



SECTION THREE
PREPARING FOR THE
WRITTEN EXAMINATION

Issued May 2000

PREPARING FOR THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION

1. Introduction

Every attempt has been made to ensure that there is no conflict between the information given in the Rules, Syllabuses and Bibliography, and in this Handbook but, in the event of one arising, the Board will be guided by the Rules, Syllabus and Bibliography.

2. Assumption

The FSEB supports the competency based approach to training and therefore assumes that a candidate has acquired the relevant knowledge, understanding, skill and ability in the rank previous to the examination that is being sat.

Therefore, the examination will not generally seek to test knowledge that "should already have been acquired".

3. Role Map

Role maps describe the functional role, standard of performance and competencies expected of a Fire Officer. The FSEB has adopted the role maps that have been developed by the Joint Strategic Committee on Personnel, of the CFBAC. The role maps known collectively as "The Fire Service Standards of Competence", will be used as one of the foundations on which to base the national examinations.

The role maps to which the station officers examination relate are the watch/station commander role maps.

The "Fire Service Standards of Competence Role Maps" are available within Brigades.

4. Other Publications

In the past, the FSEB has published a report by the assessors and examiners after each written examination and copies have been made available to brigades.

This practice will continue but only one hard copy will be supplied to each brigade, and the text will be put onto the FSEB's web site www.fseb.gov.uk.

The aim of these publications is to help future candidates by commenting generally on the performance of candidates when taking the examination. You are advised to look at these publications because they contain general advice and comments on examination technique as well as on specific questions and topics.

5. Preparations

The first step in your preparation should be to thoroughly understand the advice and guidance set out in this handbook. The Rules in Section One should be followed and your study and research should follow the Syllabus and Bibliography in Section Two.

You must ensure that you are studying material listed in the current edition of the Syllabus and Bibliography.

The secret of success in any examination is directly related to the amount of time and effort you are prepared to give to a thorough, systematic and detailed study of all sections of the relevant material listed in the Syllabus and Bibliography.

There are no short cuts to success, you should be prepared to undertake at least nine months, regular, carefully planned preparation for the examination.

Your preparation should include practice at answering questions. You must not rely on just your experience and the training you have previously received to answer the questions successfully.

It is well worth remembering that sometimes practices in individual brigades may differ from those spelt out in the Syllabus and Bibliography.

REMEMBER:

The questions are drawn from, and the answers marked in accordance with, the material contained in the Syllabus and Bibliography. It is the material in the SYLLABUS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY, which is used to determine the correctness of an answer.

Before attending the examination, you will receive from the secretary of the local examination board your examination notice and any other relevant information, eg how to get to the examination centre, etc.

The examination notice is your formal confirmation of your examination number and the date, time and location of your examination centre. If you have not received your examination notice within 4 weeks of your examination date, you should raise the matter with the secretary of your local examination board, or your brigade and if necessary with the Board.

REMEMBER:

Check your examination notice carefully, particularly the paper(s) for which you have been entered. If you fail to produce your examination notice, and you are not listed on the attendance register, you will not under any circumstances be allowed to take the examination.

6. Conduct in the Examination Room

Before you sit a written examination you will be issued with instructions concerning conduct in the examination room. It is important that you comply with these and with any instructions given by the examination supervisor because, if you do not, you will be reported to the FSEB who will consider whether or not to disqualify you.

Particular points that you should note are:

- (a) You must be in the examination room at least ten minutes before the start of each session.
- (b) You must supply your own pen, pencil, eraser, ruler, pencil sharpener and, where necessary, ink (red ink must NOT be used).
- (c) You will be provided in the examination room, with a calculator supplied by the FSEB. You are not permitted to bring into the examination room your own calculator and if you are found to be in possession of these you will be liable to disqualification from the examination.
- (d) Your examination number must be entered on all examination material. Your name should not appear on answer books or additional sheets.
- (e) When you get into the examination room you should check that the number on your examination notice is the same as that on the attendance form where you are seated. If it is not, contact the examination supervisor immediately.
- (f) You must not take mobile phones, food or drink into the examination room.
- (g) You must maintain strict silence during the examination and you must not communicate with other candidates.
- (h) You must not use or attempt to use unfair means in the examination eg copying from another candidate or from notes, textbooks etc. Any books (including dictionaries), notes etc must be left at the front of the room before the start of the examination. If you are found in possession of any such material once the examination has started you will automatically be reported to the FSEB and will be liable for disqualification.
- (i) If you write comments on your answer books/sheets, which are offensive to the assessors and examiners, you will be reported by the Board to your Chief Fire Officer/Firemaster.

The FSEB has introduced an optical mark reading form, the CANDIDATE'S ATTENDANCE FORM (see Appendix 2), to assist in the analysis of the questions that you have attempted. The form contains your name and candidate number, for easy identification when entering the examination room, and your personal details. The form also includes a declaration notice for signing to confirm your fitness and suitability to take the examination (see Rules – Section 1).

- (a) On entering, the examination room you must sit at the desk that bears your name and candidate number.
- (b) You must sign the declaration notice on the attendance form to indicate your attendance and your fitness and suitability to take the examination.

- (c) If any of your personal details included on the attendance form are incorrect, encode the appropriate box and state the correct details.
- (d) After encircling the question attempted on the front of your answer book you must also complete the same information on the attendance form. Encode IN PENCIL the relevant boxes for each question attempted for the relevant paper.
- (e) At the end of the examination day the attendance form will be collected by the Supervisor together with your other examination papers.

If you decline to sign the declaration notice then it is unlikely that your examination scripts will be marked.

The FSEB has agreed that the wearing of fire service uniform when taking the written examination is optional. You should remember, however, that you are seen as representing your brigade and that your dress and behaviour reflect on the brigade as well as on yourself.

7. The Examination Timetable

The examination timetable is set out in paragraph 3 of Section One. This shows the format of each paper and the timetable. The following sections are included to give you guidance on how to prepare for the questions and how to tackle them in the examination room.

8. Preparing for the Examination

- (a) With the exception of the in-tray exercise in Paper four, all the questions in the examination are subjective. This means that they are based on a main theme or topic from a book or other reference material.
- (b) Subjective questions can have different layouts and increasingly Assessors use a layout referred to as "a scenario question". These questions are designed to assist the candidate to more fully understand the question by putting the candidate in a situation likely to be met with at work and asking the candidate to describe the actions to be taken.
- (c) All subjective questions, whatever the layout, generally require a written answer in the candidate's own words and style demanding not only the recall of facts, but also a demonstration of understanding and the ability to apply knowledge correctly in solving the problem.
- (d) Although the number of subjective questions in each paper is small they all have to be attempted. The questions can be drawn from any part of the syllabus as described in the Syllabus and Bibliography in Section Two. Unless, therefore, you have studied the whole syllabus and understood it, you may find that you cannot answer any of the questions.
- (e) Previous examination reports of the assessors and examiners comments will be sent to Chief Fire Officers and Firemasters and you are advised to study these. They will give you an idea of the kind of questions the assessors are likely to set and the difficulties most frequently encountered by candidates.

- (f) A particular point, which the assessors and the examiners often make, is that candidates pay too little attention to the precise wording of the questions. This comment relates not only to the subject matter but also to the way in which the answer should be presented.

For example, questions asking, for 'lists', 'brief descriptions', 'definitions', do not require long, discursive essays.

- (g) All answers must be given in a logical and legible manner.

Even if you know the answer, marks cannot be given if the examiner cannot understand what you have written or cannot read your handwriting. You should, therefore, practise writing answers to the questions from previous examination papers.

- (h) Some questions may require sketches or diagrams while other answers may benefit from them even if not specifically asked for. If you include a diagram in your answer ensure that it is clear and helpful.

You may find it useful to draw a rough outline before drawing the final diagram as part of your answer.

REMEMBER:

The final diagram should be clear and accurate and drawn with a ruler if appropriate.

Ample room must be left around the edges for the necessary labels. Labels should have clear straight lines going from the label directly to the part being named

Sketches should normally be in black lead pencil though coloured pencil or felt tip pen (not red) can be used for clarification.

Practice in drawing sketches is as important as practice in writing answers.

- (i) When practising answering the questions, you should time yourself so that you become familiar with the length and kind of answers you can complete in a given time.

By the time you take the examination you should know from experience how much you can write in a given time. This will be a great help in drawing up your timetable for answering questions.

- (j) Before going into the examination room ensure that you know what to expect - particularly the time available and the total number of questions to be answered.

This information is given in the table at Appendix 1 in section five of this booklet and by studying this, you will be able to work out a provisional timetable in your mind.

REMEMBER:

The time available for actually answering each question should be divided into a few minutes for preparation, including making detailed notes, with the remainder of the time being used for writing out your answer to the question.

- (k) The questions in section B of Paper four, 'the in tray exercise', differ from the other questions in the examination as they are designed to test skills other than knowledge and understanding.

Study note 3404 in section four of this handbook provides an outline of what you may anticipate in the 'in tray exercise' and how you can prepare for it.

REMEMBER:

If you have not come across this type of question or test before, familiarise yourself with the kind of problems that your station officer has in the office 'in tray' and see how and why the problems were prioritised and dealt with in a particular way in real situations . think how you would have dealt with the same situations and why.

9. Taking the Examination

- (a) Carefully read the instructions given on the front cover of the question paper, the front of the answer book and in the rubric to the subjective questions.
- (b) Ensure that you have inserted your candidate number and centre number in the boxes on the front of the answer book. This is the only way that anyone can identify whose answers the book contains. No candidate number or an incorrect number means that it may not be possible to give you credit for the work you have done. Fill in other details (eg date) as required.
- (c) Note particularly the total number of questions to be answered and the time available.

REMEMBER:

YOU MUST answer all the questions.

Insufficient answers will mean you cannot obtain maximum marks and your chances of passing the papers will be considerably reduced.

- (d) If you have previously given thought to the format of the examination you will have a rough timetable in your mind.
- (e) When drawing up your timetable do not forget to leave some time at the end of the examination during which you can read through your answers and check that everything is in order.
- (f) Ensure that you keep to the timetable that you have drawn up, even if this means leaving a question unfinished. You can return to it when you have completed the other questions if you have time.
- (g) Read through all the questions before attempting to answer any. This gives you an idea of what the paper contains.
- (h) It can be useful also to make some rough notes on particular points that come to mind during this initial reading in case these are subsequently forgotten.

REMEMBER

There is no choice of the questions that have to be answered, you have to attempt ALL questions. Bearing this in mind, decide the order in which you are going to tackle them.

- (i) Read each question thoroughly before beginning your answer.

REMEMBER:

Every word in a question has significance and many marks are lost by candidates failing to read the question or to answer the question as it is set.

- (j) If a specific number of points or examples is asked for, do not give more than the specified number. Any excess will NOT be marked.
- (k) If you feel it would be useful, make a brief note of the salient points in the answer book before writing the final version. Do not spend too long on this, but it may help in the logical presentation of information in your final answer.
- (l) For each question begin a new page in the answer book.
- (m) Show which question you are answering by writing the question number clearly in the box at the top of the page.
- (n) Ensure that your answer is clear and logical.
- (o) Where a question is divided into parts, the answer must also be divided into parts and clearly labelled in the same way as the question.

- (p) If you use sketches ensure that they are neat, clear and legible.

REMEMBER:

The examiner is expecting you to show your knowledge not your ignorance.

Avoid vague generalities and padding and be as precise as possible.

Ensure that you are answering the question asked as no marks will be gained by inserting irrelevant material or by just repeating the question.

- (q) Should you not wish the examiner to read any rough notes you have written in the answer book or take account of any rough sketches, these should be neatly crossed out, but do not waste time trying to make them completely illegible.

Similarly, if you do not wish the examiner to mark an answer or part of an answer, neatly cross this through in the same way.

- (r) If you run out of paper in your answer book, ask the supervisor for more paper.

- (s) Ensure your candidate number is clearly written on each additional sheet but do not write your name on it.

- (t) When you have answered all the questions in accordance with your timetable, check again to see that you have answered them all and that you have answered the questions as set.

- (u) Check your spelling and the way you have expressed your answer and make any small alterations that you consider might help. Do not attempt to rewrite your answers at this stage.

If, after this, there is any time left, you can go back to any question which you did not complete earlier and continue the answer.

- (v) Should you need to continue an answer on a different page of the answer book to that on which you started, ensure that you clearly indicate the question number and that this is a continuation from an earlier page. You should also indicate on the earlier page where you have continued your answer.

- (w) Before the end of the examination you must ensure that you have indicated on the front cover of the answer book and your attendance form those questions which you have attempted by ringing and encoding the appropriate question numbers.

- (x) If you should finish the whole paper well before your time limit, it is unwise to leave the examination room even if you are allowed to - it is best to look again at the question paper.

- (y) When the supervisor calls that time is up, stop writing at once and listen to any instructions that the supervisor may give you - particularly concerning the order in which you have to leave your papers.

Ensure that any additional sheets used for answering questions are inserted into your answer book. Do not attach them to the question paper.

- (z) You may remove the question paper from the examination room. However, your answer book (together with any additional sheets), and your attendance form must be left on the desk for collection by the supervisor.

- (aa) Do not talk to any one until you have left the examination room and ensure that you comply with the supervisor's instructions until you have left the building in which you sat the examination.

ALWAYS REMEMBER:

YOUR SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN THESE EXAMINATIONS IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE AMOUNT OF TIME AND EFFORT YOU ARE PREPARED TO GIVE TO A SYSTEMATIC AND DETAILED STUDY OF ALL SECTIONS OF THE RELEVANT BIBLIOGRAPHY.

THERE ARE NO SHORT CUTS TO SUCCESS.

YOU SHOULD BE PREPARED TO UNDERTAKE AT LEAST NINE MONTHS REGULAR, CAREFULLY PLANNED PREPARATION FOR THIS EXAMINATION.