

m0blf

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Saturday, 14 February 2004.

RadCom Letters Page,
Radio Society of Great Britain,
Lambda House,
Cranbourne Road,
Potter's Bar,
Herts. EN6 3JE.

Dear Sir,

Radiocommunications Examinations Price Increases

I am writing to express my disappointment at the recent announcement by the Society to increase the fees charged for the Radio Amateur's Examinations.

Given the new licensing structure, whereby all applicants for the Full licence have to previously take the Foundation and Intermediate examinations, the cost to an enthusiastic beginner is now £60 (£15 for the foundation, intermediate £20 and full £25). This is an increase of almost 50% on the cost of the full licence examination with City & Guilds under the old scheme. Already in 1995 when, at the age of fourteen, I took the full RAE, my parents were a little reluctant to pay the examination fee. I cannot imagine many being generous enough to pay £60 for the same today.

Such costs will, I am sure, prove detrimental to the laudable aims of the Society in creating the foundation licence: namely to provide a structure where the hobby could be taken into schools and youth groups, for example, and where the children given an opportunity to 'try-out' amateur radio with a minimum of commitment and outlay.

I am not only concerned about children. This hobby has a number of other low-income groups, especially pensioners and the disabled, whom we must also encourage.

As a foundation lead instructor, and committee member of the Cambridge University Wireless Society, I am aware that many clubs such as ours already heavily subsidise their amateur radio courses by not passing on the true cost of providing the resources for the course or room-hiring, for example. Some also provide free or discounted membership for the first year of joining the club. I know that if we felt obliged to pay for the increased costs too, given that most of our candidates are students, it would put an unacceptable financial burden on other club activities.

Whilst I am sure that the costs of running the three examinations are greater than it appears at first sight, with the need for police checks for instructors, and extra staff at headquarters, for example, I think many are surprised at the sharp and sudden increase in the fees. Perhaps the Society would care to clarify whether these costs will just allow the administration to break-even, or whether any additional income for the Society is being generated through the examinations?

If the case is the former, I think that, as a matter of urgency, consideration needs to be given to how best to create an affordable system, which the current proposal clearly is not. Failure to do this will mean that the young population in the hobby, only recently bolstered by the foundation licence, will start to diminish.

I would suggest, for example, that the Radio Communications Foundation might like to launch an appeal for funds amongst members of the Society, which would enable it to pay the cost of upgrading a licence from Intermediate to Full for anyone under the age of eighteen or over seventy-five (i.e. the same groups who already receive free licences from Ofcom), so that these people would only need to pay £35 for, in effect, their full licence.

To close, I note (from <http://www.w5yi.org/VEMan-A.htm#reimbursement>) that in the US, candidates are charged just \$12 for an examination. Of this \$6 goes to the VEC office. Would you please explain why the RSGB requires so many times more money to do the same job as your American counterparts?

Yours faithfully,

Dominic Smith M0BLF.

Cc: G3LAS.