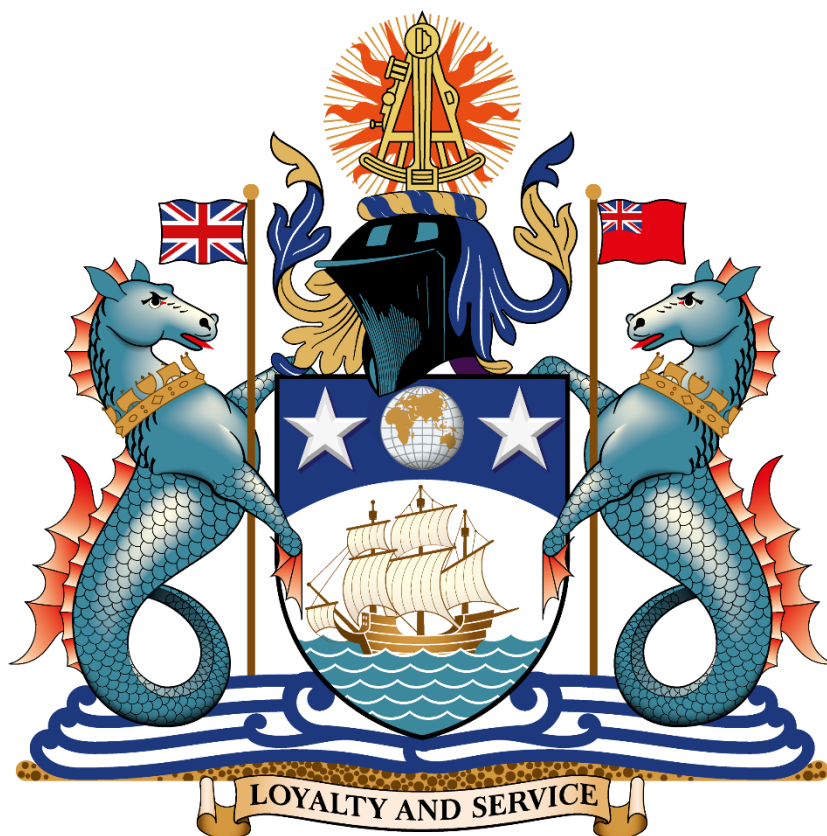


Delays in Oral Examinations for C.O.C.



THE HONOURABLE COMPANY OF MASTER MARINERS

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It is drawn to your attention the current unacceptable situation regarding oral examinations for Merchant Navy officers, especially cadets.

Charitable organisations and commercial companies sponsor young people to become either navigating or engineering officers in the British Merchant Navy.

These organisations pay for all their college fees and sometimes living expenses for the 3 or 4 years of their training. This is a substantial amount of money (over £20,000 per annum per cadet.)

At the end of their third year, cadets present themselves for an oral examination by the MCA. Ideally their oral examination should take place shortly after they pass their written examinations and immediately after a period of oral preparation, provided by their training college. This is not happening, however.

Instead, cadets are having to wait 3 to 4 months for an online oral examination, which normally lasts for around 60 minutes.

While waiting for this oral examination the cadets cannot obtain work in the Merchant Navy, and unless they are supported by their sponsors, need to find alternative employment to survive. This is detrimental to continuing studies, and often results in cadets being placed in considerable financial hardship.

Consequently, the knowledge and experiences gained at sea and in the classroom, which they should be tested on in the oral examination are no longer at the forefront of their memory, increasing the potential for failure.

Worse still, former cadets are now leaving the profession because they are forced to find alternative employment outside the maritime industry and can't afford to wait for the MCA to issue oral slots.

Previously oral exams took place shortly after the cadets had completed their written exams. Colleges were routinely able to block book oral slots for cadets about to complete their oral preparation. This ensured groups of cadets the opportunity to have a first attempt at orals close to the end of their oral preparation. Since orals were moved online, this practice has been discontinued.

The MCA oral exams could be planned and conducted at the Nautical Colleges as each cohorts complete their training. There is a precedent for this at Fleetwood Nautical College, and it worked with a considerable number of cadets being examined in a single day.

The present situation is unacceptable and needs to be addressed. Cadets are becoming more and more frustrated and stuck in a vicious cycle. They complete college phase 5 oral preparation, then wait over 3 months for an oral slot. By the time they sit these orals, the knowledge gained, has been lost.

They sit the exam, and if they fail, they are then forced to wait many months for another slot, which further contributes to knowledge degradation. Whilst they are waiting, they are not working, and

often not being paid. This causes considerable disillusionment towards the maritime industry, and they simply leave and pursue a shore job, not always within the maritime industry.

The cadets sponsoring company or charity has now lost their considerable investment and the UK Government SMarT funding final payment. In addition, and most importantly, the maritime industry has lost yet another young person.

It would be interesting to see the MCA statistics for the last 5 years of oral (COC) passes to see if there has been a decline post Covid-19 pandemic. It would also be interesting to note how many CECs have been issued compared to COCs during the same period. Has the backlog of oral slots for cadets been caused by over issuance of CECs, therefore negatively impacting UK cadets' ability to get an oral examination slot?

The MCA orals examination seem to be the only area of government administrative function that cannot be challenged with a request for a review. In what world is this fair, unbiased, or administratively acceptable? The MCA on that basis, is a law unto itself, making it non-adherent with UK legal and constitutional principles. The MCA need to be held accountable to the questions cadets are asking. Otherwise, they almost single-handedly risk destroying the professional credibility of our maritime training and qualifications industry.