

Cookies on GOV.UK

We use some essential cookies to make this website work.

We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services.

We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their services.

Accept additional cookies

Reject additional cookies

[View cookies \(/help/cookies\)](/help/cookies)



Coronavirus (COVID-19) (/coronavirus)

Latest updates and guidance

1. [Home \(https://www.gov.uk/\)](https://www.gov.uk/)
2. [Ship registration \(https://www.gov.uk/topic/ships-cargoes/ship-registration\)](https://www.gov.uk/topic/ships-cargoes/ship-registration)

Guidance

Vessel classification and certification

Class and permitted use of passenger ships, cargo ships, tankers, tugs, tenders, fishing boats, yachts, commercial vessels, and the required certificates.

From:

[Maritime and Coastguard Agency \(/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency\)](/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency)

Published

9 October 2012

Last updated

18 July 2018 —

Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Certification requirements for UK vessels](#)
- [Merchant ships: classification and certification](#)

- [Passenger ships: classification and certification](#)
- [Small commercial vessels and pilot boats certification](#)
- [Large commercial yachts classification and certification](#)
- [Fishing vessels: classification and certification](#)
- [Organisations that can help](#)
- [Further information](#)
- [Document information](#)

Introduction

All seagoing vessels registered in the UK are assigned to a specific class, which defines their type of permitted use, determines which certification they must hold and specifies the inspection and survey regime required to comply with this certification. These classes are established and assigned by the Recognised Classification Societies, who also approve surveys and inspections.

This guide explains the main classes of UK-registered seagoing vessels, and gives outline details of the statutory certificates they must carry.

Certification requirements for UK vessels

The certificates that you must carry for UK-registered vessels vary according to their type, gross tonnage (gt), type of cargo and whether they are on a domestic or international voyage.

The following is an outline of the main certification requirements:

- passenger ship safety certificate - for all passenger ships
- cargo ship safety radio certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 300gt on international voyages only
- cargo ship safety equipment certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 500gt on international voyages only
- cargo ship safety construction certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 500gt on international voyages only
- cargo ship safety certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 300gt
- load line certificate - for passenger ships in non-UK waters, cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 24 metres in length (if built on or after 21 July 1968) or of more than 150gt and for passenger ships in UK waters over 80 net tonnes
- oil pollution prevention certificate - for fishing vessels, passenger ships, cargo ships, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 400gt and oil tankers over 150gt
- minimum safe manning document certificate - for passenger ships, cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 500gt
- safety management certificate - for all passenger ships and for cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 500gt

- ship security certificate - for passenger ships, cargo ships oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts on international voyages only
- sewage pollution certificate - for fishing vessels, passenger ships, cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts of 400gt or more, or carrying 15 persons or more on international voyages only
- air pollution certificate - for fishing vessels, passenger ships, cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts of 400gt or more
- anti-fouling declaration - for fishing vessels under 24 metres in length or of less than 400gt
- anti-fouling certificate - for fishing vessels, passenger ships, cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts of 400gt or more
- certificate of fitness (chemical or gas) certificate - for all chemical tankers or gas carriers
- dangerous goods certificate - for passenger ships built after 1 September 1984, and for cargo ships after a certain date of build on international voyages only
- certificate of compliance for a large charter yacht - for all large passenger yachts
- UK fishing vessel certificate - for fishing vessels between 15 and 24 metres in length
- international fishing vessel certificate - for fishing vessels over 24 metres in length
- small commercial vessel certificate - for pilot boats and small commercial vessels under 24 metres in length
- certificate of registry - mandatory for all fishing vessels, optional for pilot boats and small commercial vessels
- international tonnage - for fishing vessels under 24 metres in length

Merchant ships: classification and certification

Merchant ships are classified by the type of cargo that they carry (general cargo, oil, chemicals, gas etc), their gt and the voyages they undertake, which can be:

- inshore, in the sea areas around the UK - for details of these, [download Marine Shipping Notice \(MSN\) 1747 The Merchant Shipping \(Domestic Voyages\) Regulations 2000](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1747-sea-areas-council-directive-9818ec) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1747-sea-areas-council-directive-9818ec>)
- short international - when the ship is never more than 200 nautical miles (nm) from a port or place of safety, and on which there is no more than 600nm between the final departure port and the first destination port
- long international - all other voyages between ports in two countries to which the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) applies

The classes of merchant vessels are as follows:

- Class VII - ships (other than those in Classes VII(A), VII(T), XI and XII) engaged on voyages, any of which are long international voyages
- Class VII(A) - ships employed as fish processing or canning factory ships and ships engaged in the carriage of persons employed in the fish processing or canning industries

- Class VII(T) - tankers engaged on voyages, any of which are long international voyages
- Class VIII - ships (other than ships of Classes VIII(T), IX, XI and XII) engaged only on short international voyages
- Class VIII(T) - tankers engaged on voyages, any of which are short international voyages
- Class VIII(A) - ships (other than ships of VIII(A)(T), IX, IX(A), IX(A)(T), XI and XII) engaged only on voyages which are not international voyages - this class includes small commercial vessels
- Class VIII(A)(T) - tankers engaged only on voyages which are not international voyages
- Class IX - tugs and tenders which go to sea but not on long international voyages

Certification for merchant ships

The certificates that merchant ships must carry vary according to class, type of cargo and size. The following is an outline of the main certification requirements for UK ships:

- cargo ship safety radio certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers over 300gt on international voyages only
- cargo ship safety equipment certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers over 500gt on international voyages only
- cargo ship safety construction certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers over 500gt on international voyages only
- cargo ship safety certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers over 300gt
- load line certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers over 24 metres in length (if built on or after 21 July 1968) or of more than 150gt
- oil pollution prevention certificate - for cargo ships and chemical tankers or gas carriers over 400gt and oil tankers over 150gt
- minimum safe manning document certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers over 500gt
- safety management certificate - for all passenger ships, and for cargo ships, oil tankers, chemical tankers or gas carriers and large commercial yachts over 500gt
- ship security certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers on international voyages only
- sewage pollution certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers of 400gt or more, or carrying 15 persons or more, on international voyages only
- air pollution certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers of 400gt or more
- anti-fouling certificate - for cargo ships, oil tankers and chemical tankers or gas carriers of 400gt or more
- certificate of fitness (chemical or gas) certificate - for all chemical tankers or gas carriers
- dangerous goods certificate - for cargo ships after a certain date of build, on international voyages only

For information about requirements for the certification, see the [guidance to legislation](http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/mcga07-home/shipsandcargoes/mcga-shipsregsandguidance/marinenotices.htm) (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/mcga07-home/shipsandcargoes/mcga-shipsregsandguidance/marinenotices.htm>)

Passenger ships: classification and certification

Passenger-carrying ships are classified primarily on whether they operate inshore or on short or long international voyages.

The classes of passenger ships are as follows:

- Class I - ships engaged on voyages any of which are long international voyages.
- Class II - ships engaged only on voyages any of which are short international voyages.
- Class II(A) - ships engaged on voyages of any kind other than international voyages, which are not ships of Classes III to VI(A).
- Class III - ships engaged only on voyages in the course of which they are at no time more than 70 miles by sea from their point of departure and not more than 18 miles from the coast of the UK and which are at sea only in favourable weather and during restricted periods.
- Class VI - ships engaged only on voyages with not more than 250 passengers on board. In favourable weather and during restricted periods, in the course of which the ships are at no time more than 15 miles from their point of departure, nor more than 3 miles from land.
- Class VI (A) - ships carrying not more than 50 passengers for a distance of not more than 6 miles. Voyages to or from isolated communities on the islands or coast of the UK and which do not proceed for a distance of more than 3 miles from land - this is subject to any conditions which the Secretary of State may impose.

Additional classifications for inshore ships are:

- Class A - passenger ships engaged on domestic voyages other than voyages covered by Classes B, C and D
- Class B - a passenger ship engaged on domestic voyages in the course of which it is at no time more than 20 miles from the line of the coast
- Class C - a passenger ship engaged on domestic voyages in sea areas where the probability of exceeding 2.5 metres significant wave height is less than 10% over a one-year period for all-year round operation; or operating over a specific restricted period (eg summer) in the course of which it is at no time more than 15 miles from a place of refuge, nor more than 5 miles from the line of the coast
- Class D - a passenger ship engaged on domestic voyages in sea areas where the probability of exceeding 1.5 metres significant wave height is less than 10% over a one-year period for all-year round operation; or operating over a specific restricted period (eg summer) in the course of which it is at no time more than 15 miles from a place of refuge, nor more than 5 miles from the line of the coast

Certification for passenger ships

The certificates that passenger ships must carry vary according to their gt. The following is an outline of the main certification requirements for UK ships:

- passenger ship safety certificate
- load line certificate required for passenger ships either operating in UK waters and of more than 80 gross tonnes (gt) or operating in non-UK waters and of 24 metres length (if keel was laid on or after 21 July 1968) or of more than 150gt
- oil pollution prevention certificate - ships of 400gt or more
- minimum safe manning document - ships of 500gt or more
- safety management certificate
- ship security certificate - ships on international voyages
- sewage pollution certificate - ships of 400gt or more, or carrying 15 persons and on international voyages
- air pollution certificate - ships of 400gt or more - application to ships other than on international voyages not yet confirmed
- anti-fouling certificate - ships of 400gt or more
- dangerous goods certificate - ships built after 1 September 1984 on international voyages only

Small commercial vessels and pilot boats certification

The operation of small commercial vessels in the UK is covered by the Small Commercial Vessel Codes of Practice. The Codes define small commercial vessels as those of less than 24 metres load line length (or under 150 tonnes if built before 21 July 1968) which are engaged at sea and are not pleasure vessels..

These vessels are classed as Class VIII (A).

The Codes regulations and classifications apply to UK registered vessels and all other vessels which are registered or owned in another country but operate from a UK port while in UK waters.

Pleasure vessels are not covered by the Codes.

To view the Yellow, Blue, Brown and Red Codes please [click here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-craft-codes) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-craft-codes>).

[Download Marine Guidance Note \(MGN\) 280 \(M\) Small Vessels in Commercial Use for Sport or Pleasure, Workboats and Pilot Boats standards from the MCA website \(PDF, 921K\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mgn-280-small-vessels-in-commercial-use-for-sport) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mgn-280-small-vessels-in-commercial-use-for-sport>).

Certification for small vessels

The specific type of certificate issued depends on operational activities of the vessel - different certificates are issued for vessels used commercially for sport or pleasure, workboats and pilot boats. Commercial vessels that are 24 metres load-line length or over are treated as cargo ships.

For information about requirements for the certification, see the [guidance to legislation](http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/mcga07-home/shipsandcargoes/mcga-shipsregsandguidance/marinenotices.htm) (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/mcga07-home/shipsandcargoes/mcga-shipsregsandguidance/marinenotices.htm>)

Large commercial yachts classification and certification

Large commercial yachts are defined as those vessels which are:

- in commercial use for sport or pleasure
- 24 metres load line length or more or over 150 gross tonnes if built before 21 July 1968
- carry no cargo and no more than 12 passengers
- are in commercial use for sport or pleasure

Certification for large commercial yachts

The certificates that large commercial yachts must carry vary according to their gt. Further information on this can be found in Section 28 of the Large Commercial Yacht Code. You can [download MSN 1792 \(M\) Large Commercial Yacht Code \(LY2\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1792-the-large-commercial-yacht-code-ly2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1792-the-large-commercial-yacht-code-ly2>).

For information about requirements for the certification, see the [guidance to legislation](http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/mcga07-home/shipsandcargoes/mcga-shipsregsandguidance/marinenotices.htm) (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/mcga07-home/shipsandcargoes/mcga-shipsregsandguidance/marinenotices.htm>)

Fishing vessels: classification and certification

Fishing vessels are classified by length. In general, operation of fishing vessels of less than 24 metres registered length are covered by The Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall and The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length Fishing Vessels.

Fishing Vessels of 24 metres in length and over are covered The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over.

[Download MSN 1871 \(F\) The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1871-fcode-of-practice-for-safety-of-small-fishing-vessels)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1871-fcode-of-practice-for-safety-of-small-fishing-vessels>)

[Download MSN 1872 \(F\) The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1872-f-code-of-safe-working-practice-for-fishing-vessels)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1872-f-code-of-safe-working-practice-for-fishing-vessels>)

[Download MSN 1873 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1873f-codes-of-practice-for-construction-and-safe-operation-fishing-vessels) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1873f-codes-of-practice-for-construction-and-safe-operation-fishing-vessels>)

Certification of fishing vessels

Fishing vessels are exempt from some certification requirements, although other specialised certificates must be carried, as follows:

- Small fishing vessel certificate
- UK fishing vessel certificate - for vessels 15-24 metres

- international fishing vessel certificate - for vessels 24 metres or longer
- oil pollution prevention certificate
- air pollution certificate - vessels of 400 gross tonnes (gt) or more
- sewage pollution certificate - vessels of 400gt or more, or carrying 15 persons, and on international voyages
- anti-fouling declaration - vessels of less than 24 metres in length and less than 400gt
- anti-fouling certificate - vessels of 400gt or more
- international tonnage certificate - vessels of 400gt or more

For information about requirements for the certification, see the [guidance to legislation \(http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/mcga07-home/shipsandcargoes/mcga-shipsregsandguidance/marinenotices.htm\)](http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/mcga07-home/shipsandcargoes/mcga-shipsregsandguidance/marinenotices.htm)

Organisations that can help

As well as guidance on specific types of vessel, more general information on classification, certification and other issues related to the operation of commercial shipping is available from the MCA and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

[Read about the IMO's work \(http://www.imo.org/\)](http://www.imo.org/).

Full information on UK regulations and procedures, including details of the certificates that must be carried on UK-registered ships can be found in [MCA's Master's guide to the UK flag \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-masters-guide-to-the-uk-flag\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-masters-guide-to-the-uk-flag).

Further information

[Download the small craft codes from the MCA website \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-craft-codes\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-craft-codes)

[Download MSN 1792 \(M\) Large Commercial Yacht Code \(LY2\) \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1792-the-large-commercial-yacht-code-ly2\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1792-the-large-commercial-yacht-code-ly2)

[Download MSN 1871 \(F\) The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length. \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1871-fcode-of-practice-for-safety-of-small-fishing-vessels\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1871-fcode-of-practice-for-safety-of-small-fishing-vessels)

[Download MSN 1872 \(F\) The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1872-f-code-of-safe-working-practice-for-fishing-vessels\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1872-f-code-of-safe-working-practice-for-fishing-vessels)

[Download MSN 1873 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1873-fcodes-of-practice-for-construction-and-safe-operation-fishing-vessels\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1873-fcodes-of-practice-for-construction-and-safe-operation-fishing-vessels)

[Fishing Vessel \(Codes of Practice\) Regulations 2017 \(http://www.legislation.gov.uk/2017/943\)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/2017/943)

[Organisation information on the MCA website \(http://www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/mcga07-home.htm\)](http://www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/mcga07-home.htm)

[Agency overview on the IMO website \(http://www.imo.org/\)](http://www.imo.org/)

[Download the Master's guide to the UK flag from the MCA website \(PDF, 5.59MB\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-masters-guide-to-the-uk-flag)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-masters-guide-to-the-uk-flag>)

[Contents](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/vessel-classification-and-certification#contents) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/vessel-classification-and-certification#contents>)

Document information

Published: 9 October 2012

Updated: 23 October 2017

From: [Maritime and Coastguard Agency](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency>)

Part of: [Ship registration Surveys and inspections](https://www.gov.uk/topic/ships-cargoes/surveys-inspections) (<https://www.gov.uk/topic/ships-cargoes/surveys-inspections>)

Published 9 October 2012

Last updated 18 July 2018 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 18 July 2018
Links updated
2. 22 November 2017
Updated text and links
3. 9 October 2012
First published.

Related content

- [MSN 1747 Sea areas: council directive 98/18/EC](/government/publications/msn-1747-sea-areas-council-directive-9818ec) (/government/publications/msn-1747-sea-areas-council-directive-9818ec)
- [Guidance on merchant shipping regulations for registered vessels](/government/publications/a-masters-guide-to-the-uk-flag) (/government/publications/a-masters-guide-to-the-uk-flag)
- [Small craft codes](/government/publications/small-craft-codes) (/government/publications/small-craft-codes)
- [Small craft codes of practice](/government/collections/small-craft-codes-of-practice) (/government/collections/small-craft-codes-of-practice)

COVID-19 vaccinations

[Book your coronavirus vaccination and booster dose on the NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/)
(<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/>)

Explore the topic

- [Ship registration](/topic/ships-cargoes/ship-registration) (/topic/ships-cargoes/ship-registration)
- [Surveys and inspections](/topic/ships-cargoes/surveys-inspections) (/topic/ships-cargoes/surveys-inspections)

OGI

All content is available under the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated

© Crown copyright

Last viewed by the First Circuit Library on 01/24/2022