

UKHO Sets Benchmark Quality Charting



With mandation of ECDIS being brought in for new High Speed Craft next year and discussion on extension of the requirement to other classes of vessel, attention needs to be paid to the quality of charts used in these systems, according to the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO).

Many charting organisations are promoting the fact that they work to ISO 9001:2000, the quality standard of the International Standards Organisation (ISO). It is important to appreciate, however, that ISO 9001 certification does not necessarily guarantee a high standard of quality in the product being produced. It simply defines a benchmark for achieving a consistent standard.

"ISO 9001 is a generic quality standard that can be applied to any industry. It provides a basis on which to build a quality system that is customer focussed and is about an organisation delivering what the customer needs. When building that quality system, however, other industry-specific standards may also need to be taken into account," says UKHO Safety & Quality Manager Steve Parnell (photo).

The UKHO has defined its own quality system that is certified to ISO 9001:2000 and TickIT. The scope of this certificate covers all of the UKHO's operations at Taunton (UK).

The UKHO's quality system is aimed at delivering products and services that comply with the standards of the International Hydrographic Organisation, such as the IHO chart specifications (M4), the survey standard (S44) and the S57 standard for digital hydrographic data.

Producing charts to these standards, however, involves a significant degree of expert interpretation of hydrographic source data. The UKHO therefore supplements the IHO standards with its own internal standards and training to achieve even greater consistency.

Steve Parnell says: "The UKHO regards ISO 9001 certification as an important benchmark in so far as it demonstrates our commitment to providing quality products in support of safe navigation at sea. There are, however, many other factors underpinning the safety and quality of the UKHO's Admiralty products and services."

These include:

- A truly comprehensive understanding of the source data, through hundreds of years of nautical chart compilation
- A deeper appreciation of the underlying issues that may affect quality
- Quality assurance processes embedded within all of the UKHO's operations.
- Skilled staff that are regularly assessed against a professional competency framework.
- A training programme that is internationally accredited and attended by staff from many other hydrographic offices.
- Performance monitoring against strict targets for product safety.
- Two independent safety committees continually reviewing the safety of UKHO products and services. One of these committees includes external representatives from key stakeholders, such as the Royal Navy, the Maritime & Coastguard Agency, the Nautical Institute, the Royal Yachting Association and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.