Europe leads the way in setting international standards for Maritime English

20 years without standard teaching and assessment frameworks for Maritime English suggests that the industry has neglected its responsibility to make the seas safer and to give seafarers the skills they need to compete in a global workforce. European maritime stakeholders are now leading the way with the SeaTALK project.

Although IMO officially recognised English as the 'lingua franca' of the sea in 1995 it is difficult to come to terms with the fact that twenty years have passed and the industry has still not formed a consensus on international, or even European, standard frameworks for teaching and assessing the key competencies of Maritime English. In the current system it is left to each country and individual maritime education institution to ensure that seafaring cadets are able to *communicate effectively* in (Maritime) English. This undefined approach is the primary cause of current wide variations in Maritime English competence, and surely explains why a high 30% of the maritime accidents caused by human error are the result of linguistic and/or communication mistakes (Ziarati, 2006, Trenkner, 2010).

In accordance with principles of cooperation, harmonisation and the free movement of people, Europe has several systems in place to create international recognition and transparency of qualifications and common approaches to teaching, in particular the European Qualification Framework (EQF), the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). European universities and industry already make extensive use of these systems as a way of 'benchmarking' their teaching and of assessing the value of a qualification against a standard framework of competence across the entire European Union (EU). These already established and trusted systems are well placed to give Europe a unique base from which to establish the first European and international standard Maritime English curricula and assessment frameworks.

Funding from the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme has facilitated the SeaTALK and MarTEL (Plus) projects (www.seatalk.pro and http://tests.maritime-tests.org/), run over several years by a Europe-wide consortium of universities, colleges, academies and industry partners. The project deliverables have resulted in the creation of a standard Maritime English assessment framework and training modules, based on an ECVET model. The latter will facilitate seafarer mobility, in line with current maritime needs and trends. Links to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) provide mutual recognition and transparency of Maritime English qualifications across Europe, all based on International Maritime Organization's (IMO) requirements for each type and rank of seafarer.

Maritime English Competence Grids developed by the SeaTALK partners establish standards for seven ranks and functions of Seafarers including Deck and Engine Room, and ranging from Support to Management level. The grids also incorporate the recent function of Electro-Technical Officer. The objective of the grids is to map relevant occupational standards with Language Learning Outcomes, Language Performance Criteria and Knowledge and Skills. The achievement of each cadet/seafarer is ascertained through the Assessment Method, which provides cross-reference to CEFR. The purpose of the grids is detailed as follows:

- **Occupational Standards:** to allow cross-referencing and linking of the SeaTALK Maritime English language criteria to professional standards. This involves cross-reference to the CEFR and STCW requirements and is complemented by a qualitative survey aimed at validating the Occupational Standards selected.

- **Language Learning Outcomes**: define what the learner is expected to achieve at the end of the training path i.e. professional profiles are addressed using the ECVET system to identify the Maritime English requirements corresponding to the seafarer's function.
- **Language Performance Criteria**: to assess and evaluate the extent of achievement; to assess the Learning Outcomes acquired through the learning experience, whether formal, non-formal or informal.
- **Skills**: the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems.
- **Knowledge**: outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of study or work.

In order to further support Maritime English teachers the SeaTALK partners have developed a free-to-use online database of Maritime English teaching resources. Each resource is linked to a specific Training Module and Learning Outcome so that teachers can be sure they are delivering the relevant materials for cadets / seafarers to achieve the Language Learning Outcomes and Occupational Standards at the level required. Anyone in the Maritime English community can contribute teaching and learning materials to the platform and, by sharing with colleagues, thus enrich the scope of Maritime English. Visit www.seatalk.pro and watch the videos to find out more.

Once the SeaTALK training module has been delivered the cadet/seafarer progresses to the corresponding MarTEL Test. There are 9 different MarTEL Tests, each designed to assess the Maritime English of a particular type and rank of seafarer from Cadets and Ratings through to Chief Engineers, Chief Mates and Captains. Once the MarTEL Test has been graded each cadet / seafarer receives a Personal Transcript detailing the level of competence achieved.

To help the community use the above SeaTALK approach the partners have produced a manual which provides sample documents. These documents

- identify and recognise the different Maritime English language qualifications acquired through formal, informal and non-formal education;
- apply the ECVET, EQF and CEFR systems to the professions and levels of seafarer identified;
- provide an assessment method of formal, informal and non-formal ME competences;
- provide an English Language competence grid for the professions and levels of seafarer identified.

Creating accurate, reliable and relevant standards for Maritime English is an ongoing process which involves cooperation between academia, industry and regulators such as IMO. Projects like MarTEL (Plus) and SeaTALK have laid the foundations; now the European and global communities must engage and make use of the work done so that IMO sees fit to enforce such standards and make these a requirement. Although it has taken 20 years to progress this far, hopefully it will not be another 20 before one high standard for Maritime English is accepted, implemented and enforced around the globe and the world's seas are made safer as a result.

For more information about how you can get involved please visit www.seatalk.pro and www.martel.pro or contact us at: info@seatalk.pro or info@martel.pro.

SeaTALK Maritime English Symposium

From 15-16 June, World Maritime University hosted a 2-day SeaTalk Partners Meeting and on 17 June, a one-day SeaTALK Maritime English Symposium that signalled the conclusion of the European Commission (EC) funded Project.

The 30-month project is funded with the support of the European Commission with the intention to create a harmonized framework enabling seafarers to undergo common Maritime English training and to assess their qualification levels to facilitate workers' mobility due to the common qualifications recognition system within the EU. This includes a unique online platform for Maritime English resources along with a syllabus that includes materials within the framework of STCW competences, CEFR levels and the ECVET system.

WMU provided the setting for the symposium that included some 50 participants from 30 countries. Professor Olof Lindén, Director of Research and the PhD Programme, delivered the welcoming remarks and Associate Professor Clive Cole was responsible for the overall symposium.
The SeaTALK Project will shortly complete its mandates and the outcomes and "products" will become accessible at http://www.seatalk.pro/