

Annex 3

Issue Three:

The customer service
provided to candidates
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1. Possible Solution(s)

- i. To create centres of excellence for different syllabuses for the conduct of oral examinations with dedicated examiners at each location. The location to be determined by the accessibility of the key maritime training centres.
- ii. To offer a service for examiners from the centres of excellence to visit maritime training colleges to conduct oral examinations.
- iii. To provide written feedback sheet/checklist for the candidates who fail the oral examination that is discussed with them immediately following the examination.
- iv. To provide an electronic system in addition to the existing telephone system to enable oral examinations to be booked and confirmed on-line.
- v. To enable the candidate to arrange a re-sit appointment and issue of a new Notice of Eligibility (NoE) with the Marine Office immediately after the failed oral examination.
- vi. To provide dates for the provision of oral examinations in advance in liaison with the colleges to ensure optimum timings to fit in with the course delivery.
- vii. To use the information on the feedback sheets to help analyse the performance of the candidates, the colleges and the examiners and investigate variances.
- viii. To develop the MCA website to provide additional information and guidance for the oral examinations.
- ix. To consider offering the option of charging separate fees for the issue of the NoE and the actual oral examination.
- x. To consider offering the option of charging fees relevant to the level of the oral examination and the estimated time for each.
- xi. To consider offering the candidate the option of additional courier costs on request rather than including them automatically in the fee.
- xii. To consider including in the development of the new Seafarers Record System the option of scanning in the candidates photograph and signature of the candidate in one process and of generating self addresses labels.
- xiii. To consider in the development of the new Seafarers Record System the option of each candidate having one unique number for each and every documentation and application.

Benefits:

- i. Ensures consistency and fairness of approach for all oral examinations; focuses training and review on the dedicated examiners; option to bring in additional examiners to ensure demand is able to be met; more efficient and effective service would be able to be provided.
- ii. Widens the choice for candidates and provides an option of taking the examination in a location familiar for them whilst still under MCA control.
- iii. Ensures the candidates have a full understanding of the weak areas highlighted and enable the maritime training colleges to take the comments into consideration in the delivery of their training courses.
- iv. Ensures the candidate and/or the maritime training colleges have more flexibility as to how they book their examinations.
- v. Improved customer service and increased flexibility for the candidate; MCA headquarters computer system would need to be accessible by the Marine Offices.
- vi. Candidates would know in advance at what stage they would take their examination and it would become an integral part of the written and oral examination process.
- vii. Ensure that any trends or concerns would be able to be addressed and rectified as a priority to maintain the delivery of a consistent services; provides a further check on the delivery of the maritime training providers and enhances the partnerships with the colleges; enables demographics to be taken into account.
- viii. Ensures the candidate has some sound advice rather than using the unofficial websites that are available.
- ix. Provides the candidate with the option of paying as they go. The NoE is valid for 5 years so it is possible that the MCA may hold the full fee for up to five years. Paying a separate fee would avoid this problem.
- x. Candidates would pay for the service provided and not subsidise those who have a shorter examination.
- xi. Reduced costs for some candidates but high risk of original documents not being received safely.
- xii. Increased efficiency for the MCA teams preparing NoEs and writing the envelopes each day; secure computer generated labels would assist the post office and couriers in reading of the candidate's address.
- xiii. Increased continuity of Seafarer system. Having one unique number for each Seafarer will ensure that individual's can be tracked and a history can be put together. The seafarer will have one unique number for all their examinations and tickets.

3. Benchmark:

3.1 Driving Standards Agency (DSA) ~ DSA have a number of procedures in place, through guidance and work instructions, which ensures that the standard of driving tests throughout the United Kingdom is conducted in a consistent and fair manner.

DSA introduced the touch screen theory test in 2000 which was later available to book (2001) on-line. The hazard perception section of the theory test was added in 2002. Theory tests are available at dedicated venues and these differ from the practical test centres. Candidates have been able to book their practical test on line since October 2003. This ensures that the candidate has different booking options that suit their individual needs.

The DSA website contains information that can be downloaded which will help the candidate pass his/her Theory and Practical Tests such as the local test routes for individual test centres along the "Show Me, Tell Me" questions required for the practical test.

Feedback is provided to the candidate at the end of the test in the form of a checklist and verbally, if the candidate wishes.

3.2 Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) ~ The guidance given to examiners refers to the conduct of the oral exam and how the exam should be structured. For example, the deck oral exams are to follow a voyage approach – arrival at ship, proceed to sea (with appropriate emergencies developing) and concluded by when the ship returns to port. This structured approach ensures consistency throughout each exam and throughout each venue where the exam takes place. Different exam centres cater for different disciplines so the candidate can choose which centre they wish to have the exam.

Oral exams are conducted using the traditional method where the examiner asks questions randomly from the relevant syllabus topics. Examiners use their judgement based on technical content and an exam weighting system.

If the candidate fails the exam, the examiner gives feedback, verbally, indicating where they were weak and advise them when they can re-sit the exam (AMSA may also give feedback on areas in which the candidate are weak even though they have passed the exam overall).

As part of the internal guidance and Marine Qualification System, examiners must use checklists. The use of checklists standardises the coverage of oral examinations and helps to provide an integral part of its Quality Management System. A checklist is completed for every examination irrespective of whether the candidate passes or fails. Candidates do not receive a copy of the checklist but can request a copy by applying under the Freedom of Information Act.

The fees for an oral exam are separated so that the candidates pay as they go through the process as well as having the option for a courier to deliver documents. The fee is the same for each discipline:

Activity	Charge \$Aus	Sterling £ Conversion (Rate - 0.4190)
Assessment of application/sea service/qualifications	185	77.53
Oral Examination for a Certificate of Competency	370	155.06
Initial issue of Certificate of Competency	127	53.22
Courier Fee (optional)	70	29.33

3.3 Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) ~ The MPA has one main centre that carries out oral examinations and this approach ensures that there is consistency throughout the oral exam process as examiners are assessing candidates on a daily basis.

Candidates are able to make provisional bookings via email, but they are required to visit the main centre to make payments. The candidate is made aware of their date for the oral exam within ten days. MPA are planning to upgrade their E application so that candidates are able to book oral exams on-line in the future.

The fees for oral examinations vary depending on discipline, class and whether the candidate is completing the simulation factor of the CoC:

Grade and Class	Charge \$ Singapore Dollar (Simulator & Oral)	Sterling £ Conversion (Rate - 0.3253)	Charge \$ Singapore Dollar (Oral Only)	Sterling £ Conversion (Rate - 0.3253)
Deck Officers Class 2 & 3	250	81.34	175	56.93
Deck Officers Class 1	300	97.60	175	56.93
Engineers Class 1 & 2	Simulator Included	Simulator Included	175	56.93
Engineer Class 5	Simulator included	Simulator Included	90	29.28

3.4. South African Maritime Authority (SAMSA) ~ There are two main ports where oral examinations take place. SAMSA operate a system by where they produce a Marine Notice that contains dates and venues for forthcoming examinations for CoCs. In this way they are able to spread resource throughout the two main centres and set aside allocated time to undertake the examinations.

The charging regime for the oral examinations is far more rigid than that of the MCA:

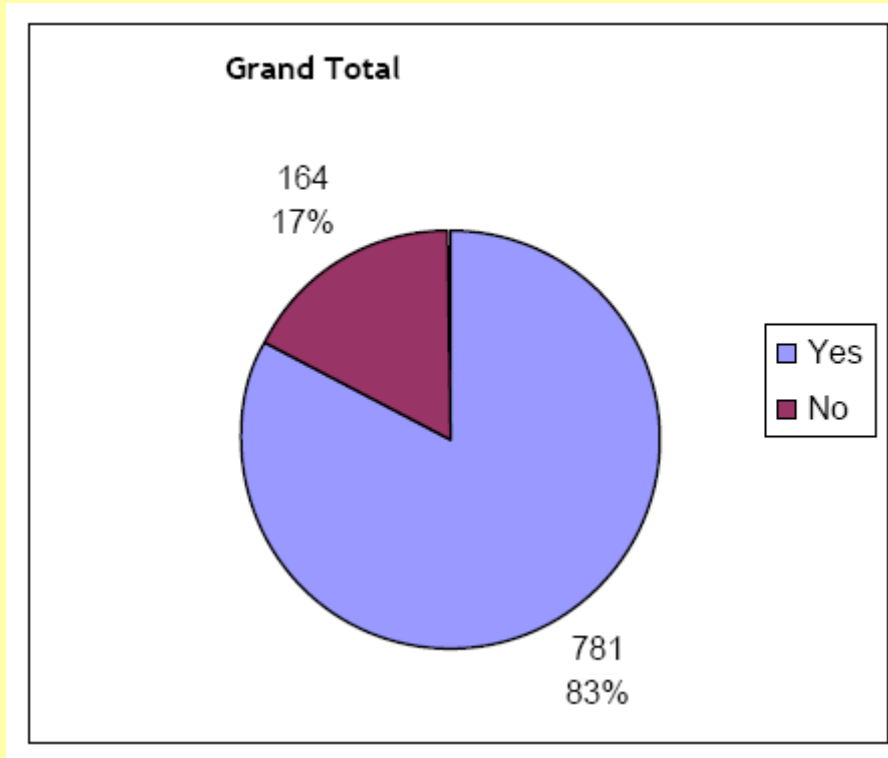
Certificates of Competency as a Fisherman or Marine Motorman		
Grade	Charge	UK Rate £
Fishermen Grade 4	R210	14.95
Fishermen Grade 3	R350	24.90
Fishermen Grade 2	R483	34.40
Fishermen High Seas Command	R483	34.40
Marine Motorman Grade 3	R142	10.10
Marine Motorman Grade 2	R210	14.95
Marine Motorman Grade 1	R350	24.90
Marine Motorman High Grade	R483	34.40

Certificates of Competency for Deck Officers				
Grade	Charge		UK Rate £	
	Full	Part	Full	Part
Skipper	R284	-	20.20	-
Mate	R420	-	29.90	-
Master	R483	-	34.40	-
Deck Officer	R550	-	39.15	-
Chief Mate	R700	-	49.85	-
Master unlimited	R1 108	-	78.90	-
Master Special Grade	R2 767	R1 380	197.00	98.25

Certificates of Competency for Engineer Officers				
Grade	Charge		UK Rate £	
	Full	Part	Full	Part
Second Engineer Officer/Marine Engineer Officer Class 4/Engineer Officer (STCW)	R550	R278	39.15	19.80
Chief Engineer/Marine Engineer Officer Class 3	R620	R310	44.15	22.05
Second Engineer Officer of Ship of 3000kW propulsion power or more/Second Engineer Officer of a ship less than 3000kW	R700	-	49.85	-
Chief Engineer Officer of Ship of 3000kW propulsion power or more/Chief Engineer Officer of a ship less than 3000kW	R1 108	-	78.90	-
Chief Engineer Officer Special Grade	R2 767	-	197.00	-

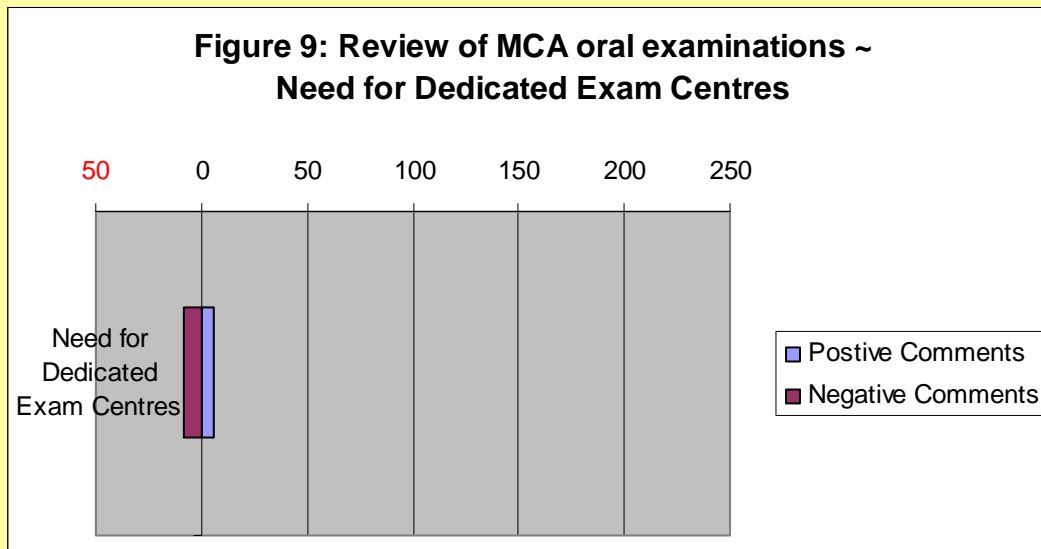
4. Data:

4.1. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 3 ~ To help ensure consistency would you support the provision of dedicated examination centres?



4.2. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 5.3% of the Consistency category.

There were 14 comments in this category grouping. 6 were in favour of a need for dedicated exam centres (2.3%) and 8 were in favour of leaving the number of exam centres as is (3.0%)



In favour

"Most of the orals should be carried out near centres of education where the concentration of studies is more"

"I believe that the MCA should introduce a rule stating that candidates who studied at a college must attend the MCA facility linked to that college"

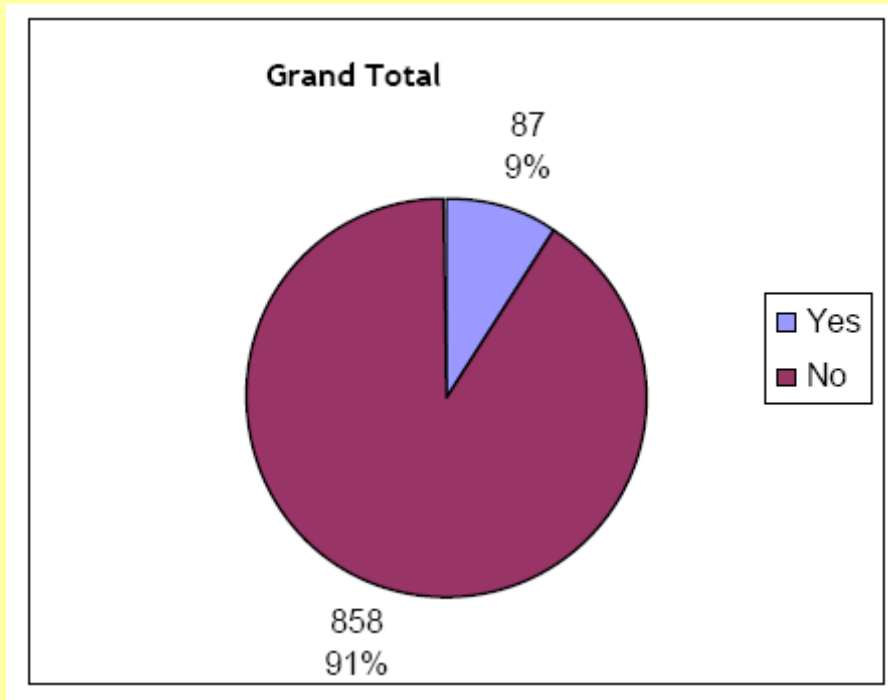
Against

"It is important that we keep a fair demographic spread of examination centres and this must be under the original strict examination criteria"

"Dedicated centres and isolated examiners will reduce the validity of the oral examination process. We currently call to book an appointment at our most convenient MCA office and show up on time"

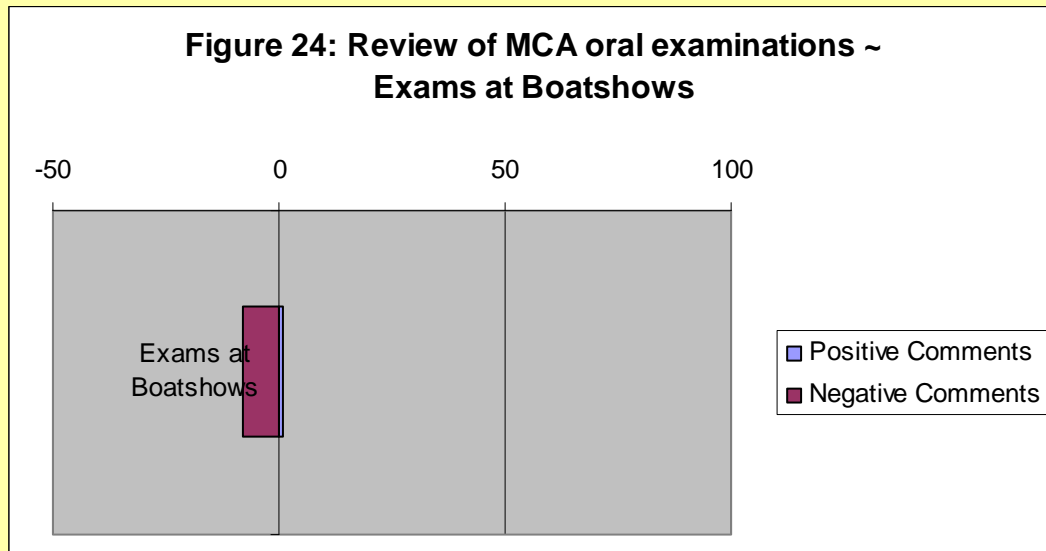
"I feel the oral examination procedures should be as flexible and convenient as possible, taking into account financial viability"

4.3. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 4 ~ Would you support the option of some oral examinations being conducted at boat shows or maritime events?



4.4. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 1.5% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 9 comments in this category grouping. 1 (11%) was in favour of having the option to hold oral exams at boat shows and events whilst 8 (89%) were against the idea.



In favour

"Exams held at marine events and boat shows would be ideal as a ship could be commandeered from the RFA or other suitable government agency for this purpose and the candidates would show better practical ability in what is a very hands on profession anyway"

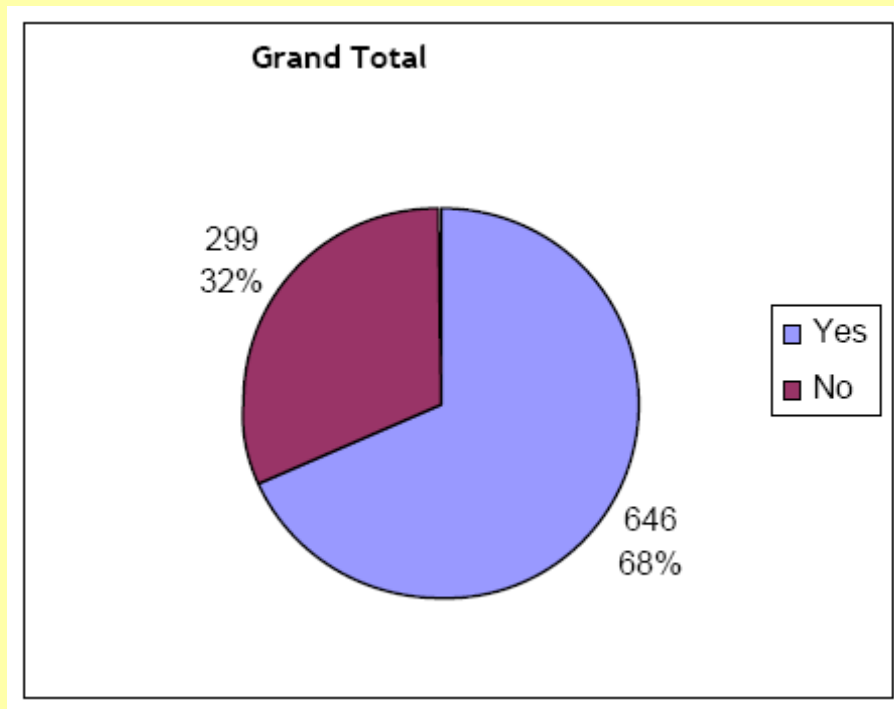
Against

"To conduct oral exams at boat shows or other marine events will do nothing less than demean the whole professionalism of the UK shipping industry"

"I believe that if they were to be held at boat shows, colleges, etc... then this would present extra distraction for the candidates"

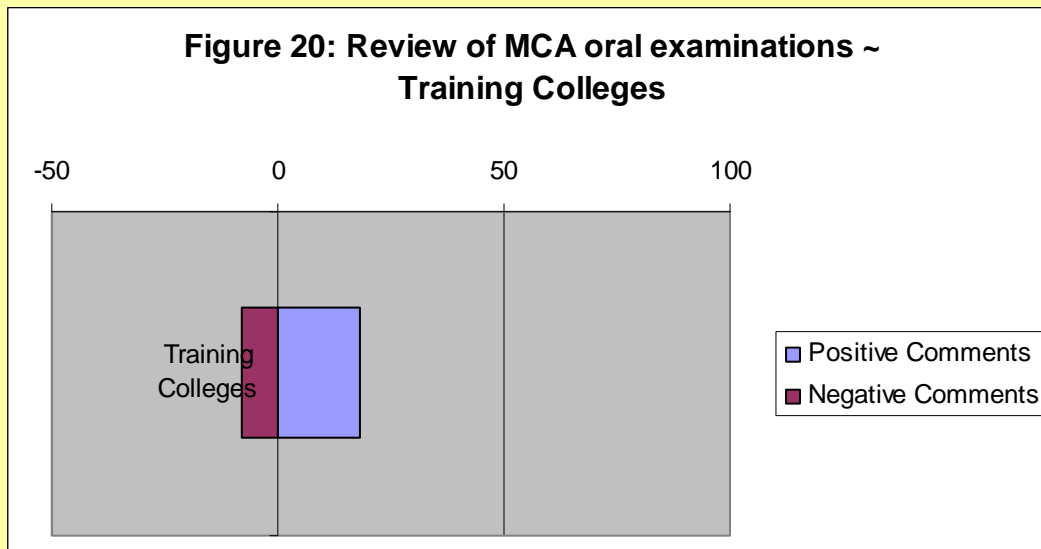
"These are meant to be questions for a professional qualification and the examinations should be carried out in a professional manner and proper venue"

4.5. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 5 ~ Would you support the option of some oral examinations being conducted at maritime colleges?



4.6. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 4.2% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 26 comments in this category grouping. 18 (69%) were in favour and 8 (31%) were against having exams at colleges.



In favour

"Major changes are not required to the current format although the facility to conduct examinations at colleges would be useful and some reduction in the number of MCA examination centres could be achieved in this manner"

"Maritime Colleges – familiarity, locations more overall understanding of their candidates competence. The final outcome is a certificate of competence after all"

"If examiners can come to college on certain dates and conduct examinations in the college premises"

Against

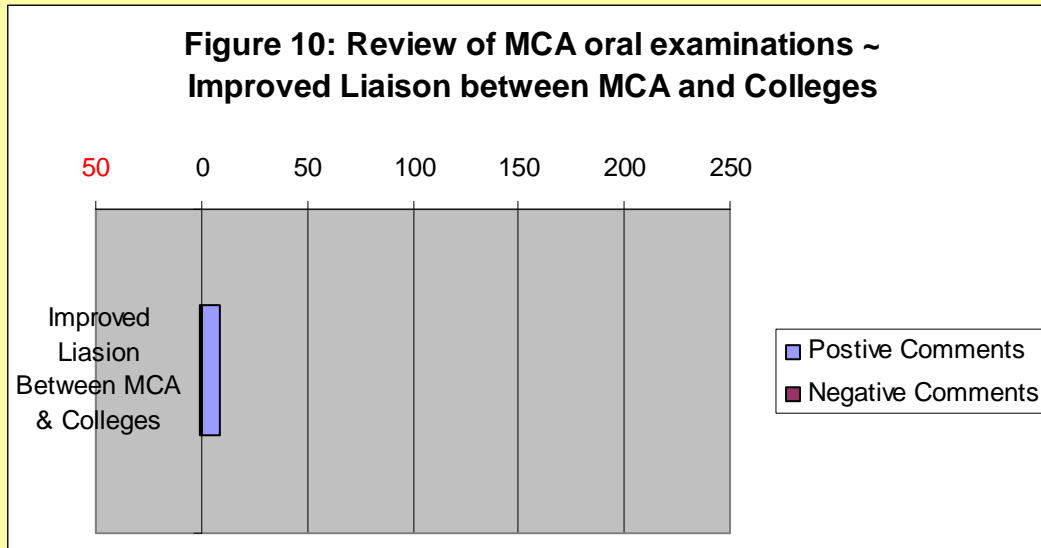
"Oral exams in colleges. I do not agree with this, as part of the experience of the oral is to be taken into a more serious environment"

"Maintain the separation between colleges and the oral exams"

"The possibility that these examinations could be undertaken within nautical colleges is one which we could not support. We consider that it is vital that the primary regulator should retain control of the examination process"

4.7. Additional comments were also received for liaison between MCA and Training and these represented 3.8% of the Consistency category.

There were 10 comments in this category grouping (3.8%). 9 were in favour of an improved liaison between MCA and training colleges (3.4%), whilst 1 comment made was against such liaison (0.4%).



In favour

"A group meeting on a regular basis with staff members of Training institutions will help address some areas"

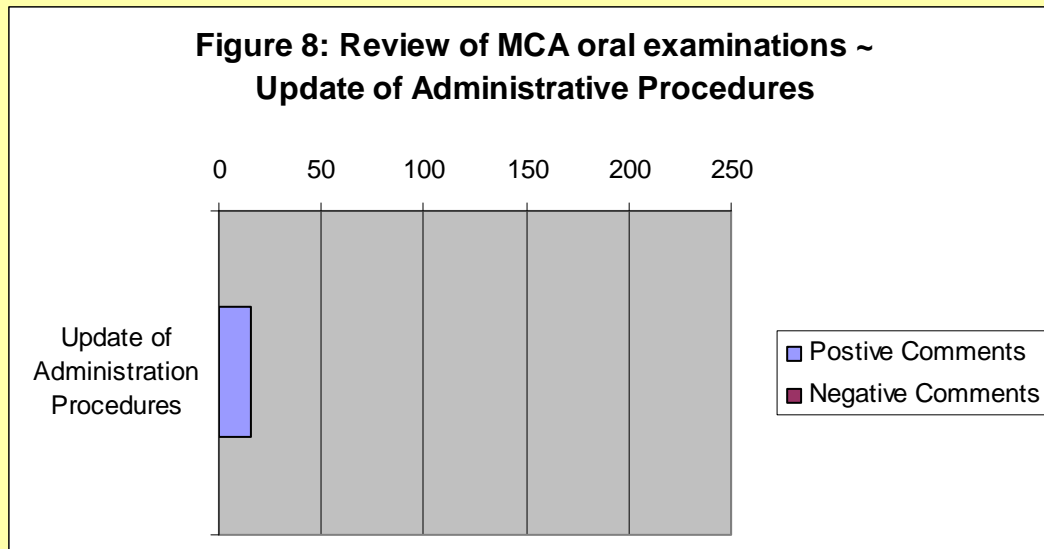
"This is an oral exam, if the colleges fail in their remit to cover the criteria what goes on failure in checking colleges"

Against

"The MCA should make every effort to retain its identity and independence from colleges"

4.8. Additional comments were also received for update of Administrative procedures and these represented 6.1% of the Consistency category.

There were 16 comments in this category grouping (6.1%). All were in favour of a need to update the administrative procedures.



In favour

"There should be provisions for a fast turn around of NoE issuance and oral examination dates under certain conditions, to tie in with shipping line pressures"

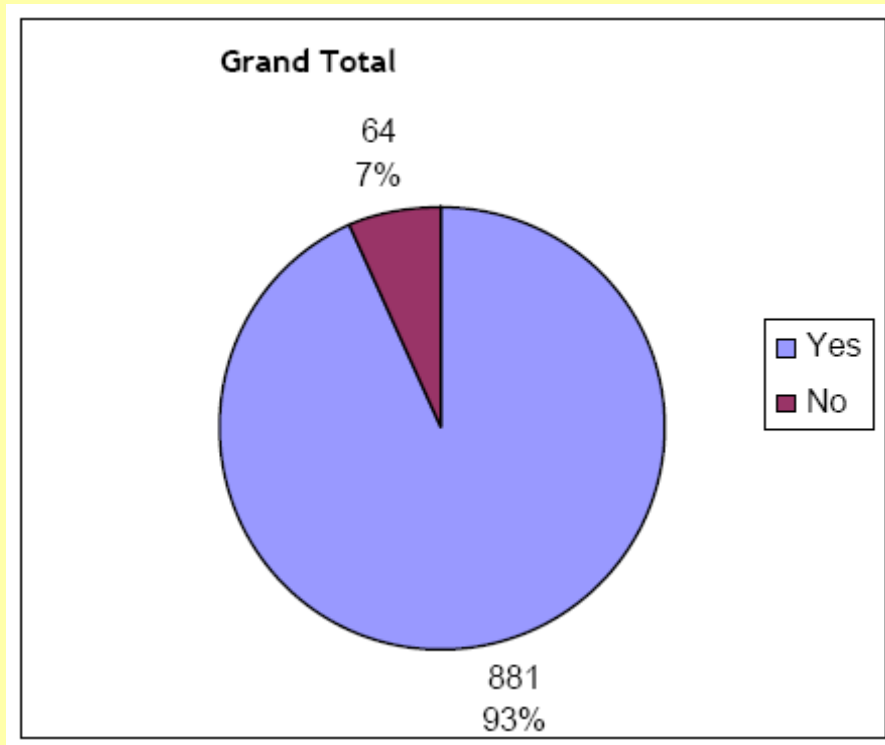
"Streamline of the time frame between application and examination"

"Quicker turnaround time from application to the sitting of the exam"

"Timescales for the issuing of NoE should also be looked at as should ways of contacting the MCA seafarer standards branch as this was always a huge issue often involving lengthy times on hold"

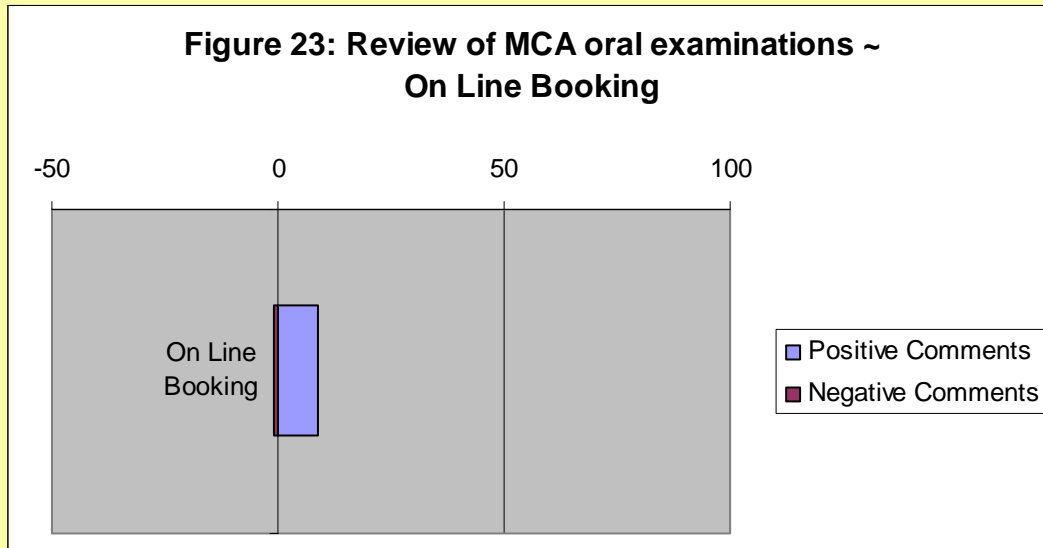
"When dealing with applications, why is that an individual only deal with surnames beginning with A-C, D-F etc..., if this individual goes away on leave then seafarers are left hanging for weeks before their application is dealt with"

4.9. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 6 ~ Should the MCA consider introducing an on-line booking system for oral examinations?



4.10. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 1.63% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 10 comments in this category grouping. 9 (90%) were in favour of having on-line booking facilities whilst 1 (10%) was against.



In favour

"Telephone communications is at best difficult and slow with the MCA so any electronic means of booking/changing dates or venues is to be welcomed"

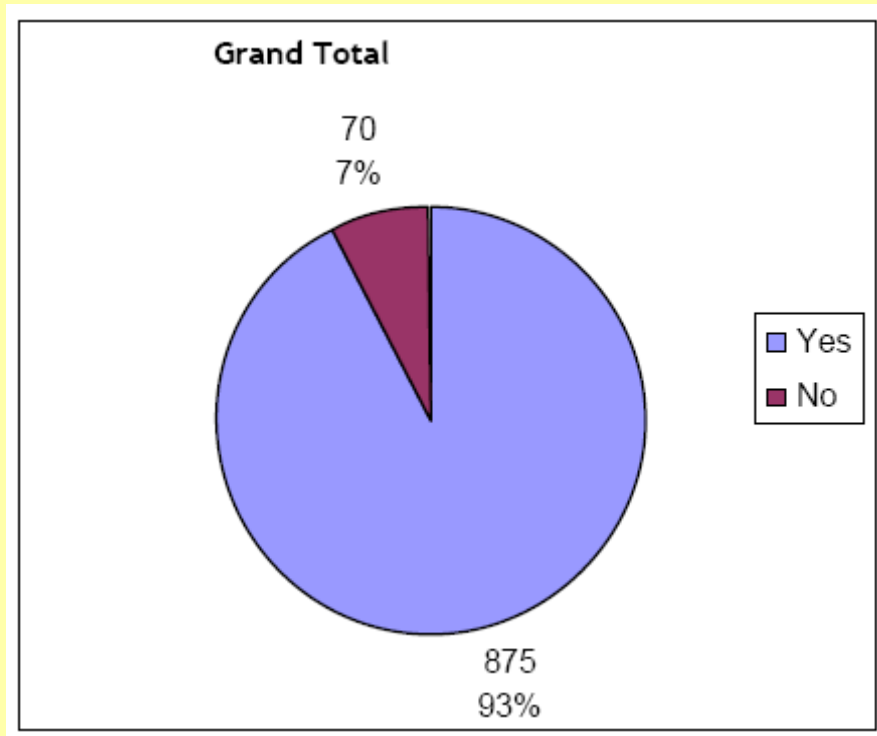
"Moving with the times is important and introducing on-line booking and things of the like will certainly make the system run more efficiently, reduce workload of MCA staff"

"Online booking of oral examination date is very good option and should be strongly considered"

Against

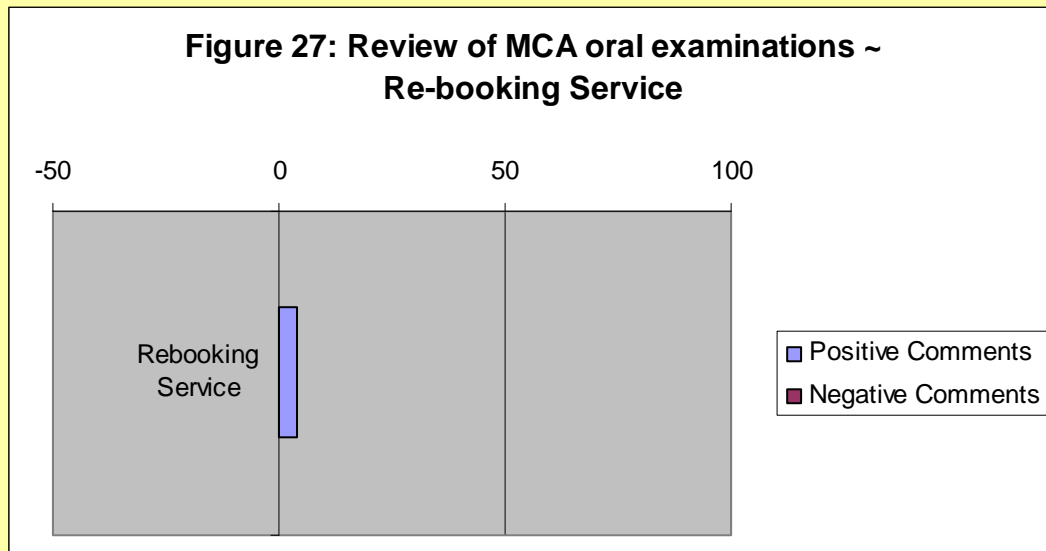
"The problem with on-line booking system is the possibility that individuals can misunderstand the requirements needed to obtain NoE or CoC, by having an individual look over this ensures that the applicant has understood the requirements for obtaining their CoC"

4.11. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 7 ~ Should the MCA consider introducing a re-booking system for oral examinations?



4.12. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 0.7% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 4 comments in this category grouping. 4 (100%) were in favour of having a rebooking system available for re-sits.

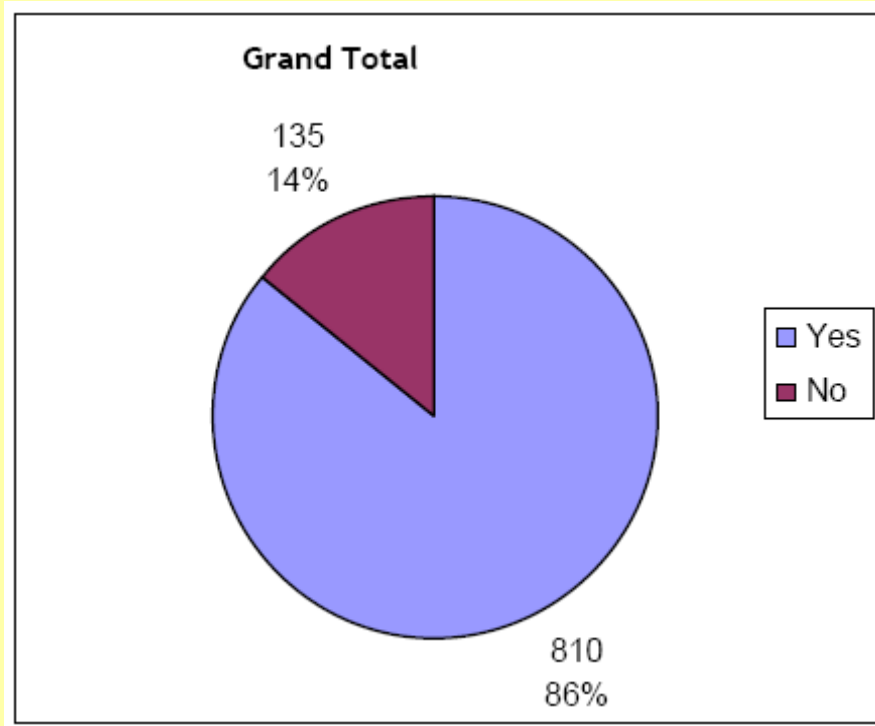


In favour

"If after failing an exam, the candidate has a chance of rebooking (priority given) rather than as a fresh booking it would be great"

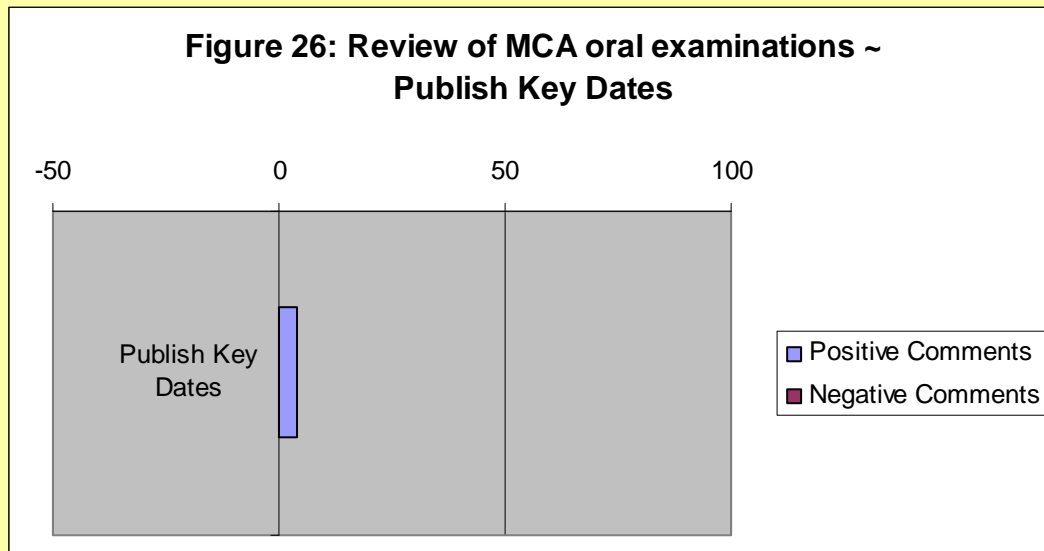
"Candidates who fail oral at a centre should have preference for booking his re-sit dates than the freshers"

4.13. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 8 ~ Should the MCA consider publishing key oral examination dates?



4.14. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 0.7% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 4 comments in this category grouping. 4 (100%) were in favour of having the MCA publish key dates for oral examinations.



In favour

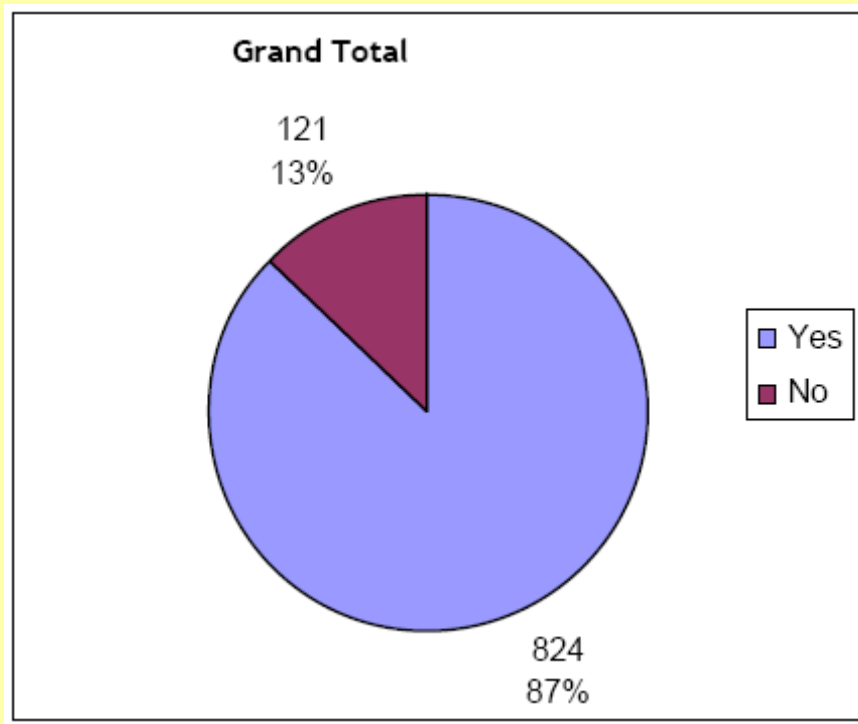
"More examination dates should be available when there are a large number of candidates booked for oral examinations"

"There should be provisions for a fast turn around of NoE issuance and oral examinations dates under certain conditions, to tie in with shipping line pressures"

"It is important that candidates know where and when they can sit their oral examination so that they can plan ahead around their leave periods"

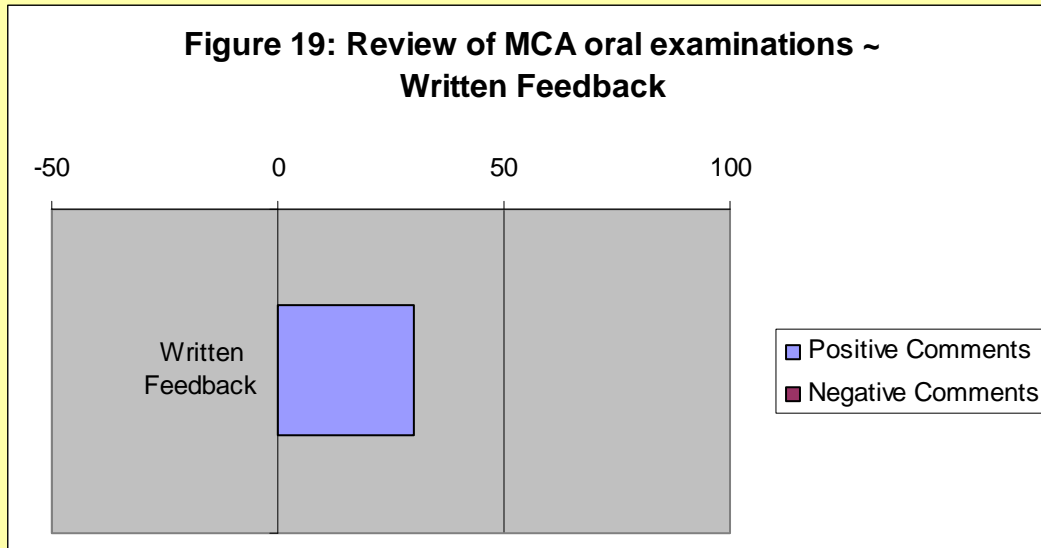
"It would enable candidates to plan ahead"

4.15. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 9 ~ Should written feedback (in the form of a checklist) be provided to the candidate and the training providers?



4.16. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 4.9% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 30 comments in this category grouping. 30 (100%) were in favour of having some form of written feedback after the oral examination.



In favour

"The oral exam procedure must be seen to be fair, transparent and consistent and as such should be properly planned & documented, with written feedback and with two examiners present"

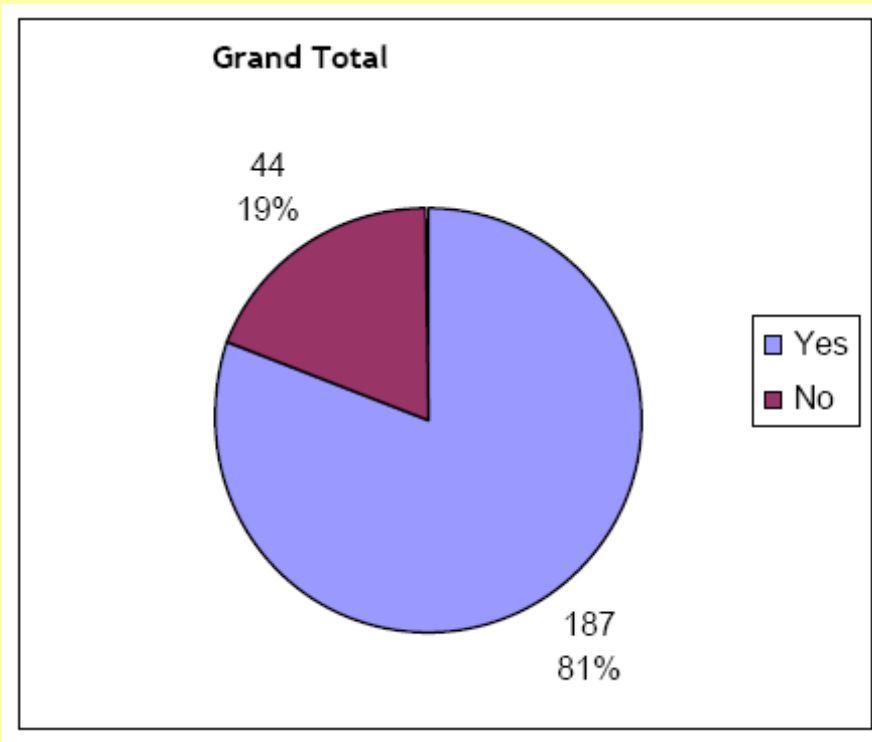
"I feel written feedback on the oral exam would be very advantageous to candidates, especially those who fail. With feedback candidates can make a concerted effort to improve their weak areas and continue to improve in their strongest areas"

"Lack of feedback is always a big issue in oral examinations at any level. Most candidates leave the exam confused as well as disappointed. A report similar to an appraisal form should be sent within a week or so of the exam with advice on how to improve"

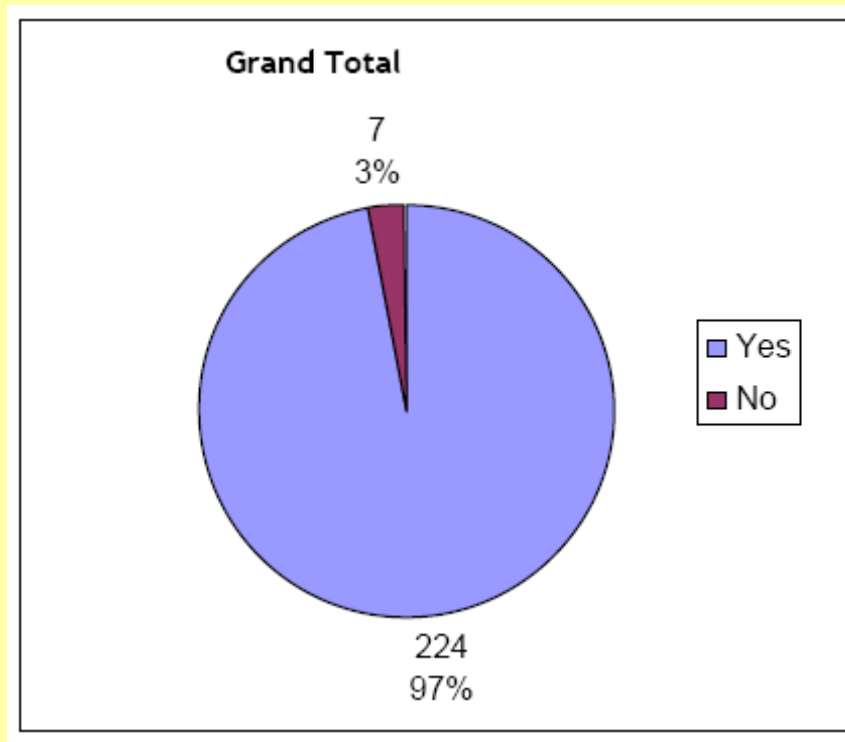
"Biggest improvements would be feedback (written) from examiner"

"Consistency is key, written feedback would help in maintaining consistency, especially where re-sits are conducted by a different examiner"

4.17. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 10 (candidates only) ~ Do you use the MCA website when looking for information and guidance about the oral examination?

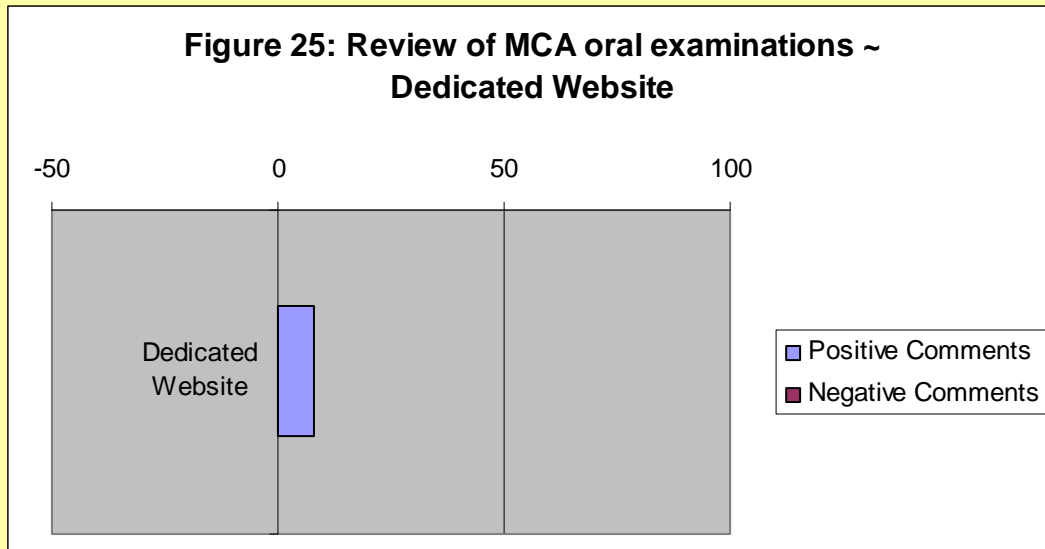


4.18. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 11 (candidates only) ~ If the MCA developed a dedicated website for all oral examination information and guidance, would you use it?



4.19. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 1.3% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 8 comments in this category grouping. 8 (100%) were in favour of having a dedicated website on oral examinations.



In favour

"The MCA website is difficult to use"

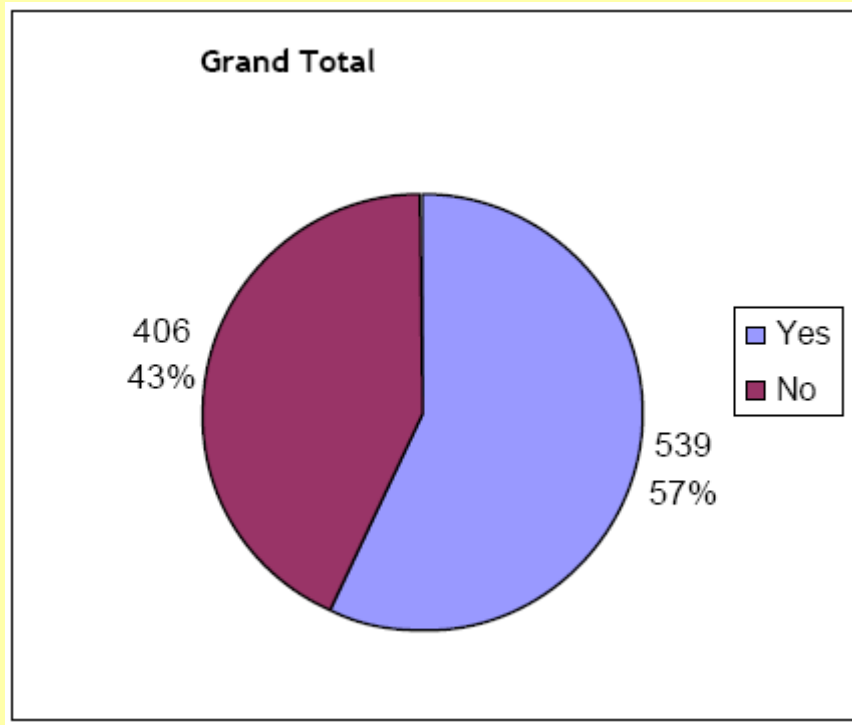
"Relevant information should be published nationally to promote interest in the industry as a whole in the UK"

"It should be easier to look up on the website what is compulsory to read in order to be properly prepared for the exam"

"Minor tweaks to better on-line information would be an advantage"

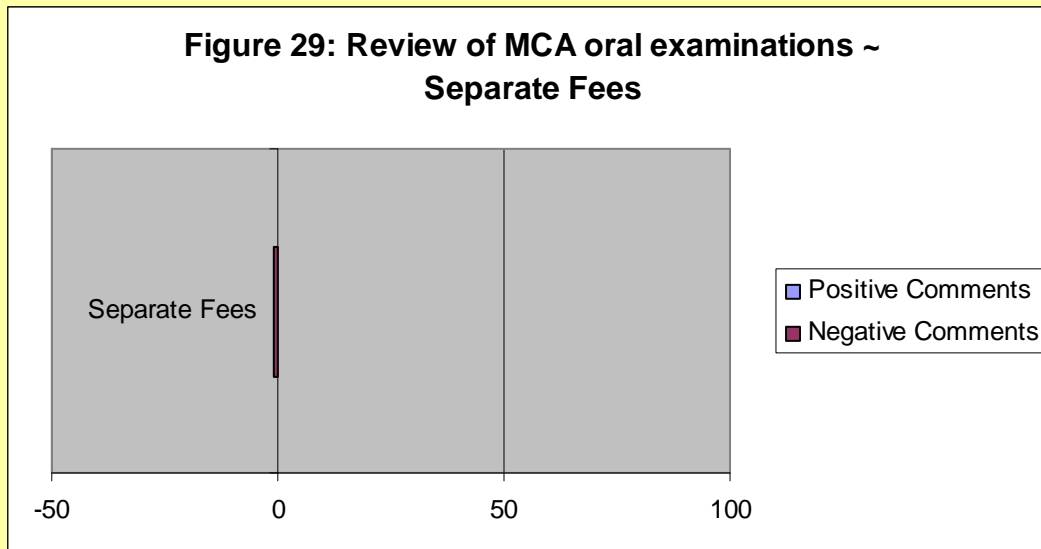
"Practice questions similar to Driving Theory publications should be available. Printed guidance about the procedure should be available"

4.20. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 12 (10 Stakeholders survey) ~ Should there be separate fees for each stage of the Certificate of Competency?



4.21. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 0.2% of the overall groupings of comments received.

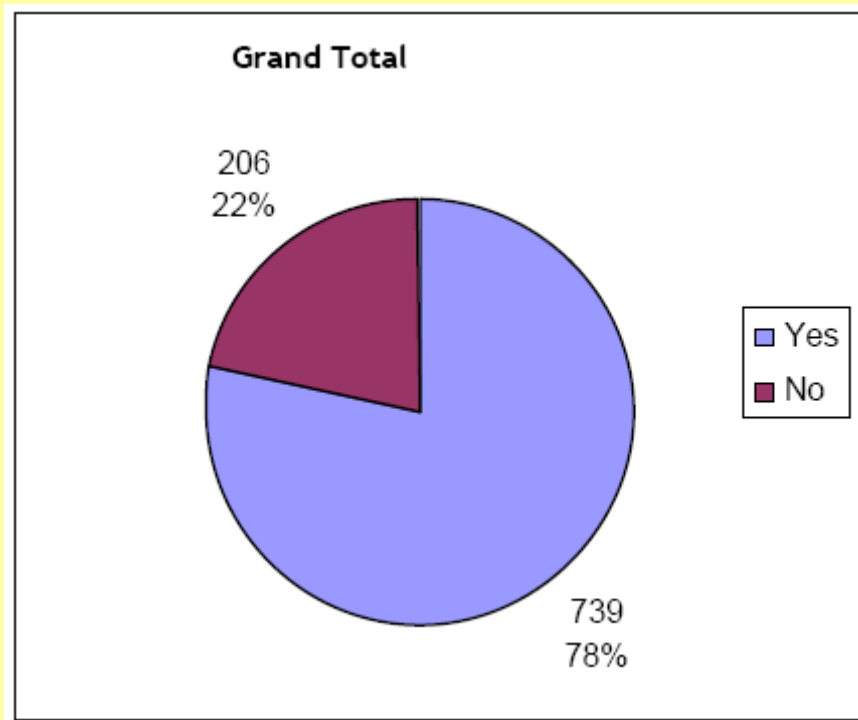
There was 1 comment in this category grouping. 1 (100%) was against having separate fees for the oral examination process.



Against

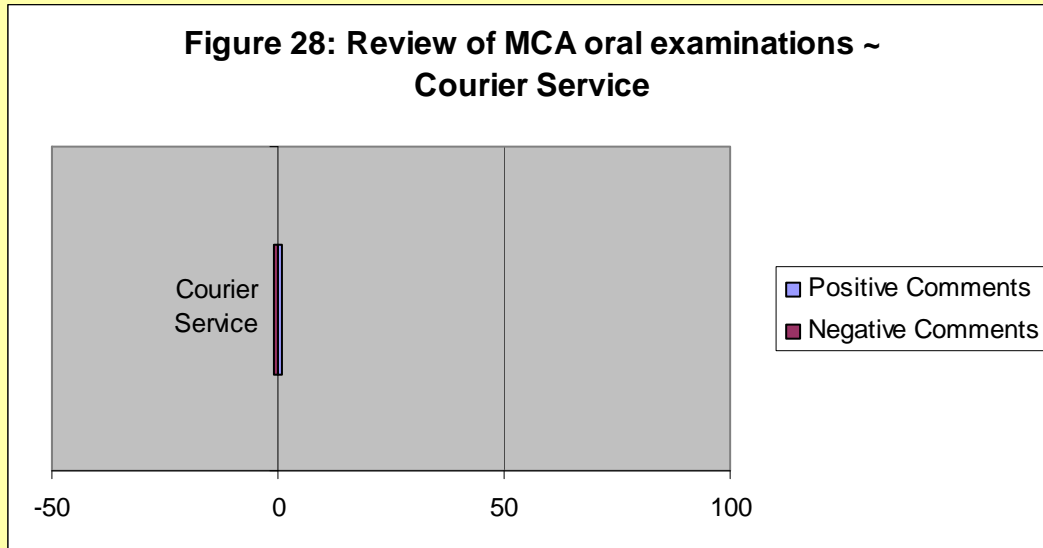
"Fees for CoC course should be fully paid at the start to prevent the worry of having to find extra funds when part of the way through"

4.22. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 13 (11 Stakeholders survey) ~ Should there be an option for a courier service at an additional charge?



4.23. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 0.3% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 2 comments in this category grouping. 1 (50%) was in favour of having a courier service option whilst 1 (50%) was against.



In favour

"Adding a courier fee gives the customer a greater satisfaction of security of their documents. There used to be a choice but documents were sometimes lost in the post"

Against

"The option of the "courier service" is not real in my experience. It may be a courier from the MCA but it is only a parcel delivery service when it gets north of Coventry"

5. Comments:

The process for the arrangement for the oral examination and the issue of the Certificate of Competency (CoC) to successful candidates is well established. A customer satisfaction survey regarding the service provided by the Training and Certification Branch of MCA was conducted on an ongoing basis since 2004 and in October 2007 there was an overall satisfaction of 90% for the service provided for the issue of a Notice of Eligibility (NoE) and CoC. There has not been a dedicated customer survey for oral examinations and the service offered that would be able to include finding out the locations that would be preferable to the training college or to the candidate.

Candidates are able to arrange a date and time for their oral examination by phone or in person with a Marine Office of their choice. The examination is conducted after the examiner has verified the NoE.

The examiner advises the candidate of the examination result immediately after the examination is concluded. Verbal feedback is offered to the candidate in the event of a fail but there is no formal written back process.

Candidates pay a full fee when the NoE (5 years validity) is applied for at the start of the process and this includes the oral examination and the issue of the CoC. The fee is the same regardless of the level of the oral examination and is based on an average of one hour of a surveyor's time.

There is a formal complaints procedure but no specific complaints or appeal procedure for the conduct of an oral examination. If a complaint did arise, it would be a difficult situation to assess because the oral examination is conducted on a one-to-one basis with no checklists or feedback sheets. It is perceived that if a candidate did complain they might face a tougher examination at the re-sit.

DSA provides the option of booking a theory and practical test via the internet and/or on the telephone and they undertake research into pass rates and carry out customer satisfaction surveys on a regular basis. The outcome of the driving test is well documented and the candidate is advised of the result after the test is complete. A formal written record of the result is provided to the candidate along with verbal feedback. The DSA provides a variety of information in various formats to assist with the preparation of the test. The DSA's website is user friendly and guidance on test routes and "Show me, tell me" questions can be downloaded. There are over 430 test centres located throughout the UK that cope with the demand for driving tests.

AMSA has nine oral examination centres specialising in different syllabuses and examiners complete a checklist and a weighting guidance is used for each examination. The results are given at the end of the examination and discussed with the candidate. Checklists are not available to the candidate to take away but may be provided under the Freedom of Information Act. AMSA requests fees payable before each stage of the certification process.

AMSA has a formal complaints procedure and comments are able to be made through several levels if they have not been fully addressed to the customer's satisfaction.

MPA only has one examination centre and provides a service for the candidates to request their oral examination on line. This is currently being upgraded to enable the candidate to actually book the oral examination on-line. The oral examination may only be booked after the simulation test has been taken and passed. The fees differ relating to the level of the examination. MPA does have a specific formal complaints and appeal procedure for oral examinations and these are made to the Director of Marine with recourse to the Minister if the response is not satisfactory to the customer.

SAMSA has two examination centres and they also charge a fee related to the level of examination. They publish their examination dates in advance and which venue they are to be held at. It is not known whether SAMSA has a complaints procedure, but it is understood that following a complaint that was upheld, a decision was taken to conduct oral examinations with two examiners.