

A youthful outlook

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by Helen Kelly @HelenKelly_LL helen.kelly@informa.com

Suzanna Laskaridis has launched Real Time Graduates to give Greek young people a foot in the door of the maritime industry



GRADUATE students and people under 30 have been some of the hardest-hit by the 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent ongoing downturn.

Across the European Union, youth unemployment is disproportionately high, peaking at 23.7% in 2015, compared with 10.8% for the rest of the working-age population, according to statista.com. Greece has been particularly hard hit with the twin forces of global meltdown and harsh austerity measures following the disastrous mishandling of its own economy.

Many young Greeks now seek their future careers abroad. But for those willing to stay, there is help at hand. Real Time Graduates is a new venture launched by Suzanna Laskaridis, of reefer and dry bulk operator Laskaridis Shipping, to help open the door to a career in maritime for the under-30s. The not-for-profit traineeship programme, launched in February, places graduates inside shipping companies to get the vital experience they need.

Lloyd's List: What is Real Time Graduates?

Suzanna Laskaridis: We place graduates into shipping companies for six months. They 'shadow' employees and see how every department works, and are observers in whatever you are doing. They ask questions, read charter parties, read conventions, learn what cruise certificates are needed — learn the business of shipping.

LL: Where did the idea come from?

SL: For a few years now, people have approached us for advice and guidance. Friends would send their children to discuss their studies and to ask what they should do next. So, my father started a kind of mentorship one-on-one and the idea grew from there.

LL: Sounds good. How much does it cost?

SL: There is no cost to the graduate and no cost to the companies. We are looking to cover costs via online advertising and any additional costs will be covered by me.

LL: I like the sound of that. Who can apply?

SL: Anyone under the age of 30 or studying at a maritime university in Greece, including technical universities with naval studies and mechanical engineers. We are looking for candidates who have had no [work] experience. Those are the people that need it the most. They need the door opened for them.

LL: It sounds like a big job for one person...

SL: I have two ladies helping me. But I do think it needs to be an industry effort. Many companies already have existing traineeship schemes of their own, and we're trying to see how maybe these can be tied together.

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LL: How many companies are signed up?

SL: We have 10 supporters. We've got classification societies, brokers, a couple of shipmanagers. We have others who say they are behind us but have not signed anything official yet.

LL: How many CVs do you have?

SL: We have more than 100 really good CVs. Every time we see a good CV it's like a punch in the stomach. It's like, these are good people and we need to do something with them.

LL: Are graduates buying into it?

SL: The graduates are crazy for it. Literally! [Experience] is the first thing that everybody asks for. We're trying to make that happen by whatever way we can without it being a relationship where one takes advantage of another.

LL: So there's no plan to hire unpaid graduates in lieu of an actual employee?

SL: I will not promote anything that is not entirely covered by every law. The laws and regulations are very strict on how it is handled. The placement has to be for a limited amount of time or it would be considered an employment agreement.

LL: Fair enough, but don't universities have their own training programmes?

SL: Yes, but these are more theoretical. They are not about the business of shipping. The graduates are here because they have no idea what a shipmanagement company does. Literally they see many things here for the first time.

LL: Hang on, I thought shipping was in the blood of every Greek!

SL: You're not alone — I think everybody in Greece was under the impression that everyone should go into shipping; shipping is for everybody. The reality is that shipping is not for everybody. Not everybody can handle shipping and the pressures of shipping.

LL: So what's next for Real Time Graduates?

SL: I am sure we will find out pretty quickly if there is not future for this. If that's the case then we will just wrap it up and go on with our daily work. But even if two people find a placement, then that's two people who a couple of years ago were saying that no-one would open the door for them.