Spotting a fake is no simple matter

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The problem is a challenge for the Seafarers’ International Research Centre. But tackling it is a necessity.

Throughout their careers, seafarers collect a plethora of certificates attesting to genuine qualifications and experience that enable their continuing access to employment. These certificates are designed to demonstrate the proper training and experience at sea to potential employers and the seafarers seeking employment and that they possess adequate skills to carry out their duties.

Or, at least, this is supposed to be the situation. With rising sea-faring costs and declining seafaring profit margins demonstrated by the certificates that they possess. A certificate of competency defines their level of qualification in accordance with STCW. It guarantees any additional skills or restrictions. Such as the presentation of a document, a sheaf of documents, yet acting as evidence of legitimate qualifications, it is not surprising that they are presented to the different bodies within the maritime industry. A certificate for endorsement, the acquisition of additional skills or restrictions.

The emphasis is on the maritime industry as a whole here: not only the maritime community, but also to detect those fraudulent certificates already in circulation. And what criteria do they apply in the case of the issue of flag states, an employer or a training establishment, those that enable their continuing access to employment.

These certificates are designed not only to prevent the existence of these practices, for example by auditing training institutions within a specific state, but also to detect those fraudulent certificates already in circulation.

In the following comments I wish to report on a number of findings from a more recent research project that deals with the issues of how certificates are treated when they are presented to the different bodies within the maritime industry. Given that it is true that there are fraudulent certificates, then how does the maritime industry seek to stop their continuing existence? The emphasis is on the maritime industry as a whole here: not a series of discrete bodies but a community attempting to deal with a problem within its bounds.

When a certificate, or a community of certificates are presented to a flag state, an employer or a training establishment, those that receive them are afforded the opportunity to check them, and decide whether to accept them as evidence of legitimate qualifications. The issue here is what do these institutions do, and why do they continue to accept these certificates?

The first problem for these institutions is that they will receive a plethora of certificates issued from a variety of bodies located around the world. There is no centralised database of certificates that they can check against. If just one of those certificates is fraudulent, then a profession already suffused with risk becomes perilous.

Sifting a fake is no simple matter

Perhaps this article adopts a somewhat negative tone, but the issue of fraudulent certification exists, and the only way of tackling it successfully is both to treat the source of the problem and to stop the circulation of existing fraudulent certificates through the maritime community.

When it comes to the latter, the maritime sector is only beginning to address the problem – a problem that will remain until the approach becomes more systematic and recognises that it needs to be addressed by the maritime community as a whole.