



February 2011

Happy New Year!

Rather late, but a happy and prosperous new year to all our Tutors and a thank you for your sterling efforts. I have to make an annual report to the RCF Standards Committee shortly and following approval will be able to share much of it with you. The missing bits are details of irregularities that would enable you to identify the clubs concerned.

Regards 73 Alan
Editor for the HQ RCE Dept, ARDC and RCF EC.

Goodbye from Julie

Julie offers her best wishes and a goodbye to all the tutors and candidates she has had the pleasure of working with during her time in the RCE Department at the RSGB. She leaves at the end of March.

Julie has been amazing during her time with the RSGB. A backlog of questions had accumulated and keeping track was getting tricky to say the least. Over the last year Julie was single handed in the RCE department and more recently her backup in the AR section had also left. Despite that, not only has she kept the show on the road, but has also sorted out the backlog. There is no doubt she is leaving things in a much better state than she found them and she will be sorely missed. She goes with all our very best wishes for the future.

Moratorium in 2011

The February moratorium was useful and allowed much valuable background work to be done on the question banks. Not everybody had remembered and a few requests did arrive during the closed period. Do please remember these are closed periods; envelopes are marked with time of arrival and dealt with later. If you really have posted something urgent you do need to telephone since there is no guarantee your letter will be opened until normal service resumes. In the event there was time to deal with the few requests that did arrive.

The next moratorium is Monday 1st August to Friday 12th August.

Requests for exams up till Sunday 31st July should arrive with 10 clear working days notice and in any case by Friday 15th July.

Requests for exams from Monday 1st August till Tuesday 30th August must also arrive by Friday 15th July. Closure of the system means splitting the 10 clear days notice either side of the moratorium may not be possible. Requests arriving after close of play on the 15th July will be stored in date order and processed in time for exams from 30th August onwards.

Moratorium in 2012

We do get the odd comment about the choice of dates for the moratorium. We do find two fortnight breaks serve us well, but can be flexible on dates provided it is remembered that marking the Advanced exam needs to be avoided as does getting too close to other closed periods such as Christmas and the new year. The August newsletter will advise the dates for 2012 so any suggestions need to be received over the next four months please.

Advanced Exam dates in 2011

Wednesday 6th April 2011 at 19.00

Thursday 16th June 2011 at 19.00

Friday 5th August 2011 at 19.00

October 2011 on Sunday of RSGB Convention weekend

Monday 5th December 2011 at 19.00

Any queries? Please contact Exams Department on 01234 832700 or e-mail rce.dept@rsgb.org.uk

A Pilot Study of the Assessment of Practical Skills at Foundation and Intermediate levels

All clubs requesting Intermediate papers are now being sent the pilot paperwork. It would help if this can be requested before the course is under way so that all aspects of the pilot scheme can be addressed. Please do take part and comment; it is the best way to influence the eventual outcome.

Administration and paperwork

Some minor incidents during the year have shown that the paperwork does matter.

Not all candidates pass first time and some candidates resit at a nearby club if the timing is more suitable. The importing tutor needs the candidates' Records of Achievement if they are to allow an exam resit without having to retake the practical assessments. It is also helpful to have the exam feedback sheet to pick up on weaker points.

Tutors must ensure candidates leave with their Record of Achievement, their Examination Result Certificate (pass or fail) and their feedback sheet. It is appreciated that possession of a fail certificate implies the RoA was complete, but the importing tutor does need to see it to annotate his Instructor's Practical Assessment Record Sheet (IPARS) with the earlier details.

The IPARS is sent to the RCE Dept, normally with the exam scripts. That evidence of having completed the practical assessments is required to allow the RCE staff to upload the exam pass results to the Ofcom system. It is not reasonable to expect HQ staff to trawl back through previous IPARS sheets, possibly from other clubs, to check that the assessments had been done previously.

Otherwise they have to spend time chasing the tutor and if it was an imported resit then the chase may have to go back to the original club. All the while the poor candidate is waiting for their licence. In the last resort HQ have to ask the candidate for their RoA. Without traceable issue and completion signatures and instructor registration numbers then acceptance is at HQ discretion. That, incidentally, is why the RoA is only available to registered tutors and photocopies are not valid.

It has also been noticed that the candidate number has been entered on the RoA in some instances. That is a helpful reminder and could be written on the back, but what is wanted in

the box is the instructor registration number so that the validity of the form can be checked if necessary.

Train the Trainers

These events are demand led. If you would like to hold a TtT session in your area or at your club please contact Brian Reay G8OSN at g8osn@yahoo.co.uk. A calendar of events and available dates is at www.g8osn.org.uk. It will be helpful if you also contact your regional representative who can help with venues and alerting other clubs in the area.

Reminder of a Change to Foundation Syllabus in July 2011

The new Specification (the syllabus and supporting material) is available on the RCF RCE web site and linked from the RSGB Tutors' pages.

www.commsfoundation.org/rce/pdf/foundationssyllabus_july_2011.pdf

A question on operating etiquette and dealing with abuse will be added to syllabus section 8 and the paper will comprise 26 questions with a pass mark of 19. The text below will appear in a reprint of the Foundation Licence Now course book.

Etiquette

It is important to remember that anyone may be listening including short wave listeners considering becoming amateurs. Abuse and bad language are not part of amateur radio and on-air transmissions should always be polite and respectful. It is also worth remembering that radio has no boundaries and your remarks may be heard in other countries with different cultures and beliefs. Indeed it is in being able to talk with such people that gives amateur radio the richness it enjoys.

Sadly there are those who do seem to find entertainment in disrupting other people's conversations, playing music and being generally abusive. This kind of behaviour has no place in amateur radio. If you do overhear such material or feel it is directed at you the important thing to remember is that you must not react or respond to it. That is often what the abuser wants you to do so they can send even more abuse. Talking to an unlicensed station is a breach of your own licence and could get you a bad name or reported to the authorities as well. Simply find another channel or frequency. If it is on a calling frequency or a repeater wait a while and see if the problem has ceased. The abuser should not even know he has been heard.

Advice on many aspects of operating and ethics can be found on the RSGB web site at www.rsgb.org/operating/. It is worth reading!

Persistent abuse can be reported to the RSGB's Amateur Radio Observation Service (AROS) but any formal action requires good evidence, dates, times, locations and recordings and will also have to take its turn in being followed up. Obviously you must not put yourself in an awkward position but AROS operates in a strictly confidential manner with RSGB headquarters at Bedford as the only contact point.

There are other minor amendments and each book has a web errata page linked from the tutors' web pages. There is also a printed A4 handout available from HQ or from http://www.rsgb.org/tutors/pdf/good_operating_practices.pdf

Conduct of Examinations

Sadly there is still evidence that the rules of conduct of examinations are not always being followed. In many cases there is no initial intention to obtain a false result but an incident causes an awkward situation and those concerned take an expedient approach rather than the correct approach.

It should be remembered that the need for integrity and adherence to the standards required also applies to the practical assessments. Suppose, for example, that an equipment failure occurs and some of the candidates miss the opportunity to complete their assessments. Spare equipment should be available and there should be some slack time in the programme to absorb any delays. Candidates must have completed the assessments before sitting the examination and course planning should anticipate and allow for such mishaps.

Construction kits

The choice of kit to construct for the Intermediate practical is left to the candidate's discretion in consultation with his or her tutor. The syllabus requires it to be relevant to amateur radio but makes no other stipulation. General advice is that it should contain one or two active devices and 20-30 soldered joints. That is simply to give some feel of the level required to allow the assessor to make a sensible judgement without being so prescriptive that a particular item is unintentionally excluded.

One kit supplier has made contact to observe that a rush for a particular item, without prior warning, could result in delays and incurs additional costs when each candidate orders separately, usually at the very last minute. He asks that he be warned in advance by the club and reminds that a bulk purchase often attracts a discount.

There is also merit in discussing the choice of kit as the supplier may know of constructional features that beginners find difficult or may be able to suggest alternatives that might be about to be introduced, or could prove more useful to the candidate after the course had completed. It was noticed, for example, that a transmitter was ordered but not the matching receiver. Which is more likely to be used in the months ahead?

Question Writing

The EC is most grateful to the authors of draft questions. We are now giving RSGB book tokens for 10 accepted questions and the feedback to authors is making a slow start. The delays are down to me and I apologise for that.

The guide is at <http://www.commsfoundation.org/rce/exams/>

Click on the Question Submission guide, the list of areas needing questions and the template which you may use to ensure you give all the bits of information required. We ask that authors copy the submission sheet as a longer single document rather than lots of separate documents which are harder to handle and easier to lose.

Thank you.