

Email response received 18 August 2005 from Mr P Beardow:

Preamble

I am a UK licenced Radio Amateur (G1SHV) and have had an interest in amateur radio for over 40 years.

I am also Managing Director of a telecommunications company that operates internationally and have been the recipient of numerous awards for innovation in communications technology. It is wearing this hat that I should like to draw to the attention of Ofcom, the benefit to the UK economy of Amateur Radio and emphasise that this is a continuing benefit, not merely confined to the technical innovations of bygone years.

- 1) I have employed many engineers who were either Radio Amateurs or engineers whose interest in electronics/engineering as a profession was kindled by an interest in amateur radio. In all cases their experience as Radio Amateurs has added an invaluable practical dimension to their work that complements the academic engineer or the ex-military engineers they have worked alongside.
- 2) On many occasions the point of contact afforded by being radio amateur has either provided introductions, in one case dinner (and QSOs) at the interior ministers private residence (I think our ambassador still dines out on that story) or simply the ability to locate substitute spare parts from nowhere.

The “magic” of amateur radio is that it is regulated, yet open to anyone; official, yet personal to the individual, something out of the ordinary. It is this “magic”, that is for many people enshrined in the licence, and it is this “magic”, that they fear losing in the reform process. As a professional I’ve been through this with Osco and its antecedents before and at least Ofcom is going in the right direction.

However I believe that potential for mayhem is so high that amateur radio must be regulated and that entry must be by “qualification” indeed I believe elements of the qualifications should be made tougher, for example demonstrable safety awareness training before high power HF or microwave operation

Question 1: *Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a lighter, electronic Licensing process? If not, please explain why.*

Yes: The current implementation of the licensing process, adds little to the essential functions of a licensing regime, which I wholly support (see Q6). The annual ritual of renewing a (rightly) low-cost licence is burdensome on all parties. This of course pre-supposes that Ofcom can produce a secure electronic system that actually works perhaps building on the experience gained through the maritime systems.

Question 2: *Do you agree with the proposal to issue licences, which remain valid for the life of the licensee? If not, please explain why.*

Yes: I and many other UK citizens hold many “long life” licences, permits and memberships, the Driving Licence and life membership of, say, the National Trust spring to mind. In the case of the Driving Licence both the DVLA & DSA seem to have few problem in maintaining an essentially valid database, admitting and as necessary removing licencees and mandating that it be kept up to date.

Question 3: *Do you agree with the proposal to issue electronic amateur radio licences free of charge? If not, please explain why.*

Yes: Given that a replacement licence would only be required on amendment of detail, I welcome Ofcom's proposal to make no charge for the "self-service" replacement. I would assume that a "print" of the said licence would be accepted as evidence that the necessary amendment had been made. Perhaps Ofcom could consider issuing a durable licence at first issue and validation documents be "self-service" with the current details.

Incidentally I have only once been asked to produce one of the dozens of Radio-Communications licences that have been issued to me both personally and professionally. In this case at US customs, in transit to South America, to support the fact that the radio equipment I was carrying was not for illicit use. Ofcom must ensure that any self-service licence will be recognized as genuine not only by their foreign radio regulatory colleagues, but other interested parties to whom the licence might be properly volunteered.

Question 4: *Do you agree with the proposal to apply an administrative charge when processing postal applications for amateur radio licences? If not, please explain why.*

Yes: With regret, manual processing always comes with a cost, a line has to be drawn somewhere. I would be concerned at an increase in cost as I would view this as "positive" discrimination against those without access to a PC, be it their own, a friend's, at work or at a public library.

With regard to my comments to Q.3, where an officially issued document maybe required Ofcom should consider a simple validation service.

Question 5: *Do you agree that WT Act licence exemption for radio amateurs is not currently practical?*

Yes: Nor is it desirable (see below)

Question 6: *What are your views regarding the possibility of WT Act licence exemption for radio amateurs in the longer term?*

Whilst it would be possible to devise a regime that did away with the need to issue a licence, for example based on an RAE pass certificate, would this achieve a great deal other than the perhaps undesirable side effect of reducing the independence of both examiner and regulator. From an administrative standpoint a lightweight licensing regime such as that proposed might well be simpler to operate not only in respect of the issues raised in sub-para 1-3 of p.11 para 2, but also in the case of a breach of conditions it may be simpler to revoke a licence than revoke a right to an exemption....

The points of sub-para 1-2 of p.11 para 3 in regard to the UK's international obligations need little further comment.

Question 7: *Is maintaining the existing licensing regime but with an extended renewal period your preferred option? If so, please state the renewal period that you believe would be appropriate and explain why.*

No: Provided there is an obligation to keep the Ofcom database up to date there is little or no point, and it would hardly be consistent with Ofcom's obligations under the 2003 act, From a personal standpoint having to remember a five or even ten-year anniversary, would be a greater burden, see Q.8.

Question 8: *Do you agree that the current licensing system is over-burdensome? If not, please explain why.*

Yes: I passed my RAE years ago, all I do is send in a cheque every year, and put the document in drawer till the following year, whilst worrying that one year (I'm a Christmas/New Year renewal) the reminder will get lost in the post or I will be away and forget! It serves no meaningful purpose, it's the database that matters in these days of scanners and colour copiers

Question 9: *Do you agree with the proposal to apply an administrative charge when processing applications for a Notice of Variation to an amateur radio licence? If not, please explain why.*

Comment: Yes, with regret, in respect of "complex" NOV's only. However I support the responses (to Q.9) of W Green on behalf of the ATC, in respect to special event stations and Prof. Watts in respect of experimentation and innovation.