SOM Examiners report May 2025

General

At last, there seems to be a determined effort by candidates to read the previous Examiners Reports and avoid some of the errors that have been identified in these with a general improvement in the marks awarded. This is to be applauded and it is hoped that this will be maintained. It is also noted the instructions given in the papers to answer all parts of the question are being followed.

There has also been an awakening in the field of **Maritime Geography** which has long been a problem for candidates and a consistent worry for the ICS which is focussing on this in a number of the other subjects. In this paper there were two questions which needed reasonable knowledge and those who used theirs generally did quite well. You must show a reasonable understanding of this. Shipping has always been a worldwide business and a good knowledge of that world is essential. There is no excuse for ignorance in a world of smart phones. A map should always show relevant ports, routes and geographical features on that route such as canals, capes, seas, oceans, and special areas affected by weather, currents or hazards. All of these, relevant to the voyage show your knowledge. Do not waste time naming irrelevant details such as distant seas and countries as these get no extra marks.
Examiners when marking papers are expected to write comments about the answers to explain the marks awarded or the lack of these and this takes up space. It will help the examiner that when answering a question you leave some space at the end or start a new question on the next page.

Q1. As usual the most popular question in the exam with real opportunities for getting high marks by showing your knowledge of the layout of the majority of commercial vessels be they Dry Bulk, Tankers or Container vessels. As usual candidates were asked to draw a profile (side view) and cross section (front view) of a vessel. Some wasted time drawing a plan (a bird's eye view) that was not required or given marks. When drawing a profile turn the paper to a landscape view and use the full length to allow more detail. Several drawings were too small, devoid of detail, limiting labelling and missing marks. It is important to show your knowledge of the layout of the fo'castle area as this and the stern arrangement are common to most vessels. It is not good enough to merely copy the thumbnail sketches in the manuals which do show any real knowledge of the chosen vessel. Examiners want to see accuracy with the dimensions you give to the vessels and you should avoid wide ranges attempting to cover lack of knowledge. A Capesize vessel is generally 180-200kMT not 120-200kMT and the draft 17.5 M not 15-20M which is meaningless. Finally if you are going to learn a route ensure that the one you choose is appropriate for the vessel, cargo and ports concerned and be VERY SURE you show this in detail using the map.

Q2. Not a popular question but most who did attempt it did quite well and there were a few who showed real knowledge. It is important to read the question as you were clearly told that Itaqui and Belem are on the north coast of Brazil, which extends just past the mouths of the Amazon easily identifiable on the map in the answer paper. You were also told the distances by each route were similar but some decided they were not which led them astray. You were told the loading date which was summer in the northern hemisphere but its mid-winter at the Cape of Good Hope so there would be a fair chance of bad weather there. In fact, several candidates ignored the weather, except for considering weather routeing which would be appropriate for all of these. Delays at the two canals were generally discussed but there should be more attention given as to the CP and which party might be paying the tolls and extra costs. Part (c) was the requirement to show on a map the three different routes with the main oceans, seas, gulfs and capes on each route. As you were given Hong Kong, Belem, Itaqui, Suez, Panama, and the CoGH, marking these and the routes on the map was important but some chose not to do this, or were unaware of the location of the ports and uncertain about the Canals. But you should also have marked on the map the North and South

Atlantic, the Mediterranean, South China and Caribbean Seas, Indian and Pacific Oceans, the Straits of Gibraltar, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Guinea, Cristobal, Balboa, Suez, and possibly Durban, Algeciras and Singapore because this is the shipping world you live in and the ships are going to these places. How many do you know?

Q3. This was quite a popular question which is not surprising at it was very straightforward for candidates who had practiced doing an actual voyage calculation. You should also develop a simple calculation format in table format which shows each part of the voyage, ballast passages, load, loaded passages and discharge as well as any delays together with distances and port times as appropriate and fuel consumptions. This makes it easy to see the usage, the days used and the totals at the end. This means that determining the cost of the bunkers used in total is simple using FIFO.
It was further simplified as no low Sulphur 0.1% Fuel was used as the ports concerned were not in a SECA or restricted area. There were some very good answers with several getting full marks and candidates who made simple mistakes in calculations only lost marks for this, and were not penalised later in the question.
Candidates must be aware of SSHEX & SHINC and be familiar with using these.
Your choice for bunkering was relatively straightforward. The vessel needed to take sufficient bunkers during the voyage to replace all that was used on the voyage, plus the required increase in the ROB.
As was made clear in the question a careful calculation of the different voyage legs ballast/ load/ laden/ discharge correctly using SSHINC and SSHEX and the right speed should have shown that the bunkers **used** on the voyage were **422MT LSFO 0.5%.** No 0.1%S ULSGO was used
The ROB of ULSGO at the start was the same as required at the end so no ULSGO was needed.
The ROB of 0.5%S LSFO at the start of the voyage was 390 MT and at the end should be 550 MT. This is an increase of 160MT
The bunkers required to meet those used and the increase of ROB were 422MT + 160MT **= 582MT** and this would cost less at Recife
Having worked out the bunkers needed to purchase several candidates then decided to put the cost of ALL of these into the voyage cost, an error in principle.
Voyage costs= Port Costs, Tolls and FUEL USED. And you must use FIFO.
Candidates who showed they were familiar with the calculation process gained marks even when an earlier error would prevent a mathematically correct answer.

Q4. Part (a)of the question asked for an explanation of the role and responsibilities of the DPA in the safe operation of each vessel and the proper implementation of the ISM code. The answer was in the question, the role is in the proper implementation of the ISM code and to do this means being a link between the ship and senior management, ensuring resources are available for this, implementing the ISM code an board and ashore, inspecting and auditing the system, addressing inadequacies, investigating non conformities and ensuring that all parties are aware of the system and work to its rules. There were some very good answers but others rather restricted themselves to mentioning the role as a first port of call in an emergency.
Part (b) asked for the specific certificates and documents that the vessel carries to show compliance with ISM. Most candidates now know about the DOC and SMC together with the CSR, records of Audits and of non-Compliances, details of Training and other records. A few persist in mentioning other certificates that are vital for the actual operation of the vessel but these are not specific to ISM.

Q5. A question on acronyms was a popular choice and candidates had five to choose out of eight and four marks as a maximum each. Two that should have been easy were AWRP and IOPP. On occasion an alternative answer for an acronym is given as was the case a two years ago with CSR. Corporate Social Responsibility was given when Continuous Synopsis Record was expected but the former was

accepted as a viable alternative. On this occasion AWRP rather expected the answer Additional War Risk Premium as this has been a prominent feature recently but at least five alternatives were suggested some of which were relevant.
One that scored highly was IMSBC as there was a lot to say, a couple of operational terms WIBON and NDFFCA PMQS, the latter more common in the tanker trades were also popular and three CII, EEXI and IEEC which are becoming more prominent with climate change and increasing scrutiny of Marine Emissions proved to be popular and accurate. In general, the standard was quite high with most knowing what the letters stood for and explaining, often in some detail, each one chosen and gaining full marks. You should always bear in mind that each scores a max of four marks so concentrate on getting as much detail about the subject down on the paper but briefly as possible to let the examiner know you are familiar with the term.

Q6.Crewing
Those who looked at the issue as one faced by any employer could and did put their knowledge of what they as an employee would want and expect from an employer to good use. Starting from that base, they were then able to expand their requirement to include the extra inducements that might be offered and would be needed to attract and retain qualified staff in a challenging, hardworking and isolating environment. The question was straightforward but required a wider answer than some candidates would consider. All of these basic requirements are part of MLC 2006 which is a real charter for shipping employment.

Several concentrated on the STCW convention which are part of the regulations to ensure that ships are manned by employees with the requisite experience, training and health requirements. This is of course important and indeed vital to the safety of the ship and its crew and can be looked at as a regulatory guidance to try to ensure this. But others also looked at the bigger picture and were rewarded appropriately. The crew of a ship should be considered as individual employees in any industry. Their requirements are the same as those individuals. Companies need employees and in order to recruit them and retain them the rarely use a stick. They normally offer a carrot of good wages and other inducements such as training, social care, holiday pay, a pension, sickness benefit and even more at a senior level. In return they expect employee loyalty and hard work. If employees do not get the former then then they go elsewhere. This situation is magnified in shipping where an individual's employment is much more onerous with long hours, hard work, separation from home and family and enforced isolation. It is therefore prudent for a shipping company to offer an even better package of benefits. Candidates for this exam hope perhaps to work in the Maritime sector. What will attract you to this employment?

Q7. The role of the Classification Society (Class) is to be an independent check on the condition of the vessel to ensure that the vessel is maintaining the Standards of Construction and Operation set by Class. They will also offer a variety of other services provided by Naval Architects, Surveyors, Engineers, Metallurgists and IT specialists advising on all areas of ship design and safety. Many will also provide a service to Flag states which delegate the task of issuing certificates to Class acting as agents.
Part (b) of the question was done quite well with many candidates showing some familiarity with the normal 4/5-year Special survey cycle, verified by Annual and Intermediate ones. The reasons for other surveys part (c) such as after Damage was also done well. Also mentioned were sale of the vessel, PSC issues and change of Flag and Class.
Part (d) should have been done better and the certificates issued by Class should be known for what they certify, their validity and verifications. It is also important to know that **Flag** normally issues some of the certificates on board including Registry, Tonnage, the Radio Licence and the Minimum Manning Certificate.

Q8. This was a budget question which has been set in the exam before. It is designed for you to show what information you would need about an unknown vessel so that you are able to create a budget for the one that has just been purchased by one of your owners with a mixed fleet. Briefly, these are Size, Age, Type, Flag, Engine and Auxiliaries, Handling Equipment and Trading area because with these you will be able to determine from your company's experience the likely Running costs and this will be fine-tuned by looking at the vessels Class history and other records. Why these details are important needs also to be explained. It is easy to say that a big ship needs more paint than a small one but it's bigger and likely earns more money. But ships need spares and a valve or cylinder head on a small vessel might come on board by hand. On a large vessel it will need a boat and a crane. And if the big ship is on a regular series of voyages from NW Australia to China, generally in good weather with modern ports and shore equipment then the wear and tear on the paint work may be a lot less than on a smaller Handy vessel in and out of all sorts of ports with a variety of equipment being used on board and ashore in all weathers.

Part (b) asked for details of the typical costs included in the actual budget for daily operating/running cost and should have been better done. A brief list will get some marks but details get more.

It also asked for how you would monitor these costs was done better with a range of reporting to check performance and some good and topical reasons why significant variations might occur in a budget and how they could arise.