

The challenges of recruiting seafarers in 2019

As yachts get larger and carry more crew with unlimited certificates, we see the skills gap between yachting and shipping reducing and thus naturally, these two worlds have started to intertwine in an unprecedented fashion.

I have elaborated in the past on the shortage of crew facing the yachting industry and believe it is now fitting to look at the bigger picture, especially given the forthcoming sectoral meeting in February 2019 in Geneva at the ILO on "Recruitment and Retention of Seafarers and the Promotion of Opportunities for Women Seafarers"... More on that in due course.

What is the current situation? Every five years the manpower report from BIMCO (Baltic and International Maritime Council) and the ICS (International Chamber of Shipping) is published and in the most recent release, it is stated that the shortage of officers was in the order of 16 500 and is estimated to increase, continually, to over 145 000 by 2025. Although the global supply of officers is forecast to increase steadily, this is predicted to be outpaced by increasing demand.

At the end of 2018 ICS has released another study, this time conducted by the Hamburg School of Business Administration (HSBA), regarding the potential effects of autonomous ships on the role of seafarers and the global shipping industry. With over 1.6 million seafarers currently estimated to serve on merchant ships trading internationally, the impact of MASS (Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships) on seafarers requires thorough consideration going forward.

"Encouragingly, the study indicates that there will be no shortage of jobs for seafarers, especially officers, in the next two decades. While the size of crews may evolve in response to technological



Laurence Lewis looks at crew shortfalls and the challenges of recruiting and retaining crew in 2019 and beyond

changes on board, there may also be considerable additional jobs ashore which require seafaring experience," Mr Platten, ICS Secretary General explained.

These numbers do of course, dwarf our yachting figures, yet with a total number of crew soon approaching 85 000, the yachting industry has its own crewing challenges, albeit very different from the Merchant Navy.

2018 has been the second busiest year at YPI CREW in terms of Engineers and Deck Officers new registrations along with an overall across the board registration increase of 8 %. Given the fact that the company has already a network of candidates spanning 16 years, this is a healthy percentage which highlights the vitality of the industry.

Yachting crew, and deck crew especially, if they stay in the industry past their university gap years, are for the most part, career orientated and racing towards "that" captain's job. However, there just aren't enough Captain's jobs to accommodate all aspiring masters and therefore, officers will likely have to remain as deck officers for a longer period of time as can be the case in the Merchant Navy where many officers, both deck and Engineering are qualified well before promotion.

The current true shortage of crew in yachting lies within the interior department, with an acute shortfall of experienced stewardesses and stewards. Retaining stewardesses long term in the industry is a challenge and whilst offering rotation is perhaps a solution, eventually, those wanting to start a family will inevitably leave.

Shipping, cruising, yachting; complex worlds with different purposes, yet a single common denominator; the crew, and the necessity to attract and retain them.