

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 22 JANUARY 2002

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

PRESENT: Mr G Meldrum (Chairman)

CACFOA

K Pearson

CONVENTION OF SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

J Shaw

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

A Gilchrist
M Harper

INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

B Cox (Substitute)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

M G Barnes
P J Corcoran

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

J Nicholson
B Virtue

SECRETARIES OF STATE

E L Wilson (Substitute)
G E 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 Cllr L Barron (previously L Brett), Mr J Cowie, Mr M Fordham, Mr T Glossop, Mr E Guy, Mr R King, Cllr A Lafferty and Mr J McCall.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 The Chairman advised the meeting of the following changes in Membership:

Mr J McCall had replaced Mr A Till, (who had retired) as one of the representative of the Local Government Association.

Mr R Virtue had been appointed as a representative of the Scottish Ministers.

- 2.2 The Chairman recorded his thanks to Mr I Ibbotson for his work as Observer, Firemaster and informed the meeting that he would be replaced by Mr A J Early, Firemaster, Central Scotland Fire Brigade.
- 2.3 The Chairman informed the meeting that Peter Coles, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, North Wales Fire Service, Mick Elliott, Chief Fire Officer, Cumbria County Fire Service and Alastair Wyse, retired Senior Examiner and Local Board 'R' Secretary had been awarded the QFSM.
- 2.4 It was agreed to send letters of congratulations in recognition of their honours.

The Board also noted the change to the Membership

- RESOLVED:**
- (i) To send letters of congratulations to Mr Coles, Mr Elliott and Mr Wyse
 - (ii) To send a letter of thanks to the retiring member, Mr A Till.

- (iii) To send a letter of thanks to Mr I Ibbotson, retiring Observer, Scottish Firemasters, at the appropriate time.
- (iv) To send letters of welcome to Mr R Virtue and Mr A J Early.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2001 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 4.4.8: Lead Assessor

- 4.1 Mr Stanley advised the members that the Constitution had been amended to reflect the delegated powers of the Chairman and he asked the members to formally note paragraph 8.

Item 5.10: Secretary of State Reports

- 4.2 Mr Stanley reported that the amendments to the candidates entry form to accommodate the 16 ethnic origin groups was in hand, but the computer software would also need to be updated to meet the requirements. The current Secretary of State Reports therefore still reflected the old ethnic groupings.

Item 10: Review of FSEB Funding

- 10.1 Mr Stanley informed the members that the conclusion of the TSSG review of the FSEB's funding was status quo for the current statutory examinations. However, the ongoing review of training as part of the work of the Integrated Personal Development Working Group (IPDWG) raised a number of issues to be pursued with the Fire Executive/DTLR before any future funding for examinations could be agreed.

Item 12: Appeals Procedure

- 12.1 Mr Stanley reported that the FBU had queried the use of the words 'clear and concise' in paragraph 2 of the appeals procedure since they felt that candidates could not make a clear and concise appeal without the benefit of seeing their scripts. He also reminded members that he had sought clarification from the DTLR on the implications on levying a fee.
- 12.2 The members discussed the content of paragraph 2, and it was agreed to amend the wording to read 'it would be required to give' reasoned arguments ...

- 12.3 Ms McManus informed the members that the DTLR had been in consultation with the London and Scottish legal advisors who had informed the DTLR that a fee could not be charged under current legislation.
- 12.4 Members agreed that it was important for the Board to have an appeals procedure for candidates and formally approved the scheme, subject to deletion of paragraph 3, relating to the fee charge.
- 12.5 It was also agreed to review after one year.

RESOLVED: That the Appeals Procedure be approved, subject to amendments, and circulated to Brigades.

5. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS AND LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

- 5.1 Mr Stanley reported that he had advised members at the July 2001 Board meeting that the Implementation Working Group (IWG), now reformed as the Integrated Personal Development Advisory Board (IPDAB), had a target date for implementation of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) of 1 April 2003.
- 5.1.1 He also reported that the 'Helix' model was generally accepted by all stakeholders and had now been approved by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) at its 16 October 2001 meeting. The model included 'Tests of Potential'.
- 5.2 Mr Stanley advised members that the work that the FSEB had been involved in as part of the examinations sub-group was to develop the new 'Tests of Potential'. Unfortunately, an impasse was reached with members of that sub-group and the matter had been referred back to IPDAB for further discussion. Part of this discussion centred on the requirements of the assessment centres, which in the 'helix' model was the stage after the 'Tests of Potential'. At the meeting of IPDAB on 11 December 2001, a presentation was given on behalf of the Integrated Personal Development Working Group (IPDWG), on an analysis of the key development and assessment centre components. It was the view of members of IPDAB present at that meeting that the assessment centres could incorporate and therefore replace the need for any separate tests of potential and therefore the need for the current examinations system. They would be recommending this decision to CFBAC and for the winding down of the present statutory examinations.
- 5.3 Mr Stanley informed members that many key issues would need to be resolved before the 2003 target date, in particular the impact to the current Fire Services (Appointments and Promotion) Regulations 1978 (as amended), as well as the need to look at transitional arrangements for existing candidates.

- 5.4 Mr Meldrum added that there was already concern from some areas of the service that FSEB would not be part of the IPDS system, particularly as they could bring independence to the process. He pointed out that the role of the FSEB was valued in bringing a quality, independent examinations system, which was backed by a reputable organisation and it was important, therefore, to not totally disregard their role in the future. He informed members that he would be taking the views of FSEB members to the Minister.
- 5.5 Mr Virtue felt the current statutory examinations did not fit with the work of the IPDS system and queried whether there was a need for them within the new structure.
- 5.6 Mr Gilchrist gave his support for maintaining an independent accreditation body to manage the IPDS system and saw a role for FSEB in administering written tests as part of this assessment process. Although the Fire Brigades Union had not been present at the December IPDAB meeting they felt there was a strong case for maintaining written tests within any new system.
- 5.7 Mr Pearson felt that the current statutory examinations did not fit the new IPDS model and queried whether it was now time for a more formal review of the role of examinations and suggested the setting up of a working party to look at all the issues. However, he also felt it important that existing candidates were made aware of the need to continue with the current examinations.
- 5.8 Mr Ibbotson felt the target date of April 2003 was unrealistic. He was concerned with the lack of detail being provided by the IPDWG, which should be of concern to Board members and felt that the current examinations system did have a role to play in the future of the service. However, the Firemasters were concerned over the lack of communications particularly as individuals needed to know what was happening with the current statutory system.
- 5.9 Mr Gilchrist added that candidates also needed to know that their studying for the current examinations would not be wasted in any future system.
- 5.10 Ms McManus confirmed that the current Appointments and Promotion Regulations were under review but no decision had yet been reached regarding the implications to the current statutory examinations.
- 5.11 Mr Stanley reminded members that if the FSEB had a role to play in the new IPDS system then it would need to identify funding by the July 2002 meeting of the Board. Ms McManus agreed to remind IPDAB members of this point. Mr Stanley also pointed out to members that any transitional arrangements had yet to be looked at as part of the IPDS system and felt that this could not be identified until the detail within the assessment centres was known.
- 5.12 The Chairman agreed to formally advise the Minister and the Chair of IPDAB of members' views and the need for improved communications to members of the

service generally, particularly the need to continue with the current statutory examinations.

RESOLVED The Chairman agreed to formally advise the Minister and the Chair of IPDAB of members' views, particularly the need for improved communications over the current statutory examinations.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF LEADING FIREFIGHTER

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

- 6.1 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 I Written Examination 2001. (Paper FB1/2002).
- 6.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter Adrian Brizzolara from Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service should receive a framed certificate at Fire Conference 2002.
- 6.3 Mr Stanley reported that 2394 candidates had entered the examination, but that 349 had absented themselves, leaving a total of 2045 who actually attempted the examination. Of those who sat, 602 (29.4%) were awarded a pass, which was an increase on the pass rate of 304 (20.5%) in 2000.
- 6.4 Mr Wright reported that there was an increase in the number of good quality scripts submitted by candidates, but unfortunately these still remained in the minority. 273 had passed none of the papers attempted, which was an increase in numerical terms, but a reduction in percentage terms when compared to last year's results.
- 6.5 Paper 1 – Operations provided a pass rate of 25.9% which was a reduction on the pass rate of 55.6% last year. The weaker responses were recorded for the questions relating to working with and controlling the application of foam, incident command and the safety procedures when dealing with a rescue from a confined space.
- 6.6 Paper 2 – Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement provided an improved pass rate of 48.8% to that achieved the previous year (38.8%). There was a general improvement in the answers provided. However, the weaker responses related to how candidates would check and deal with a false alarm call made by a young person from their home.

- 6.7 Paper 3 – Human Resource Management also provided an improved pass rate of 44.5% when compared to that of last year (32.7%). There was a general improvement in the quality of answers provided, which indicated that many candidates had prepared for the examination by studying the Study Notes. The main areas of weakness related to the knowledge of events that may be affecting the effectiveness of a crew at an incident and general knowledge of the Health and Safety at Work Act.
- 6.8 Paper 4 – Business Administration (Key Skills – Written Communication) provided an improved pass rate of 74.8% when compared to (70.9%) the previous year. The overall presentation of answers showed an improvement, but the usual grammatical and spelling errors were still in evidence.
- 6.9 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 23 candidates appealed to the Board against their automatic barring from next year's examination and 20 were upheld.

- RESOLVED: (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and to the Scottish Ministers.
- (ii) That Firefighter Adrian Brizzolara be presented with a framed certificate.

QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2001

- 7.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners. (Paper FB2/2002).

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF SUB-OFFICER

8. 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

- 8.1 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 Sub-Officer – Part II Practical Test 2001. (Paper FB3/2002).
- 8.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 549 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 499 (after withdrawals). Of these, 36 (7.2%) had absented themselves leaving 463 actually attempting the examination. Of the 463 candidates who attempted the test,

317 (68.5%) were awarded a pass and 146 (31.5%) failed. The 317 successful candidates are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Sub-Officer.

- 8.3 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme 6 candidates appealed to the Board against their automatic barring from next year's examination. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and all 6 were upheld.
- 8.4 Mr Wright reported that there was a severe decrease of 216 (-30.2%) entering the 2001 examination compared to the previous years entrants. The number of candidates passing the test was reduced by 111, although the pass rate increased by almost 5%.
- 8.5 He reported that the pass rate of 87.5% in Section A of the test was similar to that achieved last year. It was reported that it was difficult to identify any common causes of failure applicable to all failed candidates, but the inability to control crew members, cover necessary safety aspects, effectively observe and interact with the crews and poor de-briefing were all evident as reasons for failure.
- 8.6 Section B of the test produced a pass rate of 82.5% which was higher than that achieved last year. Once again it was difficult to identify common weaknesses applicable to all failed candidates, but the most common recorded by Senior Examiners were inadequacies in information gathering at the scene, risk assessment, command of and communication with crew members, and the poor de-briefing of crews.
- 8.7 Section C of the test also provided a higher pass rate to the previous year of 83.2%. The weaknesses identified related to inadequate preparation of candidates.
- 8.8 Mr Wright reported that he and the National Assessor for the practical tests had visited a number of the examination centres to assess the facilities provided and to observe the tests in progress. Overall, arrangements were considered satisfactory and where observed, examiners' assessment of candidates was considered to be competent and fair.
- 8.9 The members had a discussion on the level of pre-examination training carried out in Brigades. The issues had also been discussed at the recent Senior Examiners Workshop. Mr Wright informed members that it was the intention to circulate a proforma to all Brigades to request further information on this important area and report back to the Board with the findings.

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

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF SUB-OFFICER

9. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE SUB-OFFICERS' PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2001

- 9.1 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 Sub-Officer Part I Written Examination 2001. (Paper FB4/2001).
- 9.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter Colin A Wallace from Dumfries & Galloway Fire Brigade should receive a framed certificate at Fire Conference 2002.
- 9.3 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 1741 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 1701 (after withdrawals). 292 (17.2%) absented themselves from the examination, thus the number of candidates who attended was 1409.
- 9.4 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 26 candidates (7.2%) appealed to the Board against their automatic barring from next year's examination. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and all 26 were upheld.
- 9.5 Mr Wright reported that there was an increase in the number of entries to the examination of 120 (7.6%), and the number of candidates absenting themselves was 292 (17.2%) which in both numerical and percentage terms was an increase. Of the 1409 who attempted the examination, 262 (18.6%) were awarded a pass which was a small numerical increase, but the same percentage figure to that achieved in 2000.
- 9.6 He informed the members that there were numerous excellent scripts submitted by candidates, but these regrettably were in the great minority and it was evident that many were ill-prepared for the examination.
- 9.7 Paper 1 – Operations provided a pass rate of 38.5% which was an improvement on the pass rate of 20.7% the previous year. The weaker responses related to the operational needs to effectively deal with a crashed tanker discharging petroleum spirit, and the application of legislation to obtain sufficient water for firefighting purposes.
- 9.8 Paper 2 – Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement provided a reduced pass rate of 29.9% to that achieved the previous year 44.3%. The knowledge and understanding of fire investigation was a very weak area and the main reason for the relatively poor pass rate.

9.9 Paper 3 – Human Resource Management also provided a reduced pass rate of 24.7%, which was especially disappointing when compared to a relatively low pass rate of 29.8% the previous year. The weaker areas recorded were best practices on training, risk assessment and the minimum requirements for health in the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.

9.10 Paper 4 – Business Administration (Key Skills – Application of Number) provided a disappointing pass rate of 60.8% when compared to the pass rate of 81.0% the previous year. The main reason for this poorer result was the calculations related to bund wall heights for storage areas, with many illogical heights being given as answers.

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

(ii) That Firefighter Colin A Wallace be presented with a framed certificate.

10. QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2001

10.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners (Paper FB5/2002).

11. WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS OF THE PRACTICAL TESTS

11.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB6/2002 which reported on the Workshop held for Senior Examiners of the Local Examination Boards.

11.2 The Workshop had been held on 3 October 2001 at the offices of the Employers' Organisation 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 Lead Assessor.

11.3 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.

11.4 There were a number of issues dealt with at the Workshop, particularly dangerous practices, the proposed appeals system, dyslexia and the Section C lecture tests.

11.5 Mr Wright confirmed that the Secretariat was consulting with the DTLR, as well as obtaining information from brigades, in order to establish a policy for dyslexia. In the meantime, Mr Stanley confirmed that each individual request would be considered on its own circumstances.

11.6 The next Workshop will take place on 2 October 2002 at the Headquarters of the Greater Manchester County Fire Service at the invitation of the Chief Fire Officer.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB6/2002 be noted.

12. ASSESSORS FOR THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS', SUB-OFFICERS' AND STATION OFFICERS' WRITTEN EXAMINATION

12.1 Mr Wright introduced Papers FB7/8/9/10/2002 which reported on vacancies for Assessors for the Leading Firefighters', Sub-Officers' and Station Officers' Written Examinations.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the appointment of Mr Ian Simpkins as Assessor for Paper 1, Leading Firefighters' Examination be agreed.
- (ii) That the appointment of Mr Alasdair MacInnes as Assessor for Paper 1, Sub-Officers' Examination be agreed.
- (iii) That the appointment of Mr Jagtar Singh as Assessor for Paper 3, Station Officers' Examination be agreed.
- (iv) That the appointment of a new Assessor, at present unknown for Paper 4, Sub-Officers' Examination be agreed.
- (v) That letters of thanks be sent to Mr Allan Henson, Mr Mike Freeman, Mr Alan Martin and Mr Michael Elliott, at the appropriate time, as retiring Assessors, in recognition of the work they had undertaken.

13. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2002/2003

13.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB11/2002 which asked the Board to note the detailed estimated expenditure for 2001/2002 and approve the budgeted expenditure for 2002/2003.

13.2 He reported that the Budget for 2002/2003 reflected the original submission approached at the July meeting, but now included an inflation allowance of 2.5%.

RESOLVED: That the estimated total expenditure for 2002/2003 of £512,721 be approved.

14. COST OF FUNDING THE PRACTICAL TESTS

- 14.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB12/2002 which provided an analysis of the returns received from 19 of the 21 local examination boards on the 'Cost of Funding the Practical Tests'.
- 14.2 Senior Examiners had been asked to identify costs which were additional to those needed for the funding of the authority/brigade under six main headings: staffing; resources; equipment; subsistence; premises; and other costs. There was a significant range of total costs submitted by the boards, which provided an average cost per candidate based on the 2001 entries of £684.76.
- 14.3 Mr Wright reported that it had been difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the returns since the information provided was not always consistent across all local examination boards. However, it was felt that the information would provide useful comparisons between boards and it was agreed to circulate the report to all 21 local examination boards.

- RESOLVED: (i) That Paper FB12/2002 be noted.
- (ii) That the report be circulated to all local examination boards.

OTHER ITEMS

15. REPORT FROM CACFOA AND THE SECRETARIAT ON THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' WRITTEN EXAMINATION – SINGLE SITTING

- 15.1 Mr Stanley reminded the members that following the Board meeting on the 25 January 2001, it had been agreed that CACFOA and the Secretariat would report back on the implications for Brigades of moving to one sitting for the Leading Firefighters' Written Examination.
- 15.2 He reported that two examinations had taken place since the move to one sitting, with only one letter of concern being received by the FSEB regarding examination centre accommodation, which had been resolved, and staffing problems.
- 15.3 He advised the meeting that in the absence of any other relevant evidence, the FSEB would not propose any changes to the 2002 examination and that one sitting should continue.
- 15.4 Mr Pearson, representing CACFOA agreed that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate any change, but suggested that the 'one sitting' should be kept under review.

- RESOLVED: That 'one sitting' for the Leading Firefighters' Examination be maintained, subject to review.

16. EXAMINERS FOR THE WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS

- 16.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB13/2002 which outlined the difficulties experienced by the officers of the Board in obtaining suitable and sufficient officers from Brigades to act as examiners to mark the Leading Firefighters' and Sub-Officers' Part I Written examinations in 2001.
- 16.2 He reported that 51 Brigades had forwarded a total of 126 names of officers, and 8 brigades had failed to nominate any, as identified in Appendix 'A' of the report.
- 16.3 He informed the members that many officers withdrew their nominations and the FSEB officers were advised that some were on the instruction of their Chief Fire Officers. Although replacements were sought from the reserves list, a number of these also withdrew their names. Following further approaches to brigades, some additional officers were provided which resulted in 39 who had not previously carried out duties acting as examiners for the statutory examinations.
- 16.4 Members noted the concerns and it was suggested that the Chairman could write to these brigades identified in the report who had failed to nominate examiners, highlighting the continued need of support of brigades for the current examination marking process.

RESOLVED: That the Chairman write to Chief Fire Officers/Firemasters of the 8 brigades identified in Appendix A of the report, highlighting the continued need of support for the examination marking process.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 17.1 It was agreed to meet on Tuesday 2 July 2002 at the offices of the Employers' Organisation (EO), Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG.