New courses to boost S’pore’s maritime industry talent pool

To be funded by MPA, programmes cover areas such as law and arbitration

By GEORGE JOSEPH
[SINGAPORE] The government yesterday announced more tertiary-level programmes aimed at increasing Singapore’s talent pool for the high value-added and knowledge-based sectors in the maritime cluster.

One of the programmes is aimed at meeting the expected surge in demand for trained manpower in the $7.5 billion offshore and marine engineering (O&M) sector as a result of a deluge of contracts secured by Singapore companies.

The other schemes cover sectors such as maritime law and arbitration aimed at strengthening and widening the pool of maritime lawyers in Singapore.

The programmes were announced yesterday by Minister of State for Finance and Transport Lim Hwee Hua at the eighth Maritime Forum organised by MPA.

The programmes will be funded through the Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) of Singapore’s Maritime Cluster Fund and are established in collaboration with industry.

For offshore oil and gas technology specialisation, MPA has worked out with the Economic Development Board new courses at the National University of Singapore’s Mechanical Engineering Department.

Another new scheme is a Postgraduate Maritime Law Programme “to further push for Singapore’s aspiration to be the region’s legal services hub and to complement the suite of undergraduate maritime law modules at the NUS Law Faculty”, said MPA.

The Law Faculty will introduce two postgraduate maritime law programmes in academic year 2007-2008, a Masters (LLM) in Maritime Law, and a graduate diploma in Maritime Law and Arbitration.

The Masters (LLM) in Maritime Law aims to provide law graduates with specialised knowledge in maritime law, while the new Graduate Diploma in Maritime Law and Arbitration will be aimed at professionals like the holders of Merchant Marine Certificate of Competency as well as maritime executives whose first degrees are not in law but they hope to upgrade themselves with specialised knowledge in maritime law and arbitration.

To make it more attractive for qualified individuals to sign up for the law programmes, MPA will offer scholarships for both programmes.

MPA chief executive BG (NSI) Tan Lim Heng said: “To support Singapore’s growth as an International Maritime Centre, a steady stream of high-quality maritime-ready graduates is required.”

“The partnership between MPA and NUS in developing the new programmes is a step towards building that pool of graduates and also reflects our shared commitment in developing the right skills for the maritime industry,” he added.

Alan Tan, Vice-Dean and Director of Graduate Programmes at the NUS Faculty of Law, said: “Shipping and transport-related subjects have always been important offerings at our law school, with its diverse slate of subjects and courses.”

“Our commitment is to work with MPA and other agencies, as well as shipping companies and law firms specialising in shipping law, to be the foremost maritime law training centre in the Asian region.”

“By incorporating arbitration, dispute settlement and regulatory policy courses into the programmes, we hope to widen our students’ perspectives and to enhance their relevance not only to legal practice, but to government, industry and the broader business community as well,” Associate Prof Tan said.

MPA set up an $80 million Maritime Cluster Fund (MCF) in 2002 to help promote and strengthen the maritime cluster in Singapore.

Out of the $80 million, $50 million has been set aside to enhance maritime manpower development. More than half of it has been disbursed to benefit some 2,500 employees from 678 companies, MPA said.

Mrs Lim said that while MPA continued to attract maritime businesses to base their operations in Singapore, it was equally important to ensure that these businesses have access to a large pool of competent and talented manpower, so as to sustain Singapore’s growth as a premier International Maritime Centre.

“MPA is therefore continuously engaging employers in the maritime industry, as well as courses and scholarships that meet the industry’s needs for seafarers, shore-based personnel and maritime engineers,” the minister added.