

Key characteristics of bingo

June 2009

Following discussions with the Bingo Association and BACTA, the Gambling Commission has published a list of characteristics which it considers must be present in games, whether or not played by machine, to be classed as bingo.

The characteristics are particularly relevant to bingo machines. Machines that play bingo are exempt from limits on numbers, and stakes and prizes. If these characteristics are not present it is likely that the Commission will view the machines as gaming machines and regulate accordingly.

In the list below any reference to 'game' or 'games' means a bingo game/s

Key characteristics of bingo

- Players' payments must be divided between stakes and participation fees, although they may consist entirely of stake or entirely of participation fee. The way that division is made must be transparent to the player and in particular there must be a notice displayed showing participation fees in a way that makes it readily accessible to players. Stakes must be returned to players either in the particular game or in a subsequent one.
- Each game must be played to a single set of numbers; drawing a second set of numbers starts a new game.
- Any bingo games must clearly be presented as offering the player the opportunity to participate in a game of bingo. This includes numbers (or symbols) being marked off and the game having the appearance of a game of bingo (rather than a gaming machine).
- All bingo games (including electronic) must require players to monitor games and claim prizes.
- Any added prize money, once offered, with the exception of time limited offers, must remain available until won in that or subsequent games; the operator cannot claim them back. Prizes clearly advertised as being offered only for a limited period can be claimed back if they are not won. All prizes offered in each game must be transparent to the player.
- Games may operate with a single player, provided there is a meaningful opportunity for other players to participate in the same game.
- The game must comply with the requirements of the Gambling Act 2005 and must be capable of audit, where appropriate, to demonstrate legal compliance. Such audit data will demonstrate for example how players' payments are split between stakes and participation fees and that all stakes are returned to the players, either in that game or subsequent games.

Characteristics specific to bingo machines

- The speed of game including the time taken to join should be similar to that of an interval game. Games will not have an auto play function.
- The machines must provide the facility for the player to extend the playing time by a minimum of 100%.
- The amount that can be staked in a set period should be no greater than on a Category C machine.

Regulations specific to bingo machines in AGCs/FECs

- The nature or size of the prize offered may not be determined by the number of persons playing; or the amount paid for or raised by the game
- Bingo machines in FECs will not be made available in areas where children and young people (those under the age of 18) are permitted.

Manufacturers and operators will need to address these characteristics when developing bingo machines for bingo clubs, AGCs and FECs. We also have concerns about potential access to these machines by children and young people (those under the age of 18). Our intention is to restrict to adults the use of these machines in licensed FECs by attaching licence conditions under section 75 or 77 and in unlicensed FECs by a code of practice under section 24.

For the longer term, we need to decide to what extent we will incorporate the characteristics in our Technical Standards and Licence Conditions and Codes of Practice. In the meantime, we are content to provide the industry with an opportunity to secure the arrangements set out above on a voluntary basis. If that does not prove possible, we will pursue a more formal regulatory route. So far, both the Bingo Association and BACTA have issued these characteristics to their members as a Code of Practice.

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Keeping gambling fair and safe for all

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