

MCA ORAL EXAMINATIONS REVIEW: FYFE ANALYSIS OF ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The overall results of the survey conducted through a questionnaire with our stakeholders and customers were collated and graphed and made available internally and externally on the website in May 2008.

Work has been continuing with a Fyfe analysis of the wealth of comments received in support of the questionnaire.

This analysis has now been concluded and is presented in the following paper.

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* Totals 100.2% due to rounding in Excel and wide range of data values

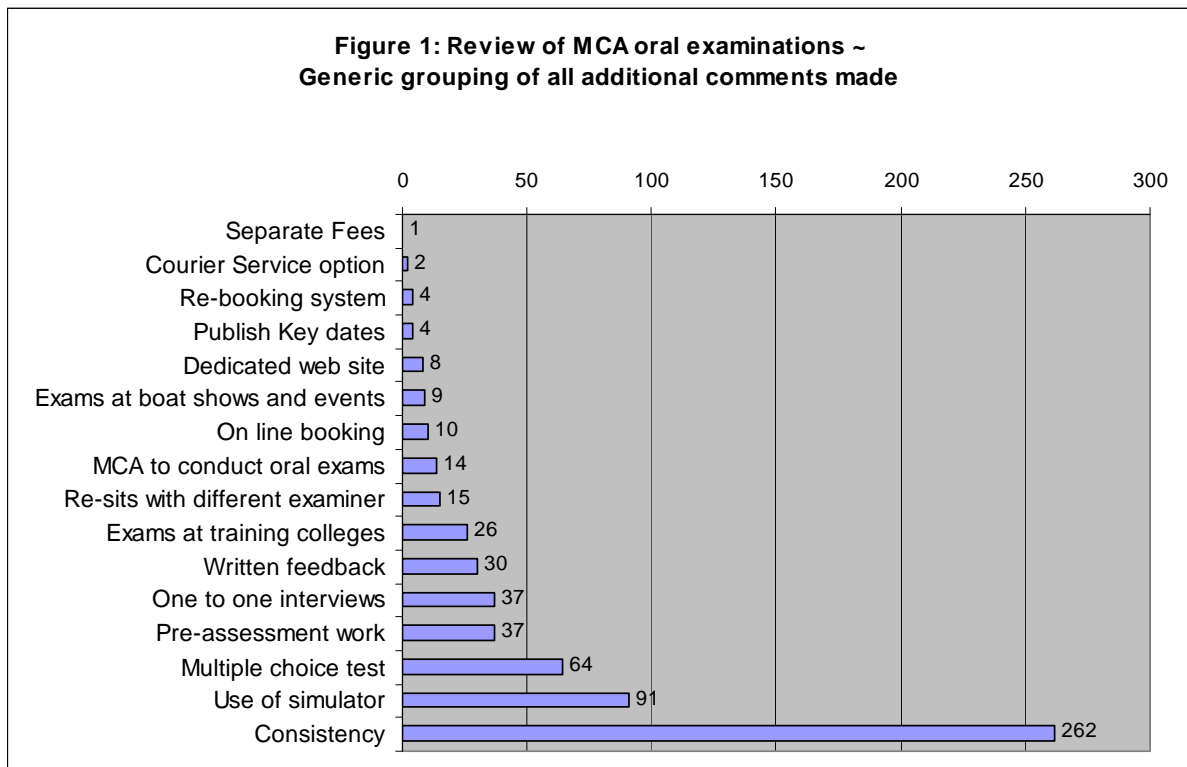
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

1. Introduction

1.1. Additional comments to the questionnaire survey regarding the MCA oral examinations process were encouraged and an excellent response was received. This paper summarises these comments using the Fyfe analysis methodology and provides an indication of the proportion for generic groupings which will complement the forthcoming discussion by the Steering Group.

2. Results

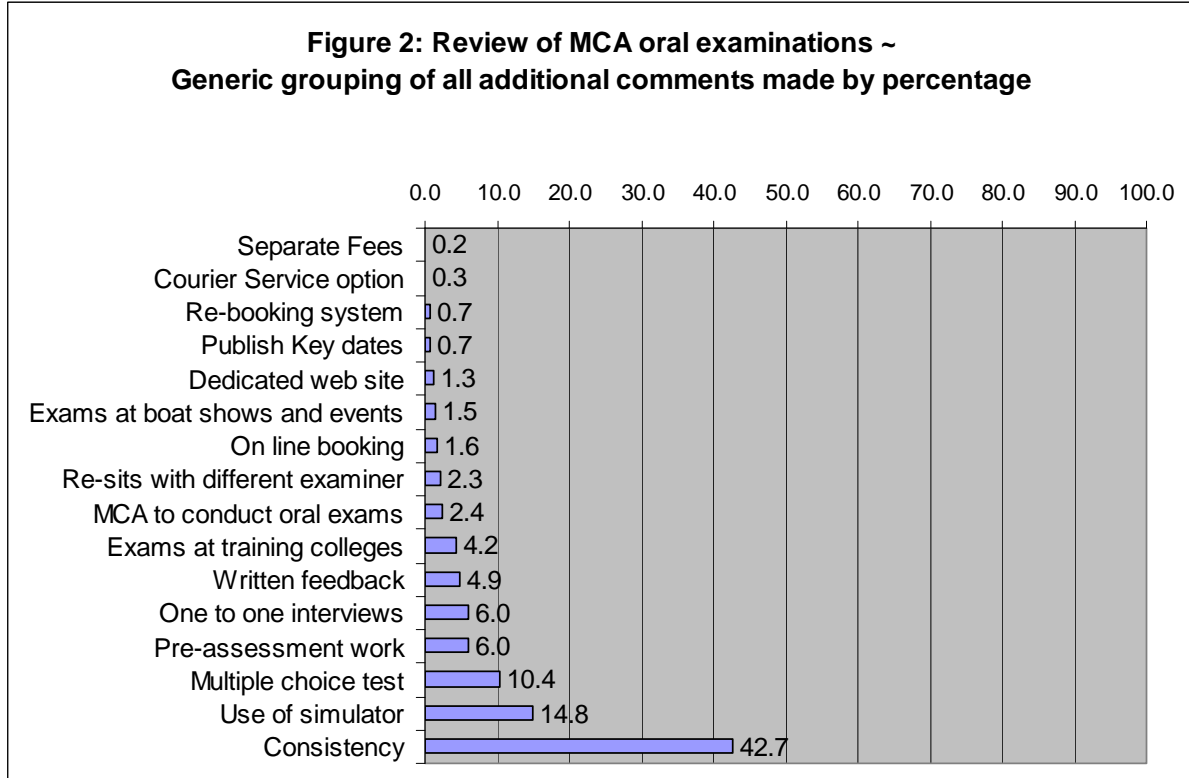
2.1. The results of the Fyfe analysis are presented as bar graphs supported by a selection of comments.



2.2. The graph in figure 1 shows that consistency was the highest category with use of simulator next followed by multiple choice tests. Pre assessment work, one to one interviews, written feedback and holding examinations at training colleges were in the next highest group. The lowest group of additional comments included publishing key dates, re booking system, separate fees and courier service option.

2.3. For consistency to result in such a high proportion of additional comments indicates this is a key area that needs further consideration.

2.4. The graph in figure 2 indicates the percentages for each category grouping and the 20:80 analysis management tool proposes that addressing a category that is indicated as being over 20 % will have the most benefit. This indicates that consistency should be further considered.



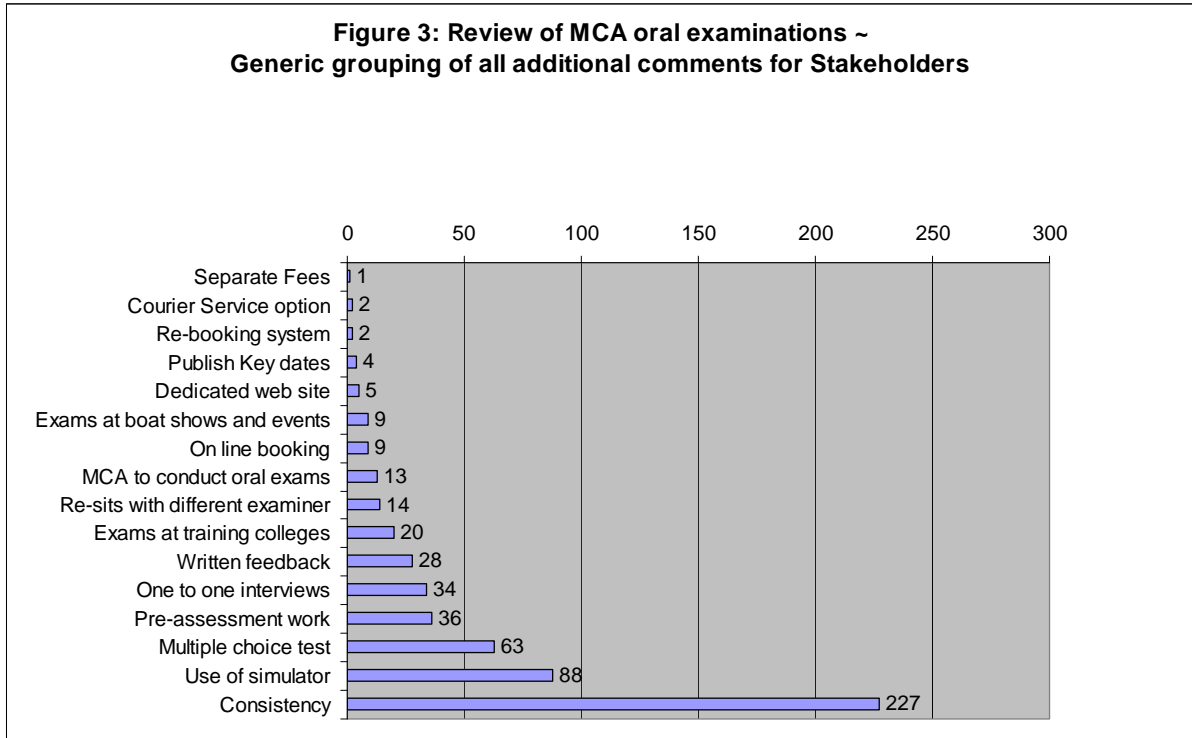
2.5. Table of categories of comments by Fyfe analysis split by Stakeholders and Candidates and total.

Letter Code	Category	Stake-Holders	Candidates	Total	+ ve	- ve
S	Separate fees	1	0	1	0	1
CS	Courier Service option	2	0	2	1	1
RB	Rebooking system	2	2	4	4	0
K	Publish key dates	4	0	4	4	0
W	Dedicated web site	5	3	8	8	0
E	Exams at boat shows/events	9	0	9	1	8
B	On line booking	9	1	10	9	1
MCA	MCA to conduct oral Exams	13	1	14	14	0
R	Re-sits with different Examiner	14	1	15	12	3
T	Exams at training Centres	20	6	26	18	8
F	Written feedback	28	2	30	30	0
O	One to one interviews	34	3	37	21	16
P	Pre assessment work	36	1	37	11	26
M	Multiple choice	63	1	64	21	43
U	Use of simulator	88	3	91	59	32
C	Consistency	227	35	262	*	*

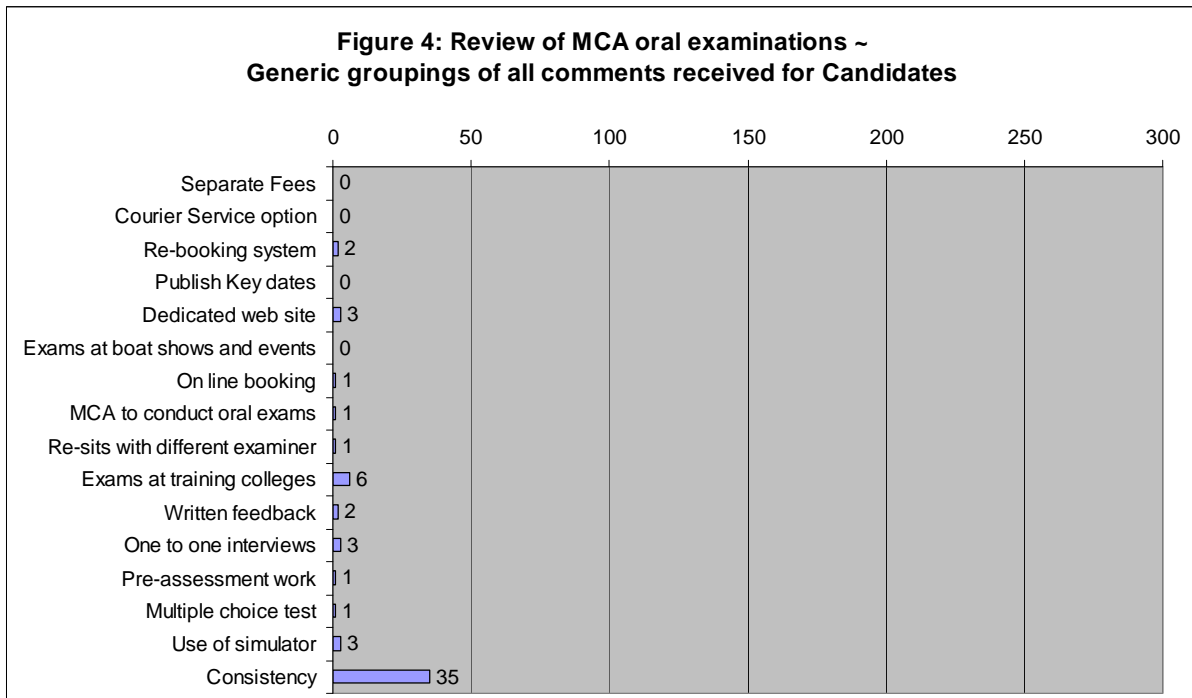
* Further breakdown provided separately

2.6. It should be noted that not everyone made an additional comment and some comments fell into more than one category and have been split.

2.7. The graph in figure 3 shows the groupings for stakeholders and this follows the same pattern as the total groupings with consistency being the highest.

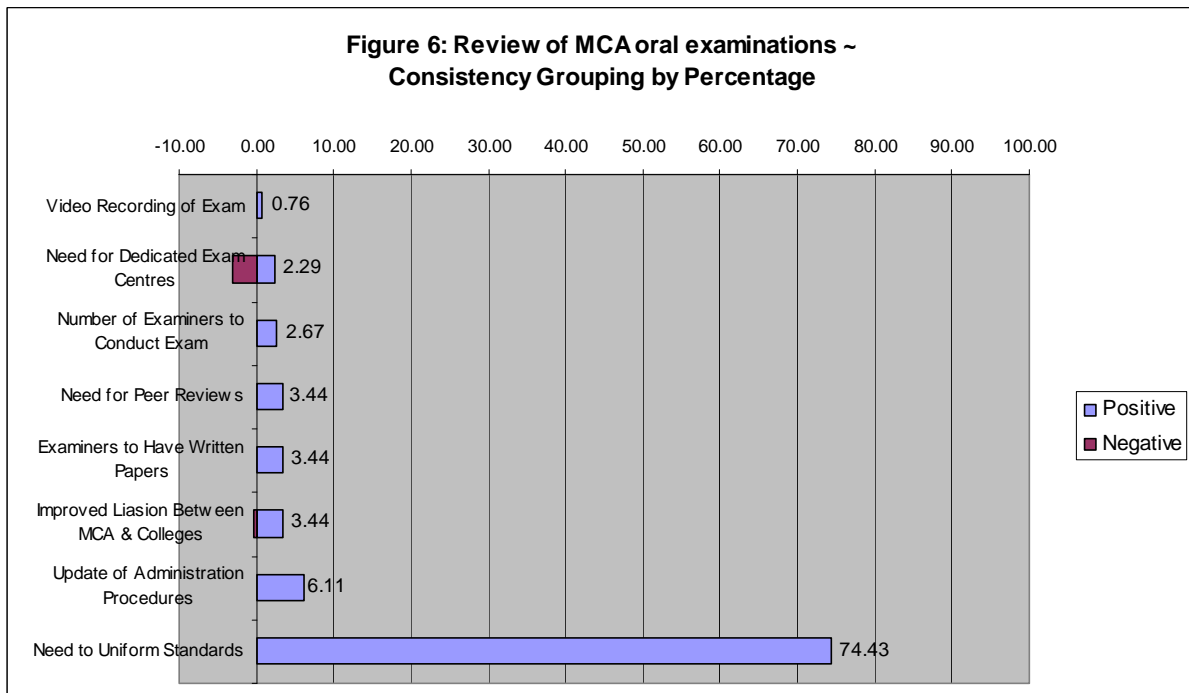
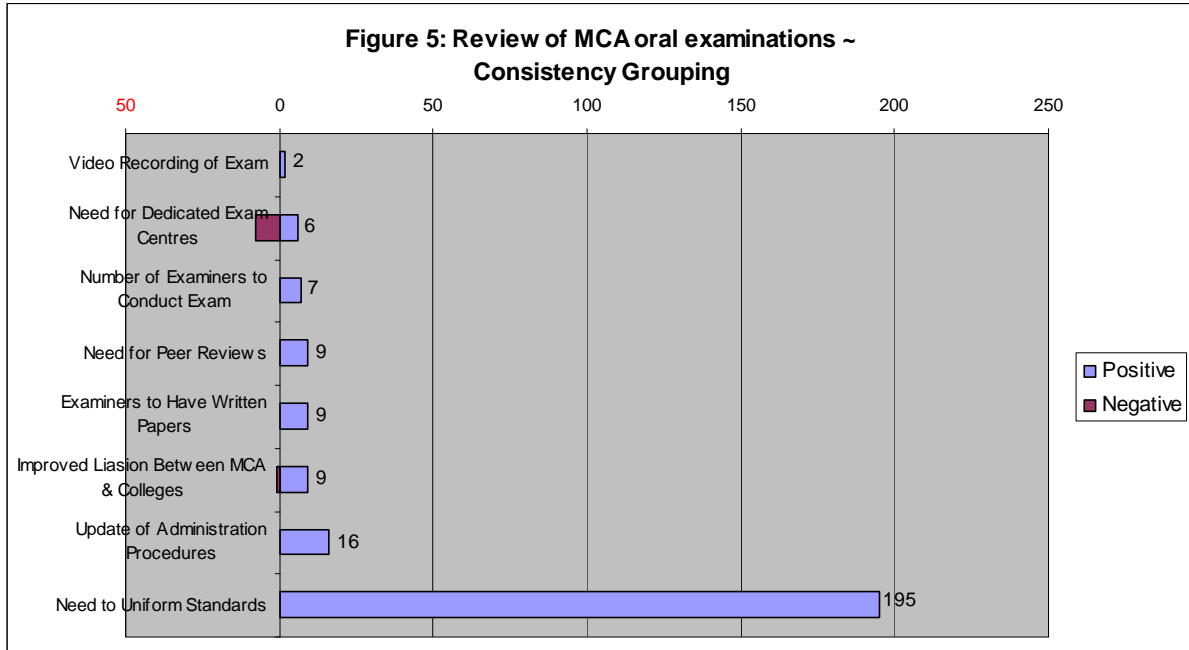


2.8. The graph in figure 4 shows the groupings for candidates and this also shows a similar pattern with consistency being the highest category commented on.



3. Consistency

3.1. Consistency accounted for 42.7% (262) of the total amount of comments received. The graph in figure 5 shows that of the additional comments about consistency, the highest category was uniform standards and figure 6 shows that this represents a high percentage of the comments indicating it is an area for further consideration.

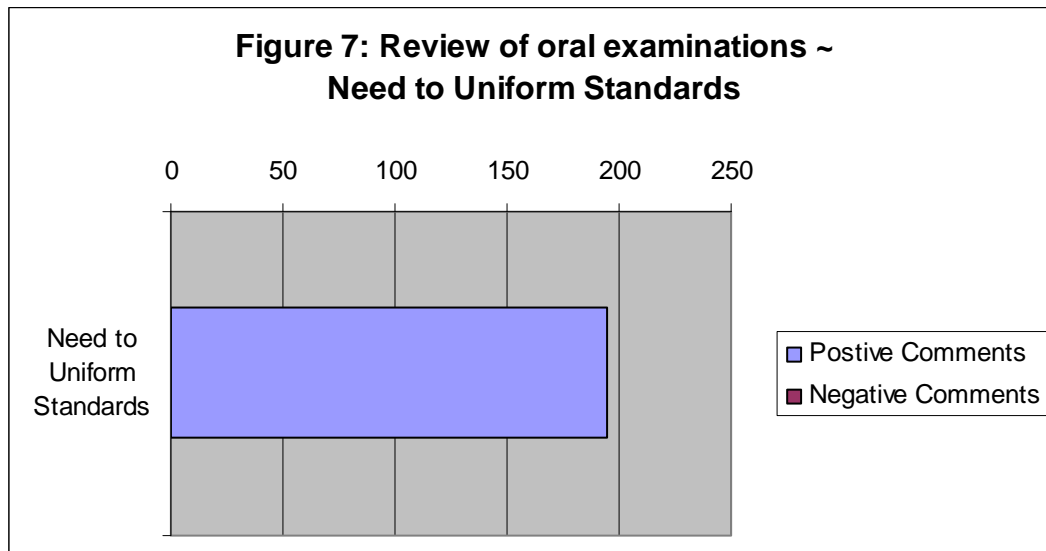


4. COMMENTS MADE AND THEIR GROUPING

4.1 CONSISTENCY

4.1.1. CONSISTENCY ~ Uniform Standards

There were 195 comments in this category grouping (74.4%). 195 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”

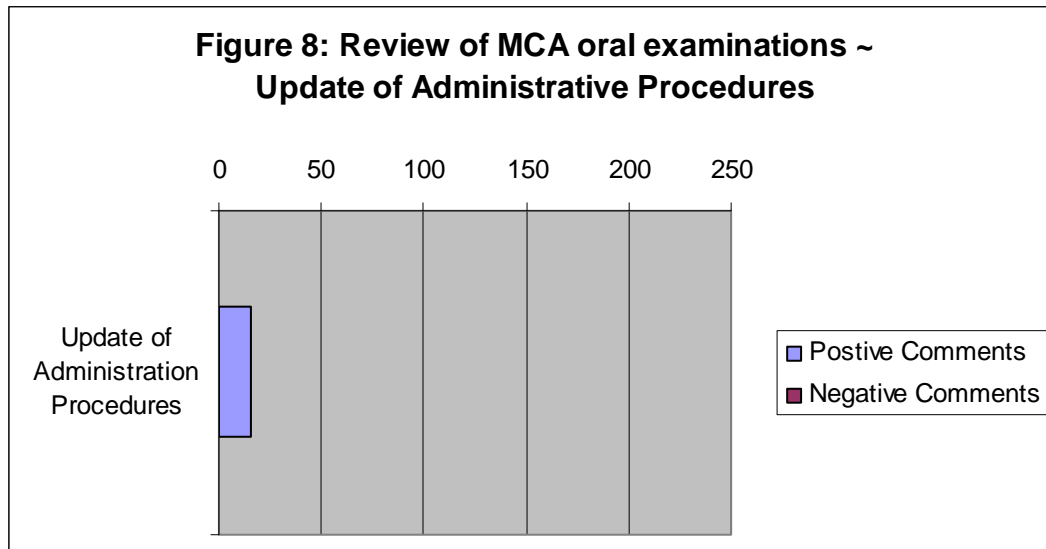
“We need a system that maintains a consistent high standard”

“Examiners should be regularly trained on exam techniques”

“Consistency between examiners, with respect to depth of knowledge required”

4.1.2 CONSISTENCY ~ Administration

There were 16 comments in this category grouping (6.1%). 16 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”

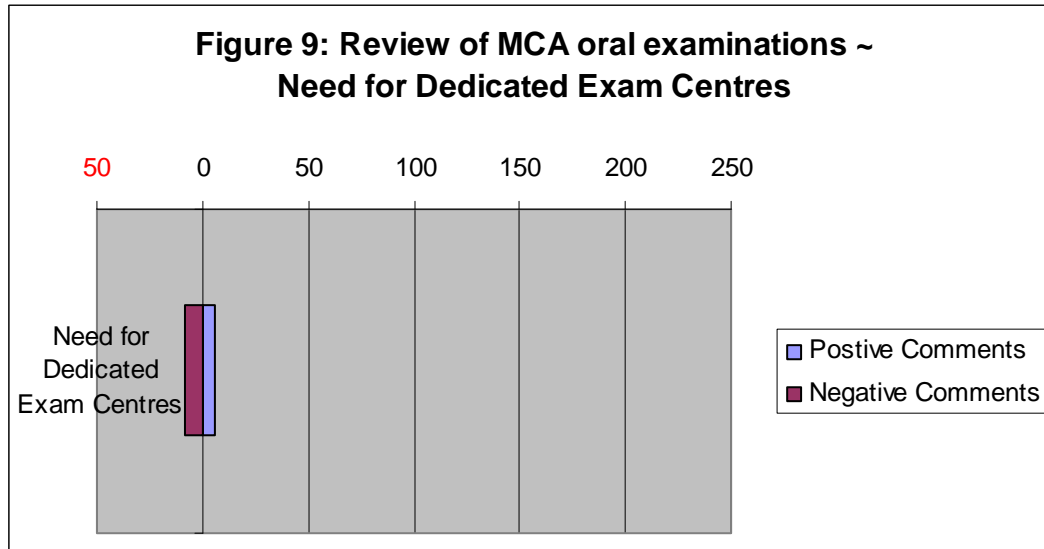
“Quicker turnaround time from application to the sitting of the exam”

“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”

4.1.3 CONSISTENCY ~ Dedicated Examination Centres

There were 14 comments in this category grouping (5.3%). 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

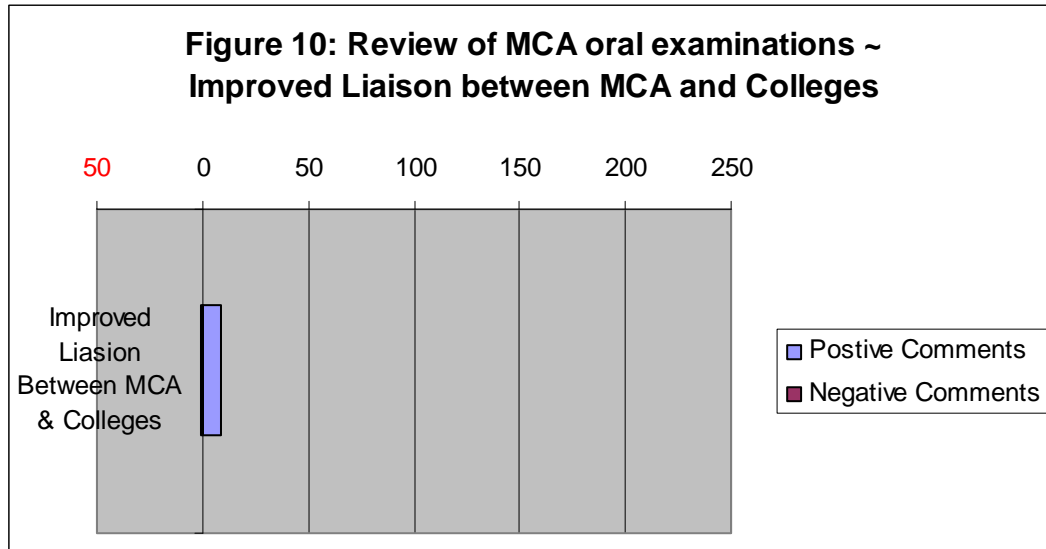
"It is important that we keep a fair demographic spread of examination centres and this must be under the original strict examination criteria"

"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"

4.1.4 CONSISTENCY ~ Liaison between MCA and training

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”

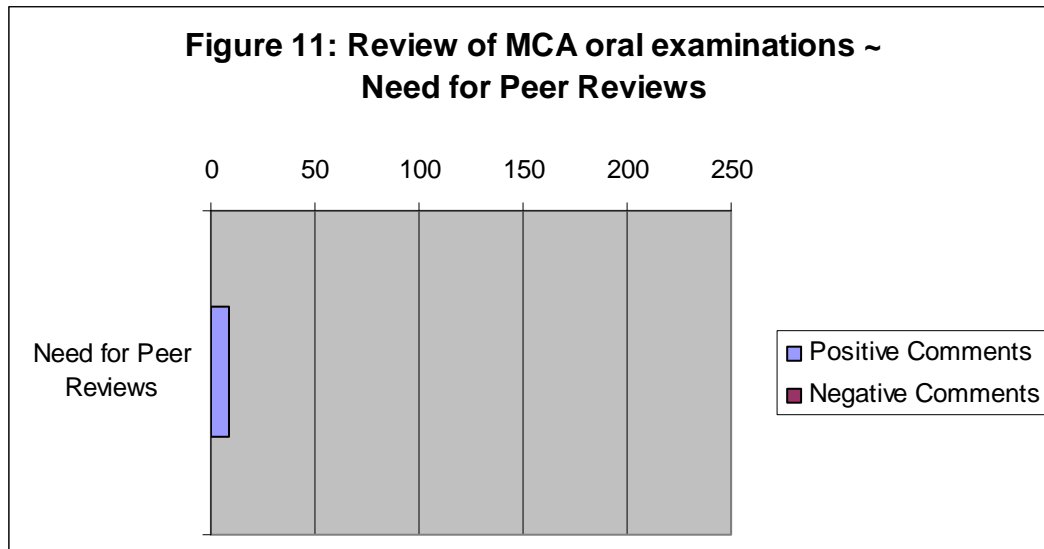
“This is an oral exam, if the colleges fail in their remit to cover the criteria what goes on failure in checking colleges”

Against

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

4.1.5 CONSISTENCY ~ Peer review

There were 9 comments in this category grouping (3.4%). 9 were in favour of a need for a peer review programme.



In favour

“Consistency between examiners with respect to depth of knowledge required”

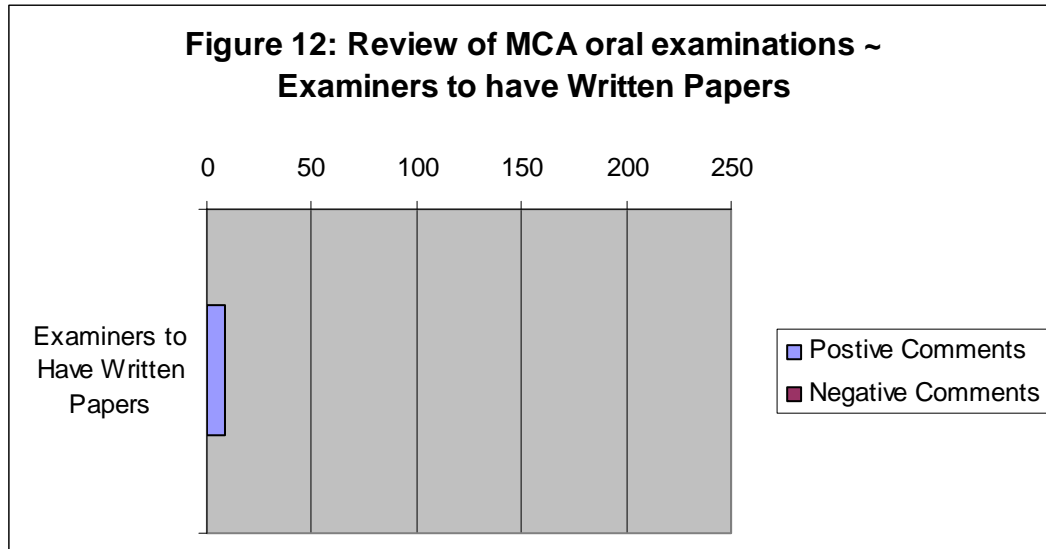
“Consistency is required throughout the organisation. Though examiners being periodically observed by a senior examiner”

“At present many students will apply to an MCA office which they think may offer an easier oral exam. Consistency between examiners and across centres is vital”

“Examiners should rotate between centres unannounced”

4.1.6 CONSISTENCY ~ Written papers before exam

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



In favour

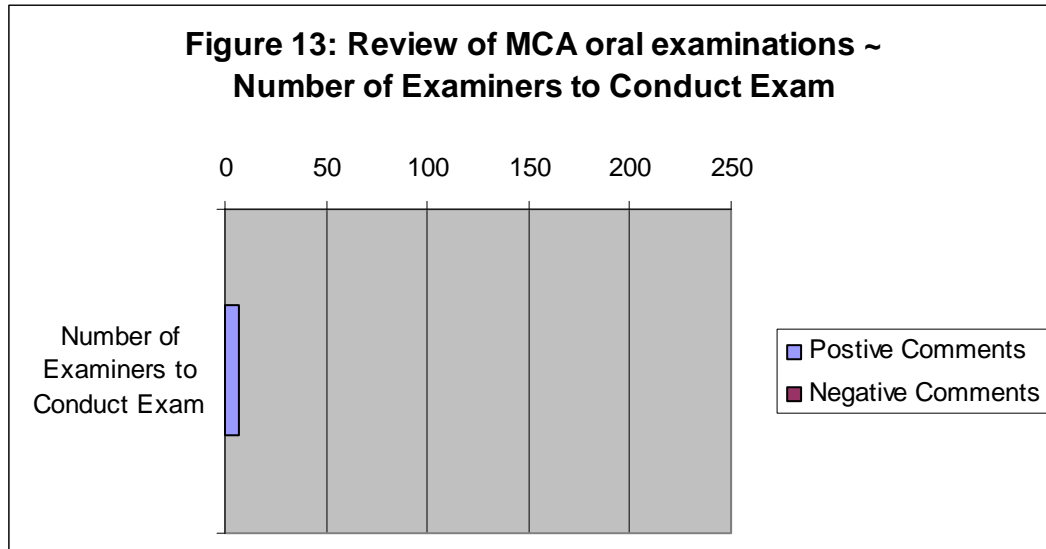
“Examiners should be given the written papers for reference”

“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”

4.1.7 CONSISTENCY ~ Number of examiners

There were 7 comments in this category grouping (2.7%). 7 were in favour of increasing the number of examiners conducting the oral exam to a panel (similar to a job interview).



In favour

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

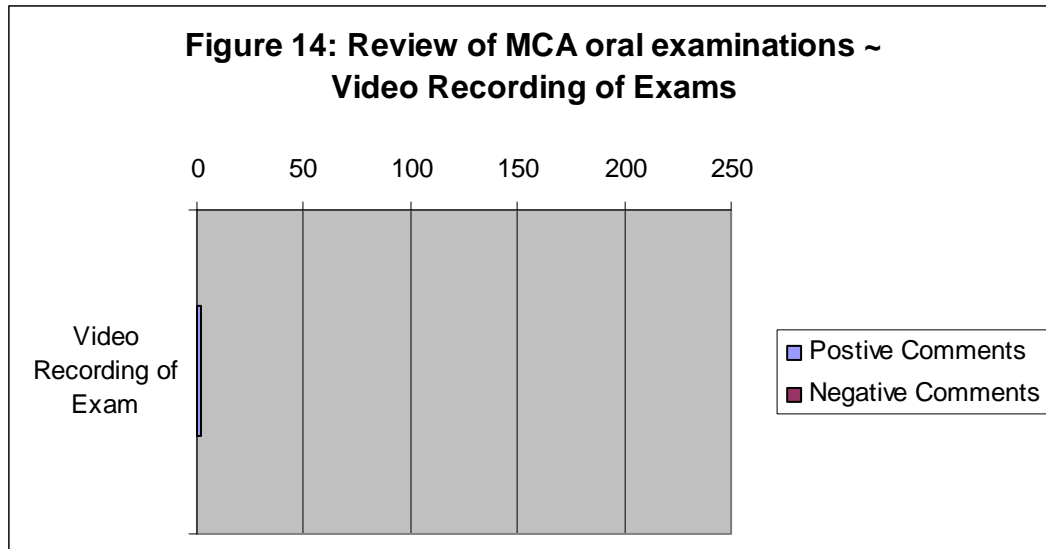
“More than one examiner so that responses can be cross-referenced”

“I believe that a more fair and balanced oral examination could be carried out before a panel of three examiners”

“The examination can be conducted on a one-to-one basis by a panel of examiners - with only one panel member asking a question at any one time. This would be a positive move towards fairness. Alternatively, observers should be present to ensure consistency, positive move towards fairness”

4.1.8 CONSISTENCY ~ Video exam

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



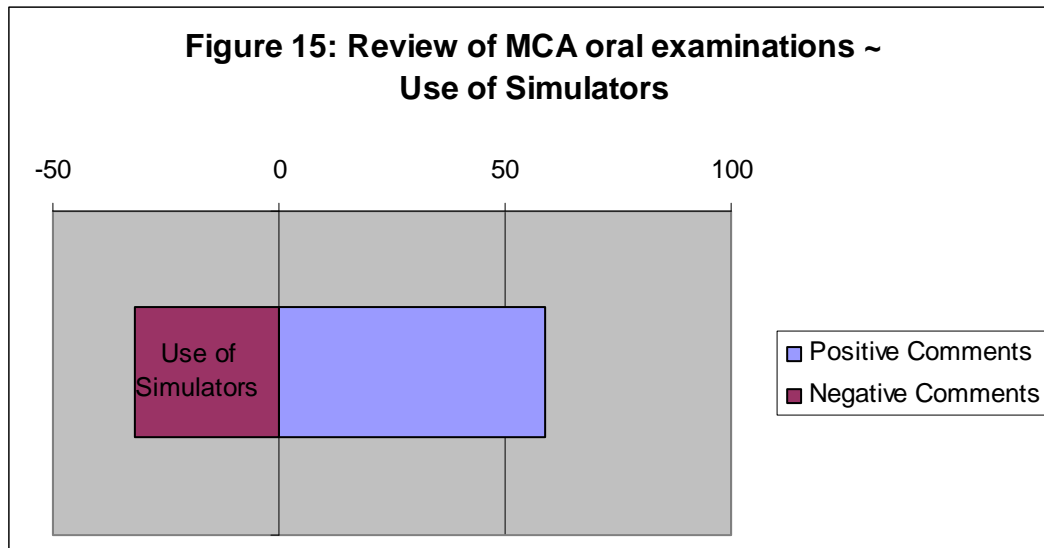
In favour

“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”

4.2. USE OF SIMULATOR (14.8%)

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

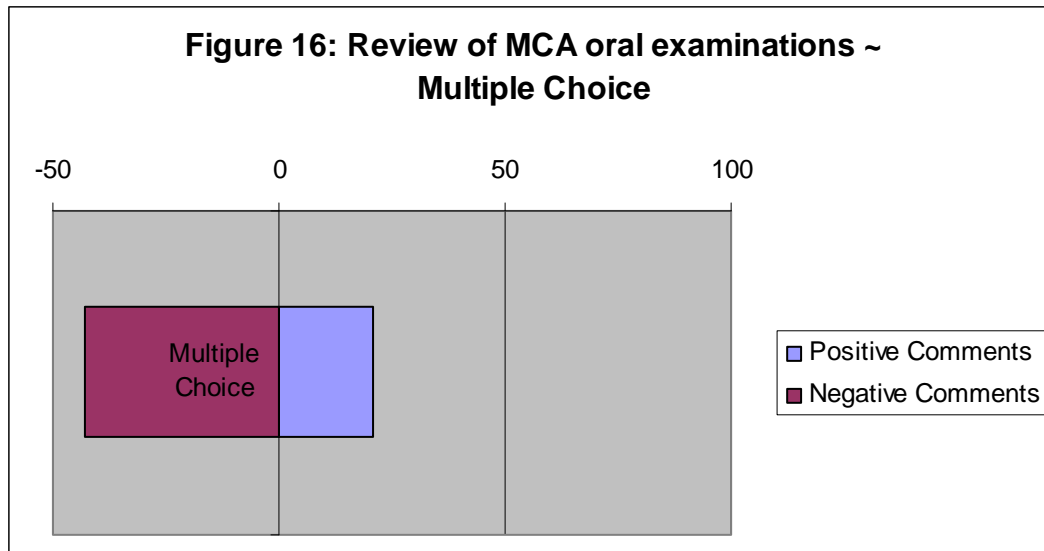
"Further tests such as simulation are already conducted via NARAS courses"*

"Simulator test would be too generic for engineers"

* NARAS Navigation Aids, Radar and ARPA Simulation

4.3. MULTIPLE CHOICE TESTS (10.4%)

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

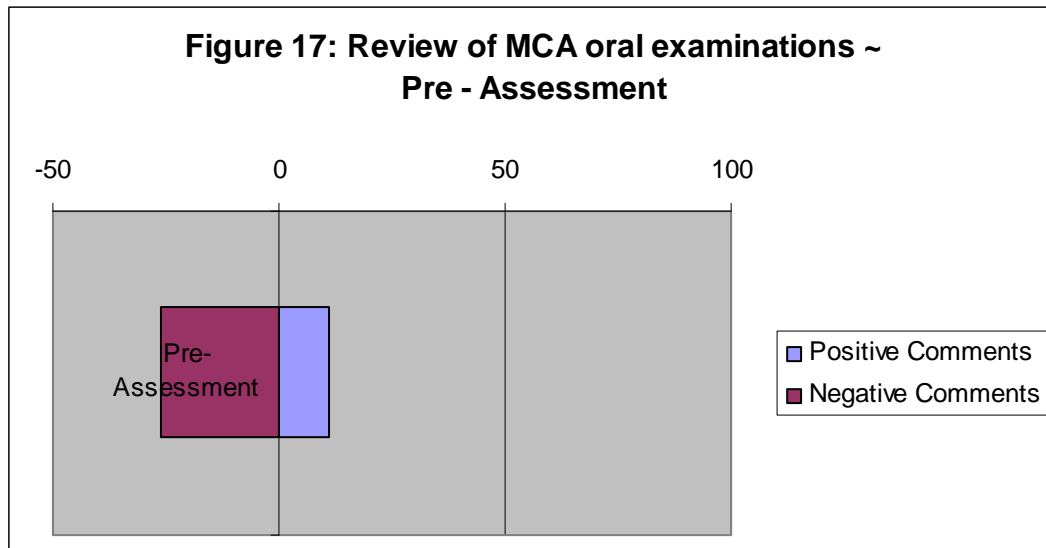
"Multiple choice questions should be avoided as an educated guess can be made with some accuracy with no understanding of the principle"

"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"

4.4. PRE ASSESSMENT WORK (6.0%)

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

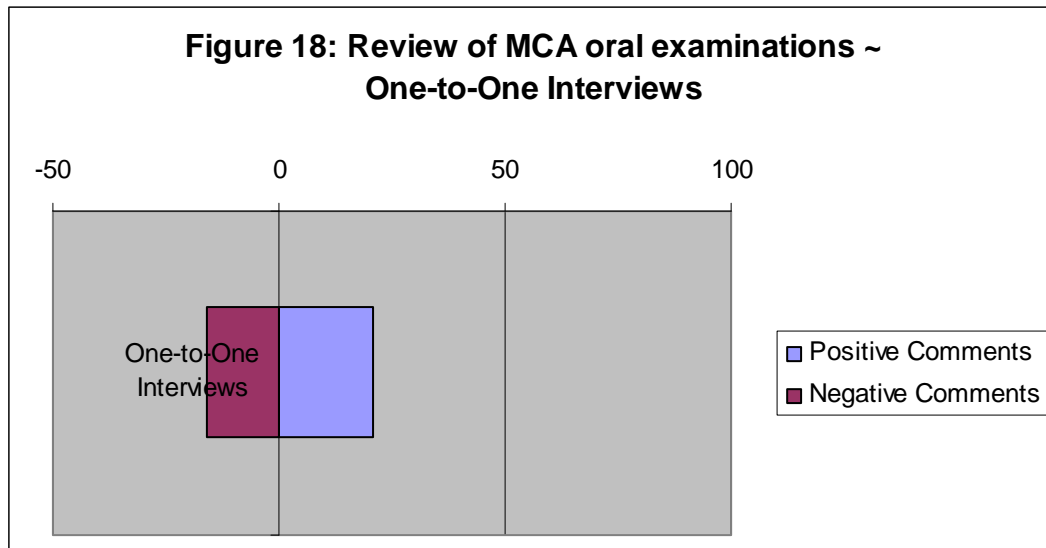
“Whilst there may be some purpose in a candidate doing some preparation work, I believe that this is sufficiently covered by college assessment and written exams”

“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”

4.5. ONE TO ONE INTERVIEWS (6.0%)

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

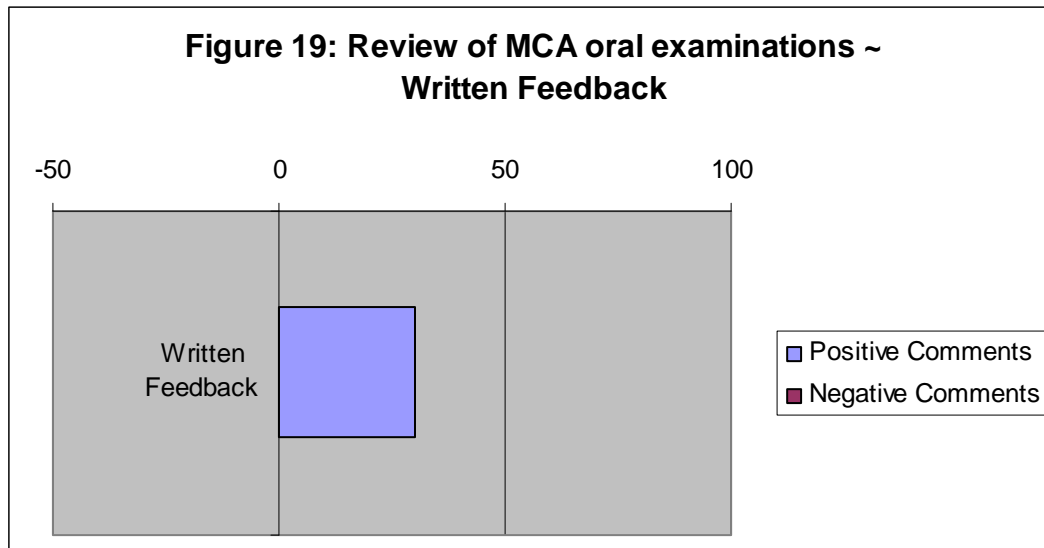
“The present format is antiquated and could rise to accusations of bullying and harassment in today’s ‘litigation-led’ society”

“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”

4.6. WRITTEN FEEDBACK (4.9%)

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"

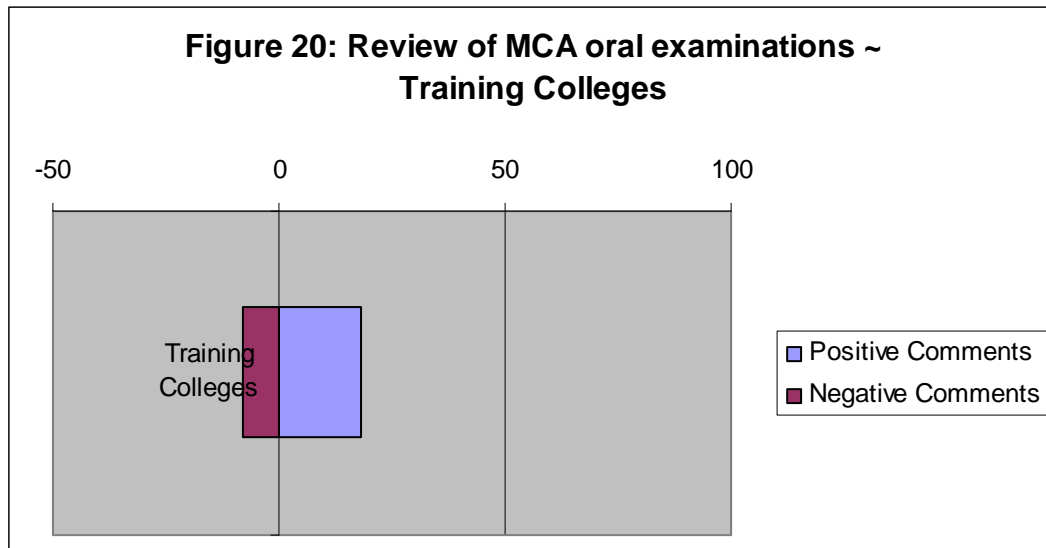
"Lack of feedback is always a big issue in oral examinations at any level. Most candidates leave the exam confused as well as disappointed. A report similar to an appraisal form should be sent within a week or so of the exam with advice on how to improve"

"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"

4.7. EXAMS AT TRAINING COLLEGES (4.2%)

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

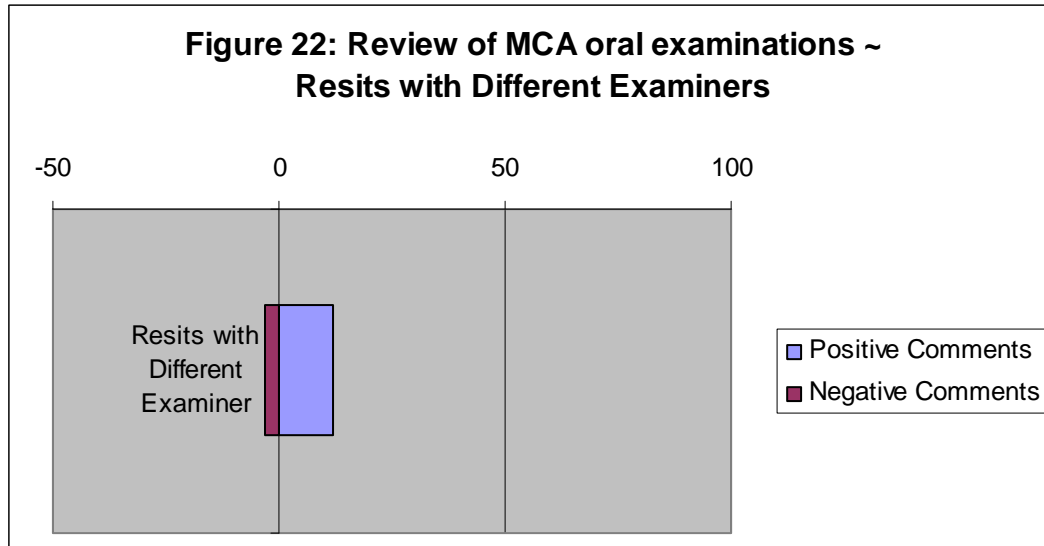
“Oral exams in colleges. I do not agree with this, as part of the experience of the oral is to be taken into a more serious environment”

“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”

4.8. RESISTS WITH DIFFERENT EXAMINERS (2.3%)

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

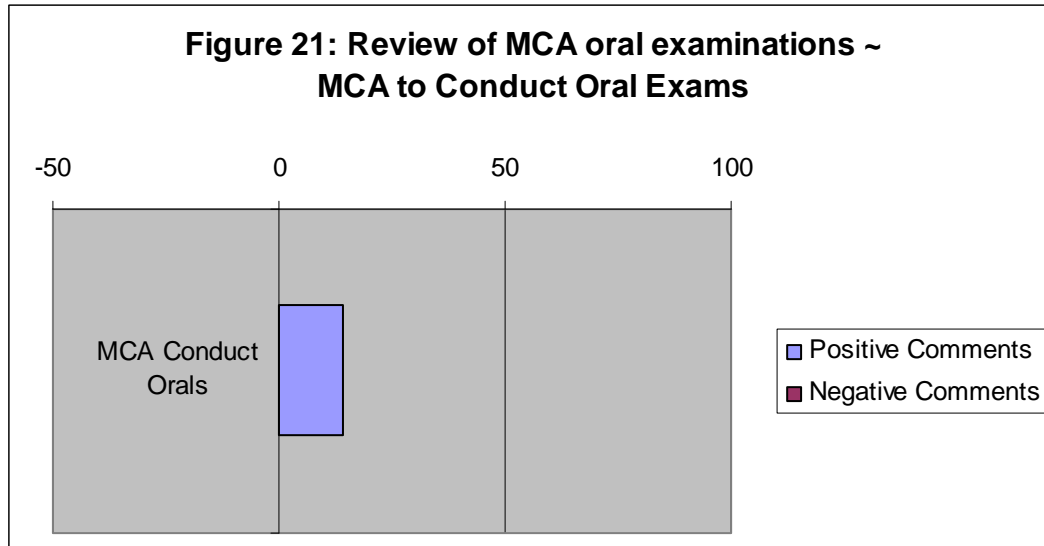
Against

"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 re-sit"

4.9. MCA TO CONDUCT ORAL EXAMS (2.3%)

There were 14 comments in this category grouping. 14 (100%) were in favour of having the MCA continue to conduct the oral examinations.



In favour

"The MCA should not lose control of the oral examinations; it is examination of competency by peers"

"It is imperative for the whole MCA to maintain its powers to give the 'final say' regarding a candidate's competency"

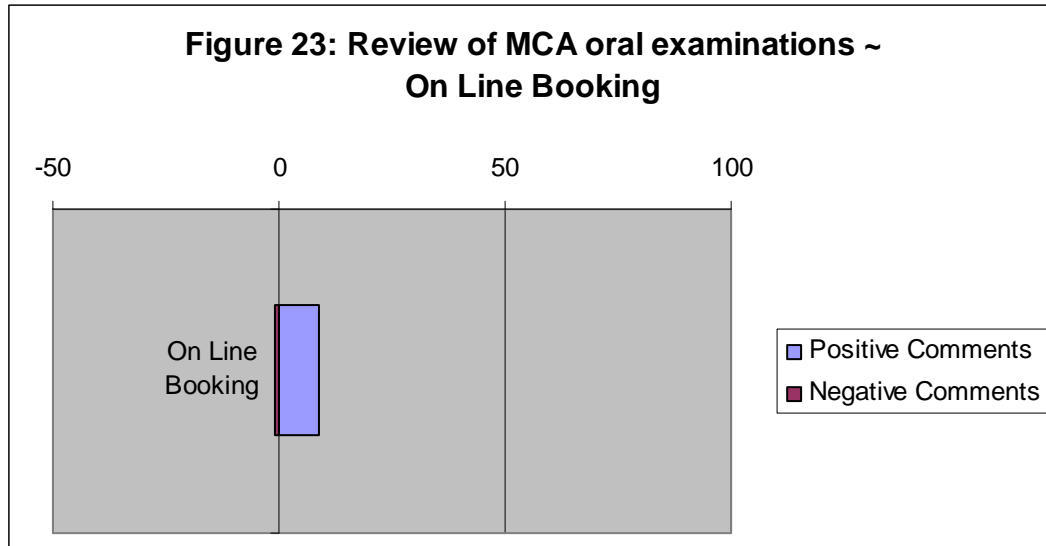
"I feel strongly that the MCA must remain the final arbiter as to a candidate's suitability to hold a certificate of competency"

"I believe that if the MCA no longer conducts the oral examinations that the result will be devaluing of the certification obtained by the candidates"

"The MCA is doing a good job, please maintain this standard that will keep the MCA on top of others"

4.10. ON LINE BOOKING (1.63%)

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”

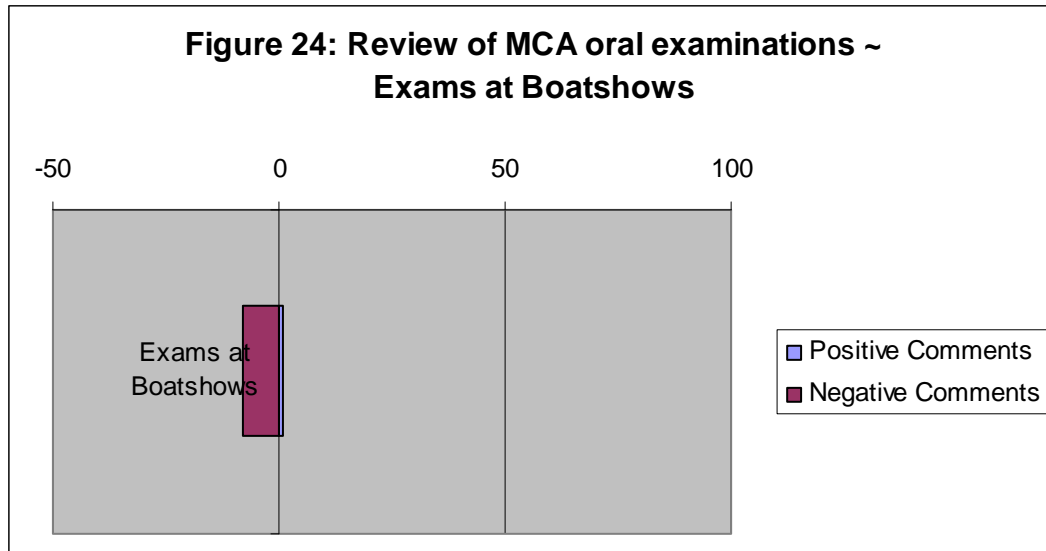
“Online booking of oral examination date is very good option and should be strongly considered”

Against

“The problem with on-line booking system is the possibility that individuals can mis-understand 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. EXAMS AT BOAT SHOWS AND EVENTS (1.5%)

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

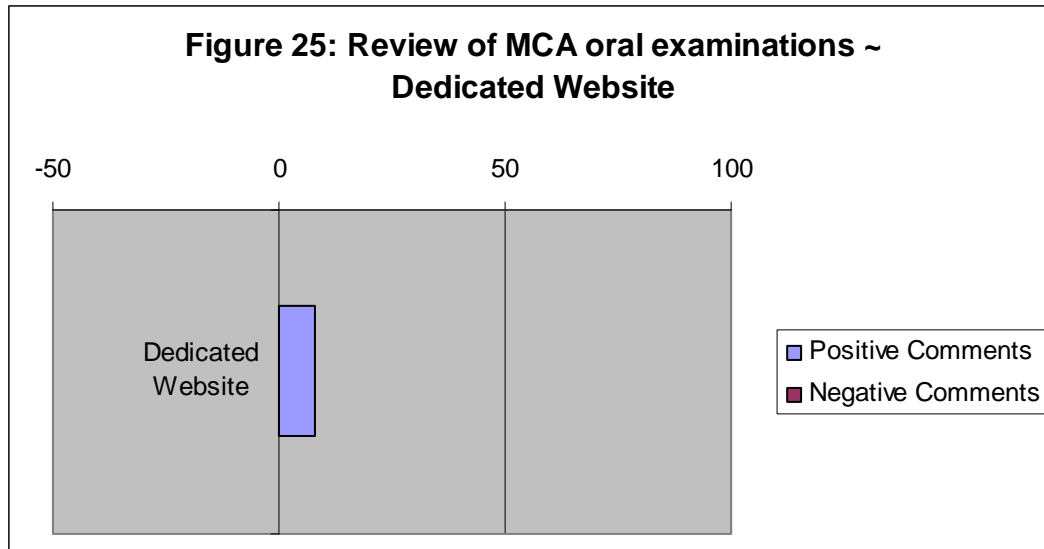
“To conduct oral exams at boat shows or other marine events will do nothing less than demean the whole professionalism of the UK shipping industry”

“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”

4.12. DEDICATED WEBSITE (1.3%)

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"

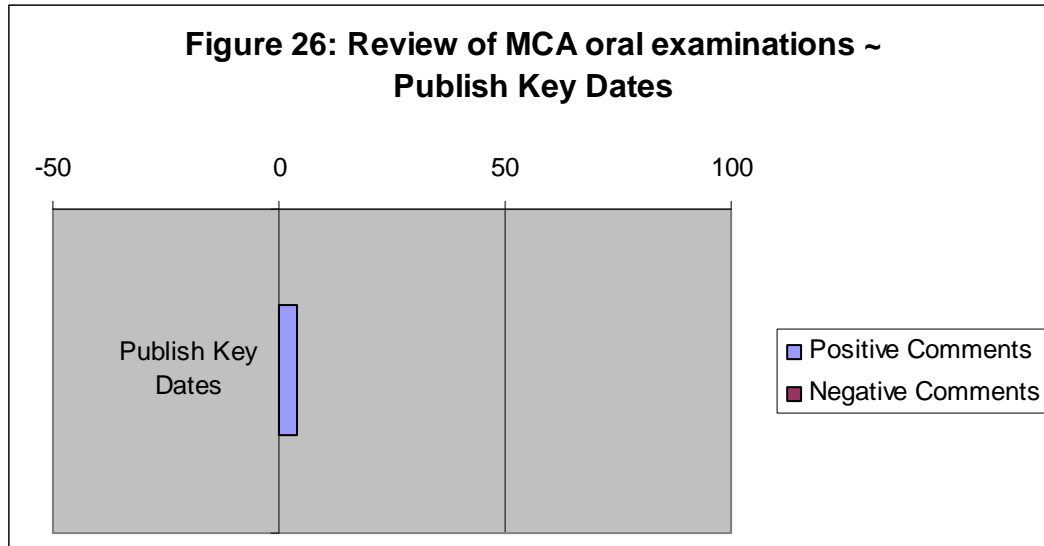
"It should be easier to look up on the website what is compulsory to read in order to be properly prepared for the exam"

"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"

4.13. PUBLISH KEY DATES (0.7%)

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”

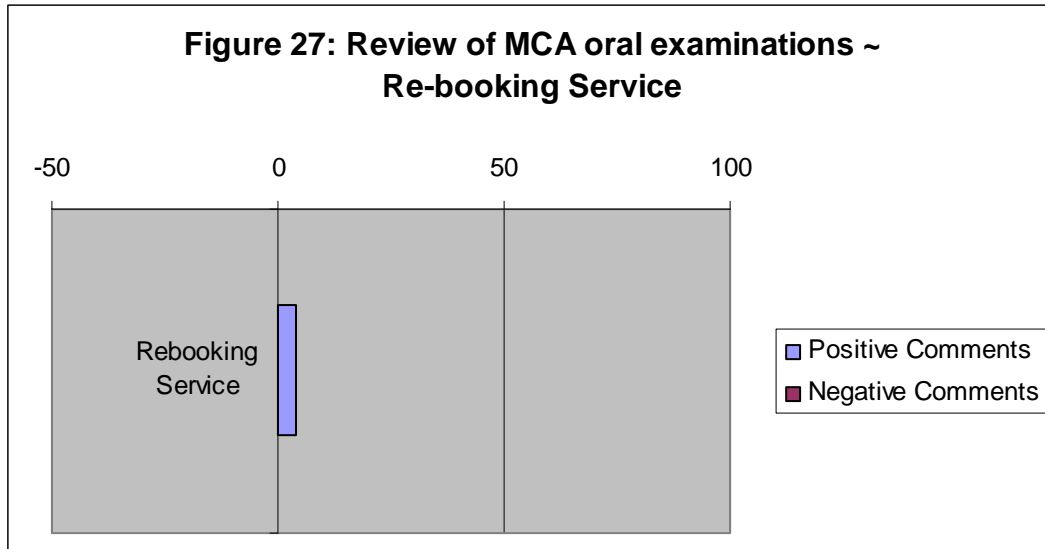
“There should be provisions for a fast turn around of NoE issuance and oral examinations dates under certain conditions, to tie in with shipping line pressures”

“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”

4.14. RE BOOKING SYSTEM (0.7%)

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



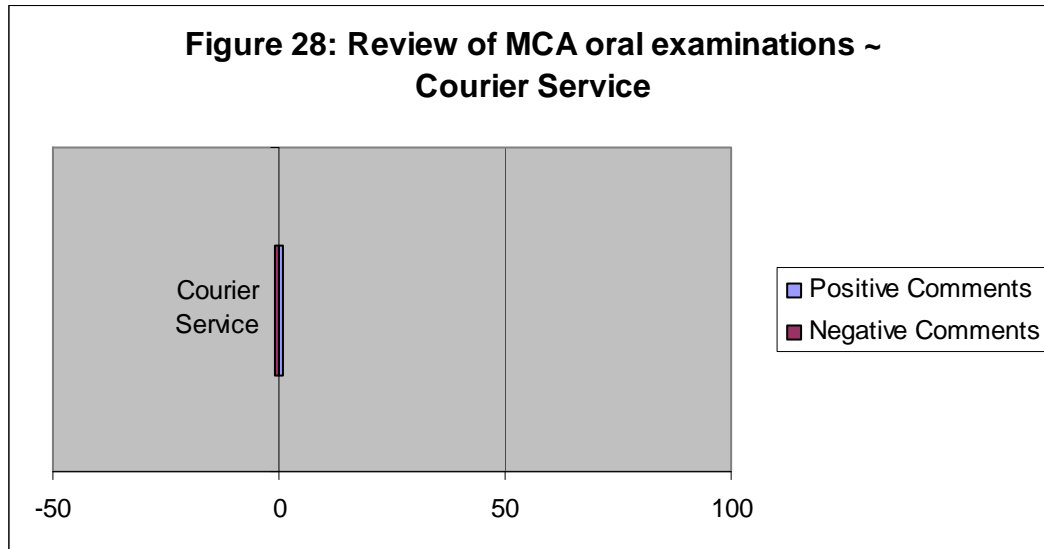
In favour

“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 fails oral at a centre should have preference for booking his re-sit dates than the freshers”

4.15. COURIER SERVICE OPTION (0.3%)

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

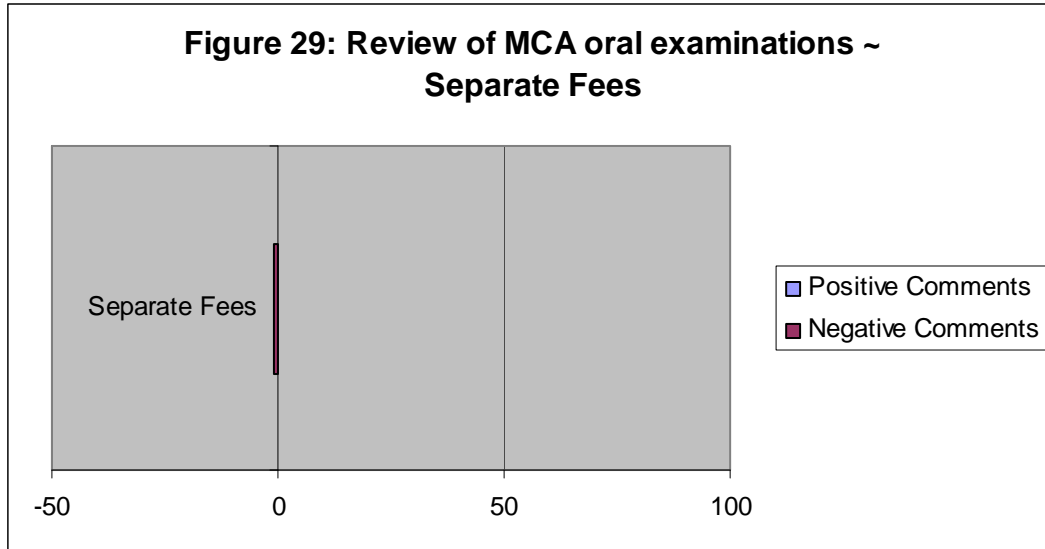
"Adding a courier fee gives the customer a greater satisfaction of security of their documents. There used to be a choice but documents were sometimes lost in the post"

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"

4.16. SEPARATE FEES (0.2%)

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"