

PRESS RELEASE

Pioneering South Hampshire College Group launches new Digital Training Vessel for public educational spearheading of new and innovative maritime skills



South Hampshire College Group (SHCG), a large and newly merged college group, that brings together three Further Education colleges from Southampton, Eastleigh and Fareham has taken delivery of a pioneering resource to meet the needs of new and emerging skills in the Solent region, through the acquisition of a state-of-the-art **Digital Training Vessel**.

Believed a first for further education in the UK, the new Digital Training Vessel (DTV) is an Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) which will support an ambitious new Further Education curriculum for both SHCG's Centre of Excellence in Engineering, Manufacturing and Advanced Skills Training (CEMAST) in Lee-on-the-Solent near Fareham, and SHCG's specialist Marine Skills Centre located by the River Itchen, Southampton.

USVs are popular with industry and research bodies for surveying, patrolling, and search and rescue duties, as they have many benefits including zero emissions, lower operating costs, anti-fatigue, consistent routing, and are safer.

The new Digital Training Vessel USV is controlled remotely from either a shore-based mission control centre, or onboard a mothership, through digital remote operations, with optional AI (artificial intelligence) decision-aided support.

The SHCG Digital Training Vessel will contribute to supporting learning across new and innovative maritime skills, which will help to address the sector's skills shortage and regional social employment challenges.



The skillsets required for USV Remote Operators combine digital, marine engineering, marine electrical, systems engineering, net zero understanding and navigational knowledge, which until recently were unavailable as a single career pathway. Through a new curriculum being rolled out this coming academic year, students from across traditionally distinct faculty areas will gain invaluable experience, knowledge, and skills to raise awareness of the maritime sector as a viable career option in which to progress.

The acquisition of the Digital Training Vessel was secured through a funding award by the **Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF)**, as part of the Group's focus on pioneering the education of innovative skills and as a contributor in delivering the Solent's **Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)**.

Other innovative educational assets recently unveiled by SHCG and LSIP include [TECH:TRUCK](#), a collaborative mobile educational and technological roadshow shared between seven local education providers, and SHCG's new multi-million pound Department for Education funded Institute of Technology (IoT) at CEMAST, the only IoT offering a specific Higher National Certificate in Robotics and Mechatronics.

Naomi Smith, LSIF Programme Director comments, "South Hampshire College Group is a pioneer in identifying new and emerging skill requirements. Maritime has been identified in the **Solent Local Skills Improvement Plan** as a key area of focus, particularly in digital skills and where traditional roles overlap with new, such as marine engineering and vessel operations."

She continues, "South Hampshire College Group works with local industry leaders to ensure the skills, qualifications and progression routes provide further opportunities for our students to create better futures. In addition, providing public educational training resources such as the Digital Training Vessel is key to encouraging social mobility as it enables access to all."

The Digital Training Vessel project is entirely British, with the USV built by **HydroSurv** based in Plymouth, together with its vessel control systems, including maritime autonomy and remote-control operations, provided by **Robosys Automation** based in Southampton.

The launch of the DTV was held at **South Hampshire College Group's Marine Skills Centre** in Woolston, near Southampton, UK, where maritime students and representatives from academia and industry were in attendance.

The launch event was also an opportunity to showcase the broad range of technical skills and career pathways available within the maritime sector and was a pivotal catalyst in bringing together multidiscipline curriculum areas for students. The USV showcased its capabilities on the water, with guests experiencing remote operations firsthand.

DTV "Trio" Collaboration Project Lead, Nigel Lee, CSO of **Robosys Automation**, which also provided the vessel control systems and autonomous operations for the USV comments, "Today is a landmark moment for the maritime industry, as demand for trained operatives in this specialism is rapidly increasing, both across USVs and also larger vessels including uncrewed

and lean-crewed ships. Having this advanced Digital Training Vessel as a Further Educational resource broadens the catchment opportunities, thus satisfying the very real skillset shortage in the maritime sector, whilst creating a consistent level of learning.”

The event welcomed representation from the UK’s Marine Robotics Innovation Centre, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, National Oceanography Centre, Robosys Automation, Landau Marine, South Hampshire College Group, Solent Local Skills Improvement Plan, South Coast Institute of Technology, amongst others from supporting associations and industry.

The Digital Training Vessel will enter service for September’s intake of students.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About South Hampshire College Group

South Hampshire College Group (SHCG) is a large and newly merged college group, that brings together three Further Education colleges from Southampton, Eastleigh and Fareham to make one strong, responsive and ambitious organisation. It defines an exciting new era to Further Education in the region, with positive benefits for students, apprentices, staff, employers and local communities.

SHCG boasts state-of-the-art facilities with industry-leading workshops, technology and equipment, providing students with unique and industry-standard training environments.

SHCG aims to increase the supply of technical and professional skills to local businesses; delivering enhanced pathways into higher levels of study and work; meeting employers' needs and supporting the region's economy to grow. Discover more at www.shcg.ac.uk

About the Digital Training Vessel

The Digital Training Vessel project was created by the "Trio Collaboration", of project lead, Robosys Automation, together with HydroSurv, and SeaRegs Training. South Hampshire College Group's new Digital Training Vessel (DTV) will be used through remote control operations either in-line-of-sight from ashore using a local wireless controller or from a classroom-based ROC.

As this type of craft is the first choice for surveying, patrolling, monitoring, and more recently, search and rescue operations, training on the Group's new DTV will enable students to learn on a real-life, compact uncrewed surface vessel (USV) to support marine engineering, marine electronics, software and digital skills. This will ensure students will be better equipped to enter a broad spectrum of fast growing maritime sectors, including offshore wind farm support, hydrography, aquaculture, defence, and marine sciences.

Utilisation of the DTV purchase will enable pivotal curriculum developments across a range of technical college qualifications, from Robotics and Automation, T Level Digital Software Programming and Development, Marine Electronics, Marine Electrical, Systems Engineering and Clean Energy.

The DTV will be powered by VOYAGER AI, the world-leading maritime artificial intelligence (AI) software both designed and supplied by Robosys Automation. VOYAGER AI delivers decision-aided autonomous navigation for the USVs and for the onboard vessel control system at various levels of autonomy, including degree 4 autonomy. This will provide students with decision aided autonomous operations and collision avoidance AI reasoning, being crucial when operating in a challenging environment such as busy shipping lanes and difficult sea states.

The new SHCG Digital Training Vessel is based HydroSurv 2.8m Rapid Environmental Assessment Vessel (REAV) USV aluminium catamaran design, and features electric propulsion, to support Net Zero ambitions.

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