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Pandemic forces maritime universities to adapt

Results of surveys of maritime universities show the importance of balancing online with classroom teaching

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Restrictions imposed in reaction to the health crisis have been eased. Almost one-third of universities are operating fully, and only 4% of those responding to the survey continue to suspend teaching



ONE OF THE WAYS OF MITIGATING THE DIFFICULTIES OF PROPER IMPLEMENTATION OF ONBOARD TRAINING OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS HAS BEEN TO INCREASE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES, SUCH AS MASK WEARING.

Source: Reuters / Alamy Stock
Photo

THE pandemic has impressed on maritime universities and academic institutions the need to put in place organisational structures that are proactive and adaptable in the face of disruption.

A survey of members of the International Association of Maritime Universities has shown an easing of restrictions and a slow return to classroom teaching.

Summary results from 54 universities in 35 countries reveal that 31% of responding institutions were said to be “operating fully” in 2021, a significant improvement on the 7% reported in the first survey of May 2020.

Those universities “operating with limited activities” have fallen from 85% last year to 65% this year. Only 4% of universities continue to suspend all operations.

There has been real progress, with travel restrictions for staff easing, access to universities’ physical facilities much improved, and few academic programmes cancelled.

The balance of learning carried out online against classroom teaching has also changed, according to the survey carried out in September, which is a follow-up to a study conducted last year.

In May 2020, fully 84% of learning was carried out online, with just 9% represented by a combination of online learning and classroom lectures.

This year more than half of all learning was a combination of online with classroom lectures, with many full classroom lectures restarting in a safe way, and only 9% fully online.

The biggest concern for universities has been keeping students engaged against the backdrop of coronavirus. Other concerns, including student assessment methods, internet connectivity, and obtaining the appropriate software, have not altered in scale or scope.

Almost two-thirds of member universities have restarted all practical training, albeit with some restrictions, and fewer than one in 10 universities have still to restart practical training. In May 2020, 70% of universities had suspended practical training, with only a few cautiously proceeding.

Regarding onboard-ship training capacity, most member universities have still not fully recovered, although the situation is improving.

“Everything has been managed in close co-operation with shipowners, to co-ordinate and harmonise training programmes and anti-Covid measures,” said one university.

Most maritime administrations have been working to mitigate the difficulties of proper implementation of onboard training. Measures include making training programmes more flexible, extending certification periods, increasing funds, and upgrading precautionary measures.

As for all universities, IAMU members are concerned by the quality of online teaching, the difficulties of practical training, and students’ mental wellbeing.

Comments included: “Academic year extension will delay the students in getting their degrees and shipping companies are unable to visit the campuses to select students for placement.”

It was suggested that online classes are conducted to teach theory parts only. Practical classes can be conducted only on campus, which is not possible during the closure of the University and lockdown period”.

The survey also tried to gain an understanding of the long-term effects of the pandemic on university operations.

Foremost among the replies was concern about the quality of teaching that could be given in an unpredictable world.

With some universities sticking to online learning only, others going for a hybrid approach, and others returning to classroom lectures overlaid with Covid-safe measures, some students were worried about how to

Maritime universities’ survey reveals long-term impact of coronavirus

By Richard Clayton

05 Jun 2020

IAMU member universities believe teaching restrictions imposed to counter the coronavirus pandemic will have far-reaching implications. The shipping industry could suffer in the long run

[Read the full article here >](#)

enroll for courses, about the quality of theoretical and practical learning, and about recruitment on completion of their studies.

Some comments suggested there had been a decline in the quality of education, which might feed through to the industry in later years.

While some comments underlined that “face to face teaching can produce better results than any online/remote education,” others thought more online programmes should be made available. The pandemic has shown the importance of discovering how to combine online with classroom teaching.

“We need to improve remote working/studying mechanisms, enhance teachers’ ability to use the relevant software, and encourage students’ engagement in online learning,” one comment said.

Meanwhile, it was acknowledged that universities should “focus on the resilience of its faculty, staff, resources, and systems” to enable them to adapt quickly when disruption happens.

“The deeper lessons of organisational learning and resilience go beyond the reactive measures triggered by Covid-19, for example, transitioning from face-to-face curriculum delivery to online delivery.”

The pandemic has shown academic institutions that their structure should make them proactive and adaptable whenever future crises arise.