



**BOAT SAFETY SCHEME**  
Go boating - Stay safe

# BSS Annual Report 2025-26



Endorsed by



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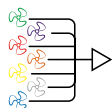
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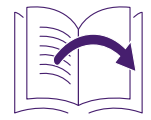
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Summary



# Section 1



## BSS Directors' Foreword

**Boat Safety Scheme Limited (BSS) is a public safety initiative delivering safer boating on Britain's inland waterways and supporting the legal duties of their navigation authorities.**

As we reflect on the achievements of this year, both the progress we have made and the challenges we continue to address, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to our dedicated community of over **157** authorised Examiners and numerous stakeholders for their continued support, commitment, and contribution to our success.

Your dedication and expertise play a vital role in achieving our shared objectives, having ensured that across the UK's inland waterways, nearly **23,000** boat examinations were conducted this year. Each examination helps to maintain the highest safety standards and safeguard our boating community. We also reflect on the additional commitment and flexibility shown by our team whilst running the scheme on a reduced headcount and thank them for their expertise, diligence and patience.

With our shared commitment to public safety, we must continue to maintain high safety standards while adapting to changing technologies, emerging risks and evolving user expectations. We will continue to share knowledge, improve guidance and support compliance across the sector. Safety is not achieved through regulation alone.

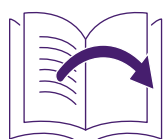
It relies on awareness, education and individual responsibility. We are therefore grateful to the boating community for its ongoing commitment to safe practices and for the constructive feedback that helps us improve our services and communications.

We thank all those who contribute to the success of the Boat Safety Scheme. Your dedication and expertise play a vital role in achieving our shared objectives.

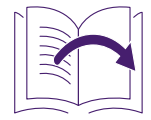
As we look ahead, the BSS will continue to focus on evidence based risk decision making, effective governance and meaningful stakeholder engagement. By working together, we can build on our achievements and ensure that the waterways remain safe, welcoming and sustainable for future generations.

During 2025-26 economic uncertainty, inflation and rising costs continued to challenge our financial sustainability and potentially reduce our income. Despite these challenges we achieved our goals and balanced our budget.

We continue to work to improve delivery of consistent Examinations by providing training programmes to our Examiners, addressing drivers for change arising from the BSS Risk Management Process. This takes account of evolving legislation, appliances, fuels, power sources, vessel construction, Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) recommendations, and developments within the operating environment.



# Section 1



## BSS General Manager's Year In Focus

**I would like to thank each of our authorised examiners for their invaluable role in supporting the Boat Safety Standards by assessing the condition of boats against those Standards, and for their continued dedication and engagement to safety, quality assurance processes and customer service.**

Additionally, I want to highlight the dedication of all our stakeholders, partners, navigation authority and harbour authorities, many of whom give their time to support our various working groups that help to support the ongoing evolution of the Boat Safety Scheme.

My sincere gratitude also goes out to the BSS office, for their dedication, professionalism and teamwork.

The BSS made significant progress in 2026, strengthening the lithium-ion battery safety initiative, progressing with Stage 1 Examiner App development, and advancing the review of Non-Private Boat Standards.

We also introduced a quality assured field assessments process to support consistent examinations, implemented a new carbon monoxide safety process and successfully held our inaugural online Annual Public Meeting.

In respect of our financial performance, I am delighted to report that our Business Plan was successfully implemented, achieving results in line with Examination-led expectations and ending the year with a small operating surplus.

Key objectives for the year ahead include the phased rollout of the BSS Examiner App, advancing behavioural safety initiatives, responding to the outcome of the smoke alarm requirements consultation and modernisation of standards for non-private boats.



**In conclusion, despite the challenges we faced, the year was highly successful. We delivered all our planned outcomes and enter the next year with optimism and confidence.**



# Section 2



## Introduction

**The BSS protects people and property either on, or nearby, the waterways, by reducing the risk of boat fires, explosions, and boat pollution.**

The work we do relates to the condition and use of powered or fuelled engines, systems, and equipment on boats. Our roles are shaped by the UK's Inland Navigation Authorities.

### Our duties include:

- Introducing, maintaining and developing Examination Checking Procedures (ECPs) and BSS Examiner Conditions of Registration to ensure vessels comply with the BSS Standards
- Providing a quality-assessed Examination service using checks to verify boats meet relevant BSS Certification and issue this appropriately
- Promoting safety advice to help people and manage known risks
- Monitoring reported boat-related incidents and accidents, and risks and trends concerning current potential future issues — feeding this into a risk register

Boat Safety Scheme Limited is a public safety initiative run as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, incorporated in 2024.

It has three appointed directors (three Canal & River Trust appointed directors and one independent director) who oversee (via the BSS General Manager and other colleagues, resourced under the Scheme's Service Level Agreement with the Canal & River Trust) the operation and delivery of the training and accreditation of BSS Examiners and the conducting of BSS Examinations and issue of BSS Certifications in accordance with the BSS risk management and quality assurance framework.

BSS Limited will receive advice and recommendations on technical matters from the BSS Technical Forum and on matters of stakeholder concern from the BSS Advisory Forum.



## Future challenges

**Boat usage on inland waterways continues to increase.**

We engage with key organisations in the marine and fire safety sectors to promote behavioural safety.

Through our customer query process, we have seen a rise in those facing safety maintenance challenges of not just keeping a boat operational, but managing a combination of ageing assets, rising costs, new technologies, and persistent safety risks, such as carbon monoxide, fire, and poorly maintained fuel-burning appliances.

The BSS continues to update its Risk Review and Assessment Paper (RRAP) on Lithium-ion Batteries (LiBs) on boats. We also reinforce the importance of suitable CO alarms and regular appliance maintenance via our stay safe advice available on our website and in our safety literature.



# Section 2



## Boat Safety Scheme Advisory Forum (BSSAF)

### Overview

**The BSSAF provides advice and recommendations to the Directors on all matters concerned with the impact and operation of the Standards and the Examination Checking Procedures.**

It comprises stakeholder representatives from navigation authorities, BSS practitioner bodies, the marine industry, and boat user organisations.

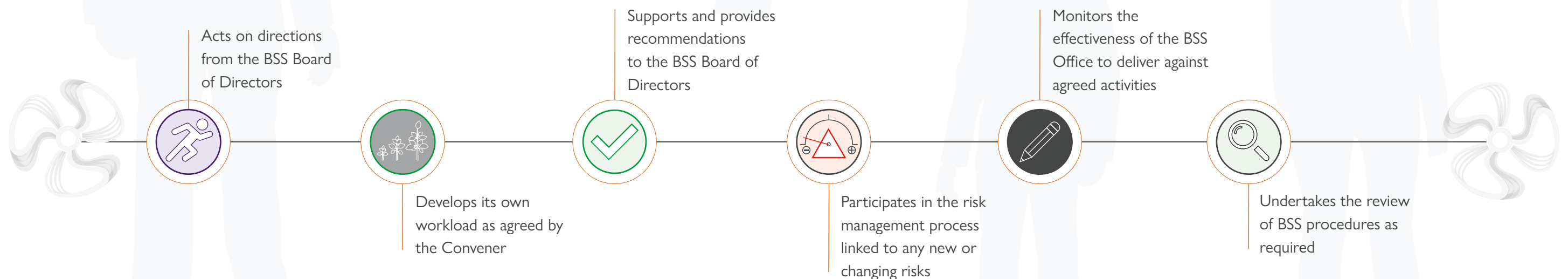
Its purpose is to ensure that key assessments and recommendations are effective and balance the responsibilities and needs, and meet the expectations of, stakeholders.

The BSSAF considers risk review and assessment papers presented to it from the BSS Technical Forum (BSSTF) concerning any boat-related risks.

Additionally, the BSSAF analyses BSSTF reviews of individual Examinations that may raise wider issues for the application of the Standards or Examination Checking Procedures from the perspective of stakeholder groups.

Moreover, it reviews BSS operations and looks to identify future trends impacting on the Scheme's risk management processes.

In 2025-26 the BSSAF considered the BSS Examiner Field Assessments paper, a proposal for change concerning BSS ECP Appendix C and a new BSS process concerning non-room-sealed LPG appliances in a space containing a bath and/or shower amongst its papers. In addition, a new working group to consider a holistic review of the timing and frequency of BSS Examinations was agreed to be established.



**The BSSAF Convener thanks the forum members for their continuing candour, engagement, and attendance.**



# Section 3



## BSS 2025-26 financial summary

The Scheme operates on a non-profit basis.

Income is generated by Examiner subscription fees, the sale of Certifications and training fees which cover the costs of the Scheme's administration and crucial technical professional support. The fees for training are based on the costs of running the programmes.

The summary for the financial year 2025-26 as per management accounts appear in the table opposite.

For further information the full audited company accounts should be consulted.

The 2025-26 business plan was created from certificate sales history and the recovery from the four-year cyclic event of the pandemic. Certification sales were **1.83%** higher than planned. The net result was an operating surplus of **£1,226.83**.

 **The 2025-26 Business Plan was successfully implemented, achieving sales in line with Examination-led expectations. Controllable costs were in line with the predicted and planned activity of the Scheme.**



## Financial summary as per management accounts

| Income and loss accounts       | Forecast        | Actual          |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| External Income                | 1,301,612.00    | 1,314,631.60    |
| Payroll Costs                  | 440,563.15      | 437,521.66      |
| Staff Related Costs            | 36,899.33       | 39,391.39       |
| Operational Costs              | 3,569.65        | 4,414.15        |
| Premises Costs*                | 796.56          | 926.15          |
| Office Costs**                 | 60,896.56       | 58,588.74       |
| Professional Fees              | 608,809.03      | 627,966.02      |
| Non-Operational Costs          | 144,798.46      | 144,134.66      |
| Total Expenditure              | 1,296,332.74    | 1,312,942.77    |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>5,279.26</b> | <b>1,688.83</b> |
| <b>Corporation tax payable</b> |                 | <b>(462)</b>    |
| <b>End of year balance</b>     |                 | <b>1226.83</b>  |

\* Premises costs includes mobile telephones and other utilities.  
\*\* Office costs includes meeting costs, printing, postage, subscriptions, computer costs.

# Section 4

## BSS in Figures

During 2025-26 there were **157** registered Examiners.

The BSS is proud to support the majority of the UK's navigation and harbour authorities.

In an average year there are:



23k

BSS Examinations



16k

BSS Certifications



43.6%

of BSS Examinations between March-June

As a result, we operate on over three quarters of UK waterways by length.

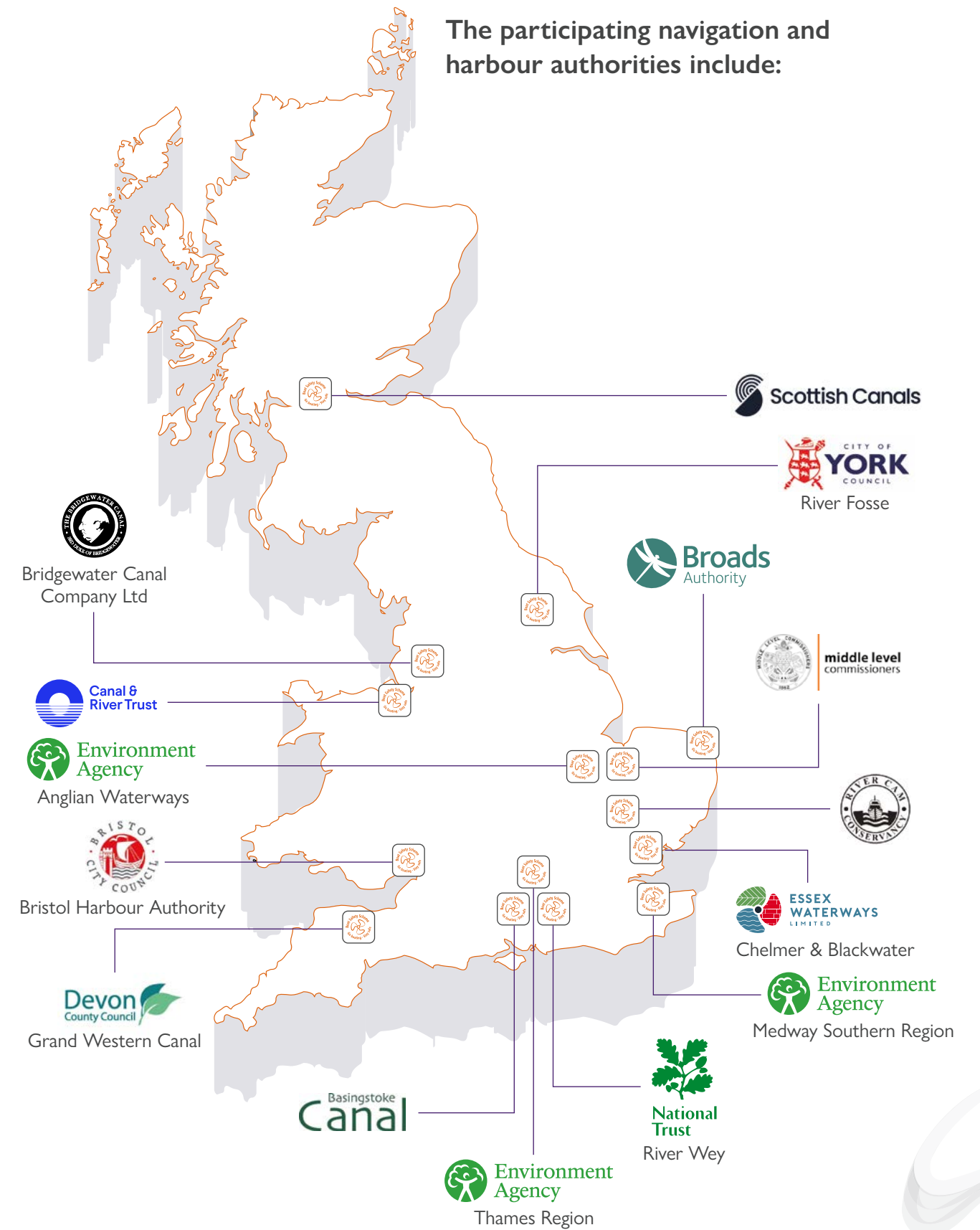
A valid BSS Certification allows a boat to be registered with navigation authorities across Britain.

Whether it's cruising the inland waterways around Lowestoft, the most eastern point of the UK to the canals of mid Wales, or from Inverness down to the waterways of Devon and Somerset, boaters, other visitors, and the surrounding environment of these navigations are protected by the BSS.

Approximately **90,000** boats are subject to a BSS Certification.

The types of craft include narrowboats, broad beam, glass reinforced plastic both for private use and hire, and other commercial and community boats such as workboats, small passenger boats, floating retailers, offices, marshalling and safety boats, galleries, and theatres.

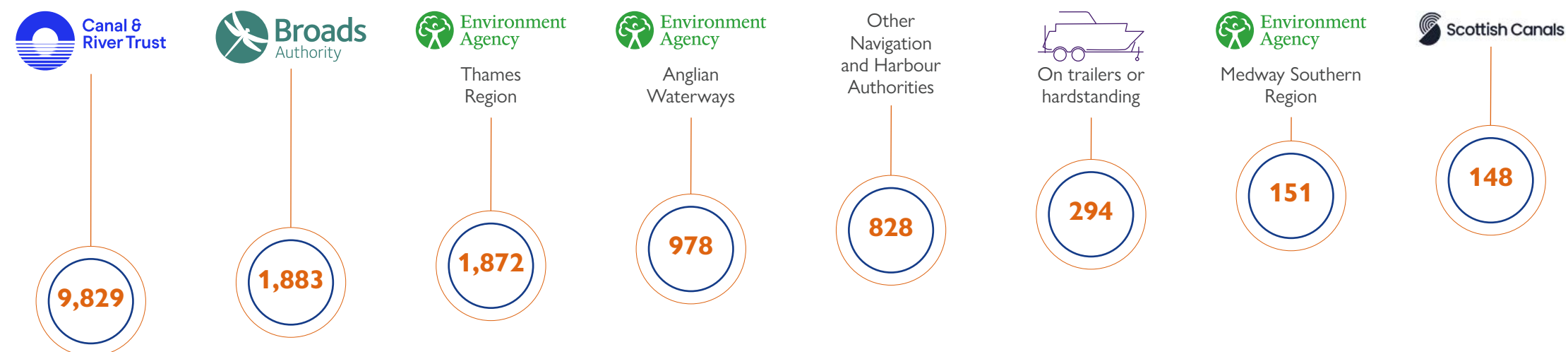
The participating navigation and harbour authorities include:



# Section 4

## BSS in Figures

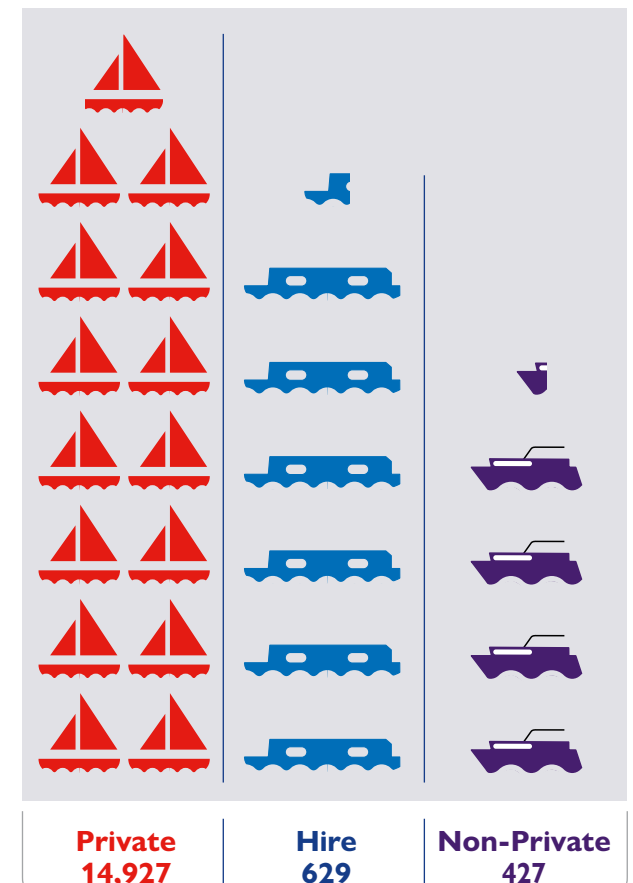
Numbers of BSS Examinations undertaken with navigation and harbour authorities during 2025-26.



In 2025-26:

- Overall **23,059** Examinations were carried out
- 15,983** Certifications were issued
  - 93.3%** were privately-owned boats
  - 3.9%** hire boats
  - 2.6%** non-private boats (for example, workboats, ferries, small passenger boats etc)
- The advice check for under ventilation (linked to the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning) was not complied with on **4,279** boats at the point of BSS Certification
- Examiners made **42.6k** comments against non-compliant checks
- Over **329** boats were missing the vital protection of all electrical circuits passing through an AC consumer unit
- 453** boats did not meet the check for 'means of escape' meaning that boat crews could struggle or be trapped in an emergency
- 42.6k** comments to boat owners were recorded in **7k** non-compliant result Examinations
- The most common mandatory non-compliance was: Are batteries secure against excessive movement in any direction? **2,219** boats had loose batteries and risked catching fire
- The second most common non-compliance was: Are battery terminals correctly insulated or protected? **1,543** had an issue with sub-standard wiring
- The third most common check not complied with was: Is the LPG system free of leaks as defined in the tightness test? **1,495** boats were found to be lacking in this area

**16k** Certifications Issued



In conclusion, our commitment to safety saw just over 23,000 Examinations. These resulted in 42.6k comments against non-compliant checks.

# Section 5



## BSS Quality Assurance and Training

### BSS Hire Boat Requirements Course

The BSS grew the number of qualified hire boat Examiners this year through a successful new training course.

To strengthen coverage for hire boat Examinations, the BSS Office delivered a BSS Hire Boat Requirements Course during February 2026. The course was a success; every participating Examiner completed the training and passed the assessment, adding a further 16 Examiners



qualified to carry out hire boat Examinations and giving the Scheme a stronger, more resilient hire boat Examiner network for the future.



### The New Field Assessment Framework for Examiners

The BSS introduced an assured in-house model for field assessments this year.

Trials began in summer 2025, with Examiner feedback informing the final process and supporting policy. A limited rollout followed in winter 2025-26, ahead of full implementation from April 2026.

The Framework is supported by a City & Guilds Assured BSS Assessor Course combining online and practical training.

Completed during March 2026, it enabled Assessors to be trained and accredited in-house for the first time.

### New Process for Non-Room-Sealed LPG Appliances in Spaces Containing a Bath or Shower

A new safety process for Examiners took effect this year, addressing a specific carbon monoxide risk.

Following extended work throughout 2025 between the BSS, the Health & Safety Executive and the Gas Safe Register to agree how the Scheme sits within the UK's gas safety regulatory regime, the BSS introduced new measures for Examiners who encounter a non-room-sealed LPG appliance installed in a room or space containing a bath and/or shower. From 1 September 2025, Examiners finding this arrangement are required to issue an Appliance Inspection Recommendation (AIR) handout to the boat owner and add specific guidance for owners to the boat's BSS Examination Record.

The new measures are underpinned by an update to the BSS Requirements and the introduction of a new Appendix H, both incorporated into the Examination Checking Procedures (ECP). They were rolled out alongside the 2025 BSS Examiner Core LPG Training and Assessment Programme, ensuring that all Examiners were briefed on the updated Requirement as part of their five-yearly LPG reassessment.



In conclusion, we continued to enhance the BSS Training and Development Programmes.



# Section 6

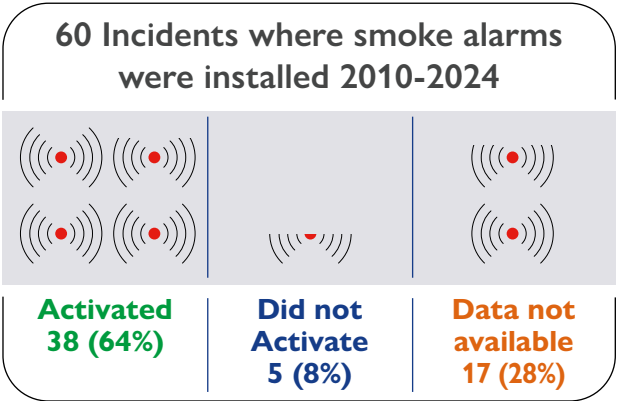


## Principal Projects 2025-26

### Smoke alarm requirements

Following research involving a decade of fire incident records, the Scheme, including its stakeholder forums, concluded that there was evidence to support proposals to introduce a new mandatory navigation and harbour authority Boat Safety Standard with related BSS Requirements and Checks.

The evidence shows that smoke alarms work on boats to provide an early alert relating to fires. The incident data also showed that commonplace smoke alarms, third-party accredited to the BS EN 14604:2005 standard, can be heard by people outside of the boat, enabling them to quickly call 999.



The National Fire Chiefs Council (representing all UK fire and rescue services and the fire safety industry groups) also support these proposals and the evidence was included in a consultation that launched on 31 December 2025. The consultation is being undertaken by the BSS on behalf of the Boat Safety Standards Setting Forum and is due to conclude by financial year end.

### BSS and Gas Safety Regime

Following extended work throughout 2025 between the BSS, the Health & Safety Executive and the Gas Safe Register to agree how the Scheme sits within the UK's gas safety regulatory regime.

The BSS introduced new measures for Examiners who encounter a non-room-sealed LPG appliance installed in a room or space containing a bath and/or shower. This new safety process addresses a specific carbon monoxide risk.

### Lithium-ion Batteries (LiBs): Update

The BSS significantly strengthened its lithium-ion battery safety work this year, drawing on expert collaboration from across the industry.

The Scheme brought together a dedicated Working Group of 13 experts from British Marine, insurers, surveyors and industry specialists to examine high-voltage and lithium-ion battery systems. The Group agreed a clear programme of work to build the evidence base further, including a forthcoming survey of boat users and continued refinement of BSS safety guidance, encouraging professional installation.

### Non-Private Boat Standards Modernisation

The review of the Non-Private Boat Standards, assessing the relevance of all Core ECP checks and the 2002 Examination Checking Procedures to non-private vessels, is being progressed through a dedicated working group comprising industry experts.

These outputs are fed into the Technical Forum for discussion and agreement.

The project is overseen by a Steering Group made up of representatives from the navigation authorities, including the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA), which provides direction and oversight, while ensuring the project remains aligned with the agreed project plan.

### BSS Examiner Core LPG Training and Assessment Programme 2025

Examiners undertook the LPG Training and Assessment Programme; this City & Guilds Assured programme is designed as a five-yearly refresher training and assessment.

### BSS Examiner App

The Scheme's first Examiner App moved from concept to a testable product this year, a major step forward for the BSS.

Designed to enable paperless, offline-capable Examinations for the first time in the Scheme's history, the App progressed steadily through the year, from early design work to a working prototype demonstrated to Examiners and other stakeholders.

Once live, the App will automatically populate a boat's record with details captured during an Examination, improving both the accuracy and efficiency of the Examination process.

Following user acceptance testing and refinement the BSS plans to phase in the App to Examiners over the coming year, an exciting step towards a fully digital Examination process.

### First Annual Public Meeting

December 2025 saw the inaugural BSS Annual Public Meeting held online.

Highlights included a welcome and governance overview from the Board of Directors, trends and risk insights, future projects and a question and answer session.

# Section 6



## BSS Priorities

Building on this year's progress, these areas will be a particular focus for the BSS in the year ahead.

### BSS Examiner App

The Examiner App will move into its final stages of testing and development, building on the very positive feedback received from Examiners and stakeholders.

This will include full end-to-end testing, from data entry through to data capture within the BSS database, followed by a further, smaller round of user testing to confirm the latest improvements are working well.

The BSS Office will then develop a plan for a staged rollout to Examiners, beginning with a small-scale soft launch to confirm data capture is working correctly before gradually widening access to the full Examiner cohort over the course of the year.

Alongside this, the BSS will develop robust training for Examiners, combining online learning with hands-on familiarisation, so that every Examiner feels confident and fully supported in using the App as part of their day-to-day Examinations.



### Lithium-ion Battery Safety

Building on the Working Group's findings, the BSS will develop targeted guidance covering three areas of lithium-ion battery use aboard boats: small portable devices, including phones and vapes; larger portable devices, such as e-bikes; and installed battery systems used for propulsion and onboard power.

This will complement the Scheme's existing lithium-ion battery safety advice. The BSS also plans to roll out a survey to boat owners to improve its understanding of how these batteries are used and the associated safety considerations.



## Non-Private Boat Standards Modernisation

The BSS will continue the modernisation of the Non-Private Boat Standards.

We draw upon the Technical Forum, Advisory Forum and Standards Setting Forum, and carry out pre-consultation with user groups and other stakeholders in preparation of a full public consultation.

The project remains on track, and we envisage implementation during 2027.



## Customer Service

The BSS office has seen an increase in personnel during this period, with the introduction of a new Governance Manager.

This new role was created to provide in-house governance for BSS Limited ensuring compliance and transparency throughout the scheme.

Plans are also in place to further increase team capacity through the addition of a Technical Administrator role aimed at providing greater support for customer enquiries, case management, and technical administration.

Supported by the technical team, specialist consultants and an outsourced telephone answering service, the team continue to improve the efficiency, consistency and responsiveness of our customer service provision.



### During 2025-26, the office dealt with:

1,948 new cases opened

1,805 cases closed

642 certificate queries handled

473 technical enquiries managed

6.87 days average resolution times for certificate and technical, maintaining a consistent performance compared to last year

Section 6



# Boat Safety Scheme Technical Forum (BSSTF)

BSSTF is the specialist stakeholder forum making recommendations to the Boat Safety Scheme Advisory Forum (BSSAF) concerning issues of a technical nature.

The Technical Forum has representatives from boat owners, BSS Examiners, trade groups, marine surveyors and the navigation authorities.

During this period it covered safety-critical appeals, standards reviews and the Scheme’s response to emerging risks.

Key areas the Forum addressed this year included:

- 

Reviewing the Non-Private Boat Standards, assessing the relevance of all Core ECP checks and the 2002 Examination Checking Procedures to non-private vessels
- 

Establishing the HV/LiB Working Group to examine high-voltage and lithium-ion battery systems and beginning the collection of Examination data on battery voltages
- 

Determining Technical Appeals
- 

Reviewing proposed changes to Core ECP Checks
- 

Welcoming new members and contributors to the Forum, including industry experts to support the Non-Private Boat Review and a new BSS Governance Manager to assist with the managing of the Forum
- 

Managing a change in Forum leadership with the AINA representative, acting as interim Convener and later taking the position of the permanent Convenor

## Appointment of a New Technical Forum Convenor

The BSSTF underwent a leadership transition during the year.

Following the previous Convenor’s decision to step down in June 2025 members expressed their appreciation for his contribution to the Forum. The AINA representative agreed to serve as interim Convenor while a nationwide recruitment campaign was conducted over the summer. By September 2025, the BSS Office had concluded that the interim Convenor was the strongest candidate to lead the Forum on a permanent basis.

## Technical Forum

| Organisations                                                                                                                      |                                                     | Sector                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
|  BOAT SAFETY SCHEME                             | Convener                                            | Independent            |
|  BRITISH MARINE                                 | British Marine (1)                                  | Marine Trade           |
|  BRITISH MARINE                                 | British Marine (2)                                  | Marine Trade           |
| Boat Safety Scheme Examiners                                                                                                       |                                                     | Practitioners          |
| Surveyors Group Representative                                                                                                     |                                                     | Practitioners          |
|  RYA                                            | Royal Yachting Association (RYA)                    | User Organisations     |
|  AWCC                                           | Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs (AWCC)       | User Organisations     |
|  NABO                                          | National Association of Boat Owners (NABO)          | User Organisations     |
|  INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION                 | Inland Waterways Association (IWA)                  | User Organisations     |
|  ASSOCIATION OF INLAND NAVIGATION AUTHORITIES | Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) | Navigation Authorities |

| Contributors                                                                                             |                                                | Category   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------|
|  BOAT SAFETY SCHEME | BSS General Manager                            | Non voting |
|  BOAT SAFETY SCHEME | BSS Technical & Quality Manager                | Non voting |
|  BOAT SAFETY SCHEME | BSS Examiner Support and Development Engineer  | Non voting |
|  BOAT SAFETY SCHEME | BSS Lead Quality Control Assessor (Consultant) | Non voting |
|  BOAT SAFETY SCHEME | BSS Quality Control Assessor (Consultant)      | Non voting |



The BSSTF Convener thanks the forum members for their continuing proactive participation, open communication and professionalism.

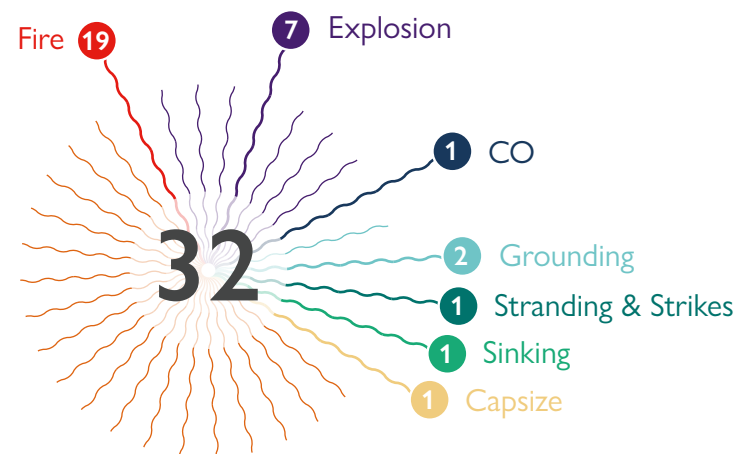
# Section 7



## BSS Incident and Risk Data

Small Craft Incident Data recorded by the BSS between April 2025 and end of March 2026

Incidents by type on inland waterways



The BSS records incidents involving fires, explosions, and carbon monoxide poisoning on boats on all UK and Irish inland and coastal waters.

We analyse these incidents to identify lessons learned and risk factors, which are then used to assist BSS forums and navigation authorities in reviewing BSS Requirements.

This ensures we can provide the most reliable

advice and guidance to boat owners, helping them protect both themselves and their crews.

In addition, with a focus on Hire Boat and Non-Private Boat Requirements, we record incidents such as groundings, collisions, sinkings, man overboard (MOB) events, and personal injury accidents related to boat design and fittings.

This data supports our efforts to continuously improve safety measures across the boating community.

Fire, CO, explosion & pollution incidents



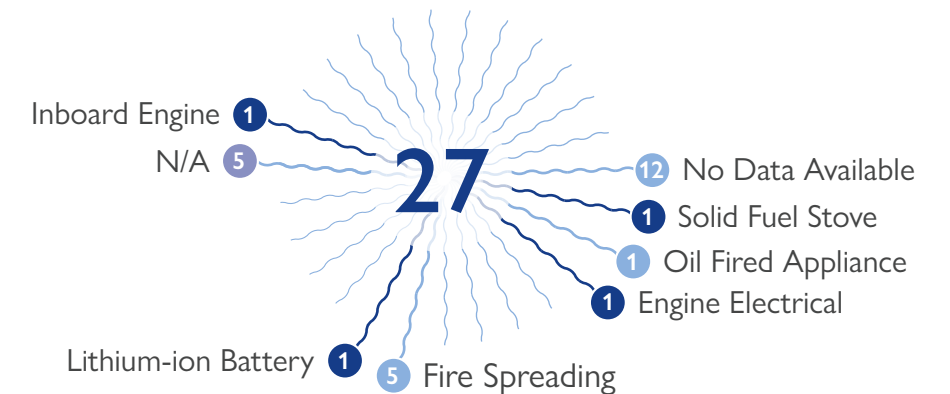
MOB & Navigation Incidents



Inland waterways only

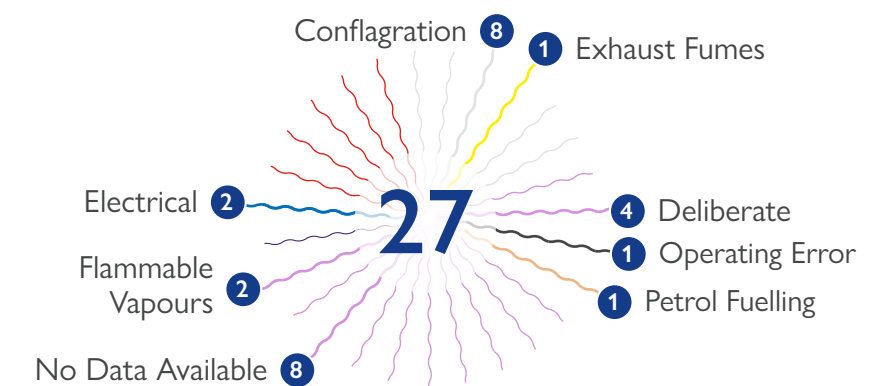
Fire, Explosion, CO or Pollution on all Inland Waterways

Cause - Equipment



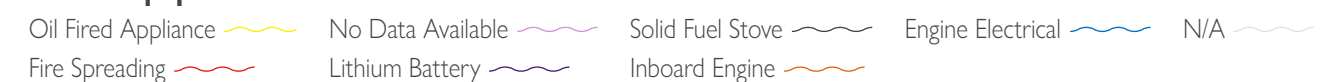
Record of boats involved

Cause and actions linked to Equipment



Record of boats involved

Cause Equipment:



All the anonymised data is used to feed the risk management process and aid our advice and guidance communications so that we can help people stay safe.

# Section 8

## Summary

### The BSS delivered another consecutive year of strong financial and operational performance

**Boat Safety Scheme Limited has achieved significant progress against its key objectives.**

During another year of substantial change, the BSS remains steadfast in its dedication to supporting stakeholders and helping maintain safety on the waterways.

Every aspect of the Scheme — from training courses and ensuring Examiner consistency, customer satisfaction and effective safety messaging through to our larger-scale projects — are all underpinned by a commitment to continuous improvement.

We have made considerable strides and will maintain this momentum into the next year and beyond.

Rapid developments in emerging technologies, fuels, material and research means the operating environment is ever-evolving, with new challenges as well as persistent safety risks.

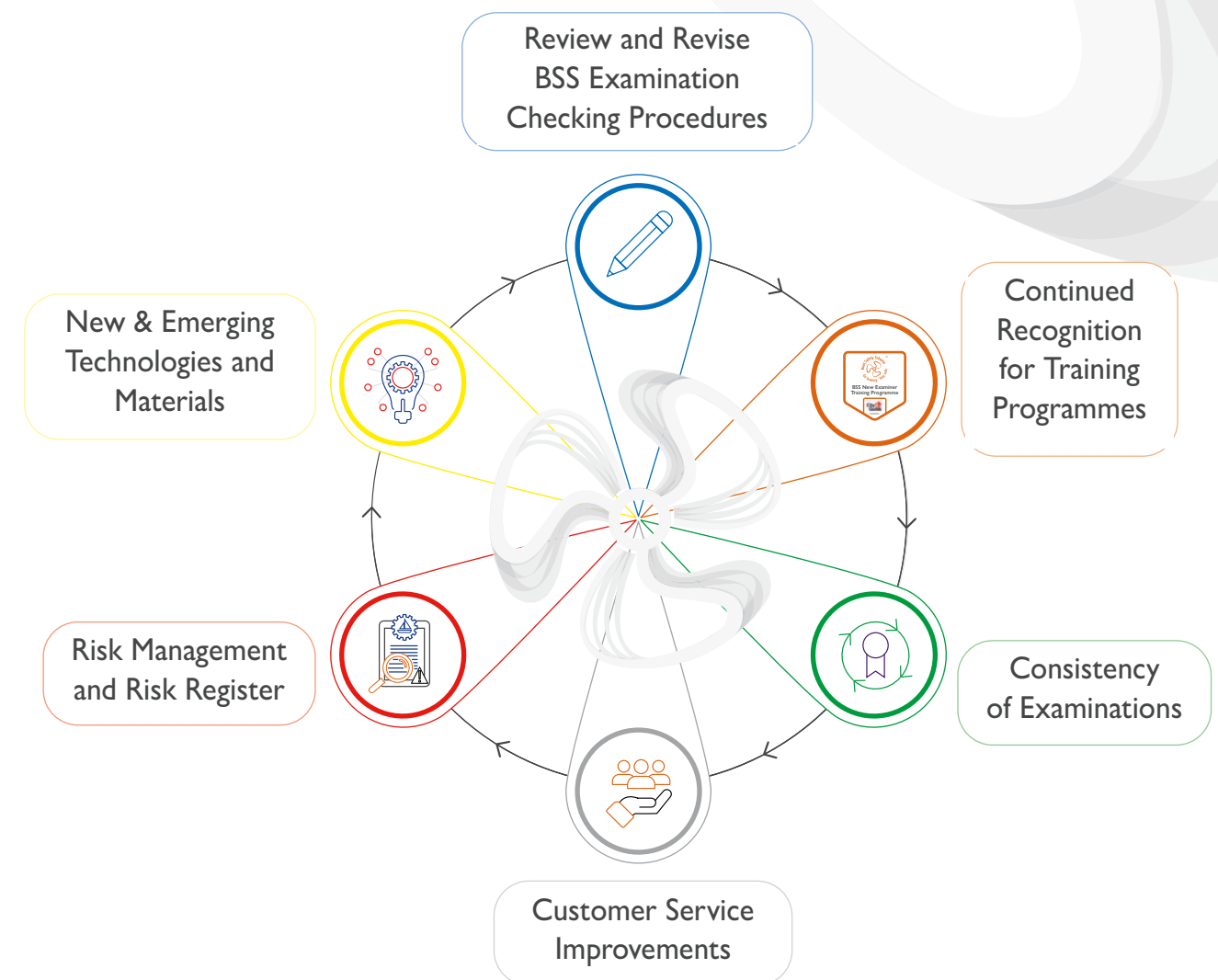
As ever, we remain diligent in anticipating and responding to these through our dynamic risk-management process, enhancing our guidance and education accordingly to protect navigation authority staff, waterways users, nearby communities, and visitors to Britain and Ireland's unique and valued waterways.



**In conclusion we enjoyed an extremely successful year with meaningful progress and welcomed new members to the team. Our key achievements included:**

-  Overseeing the conducting of just over 23,000 Examinations
-  Successfully delivering our Business Plan with income and costs in line with our expected predictions
-  Smoke Alarm Requirements Consultation launch
-  A new safety process to address a specific carbon monoxide risk
-  Improving customer service
-  Building on our key future priorities
-  Maintaining safety records and analysis

### Continuous Improvement





# BOAT SAFETY SCHEME<sup>®</sup>

Go boating - Stay safe



## Boat Safety Scheme Contact Details

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w: [boatsafetyscheme.org/contact-us](https://boatsafetyscheme.org/contact-us)

The Boat Safety Scheme Limited is a public safety initiative, run as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 15501423. Registered office address % National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port South Pier Road Ellesmere Port Cheshire CH65 4FW.