MARITIME EMPLOYERS' RESEARCH

What training and skills do British merchant navy officers need to make a successful transition from ship to shore?

June 2016

Research conducted by Navigate PR and Occam Insight on behalf of Maritime London, Trinity House, Nautilus International, the Merchant Navy Training Board, the Marine Society and Sea Cadets.

NAVIGATE

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Executive Summary

In order to help identify the educational and skills gaps for UK seafarers coming ashore that would make them the employee of choice for the UK maritime shore industries, a qualitative investigation was commissioned into the attitudes of these employers.

The two most important findings were that 'mariners should be encouraged to better prepare themselves for working ashore' and also that 'more needs to be done to help seafarers find out about shore-side opportunities' – the latter point being clearly the most significant.

There is a vast array of shore-side job opportunities for ex-seafarers, but it would appear that many of them are unaware of the opportunities that exist beyond the ones they directly encounter in the course of their sea-going careers.

The adjustment in working practices from the 'command and control' system common afloat to the more collaborative management style ashore was noted to take time and this, along with a recognition in the profound change in culture, lifestyle and remuneration, leads to a preference for those candidates who can demonstrate a commitment to making the change.

There are currently two attributes that can help British candidates establish a preference for British employers – the fact that English is their first language is an aid to their communication skills, whilst British residency is also a clear advantage (shared with other EU nationals).

Clearly there are some shore-side jobs where a directly-relevant additional qualification is required (for example a law degree for working in a legal practice) but beyond that many expressed a preference for an additional qualification such as a degree from a good university.

Background and Overview

This research is designed to assist Maritime London, Trinity House, Nautilus International, the Merchant Navy Training Board, the Marine Society and Sea Cadets (the Committee) gain an insight into the views of UK based maritime employers.

The study was designed to help the Committee gain a better understanding of what additional training and educational requirements might be needed to ensure British seafarers wishing to take shore jobs are best prepared and more attractive to employers, so that they become the 'employee of choice' for the UK maritime shore industries.

A qualitative investigation amongst employers was required to sit alongside other quantitative investigations as part of a wider project.

The research was undertaken by Navigate PR and Occam Insight between March and May 2016 in three stages:

1. Interviews with specialist maritime employment agencies (March 2016)
2. On-line quantitative survey of employers of ex-mariners (March 2016)
3. Follow-up qualitative exercise bringing the quantitative responses into sharper focus (April/May 2016)

Stage 1

Three extensive interviews of at least 2-hours duration were conducted with specialist maritime employment agencies: Spinnaker, Faststream and Halcyon. We would like to thank them for their co-operation.

These interviews were used to identify the key areas that these vital intermediaries believed were likely to be of key relevance to the project, and these were accordingly built into the on-line questionnaire.

Stage 2 – The respondents

The questionnaire was sent to Navigate PR's database of 4000 UK maritime contacts, UK members of the Baltic Exchange, UK based members of the International Union of Marine Insurance, members of the UK Chamber of Shipping, Spinnaker and Faststream's databases of UK employers, members of the Society for Marine Industries, Maritime London members and the subscribers of Maritime London's newsletter *London Matters*. It was also promoted on social media and retweeted by a range of organisations and individuals including Intermanager.

A total of 155 responses were received from most regions of the UK and include senior level responses from the main UK maritime law firms, leading P&I clubs, insurance underwriters and brokers, large and small ship management and ship operating companies, leading maritime educational establishments, major British ports, classification societies, flag states and engineering companies The sample is representative of the UK maritime sector. (See Exhibits 1, 2, 3).

Similarly, a good spread was achieved of the number of employees employed by the companies (Exhibit 4). For the companies managing vessels, again a good representative spread was achieved by size and type of fleet (Exhibits 5 and 6).

Whilst the largest group of employers were from large companies, with 1/3 having over 200 employees, (Exhibit 7), the number of ex-seafarers employed showed a very different profile, with over 40% of companies employing 5 or fewer (Exhibit 8).

Currently almost half the respondents employ both ex engineers and ex deck officers, 40% employ only ex deck officers but only 9% only employ ex engineers (Exhibit 9).

Looking to the future, almost a third were not expecting to hire any ex mariners within the next 2 years or so. Reflecting current employment levels, 36% were looking to hire both deck and engineering officers, 20% ex deck officers and 7% only engineers. 6% were looking to hire 'other mariners' such as ex Royal Navy specialists (Exhibit 10).

There was a plethora of job titles for both the ex-engineers and deck officers. Even with some grouping there were 26 different job titles for the engineers and 36 for the deck officers. Amongst the engineers, the only frequently-mentioned job titles were 'Surveyor / Principal Surveyor' at 22% and 'Technical Supervisor' at 16%. For the deck officers 'Surveyor / Principal Surveyor' was again the leading job title a 15% whilst were 8% who were looking to hire as 'Skipper/Master'. After this there were 5% mentions for 'Marine Manager', 'Operations Manager / Super' and 'Solicitor'.[1]

Stage 2 – Main Findings

We turn now to the main thrust of the project – the qualifications required. Clearly, given the numerous different specialisations covered, there were a number of specific additional qualifications that were required (such as a law degree for potential solicitors). However, a number of clear overall requirements emerged.

For engineers there was a clear preference for 1st Engineers with over 3 years' experience (57%) or First Engineers (no experience specified) at 21%. Second Engineers were 7%, Third or Fourth Engineers at 9% and ETOs at 5%. When it came to whether employers were looking for any additional qualifications from prospective ex-Engineers, only 11% said that none were necessary. 32% were looking for an Engineering Degree, 16% for any Degree. 12% wanted some additional

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[1] A list of job title for the Business Services and Shipping Companies is shown in Exhibit 12
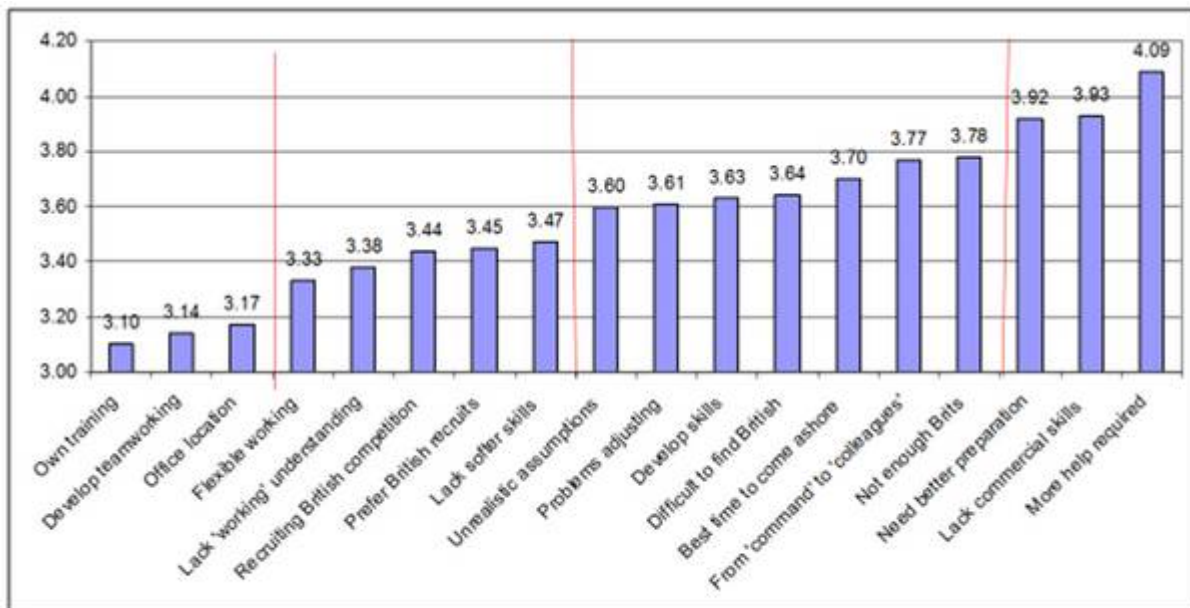
engineering qualification and 30% ideally wanted candidates to have some previous shore-side working experience.

For Deck Officers a similar picture emerged with 32% wanting some previous shore-side working experience, 24% wanting a Degree and 40% wanting some additional qualification[2]. Only 5% were not looking for any additional qualifications.

The most revealing element of the project was the 'agree/disagree' responses to the 'statements' at the end of the questionnaire. In this section respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements on a 5-point rating scale, where 1= disagree strongly, 3= neither agree nor disagree and 5= agree strongly.

For the sake of simplicity this has been divided up into 4 sections: The first is where there is only mild agreement (although note that ALL the statements received a positive score), the second where there is a more positive response, and the last where agreement is strongest. (A full list of the actual agree/disagree statements is in the Appendix).

Section 1: In the first section we find only mild agreement that 'We have our own training scheme to help us fill our vacancies'. If those who replied 'not applicable' it emerges that only 31% of respondents appear to have any additional training provided. Most respondents also felt that shore-based team working was a minor issue, as was the location of their offices; those that did find location were based in London, where the high cost of living was cited as a problem.

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[2] Whilst a many requested an additional qualification, an insufficient number specified what this should be to yield any meaningful data.

Section 2: This London-based issue also arose in the next section in responses to the statement 'We are having to be more flexible in our working practices to attract the best candidates including *"one of the biggest barriers is to attract quality seafaring candidates to move to central London"*.

There were two 'British' comments in this section: 'The competition to recruit British candidates is increasing' and 'I prefer recruiting British candidates'. The latter statement attracted a number of comments – some highlighted that the key issue was British residency rather than nationality, whilst more noted that it was that it was the language skills of British nationals that made them the preferred choice.

There were two other issues in this section: 'A lot of candidates don't seem to understand what working ashore will entail' and 'Many mariners seem to lack the softer management skills required for working ashore'. Both of these attracted comments supporting either side of the argument, for example: *"Large cultural shift involved in moving ashore"* as against *"Depends on the candidate, I think most mariners have a reasonable grasp of what working ashore will entail"*.

Section 3: There are a number of responses here, 'The adjustment in working practices from afloat to ashore can cause problems', 'Mariners would benefit from developing their management and leadership skills before coming ashore', 'I have difficulty finding suitably-qualified British candidates', 'Mariners don't always understand the best time in their sea-going careers to come ashore', 'The adjustment from the command structure afloat to working with colleagues ashore can be challenging' and 'There aren't enough British mariners coming ashore now to meet demand'.

The greatest number of comments was generated by the number of British mariners, where several observations were made that the underlying issue was that there were not enough British nationals going to sea, and that more needed to be done to encourage school and college leavers into the profession (although there was a comment that more Brits were now becoming available from working in the Offshore industry). The comments about the 'leadership and management skills' tended to focus on communication and commercial skills rather than on general management and leadership, which were generally felt to be fine.
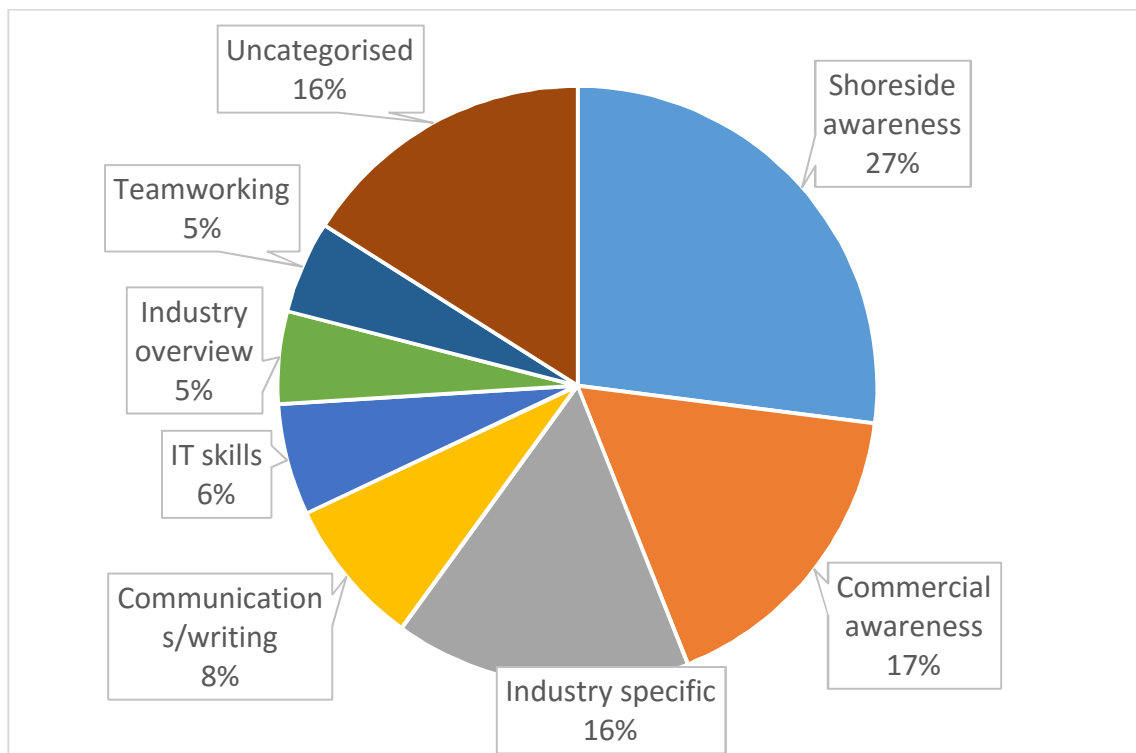
Section 4: Clearly these are the most important issues identified in the survey: 'Mariners should be encouraged to prepare themselves better for working ashore' and particularly: 'More needs to be done to help seafarers find out about shore-side opportunities'.

The comments about better preparation and 'lack of commercial skills' were closely related. Generally it was felt that more courses were now available for studying whilst at sea, but in particular commercial, budgeting and communication skills were the most important to address. Finally, although some commented that information was available for seafarers to find out about shore-side job opportunities, some also observed that it was fragmented.

Finally, respondents were asked for their views on the most important training or education needs if mariners are to be best prepared for jobs ashore. A 'wordle-type' analysis shows the following:

An alternative way of viewing the responses is as follows:

Stage 3 – follow up telephone interviews

The 10 telephone interviews conducted highlighted just how diverse the shore-side maritime industry is – and how the requirements it has from mariners coming ashore vary enormously. We spoke to 'traditional' City businesses, to dynamic, sophisticated hi-tech trading and ship management companies; from those where extensive further professional training was required to those where the skills learned at sea were largely sufficient in themselves.

Having said that, there were also a number of similarities. Once again the conversations highlighted that a number of job applicants were ill-informed about the nature of the specific jobs they were applying for and also about the realities of working ashore – especially office-based working:

- "The trouble is that they apply for a lot more jobs than they're suitable for"
- "They often have no idea about the nature of the work that's involved, or the hours. There's a misconception about what happens in the office and the fact that they can be on call 24/7. Not to mention the commuting…"

Unsurprisingly, therefore, there were widespread calls for mariners to be better informed about their options and about the realities of working life ashore. Whilst some larger firms operate a system of giving promising young mariners shore-side experience through their sea careers, most agreed that some sort of industry-wide 'intern scheme' would be a good idea – although none could immediately conceive how it might operate although a couple indicated that their companies might be prepared to join such a scheme.

- "They should start [getting shore-side experience] when they are junior officers and then throughout their careers."

Almost all were also of the opinion that a key determinant of success in transferring into shore-based working was the attitude of the applicant. Those who were committed to making a success of their new life inevitably did so:

- "It's more about attitude than it is about skills – which are going to be present anyway, especially with senior officers. If they're committed then they'll make almost any sacrifice to make it a success."
- "We're looking for people with technical experience combined with grit, determination and a proactive approach; people who are constantly questioning. People with some shore-side experience, even just a few weeks of office work are preferred."
- "Some will say 'I went to sea because I didn't want an office job.' Later in their careers their commitments and attitudes can change."

Turning to specific skill requirements, there were numerous comments about the difficulties many ex-seafarers faced in learning how to move on from the 'command and control' management style at sea to the team-working ethos ashore:

- "They need to learn that there's different ways of getting things done than simply telling someone to do it."
- "We've got cross cultural teams. We've got cross functional teams. They have to learn to deal with Commercial, Health and Safety, Vetting and so on. Some of them find difficulty in dealing with women in powerful positions. They're dealing with customers – they need to be customer focussed and deal with them with sensitivity. And all that's a big transition for most of them who are used to just giving orders."
- "Too many captains /2in a team think they're in charge."
- "If you're an ex captain with a few years' experience it can be difficult taking instruction from a 30 year-old MBA who's much better qualified than they are."
- "You need to give them a structure in which to work – at least at first."

Whilst some suggested that these issues could be addressed relatively quickly:

- "They need to learn about the office environment – not just by looking at a piece of paper but by learning over 2 or 3 days what to do…. How to work with women, how to speak on a phone, how to cope with technology in an office."

Others, however, felt this took longer:

- It can take time… they need to sit in a team with someone prepared to help and coach them for a while."
- "It's a tough learning curve. Having the right attitude is vital… they've got to have a willingness to adapt."

There was, however a widespread recognition that the skills of ex-mariners went beyond simply managing at sea:

- "They're capable of so many things. They've got experience of making real-time decisions under pressure, fatigued and feeling stressed.   Senior officers aren't in a sealed environment on a ship – they have to deal with ports, terminals and other third parties."

We heard several comments that the nature of some shore-based work had changed rapidly in the past few years:

- "It's not like it used to be – I was lucky – when I came ashore you could go straight from ship to shore, now you need a many more additional skill sets. There's just so much more complexity – they need to understand supply chain management, project management a

really sophisticated budget management – some of our budgets have quadrupled in just the past few years – so any mistake can be really, really expensive."

- "Nowadays it's genuinely a global business with competitors in new markets. There are different cultural sensitivities and ways of working. There's new technology to use and sophisticated budgeting to master. Candidates should begin to prepare themselves beforehand so they're not overwhelmed when they come ashore."

Whilst some companies ran their own in-house training programmes, sometimes making use of specialised external courses, many relied on recruits having gained external qualification beforehand:

- "We've got our own 6-month training programme. It's expensive and it's not always understood by those coming ashore who think they should be able to walk straight into the job."
- "In Dubai we've just introduced a new training scheme that takes less experienced mariners and trains them on the job, followed by a 12 month mentoring programme. We hope to expand this to other offices. But it still takes 2-3 years before the candidate can do the job, 5 years until they are really good."
- "We place a huge emphasis on training and educating staff. It's an extremely difficult job with big calls needed that can have multi-million dollar implications."
- "We'd expect most of them to take a maritime business degree as a bridge between the two worlds."
- "We'd ideally look for a degree, but a degree from a 'tin pot' university is worse than nothing."

Some types of company looked for specific qualifications:

- "We employ ex-master mariners and they're expected to have a law degree or the International Group P&I qualification."

Most respondents did not necessarily have a preference for British recruits – it was down to the quality of each applicant, and there was a feeling that the supply of British mariners was declining as the British merchant fleet also declined. However, there were some businesses where having English as a first language was considered an advantage, provided it resulted in the respondent having better communication skills:

- "We need people who can be firm and clear in correspondence."
- "Clarity on the telephone – having good telephone skills, that's important when dealing with clients."
- "Communication skills are key – resolving big incidents successfully involves having a transparent and open dialogue with local authorities."

- "They need to be able to write reports and speak good English. They can't be too verbose and they must use the correct terminology. Most seafarers can communicate well – although Engineers perhaps less so."

Turning to specific skills that would be useful, it was felt that most mariners these days had mastered basic IT skills such as the Microsoft Office suite.

- "There's a lot of IT on a vessel these days and they're used to mastering computers for communication and so on."
- "They need to be able to do Word and PDF and emails. Nothing too sophisticated."

Some companies had proprietary or enterprise systems (such as SAP) and it was recognised that specific training would be required to master these.

More comments were made about gaining commercial skills:

- "A good commercial operator sees the world in a very different way to a captain. Some say 'I wouldn't do it that way if I was a captain' – but if you're in the office you're expected to push the commercial agenda – you need someone to try and optimise the deal, not someone who's second-guessing the captain. The captain's got the final say, it's a question of how far you can push him."

Other skill sets mentioned:

- "It's about customer service – realising that the other person on the end of the phone is vitally important and needs to be handled in the appropriate way."
- "Management and leadership skills are often sadly lacking from people from the merchant navy – the military are much better at it. Tailored management and leadership courses would be very useful."
- "We're behind as an industry in training for leadership and analysis."
- "They need analytical skills – and an attention to detail and the ability to hold things in your head."
- "Whilst most ships are multi-cultural it doesn't mean that everyone ends up with enough cultural sensitivity for working ashore in this business. And they need to be able to work in multi-cultural teams, they need to be able to deal with other departments. And that can sometimes be a bit of a problem – especially for engineers."
- "Interpersonal skills are vital – they need to be able to deal with a huge range of people – police, salvors, lawyers, surveyors, barristers…"
- "They need to be able to establish a good rapport with people still at sea – that's why we have ex-seafarers, but they need to stay up to date with how life at sea is changing."

- "Seafarers don't have the experience of applying for jobs and making their CVs look good in a way that many non-seafarers do. Help in this area could be relevant."

Conclusions

- Evidence from this survey has highlighted the sheer number and different types of job opportunities that are available to mariners coming ashore

- The particular skills and qualifications required for each type of job are very different

- Mariners are having to search in a number of different places in order to identify what shore-based career is most appropriate to them – when might be the best time to come ashore and what additional qualifications they may require to obtain a suitable position

- A 'single-shop' source of information for mariners would therefore seem to be a way of addressing this issue

- In addition, it was clearly felt that more attention should be given to encouraging suitable recruits into the maritime profession

- The telephone research revealed that there was a very strong interest in a programme that would allow ex-seafarers work-experience in a variety of businesses combined with training in areas such as communication, management and IT.

Appendix
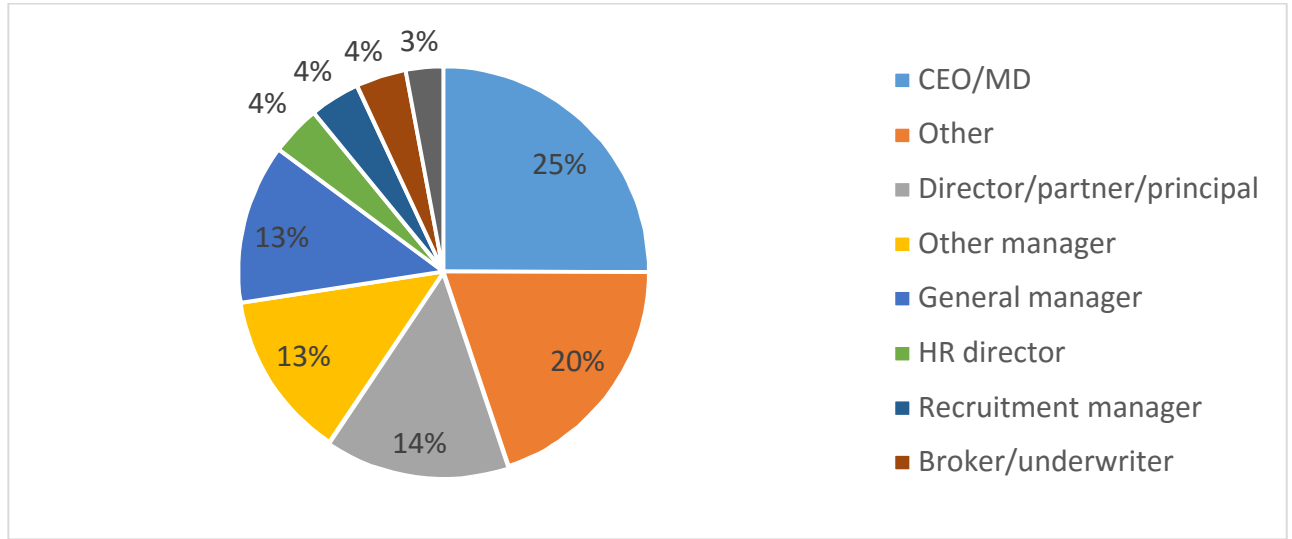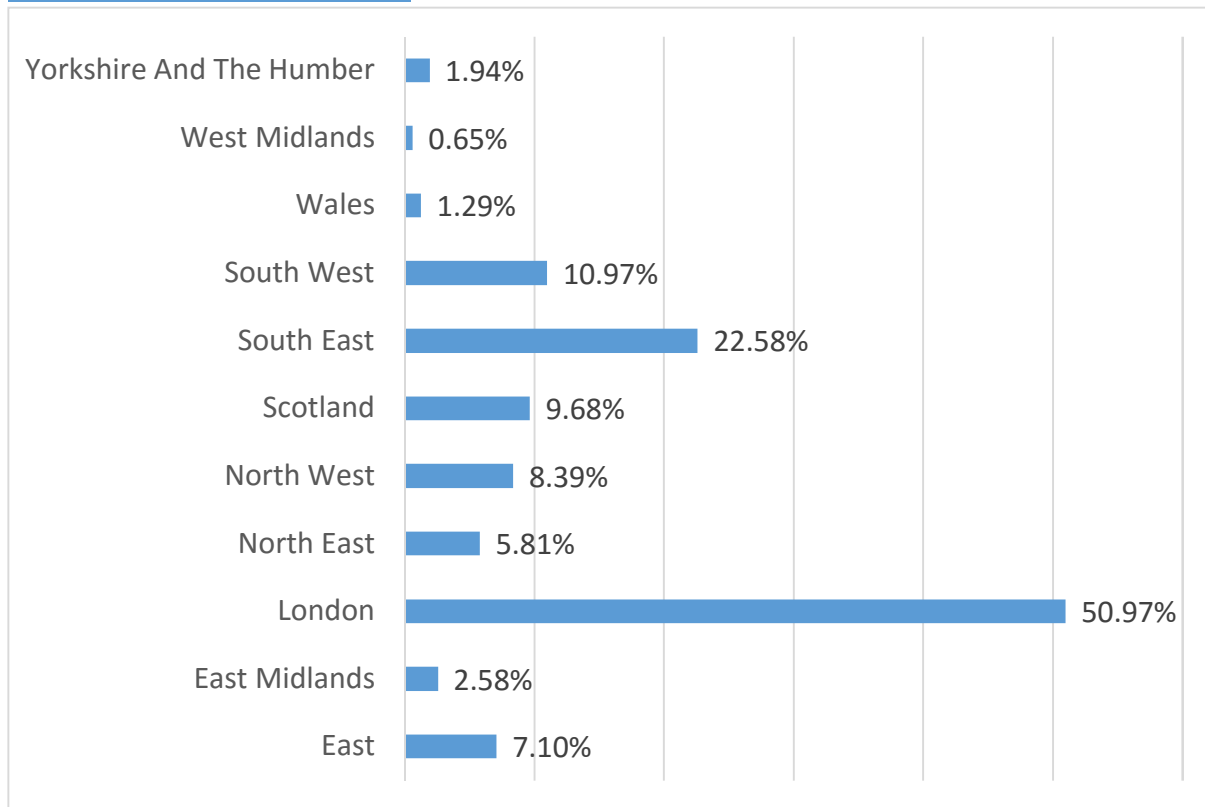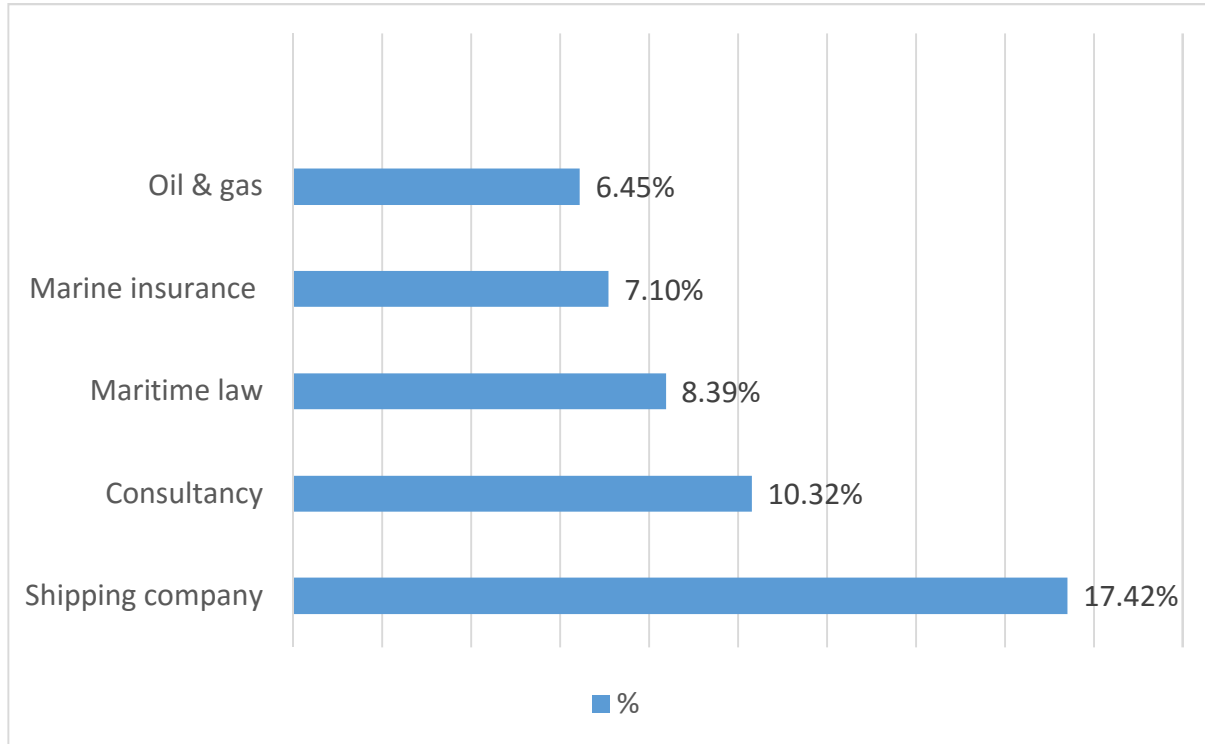
Exhibit 1: Job title of respondent

Legend:
- CEO/MD
- Other
- Director/partner/principal
- Other manager
- General manager
- HR director
- Recruitment manager
- Broker/underwriter

Pie chart values: 25%, 20%, 14%, 13%, 13%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 3%

Exhibit 2: Location of respondent

Location	Percentage
Yorkshire And The Humber	1.94%
West Midlands	0.65%
Wales	1.29%
South West	10.97%
South East	22.58%
Scotland	9.68%
North West	8.39%
North East	5.81%
London	50.97%
East Midlands	2.58%
East	7.10%

Exhibit 3: Type of company

Half of the responses came from a wider range of companies including shipbroking at a close 6th with companies involved in coastal operations, surveying/inspecting, equipment manufacturing, 3rd party ship management, finance, defence & security, port operations, trade associations, ship repair/building and systems, recruitment and education.
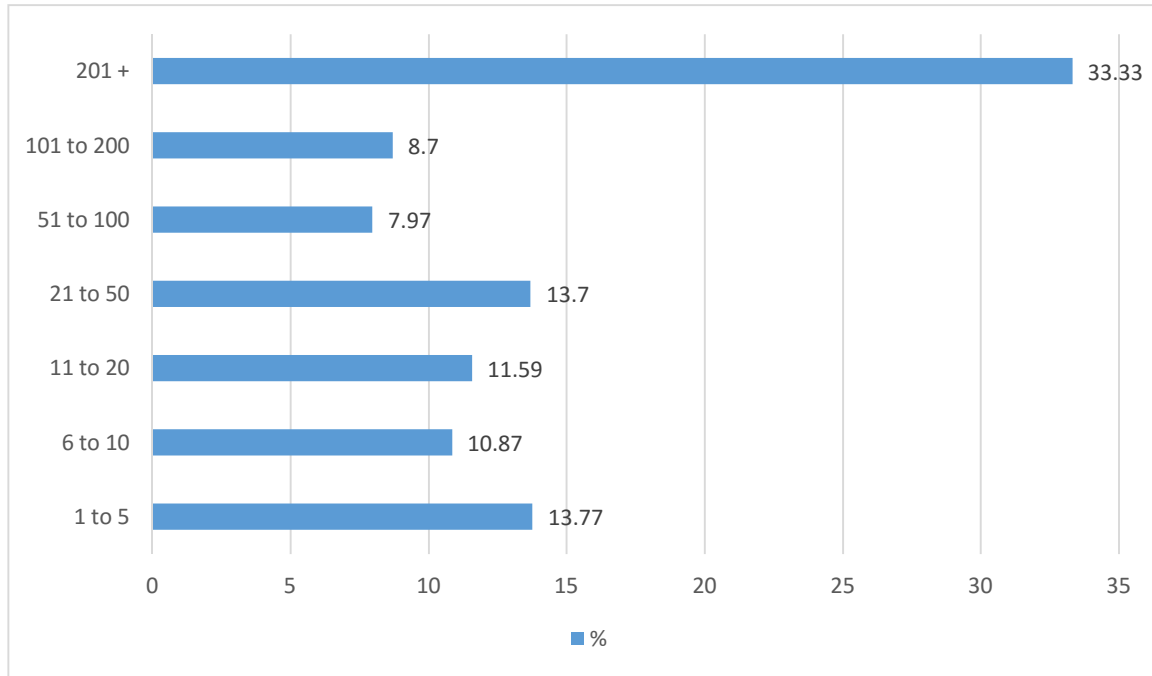
Exhibit 4: Number of employees in the company

Category	%
201 +	33.33
101 to 200	8.7
51 to 100	7.97
21 to 50	13.7
11 to 20	11.59
6 to 10	10.87
1 to 5	13.77

Exhibit 5: Size of fleet

Size of fleet
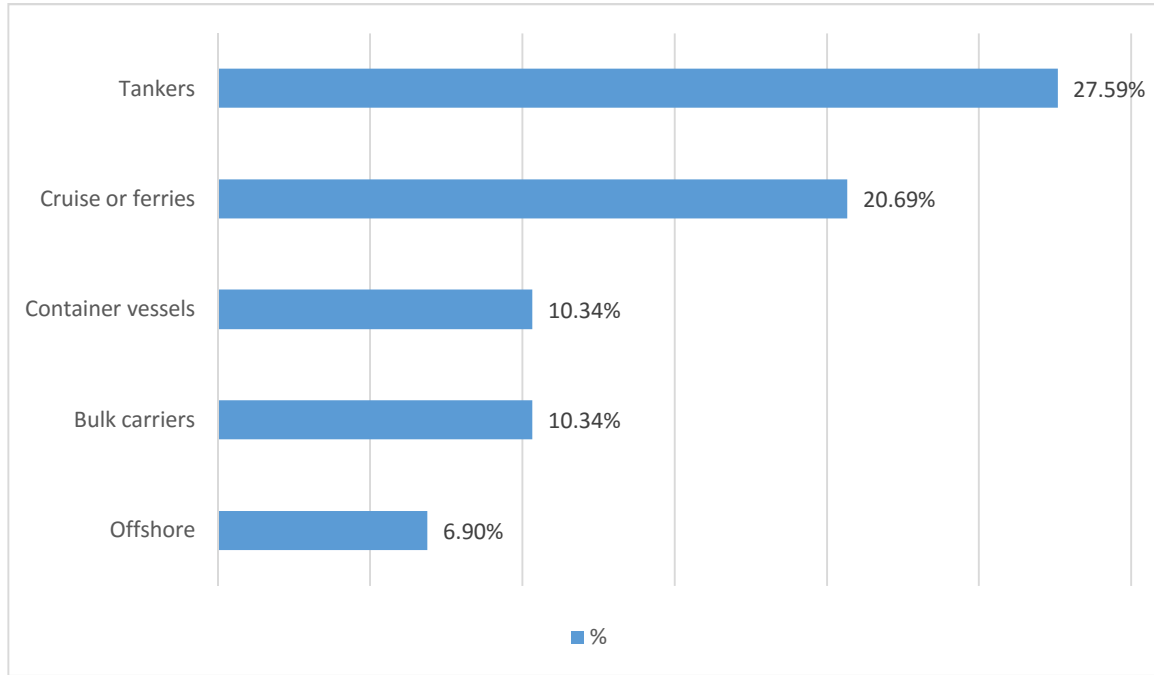
Exhibit 6: Type of fleet

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Exhibit 7: Number of ex-seafaring employees
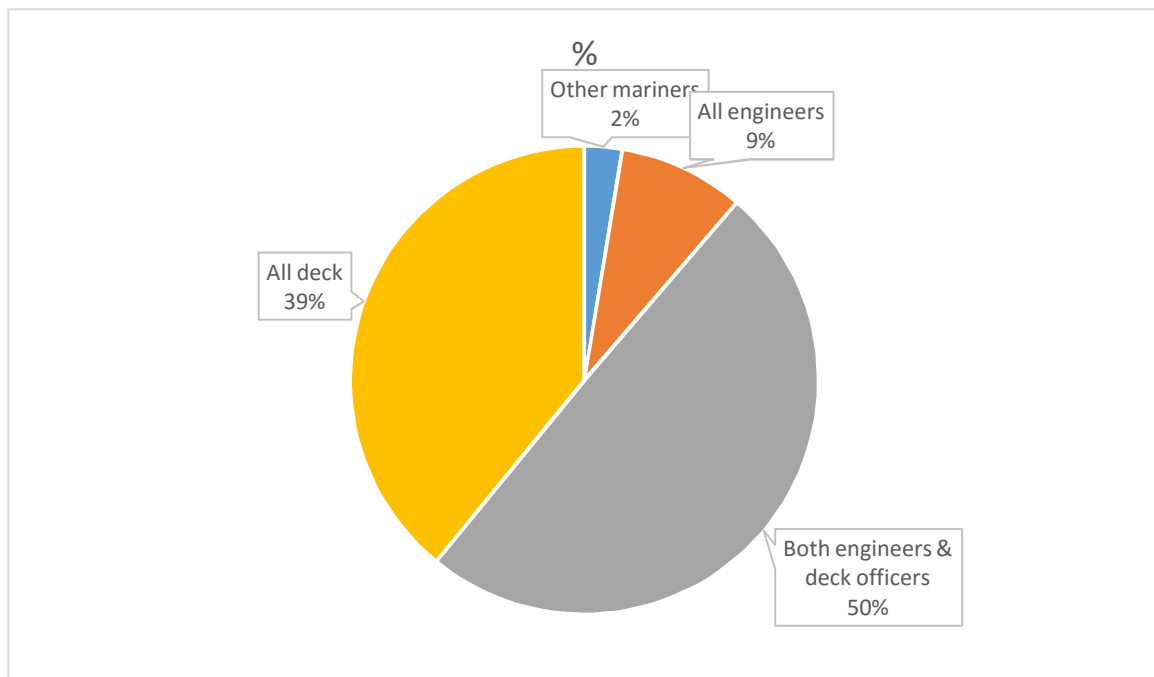

Exhibit 8: Current ex-seafarer employees

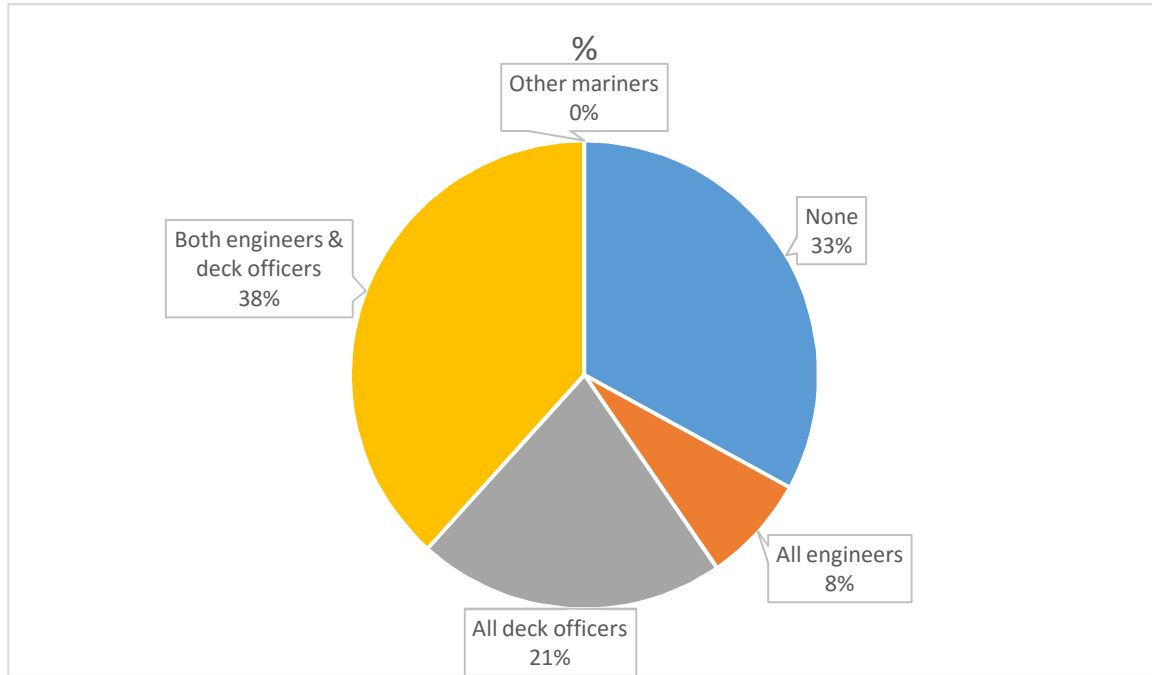**Exhibit 9: Anticipated hiring within the next 2 years**

Exhibit 10: The agree / disagree statements

- We have our own training schemes to help us to fill our vacancies

- Mariners would benefit from developing team working skills before coming ashore

- The location of our offices / workplaces makes recruitment more difficult

- We are having to be more flexible in our working practices to attract the best candidates

- A lot of candidates don't seem to understand what working ashore will entail

- The competition to recruit British candidates is increasing

- I prefer recruiting British candidates

- Many mariners seem to lack the softer management skills required for working ashore

- Mariners can have unrealistic assumptions about what working ashore might entail

- The adjustment in working practices from afloat to ashore can cause problems

- Mariners would benefit from developing their management and leadership skills before coming ashore

- I have difficulty finding suitably-qualified British candidates

- Mariners don't always understand the best time in their sea-going careers to come ashore

- The adjustment from the command structure afloat to working with colleagues ashore can be challenging

- There aren't enough British mariners coming ashore now to meet demand

- Mariners should be encouraged to prepare themselves better for working ashore

- Some mariners lack the commercial skills required for working ashore

- More needs to be done to help seafarers find out about shore-side opportunities

Exhibit 11: Approximate percentage of employees with seagoing experience

We were asked to examine the percentage of employees with seagoing experience by company size. This is shown in the table below. However, this should be treated with great caution for the following reasons:

- The sample sizes are very small
- The questions were not phrased so as to generate exact numbers – so the actual numbers within each group could differ significantly
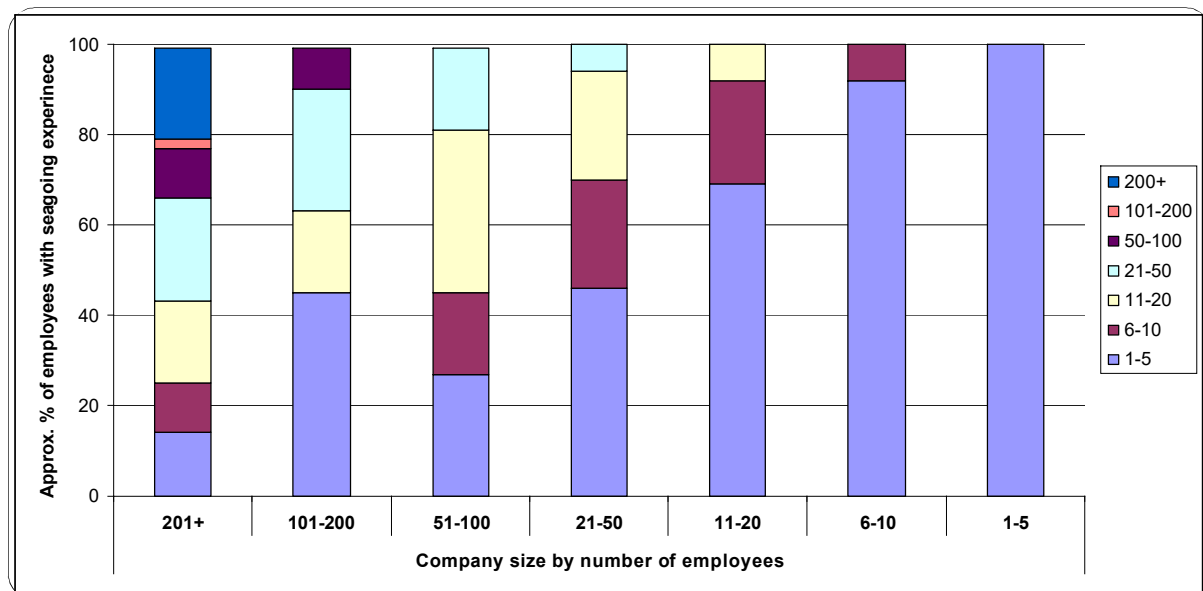

Exhibit 12: Job titles for Business Services and shipping companies

Indicative job titles in Business Services (Finance, Insurance Law):

- Technical Manager / Advisor, Loss Prevention Executive, Casualty Inspector / Investigator, Marine Manager, Solicitor, Master Mariner

Indicative job titles in Shipping Companies:

- Marine Superintendent, Technical Superintendent, Vessel / Ship Superintendent / Manager, Chief engineer, Technical Auditor, Nautical Assessor, Vetting Superintendent / Co-ordinator, Commercial Operations Manager / Director, Marine Operations Superintendent, HSEQ Manager / Superintendent, Marine / Safety Superintendent