



# The Future of the Maritime Workforce

A report by SMIFutures outlining the factors influencing the acquisition and retention of maritime talent.

August 2023

## **Society of Maritime Industries**

(SMI) is the voice of the UK's maritime engineering and business sector promoting and supporting companies which design, build, refit and modernise ships, and supply equipment and services for all types of commercial and naval ships, ports and terminals infrastructure, digital technology, maritime defence and security, marine science and technology, maritime autonomous systems and marine renewable energy.



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# SMIFutures

## Created to empower future maritime leaders

SMIFutures, an initiative by the Society of Maritime Industries, is dedicated to developing and empowering young professionals within the maritime industry. Open to individuals within the first decade of their maritime careers, the group aims to deliver exceptional value in three essential areas:

### **Empowering Members: Enhancing Professional Development**

SMIFutures is committed to equipping its members with industry-level thinking and continuing their growth as professionals. Through a range of curated activities, including workshops, seminars, and mentorship programs, our initiative strives to foster an environment that stimulates continuous learning and personal development. Members gain invaluable exposure to cutting-edge trends, emerging technologies, and strategic insights, empowering them to excel in their maritime careers.

### **Enriching Member Companies: Developing Human Capital, Promoting Brands, and Accessing Industry Work**

SMIFutures recognises the pivotal

role member companies play in driving the maritime industry forward. By actively developing the skills and capabilities of their early career people, our initiative directly contributes to the growth and success of these organisations. Through dynamic collaborations, member companies gain enhanced visibility and recognition within the industry. Furthermore, SMIFutures facilitates access to completed projects, fostering knowledge sharing and nurturing a culture of collaboration among member organizations. SMIFutures activities further include engaging with a wide range of early careers across the sector to influence and promote maritime careers, looking across companies in the sector to brainstorm solutions to common issues, and providing links between different parts of the industry and diverse companies.

### **Advancing the Maritime Industry: Enhancing Image and Talent Retention**

SMIFutures is committed to bolstering the reputation and image of the



maritime industry for the next generation. By showcasing the diverse opportunities, exciting challenges, and meaningful impact of the sector, our initiative actively attracts talented individuals to join and contribute to the industry's growth. SMIFutures hopes to play a pivotal role in attracting and retaining the next generation of the maritime workforce, ensuring a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals to propel the maritime industry forward.

Join SMIFutures today to unlock unparalleled opportunities for

personal growth, professional development, and industry-wide impact. For more information about SMIFutures and how to become a member, [visit our website](#).

SMIFutures was officially launched during SMI's Annual Conference in Edinburgh, on March 13th, 2023. SMIFutures currently consists of a board of 14 young professionals, from various companies and backgrounds within the maritime sector. A list of the [board members](#) can be seen on the SMIFutures website.







# Future of the Maritime Workforce Survey

SMIFutures ran a survey centred around the future of the maritime workforce. Participants were asked five questions, as follows:

How do we best improve diversity in maritime?

How do we best retain and inspire talent in the maritime industry?

What do you think the future of a maritime computer-based job in 2040 looks like?

What do you think the future of a Sea-based job in 2040 looks like?

Should we provide more cross-company placements within the maritime industry?

More than 100 responses were obtained, providing an interesting sample. Participants had varying levels of experience, but a majority of participants were within the first 10 years of their career (57.3%). The remaining participants had between

11-20 years of experience in the industry (17.5%) or more than 21 years of experience (25.2%).

In addition to the survey, attendees at the SMIFutures launch event in Edinburgh discussed the questions and provided thoughts on flip charts. An overview of survey results is provided later in the report.

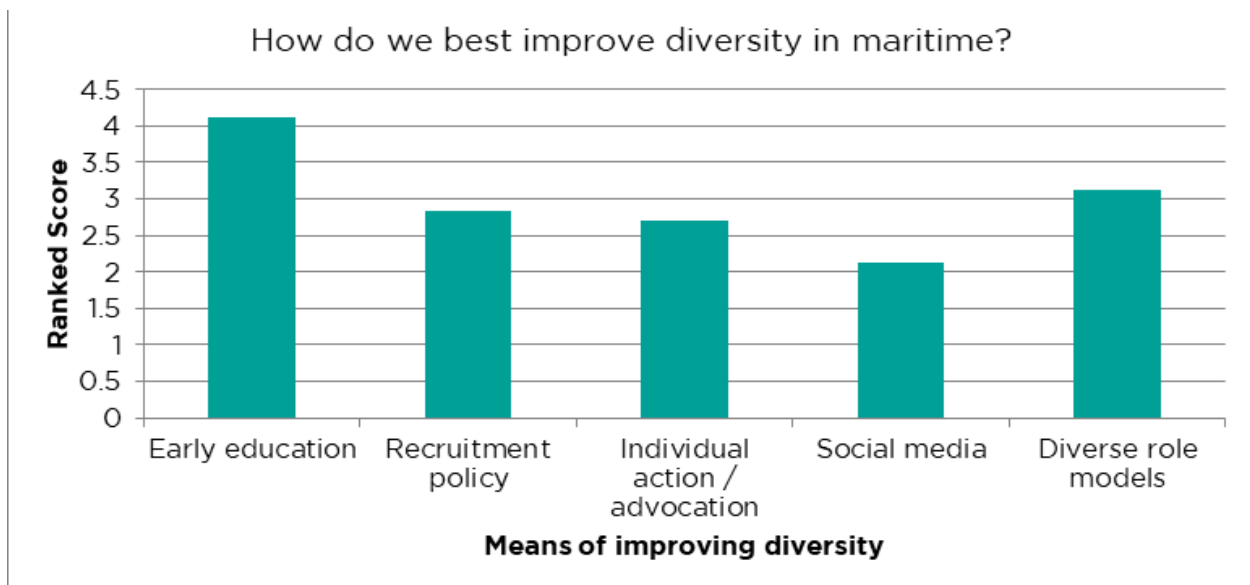
# 1. How do we best improve diversity in maritime?

Participants were asked to rank five different initiatives that could help improve diversity in maritime: early education, recruitment policy, individual action/advocacy, social media and diverse role models.

Early education and diverse role models were considered the best ways to improve diversity in maritime (Figure 1), with a strong agreement between all levels of experience. This was highlighted during event discussions as well, where participants discussed the importance of educating children as early as primary school. Giving both boys and girls the opportunity to better understand the maritime world through activities like school trips e.g. to shipyards, or presentations

from industry representatives could help inspire children to enter our field later on. Teachers also have a role to play through the way they talk about the industry and especially STEM disciplines.

Spotlighting diverse role models would help young people visualise the future that they can/may have in the maritime industry. Although social media came out as the least preferred option in survey results, discussions at the in-person event highlighted the role of PR/social media communication in breaking active stigmas about the maritime industry, taking the “Made in the Royal Navy” campaign as an example of a successful initiative to encourage young talent to join our industry.



**Figure 1:** Graph showing how to best improve diversity in maritime



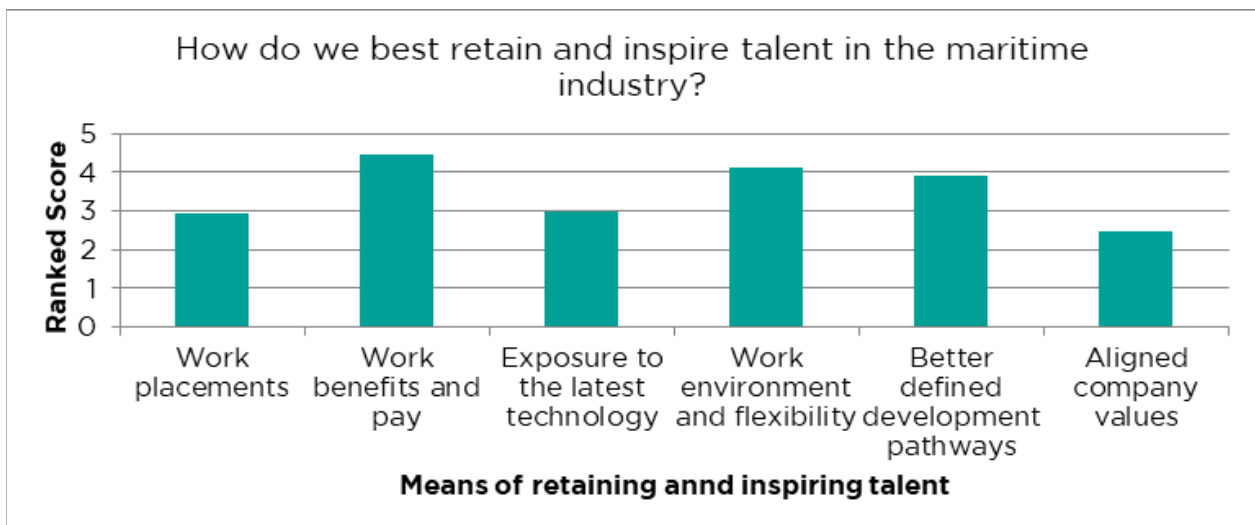


## 2. How do we best retain and inspire talent in the maritime industry?

Participants were asked to rank six different initiatives that could help retain and inspire talent in the maritime industry: work placements, work benefits and pay, exposure to the latest technology, work environment and flexibility, better defined development pathways and aligned company values.

Work benefits and pay, work environment and flexibility, and better defined development pathways came out as the top three means to better retain and inspire talent in the maritime industry (Figure 2). Discussions at the event highlighted the importance of defining clear career paths, with mentorship and

varied opportunities to progress within one company. In terms of retention, it was highlighted that many talents are lost at mid-career levels, due to a lack of emphasis placed on developing talents at these levels. Mid-range job benefits must be improved as well, including better benefits for physical working conditions, and better maternity options. Company values and especially treatment of female workers within one company was highlighted as an important factor to improve retention, in a widely male-dominated industry.



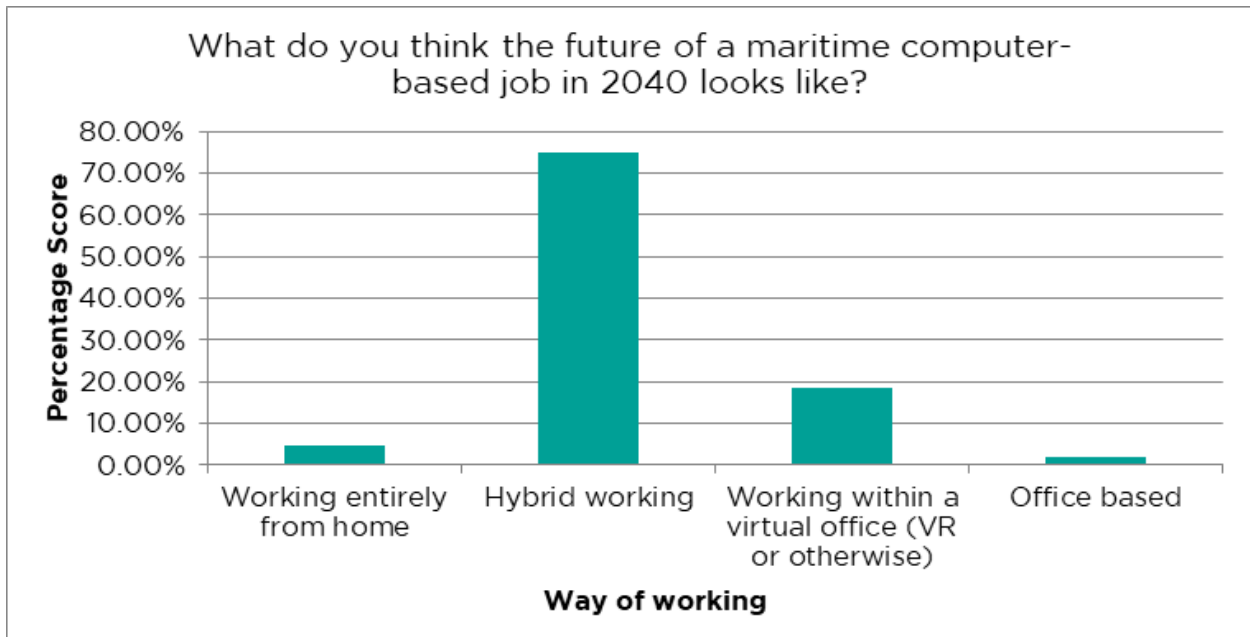
**Figure 2:** Graph showing how to best retain talent.

### 3.

## What do you think the future of a maritime computer-based job in 2040 looks like?

77% of survey participants view maritime computer-based jobs in 2040 as hybrid jobs, i.e., working both remotely and in person (Figure 3). This reflects the ways of working in our post-covid world, especially where younger generations have been used to hybrid working from an early career stage. 19% of survey participants thought people in computer-based roles will be working within virtual offices (VR or otherwise), 5% thought they will be working entirely from

home interestingly all with less than 10 years of work experience, and 2% thought they will be fully office-based (all with 10+ years of work experience). Discussions during the in-person event highlighted different considerations, such as the fact that a future work environment will be greener (sustainable), less male-dominated, and with improved data collection/sharing processes to enable better decision-making.



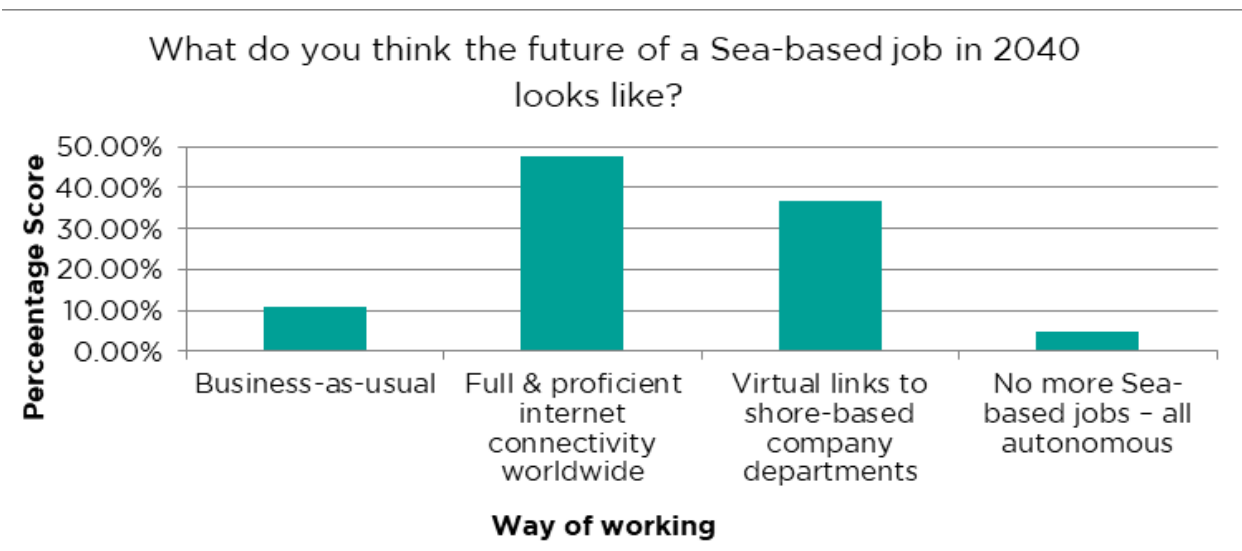
**Figure 3:** Graph showing what the future of a maritime computer-based job in 2040 might look like



# 4. What do you think the future of a sea-based job in 2040 looks like?

Approximately 48% of respondents thought a sea-based job in the future will benefit from full and proficient internet connectivity worldwide, whereas 37% of respondents thought a sea-based job will even have virtual links to shore-based company departments (Figure 4). 11% thought that sea-based jobs will remain business-as-usual, and approximately 5% thought there will be no more sea-based jobs by 2040 (Figure 4), as ships become increasingly autonomous. It is understood that some of these categories are not

mutually exclusive, however results generally show that participants agree sea-based jobs are going to change (and improve) towards 2040, where better connections to shore are linked with increased safety and improved mental health for seafarers.



**Figure 4:** Graph showing what the future of a sea-based job in 2040 might look like



# 5. Should we provide more cross-company placements within the maritime sector?

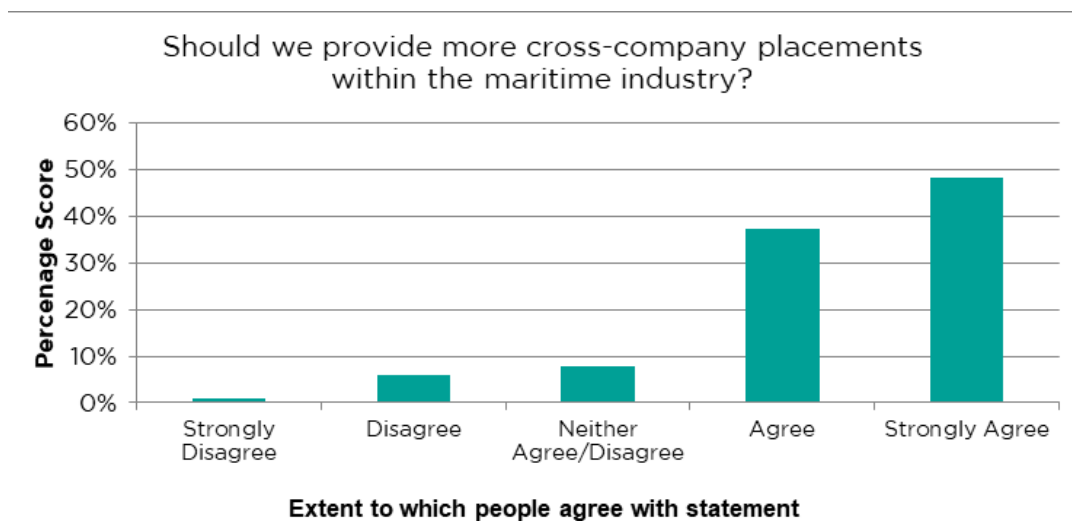
Results and discussions showed a strong consensus that more cross-company placements should be provided within the maritime industry, with 85% of survey participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. 8% neither agreed or disagreed and only 7% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 5).

In-person discussions highlighted various challenges with cross-company placements. One is the fact that such placements are a bigger challenge for small companies that do not have the necessary structures in place.

Therefore, collaboration would be required between smaller and larger-sized companies. Issues with intellectual properties were highlighted as well, with strong HR framework agreements and NDAs

in place needed to ensure cross-company placements work. However, these issues should not be a hard stop to the implementation of such placements, rather challenges that should be worked on, where long term benefits were generally thought to outweigh such short-term risks. It was discussed that a possible simpler implementation was to embed employees in a project team involving multiple companies to work together tackling a common problem.

This would allow employees to work with differing companies but potentially remove some of the challenges discussed. It was also highlighted that cross-industry placements would potentially offer more benefits with learning from other sectors such as automotive and aerospace, however these may be more difficult to set up.



**Figure 5:** Graph showing opinions on whether there should be more cross-company placements within the maritime industry



## Outcome:

The SMIFutures board is improving diversity in the sector by highlighting a diverse workforce and ensuring there are visible diverse role models in the industry. The SMIFutures board members will engage with local schools to offer a presentation to the students about the maritime industry and their role in it. Please reach out if you would like to nominate a school for a presentation if you think it would be of interest.

SMIFutures is pulling together a career path map to provide awareness of different routes within the sector. We will be considering the existing work on future skill requirements when visiting schools, hosting our workshops and developing our career path map.



## Way Forward:

The SMIFutures board will be setting up a mentoring program early next year and will be reaching out to SMI members who would like to be involved.

SMIFutures will be engaging companies in further detailed discussions on any considerations and restraints of cross-company placements to propose potential solutions. We welcome feedback and input on the benefits or barriers of cross-company collaboration or placements.



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