

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 25 JANUARY 2001

VENUE: Scottish Fire Service Training School, Gullane
East Lothian, Scotland, EH31 2HG

PRESENT: Mr G Meldrum (Chairman)

CACFOA

K Pearson
K Seager

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

J McGhee (Substitute)

INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

J W Cowie

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

J Doyle (Substitute)
A J Till

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

G Currie (Substitute)
D Grant

SECRETARIES OF STATE

T Glossop

IN ATTENDANCE

H E Wright (Lead Assessor)
L I Ibbotson (Observer, Firemaster)
D J Stanley (Secretary)
M A Malone (Senior Administrator)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Barnes, Cllr L Brett, Cllr P Corcoran, Mr M Fordham, Mr W Giles, Mr A Gilchrist, Mr E Guy, Mr M Harper, Mr R King, Cllr A Lafferty and Cllr J Shaw.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 Mr Meldrum informed the meeting that Malcolm Alcock, previous CACFOA Member of the Board, Alan Marshall, Board Assessor for the Leading Firefighters' Written Examination and Bob Doherty, previous IFE representative of the Board had been awarded the QFSM. He also congratulated Donald Grant, Scottish Minister representative on his award of the OBE.

- 2.2 It was agreed that letters of congratulations be sent in recognition of their honours.

RESOLVED: To send letters of congratulations to Mr M Alcock, Mr A Marshall and Dr B Doherty.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2000 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Presentation to Top Candidates

- 4.1 Mr Meldrum reported that the top candidates at the written examinations had been presented with their framed certificates by the Minister at the Fire 2000 Conference.

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 ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 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 I Written 2000. (Paper FB1/2001).
- 5.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter Daniel Edward Barton from Essex County Fire and Rescue Service should receive a framed certificate.
- 5.3 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that this was the first application of the new examination format using four Papers with all questions to be answered, and the provision of one sitting instead of the two previously used.
- 5.4 He reported that 1815 candidates had entered the examination, but that 331 had absented themselves, leaving a total of 1484 who actually attempted the examination. Of those who sat, 304 (20.5%) were awarded a pass.
- 5.5 Mr Wright reported that whilst a minority of candidates had submitted excellent scripts, 226 had passed none of the papers for which they had entered, which was considerably less than the figure of 540 for the previous year.
- 5.6 Although the overall number of candidates passing was down, the number who now had paper credit passes was encouraging. It was difficult to compare the passes recorded for the individual papers due to the changes that had been applied. However Paper 1 provided a pass rate of 55.6% which was a reduction on the pass rate of 62.7% for the similar Paper 1 of last year.
- 5.7 Paper 2 showed a general improvement in the level of knowledge displayed, but the overall pass rate of 38.9% was a poor reflection of the 50.2% pass rate achieved in the similar Paper last year, which was almost entirely due to the general lack of knowledge being displayed of the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997.
- 5.8 Paper 3 – Human Resource Management, was new to the examination and the pass rate of 32.7% was very disappointing. Weaknesses were displayed in all aspects of the subject matter which were examined.
- 5.9 Paper 4 – Business Administration, related to similar subject matter previously examined at Sub-Officer level. Excellent scripts were presented by some candidates and the quality of responses was good which resulted in a pass rate of 70.9%.

5.10 The Chairman commented on his concern for the high level of absenteeism at this year's examination and added that Chief Fire Officers/Firemasters had been previously made aware of the Board's concern for candidates not presenting themselves for examinations.

- RESOLVED: (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Scottish Ministers (subject to an amendment to Mr Ibbotson's initials).
- (ii) That Firefighter Daniel Edward Barton be presented with a framed certificate at the Fire 2001 Conference.

6. QUESTION PAPER AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART 1 WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2000

6.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and the Examiners (Paper FB2/2001).

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF SUB-OFFICER

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

7.1 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 2000. (Paper FB3/2001).

7.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter Bryan J Nelson from Tayside Fire Brigade should receive a framed certificate.

7.3 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that this was the first application of the new examination format using four Papers, with all questions now being compulsory.

7.4 He reported that there was a reduction in the number of entries compared with the previous year and an increase in the number of candidates who absented themselves. Of the 1581 candidates who entered the examination, 236 (14.9%) had absented themselves, leaving a total of 1345 who actually attempted the examination. Of those we sat, 250 (18.6%) were awarded a pass.

7.5 Mr Wright reported that some candidates made a significant effort to prepare themselves for the examination and had produced excellent answers, but these were in the minority.

- 7.6 Mr Wright explained that it was again difficult to compare the passes of the individual papers due to the changes applied in the examination. However, Paper 1 provided a pass rate of 20.7%, with the weakest responses recorded relating to incident command structures and the characteristics of a flame and water relay procedures.
- 7.7 Paper 2 – Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement, was new to the examination and a pass rate of 44.3% was recorded. The weakest responses related to the questions on automatic venting systems and fire investigation procedures.
- 7.8 Paper 3 – Human Resource Management, was again another new paper and a disappointing pass rate of 29.8% was recorded.
- 7.9 Paper 4 – Business Administration, provided some good responses and excellent scripts from candidates and an encouraging pass rate of 81.0% was recorded.
- 7.10 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 17 candidates appealed to the Board against the automatic barring from next year's examination and 12 were upheld.
- 7.11 Concern was expressed by Members over the decline in the number of candidates presenting themselves for both the written and practical examinations. Whilst it was acknowledged that there was no single reason for the decrease in numbers, no actual research had been carried out by the Board with brigades. Mr Glossop suggested that a letter could be sent to the Fire Service College with a suggestion that such research could be carried out as part of the Brigade Command Course.

- RESOLVED:**
- (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Scottish Ministers (subject to an amendment to Mr Ibbotson's initials).
 - (ii) That Firefighter Bryan J Nelson be presented with a framed certificate.
 - (iii) That a letter be sent to the Fire Service College (Mr Shevells) to explore the reasons why firefighters are not presenting themselves for examinations.

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 2000. (Paper FB4/2001).
- 8.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 715 candidates had entered the test but that 41 (5.7%) had absented themselves leaving 674 actually taking the test. Of these 428 (63.5%) were awarded a pass and were now qualified for promotion to the rank of Sub-Officer. 9 female firefighters attempted the test, all of whom were successful.
- 8.3 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, one candidate appealed to the Board against his automatic barring from next year's examinations and the appeal was upheld.
- 8.4 Mr Wright commented on the comparison to the figures relating to the previous year's test which indicated a significant decrease in the number of entries. However, although the numbers passing in numerical terms was down, the percentage passing again showed an improvement (+5.3%) to that of 1999 and reflected the highest on record for this part of the examination.
- 8.5 He reported a pass rate of 87.4% in Section A of the test which was higher than that achieved last year. It was reported that the most common causes of failure continued to be a reluctance to take command of the crews, inadequate attention to safety aspects and the poor de-briefing of crews.
- 8.6 Section B of the test produced a pass rate of 79.5% which was again higher than the result achieved in the previous year. The weaknesses identified in this part of the test were the inadequate risk assessments and inappropriate actions being applied together with failure to delegate duties, establish overall command and control of crews and unsatisfactory de-briefing of crews.
- 8.7 Section C of the test also provided a higher pass rate to 1999 of 79.9%. The main weaknesses identified related to inadequate preparation of candidates for their instructional talk.
- 8.8 Mr Wright reported that he and the National Assessor for the practical tests visited all local examination boards to assess the facilities provided at the examination centres and to observe the tests in progress. He informed the meeting that few problems were in evidence in the arrangements made for the tests and where matters required attention, these had been adequately dealt with.

RESOLVED: (i) That the draft report be approved and forwarded to the Secretaries of State for the Home Department and the Scottish Ministers.

PRACTICAL TESTS

9. WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS

- 9.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB6/2001 which reported on the Workshop held annually for local examination board Senior Examiners.
- 9.2 He reported that the Workshop provided a mechanism for issues to be discussed to a common national standard and enabled an exchange of information and views on the administration and conduct of the practical tests. In particular, two Papers, one on a section pass credit system and the other for a review of the number of lectures for the Sub-Officers' Section C test produced a most healthy debate by Senior Examiners.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB6/2001 be noted.

10. ASSESSOR FOR THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' EXAMINATION

- 10.1 The Chairman, Mr Meldrum introduced Paper FB7/2001 which reported on a vacancy for an Assessor for the Leading Firefighters' Examination, Paper 4 – Business Administration.
- 10.2 The Board was asked to confirm the appointment of Mr Roger Greet, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Dorset Fire and Rescue Service as the Assessor for this Paper following the transfer of Mr Paul Young, as Assessor to the Station Officers' Examination.

RESOLVED: That the Board agreed the appointment of Mr Roger Greet as Assessor, for Paper 4 of the Leading Firefighters' Examination.

FINANCE

11. FEES AND HONORARIA FOR ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS

- 11.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB8/2001, which detailed the proposed new fees and honoraria to be paid to assessors and examiners with effect from 1 April 2001.

RESOLVED: That the Board agreed to an increase in the fees and honoraria for the 2 year period commencing 1 April:

- (i) the annual fee paid to the technical adviser for the Written Communication Paper in the Leading Firefighters' Examination would be increased to £639.00 plus £39.25 per day for attendance at additional meetings.

- (ii) the honoraria paid to assessors and examiners would be increased to £44.25 and £32.00 respectively per examination marking session.

12. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2001/2002

- 12.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB9/2001 which asked the Board to agree the detailed estimated expenditure for 2000/2001 and approve the budgeted expenditure for 2001/2002.
- 12.2 He reported that further savings were now anticipated for 2000/01 due mainly to a reduction in printing and stationery costs following the publication of the Candidates Handbook via the internet.
- 12.3 The budget for 2001/2002 reflected the original submission approached at the July meeting, but now included an inflation allowance of 2.5%. Again he reported that further savings were anticipated at Station Officer level due to reduced printing and stationery costs, but the ongoing work at IWG level had necessitated the provision for continuing work by the Project Manager.
- 12.4 Mr Glossop enquired as to the true costs for running the practical tests and after discussion, it was agreed to write to each local examination board for this detailed information.
- 12.5 Mr Stanley also advised Members of the recent Inland Revenue's assessments as to the status of the post 'Chairman of Assessors' which would need to be treated for PAYE purposes from the 1 April. As well as having implications to the budget for 2001/2002, it would also mean a change to the conditions of service to the current Chairman's post.
- 12.6 Members were concerned as to the grounds that the decision had been reached by the Inland Revenue and Mr Stanley confirmed that, as the assessment had only just been received, he would need to investigate fully the implications of the ruling and report back to Members at the July Board meeting. He reported that the Chairman of Assessors contract was due for renewal on 31 July 2001.

RESOLVED: That the estimated total expenditure for 2001/2002 of £510,047 be approved.

13. DANGEROUS PRACTICES IDENTIFIED IN EXAMINATION SCRIPTS

- 13.1 Mr Meldrum introduced Paper FB10/2001 which provided an update on the application of the procedures applied following the marking of the scripts submitted by candidates for the Leading Firefighters' and Sub-Officers' Part I Written Examination 2000.

- 13.2 The Board was asked to note the report and to consider whether the procedure should be amended to cater for the comments received.
- 13.3 Mr Wright reported that during the Leading Firefighters' and Sub-Officers' examinations marking session, the examiners and assessors identified responses from seven candidates to specific questions, which 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. These candidates and their Chief Fire Officers/Firemasters had been written to in accordance with the agreed procedure.
- 13.4 He reported that the information sent to candidates had preceded the issue of the overall results of the examination which had led some candidates to assume that they had therefore failed the examination. Also, some Chief Officers had commented that they would have preferred to have been the sole recipients of the information and dealt with the issues accordingly.
- 13.5 Although members noted the concerns expressed by brigades, they nevertheless felt that it was important that both candidates and Chief Officers were notified as soon as possible, particularly as any undue delay could have legal implications to the Board. However, it was agreed that the letter to candidates should indicate that despite a dangerous practice being identified, they had not necessarily failed the examination. It was also agreed to ask Chief Officers to acknowledge receipt of their letter.

RESOLVED: The Board confirmed the Procedure of Dangerous Practices, subject to:

- (i) the letter to candidates amended to confirm that they had not necessarily failed the examination; and
- (ii) the inclusion of a request that the receipt of the letter from the Chairman of Assessors to Chief Fire Officers/Firemasters be acknowledged.

14. APPEALS PROCEDURE

- 14.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB11/2001 which provided members with the background and reasons to consider the inclusion of an appeals procedure for future examination candidates.
- 14.2 He reported that it was generally accepted by other examination boards that candidates should have the right to have their results reviewed and that the Data Protection Act and the Human Rights Act had increased these rights. Furthermore, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) would expect any new Qualifications Body appointed to quality assure the proposed integrated system of qualifications to have such an appeals system in place.
- 14.3 Members noted the comments of Mr Cowie, who outlined the recently introduced appeals system of the Institution of Fire Engineers and confirmed that, in principle, they were happy to support an appeals system.

14.4 Mr Stanley agreed to report back at the July meeting with full details of how such a scheme would apply to both the written and practical examinations.

RESOLVED: That the Board approved the principles of Appeal Systems for the Written and Practical examinations, subject to a more detailed report being presented for the July 2001 meeting, as to how such a system would be applied.

15. FSEB WEBSITE - ADVERTISING

15.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB12/2001 which reported on the development of the FSEB website and outlined a proposal for advertising on the site.

15.2 The Board was asked to approve the principle of allowing advertisements on the FSEB website, in order to reduce the cost of the setting up and ongoing maintenance of such a site.

15.3 Members expressed some concerns with the proposal, particularly as experience had shown the need to be cautious when inviting companies to advertise. Mr Glossop advised that there were 'government guidelines' published on website advertising. After discussion, it was felt that further information was needed as to the benefits and costs to the FSEB and Mr Stanley agreed to investigate further.

APPROVED: That Mr Stanley explore the options on website advertising and prepare a paper for the July 2001 meeting of the Board.

16. PROPOSED TRANSFER OF THE EXAMINATIONS FUNCTIONS TO THE EMPLOYERS ORGANISATION

16.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB13/2001 which updated the Members on the changes proposed for the examinations functions of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) which acts on behalf of the Fire Services Examinations Board (FSEB) in the delivery of the statutory promotion examinations.

16.2 Following changes previously to the structure of the Examinations and Qualifications Unit, it was now generally felt that with the change of focus of the IDeA's work that these areas of activity would be better placed within the Employers' Organisation. Mr Stanley stated that the Employers' Organisation were already involved with the Fire Service as employer negotiations for their pay and conditions of service.

16.3 He reported that there would be a need to amend the Fire Services (Appointments and Promotion) Regulations for both England and Wales and for Scotland to identify the new organisation.

RESOLVED: (i) That Paper FB13/2001 be noted.

(ii) That the officers of the Board liaise with the Home Office and the Scottish Ministers with reference to legislative changes necessitated by the transfer to the Employers' Organisation with effect from 1 April 2001.

17. REPORT FROM CACFOA ON THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' WRITTEN EXAMINATION – SINGLE SITTING

17.1 Mr Pearson, representing CACFOA, presented the responses from brigades on the implications of holding one sitting at the 2000 Leading Firefighters' Written Examination.

17.2 He reported that 39 brigades had replied and that although the majority had expressed that no difficulties had been experienced, problems identified could be broken down into two areas. Difficulty with crewing and finding a larger venue to hold the examination. It was CACFOA's view that the Board re-consider its policy and return to two sittings from 2001.

17.3 Members noted CACFOA's reservations to one sitting, but felt that as the change had only been effective for one year and that the majority of brigades had not expressed problems, the current arrangements should continue for 2001. However, because of CACFOA's concerns, it was agreed to review this decision after the September 2001 examination.

RESOLVED: That the Leading Firefighters' Written Examination for 2001 be conducted in accordance with one sitting, but that both CACFOA and the Secretariat review the implications of this decision and report back to the January 2002 meeting.

18. 25 JANUARY 2001 BOARD MEETING

18.1 A letter of thanks to be sent to Mr Grant at the Fire Service College, Gullane, for the hospitality given to Board Members on their visit.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

19.1 It was agreed to meet on Tuesday 3 July 2001 at the offices of the Improvement and Development Agency, Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, London EC1M 5LG.