After leaving school in the mid-seventies, John McLoughlin gained his seafarers’ qualifications and spent a decade working on deep sea cargo ships before containerisation revolutionised the industry. Moving into offshore oil and gas, John completed his Officer of the Watch Certificate. Undertaking the course led him to discover how much he enjoyed the personal challenge of study, as well as the career progression opportunities. Coming across the Middlesex University maritime programmes through the Marine Society, John found that work based learning offered both the flexibility and career focus that he required.

The bespoke nature of the course meant that John was able to design his work based learning project around his area of professional interest: health and safety training offshore, its relevance and value for money. It has been instrumental in John being able to set up as an independent health and safety consultant.
“As well as marine and offshore oil and gas, I now also work with renewable energy companies. I have the professional freedom to choose the work that interests me, and balance it with my family life,” he said.

Although the distance learning aspect of the course could be tough at times, John enjoyed the experience. Learning about research methods and self management were instrumental in helping him tackle his wide ranging research project. “Having good contact with my academic advisor made my learning experience a very rewarding one. I managed to go from struggling to understanding what was required of me to gaining a first class BSc with honours in twenty months from start to finish.”

The rewards for John have been both professional and personal. On a practical level the professional benefits in terms of the opportunities open to him have been substantial. On a personal level John sums up the work based learning experience as providing a real sense of “achievement”.

Daniel Wood, First Officer, Ruby Princess, Princess Cruises
BA Professional Practice (Marine Navigation – Voyage Planning)

South African Sub-Lieutenant Daniel Wood had always planned to take a nautical degree after secondary school but circumstances meant that his path took a different turn. After 7 years in the South African Navy, he and his family immigrated to the UK where he embarked on a career with P&O Cruises, achieving his Master’s Certificate and HND in Nautical Science. After moving to Princess Cruises in 2008, he decided to top up his professional qualifications to a full bachelor degree with the Middlesex University Institute for work based learning.

“I had always wanted the reward, experience and prestige of obtaining a university degree,” said Daniel, “so I was very interested to find out about the Middlesex University/Marine Society professional practice programme.”
"I highly recommend the Middlesex maritime programmes to any seafarer who is looking to upgrade their HND to a degree."

Daniel Wood

Having made initial enquiries, Daniel found that the Marine Society not only provides seafarers with guidance and moral support but they also offer a range of financial benefits including interest free loans and scholarships. These benefits are available to all UK domiciled officers embarking on qualifications that will help prepare for a broader career in the maritime sector. The scholarship meant that Daniel could undertake his degree without impinging on his family commitments.

Daniel found the experience of undertaking the course, particularly the research, extremely rewarding. “My whole perspective has changed. The way I learn, conduct my work, manage relationships and set goals has been extensively improved.”

“There are a number of specific challenges facing seafarers, including, internet bandwidth and finding the time to study when you are at sea doing 12 hour shifts,” however Daniel found that the support of the Marine Society made a real difference. “Their staff provided invaluable advice and assistance every step of the way. Nothing was ever too much trouble.”

Paul Bryson, Assistant Harbour Master, Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners

MSc in Work Based Learning Studies (Marine Accident Management)

Despite holding a Class 1 Masters, HND Nautical Science, Diploma in Marine Engineering and Diploma in Marine Surveying, Irish Ferries Staff Captain Paul Bryson always felt that a degree was missing from his CV “When I saw the Middlesex University work based, postgraduate qualification advertised I realised that I would be able to continue working full time whilst attaining my degree,” said Paul. My employers, Dobson Fleet Management, technical managers of Irish Ferries, were extremely supportive.

The work based nature of the degree meant that Paul could design his course to benefit his career development. On that basis he elected to focus on marine accident management, and how the company deals with accidents to passengers and crew on-board its vessels.

Through a process of accreditation for his prior qualifications and experience, Paul was able to go straight onto the postgraduate level course without having to complete a bachelors degree first. The work based nature of the course means that he is on schedule to complete within 12 months. “While I was doing the actual project it felt like it was growing all the time. I kept coming up with new ideas and other potential research areas. Although I spent a lot of time preparing the project, I feel it was extremely worthwhile.”
Paul found the most challenging aspect of the course was finding a balance between work, family life and studies. There were periods when significant time had to be devoted to the course. However the support of the Marine Society made a huge difference. “Previously I had little understanding of what the Marine Society did, but they were excellent. They assisted with the initial paperwork and also reduced the actual costs involved by providing very attractive payment options to minimise the expenses involved,” said Paul.

Dr. Valerio de Rossi, MSc, DProf.
AFNI, MCMI, Master Mariner,
Captain and Offshore Installation
Manager, Vantage Drilling Company

Putting his many years of experience in the offshore oil and gas industry to good use, Valerio completed a Middlesex University Work Based Learning masters degree in marine operations and safety management in 2004. Having found the experience extremely rewarding, Valerio “wanted to push his education to the highest level”. His past experience of work based learning made a professional doctorate through Middlesex the obvious choice. Valerio’s chosen area of research, an investigation into the impact of cross cultural interactions on offshore health and safety management, is of critical importance, not just to his employer, Vantage Drilling, but to the whole industry.

Valerio enjoyed the challenge of planning and presenting his research proposal to the Programmes Approval Panel. “It forced me to think deeply about the implications of my approach to the research and to be rigorous about my choice of data collection techniques,” he said. The highlight for Valerio was seeing the fruits of his research and knowing that it makes a very real contribution to his industry. “I have used my research findings as a basis for a book which has been published in order to help the dissemination of good practice throughout the industry.”

Currently based on a drilling platform off the east coast of India, Valerio is certain that undertaking the doctorate has “improved my reflective learning skills and therefore my ability to tackle the wide range of challenges,” required in his professional practice.

Valerio sees his next career progression step as securing a shore-based senior management position with Vantage Drilling. He sees his doctorate as an important differentiator because it not only evidences his commitment to the industry but also a breadth of transferable analytical skills.

Contact details

If you are looking to set a new direction for your career, visit www.mdx.ac.uk/maritime, and contact the Marine Society for an informal discussion.

Telephone 020 7654 7050 or email education@ms-sc.org