INTERFACE MARINE · YACHT SURVEYORS & CONSULTANTS

MCA Coding Under 24 m

A plain guide to the Sport or Pleasure Vessel Code for owners, operators and managers of small commercial yachts and boats: what coding is, who needs it, and how we take a vessel through it.

One code since December 2025

The Sport or Pleasure Vessel Code replaces the Yellow, Blue and Red Codes, the IPV Code and MGN 280.

Certifying Authority examinations

Compliance, annual, intermediate and renewal examinations, afloat and ashore.

THE BASICS

What coding is, and who needs it

A UK-flagged vessel used privately is a pleasure vessel. Once she is used commercially, for example for charter, training or paid trips, she must meet a code of practice and carry a certificate. "Coding" is the process of examining the vessel against that code and getting her certified.

Who the Code covers

- Vessels under 24 m load line length in commercial use for sport or pleasure, at sea
- No cargo, and no more than 12 passengers
- Motor and sailing yachts, RIBs and open boats, multihulls, race and race support boats, beachcraft and personal watercraft in commercial use
- Non-UK vessels operating from UK ports while in UK waters

Typical uses

- Skippered or bareboat charter
- Sailing schools and sea training
- Sightseeing trips and sea safaris
- Corporate days and hospitality
- Race and race support work

> "Commercial" doesn't only mean profit-making. If a vessel doesn't meet the legal definition of a pleasure vessel, she is in commercial use.

Not covered

Vessels operating underwater, hovercraft and vessels carrying cargo. Workboats and pilot boats are certified under the Workboat Code Edition 3. Yachts of 24 m and over come under the REG Yacht Code.

The legal basis

The Code is given effect by the Merchant Shipping (Vessels in Commercial Use for Sport or Pleasure) Regulations 2025 (SI 2025 No. 1195) and is read together with them.

WHERE SHE CAN GO

Area categories, from 6 to 0

Every certificate is issued for an area category. The further from a safe haven a vessel works, the more self-sufficient and resilient she must be, and the more equipment, stability and structural requirements apply.

	Operating limit	Conditions
Category 6	Within 3 miles of land and not more than 3 miles from the departure point or the seaward boundary of categorised waters	Favourable weather, daylight
Category 5	As Category 6	Favourable weather
Category 4	Up to 20 miles from a safe haven	Favourable weather, daylight
Category 3	Up to 20 miles from a safe haven	—
Category 2	Up to 60 miles from a safe haven	—
Category 1	Up to 150 miles from a safe haven	—
Category 0	Unrestricted service	New with this Code

Choose the category you need

Choosing a higher category than the business needs adds cost in equipment, liferafts, stability and radio. Choosing one too low limits the charter programme. We help you settle this before any money is spent.

Changing category later

A change of area category, a conversion or new equipment means the owner's risk assessment must be redone, and the change agreed with the Certifying Authority in writing before it takes effect.

Summary only. The Code's definitions, including "safe haven" and "favourable weather", always apply.

THE CERTIFICATE

Five years, with examinations between

The certificate is issued by a Certifying Authority, such as the MCA, IIMS, the RYA or a classification society, for up to five years. It stays valid only while the vessel is maintained and operated as recorded on her SCV2, and while every examination is done on time.

	What it is	When
Compliance	Full examination of structure, stability, machinery, fire protection, fittings and equipment. Partly out of the water, partly afloat	Before first certification
Annual	General or partial examination of what can readily be seen	Each year
Intermediate	General or partial examination, similar in scope to the annual	Within the certificate period
Renewal	Equivalent to the compliance examination	To renew the certificate
Emergency	Equivalent to the compliance examination	After an incident

The hull, shell fittings, and external steering and propulsion must be examined out of the water at intervals of no more than five years; the Certifying Authority may set a shorter interval.

New vessels

Vessels with keels laid on or after 12 December 2025 must meet the new Code in full. A vessel cannot combine the new Code with parts of earlier codes.

Existing coded vessels

Vessels certified under the old codes move across under the Code's transitional arrangements, at the next renewal or within three years, according to MCA guidance. Check the date for your vessel with us early.

When the certificate stops being valid

- An annual or intermediate examination is missed
- The vessel is sold: the certificate is cancelled automatically, and the new owner must apply again
- Changes are made without the Certifying Authority's prior written agreement

HOW WE GO ABOUT IT

From enquiry to certificate

1
Application
You choose the Certifying Authority and complete the SCV1 application. We can help with both.

2
Document review
We review the builder's papers, CE/RCD documents, stability information, and any previous certificate.

3
Pre-coding visit
An optional walk-round, before anything is bought or fitted, that gives you a gap list against the Code.

4
Examination
The compliance examination, out of the water and afloat, including equipment checks and trials.

5
Certificate
Deficiencies are cleared, the SCV2 is signed, and the Certifying Authority issues the certificate.

What the owner provides

- A risk assessment for risks not covered by the Code, presented before issue or renewal
- A safety management system that fits the operation
- Manning and qualifications for the type of charter: skippered, bareboat or training
- Records of maintenance and servicing

Our approach

- A clear deficiency list, graded by what stops certification and what can follow
- Equivalences explained and recorded, not assumed
- Every finding photographed where it was found
- One point of contact from first call to certificate

Before going to sea

The vessel must hold her certificate before she works commercially. The certificate and a signed, current SCV2 are kept on board, or ashore and available on request.

ON BOARD

What we examine, and how to prepare

The vessel

- Construction, structural strength and weathertight integrity
- Stability and freeboard marking; for many vessels a simplified assessment, for others an approved stability booklet
- Machinery, fuel systems and steering
- Electrical installations, and hybrid or battery-electric propulsion where fitted
- Bilge pumping and water freeing
- Rig and sails on sailing vessels

The equipment

- Life-saving appliances and liferafts
- Fire safety and fire appliances
- Radio, navigation lights and navigation equipment
- Anchors and cables
- Tenders, toys and activity equipment
- Medical stores, protection of personnel and accommodation

What to have ready

- Registration documents and any previous code certificate
- Builder's certificate and CE/RCD Declaration of Conformity
- Stability information, or the builder's ISO stability data
- Liferaft, EPIRB and fire equipment service certificates
- Gas installation certificate, if gas is fitted
- Rig inspection report for sailing vessels
- Engine and machinery service records
- Your draft risk assessment and safety management system
- Lockers, bilges and machinery spaces opened up
- A crew member on board to give access

Standards

The Code and its supporting MIN 724 refer mainly to international ISO standards, for example ISO 12216 for windows, hatches and doors. Equipment certified to them is usually the simplest route to compliance.

GETTING IT RIGHT

Common problems we see

Problem	Why it matters
Buying a "coded" yacht and assuming the certificate follows	It is cancelled on sale; the new owner must apply again, and may face the new Code in full
Equipment bought before a gap survey	Kit can be wrong for the area category, or not needed at all
Mixing old and new code standards	Not allowed: a vessel meets one regime in full
Examination dates allowed to slip	A missed annual or intermediate examination invalidates the certificate
Modifications made without telling the Certifying Authority	Changes need prior written agreement, or the certificate is no longer valid
Assuming a UK certificate works everywhere	Other countries may not recognise it; local rules must be checked (MGN 416)

CASE STUDY · ILLUSTRATIVE

A 15 m sailing yacht bought for charter

The buyer of a 15 m cruising yacht with a Category 2 certificate under the old Blue Code planned to start skippered charter straight away. Because the certificate had been cancelled on sale, a new application was needed.

A pre-coding visit before completion set out the gap against the new Code. It covered the liferaft and fire equipment, the rig inspection, and the stability information needed for Category 2. The buyer took the cost into the price negotiation, and the yacht was examined and certified before her first charter.

Working outside the UK

For Red Ensign yachts chartering in France, Italy or elsewhere, the UK certificate is only part of the picture. Local charter rules can also apply, so check them before the season.

GET IN TOUCH

Book a coding examination

Send us the vessel's name, type and length, her flag and location, the area category you need and any previous certificate. We will advise on the route to certification and reply with a fixed-fee quote.

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YOUR EXAMINER

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