
Amateur radio

Policy on temporary call signs and call sign enhancement

POLICY

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About this document

This document explains our policy on enhancing amateur radio call signs (notably with Regional Secondary Locators) and on the formation of call signs for temporary special event stations. It updates a document published in 2015 though without making any substantive changes to the policy.

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1. International context

The Radio Regulations

- 1.1 Article 19 of the Radio Regulations (“RRs”) ¹ requires administrations to ensure that Amateur Radio stations are identified with a call sign. It sets out the format that call signs must adopt for different types of stations. Further, it prohibits misleading identities. These considerations underpin our overall policy regarding call signs for Amateur Radio stations.

The UK Amateur Radio Licence

- 1.2 Clause 13 of the UK Amateur Radio Licence requires licensees to ensure that the station is clearly identifiable at all times and that the call sign is transmitted as often as is practicable. Clause 2(2) requires licensees to use the appropriate Regional Secondary Locator (“RSL”) ² and sets out rules for using RSLs. This is explained below.

¹ The Radio Regulations are the rules in the use of the radio spectrum agreed by the international community at the International Telecommunication Union

² The Amateur Radio Licence defines Regional Secondary Locator as “a letter used by the Licensee to convey the location of the Radio Equipment in accordance with Clause 2(2) and note (c) to this Licence”

2. Call sign format

- 2.1 We assign each Amateur Radio station a unique call sign, in the format cnaaa³. This format ensures that station identities conform to Article 19 of the RRs. The format of the call signs that we assign (notably the initial characters) denotes the level of the station, Foundation (eg M6ABC), Intermediate (eg 21ABC) or Full (eg M0ABC) - including both personal and club licences.
- 2.2 We permit Radio Amateurs to use other formats of call signs in certain circumstances. For example, Special Event Stations (perhaps at a village fete) are given call signs in a different, but distinctive, format.
- 2.3 The composition of amateur radio call signs and the use of RSLs is described in greater detail, in paragraph 2.43 *et seq* of our online guidance, here:
https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/82637/amateur_radio_licence_guidance_for_licensees.pdf.

³ Here, 'c' is a character (2, G or M), 'n' is a number and 'a' is a letter

3. Using RSLs

Normal use of RSLs

- 3.1 In most circumstances, the Amateur Radio Licence requires licensees to enhance the normal call sign with a so-called 'Regional Secondary Locator' ("RSL"). This is an additional letter, inserted after the initial character of the call sign, to denote the part of the British Islands in which the station is operating (eg 'GW8ABC' for a station operating in Wales).
- 3.2 RSLs serve no regulatory purpose. They are not mandated by the Radio Regulations or UK law (beyond their inclusion in the Licence). They are used by few other countries. They seem first to have appeared in the UK Amateur Radio Licence in the 1950s. However, they have become custom and practice amongst Radio Amateurs and we are therefore prepared for RSLs to be retained.
- 3.3 The rules on the use of RSLs are set out in Clause 2 of the Licence. This clause says that, with the exception of individual Foundation or Full stations operating in England, licensees must use the applicable RSL, listed in Clause 2(2) of the Licence, to denote where they are operating.

Intermediate stations

- 3.4 The call sign used to identify an Intermediate station must always include an RSL, wherever it is operating, even in England. When operating in England, therefore, the RSL 'E' must be inserted into the call sign of an Intermediate station, for example '2E1ZYX'. By contrast, if operating in Wales, that station would be '2W1ZYX'.
- 3.5 However, Foundation and Full (including Club) stations must not use the RSL 'E' to denote England.

Club stations

- 3.6 The call sign used to identify a Club station must also include an RSL. This could be one of the RSLs listed in Clause 2(2) (therefore excluding 'E' for England). Alternatively, however, it could be an RSL from the set listed in Note (c) to the Licence. The RSLs in this list are solely for use by Club stations. This list of RSLs includes an RSL ('X') to denote England (for example 'GX3DEF').

New permanent RSLs

- 3.7 We do not issue new permanent RSLs. Clause 2(2) and Note (c) to the Licence already account for 14 RSLs. This leaves only 12 letters and some of these have been used as temporary RSLs. Noting the limited number of remaining unused letter designations, we believe that it would be inappropriate to make such a permanent award without careful consideration of the criteria and mechanism for such a permanent award. Further, we

believe that to implement such a permanent change may require us to vary a number of amateur radio licences, and doing so would be at odds with the international regulations⁴ that specify permitted permanent UK RSLs.

- 3.8 Developing and implementing changes to put in place a wider framework for the allocation of new permanent RSLs would impose a cost on us. In the absence of any spectrum management value in such a measure, we believe that it is not proportionate or justifiable to pursue the development or implementation of a policy for allocating new permanent RSLs.

⁴ Annex 2 to CEPT Recommendation T/R 61-01 (<http://www.erodocdb.dk/docs/doc98/official/pdf/TR6101.pdf>) lists the format of the call signs that visitors must use. For the UK, it lists the RSLs from Clause 2 of the UK Amateur Radio Licence.

4. Special Event Station ('SES') call signs

- 4.1 The holder of a Full licence (personal or club) may apply for permission to use an additional call sign to denote a special event. We authorise these SES call signs by varying the individual Amateur Radio licence. An SES must mark a recognised event, such as a sporting or local event. A Permanent SES ("PSES") marks a permanent fixture, such as a museum.
- 4.2 The effect of the variation is to authorise the licensee to identify the station using the SES call sign, because the (unvaried) licence does not normally allow that. However, using an SES call sign remains optional. The licensee may still identify the station with the normal station call sign.

Special Event Stations

- 4.3 The criteria for determining requests for SES call signs are that their format must comply with Art 19 of the RRs, they must not be offensive or otherwise profane and must not have been used for another event in the past two years. The applicant may request a particular qualifying call sign. Alternatively, we assign one.
- 4.4 We always assign an SES call sign in the format 'GB' followed by a digit (except '3' or '7', as these are used to identify other types of stations), followed by up to two or three letters. It is our practice to rest a call sign for two years following the event, to ensure that any subsequent use is not confused. The SES call sign is therefore an additional call sign, which the licensee may opt to use.
- 4.5 We normally authorise an SES for no more than 28 days and allow only one SES per event. It is therefore first come, first served. In a limited set of circumstances, we may authorise a SES for longer than 28 days, for example to mark a longer celebration or as a PSES.

Special Special Event Stations

- 4.6 If we agree that an event is itself of clear national or international significance, we may grant an NoV for a 'Special Special Event Station' ('SSES'). The requirements in section 4.3, above, also apply to an SSES call sign. To reduce the risk of the station's identity being mistaken, the call sign should not normally exceed eight characters in total though we may consider requests for longer call signs. The format of the SSES call signs that we assign is 'GB' followed by 2 or 3 digits (0-9) and by 2 or 3 letters.

Permanent Special Event Stations

- 4.7 The PSES variations that we grant all expire on the same date, allowing us to review them *en bloc*. The call sign that we authorise for a PSES will reflect the station, such as GB0IWM, for the Imperial War Museum.

5. Temporary RSLs

- 5.1 We may also permit the temporary use of other special call signs to mark particular events. These are formed by inserting an additional letter as the second character of the call sign. They are therefore akin to special RSLs though they need not identify an area. Licensees may use them as an alternative to the normal RSLs, for the duration of the event. Requests to establish these special call signs are handled on a first come, first served basis. Use of this facility by licensees is authorised by varying the individual licence of either a person or club.
- 5.2 Such temporary RSLs are only available on a temporary basis which we take to mean:
- The RSL is available for no more than one year;
 - Where possible, the period of availability will be bounded by two dates of significance to the event being marked;
 - The start and end dates need not be in the same calendar year; and
 - We only allow a temporary RSL to be re-used if we are satisfied that doing so will not lead to confusion.
- 5.3 Examples of such temporary enhancements include:
- 'A' for 'Alba', which was available to licensees with a main station address in Scotland, between Burns' Night and St Andrew's Day, to celebrate the Homecoming Scotland (eg 'MA6ABC'); and
 - 'O' which was available throughout 2012, to all licensees in the UK and Crown Dependencies to celebrate the 2012 Olympics (eg '200ABC')
- 5.4 We use our discretion in reaching a decision on these requests, based on past cases. We assess them on their merits and take a view on the significance of the event in question.