



Maritime Search and Rescue Endorsement Scheme

Command Endorsement Handbook

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Maritime Search and Rescue Endorsement Scheme



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Amendments

Date:	Section:	Changes by:	Reviewed by:

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Introduction

The Maritime Search and Rescue Endorsement Scheme has been developed to address the specialist skills and knowledge required for effective maritime search and rescue (SAR) operations. Recognising the vital need for specialist expertise in carrying out search and rescue operations safely and efficiently, the scheme allows candidates to complete practical tasks, acquire essential knowledge, and be assessed for certification beyond the general maritime training and assessment undertaken as part of their career progression.

The Nautical Institute and The Maritime Search and Rescue Council recognise that crew and commanders on board SAR vessels require expert skills and knowledge to operate their vessels safely and efficiently. The Maritime SAR Endorsement Scheme is split into two distinct pathways: one for command and one for crew. Each pathway has its own modules and tasks. This dual-pathway approach ensures that both command and crew members possess the specialised skills required for their respective roles, leading to more effective and cohesive SAR operations.

MSARES has been designed to be a self-driven professional development programme, ensuring that professionals engaged in maritime search and rescue meet a recognised standard of proficiency. The scheme is specifically designed for candidates involved in maritime search and rescue operations on board search and rescue vessels, in any capacity. Responsibility for completing practical tasks and acquiring the underpinning knowledge lies with the candidate enrolled in the scheme.

The Maritime Search and Rescue Command Endorsement (MSARCE)

The Command pathway is designed to equip candidates with the advanced leadership and strategic skills necessary for overseeing maritime SAR operations. This pathway focuses on developing the ability to make critical decisions under pressure, coordinate complex rescue missions, and effectively manage resources and personnel. Command candidates will undergo rigorous training in SAR navigation, incident management, crew management and inter-agency communication, ensuring they are prepared to lead SAR operations safely and efficiently. By completing the Command Pathway, candidates will demonstrate their capability to handle the high-stakes responsibilities of command roles in SAR operations, contributing to the overall effectiveness, safety and success of search and rescue efforts.

The MSARCE is applied in accordance with the SAR asset and operational environment in which the candidate is actively working and experienced in, as clarified later in this document. It is to be used alongside the appropriate maritime certification required for the size and type of SAR vessel operated (Powerboat, Yachtmaster, Master CoC or equivalent internal organisational command qualification). This endorsement does not alter the limits or privileges of these certificates but instead recognises the specialised skills and proficiency required in SAR operations in different SAR contexts, particularly in the complex and high-risk scenarios that SAR vessels frequently encounter when compared to traditional maritime operations.

Requirements

All candidates applying for Command endorsement must have at least 200 hours of sea hours on board a SAR vessel accrued in the last five years and;

- hold an appropriate and Powerboat, Yachtmaster, Master CoC, Naval/Coastguard/Military Command qualification issued by a recognised authority, or hold an equivalent internal command qualification for your specific SAR organisation (endorsement will be limited to service on issuing organisation vessels only)
- be at least 21 years old,
- have accrued a minimum of 200 sea hours on board dedicated SAR vessels or emergency response vessel with prescribed SAR responsibilities in SAR related tasks or training
- satisfying the conditions noted in this section,
- have accrued sea hours on board dedicated SAR vessels or emergency response vessel with prescribed SAR responsibilities in SAR related tasks
 - Hours accrued prior to the scheme enrolment may be counted, subject to the conditions in this section being met. Sea hours acquired prior to enrolment must be confirmed either by a letter on an organisational letterhead and signed by an appropriate authority within the organisation, or an appropriate logbook where entries are signed and stamped by the Master or other representative of the vessel/organisation. New candidates acquiring sea hours after enrolment will log such hours in the Task Record Book provided to candidates. Self-declared sea hours will not be accepted.

New candidates

New candidates are required to complete a programme of self-study and a Training Record Book (TRB) at sea under the supervision of a competent person¹. With accumulated sea hours and completion of the outlined tasks, new candidates will be eligible to take the two-tier examination in which their knowledge and proficiency to safely operate and command SAR vessels will be tested. Any approved sea hours accrued must have been recorded/signed off no more than five years prior to sitting part one of the examination. The new candidate pathway diagram can be found in Annex A.

New candidate examination

Examination for the pathway is divided into two distinct stages, the written exam, and an oral interview.

The written exam

The online exam is invigilated and completed over a two-hour period, during which candidates will complete:

- a multiple-choice exam, consisting of 50 questions (1 mark each)
- a long answer section (maximum of 250 words per question), consisting of three questions (10 marks each)

The oral interview

The second stage of the examination process involves an oral interview. Candidates will be invited to complete an interview with the examiner, the interview generally lasts between 60-90 minutes.

The content, conduct and outcome of written and oral examinations is overseen by MSARES Training Expert Group (MSARESTEG).

Experience candidates

The Scheme provides a streamlined pathway for experienced commanders of search and rescue vessels with substantial prior knowledge and expertise in search and rescue operations. These individuals may participate in a verification interview combined with a shortened oral examination, which could result in the direct issuance of a Maritime Search and Rescue Command Endorsement. Candidates who meet the criteria outlined in the experienced candidate pathway diagram (Annex B) will be exempt from completing the Training Record Book (TRB) and written exam but must still attend an oral interview. This provision recognises their existing qualifications and experience.

Candidates applying through the experienced candidate route must complete the scheme requirements detailed above and provide evidence of command role/experience.

¹ A competent person is a person who holds a command position onboard a SAR vessel or emergency response vessel with prescribed SAR responsibilities and possesses the knowledge and experience necessary to supervise the safe and efficient execution of tasks in accordance with standards expected onboard a vessel of this type

Experienced candidate examination

Exemption from written exam

Experienced candidates are exempt from the written exam. To classify as exempt, candidates must meet the points stated in the “requirements” section and provide evidence of command role/experience.

Evidence should be provided as a letter on an organisational letterhead and signed by an appropriate authority within the organisation stating the person holds a Commander position/internal command qualification within the organisation. The candidates’ appropriate maritime Command qualification must also be evidenced via a copy or electronic certification verification link

The verification/oral interview

Candidates will be invited to complete an interview with the examiner, the interview generally lasts between 60-90 minutes.

The content, conduct and outcome of written and oral examinations is overseen by MSARES Training Expert Group (MSARESTEG).

Vessel types

SAR vessel or emergency response vessel with prescribed SAR responsibilities in SAR related tasks hours include SAR training hours at sea, SAR exercises at sea, and SAR service taskings. For this scheme, sea service hours and relevant endorsement, SAR vessels are broken down in the following three categories with associated guidance to establish what type of SAR vessel is applicable to which Endorsement.

- **Coastal SAR Unit**
- **Offshore SAR Unit**
- **Ocean SAR Unit**

Note the below guidance is not fixed and it is expected that professional judgement is made when applying for the most appropriate SAR endorsement based on your SAR asset service. The below will help guide you in applying for the correct endorsement:

SAR Asset Type	Coastal SAR Unit	Offshore SAR Unit	Ocean SAR Unit
Guidance on Vessel Type and Capability	Open type design Limited to no more than 20nm from a safe haven or similar 12m or less in length Weather restriction on vessel operation Fitted with outboard engines	Limited to no more than 150nm from a safe haven or similar Between 12.1m and 24m in length No formal weather restrictions Fitted with inboard engines Self-righting post capsize	No limitation on distance offshore Sleeping accommodation on board GMDSS area A3 compliant Over 24m in length Over 200gt No formal weather restriction

To be granted an endorsement for SAR unit, the candidate must accrue a minimum of 50 hours on each asset type within their 250-hour total, as well as complete each of the specialist units within the TRB.

For instance, an individual who accumulates 130 hours on a Coastal SAR Unit and 70 hours on an Offshore SAR Unit, while also completing the required specialist tasks within the TRB, will receive both endorsements upon successfully completing the scheme. Conversely, an individual with 180 hours on a Coastal SAR Unit and only 20 hours on an Offshore SAR Unit will be granted only the Coastal SAR Unit endorsement. However, upon revalidation and completion of the TRB tasks, the Offshore SAR Unit endorsement can be added once the 50-hour requirement is met. Revalidation can be requested at any time.

Validity

The Maritime Search and Rescue Endorsement certificate is valid for a period of 5 years.

Revalidation

To revalidate, the candidate must still hold a valid Powerboat, Yachtmaster, or Master CoC, and have at least 60 sea hours on a SAR vessel accrued in the last 5 years (or 12 months approved and relevant shore side employment or volunteer role)

Fees

First Time Applicant		
Pathway	Fees:	What's included/specific requirements:
New candidates	£400.00	Enrolment, written examination (3 attempts), oral examination (1 attempt), verification of sea service, certification, and administrative support.
Experienced candidates	£250.00	Enrolment, formal Interview (1 attempt), verification of sea service, certification, and administrative support.
Revalidation		
All candidates	£200.00	Enrolment, verification of sea service, certification, and administrative support.
Re-sit		
Oral	£100.00	Re-sit after failing the oral examination
Written	£100.00	Re-sit after failing the third attempt at the written examination

Syllabus

Module	Unit	Indicative Content
Module 01 – Understand the role and duties of the SAR commander	1.1 Explain the duties and expectations of a SAR commander	Leadership, team management, decision-making, operational coordination, stakeholder engagement, compliance with SOPs
	1.2 Describe the operational structure and hierarchy of a SAR unit	Commander, crew, shore-based roles, station management, organisational management
	1.3 Describe the International SAR framework and structures, including	SAR1979, UNCLOS, SOLAS Chapter V, IMO, IAMSAR I, II, III, position as “Master” of vessel, health and safety regulations

	regulations and governance	
Module 02 – Demonstrate effective leadership and crew management	2.1 Apply leadership techniques to manage crew in rescue operations	Leadership styles, situational awareness, command presence, motivation and team dynamics
	2.2 Conduct operational briefings and debriefings	Structured briefings and debriefings, communication clarity, post-mission reflection
	2.3 Manage conflict and difficult interpersonal situations	Dealing with aggression, safeguarding, conflict resolution techniques
Module 03 – Manage vessel operations in various sea conditions	3.1 Explain the effects of different weather conditions on own vessel handling and stability	Buoyancy, stability, capsize prevention, heavy weather handling, wave impact, wind effect, vessel trim adjustments
	3.2 Explain the effects of different weather conditions on casualty vessel handling and stability	Buoyancy, stability, capsize prevention, heavy weather effects on casualty vessels, risk of broaching, hull integrity, shifting cargo
Module 04 – Apply safety, health, and environmental protocols	4.1 Identify and mitigate potential hazards in SAR operations	PPE usage, risk assessment, hierarchy of rescue, risk vs. benefit
	4.2 Implement emergency operating procedures effectively	Firefighting, flooding control, collision, grounding, steering failure, engine failure, abandon
	4.3 Perform risk assessments and manage incident reporting	Dynamic risk assessment, accident cause analysis, post-incident procedures
Module 05 – Conduct effective search and rescue operations	5.1 Develop and execute SAR plans using appropriate search patterns	All water based and ground-based searches, IAMSAR III, LAST/LASET principles
	5.2 Evaluate risk versus benefit in rescue operations	Dynamic risk assessment, crew and casualty safety prioritisation
	5.3 Coordinate with external agencies and emergency responders	Coastguard, ambulance services, air-sea rescue units, multi-agency working
	5.4 Execute effective search techniques	Visual searching, radar searching, radio searching, night vision equipment, SARTs
	5.5 Perform rescue operations safely and efficiently	Casualty recovery techniques, towing procedures, vessel boarding
	5.6 Manage mass rescue operations	Coordinating multiple assets, casualty prioritisation, triage procedures

	5.7 Coordinate casualty care and evacuation procedures	Casualty care techniques, helicopter winching, transfer to shore-based medical facilities
	5.8 Manage on-scene coordination as OSC	On-scene coordination responsibilities, communication with multiple assets, maintaining situational awareness, IAMSAR III
Module 06 – Navigate and operate SAR vessel safely	6.1 Interpret and use navigational charts and electronic aids	GPS, radar, compass use, electronic chart systems,
	6.2 Apply collision avoidance regulations	COLREGS, right-of-way rules, restricted visibility navigation
	6.3 Perform passage planning and safe route execution	Appraisal, planning, execution, monitoring, tidal considerations, weather considerations, search and rescue passage planning
Module 07 – Manage propulsion, auxiliary systems, vessel and equipment	7.1 Operate and troubleshoot engine and propulsion systems	Inboard and outboard engines systems, machinery safety
	7.2 Perform regular maintenance checks on vessel systems	Daily pre-launch checks, post-mission inspections, fault reporting, SAR asset maintenance
	7.3 Perform regular maintenance checks on vessel equipment	Ropes, lifesaving appliances, firefighting appliances, radar and communication devices, deck fittings, hull integrity inspections
Module 08 – Conduct effective communication in SAR operations	8.1 Use VHF radio and emergency communication systems	Radio protocols, distress signals, coordination with Coastguard, GMDSS
	8.2 Manage interactions with media and the public	Media awareness, reputation management, ethical considerations
	8.3 Apply clear and effective crew communication techniques	Command clarity, ensuring message comprehension, use of standard terminology
Module 09 – Manage SAR crew mental health and wellbeing	9.1 Identify the impact of SAR operations on mental health and systems for post-incident support	Post-trauma coping strategies, psychological resilience, support networks, Peer support, professional mental health services, stress management

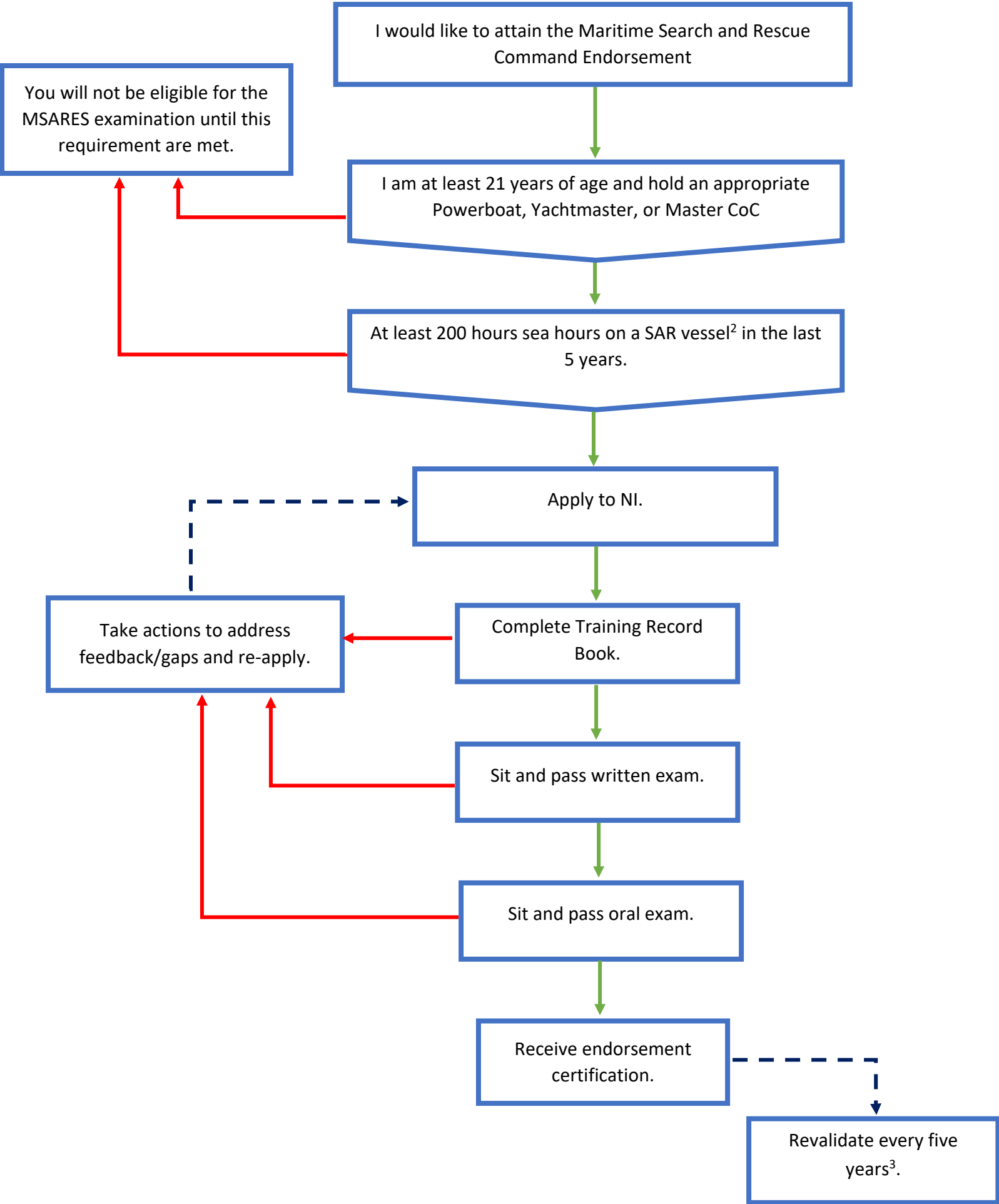
Suggested Reading List

- SAR1979
- IAMSAR Volume III
- SOLAS Chapter V
- IMRF MRO Guidelines
- COMSAR Circular 31, Guidance for Mass Rescue Operations
- MSC Circular 1182, Rev.1, Guide to Recovery Techniques
- MSC Circular 1183, Guidelines on the Provision of External Support as an Aid to Incident Containment for SAR Authorities and Others Concerned
- MSC.1/Circ.1186, Guidelines on the Training of SAR Service Personnel Working in Major Incidents
- MSC Circular 1447, Guidelines for the Development of Plans and Procedures for Recovery of Persons from the Water
- Vessel Triage - User Manual
- IMRF Basic Rescue Boat Operator Manual & Search Cards
- IMRF Rescue Boat Service Implementation Guide
- IMRF #SARyouOK? Guidance
- RYA Powerboat Manual
- RYA Yachtmaster Handbook
- RYA Diesel Engine Handbook
- RYA Radar Book
- GMDSS: A User's Handbook, Denise Bréhaut
- Safety at the Sharp End: A Guide to Non-Technical Skills, Rhona Flin
- Maritime SAR Council Briefing and Debriefing SAR Crews
- Maritime and Coastguard Agency Rescue Boat Code

New Candidate Pathway

If you’ve identified yourself as an ‘New Candidate”, you’ll need to follow the adjacent flowchart to attain the Maritime Search and Rescue Command Endorsement.

Fees for the Interview and Certification are detailed in the fees section of the handbook.



¹ **Powerboat:** RYA Powerboat Level 2, Intermediate Powerboat, Advanced Powerboat, IYA International Powerboat Level 1 & Level 2, and all other nationality powerboat qualifications providing national states of qualification and assessment criteria can be verified.

Yachtmaster: RYA Yachtmaster Coastal, Offshore, Ocean, IYT Master of Yachts and all other nationality Yachtmaster equivalent qualifications providing national states of qualification and assessment criteria can be verified.

Master CoC: STCW recognised Master CoC (including limited CoCs).

Other qualifications: Naval/Coastguard/Military Command qualification issued by a recognised authority *or* hold an equivalent internal command qualification for your specific SAR organisation (endorsement will be limited to service on issuing organisation vessels only).

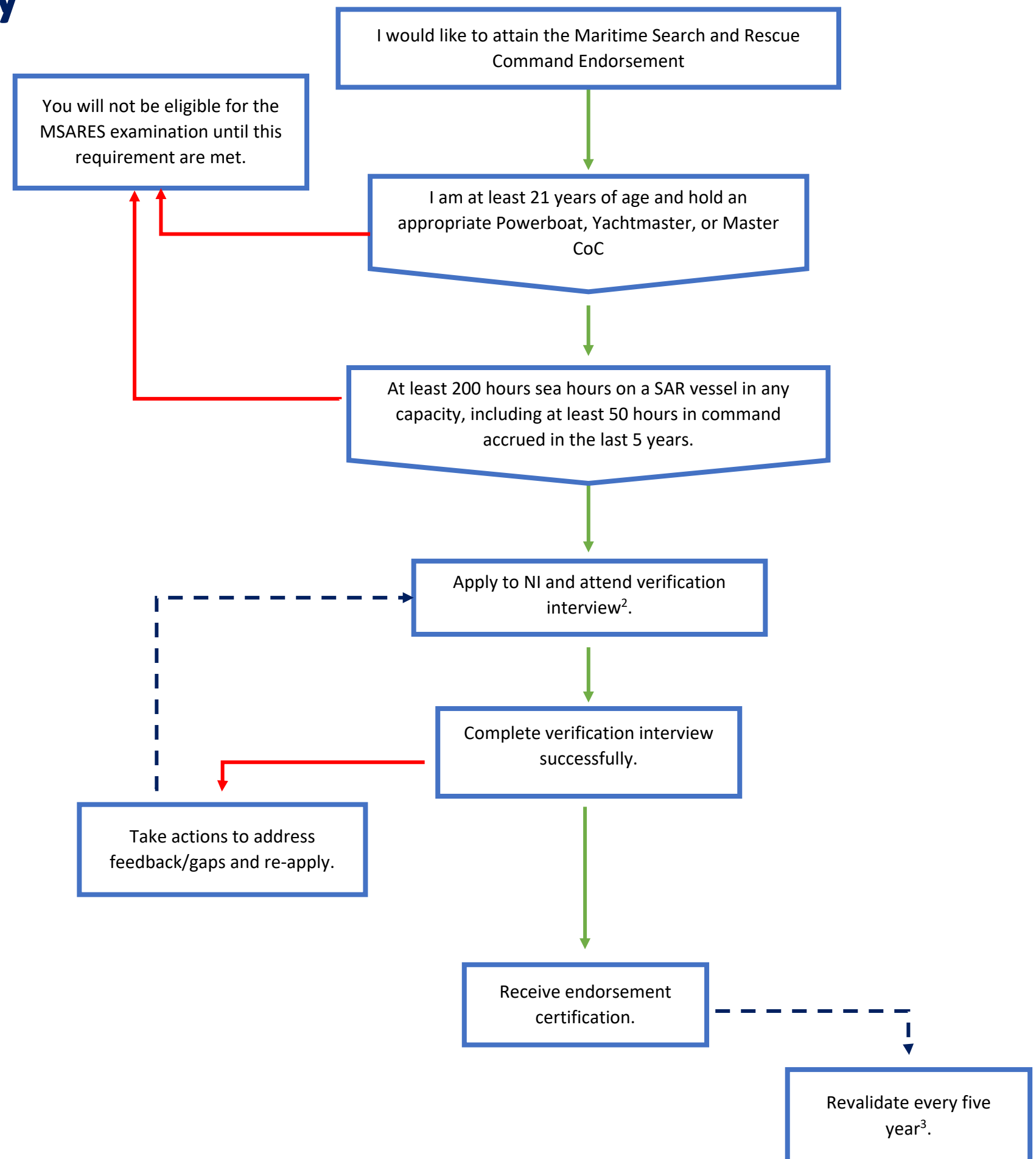
² SAR vessel or emergency response vessel with prescribed SAR responsibilities in SAR related tasks hours include SAR training hours at sea, SAR exercises at sea, and SAR service taskings.

³ Revalidated every 5 years subject to 60 hours approved sea hours onboard qualifying SAR vessel

Experienced Candidate Pathway

If you've identified yourself as an 'Experienced Candidate', you'll need to follow the adjacent flowchart to attain the Maritime Search and Rescue Command Endorsement.

Fees for the Interview and Certification are detailed in the fees section of the handbook.



² **Powerboat:** RYA Powerboat Level 2, Intermediate Powerboat, Advanced Powerboat, IYA International Powerboat Level 1 & Level 2, and all other nationality powerboat qualifications providing national states of qualification and assessment criteria can be verified.

Yachtmaster: RYA Yachtmaster Coastal, Offshore, Ocean, IYT Master of Yachts and all other nationality Yachtmaster equivalent qualifications providing national states of qualification and assessment criteria can be verified.

Master CoC: STCW recognised Master CoC (including limited CoCs).

Other qualifications: Naval/Coastguard/Military Command qualification issued by a recognised authority *or* hold an equivalent internal command qualification for your specific SAR organisation (endorsement will be limited to service on issuing organisation vessels only).

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