

The maritime college in Gaeta that places 100% of its students in work.

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The bowlines are off and they're away: 25 successful applications out of a total of 300, 1,500 hours in the classroom and 12 months on board ship and, most importantly, a 100% employment rate with starting salaries from €1000 upwards. What is remarkable about the John Cabot Foundation's Maritime Technical College in Gaeta (in the Italian province of Latina) is the number of students enrolled for the start of its 2014-2016 course. And since 2011, each and every student that has completed their training here has found work with their diploma certificate still fresh in their hands, signing on as crew members or for office positions and advancing their careers right from the very start of their working lives in the shipping businesses that operate in partnership with the college. The base is still Gaeta, a stronghold with a nautical institute that dates back 160 years and boasts high-tech laboratories and up-to-date training; the future spans a vast arena, from the giant ships on route for America and Asia to on-shore roles, depending on the particular path chosen on the other side of a selection procedure which, on the basis of the latest admission figures, sees fewer than one in ten candidates being admitted.

Of the 30 students to graduate in 2014, all 30 were hired. In 2014, this 100% success rate meant 30 new employment contracts awaiting signature by 30 graduates, with twenty of them joining the deck officers and taking up senior positions operating the ships and ten joining the engineering teams responsible for on-board plant and equipment. But what makes this college a centre of excellence is the entire student journey from start to finish: at a tried and tested 'cutting-edge workshop' that works on the strength of a partnership between the business world and the world of education, student time is invested in the lecture halls as well as in gaining experience on board. Textbook-based courses see students cover subjects ranging from law and physics to English. Their final screening then involves 12 months at sea, giving both the students and the college an opportunity to assess whether they are suited to the career that possibly awaits them. If the answer is yes, then an offer of employment is issued, and on occasions this happens on the very day that the students graduate.

The president: a way of introducing the younger generation into the world of work.

The programme and its results are anything other than mainstream in a country that is struggling with a disparity between training and actual demand on the employment market. So how has it been possible to engineer a situation in which the exact opposite comes about? In the view of Cesare d'Amico, president of the John Cabot Foundation, "We've got what's referred to as a matching of supply and demand as a result of painstaking preparation by the businesses involved, who assess their actual requirements right at the outset, as early as the initial selection process. Basically, the number of admissions reflects the number of people who can then be employed on board ship". Basically, nothing other than a "correlation between the teaching element and the businesses, so as to introduce the younger generation into the world of work. Following a particularly rigorous selection process, the students already know that, armed with their diploma, they will be able to secure their first job on board ship. And it is during this selection process that the various businesses pick out the candidates, going on to provide them with focused tutorship on an ongoing basis".

Study, diploma, employment: a sequence of events that is becoming increasingly rare in a country like Italy with a youth unemployment rate that has just hit 44%. There is in fact another - historic - maritime technical college, the Merchant Shipping for Sustainable Mobility Academy in Genoa that boasts an

employment rate of 100%. But is this a model that can be successfully rolled out elsewhere? "There are in fact other technical colleges already up and running that have established very strong links between the teaching component and the role played by businesses" explains d'Amico. "Our model can be used where the concept of a 'technical college' goes further than simply being a method of teaching: you need a business on board working alongside you that promotes the college and follows up its commitment to open up the door to the students in its ranks".

Female students on board: interest from women on the increase. Is it true to say that we have (only) male professions in the maritime sector? While the pendulum still swings in favour of the male component, applications to study at the college in Gaeta are also received from women, with four female students graduating in 2014 and three others currently mid course. The most recent addition to the register here is Maria Grazia Russo, 28, with a CV that stands out from the usual format submitted: scientific high school completed in Catania, a degree in psychology and work experience of various types. She then became hooked on the idea of life on the sea: "I got into this area quite by chance. I was working in entertainment on a cruise ship as a hostess, and that's how I got interested in it. I did the six-month preparatory course and then various things happened that prompted me to give it a shot". It was not an easy target that she faced, with one massive hurdle being the fact that of 300 applications, only 25 are successful. So are women beginning to 'throw off the bowlines' where careers in the maritime sector are concerned? "Not yet. The percentage of women is still very low. It's a privilege to help increase that number. It would be great if more women entered the profession".

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