

# PSS Strategy Update 2024

## Background

Between 2021 and 2023, Port Skills and Safety (PSS) underwent a major project to refocus its strategic direction. The pandemic and recent staff changes provided an ideal opportunity to re-evaluate the membership benefits, resources and direction to ensure that PSS was placing membership value and safer ports, at the heart of its work.

Initial membership research concluded that whilst PSS resources – particularly the Safety in Ports guidance - were highly valued by its members, some of the guidance was over five years old and didn't take into account developments in safety best practices.

PSS's work in skills had previously been noted by the Board as having less focus than its safety work and received a lower level of recognition within the sector. Therefore, a new skills strategy was needed to position PSS as the sector skills organisation and a revised overarching strategy to remain the go-to safety organisation for the port sector.

In January 2023, a new skills strategy was launched which detailed how PSS would reposition itself over the next five years as the main port skills organisation, working alongside other wider maritime organisations.

A new PSS strategy was developed in March 2023 which included the revised mission statement and aims, organisational values, and an overview of the organisation's services which would work together to achieve continuous improvements in port safety. The strategy defined four key performance indicators, with smart objectives attached, by which members could measure the organisation's success:

### 1) Improve UK Port Safety Guidance

- a) Bring all existing Safety in Port (SiP) documents up to best practice industry standards by 2028. At least four SiPs will be reviewed per year, with existing SiPs updated by 2028.
- b) Increase awareness of SiPs guidance by increasing website downloads of guidance by 35 per cent from 2023 levels by 2028.

### 2) Increase UK Port Skills Engagement

- a) Deliver a 25 per cent increase in participation from members on skills projects, including the Skill Group, from 2023 levels by 2028. Fulfil the objectives laid out in the five-year skills strategy.
- b) Research and deliver a suite of information detailing port-related jobs, career opportunities, training requirements, qualification routes and competencies by 2028.

### 3) Improve UK Port Safety Statistics

- a) Zero incidences of fatal industry accidents among membership, where SiPs guidance is adhered to.
- b) Increase the number of full port members contributing to the incident safety dashboard to a minimum of 75 per cent for full members by 2028.

### 4) Improve Membership Value Proposition

- a) Facilitate full communications with, and between members, by sharing all alerts and bulletins within three working days, hold one all-member conference per year, and at least eight safety or skills meetings per year.
- b) Increase membership by 15 per cent of income from 2022 within five years and introduce at least four new tools to help members continuously improve their safety statistics.

To relaunch the organisation, raise awareness and improve visibility, the PSS brand and logo were updated in July 2023. A new membership management database launched in November to provide better ways of communicating with members and keeping contacts up to date. A new website followed in February 2024 which refocussed on the resources that PSS is best known for, with equal prominence given to skills and safety resources.

The site clearly defined the organisation's purpose: to make it a shop front for new members and develop a stronger members-only section, with improved versions of guidance and a discussion platform.

Following staff changes and a move to make safety initiatives more data-led, a new safety strategy was launched in May. This strategy defined how PSS's safety output would be improved to lead industry and technological safety developments. It combined the previously separate areas of safety and data and placed a strong focus on innovation.

## **Performance against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Update 2024**

### **Improve UK Port Safety Guidance**

1a) Changes in staffing led to a delay in the SiP review being undertaken, however, initial member research found that one of the key areas for improvement was to make the SiPs more accessible to all levels of member organisations; not just for use by the health and safety managers. In February 2024, the SiP000 Guidance Framework was launched. This Guidance Framework removed the repetitive information in all SiPs making it a stand-alone 'first chapter' for every SiP. This enables all SiPs being reviewed to be shorter and more focussed.

Four SiPs will be reviewed in 2024. The new versions will be text only for the publicly available copies, whereas members' versions will include more best practice, images, videos and quick reference versions. A system for auditing members' compliance with the guidance is being developed alongside the updates.

1b) During the process of launching the new website, it became apparent that meaningful statistics could not be gathered from the old site to provide a benchmark for SiP downloads. Member research also found that members often downloaded the SiP just once when it was launched and used a locally saved version until an updated version was released. This meant download statistics would not be an accurate reflection of SiP usage. The new site enables better analysis and quantifying downloads of new or revised SiPs. An annual survey will monitor the ongoing usage and validity of the SiPs and a new compliance audit will measure ports' conformance with the SiPs.

### **Increase UK Port Skills Engagement**

2a) Due to the lack of dedicated work streams for skills in the previous years, the new membership management system launched in November 2023 with only 27 contacts for

skills within membership companies. Following the launch of the Port Skills Group, various working groups, and the skills strategy led by the skills, careers and diversity lead, by January 2024 there were 186 contacts for skills on the system with more than 50 consistently active contacts. This represents an increase of nearly 500 per cent for contacts and at least a doubling of active members.

After one year of implementation, the skills strategy was updated and revised into four key pillars that better reflect the work being requested by members. Updates on progress and stretch objectives were added where work had progressed outside of the original scope.

2b) The new website contains a one-stop-shop on port skills – designed for port staff (as opposed to careers advisors) – containing skills resources and guidance including apprenticeship schemes, career pathways, ongoing professional development, and jobs and skills requirements. A competency framework has been established and assessments for safety-critical tasks are being developed. More skills resources are being added all the time.

### Improve UK Port Safety Statistics

3a) From the launch of the strategy in 2023, there have been no fatalities recorded on the PSS benchmarking dashboard. However, there were fatalities in the UK port sector and whilst these were not among the PSS membership and not in areas specifically covered by the SiPs, if PSS has an ambition to make UK ports one of the safest places to work, any fatality in a port is relevant and will have learnings to share to avoid a repetition. PSS continues to work with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) to understand and share any safety lessons or best practice arising from any investigation involving a UK Port.

3b) The objective aimed to ensure that PSS was able to represent the entire port sector when reporting incident data, bearing in mind the above. There were 53 full port members in membership in 2023 and 24 active dashboard members - representing around 85 per cent of UK port trade. This number has remained stagnant. The main reason given by members for not providing data is around the amount of resource needed within the health and safety teams to be able to provide the correct data in the correct format.

In 2023, a pilot data project was launched using AI to analyse large amounts of data. One of the benefits of this project was that the system would allow members to 'dump' their data into the system from whatever format it was already in, thereby reducing the time commitment from members. Unfortunately, this part of the project did not achieve the desired outcomes and smaller ports still found the time commitment difficult. Therefore, PSS continues to look for ways to enable smaller ports to contribute safety data.

### Improve Membership Value Proposition

4a) The introduction of a proper contact management system in November 2023, enabled PSS to track the employees in each member organisation who are interested in PSS resources and activity. This led to a large upturn in people receiving the newsletter and taking part in events, etc. The membership conference has grown year-on-year and in 2024, the PSS membership awards were introduced. This followed feedback from the previous events which called for members to hear more about the best practice taking place amongst the membership. Feedback also led to extended breaks and better facilitation of networking to provide members with better opportunities to build connections with like-minded professionals from other organisations. The awards will

become a biennial event with keynote speakers and panel discussions at membership conferences in the intervening years.

Port Safety Group (PSG) and Port Skills Group (PSkG) each hold four meetings per year and are very well attended. Between 30 to 50 members attend in-person meetings and upwards of 50 for online meetings. Two PSG meetings take place each year, which include a port tour and, in addition, either a data meeting or an innovation meeting around it to increase attendance. Two PSkG meetings also take place in person and include tours of training facilities. Both have a large number of active online working groups focussed on specific outcomes.

4b) Membership income was £416,000 in 2022 and £470,500 in 2023, representing a 13 per cent increase. However, inflation was as high as 12 per cent for some of 2023, therefore, this may not represent a measurable increase in recruitment.

To support members to continuously improve in safety, new courses have been developed for members, including the Incident Investigators Toolkit, and previously provided courses, including the Managing Safely in Ports and Explosive Officers course, were refreshed and updated. Safety audits have been introduced, going from free basic observations and feedback to full site or operation audits. More new tools are in the pipeline including more courses, safety culture support and incident investigation software.

## **Strategic Planning for 2024 Onwards**

PSS believes that to deliver safer ports, the **combination of focus on skills and safety is vital**. Whilst it is more obvious that sharing safety data, learning, and best practice will make ports safer; **it is ultimately people** – their skills, knowledge and commitment to a safety culture, that will make ports one of the safest places to work.

Skills ensure there is an adequate workforce, with the skills to work safely and the ongoing development to adapt to changing requirements. Sharing safety learnings and resources can only make ports safer if people are able to understand and implement them. Ports cannot become safer if people don't know how to act safely. Port workplace culture must promote safety as the main driver for performance, and people and the main drive for safety.

The new skills and safety strategies represent much more comprehensive overviews and objectives for the two main strands of PSS work. They also better reflect measurable targets for those areas. For PSS to move forward with measurable and realistic targets, a clear path to the future is needed.

The two department plans both focus on four key pillars which guide all objectives. [For skills, these are:](#)

- Entry routes
- Progression routes
- Current and future skills requirements
- Skills standards

[For safety, these are:](#)

- Resources
- Collaboration
- Data
- Innovation

These strategies define specific, measurable objectives which will be monitored and

reported on each year. In addition to the link between better skilled people and safer ports, there is a clear overlap in both strategies around technology and the changes that will evolve in working practices, equipment and the skills needed to operate them.

In the next ten to twenty years, the way ports operate could radically change, and commonly-accepted practices – like working from height, or working manually – could be completely eradicated. Different working practices, environments, equipment and cargos will require vastly different skills to those required today. The way people choose to work is also changing and ports must adapt to ensure young people remain interested in a career in ports.

The drive towards net zero and alternative fuels will continue to impact ports for many years, and unexpected changes, such as those seen from coronavirus, means new skills are always in demand and dynamic assessments of risk are always needed.

The port sector looks to PSS to advise on dealing with emerging trends and risks, and therefore the organisation must remain agile to be able to keep ahead of these changes and advise appropriately. The increasing risks around electric vehicle and lithium-ion batteries is one example of this. Whilst the technology has existed for many years, the risk (especially related to lithium-ion fires) is a relatively new risk for ports to mitigate. Instead of moving straight to developing guidance, PSS is holding a conference to bring all relate parties together to collaborate on developing best practise and increase knowledge.

This also extends to being able to understand the skills requirements of the future. PSS needs to be at the forefront of development to ensure that there is a sufficient talent pipeline in place to meet future skills needs in ports.

The different types of PSS membership must all work together to realise all the benefits that new technology can bring. The innovators bring ideas and disruption to move away from traditional working methods; port workers bring their knowledge of how ports work and are vital in ensuring that changes genuinely improve safety and do not simply move risk around; and training providers ensure that ports have the skills required to operate safely with new equipment and methods.

PSS's commitment to **collaboration is the best platform** for bringing all three of these elements together to share, adopt and improve new technologies and new working practices. By sharing knowledge, networking and leading innovation, members can work together through PSS to deliver consistent improvements to safety.

Data also features heavily in both departmental strategies. Currently, PSS collects safety data for benchmarking via the incident dashboard and skills data on the use of qualifications and some basic workforce data. However, by moving to a data-driven approach, PSS can lead the sector and drive the membership to collect and provide more and better data, for better analysis and better results.

More members will be urged to take part in the incident benchmarking dashboard and to provide more detailed data and investigation outcomes so that AI may be used to identify common root causes.

PSS will collect more data about members via website analytics, communications engagements, membership mapping, survey and event attendance, etc. This will be used to understand what services and resources members value most and target them to the members they are most relevant to. This will also reveal any gaps where members are not engaged or active and where resources need to be developed.

PSS audits will provide data on whether members are achieving the standards set in the

Safety in Ports guidance and push towards best practice. Findings from these audits will also add to the pool of information around root causes to define areas for new PSS support and resources.

PSS will seek to continually improve and develop value added services for members and better understand how these can also be made available to non-members. Much of the advice and support PSS offers can be class as consultancy services and PSS should expand this type of delivery to diversify income away from a heavy reliance on subscription fees. Providing a range of services to non-members also increases PSS's reputation and further increase income. However, providing service to non-members should never be at the detriment of members and should always be with a view to future recruitment of those organisations in membership.

## **Driving continuous development**

When the 2023 to 2028 KPIs were set, PSS was in a period of change. Over the last two years, PSS has realigned to deliver a better focus on member value. The skills remit was defined and expanded, and the safety output was improved and updated. The review of KPIs at the beginning of this paper highlights that some of them are not driving the organisation forward in the strongest ways.

Making ports safer is not something that happens once and is done. There must be **continual development** in order to become increasingly safer. Therefore, the KPIs PSS uses must also promote continuous development and continuously improve the value delivered to members.

The headline KPIs will be revised from 2024 as:

### **Maintain Safety in Ports guidance as industry-leading**

PSS must ensure that SiPs remain at the forefront of port safety guidance. Within the next five years, all current SiPs will be reviewed. The review will maintain the link to legal standards and be produced in collaboration with the Health and Safety Executive and trade unions. Supplementary resources will be produced for members which include best practice, practical guides, images and videos of operations and equipment in use, and quick reference versions for use on the quayside. Annual surveys will measure SiP usage to target a year-on-year increase and an assessment tool will be developed enabling members to self-assess their compliance against the standards.

### **Maintain PSS as the standard setter for port skills**

PSS must maintain a position as the ports' skills standards-setting body. Within the next five years, PSS will review all the port-specific apprenticeships and deliver increased usage of them in ports. Career mapping will be developed demonstrating entry level and progression routes through ports and the skills required at each stage. PSS will provide resources which support training and skills development, and work with training providers to meet current and future training needs to support the development of a skilled and future-proof workforce.

### **Be Data-driven**

PSS will collect and use data to drive all areas and demonstrate success. Safety alerts, the incident dashboard and new AI initiatives will be used to direct which safety improvements to focus on. Membership surveys and feedback from events and meetings will be used to determine which resources to produce. Data on downloads, event attendance and engagement should evidence success of all outputs.

### **Grow, Collaborate and Share**

PSS will constantly increase membership so that all those who can improve port safety and skill levels are involved. Collaboration should be central to PSS work, sharing

lessons learned and best practice in both skills and safety. SiP documents should be robust and comprehensive so that members can be confident that adherence to them will result in zero incidences of fatal industry accidents. Training standards should provide the skills that ports need to support this, now and in the future.