

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 3 JULY 2001

VENUE: The Employers' Organisation (EO)
Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG

PRESENT: Cllr L Brett (Chairperson)

CACFOA

K Pearson

CONVENTION OF SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

J Shaw

INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

J W Cowie

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

M G Barnes

A J Till

E Grannell (Substitute)

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

J Nicholson

SECRETARIES OF STATE

G McManus (Substitute)

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 G Meldrum, Mr W Giles the retiring Scottish Minister, Mr E Guy, Cllr P Corcoran, Cllr D Fox, Mr R King, Cllr A Lafferty, Mr K Seager, Mr A Gilchrist, Mr M Harper and Mr M Fordham.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 The Chairperson welcomed Ms Jill Nicholson as the new representative from the Scottish Ministers, to replace Mr Giles who had retired.

- 2.2 The Chairperson also informed the meeting that Paul Young, Chief Fire Officer, Devon Fire & Rescue Service had been awarded the OBE and Dick Ibbotson, Firemaster, Dumfries & Galloway Fire Brigade and Alan Martin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, South Wales Fire Service had been awarded the QFSM.

- 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 Young, Mr Ibbotson and Mr Martin.
- (ii) To send a letter of thanks to the retiring Scottish Minister, Mr W Giles.
- (iii) To send a letter to Ms Jill Nicholson to welcome her as a Member of the Board.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2001 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 7.11: Brigade Command Course Research Project

- 4.1 Mr Wright updated members on two research projects which had been agreed to be undertaken by officers attending their brigade Command Course at the Fire Service College. The projects would be based around the examination and progression systems.

They would focus on the reasons why insufficient fire officers were applying for and succeeding in the statutory examinations, and upon complimentary and alternative strategies to the current examination methodology and how these could contribute to the future of the Fire Services progression and development systems.

Item 10: Assessors for the Written Examination

- 4.2 Mr Wright advised members on the current position with regard to vacancies for Assessors.

- (a) He reported that Mike Freeman Chief Fire Officer Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service, Assessor for the Sub-Officers' Written Examination, Paper 1 – Operations had retired and an alternative assessor would be required.
- (b) Alan Martin DCFO South Wales Fire Service, Assessor for the Station Officers' Examination, Paper 3 – Human Resource Management would be retiring after the marking session in March 2002.
- (c) Allan Henson DCFO Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service, Assessor for the Leading Firefighters' Written Examination, Paper 1 – Operations would be retiring after the marking session in October 2002.

Item 12.4: Funding of the Practical Tests

- 4.3 It was reported that the Fire Services Examinations Board had written to Senior Examiners with a pro-forma to ascertain the cost to brigades of funding the practical tests. 3 of the 21 pro-formas had been returned to date. A full report would be prepared for the January 2002 meeting of the Board.

4.4 Item 12.5/12/6: Lead Assessor

- 4.4.1 Mr Stanley advised the members of the recent Inland Revenue Assessment of the status of the Chairman of the Panel of Assessors post which now had PAYE implications.

- 4.4.2 He reported that the FSEB sought advice from IDEA's solicitors and from an independent adviser, which resulted in numerous meetings and correspondence with the Inland Revenue and solicitors over the 'interpretation' and 'definition' of the post of Chairman, under Section 19(I) of the Income and Corporation Tax Act 1998.
- 4.4.3 The outcome defined the post as 'an officer or post within the FSEB' which meant it would be tax accessible under Schedule E, PAYE. This ruling was applied to tax years 1998 to 2001 inclusive.
- 4.4.4 The Inland Revenue's decision had resulted in additional employers National Insurance payments of £4,500 per annum having to be made, and since the decision was retrospectively for 2 years, the IDEA had agreed to meet these additional costs.
- 4.4.5 Mr Stanley explained that the financial implications for the Chairman were quite significant since he had not previously been identified as an employee of the Board, and felt that the FSEB had some responsibility for this position.
- 4.4.6 Consequently, it was agreed with the Board's Chairman, Mr Meldrum, that a 'one-off payment' of £4000 be made to compensate Mr Wright for the inconvenience and implications of the Inland Revenue's decision. Furthermore, as the post of Chairman of Assessors was still expected to work from home in order to carry out the duties, the Board's Chairman agreed that the post should carry an allowance of £5000 per annum to cover this provision.
- 4.4.7 Finally, Mr Stanley reported that it was the view of the Inland Revenue that the title of the post of Chairman was misleading, and it was agreed to change the title to 'Lead Assessor' to more closely reflect the level and commitment the post required.
- 4.4.8 In agreeing the Chairman's actions, members asked that the Constitution of the Board clearly reflected the Chairman's delegated powers.

- RESOLVED: (i) That the Members ratified the Chairman's actions for the payments for the post of Chairman of Assessor (Lead Assessor).
- (ii) That the Constitution of the Board clarifies the delegated powers of the Chairman.

Item 13.5: Dangerous Practices

- 4.5 Mr Wright updated the members on the amendments made to the letters relating to 'Dangerous Practices' and also reported that there had been similar concerns in this year's practical tests. It was suggested that where a dangerous practice was identified Senior Examiners should issue guidance, as necessary, on the day of the practical tests, before the candidates returned to brigade duties. It was agreed that these issues would be discussed in detail at the Senior Examiners Workshop on 3 October 2001.

Item 15: Website Advertising

- 4.6 Mr Stanley reported that he had investigated further the possibility of advertising on the FSEB website and found that the government guidelines and restrictions far outweighed any real income benefit that may have been achieved. The members agreed that the matter was not worth further consideration.

Mr Stanley gave the members a demonstration of the FSEB website and explained the reasons behind its design.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF LEADING FIREFIGHTER

5. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART II PRACTICAL TEST 2001
- 5.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and to the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination for promotion to the rank of Leading Firefighter - Part II Practical Test 2001. (Paper FB14/2001).
- 5.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 723 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 662 (after withdrawals). Of these, 48 (7.3%) had absented themselves leaving 614 actually attempting the examination. (This included an RAF candidate, but the report's statistics do not include this candidate). Of the 613 candidates who attempted the test, 392 (63.9%) were awarded a pass and 221 (36.1%) failed. The 392 successful candidates are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Leading Firefighter.
- 5.3 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 5 candidates appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 5 were upheld. These candidates would have a further year to complete their examination. A further 52 candidates had failed to pass their Part II examination within the three year period, they must now re-sit their Part I written examinations.
- 5.4 Mr Wright reported that there was a severe decrease in the number of candidates entering the 2001 examination compared to the 2000 entrants. The number of candidates passing the test was reduced by 219, although the pass rate increased by nearly 2.0%.

- 5.5 Section A of the test provided an overall pass result of (86.3%) which was a slight decrease to that achieved last year (87.0%). This general quality of candidates performance continued to be good. The general weakness observed, related to the failure of candidates to take command of the crew and in the failure by many to use the de-brief as a training aid, which is recognised as an essential requirement.

Section B showed an improvement in the pass rate (78.8%) to that achieved in the 2000 tests (73.2%). It was difficult to identify a general weakness by failed candidates, but a lack of command and control of the crew was recognised.

Section C of the test provided an improvement in the pass rate (84.3%) to that achieved in 2000 (82.8%).

- 5.6 Mr Wright reported that both himself and the National Assessor for the Practical Tests had visited a number of examination centres to assess the facilities provided and observe the tests in progress. He confirmed the facilities provided were satisfactory and the assessments undertaken by the examiners met the Board's standards.
- 5.7 Mr Wright further commented that many brigades continued to provide pre-examination courses which candidates attended on a voluntary basis. Not all candidates availed themselves of this instruction and some failed to attend the complete course.
- 5.8 There was a discussion amongst the members with reference to the reasons why some brigades did not provide pre-examination courses, why candidates did not attend the courses where provided and why many candidates did not complete the course.
- 5.9 It was agreed that Mr Wright and the National Assessor for the Practical Test would investigate these matters further on future visits to the Practical Tests.

These issues would also be raised at the Senior Examiners Workshop on 3 October 2001.

- 5.10 The Chairman advised the secretariat that future statistical data relating to results by ethnic origin should include the 16 groups as recommended by the Commission for Racial Equality. Mr Stanley confirmed that the necessary amendments would be carried out.

RESOLVED: (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Scottish Ministers.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF STATION OFFICER

6. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS AND TO THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2001

- 6.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination to the rank of Station Officer (Paper FB15/2001).
- 6.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 1316 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 1217 (after withdrawals). 158 (13.0%) absented themselves, thus the number of candidates who attended was 1059. Of these 360 attempted all four papers. Of the 1059 candidates who attempted the examination, 274 (25.9%) were awarded a pass, and are now qualified to the rank of Station Officer.
- 6.3 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 19 candidates appealed to the Board and 17 were upheld. These candidates will have one further year to complete their examination.
- 6.4 Mr Wright reported that this had been the first application of the new examination system which, although still consisted of four papers, now had a new syllabus for each paper, which included a paper on Business Administration (Paper 4).
- 6.5 He reported that it was unrealistic to attempt to compare the results obtained in this year's examination to those of previous years because of the differences that had been applied to the examination in general, and in each paper in particular.
- 6.6 He informed the members that there were extremes in the quality of scripts submitted, some being outstanding in their quality, whereas others were of a poor standard.
- 6.7 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate, Leading Firefighter Jonathan Martin Miller from Devon Fire and 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 Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Scottish Ministers.
- (ii) That Leading Firefighter Jonathan Martin Miller be presented with a framed certificate at the Fire Conference 2001.

7. RECIPROCIITY BETWEEN THE STATION OFFICERS' EXAMINATION AND THE GRADUATESHIP EXAMINATION OF THE INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

7.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB16/2001 which asked the Board to note the report.

7.2 He reported that at the July 1999 meeting members were advised that the reciprocal arrangements were subject to review once the outcome of the joint Training Committee's work on training strategy was known.

7.3 The Board was informed that this work was still ongoing, but it was important to advise members that liaison between the officers of the FSEB and those of the IFE was still continuing.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB16/2001 be noted.

8. QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2001

8.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners (Paper FB17/2001).

9. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2002/2003

9.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB18/2001 which set out the funding requirements for 2002/2003 under Section 78(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1998 which would be submitted to the Local Government Association (LGA/WLGA) and to the Scottish Executive for their approval. The paper also showed the actuals for 2000/2001 and the variations from the budget.

9.2 Mr Barnes asked that clarification that the figures did not include an inflation allowance be incorporated into the paper before submission to the LGA/WLGA and the Scottish Executive.

9.3 The Board was asked to agree the detailed estimated expenditure for 2002/2003.

RESOLVED: (i) To note the actuals for 2000/2001.

(ii) To approve the submission for 2002/2003 of:

- £414.509 plus inflation from the LGA (England)
- £24.589 plus inflation from the LGA (Wales)
- £45.827 plus inflation from the Scottish Executive

10. REVIEW OF FSEB FUNDING

- 10.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB19/2001 which asked the members to note the work of the Officer's group of the Top Slice Strategy Group (TSSG).
- 10.2 He reported that the Memorandum of Understanding with the DTLR required the LGA to review the central bodies on a five year cycle. The FSEB was the last of the bodies to be reviewed.
- 10.3 Members were advised that as a preliminary step in the review process, the Fire Executive was asked to consider its responses to three broad options for the future funding of the FSEB, namely:
- Direct funding from the DTLR
 - Charging for examinations
 - The status quo (top slice funding from RSG)
- 10.4 The Fire Executive had set up a Task Group to look at these issues, but acknowledged that FSEB was engaged in its own review of the current examinations system, and therefore it would not be appropriate at this time to undertake the wider funding review. However, it had been agreed to set up an officers group who would report back on the quality of the services provided by FSEB to its customers, as well as looking at its staffing arrangements and financial control of its budget.
- 10.5 The officers group was due to report back with recommendations to the September meeting of the TSSG.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB19/2001 be noted.

11. FSEB CORPORATE PLAN

- 11.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB20/2001 which outlined the Corporate Plan for the FSEB's activities for 2001/2003. The Board was asked to approve, and comment upon the draft Corporate Plan.
- 11.2 He reported that the Memorandum of Understanding between the DTLR and the LGA required each of the central bodies to prepare annually a Corporate Plan following a common format and to include the following:
- Aims and Objectives
 - Budget 2001/2002
 - Work Programme 2001/2002
 - Statement of Strategic Objectives and Target Indicators for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004
 - Financial forecasts for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004.

RESOLVED: That the draft Corporate Plan be approved and submitted to the LGA (subject to minor amendments).

12. APPEAL PROCEDURES

- 12.1 Mr Wright presented Paper FB21/2001 which provided members with a detailed appeals system for the written and practical statutory examinations and how the scheme could be applied.
- 12.2 The Board was asked to approve the appeals procedures for both examinations and that a fee of £25 be levied for each paper/section that a candidate submitted an appeal on.
- 12.3 He reported that both schemes would ensure that an independent examiner would investigate the candidates comments, re-mark the appropriate scripts in respect of the written examinations and submit a full report for consideration by an appeals panel.
- 12.4 The appeals panel would consist of the Secretary of the FSEB, the Lead Assessor and the General Assessor for Scotland (written) or the National Assessor (practicals).
- 12.5 The members discussed the legal implications of levying a fee, and it was agreed that approval would need to be sought from the DTLR on the legality of requesting a fee.

RESOLVED: That the Appeals Procedure be approved, as detailed in Paper FB21/2001, subject to clarification from the DTLR on the legal implications of levying a fee.

13. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

- 13.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB22/2001 which updated members on the work emanating from the Implementation Working Group (IWG) and the FSEB's involvement in shaping the new written examinations.
- 13.2 He reported that the 'Helix' model was generally accepted by the stakeholder bodies, but had yet to be formally adopted by CFBAC. The next CFBAC meeting should formally approve the Integrated Personnel Development System as the national training and development strategy for the fire service. At the same meeting a project plan for the implementation of the system and IWG's role for delivering this would need to be approved.
- 13.3 The Members were informed that a national implementation date of 1 April 2003 was suggested as a target date.
- 13.4 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that many issues had still to be addressed which were outlined in Appendix 1 of his paper, but as a result of the April meeting of the IWG, individual working groups had now been set up to deal with all outstanding business.

- 13.5 An examinations working group, which included Mr Stanley and Mr Wright were tasked with identifying the requirements of, and developing the new written tests.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB22/2001 be noted.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 14.1 It was agreed to meet on Tuesday 22 January 2002 at the offices of the Employers' Organisation (EO), Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG.