

Our reference: General information on Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) courses.

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JNCC is a statutory advisor to UK Government (and devolved administrations) and as such the Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) courses recognised by JNCC and registered on our website are only relevant to the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS). Attendance on such courses and associated 'certification' is a prerequisite for working as an MMO only within the UKCS.

The MMO courses explain the rationale and requirements of the JNCC guidelines so that upon completion attendees know how to perform the duties of an MMO. This document provides a brief summary of the standards JNCC looks for in MMO courses and highlights topics usually covered by JNCC recognised MMO courses. This document should be taken as an overall summary and not a detailed account of the specifics usually contained within a JNCC recognised MMO course.

MMO course providers

MMO instructors are responsible for providing high quality training of MMOs and as such, have a duty to ensure that their courses are of a high standard and are up-to-date. In order to provide thorough training in all aspects of the work of an MMO, instructors should themselves have considerable experience of working as an MMO within the UKCS and therefore in implementing JNCC's guidelines.

Criteria for MMO instructors include that they should have attended a JNCC recognised MMO course in order to ensure that they are trained for the job for which they are providing instruction and should also have attended (or taught) on a JNCC recognised MMO course relatively recently in order to ensure they are up-to-date with current practices. Instructors should have been the sole/ primary dedicated MMO, based on the source vessel, on a decent proportion of their jobs as an MMO and this should include some surveys within areas of importance for marine mammals within the UKCS. Instructors should also have been the sole/ primary dedicated MMO, based on the source vessel, on a variety of types of seismic survey.

Course providers should be knowledgeable regarding marine mammal biology, conservation, the variety of sound sources in the marine environment and their associated effects upon marine mammals. This includes having highly developed marine mammal identification skills for species common to the UKCS. In addition the course provider should have some experience of analysing biological data relevant to marine mammal surveys in order to be able to teach how to record such biological information successfully. Furthermore, course providers should have good communication skills and preferably some form of teaching/ presentational experience to audiences.

MMO training course content

The MMO course is intended to be a thorough introduction to the role of the MMO and to equip new MMOs with all the knowledge necessary to enable them to perform well in their role. The course should be attended in person and allow plenty of opportunity for explanation, discussion and questions. The content usually covered in JNCC recognised MMO training courses includes;

- a thorough background and introduction to the JNCC guidelines (seismic, piling and explosive guidelines), including the requirements of the guidelines, e.g. before, during and after the work operation and the legislative framework/ consent process that they fit into.
- a summary of the associated effects of noise upon marine mammals.
- a full explanation of the role, responsibilities and duties of an MMO, e.g. from pre-survey and mobilisation meetings through to the provision of advice on compliance with the guidelines and post-survey reporting. Communication and influencing skills are a vital part of the MMO role and as such should be covered within the course material (e.g. through discussing experiences, such as MMO work situations, where good communication was required, role plays exercises etc).
- an introduction and overview of seismic surveys, e.g. basic principles and aims of seismic surveys, personnel involved, how the MMO is expected to interact with the crew, how the guidelines work during different types of seismic survey etc. This can also be extended to incorporate lessons specific to work situations for piling and explosive use.
- an explanation of how to conduct a pre-shooting search and achieve a soft-start.
- an explanation of the reporting requirements after a survey, e.g. recording forms (including a demonstration of their use), other useful information to report during surveys, how to submit a MMO report etc.
- an introduction to the identification of marine mammals, e.g. commonly used marine mammal identification guides, explanation of the key features used in the identification of marine mammals found within the UKCS.

JNCC process for recognising a MMO course

JNCC can help review MMO course material if required as the course content is developed. Evidence should be provided to JNCC to demonstrate that the course provider(s) meet the criteria outlined above to become an MMO instructor.

Once the course is developed, JNCC attendance is required on the first MMO course in order for the course to be reviewed appropriately.

JNCC will keep the MMO course providers informed of any changes to the guidelines or recording forms and any other relevant new information.

MMO course provider responsibilities

As stated earlier, MMO instructors are responsible for providing high quality training of MMOs and as such, have a duty to ensure that their courses are of a high standard and are up-to-date. Instructors should therefore maintain close liaison with JNCC to ensure that they are aware of any changes in the guidelines, recording forms, or other practices and that this is reflected in their courses. In addition, MMO course providers should keep MMOs that were trained by them informed of any changes to the guidelines and recording forms or any other relevant new information.

Instructors should also notify JNCC of any significant changes in course content or course personnel as JNCC may need to further assess this additional content/ personnel. Furthermore, instructors play a key role in maintaining records of those who have attended training courses and as such should submit records of trainees to JNCC at regular intervals.