

# A European Crane Operator Licence

## How will it work and why is it needed?

**E**STA's plans to create a European Crane Operator Licence have gathered momentum, although this huge and complex project might not be completed for another two to three years.

ESTA has applied for funding under Erasmus+, the new European funding programme for education, youth and sport (2014-2020). Its basic premise is that investing in education, training and non-formal and lifelong learning is hugely important, both for the individuals concerned and because it makes the European economy stronger.

ECOL comes under the Erasmus+ section that covers strategic partnerships, alliances for sector-specific skills and capacity building. One of the key aims is to help increase the economic competitiveness of the sector concerned.

Projects last two or three years. A Strategic Partnership should consist of at least three organisations from three different programme countries and there is a maximum of € 150,000 available for each project year.

At the time of writing, it looked as though ESTA's application would be successful. Please see our website for the latest information.

At the time of writing, we were optimistic that our application for European funding through the Erasmus + scheme (see below for details) would be successful.

This article sets out the background to the project, how it will be run and what we hope it will achieve.

### Background

ESTA took the initiative to investigate whether and how a European craft proficiency certificate for crane operators can be established for the industry back in 2013.

Currently each Member State has its own rules in the field of professional competence and certification of crane operators. These rules differ from country to country and range from compulsory to optional and even to no rules at all. These differences can lead to confusion which has a negative impact on safety and also prevents the mobility of drivers in Europe.

For this reason ESTA has committed itself to developing a system for optimum distribution of safe and qualified crane operators within Europe in the near future

It is ESTA's intention to enable every crane operator in Europe to demonstrate that he or she meets the minimum requirements of the industry. Similar initiatives have

been established in the United States (NCCCO) and Australia (CICA). The work of both NCCCO and CICA can serve as an example for Europe.

To establish a similar organisation for Europe means that the minimum requirements for safely operating a crane have to be mapped – not only technical knowledge and skills, but also the operator's personal skills and attitudinal aspects.

Worldwide, most cranes are the same and 80% of the workplace conditions are identical. The challenge is finding the right balance between the minimum required standards and the specific national requirements that can vary between countries. It is important for a crane operator to know what the differences are and where he/she can go to and learn how to cope with these variations.

A European craft proficiency certificate will contribute to the harmonisation of the various laws and regulations by explaining what is covered by the craft proficiency certificate and what is nationally regulated.

The first steps towards establishing a European standard for the individual certification of crane operators have been taken. An ESTA working group, with eight European countries represented, has made the first draft of the standard by analysing and restructuring the competence schemes and training materials of the eight countries.

However, the working group realises that filling the gap between a competency framework and a European system of approved individual craft proficiency is a major project. In the full project plan, the route to developing a European proficiency certificate for crane operators is set out, with the ambition to achieve this within the next three years.

This project plan includes an application to Erasmus + for funding to co-finance this project (see appendix).

### Advantages of developing the European Crane Operators Licence (ECOL)

#### 1. SAFETY

Formulating the minimum skill requirements of a crane operator, and making it demonstrably clear who meets these requirements, will improve safety.

#### 2. MOBILITY OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL WITHIN EUROPE

ECOL will enable companies to take their own personnel abroad and will help in the process of obtaining personnel from other countries. In addition, ECOL will make it easier to verify whether a foreign contractor meets the specific national requirements in force.

#### 3. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF PERSONNEL

## (LICENSED PERSONNEL ONLY)

Currently in Europe there are widely differing requirements for crane operating. When a company carries out a project abroad and has to make use of local personnel, it is important both for safety and liability that the value of the diploma an employee holds is clear.

## 4. HIGHER SAFETY STANDARDS IN OPERATIONS THROUGH EUROPE

By determining the minimum safety requirements for crane operating, the joint safety level within European countries will increase. Countries with high safety levels will not make concessions in the area of safety; ECOL will act as the highest common denominator, raising the minimum safety standards across the board.

## 5. REDUCED TRAINING AND EDUCATION COSTS

Currently, some personnel need to be trained when a project is carried out in another country rather than their own. ECOL will reduce the need for this.

## 6. INCREASED EFFECTIVENESS OF INDUSTRY

Transparency and interchangeability of diplomas and certificates will simplify the process of hiring and deploying personnel. With a European register of ECOL-licensed crane operators it is easily and quickly verified who meets the requirements and can be safely deployed.

## 7. MAKING THE EUROPEAN CRANE INDUSTRY MORE COMPETITIVE

ECOL will enable medium-sized companies in Europe to operate more efficiently and better able to compete with the few global players, helping strengthen the European economy.

## Describing the project structure

Establishing ECOL means developing a system that organises and administers the process of issuing certificates. As an industry association, ESTA will have a strategic supervisory role, but will not take part in carrying out training and examination.

An ECOL foundation will be established that supervises and monitors the system of education, examination and maintenance.

ESTA will set the criteria for being a licensed crane operator and what the key performance indicators are for staying a licensed crane operator.

The ECOL foundation will set the criteria for becoming an ECOL-educator and for becoming an ECOL-examination institution in this field. Only when you are 'ECOL-approved' can you train and test operators for the ECOL licence and have use of the ECOL logo.

Other tasks that will be assigned to the ECOL

foundation are issuing certificates, recognising diplomas, managing the register and organising continuing education, and providing the knowledge bank with new high level content. This system will require good relationships between the industry and the education sector.

## The ECOL system

The ECOL system has basically three actors, the industry, ESTA and the market.

1. The industry is all the companies that employ crane operators, their clients and crane and lifting materials suppliers. Together they determine the job requirements of a crane operator.
2. ESTA is the organisation responsible for formulating the standards for crane operators and within the ECOL foundation, the conditions for education, validation and examination are established.
3. The market is those organisations that take care of education, examination and validation. Based on the professional standard for crane operators and the conditions for good education and good examination, they can qualify the crane operators.

When crane operators pass their exams, they receive their ECOL licence and will be included in the ECOL register. However, they will have to keep up to date with changes in the industry and collect (learning) credit points to maintain their registration.

## Partnerships

ECOL will only be a real success if organisations, governments, labour unions, and industry associations all recognise and acknowledge it.

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## NOTE

*This article is an edited summary of the draft produced by Barbara Marcellis of CINOP.*

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## Q&A with ESTA president David Collett

- ▶ transport as a 'minimum' standard would go a long way towards the harmonisation of some of the rules.  
For crane operations, harmonisation of the 'Contract Lift' and 'Crane Rental' type agreements would also be of great benefit, along with the implementation of the ECOL project.

### AND FINALLY, ARE THERE PARTICULAR MOMENTS IN THE PAST YEAR OR SO THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT?

Once again the ESTA Users' Night and Awards events was a huge success. It showcases the true excellence that can be achieved in our industry, and it provides us with a great opportunity to celebrate our successes.

For an international organisation representing an industry that is – obviously – highly mobile and working all over the world – opportunities like that to meet old friends and make new contacts in an informal, social setting are hugely valuable.

I am already looking forward to next year's dinner in Munich during the Bauma exhibition.

As you can see ESTA today is thriving and is having a growing impact through our continued efforts to raise quality standards and make this industry a safer one to work in.

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- ▶ Cooperative agreements and partnerships with different kind of stakeholders' will have to be forged to make it work, with groups such as governments and national bodies; the crane-using industries; and labour unions.

### Conclusion

ECOL is a major and ambitious undertaking. However, ESTA can build on the work already carried out in the USA and Australia and firmly believes that ECOL will both improve safety and lead to a stronger and more efficient industry.