

## MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 26 JANUARY 2000

VENUE: The Improvement and Development Agenda (IDeA)  
Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG

PRESENT: Mr G Meldrum (Chairman)

### CACFOA

K Pearson

### CONVENTION OF SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

A Lafferty

### FIRE BRIGADE UNION

M Fordham

### INSTITUTE OF FIRE ENGINEERS

J W Cowie

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

M G Barnes

A J Till

D J Williams

K Roberts (Substitute)

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

G Currie (Substitute)

## IN ATTENDANCE

I S T Adam (Observer, Firemaster)  
H E Wright (Chairman of the Panel of Assessors)  
C J Webb (Secretary)  
A Wells (Observer, Home Office)  
D Fretwell (FSEB Project Manager)  
M A Malone (Senior Administrator)

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr W Giles, Mr T Glossop, Mr D Grant, Mr E Guy, Cllr P Corcoran, Mr M H Alcock, Mr K Cameron, Mr M Harper and Mr D Patton, the retiring FBU member.

### 2. MEMBERS

2.1 The Chairman welcomed Mr Fordham as the new representative from the FBU

#### New Years Honours List

2.2 Mrs Webb informed the meeting that Peter Morphew and Malcolm Eastwood had been awarded the CBE and Ian Kerr, CFO Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service had been awarded the OBE.

2.3 It was agreed that letters of congratulations be sent in recognition of their honours. The Board also noted the change to the Membership.

RESOLVED: (i) To send letters of congratulations to Mr Morphew, Mr Eastwood and Mr Kerr.

(ii) To send a letter of thanks to the retiring FBU Member, Mr D Patton.

### 3. MINUTES

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 1999 were approved, subject to the following amendment :

“RESOLVED: (i) To send letters to Mr M Harper and Mr D Patton.”

3.2 The minutes of the special meeting held on 10 November 1999 were approved.

3.3 Both sets of minutes were duly signed by the Chairman.

#### 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

##### Presentation To Top Candidates

- 4.1 The Chairman reported that the presentation of the framed certificates to the top candidates had been made by the Minister at the *Fire'99* conference. Everyone involved had felt the occasion had gone well. Arrangements were in hand to repeat the presentation at the *Fire 2000* conference in Manchester.

##### Changes to the Statutory Promotion Examinations

- 4.2 Mrs Webb reported that the changes to the examinations had been publicised through a Newsletter and a National Training Workshop held on 19 January 2000. Mr Fordham welcomed the Newsletter and confirmed that the Fire Brigades Union had disseminated extracts to all fire stations, confirming the Union's support of the changes.

#### QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF LEADING FIREFIGHTER

##### 5. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS

- 5.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and to the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination for promotion to the rank of Leading Firefighter - Part I Written 1999. (Paper 1/2000).
- 5.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter Alistair Richard Hornsby from Cumbria Fire Service should receive a framed certificate.
- 5.3 Mr Wright informed the meeting that 2004 candidates had entered the examination, but that 231 had absented themselves, leaving a total of 1773 who actually attempted the examination. This figure represented a 15.5% increase on the previous year. Of those who sat, 853 (42.6%) were awarded a pass.
- 5.4 He commented that whilst a small number of candidates had submitted excellent scripts, 540 had passed none of the papers for which they had entered. Although there had been an improved pass rate on Paper I, the weaker responses had been on ventilation methods to assist firefighting and the advantages of high nozzle pressures when applying water to fires. Paper II had also provided an improved pass rate, with the weaker responses being on certain fire precautionary measures in buildings.

- 5.5 Mr Wright explained that although candidates had been barred for either absenteeism or poor performance in accordance with the Rules governing the 1999 examination, the introduction of the new arrangements from September 2000 meant that the bans would be lifted
- 5.6 Copies of the Report of the Assessors and Examiners would be circulated to Members of the Board as soon as it was available.

- RESOLVED: (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Scottish Ministers.
- (ii) That Firefighter Alistair Richard Hornsby be presented with a framed certificate.

#### QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF SUB-OFFICER

#### 6. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS

- 6.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination for promotion to the rank of Sub-Officer Part I Written Examination 1999. (Paper FB2/2000).
- 6.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter Steven John Healey from Cumbria County Fire Service should receive a framed certificate.
- 6.3 Mr Wright informed the meeting that not only had there been a slight reduction in the number of entries compared with the previous year but also the pass rate had been one of the worst since 1987. Only 83 candidates with the rank of Leading Firefighter had passed the examination.
- 6.4 1718 candidates had entered the examination, but 172 had absented themselves, leaving a total of 1546 candidates who had actually sat the examination. Of these, 468 or 27.2% were awarded a pass.
- 6.5 Mr Wright explained that although candidates had been barred for either absenteeism or poor performance in accordance with the Rules governing the 1999 examination, the introduction of the new arrangements from September 2000 meant that the bans would be lifted.
- 6.6 The Members of the Board discussed the implications of the weaknesses shown by candidates in the areas of the use of breathing apparatus and literacy. They were also concerned that candidates described potentially fatal practices in their answers. There was general agreement that brigade managers had a role to play in responding to the feedback provided on the examinations.

6.7 Members also asked that the statistical analyses be reviewed to provide breakdowns by gender and not by title; to eliminate the 'up to 20 years' and '55+' age categories and to show passes by paper title.

6.8 Copies of the Report of the Assessors and Examiners would be circulated to Members of the Board as soon as it was available.

- RESOLVED:
- (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Scottish Ministers.
  - (ii) That Firefighter Stephen John Healey be presented with a framed certificate.
  - (iii) That a report be brought to a future meeting of the Board on options for responding to candidates who describe potentially dangerous practices in their examination answers.

## 7. ASSESSOR FOR THE SUB-OFFICERS EXAMINATION

7.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB5/2000 which asked the Board to approve the appointment of Mr Richard Hards, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service as Assessor for Paper 2 of the Sub-Officers' examination.

7.2 He explained that this role had been offered to Mr Jeffrey Ord, Firemaster, Strathclyde Fire Brigade who was currently an assessor for the Station Officers' examination but he had indicated that he would no longer be able to continue as an assessor for the Board after March 2000.

- RESOLVED:
- (i) That the appointment of Mr Richard Hards as Assessor for Paper 2 of the Sub-Officers' examination be agreed.
  - (ii) That a letter of thanks be sent to Mr Jeffrey Ord after the March 2000 marking session in recognition of the work he had undertaken as assessor since 1991.

## 8. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART II PRACTICAL TEST

8.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination to the rank of Sub-Officer Part II Practical Test 1999 (Paper FB 3/2000).

- 8.2 Mr Wright informed the meeting that 1102 candidates had entered the test but that 88 had absented themselves, leaving 1014 actually taking the test. Of these, 590 (58.2%) had obtained a pass and were now qualified for promotion to the rank of Sub-Officer. This was the highest number since 1987. He highlighted the fact that 150 candidates holding the rank of Leading Firefighter had failed the practical test.
- 8.3 Members of the Board noted that pre-test preparation was a matter for brigades.
- 8.4 Copies of the biennial report on the practical tests would be circulated to Members as soon as it was available.

**RESOLVED:** That the draft report be approved and forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and to the Scottish Ministers.

## **9. WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS OF THE PRACTICAL TESTS**

- 9.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB4/2000 which reported on the workshop held annually for the Senior Examiners of the Local Examinations Boards.
- 9.2 The workshop had been held on 5 October 1999 at the offices of the IDEa in London and attended by the Senior Examiners, or their representatives, from each of the 21 Local Examination Boards and by officers of the Board's Secretariat. It was chaired by the Chairman of the Panel of Assessors.
- 9.3 The workshop provided a mechanism to maintain consistency of national standards across the local boards and facilitated an exchange of information and views on the administration and conduct of the practical tests.

**RESOLVED:** That Paper FB4/2000 be noted.

## **QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF STATION OFFICER**

### **10. RECIPROCAL ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN THE FSEB AND THE IFE**

- 10.1 Mrs Webb introduced Paper FB6/2000 which reported on the meeting held in October 1999 between officers of the Board and the IFE.
- 10.2 The issues affecting the reciprocal arrangements had been brought to the Board in a series of papers since January 1998. In order to try to quantify the scale of these differences, the two bodies had agreed to carry out a mapping exercise of the syllabus for the station officers examination which would come into effect for February 2001 and the relevant IFE syllabus. A further report would be brought to the next meeting of the Board. It was noted that any debate by the Board would be against the background of the impending outcome of the Implementation Working Group on Training Strategy.

## OTHER ITEMS

### 11. FUNDING OF THE BOARD - ESTIMATES 2000/2001

- 11.1 Mrs Webb introduced Paper FB 7/2000 which asked the Board to agree the detailed estimated expenditure for 2000/2001.
- 11.2 She also asked the Board to note that, in approving the bid for finance for the next financial year, the Central Bodies Scrutiny Group had asked the Local Government Association's Fire Executive to consider future options for the funding of the Board - status quo; direct grant from the Home Office, Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament; or direct charging, either wholly or in part, on fire authorities.
- 11.3 Mr Williams asked that the Welsh Local Government Association be sent copies of the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the estimated total expenditure of £498,100 be approved.

### 12. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

- 12.1 Mr Fretwell introduced paper FB8/2000 which brought the Board up-to-date with progress on the Review project since the special meeting in November 1999.
- 12.2 He confirmed that the Handbooks for the Leading Firefighters and Sub-Officers examinations had been circulated to brigades before the end of December. Their contents should be available on the Internet within a few days; on FINDS within a few weeks and on the Fire CD ROM by June or July.
- 12.3 When considering the draft syllabus for the Station Officers' examination from 2001, Members discussed the need to achieve the correct balance when distinguishing between the knowledge an officer would need to have at the time of promotion and that which s/he would acquire in the rank.

**RESOLVED:** That the syllabus for the Station Officers examination from 2001 be approved.

### 13. REORGANISATION WITHIN THE IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY for Local Government

- 13.1 Mrs Webb reported that following an internal reorganisation with the IDeA and a streamlining of the examining and awarding function, she would be retiring at the end of March and Mr David Stanley would become Secretary to the Fire Services Examinations Board.
- 13.2 The Chairman thanked Mrs Webb for her work with the Board since 1990.

14. RETIRING MEMBERS

- 14.1 The Chairman paid tribute to both Mr Ian Adam, who would be retiring as the Observer for the Firemasters, and Mr David Williams, who would be retiring as a representative of the Local Government Association, for their services to the Board.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 15.1 It was agreed to meet on Thursday 6 July 2000 at the offices of the Improvement and Development Agency, Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, London EC1M 5LG.