

# **Survey of recently qualified Merchant Navy Officers**

Undertaken in collaboration with the  
Maritime Skills Commission Cadet Review Sub-group



# Welcome

The Maritime Skills Commission (MSC) was launched in the summer of 2020 as part of the government's Maritime 2050 strategy. This important strategy document includes a commitment to ensure the UK maritime industry has a pipeline of talented people to serve all parts of the sector covering shipping, ports, leisure marine, engineering, science and professional services.

As one of the Commissioners appointed by the Maritime Minister, I am keen that Nautilus supports the work of the MSC since we share a desire that the UK grows its maritime skills base. I was also pleased to join the MSC Cadet Review Sub-Group charged with making recommendations on the cadet training experience.

It is vital that the views of maritime professionals are included in any review of their training. With that in mind, and to support the Cadet Review Sub-Group, Nautilus surveyed members who have recently been through maritime training themselves and had the opportunity to practically apply that training in seeking and undertaking jobs at sea. These members have a unique insight into the standards of the training they received and how well it prepared them for the realities of working at sea or in the wider maritime industry.

UK seafarers are held in high regard around the world, yet over the past 40 years the British seagoing workforce has declined by around two thirds. This trend is likely to continue given the demographics of the UK seagoing workforce unless substantive investment is made. The work of the MSC is targeted at addressing this issue and ensuring that the industry has the sufficient talent, support and resources to thrive in future.

The MSC Cadet Review Sub-Group will be supporting the findings of this Nautilus report with in-depth conversations with some of those who took part in this survey to provide a complete analysis of UK maritime training.

My thanks to all those members who took part in the Nautilus survey and to those who agreed to take part in the follow-up focus groups.

*Onwards.*

**Mark Dickinson**  
General Secretary  
Nautilus International



# Introduction

In support of the Maritime Skills Commission Cadet Review sub-group activity, Nautilus International conducted a survey of UK members who had completed their maritime training within the last ten years.

The survey was conducted between September and December 2020. It was initially completed by 152 members, however a number of those fell outside the scope of the exercise (incomplete responses or had been qualified for more than ten years). Therefore, the total number of valid responses was 118. This equates to 3.5% of Nautilus's total UK young members (those aged 35 or below). Fifty respondents said they would be interested in taking part in further discussion on this topic and were invited to a meeting held in March 2021.



Credit: Danny Cornelissen



Credit: Danny Cornelissen

# About respondents

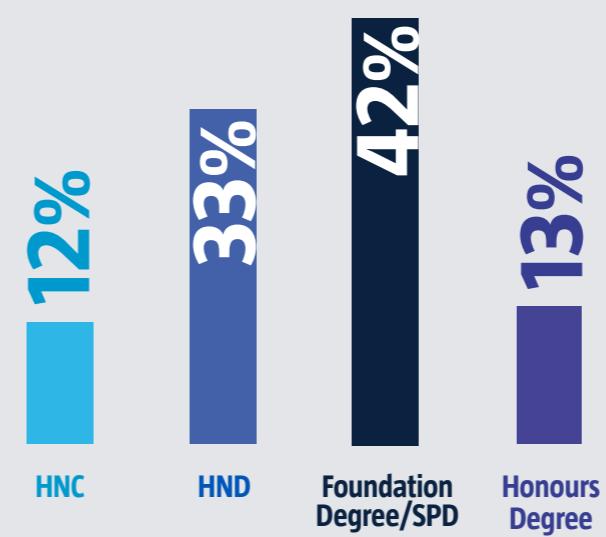
The age range of respondents is broadly in line with what is expected for a survey of recently qualified officers – 36% were between 18 and 24, and 62% between 25 and 34. Around 15% were female which reflects that more females are coming into the industry and reflective of Nautilus membership. In line with the survey parameters only those respondents who qualified less than ten years ago have been included.

A third of respondents were still undertaking their cadetships, while 17% were Engineer Officers and 42% were Deck Officers. The remaining few were shore based, ETOs and three were master / chief engineer rank (under 35 and within ten years of qualifying).

The age is also reflective of in their qualification level 64% had either deck or engine OOW certificates, 10% were seconds and 26% had Chief Officer certificates. All the main maritime colleges were represented with the small number of 'Others' including the UKSA and Britannia Royal Naval College.

Respondents were asked which specific course they studied however, most gave general answers (HNC / BSc etc) which is better summarised below:

## Which course of study did you follow?



The most popular alternative career choices include airline pilot, IT, other type of engineer / electrician, other maritime / sea related career, the law, Royal Navy or other armed forces, and the police or other emergency services.

Other responses included oil price collapse, shortage in officers, pay and work/life balance.

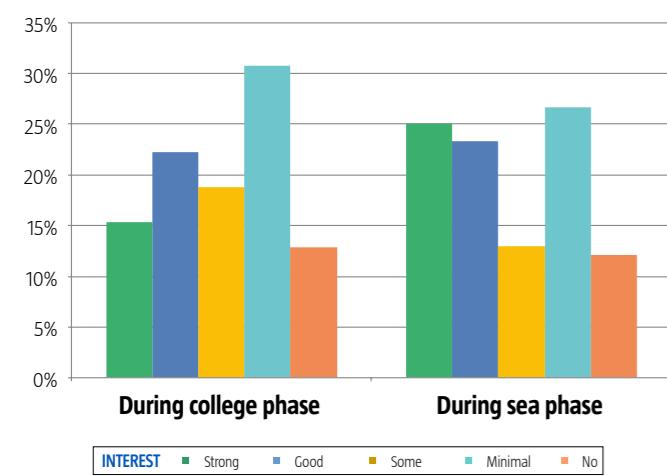
## Why did you decide to pursue a career at sea?



# Quality of training and support

The survey asked about the interest that companies, colleges, and any other sponsoring organisation took in the various aspects of cadet training.

## How much interest did your sponsoring company take in your development?



Just under half (44%) of sponsoring companies took little to no interest in the cadets' college phase, they tended to take slightly more interest during sea phases but over 10% of companies were not interested in either aspect of the cadets training experience.

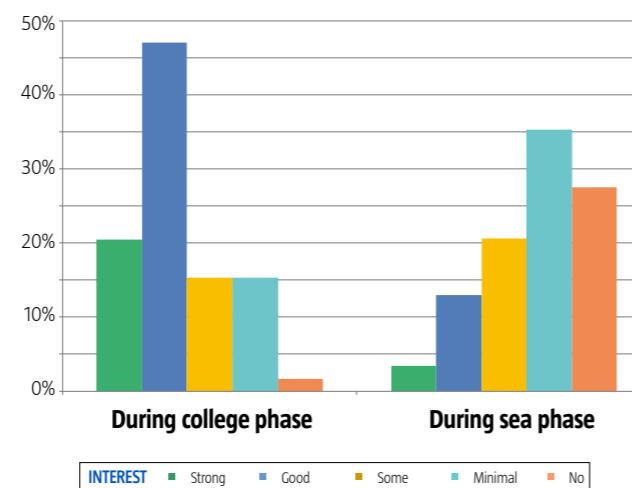
For further clarity the figures show 38% of employers showed strong or good interest in the cadets' college phase and 48% strong or good interest in the cadets' sea phase; compared to 44% showing little to no interest in the college phase and 38% showing little to no interest in the sea phase.

However, there could be signs that this is improving, looking only at respondents who qualified in the last five years 55% said their company demonstrated good or strong level of interest in their college phase (up from 38% overall) and 70% said they showed a good or strong level of interest in the sea phase (up from 48% overall).

As may be expected, the percentage of colleges taking an interest in respondents' college phase was quite high with nearly 70% showing a good to high level of interest. However, over 60% had very little interest in what happened to students when they were 'out of sight' on their sea phases. There was

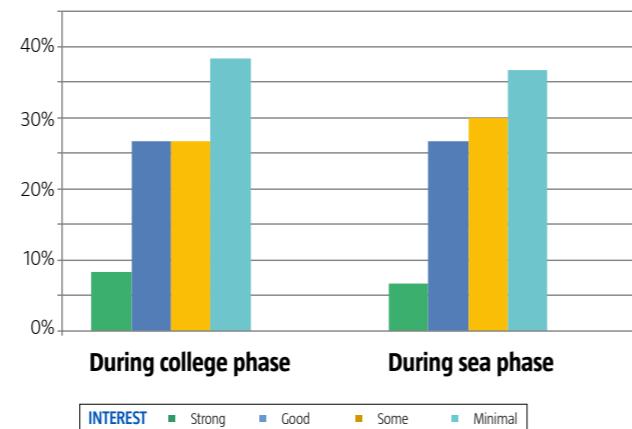
no sign of change over time as far as colleges were concerned.

## How much interest did your college take in your development?



The situation was even worse for cadets who had a training provider different from the sponsoring company. They appear to take little interest in the cadets in all aspects of their training. This also showed no signs of improvement over time.

## If your training provider is different for your sponsoring company, how much interest did your training provider take in your development?



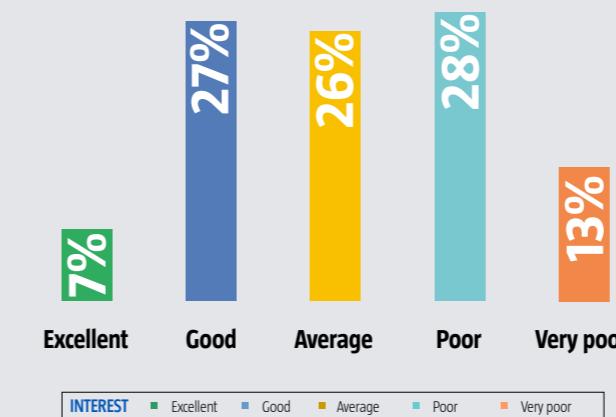
Given all of the above it will not come as a surprise that respondents were less than enthusiastic about the overall level of support and mentoring received during their cadetship.

Whilst not many were at the extremes of excellent or very poor, the average response was Good to Average.



Credit: Danny Cornelissen

## Please rate the level of training that you received in leadership and management during the sea phases of your training.



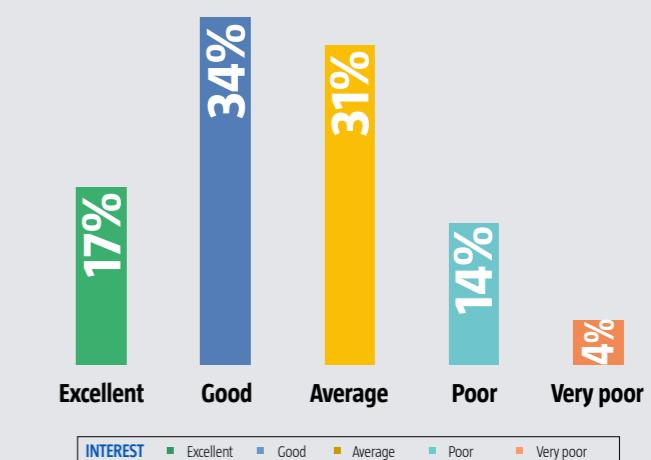
There was a similar worrying trend in the overall rating respondents gave to the leadership and management aspects of their training. Just over a quarter of respondents said they were in the middle ranges (good to poor) while only 7% said it was excellent and 13% rated it as very poor.

There was little evidence of change over time, for those who qualified within the last five years compared with those who qualified over five years ago. In both groups around half gave a positive answer and a quarter a negative response.

The results show that respondents were slightly more positive about the overall

technical content of the course with only 18% of respondents rating it as poor or very poor, whilst over half (51%) said the experience covered all of the technical aspects that it needed to.

## Please rank how well your sea experience covered all of the technical aspects of navigation / engineering that it should have done?



There is evidence of a slight improvement in this over time. Just over half (51%) of those who had more recently qualified rated the technical aspects of their course positively compared to (45%) for those who qualified more than five years ago. On the other end of the scale only 16% of those recently qualified gave negative feedback, compared to around a third (29%) for those qualifying longer ago.

# Simulators

Over 70% of respondents said that they would have benefited from additional simulator time during their training.

They wanted this additional training to cover all of the following areas:

<b>Emergency procedures</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b>Collision avoidance / rule of the road</b>	<b>63%</b>
<b>Manoeuvres / ship handling</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Equipment familiarisation</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>Operational procedures</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>Teamwork / leadership</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>Passage planning</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Position fixing techniques</b>	<b>39%</b>

In addition, some respondents suggested they would also like simulator training to cover the following areas.

- Different types of transit ie canal, open sea, anchorage
- Communication via VHF requirements
- Machinery breakdown
- ECDIS familiarisation
- SAR
- Electrical faults and failures
- Electrical systems diagrams and familiarisation
- Engine Resource Management
- Night-time lookout and following Masters' standing orders



Officer cadets in 360 degree simulator

# Employment after qualifying

Over 80% of respondents stated that they did get a job after qualifying although there was some apparent confusion as to whether this meant immediately after or eventually, and in maritime or any job at all. A better analysis can be made looking at how long it took to get that first job after qualifying.

## How long did it take to get that job?

**53%**

I was offered a job upon completion of my cadetship by my sponsoring company

**11%**

Less than one month

**23%**

Between one and three months

**11%**

Between three and six months

**1%**

Longer than 6 months

Over half of respondents who said they got a job straight after qualifying were employed by their sponsoring company on completion of their cadetship. The situation is more difficult for those who were not taken on by a sponsoring company (often 'Tonnage Tax Companies'), they respondents took on average more than three months to secure a position.

The majority (57%) secure positions as Third Mates or Fourth Engineers, although some were junior officers (Fourth Mate / Fifth Engineer), there was a worrying trend for qualified officers to sail as ratings, volunteers, or continue as a cadet for at least one trip.

Most first jobs were permanent positions (75%) as opposed to single trip or agency contracts and the same percentage remained in the same sector that they undertook their cadetship in.

The salaries which respondents received for their first job after qualifying varied widely, but most reported salaries in the range of £25,001 to £35,000.

## What was the annual salary for this first job including leave periods?

**More than £40,000 3%**

**£35,001 – £40,000 7%**

**£30,001 – £35,000 27%**

**£25,001 – £30,000 36%**

**£20,001 – £25,000 17%**

**£15,001 – £20,000 4%**

**Under £15,000 6%**



Credit: Danny Cornelissen



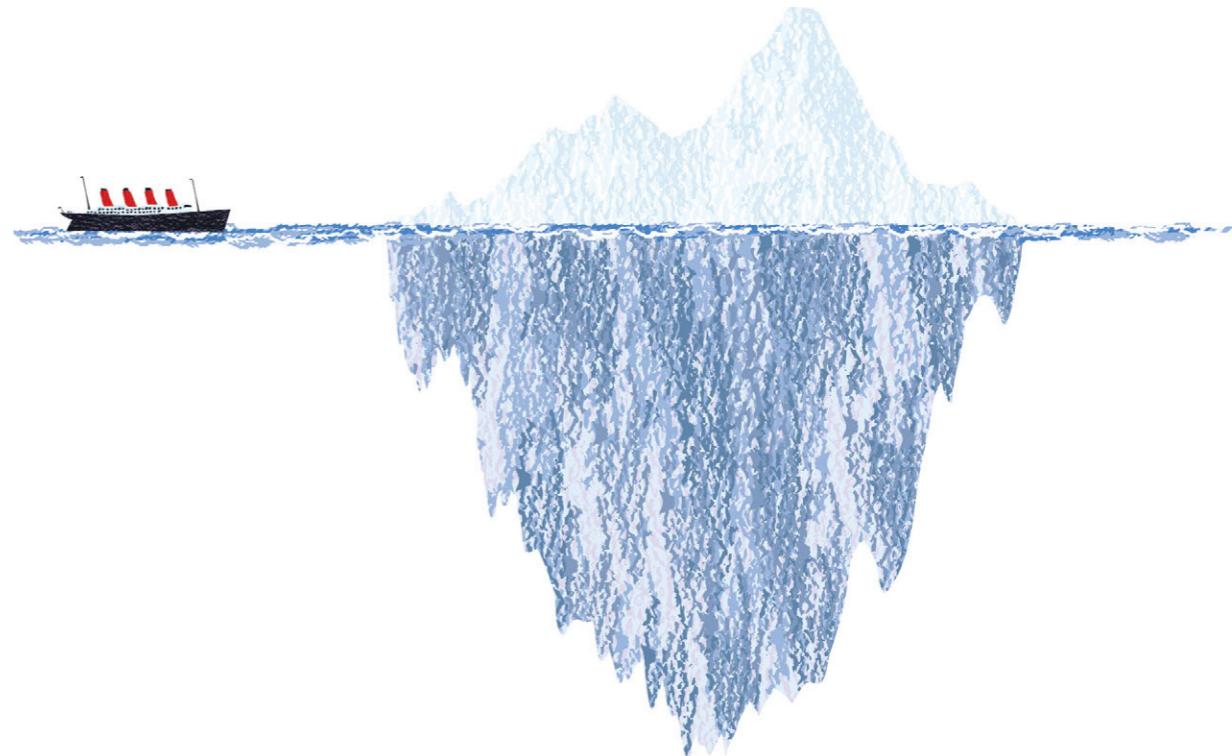
# Unemployment after qualifying

The survey found that 17% of responses did not gain employment after completing their course. The reason for this was predominantly because they were not successful in getting a position at sea rather than deciding the career was not for them.

Some took temporary positions before finally gaining a permanent role (on average for one year after qualifying), other more recent

graduates noted that Covid-19 had led to their original job offers being rescinded.

Most of those who had not gained a position at sea soon after qualifying had managed to do so eventually (on average one year after qualifying). A small number had decided against a career at sea but worked in the wider maritime industry. A small number remained unemployed.



## Tip of the iceberg?

The appalling treatment of three cadets terminated by their sponsoring company during the Covid crisis, shows how precarious the training system is, and how it can benefit employers while potentially jeopardising trainees' Merchant Navy careers

Image: Jobalou/Getty Images

Read the whole article at  
[tinyurl.com/vy5fafur](https://tinyurl.com/vy5fafur)

# Open feedback

The survey asked several open questions about maritime training, some of the common themes are detailed here.

## What would you change about course content and at sea experience?

- The entire cadetship system needs an overhaul, especially cadets seafarers. Seafarers is simply a gamble and only a small number of cadets actually receive valuable training at sea
- MNTB training book urgently needs to be revised, there are many types of vessel and a lot of the tasks aren't applicable to the type of vessel you may be allocated
- More focused on management and organisation skills
- Update the training - we learn about irrelevant equipment
- First sea-phase could take place a little earlier into the training. For someone who had never been at sea, some of the academic work during the first college phase was difficult to put into context or visualise, having never seen a ship before
- Update the training requirements to the modern 21st Century. Remove the training for outdated and obsolete technologies - celestial navigation, paper charts, outdated ship designs, training rowing boats. This takes up a lot of the training time. Instead focus on modern requirements like ECDIS, Navigation Position Systems, Integrated Bridge Systems and the modern ship types cadets are actually likely to encounter but are not covered at all in the current syllabus

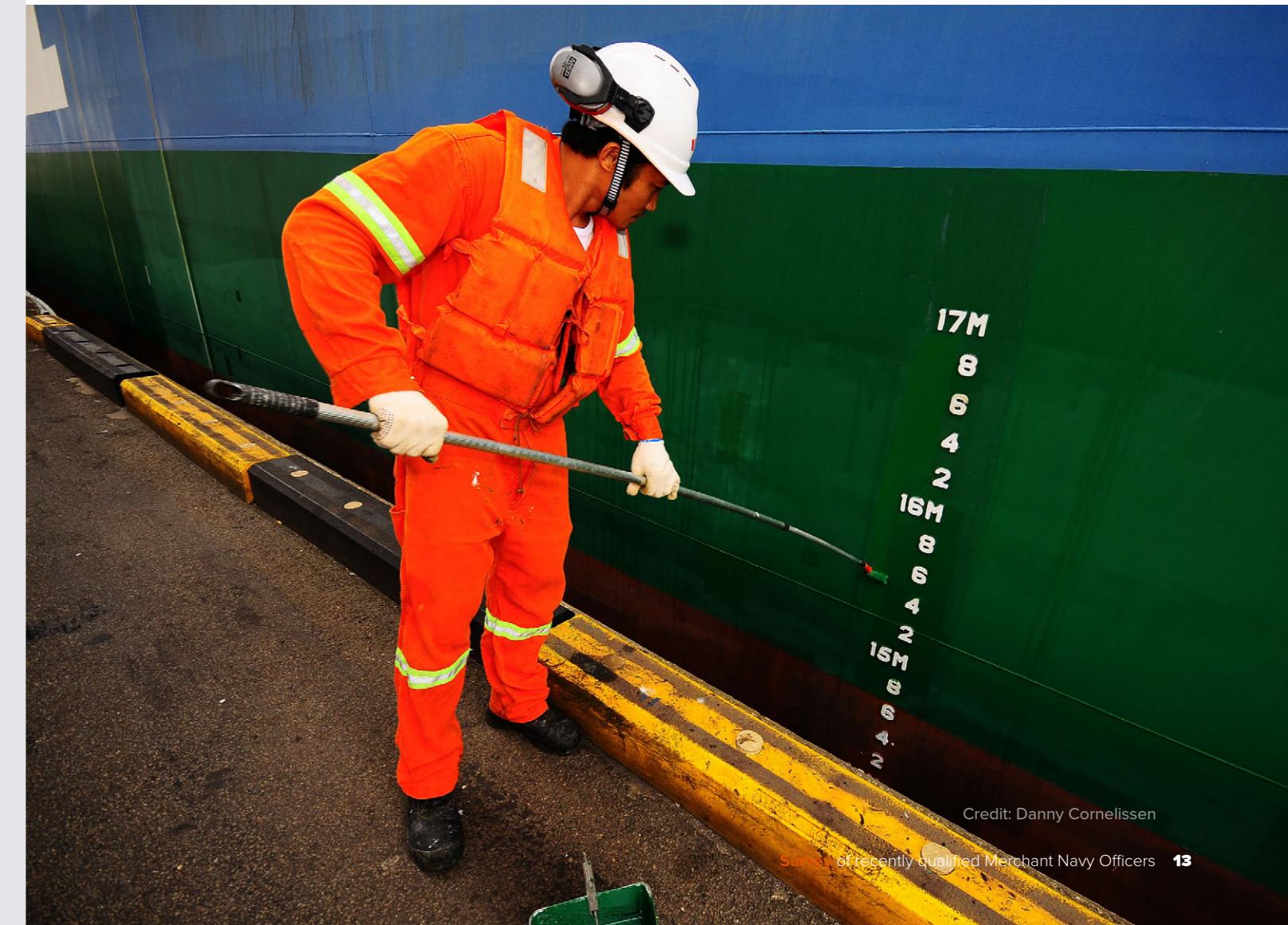
- Provide more opportunities in simulators to trial emergency procedures
- More practical experience with machinery, simple jobs and watch keeping
- More computing should be included in the ETO course at college

## What would you change about the training/education experience?

- More experienced lecturers and more opportunities for cadets to provide feedback to the MNTB/MCA
- More simulator time and more time spent on each piece of equipment.
- The requirements for the FD and CoC should not conflict. At times the 'Uni experience' or university type of marking for assignments is not clear and understood. This is due to the weakness in developing students for higher level written work
- MCA examinations to be more relative to modern shipping
- The standard of teaching was poor and the reality at sea is very different to that portrayed by college
- Increase the salary wage of cadets
- Refresh the content to reflect the modern role of an officer at sea with more focus on culture and expectations for the future, not just textbook delivery
- Slightly extended course time - taking multiple exams in a within two weeks applies too much pressure on an individual

# Other comments

- College and Sea don't talk to each other. Sea thinks college should teach everything; college thinks sea should. There was no balance as ships were unfamiliar with MNTB training book
- More opportunities to complete simulator time before going on your first ship
- Job security for post cadetship is a big concern for current cadets
- Training companies should be more honest during recruitment campaigns. Shore leave is not always granted and you work every day
- Colleges are very unorganised and just do the minimum to churn cadets through
- Sponsoring company had mainly eastern European officers that took little to no interest
- in teaching, this did not partner well with the lack of marine plant training in college
- The opportunities are amazing, but the training is shocking. Onboard and at college it always seemed to be someone else's job to do it
- The training syllabus is behind reality, by years
- Make the course content all HND and remove HNC courses. Having to take further lessons to be able to take the second/Chief tickets adds too much financial pressure and time away from work
- Paying for STCW courses should fall on the employer and not the employee



Credit: Danny Cornelissen



# Recommendations

## Maintain and enhance the attractiveness of cadet programmes

The introduction of the Tonnage Tax scheme was undoubtedly successful in increasing the number of cadets in training. However, since the peak in 2008/2009 when in excess of 900 new entrants were recruited there has been a steady downward trend in numbers, resulting in approximately 630 cadets being recruited in both 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. Whereas previously the number recruited was limited by the number of places on offer with companies reporting that they received many times more quality applications for each post advertised, anecdotally, that position is now reversed with companies reportedly struggling to find suitably qualified applicants to fill the positions available.

Any policy aimed at increasing the number of cadets recruited each year will be dependent not only on making the opportunities available but also attracting a sufficient number of high-quality applicants to fill those positions.

Survey respondents were asked why they decided to pursue a career at sea. Whilst many stated that they were at least partly motivated by an interest in ships and the sea and/or an opportunity for travel, a very large proportion stated that long term career opportunities both at sea (65%) and ashore (20%) were amongst their reasons for choosing the career. Additionally, 40% pointed to the fact that the cadetship is funded as a motivating factor.

Other relevant feedback received included comments regarding cadet pay and difficulties experienced with career progression for those following the Higher National Certificate (HNC) programme.

It is therefore imperative if we are to continue attracting high quality applicants to the industry, that the cadet offering continues to meet their expectations in terms of career progression opportunities and the competitiveness of the package when compared with other options such as apprenticeships.

Based on this feedback the following recommendations are made:

- **Ensure that cadets are provided with accurate and realistic information relating to career paths at the onset of their training.** This could expand on the work of careers at sea and beyond and/or other initiatives but with an additional focus on the long-term career outlook for the applicant and how their initial choices will have a bearing on the positions that will be available to them long term. Whilst at the beginning of their training, only 20% versus 65% were focussed on a long term career ashore, peoples priorities change and it should be borne in mind that most cadets will want to come ashore at some point in their career.
- **Ensure that opportunities exist to facilitate the long-term career prospects of new entrants.** The information that cadets are given regarding the possible career paths that they could follow need to be achievable both in terms of opportunities being available and MN officers being equipped with the skills to progress. Support for programmes such as the Marine Society's Coming Ashore Project should be continued and expanded to ensure that there is support available to those wishing to further their careers. Close attention should be paid to the results of research projects such as Project Ulysses and the EU SkillSea project to ensure that UK cadets are equipped with the skills to future-proof their careers.
- **The HNC programme should be revaluated and considered in relation to its continued ability to meet the career aspirations of cadets both at sea and ashore.** Nearly two thirds (65%) of respondents indicated that career opportunities at sea were one of their primary motivating factors in joining the industry but a number of participants provided feedback regarding the difficulties experienced in terms of career progression when taking the HNC route. The need for multiple access routes to the industry for people from various academic backgrounds is recognised, however, considering the various changes in the regulatory environment which include the National Minimum Wage (NMW) legislation, Brexit and the Points Based Immigration system, consideration should be given to how these may affect the balance of demand for officers and ratings and, where the most appropriate entry points may be for those from varying academic backgrounds.

## ...Recommendations

### Provide strengthened and more co-ordinated support to cadets throughout college and sea phases.

Respondents were asked how much support they received during both their college and sea phases. Alarmingly, just under half (44%) of respondents reported that companies took little or no interest in their progress during the college phase compared to 38% who reported that their company paid a strong or good interest. Unsurprisingly, companies were reported to have shown more interest in the sea phase with 48% of respondents showing a strong or good interest in the sea phase compared to 39% showing little or no interest. Although the situation seems to have improved amongst those participants who had qualified in the last five years, that these responses are far from satisfactory.

The situation was even more alarming for cadets who had a sponsor that was different to their training provider, with 38% reporting that the training provider had low level of interest in their development during the college phase and 37% during the sea phase.

When it came to the colleges, nearly 70% of respondents reported that their college showed a high level of interest in their progress during the college phases but this position was not surprisingly reversed during the sea phase where colleges have very little contact with the cadets.

When asked how they rated the level of support and mentoring overall, 47% of respondents rated their experience as excellent to good.

Based on this feedback the following recommendations are made:

- **Review the role of the company training officer.** Companies are required by SMarT Funding rules to nominate a company training officer who is responsible for overseeing the training of each cadet. From the responses received, it is clear that many cadets do not feel that they are receiving adequate support during their cadetship. The requirements for company training officers listed in MGN 455 are mainly concerned with the administrative procedures relating to SMarT Funding and ensuring completion of the Training Record Book (TRB). These requirements should be reviewed to determine if it is necessary to explicitly state other areas which the company training officer should be responsible to ensure that cadets feel adequately supported.

- **Encourage greater co-ordination of support during college and sea phases.** Whilst overall, respondents were happy with the levels of support received from the colleges during college phases, the picture during sea phases was far more mixed. Additionally, it was evident from responses that the company's interest was greater than the colleges during the sea phase and vice versa. Whilst this is to be expected, consideration should be given to encouraging greater co-ordination between the support received from the college and company during both sea and college phases in order to provide greater continuity between the phases and, to ensure that there is a safety net if, for whatever reason, a cadet feels they are not getting adequate support from one party or the other.
- **Increase external monitoring of support provided to cadets.** The levels of support that companies and colleges are expected to provide to cadets are set out in the tonnage tax regulations and associated guidance and, in MNTB guidance documents which apply to both colleges and companies. It is clear that in some instances, cadets feel that they are not receiving adequate levels of support. It may therefore be necessary to increase the level of scrutiny that is applied in ensuring that parties are meeting their obligations.



Fleetwood Nautical College bridge simulators

# Training

## Improve course content

Respondents were asked for their views on the quality of training that they received. On the technical content of the course, feedback was positive on the whole with only 18% stating that the course content was poor or very poor. There was also evidence that the situation has improved in the last five years with only 16% of those qualifying in the last five years giving negative feedback. There were some comments regarding the need to update the curriculum, but this subject was not explored in detail in the questionnaire.

Respondents were far less enthusiastic about the quality of leadership and management training with only 34% describing it as good or very good.

On the subject of simulators, the results were quite conclusive with 72% stating that they would have benefitted from additional simulator time. The respondents were particularly keen to see exercises covering emergency procedures and collision avoidance included in any additional simulator training.

Additionally, there were comments received relating to the timing of sea phases and difficulties experienced in understanding some aspects of the academic work at a time when they had little or no practical sea experience.

Based on this feedback the following recommendations are made:

- **Continue ongoing work to modernise the syllabus.** The survey did not specifically focus on the content of officer of the watch (OOW) courses, but the results support previous studies including the 2019 Nautilus Cadet Survey and the 2020 EU Skillsea report. These studies concluded that the OOW syllabus is in need of modernisation. However, it should be borne in mind that overall perception of the technical content was good. Feedback was also received pertaining to the value of the phased system. This would suggest that although close attention should be paid to ensure that the training content remains relevant, that overall cadets were satisfied with the structure and delivery of academic content so we should be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water when considering any changes.

- **Complete the work to modernise HELM training.**

**HELM training.** It has been suspected for a number of years that Human Element, Leadership and Management (HELM) training in its current form is falling short of what is required by the industry. This led to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) commissioning a review into HELM training which was completed in 2018. The results of this Nautilus survey would indicate that UK cadets do not feel that the training they are receiving in leadership and management is up to standard. This underlines the need to complete the work begun by the MCA to review and modernise UK HELM training.

- **Support the introduction of increased simulator training into cadet training programmes.**

It was announced last year that the MCA would soon be conducting a trial programme whereby cadets would be entitled to a reduction of up to one month in the mandatory minimum sea time requirements if they have attended the Bridge Watchkeeping Skills simulator course developed and approved by the MNTB. The reasoning behind this proposal is that trainee officers will be given opportunities to experience scenarios in the simulator that they may not have the opportunity to take part in during their sea service. The results from this Nautilus survey would support this way forward as over 70% of respondents were in favour of additional simulator time and pointed to emergency procedures and complex collision avoidance as scenarios that should be covered. It is worth noting that controversy around simulator training relates to the reduction of sea time as opposed to the utilisation of simulators per se.



Credit: Danny Cornelissen

## Track employment after qualification

Respondents were asked several questions relating to their experience finding employment after qualifying. Nearly 20% of respondents reported that they had failed to find employment after qualifying. However, it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions from this data. Several respondents will have been recently qualified therefore should not be considered to have failed to gain employment. On the other hand, the respondents are drawn from Nautilus membership and followers of Nautilus's social media pages, so it is likely that the sample is skewed to those that are still working in the industry.

The survey also raised questions regarding the types of employment that are being found once qualified with 10% of respondents reporting that their first job paid less than £20,000 p.a. and 6% under £15,000 p.a. Additionally, 25% reported that their first job was either as a volunteer or single contract/agency position.

Based on this feedback the following recommendations are made:

- **Implement a system to track outcomes for cadets once they have qualified.**

The question of employability for cadet's post-qualification has been circulating for several years. As there is no formal system for tracking what happens once a cadet is qualified the question has never been satisfactorily answered as any poll or questionnaire is inevitably constrained by similar issues to the one identified above. The only way to answer this question for certain is to track the progress of cadets centrally. One suggestion that has been put forward previously is incentivise cadets to report on their status at a set interval after their scheduled completion date.

Nautilus International is an independent, influential, global trade union and professional organisation, committed to organising and campaigning for maritime and shipping professionals, delivering high quality services to members, and maritime welfare support

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Cover image:  
Navigation training deck officers  
Credit: Getty Images

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