



## June 2010

### August Moratorium

The August moratorium is from Monday 2 August until Friday 13 August 2010. Requests for exam papers should be received please by Friday 16<sup>th</sup> July for exams on any date in August. After that date papers will be held in order of receipt and processed in time for exams from Wednesday 1 September. Please remember Monday 30 August is a bank holiday and there will be no post that day.

### Advanced Exam dates 2010 and 2011

Friday 6 August at 18:30                      enrolment closing Wednesday 7 July  
Sunday 10 October at 10.30  
Monday 22 November at 18:30.

#### 2011 Advanced exam dates:-

Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011 at 19.00  
Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011 at 19.00  
Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at 19.00  
Friday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2011 at 19.00  
October 2011 on Sunday of RSGB Convention weekend  
Monday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2011 at 19.00

Any queries please contact Exams Department on 01234 832700 or e-mail [rce.dept@rsgb.org.uk](mailto:rce.dept@rsgb.org.uk)

### All Three Exams Under One Roof

The ARDC will again be arranging to hold Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced examinations at the RSGB Convention scheduled for 8 to 10 October. Candidates are reminded to plan to complete the practical activities with a local assessor prior to the Convention. Further details will be published in due course.

### Examiners' Report on examinations in 2009

The Examination Committee of the RCF have published their report on examinations in 2009. This is available at <http://www.commsfoundation.org/rce/committees/>

1939 candidates took the Foundation exam, 704 took the Intermediate and 426 sat the Advanced. It is pleasing to see both the number and proportion of candidates moving through to Advanced has increased again. The clubs and tutors certainly deserve the credit for this. Nonetheless there still seems to be a shortage of opportunities to sit the Advanced examination.

## Foundation

Almost 88% of candidates passed the Foundation exam, a commendable result. The best topic, pleasing to note, was Safety at 90% and the poorest was Transmitters and Receivers with 76% of the questions being correctly answered. The students' answers suggest they do not understand the functions of each block,

## Intermediate

Here 94% passed and Safety kept its top slot with 91% on the questions correctly answered. Transmitters and Receivers remained the poorest subject at 70%. That is a subject where students need to understand the material as questions focus more on why rather than what.

## Advanced

68% passed, a sustained increase over the last three years and a commendable result for which tutors should be congratulated. Licence Conditions took the honours in first place at 87%, Safety having slipped (not too literally hopefully) to 80%. Feeders and Antennas was the poorest performing topic area at 53%. Reflections in feeders, the effect of standing waves on impedance matching and return loss are causing difficulties for candidates. Transmitters and Receivers scored 62% which is an improvement on previous years.

Many candidates failed to take account of the velocity factor in coaxial cable when calculating lengths, and the difference between Power Flux Density and Field Strength was not well appreciated.

## General comments

It is suggested that the meanings of units such as power flux density and field strength are learnt as formal definitions. PFD in  $W/m^2$  obeys an inverse square law whereas Field Strength in  $V/m$  is a simple reciprocal law of distance, twice the distance is half the field strength. This has a direct parallel with the potential difference across and power dissipated in a resistor.

One demonstration idea is to slightly inflate a balloon and draw a square on it, now inflate the balloon until the square has doubled in size and note the area has increased by a factor of four. The same power is spread over an area four times the size, the power flux density is a quarter of its previous value. By this "power balloon" method the tutor is seeking to associate power with area, using the balloon as a 'memory hook'.

The very low marks achieved by a few candidates was cause for concern and highlights the need for tutors to be aware of how all their candidates are learning and have a strategy in place to help those candidates who would most benefit from an extra evening of more individual attention.

Some tutors felt the report was critical of their teaching. The EC apologises if that was the impression given, it was not intended. For the future the proposal is to confine the report to factual comments on the results and offer what it is hoped will be constructive comments through the medium of these newsletters.

## Finding training providers and exam centres

The high numbers of newcomers seeking and taking the Foundation exam has caused some difficulty in finding training providers and examination centres. The RSGB web site lists the various clubs, providers and exam centres. A small ARDC working group held a meeting recently to see how bad the problem really is and if anything can be done to improve the situation. The working group identified some quick wins to make it easier for newcomers to find information about amateur radio and to locate training providers and exam centres via the RSGB website - most of the required information is already there, it is just not easy to navigate. The group also identified a longer term solution that will be explored further with HQ staff.

One of the things that tutors can do to help this process is to ensure that their details shown on the RSGB Local Info pages are up to date. If you no longer offer courses, or you have expanded your range of courses, please let HQ know so that the web pages can be kept up to date.

## **Challenging Exam Questions**

Hopefully the number of faulty items in the banks is now very low, but it would be foolish to assume there are none. Similarly the EC tries to see questions through the eyes of the candidates, including younger ones. However what proportion of the less clear questions are challenged?

Sometimes the most obvious phraseology does not close off a wrong interpretation; sometimes extracting relevant information from a surfeit of it is part of the assessment. Nonetheless questions that confuse or seem wrong should be challenged. The EC would far sooner reply 'no fault found' to a couple of challenges than leave an unsatisfactory question in the bank.

## **Course Planning**

During correspondence it has become apparent that courses run over a single weekend do not allow optimum completion of the REP (was REQP). In particular, students are enrolled for the Foundation examination well before any possible learning difficulties have been identified and this can lead to potential failures as well as pressures on tutors. Whilst holding the course over a single weekend is not common, courses held on two days a week or a fortnight apart does seem to be a common and successful format. However this does not allow tutors to get to know the candidate prior to posting the REP and curtails the ability to identify weaknesses and provide extra tuition or study time before the exam is upon them. This does seem less than ideal, and it seems right to ask if it can be done better?

Evening courses over a small number of weeks are a solution and may work well when the club meets weekly or has its own premises. In London and other major conurbations commuting is the order of the day and getting home between 6.30 and 7.30 is quite normal. That is often too late to rest, eat and get to a class.

The tutor reflector is an opportunity for short comments but a longer reasoned article can appear here, contributions are welcome. Comments and suggestions to [newsletter@rsgb.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@rsgb.org.uk)

## **Feedback**

Both the ARDC and the EC are interested to know what more can be done to help tutors in delivering their courses and in increasing the number of candidates continuing their studies through to the higher level licenses.

## **Train the Trainers**

The TtT meeting in April in N London at LEFARS was well attended and well received.

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](mailto:g8osn@yahoo.co.uk). A calendar of events and available dates is at [www.g8osn.org.uk](http://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.

## **Log keeping and EMC**

Comments have been received from time to time that log keeping is no longer a licence requirement. That is true but the merit of keeping a log for awards, contests and EMC purposes is still mentioned in the syllabus. Questions are asked where comparing times of complaint with the log is an appropriate answer.

Licensees are required to conduct tests from time to time and may therefore be asked to show that they have done that. A log is not the only option but it is a simple one. Licensees may also be required to keep a log if allegations are made; an existing log is a substantial asset in that respect and, if kept up to date, may well be taken as evidence of when you were not operating.

## **Submitting Draft Questions**

There are still some gaps in the Question banks. The RCF web site has a list of areas where questions are needed and guidance on writing questions. It has been agreed that an RSGB book token is available to authors submitting 10 or more accepted questions. The arrangements for giving feedback to authors have also been improved. There had been delays in entering submitted questions and that had impacted knowing where the gaps still were. There is still a backlog, particularly at Advanced level, but the RCF web site will shortly have the list of where questions are needed.

## **Change to Foundation Syllabus in July 2011**

Recent meetings with Ofcom identified a desirable improvement to the Foundation syllabus which will be expanded to include a question on operating etiquette and dealing with abuse. A question on this will be added to section 8 and the paper will comprise 26 questions with a pass mark of 19. This change will be implemented from 1 July 2011.

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

Since the introduction of the three tier licensing structure the assessment of practical skills as written in the syllabuses has perhaps been taken as a 'given'. Those volunteers concerned with such assessment have been left to get on with the job as best they may.

However, if amateur radio examinations are to be given the credit they deserve, particularly in terms of other qualifications that the public are being offered, the RCF must carefully check all its examination practices and procedures. This process has been taking place behind the scenes for about four years.

Concentrating purely on the practical elements of the Foundation and Intermediate examinations, how can a candidate in Surrey, for example, be sure that their practical skills have been assessed in the same way and to the same standards as a candidate in Northern Ireland? At the moment neither the candidates, the assessors nor the RCF can be sure that they have all been assessed in the same fair manner.

To address this matter the RCF is proposing a pilot study. In order to conduct the study within a reasonable time frame centres that run courses frequently are more likely to be asked to help than those that don't. Even so, it is expected that the study will take several months.

What we are hoping to achieve is an assessment system that is obviously fair to all candidates, recognises the contribution made by those involved in teaching students of amateur radio as the assessment process evolves, that is transparent, and helps to foster a population of new radio amateurs that have the necessary skills to use an increasingly crowded radio spectrum.

We very much hope you will take part if you are selected but it is optional. The more constructive input we receive from centres the more likely we are to make practical assessments fairer to the candidate and straightforward for the assessor to apply.

Clearly before any kind of assessment can be made about the merits of a candidate, there have to be standards in place to act as a yardstick against which they can be compared. The guidance notes that accompany the pilot study do contain standards, but it is important to realise that these are not set in stone. If our pilot study reveals that they are unworkable or defective in some other way then we can work towards a more appropriate solution.

If you agree to take part you will receive a pack of instructions on how to run the pilot study including a questionnaire. The questionnaire is loosely structured so that you may offer constructive comments on what you feel went well and what did not.

Clearly this pilot study will demand some forbearance on the part of tutors and candidates, but we hope, with your help, we may be able to produce an assessment system that justly rewards the candidate for their effort and enables the tutor and assessor to impart their skills effectively.

Anthony Vinters GOWFG  
RCF

## **Keeping in Touch**

Formal examination announcements are made on the RCF web site at <http://www.commsfoundation.org/rce/>

Normally the announcement will also be made on the RSGB tutors web site <http://www.rsgb.org/tutors/general/>

Often a few words will appear in the newsletter, although that can be a month or two after the first announcement.

Announcements on the RCF and RSGB pages will also be mentioned on the tutors' reflector. This is an informal way of keeping in touch with other tutors and is moderated by Brian Reay, the ARDC chairman, contact on [g8osn@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:g8osn@yahoo.co.uk) It can be used to immediately reflect incoming e-mails, provide a daily digest or accessed via your web browser where other items such as uploaded files are available. If, like me, you dislike an unending stream of e-mails the web browser approach is preferable. All details and help joining from Brian.