

National Numbering Conventions

Responses to Consultation and Decision

February 2010 (Updated May 2014)

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The MCA introduced the Numbering Conventions in 2001 before liberalisation had really begun in the Maltese electronic communications market apart from the launch of Go Mobile.

In December 2005 the MCA issued a consultative document on a revision and simplification of the Numbering Conventions in parallel with its consultative document on the Numbering Plan. In June 2006 the MCA published the decision 'National Numbering Conventions' which included comments on the responses it received during consultation.

Since the publication of the Conventions in June 2006, the market experienced a number of new entrants and new services requiring numbering resources. From this development it became evident that it would be desirable if the national numbering conventions are updated to include:

- a more detailed process to apply for numbering resources,
- different timeframes in the application process applicable to:
 - applications for new numbers in blocks from unallocated number ranges, and
 - applications for additional numbers/number blocks from within the same number range containing number blocks previously allocated to the same applicant operator with identical terms and conditions.
- a delineation of responsibilities of the various parties during a number application process.
- requirements to ensure that all callers in Malta can reach new numbers when they are brought into service in a timely manner.
- the provision whereby unused number blocks may be recovered by the MCA.

In October 2009, the MCA issued a consultation proposing revisions to the Numbering Conventions in order to improve and clarify the arrangements for the allocation of new and additional number blocks.

1.2 Responses to the Consultation

The consultation period ran from 23 October 2009 to 4 December 2009.

Feedback on the consultation was received from the following service providers:

- Go plc
- Vodafone Malta Ltd

MCA wishes to thank these parties for their feedback.

1.3 Summary of the Responses received from operators

The proposals from the MCA were welcomed by all the respondents as improvements to the current text of the Numbering Conventions.

The operators made a number of comments on specific points and these comments and the consequent changes being made by the MCA are summarised as follows:

- The wording of 3.2(9) caused some misunderstanding over whether or not it refers to all number charging and the text has now been clarified to only include the charges applicable to the invoice accompanying the letter confirming allocation of the new or additional number block.
- The reference to “days” in the figures has been changed to “working days”.
- A provision has been added in 4.1.3 (5) in the case where interconnection arrangements would require longer timeframes. This can be achieved by the applicant asking the MCA to postpone publication of the new numbering allocation.
- 4.1.3 (7) has been added to give the applicant responsibility for updating number portability arrangements as necessary.
- One of the respondents proposed adding standardised text for numbering to be used in contracts and/or agreements. The MCA considers that this is most attractive and will discuss with the operators the preparation of an annex with such text in the future.
- An operator suggested extending the timeframe to make changes to billing arrangements. This is being addressed since the overall timeframe has now been extended.
- Another operator is of the opinion that the timescales for the MCA to issue a number block should be shortened as the MCA normally works more quickly than the figures quoted. The MCA opted to retain the same timeframe but shall continue to handle applications as quickly as possible as has always been the case in the past.

2 TEXT OF NATIONAL NUMBERING CONVENTIONS

Definitions

Activated

Activated is the status of a number when it is fully operational such that it is able to support the telecommunications service for which it is designated.

Allocation

An allocation is the granting of rights of use over numbers from designated number ranges to authorised providers. Allocation of numbers grants a right to use the allocated numbers in accordance with the Numbering Plan but it is not a property transfer.

Applicant

A service provider or operator that applies for numbers/number blocks.

National Numbering Conventions

The National Numbering Conventions is the set of 'rules' under which the Maltese National Numbering Plan is managed and administered.

National Numbering Plan

The national numbering plan specifies the subdivisions of the Maltese numbering space, the purposes for which each number range may be used and the conditions attaching to such use.

Numbering Block

A set of numbers of a size specified in the Numbering Plan (typically 10,000 numbers) that may be allocated by the MCA to an Operator (or service provider).

Numbering Range

A set of numbers defined according to the Numbering Plan in most cases by the value of the first digit, e.g. 2xxx xxxx is the Fixed Range and 7xxx xxxx and 9xxx xxxx are the Mobile Ranges. A range may include allocated and non-allocated numbers.

Originating Operator

An operator who originates calls to numbers that may be served on the networks of other operators.

Service Provider

An entity that offers telecommunications services to subscribers and/or other service providers, involving the use of telecommunication facilities provided by network operators.

Subscriber/Customer

A person or organisation that receives telecommunications services from a service provider or operator, usually against payment. The subscriber / customer is normally also an end-user of the relevant service.

3 GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 MCA Responsibilities

The Malta Communications Authority (MCA) is responsible for managing the Maltese telecommunications Numbering Plan and issuing conventions for its administration. The MCA has a statutory obligation to put in place procedures to ensure that the allocation of numbers is carried out in an objective, transparent, equitable, non-discriminatory, and timely manner.

The MCA will maintain, develop and administer the Numbering Plan and its conditions to achieve the following objectives:

1. The Numbering Plan should provide a stable framework for the development of communications with sufficient capacity and flexibility to meet future demands of end-users, operators and service providers;
2. The Numbering Plan will, where appropriate, remain compatible with relevant international agreements, standards and recommendations;
3. Where changes to the Numbering Plan are necessary, they will be implemented in a way that minimises disruption, cost and inconvenience for customers, operators and service providers;
4. Publicity for changes will be co-ordinated and commence well in advance of the change taking place;
5. The Numbering Plan will be organised wherever possible and practicable to enable callers to gain from the number a reasonable indication of the tariff type that applies to a call.

The MCA will:

1. Aim to respond to applications for numbers within the timeframes stated in the Application Process section found below;
2. Treat all applications for numbering capacity in confidence unless they raise issues that require public consultation;
3. Not disclose information obtained during the course of managing the Numbering Plan about undertakings, their business relations or their cost components, provided that such information has been identified as confidential;
4. Take account of the need that operators may have for additional allocations in the future and where possible avoid the interleaving of allocations to different operators so that routing tables are not unnecessarily lengthened;
5. Advise the ITU-T Secretariat as necessary of the allocations in Malta;
6. Consult on any changes of substance to the Numbering Plan.

The MCA does not for the time being intend to make allocations of numbers itself direct to subscribers or end users.

The MCA may at any time and without notice withdraw an allocation at the request of the Government concerning a matter of national security or interest. The reason for the withdrawal will normally be given to the operator concerned.

3.2 Applicant's Responsibilities

Operators and service providers who apply for and are allocated numbers shall:

Recognise that the allocation of a number/number block is a grant of right of use and not a property transfer;

1. Use numbers allocated to them only in accordance with the purpose given in the Numbering Plan for the range containing the numbers concerned and with any conditions that attach to the numbering range, including the adoption of any changes made by the MCA;
2. Unless the MCA agrees otherwise, surrender any number block that has not been used at all within two years of its allocation;
3. Surrender any number block that has been used but where usage has ceased unless it needs the number block for other purposes that also conform to the plan. Unless the MCA agrees otherwise, this shall be done no later than 12 months after the last use of a number in the block;
4. Conform to any direction given by the MCA concerning the national numbering plan;
5. Maintain an up-to-date record of the numbers in use and any numbers they have ported to other operators;
6. Provide to the MCA upon request any information that it may reasonably require concerning their current and planned use of numbers or any other information relevant to the administration of the national numbering plan;
7. Not allocate network specific numbers that conflict with the Numbering Plan and keep the MCA informed of all internally allocated network specific numbers with the exception of numbers used for internal network purposes that may be changed or withdrawn without difficulty (e.g. temporary test numbers);
8. When number charges are applicable, the applicant should pay the amount listed in the invoice accompanying the letter confirming allocation of the new or additional number block within one calendar month from the date of invoice;
9. Pay the quarterly invoices issued by the MCA under the conditions of Part IV of the "Directive on the Modalities of Payment for General Authorisations and Rights of Use under the Electronic Communications (Regulation) Act";
10. Where numbers are subject to individual number charging applicants should provide twice yearly, by 30 April and by 31 October, a statement of the number of numbers that were utilised on the last day of the previous month (31 March and 30 September respectively);
11. Inform the MCA if they share a block of allocated numbers with another operator or service provider and ensure that such arrangements conform fully to the Numbering Plan;
12. Advise the MCA of the name and contact details of the person responsible for numbering issues;
13. Check that the numbering allocation table published on the MCA website contains a true representation of the numbers, and/or number blocks allocated to it by the MCA;
14. Whenever use of a number by a subscriber ceases altogether (not when it is ported), not to re-allocate the number to another subscriber for a period of at least three months;

Whenever the MCA introduces changes to the national numbering plan following the appropriate discussions and/or consultations, the applicant shall ensure that the following measures are in place wherever possible and appropriate:

- i. a period of parallel running, at no extra charge to the number holder, during which both old and new numbers are available for use (typically 6 to 12 months);
- ii. after completion of the change, a period of call trapping during which announcements are made free of charge to callers to the old number to inform them of the change, (typically for 3 to 6 months after the end of the parallel running period).

4 THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The numbering plan provides a list of the available numbering ranges and the requirements and criteria that apply to them (including requirements on termination rates). The following applies for applications that fit into the current numbering plan. If an applicant wishes to obtain numbers for a service that does not fit into the existing numbering plan it should discuss with the MCA the possibility of changing or enhancing the numbering plan so that suitable numbering ranges become available. Any such changes to the numbering plan shall be at the MCA's sole discretion. If and when these ranges have been made available the applicant can apply for numbers using the following process.

Applications for numbers fall under one of the following two application processes.

- **Applications for new numbers/number blocks.**

Applications for numbers/number blocks where the applicant has never been allocated numbers/number blocks within the same number range using the same terminating rate and interconnection arrangements as included in the application of the numbers applied for.

- **Applications for additional numbers/number blocks**

Applications for numbers/number blocks from the same number range containing number blocks previously allocated to the same applicant operator, using the same terminating rate and interconnection arrangements as included in the application of the numbers applied for.

The following application processes do not apply in the case of applications for short code numbers in the '1' range, which is treated separately in section 9 of the Development of the Number Plan decision.

The timeframes listed in this section shall not apply during an industry-wide network data freeze.

4.1 Applications for new numbers/number blocks

4.1.1 Description of the procedure

The application process is shown in the following figure.

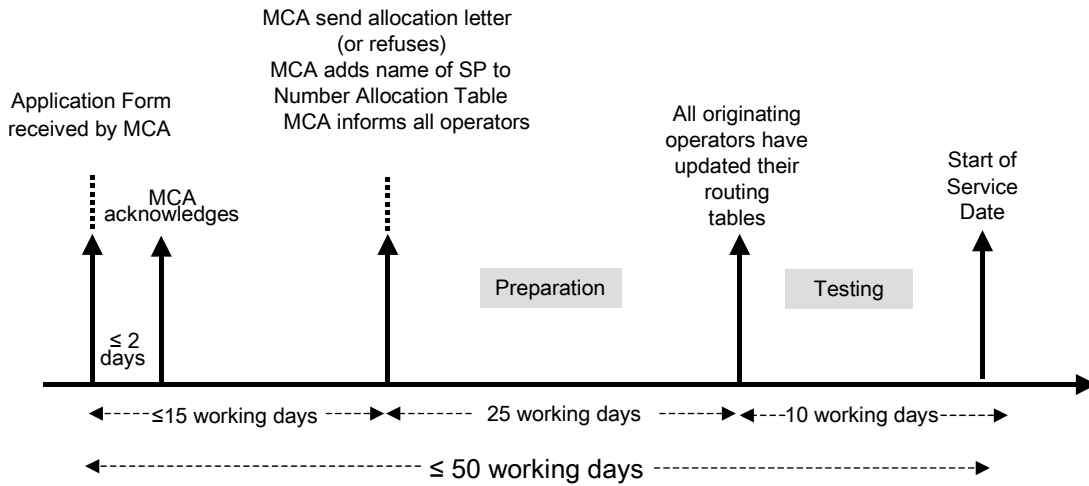


Figure 1: Number application process - new number blocks.

The following describes the process:

- a) The applicant sends the Application Form to the MCA.
- b) The MCA acknowledges the application within 2 working days.
- c) Whether the application is approved or not, the MCA replies to the applicant of its decision within 15 working days.
- d) If the application is approved, the MCA immediately informs all Originating Operators by e-mail, and publishes the Number/Number Block allocation and the identity of the Applicant in the Numbering Allocations Table.
- e) Within the next 25 working days (i.e. within the 'preparation phase'), all Originating Operators should update their routing tables and billing information.
- f) The 'preparation phase' is followed by the 'testing phase' consisting of 10 working days to allow for test calls to be made to a test number, and any problems identified to be corrected.¹
- g) Following this timeframe, all telephony subscribers should be in a position to access the newly allocated number/s.

4.1.2 The MCA's Responsibilities

1. The MCA shall follow the principle of 'first come, first served' in respect of the choice of numbers or number blocks. Allocations shall be carried out in an open, transparent and non-discriminatory manner. Applications for the same numbers received in the same postal delivery will be allocated by lottery.
2. The MCA shall send an acknowledgement letter to the applicant within 2 working days from receipt of the original application confirming that the application is being processed.
3. The MCA shall aim to process the allocation as soon as reasonably possible and not exceeding 15 working days from receipt of the application. This timeframe may be exceeded if such a process depends on third parties such as the ITU for particular number types.
4. The MCA may refuse an application for an allocation of numbers/number blocks. Alternatively, the MCA may attach specific conditions to the allocation that are consistent with the Numbering Plan and relate to the use and management of the numbering capacity allocated. Such specific conditions will be set out in the letter of allocation.
5. In the event of a refusal, the MCA shall inform the applicant, in writing, of its reasons.
6. If approved, the Allocation Letter shall include details on which number/number blocks have been allocated. Number/number blocks allocated may be different to those requested in the Application Form.
7. The MCA shall update the Numbering Allocation Table available on the MCA website with the new allocation when it sends the Allocation Letter to the applicant and its communication with the originating operators informing them on the allocation.

If it is requested specifically by the applicant providing valid reasons, the MCA may consider extending the immediate publishing of the allocated

¹ Both the originating and terminating operator should communicate information on test numbers and other testing related requirements prior to this phase.

numbers/number blocks, and refrain from immediately informing the originating operators of the allocation. Such requests shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The MCA may take appropriate steps to revoke or amend the additional numbers/number blocks granted to the applicant and/or the specific conditions attached thereto in line with the general responsibilities identified in Section 3.

4.1.3 The Applicant's Responsibilities

1. The applicant shall complete the Application Form found in Annex 1 in its entirety. This form may be completed electronically and sent to numbering@mca.org.mt to facilitate processing. However, an original hardcopy must be sent to the MCA.
2. The applicant shall have the right to indicate its preference for specific numbers/number blocks. However, these preferences will not necessarily be agreed by the MCA.
3. Applications for new numbers/number blocks shall be submitted so as to allow 50 working days before the planned Start of Service Date.
4. In the case when an applicant shall use a transit operator/s to convey traffic, before commencing its application for new numbers/number blocks, it is required to ensure that all negotiations including any contractual agreements with the transit operator/s in question have been completed. Third party operators should be in a position to convey calls without incurring any additional charges beyond the regulated termination rates.
5. Prior to the commencement of the preparation phase the applicant shall be responsible to ensure its own technical and commercial readiness to adhere with all the milestones according to these numbering conventions. This shall include readiness to provide other operators with the conditions for terminating or conveying traffic, technical specifications, and network characteristics,² at the beginning of the preparation phase.
6. The applicant shall ensure that, upon the commencement of the preparation phase, the applicant sends a formal notification to all operators with all the set milestones they are required to adhere to according to these numbering conventions and other applicable obligations.
7. In case the applicant needs to set up any underlying infrastructure to interconnect with other operators, as in the case of E1 links, it should ask the MCA to postpone the publishing of the allocated number/number blocks (as specified in the last paragraph of 4.1.2) until the technical and commercial arrangements are sufficiently complete so that all operators can fulfil their obligations for Preparation and Testing³ according to the timeframes specified in Figure 1 above.
8. The applicant shall ensure that during the preparation phase any necessary contractual arrangements, including interconnection agreements, with other operators are concluded so that the numbers can be brought into service on the Start of Service Date.
9. During the preparation phase the applicant shall also ensure that the number porting arrangements are updated as necessary in line with the number portability specifications to recognise that it is the block operator for the new numbering allocation.

² This information may be contained in a reference interconnection offer.

³ Including the infrastructure for number portability (i.e. VPN/web service) as per the number portability specifications

10. The applicant shall ensure that the test number is operational at least 10 days before the Start of Service Date and shall cooperate with other operators as necessary for testing and use its best efforts to resolve any technical issues with regards to terminating calls originating from other networks and number portability related processes.
11. The applicant shall not be held responsible if subscribers of originating operators do not have access to these numbers within the stipulated timeframes provided that it has fulfilled all the points mentioned above.

4.1.4 The Originating Operator's Responsibilities

1. All originating operators who may originate calls to numbers that terminate on other networks must ensure that their subscribers may access the allocated numbers/number blocks by the Start of Service Date.
2. The originating operator shall use its best efforts to resolve any technical and administrative issues with regards to the conveyance and billing of calls and/or SMSs to these numbers/number blocks.
3. The originating operator shall be held responsible if its subscribers are not in a position to access the allocated numbers/number blocks within the stipulated timeframes provided that the applicant has fulfilled its obligations as specified in section 4.1.3.
4. All originating operators shall take the utmost account of formal notifications that include milestones according to these numbering conventions which are received from applicants. Where the milestone are not or cannot be adhered to, whether by the applicant or the originating operator, it shall be the Originating Operator's responsibility to inform the applicant at the earliest opportunity where this becomes apparent, giving details and reasonable grounds for such communication. If the problem persists the originating operator is responsible to inform the MCA.

4.1.5 General

1. An Interconnection agreement is required between the terminating operator and all originating operators in order for calls to be conveyed. The applicant and the originating operators shall appoint a representative for the purposes of exchanging relevant information as well as for the overseeing the organisation of the day-to-day practical implementation of the Interconnection Agreement.
2. All the parties involved should exchange commercial and technical information willingly in order to make interconnection effective, subject to commercial confidentiality.
3. Subject to any confidentiality obligations, the parties shall provide appropriate information including, but not limited to;
 - a. The services which are required/offered with regard to interconnection and the terms and conditions on which such interconnection services are offered,
 - b. The charging structure and relevant fees for each interconnection service,

- c. Information regarding own or any transit network control and management utilised, as is necessary for interconnection,
 - d. Information regarding the setup and operation necessary for the number portability processes.

4. Each Party shall ensure that its apparatus used to establish and provide interconnection, shall conform to national and international standards and operating guidelines including, but not limited to, those of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI).

5. The Interconnection should not be unnecessarily constrained by technical issues or limitations unless justified by objective reasons. The time period for the preparation phase may be extended under certain circumstances due to industry practices such as network data freezes which are carried out by the operators, as long as the Authority and the parties are appropriately notified and approved by the MCA.

6. The parties should at all times act in a manner to facilitate the speedy and effective operation of the interconnection to the benefit of customers and their mutual advantage. In the case of any commercial or technical issues which may hinder the implementation, application or interpretation of the interconnection process, the relevant parties shall co-ordinate with each other to achieve a mutually acceptable solution in order to resolve any disputes related to such an issue.

7. In the event that the Parties fail to resolve any disagreements within the time period designated for the preparation phase, then either Party has the right to file a Dispute with the Authority.

4.2 Applications for additional number blocks

4.2.1 Description of the procedure

The application process is shown in the following figure.

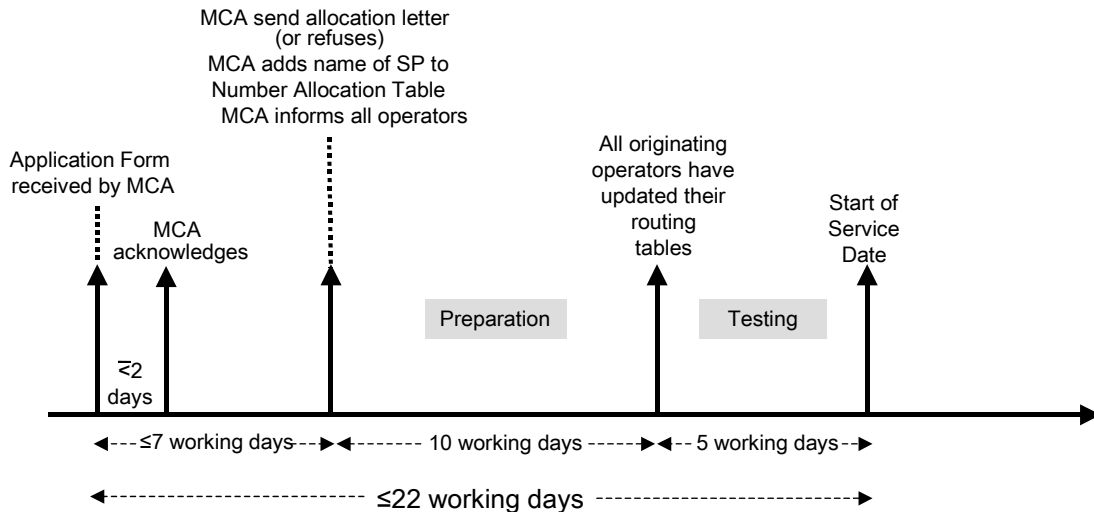


Figure 2: Number application process - additional number blocks.

The following describes the process:

- The applicant sends the Application Form to the MCA.
- The MCA acknowledges the application within 2 working days.
- Whether the application is approved or not, the MCA replies to the applicant of its decision within 7 working days.
- If the application is approved, the MCA immediately informs all Originating Operators by e-mail, and publishes the Number/Number Block allocation and the identity of the Applicant in the Numbering Allocations Table.
- Within the next 10 working days (i.e. within the 'preparation phase'), all Originating Operators should update their routing tables and billing information.
- The 'preparation phase' is followed by the 'testing phase' consisting of 5 working days to allow for test calls to be made to a test number, and any problems identified to be corrected.⁴
- Following this timeframe, all telephony subscribers should be in a position to access the newly allocated number/s.

⁴ Both the originating and terminating operator should communicate information on test numbers and other testing related requirements prior to this phase.

4.2.2 The MCA's Responsibilities

1. The MCA shall follow the principle of 'first come, first served' in respect of the choice of numbers or number blocks. Allocations shall be carried out in an open, transparent and non-discriminatory manner. Applications for the same numbers received in the same postal delivery will be allocated by lottery.
2. The MCA shall send an acknowledgement letter to the applicant within 2 working days from receipt of the original application confirming that the application is being processed.
3. The MCA shall aim to process the allocation as soon as reasonably possible and not exceeding 7 working days from receipt of the application. This timeframe may be exceeded if such a process depends on third parties such as the ITU for particular number types.
4. The MCA may refuse an application for an allocation of numbers/number blocks. Alternatively, the MCA may attach specific conditions to the allocation that are consistent with the Numbering Plan and relate to the use and management of the numbering capacity allocated. Such specific conditions will be set out in the letter of allocation.
5. In the event of a refusal, the MCA shall inform the applicant, in writing, of its reasons.
6. If approved, the Allocation Letter shall include details on which number/number blocks have been allocated. Number/number blocks allocated may be different to those requested in the Application Form.
7. The MCA shall update the Numbering Allocation Table available on the MCA website with the new allocation when it sends the Allocation Letter to the applicant and inform all Originating Operators of the allocation.

If it is requested specifically by the applicant providing valid reasons, the MCA may consider extending the immediate publishing of the additional number block, and refrain from immediately informing the originating operators of the allocation. Such requests shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The MCA may take appropriate steps to revoke or amend the numbers numbers/number blocks granted to the applicant and/or the specific conditions attached thereto in line with the general responsibilities identified in Section 3.

4.2.3 The Applicant's Responsibilities

1. The applicant shall complete the Application Form found in Annex 2 in its entirety. This form may be completed electronically and sent to numbering@mca.org.mt to facilitate processing. However, an original hardcopy must be sent to the MCA.
2. The applicant shall have the right to indicate its preference for specific numbers/number blocks. However, these preferences will not necessarily be agreed by the MCA.
3. Applications for additional numbers/number blocks shall be submitted so as to allow 22 working days before the planned Start of Service Date.
4. The applicant shall ensure that, upon the MCA updating the Numbering Allocation Table available on the MCA website with the additional allocation and the MCA communication with the originating operators informing them on the allocation, it sends a formal notification to all originating operators with all milestones according to these numbering conventions.

5. The applicant shall be responsible to ensure its own technical and commercial readiness to adhere with all milestones according to these numbering conventions.
6. The applicant shall ensure that any necessary contractual agreements with other operators are in place so that the numbers can be brought into service on the Start of Service Date.
7. The applicant shall ensure that the test number is operational at least 5 days before the Start of Service Date and shall cooperate with other operators as necessary for testing and use its best efforts to resolve any technical issues with regards to terminating calls originating from other networks.
8. The applicant shall not be held responsible if subscribers of originating operators do not have access to these numbers within the stipulated timeframes provided that it has fulfilled all the points mentioned above.

4.2.4 The Originating Operator's Responsibilities

1. All originating operators who may originate calls to numbers that terminate on other networks must ensure that their subscribers may access the allocated numbers/number blocks by the Start of Service Date.
2. The originating operator shall use its best efforts to resolve any technical and administrative issues with regards to the conveyance and billing of calls and/or SMSs to these numbers/number blocks.
3. The originating operator shall be held responsible if its subscribers are not in a position to access the allocated numbers/number blocks within the stipulated timeframes provided that the applicant has fulfilled its obligations as specified in this section.
4. All originating operators shall take the utmost account of formal notifications that include milestones according to these numbering conventions which are received from applicants. Where the milestone are not or cannot be adhered to, whether by the applicant or the originating operator, it shall be the Originating Operator's responsibility to inform the applicant at the earliest opportunity where this becomes apparent, giving details and reasonable grounds for such communication. If the problem persists the originating operator is responsible to inform the MCA.

4.3 Reservations and allocations

The MCA does not run a system of reservations for operators who are considering the possible introduction of services.

An operator or service provider who wishes to obtain the right to use a block of numbers shall make a formal application and if approved pay for the numbers from the date of allocation (if numbering fees apply).

4.4 Simplification for adding new blocks

Where practicable, the MCA will refrain from allocating 10k number blocks containing the same 3 digit prefix as other number blocks being used by another operator. This practice is designed to allow operators to choose to include only the first three digits of numbers in their routing tables, billing solutions etc so that they do not need to make further changes when another 10k block with the same value of the first 3 digits is allocated to the same operator.

In the unlikely event that other 10k number blocks from the range with the same first 3 digits have to be allocated to other operators due to numbering shortages, then this practice will no longer be possible and all operators will have to use 4-digit prefixes for routing.

4.5 Unused allocations

If after two years from allocation no subscriptions have been activated with numbers in the block concerned, the MCA may withdraw the allocation by issuing a Withdrawal of Allocation letter.

Annex 1: Application form for allocation of new numbers/number blocks

Application Date _____

COMPANY NAME	Company Reg. No. _____
Address and Contact Details	Contact Person Postal Address telephone: fax: e-mail:
Description of intended use	
Preferred numbering block or code and alternatives	
Proposed terminating rate for incoming calls/text if applicable	
The name of the operator the applicant plans to have direct interconnection with to transit calls to and/or from other operators if applicable.	
Additional Remarks; (including the special request to extend the publishing of the allocation table and the start of service date if applicable.) ⁵	

Signed: _____

⁵ Requests to extend the date of publishing and start of service date shall be considered by the MCA on a case by case basis.

ANNEX 2: APPLICATION FORM FOR ALLOCATION OF ADDITIONAL NUMBER BLOCKS

Application Date _____

COMPANY NAME	Company Reg. No. _____
Address and Contact Details	Contact Person Postal Address telephone: fax: e-mail:
Preferred numbering block :	
Additional Remarks; (including the special request to extend the publishing of the allocation table and the start of service date if applicable.) ⁶	

I declare that the intended use, terminating rate and interconnection arrangements are the same as for our existing number allocations from within the same number range.

Signed: _____

⁶ Requests to extend the date of publishing and start of service date shall be considered by the MCA on a case by case basis.