



Discussion paper on STCW Changes and delay in Introcucing the IMO Model courses by IMO

As it stands STCW2010 changes looks quite clear and in detail when reviewing the major changes introduced in June 2010. Examples of such clarity are in competence tables within STCW2010 for marine engineering at operational and management.

It is commonly accepted by MET organisations that applying the IMO model courses as programmes (Deck and Engineering) of MET for seafaring officers or as guidelines in their institution are sensible and a safe option of ensuring that their MET programmes are in line with IMO requirements/standards. The problem is that IMO model courses) for all ranks and types of ship officers) are not ready as yet. IMO declared in the recent STW43 committee meeting in London that the model courses will be available soon. Since they are not ready, at the time this paper is being written, what this implies is that all MET institutions have to interpret the changes as best as they can. Many MET providers are of the view that has the resources to correctly implement the changes and integrate them within the MET Programmes.

For institutions with fewer resources, lack of access to the latest IMO model courses has created some uncertainty, and this in term has and will lead to variability in the implementation of the latest changes. Ideally, it would have been helpful to have had this model course ready before introducing their implementation in January 2012.

The common opinion of many captains who serve at sea, as expressed in some discussion groups, is such that the situation is frustrating and causes uncertainty. This leads to confusion as to how they should do their jobs and discharge their responsibilities on board which usually ends up with unexpected discussions, and even arguments in some cases on board the vessel. Furthermore, they hope that the internationally recognised IMO model courses will be easy and clear to understand to resolve the complications at sea once they become available.

Recently, engineering related course proposed by Japanese authorities which includes extensive knowledge of radio installations, regulations and navigational rules was rejected by IMO. The proposed course was found not to be necessary for an Engineer watch-keeper. This is just one example of the problems the seafarers are facing viz., uncertainty.

Looking at the problem from the point of view many Maritime Administrations, the followings could be true of the situation:

- As Model Courses are not ready by now, many Maritime Education and Training institutes are in doubt as how to amend their curricula to meet the new requirements.
- Some Administrations had incorrectly interpreted competency for Navigating in Polar Water requirements. This was noted that there was confusion as to why these requirements were necessary Engineers. The discussions at STW working group when discussing the resolution 11 of the STCW Manila Conference, did not resolve the issue. There has been no further explanation whether the requirements are still considered necessary for Engineer Officers.
- Competency for operation of ECDIS as mentioned in STCW Code is distinguished between Operation level and Management Level. However, IMO Model Course 1.27 has no explanation on the matter. It creates confusion in developing curriculum for Certificate of Competency in this regards.



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- The new requirements proposed for the Electro-Technical Officer and Ratings are interpreted differently by several maritime Administrations, particularly as to whether the requirements will also apply to Engineer Officers. In any case the Model courses for these categories of officers are not available as yet.
- Requirements for GMDSS Radio Operators have also created some ambiguity for some Administrations. These confusions related to the RR (Radio Regulations) and note concerning STCW for certification in this regard.

A MET Academy in Sri Lanka states that they have already prepared a new syllabus considering the feedback of their students by being proactive rather than waiting for Model courses from IMO. Their hope is that IMO model courses will not be dissimilar to what they have already done. They further add their concern stating that they are afraid that we will need to spend a lot of time again to revise their programmes when IMO eventually publishes the new model courses. They assert that the delay was mainly due to various authorities involved in producing the model courses trying to account for their individual interests which were rejected by IMO.

It is pertinent to note that the IMO model courses were originally intended as guidelines for flag states and MET institutions. The model courses were produced to help flag states and the institutions to have the benefit of hindsight when developing their own programmes/courses. The model courses in fact have never been intended to be the IMO standards.

The reports show that most institutions go beyond STCW standards (UniMET, 2010). They design their programmes to meet the standards and get approval from their flag states for their own programmes. Even where the model courses have been used as a guide for delivery, there is often disparity on how MET Institutions/colleagues interpret them. If some nations wish to have “gold standards”, it is their prerogative where shipping companies will source their training with this in mind.

The world of MET has moved on since the original model courses were formulated. Many are of the view that the merchant navy is stuck in a 1960s educational time warp - which may be one of the reasons why the accident statistics remain stubbornly resistant to training.

Arguably, model courses are fundamentally flawed in that they tend to be syllabus-led with a prescribed curriculum. That means that some parts of them are obsolete before the ink is dried. The Input-driven courses have always had this flaw, for example, one teaching union was promoting the purchase derricks and streaming logs when they had all been disappeared – this was because these items were mentioned in the syllabuses. Although output-driven courses can exclusively also be flawed (because they sometimes ignore or downgrade the educational processes), they do give much greater leeway to course designers to change and update their material as often as required.

There is growing international awareness that the model courses need a root and branch review if they are to meet modern pedagogical standards and the demands of 21st century shipping. GlobalMET (www.globalmet.org) and UniMET (www.unimet.pro) are the two active players looking at these issues. We may have to wait a while until we see the way this will all pan out.



Conclusion

We cannot wait for model courses whenever changes are presented to us. Model courses are not standards. Changes happen all the time and it is obvious that there is a need for a modular and continuous approach. Too much reliance IMO STCW and IMO Model courses for the development of the MET programmes do not seem to be the way forward. One reason as being that IMO STCW revised or otherwise, set the minimum standards. Yes, it is wise to review these standards and make sure that they are incorporated into ship officers, and when required in Ratings, programmes (Ziarati, 2010). EU has put a great deal of effort to identify the main deficiencies of the current MET standards and practices. EU funded, on-going project UniMET (Unification of Marine Education and Training), has created a consortium to help to implement the changes introduced in 2010 within a modular platform so that any future changes can easily be up-dated whether these changes are related to minimum standards set by IMO (STCW) or any constituent part of the MET programmes (Ziarati et al, 2010). If there are any changes in the future (as changes become inevitable due to changes in technology or practice) then only modules affected by change are up-dated and the rest remain the same. Secondly, why should there be so much focus on minimum standards, should we not aim for a higher standard, namely, the Master Class, as proposed by Ziarati et al (2011). Please see UniMET website (www.unimet.pro) for more information on UniMET platform and programmes. Joining UniMET is free of charge and there are no restrictions. For papers and articles on innovations in MET, please refer to MariFuture Platform, www.marifuture.org).

References

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