

Report

The Annual Report of the RSGB Examination Standards Committee

June 2026

This report covers the operation of the Amateur Radio Examinations during the calendar year 2025. The Examinations Standards Committee (ESC) meeting held on 9 May 2026 at the Civil Service Club in London reviewed the reports from the various officers and sub-groups and considered several other matters including progression through the licence levels. Based on the reports received, it was concluded that as of 31 December 2025, the Amateur Radio Examinations are/were fit for purpose for the issue of UK amateur radio licences.

In 2025 the RSGB Examinations Department (ED) and the Examinations and Syllabus Review Group (ESRG), overseen by the ESC continued their main task of operating the amateur radio examinations process. The total enrolment on all examinations was 7.4% lower than in 2024, due largely to a decrease in the number of Foundation candidates. However, these numbers are still well above those in 2018/19.

The Committee notes that this performance owes much to the hard work and enthusiasm of volunteer tutors, exam secretaries and invigilators, and the RSGB Exams Department team.

Anthony J Kent, G8PBH

ESC.Chair@RSGB.org.uk

1. Introduction

The role of the RSGB Examination Standards Committee is to ensure the examinations system is fit for purpose so that licensed radio amateurs can enjoy their hobby legally and safely, without causing interference to other spectrum users and the public, and be good citizens on-air. In addition, that they understand how to get the best out of the hobby at whatever level they choose to operate, and that they have enough knowledge and understanding to progress to higher levels if they wish. The ESC assesses the quality of the examinations and makes sure that it is uniform across the United Kingdom so that everyone, including those with special needs, reaches the same level of attainment. The ESC also ensures that Full level is broadly aligned with HAREC so that UK amateurs can continue to benefit from reciprocal licensing arrangements.

The annual reports of the Examination Standards Committee are published on the RSGB website, <http://rsgb.org/main/about-us/committees/examination-standards-committee/>. Other relevant documents are also available on this website, including the terms of reference of the Examination Standards Committee and the agreement between Ofcom and the RSGB.

The data and analysis presented in this report covers the examination period 1 January to 31 December 2025.

2. Membership of ESC

The terms of reference and constitution of the committee are set down in the Schedule of Terms between Ofcom and RSGB. The membership of the Examination Standards Committee at the time of writing this report is as follows:

Prof. Tony Kent, G8PBH, Chairman
Paul Chapman, Ofcom
Andrew Lenton, G8UUG, Chair of the Examinations and Syllabus Review Group
Dave Wilson, M0OBW, Examinations Quality Manager
Graham Smith, G4NMD, RSGB Board Liaison
Nigel Barker, M0HZR, Examinations Standards Manager
Flt. Lt. Timothy Stanley, G4TXK, Air Cadet Organisation
Steve Thomas, M1ACB, RSGB General Manager, Exam Dept representative
Prof. Hugh Griffiths, G4CNV, University College London, Independent Member
Murray Niman, G6JYB, BAE Systems AI-Labs, Independent Member
Dr. Donard de Cogan, M0KRK, Independent Member

At the 9th May 2026 meeting, Flt. Lt. Timothy Stanley, Hugh Griffiths, Steve Thomas and Graham Smith were absent, and apologies were noted. Len Paget, GM4ONX, represented the RSGB Board, and Carol Meredith and Barbara Burnell attended on behalf of the RSGB Exams Department.

3. Assessment of Overall Examination Performance

The committee received reports on the management and performance of the examination processes from the Examinations and Syllabus Review Group (ESRG), the Examination Quality Assurance Manager and Examination Standards Manager (EQAM&ESM), the RSGB Examination Department (ED). These reports and any discussions regarding them are summarised in the sections below.

The Examination Standards Committee is satisfied that the Foundation, Intermediate, Full and Direct to Full examination syllabuses effective in 2025 were/are suitable for the award of Amateur Radio licences. Further, the examinations are compatible with the CEPT harmonised arrangements set out in Recommendations T/R 61-01 and T/R 61-02. The committee will continue to review the syllabuses and examinations to ensure compatibility with international and national requirements and to respond to developments relevant to the hobby.

4. Review of the Report from RSGB HQ Examination Department (ED)

4.1 The year in retrospect

The total number of exams administered by the RSGB Examinations Department in 2025 was 2783 (3005 for 2024) a decrease of 7.39% compared to the previous year.

We began testing against the V1.6 syllabus for Foundation, Intermediate and Full levels on 1 September 2024. The new syllabus testing for Direct to Full began on 1 October 2024. Paper exams were discontinued during December 2024 except where approved for special needs candidates. In 2025, there was only one paper exam sat.

Published timescales for providing papers and results were maintained.

4.2 Exam statistics

Overall, there were a total of 242 fewer candidates across all exam levels in 2025. 177 fewer at Foundation, 57 fewer at Intermediate, 26 fewer at Full level and 18 more at Direct to Full level when compared to 2024.

In 2025 there were 78 absentees (58 in 2025). 50 for Foundation level (48), 15 (7) for Intermediate level, 13 (3) for Full level and 0 for Direct to Full in both years. The absentees have been removed from the figures displayed below for 2024 and 2025 but were included in the numbers for 2023.

The pass rate has increased at Foundation, Intermediate and Full level, but Direct to Full pass rate slightly decreased. A total of 2378 candidates were successful during 2025 compared to 2508 in 2024.

We understand that 96 candidates passed the Air Cadet exam in 2025, with 53 requesting a candidate number from the RSGB for Foundation equivalence. This is an increase from the numbers in 2024 which were 63 candidates that passed and 38 requesting a candidate number.

The cadet figures are NOT included in the statistics below as we only administer the result paperwork.

Level	2025				2024		2023	
	Candidates vs 2024	Candidates vs 2023	Candidates	Pass Rate	Candidates	Pass Rate	Candidates	Pass Rate
Foundation	-8.17%	+32.60%	1989	89.1%	2166	87.6%	1500	85.5%
Intermediate	-12.4%	-3.36%	402	90.3%	459	87.4%	416	86.8%
Full	-8.64%	-4.84%	275	76.7%	301	63.5%	289	66.1%
Direct to Full	+85.71%	+44.44%	39	82.1%	21	85.7%	27	44.4%
Total			2705		2947		2232	

Table 1. Numbers of candidates registered for the exams at each level for 2025 compared with previous two years.
Note: the numbers for 2025 and 2024 do not include absentees.

4.3 Trends

In 2025 the number of exams at Foundation, Intermediate and Full decreased compared with 2024. The number of exams at Direct to Full level increased significantly.

Historical trend charts are presented in the discussion of progression later in this report.

4.4 Special needs exam provision

Ofcom has requested that the pass rates for candidates requiring special exam provision are formally monitored and reported.

There were 27 candidates requiring special assistance during 2025 and this decreased from 48 in the previous year. The pass rate across all levels was 84%, broadly in line with other candidates.

4.5 Direct to Full

There were 39 Direct to Full candidates in 2025, 44% more than in the previous year. However, the pass rate decreased slightly from 85% in 2024 to 82% in 2025.

5. Review of the Report from the Examinations and Syllabus Review Group (ESRG) Chair

5.1 General

The ESRG gained three new RSGB members in 2025: Peter Thomson, GM1XEA, Trevor Harvey, G6APW, and Ian Marsh, M0UAT. The Group lost Len Paget, who stood down from his RSGB Board role, but have gained Graham J. Smith, G4NMD, who is a new Board Liaison member. Mark Savage, M0XIC, also left the group to devote more time to his Board responsibilities. The ESRG membership remains strong in numbers and range of expertise.

The ESRG has had a busy 2025, meeting fortnightly, it has reviewed the D2F syllabus and has been working through the entire question data base reviewing the questions, which has involved about 20 hours work per person outside of the formal meetings. Completion of the question bank review was required before the publication of the entire Full level question bank as had been agreed in the 2024 ESC meeting.

During 2025, the EQAM began compiling data on how individual questions were answered to identify any questions with success rates significantly below the pass rates for that paper as a whole. The data allowed the Group to find questions where a significant proportion of candidates chose the same distractor instead of the correct answer. For example if 50-80% always chose the same distractor, we wanted to see if it was too attractive due to ambiguity. To this end the ESRG held meetings to analyse the results. This led to changes to the stem of a few questions and also to a few distractors. However, as a result of this process it also became apparent that there are some subject areas, e.g. dBs, where there are weaknesses in the preparation of candidates. The data gathering is on going and will be reviewed from time to time, as well as used to help assessing challenges in future.

5.2 Challenges and queries

The number of challenges was reduced considerably in 2025. The ESRG considered 14 challenges and, of those, two were accepted but did not change the outcome of the exam. No formal appeals were received for consideration by the ESC. It is possible that the recent review of the question bank has contributed to the reduction in the number of challenges.

5.3 Tutor engagement activities

Although many ESRG members are active tutors or have been tutors in the recent past, the Group has been looking for ways to increase engagement with the wider tutor community. During 2025 the ESRG trialled establishing a Tutor Review Group (TRG), who would have the opportunity to review documentation, e.g. syllabus updates and mock exams, and comment on them before public release.

Eight tutors volunteered for the TRG, and their first task was to review the updated Direct to Full syllabus. The TRG submitted around 90 suggestions for changes, many minor (e.g. minor punctuation errors) and some more substantial. The ESRG accepted around 40 – 50% of the suggestions and made changes to the syllabus. The whole process took some time as the TRG was set up over the summer holiday period. It also took the ESRG time to consider all the TRG's comments in its meetings communicate by email. Further rounds of review were requested, which inevitably would have added more delays to the publication.

The ESRG proposed to hold an in-person meeting with the TRG as a more efficient way to resolve differences than email communication. This would also provide an opportunity for ESRG team building. This proposal was approved and the RSGB agreed to fund the costs of a centrally located meeting venue and travelling costs for the whole ESRG and TRG. However, it was not possible to agree a date when a 'critical mass' of members were able to attend.

It was regrettably agreed that the trial had been a failure as it resulted in excessive delays to the publication of exams documents, and the best approach for the future is to encourage any tutors to bring their concerns to ESRG meetings on an ad hoc basis.

6 Review of the Report from the Examination Quality Assurance Manager (EQAM) & Examinations Standards Manager (ESM)

6.1 Examination Results 2025

For the numbers of candidates, refer to Sec. 4. After the increase of candidate numbers in 2024 exam overall numbers in 2025 decreased to a grand total of 2,705 (2,947).

Overall the pass rates improved slightly with Foundation improving from 87.6% in 2024 to 89.1% in 2025, Intermediate increasing by almost 3% to 90.3% and Full increased significantly to 76.7% from 63.5% in 2024. The pass rate at D2F reduced slightly to 82.1% from 85.7%, with the number of D2F candidates increasing from 21 in 2024 to 39 in 2025.

6.2 Examination Breakdown 2025

The charts below show the marks achieved by online candidates taking the examinations in 2025.

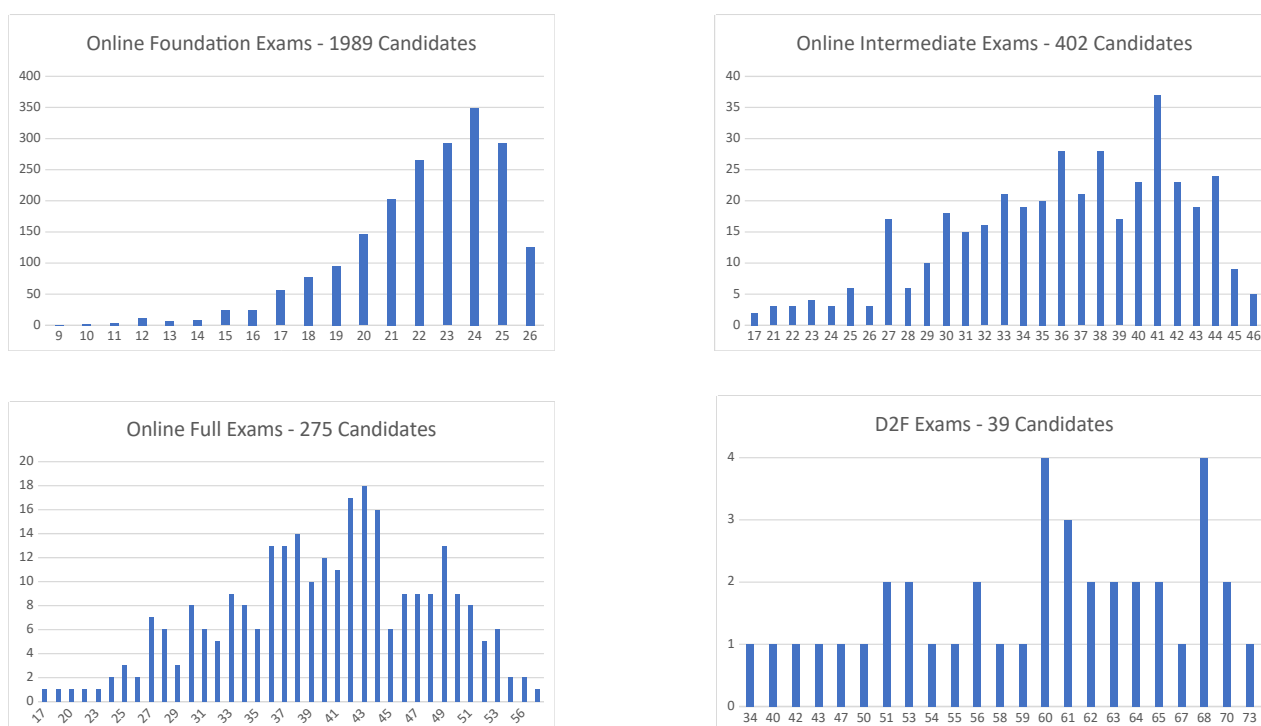


Figure 1. Distribution of marks achieved by candidates in exams taken online. The horizontal axis is the number of questions answered correctly and the vertical axis is number of candidates achieving that mark.

6.3 Breakdown of candidate numbers by region, gender and age

There continues to be a good spread of candidates across the country:

Foundation (including clubs)														
Region														Grand Total
Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Jan-25	5	5	16	14	10	4	6	7	25	17	11	10	8	139
Feb-25	5	6	24	17	11	3	4	4	20	20	15	21	11	162
Mar-25	10	7	20	25	17		10	5	21	28	17	21	17	199
Apr-25	4	10	20	23	16	4	2	16	21	23	11	13	17	181
May-25	5	7	17	18	11	1	6	6	21	25	9	20	9	160
Jun-25	4	10	18	19	13	2	3		26	29	10	19	9	163
July-25	4	11	18	12	19	3	7		22	25	8	12	7	154
Aug-25	7	5	25	18	17	3	7	3	22	13	15	13	11	160
Sept-25	8	7	14	21	19	2	11	2	22	16	11	14	9	156
Oct-25	6	8	12	18	15	3	9	7	23	25	13	17	7	165
Nov-25	5	7	22	16	25	2	10	8	22	48	8	16	6	198
Dec-25	5	9	14	23	8	2	6	2	20	20	14	24	5	152
Grand Total	68	92	220	224	181	29	81	60	265	289	142	200	116	1989

Intermediate (including clubs)														
Region														Grand Total
Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Jan-25			2	1	1			1	4	2		1		12
Feb-25		2	4	1	3			1	4	3	1	3	3	25
Mar-25			3	5	2		1	4	3	3		3	4	28
Apr-25	1	3	6	6				2	8	4	7	9	4	52
May-25	1	3	10	8	6	1		1	4	12	4	6	6	62
Jun-25		1	4	3	4		2	1	2	6	2	6	4	35
July-25		1	2	5	5	1	1	1	2	4	4	1		28
Aug-25	2	2	2	3	5		1	8	7	2	2	3	3	40
Sept-25	1		4	2	2	1	1	1	8	7	4	1	1	37
Oct-25	2	1	5	2		1	1	1	10	8		1	2	35
Nov-25	3	1			1	1	1	5	5	4	4	3	2	30
Dec-25	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	4			1	19
Grand Total	8	18	45	37	30	6	8	15	60	63	32	37	30	402

Full (including clubs)														
Region														Grand Total
Row Labels	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Jan-25	2	3	4	5	5	1	1	3	6	5	5	4	3	48
Feb-25	2	1		6	4		3	3	6	1			1	27
Mar-25	2	1		2			1		2	2	1	5	1	17
Apr-25	1		2	3	1		3		3	2	2	1	2	21
May-25		1	3	3					1			3	1	12
Jun-25	1		2	4		2	2	1	1	4	2	2		21
July-25		1	2	5	1		1	7	2	3	2	2	1	27
Aug-25	2		2	3				5	2		1		2	17
Sept-25	2			1	2		3			2		2	1	13
Oct-25				2	1	1					3		2	9
Nov-25	1	1	1					4	3	1		2	1	14
Dec-25	1	3	6	5	3	1	3	1	6	4	1	6	5	49
Grand Total	14	11	22	39	17	5	13	9	38	35	16	26	18	275

D2F														
Region														Grand Total
Month	1	3	4	5	8	9	10	11	12	13	14			
Jan-25			1			3					1			5
Feb-25							1				1			2
Mar-25				2		1		1						4
Apr-25						1								1
May-25			1		1	1	3				1			7
Jun-25	1					1				1	1			4
Jul-25							2	1	1					4
Aug-25	1				1	2	1							5
Sep-25						1								1
Oct-25											1			1
Nov-25						1	1				1			3
Dec-25	1						1							2
Grand Total	1	2	2	2	2	11	9	2	1	1	6			39

Table 2. Numbers of candidates by region at the different examination levels.

2025 - FOUNDATION - ONLINE EXAMS							2025 - INTERMEDIATE - ONLINE EXAMS						
Age	Total		Male		Female		Age	Total		Male		Female	
0-9	2		1		1		0-9	1		1		0	
10-14	57		49		8		10-14	7		5		2	
15-19	132		107		25		15-19	11		8		3	
	191	10.0%	157	8.8%	34	28.3%		19	4.8%	14	3.6%	5	1.3%
20-29	210	11.0%	195	10.9%	15	12.5%	20-29	38	9.7%	37	9.4%	1	0.3%
30-39	249	13.0%	228	12.7%	21	17.5%	30-39	43	10.9%	37	9.4%	6	1.5%
40-49	346	18.1%	332	18.6%	14	11.7%	40-49	74	18.8%	72	18.3%	2	0.5%
50-59	483	25.3%	458	25.6%	25	20.8%	50-59	124	31.6%	120	30.5%	4	1.0%
60-69	317	16.6%	308	17.2%	9	7.5%	60-69	69	17.6%	67	17.0%	2	0.5%
70-79	101	5.3%	99	5.5%	2	1.7%	70-79	24	6.1%	23	5.9%	1	0.3%
80+	12	0.6%	12	0.7%		0.0%	80+	2	0.5%	2	0.5%		0.0%
	1909		1789	93.7%	120	6.3%		393		372	94.7%	21	5.3%

2025 - FULL - ONLINE EXAMS						
Age	Total		Male		Female	
0-9	1		1			
10-14	1		1			
15-19	18		17		1	
	20	7.7%	19	7.3%	1	0.4%
20-29	15	5.8%	14	5.4%	1	0.4%
30-39	27	10.4%	23	8.9%	4	1.5%
40-49	52	20.1%	51	19.7%	1	0.4%
50-59	81	31.3%	80	30.9%	1	0.4%
60-69	48	18.5%	46	17.8%	2	0.8%
70-79	15	5.8%	14	5.4%	1	0.4%
80+	1	0.4%	1	0.4%		0.0%
	259		248	95.8%	11	4.2%

Table 3. Breakdown of candidate numbers at the different exam levels by gender and age

Overall the % female to male candidates in 2025 remained stable at 6%. Of the 1,989 candidates taking the Foundation exam in 2025 only 138 (110) were female (6.9%), with 22 (16) out of 402 (5.4%) at Intermediate and only 13 (6) out of 275 (4.7%) at Full. Once again a single female candidate took the D2F exam in 2025.

At Foundation level in 2025 the 40 – 59 age range accounted for some 43.4% (47.2% in 2024) of candidates taking the examinations. The number of youngsters taking the Foundation examination in 2025, 191, rose slightly compared with 2024 (133).

At Intermediate and Full level the 40 – 59 age ranges accounted for 50.4% (48.5%) at Intermediate level and 51.4% (53.7%) at Full level.

6.4 In-year progression

In 2025 a total of 158 (104) new online Foundation candidates (ie they took their Foundation examination in 2025) sat and passed the Intermediate examination in 2025. This represents approximately 39.3% (24.4%) of candidates taking the Intermediate examination in 2025.

In a similar way, of those 158 a total of 62 (51) of those “new in 2025” Foundation candidates sat and passed both the Intermediate and Full level examinations in 2025. This represents some 22.5% (17.2%) of all Full level candidates taking the examination in 2025.

A total of 39 (25) Intermediate candidates who took their Intermediate exam in 2024 went on to take the Full examination in 2025.

6.5 Challenges, appeals and inspections 2025

As was the case in 2024 no challenges were received in respect of the manner in which examinations were run, i.e. using remote invigilation. Candidates continue to praise the RSGB for the way they’d made examinations much more accessible. A very small number of candidates had technical issues such as the temporary loss of an internet connection. The majority of those were resolved at the time, i.e. the internet connection returned and invigilators were able to resume the examination. As per previous years if the internet connection didn’t re-connect in a timely manner, candidates were offered a free re-sit at a time to suit them.

A small number of “informal” challenges were received in respect of examination questions, with no appeals as to the outcome of those challenges.

As part of the remote invigilation process all online examinations are recorded in case of challenges etc. with recordings being deleted after 5 working days. In 2025 a team of 16 (24) remote invigilators invigilated approximately 108 (110) examination sessions per month. As per previous years at least 5 recordings per week are reviewed.

6.6 Face to face Club Examinations

Face to face exams in a traditional club environment remained relatively low in 2025 with one single exam being paper based. A total of 26 (76) unique clubs ran 63 (161) exam sessions in 2025 (2024). Of those 63 sessions 46 (115) were at Foundation level, 7 (37) at Intermediate level, 8 (13) at Full level and 2 (1) at Direct to Full. The breakdown of those exam sessions is as follows:-

Foundation – 1 (167) candidate sat a paper exam whilst 130 (81) took the exam online.

Intermediate – 20 (63 - 33 paper, 30 online) took the exam online.

Full – 11 (34 - 30 paper, 4 online) took the exam online.

Note: As the data in this section has been collected from various places it's no surprise that when drilling down into the detail the actual numbers may or may not align perfectly with data in other reports e.g. account being taken of resits, no shows etc.

6.7 Question Analysis

For a long time the pass rate at Full level has hovered around the 60 – 65% rate.

It had been recognised for some time that 3 of the 9 syllabus sections were always answered poorly, i.e. Technical Aspects, Transmitters and Receivers and Measurement and Construction so in 2025 an exercise took place to analyse how well Full level questions were being answered.

Data was gathered from April 2025 through to February 2026 to see how each of the Full level candidates answered the questions that they got wrong – see screen grab below:

16	17	Month	GENDER	AGE	RESULT	MARK	1	2	9	10	20	21	32	33	36	37	38	39	48	49	50	51	56	57	58
18	Apr-25	Male	46	FAIL	33				7645 B	7764 A					7752 C	653 C		250 B			7954 C			7998 B	3441 B
38	Apr-25	Male	79	Pass	36				110 D		8029 B	7774 A	3738 C												
39	May-25	Male	64	Pass	51									6037 C				6073 A							
40	May-25	Male	54																						
55	Jun-25	Male	20	Pass	39				106 A		7700 B		3817 A										6060 C		
56	Jun-25	Male	57																						
57	Jun-25	Male	68	Pass	52													6071 A	73 A						
77	Jul-25	Female	62	Pass	36	8126 D							7916 B		8123 B	3797 B		370 B			6064 A				
78	Jul-25	Male	67	Pass	37	3972 C	8121 B	7770 A		7699 A				7918 A											7966 B
79	Jul-25	Male	61	Pass	37		8082 A			472 B		829 C	7919 C	6031 D	624 D	364 D							7967 B	3424 C	
80	Jul-25	Male	15	Pass	44			7686 D						6042 D	627 A	7936 B	369 B						4039 A	7644	
81	Jul-25	Male	63	Pass	49			462 C	323 D	4082 C			602 D												
82	Jul-25	Male	80	Pass	47							3739 A			7926 C									7998 D	
83	Jul-25	Male	28	Pass	56					7697 C															
109	Aug-25	Male	27	FAIL	27			124 D	3428 C	3408 A	554 C	718 A	600 A	624 A		7825 C	7711 A	2856 A					6055 A		
110	Aug-25	Male	72	Pass	41			459 A			6028 B	543 A	575 C										6063 A	3576 A	
111	Aug-25	Male	42	Pass	37					540 B	716 D	587 D	718 A	852 C			250 B								
127	Sep-25	Male	54	Pass	47			6019 D	3593 D				600 B												7967 B
128	Sep-25	Male	28	Pass	37			673 B	3322 B	409 B	3602 A	600 B	573 B				364 D						3614 C	7759 D	
129	Sep-25	Male	13	Pass	35				3322 B			594 D	3739 D							4099 A			7966 B	3647 C	7964 C
147	Nov-25	Female	32	Pass	48									3673 A									7964 C	6063 D	4039 D
148	Nov-25	Male	65	Pass	41							3739 A			7818 A								7884 C		
205	Dec-25	Male	45	Pass	44			3585 B		7901 D			602 A			250 B								7997 B	
206	Dec-25	Male	54	Pass	47					98 A			7917 C					6070 D					6063 D		
207	Jan-26	Male	50	Pass	51				3983 C		3410 C											4005 C			
208	Jan-26	Male	61	FAIL	32			170 A	3361 C		3349 B	718 A	7922 D						8052 A				140 D		
209	Jan-26	Male	55	FAIL																					
280	Feb-26	Male	40	Pass	35				3593 D	384 B						7711 D							6063 D	7966 B	
281	Feb-26	Male	60	Pass	38			7666 A	7765 B	3629 A		7914 C											8045 A	6055 D	

Once that data had been collected a table was created listing the 5 most poorly answered question per month and a similar table created showing the 20 most poorly answered questions overall – see screen grabs:

	Month	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26
	Count	21	13	23	27	17	14	9	14	51	60	15
	WrongQs	424	249	332	487	348	266	130	277	735	905	276
	AvgWrong	20.19	19.15	14.43	18.04	20.47	19.00	14.44	19.79	14.41	15.08	18.40
Top Wrong Qs	1	8008 [6]	7666 [4]	3987 [5]	3406 [7]	267 [4]	3739 [4]	250 [2]	3555 [4]	3410 [9]	6063 [18]	3944 [6]
	2	8031 [6]	145 [3]	8031 [5]	7897 [6]	852 [4]	7665 [4]	462 [2]	6063 [4]	7665 [9]	3410 [15]	561 [5]
	3	4039 [5]	3280 [3]	3406 [4]	373 [5]	3983 [4]	171 [3]	515 [2]	540 [3]	7676 [9]	3361 [10]	6055 [5]
	4	104 [4]	3590 [3]	4038 [4]	587 [5]	4086 [4]	325 [3]	3408 [2]	3410 [3]	7901 [9]	3406 [9]	6063 [5]
	5	3361 [4]	3960 [3]	7686 [4]	3410 [5]	7686 [4]	673 [3]	3569 [2]	6030 [3]	250 [8]	256 [8]	240 [4]

		Questions with the most wrong answers podium position [count]																			
SECTION	Columns	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Licensing	1-7	8008 [33]	8082 [27]	3972 [24]	6011 [23]	8114 [14]	8118 [14]	4060 [12]	8117 [12]	8001 [11]	8121 [11]	8009 [9]	75 [8]	8109 [8]	8120 [8]	8126 [8]	7657 [7]	8017 [7]	8112 [7]	8081 [6]	8110 [6]
Technica	8-18	7676 [33]	7665 [29]	3983 [26]	7666 [25]	679 [24]	3361 [23]	462 [21]	7664 [21]	138 [20]	673 [20]	6019 [20]	7645 [18]	7686 [18]	325 [17]	774 [17]	3555 [17]	7674 [17]	8026 [17]	322 [15]	3585 [15]
Transmitt	19-30	3410 [44]	8031 [40]	3406 [33]	7897 [27]	3626 [26]	7751 [26]	3987 [25]	540 [22]	6024 [22]	3802 [21]	7901 [21]	7687 [20]	3944 [19]	7700 [18]	3408 [16]	4078 [16]	7698 [16]	7778 [16]	7637 [15]	8029 [15]
Feeders a	31-34	582 [17]	587 [16]	3739 [16]	7908 [15]	7918 [15]	7922 [15]	561 [13]	3750 [13]	600 [12]	7914 [12]	563 [11]	3738 [11]	575 [10]	718 [10]	3675 [10]	3737 [10]	7916 [10]	7917 [10]	746 [9]	3817 [9]
Propagati	35-37	852 [17]	7752 [12]	624 [9]	653 [9]	3732 [9]	8123 [9]	782 [8]	3730 [8]	617 [7]	6042 [7]	6044 [7]	7802 [7]	7926 [7]	648 [6]	652 [6]	3760 [6]	6037 [6]	6043 [6]	3797 [5]	3806 [5]
Electrom	38-47	4086 [33]	373 [28]	256 [27]	267 [23]	7936 [23]	250 [20]	3960 [20]	3995 [19]	388 [16]	298 [15]	7711 [15]	293 [13]	3678 [13]	6052 [13]	277 [12]	263 [11]	362 [11]	370 [11]	3803 [11]	6050 [11]
Operatin	48-49	6077 [11]	6073 [6]	8084 [6]	73 [5]	3764 [5]	8052 [5]	742 [3]	8042 [3]	41 [2]	3856 [2]	3857 [2]	6068 [2]	6070 [2]	6071 [2]	6075 [2]	7946 [2]	8043 [2]	8083 [2]	2856 [1]	3855 [1]
Safety	50-53	755 [12]	177 [11]	194 [8]	189 [7]	188 [6]	7952 [6]	4099 [5]	186 [4]	7756 [4]	3355 [3]	4004 [3]	7959 [3]	176 [2]	191 [2]	3356 [2]	6064 [2]	6065 [2]	7954 [2]	8125 [2]	6066 [1]
Measur	54-58	6063 [46]	7964 [25]	4039 [24]	3590 [22]	7967 [22]	4038 [21]	7965 [20]	7966 [19]	6055 [17]	145 [16]	7997 [16]	335 [14]	7759 [14]	3814 [13]	4005 [13]	6060 [13]	6061 [13]	7884 [13]	3576 [12]	7998 [12]

A member of the ESRG then ran an exercise looking at the top 5 poorly answered questions in each of the 9 syllabus sections, to see if there were any issues with particular questions – see Sec.5.

7. Review of the Report from the Royal Air Force Air Cadets (RAFAC)

No report was submitted by the RAFAC.

It should be noted that the role of the RSGB is purely administrative, passing candidate numbers between RAFAC and Ofcom for Foundation licence equivalence. It will be considered whether, in future, the RAFAC could send the information directly to Ofcom as is currently done by the Army Cadets.

8. Progression

8.1 Introduction

In 2025 the progression from Foundation to Intermediate fell to below 20% for the first time since 2012. This has caused some concern in the community as it could ultimately result in the loss of experienced Full licensees to train and mentor newcomers to the hobby. At its meeting, the ESC considered the progression rates, possible reasons for the recent drop and whether there should be any changes to the exams in an attempt to reverse the fall.

8.2 Progression trends

Figure 2 shown the trends in the candidate number data since 2012. The candidate numbers, numbers of passes and pass rate data are self explanatory and don't include the no-shows. The model used to calculate the progression from Foundation to Intermediate was to take the number of candidates passing Intermediate and divide it by the number of candidates passing Foundation in the previous year, expressing the result as a percentage in the charts. The same model was used for calculating the progression from Intermediate to Full using the appropriate data sets. It should be noted that this method is not perfect, as some candidates progress in the same year (See Sec. 6, above) and some take more than a year to progress. However, using a consistent model has enabled the trends to be followed since 2012.

As can be seen in the Progression chart, the Foundation to Intermediate progression data has been quite volatile in recent years. A significant contribution to this was the large peak in Foundation passes during Covid-19 lockdowns. With the Covid effect falling out of the data, the progression to Intermediate appeared to be on an upward trend, 2021-2024. Extrapolating the

curve to 2025 would suggest that the progression to Intermediate might have reached around 40%, not far from the pre-2019 value of about 45%. Instead the progression in 2025 sharply dropped to below 20%.

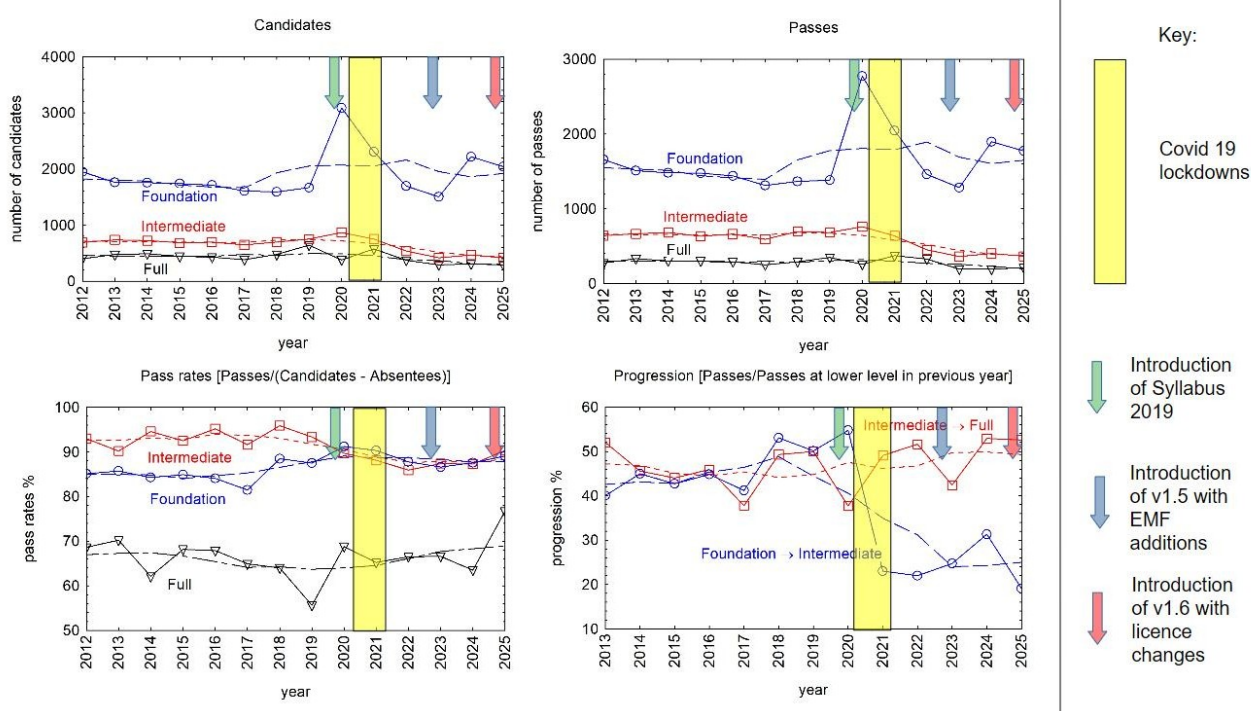


Figure 2. Trends 2012-2025. The dashed lines are the five-year rolling average. Significant events since and including the introduction of Syllabus 2019 are indicated.

8.3 Analysis of the progression data

It is tempting to attribute the drop in progression to intermediate that occurred in 2020/21 entirely to the introduction of the new syllabus in September 2019. Indeed, one of the objectives of the review was to reduce the Intermediate pass rate, which was running at over 90% prior to 2019, to bring the standard in line with the increase of privileges granted to Intermediate licensees [see: RCF Standards Committee Annual Report 2015]. Furthermore, moving some material from Full to Intermediate would achieve the objective of equalising the steps between Foundation and Intermediate and Intermediate and Full, thus, hopefully, increasing progression from Intermediate to Full. From the data post 2019, we can conclude that these objectives were met: the Intermediate pass rate dropped to below 90% and is now about the same as the Foundation pass rate, and, based on the five-year rolling average, the progression from Intermediate to Full has increased from about 45% to about 50%.

Shortly after the introduction of Syllabus 2019, Covid hit. The emergency changes to exams including the ending of practical assessments and introduction of remote invigilation contributed, along with candidates having time on their hands during lockdown, to a near doubling of the number of Foundation passes in 2020 compared to 2019. However, this peak was not reflected in the number of intermediate passes in the following year as people returned to 'normal life' post-Covid. This also contributed to the sharp drop in progression to intermediate seen in 2020/21.

Another factor, noted in previous ESC Reports, was the closure of Club training programmes during Covid, many of which did not reopen. However, the ending of practical assessments has meant that a number of Intermediate level distance-learning courses have come online, which could explain the steady recovery in progression from Foundation to Intermediate during 2021-24.

During this period there have also been two more syllabus changes, first due to the introduction of EMF regulations in 2022/23 and the licence changes in 2024/25. Both of these could have disrupted candidates and training courses, leading to more volatility in the data. With the exams now being available on-demand, these effects can be reflected in the data very quickly. Another possible effect of the recent licence changes could be to reduce the incentive to progress to Intermediate as there are now fewer extra privileges on offer compared to Foundation.

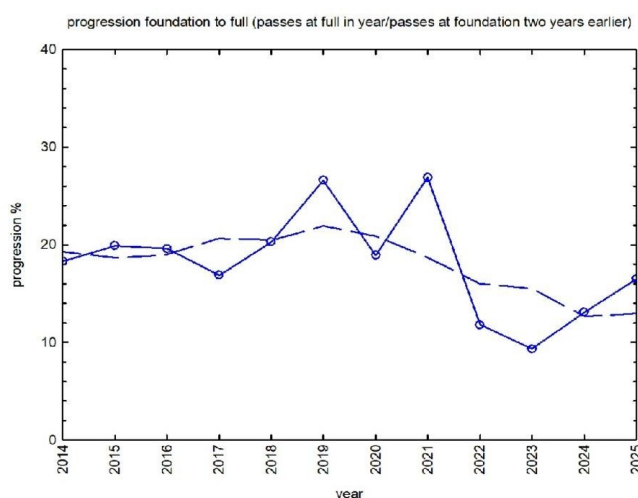


Figure 3. Trend in progression from Foundation to Full over a two-year period.

Using a similar model to above, taking the ratio of the numbers of passes at Full level to the number of passes at Foundation *two* years earlier, we get the progression from Foundation to Full, Figure 3. Pre 2019 this fluctuated around 18% and, after some volatility of the figures in the period 2019 – 2023 has recovered to 16%. The drop in the actual number of Full licensees that this implies is made up for by the number of D2F passes.

It remains to be seen if the drop in progression to Intermediate in 2025 feeds through to the numbers for Full in 2026, but at the time of writing this report, with five months of data

available for 2026, the Intermediate to Full progression rate currently stands at 72%. This high figure suggests that for the majority of those who progressed to Intermediate in 2025 the motivation was to progress all the way to Full rather than to hold an Intermediate licence in its own right. Based on the same five months of 2026 data, the progression from Foundation to Intermediate has ticked up a bit to 25%.

8.4 Conclusions

The progression from Foundation to Intermediate has been affected by a number of events during the past six years: the 2019 and subsequent syllabus changes, the Covid pandemic and its affect on Foundation candidate numbers, the accessibility of in-person training courses, and, most recently, the licence changes. Progression from Foundation all the way to Full hasn't been so seriously affected.

The ESC sees no justification for changes to the Intermediate exam, e.g. reducing the pass mark, as the current pass rate is felt to be appropriate. Significant syllabus changes are not considered desirable. Indeed, after the many changes in recent years a period of stability for the ESC/ESRG, candidates and trainers would be welcome. During the next few years, the ESRG will focus on maintenance of the syllabus and exam question banks.

If the impact of the publication of the Full question bank is considered positive, publication of the Intermediate question bank will likely follow. This could increase the confidence of potential candidates to take the Intermediate exam (initial feedback suggests this has been the case for Full).

9. Summary

All the reports that were presented at the May 2026 meeting and summarised in Sections 4 – 6, above, were discussed and accepted by the Examinations Standards Committee. Overall, the ESC believes standards were maintained in 2025, and the amateur radio examinations were deemed to be fit for purpose.

The Foundation candidate numbers in 2025 fell by 8.2% compared to the previous year, but still exceed predictions based on extrapolating the pre-2019 trend, which showed a steady small decrease year on year. Intermediate and Full candidate numbers fell by 12.4% and 8.6% respectively. Compared with the previous three years, pass rates are increased at all three levels. The number of Direct to Full candidates increased by 44% and the pass Rate fell slightly.

Owing to the efforts of RSGB Tutors and Exam Secretaries, RSGB Remote Invigilators, the RSGB Examinations Department and the Examinations and Syllabus Review Group, 1772 candidates demonstrated that they had achieved the standard for a Foundation licence in 2025. The number of candidates attaining the standards for a Full (HAREC) licence in 2025 was 243 (including D2F).

10. Other Matters Considered at the May 2026 ESC Meeting

Although not directly relevant to the performance of the examinations system in 2025, other matters were considered by the Examinations Standards Committee in its 2026 meeting:

- 1. Publishing the question bank:** The initial feedback suggests that the publication of the Full question bank has been well received by candidates. The ESC would like to formally thank Aubrey, M8AUB, for producing the excellent web interface. It is too early to judge the impact of the publication at the meeting, and so it is planned to review the exam data after six months from the date of publication. It was agreed that if the impact of publishing the Full questions is felt to be positive, the other levels could be published in due course.
- 2. Schedule of Terms:** The revised Schedule of Terms between the RSGB and Ofcom, with the modified clause about exam bank confidentiality and other changes, has been approved by the Ofcom legal department following minor changes and is awaiting feedback from the RSGB Company Secretary before formal signing. It was noted that the RSGB and Ofcom have already been working to the revised Schedule of Terms.
- 3. HAREC review:** The IARU Region 1 has set up a Working Group to review and update Annex 6 (the 'syllabus' section) of the Harmonised Amateur Radio Examination Certificate document. There are three RSGB representatives on the Working Group: Tony Kent, G8PBH (ESC Chair) Murray Niman, G6YJB, and Ian Suart, GM4AUP. It is still a work in progress to produce a revised document in time for the September IARU Region 1 meeting. The Committee saw a copy of the current draft which includes more up to date topics, e.g. in digital and SDR and EMF safety, and removes some legacy material. Paul Chapman (Ofcom) commented that Regulators would need to be presented with a clear summary of the changes that have been made and the rationale to

facilitate approval. The timescale is such that if the new Annex 6 was approved by the IARU, it may be at least 2030 before it could be adopted following Regulator approval. If something close to the current draft is adopted, any necessary changes to our syllabus would be minimal.

4. **Board Liaison:** The Committee formally thanked Len Paget, GM0ONX, for his support as RSGB Board Liaison member and welcomed Graham Smith, G4NMD, to the Board Liaison role.
5. **Army Cadets:** Paul Chapman (Ofcom) presented a report from the Army Cadets. They run their own training and successful candidates can apply to Ofcom for a Foundation licence. In 2025, 122 candidates, supported by 50 trainers, passed their exams. There is a 50:50 male/female candidate split. It is not known how many of the successful candidates took up a foundation licence.
6. **Trainer Representative on ESC:** The Committee considered a request to create a seat for a representative of the trainer community on ESC. It was felt that there was a sufficient number of active trainers already on ESC in their various roles, and it was also thought that there would be no advantage to creating a new member.
7. **Next meeting:** The next meeting is provisionally scheduled to take place on the 20th March 2027 in London.