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Champion's clarion call to WMU class of '89

THEY had come from the furthest corners of the earth to begin two very demanding years of study.

They sat, 104 of them in a dozen rows, facing their chancellor with hope in their hearts and a good deal of apprehension regarding their ability to cope.

They had left secure jobs: commanding ships, operating machinery, from port offices and shipping company headquarters, all comfortable niches in the maritime world. And, with an average age of 35, most had left wives and families whom they would not see again until Christmas. You don't go home to Kiritati, Tanzania or Manila for a long weekend, even if you can afford it.

They were the class of '89 that last week began four semesters at the World Maritime University' at Malmo, Sweden. At their inauguration ceremony in Malmo City Hall, they listened with 100 compatriots of the previous year to C. P. Srivastava of the International Maritime Organisation tell them that "your country is entitled to your devotion."

It was, of course, the IMO secretary general who had become seized with the idea that the developing world would be seriously handicapped if it could not supervise and implement IMO standards. The organisation is always being accused of lethargy, but it took only two years from a resolution in 1981 to the first 70 students arriving at the refurbished nautical school gifted by the city of Malmo. The 104 students who began their course last week brought the total number of admissions to more than 600. Mr Srivastava retires this year, but his championship of WMU — a fight that ranged from convincing a sceptical majority at IMO to the battle for funds — would be a worthwhile conclusion to anyone's career.

The long-term raison d'être

Michael Grey's



VIEWPOINT

of the WMU is to provide graduates who can influence the standards of maritime affairs in their own countries. Most students come from the developing world, and 104 countries have so far each sent a maximum of three per year. There is a sprinkling from developed world countries, which is universally welcomed, but it is particularly difficult for such students to raise the finance for their course. There are a few women, but shipping seems always to have been a man's world, no matter how much this is deplored.

With students coming from a large number of different cultures and backgrounds, finding a common level at which to start the course is not exactly easy. The course language is English, and not surprisingly there is a wide variance. For those who do not speak or write the language there is a preliminary sixteen-week high-intensity course provided. Even so, it cannot be easy to comprehend complex technical ideas in a foreign tongue, and there are, inevitably, a few who do not make it past this hurdle.

Seven different courses are available, ranging through

general maritime, ports, shipping and marine safety administration, plus education and training to the technical management of shipping companies. A modular approach is followed, after which the students hope to be awarded a Master of Science in his appropriate speciality.

The WMU can be likened to a mid-career training establishment rather than a conventional university, the aim being to broaden specialised skills that the candidate probably applies to his normal job. Many students may be thought of as "fast track" professionals who will rapidly go on the top in their home countries. Already, WMU graduates are appearing in the delegate lists at IMO meetings, and are operating in many senior positions throughout the world. While this may not be considered a great accomplishment in countries where maritime matters command a low priority, what is important is the growth of an international cadre of people with a similar approach to standards in the maritime world.

The university is fortunate in having a distinguished academic staff, supplemented by a list of some 150 consultants, eminent people from the maritime world who lecture students without charge. The courses are practical in content, and the lecturers are largely drawn from administration and business rather than the more rarified academic world. These visitors are encouraged to live in the students' residence during their stay, and most seem to enjoy the experience.

The sojourn at Malmo, which is not the world's most exciting city, is leavened with technical visits, and the third term is largely devoted to on-the-job experience. Here there is an effort to link the student to a company or administration in which he has a proper job and training for a number of weeks. The university ranges far and wide for suitable donors of this training: students go to

Japanese ports and Canadian shipping companies, and are generally scattered around the developed world in their quest for knowledge. The final term is largely spent writing a thesis relevant to their country and their chosen profession. An actual task concerned with a domestic problem is often done in fulfilment of the thesis conditions.

With the WMU operating at capacity, there is stiff competition for entrants, and the admissions procedure has been refined to get a broad range of students who will benefit the most. In the past, there has been a suspicion that some applicants from certain countries have been sent by their administrations to get them out of the way for a couple of years, while others might have been sent for some political objective. Today, the WMU tries to get people whose governments are able to provide ongoing career paths.

It is recognised that the re-entry of the student into his domestic environment may cause problems, and there is specific guidance given on the best approach to people in his home country who may take a dim view of changes proposed by someone with a lot of newfound knowledge.

Is the WMU value for money? The students are impressive, certainly, not least for their willingness to make considerable sacrifices during their two years in Sweden. It's worthwhile because it is a highly practical technology transfer that gives the Third World real help in developing self-sufficiency. And for the countries and firms who provide funds and job experience, it is an admirable demonstration of enlightened self-interest, since the links that are made will benefit the donor as much as the student. The 600 WMU graduates may be spread fairly thin worldwide, but there is little doubt that in the quest for higher maritime standards they represent a force to be reckoned with.

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