

Annex 4

Issue Four:

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1. Possible Solution(s)

- i. To produce formalised guidance for the examiners to include: Code of Practice; master syllabus checklist; weighting answer system; MAIB Reports and feedback sheets.
- ii. To have teams of examiners in centres of excellence with each covering specified syllabuses.
- iii. Re-sit examinations to be conducted with a different examiner.
- iv. To continue with a one-to-one basis for the conduct of the oral examination with the candidate's expectation that an auditor or another nominated member of staff may sit in on the examination.
- v. To ask all candidates to prepare some related work whilst waiting for their oral examination such as risk assessment for a passage plan.
- vi. To consider introducing a computer based theory examination that must be passed before an oral examination may be conducted.
- vii. To consider introducing the use of ICT in the oral examination for tasks such as, collision avoidance behaviour, bridge equipment simulation and stability/loading programmes.
- viii. To consider introducing a simulator test that must be passed before an oral examination may be conducted.

Benefits

- i. Ensures fairness and consistency of approach and the guidance reminds examiners of the key elements for the conduct of the examinations.
- ii. Ensures fairness and consistency as the examiners will be focusing on a limited number of syllabuses and regularly conducting examinations; interview skills would be sharpened as oral examinations are conducted on a regular basis; potential for training to be conducted centrally at the specific locations.
- iii. Ensures fairness
- iv. Ensures consistency or approach provided the best practices and guidance is formalised and auditable; candidates aware in advance that there may be another person sitting in on their examination.
- v. Potential to relax candidates on arrival and the work is able to form part of the oral examination.
- vi. Ensures candidates have an acceptable level of knowledge before an oral examination is conducted; candidates would only take an oral examination once they had confirmed the necessary level of competence; potential for reducing the number of re-sits.
- vii. Potential to use ICT to supplement the oral examination with the benefit of the computer programmes being able to be changed easily for each candidate.
- viii. Ensures candidates have the opportunity of demonstrating their handling of a real situation in addition to a (potentially shorter) face to face examination.

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. The Agency monitor individual Test Centres and Sector pass rates on a regular basis and provides training or mentoring opportunities for those individuals who fail to reach the minimum required level to undertake driving examinations.

Guidance ensures that all examiners are marking candidates to a consistently applied system and checks are carried out on the application of guidance by monitoring. This happens twelve times a year by both Sector and Centre Managers.

The driving test is carried out on a one-to-one basis but there are occasions when the test is supervised. There is also an element of verbal one-to-one whilst the "Show me and Tell me" questions are asked to the candidate before the practical test has started. Answering any of these questions wrong will be added to the overall minor marks at the end of the driving test.

The Theory test that was introduced in 2000 has to be passed before a candidate is able to undertake a practical test and has a validity date of three years before the test has to be taken again.

3.2. Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) ~ AMSA have produced checklists for the examiners along with a weighting system that identifies whether a candidate has passed or failed. The checklist contains items from the syllabus depending on the discipline and contains letters (ABC) which designate the relative importance of each topic.

The ABC concept is to assist the examiners in ascertaining the standard of the candidate's progress during the exam. As an example in the Deck exams failure to answer correctly five "A"s constitutes a failure, except in the Rules of the Road section, where failure to answer a question on rules or buoyage correctly, constitutes and automatic fail. Failing to answer a combined ten questions, in any combination of A, B or C constitutes a failure. At the examiners discretion, failing to answer correctly questions representing half of those categories in a single section constitutes a fail.

The checklists are provided as guidance, the final decision as to the standard of the candidate's knowledge is the examiners. Guidance on the completion of the checklists and the conduct of the oral exam are published in Instructions to Examiners (ITE).

In AMSA's Corporate Plan 2008-2009 one of the priorities to look at is to investigate computer-based, pre-oral examination screening, to assess candidates basic mandatory knowledge before entry into the oral examination for a CoC.

AMSA is currently exploring the use of software that can be used to screen candidates before they take the oral exam. This will initially be for Deck Officers and will primarily focus on Rules of the Road, Buoyage and other subject matter that will lend itself to this type of assessment. The concept is that the pre-oral will be available only in the AMSA office and will consist of a series of multiple choice, pictorial and simulation questions randomly chosen from an extensive question bank. The candidate will be given a finite period to complete the questions and failure to do so will record a failure only on the pre-oral test.

There will be safety critical questions within the exam that the candidate must answer correctly. The software will advise the candidate by email whether they have passed or not. It will therefore be a pre-requisite to pass the pre-oral exam before being allowed to enter the full oral exam. It is thought that by introducing this form of assessment candidates will be better prepared for the oral exam and not waste their own time and the examiners.

AMSA operates a system or regularly auditing their examiners at least once in a three year period as exams are normally conducted on a one-to-one basis.

3.3. Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) ~ MPA have no internal documents that provide guidance on the conduct of the oral exam, however, the MPA have regular departmental meetings amongst examiners where any issues relating to the oral exam can be raised. Dialogue sessions are also encouraged with the training providers.

MPA have invested heavily in the use of simulation and has the Integrated Simulation Centre (ISC) available to them. This is an initiative of the MPA, in close cooperation with the Singaporean Polytechnic to further boost the quality and efficiency of maritime education and training in Singapore.

The simulation test is usually about 60 minutes in duration with some time being set aside for briefing and debriefing. MPA will arrange the simulation in such a way that candidates can be assessed for various facets of navigation and watchkeeping, for example; proper handing and taking over, internal and external communications, compliance with collision regulations etc... In some cases, where the groups are of a mixture of higher and lower grades the simulation will involve them all. Class 1 will be the Master conning the vessel while the Class 3 candidate will be the Officer of the Watch.

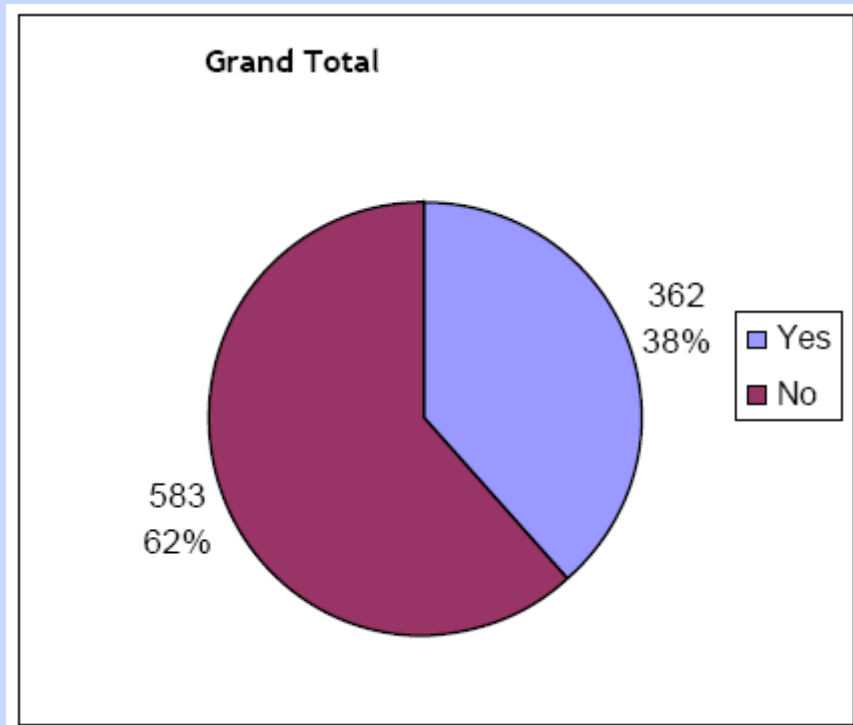
Candidates must pass the simulation in order to be able to book an oral exam. To obtain the CoC, candidates must pass both simulator and oral exam. The full mission ship handling simulators and Engine Room Simulators meet the IMO International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping in the STCW requirements for training and assessment at the operational and management levels.

The MPA have one centre that carries out oral examinations. This ensures that there is consistency throughout the oral exam process as examiners are assessing candidates on a daily basis.

3.4. South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) ~ There is no information for this key issue as to the limited information publicly available from their website.

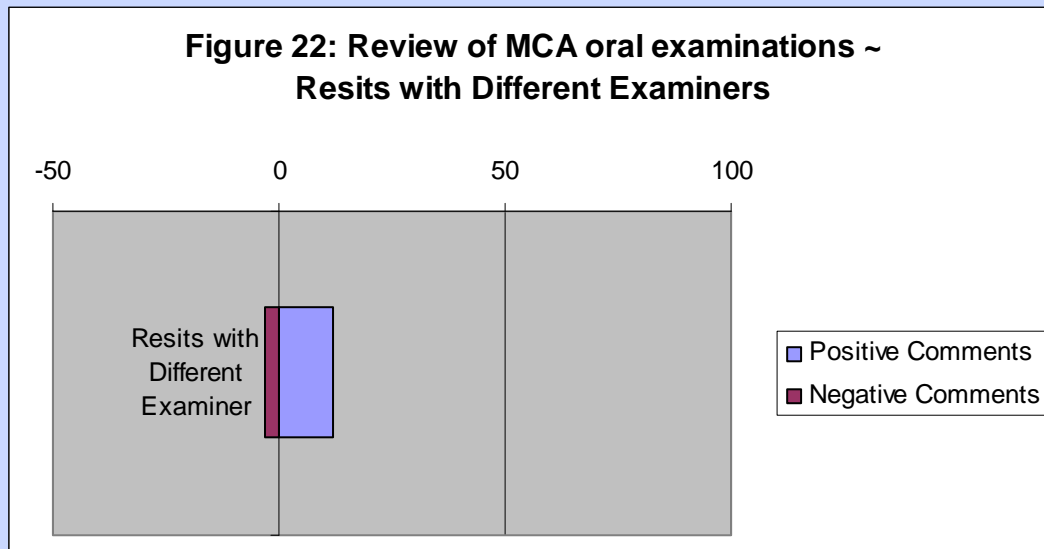
4. Data

4.1. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 14 (12 Stakeholders survey) ~ Should all re-sits be conducted with a different examiner?



4.2. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 2.3% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 15 comments in this category grouping. 12 (80%) were in favour of having re-sits with different examiners whilst 3 (20%) was against.



In favour

"With the exception of having re-sits conducted by a different examiner (which would address a perception rather than an actual problem) little needs to be changed"

"A different examiner should be available at the request of the applicant of the re-sit"

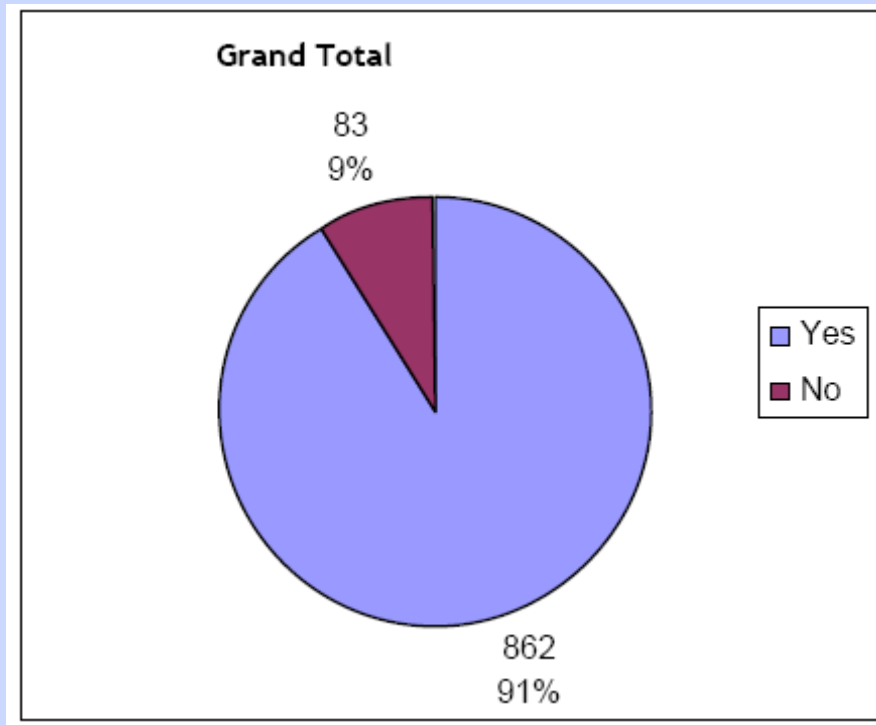
"A new examiner would mean a 'fresh start'. No chance that the old examiner might grill you on that bit you failed on. Ensures that a complete and thorough re-sit is achieved"

Against

"The examiner is/should be unbiased as to whom you are as long as you can present yourself for examination in a respectable fashion"

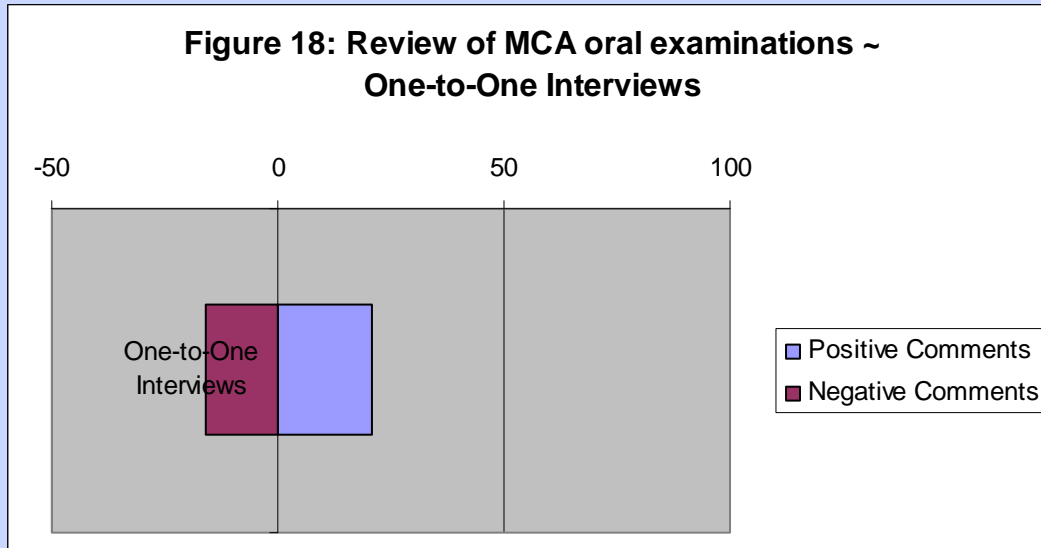
"I don't think it should make a difference whether the examiner is the same or different for a resit"

4.3. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 15 (13 Stakeholders survey) ~ Should oral examinations continue to be conducted on a one-to-one basis?



4.4. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 6.0% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 37 comments in this category grouping. 21 (57%) were in favour of having the oral examination on a one-to-one basis and 16 (43%) were against.



In favour

"A one-to-one examination is an acceptable situation; it stops people passing 'by committee'"

"The current procedure is generally fine; it should be kept on a one-to-one basis as this applies extra pressure on the candidate to help stimulate some of the pressure at sea"

"In my opinion the fact that a candidate faces a one-to-one exam by an MCA Examiner which puts the candidate under pressure is a good way of allowing the examiner to judge how the candidate acts under pressure"

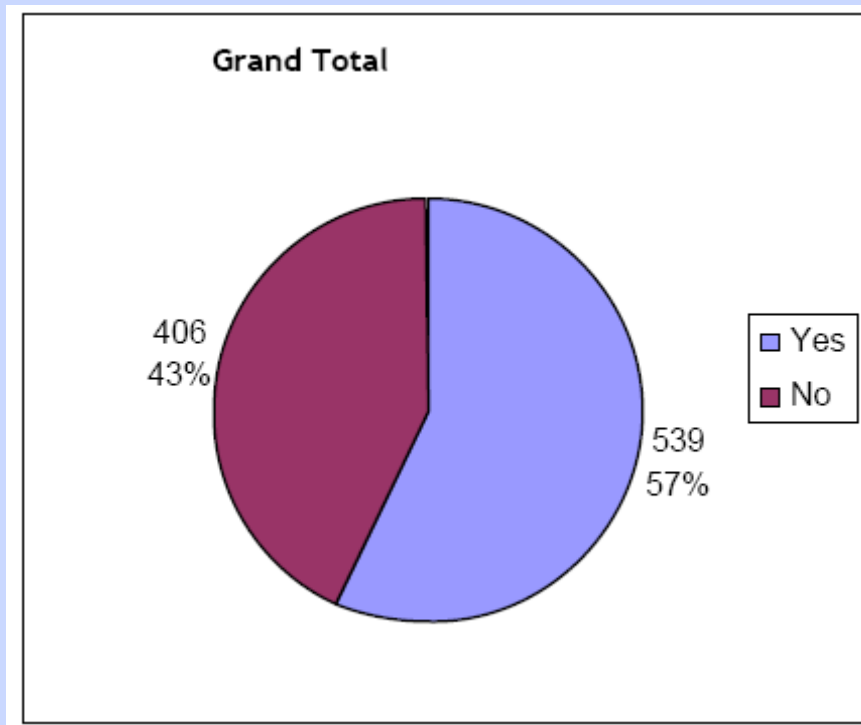
Against

"The present format is antiquated and could rise to accusations of bullying and harassment in today's 'litigation-led' society"

"I would like to see the oral exam being conducted by a panel of examiners rather than one examiner as I think this would give a more fair reflection of a persons ability rather than going off the option of one examiner"

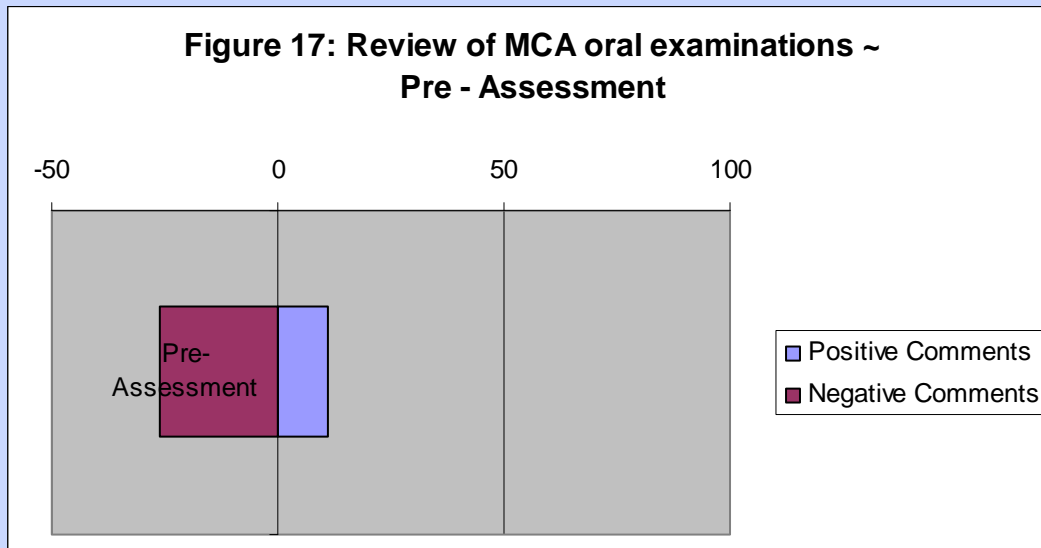
"The oral exam is very important but it could be brought up to date by including other persons on the 'panel' to ensure there could be no accusation of favouritism"

4.5. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 16 (14 Stakeholders survey) ~ Should there be some preparation work before the examination, such as Risk Assessment or Passage Planning?



4.6. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 6.0% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 37 comments in this category grouping. 11 (30%) were in favour of having a pre-assessment before the oral examination and 26 (70%) were against.



In favour

"With respect to passage planning or risk assessment tests, these would have to be suitably controlled to ensure that the submitted work was actually completed by the delegated"

"The results should be available to the examiner before and during the oral, so that he could explore the candidates strengths and weaknesses further"

"My opinion, there should be some type of assessment before appearing final oral exam with MCA surveyor, It will help the candidate to assess his level and failing percentage will be reduced"

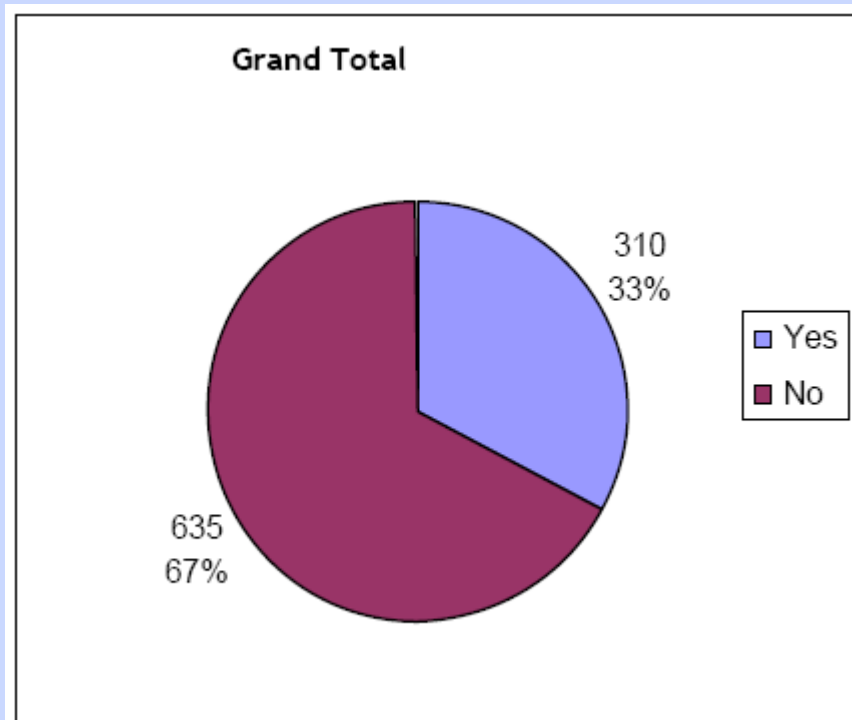
Against

"Whilst there may be some purpose in a candidate doing some preparation work, I believe that this is sufficiently covered by college assessment and written exams"

"All candidates that attend a nautical college have to complete units on passage planning, risk assessments and a simulator exercise so I don't see the need for additional testing"

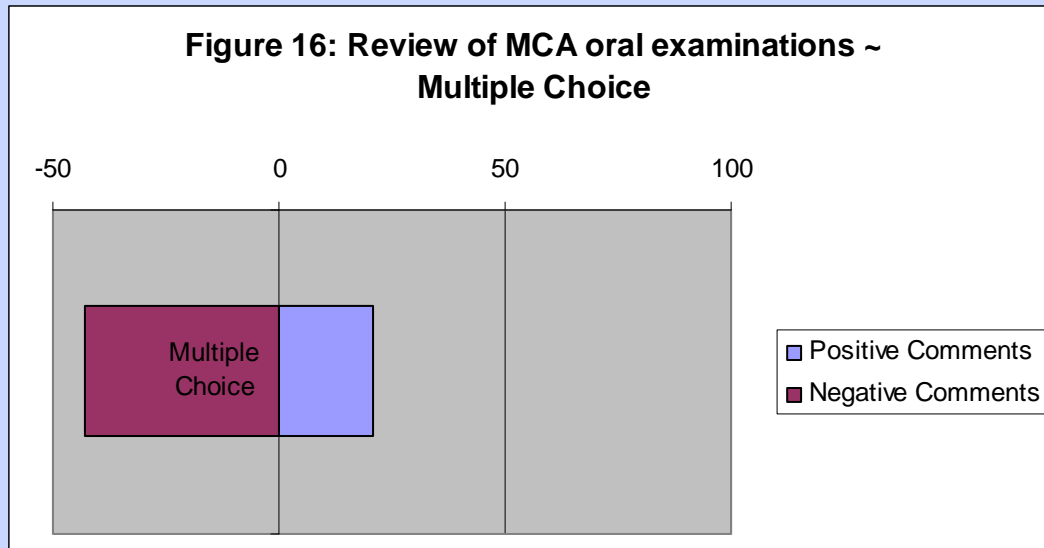
"Some good ideas but not practical. Students will not get involved in a more complex and expensive regime. If no other flags takes this approach, then students will take certificates under other easier administrations"

4.7. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 17 (15 Stakeholders survey) ~ Should there be a multiple choice theory test that must be passed before a candidate takes an oral examination?



4.8. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 10.4% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 64 comments in this category grouping. 21 (33%) were in favour of multiple choice and 43 (67%) were against.



In favour

"The orals exams can be simplified and standardised by using multiple choice questions and answers like DVLA on a computer based or on-line system which permits records to be kept of any answers given by the students"

"This could be a good way to ensure a minimum standard and that all areas are covered to some degree before an oral."

"There could be the possible inclusion of limited multi-choice questions to supplement the oral examination should be explored. It is important that it should not be considered as an alternative but as a means of finding weakness amongst potential candidates"

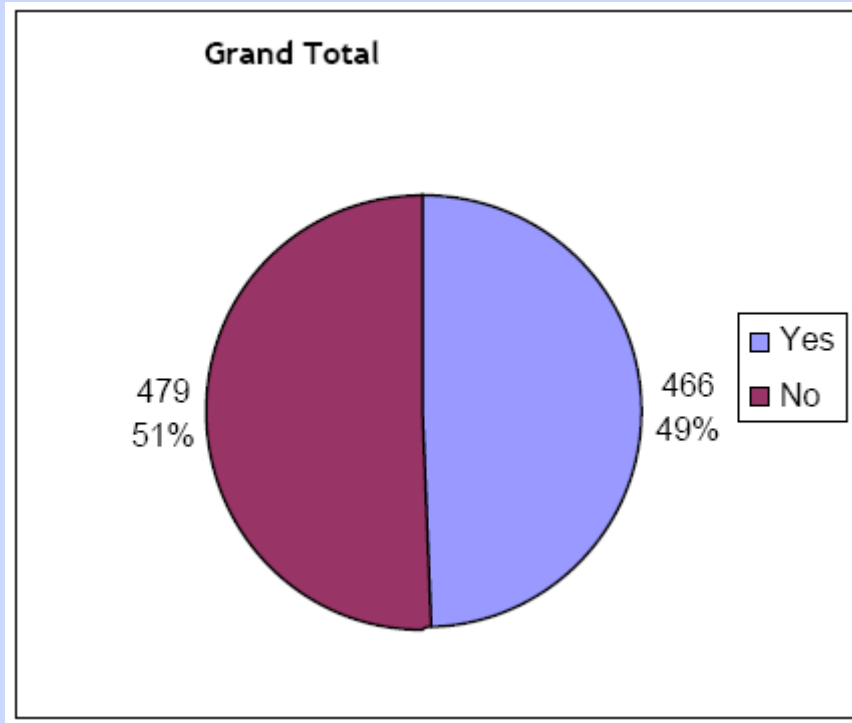
Against

"Multiple choice questions should be avoided as an educated guess can be made with some accuracy with no understanding of the principle"

"The oral exam also examines the candidate's character and ability to cope under pressure, still an essential asset. There is no multiple choice alternative to this"

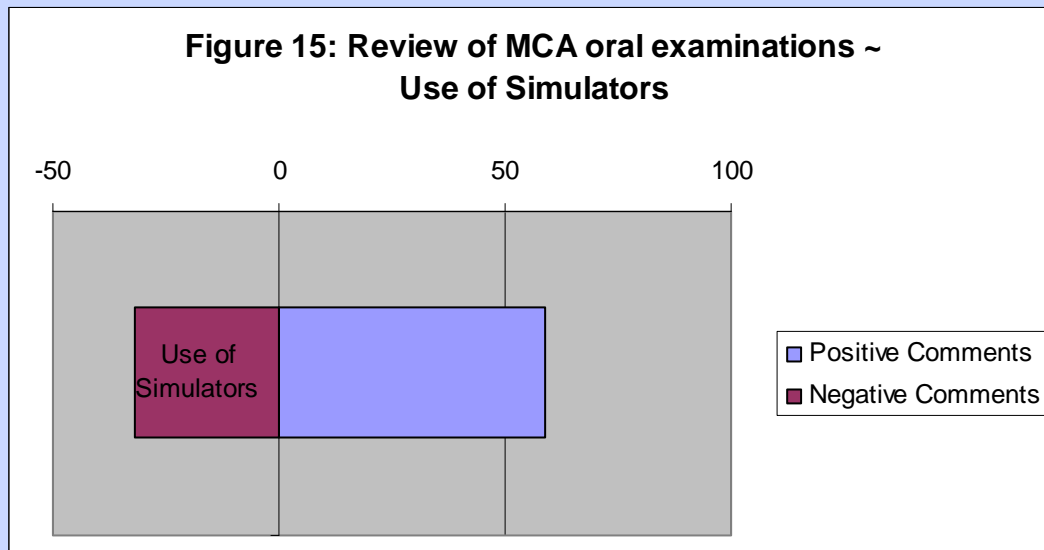
"Multiple choice are not always a good measure of competence"

4.9. Results of the Stakeholders and Candidate survey question 18 (16 Stakeholders survey) ~ Should there be a simulator test that must be passed before a candidate takes an oral examination?



4.10. Additional comments were also received for this key issue and these represented 14.8% of the overall groupings of comments received.

There were 91 comments in this category grouping. 59 (65%) were in favour of a simulator test and 32 (35%) were against.



In favour

"I believe greater use should be made of modern technology such as simulators"

"I do agree that a simulator assessment would be beneficial in terms of establishing competency of watchkeeping"

"By far the biggest advance that could be made would be to hold a simulator test before the oral examination - these would prove competence and put the marine industry on a par with aviation"

Against

"To introduce a simulator would only increase the cost of the examination"

"Simulators are a useful tool, but I feel this would not be the right place for them. Personnel undergoing simulator courses should have assessments made at the end of the course and where applicable certificates issued to say they have completed the course successfully"

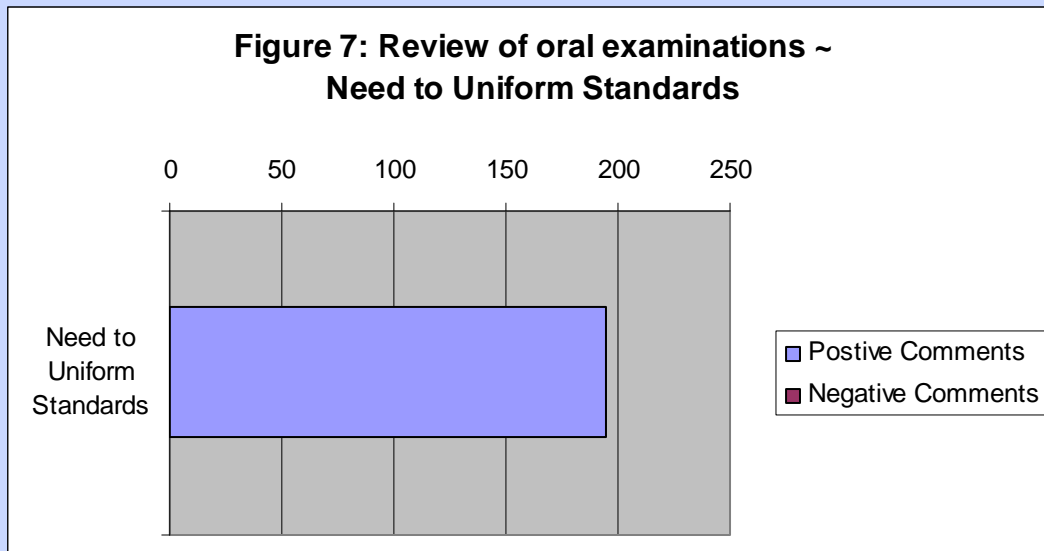
"Further tests such as simulation are already conducted via NARAS courses"*

"Simulator test would be too generic for engineers"

* NARAS Navigation Aids, Radar and ARPA Simulation

4.11. Additional comments were also received for Uniform Standards and these represented 74.4% of the Consistency category.

There were 195 comments in this category grouping (74.4%). 195 (100%) were in favour of a need to uniform the standards.



In favour

"Consistency in Examination Centres. Checklists for Examiners so that candidates are asked similarly styled questions"

"I feel the type of question asked should reflect modern technology and the many advances made in design and manufacture of ship board equipment over the last decade"

"The MCA should continually seek to modernise and improve the way oral exams are managed and conducted but not at the expense of quality"

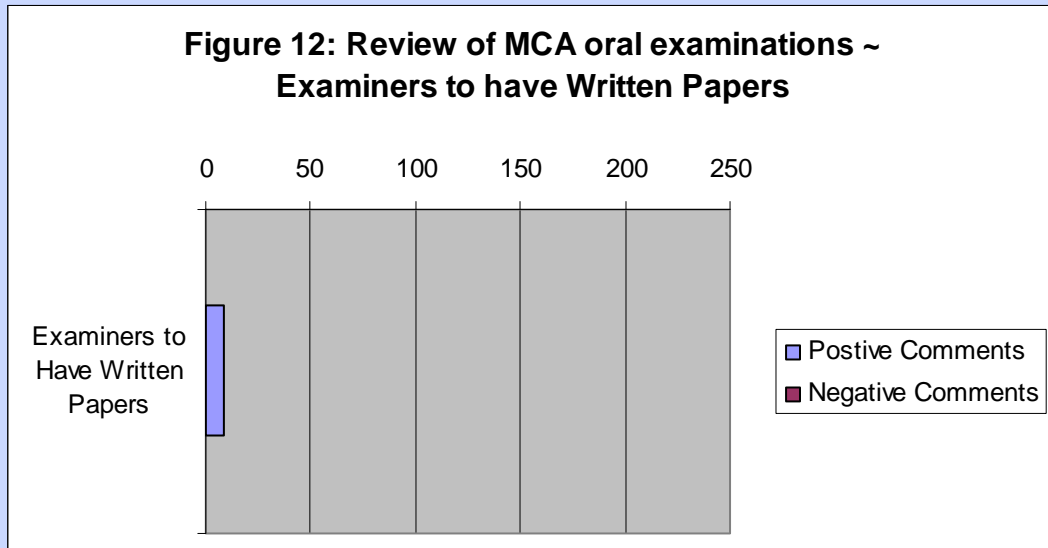
"We need a system that maintains a consistent high standard"

"Examiners should be regularly trained on exam techniques"

"Consistency between examiners, with respect to depth of knowledge required"

4.12. Additional comments were also received for provision of written papers before oral examination and these represented 3.4% of the Consistency category.

There were 9 comments in this category grouping (3.4%). 9 (100%) were in favour of examiners having the candidates written papers with them at the time of the oral examination.



In favour

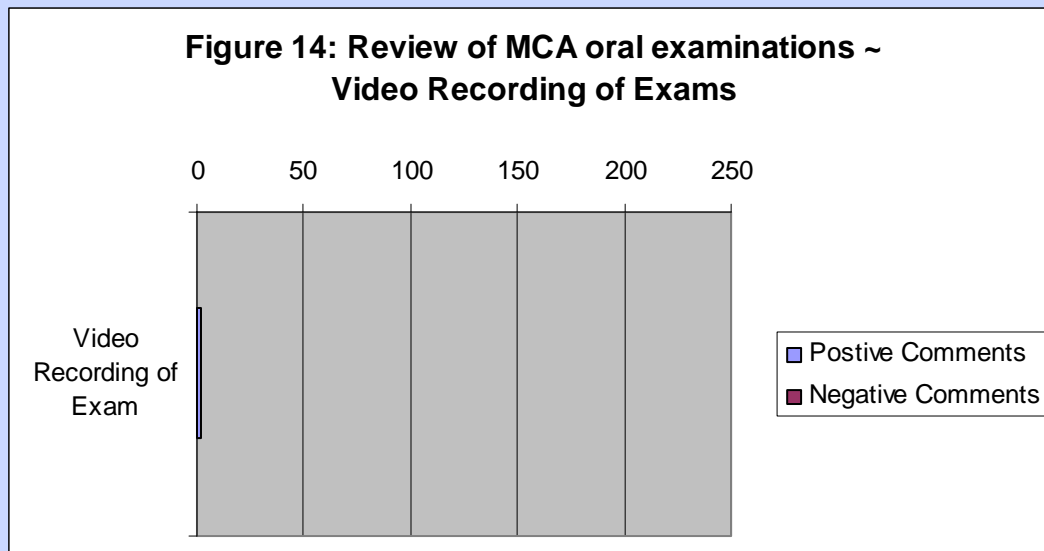
"Examiners should be given the written papers for reference"

"I think it would improve the present system if the examiner would be able to 'call up' any written papers he may think relevant"

"Having the candidate's written general and associated motor/steam paper prior to the oral exam gives the examiner an idea of the candidates thought process, thus allowing a more productive oral examination. Not having any prior idea of how the candidate thinks, especially in a stress situation allows the college to simply work down a list of possible questions, coaching all the answers"

4.13. Additional comments were also received for recording of oral examination (videoed) and these represented 0.8% of the Consistency category.

There were 2 comments in this category grouping (0.8%). Both comments were in favour of having the oral examination recorded or videoed.



In favour

“Oral exams should be videoed or DvD, this would allow a fair system and appeals to be fairer”

“Why is the examination not taped or recorded to ensure that any complaints about questions could be re-visited – such as with standard oral examinations for GCSE’s and A levels”

5. Comments

The existing system for the conduct of oral examinations is well established. However, there is no formal guidance apart from the overview given in Marine Guidance Notice (MGN) 69 and this has not been reviewed since 2000.

The MCA oral examinations are based on the set syllabus and the questions asked are intended to cover the different areas of the syllabus. There are no standard questions or checklists nor is there any currently benchmarking of the quality of the questions or level of pass rate to establish trends and to try and ensure that there is a consistent and auditable approach taken to ensure a fair system for all candidates which ever Marine Office the examinations are conducted at.

Some examiners have their own bank of questions and answers, or ideas and notes against the different part of the syllabus, that they have built up and which they can draw from to ensure the syllabus is covered. These are not often shared or pooled and the level of questioning may vary between examiners. There is no basic model or key questions and answers available to determine if a candidate would respond in a satisfactory manner.

Within regions of the UK, there are some peer reviews and exchange of views and discussions about the handling and conduct of the oral examinations although these are not all done on a formal basis. The examiners seminar that is planned to be held each year is a valuable forum to share and update information and although it is open to all MCA examiners, the attendance varies.