Merchant Navy Engineer Officer

Introduction

Merchant Navy engineer officers oversee the smooth running and maintenance of a ship's main propulsion machinery. They work in the engine rooms of a variety of ships such as cruise liners, ferries or cargo ships.

Also known as

- Engineering Officer, Merchant Navy
- Navy Engineering Officer, Merchant Navy

Work Activities

As a Merchant Navy Engineer Officer, you are responsible for all aspects of the running and maintenance of the ship's engines and other machinery, such as:

- generators
- pumps
- sewage treatment plant
- purifiers
- mechanical cargo handling equipment.

Most of this equipment is electronically controlled or automated to varying degrees. However, the engine rooms need continuous watchkeeping, so you'll work on a shift system. This usually means four hours on watch and eight off, or six on and six off.

You will control and monitor the performance of plant and machinery, carry out planned maintenance, diagnose and rectify faults, and maintain safety equipment.

Specific duties vary according to the type of vessel. Large passenger ships have 'hotel services engineers' who look after air conditioning systems and passenger lifts.

On cargo ships, you'll control refrigerators which are essential for the transportation of fruit and meat. On scientific survey ships, you will be responsible for hydraulic machinery that is used to lower and raise equipment from the sea bed.

Usually, you will supervise the work of a crew of engineer ratings, and make sure they work effectively together.

Sometimes you might need to work in difficult and uncomfortable conditions and spend up to four months at a time away from family and friends.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary Engineer Officers

Merchant Navy Engineer Officers can also work on Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) ships. These ships supply cargo to Royal Navy (RN) ships at sea. As RFA personnel work closely with the Royal Navy, they may have to perform duties under combat conditions.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To do this job well, you'll need:

- To be able to show initiative and self-reliance.
- Good problem-solving skills.
- To be a confident person so that your instructions are respected and followed.
• An interest in physics.
• Good teamworking skills, as you’ll often be working with large groups of people.

It’s very useful to have an interest in boats, ships and the sea. You should also have some knowledge of the types of machinery found on boats and ships, and how that machinery works.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay
Salary rates for Merchant Navy Officers vary with the company.

The pay rates given below are approximate.

As an Engineer Officer, you can expect to earn in the range of:

• Starting: £20,000 - £25,000
• With experience: £30,000 - £40,000
• High flyers: Around £65,000.

Hours of work
Shift work is usual. Ships operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Where could I work?
Merchant Navy personnel are civilian employees who work on a variety of ships of all sizes including:

• passenger and cruise liners
• container ships
• oil tankers
• cargo vessels
• passenger and freight ferries.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary, which supplies the needs of Royal Navy ships at sea, also employs civilian Merchant Navy personnel.

As a Merchant Navy Engineering Officer, you can work on board ships on local, national and international voyages.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised in local/national newspapers, on recruitment and employers’ websites, and on Universal Jobmatch (www.gov.uk/jobsearch).

Social media websites, such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook, are a great way to network, find vacancies and get in contact with possible employers. Make sure that your profile presents you in a professional manner that will appeal to potential employers.

Take a look at our General Information Article ‘Finding Work Online’.

Vacancies are advertised on shipping lines' websites.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes
The main route into careers in the Merchant Navy is by applying directly to sponsoring companies. The Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB) has a complete list of these companies.

Once sponsored, there are various routes to full qualification. These include:

- A Foundation Degree in Marine Engineering.
- Degrees in Mechanical and Power Plant Systems, Mechanical and Marine Engineering, or Marine Engineering.
- An HNC/HND in Marine Engineering.

People with seafaring experience or relevant qualifications may be exempt from some of the academic and practical aspects of training. This makes your route to full qualification quicker. Sponsoring companies will provide relevant details.

City College, Plymouth also offer an apprenticeship in Marine Engineering. They will also help you to find a suitable employer.

**Training**

Training varies according to employers. Generally, it covers subjects such as mechanics, engineering drawing, fitting, machining and welding. All trainees are also given thorough instruction in health and safety, including firefighting and survival techniques.

**Progression**

After your training period, the promotion routes for Engineer Officers are as follows:

- junior/fourth engineer to third engineer
- third engineer to second engineer
- second engineer to chief engineer.

For each of the ranks mentioned above, you will have to hold a Certificate of Competency which is issued by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

**Work Experience**

Previous experience in a nautical environment will be useful for this career. People with seafaring experience or relevant qualifications may be exempt from some of the academic and practical aspects of training. This makes your route to full qualification quicker. Sponsoring companies will provide relevant details.

**Rehabilitation of Offenders Act**

This career is an exception to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that you must supply information to an employer about any spent or unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, if they ask you to. This is different from other careers, where you only have to reveal information on unspent convictions if you are asked to.

**Qualifications**

For entry to a relevant degree course the usual minimum requirement is:

- 2/3 A levels, including Maths and Physics.
- GCSEs at grade C/4 or above in your A level subjects.
- A further 2/3 GCSEs at grade C/4 or above, including English.

Alternatives to A levels include:

- BTEC Level 3 qualifications.
Advanced Level Apprenticeships.
The International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBD).

However, course requirements vary, so please check college/university websites very carefully.

To enter a relevant HNC/HND or foundation degree, you’ll usually need:

- 1 A level. Science subjects, such as physics will be useful.
- A GCSE at grade C/4 or above in your A level subject.
- A further 3/4 GCSEs at grade C/4 or above, including English and Maths.

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A-level.

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Courses

The University of Plymouth and City College, Plymouth, offer foundation degrees in Marine Engineering by part-time study. These courses take three years to complete.

City College, Plymouth also offer an apprenticeship in Marine Engineering. They will also help you to find a suitable employer.

The Marine Society College of the Sea offers seafarers a route to top up their HND or foundation degree to a full honours degree. Candidates can go on to achieve an MA or MSc. This is delivered via the work-based learning and Professional Studies programme, by distance learning.

Funding

Candidates can apply for financial support for study from The Marine Society.

Further Information

Contacts

- The Engineer
  Engineering technology news
  Email: customerservices@theengineer.co.uk
  Website: www.theengineer.co.uk

- Tomorrow’s Engineers
  Publisher: EngineeringUK and Royal Academy of Engineering
  Email: contactus@tomorrowsengineers.org.uk
  Website: www.tomorrowsengineers.org.uk

- Engineer Jobs
  Publisher: Venture Marketing Group
  Email: ner@vmgl.com
  Website: www.engineerjobs.co.uk

- Getting into Engineering Courses
  Author: James Burnett
  Publisher: Trotman
Website: [www.mpw.ac.uk/university-guides/getting-into/engineering-courses/](http://www.mpw.ac.uk/university-guides/getting-into/engineering-courses/)

- **Scottish Engineering**  
  Scottish enquiries  
  Address: 105 West George Street, Glasgow G2 1QL  
  Tel: 0141 2213181  
  Email: consult@scottishengineering.org.uk  
  Website: [www.scottishengineering.org.uk](http://www.scottishengineering.org.uk)

- **Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)**  
  Address: Spring Place, 105 Commercial Road, Southampton, Hampshire SO15 1EG  
  Tel: 02380 329100  
  Email: infoline@mcga.gov.uk  
  Website: [www.dft.gov.uk/mca/](http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/)

- **Careers at Sea**  
  Merchant Navy  
  Address: 12 Carthusian Street, London EC1M 6EZ  
  Email: enquiry@careersatsea.org  
  Website: [www.careersatsea.org](http://www.careersatsea.org)

- **Royal Fleet Auxiliary**  
  Tel: 0845 6040520  
  Website: [www.royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/royal-fleet-auxiliary](http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/royal-fleet-auxiliary)

- **Ship Safe Training Group Ltd (SSTG)**  
  Address: The Precinct Office, The Precinct, Rochester, Kent ME1 1SR  
  Tel: 01634 820820  
  Email: training@sstg.org  
  Website: [www.sstg.org](http://www.sstg.org)

- **Marine Society & Sea Cadets (MSSC)**  
  Address: 202 Lambeth Road, London SE1 7JW  
  Tel: 020 7654 7000  
  Email: info@ms-sc.org  
  Website: [www.ms-sc.org](http://www.ms-sc.org)

- **Trinity House Merchant Navy Scholarship Scheme**  
  Address: Unit G Deacons Marina, Bursledon Bridge, Southampton SO31 8AW  
  Tel: 023 8040 4607  
  Email: enquiries@trinityhousetraining.org  
  Website: [www.trinityhousetraining.org](http://www.trinityhousetraining.org)

- **Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB)**  
  Address: 30 Park Street, London SE1 9EQ  
  Email: enquiry@mntb.org.uk  
  Website: [www.mntb.org.uk](http://www.mntb.org.uk)

- **Maritime UK Careers**  
  Tel: 020 7417 2837  
  Email: enquiries@seavision.org.uk  
  Website: [www.seavision.org.uk](http://www.seavision.org.uk)

- **Clyde Marine Training**  
  Scottish enquiries  
  Address: Kintyre House, 209 Govan Road, Glasgow G51 1HJ  
  Tel: 0141 4276655  
  Email: training@clydemarine.com  
  Website: [www.clydemarinetraining.com](http://www.clydemarinetraining.com)

- **Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST)**
Sea Cadets
Whether at sea or on land, the Sea Cadets offers young people across the UK amazing opportunities for personal development - by learning new skills and working in teams - the Sea Cadets offer an environment where young people find new confidence and inspiration.
Website: www.sea-cadets.org/

Related Careers
• Merchant Navy Rating
• Merchant Navy Deck Officer
• Merchant Navy Electro-Technical Officer