

RSGB Contest Committee Report to Spectrum Forum, November 2014

A major contests rules consultation exercise has been undertaken this year. The purpose of the consultation was to elicit feedback from contest entrants (at all levels from beginner to 'elite') over proposed changes to both the General Rules and to individual contest rules.

A White Paper containing seventeen proposals to change the rules of HF and VHF contests and two questions about activity in weekend contests was issued at the end of April 2014. Eight proposals were aimed at HF contests, three proposals were aimed at VHF contests and six proposals covered both HF and VHF contests. The existence of the White Paper and the request for responses was advertised in RadCom, in the Contest Committee monthly newsletter and on three yahoo.co.uk groups (uk-hf-contesting, uk-vhf-contesting and vhf&uhf).

One hundred and twelve (112) responses were received before the cut-off date of 14th August. This represents approximately 10% of the number of testers entering RSGB contests in the UK.

Analysis of the responses revealed, as expected, a wide range of different opinions. Some of the proposals were very popular, some were very unpopular and some had no clear majority for or against.

The results of the analysis were considered at the Contest Committee meeting in late August and after a discussion on every proposal, a collection of rule changes were agreed.

The full set of rule decisions are:

1. Addition of 40m to the 80m SSB AFS Contest (making it dual band 80m and 40m)
 - a. The majority of respondents considered (only) SSB AFS to be broken from an overcrowding point of view
 - b. The same station can be worked on both bands for points
 - c. Band changes are limited by the '10 minute' rule
 - d. A station must stay on a band for at least 10 minutes before changing bands
 - e. Band change rule included to prevent stations alternately CQing on both bands – thus taking two frequencies and defeating the objective of this change!
2. UKAC multiplier changed from M5 to M7 - All large square locators will count as multipliers; UK locators count as two multipliers.
 - a. No clear majority for retaining M5
 - b. Prefix multipliers really not liked – large majority against this suggestion!
3. Splitting the Single Operator category into Assisted and Unassisted categories. A large majority of the respondents (>90%) approved of this change. This change will be implemented in the Commonwealth (BERU) Contest, the 21/28MHz Contest, 1st 1.8MHz Contest and the 2nd 1.8MHz Contest. All other RSGB HF Contests do not require this alteration.

4. Removal of QSO restrictions in the 1st and 2nd 1.8MHz Contests. This means non-UK stations can now work other non-UK stations. UK stations can work everybody. The duration of the contest remains at 4 hours.
5. No change to the timing or duration of 80m AFS (CW & SSB) Contests
6. Stations not representing a club may enter the AFS contests
7. Station Inspection clause for all HF contests added. However, except for NFDs, surprise inspections on stations will not take place except in exceptional circumstances.
8. Equipment (rig/antenna) declaration clause added
9. RSGB Band Plan clauses to be revised in accordance with IARU Region 1 recommendations
10. Modes permitted in VHF contests to be revised in accordance with IARU Region 1 VHF Contest rules (e.g. no data modes or MGM permitted except in data and MGM specific contests)
11. NFD rules updated as proposed in the White Paper.
12. Adjudicator's discretion added to the criteria for the awarding of Foundation and Intermediate merit certificates. However, the default position is the certificates will be awarded
13. 'Trophy' award criteria are to be clarified
14. Internet chat rules are to be clarified
15. The proposal to instigate RSGB Data Contests will not be taken forward
16. The proposal to reward 'perfect' logs with bonus points will not be taken forward

The White Paper asked for ideas to improve participation in weekend contests. Most responses pointed out that:

1. 'Radio time' for people was more limited these days
2. People were generally more busy at the weekend ('modern life' was cited many times).
3. No time for long contests at the weekend
4. Short 80mCC/UKAC style contests were preferred
5. Too many long (weekend) contests tends to spread activity thinly between them
6. Not satisfying for serious participants – hence entries are decreasing for weekend events

A few suggestions to improve participation in weekend contests were received:

1. Axe (or combine) less popular events
2. Add defined short duration sections to the remaining contests
3. Split contests into multiple short segments and allow stations to work each other in each segment – certificates for each segment and overall

These suggestions will be considered by the Contest Committee for inclusion in a future White Paper.

Overall, the Contest Committee consider the White Paper consultation was a success. The feedback from the contesting community over the consultation has been very positive. The

next White Paper (to be issued in the next few weeks) will contain proposals for changes to the IOTA contest. The next annual White Paper will be issued by May 2015.

One lesson that has been learnt from the 2014 White Paper is that analysing 'free format' text responses takes a lot of time! Alternative response formats that still permit the respondents to express their views but are easier to analyse are being investigated.

The Contest Forum was re-introduced at the RSGB Convention this year. The discussions revolved around the rule changes to be introduced in 2015. Other 'hot' topics raised at the forum and in a subsequent lecture on 'Contest Adjudication' were 'out by 1' serial numbers, reducing log submission time period and the need to penalise broken QSOs by more than the claimed points. All of the points raised will be considered by the Contest committee and may be included in a future White Paper consultation document.

The anticipated expansion in the Contest Committee SDR contest recording capability in 2014 did not materialise so the plan will be rolled over into 2015.

The Contest Committee continues to assist OFCOM with the issuing of Special Contest Calls (SCC). So far, 122 SCC applications have been processed on behalf of OFCOM and the Contest Committee has recommended the issuing of a new NOV for 111 of these applications. Regrettably, the Contest Committee has had to recommend that 11 applications be rejected due to not meeting the participation and/or achievement criteria specified in the OFCOM SCC application form.

Ian Pawson, GOFCT
Chairman, RSGB Contest Committee
October 2014