

# Support and Career Development Platform for Georgian and Worldwide Maritime Graduates

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**Abstract:** The article is a continuation of the research project "From Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) to University Resource Planning (URP)" (AGA IAMUC 2022). A digital centralised system is essential for properly analysing and assessing the performance of administrative and academic staff.

In the proposed model, fundamental URP components include financial resource management, Quality Assurance Management, Human and Assets Management, Marketing & PR Management, University Administration, Faculty Governance, Academic Activities, and Student Support and Career Development. Without consolidating and measuring these activities, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) merely perceive aggregated information regarding weaknesses and gaps in achieving strategic or operational goals. The goal of the article was to study how to create a unified platform (portal and database) to support the URP's Student Support and Career Development component. The research studied Batumi State Maritime Academy's (BSMA) alumni, government, local, and international businesses in Georgia to assure their continuing connection via an integrated remote platform. The study also evaluated IAMU member HEIs graduates' challenges, opportunities, and labour market competitiveness. Currently, maritime universities individually sign memorandums of understanding with employers, but no centralised platform exists for ALL MEMBER UNIVERSITIES to serve both students and employers.

The objective was to study unified platform perspectives, propose the best alternative, and initiate a commonwealth system among IAMU partner universities to facilitate sharing job and career development information.

The research methodology relied on primary survey data, secondary data, and the analysis of quantitative and qualitative statistics.

In conclusion, the article detailed the development of an electronic platform and database that will assist students in finding jobs matching their specialisation and competencies. Concurrently, employers can use database filters to select students or graduates possessing the precise qualifications for their vacancies. Thus, the platform effectively connects maritime industry employers with qualified candidates.

**Key words:** Career Development; Students & Graduates Support; Employment Platform.

## **1. Introduction**

Maritime shipping is one of the most widely used and effective types of transport in international freight operations. Maritime transport is also very important globally since it plays a crucial role in the emergence of a single international transport system of product transportation. Different from many other transport sectors where the business is carried out based on specific contracts, maritime transport belongs to the international shipping and logistics field.

Consequently, employment prospects for Georgian Maritime graduates include global positions in the maritime business of commercial shipping, offshore oil and gas, cruise lines, port management, and maritime logistics. Before graduating, they should make it their endeavour to have relevant certification, which is expected under the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW Convention). Once they secure these certificates, employment may be procured by one of the online recruitment sites, employment agencies, or direct application with shipping companies. Also, they can benefit from the academic networking, to attend conferences and exhibitions, get to know people belonging to the maritime field. COVID-19 has drastically affected the worldwide maritime industry by creating difficulties in crewing and employment; however, it is gradually recovering, and therefore, the worldwide employment opportunities for the Georgian Maritime graduates are also expected to rise with time as the industry recovers from all situations.

The advancement of maritime business specifically necessitates is the acquisition of higher standards of education. During the last 10 years, Georgia has been developing as an international centre of maritime logistics. Maritime education is becoming more developed, which can be illustrated by the constant increase in the percentage of students studying in maritime education programs and the number of educators' programs in national MET institutions. (MDPI open access journal 2021)

As stated in the Government Programme 2021-2024 (GoProgram 2021-2024), several initiatives are implemented to boost maritime employment and enhance the country's transport and logistics functions:

- The expected outcome will be the development of an online trading platform relating to international transport.
- Will continue to follow ICAO and European regulations.
- The possibility of applying the maritime single-window principle and the digitalisation of services related to Georgia's maritime sector will be examined by the country.

- Directing the Georgian seamen to get employed, ratification of the international maritime conventions, and development of the maritime educational systems.
- Financing of projects and the development of maritime transport and maritime structures will be supported. (EBRD 2021-2026)
- Help the Maritime Transport Agency in developing a Port Social Network in symbiosis with the MSW to support simplified supply chains as per the Government. (Maritime Transport Agency 2021)

## **2. Literature Review**

The mission of the Maritime Transport Agency of Georgia is one of the main priorities of which is to promote employment of Georgian seafarers. Since 2021, the certificates for foreigners' competence of Georgian sailors have been acknowledged by the main counterpart countries, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Thus, Georgian seafarers have a right to work in the labour markets of 62 maritime countries, of which 22 are members of the European Union. According to Georgian statistics of sailors in 2021 – 2022, more than 8500 sailors entered the state border of Georgia for sailing. On average, the seafarers contributed \$300 million in foreign currency to the country's economy. The relevance of large ship-owning companies towards Georgian sailors has increased significantly: For instance, in 2021-22 a tripartite memorandum was signed with the leading Singaporean ship owning company and the five famous ship owners of the country named, Eastern Pacific Shipping Pte. Ltd. (SOS operates 123 vessels, 42 of which are container carriers, the remaining vessels include a young generation of dry bulk carriers and tankers, and EPS directly employs over 5,000 people), where the achievement of company representatives, an annual list of students completed a six-month maritime internship. The flow of clients to receive a certificate of competence through passing the test in the period from January to December 2022 at the Maritime Transport Agency was 2142, but 1804 clients completed the test. Slightly different information can be received in the case of the interview: the number of passers amounted to 766 individuals, and the result by 80% was positive. (GEORGIAN MARITIME SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL 2021)

Over time, the global supply of officers and skilled seafarers in industrialised countries is dwindling in the international labour force. It also expects the prevalence of obvious competence in human capital shortage in the labour market by 2026, which will contribute up to 5% staffing deficit. The first and foremost is the relative inactivity of the seafarer profession in the affluent countries of the world. Marine agents, consultants and shipbuilding employees are sought after in

the same countries' labour markets. Being responsible for around 80% of the global commodity transport, the maritime business stands among the most rapidly growing ones. General maritime commerce is expanding at a much faster rate than the world's population, which is why addressing these shortcomings and staff advancement is vital. Population in the global level and the availability and need for the market in the area influence the rate of growth of shipping. (ICMAT 2021)

### **3. Research results**

On June 22, 2022, Batumi State Maritime Academy held the "Employers' Forum 2022" at the "Sheraton Batumi" hotel. Within the framework of the mentioned forum, we conducted a survey of employers; more than 26 local and international organisations participated in the survey and the purpose was to reveal the trends of the labour market, define the main problems and receive recommendations. (QAS 2022)

The indicators of employment of graduates of the undergraduate programmes of the three faculties of the Maritime Academy (the faculty of navigation, engineering, and business). A graduate of the Faculty of Navigation and Engineering cannot start working immediately after graduation. Since there is a lot of competition in the global labour market for employment in international companies, their employment rate is 38–60%. Business graduates are mainly employed in local organisations, which is reflected in the high level of employment (60–80%). According to the graduation rate, the Maritime Academy largely produces qualified students. (QAS 2022)

We assess the degree to which a graduate's knowledge and abilities satisfy the standards for the efficient performance of the organisation's operations.

As a result of our research (in Diagram N1), we observed that the knowledge and skills of our graduates are mostly in line with the requirements of organisations. The evaluation of organisations was distributed as follows: completely 15.4%, mostly relevant 53.8%, partially relevant 19.2%, and 11.5% replied that they do not yet have a graduate of the academy employed in their organisation. Through a personal interview, up to 70 percent of organisations are satisfied with the graduate. (QAS 2022)

With joint research by the Academy and us, we specified what knowledge, skills, and values graduates of the Maritime Academy should have for employment in certain companies.

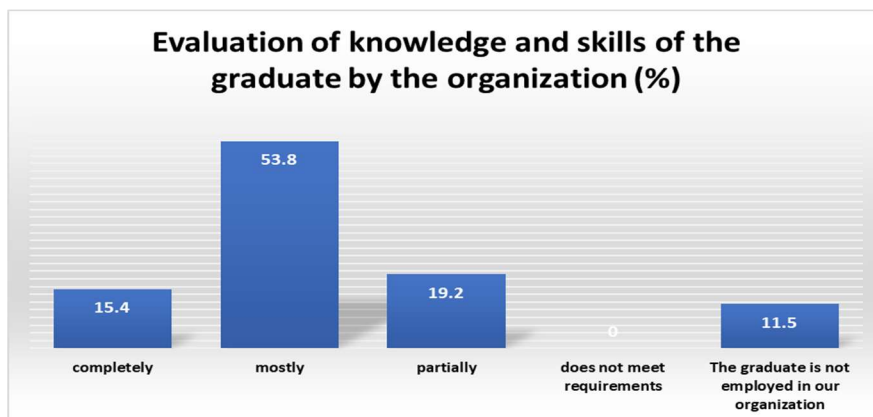


Diagram 1. Evaluation of knowledge and skills of the graduate by the organisation (%)  
Source: Evaluation of graduates by the employer, QAS, Batumi State Maritime Academy 2022

In the survey (Diagram N2), the respondents had the opportunity to prioritize the predetermined criteria that employers consider essential in the case of hiring graduates of the Maritime Academy. As a result, we can see that teamwork and the ability to constantly update knowledge (LLL), as well as knowledge of foreign languages, are the three main criteria that are determined in the applicant selection process.

Also, most of the respondents believe that the lack of qualified personnel in the labour market makes it difficult to find new staff in the current environment. Most interviewed employers

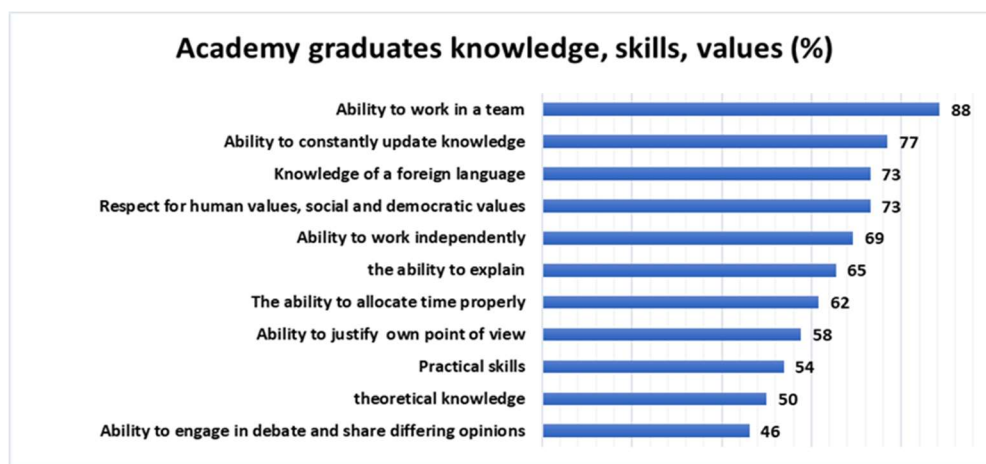


Diagram 2. Academy Graduates' knowledge, skills, and values (%)  
Source: Evaluation of graduates by the employer, QAS, Batumi State Maritime Academy 2022

are satisfied with the level of competence of the graduates of the Maritime Academy, while many of them note that, depending on the activities of their company, the graduates need additional qualification training/courses; only a part of them notes that there was no such need.

#### **4. Analysis**

During the analyse global academic institutions, it can be assumed that there is a gap in demand for competent seafarers in the international labour market till 2025, and so Georgia, as a maritime country, will be able to respond to the requests on time.

In consequence, we must concern the necessity to identify the issues with the employment of students and graduates in the global and national economies.

Studies and analysis of numerous results of students also demonstrate that graduates from Georgian universities can be employed in foreign countries and can easily compete in the international labour market, but the maritime universities are mostly oriented to employ students of marine navigation and mechanical specialities. The overwhelming majority of the IMO' s affiliated universities offer additional educational programs like business administration, Maritime economics, port management, logistics and forwarding, transport economics, Maritime and Cruise Tourism, and others, even though the employment opportunities for these courses are not properly promoted.

Even though maritime institutions are mainly aiming at placing students of maritime navigation and mechanical specialisations into the Georgian and foreign workplaces, research and students' evident success support the conclusion that Georgian graduates may compete and secure a job in the global labour market.

The BSMA graduates are competing in quite a different world characterised by certain challenges, opportunities, and competitiveness at the international labour market. Here are some of the key factors that can impact their career prospects:

##### **Challenges:**

- Few employment opportunities in specific areas or certain areas of the marine business.
- The key factor which has been identified as contributing to the maritime labour market is its highly competitive.
- A situation where to be qualified for a certain position, one needs to get extra certifications or a license.
- The strenuous and rigorous actions of some of the occupations in the maritime sector.

##### **Opportunities:**

- The opportunities of getting better jobs and chances to navigate to leadership positions within the companies in the business.
- The ability to enter a project with mass-market appeal that can make effective use of modern technology in its turn and actively participate in creating new methods.
- The possibility of competitive remuneration and added perks depending on the area of the industry.

**Competitiveness:**

- Global and local maritime industry organisations could be significant partners of IAMU member HEIs given that some of the institutions place their graduates to work directly with their employees.
- With a good reputation, IAMU member HEIs' graduates can easily find market themselves and be more likely to be chosen because of worldwide recognition.

All in all, IAMU member HEIs graduates are exposed to the constantly growing and highly competitive labour market but, at the same time, various opportunities and privileges are opening for them. Since IAMU member HEIs provide continued education for their graduates, networking/job placement services and being updated with current developments in the industry, their graduates will be well-suited in the global maritime industry market.

**5. Conclusion**

The factors that could influence labour market competitiveness, opportunities, and challenges for graduates may be numerous and diverse for member higher education institutions of the International Association of Maritime Universities. They may be related to a field of study, a geographical region, or general economic conditions in a country.

in our article we aim to present not a theoretical model, but to introduce the idea of a commonwealth real-life job occupation portal. Although the partner university member information data cannot be obtained by the IMO member institutions, every university does provide a local student career support page, and each one of them has a significant quantity and quality of employers, together with government support systems.

It's worth mentioning that it would be appropriate and useful to somehow share all these resources together by means of a single platform whereby, for example, by clicking the button "career support" on the page of a concrete university, a student or graduate would automatically be transferred to the unified page of IMO-member universities where the information about vacancies for maritime students is deployed.

On the one hand, he/she can choose the appropriate organisation and management level corresponding to his/her career, experience, qualification, salary, and location (region/country). On the other hand, the vacancy information for these so-called "international students/graduates" will be posted by partner organisations of IMO member institutions and stakeholders with an eye to filter the students' competence, education, specialisation, language abilities, etc., and send an invitation for the announced vacancy.

The digital platform will be placed for the researchers from the universities of IMO member countries, who will use it to conduct research - by making a search of information by region, country, speciality, gender, and so on - and afterwards, for further development, they can provide strategic recommendations and suggestions to the leadership of their government authorities.

To conduct such research is normally very time-consuming and inefficient, since it is practically impossible to interview more than 10<sup>th</sup> thousands of persons at once. Our proposed platform will involve more the 100 000 students, graduate professional workers, and academic and administrative personnel from all IMO member universities. A worldwide job centralising platform will be usable by IAMU students, employers, and other stakeholders, which could have huge potential by linking employers in the maritime sector with competent candidates from among IAMU member HEIs.

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