

## **ESTA submits bid for next stage of EU funding for ECOL – says scheme is needed “more than ever”**

A European crane operator licence is needed more than ever to help the industry raise standards while dealing with growing skills shortages and an ageing workforce.

That is the view of ESTA Secretary Ton Klijn, one of the driving forces behind the ambitious ECOL project.

He was speaking as ESTA – the European association for abnormal road transport and mobile cranes – submitted the project’s latest progress report to officials in Brussels.

If the report is accepted, it will trigger the next wave of support funding from the European Commission’s Erasmus+ project.

ECOL supporters say they have made huge progress and are optimistic that the project will receive continued financial backing.

Ton Klijn said: “The growing sophistication of the equipment and rapid technological change needs to be reflected in training schemes across Europe, some of which are based on structures that in some cases were set up many years ago.

“On top of that, there is the issue of an ageing workforce, which means the existing skills shortages are going to get worse.

“Under our proposed scheme, an employer will have the ability to ensure that any crane operator they take on, wherever they come from within the EU, will have an accepted level of competence if they are ECOL-qualified.

“This can only help the industry meet demand and raise standards of safety.”

Members of the ESTA’s ECOL working group have carried out a series of fact-finding trips to Germany, Poland, Norway and the Netherlands.

The meetings with national experts focus on the scheme’s learning outcomes – that is to say, what the operator needs to know – and the training plan, a framework which sets out how those outcomes will be delivered.

The European licence will supplement, rather than supersede, existing national qualifications and is likely to be set at a higher qualification level than currently exists in many member states - so countering the fear amongst some in the industry that ECOL could become a "lowest common denominator" qualification.

To do this, ESTA will also be drawing on the experiences of similar initiatives in the USA and Australia, organised by the National Commission for the

Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO) and the Crane Industry Council of Australia (CICA).

To underline the progress made to date, ESTA's progress report has said that the "table of learning outcomes" for the crane operator that is now 90 % completed.

The workgroup is also currently working on the production of a "generic training design" needed to allow training institutes to develop a training program that matches the requirements of the ECOL license. This generic training design is now 80% completed..

Next steps include setting up the ECOL Foundation to oversee the future running of the whole project. ESTA plans to have the ECOL Foundation in place in the first half of 2017.

The foundation will supervise and monitor the system of education, examination and maintenance. It will set the criteria for becoming an ECOL-educator and for becoming an ECOL-examination institution in this field.

Only when an organisation is 'ECOL-approved' will it be able to train and test operators for the ECOL license and have use of the ECOL logo.

ECOL is being created by ESTA - the European association for abnormal road transport and mobile cranes – with financial support from the European Erasmus+ programme that backs education, training and lifelong learning with the aim of boosting economic competitiveness.

Klijn, who is also managing director of Wagenborg Nedlift in the Netherlands, added: "It is clear that using ECOL as a way of training everyone to the same benchmark will raise standards, improve site safety and boost employment opportunities for qualified operators."

ESTA also thinks the licence will reduce training and education costs and help make the European crane industry more competitive in global markets.

Members of the working group have been recruited from 8 European countries representing the various stakeholders' representative organisations. They are: Ton Klijn [ESTA Secretary], Giovanni Pauwels [Comokra], Lion Verhagen [VVT], Philip Grootenboer [Mammoet Europe B.V], Haydn Steele [CPA], Jörg Senn [ASTAG], Jochen Genausich [BSK], Christoph Behmueller [Liebherr|FEM], Pia Metsola [Finnish Crane Association, INFRA ry], René van der Steen [Vakvereniging Het Zwarte Corps], Alexandre-Jacques VERNAZZA [UFL], Kim Hvolbøl, [The Danish Crane Association], Knut Nordås [Norwegian Crane Association]