

Sharing a success story...

It's been a while since I've written an editorial for *RadCom* and given a view of what has been happening at the RSGB. We have all found ourselves in unusual circumstances in recent months, so I thought it was time to share an update with you.

My *2019 a year in numbers* article and infographic in the March 2020 *RadCom* gave an overview of what a typical and successful year looked like for the RSGB. This year continues to be very different and in ways that we didn't expect.

In April, we launched Get on the air to care (GOTA2C) in partnership with the NHS – a major campaign to help support radio amateurs during a national, and international, crisis. As part of the campaign we launched a wide range of initiatives to encourage people to discover amateur radio for the first time or to extend their knowledge and use of different aspects of our technical hobby. Remote invigilation exams, the Hope QSO Party, the Beyond Exams group of resources and the Tonight @ 8 webinars are just some of those activities that have helped radio amateurs through these challenging times.



Amateur radio in the media

Get on the air to care has also been by far the largest media campaign we have ever run, bringing amateur radio to the attention of millions of people through web, video, radio, television and newspapers. That level of publicity took well over a hundred individual press releases followed by an enormous amount of time talking to journalists about the fantastic range of positive messages and personal interest stories we received from radio amateurs. I did a number of interviews and took part in a special-focus NHS webinar and it was a privilege to talk about amateur radio to a new audience. We have been working extremely hard to raise the profile of amateur radio and its benefits and we are seeing very positive results.

Some interesting challenges

Our team of just sixteen staff at the RSGB deliver the Membership, sales, exam, publishing, finance, communications and IT services to our Members and manage the National Radio Centre, so moving everyone out of the office to work from home for the last four months has been a big step, especially while interest in amateur radio has been so high. We are extremely proud to have maintained and extended those services under very challenging conditions. When one of our warehouses was experiencing difficulties, we started shipping some books from our office and receiving deliveries to our homes, just to maintain service. We sent out many replacement *RadComs* when delivery services were failing around the world and even made the May issue freely available worldwide via our website. At HQ we did whatever it took to help and support those confined to their homes.

Closing the RSGB National Radio Centre (NRC) in response to government guidelines was a difficult but necessary decision. Having welcomed over 97,000 visitors to the Centre in 2019, the NRC Coordinator and volunteers decided to create a special daily net to keep in touch and to provide a way to 'welcome amateur radio visitors' who had had to cancel their plans to visit. It has been a very successful and positive initiative.

Creating new routes into amateur radio

The remote invigilation Foundation, and more recently Intermediate, exams have been a huge success. Our Exam Department was supported by many of the other staff as demand grew and we have an amazing team of volunteer invigilators who are spending a huge amount of time helping candidates through the online exam process. I would also like to mention the groups and individuals who have created online training courses to prepare candidates for the exams – an absolutely fantastic achievement, thank you all.

Like everyone, I'm really missing chatting to people in person and I have particularly missed representing the RSGB at the Dayton Hamfest, Friedrichshafen, the National Hamfest and our annual RSGB Convention. I'm looking forward to when we can hold physical events again but, in the meantime, we will create online options to bring as many people together as possible.

We have been very pleased to see that many clubs have also adapted and been proactive, setting up nets and taking their club meetings online, offering a wide range of speakers and presentations. I've joined a number of those myself and have really enjoyed the interactive discussions as well as hearing about how their membership has grown as a result. You can read some of their stories on our website.

Momentum

In just four months, we have helped over 1,500 people take their first steps into amateur radio through remote invigilation exams (with a further 1,000 future exam bookings) and helped hundreds more return to amateur radio by supporting their licence reactivation requests with Ofcom. RSGB Membership numbers have increased by over 600 and currently stand at the highest number we have seen since 2011. There has also been a tremendous increase in our web and social media traffic, with radio amateurs enjoying our large library of YouTube videos and keeping in touch with everything that the Society has been offering.

I'm immensely proud that we have brought amateur radio to the attention of so many people and attracted many who are now keen to learn about and explore wireless communication. We have supported their first steps and continue to look for more ways to help them enjoy the hobby which we all love. I have a privileged position which allows me to see the feedback, stories, comments and gratitude from many of those people and it makes this job extremely rewarding. Amateur radio in the UK has changed and grown. The amateur radio community has a great opportunity to build on this by giving positive support and encouragement to all radio amateurs who have just passed their exams or who are returning to amateur radio.

We have a success story to share. Let's work together to keep the momentum going.

Steve Thomas, M1ACB
RSGB General Manager