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MOUNTAINEERING INSTRUCTOR AWARD ASSESSMENT PREPARATION SURVEY 2017

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Abstract

Following a survey of Mountain Training candidates who had attended Mountaineering Instructor Award assessments between 2014 and 2016 key factors have been identified that differentiate the candidates who passed their first assessment from those who did not. Namely: the fortune of good quality social support; the ability to commit sufficient time to prepare for the assessment; sufficient confidence in their preparations and likelihood of passing; thoroughness/depth of practice; and time spent instructing graded scrambling. Based on these findings recommendations to improve the first pass rate for the MIA have been made to several stakeholders.

Terms of reference

This report was commissioned in November 2016 by Mountain Training UK as part of the joint KESS 2 PhD project with Bangor University.

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Mae'r Ysgoloriaeth Sgiliau Economi Gwybodaeth (KESS 2) yn fenter sgiliau lefel uwch Cymru gyfan a arweinir gan Brifysgol Bangor ar ran y sector AU yng Nghymru. Fe'i cyllidir yn rhannol gan raglen cydgyfeirio Cronfa Gymdeithasol Ewropeaidd (ESF) ar gyfer Gorllewin Cymru a'r Cymoedd.

Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS 2) is a pan-Wales higher level skills initiative led by Bangor University on behalf of the HE sector in Wales. It is part funded by the Welsh Government's European Social Fund (ESF) convergence programme for West Wales and the Valleys.



Executive Summary

Scope and Objective: The percentage of candidates passing the Mountaineering Instructor Award (MIA), at their first assessment, declined from 61% in 2010 to only 35% in 2016. Mountain Training recognise that the first-time pass rate can be improved upon and wish to see that. Mountain Training commissioned this survey to attempt to identify differences in the preparation of candidates who passed their first assessment and those who did not.

Findings: There were several key themes that differentiated those candidates who passed first time and those who did not:

- The time they had to commit to preparation
- How thorough their preparation was
- How confident they were
- Deliberate practice of scrambling and navigation
- Input from qualified instructors with current knowledge of the MIA
- Social support beyond the technicalities of the MIA process

Recommendations: This report makes recommendations for stakeholders (Mountain Training, MIA course providers, and the associations) and candidates. Stakeholders should: work together to create a common plan with organisation specific tasks that ensure candidates receive the support that they need and that it is of a suitable quality. Candidates should: ensure that they put the requisite time into preparing for their assessment, ensuring that they do not miss any areas of the syllabus and that they particularly focus on the skills they do not use recreationally. Candidates should also identify areas that they need support in and actively seek that support out; this may be help with technical aspects but could also be esteem or emotional support.



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	III
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 METHOD	2
3 SURVEY FINDINGS	4
3.1 PASS RATES AND DEMOGRAPHICS	4
3.2 MOTIVATION	7
3.3 ASSESSMENT PREPARATION	7
3.5 ASSOCIATION SUPPORT	12
3.6 SOCIAL SUPPORT	13
3.7 WHAT WAS THE MOST USEFUL PART OF PREPARATION AND WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY ...	19
3.8 OTHER COMMENTS	22
3.9 POST ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK	23
4 GENERAL DISCUSSION	24
5 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	26
6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING	29

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

“The Mountaineering Instructor Award (MIA) scheme provides comprehensive training and assessment for individuals working as instructors in mountaineering activities, including multi-pitch climbing. It is designed for the specific situations and conditions found in the UK and it integrates training, experience and assessment in a variety of testing situations. The Mountaineering Instructor Certificate (MIC) is a separate qualification that is gained after the MIA and is focused on the instruction of winter climbing and mountaineering.” (Mountain Training, 2016, p. 5)

Between 2010 and 2016, a total of 309 candidates took the MIA assessment for the first time and 52% of them passed on that first attempt. However, the first-time pass rate has decreased during that time from 61% in 2010 to 35% in 2016. During the same period, the two-day deferral rate doubled from 12% to 24%.¹ Mountain Training recognise that the first-time pass rate can be improved upon and wish to see that.

All women who were assessed for the first time in 2016 passed and were mentored. Four of whom were mentored as part of a joint mentoring pilot scheme organised by Mountain Training and AMI.

This led Mountain Training to question how candidates were preparing prior to their first assessment. To improve the pass rate, Mountain Training feels it is important to better understand the factors and processes affecting candidates' assessment so that the greatest improvements can be realised.

1.2 Survey scope and aims

This survey was commissioned to identify key factors and processes influencing success at assessment for those who gained the MIA between 2014 and 2016². Mountain Training hope to use the results to inform any additional guidance/support provided for future candidates. The findings in this report are from a survey carried out in Spring 2017 as part of a larger investigation into the factors affecting the completion rates of Mountain Training awards.

¹ Of those who were deferred at their first assessment between 2012 and 2016, 56% involved teaching climbing, 44% involved safeguarding and managing self/seconds during the teaching climbing day and 41.8% involved mountaineering. Future work will analyse this data further.

² Their first assessment may have been prior to 2014



There are likely a myriad of variables that will influence successful completion of the MIA including, but not limited to:

- Demographics
- Planning
- Ability and experience
- Motivation
- Candidate support
- Assessment preparation

1.3 Statement of objectives

It is important to understand the factors and processes influencing successful completion of the MIA so that:

- Mountain Training can evaluate the effectiveness of the current qualification pathway
- Course providers can establish how to best meet the needs of candidates
- The professional associations can support their members
- Candidates can best position themselves to pass their assessment



2 Method

This section of the report describes the approach to collection and analysis of data as well as outlining some of the limitations of this study.

2.1 e-shot

A pool of factors deemed relevant to passing an MIA assessment was created based on a literature review of relevant sports science research, abstraction of relevant media sources, conversations with MIA candidates, MIA course staff, and Mountain Training staff. The pool of factors was narrowed down using an expectancy value approach and the remaining factors were validated with Mountain Training staff and MIA course directors. Questions were developed from this shorter list and covered:

- Demographics
- Assessment details
- Association membership
- Practical preparation
- Non-practical preparation
- Assessment expectations
- Motivation for becoming an MIA
- Candidate support

On the 21st December 2016 Mountain Training emailed the 149 candidates who had attended an MIA assessment between 2014 and 2016 asking them to complete anonymously an online questionnaire, which focused on their experience of preparing for their first assessment. Of the 149 candidates who were asked to participate 91 began the questionnaire and 77 (52%) completed it³.

This study used a mixed methods approach where quantitative and qualitative data were collected. This mixed methods approach was chosen as it provides both richer and broader insights into the factors and processes affecting assessment result than either approach in isolation

2.2 Analysis

Responses were grouped as successful (i.e., passed) and unsuccessful (i.e., deferred 1 or 2 day and fail). Quantitative data was analysed using, t-tests, analysis of variance and covariance tests, correlation tests as well as both linear and logistic regression. A concurrent inductive and deductive thematic analysis was carried out on the qualitative data.

³ We would like to thank all those who responded to this survey request, your engagement was essential to this project and will help future candidates.



To aid readability, correlation coefficients, significance values, codes, and themes have not been included in this report. Further details of the analyses carried out can be obtained from the author of this report using the contact details above.

Raw quotes have been presented in the hope that the data will speak for itself and the voices of the participants might be heard, a common method in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The sex, age, and whether the respondent lived in a mountainous or non-mountainous region has been presented alongside the quote to contextualise it whilst maintaining anonymity.

Part of the brief for this survey was to identify differences between men and women. Due to time constraints only the quantitative data has been analysed for differences between men and women. The qualitative data will be analysed as part of another project. Unless stated, there was no evidence for a difference in responses from men and women.

2.3 Caveats

When reading this report it is important to consider that this survey was intended to explore some of the factors influencing success at MIA assessment. While it does highlight areas of interest it is not exhaustive or definitive. As the results are from a single survey they should be treated with appropriate levels of caution whilst further corroboration and validation work continues as part of the wider PhD project.



3 Survey Findings

3.1 Pass rates and demographics

The annual numbers of responses from candidates who took their first assessment between 2013 and 2015 were approximately the same, there were significantly more responses from 2016 (Table 1). It is possible that people were more willing to respond to the survey request whilst the experience is recent for them. The pass rates for respondents between 2014 and 2016 were no different to one another.

Table 1 Summary of responses, number of passes in brackets

Sex	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Men	14 (0)	16 (9)	14 (7)	21 (7)	64 (23)
Women	2 (0)	2 (0)	3 (2)	5 (5)	12 (7)
Undisclosed	-	-	-	1 (0)	1 (0)
Total	16 (0)	18 (9)	17 (9)	27 (12)	78 (30)

3.1.1 Age and Sex

The youngest candidate was 21 at assessment and the oldest was 57; the average age was 34 years old, there was no significant differences in the age of candidates at each year of assessment. However, results indicated that age affected completion, as **the younger candidates were, the more likely that they were to pass.** The average age for successful candidates was 31 and for unsuccessful it was 36. Because of this effect of age on pass rates, age was accounted for in all subsequent analyses.

More men than women were assessed each year and the ratio of men to women did not change over time (Figure 1). In 2016 women were more likely to pass than men, in other years there were no differences in the pass rates for men and women. In 2016 Mountain Training and the Association of Mountaineering Instructors piloted a mentoring scheme with women MIA trainees. For further details on the effects of mentoring please see section 3.5.3 (p. 16).

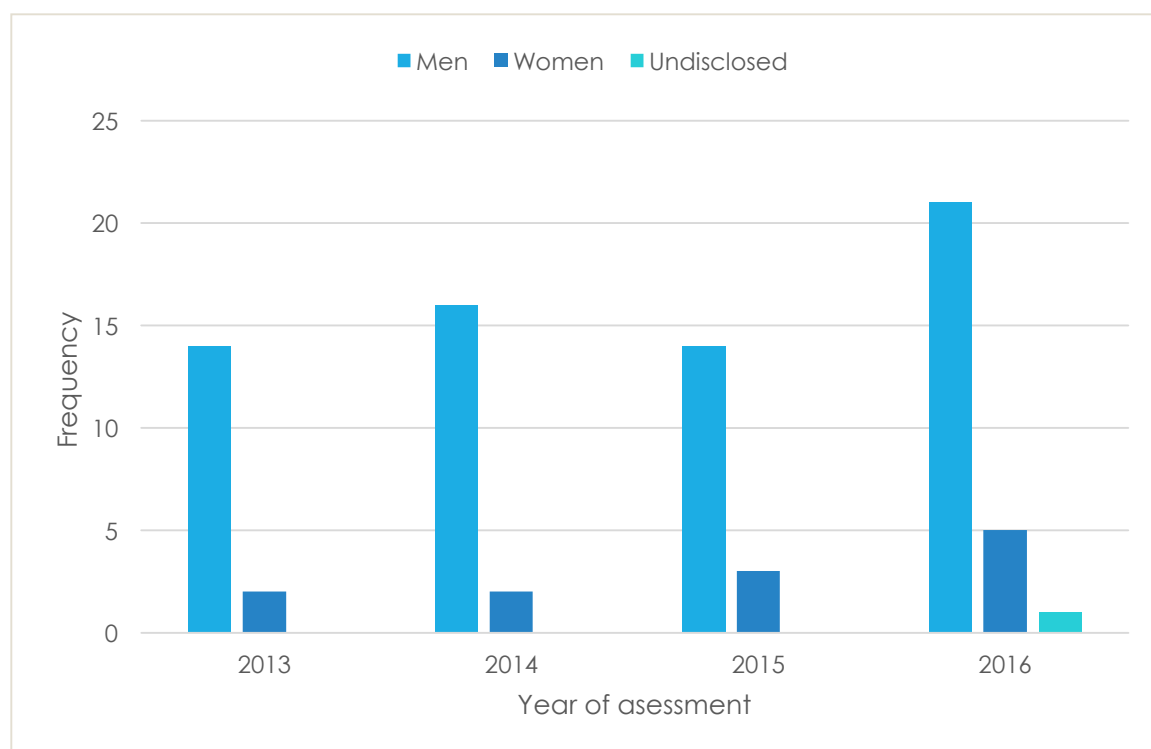


Figure 1 Candidates by year and sex

3.1.2 Candidate Location

Candidates from across the UK and Ireland⁴ responded to the survey (Figure 2). Pass rates for candidates from mountainous regions⁵ were no different to those from other areas and no individual area had a higher pass rate than the others. There were insufficient responses to investigate the effect of relocating to prepare for assessment.

3.1.3 Employment

Over half (53.2%) of candidates were employed/worked full time with a further 32.9% being self-employed. Prior to assessment most candidates worked in outdoor instruction (67.1%) with teaching (10.1%) and the military (7.6%) making up much of the remainder.

There was no evidence that a candidate's profession or employment status had a significant effect on their result.

⁴ Due to an error, Ireland and Northern Ireland were not included in the options on the questionnaire. When this was queried during the data collection phase candidates were asked to choose "Other" and comment in the free text box at the end of the survey.

⁵ Scotland – Highlands, Scotland – Central and Tay, Scotland – North West, and Wales – North

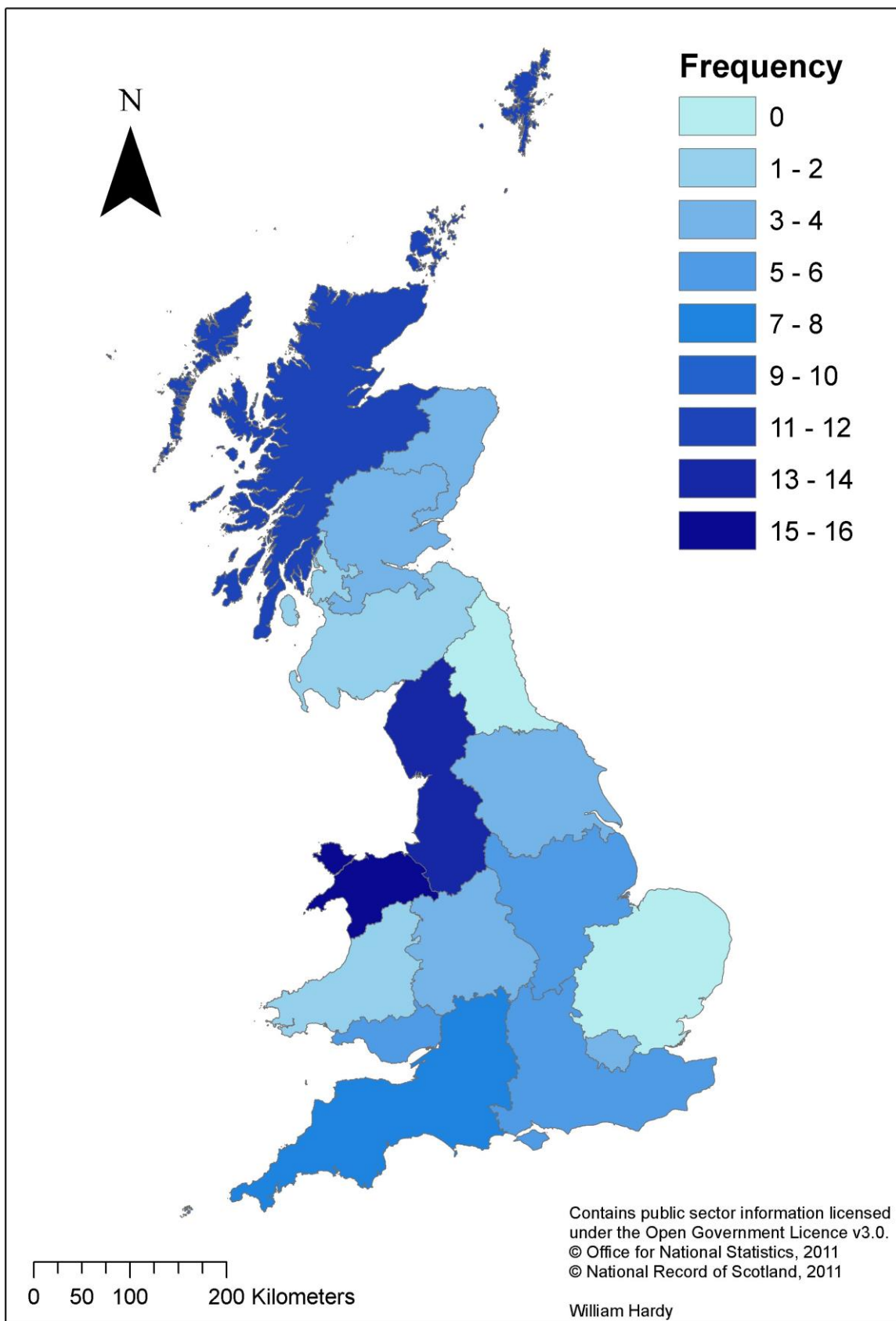


Figure 2 Distribution of responses

3.2 Motivation

It was expected that candidates who were intrinsically motivated (e.g., wanted to pass the MIA to increase personal competence) would do better than those who were extrinsically motivated (e.g., wanted to pass the MIA to earn a living), however there was no evidence to support this hypothesis.

3.3 Assessment preparation

3.3.1 Development plan

Just over half (50.6%) of candidates agreed with the statement “I had a clear development plan following my MIA training course” (Figure 3). There was no relationship between having a development plan and assessment result.

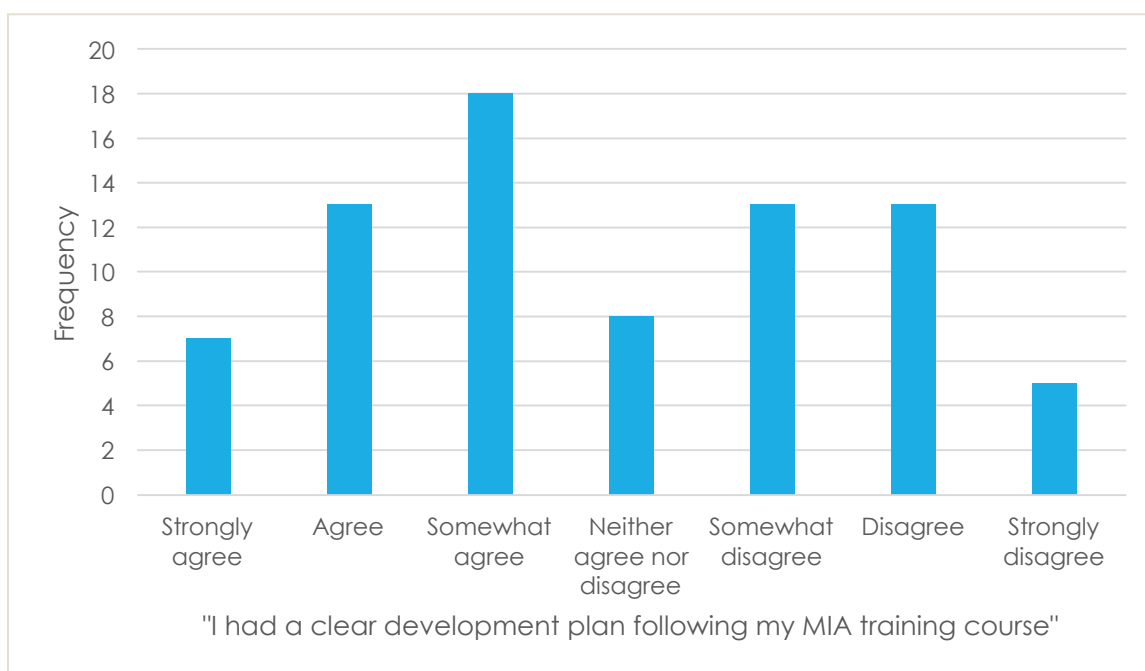


Figure 3 Development plan

3.3.2 Assessment expectations

In general, people felt well prepared when they arrived for their assessment (Figure 4). The better prepared candidates felt the more likely that they were to: think they would pass, less likely to think that they would be deferred, and the assessment process was more likely to be as they expected. However, neither feeling prepared nor expectations of passing or being deferred directly affected assessment result.

Most people (82%) said that the process was as they expected to some degree and **those who passed agreed more strongly with the statement “The assessment process was as I expected”**.

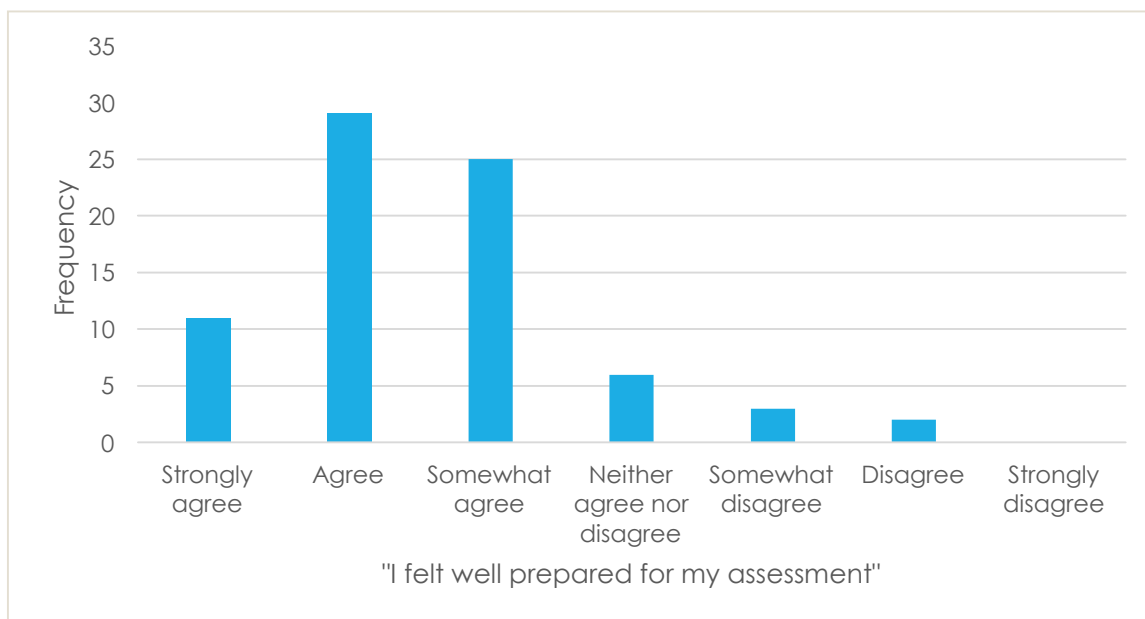


Figure 4 Feeling prepared

Those who felt well prepared **and** were expecting to pass, were more likely to pass than those who felt well prepared and weren't expecting to pass, and also more likely to pass than those who didn't feel well prepared, regardless of whether they were expecting to pass or not (Figure 5). **This suggests that it is important for candidates to be confident in their own abilities to pass the assessment.** Those who agreed more strongly with the statement "I expected to pass," were more likely to pass.

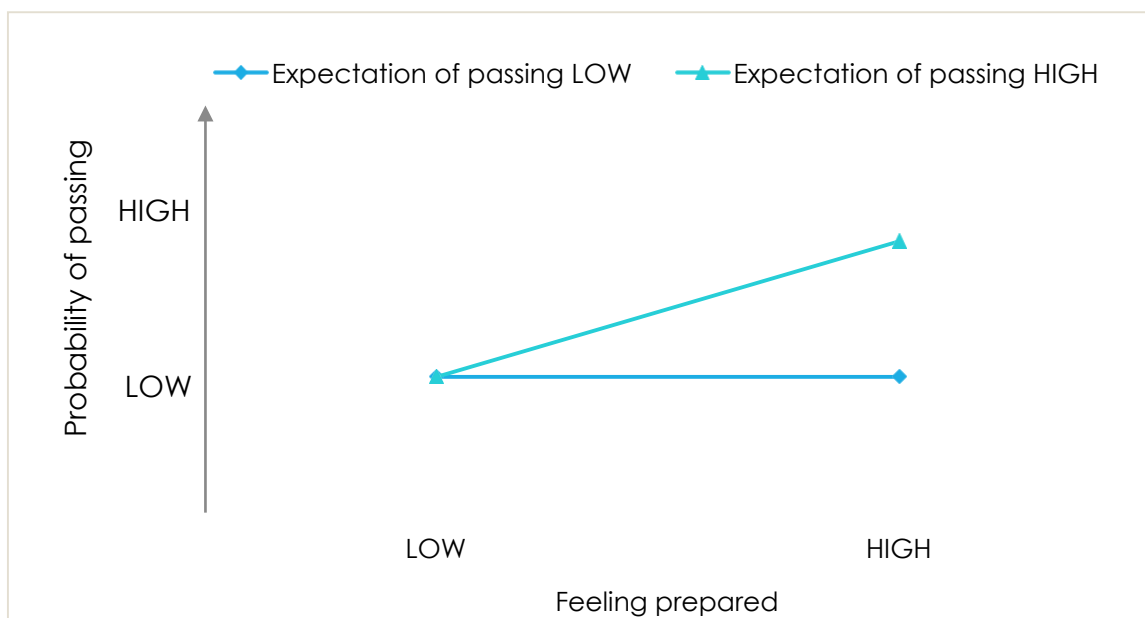


Figure 5 Moderating effect of expecting to pass on the relationship between feeling prepared and passing

3.3.3 Preparation time

In the survey, candidates were asked how many “sessions” they spent preparing on a range of practical topics and who they did this preparation with (Figure 6). In addition to this they were also asked how long they spend preparing on the following topics: the mountain environment; the development and history of mountaineering; technical equipment information; and their lecturette/presentation.

How many sessions, and with who, did you spend practicing each of these areas?

	Clients (paying/non- paying)	Other trainee(s)	Friends/Family	Solo	Total
Graded scrambling - personal	0	0	0	0	0
Navigation - personal	0	0	0	0	0
Graded scrambling - instruction	0	0	0	0	0
Problem solving and rescue skills	0	0	0	0	0
Multi-pitch rock climbing - instruction	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 6 Practical preparation table

Neither the total time spent on practical- or non-practical preparation differed significantly between those who did and did not pass. Furthermore, there were no differences in how well prepared people felt for their assessment based on how long they had spent preparing.

The total number of sessions spent preparing varied greatly (19-367 sessions). Informal conversations with candidates have revealed that some trawled their logbooks and diaries where as others made rough guesses at the number of sessions spent preparing. Whilst this may account for some of the variability it is possible that individual differences in personality factors (e.g., conscientiousness) account for some of the variance in preparation times. Whilst it was beyond the scope of this survey to examine personality factors, they are being considered in other ongoing studies.

Despite the variability in the time spent on practical preparation, one element of practical preparation did differentiate successful and unsuccessful candidates; **successful candidates spent significantly more sessions instructing graded scrambling during their preparation than unsuccessful candidates did.**

Instructing graded scrambling brings a wide number of skills together, (e.g., rope work; route finding; decision making; teaching; environmental knowledge; etc.). Some of these skills will be transferable from a recreational context while others are not. For example, short-roping requires specific techniques that are rarely used in a recreational context therefore will not develop in the same way that stance management in a multi-pitch climbing context might. As such, short-roping requires dedicated practice.

The rope work and decision making required for instructing and guiding scrambling might be developed somewhat by gaining experience of alpine climbing, long winter climbs and other irregular mountaineering activities. It is likely that when scrambling in a recreational context in the UK candidates would not use a rope; therefore, they will not be practicing all the decision-making skills needed when instructing (i.e., choosing appropriate anchors for direct belays).

Whilst spending more time instructing graded scrambling may not be important for all candidates, there will be some skills that are more important for some people. The Mountain Training Candidate Management System shows that candidates spend more time climbing than scrambling. Therefore, it should be expected that, in general, candidates will need to spend more time practicing scrambling.

The mean active preparation time was 11 months; however, the most common active preparation time was 6 months (Figure 7). Those who passed did not start preparing any sooner or later than those who did not. This supports the suggestion that what candidates spend their time doing in their preparation is more important than the amount of time that they spend preparing.

There was no relationship between the length of the active preparation period and how candidates felt prior to assessment (i.e. those that spent longer preparing did not feel more prepared than those who spent less time preparing). Again, this suggests that what candidates do with their time is more important than how long they spend preparing.



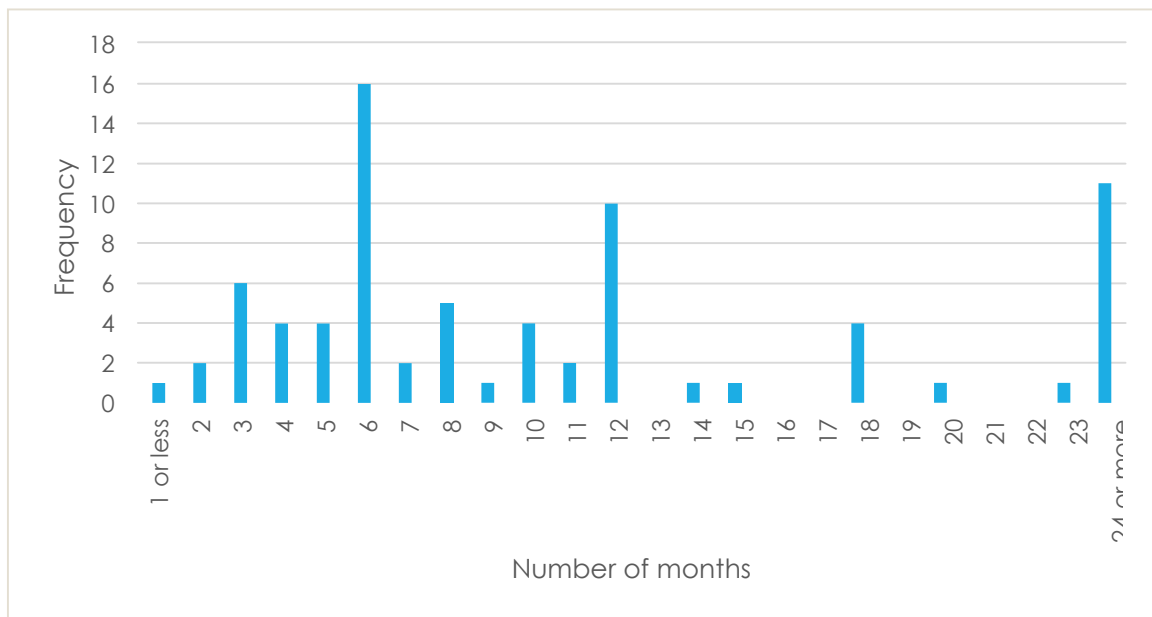


Figure 7 Number of months actively preparing for assessment

3.3.4 Preparation with peers

Over half of candidates (57.1%) prepared with friends/colleagues who were also preparing for an MIA assessment. This included both successful and unsuccessful candidates, who reported preparing in similar ways. However, **successful candidates practiced a broader range of skills**. Successful candidates often reported covering all the syllabus areas, whilst some unsuccessful candidates mentioned specific areas that they did not cover.

Unsuccessful:

“every aspect of the MIA except navigation” – Man, 32, mountainous region

“Mixture of everything- except scrambling really.” – Man, 24, mountainous region

Successful:

“Scrambling, problem solving, personal climbing, guided climbing, navigation (all the things)” – Woman, 29, mountainous region

Successful candidates were more thorough in their preparation, the language they used in answers indicated a deeper level of preparation than unsuccessful candidates. Successful candidates practiced and tested their skills in a more holistic manner, going beyond practicing skills in isolation by putting them together in “scenarios” or “mock tests”. They were also often working towards best practice and not only preparing to meet the assessment standard.

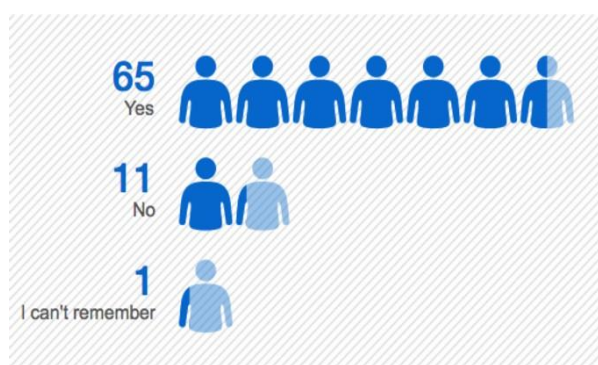
“Pretty comprehensive training schedule for the whole syllabus. Eg. Day after day of rescue scenarios, scrambling as a 3, mock test days etc.” – Man, 30, mountainous region

“Yes. We went climbing together, included some scenarios as part of the day and talked about best practice.” – Man, 27, mountainous region

3.4 Association support

The impact of association membership was not the focus of this survey and could form the basis of further research. 83.5% of candidates were members of AMI and 39.2% were members of the Mountain Training Association (MTA) (Figure 8). Based on the results of those who answered the survey, there was no evidence that association members were more likely to pass than non-members. It may be that association membership affects individuals in more subtle ways, that this survey was unable to detect. Furthermore, individuals will have engaged in different ways with the associations and effects of this engagement will vary accordingly.

Were you a member of AMI?



Were you a member of MTA?

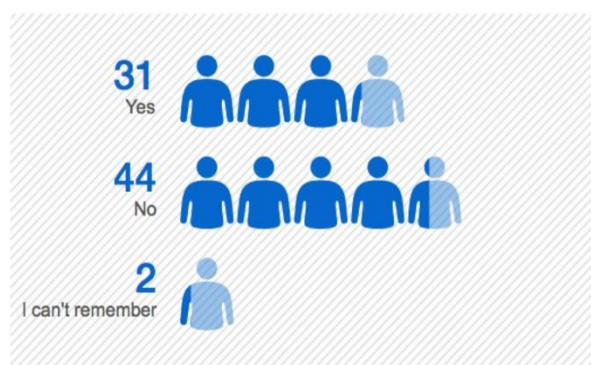


Figure 8 Association membership

Most candidates who were members of AMI (74.7%) attended at least one AMI workshop. According to this survey, attending AMI workshops did not affect three outcomes: pass rates, how prepared candidates felt, or expectations of passing/being deferred. When those who did attend AMI workshops were asked, to what extent they agreed with the statement “I found the AMI workshops that I attended very useful”, 93.5% agreed (Figure 9).

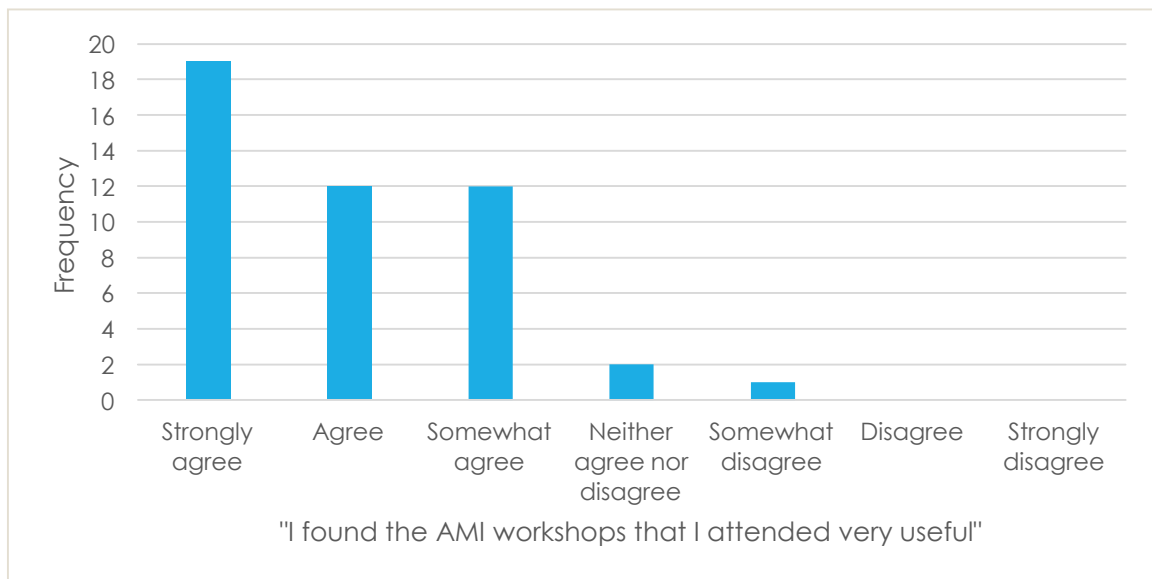


Figure 9 Usefulness of AMI workshops

Candidates who passed found AMI workshops more useful than those who did not. There were no significant differences in how candidates felt about their assessment based on how useful they found the workshops.

Some candidates commented that they had found some AMI workshops better than others.

Of the 31 MTA members, only seven attended MTA workshops, all of whom were men. Whilst five out of seven candidates who attended MTA workshops found them useful the group size is too small to determine how, if at all, this related to other variables (e.g., feelings prior to assessment, assessment result, etc.)

Further research should examine the utility of different workshops as, not only is it possible that some are more useful than others, but it is likely that different people will benefit from different workshops run by different trainers. Candidates could be matched with specific workshops/trainers based on their individual needs.

As part of this it would be important to establish the direction of the relationship between: finding workshops useful and passing. Are candidates who find the workshops useful more likely to pass because of them, or are the workshops more useful to stronger candidates? If this second scenario were the case, it would be important to find a way to better engage weaker candidates in workshops so that they benefit from them too.

3.5 Social support

Social support is made up of a variety of interpersonal behaviours between different people in an individual's social network.

Social support is, "A broad range of interpersonal behaviours by member of a person's social network may help him or her successfully cope with adverse life events and circumstances. Direct assistance, advice, encouragement, companionship, and expressions of affection all have been associated with positive outcomes for persons facing various life strains and dilemmas."
(Cutrona & Russell, 1990, p. 319)

3.5.1 Peer support

Successful candidates were more likely, than unsuccessful candidates, to know someone else who was preparing for their MIA assessment at the same time. It is becoming less common for candidates to not know other trainees (Figure 10). It is possible that this is in part due to the increasing number, and use of, Facebook groups for MIA trainees. All women knew someone else who was preparing at the same time.

Unsurprisingly, those who lived in mountainous regions were significantly more likely to know other people who were preparing for the MIA at the same time. **Candidates who did not live in the mountains and did not know anyone else were no more or less likely to pass than those who did live in the mountains and didn't know anyone else.** This suggests that to become an MIA, it is more important to be engaged with the professional mountaineering community than it is to live in the mountains.

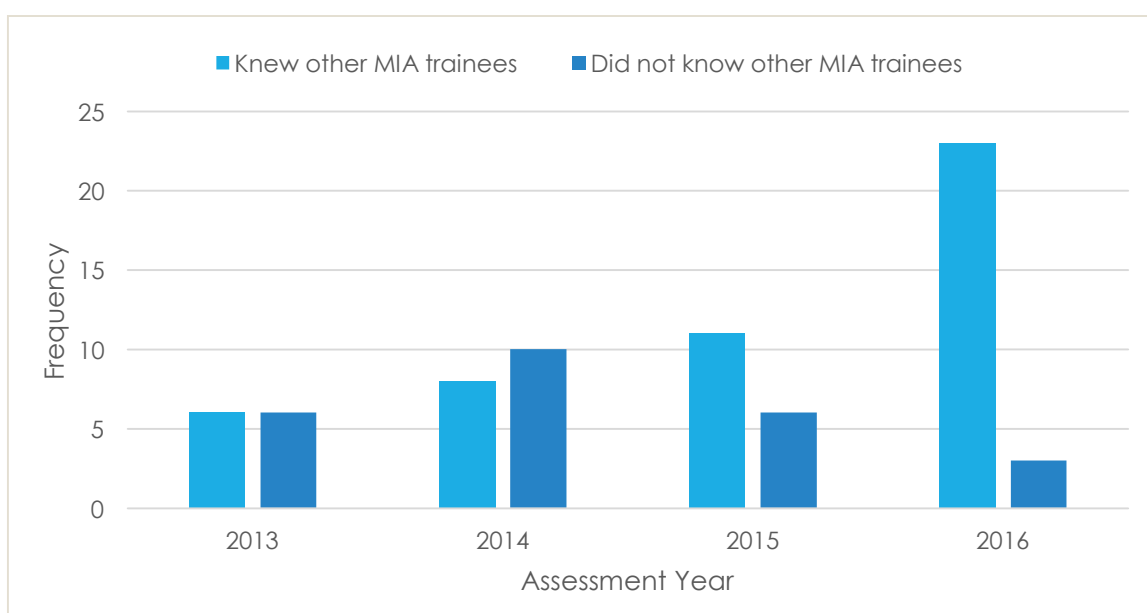


Figure 10 Knowing other trainees

3.5.2 Support from qualified instructors

Most candidates (84.4%) received some advice/support from qualified instructors (MIA/MIC/BMGs); the three candidates who did not have any friends/colleagues who were qualified instructors did not pass. Although this is not to say that it is



impossible to pass without knowing someone or being mentored, it does appear to be an important factor, with many candidates suggesting that it would be hard to “go it alone”. Some of the other candidates who did not pass said that they struggled to organise the time with the people that they knew, or that they didn't get as much support as they would have liked.

“It would be incredibly hard to go through the MIA Consolidation/Assessment process without mentors or friends who are MIA/MIC” – Man, 24, mountainous region

The advice that unsuccessful candidates received was varied and included but was not limited to: technical advice, opportunities to shadow qualified instructors, opportunities to be observed by qualified instructors. Successful candidates received similar advice and opportunities to spend time in the mountains with qualified instructors.

Unsuccessful:

“rescue day practice/advice/tips” – Man, 32, mountainous region

“Went climbing practice rescues, scrambled” – Woman, 31, mountainous region

Successful:

“Shadowing. Observation with clients and feedback. Problem solving and rescues-hint, tips, slick little modifications. Encouragement.” – Woman, 32, mountainous region

Successful candidates reported a wider range of social support from qualified instructors than unsuccessful candidates did. Whilst both groups received technical advice and support from qualified instructors, **successful candidates also received emotional and esteem support from qualified instructors.**

Being given advice on how to relax is an example of emotional support and help with confidence is an example of esteem support. This support beyond the technicalities of the MIA and assessment process possibly indicates a closer relationship between the candidate and qualified instructors. Closer relationships are also more likely to yield tailored advice, as the person supporting the candidate will better understand their needs.

“Lots of information regarding the assessment process. Locations that may be suitable for different types of clients, relax during the assessment process and the pressure is put on yourself from yourself not the assessors.” – Man, 29, mountainous region



“Some pointers on days out while climbing, some route suggestions, verbal advice about how to relax.” – Man, 30, mountainous region

“Lots of verbal support and confidence that ‘all would go fine’” – Man, 41, mountainous region

3.5.3 Mentoring

In the questionnaire, a mentor was defined as, “someone that took an active interest in and helped with your development”, 26.5% of candidates said that they were mentored. In 2016 women were more likely to be mentored than men, there were no differences in other years. In 2016 Mountain Training and AMI piloted mentoring schemes for MIA trainees. The pilot group Mountain Training used was made up of women who had completed their MIA training in the last five years, but who had not yet passed assessment. This group was chosen as Mountain Training knew the numbers would be manageable (23 women compared to 248 men).

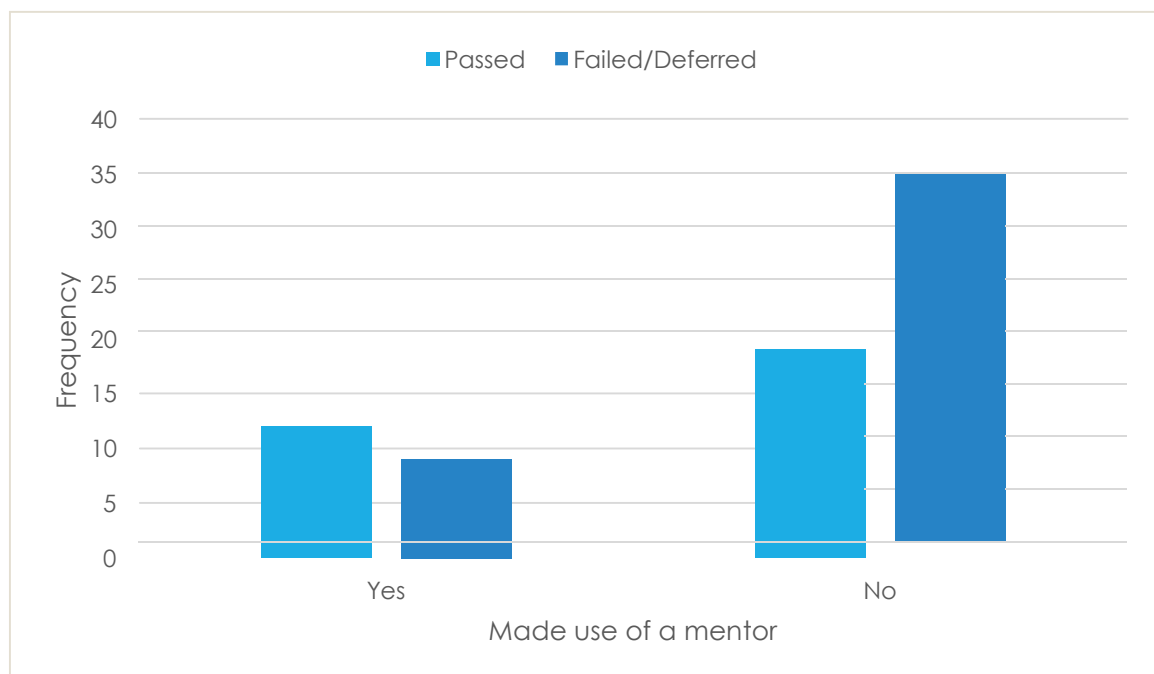


Figure 11 Use of mentor and assessment result

Whilst both successful and unsuccessful candidates reported that they had been mentored in preparation for their MIA assessments there was no evidence that mentoring directly influenced assessment results (i.e., those that were mentored did not do any better or worse than those who were not mentored) (Figure 11). Candidates who were mentored were more confident, they were less likely to think that they would be deferred than those who were not mentored.

Successful candidates appear to have had a closer relationship with their mentors than unsuccessful candidates. In some instances, the mentoring that unsuccessful candidates received may have been better described as coaching. Whilst

coaching is the provision of support it is often limited to technical instruction or training and maybe on a one-off basis.

Many, but not all of those who passed and were mentored felt that this process was very important to their success.

"This was perhaps the single biggest difference in my success. I had a good prep plan to be able to pass, but being mentored by [an experienced MIC] made sure it was a solid pass." – Man, 30, mountainous region

"I thought it [being mentored] was key to my pass." – Woman, 31, mountainous region

"[being mentored] was an extremely useful addition to my preparation mostly to my confidence." Man, 32, non-mountainous region

Mentors helped candidates to become more rounded instructors and to work towards a "gold standard" rather than just the assessment standard. This was reported by both successful and unsuccessful candidates. The benefits of working towards a "gold standard" are highlighted in section 3.6.4.

"I had a variety of mentors and got consistent feedback regarding good practice and 'Gold Standard' practice." – Woman, 29, mountainous region

Mentoring should be a close relationship and therefore will go beyond coaching. The closeness of this mentoring relationship will not only allow the transfer of technical information and skills but will also facilitate the provision of support beyond technical advice.

"I went out with [an experienced MIC] for a day and she broke down my performance very thoroughly, which was very positive. She then went through it again for me a day or so before the assessment when I was having a wobble." – Woman, 27, non-mountainous region

Whilst mentoring may not have a direct effect on whether a candidate passes their assessment or not, there is evidence to suggest that it influences other factors that do influence the result. For example, mentored candidates being less likely to think that they would be deferred could be a result of mentors boosting a candidate's self-esteem and therefore they are less likely to think that they will be deferred.

Not all candidates found mentors in the same way, some were mentored by people that they already knew, some candidates were offered the opportunity to be



mentored, be this through work, the MTA, Mountain Training, or AMI, and some other candidates actively sought out mentors.

"... [a senior member of staff] would mentor me afterwards and give me some feedback" – Man, 23, non-mountainous region

"I sought out mentors to help me and asked lots of questions. I put myself in National Centres, observed courses run by experienced MICs and trainers of MIAs." – Woman, 29, mountainous region

"Having the mentoring support set up through the MTA was amazing, I feel I would not have got through it if it was not for this. Long may it continue and prosper." – Woman, 38, non-mountainous region

Whilst there are benefits to receiving advice from others, there are also pitfalls. Advice from different people may be conflicting and advice from people who have weak ties to the candidate may not be suitable for them. In areas such as North Wales there are a lot of candidates as well as qualified instructors, many of whom may know one another but not very well. This environment is ideal for the sharing of generic advice, which may or may not be appropriate to the recipient. In an ideal world, candidates would have several advisors with whom they had strong ties, this would allow high quality, tailored advice to be given.

"One single mentor would have been useful rather than bits of help from lots of people." – Man, 49, non-mountainous region

"External input is important, if not essential. However, it is important that this input is reliable and personalised. Having too many opinions can make things less clear" Man, 37, non-mountainous region

This issue is discussed in organisational mentoring literature.

"although [a wide ranging development network with weak interpersonal ties] may provide great breadth of information and resources to a protégé, with developers' limited understanding of what would truly help the individual grow and develop, these relationships might actually leave the protégé confused rather than increasingly clear regarding his or her own needs, values, strengths, and weaknesses." (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 279)

In addition to advice being tailored to the individual's needs, it is also important that the advice is current and in line with the MIA syllabus. Some candidates reported having received advice from qualified instructors that was misleading and in their opinions contributed to their deferrals.



3.6 What was the most useful part of preparation and what would you do differently

Which parts of your preparation were most useful?

What would you have done differently?



Figure 12 Word clouds based on candidate responses

Similar themes emerged in answer to questions about what candidates would do differently and which parts of preparation they found most useful (Figure 12).

Seven candidates said that they would not do anything differently, six of whom had passed and said that they felt well prepared for their assessment, so it is likely that they felt there was nothing more they could have done to prepare. A further sixty-four candidates said that they would do something differently, this includes both successful and unsuccessful candidates. Five main themes emerged in answers to the questions: 1) “On reflection, which parts of your preparation were the most useful?” and 2) “On reflection, what, if anything, would you have done differently in preparing for the assessment week?”:

- **Volume of practice**
- **Working with “real” clients**
- **Area knowledge**
- **Goal setting and assessment standard**
- **External input**

3.6.1 Volume of practice

Many candidates said that the most useful thing they did was lots of practice and that they would “do more” in one way or another if they were to prepare again. Candidates described practicing a wide range of skills in preparation for their

assessment. Several candidates had dedicated weeks or even months to intense practice prior to their assessment, whilst others expressed frustration that they had not been able to commit as much time as they would have liked to their preparation.

Notably, **scrambling was highlighted as the most useful part of preparation by many candidates**, in addition to this the most common areas of the syllabus that people would have spent more time practicing were scrambling and navigation. Candidates may have found these areas more useful than multi-pitch climbing for example if they are not used as often in a personal context. Furthermore, it is interesting to note the only candidates who said that they would have done more personal climbing were those that did pass.

Most useful:

“Practice, practice, practice” – Man, 49, mountainous region

“Lots of practice in context” – Man, 35, non-mountainous region

Would have done differently:

“I would have gone for navigation a bit more, full days rather than shorter sessions. I would have got out with genuine novices for scrambling days. And I would have ideally not been working quite as much over the summer beforehand.” – Woman, 27, non-mountainous region

“More navigation practice having to follow someone. Didn't practice that.” – Man, 32, mountainous region

3.6.2 Working with “real” clients

Candidates prepared with both mock and real clients, these clients may have been genuine novices, friends, family, other trainees, or qualified instructors. Many candidates indicated that they would have used a wider variety of mock-clients in preparation for their assessments. Using a range of mock-clients means that candidates will develop the skills to work with clients across a range of abilities, some candidates said that they would have developed plans for teaching more advanced clients as well as novices.

Both successful and unsuccessful candidates felt that working with real clients was a valuable part of their preparation. **Whilst they felt that preparing with other trainees was important it could not replace working with real novices.** Experienced climbers are more likely to automatically do things that you might normally have to instruct a novice to do, (e.g., standing in the best position on a belay, staying “snug” on a belay).



*“More practice with people who genuinely have done less.” –
Woman, 49, non-mountainous region*

*“Climbing with random people as they do random things and have
a wide variety of needs. Better than just climbing with people I
knew.” – Man, 28, mountainous region*

3.6.3 Knowing the assessment area

Several candidates said that they would have spent more time getting to know the area that they would be assessed in. Some found it hard to pick appropriate venues easily and quickly during their assessment as they did not know the area as well as they might have liked to. Others also said that they would like to have known individual venues better to make route choice easier. Some successful candidates said that they had spent a lot of time getting to know the area that they would be assessed in.

Whilst the MIA is not and should not be a site-specific award, it is important that instructors are able to pick appropriate venues and routes based on their clients' abilities and needs as well as the conditions of the day.

*“I didn't know North Wales well and struggled to pick routes etc.” –
Man, 31, non-mountainous region*

3.6.4 Goal setting and assessment standard

Both successful and unsuccessful candidates said that they would have found more out about the assessment standard. Unsuccessful candidates often wanted to know more about the assessment standard so they knew what to aim for, whereas successful candidates said that they would have liked to have known more about the assessment standard as this would have allowed them to relax more and rest.

*“Been more relaxed in the knowledge I was operating at the level.”
– Man, 30, mountainous region*

Successful candidates often said that being above the minimum standard was one of the most useful parts of their preparation, often working towards “best practice” or a “gold standard”, unsuccessful candidates were more concerned with being at the required standard.

3.6.5 External Input

Many candidates felt that external input was important, if not essential, to being able to successfully complete the MIA. External input was also highlighted as something that some candidates would have liked more of in preparation for their assessments, both from other trainees as well as from qualified instructors, often to provide feedback and to help with goal setting.



“Spent more time on supervised preparation events and workshops; sought out more input from mentors and organisations that could have given me specific development goals throughout my preparation.” – Man, 36, non-mountainous region

“Spent much more time out with clients in varied terrain. Would have spent much more time either shadowing MIA's or working with MIA Trainees. I spent too long working in isolation and felt this was one of the main reasons why I deferred.” – Man, 37, non-mountainous region

“Taken a pair guided scrambling with a mentor following and watching/advising at each stance/discussing the terrain and helping to make judgements” – Woman, 30, non-mountainous region

“Working in Isolation is a fast road to deferral. Lots of MIA Trainee's I spoke to AFTER [original emphasis] my deferral had that same feeling. Many did not know what was really expected of them on assessment nor how the 5 day assessment actually ran.” Man, 37, non-mountainous region

3.7 Other comments

Candidates were asked if they had any other comments to make, some of the responses to this question echoed what is in section 3.6. Below are some of the other themes that emerged from the responses to this question.

The Mountaineering Instructor Award is a high-level qualification covering a wide range of skills and therefore, requires candidates to put a lot of time and effort in to complete it successfully. Some candidates said that they did not have as much time as they felt was necessary to prepare themselves adequately for assessment. This was often due to other life pressures, i.e., family commitments, mortgage payments, etc.

A small number of candidates said that they would have chosen a different time of year for their assessment, some would have done it later in the year to give themselves more time to prepare, whilst others would have done it earlier in the year to reduce the chances of having bad weather. Choosing the right time for one's assessment will be a balance of preparation time, weather conditions, but also availability of both the candidate's and of courses.

“Not done it in October! The weather had a direct effect in receiving a deferral.” – Man, 40, mountainous region



3.8 Post assessment feedback

3.8.1 Result fairness/communication of results

Most candidates (87.7%) agreed that the result of their assessment was fair based on their performance, furthermore 93.2% agreed that they both fully understood the reasons for their results and that the assessment staff communicated these reasons clearly. This suggests that by the end of the assessment process the candidates understood what the assessment standard was and how their performance related to that. In addition to this, 62.2% of candidates left their assessment with a clear action plan for further development.

Of the candidates who did not pass the assessment, 55.3% felt that they left their assessment with a clear action plan for further development, 55.7% of those felt that assessment staff had helped them to create this action plan. That is, 15 of the 47 candidates who did not pass their first assessment, left the assessment with a clear action plan for further development that they felt the staff had helped them create. This raises two questions:

- 1) Why did 44.7% of unsuccessful candidates feel that they left their assessment without a clear action plan for further development?
- 2) Why did 44.3% of unsuccessful candidates who did leave the assessment with a clear action plan for further development feel that the staff had not helped them to create it?

4 General discussion

The findings of this survey show that there are some factors that do influence successful completion of the MIA and suggests that some do not, despite them previously being considered relevant. These findings are important as they may help to remove perceived barriers, confirm previous beliefs, but also highlight other barriers that were potentially previously unknown or even counter-intuitive.

The MIA is a very involved process and requires that candidates invest a significant amount of time in the preparation and assessment process. Whilst the quantitative data did not support the hypothesis that the more time candidates spent preparing the more likely they would be to pass, the results from other questions do support it. Some unsuccessful candidates said that they did not have as much time as they would have liked to prepare, mostly due to other constraints on their time. Many candidates said that putting lots of time into their preparation was a useful part of their preparation. Older candidates were less likely to have passed. Some older candidates who did not pass cited a lack of time due to other commitments as being a reason that they were not fully prepared.

Candidates who were well prepared in all aspects of the syllabus did better than those who prepared in most areas of the syllabus; putting skills together was better preparation for assessment than practicing skills in isolation. It is important to have all the basics skills well practiced, e.g., it is hard to focus on developing clients whilst concentrating on not getting a twist in your ropes. The simple skills will become second nature to those who practice them a lot and to a higher level than the assessment standard. **Not only is it important to have these basic skills well practiced, but it is important to put them together in context.** Having practiced skills in context allows candidates to test their systems and make them more robust.

Furthermore, the time spent practicing some skills seems more important than others and more important than the total time spent preparing. For example, if a candidate spends a lot of their personal time multi-pitch climbing and not much time mountaineering, they will benefit more from the time they spend practicing their scrambling and navigation than they will putting further time into multi-pitch rock climbing.

Whilst it is not essential to live in a mountainous area to pass the MIA assessment, **it is important to interact with other people who are engaged with the MIA** (both as trainees and qualified instructors). Those who do not live in the mountains are more likely to be isolated from this community. However, it is becoming less common for candidates to not know other trainees. This is likely related to an increasing use of social media. There are several Facebook groups that are used by candidates to ask for advice, share ideas and to meet other trainees.



The support a candidate receives, or perhaps more importantly does not receive, is very important. As mentioned above, the MIA is a very involved process and, candidates will have to deal with stress related to both their assessment and preparation. Having people to provide emotional and esteem support to the candidates is important. In addition to this esteem and emotional support, having someone to provide feedback on technical matters and information about assessment process is also important. All types of support should be tailored to each candidate's needs and that any advice given relating directly to the MIA is current. Candidates should be wary of looking for advice from too many different people as this can lead to confusion.

Other trainees and qualified instructors are the ideal people to provide much of the support that candidates are likely to need. Candidates who knew other trainees were more likely to feel actively supported by friends than those who did not. Candidates will be more receptive of advice and support from people who they feel understand the process they are going through.

Qualified instructors engaged with the MIA process would be a good source of advice about the standards that candidates are expected to meet and the assessment process. Having feedback from a qualified instructor will help candidates to know if they are ready or not. If they are not, this will identify which areas need improving and how best to do so and for those who are at the standard it will help them to become more confident and to relax. Working to a gold standard is better than working to the assessment standard.

There is some evidence to suggest that confidence is an important factor. **Confident candidates are more likely to pass their assessment than unconfident candidates.** However, a question remains; do confident candidates do better because they are more confident, or is it that they are more confident because they are better? It is probably a bit of both. A candidate who is well prepared (i.e., is good) but feels unconfident is less likely to pass than a candidate of the same ability who is more confident. The provision of emotional and esteem support by mentors appears to improve candidates' confidence.



5 Implications and recommendations

If acted on, these implications and recommendations should improve the first-time pass rate of the MIA. Some of the implications and recommendations made here may be new, but many are not. Although some of the findings/conclusions may be the “same old” advice that has been given for some time, it is still important. This report is intended to be useful for a variety of readers who are interested in the MIA. As such, different sections will be useful to different people. The implications and recommendations have been split into six sections. This should allow a common plan to be created amongst stakeholders, thus reducing duplication of work and ensuring that the maximum benefit is realised.

5.1 Mountain Training

- Identify isolated candidates and help them to integrate into the professional mountaineering community.
- Provide more information relevant to older candidates about the time commitment needed to successfully complete the MIA.
- Review the MIA training pathway as candidates appear to need more training than is currently provided through the existing programme.
- Ensure that assessments are standardised between providers and reassure candidates that this is the case.
- Provide clear guidance on assessment expectations to candidates. This should be done in conjunction with providers.

5.2 Providers

- Provide clear guidance on assessment expectations to candidates. This should be done in conjunction with Mountain Training.
- Assist deferred candidates with post assessment action plans.

5.3 Candidates

- Ensure that you have enough time to fully prepare for the assessment. It is important that you arrive well prepared and confident in your skills. Having a development plan may help you work out how much time you need to commit to preparing for your assessment.
- The “minimum” is just that. If you are at the minimum standard and/or just have the minimum experience then you will find it hard. Practice above and beyond the minimum will stand you in good stead.
- Practice all aspects of the syllabus, especially the areas that you do not spend as much of your own time doing (e.g., scrambling and navigating).
- Become slick in core skills (e.g., taking coils, stance management, etc.), if you can do these things easily your mind will be freed up to make decisions.



- Progress your practice as you build up to assessment, make the bricks and then build the wall.
 - For example, start off just going scrambling on your own to improve route finding skills, then go with other trainees to practice the rope-work, finally, try and take mock clients out for the day putting a few different skills together.
- Work with a range of clients, novice to intermediate, mock clients and real clients. Each group will present its own challenges that will make you a more rounded instructor.
- Get to know the area that you will be assessed in, it will relieve some of the pressure you feel on assessment if you are able to choose appropriate venues quickly and confidently.
- Shadow **experienced** instructors, have them observe you and ask them for feedback. External input will ensure that you are doing the right things and are doing them well.
- Try to work towards the “gold standard”. Firstly, this is higher than the assessment standard so you will be a better instructor for it, and secondly, if you are doing the best you can then knowing the assessment standard is not as important.
- Try to integrate with the professional mountaineering community, especially if you do not live in a mountainous area. It will be easier to find the support you need if you are a part of this community.
- Whilst social media is a useful tool, you should be mindful that there is no regulation of the advice given; to be useful advice should be specific to you and current.

5.4 The associations

- Ensure that all workshops are of a suitable standard. This could include a moderation and accreditation process as well as feedback from candidates.
- Run mock-test workshops where candidates can test their skills in a realistic scenario. These should be run far enough in advance of assessments that areas identified for improvement can be acted on. This should help candidates to feel more confident and better prepared.
- Identify isolated candidates and help them to integrate into the professional mountaineering community
- Identify which workshops are useful to which candidates, then work towards matching candidates with workshops. Part of this should address the question “Are workshops working for weaker candidates?”

5.5 Mentoring/coaching

- Mentoring and coaching are different, both are useful and important to candidates.



- Coaches can provide technical support, this can be on one occasion or over a longer period, this may or may not be for financial remuneration.
- A mentor should take an active interest in the development of the candidate and as such will likely provide esteem and emotional support as well as technical support.
- Those considering becoming a coach or mentor should consider their suitability and be mindful of their strengths and weaknesses. For example, whilst a newly qualified MIA may be able to provide emotional and esteem support to candidates, they will not be able to provide the same technical advice as an MIA course director.

5.6 Future research

- Finer grained analysis of time spent on practical preparation to better understand which candidates benefit from each type of preparation.
- Investigate the effect of confidence on passing the MIA assessment.
- Investigate the effect of personality and individual differences on passing the MIA assessment.
- Identify which workshops are useful to which type of candidate.



6 References and furtherreading

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