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Assessment Report

MARINE SOCIETY & SEA CADETS



The matrix Standard is delivered by The Growth Company on
behalf of the Department for Education
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ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Maintaining accreditation
Assessor's Name	Steve Jackson
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	22/10/2024 – 23/10/2024
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C12033 PN202684
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	26 October 2027

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	Remote via Teams and phone
Staff interviews	12
Recipient interviews	8
Partner interviews	5
Document review	SAR/QIP, Business Plan, IAG Policy, EDI Policy and Action Plan 23-24, Learner ILP, other key policies, MSSC apprenticeship Handbook, Induction Programme, Website and social media. A wealth of documentation was provided which gave a comprehensive overview of MSSC

About the organisation

Marine Society & Sea Cadets (referred to as MSSC in this report) was formed in 2004 and is a charitable organisation providing education and training and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to sea farers and learners in the maritime sector. The original charity was established in 1756 and is based in London and delivers its programmes nationally, and internationally. MSSC's Mission is: 'Enabling current and future seafarers and maritime professionals to realise their potential through learning and career development.' Marine Society is four years into a new strategy that the Trustees of the Charity approved in May 2020. This helped create an MSSC 5-year 'Future Ready' Strategy, which has relaunched learning and

apprenticeships in the organisation. MSSC has the following ambition: 'We want to be the organisation of choice for post 16 education providers seeking to embrace curriculum or career progression into maritime for their students and helping to attract a new generation into maritime roles, whether that is shore-based or seagoing.' (Training & Development Business Plan). This provided a very helpful framework for the **matrix** Standard Review in 2024. It was agreed that the current training position in the maritime sector is capable of helping to meet the skills shortage crisis overall. There are some significant barriers for the MSSC beyond its control, and there is strong support from key partners in the sector to help MSSC address these and to boost the reputation of the sector among schools, colleges, parents/carers and young people.

A key part of the MSSC offer is apprenticeships. Currently MSSC offer Apprenticeships for the following Standards: L3 Small Commercial Vessel Crewmember, L3 Officer of the watch (near coastal), L2 Port Operative, L3 Port agent, L2 Marina and Boatyard Operative, L2 Seafarer (Deck Rating). This gives excellent coverage of the main apprenticeships needed by most employers in the sector, and partners interviewed were very positive about the curriculum provided and relevance of the learning to opportunities provided by employers. Since the last **matrix** Accreditation Review in 2021 MSSC has further strengthened its delivery model and performance and the quality of delivery and outcomes has improved. MSSC has evolved a digital delivery model supplemented by face to face contact with apprentices at key points of learning and IAG. This appears to be working well with apprentices, employers and staff working well with Teams and reporting gains in efficiency with less travel and flexible training delivery. The Ofsted Inspection of March 2024 endorsed the offer with very positive comments about the learning observed and the effectiveness of the support provided by the team. MSSC has recruited its trainers well to support the sector, and apprentices interviewed were enthusiastic about the support they had received.

MSSC operates with a small team of nine including book services staff, welfare staff and trainers and assessors who are very experienced and support each other very well. Knowledge of individual apprentices and learners is key to success and the Director of Maritime Training & Development, Head of Seafarer Learning & Welfare and Apprenticeship Manager encourage staff to take responsibility for curriculum and IAG services development. Challenge is welcomed by leaders of MSSC and encouraged. MSSC has a strong repeat business rate in 2024 which demonstrates loyalty and, more impressively, the trust employers have in MSSC and its performance.

MSSC has always produced clear plans and the current Business Plan is thorough and demonstrates very well the priorities, objectives and targets of the organisation. MSSC continues to improve its monitoring of performance with regular reviews of data and compliance that ensures MSSC accurately reports performance and achievement. Scrutiny and external oversight have been further improved since 2021 with trustees providing scrutiny and oversight.

The scope of the **matrix** Accreditation Review was the IAG offered by MSSC to its employers and apprentices, seafarer learners and participants in the Coming Ashore programme. The Sea Cadets Service was not specifically focused upon but an interview about the careers IAG resources available was very helpful including a valuable discussion about the IAG available to some 14,000 sea cadets and their parents/carers and 190 staff and 9,000 volunteers that help run the cadets' centres. Volunteers can take advantage of the wealth of courses provided by MSSC and this adds to the capacity and capability of the Sea Cadets to become a stronger supply chain for the sector. Few sectors can boast such an asset.

The scale of IAG services available is remarkable given the small size of the team. Although there are many other services offered by MSSC as a whole the impact of the Learning and IAG Services is commendable. MSSC apprenticeships was inspected by Ofsted in March 2024 and the result was 'Good' in every area. This is a significant achievement for the team for a small number of apprenticeships. Areas for improvement were not onerous indicating how favourably Ofsted considered the training provision to be. The result gives MSSC a strong platform to promote apprenticeships in the future.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

IAG is embedded in MSSC's delivery whatever the offer. MSSC apprentices are supported very well by the Lead Tutor and Apprenticeship Manager with progression featuring strongly. This approach is embedded in other IAG services. In the IAG Policy MSSC states:

'In the delivery of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) we support enquirers, learners and apprentices and beneficiaries in making decisions about their studies and planning based on their individual needs, circumstances and interests, mindful of the particular context of a seafarer lifestyle.'

The context is a key element of the IAG provided. At one extreme can be a crew member on board a tanker in a community of up to twenty on long watches with limited access to digital resources. Periods of isolation can mean learning and contact with a tutor or mentor are a genuine lifeline. At another extreme a learner could be land-based in a port with limited access to conventional class-based activities and with family responsibilities. Most noticeably learners and apprentices rely heavily on sea-based resources and networks for support. Once change has to be managed such networks may not be so reliable or up to date so the MSSC offer becomes even more significant. The welfare element of the IAG service is essential in helping seafarers to combat isolation and any mental health issues they are encountering. Such issues often emerge during discussions about learning. Sometimes a friendly and encouraging conversation is all that may be required but referral to other organisations such as MIND was evidenced. It is important to note the role of Books & Library Service in this welfare role too. Books remain important whether digital or physical and for some seafarers they represent a luxury. Accessing the Books & Library Service can develop into important social contact, something more than just a transactional event, and there was evidence from interviews and

comments from MSSC questionnaires that Books & Library Service are informal and welcome contacts amid routine duties.

Other key services include the learning programme – Learn@Sea, Learn@Shore, Coming Ashore (for seafarers wishing to resettle on land) and Slaters Fund Bursaries. All of these are designed to provide progression opportunities and accessing these brings potential learners into contact with the Learning and Welfare Team and the IAG they can provide.

The operation of apprenticeships relies upon employers to refer their candidates to MSSC and video interviews are held with line managers and apprentices to ensure each knows what to expect and to ascertain prior learning which is important particularly where more mature staff are taking up an apprenticeship. Skills scans of employers and apprentices follow and any English, maths or additional needs are ascertained. MSSC's staff frequently provide initial information and advice on careers and progression routes in line with apprentices' ambitions, drawing on their considerable sector knowledge.

There is a strong Induction Programme which emphasises how they will be supported during their apprenticeships. The Apprenticeship Handbook is comprehensive and was referred to by apprentices interviewed. Learners confirmed they are reminded about 'hot topics' such as radicalisation and wellbeing. Apprentices receive impartial IAG about key themes in the early modules of their apprenticeship. These themes include Prevent, British Values, Equality and Diversity and Health and Safety. During this period they are also advised how their tutor and assessor will support them with IAG around any personal issues and refer to appropriate external agencies. Safeguarding is covered well and employers appeared to be well briefed.

Once enrolled tutors/assessors are responsible for running the courses/modules supporting the qualifications followed. Delivery is online with workbooks provided digitally. IAG is provided to ensure the apprentice is realistic, while learning plans are practical and demonstrate the support available. MSSC has established a formal 12 week review process which engages the apprentices' line manager and there were examples from apprentices and MSSC staff interviewed that managers were engaged and, refreshingly, saw the apprentices as an investment.

MSSC has managed well the End Point Assessment (EPA) process, introducing mock assessments early and giving apprentices mock interviews. The Gateway is managed well and the resultant grades have shown a marked uplift in achievement of merit and distinction. Apprentices in their second year or who had just completed their apprenticeship who were interviewed mentioned how well they had been supported through the EPA, and the encouragement received to be prepared for this. Any apprentice who may be at risk of leaving the programme is provided with more regular 121 support with the employer's help, and the apprentice is monitored carefully through to the end of the programme.

Trainers/Assessors interviewed described learners different learning styles and how they had helped them by adjusting learning methods. There were some learners recruited with learning difficulties such as dyslexia for which appropriate support had been provided. There was an example of IAG to another learner who would probably have withdrawn from the apprenticeship without sensitive and appropriate support. As the individual had family responsibilities the support was tailored to provide the right balance of encouragement and listening and advice.

MSSC recognises the need to be innovative and deliver to high standards consistently. It is interesting to note that all partners interviewed were very clear how valuable the relationship with MSSC is, because of excellent communications and the expertise of the staff and their ethos, which in turn leads to better IAG support and outcomes for learners.

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

Learners and apprentices interviewed were highly satisfied with the training and IAG support they received from their trainers and assessors as evidenced by MSSC and the comments made to the **matrix** Assessor. For example one learner said:

'The trainer has been brilliant and given me loads of support when I was struggling. I might have dropped out were it not for him. He has been very encouraging and has intervened when I needed to be reminded about tasks but most importantly to make sure I received the OTJ time. He understand my needs and is always encouraging me and suggesting ways I can improve. What I learn is relevant to my job and my line manager recognises this.'

Quotes from two learners about their experience of being Slaters Scholars (a long established bursary fund to provide help with training costs and course fees) are significant and typical of the survey comments reviewed:

'The Marine Society provided invaluable support and assistance tailored to my needs. Guidance on career paths, access to educational resources and financial aid helped me navigate and succeed in my studies.'

'The support from the Marine Society was invaluable. The staff were always so kind and helpful, no question went unanswered or unsolved. With having a young family, the Marine Society removed all the financial strains and struggles, and allowed me to focus on my studies. The end result means so much to my family and I. We will be forever grateful.'

What was also clear was a sense of trust built up between learner and trainer/ assessor. Responses to email queries about assignments and prompt marking and return of those assignments were valued, and apprentices mentioned the IAG they received especially about workplace issues and how to manage work relationships. MSSC shared feedback from apprentices that showed thoughtful and careful reflection on how well they had been supported.

The IAG service is delivered effectively to meet most clients' needs. Feedback from partners was extremely positive with interviewees expressing confidence and trust.

They all confirmed positive interventions by MSSC' staff that had helped with the progression of learners, further confirming the feedback about MSSC recorded on questionnaires and received informally. One partner's comments were typical of the others received during interviews:

'We have been with MSSC for two years and they are brilliant. I can't fault them. I value the advice I get from the trainer who is excellent at communications and is always there at the end of a phone or email. We get very positive feedback from our apprentices about their learning, what apprentices learn from each other on Teams sessions and the IAG they receive.'

Another partner talked about the IAG received about the sector and the flexible way of working. Another major maritime organisation was clear about the effectiveness of MSSC:

'We have worked closely with MSSC to develop appropriate responses to the skills agenda and encourage employers to take up apprenticeships. It is difficult because of the hiring system in the sector (workboats) and the predominant feature of SMEs. Nevertheless MSSC are very innovative, always trying to make the most of available funding and pathways. Over the last five years in particular I would characterise the relationship we have as one of trust and based clearly on outcomes. Their services are excellent and especially pleasing is the Coming Ashore programme which is putting seafarers in touch with employers they would not have encountered. Learn@Sea is another product that's deserves greater success – vital in helping seafarers combat isolation...MSSC is far more responsive and flexible in its response to learners. The training provided seems to stimulate the apprentices, especially thinking about how to plan for issues arising. The model works well and I cannot think of any way MSSC can improve.'

The last point is telling. All partners interviewed said they would recommend MSSC without hesitation and all seemed genuinely pleased to be associated with MSSC.

The focus on high quality delivery is key and there were many examples provided by MSSC staff which demonstrated the commitment to continuous improvement. The new SAR and QIP appeared to focus on the right areas for improvement and the use of data and key outcomes such as attendance, achievement and outcomes were the main performance monitoring tools. MSSC is working well to raise standards even further and staff are increasingly reviewing processes and procedures routinely, as well as working with employers to review operational activity and establish and share good practice. Improving achievement remains challenging as apprentices try to balance work demands with OTJ.

MSSC staff are working hard to ensure that they can meet any future challenges and continue to work positively. Many of their approaches and adherence to high standards are paying off and will continue to aid growth. One of the key principles is continuing to deliver well on what MSSC knows are its strengths and its staff are highly motivated to achieving success for the organisation, and apprentices and employers. MSSC is in a very good place to capitalise on the enormous goodwill it

enjoys from partners and employers and achieve growth from its range of apprenticeship offers.

What is working particularly well

A number of strengths/areas that are working particularly well were identified during the assessment, which are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- MSSC continues to provide clear management with very good direction, communication, and decision making. Teamworking in the organisation is excellent with regular keep in touch meetings giving the opportunity to share issues, information and good practice. Leaders and managers provide very good line management support. Overall professionalism has helped focus staff effectively on delivering high quality IAG services to learners through the emphasis on quality. (1.1, 2.1)
- The range of services provided by MSSC is impressive and can be said to be a 'wrap around service' or a 'one-stop shop' as MSSC likes to call its services. Starting with the online services to Sea Cadets and volunteers and IAG career services it is possible to track through different levels of IAG support, to the Coming Ashore programme which seeks to help seafarers begin second and alternative careers, or semi-retirement. Users of any of the IAG services and the Learn@Sea, Learn@Shore provision are assured of high quality levels of support with referral to other agencies as required. IAG services are clearly set out and high standards adhered to. (4.1, 4.2)
- Trainers/assessors and the Learning and Welfare Team in general give learners a sense of being individuals and valued. Confidence and self-belief are consistently noted as major changes by learners through MSSC's IAG support. The encouragement given to apprentices, learners, and mentors/mentees by all staff is a key element of MSSC's success. (2.8, 3.2)
- Employers and partners interviewed consistently praised the quality of delivery and the high standard of support for apprentices' and learners' achievement. MSSC's staff were noted for their professionalism and enthusiasm, while all partners mentioned 'going above and beyond expectation.' MSSC emphasises the flexible nature of their offer which suits employers' needs. (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.8)
- The digital delivery model is well established and appreciated by staff, employers and apprentices. Trainers carry out face to face interviews such as reviews when required every 12 weeks formally, and apprentices were fulsome in their praise of the learning and IAG support provided by training staff. (2.1, 2.2)
- The renewed focus on marketing is welcome and the online resources and use of social media with a regular calendar of activities is beginning to have better results in raising awareness of the sector. (2.7)

- MSSC's commitment to review and continuous improvement is impressive. Employers and partners are very supportive of the services provided by MSSC and recognise the IAG they receive is integral to high quality delivery and support for their apprentices and learners. The IAG provided to employers could be said to be more significant than that given to apprentices and has led to improvements in apprentice support by employers. (2.3, 6.1, 6.2,)

Development suggestions

Development suggestions are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement and a way for an Assessor to add value e.g. where the service is of a high quality, development areas are offered to help the service be even better than it already is, or to give insight into practices seen elsewhere. There is no correlation between the number of strengths and development suggestions. Where development areas are greater in number this is not intended to indicate that the information, advice and guidance service is in any way lacking. These will form the basis for discussion at the Continuous Improvement Checks (CIC) conducted twelve and twenty-four months from the date of this Assessment, along with any other notable developments. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- We discussed how well positioned MSSC is to grow apprenticeship business further. There are clear skills gaps in the sector which have broad agreement across the sector yet frustratingly there are barriers to the much-needed expansion. Having an excellent portfolio and growing reputation for quality regrettably is only half the solution, but the main contribution MSSC can make. We agreed that structural issues act as one of the barriers and greater flexibility in delivery could circumvent some of the sector's hiring practices. A consortium approach such as that operated in other sectors such as construction or engineering can pull together groups of SMEs to spread work placements and mitigate risk. It is suggested that as the plans for Skills England evolve and the role of the new nine regional bodies emerges MSSC should be ready to set out business cases for funding either local consortia or group approaches based around acknowledged maritime skills issues. Clearly MSSC would need to target the seven regions with coasts and ports and MSSC has excellent networks in these areas to take advantage of the opportunities that will present over the next few years. (1.1)
- There is a very welcome emphasis on a new EDI Policy with Equity being adopted as the key 'front end'. Discussions showed there remains much to be done in what is essentially a conservative sector. Nevertheless the appointment of a Head of EDI who has produced a practical but ambitious Action Plan is very encouraging. An example of this is the establishment of a Reconciliation Committee to examine links to slavery, and engagement with the Windrush charity, which demonstrates the intent and direction. Translating this work into narratives for today's generation could help promote more

positive opportunities in the sector and help remove ethical barriers. (4.3, 4.4, 4.7)

- We discussed the continuing issues surrounding wellbeing and supporting apprentices and learners who may need IAG welfare support around mental health issues. MSSC has trained some staff in the Mental Health First Aid course. MSSC has undertaken maritime contextualised Mental Health First Aid Training by a company called Seas The Mind, which is commendable. Further steps have been taken to ensure that mental health issues are part of personal development for apprentices and these issues occur regularly in contacts with mentees on Coming Ashore and sometimes in contacts with users of the Books & Library Service. Similarly referral to an external agency such as MIND can help and learners are regularly referred to such external agencies. It is suggested that over time all staff take the Mental Health First Aid course which is free and online, to help understanding of mental health issues and give confidence to staff in how to approach mental health issues with apprentices in different ways. (2.5, 4.3)
- As noted in previous **matrix** Assessment Review reports the use of the website and social media are areas that continuing development support. website could carry information on the success of MSSC on the landing page, backed up with case studies of successful apprentices and their progress. Equally case studies about former apprentices who have been promoted as a result of their apprenticeship success could be compelling. It is also important to ensure potential clients see MSSC displaying confidence about the delivery model and the services to employers and its success. The employers video is a very good example of this. Tracking destinations of apprentices will also help to build a 'track record' of success and some of these alumni will be helpful in bringing back for talks to learners and apprentices and perhaps for use at careers fairs and presentations to schools and parents/carers. Putting such case studies on the website and social media would add considerable evidence about the opportunities available in the marine sector and the wide range of opportunities, which are generally not apparent to school and college leavers as well as parents/carers. (3.2, 4.3)

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3. Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out annually by the accreditation anniversary date.
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