

Maritime Offshore Learning Programme Awarded



A one-of-a-kind educational programme that enables professional mariners in the offshore sector to study for a degree even when they are in the middle of the ocean has won a Times Higher Education (THE) national award for Plymouth University, UK. The Hydrographic Academy, launched in 2012 in partnership with Fugro, scooped the Outstanding Employer Engagement Initiative at the annual THE Awards – the higher education sector’s equivalent to the Oscars.

Dr Richard Thain, director of the Academy, received the award from guest host Jack Dee at the gala event at London’s Grosvenor Hotel. Plymouth was the only university in the region to come away with a THE Award on the night.

Professor David Coslett, interim chief executive, said that for more than 150 years, the University has served the marine and maritime community: it’s an intrinsic part of who we are. And while they have grown and developed into a modern and vibrant university with expertise across the academic spectrum, this award is seen as a testament to both that heritage and the innovative approach, working in partnership with others to open up new pathways into education.

The Academy provides professional development in subjects such as hydrography, oceanography and meteorology, and has been tailored to accommodate the realities of life at sea, with all of the course content housed on a single memory stick.

More than 430 students have enrolled in the first two years from 38 countries, and they access to tutors through web-based channels and via telephone, and that’s supplemented by intensive residential sessions during their shore-leave.

Dr Richard Thain added that it’s about meeting the needs of professional mariners, regardless of their location, and providing opportunities for career development and lifelong learning. The University has worked closely with Fugro, who’ve taken it forward on behalf of the industry, and the University is now looking to develop new programmes for the marine sector and look at other distance-learning opportunities.

The University was also shortlisted in the Outstanding Contribution to Local Community category, for its management of the Innovation Centres in Cornwall (on behalf of Cornwall Council), which have created hundreds of jobs and helped to grow scores of businesses in Truro, Pool and Penryn.

Now in their tenth year, the *Times Higher Education Awards* are a highlight of the academic calendar, shining a spotlight on the outstanding achievements of institutions, teams and individuals in the UK higher education sector. The Minister for Universities, Science and Cities, Greg Clark, was also a guest speaker.

Image, from left to right: Jack Dee; Andrew McNeil, Global Talent Development Manager, Fugro; Professor Julian Beer, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Regional Enterprise; Dr Richard Thain, Director of the Hydrographic Academy; Justin Shaw, Managing Director, Communications Management (sponsor of the award).