

File Note

Meeting with Brian Thomas and Wendy Monaghan

15th August 2012 at Lambeth Road HQ

Background

The Marine Society is a seafarers' charity founded in the UK in 1756. It offers education and training to seafarers, both Royal Navy and Merchant Navy, from functional skills through to postgraduate. The HQ is based in London. It operates across the UK and dependent territories with a current annual spend in excess of £12 million, including Sea Cadet support.

Provision covers all ages, abilities and aspirations - from popular and quality-assured tutor supported distance learning courses at GCSE and A level through to work-based learning degrees.

In the present context of the EU Rank-up¹ pilot project the Society administers the John William Slater Memorial Fund established in 1976 for the *provision of financial assistance to suitable ships' ratings to enable them to obtain certificates of competency or other officers' certificates and diplomas*. It has a current annual spend in excess of £600,000.

The Slater Fund

For a Merchant Navy rating considering career progression, the Slater Fund, administered by the Marine Society in association with Nautilus International², offers scholarships of up to £17,000 to help ratings study for a first certificate of competency. The scholarship can be used to help offset the direct costs of obtaining a certificate of competency through any approved UK nautical college. Specifically, funding is offered towards the costs of any necessary full or part-time education, and to provide some financial support during college phases for those off pay.

It can be used for funding the necessary courses and for help with accommodation, travel, learning resources and living expenses whilst undertaking the qualification. It can also be used to fund the cost of up-skilling in functional skills (eg Maths) which is offered by The Marine Society to those in need.

The money is available for four years from the date of the award. It is available to serving ratings over 20 years old permanently resident in the UK.

¹ A Transfer of Innovation, Multilateral Projects, Leonardo Da Vinci Lifelong Learning Programme Agreement N° 2011-1-LV1-LEO05-02233 EU Leonardo Da Vinci Programme – Ratings to Officer VET Progression Programme

² Nautilus International an international seafarers' trade union and professional organisation

Set up in 1977 and named in memory of former MNAOA³ General Secretary John William Slater, over the past decade the value of the fund has increased from £2,500 to its present level. During this time over one thousand seafarers have benefited. Financial help is available only to British professional seafarers who are domiciled in the UK, is subject to status checks, and dependent upon the availability of funds.

Selection for training

Experience over many years has shown that success in training through in distance learning programs less than 10% succeed. A critical part of the process is screening and selection of candidates. A typical candidate is aged mid 40s and returning to learning after a long period without any formal study. All candidates have a common financial challenge: to take time out to study and continue to meet financial commitments of supporting home, family etc.

Maths

Maths is a key part of the education which is lacking in ratings considering career progression. An early step in the procession of selection and admission to the college training is in basic maths required by watchkeepers. An on-line learning program **Maths@Sea**⁴ is available to Slater Scholarship candidates for free of charge. The learning covers:

- Numbers and Arithmetic
- Algebra
- Volume and Space



The program, developed with South Tyneside College, covers an initial diagnostic assessment and up-skilling learning. Attainment of a satisfactory outcome is a prerequisite for admission to education and training under the Slater Award scheme. In addition to building competence it also aids in building confidence in a candidate that has not had exposure to learning for a long time and builds competence in using the internet and on-line systems.

Shipping companies and ship managers find that even cadets with attainments in GCSE struggle with nautical maths. Areas like geometry, trigonometry and algebra don't carry much weight in the syllabus of modern school maths teaching. For this reason the Marine Society's **Maths@Sea**⁵ assessment is now used as part of their cadetship selection process. Trainees need mathematical skills to perform calculations in navigation, cargo work, ship stability and other areas of their professional work.

Writing skills

As a next step to address another weakness in candidates the Society is developing an on-line application to address basic writing skills. Topics which are frequently missing in candidates without recent formal education include use of capitals, paragraphs, letter and report writing. Like maths these are seen as non-negotiable competencies for officers.

³ Merchant Navy and Airline Officers' Association

⁴ See www.mathsatsea.com

⁵ The Maths@sea innovation was short listed for a Sea Trade Award in 2012

Candidates

As noted before a typical candidate is aged mid 40s and returning to learning after a long period without any formal study. About 60-70% are ex fishing fleets due to the decline in this industry. Some may have fishing qualifications, others not. They are very practical seafarers often from families with a history of fishing over many generations. They don't have class room skills. Others come from coastal and ferry operators like WhiteLink and Stena, or want to return to sea as an officer after having been ashore.

There are currently 175 ratings receiving Slater awards. Annual intake is 55. With changes in the UK training schemes and the introduction of Marine Apprenticeships the average age of candidates is expected to fall.

Support is offered to candidates for a maximum period of four years. One key role of the Society is to offer through a dedicated tutor the support, encouragement and mentoring to achieve success in the selected program. The Society assists in the selection of appropriate text books, and can supply these and other learning resources such as a laptop. Typically candidates take two years to complete. Initially the method of college learning can take time and encouragement to settle to. Tutors will put students in touch with one another for peer group support to share common problems. Candidates need a strong self-motivation to stick with studying and need to find time and space to study. There is also a large practical element, for example, for training leading certification under Regulation II/1 of the STCW Convention, Operational Level Officer in Charge of a Navigational Watch⁶ for ships of 500 gross tonnage or more, the STCW Chapter VI short courses: fire prevention and fire fighting; personal safety and social responsibility; proficiency in survival craft and first aid are all part of the training leading to certification.

Training providers

The following colleges offer upgrading training, in full or in part.

- Banff and Buchan
- Blackpool and the Fylde
- Glasgow College of Nautical Studies
- Liverpool John Moores
- South Tyneside College
- Warsash Maritime Academy

Commercially Ocean Training Plymouth Ltd is an MCA approved training provider.

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⁶ STCW A-II/1