



Instructors' Newsletter

October 2014 edition

2014-2016 Advanced Exam schedule

	Date	Time	Closing Date for Entries
2014			
Mon	8 Dec	19.00hrs	14 Nov 2014
2015			
Thur	29 Jan	19.00hrs	7 Jan 2015
Sat	7 Mar	14.00hrs	13 Feb 2015
Fri	1 May	19.00hrs	11 April 2015
Tues	30 June	19.00hrs	9 June 2015
Wed	19 Aug	19.00hrs	29 July 2015
Sun	11 Oct	10.00 (Convention)*	18 Sept 2015
Mon	7 Dec	19.00hrs	16 Nov 2015
2016			
Thur	28 Jan	19.00hrs	14 Jan 2016
Sat	5 Mar	14.00hrs	19 Feb 2016
Fri	6 May	19.00hrs	22 April 2016
Tues	5 July	19.00hrs	21 June 2016
Wed	24 Aug	19.00hrs	10 Aug 2016
Sun	9 Oct	10.00 (Convention)*	23 Sept 2016
Mon	5 Dec	19.00hrs	21 Nov 2016

*Please note that the October Sunday exams are planned to coincide with the RSGB Convention dates but are open to all exam centres that are able to open at the appropriate time.

Please also remember the minimum notification period for all examination levels is two weeks (10 clear working days). Requests submitted without sufficient notice will be rejected.

We aim to have papers delivered in time for a non-delivery to be queried and resolved. If you have a query or your papers have not arrived 5 days before the exam please email exams@rsgb.org.uk or ring 01234 832 717.



Distributing examination papers and OM sheets

There have been a few instances of examination papers and optical mark sheets being given to the wrong candidates. Not all examinations have personalised papers but many do, including ours. The optical marking system identifies the candidate by the bar code so if the problem is not spotted the marks will be attributed to the wrong candidate. If it is spotted it is nonetheless necessary to manually input the answers to the marking system which is very labour intensive and potentially error prone. This muddle happens sufficiently often that consideration is being given to either refusing such papers or imposing a manual marking fee which would have to be paid before marking takes place. The candidates are relying on the exam centres to provide them with a safe and secure examination, please don't let them down.

Invigilators should also check candidates have the right material and only the right material. A recent incident resulted in a candidate being given an answer sheet which was stuck to the back of an examination paper. Examination packs are always checked before dispatch but such checks are not infallible so invigilators should please ensure the materials they are giving out are correct.

Mobile, portable and suffixes

There is continuing confusion on the correct call sign suffix to use as a pedestrian.

Clause 17(1)(x) of the licence reads:

"Mobile" means the Radio Equipment is located in the United Kingdom:

- I. in or on any vehicle or conveyance;
- II. on the person of the Licensee where the Licensee is a pedestrian, or
- III. on any Vessel on Inland Waters.

There is also confusion as to whether the suffixes are examinable at Foundation level. They are examinable. The relevant Foundation syllabus item is 2b1 'Recall the format of the current Foundation, Intermediate and Full Callsigns.' Suffixes, although optional, are part of the call sign and if used should be used correctly.

The second part of 2b1 excludes the need to know 'E' as a Regional Secondary Locator for use in England for Intermediate Callsigns.

Until 2005 the then syllabus guide did exempt suffixes from the Foundation exam but they were included when that guide was discontinued. The change was announced at the time.

Trust and responsibility

We are sure no one will disagree that for radio amateurs in the UK to be allowed to run an examination system that is required by international treaty is a privilege and implies a high level of trust from Ofcom. That trust brings responsibility to design and operate an exam system that is both robust and fair. Unfortunately several issues are arising:

Copying of exam questions

Exam questions are reused throughout the system, simply because there are no resources for having unique questions in each exam. That in turn means that questions must not be copied or in any other way released from the exam room for any reason whatsoever, otherwise exam integrity becomes compromised.

Unfortunately that seems to be occurring more frequently, despite our pleas not to do so. Each question released into the public domain has to be removed from the question bank and a new one generated; an unfair burden on volunteers to do that



job. There is also a growing risk that question banks could become depleted below the specified minimum number of questions if the rate of leakage exceeds the rate at which they can be replenished. This will result in a reduced number of exams possible in a year.

We are determined that won't happen so with immediate effect stiffer sanctions will be applied as a result of any such copying or release of exam questions, up to and including suspension or even de-registration of the Exam Centre involved.

Please, do not copy exam questions. Note that they are also RCF copyright.

Exam procedures

It is vital that exams are carried out properly, but it's just as important that they are *seen* to be carried out properly. For example, show the sealed envelope to all candidates and others in the exam room before opening it.

Following the rules most importantly ensures that the exams are fair to all, not only the candidates, but to everyone involved with the exam system.

Please make sure that everyone involved in the exams knows the rules and appreciate that the checks and balances are there not only to ensure exam integrity but to protect the Exam Centres and people involved from mischief and misunderstandings.

The rules try to ensure that no individual can be put in a position where they can do something underhand or have an allegation made against them without being able to show that the allegation is misplaced. The procedures also aim to ensure that entirely innocent errors which might cause subsequent embarrassment are spotted well before anything can actually go wrong.

The number of EC investigations into alleged malpractice has now increased into double figures each year. See http://www.commsfoundation.org/rce/pdf/annualreport_2014.pdf The confirmed incidents are mostly breaches of the rules with no intent to falsify results, but perhaps inevitably others are less clear-cut. We all need to work to reverse this upwards trend.

To assist there is work under way to provide better guidance to the key players in arranging and conducting exams; the Exam Secretaries and Invigilators. We have already placed a one-page guide to completing optical marking sheets in the Files section of the RSGB Tutors' Yahoo Group and further one-page guides are under development for publication shortly.

Up in the North East, the Five Bridges cluster of Clubs has developed a training course for Invigilators. Depending on how the pilot goes it may be made available across the UK.

Please, let's not breach the trust shown to us by Ofcom. Play by the rules.

Challenging exam questions

We welcome constructive challenges if a question or answer is thought to be in any way wrong. None of us are perfect!

Please quote the bank number (found on the exam paper in the format "1a1-xxx" for example), but there is no need to quote the full question and multiple-choice answers. If you do it means that we have to assume that question is in the public domain, no matter how local, and it has to be withdrawn with all the attendant issues as noted above.

Please just describe the problem without copying the question.

Requests for readers

The EC is very concerned at the increasing number of requests for readers, most of which evaporate when the candidates are asked by the Examinations Office to provide proof of their special needs. In addition, providing readers presents particular difficulties as the exam itself must be read in a way that does not give candidates an advantage. At Foundation and Intermediate level knowing that mH means millihenry or kV means kilovolt is part of the knowledge being examined meaning the reader must say 'small m, capital H' not 'millihenry'. There are also technical terms and words that a non-amateur might not read 'correctly' to a candidate for example 'Yagi', 'ohmmeter' or 'imaging'. In addition, a well-documented effect of dyslexia



is a difficulty in remembering and following verbal (oral) communication. In these circumstances a reader is more likely to confuse than to be of assistance. Most dyslexic candidates will know the sorts of things that will help them to undertake the examination and it is proposed that we ascertain their precise requirements with the aid of tests available from organisations such as the British Dyslexic Association (BDA).

Whilst a check-list for readers would be most helpful it was felt that the restriction of only using non-amateurs creates as many problems as it solves. Bearing in mind the relatively small number of cases where the most appropriate help is a reader it was felt that a better solution would be for the RCF to maintain a list of approved readers who may well be amateurs and to allocate a reader for each occasion when they are needed. This avoids the need for an Examination Centre to find a suitably skilled reader, ensures the readers used are appropriately briefed (which the RCF would undertake) and provides a high quality experience for the candidate. If you know of people who would like to be added to the list of approved readers and would be prepared to travel a reasonable distance (costs reimbursed) to other clubs please ask them to contact the Examinations Office.

The RCF is therefore proposing to deal with requests for special needs as outlined below.

1. The candidate will contact Examinations Office and will be sent an appropriate pack of guidelines as to what we need to know in order to assist them. (This is exactly what happens at the present.)
2. If the candidate responds with evidence of their requirements then they will be provided for in the usual way and if a reader is required a local reader will be allocated for the particular examination.
3. Full dyslexia statementing is not available on the NHS for people over the age of 25. To obtain a full statement is therefore an expensive process but the candidates GP is often able to provide a simple letter on the lines we currently use. Once the letter from the candidates GP arrives at the Examinations Office, if it is found to be inadequate in recommending a course of action, the Examinations Office will pass their details to one of a small team who will contact the candidate and conduct a telephone assessment of the candidate's needs. This will be based upon information from the BDA. Under these circumstances the 'assessor' will then report back to The Examinations Office what provisions should be made for the candidate.
4. We currently have a limited number of readers so will gradually roll out this new provision during 2015 as readers become available.

The advantages will be

Better control of readers

Assured independence of the reader

Better reader training and familiarity as their experience grows

Candidates more correctly assessed

Less work for Examination Centres to find readers

A potential reduction in the need for readers where one is not necessarily the best option.

Train the Trainers

Following extensive work by a number of Training and Education Committee members, a date and venue has been set for the pilot of the revamped Train the Trainers courses. The event will take place on Saturday 31 January and will be held in Tamworth.

Following feedback from the pilot the new course will be rolled out across the UK; we are aiming to run three or four courses a year.

Anyone interested in attending the new course should contact Steve Hartley, G0FUW, via tec.chair@rsgb.org.uk.



Morse Competency Certificate

The Training and Education Committee has been tasked with reviewing the RSGB's Morse testing scheme. This work is under way and will be making recommendations on how to improve it soon.

This work will not impact on the GB2CW slow Morse broadcasts but will hopefully make access to assessments much easier and the issuing of certificates less onerous.

A worrying trend

The latest statistics on exam candidates shows that the numbers of Foundation candidates continues to reduce each year. Whilst the numbers progressing to Intermediate and Advanced are fairly steady, or indeed, on the up, the entry level seems to be slowing down.

Clubs and Independent Trainers are asked to redouble their efforts to seek out newcomers. The RSGB will be producing guidance on communications and marketing very soon but it does need local groups to be proactive in spreading the word.

There does seem to be an increase in the number of would-be students reporting difficulties in finding courses. If there are reasons for that it would be really helpful to let us know. Just drop an e-mail to tec.chair@rsgb.org.uk.

Syllabus review

The long awaited review of the three UK exam syllabuses has begun with a meeting of representatives from the RCF Exam Committee and the RSGB Training and Education Committee.

The team will be meeting again early in the new year to look at two separate reviews of the current position to identify gaps, overlaps, areas of redundancy and new topics for inclusion. The process will take some time as all three levels need to be reviewed as a coherent package.

We will keep the training community informed of developments and consult as and when it is appropriate to do so.

New Quality Assurance Manager and Standards Manager

David Wilson M00BW has been appointed as the RCF Quality Assurance Manager and Ian Shepherd G4EVK has been appointed as Standards Manager. The appointments are announced on the GB2RS news and RCF web page at <http://www.commsfoundation.org/news/two-new-rce-appointments.html>

The Quality Assurance Manager has wasted no time in addressing the matter of reports of inspections of examinations:

I took up the QM role on an interim basis in May this year. One of the things I was always concerned about was the lack of feedback to exam centres ie an RCF appointed inspector would arrive, carry out the inspection and leave. Some inspectors might, or might not, have given an informal verbal report to the Invigilators etc. My view, considering that we rely heavily on volunteers, was that this just wasn't satisfactory.

What I instigated, and will develop further over time, is a feedback system ie after receiving the inspectors report I would review the results and send the Exam Secretary a feedback report based on the inspectors findings which would essentially show them where they were doing well, where they could do better etc.

So, if your exam centre is inspected, and I'm sure you'll get to know about it after the event, please encourage your exam secretary to circulate that feedback form to the invigilators so that they can see how they fared. I have to say that the vast majority of exam centres carry out their roles very diligently and in the main, where minor errors have crept in eg not showing the start finish times etc they take those points on board in a positive manner.



Finally I would just, on behalf of the RCE, like to thank all the exam centres, the exam secretaries and the invigilators for all." their hard work and energies in running the exam sessions on behalf of the RCE and on behalf of the inspectors thank them also for the positive way which the vast majority make them welcome when they arrive to carry out an inspection.

Training and Education Committee Chair

I have great pleasure in announcing that Philip Willis, MOPHI, has been appointed as the new Chair of the RSGB Training and Education Committee.

I will leave Philip to introduce himself more formally but I will say that he comes with an impressive CV and was appointed after a formal interview at the weekend, followed by full RSGB Board endorsement.

Philip is already a member of the training community and I will be handing over Committee tasks in the coming days and weeks, so you can expect a little parallel running for a short time.

I will not be throwing all the work over the fence and heading for the hills, far from it, I remain committed to the Training and Education work and will continue as a project team member (assuming the new chair is content with that!).

I am also the RSGB Board link to the Training and Education Committee so I will maintain an oversight and provide the route to the Board as and when required.

Thank you all for your support during my Chairmanship and I trust you will continue your work under Philip's leadership.

73, Steve, G0FUW

(no longer) RSGB Training & Education Committee Chair.

Syllabus areas needing examination items

The number of items required continues to fall. Some items are still short and submission of draft items (to exams@rsgb.org.uk) is very much appreciated. There is a £20 RSGB book token for 10 accepted items. If you don't want this personally the club may like a small stock of training books for those unable to afford their own. Do please read the guidance notes first.

Foundation

None required but nice to have one more each in 2c1 2c8 3b4 4b4 8a1 8a5 8a6 8d1 9a6 9b1

Intermediate

None required but nice to have one more each in 7b2 7c1 7c2 8e1

Advanced

Wanted: 2b1 2g1 2h1 2i1 2j1 4h1 7a2 7d1 7e1 9a1 9a2 9e1

Nice to have one each for: 2f1 3e3 3h2 3l1 3p2 4c1 4e1 4f1 4f3 4h2 4h4 4h5 4h6 4i1 4j2 4j3 4p1 4q1 4r1 5c2 7b1 7b5
7c1 7f1 8a1 8d1 9a3 9a4 9b1 9c1 9f1 10a1 10e1

Where items are shown as wanted then two items per syllabus topic will be acceptable from any one author to allow a range of authors and styles. Please do not simply change a distractor to make a different item; items on the same topic should seek to examine a different aspect of it.

All authors are warmly thanked for their inputs; it is very much appreciated.