

‘Strong economic returns’ from Maritime and Coastguard Agency seafarer training support, finds independent report

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Eight-year review shows skills-funding contributed over £500m to UK economy.

A funding programme managed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) to support men and women train for a career at sea is creating economic value worth nearly five times its outlay, an independent report has found.

The latest eight-year review of the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme, published today (13 April 2026), has calculated that from 2016-24 it contributed more than £500m to the UK economy from a cost of £117m to the public and £10m to the private sector.

It equates to a return of £4.78 for every £1 spent.

The SMarT initiative, which launched in 1998, provides financial assistance to employer-sponsors of up to 50% of the training costs for people to qualify as seafarer officers or ratings.

It is funded by the Department for Transport and from 1 April 2026 was extended by another year.

SMarT's return-on-investment was described as “excellent” in the report by Frazer-Nash Consultancy which was instructed by the MCA to review value for money and provide external recommendations for ongoing success.

The report concluded SMarT was delivering “strong economic returns”, as well as offering a 15-point set of suggested developments.

The report said:

In practical terms, this means that for every £1 of public investment, approximately £4.78 is returned to the UK economy, primarily through the enhanced lifetime productivity of trained seafarers.

These benefits extend beyond their time at sea, as most former seafarers transition into shore-based roles within the maritime sector, continuing to contribute to national economic growth.

This strong multiplier effect is driven by enhanced lifetime productivity of seafarers, both at sea and in shore-based roles, and underscores the strategic importance of maintaining a skilled domestic maritime workforce.

Lars Lippuner, MCA Director of UK Customer Service, said:

This latest review confirms SMarT is continuing to give strong support for the skills that the maritime sector relies on to thrive into the future.

New technologies, fuels and digital systems are increasingly entering the merchant fleet. This presents a major opportunity for the UK which well-trained seafarers can assist in unlocking, bringing benefit to their industry and the wider economy.

This review shows what we have been doing right but also where we need to develop in the future to ensure SMarT continues to nurture seafarer skills and builds on success for decades to come.

The MCA will consider the report's recommendations with a view to further strengthening SMarT's benefits and return on investment. The MCA will continue to engage closely with stakeholders to enhance the scheme and ensure SMarT continues to deliver a supply of highly trained UK seafarers with the skills needed to support the UK's economic resilience and strategic maritime capability.

Running alongside SMarT is the MCA-led Cadet Training and Modernisation (CT&M) Programme which, in partnership with industry, is updating learning and testing to prepare future crew for a career in the modern, hi-tech maritime industry.

The review summary is published here: A review of the effectiveness of funding for UK seafarer training - GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/strong-economic-returns-from-maritime-and-coastguard-agency-seafarer-training-support-finds-independent-report>