

UKAC CONTESTING NOTES

From the Heckington Area

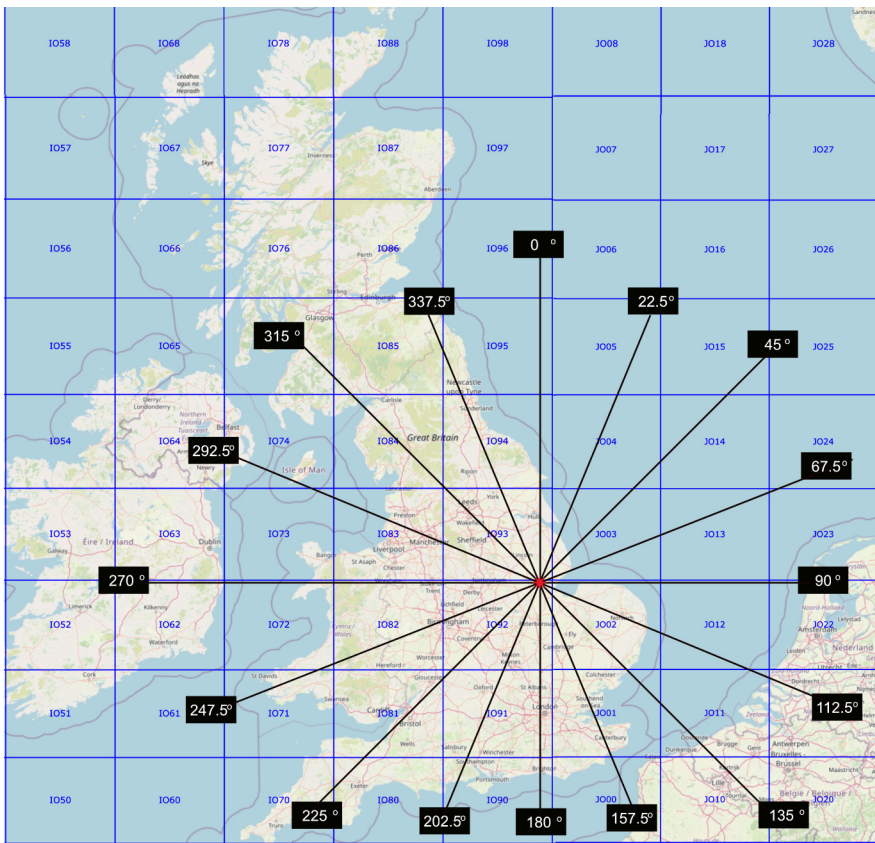
In the UKAC contests, the objective is to work as many stations as possible, the more distant the better, and as many 4-digit locator squares as you can. Points are awarded for each contact, according to their distance (in km) from the centre of your square to theirs, plus 500 bonus points for each square. So, bonus points can make a big difference to your score.

When you're a beginner, it's easiest to just chase any contacts you can hear. But as your experience builds, you can develop strategies to maximise your score.

There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way. It's a case of working out what works best for you. But here are some ideas to consider.

Squares

Think about the order in which you might want to try working them.



I usually spend the first 30-45 minutes working all the squares I can hear, beginning with JO03 and working my way around. The minimum you need is ONE contact in each. So, at this stage, you don't need to spend loads of time working 10 stations in the same square. You can bag them later!

JO03: - is a very small square (most of it is in the sea) and there may be nobody operating from it. If there is, they will be strong and easy to hear from Heckington. Check on4kst.com to see if anyone is operating from 03. If not, it can still be worth beaming NE and scanning the band for this square. But if you hear nothing, then don't waste any more time on it. In that case, it's one direction you can pretty much forget.



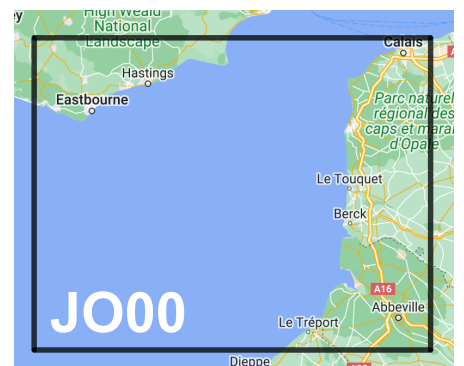
JO02: - is usually relatively easy to work as there are several big stations which work from there. Beam SE. Beyond 02 is the English Channel and Europe. Unless the band is open to Europe, you're unlikely to work more than a few in 02, so grab one and move on.



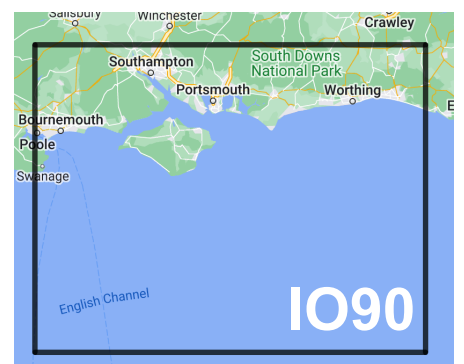
JO01: - beam SSE for Essex, East London and Kent. This square can be more challenging. So, spend some minutes scanning the band for anything in 01 and, if you don't hear anyone, move on and come back to it later.



JO00: - This is another very small land mass square. Check ON4KST for anyone operating from 00 and beam just East of South for the SE corner of the UK and the coast of NW France. If there is anyone operating from here, JO00 can be a good catch, as not everyone will manage it, so that's an extra 500 bonus points for you! But don't go wasting too much time chasing it. If you don't make it, move on and come back to it later.



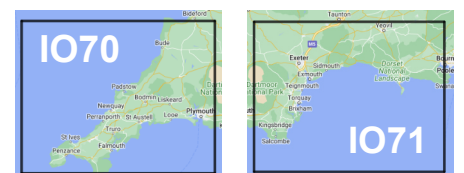
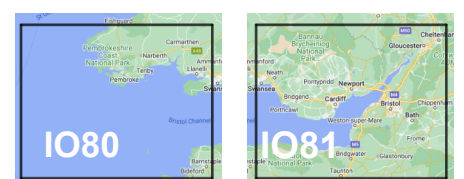
IO90: - Far south coast and the Isle of Wight. Is surprisingly easy if any of the big stations down there are on. Find them if you can, bag one and move on. If not, come back later.



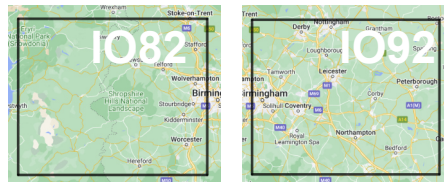
IO91: - This square covers a large part of central England. There are MANY stations operating from here. Beam just West of South. Work one and then think about some CQ calls, as you might pick up many more and some of them will be reasonable distance.



IO80 and IO81: - While you're trying for IO91, you might also pick up **IO80 and IO81 (and possibly even IO70 and 71)** in the far South West and South Wales. Spend some time beaming in this direction, to see if you can pick them up.



IO92 (IO82 and IO72): - Our home square is very easy to work. Bag it and ignore for now. Or continue beaming SW and you might also pick up IO82 and IO72.



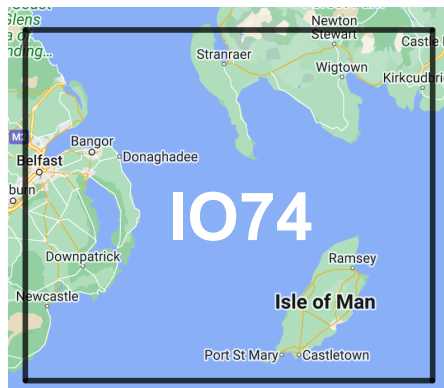
IO93: - Beam West and slightly North of West for IO93. Loads of big stations here. Bag it and, if you want to, spend some time calling CQ and work as many as you can. But keep an eye on the clock.



IO83: - Beyond IO93 is IO83. This is not the easiest square to work from Heckington. So listen out for it and grab it if you can.



IO74: - Listen for GD8EXI (on the Isle of Man) and any GM's on the South West coast of Scotland. IO74 is entirely possible from Heckington.



IO64: - Beyond IO74 is IO64. Listen out for GI4SNA (in Northern Ireland). If he is on, you might bag him. Great distance and a rarer square!



IO94: - Beam NNW for Yorkshire and beyond. Listen for G4FZN/P and others. A relatively easy one to bag.



IO95 and 85: - While you're beaming for 94, turn a bit further North and listen for G8PNN who may or may not be portable. Unusually for a UKAC station, he often uses a roger beep. Listen for that tell-tale beep and if you hear him, go for him. He can be weak but will often hear you if you persevere.



Bag that lot and you'll have yourself a nice big score already! You've spent 30-45 minutes doing this and maybe missed a few squares. So, what next?

Mop up

Forget squares for now and spend 30 minutes mopping up the stations you heard but didn't bother working (because you'd already bagged the squares). Bag all the locals to get them out of the way. Then beam SSW for the additional stations in IO91 etc. And WNW for those in IO93 and beyond.



Calling CQ Contest

Think about calling CQ Contest in those directions. Find what appears to be a clear frequency, be patient and prepared to move. Unless the bands are open to Europe, don't bother beaming to the East (or NE/SE).

If calling CQ doesn't achieve much

Revert to 'search and pounce' and focus on bagging the squares you missed. Use ON4KST to make sure that someone is on in the square you need. Watch the feed to see where they are, go to those frequencies and LISTEN! Just because you can't hear them doesn't mean they're not there. They may be beaming in another direction so be patient. But watch the time as the clock will now be ticking down. Don't spend too much time chasing a square in a direction that is unlikely to bring additional contacts and points.

If you have worked everything you expected, use 15 mins or so to try for the difficult squares. Use ON4KST to spot them – GM, GI, EI, GD, GU, GJ and F. A couple of very distance stations will add significantly to your overall haul.

Is it worth calling stations I can barely hear?

Yes! They may not be beaming in your direction, but if they hear you they may turn the beam and suddenly come up. So, keep this in mind. Don't just call once or too quickly. Call a few times in succession and include your locator. If they catch your call, this will help them locate you and peak their beam.

Other tips

Don't be too eager. Listen first! If the station you're trying to work is weak, work out exactly where they are before you call. Listen to an exchange, obtain their locator and get your beam on them. Also note their latest serial number. Armed with it, you know what yours will be if they hear you next and, if you already have their locator, all you need to complete the exchange is their signal report.

Listen to the operator's style, so that you are able to respond accordingly. For example, G4CLA in IO92 has one of the best contest stations in the country but he is very quick. If he hears you, he will normally only need one attempt. Be ready to log the details he gives you and respond without repeating yourself. He'll soon ask for a repeat if he needs it. Other stations will be slower and more relaxed. But very few if any stations will want to have a conversation – some won't even say "73" or "good luck" at the end of the exchange. They're not being rude, they just want to clock up that score! So only respond with other comments if invited.

SIGNAL, SERIAL, LOCATOR

Always follow the exchange format and don't vary from it. It is 'Signal report, serial number, locator' in that order. Muddle them up and you could cause confusion.

Avoid unusual reports. If stations are struggling to hear you, then don't give a report they are not expecting. Give "4/2" as the report and they'll probably think "042" is the serial number. Why sew possible confusion when you could have given "5/5"? Remember, you're not giving a report that the receiving station will have great interest in. You're simply passing an exchange. So keep it simple!



Consider supplementing your call with different phonetics

Begin by using the standard phonetics. But if you're weak and the receiving station is struggling to hear you, supplementing details with different phonetics can help. So I make say "two echo zero victor papa x-ray, that's VICTORIA PETER X-RAY". Speak slowly and deliberately. Don't whisper or mutter – you want that contact. Sound like you mean it!

Mic Gain etc

Don't be tempted to have your mic gain or compression up too high. Too much of these doesn't make you 'louder' - it will distort your audio. Most radios work best on SSB with Mic Gain under 50% and with just a little compression (I use just 10%). Monitor your audio and if in doubt, ask another team member for a full audio report when you work them.

Interference

Conditions on VHF/UHF vary. Sometimes there will be heavy QRM (much noise) in one direction, which in extreme cases can wipe out all but the strongest stations. If it persists, don't spend too much time trying to work more distance stations or calling CQ in that direction as you're unlikely to hear people even if they call you back. But check back in that direction every now and then. Conditions can change very quickly and a direction that was unworkable can suddenly become workable again... if you're lucky!

What if the band is open to Europe?

For modest stations there's a couple of possible strategies. Firstly, by all means work any DX stations that you can hear. But unless the opening is very strong, you may hear people working DX but not be able to copy it yourself. If you're running low power, they may not be able to hear you. That might seem like a downer, but there is a way of still benefiting!

If there is any sort of opening, many of the stations to our West, will be beaming East towards Europe to try to work all that lovely DX. An OZ (Danish station) may clock you up 800pts, plus 500 for the square (1300pts

in total) but if, instead of burning up too much time trying to work that illusive OZ, you beam West, you might mop up all those stations beaming straight at you!

10 UK stations at 200km each will clock you up more points, even without any extra squares. So, if you can, then by all means bag yourself an OZ but then turn that beam back West!

Don't interrupt!

Don't be tempted to call too early and certainly not over a QSO. It's considered very rude and may disrupt an exchange. Wait until the station calls CQ, or says "QRZ?", then make your call.

ON4KST.com

This is a chat messaging system for radio amateurs, and is especially useful on VHF/UHF. To use it, you need to be logged in and enter the chat for the band that you're using.

Depending on how you have your display set up, in the right hand pane you will see a list of the stations logged in, their locator square and sometimes, the frequency they're using. On the left hand pane you'll see the messaging system. Even if you don't use this to message anyone, it can be useful to see where people are and who they are working.

UTC	CALL/NAME	144/432 MHz MESSAGES	UTC SPOTTER ORG	DX	INFO
17:46:02	OZ8ZS Henrik 144/432	(OK2PMS) GE Jiri, time to try FT8	1816 @mto	144300.0 IZ8JDA	
17:14:23	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) 73	1803 ic8fax	144174.0 IJ5NAV	<TR> FT8 -20 dB 1103 Hz trx qo
17:14:22	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) Thanks for your time, all the best.	1759 a51zo	144119.0 CT7ABA	JN8DR-EME-RN60 -20db trx
17:14:08	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) 73!	1753 ha8al	144174.0 DF1BO	RX FT8 -04 via webstr.camras.nl
17:13:14	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) FSK441 165330 22.0 s 80 ms 5 dB 27 -75 Hz > 6.26 OK2PMS PA0L	1741 a51zo	144119.0 SS2LM	JN8DR-EME-JN65 -20db trx Milo
17:12:54	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) OK I stopped	1727 ha8al	144174.0 F8KRR	RX FT8 -05 via webstr.camras.nl
17:12:35	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) No progress, Jiri. Better to stop and save the energy for better times :))	1725 st0gpa	144300.0 US1AAE	JN8CC->TR- J250L dgr qo
17:05:07	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) OK	1724 ra1amw	144020.0 SM4HF1	KP0UM-AUR->JPTOTO QSA 67A
17:03:04	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) 13/14 dgr other way	1721 ra1amw	144433.0 OH7VFB	KP0UM-AUR->KPS2U QSA 55A
17:02:33	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) In MSHV SW only HOT A	1719 ic8fax	144174.0 K3ITB	<TR> FT8 -15 dB 1896 Hz
17:01:25	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) For10min	1713 k5vwx	144174.0 DK7UY	JN2US-J044 TR CO
17:00:46	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) Try ho1B	1656 r0gpa	144300.0 F8BEC	QSO since FT8 Y2H
16:59:07	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) That's the fun, Jiri. Waiting for the unexpected. Mind. SGO doesn't show many dots atm.	1647 kv3fp	144174.0 IV3VAV	JN6HD->JN68 trx qso best reg
16:57:38	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) OK I continue, Here 1 ping	1646 ic8fax	144174.0 IV3VAV	<TR> FT8 -1 dB 2280 Hz
16:54:35	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) Poor here, Jiri. 400 with 3 character :)) Please continue	1643 oh8ia	144102.0 DL4RCE	KP0-EME-JN68 lu QSO -21dB
16:46:33	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) Same, 8 dgr elevation	1640 r1ni	144049.0 SK1BL	trx QSO 55A QTF 315
16:46:05	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) Yes, here Hot A and elevation 37	1638 ua6ndx	144050.0 UA4PKA	LO8TO-AUR-LO86GO 57A/58A CCCC
16:45:39	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) It's distance, between us.	1635 r1ni	144054.0 RD3B	trx QSO 55A QTF 35
16:45:24	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) Please hotA, Jiri.	1634 ic8fax	144174.0 IJ3UK	<TR> FT8 -18 dB 740 Hz trx qso
16:40:43	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) I running too, GL!	1628 ic8fax	144174.0 IZ8JES	<TR> FT8 -2 dB 1775 Hz trx qso
16:39:34	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) RRRRRunning.... GL	1624 ua6ndx	144051.0 R10A	CO AUR
16:36:07	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) Are you running?	1620 ua6ndx	144051.0 UA3NFG	LO8TO-AUR-LO28SU 58A/57A
16:34:27	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) okay, please 3 min before start. You can run, PA warming	1611 ha8al	144174.0 G8SEI	RX FT8 -09 via webstr.camras.nl
16:33:23	SA6BUN Michael	(DK3BU) ich probler mal Skype	1614 v0ff	144350.0 UB9FCJ	LO8TC-AUR-LP70DH auroral
16:33:02	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) 366 FSK441, LMA 2-nd?	1612 v0ff	144420.0 UA4PKA	STA of 90
16:29:42	OK2PMS Jiri	(PA0LMA) GE Hennie	1610 ha8al	144174.0 G4DDK	RX FT8 -03 via webstr.camras.nl
16:23:02	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	(OK2PMS) ((FSK MS TEST, anyone?))	1609 ua6ndx	144174.0 UA4PKA	K08SS->TRH Q28KE FT8 -2 dB 781
16:21:55	PA0LMA Hennie 2m only.	GA, all	1606 oh8ia	144118.0 OK1UGA	KP0-EME-J080 lu QSO -19dB
16:10:23	DK3BU Harm	(SA6BUN) Ok, ich lass den looserchat laufen und schau mal, ob Skype noch geht, gress schoen!	1601 @egad	144118.0 OK1UGA	JN8DR-EME-J080CF Trx qso 73

ON4KST may be used during the UKAC's but check the contest rules for the specific restrictions. Personally, I don't currently use ON4KST to schedule contacts and I don't respond to messages or 'meeps', as this doesn't seem to me to be in keeping with the spirit of radio contesting. But many stations do and you may choose to. If nothing else, using it to see who is on the band and perhaps, where, can be invaluable.

Good luck!