

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 2 JULY 2002

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

PRESENT: Sir Graham Meldrum (Chairman)

CONVENTION OF SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

J Shaw

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

J McGhee (Substitute)

INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

J W Cowie

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

M G Barnes

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

J Nicholson

R Virtue

SECRETARIES OF STATE

G McManus (Substitute)

IN ATTENDANCE

H E Wright (Lead Assessor)

D J Stanley (Secretary)

M A Malone (Senior Administrator)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr T Glossop, Mr E Guy, Mr R King, Mr J McCall, Cllr J Newman, Cllr A Lafferty, Mr A Gilchrist, Mr M Harper, Mr M Fordham, and Mr A J Early.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that Mr Meldrum had been made a Knight Bachelor.
- 2.2 The Chairman informed the meeting that Steve McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire Fire Brigade has been awarded the QFSM and it was agreed that a letter of congratulations be sent in recognition of this honour.

RESOLVED: (i) A letter of congratulations be sent to Mr McGuirk.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2002 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 5: Future of the Statutory Examinations and Legislative Requirements

- 4.1 Mr Meldrum informed the members that he had formally advised 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

5. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER ON THE PART II PRACTICAL TEST 2002

- 5.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and to the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination for promotion to the rank of Leading Firefighter - Part II Practical Test 2002. (Paper FB14/2002).

- 5.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 822 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 751 (after withdrawals). Of these, 56 (7.5%) had absented themselves, leaving 695 actually attempting the examination. (This included 2 RAF candidates, but the report's statistics do not include these candidates).
- 5.3 He also asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix 'D'.
- 5.4 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 61 candidates had failed to pass their Part II examination, within the three year period, they must now re-sit their Part I written examination.
- 5.5 Mr Wright reported that there was an increase of 88 (13.3%) in the number of candidates entering the examination when compared with the 2001 entries. There was a slight increase in number, but similar percentage of candidates absenting themselves resulting in an increase of 80 (13%) in the number of candidates taking the test. The number of candidates passing the test increased by 89, and the pass rate improved by 5.5%.
- 5.6 Section A of the test provided an overall pass result of (88.8%) which was in improvement to that achieved last year (86.3%). The general standard of candidates performance over the years continued to be good. The general weaknesses observed continued to relate to the lack of ability to command and control the crew, and a failure by many candidates to use the de-briefing of the crew as a training aid.
- 5.7 Section B showed an improvement in the pass rate (79.9%) to that achieved in the 2001 test (78.8%). It was difficult to identify a general weakness by failed candidates, but inadequate safety considerations for crew members and the inability of candidates to take command of the situation continued to be recognised.
- 5.8 Section C of the test provided a pass rate of (87.6%) compared to last year's pass rate of (84.3%) which confirmed the continued improvement shown by candidates over the years.
- 5.9 Mr Wright reported that the National Assessor, the Lead Assessor and the Secretary of the Board had visited a number of examination centres to assess the facilities provided and observe the tests in progress. Where improvements associated with the local board arrangements were considered necessary, advice was given. He confirmed that the assessments undertaken by the examiners were considered to be competent and fair and met the Board's standards.

5.10 There was a discussion amongst the members with reference to Appeals Against Examination Results (Appendix D) of the report and Mr Wright confirmed that letters had also been sent to the relevant Senior Examiners explaining in detail how the decisions were made where individual appeals were upheld. The report will be discussed at the Senior Examiners Workshop in October 2002.

RESOLVED: (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Secretary for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Scottish Ministers.

(ii) That the Board note the results of the appeals panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.

6. DANGEROUS PRACTICES IDENTIFIED IN THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' PRACTICAL EXAMINATION 2002

6.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB15/2002 which reported on the dangerous practices identified in the Leading Firefighters' practical examination 2002.

6.2 The Board was asked to note the report.

6.3 Mr Wright reported that where a candidate applied, demonstrated or failed to recognise a 'dangerous practice' (ie an action or procedure that, 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), a procedure which involved a discussion between the Examiners and the Senior Examiner is applied. Should they all agree that what has been observed constituted a 'dangerous practice', the candidate is effectively de-briefed and provided with appropriate guidance at the conclusion of the examination before leaving the examination centre.

6.4 Senior Examiners had advised the Fire Services Examinations Board of four separate cases where the procedure had been applied following the Leading Firefighters' Part II practical tests. The 'dangerous practices' identified included the following:

(i) Extinguishing a simulated gas vapour leak within a compartment in which firefighters were present prior to ensuring that the leakage had been isolated at its source.

(ii) Using the Breathing Apparatus Entry Control Officer for other duties whilst breathing apparatus wearers were committed inside a building.

(iii) Firefighters being committed inside building to deal with a simulated boiler house fire with an uncharged length of hose which when charged with water further compounded the dangerous situation by wedging the door shut which compromised the firefighters' exit route.

- (iv) A hose-reel in constant use by breathing apparatus wearers committed inside a building with an uncharged safety jet provided outside the building with no thought given to augmenting the appliance's water supply.
- (v) Information made known to the candidate which was relevant to the safety of firefighters prior to them being committed inside a building was not communicated to them.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB15/2002 be noted.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF STATION OFFICER

7. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2002

- 7.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination to the rank of Station Officer (Paper FB16/2002).
- 7.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 1288 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 1208 (after withdrawals). 173 (14.3%) absented themselves, thus the number of candidates who attended was 1035. Of these 316 attempted all four papers. Of the 1035 who attempted the examination 253 (24.4%) were awarded a pass and are now qualified to the rank of Station Officer.
- 7.3 He also asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.
- 7.4 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 34 candidates appealed to the Board and 33 were upheld. Those candidates will have one further year to complete their examination.
- 7.5 Mr Wright reported that as this was the second examination to use the changed system and syllabuses, comparison could be made with the results achieved last year. Paper 1 provided a reduced rate of 38.2% compared to 43.1% in 2001; Paper 2 provided an improved pass rate of 44.4% from 39.2%; Paper 3 provided a reduced pass rate of 32.7% compared to 38.2%; and Paper 4 a reduced pass rate of 55.7% from 65.2% in 2001.
- 7.6 He informed the members that there were extremes in the quality of scripts submitted by candidates, as in previous years, some being outstanding in their quality, whereas others suggested that many candidates were ill-prepared for the examination and most certainly for the rank to which they wished to aspire.

7.7 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate, Sub-Officer Andrew Gillingham from Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, should receive a framed certificate from the Board.

7.8 It was requested that a presentation of statistics by ethnic comparisons of both male and female by their success in the examination be produced for future reports.

RESOLVED: (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Scottish Ministers.

(ii) That the Board note the results of the appeals panel for candidates examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.

(iii) That Sub-Officer Andrew Gillingham be presented with a framed certificate at the Fire Conference 2002.

(iv) That statistics be prepared to reflect the ethnic comparison of both male and female and by their examination success.

8. QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2002

8.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners. (Paper FB17/2002).

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

9.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB18/2002 which asked the Board to note the report.

9.2 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.

9.3 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.

9.4 Mr Wright had visited the IFE's, marking session following Mr Cox's visit to the Board's marking session in March.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB18/2002 be noted.

10. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2003/2004

10.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB19/2002 which set out the funding requirements for 2003/2004 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 Ministers for their approval.

10.2 The Board was also asked to agree the detailed estimated expenditure for 2003/2004 and note the actuals for 2002/2003.

- RESOLVED: (i) To note the actuals for 2002/2003
- (ii) To approve the submission for 2003/2004 of:
- £424,891 plus inflation from the LGA (England)
 - £25,205 plus inflation from the LGA (Wales)
 - £46,975 plus inflation from the Scottish Ministers

11. FSEB CORPORATE PLAN

11.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB20/2002 which outlined the Corporate Plan for the FSEB's activities for 2002/2004. The Board was asked to approve and comment upon the draft Corporate Plan.

11.2 He reported that the Memorandum of understanding between the ODPM 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 2002/2003
- Work Programme 2002/2003
- Statement of Strategic Objectives and Target Indicators for 2003/2004 and 2004/2005
- Financial forecasts for 2003/2004 and 2004/2005.

- RESOLVED: (i) That the draft Corporate Plan be approved and submitted to the LGA.

12. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

12.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB21/2002 which updated members on the progress of the work being undertaken by the Integrated Personal Development Advisory Board (IPDAB)

12.2 Members were asked to note the ongoing work by IPDAB in reviewing the statutory examination as part of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDAB).

- 12.3 Members were also asked to note that the introduction of transitional arrangements would need to be approved to facilitate the move from the current examination system.
- 12.4 Mr Stanley reported that in accepting the need to change the current statutory examinations, officers of the FSEB have had discussions with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) with reference to a new quality assurance role for FSEB.
- 12.5 He advised members that they should be aware that current legislation only allows the FSEB to deliver the current statutory examinations. Therefore any new role approved for FSEB (or its successor in name) would need to be confirmed either in statute or in contract, as well as agreeing its constitutional membership and reporting structure. The Employers' Organisation (EO) current administrators of the statutory examinations on behalf of the FSEB, had indicated a willingness to be involved in this future new role.
- 12.6 Mr Stanley reported that the Secretary and the Lead Assessor were continuing their discussions with the ODPM and they would be presenting a paper to IPDAB/CFBAC to approve this new role.
- 12.7 He advised the members that there would be a need to secure additional top slice funding through the Top Slice Strategy Group (TSSG). Members were asked to note that the Employers' Organisation may need to take this bid on behalf of FSEB in view of its legislative limitations.
- 12.8 There was a discussion amongst the members on the status of candidates with reference to the transitional arrangements and Ms McManus stated that a proposal on this would be issued shortly. Councillor Shaw felt that a special meeting of the Board might be necessary if transitional arrangements needed to be approved by members of the Board before the January 2003 meeting.
- 12.9 The Chairman stated that it was important for the FSEB to be represented at IPDAB meetings to enable them to continue to contribute to future decisions and discussions affecting the promotion examinations.

- RESOLVED: (i) That Paper FB21/2002 be noted.
- (ii) That a special meeting of the Board be called if transitional arrangements to the IPDS system need to be approved.

13. POLICY FOR DYSLEXIA

- 13.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB22/2002 which asked members to formally agree a procedure and policy that should be applied to all FSEB promotion examinations.

- 13.2 He reported that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 accepted dyslexia as a disability for the purposes and remit of the Act. The Act requires reasonable adjustment to be made in the workplace for people with disabilities. Currently, there does not appear to be a policy which takes account of Dyslexia for initial recruitment in the fire service.
- 13.3 He reported that he had looked at how other educational bodies dealt with dyslexia in terms of agreeing a policy and in particular the recent procedure agreed for the Police Promotions examinations, also administered by the Employers' Organisation.
- 13.4 Principally the Procedure allowed candidates up to an additional 25% of *the examination time although it was also recognised that there would be other situations which would need the Secretary's and Lead Assessor's endorsement.
- 13.5 Members were asked to approve the Procedure as outlined in Appendix A of the Paper, subject to a minor amendment and agree the statement for inclusion in the rules for each level of the examination, as outlined in Appendix B.

RESOLVED: That the procedure and policy as outlined in Appendices A and B of Paper FB22/2002 be agreed and issued to brigades (subject to a minor amendment).

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 14.1 It was agreed to meet on Tuesday 21 January 2003 at the offices of the Employers' Organisation (EO), Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG.