Maritime & Coastguard Agency

MARINE INFORMATION NOTE

MIN 720 (M) Amendment 1 Transforming seafarer training: the UK's modernised officer qualifications syllabus

Notice to all Shipowners, Operators, Masters, Skippers, Officers, Cadets, and those concerned with maritime training.

This notice should be read with MSN 1856 Amendment 1, MSN 1857 Amendment 1 and MSN 1860 Amendment 1.

This MIN expires 30 April 2028.

Summary

This marine information note (MIN) sets out the changes to the UK's seafarer officer qualifications syllabus, overseen by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) through the Cadet Training & Modernisation (CT&M) Programme.

Established in late 2021, the CT&M Programme aims to implement recommendations from the Maritime Skills Commission's (MSC) Seafarer Cadet Review, bringing together experts from various organisations to modernise and improve training.

This collaborative effort has resulted in a modernised syllabus for Nautical, Engineering, and Electro-Technical disciplines, implemented by UK/MCA Approved Nautical Colleges/Universities from August/September 2025.

Additionally, it outlines the modernisation of MCA assessments, which are planned to replace existing written exams.

1. Introduction/background

The UK's seafarer officer qualifications syllabus has undergone its first major overhaul in many years, overseen by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) through the Cadet Training & Modernisation (CT&M) Programme.

The CT&M Programme was established in late 2021 to implement the recommendations from the Maritime Skills Commission's Seafarer Cadet Review. It brings together approximately 41 people from 24 organisations, dedicating their expertise to modernise and improve Merchant Navy Cadet and Officer training.

One of the key achievements has been the completion of the Cadet Syllabus Review. The syllabuses for Nautical, Engineering, and Electro-Technical disciplines have been updated to reflect current practices and technology used on board. While the MCA led on the programme modernisation project, it was industry driven in determining the skills needed for the modernised syllabuses.

This marks the important collaboration between a maritime regulator, seafarers and industry experts to shape training, with aims of influencing global standards through the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The new syllabuses, which go beyond the minimum criteria required by the STCW Convention, were implemented by UK/MCA Approved Nautical Colleges/Universities from August 2025, include updated content on current practices, technology, cyber security, and 'human element' skills to enhance seafarer wellbeing and operational safety. Additionally, the syllabuses incorporate training on alternative fuels and new technologies associated with decarbonisation.

Nautical Colleges have played a crucial role in this transformation. They have worked diligently to integrate the modernised syllabuses and prepare for the new qualifications. This collaborative approach with industry stakeholders has ensured that the syllabuses are comprehensive, modern, and relevant, positioning cadets and officers for success in the maritime industry.

This MIN confirms the changes and provides a timeline for the programme start date, new assessments and transitional arrangements for those currently in the system.

2. Deck qualifications

All qualifications listed in this section must have been completed at an MCA-Approved College as part of an MCA-Approved Deck cadetship programme, as per Annex G of MSN 1856 (M+F) - Amendment 1 - UK Requirements for Master and Deck Officers.

This section only focuses on the following requirements from MSN 1856 Amendment 1:

- The approved education and training programme meeting the standards of competency specified in section A-II/1 and A-II/2 of the STCW Code as listed in section 11 of the MSN.
- Navigation and Stability assessment requirements.

All other requirements MSN 1856 Amendment 1 must be met prior to the issuance of the corresponding Certificate of Competency (CoC).

2.1 Summary of Deck Changes

This section aims to provide a quick overview of the changes.

2.1.1 Officer of the Watch (OOW) Unlimited

- From August 2025: all new Deck OOW Unlimited course starters will follow a modernised syllabus and must pass the new MCA Digital Assessment: Navigation, Stability and Operations – Operational Level STCW Reg. II/1 (the MCA Deck Operational Level Digital Assessment).

- If you started your Operational Level academic qualification before August 2025 you will continue to take the MCA OOW written safety examinations for Navigation and Stability, administered by Qualifications Scotland.

- Exemptions: Those enrolled on an MCA approved OOW Foundation Degree or Degree qualification before August 2025, will continue to be exempt from the MCA OOW written safety examinations for Navigation and Stability, administered by Qualifications Scotland, until September 2029.

More information on these changes can be found in sections 2.2.1 and 2.3.1.

2.1.2 Chief Mate Unlimited

If you currently hold an Operational Level academic qualification:

- From August 2026, anyone progressing to a Chief Mate Unlimited CoC while holding an Operational Level academic qualification must complete the modernised Chief Mate top-up syllabus.

- Some colleges may have offered the modernised syllabus from September 2025, so you should check with your college to confirm which syllabus you are following.

- If you complete the modernised syllabus, you will be required to pass the new MCA Digital Assessment: Navigation, Stability and Structure – Management Level STCW Reg. II/2 (the MCA Deck Management Level Digital Assessment).

More information on these changes can be found in section 2.2.2.

If you already hold a Management Level academic qualification:

If you started your Management Level academic qualification before your college introduced the modernised Chief Mate syllabus (which may have been from September 2025 or August 2026, depending on the college), you will have the choice to either;

- continue to take the MCA Chief Mate/Master's Safety Examinations in Navigation and Stability, administered by Qualifications Scotland, until April 2028;

- **Or;** enrol on the digital assessment program and follow the MCA approved modernised curriculum preparation course at the discretion of an MCA approved training provider from November 2026.

More information on these changes can be found in section 2.3.2.

2.2 If you have not yet started a course

2.2.1 OOW Unlimited

From August 2025, if you commence an OOW Unlimited course, you will follow the modernised MCA syllabus and be required to pass the MCA Digital Assessment: Navigation, Stability and Operations – Operational Level STCW Reg. II/1 (the MCA Deck Operational Level Digital Assessment).

These aim to ensure that seafarers are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to safely operate vessels. In addition, the modernised syllabus will help develop skills that make candidates more attractive for employment by providing the latest skills needed to operate ships and preparing them for newer technologies.

When you progress to the Chief Mate Unlimited CoC, you will need to pass the MCA Digital Assessment: Navigation, Stability and Structure – Management Level STCW Reg. II/2 (the MCA Deck Management Level Digital Assessment). This assessment has been updated and aligned with the modernised syllabus. It will replace the existing written exams and continues to focus on Navigation and Stability, incorporating modern methods of assessment.

The new assessment formats have been available since March 2026 with assessments taking place in line with the applicable programme.

2.2.2 Chief Mate Unlimited top up qualifications

From September 2026, if you hold an OOW CoC but still need to complete the Management Level academic qualification required for a Chief Mate Unlimited CoC, commonly referred to as HND/Dip HE/Advanced Diploma 'top up', you will be required to follow the modernised Chief Mate syllabus. This route is only if you qualified with an Operational Level academic qualification, such as an HNC/Cert HE/Advanced Certificate qualification.

If you have partially completed modules from the historic qualification, or failed to achieve the MCA pass mark, then you will be required to undertake an assessment against the modernised module(s) to achieve education and training at management level.

The modernised Chief Mate route has been available at some Colleges from September 2025 - please speak to your college to confirm which syllabus you are following.

If you undertake the modernised Chief Mate top up qualification, you will be required to pass the MCA Digital Assessment: Navigation, Stability and Structure – Management Level STCW Reg. II/2 (the MCA Deck Management Level Digital Assessment). This assessment has been updated and aligned with the modernised syllabus. It will replace the existing written exams and continues to focus on Navigation and Stability, incorporating modern methods of assessment.

The new assessment format has been available since March 2026 with assessments taking place in line with the applicable programme.

2.3 If you are currently in the system

This table summarises the options described throughout this section. All MCA written exams administered by Qualifications Scotland in their current format will cease from April 2028.

HNC/HND OOW Candidates who started before September 2025

Qualification route	**Availability**
Qualifications Scotland Written Exam	Until April 2028
MCA Digital Assessment Only (upon completion of a modernised curriculum preparation course)	April 2028 onwards

FD OOW Candidate who started before September 2025

Qualification route	**Availability**
Qualifications Scotland Written Exam	N/A
MCA Digital Assessment Only (upon completion of a modernised curriculum preparation course)	September 2029 onwards

Chief Mate Candidates who started before September 2025/August 2026, depending on college

Qualification route	**Availability**
Qualifications Scotland Written Exam	Until April 2028
MCA Digital Assessment Only (upon completion of a modernised curriculum preparation course)	April 2028 onwards

2.3.1 OOW Unlimited

If you started your OOW Unlimited course before September 2025 and are working towards an Operational Level academic qualification (such as an HNC/Cert HE/Advanced Certificate qualification), you will continue on the same course and undertake the MCA OOW written Safety Examinations for Navigation and Stability, administered by Qualifications Scotland.

If you started your OOW Unlimited course before September 2025 and are working towards a Deck SPD, Foundation Degree or Degree level qualification you will still be eligible for an exemption from the MCA OOW written safety examinations for Navigation and Stability, administered by Qualifications Scotland, until September 2029.

All MCA written exams administered by Qualifications Scotland in their current format will cease from April 2028. If you have not passed the MCA OOW written Safety Examinations for Navigation and Stability prior to this date, you will need to complete a “modernised curriculum preparation course” and pass the MCA Deck Operational Level Digital Assessment.

2.3.2 Chief Mate Unlimited top up qualifications

If you started your Chief Mate Unlimited course before your college introduced the updated Chief Mate syllabus (which may have been from September 2025 or August 2026, depending on the college) and are working towards a Management Level academic qualification (such as SPD, HND, Dip HE, Advanced Diploma, Foundation Degree, or Honours Degree), you will continue the same course and undertake the MCA Chief Mate/Master’s Safety Examinations in Navigation and Stability, administered by Qualifications Scotland.

All MCA written exams administered by Qualifications Scotland in their current format will cease from April 2028. If you have not passed your Chief Mate/Master’s Safety Examinations in Navigation and Stability prior to this date, you will need to complete a “modernised curriculum preparation course” and pass the MCA Deck Management Level Digital Assessment.

3. Engineering qualifications

All qualifications listed in this section must have been completed at an MCA-approved college as part of an MCA-approved engineering programme, as per Annex D of MSN 1857 (M+F) - Amendment 1 - UK Requirements for Engineer Officers and Engineer Operators.

This section only focuses on the following requirements from MSN 1857 Amendment 1:

- The approved education and training programme meeting the standards of competency specified in section A-III/1 and A-III/2 of the STCW Code as listed in section 7 of the MSN.
- The Engineering Knowledge assessment requirements

All other requirements in MSN 1857 Amendment 1 must be met prior to the issuance of the corresponding CoC.

3.1 Summary of Engineering Changes

This section aims to provide a quick overview of the changes.

3.1.1 Engineer Officer Of the Watch (EOOW) Unlimited

From August 2025: all new EOOW Cadet starters will follow the modernised syllabus and must pass:

- the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – General – Operational Level STCW Reg. III/1, and;
- **either**; the MCA Digital Assessment; Engineering Knowledge – Motor – Operational Level STCW Reg. III/1;
- **or**; the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – Steam – Operational Level STCW Reg. III/1;
- **or**; both assessments if you are a combined candidate

Throughout the rest of this MIN, these will be referred to as “the relevant MCA Engineering Operational Level Digital Assessments”.

If you started your Operational Level academic qualification before August 2025 you will continue to take the written MCA EOOW Professional Engineering Knowledge examinations until April 2028 when these exams will cease.

Exemptions: Those enrolled on an MCA approved Marine Engineering Foundation Degree, Scottish Professional Diploma (SPD) or Degree qualification before August 2025, will continue to be exempt from the written MCA EOOW Professional Engineering Knowledge examinations until September 2029.

If you plan to follow **an experienced seafarer or alternative route and enrol before the 30 June 2026, or were issued an LIA/ Action Plan before 31 August 2026,** you will continue to use the existing routes. For experienced seafarers please refer to MSN 1857 Amendment 1 and for alternative route(s) please refer to MIN 511 (M) - Amendment 1 - Alternative Route for an Engineer Officer of the Watch (EOOW) Unlimited Certificate of Competency.

The required modules and examinations for the existing routes will be available until April 2028. After this date, you must complete the corresponding modernised modules and assessments.

From the 1 September 2026, colleges and universities will be able to start issuing action plans based against the modernised syllabus.

More information on these changes can be found in sections 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

3.1.2 Second Engineer Unlimited

If you currently hold an Operational Level academic qualification:

From August 2027, anyone progressing to a Management Level CoC, while holding an Operational Level academic qualification, must complete the modernised Management Level top-up syllabus.

When you complete the modernised syllabus, you will be required to pass:

- the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – General – Management Level STCW Reg. III/2, and;
- **either;** the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – Motor – Management Level STCW Reg. III/2
- **or;** MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – Steam – Management Level STCW Reg. III/2
- **or;** both assessments, if you are a combined candidate

Throughout the rest of this MIN, these will be referred to as “the relevant MCA Engineering Management Level Digital Assessments”.

More information on these changes can be found in section 3.2.3.

If you already hold a Management Level academic qualification:

If you started your management level academic qualification before your college introduced the modernised Management Level syllabus (from August 2027), you will be able to choose between taking the written MCA Second Engineer/Management Professional Engineering Knowledge examinations, or the modernised management level top-up course, until April 2028 when the written exams cease.

If you have partially completed modules from the historic qualification or failed to achieve the MCA pass mark, then you will be required to undertake an assessment against the modernised module(s) to achieve education and training at management level. This will be available until April 2033 and after that date you will have to undertake the complete Management Level top-up course.

More information on these changes can be found in section 3.3.3.

3.2 If you have not yet started a course

3.2.1 EOOW Unlimited Cadetships

From August 2025, if you commence an EOOW Cadetship (not the experienced seafarer or alternative route) you will follow the modernised MCA syllabus.

When you complete the modernised syllabus, you will be required to pass:

- the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – General – Operational Level STCW Reg. III/1, and
- **either;** the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – Motor – Operational Level STCW Reg. III/1
- **or;** the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – Steam – Operational Level STCW Reg. III/1
- **or;** both assessments, if you are a combined candidate

Throughout the rest of this MIN, these will be referred to as "the relevant MCA Engineering Operational Level Digital Assessments".

These aim to ensure that seafarers are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to safely maintain and operate vessels. In addition, the modernised syllabus will help develop skills that make candidates more attractive for employment, by providing the latest skills needed to maintain and operate ships along with preparing them for newer technologies.

When you progress to a Management Level CoC, you will need to pass:

- the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – General – Management Level STCW Reg. III/2, and;
- **either;** the MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – Motor – Management Level STCW Reg. III/2;
- **or;** MCA Digital Assessment: Engineering Knowledge – Steam – Management Level STCW Reg. III/2
- **or;** both assessments, if you are a combined candidate

Throughout the rest of this MIN, these will be referred to as "the relevant MCA Engineering Management Level Digital Assessments".

These assessments have been updated and aligned with the modernised syllabus. They will replace the existing written exams and continue to focus on core competency requirements of critical engineering knowledge and its application, incorporating modern methods of assessment.

The new assessment format will be available from May 2027 for Operational Level and October 2027 for Management Level, with assessments taking place according to the applicable programme.

3.2.2 Experienced Seafarer Route and Alternative Routes to EOOW Unlimited

If you are an experienced seafarer entering the system from 1st September 2026, you will follow the LIA/ Action Plan issued referencing the modernised syllabus. You will work towards a recognised HNC/Cert HE/Advanced Certificate qualification. This will be required to demonstrate the underpinning knowledge of an EOOW CoC. Exemptions from modules and assessments will be available in line with the process set out in MSN 1857 Amendment 1, section 3.

If you enter via the alternative route (e.g. Graduates or those that have completed 'Higher or Degree' Apprenticeships) from 1st January 2027, will be issued a new action plan by your college setting out the modernised modules and/or assessments you will need to complete to fulfil the education and training requirements for the underpinning knowledge required for the issuance of a CoC.

All MCA written exams in their current format will cease from April 2028. If you have not passed your MCA EOOW written Operational Engineering Knowledge Exams prior to this date, you will need to complete a "modernised curriculum preparation course" and pass the relevant MCA Engineering Operational Level Digital Assessments.

If you start either of these routes before 1 September 2026, please refer to section 3.3.2.

3.2.3 Second Engineer Unlimited top up qualifications

From August 2027, if you hold an EOOW CoC but still need to complete the management level academic qualification required for a Second Engineer Unlimited CoC, commonly referred to as HND/Dip HE/Advanced Diploma 'top up', you will be required to follow the modernised Management Level syllabus.

This route is only if you qualified with an Operational Level academic qualification, such as an HNC/Cert HE/Advanced Certificate qualification or if you followed the experienced seafarer route, starting before 1st September 2026.

If you undertake the modernised Management Level top up qualification, you will be required to pass the relevant MCA Engineering Management Level Digital Assessments.

These assessments have been updated and aligned with the modernised syllabus. They will replace the existing written exams and continue core competency requirements of critical engineering knowledge and its application, incorporating modern methods of assessment.

HND/Foundation Degree or Advanced Diploma partial completions:
If you have partially completed modules from the historic qualification or failed to achieve the MCA pass mark, then you will be required to undertake an assessment against the modernised module(s) to achieve education and training at management level. This must be completed by April 2033. You may have the option to move to the modernised syllabus at the discretion of your training provider.

MCA academic subject examinations conducted by Qualification Scotland partial completions:
If you have partially completed modules from the historic qualification or failed to achieve the MCA pass mark, then you will be required to undertake an assessment against the modernised module(s) to achieve education and training at management level. This must be completed by April 2033. You may have the option to move to the modernised syllabus at the discretion of your training provider.

Full HND/Foundation Degree/Advanced Diploma academic exemptions:
Academic exemptions are valid for the lifetime of a candidate subject to proof of passes in relevant subjects.

The new assessment format will be available from October 2027 with assessments taking place according to the applicable programme.

If you are a new starter to this route before August 2027, please refer to section 3.3.3.

3.3 If you are currently in the system

These tables summarise the options described throughout this section. All MCA written exams administered by Qualifications Scotland in their current format will cease from April 2028.

HNC/HND EOOW candidates who started before September 2025

Qualification route	Availability
IAMI Written Exam	Until April 2028
MCA Digital Assessment Only (upon completion of a modernised curriculum preparation course)	April 2028 onwards

FD OOW Candidate who started before September 2025

Qualification route	Availability
IAMI Written Exam	N/A
MCA Digital Assessment Only (upon completion of a modernised curriculum preparation course)	April 2028 onwards

Management level academic candidates who start before August 2027

Assessment type	Availability
Qualifications Scotland Written Exam	Until April 2028
College assessed module(s)	From September 2026
MCA Digital Assessment Only (upon completion of a modernised curriculum preparation course)	August 2027 onwards

Management level engineering knowledge candidates who start before August 2027

Assessment type	Availability
Qualifications Scotland Written Exam	Until April 2028
MCA Digital Assessment Only (upon completion of a modernised curriculum preparation course)	August 2028 onwards

Management level engineering knowledge candidates who start after August 2027

Assessment type	Availability
Qualifications Scotland Written Exam or Modernised MCA Digital Assessment	Until April 2028
MCA Digital Assessment Only (upon completion of a modernised curriculum preparation course)	August 2028 onwards

3.3.1 EOOW Unlimited Cadetships

If you started your EOOW Unlimited Cadetship before September 2025 and are working towards an operational level academic qualification (such as an HNC/Cert HE/Advanced Certificate qualification) you will continue the same course and take the MCA EOOW written Operational Engineering Knowledge Exams.

If you started your EOOW Unlimited course before September 2025 and are working towards a Foundation Degree or Degree level qualification you will still be eligible for an exemption from the MCA EOOW written Operational Engineering Knowledge Exams, until April 2028.

All MCA written exams in their current format will cease from April 2028. If you have not passed your MCA EOOW written Operational Engineering Knowledge Exams before this date, you will need to complete a "modernised curriculum preparation course" and pass the relevant MCA Engineering Operational Level Digital Assessments.

3.3.2 Experienced Seafarer Route and Alternative Routes to EOOW Unlimited

If your LIA/ Action Plan was issued prior to 1 September 2026 you may continue to utilise the existing routes:

- Experienced Seafarers - MSN 1857 Amendment 1 section 7.6

- Alternative Route (graduates, higher level apprenticeships, industrial experience) - MIN 511 Amendment 1

All MCA written exams in their current format will cease from April 2028. If you have not passed your MCA EOOW written Operational Engineering Knowledge Exams prior to this date, you will need to resubmit for a new LIA/ Action Plan and complete a "modernised curriculum preparation course" and pass the relevant MCA Engineering Operational Level Digital Assessments.

3.3.3 Second Engineer Unlimited top up qualifications

If you commenced your Second Engineer Unlimited top up course before your college introduces the updated Management Level syllabus (expected August 2027) and are working towards a management level academic qualification (such as SPD, HND, Dip HE, Advanced Diploma, Foundation Degree, or Honours Degree) you will continue the same course and undertake the written MCA Management level Engineering Knowledge Exams up until April 2028.

All MCA written exams in their current format will cease from April 2028. If you have not passed your MCA Management level Engineering Knowledge Exams prior to this date, you will need to complete a "modernised curriculum preparation course" and pass the relevant MCA Engineering Management Level Digital Assessments.

4. Electro-Technical Officers (ETOs)

All qualifications listed in this section must have been completed at an MCA-approved college as part of an MCA-approved ETO programme, as per Annex B of MSN 1860 (M) - Amendment 1 - UK Requirements For Electro-technical Officers.

This section only focuses on the following requirement from MSN 1860 Amendment 1:

- The approved education and training programme meeting the standards of competency specified in section A-III/6 of the STCW Code as listed in section 8 of the MSN.

All other requirements in MSN 1860 Amendment 1 must be met prior to the issuance of the corresponding CoC.

4.1 Summary of ETO changes

This section aims to provide a quick overview of the upcoming changes:

- From August 2025, all new ETO Cadet course starters will follow a revised syllabus. New entrants from this date will also be required to undertake the new MCA Digital Assessment: Electrical Knowledge – Operational Level STCW Reg. III/6 (the MCA Operational Level Electrical Knowledge Digital Assessment).

- A separate MIN will be produced outlining the alternative routes for experienced seafarers, graduates, 'Higher and Degree' apprenticeships, and apprenticeships with appropriate industrial experience.

4.2 ETO qualifications

Starting from August 2025, if you commence an ETO Cadetship (not experienced seafarers or alternative routes) you will follow the updated MCA syllabus and be required to pass the MCA Operational Level Electrical Knowledge Digital Assessment.

These aim to ensure that seafarers are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to safely maintain and operate vessels. In addition, the modernised syllabus will help develop skills that make candidates more attractive for employment by providing the latest skills needed to maintain and operate ships and preparing them for newer technologies.

If you started your ETO Cadetship before September 2025 you will still be eligible for an exemption from the MCA Operational Level Electrical Knowledge Digital Assessment, until September 2029.

4.3 Experienced Seafarer Route and Alternative Route to ETO

If you entered the system before July 2027 you may continue to utilise the existing routes set out in MSN 1860 Amendment 1.

If you are an experienced seafarer or alternative route applicant entering the system from July 2027, you will undertake the updated route. Experienced seafarers will work towards a recognised HNC/Cert HE/National Diploma qualification. This will be required to demonstrate the underpinning knowledge of an ETO CoC. Both routes will need to complete the MCA Operational Level Electrical Knowledge Digital Assessment for the ETO CoC, which will be available from March 2028.

A new MIN will be published outlining new proposed routes that will expand entry into this qualification, allowing those with relevant shore-based or onboard experience to join the ETO programme. If you are interested in this route, please email ctandm.admin@mcga.gov.uk for further guidance.

More information

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