



NOTES FOR ASSESSORS

ON THE

MARKING SESSIONS

Updated March 2003

FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

NOTES FOR ASSESSORS ON MARKING SESSIONS

Priorities for the Marking Session

- 1 It is suggested that the Assessors should establish their priorities for the tasks to be accomplished during the Marking Session before it starts. This should include the following tasks:
 - (a) to introduce examiners to the marking procedures;
 - (b) to ensure that each examiner establishes and maintains an appropriate standard of marking, both in the allocation of marks and the annotation of scripts in accordance with guidance given;
 - (c) to organise the work of
 - (i) marking; and
 - (ii) checking.
 - (d) to ensure the completion of all the work of the team during the time available.
- 2 To ensure that the Assessors are able to complete all of the tasks, the Secretariat will, if required, allocate to an Assessor clerical help to assist with any 'number crunching' work.

Preliminaries for the Marking Session

- 3 Shortly following the examination, each Assessor, will receive:
 - (a) A complete set of all the subjective question papers for the examination.
 - (b) A complete set of the Provisional Marking Guides for Examiners.
 - (c) A copy of the Notes for Examiners on Marking.
 - (d) A list showing the names of the examiners allocated to mark the paper for which the Assessor is responsible together with information about the previous performance of each examiner and their current reference within the brigade.
 - (e) A full list showing all examiners invited to the Marking Session.
 - (f) Other information concerning other papers, allocation to rooms, etc.
- 4 Where possible examiners are allocated to the same or similar papers to those that they have previously marked or expressed an interest in marking. New examiners are allocated on a random basis but will not normally work under an officer from their own brigade.

- 5 As part of the administrative procedures carried out by the Secretariat before the beginning of the Marking Session a count of question responses is made. This is produced via the computer through the analysis of the Candidates' Attendance Forms. Based on this information and the Assessor's personal knowledge of the marking team, the Assessor will then allocate the examiners to a particular question and notify the FSEB accordingly. The FSEB will then inform the examiners of the question to which they have been allocated before the Marking Session in order to assist them in their preparation.

The beginning of the Marking Session

- 6 A meeting usually takes place on the Sunday evening at which the Lead Assessor, the General Assessor for Scotland, the Assessors, Examiners and Secretariat all meet together by way of a formal introduction to the session. Domestic matters relating to the hotel are also discussed.
- 7 Assessors will then normally move to their own marking rooms where they will have a meeting with their own team of examiners. Any domestic matters relevant to their own team should be dealt with at this meeting.
- 8 The Secretariat will inform Assessors of any comments regarding their own paper, which have been received from candidates, examination supervisors, or any other source. Such comments may necessitate a review of particular questions and Notes for Guidance because of ambiguities, etc. or special treatment for particular candidates. Where there are special circumstances surrounding a candidate or group of candidates, it is normal practice to mark them without reference to the circumstances and to review the scripts and, if appropriate, to discuss moderation of their results at the meeting of Assessors on the conclusion of the Marking Session.

The Marking Session

Hours

- 9 The working hours will normally be 0900 to 1230 and 1400 to 1730 each day (Monday to Thursday) unless varied by the Assessor. The need for individual examiners to work after 1730 hours on any day will be dependent upon their own work load and intended time of departure from the hotel. All marking should normally be completed by late afternoon on the Thursday although there is the possibility of marking on the Friday morning. The work of the Assessors should be concluded by mid-morning on the Friday.

Bundles

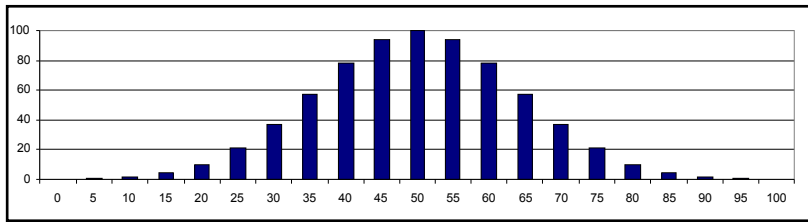
- 10 Before the scripts are despatched from the Board's offices to the marking centre they are divided into "bundles" and each bundle has a front sheet attached. Within each bundle all scripts are in ascending numerical order. Candidates are now given a unique personalised number. This number will remain with the candidate for all examinations subsequently undertaken. Therefore, gaps in the candidate numbers of the scripts are to be expected. **It is important, however, that the scripts are kept in strict ascending numerical order, within each centre, throughout the marking process. To assist, each script has a number in the top left hand corner to identify its position within the bundle.**

- 11 The bundle front sheet has spaces on the right hand side for each examiner to initial when he has marked his own question. On the left hand side, the Assessor will initial the box 'bundle approved by Assessor' when all of the scripts have been marked and totalled. The 'clerical checks completed' box is for use by the clerical helper during the marking session.

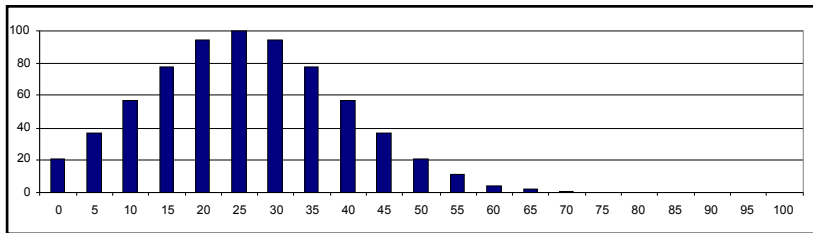
Introductory Session

- 12 The first working session on Monday morning is spent with the Assessor introducing his paper and the mechanics involved in marking and then the examiners participating in an initial 'random' marking session.
- 13 The aim of the introduction is to give all examiners some background to the structure and origins of the paper and where appropriate, the relationship between different sittings. Some information should also be given concerning how the questions were chosen to cover the syllabus and not overlap unduly with the previous year's questions. Assessors should note that ALL questions are now compulsory for candidates.
- 14 The aim of the initial random marking session is to translate the Provisional Marking Guide into a firm marking scheme for each question. Scripts should be selected at random from those available but not withdrawn from their bundles; they should subsequently be marked in the usual way. It is at the Assessor's discretion as to how the 'random' selection is made. The initial marking must be done in pencil and should firstly confirm the Assessor's allocation of marks to sections of questions and then sub divide marks within sections of questions so that, as a general rule, single marks are allocated to points within the marking guide. Although marks may be re-allocated within sections, the stated number of marks for each 'part' of the question must NOT be adjusted.
- 15 During the initial random marking each examiner should keep a tally of marks awarded but this should not be done on the Examiners' Distribution of Marks Sheet. Throughout the marking session, information can be obtained from looking at the shape of the distribution curve. It must be remembered, however, that once the initial marking exercise has been completed and the marking scheme agreed, an examiner's standard must not be amended part way through the work, unless discrepancies appear when more than one examiner is marking the same question (see overleaf).

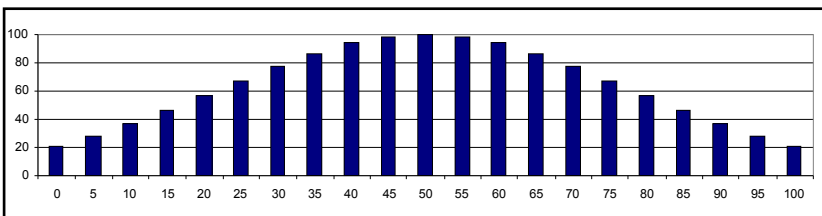
16 Examples of distribution curves and the conclusions that may be drawn from them are:



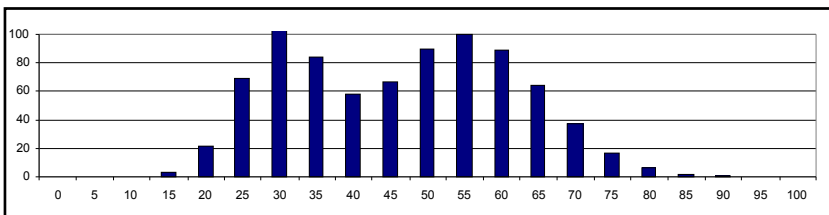
A perfect distribution – this means either that it is a perfect question or that the way in which it is being marked makes it look that way.



A poor result – either a hard question or a hard marker (a similar asymmetric curve for easy question or marker).



A good spread of marks – results discriminating better than normal.



A spiky curve often encountered where a question has more than one part and each part is marked out of a different sub-total.

Whatever the shape of the curve it must be treated only as a guide for it may be the result of an inconsistent marker, which is always a potential problem.

- 17 The Assessor must agree each marking scheme after it has been drawn up by the examiner. The Assessor should look not only at the guide but also at the scripts to see how the scheme was evolved and how it works in practice, i.e. that those responses worthy of credit receive their just reward.
- 18 During this initial exercise, it may be found that candidates have reacted to a question in a quite unexpected manner. They may be consistently including a valid point which is not in the Provisional Marking Guide or frequently misinterpreting part of a question. In such instances the examiner should consult with the Assessor who may feel it necessary to consult with the Lead Assessor before agreeing to a revision to the Provisional Marking Guide. Such discussions may lead to a decision to make no changes and will thus recognise the fact that large numbers of candidates will score low marks for the question.
- 19 It is important, however, that any revisions made to the marking guide at the initial random marking stage **MUST** be agreed with the Lead Assessor before the final marking is undertaken.

Checking and tallying scripts

- 20 Assessors are provided with sheets on which to record the progress of the marking of the bundles of scripts. The Assessor will control the marking of the paper(s) by instructing an examiner to take a particular bundle of scripts. The Assessor should ensure that the examiner's initials are placed in the appropriate box on the tally sheet when a bundle is taken and a diagonal line is drawn across the box when the marked bundle is returned. Assessors should ensure that the marking of all questions for each bundle of scripts is completed as quickly as possible so that they can proceed with their own work on the completed bundles.
- 21 The Assessor should make random detailed checks on the way in which the examiners are marking, their consistency, speed, recording and tallying of marks etc. Any problems arising from the way in which an examiner is doing the job should be raised with the individual concerned immediately so that remedial action can be taken.
- 22 Assessors must give particular attention to any situation where more than one examiner is marking the same question. The initial exercise should have determined a common standard and this must be maintained. Constant checks should be made to ensure that this is so and any significant variation should be investigated as soon as possible. If necessary the answers involved may need to be re-marked to ensure a common standard has been applied.
- 23 There is no requirement for the Assessor to do any totalling or checking of the script to ensure that every question is marked. The clerical help provided by the Secretariat will undertake this. Furthermore, there is no need to total the marks on the front of each script – this information will be provided by the Secretariat's computer.
- 24 Part of the role of the Lead Assessor, assisted by the General Assessor for Scotland is to quality assure the questions, and to ensure standardisation across the paper and the examination as a whole. During the marking week either officer will retrieve bundles to assess the standard and quality of the marking and this process will assist Assessors in their own checking and verifying process of each question.
- 25 Assessors should be aware that until the Lead Assessor has signed off each question, it is imperative that examiners are not released from their paper.

Re-allocation of examiners

- 26 If an examiner completes the marking of the allocated questions, the statistics and the report before the end of the session, the Assessor should notify the Lead Assessor to see whether the examiner should be re-allocated to another question/paper. The decision will be dependent upon a number of factors, the main one being the amount of work outstanding but also bearing in mind the examiner's speed, intended time of departure, etc.
- 27 An examiner re-allocated either within a paper or to another paper must go through a work-up exercise in the same way as on the Monday morning for the first question. If assisting another examiner a start must be made with the other examiner's marking scheme, which must be learnt and applied in the same way as the other examiner.

- 28 Unless personalised examiner mark sheets have already been created, there will be a need to ensure that an examiner re-allocated to another question, encodes his marks to an existing examiner's mark sheets. Although the procedure is outlined in paragraphs 25-27 of the Examiners 'Notes on Marking', it is suggested that the Secretariat are always consulted when this situation arises.

Imbalance

- 29 If it is found that an examiner is a hard or lenient marker no attempt must be made to revise the standard in mid-stream unless there is a difference in the standard being applied by different examiners to the SAME question (see above); this is something that should be brought up at the meeting of Assessors and Secretariat at the end of the session.

Dangerous Practices

- 30 If an examiner considers that a candidate's answer, if applied in the real world, would have resulted in the lives of firefighters and/or the general public being placed at serious and unacceptable risk they have been instructed to bring the script to the attention of the Assessor.
- 31 If the Assessor agrees with the examiner's opinion, details of the candidate number, examination paper and appropriate question number, and the reporting examiner will be recorded and passed to the Lead Assessor for consideration.
- 32 If it is agreed that the candidate's answer meets the criteria, the Lead Assessor will write to the candidate's Chief Fire Officer/Firemaster with details of the dangerous practice with a recommendation that the candidate receives counselling guidance and appropriate training. It will also be recommended that the Chief Fire Officer/Firemaster might wish to ensure that the practice identified by the candidate does not identify a shortfall in brigade training on a wider basis. The candidate will also be advised in writing that this communication has been sent.

At the end of the Marking Session

- 33 Towards the end of the marking session, a meeting of the Assessors and Secretariat will be held – usually either on the Thursday afternoon or sometime on the Friday morning.
- 34 Each Assessor will complete a report form supplied by the Secretariat on the results of their paper. The form is in three sections:

Section A - concerns **the examination details** and requires the Assessor to summarise the details of the marking of each examiner from their distribution sheets together with the finish times of each examiner.

Section B - concerns **general examination comments** on any questions that the Assessor feels may cause moderation of results to be considered and would include reference to unexpectedly hard or easy questions.

Section C - concerns **secretarial matters** and includes information on:

overall number of examiners used;

comments on the hotel; and

a list of the items the Secretariat require to be returned.

35 The Secretariat will have information on the estimated pass rates for each paper.

36 The results of individual candidates who were examined under special conditions will also be reviewed.

After the marking session

37 Assessors are asked to complete a brief report concerning the individual members of their marking team. This is not intended to be a full "end of term" report but a brief aide memoire for the next session or another Assessor. Examiners should be graded between 'A' and 'C'. An Examiner graded 'B-' or below would not normally be invited back to a future marking session.

38 Each examiner is required to submit a written report to the Assessor on the question marked and is expected to include any specific comments about the question, especially common errors and misconceptions. Pass rates should NOT be stated.

In addition, the Examiners' Distribution of Marks Sheet should be completed to show:

- total number of candidates expected; (*taken from the 'Analysis of Responses' sheet*)
- total number of actual scripts marked;
- number passing (25 marks = 13 pass mark);
- number failing; and
- percentage passing.

39 Each Assessor must then prepare a full report, on to the examination paper(s) and they should ensure that it reaches the FSEB within one week of the end of the marking session. Where possible, this should be provided to the secretariat as a Word file. The report should be concise and not contentious and suitable for publication in the 'Report of the Examiners'. It should be based on information gathered throughout the marking period by the Assessor and take into account the examiner's comments. The 'Introduction' should include any general comments/trends/concerns relevant to the paper as a whole.