

The 4th Annual Report of the Radio Communication Examination Standards Committee, June 2010

1. Introduction

This is the fourth annual report of the Radio Communication Examination (RCE) Standards Committee, set up under the terms of the agreement between Ofcom and the Radio Communication Foundation (RCF) for the conduct of amateur radio examinations (the Radio Communication Examinations).

The annual reports of the Standards Committee are published on the RCF website, <http://www.commsfoundation.org/rce/>. Other documents relevant to the RCE are also available on this website, including the terms of reference of the Standards Committee and the agreement between Ofcom and RCF.

2. Membership

The membership of the Standards Committee is as follows:

Prof Simon Watts MBE FEng, G3XXH, Thales UK (Standards Committee Chairman)
Prof Hugh Griffiths FEng, G4CNV, Department of Electronic & Electrical Engineering, UCL

Dr Julian Gannaway, G3YGF, Roke Manor Research Ltd
Murray Niman BSc MIEE, G6JYB, BAE Systems ATC
Dave Powis BSc, G4HUP, College Lecturer

Paul Jarvis, MCMI, G8RMM Ofcom

Alan Betts BSc CEng MIEE MIFL, G0HIQ (Chairman of RCE Examination Committee)
Jeff Smith, MI0AEX (RCE Quality Manager)

Robin Bellerby, GM3ZYE (RSGB Board Member)
Barry Maxwell (RCF Trustee)

3. Assessment of Overall Examination Performance

The committee received detailed reports from the RCE Examination Committee, the RCE Quality Manager and the RSGB Examination Department on the management and performance of the examination processes. Their reports are summarised below.

The Standards Committee is satisfied that the current Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced examination syllabuses are suitable for the award of Amateur Radio licenses. Further, the examinations are compatible with the CEPT harmonised arrangements set out in Recommendations TR 61-01 and TR 61-02. The committee will continue to review the syllabuses and examinations to ensure compatibility with international and national regulations.

4. Syllabus Revisions

The new Intermediate Examination Specification came into force in February 2010. This had been due in June 2009, but was delayed due to administrative problems.

The SC discussed a proposed change to the Foundation Syllabus to include further questions on inappropriate behaviour and the response to such behaviour by other operators. This was agreed in principle and the EC was asked to circulate detailed proposals to the SC for comment.

Revision of the syllabuses will occur from time to time. In all cases changes will be approved by the RCE Standards Committee and normally a notice period of at least 12 months will be given before they are implemented in examinations.

5. Review of the Examination Committee (EC) report.

Question Banks

Each of the examinations still has a pressing requirement for additional questions. The status of each of the of question banks was reported to be:

- Foundation 703 questions in the bank; 14 more required.
- Intermediate 1041 questions in the bank; 84 more required (ideally 104 more).
- Advanced 714 questions in the bank; 312 more required (ideally 415 more).

Work is underway at RSGB HQ to enter a large number of approved new questions into the question banks, but there is still an urgent need for more questions. The routine work of maintaining the question banks will in the future be undertaken by the EC, once the existing backlog of work is completed.

The Standards Committee instructed the EC to continue considering urgently how additional questions may be acquired and to put into effect actions to correct the shortfall. A range of ideas are under consideration and the EC is working closely with the RSGB to find fresh approaches to this problem.

Results for 2009

The table shows the number of examinations offered and the overall results for 2009. The 2008 and 2007 and 2006 results (bottom) are shown in brackets.

	Foundation	Intermediate	Advanced
Number of Examination sessions	643	260	155
	(614)	(265)	(169)
	(616)	(206)	(95)
	(640)	(230)	(154)
Number of Candidates	2021	704	426
	(2003)	(733)	(397)
	(1965)	(646)	(289)
	(2034)	(625)	(446)
Number of Passes	1704	662	289
	(1678)	(677)	(263)
	(1605)	(603)	(161)
	(1719)	(604)	(326)

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Pass rate	84.3%	94.0%	67.8%
	(83.8%)	(92.4%)	(66.2%)
	(87.4%)	(93.4%)	(64.1%)
	(84.5%)	(96.6%)	(73%)

The Foundation and Intermediate examinations were available at 'short notice' during 2009 and Advanced examinations were held at 6 set times with an average of 26 centres active on each occasion with 2.75 candidates per centre. Enrolments were 2021 Foundation, 727 Intermediate and 440 Advanced. The differences represent absences and invalid examinations. Pass rates are percentages of those obtaining exam results.

The number of Foundation candidates has again shown a modest increase and the Intermediate numbers remain buoyant. The number of Advanced centres has dropped to an average of 26 per session but the number of candidates is up. The pass rate has also increased, which is a pleasing sign and warrants a 'well done' to the tutors.

The EC have produced a detailed report on the results of the RCE in 2009, aimed at examination tutors. This has been published on the RCF website, together with the EC Annual Report <http://www.commsfoundation.org/rce/committees/index.html#ec>.

Pass Marks

There were no changes to the pass marks set for all the examinations during 2009.

Following a recommendation from the EC, the Standards Committee agreed that passes in the Advanced Examination should be ranked as Pass, Merit and Distinction. The top 50% of those passing will be awarded at least a Merit with the top 20% achieving a Distinction.

6. Review of the Quality Manager's Report

Examination Administration

Some staffing problems were encountered at RSGB HQ during 2009, which could have impacted on the quality of service for the administration of the RCE. These problems have now been resolved and agreement has been reached with RSGB on steps to be taken to clear the backlog of work on the examination question banks.

Conduct of Examinations

Inspections

About 20 examination centres had unannounced inspections during 2009. These inspections were undertaken by the Quality Manager, RSGB Regional Managers or RSGB Deputy Regional Managers. In all cases the examination arrangements were good and the invigilators and Examination Secretary conducted their duties in accordance with the rules.

Following the raising of some concerns, the EC was requested to strengthen and update the published guidance on the use of examination readers.

Quality Manual

Work is continuing on the production of a Quality Manual which will document all the procedures undertaken by RSGB HQ and the EC in the administration of the RCE.

7. Review of the Report from RSGB HQ Examination Department

This was the second annual report from the HQ Examination Department.

Following some problems early in 2009, Mrs Julie Venison has now undertaken sole responsibility for the Examination Department and good progress is being made to clear the backlog of work that had arisen. To provide additional time for this work, two moratoriums are planned for 2010. The first occurred during the first two weeks of February and the second will be during the first two weeks of August. During these two periods the Examination Department will effectively close.

Examination Software

The new examination software is currently being written by a contractor. As well as a more user friendly and modern alternative to the current software this will also include optical marking of examination papers. The software is planned to be installed during 2010. The use of optical centralised marking of all Advanced exams will be a major change and will greatly enhance the integrity of the whole exam procedure.

Examination Fees

In September 2009 the examination fees for all examinations were revised:-

- The Foundation Licence exam is now £22.50
- The Intermediate Licence exam is now £27.50
- The Advanced Licence exam is now £32.50

Examination Appeals

There were two appeals received in 2009, relating to alleged irregular conduct of examinations. These were adjudicated by the Quality Manager. In both cases, the EC had ruled that because of possible irregularities in the results it was not possible to declare a result. The candidates had been invited to resit the exams. In both cases the appellants were unable to produce further evidence to support their appeals and the appeals failed. The great majority of clubs and Examination Centres are absolutely beyond reproach, and for this reason claims of anomalous behaviour are rigorously investigated.

8. Complaints Received by the RCE Examination Committee

During the year, 7 questions were queried, one requiring invalidation and credit of a mark and one being a duplicate.

Four problems were encountered during the year and one spanned the previous year end. It is disappointing to note that this year, for the first time, the number of candidates who have had their examination invalidated has reached double figures. The appeals procedure for formal complaints is published on the RCF RCE website

<http://www.commsfoundation.org/rce/pdf/appeals.pdf> .

9. Recommendations

The RCE Standards Committee made the following recommendations for action during 2010:

- Continuing urgent consideration should be given by the Examination Committee, working with the RSGB, to improving the supply of questions for the RCE question banks.
- The Quality Manager will continue development of the quality process, including a quality manual for the administration of the RCE.
- Accreditation of the RCE by the QCA should continue to be actively pursued during 2010.