

A smooth transition to superintendent status

→ Going to sea is the ultimate goal for many mariners — as it gives them a chance to see the world and learn new skills. However, for some, a life afloat is not the long-term plan.

Moving from ship to shore is a major change in any seafarer's career. Everything from the style of work down to the wages they take home will be different. Acknowledging this, a training centre for the next wave of superintendents is helping to make that transition a bit more manageable.

Based on the Isle of Man, the intensive Ship Superintendents' Training Course provides all participants with the knowledge, tools and skills they may need in order to work on the shore side of the industry.

The course is a joint initiative between the Isle of Man Ship Registry and the Isle of Man College of Further and Higher Education. It is delivered by a range of industry experts and it lasts for nine days, at a cost of £3,000 per participant.

For over a decade it has been run by EMCS International — a family-run business based on the Isle of Man. At the forefront of the business, helping to guide participants through the training, is EMCS owner and programme manager Steve George, who spent 14 years at sea before coming ashore.

'The idea of the course is principally to bring senior officers from onboard ship to shore,' he explains. 'It is a career progression where they have come from captain or chief engineer onboard ship to shore as a superintendent.'

'A superintendent is the managerial link between the ship and ashore,' Steve notes. 'The course has developed over the years where it's not just captains and chief engineers, but we also get different people from the marine industry.'

'They come on the course to learn the new skills they need, which are legal issues, accountancy issues, report writing and insurance, to name a few. The big advantage of this course is the interaction between future superintendents so they learn from each other's experiences.'

→ Every year, two training sessions are undertaken at the Nunnery, near the Isle of Man's capital Douglas. This beautiful setting — spreading over 12 acres and dating back as far as the 12th century — is a tranquil surrounding to help attendees focus on the new skills they are learning.

The move from working at sea to working ashore is not always an easy one. But a special course run in the Isle of Man aims to give seafarers the skills and knowledge they need to progress their careers as respected maritime professionals on land.

STEVEN KENNEDY joined the students last month...



Participants listen during the training at the Nunnery on the Isle of Man
Pictures: Steven Kennedy

During the training, students are guided through topics including dry docking, changes to reporting lines, environmental issues, budgeting, repair costs, buying and selling ships, media responses, and damage surveys.

Each course usually welcomes 12-15 participants, arriving from all over the world. This occasion — the 22nd course — is no different. In the room is an assortment of nationalities. Seafarers from Britain are flanked by colleagues from Latvia and Germany, as well as from as far afield as India and Venezuela — including the 300th person to have taken the course. All have a goal in mind, and that involves taking those steps back to shore following a life at sea.

Due to the nature of the industry — and with the international flavour of the participants — the course constantly has to keep adapting and changing to ensure its students are receiving up-to-date knowledge.

'The course changes progressively all the time,' says Steve. 'We still have the same key people to pass on the information because they are key to the course as they have the in-depth experience.'

Over the years we adapt to trends and changes in the business. On the current course, for instance, we've actually bought a superintendent of the police force here, who's retired now, to teach them about incident investigation and protecting the evidence.

'There are 37 modules here and maybe once a year we'll change one,' he adds. 'It takes quite a long time to do that. There are quite basic things which don't change like the legal issues and insurance. It's the side issues that do change.'

→ Nine long days of training can be a big commitment for a working person, perhaps with a family to support. With a substantial course fee to pay and a life-changing decision to make, the choice to come to shore for a superintendent's existence is not one participants make lightly.

However, for those who are willing to make the jump back to land, it can be a decision that is extremely rewarding, and — although not easy — it's a path Steve believes will serve them well in the future.

'It's £3,000 to do the course, which is



Steve George, programme manager for EMCS

a lot for an individual, but much of the time it's the companies that are putting people forward,' he explains. 'What we've seen is that many of the people who've finished this course go on to be junior superintendents, then full superintendents, then they may move to become a fleet manager. The sky really is the limit.'

'The biggest changes they'll have to get used to are working in an office environment — the wages aren't quite as good as they can get at sea, and you get half the leave as well.'

'These are things that may put people off coming ashore but you've got to choose,' Steve points out. 'You can stay at sea, but you've got to look at the reason why you've come ashore. At the end of the day if you're at sea you can be the chief engineer, you can be the captain on the ship and go two months on, two months off, but you can't get any higher.'

'If you choose to come ashore as a superintendent, it's career progression. You can make managing director, but you won't as a captain on a ship. You have to suffer a little bit at first. Superintendents are on call all the time — seven days a week, 24/7.'

'Personally, I love doing this job,' Steve says. 'Sometimes people come and they're quite apprehensive about what's going to happen. Seeing them go from that through the course and then at the end seeing the confidence that they've got means a lot.'

'The good thing about it is that even once the course has finished they can pick up the phone to us as they have all the contact numbers. They can ring and say "I'm in the bottom of a dry dock here and there is a big lump off the end of the propeller blade. What do I do?" We get those calls all the time and it gives them confidence. At the end of the day we're here to help.'

» For more information about the Ship Superintendent Training Course, contact Steve George on +44 (0)1624 833 955 or email enquiries@emcs.co.im.

Latvian-born seafarer Taras Kulmjakovs became the Ship Superintendent Training Course's 300th participant when he enrolled on April's course.

A voyage manager for MOL LNG Transport (Europe), Taras first went to sea back in 2007 and said that he always planned to make the move ashore when the time was right.

Now, almost a decade on, Taras is in the first stages of making that ambition a reality.

'I've been sailing since 2007 until 2015 on the LNG carriers and decided to try out the superintendent's life and come ashore last summer,' said Taras. 'I've been working with my current company, MOL LNG, since September, so I'm pretty new to life ashore.'

'This was always my intention from when I started sailing,' he added. 'The main reason for this was to go on developing. There were times at sea when I wasn't moving forward. I was stuck doing the same routine tasks; I was very comfortable in it, but I felt bogged down.'

Coming into the course, Taras didn't know what to expect. Through his work and time at sea he has seen various ways of working which have helped shape the way he operates. He is now looking at identifying the areas that need improvement and says he is looking forward to the challenge of being a superintendent.



Aspiring superintendent
Taras Kulmjakovs

'So far I'm doing operational superintendency. I hoped the course would give me a better understanding of what I'm getting into. I don't expect it to give me an instant boost in my career or anything like that.'

'In this course we've spoken about general managerial skills, assertiveness and being able to talk to people. I'm not entirely sure that I have all those skills yet at the required level, but I've spotted areas that I need to develop in myself, which is an important thing to do.'

'I'm excited about the prospect of stepping up. I want to see if I can handle it. I'm already seeing how difficult it is, but I wasn't looking for easy so I've embraced that,' he added.

One surprise Taras couldn't have anticipated was that his enrolment was to be a landmark for the training course. From his own experiences on the Isle of Man, he said he'd not hesitate to suggest the same for others.

'Being number 300 through the course is a good thing,' said Taras. 'I didn't realise that until I was told in the room. I've heard that pretty much everyone who's done the course is happy with it. I'd certainly suggest to people looking to start out as a superintendent to do the course. It's a great thing to go through.'



The Nunnery Picture: Isle of Man Department of Economic Development