

Speech: Boosting diversity in the maritime industry

Good afternoon everyone,

As I bring today's (24 January 2019) event to a close I would like to thank you all for attending.

And express my gratitude to our speakers.

Whose contributions have informed us all.

It has been wonderful to see so many representatives from all sectors of the maritime industry here today.

Your presence underlines the strength of your commitment.

Towards turning the vision for our sector's future, laid out in [Maritime 2050](#), into a reality.

As the [Secretary of State said at the start of this event](#).

Our industry is on the cusp of an era of change.

But I think today's event has highlighted that it is also on the edge of a time of great potential.

There will be many opportunities over the coming decades for our industry.

And the document we have launched today outlines a clear vision of how together we will seize them.

And chart an ambitious course for our sector.

As we seek to harness the opportunities of technology.

Strengthen our status as a global maritime leader in the fields of environment, security and trade.

And give the next generation of seafarers the skills needed to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Today marks an important step in our journey towards those goals.

And I hope it will prove to be a catalyst for action to turn our shared vision into a reality.

But while [Maritime 2050 examines nearly every aspect of our industry in its more than 300 pages](#).

From trade to technology.

Security to supply chains.

And regulation to resilience.

At its heart is the people who make up our great industry.

And I'd like to talk about them today.

Without the dedication, skills and talent of its workforce, the UK's maritime sector quite simply would not be able to function.

For while our industry provides fantastic career opportunities.

And our top quality maritime education institutions – along with the renewed focus on providing high quality apprenticeships – mean that British training for the maritime industry is second to none.

There is still much more we need to do.

Particularly in ensuring that the great career opportunities the maritime industry has to offer are open to everyone. No matter their gender or background.

Unfortunately at present that's not the case.

Just 4% of the 10,600 UK certified officers active at sea are female.

The reasons for this are many and varied.

But one thing is clear.

This is a situation that has got to change.

Of course there is already some great work underway through the [Women in Maritime Taskforce](#).

Last year it launched both the [Women in Maritime Pledge](#) and the [Women in Maritime Charter](#) – challenging companies to make progress on diversity.

I am delighted that there are already over 100 signatories to the pledge.

And the charter is midway through its pilot phase, with 4 organisations, from across the breadth of the maritime industry taking part.

They are making sure the charter works for all the diverse businesses within it. From training companies to law firms, to ports and marine manufacturers.

But we need to go further still.

This document lays out how we plan to dramatically overhaul the diversity of the maritime sector by 2050.

And let me be clear – this is not a tick box exercise.

Or an attempt at virtue signalling.

It's handing our sector a wonderful opportunity.

That will serve it well into the future.

Because no industry will reach its full potential if it only takes advantage of a tiny proportion of the talent pool.

There are so many gifted people out there.

And we want them to see all the great things our industry has to offer.

So through Maritime 2050 we have pledged to.

Build on the success of the Women in Maritime Taskforce and other great joint government and industry initiatives.

To highlight the industry's wide variety of career opportunities, both at sea and on land, to as wide an audience as possible.

This includes funding a project called People Like Me – that will address the image of the industry and dispel myths.

And explore harnessing technology, such as connected ships, to enable seafarers stay in touch with family on shore.

Making periods away from home less isolating – improving mental wellbeing and making a career at sea a possibility for a wider variety of people.

And it's this theme of technology opening up new horizons for our industry, which runs through Maritime 2050.

But to take advantage of these innovations our workforce must not only be equipped with the right skills.

It must also be ready to adapt and keep pace with technological change.

Over the next 30 years the importance of STEM skills will increase as jobs become more skilled and data driven.

And industry roles will become multi-disciplinary.

For instance in future it may not be simply enough to operate a technological system.

You will probably have to be able to create and maintain it too.

So through Maritime 2050 we have set out our plan to create a culture of continuous learning.

By encouraging maritime employers to offer professional development and training to their workers throughout their careers.

In addition we have committed to develop cutting-edge seafarer training. For instance by using virtual reality technology to enable workers to get to grips with new systems.

And to ensure the industry is fully prepared for the changing recruitment pressures of the future we plan to help assess the needs of the industry through a Maritime Skills Commission.

A body tasked with finding ways of addressing current maritime skills gaps and anticipating future trends.

These are all steps that will not just improve the prospects of maritime workers.

But those of their employers as well.

Through a lower turnover of staff.

Because a happy workforce is a highly motivated one.

And Maritime 2050 recognises the pressures under which many seafarers are placed.

Whether that's long hours, hard work and periods away from home.

All situations that can put a strain on workers' mental and physical health.

So a core part of this document focuses on what we can do to help with these issues.

And ensure we are not so entirely absorbed with dealing with technological change that we forget about the human face of the industry.

In the short term we will work with the maritime sector to develop a social framework – laying out the UK's expectations for the welfare of its workforce.

And work in the near future to finalise the introduction of a National Minimum wage for mariners in our waters, while producing guidelines that will help employers ensure that workers' mental health is properly considered.

And we will use our influence through the IMO and International Labour Organization to push to improve conditions for seafarers on a global level. For instance through a limit on hours by shift and eradicating modern day slavery.

A diverse and highly skilled workforce.

Incredible technology.

And fantastic opportunities.

Those are just some of the many things to which our industry has got to look forward over the coming decades.

And Maritime 2050 lays out how we can make the most of this new world.

I know that many of you in this room have contributed and shaped this document over the past year.

And I thank you for your efforts.

And I want us to continue in that spirit of collaboration and cooperation.

Industry and government.

Working together, sharing ideas, and building a better future for the maritime sector in this country.

And it's difficult to think of a better example than London International Shipping Week which will take place in September.

When government and the UK maritime industry will join forces and showcase this country's shipping industry to the world.

I'm very much looking forward to seeing you all there.

It should be a great event.

And today was certainly another.

So finally I'd like extend my thanks to the International Maritime Organisation for hosting us this afternoon.

And helping to ensure the launch of Maritime 2050 was a success.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this document.

In particular I'd like to thank staff at my department for their efforts and hard work over the past 12 months.

Your time has been truly well spent.

As this document is an important milestone in preparing our industry for the coming decades.

For it's clear that the future of maritime in this country will be different from its past.

But no less exciting.

And I hope today we have sparked your imagination and stoked your ambition.

So we can harness technology to grasp the opportunities of the future.

So that we can build a sector that is open to everyone.

And so we can create a maritime industry ready to lead the world.