

# Updating the Amateur Radio licensing framework: overview of key changes

## What you need to know

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Amateur radio licences will be changing in 2024. We are maintaining the three-tier licensing structure and lifetime licensing regime but have decided to introduce changes to enable greater operating freedom for people using amateur radio while making the process of getting and using a licence simpler and more consistent.

This document provides a high level summary of the changes we plan to make to the amateur radio licensing framework following our recent review and consultation. The changes affect our overall licensing framework and rules on a number of areas including call signs, technical parameters (such as power levels and when a Notice of Variation is required); and the licence format, terms, and conditions. Full detail can be found in our [2023 Statement](#) and [Notice of Variation](#) documents.

## Timetable for implementing the changes

To implement many of our decisions we need to make changes to all existing amateur radio licences. This means that many of these decisions are subject to the outcome of the statutory processes for varying existing licenses. We have therefore decided to start the statutory process to vary all amateur radio licences by publishing a [General Notice](#) which sets out the proposed licence variations. **Licensees can provide representations on these proposed changes by 5:00pm on 22 January 2024.** Ofcom will consider all representations that have been provided after this date and decide whether to go ahead with our proposals. We may decide to vary the licences in accordance with our proposal, or with some modifications.

We will publish our decisions on the Ofcom website no later than February 2024 and vary the standard licences used for new licences at this point. The new rules will also apply for all licensees from this time, meaning all licensees may operate under the new terms and conditions applicable to their licence class. We will issue new licence documents to all current licensees. As there are around 70,000 amateur radio licensees you may not receive your new licence immediately but following the variation update you may operate under the new rules as set out in the new terms and conditions booklet, which will be published on the website.

## Phase 1 changes – new call sign rules and greater flexibility

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We plan for the new terms and conditions and following changes to come into effect when we have completed the licence variation process. This is planned for February 2024. Under our new policies, and subject to the licence variation consultation and decision process, we plan to introduce the following changes:

### Call signs and suffixes

- The use of Regional Secondary Locators (RSLs) will become optional, removing the mandatory requirements for RSLs from the licence. If you wish to continue using one, you are able to do so, and they remain a valid call sign format. For licensees using a '2' format call sign, it will remain mandatory to insert an RSL.
- If you are a Foundation or Full licensee, you will be able to use the RSL 'E' in your call sign if operating in England, if you wish.
- You will no longer be required to apply for an NoV to your licence if you wish to use a 'special' RSL, when designated by Ofcom.
- We will amend the licence so licensees can use any suffix, so long as the station remains identifiable. It's important to note that suffixes fall under the [Wireless Telegraphy \(Content of Transmissions\) Regulations](#).
- New applicants will only be allowed to hold one personal licence (excluding any Club licence).

### Power levels and airborne use

- Foundation licensees will be able to transmit at 25 Watts PEP and Intermediate licensees at 100 Watts PEP, in bands where the Full licence currently permits operation at 400 Watts PEP. Full licensees will be able to transmit at 1000 Watts PEP in bands where amateur radio has a primary allocation.
- All licensees will be able to transmit airborne in primary amateur radio bands. There is a maximum power limit of 500mW EIRP.

### Enabling more flexibility within the licence

- Many Notices of Variation (NoV) will be embedded into the licence terms and conditions, so a NoV will not be needed for some activities which currently require a NoV. This includes the deployment of some beacons, repeaters, and gateways as detailed below.
- As a licensee you will be able to allow unlicensed individuals to use your radio equipment under direct supervision. You will remain responsible for ensuring they comply with your licence conditions.

- The rules on remote and unattended operation will be updated. As well as this, Foundation and Intermediate licensees will be able to use the internet for remote control operation.
- For most repeaters, beacons and gateways you will no longer require an NoV.<sup>1</sup> Licensees will have to carry out an interference assessment to prove that they have minimised the risk of interference to other users. For powers above 5W, a call sign must be obtained from the RSGB.
- A new Data Station mode of operation will be introduced. This is to allow the authorisation of a wide variety of other data systems, mainly machine-to-machine operations. This provision will permit the following types of operation under the licence; APRS, UIVIEW/Packet, data/trunk links, and RF mesh networks.
- As a Foundation licensee, you will be able to build your own equipment and access the 2.4 GHz and 5 GHz band. There is a maximum transmit power of 2 Watts in these bands.
- We will align various terms and conditions with other licences that Ofcom issues, simplifying many of the conditions, removing unnecessary complexity and making them clearer. We will also remove several provisions from the licence that are not required for spectrum management purposes.

## Phase 2: Changes to new intermediate call signs, SES rules and restrictions on the number of call signs an individual may hold will be implemented later in 2024

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**We plan for these changes, which require modification to our licensing platform (or some other Ofcom action) to be implemented in 2024. Should the timings change, we will provide an update.**

- We will cease issuing the '2' series of call signs for Intermediate licensees and will instead issue 'M8' and 'M9' call signs. Existing holders of '2' series call signs will be able to transfer their call sign to the new M8 and M9 format at the same time. Although we will encourage this, this will be voluntary. For those who continue using a '2' format call sign, you will have to continue to input an RSL into your call sign.
- Simplified the rules around Special Event Stations will be introduced, enabling a more flexible authorisation. We plan to fully automate the process, resulting in a quicker response for licensees.
- We will place restrictions upon the number of call signs an individual can hold. For personal licences, this will be limited to one in line with our decision to only allow radio amateurs to hold only one personal licence.
- For Full (Club) licences, you will be able to start applying for additional call signs (up to 5).

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<sup>1</sup> Powers over 25 Watts will still require an NoV.

## Phase 3: New licensing platform required

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**We plan for these changes to be implemented later in the 2024/2025 financial year, unless otherwise stated. We will provide updates should this change.**

- For existing licensees, once we have implemented the new licensing platform, we will look to revoke any lower-class, or duplicate, licences in phase 3. When you progress to the next licence class, your previous licence will be revoked. If you already hold multiple licences, you can either surrender them now or Ofcom will contact you at a later date to do so.
- We will be updating our mechanisms for online revalidation as part of our Licensing Platform Evolution.
- As a licensee, in the future you will be able to change your call sign periodically. This will be limited to once every 5 years to maintain identification of a station.
- From the time the new licensing platform is launched, new applicants will be able to choose from any available call sign when applying for a licence on the online portal. We will also allow the re-issue of old call signs after a 5 year 'cooling-off' period at this time.