

Taking on the role of educating hopefuls to become mariners

Onomichi Marine Institute

The Onomichi Maritime Institute, a private institution that specializes in crewmember education, also plays an important role in the formation of the Maritime City of Onomichi. The institute became registered as The class 1 Training Facility, the first privatized six grade Licensed Mariner training facility to do so, by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport & Tourism (MLIT) in 2009. Most of who wish to become mariners and attend the training facility is on shore duty with non-marine duty. Their age is a wide range from twenties to forties. They are employed by domestic shipping companies after finishing their curriculum. The following is an interview with company chairman Yasufumi Murase and senior director Kuniaki Mukai.



Photo caption

Chairman Murase (left) and Senior Director Mukai

Kaiji Press: Can you talk a bit about the institute's operations?

Murase: We have several courses, including our Registered Small Vessel Operator's Course, Marine Mechanic Training Course, and Scuba Diving Training Course, but we also have a special technical school called Japan Marine Technical School. We are the only privatized institution to have a maritime-related special technical school.

KP: How did you achieve registration as the class1 Training Facility?

Murase: The shipping world is facing a critical lack of mariners, and once the time came when the bulk of the baby boomers began to retire, the domestic shipping industry in particular was faced with the problem of coping with a lack of workers. The class 1 Training Facilities where one could obtain a mariner's license included state-run educational institutions such as Tokyo University of Marine Science & Technology (formerly a nautical college), Kobe University, fisheries universities, and marine

technical colleges, as well as Tokai University. This was due to the fact that the institutions were required to have training ships, but later on institutions were also permitted to conduct training using training ships at the Marine Technical College navigation training center.

The Seto Inland Sea has many domestic shipping companies, but graduates tend to choose large shipping companies despite putting up offers of employment at universities and marine technical colleges, so we needed to find some way of acquiring crewmembers. We talked with the relevant government agencies to see if our institute could participate in mariner education and training, but our lack of a training ship proved to be a bottleneck.

Mukai: Given the situation, we decided to talk with the Onomichi Maritime City Promotion Council being advanced by the City of Onomichi, the Chugoku District Transport Bureau, and others, and because human resources training was already on their list of items for consideration, the decision was made to create a plan for crewmember training under a joint effort between the private and public sectors. By providing mariner education at Onomichi Marine Institute and outsourcing training ships from various domestic shipping companies, we managed to achieve registration as the class 1 Training Facility from the MLIT where people could acquire six grade mariner license, which is the first certification required to become a mariner. The Japan Marine Technical School has also added a 'mariner course'.

KP: How has recruitment of students been?

Mukai: Our first batch of students in fiscal 2009 saw nine students, followed by 20 in fiscal 2010, 20 in fiscal 2011, and 28 for the current fiscal year. In terms of demographics, ages vary widely, ranging from those in their 20s to those in their 40s, and we have students from all over Japan, from Hokkaido to Kyushu.

Those seeking to change jobs from on-land to at-sea are, for the most part, people that wanted to become mariners at a young age, but were unable to do so due to family circumstances. There are also those that wish to get a fresh start on life due to poor working conditions at their previous workplace due to the economy. Those kinds of people come here after talking with their friends and acquaintances that are mariners, and realizing that drawing up life plans becomes easier after becoming a licensed mariner. Another apparent appeal is the ability to take holidays in large blocks.

KP: What challenges will you face going forward?

Murase: We currently only offer the six grade Mariner Licenses, which is the doorway to becoming a deckhand, navigation officer, and ship captain. We have been hearing more and more requests from shipping companies to train engineers, so we would like to focus

on being able to do that going forward. In addition, all trainee tuition and expenses related to training ships from shipping companies is paid out-of-pocket. We are nearly at the point where we will see a critical insufficiency of crewmembers, so I would like to see more support offered to private institutions.

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