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Widespread changes in seafarers' role forecast

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NEIL SINCLAIR reports from the conference in Amsterdam entitled Maritime Industries in the Nineties — A European View.

Widespread changes in seafarers’ role forecast

WIDESPREAD and fundamental changes in the number and role of seafarers were predicted yesterday by one of the world’s leading experts in maritime education and training.

Professor Gunther Zade, vice-rector and academic dean of the World Maritime University in Malmo, Sweden, forecast that in the next decade dual purpose ratings may replace deck and engine-room ratings, and that overall number of ratings will about equal or even fall below the number of officers.

He also predicted the phasing out of radio officers and their replacement by advanced ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communications technology, managed by a bridge officer.

"The number of engineers may be reduced to two or even one, as a result of the availability of reliable automated engine operation and control systems," said Professor Zade.

He said the quest by shipowners for reduced manning levels coupled with the introduction of new communications and navigation technology would also mean substantial changes for maritime academies.

He said the number of maritime academies would be further reduced and those remaining would be better equipped with sophisticated training equipment. The introduction of new syllabi to reflect technological changes and lower manning targets was vital.

Professor Zade said navigation would lose importance in the maritime training syllabus, whereas seamanship and maritime law might have a greater effect on the training of master mariners. Electronics and automation would receive increased attention.

Professor Zade called on maritime lecturers to recognise the need for changes and to do a full part in their implementation.

"Academics will have to abandon their too often defensive or fatalistic attitude to change on the basis of a constructive participation in the implementation of reasonable amendments to the present system," he said.

- Western European shipowners must not sacrifice their high standards in the battle with low-cost flag of convenience shipping, delegates were urged.

Mr R. J. de Wit, Queen’s Commissioner in the province of North Holland, said: “Quality is the best weapon in competition.”

Opening the conference, which was organised by Hogere Zeevarstschool (Amsterdam’s senior nautical college), Mr de Wit criticised the low quality of crews on some ships sailing under convenience flags such as Panama and Honduras.

But he said it was of great importance that West European owners responded not by lowering their standards to reduce costs, but by striving to offer high-quality ships, crews and management.

Gas producers face ‘severe competition’

THE uncertain future facing gas producers was outlined to the conference by a senior energy adviser at Shell International.

Mr Douglas Wade said gas...