

The Maritime Barometer



Executive Summary

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Maritime transport is the backbone of global trade and the global economy, playing a critical role in maintaining global supply chains and improving living standards. Its capacity to transfer goods and materials from production to the point of consumption underpins the essence of modern life, made possible by the maritime professionals who work aboard merchant vessels.

During COVID-19 this reliance on maritime was magnified but perhaps the most graphic illustration of our reliance on maritime and seafarers was the Ever Given getting jammed in the Suez Canal.

Yet, most people in the UK are unaware of the integral part the maritime industry and those who work in it play in their daily lives – being an island nation, 95% of everything we use and consume enters the country by sea including 25% of the UK's energy supply and almost half of the country's food supplies. Younger people especially are not receiving adequate information in schools or their family units regarding a career in maritime, thereby compromising the future supply of recruits into this vital sector.

This lack of awareness, which we refer to as "sea blindness", signals a looming crisis in the UK maritime industry if today's young people are unaware of the opportunities on offer. It is also deeply concerning if a lack of appreciation of maritime and seafarers translates

into a lack of concern in society for the demise of our maritime skills base or for a UK registered fleet of ships.

However, the lack of visibility or knowledge around the maritime sector isn't the only threat. There are still other glaring issues affecting maritime professionals – unheard of in traditional, land-based jobs – that need addressing.

The social and working conditions of seafarers need to be improved – not least enhanced connectivity – and further steps towards a diverse and inclusive industry all require major attention, not only for current seafarers but also if we are to recruit the maritime professionals we need for the future. Broader industry issues, including securing jobs as we address the environmental impacts of shipping (the so called "just transition"), will also need to be considered in the coming years.

To highlight the current situation within the maritime industry and understand the attitudes and knowledge of those outside of it, Nautilus International, the trade union representing more than 20,000 maritime professionals at sea and ashore, conducted its "Maritime Barometer" survey of 2,000 UK residents across August-September 2021. This report reflects the survey results, and we hope it serves as a springboard to enhance knowledge about the sector, encourage change within the industry, help to enhance maritime as an attractive career option, and foster a better understanding of the needs of maritime professionals.

Introduction

This report highlights the survey's key findings, underscoring the general attitudes and perceptions of the nation towards the maritime industry. It also provides helpful information regarding the low profile of the maritime industry compared with other high-profile sectors such as automotive and aviation.

Summary of findings

- Only one in a thousand people in the UK (0.1%) know that more than 90% of goods consumed arrive by sea
- In the UK, only a fifth of the public (21%) believe that seafarers deserve key worker status
- A third of the UK population (33%) do not know what their nearest port is
- Only 7% of respondents could name the UK's merchant navy flag Red Ensign/Red Duster when shown an image of the flag
- Fewer than a fifth of the population (18%) know someone personally who works at sea
- More people believe that a shark attack is more common than a pirate attack (45% vs. 37%) – in reality, there were 132 piracy incidents reported globally in 2021 and 73 unprovoked shark attacks
- On average, the population estimates that 18% of seafarers are women – in reality, this figure is just 2%
- More than half of respondents couldn't name any well-known seafarers (58%)

Results summary

Sea Blindness

The term “sea blindness” describes a lack of awareness among the public, media, and decision-makers, impacting the maritime sector’s ability to, for example, attract support, investment and ultimately entice talent into seafaring. For a sector delivering 95% of everything coming into the country, the perception of how reliant we are on seafarers is widely disproportionate to the current perception and awareness of the industry.

This survey illustrates the extent of this sea blindness, with only one in a thousand people (0.1%) knowing that 95% of consumer goods arrive by sea. Instead, respondents were of the impression that only around 48% of these goods enter via the UK’s ports. In addition, a third of the UK population don’t know where their nearest port is, while fewer than a fifth (18%) know someone personally who works at sea. Just 7% of the respondents could identify the UK’s merchant navy flag as the “Red Ensign” or “Red Duster”, which UK registered vessels are required to display during daylight hours.

Out of several household goods, the only item that more than half the British population identified as arriving in the UK predominantly by sea was bananas (63%). Fewer than half of all adults believe that oil/petrol (46%), t-shirts (41%), games consoles (40%) and medicines (37%) predominantly arrive on these shores by sea, emphasising just how out of sight and out of mind the maritime sector is when it comes to its critical role within the nation’s supply chain.

The nature of a career at sea and the challenges faced by seafarers also remain largely misunderstood, with individuals believing that shark attacks are more common than pirate attacks (45% vs. 37%) – in reality, there were 132 piracy incidents reported globally in 2021 and 73 unprovoked shark attacks.

Additionally, more than half of individuals in the UK (58%) were unable to name any well-known seafarers. The majority of those identified being historical real and fictional characters, despite the continued prominence of

the UK’s maritime sector in the current day, highlighting how underreported and unfeatured the industry remains both in fiction and non-fiction settings.

The most common seafarers that were able to be named by respondents were Captain Cook, Admiral Nelson and Christopher Columbus, with Blackbeard, Captain Morgan and Captain Birdseye also featuring high on the list.

This lack of understanding about the industry likely explains why only a fifth of the public (21%) believe that seafarers deserve key worker status, with 68% indicating that doctors are the most deserving, followed by supermarket assistants (58%) and delivery drivers (57%). Ironically, the latter two wouldn’t have a job without seafarers, a fact driven home on social media during the pandemic with the hashtag #NoSeafarersNoShippingNoShopping briefly trending on Twitter.

Maritime careers

The popularity of careers in maritime has been in decline for quite some time, despite new demands on officers and ratings because of the increased sophistication of technology aboard modern vessels and new operational innovations. Skills in IT, communications, and engineering are increasingly in demand.

One of the significant issues affecting recruitment within the UK’s maritime sector is the lack of awareness of the opportunities available. More than a third of the UK population (35%) said they would consider a career at sea should the opportunity present itself, but the industry’s out of sight, out of mind nature is preventing people from proactively considering maritime jobs.

Respondents’ perception that the maritime industry employed the fewest people in the UK out of the career options provided further highlighted the concept of sea blindness. The public believes that teaching employs the most people, followed by engineering, banking, farming, the arts, and journalism.

In reality, the maritime sector directly supported 220,100 jobs in the UK and indirectly supported close to 1 million jobs in 2019, according to a Maritime UK report. Additionally, the sector's contribution to the economy was £17 billion in 2017. This is larger than the entire rail and transport sectors combined and is an important indicator that maritime, which greases the cogs of global trade, is a fundamental sector for the continued growth and prosperity of the UK economy.

Young people are not receiving adequate information in schools or from their families – only 4% of the UK population heard about or discussed career prospects in maritime at school or college. Again, this was the lowest out of all options, superseded by teaching, medicine, engineering, banking, hospitality, construction, journalism, marketing and farming.

Asked which career offered the highest income potential, only farming received marginally fewer votes than maritime, with just 6% of respondents opting for a maritime career as potentially the most financially rewarding.

In comparison, Nautilus International's own data shows that a ship master working onboard a cruise ship or tanker could earn in the region of £70,000 to £80,00 per year and a captain on a large super yacht could earn up to £120,000 per year. This compares with the average UK full time salary in 2021 of £31,285. In addition, a UK seafarer can access the Seafarers Earnings Deduction (SED) if they are outside the UK for more than 183 days.

Untapped jobs market

Meanwhile, the population estimates that on average 18% of seafarers are women. Actually, this figure is just 2%, emphasising that significantly more work needs to be done both within the sector and external to it, to make the proposition of a career at sea more attractive to people from all backgrounds, ultimately to the benefit of the nation and its maritime resilience.

Despite the significant imbalance between the number of men and women working within the maritime industry, findings from the survey revealed there to be an untapped jobs market, with a third of women (32%) in the UK saying that they would consider a career at sea.

This figure was only slightly lower than the number of men willing to consider a maritime job (41%) and emphasises that with better education and more awareness of the different roles available at sea, the industry can begin to increase the number of women working within it and make the sector a significantly more diverse one in years to come.

Conclusion

Despite being an industry responsible for 95% of imports and supporting almost a million jobs, it is clear from our Maritime Barometer survey data that the UK's maritime sector remains very much 'out of sight, out of mind'. It's at a crossroads, and there must be a societal shift in attitude and a greater level of understanding and appreciation among all stakeholders around the prerequisites to future proof the maritime industry and secure our maritime resilience before it's too late.

Nautilus International is committed to raising public awareness of the critical role of seafarers, increasing recognition of maritime as a worthwhile career, and ensuring those currently working at sea and in the maritime industry experience decent work and fair treatment in their jobs. Turning a race to the bottom into a race to the top will improve the attractiveness of the career in shipping and help retain and motivate current maritime professionals. To achieve that we must address the nation's sea blindness.

To find out more about Nautilus International and its work to support maritime professionals, visit: www.nautilusint.org



About Nautilus International

is an independent, influential, global trade union and professional organisation, committed to organising and campaigning for maritime and shipping professionals, delivering high quality services to members, and maritime welfare support

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