



SOUTH AFRICAN CADETS SAILING THE SEVEN SEAS

The National Cadet Programme, recently named the National Seafarer Development Programme (NSDP) provides a structured training programme for deck and engine cadets who gain practical experience on a wide range of vessels while sailing the seven seas. This enables them to gain internationally recognised qualifications.

Funded by the National Skills Fund, cadet training in South Africa is managed by the South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI). A key operations component is to identify berths and subsequent employment for South African seafarers. SAIMI is working on increasing the number of berths as this is a challenge, particularly with increasing numbers of cadets. SAIMI is also developing a new framework for the NSDP to continuously increase the level of seafarers coming through the system. The South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) as the regulator, supports the system through oversight of the curriculum and the issuing of certificates of competence.

"In the cadet programme, there is not one candidate I wouldn't be proud to say she or he represents us. They all have a strong work ethic and solid values by virtue of being in the programme – it's like being in a club and you carry the flag in a certain way."

These are the words of Sheldon Gumbrill, training superintendent at the South African Maritime Training Academy (SAMTRA) which at any given time has 100 deck and engine cadets (one-third women) doing their training as part of the National Cadet Programme, recently named the National Seafarer Development Programme (NSDP).

Throughout the pandemic, training continued. "Our cadets are champions; they have remained focused and resilient," says Zulfah Tyman, representing the training department of Marine Crew Services South Africa (MCS). "We prioritised the well-being of the cadets and keeping the momentum going. We continued onboard experiential training and examinations in line with the COVID-19 protocols and focused mainly on local placements during the periods of international travel restriction."

Gumbrill adds: "It was incredibly challenging during lockdown to try and get cadets on and off ships all over the world, but we adapted as an industry and put measures in place, such as lining up two cadets per vessel in the event that one tested positive. If both were negative they would each be assigned to a vessel. We expected them to continue performing optimally, and they have."

Optimal performance starts with giving the cadets a strong grounding and induction that prepares them to deal with the wide range of challenges they will inevitably experience in the course of their maritime careers.

"Our cadets are sought after because we have a stringent selection process from higher education institutions throughout South Africa," says Gumbrill. "They need to be highly disciplined with loads of drive and passion for the industry. They also need to be emotionally well-balanced as they are in close quarters with other crew members for six months at a time."

The cadet training institutions work closely with international ship owners and managers to provide berths for South African cadets. It is an advantage that they speak good English, that South Africans can readily access visas, and that all the different medical examinations are available here.

Overall, the cadet training programme is expanding the specialist skills base in the country's maritime sector, and giving more young people the opportunity to pursue this unique career and make their mark, as Gumbrill has. "I studied maritime studies at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPU). I always wanted to do this and I started my deck officer cadetship on the SA Agulhas in 2012. At the time SAMTRA was setting up trainingships, so I trained at sea for two years and then started doing training from our base in Simonstown in the Cape. The career chose me and it's gratifying to see this same affinity in the cadets."

