Online Advanced Exams

Further to the announcement just before Christmas regarding the availability of online Advanced examinations, here are a few more details which, while giving a little more insight into the project, will hopefully help Exam Secretaries when booking an online Advanced exam.

Background

For some time both the RCF and the RSGB's Examinations Standards Committee had an aspiration to move the Amateur Radio examinations from the traditional paper-based system in place today to something more in keeping with advances in technology. To that end a project was commissioned in 2015 to look at how that might be achieved.

After some research and a presentation to the RSGB Board in May 2016, approval was given to carry out a 'Proof of Concept' trial with a company who already had expertise in that area. Since then that company, TestReach, located in Ireland, have been working closely with a core team of RSGB volunteers and clubs to explore how we might add online exam capabilities to the existing system.

TestReach offers a total solution for online assessment, providing both comprehensive test authoring and rollout capabilities, as well as the option for those tests to be supervised remotely in real-time over the internet.

As was announced in December, the 'Proof of Concept' phase proved to be very successful; hence the move to the next phase of the project, which is a pilot phase based on the Advanced exam.

As of Monday 20 February 2017 Exam Secretaries will have, in addition to paper-based exams for Advanced candidates, the option to provide candidates with an online Advanced exam. The same four-week notice period applies, so the first opportunity to sit an Advanced examination online will be Monday 20 March 2017.

This is a major step forward and, while it might not be suitable for every exam venue, there will undoubtedly be clubs out there who are keen to make this progression.

Attached are some FAQ which will help Exam Secretaries and candidates, apply for Advanced online exams. Obviously, there are some technology requirements to run online exams but they aren't that onerous; again these are covered in the FAQ.

Exam Secretaries who are looking to take up the offer of online Advanced examinations should, in the first instance, contact the RSGB Examinations Quality Assurance Manager, Dave Wilson, M0OBW, for further details: **eqam@rsgb.org.uk**

FAQ

1. How does a club apply to run an online Advanced examination?

    The application process is presently the same as for paper-based exams. In the future it will be possible to book examinations and register candidates electronically. All approved examinations centres may apply to hold online examinations but should be aware that they must have a reasonable internet connection (see below) and that candidates must have access to a suitable laptop computer. The RSGB will not be undertaking the supply of computer hardware.

2. As an Exam Secretary, can I set up a mixed paper and online exam, or am I limited to one format or the other at one sitting?

    Providing all the criteria are satisfied for both styles of exam then there are no reasons why an exam sitting with mixed paper and online exams can't be set up.

3. What does an Exam Secretary have to do in addition to what they do already to request an online exam?

    Currently the application process is the same (see above). It is expected that Exam Secretaries will need to check that candidates wishing to sit an online exam have access to suitable computer equipment and be satisfied that the examination venue has an adequate internet connection with enabled Wi-Fi access.

4. What does an Invigilator have to do in addition to what they do already to invigilate an online exam?

    There are a couple of additional actions that the First Named Invigilator has to perform; these revolve around ensuring everyone starts the exam at the same time. Other invigilators won't have any additional tasks, they will just monitor candidates in the same way as usual.

5. Are instructors and tutors expected to do anything extra in the way of teaching candidates?

    No – it's recommended that instructors simply make students aware that an online option is available and ask them to talk with the Exam Secretary who will give them further information.

6. What does a candidate have to do in order to sit an online Advanced exam?

    Candidates will, via the RSGB, register with TestReach who will give each candidate a user name i.e. their email address on the TestReach system, together with a unique password. Candidates can then download and launch the TestReach Application and are recommended to complete the online tutorial prior to taking their Advanced exam. Once they've done that, the RSGB will make the booking, similar to today, for a particular date and time and candidates will receive an email confirmation. They will also receive email reminders before the actual exam and again the day before the exam. As can be seen, email addresses are the key to the system and RSGB must be advised of any change of email address for the system to work.

7. What are the technology requirements required to run an online Advanced examination?

- Essentially each candidate will need access to a computer, desktop or laptop (no tablets including Surface Pro) with a minimum of 4GB of RAM, connected to the internet in order to launch the TestReach application
- This requires a continuous internet speed of at least 512kbps per candidate (most broadband connections should support six candidates) and a Windows computer (Windows 7+) running Chrome or a Mac running IOS 10.8+ and Safari browser.
- Other operating system/browser combinations may work satisfactorily, but the above have been rigorously tested and are recommended. As other combinations are evaluated they will be added to the recommended list
- The obvious requirements of mains and chargers to ensure that laptops don't run out of battery all need to be in place

8. Can candidates take the online Advanced exam on an iPad or Android Tablet?

No – the TestReach application is not available on those devices.

9. What if candidates don't have access to email?

The option of paper exams is still there. Online exams revolve around email addresses. It may be possible to create temporary addresses via the exam venue, but this will be checked during the pilot phase.

10. What if candidates don't have access to a computer?

In such cases if the candidate wants to do an online rather than a paper exam they will need to work with the exam venue to see if they can provide a suitable computer. It is not a requirement that exam venues **have** to provide PCs for online exams.

11. Can a candidate take the online Advanced examination at home or must it be at an RSGB registered exam venue?

Online exams can only be taken at RSGB registered exam venues.

12. Do candidates have to have taken, and passed, a Foundation and an Intermediate exam before they can take the online Advanced exam?

Yes, all the criteria that currently exists surrounding suitable pre-qualification etc. needs to be in place before candidates can sit the online Advanced exam.

13. An exam is booked and all candidates are in place and ready to go – can the First Named Invigilator start the exam early?

When the exam is booked, a time is set in the TestReach system – the exam window is 30 minutes from that allotted start time. That means that it **isn't** possible to start the exam **before** the allotted time but there is flexibility for a later start.

14. Due to unforeseen circumstances it isn't possible to start the exam on time – what's the latitude as regards starting late?

    The exam can be started **up to** 30 minutes **after** the allotted start time. Later than that it will be necessary to rebook the exam.

15. What happens if the exam venue loses the internet connection part way through an exam?

    The facility is there to resume the exam in the event that the internet connection is lost. As described it's a resume, not a re-start i.e. the paper will appear on the screen in the same place as when the connection was lost.

16. What if a candidate accidentally submits their answers, can they recover their 'paper'?

    In order to prevent candidates accidentally pressing the 'Submit' button and the exam closing, candidates are asked to confirm that they do indeed want to submit their answers. Once they agree to that, it is not possible to recover their paper and resume the exam.

17. Can candidates change their answers during the exam?

    Yes, the system allows candidates to change their answers as many times as they like up until the point they press the 'Submit' button. In order to prevent candidates accidentally pressing the 'Submit' button and the exam closing, candidates are asked to confirm that they do indeed want to submit their answers.

18. What if a candidate forgets to answer a question and presses the 'Submit' button?

    The system will, under those circumstances, advise the candidate that there are unanswered questions on the paper. Candidates can either provide answers or go ahead and submit the exam with one or more questions unanswered. Once the 'Submit' button has been pressed and the candidate confirms they do indeed want to submit their answers, candidates will not have any further access to their paper.

19. Can candidates change their answers after they've submitted their answers?

    Once the 'Submit' button has been pressed and the candidate confirms they want to submit their answers it's not possible to re-open the paper or review their answers.

20. How do Invigilators know it's the candidate on the paperwork taking the exam?

    As per today's procedures candidates will, on the day, still need to provide photographic ID, which the invigilators will check **before** they are allowed to start their exam. During this pilot phase online exams will still use the same back-office paperwork that is used today.

21. When will candidates receive their results?

    A few seconds after submitting their answers candidates will receive feedback in the form of a pdf document which they can print out or forward on via email. As with all exams, the results will be confirmed by the Examinations Department approximately ten days after the date of the exam.

22. TestReach offers exams using 'Remote Invigilators' – can Exam Secretaries request an online exam using remote invigilators?

> No – that option isn't currently available.

23. Will Exam Secretaries' and candidates' point of contact be TestReach or the RSGB?

> It will be the RSGB.

24. If candidates are unsuccessful when can they re-sit the exam?

> Unsuccessful candidates can apply for a re-sit any time as long as they give one month's notice – it is the same timeframe as is currently in place.

25. If candidates are successful will they still get a certificate from the RSGB or will it come from TestReach?

> The RSGB, via the Exam Department, will continue to issue certificates to successful candidates.

26. Is passing the online exam recognised by Ofcom and can candidates still apply for a licence in the same way as they do now?

> Yes – Ofcom very much welcomed this development and has no difficulties in continuing the same licence application process that exists today.

27. When will Foundation and Intermediate exams be available online?

> A decision to make Foundation and Intermediate exams available online will not be made until the RSGB is satisfied that all the procedures etc. around online exams are robust enough to handle up to three or four exam sessions running every day of the year.

28. Does this impact the ongoing syllabus review?

> This exciting development is not expected to have any impact on the syllabus review. Where it will impact, is having the ability or option to create exams using different styles of questions, in the same exam, rather than the current stereotypical multiple-choice one-from-four answer format.

29. How long is the pilot phase of this project?

> The pilot phase runs from 20 March through to 30 June 2017.

30. Will the cost of the exam change if it is paper or online?

> The cost of the online Advanced exam will remain at £37.50. There are currently no plans to review the exam charges.