

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 6 JULY 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 Harper
M Fordham

INSTITUTE OF FIRE ENGINEERS

J W Cowie

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

L Brett
R King
B Taylor (Substitute)
A J Till

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

C McGarva (Substitute)

IN ATTENDANCE

H E Wright (Chairman of the Panel of Assessors)
D J Stanley (Secretary)
D Fretwell (FSEB Project Manager)
M A Malone (Senior Administrator)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Barnes, Cllr D Fox, Mr W Giles, Mr T Glossop, Mr E Guy, Mr I Ibbotson and Mr A Wells.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that George Edwin Guy, Head of the Fire Policy Unit, Home Office and Secretary of State Member of the Fire Services Examinations Board was awarded the CBE and John Judd, ACFO, Greater Manchester County Fire Service and David Kennedy, Deputy Firemaster, Strathclyde Fire Brigade (both former examiners) were awarded to QFSM.
- 2.2 It was agreed that letters of congratulations be sent in recognition of their honours. The Board also noted the changes to the Membership.

- RESOLVED:
- (i) To send letters of congratulations to Mr G Guy, Mr J Judd and Mr D Kennedy.
 - (ii) To send letters to Cllr L Brett and Mr R King to welcome them as new Members of the Board, representing the Local Government Association and to Mr A Gilchrist as a new Member of the Board representing the Fire Brigades Union.
 - (iii) To send a letter of thanks to the retiring Fire Brigades Union Member, Mr K Cameron.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2000 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 5 and 6: Statistical Reports

- 4.1 Mr Stanley reported that a review had been carried out on the statistical reports and that the following amendments would be made as agreed by the Board Members.
- (i) To amend Analysis of Entries by Age Group Statistical Report to read 50+, to replace 55+ and to amend Analysis by Title to male and female only.
 - (ii) To revise Full Statistical Report to remove the repeat of headings.

Leading Firefighters' Written Examination – One Sitting

- 4.2 Mr K Pearson, on behalf of CACFOA, raised his concerns on brigade resources over the move to one examination sitting at Leading Firefighter level.

RESOLVED: Mr Pearson to report back at the January meeting of the Board on the effect on brigades on holding one sitting at the September 2000 Leading Firefighters' examination.

Item 10: Reciprocal Arrangements between the FSEB and the IFE

- 4.3 Mr Stanley reported that no further work had been undertaken on the mapping exercise of the Station Officers' and the IFE Graduates Examinations' Syllabuses. A further report would be brought to the Board when the impending outcome of the Implementation Working Group on Training Strategy was completed.

Item 12: Future of the Statutory Examination

- 4.4 Mr Fretwell updated the members on the progress of the work on the new examination.
- 4.5 He reported that refinements had been made to the bibliography, as previously circulated, due mainly to amendments to the Building Regulations and the need to develop Study Notes with the delay in the publication of the Fire Service Training Manual.
- 4.6 He confirmed that the Handbooks for the Station Officers' Examination had been circulated to Brigades at the end of May. The contents were currently available on the Internet and Finds and would shortly be on the 'Fire' CD Rom. Copies of the Handbook were passed around the meeting to Members for information.
- 4.7 Mr Fretwell explained that the work was progressing with external consultants on the development of the In-Tray exercise, which would form part of the Business Administration paper at Station Officer level in February 2001.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF LEADING FIREFIGHTER

5. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARIES OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART II PRACTICAL TEST 2000

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 II Practical Test 2000. (Paper FB9/2000).

5.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 1143 candidates had initially entered the examination. However the final number of candidates entered was 1047(after withdrawals). Of these 61 (5.8%) had absented themselves, leaving 986 actually attempting the examination, 611 (62.0%) of which were awarded a pass and 375 (38.3%) failed. 25 female firefighters attempted the test, 17 (68.0%) of whom were awarded a pass. The 611 successful candidates are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Leading Firefighter.

5.3 The Board was advised that with the changes affecting the Restriction of Entry Scheme, only candidates whose appeals related to the final year of their three year period were heard. In this respect 5 candidates appealed against their automatic barring from the 2001 examination and 4 were upheld. These candidates would have a further year to complete their examination. A further 33 candidates had failed to pass their Part II examination within the three year period, they must now re-sit their Part I Written Examination.

5.4 Mr Wright reported that there was a decrease in the number of candidates entering the 2000 examination compared to the 1999 entrants. The pass rate was slightly lower than that achieved in 1999.

5.5 Section A of the test provided an overall result of (87.0%) which was an improvement to that of last year (84.0%) and the general quality of candidates observed during the test was good. General weaknesses of failed candidates related to a hesitance in establishing command which carried over into the debrief, where many candidates failed to involve the crew members in a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses displayed.

Section B showed a decrease in the pass rate (73.2%) to that achieved in the 1999 tests (76.3%). The general weaknesses displayed by failed candidates in this Section related to inadequate information gathering which resulted in the application of an inadequate plan and an unsatisfactory level of command.

Section C of the test provided an improvement in the pass rate (82.8%) to that achieved in 1999 (80.8%).

- 5.6 Mr Wright reported that both himself and the Assessor for the Practical Tests had visited examination centres during the course of the tests. He confirmed that the facilities provided were satisfactory and that assessments undertaken by examiners met the Board's standards.
- 5.7 Mr Wright further commented that where brigades provided pre-examination training this was reflected in brigade results.
- 5.8 There was discussion amongst Members over the decline in the number of firefighters taking the tests and the possible future implications of the number of qualified Leading Firefighters in the Fire Service.

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

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF STATION OFFICER

6. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARIES OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2000

- 6.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretaries of State for the Home Department and the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination to the rank of Station Officer. (Paper FB10/2000).
- 6.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 1399 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 1279 (after withdrawals). 164 (12.8%) absented themselves, thus the number of candidates who attended was 1115. Of these 435 attempted all four papers. Of the 1115 candidates who attempted the examination, 359 (32.2%) were awarded a pass, and are now qualified to the rank of Station Officer. 16 female candidates entered the examination, 7 (43.8%) of whom passed the whole examination.
- 6.3 The Board was advised that with the changes affecting the Restriction of Entry Scheme, under the revised examinations, only candidates whose appeals related to the final year of their three year period were heard. In this respect, 4 candidates appealed to the Board against their automatic barring from the 2001 examination and the 4 were upheld. These candidates will have one further year to complete their examination.
- 6.4 Mr Wright reported that following the introduction of the new system, this was the final year for some candidates to pass outstanding papers. 39 candidates failed to do so and their previous passes have become null and void.
- 6.5 He reported that the objective questions in Papers 1 and 2 indicated that the results achieved were marginally poorer than those achieved in the 1999 examination. Of the subjective questions in each of the four papers, when compared with the results achieved last year, improved pass rates were achieved in all papers, with the exception of Paper 2.

Overall, he felt that the standard of scripts submitted by candidates was generally better than in previous years.

- 6.6 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate, Leading Firefighter Leslie David Britzman from Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service should receive a framed certificate from the Board.

- 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 Leading Firefighter Leslie David Britzman be presented with a framed certificate.

7. QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2000

- 7.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners. (Paper FB11/20).

8. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2001/2002

- 8.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB12/2000 which set out the funding requirements for 2001/2002 under Section 78(1) of the Local Government Finance Act which would be submitted to the Central Bodies Task Group and the Scottish Executive for their approval. The paper also showed the actuals for 1999/2000 and the variations from the budget. Savings were predicated for 2001/2002 with a reduction in expenditure on printing costs following the production of the new Candidates Handbook via the IDeA's Website.

- 8.2 The Board was asked to agree the detailed estimated expenditure for 2001/2002.

- RESOLVED: (i) To note the actuals for 1999/2000.
- (ii) To approve the submission for 2001/2002 of:
- £422,180 plus inflation from the LGA (England)
 - £25,045 plus inflation from the LGA (Wales)
 - £46,675 plus inflation from the Scottish Executive.

OTHER ITEMS

9. ASSESSORS FOR THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS', SUB-OFFICERS' AND STATION OFFICERS' WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS

9.1 Mr Wright introduced Papers FB13/14/15/17/2000 which reported vacancies for Assessors for the Leading Firefighters', Sub-Officers' and Station Officers' Written Examinations.

- RESOLVED:
- (i) That the appointment of a new assessor, at present unknown for Paper 4, Leading Firefighters' Examination be agreed.
 - (ii) That the appointment of Mr Michael Freeman as assessor for Paper 1, Sub-Officers Examination be agreed.
 - (iii) That the appointment of Mr Paul Young as assessor for Paper 2, Station Officers' Examination be agreed.
 - (iv) That the appointment of Mr Peter Coles as assessor for Paper 4, Station Officers' Examination be agreed.
 - (v) That letters of thanks be sent to Mr Bryan Smith and Mr Peter Jones at the appropriate time, as retiring assessors, in recognition of the work they had undertaken.

10. DANGEROUS PRACTICES IDENTIFIED IN EXAMINATION SCRIPTS

10.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB16/2000 which advised members of a procedure which could be applied if dangerous practices were identified by examiners in candidates examinations scripts. Such practices, if applied in the real world, could have serious implications on the lives of firefighters and/or the general public, and he felt it appropriate that action be taken on behalf of the Board.

10.2 The Board was asked to agree the procedure for reporting such instances found in examination scripts to Chief Fire Officers/Firemaster.

10.3 Mr Fordham suggested that candidates should be given counselling, guidance and appropriate training. It was also recommended that Chief Fire Officers/Firemasters may wish to ensure that the practise identified by the candidate does not identify a shortfall on brigade training on a wider basis. The candidate would be advised in writing that this communication had been sent.

- RESOLVED: To agree the Procedure for Dangerous Practices, subject to amendments outlined in paragraph 10.3.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed to meet on Thursday 25 January 2001.

After discussion with the Deputy Commandant of the Scottish Fire Service Training School, it was agreed to hold this meeting at Gullane.