be made on three levels, the macro, the medium and the micro levels.

Users on the macro level are political decision makers, users on the medium level are national MET-supervising agencies in ministries for transport and education, users on the micro level are MET institutions. National ship operators are users of MET institutions' "products".

Changes on the macro or political level concern the number of study places, the closing of MET institutions or their possible affiliation with other institutions of higher education and the introduction of ship-shore syllabi. Measures in favour of national MET standards and offers should prevail over local and institutional preferences.

Changes on the medium or administrative level concern adaptation of national MET programmes to international requirements (STCW 95) and the national industry's training needs. Decision makers are governmental agencies supervising MET, i.e. maritime or educational administrations. They are also those who

have to see to it that political decisions on the macro level are implemented.

Changes on the micro or institutional level concern implementation of decisions on the medium level as well as the extension of institutional activities to short intensive professional development courses, consultancy, research and the making of an own income from these activities.

Adaptation on the medium level and also on the micro level can best be achieved by including MET as equal partner in a national task force of the MET supervising government agency and the industry.

#### **6. HOW CAN THE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS BE EXPLOITED?**

There is a multitude of possibilities to exploit the proposed solutions for obtaining benefits from minimizing or overcoming existing problems. Exploitation requires the willingness to pursue changes in national MET with the objectives of increasing attraction of MET, mobility and competitiveness (employability) of MET graduates. Increasing attraction requires both a top-down approach from the macro level and a bottom-up approach from micro level. Increased mobility through national recognition of certificates and ship-shore syllabi is mostly the consequence of a top-down approach and through harmonization of MET programmes a decision on the medium level where top-down and bottom-up approaches meet. Increased competitiveness has to be initiated by top-down measures and implemented through bottom-up measures.

#### **7. WHICH BENEFITS CAN BE EXPECTED FROM IMPLEMENTING THE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS?**

Improving and harmonizing MET and making it more widely applicable-as proposed in the METHAR project outcomes-would attract more national

applicants and provide increased employment for nationals on national ships and in the national maritime industry ashore. It would also facilitate the mobility of ship officers between METHAR countries and between ship and shore.

Eventually, the trends which make the EU ship officers an endangered species would be halted and even be reverted. A national staff involvement in national shipping would be maintained and would provide for a national supply of ship officers for the national shore-based maritime industry. Present jobs will be maintained and new jobs will be created.

It will not be possible to reach major benefits without national political decisions on the concentration of MET resources in all the countries where these resources are scattered over too many MET institutions. The common achievement of STCW 95 minimum standards will facilitate the mobility of ship officers between METHAR countries as well as an increase of mutual recognition of certificates of competency between countries.

The present situation national MET – international industry should be changed into METHAR country MET- international industry

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

The METHAR project has, in cooperation with CAMET, identified common ground in MET in the 15 participating countries and made proposals for the further development of the existing commonalities. It has also identified problems with which most of the 15 countries are faced and has noted country-specific problems. Although the outcomes of METHAR concentrate on further developing commonalities of MET and on solving frequent and pressing MET problems, CAMET has also given countries with specific problems the opportunity to find out whether these are one-country

problems or exist in the same or a similar form also in another country and, if so, which solutions the other country may have tried and whether it has succeeded in solving the problem. The learning-to-know-each-other provision of CAMET has established a network of representatives of MET institutions and of MET-supervising national administrations who now easily communicate with each other, have learnt about the problems with MET in other countries, about failed and successful attempts to solve them and have become more inclined to future cooperation.

## REFERENCES:

1. International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended in 1995.