

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 2 APRIL 2003

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

PRESENT: Sir Graham Meldrum (Chairman)

CACFOA

J Doyle

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

M Fordham

INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

B Cox (Substitute)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

M G Barnes

L Barron

J Newman

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

K Bradley (Substitute)

R Virtue

SECRETARIES OF STATE

E L Wilson (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 Mrs J Clark (previously Ms J Nicholson), Cllr P Corcoran, Mr J Cowie, Mr A Currie, Mr R Elliott, Mr A Gilchrist, Mr E Guy, Mr M Harper, Cllr A Lafferty, Mr J McCall, Cllr J Shaw, and Mr A J Early (General Assessor, Scotland)..

2. MEMBERSHIP

2.1 No changes reported on the Membership.

3. MINUTES

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2002 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising other than those dealt with on the agenda.

5. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

5.1 Further to the meeting of the Integrated Personnel Development Advisory Board (IPDAB) on 19 September 2002 and Mr Stanley's subsequent letter to the Board Members on 23 September 2002 which outlined the principles for transitional arrangements for replacing the statutory examinations by elements of the new Integrated Personnel Development System (IPDS), Mr Stanley gave a powerpoint presentation to the Members to update them on the current situation.

5.2 Because of the industrial action, work had been delayed within IPDAB and in particular in agreeing the detail for the weighting to be given to the transitional arrangements. At the January 2003 meeting of IPDAB it had been agreed to postpone the implementation of the transitional arrangements by one year and, in particular, there would be a need for the statutory practical examinations in 2004. The revised last dates for candidates to enter the examinations were confirmed as follows:

Leading Firefighters'	Part II Practical Examination	March/April 2004
Sub-Officers'	Part II Practical Examination	April/May/June 2004
Leading Firefighters'	Part I Written Examination	September 2004
Sub-Officers'	Part I Written Examination	October 2004
Station Officers'	Written Examination	February 2005

5.3 Mr Doyle informed the meeting that Members of IPDAB had received a presentation from the newly appointed project officer for the IPDS system who had outlined the expected completion dates for each phase of the work. The only outstanding areas focused on the work to the assessment centres and changes to legislation which were expected to be completed on time, later this year.

5.4 The Members expressed concerns on their lack of understanding on this major and important issue and requested a mechanism to enable them to promote and better understand the process.

5.5 The Chairman suggested that a presentation on the IPDS system by a member of the IPDWG team would be helpful for Members and Mr Stanley agreed to formally write to Mr Doyle, on behalf of IPDAB, to arrange for this to be undertaken at the July 2003 meeting of the Board.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF LEADING FIREFIGHTER

6. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2002

6.1 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 I Written Examination 2002. (Paper FB1/2003).

6.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter Matthew Payne from West Midlands Fire Service should receive a framed certificate at the Fire Conference 2003.

- 6.3 Mr Stanley reported that 2608 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 2491 (after withdrawals). The initial entries included 5 RAF candidates, but these were not included in the statistics. Of these, 453 (18.2%) absented themselves, leaving 2033 actually attempting the examination. Of the 2033 candidates who attempted the examination 615 (30.3%) were awarded a pass, which was a slight improvement on the pass rate of 602 (29.4%) achieved last year. 212 candidates had failed to obtain a pass in all papers within the requisite period.
- 6.4 He asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix 'D'.
- 6.5 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme 32 (6.2%) appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 29 (90.6%) were upheld.
- 6.6 Mr Wright reported that the number of good quality scripts submitted remained at a similar level to that of last year, but unfortunately these continued to remain in the minority. 210 (10.3%) passed none of the papers attempted, which is a reduction in both numerical and percentage terms when compared to last year's results of 273.
- 6.7 Paper 1 – 'Operations' provided a pass rate of 51.1%, which was a tremendous improvement to the pass rate of 25.9% achieved last year. The weaker responses were recorded for the questions relating to the controls exercised by the officer-in-charge of an incident and the driver operator of a hydraulic platform, and the additional responsibilities of a breathing apparatus entry control officer when chemical protective clothing was used at an incident.
- 6.8 Paper 2 – 'Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement' provided a pass rate of 36.1%, which was a reduction to the pass rate of 48.8% achieved last year. The weakest response recorded was for the question relating to the duties of a responsible person appointed to ensure that an automatic fire detection and alarm system in a building would be effective.
- 6.9 Paper 3 – 'Human Resource Management' provided a pass rate of 44.0%, which was similar to that achieved last year. The general standard of responses and many of the scripts submitted was good. The weaker responses were recorded for the questions relating to leadership, motivation and communication responsibilities.

6.10 Paper 4 – ‘Business Administration’ provided a pass rate of 69.7%, which was a reduction in the pass rate of 74.8% achieved last year. The responses of candidates, when required to provide an article of specific length for a job focus week on a career in the Fire Service, identified a weakness with many key factors not being mentioned.

- 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, subject to a minor amendment to Table V relating to the ‘Declined to Say’ figures.
 - (ii) That the Board note the results of the appeals panel for candidates’ examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.
 - (iii) That Firefighter Matthew Payne be presented with a framed certificate.

7. QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2002

7.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners. (Paper FB2/2003).

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF SUB-OFFICER

8. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART II PRACTICAL TEST 2002

8.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for the Officer of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination for promotion to the rank of Sub-Officer Part Practical Test 2002 (Paper FB3/2003).

8.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 416 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 372 (after withdrawals). Of these, 20 (5.4%) had absented themselves, leaving 352 actually attempting the examination. Of the 352 candidates who attempted the test 254 (72.2%) were awarded a pass and 98 (27.8%) failed. The 254 successful candidates are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Sub-Officer.

8.3 The Board was advised that 5 candidates appealed to the Board following their absenteeism from the examination and under the delegated authority given to the Chairman all appeals were upheld.

- 8.4 It was reported that 20 appeals against their examination results had been received from 17 candidates. The appeals had been conducted in accordance with the rules. The appeals panel consisting of the Secretary of the FSEB, the Lead Assessor and the National Assessor for the Practical Tests had reviewed all appeals in the light of the Senior Examiners' reports, examiners' comments and the candidates original submission. 16 appeals were unsuccessful, which included one re-test.
- 8.5 A further 25 candidates had failed to pass their Part II examination within the three year period. They must now re-sit their Part I examination.
- 8.6 Mr Wright reported that there was a decrease of 127 (-25.4%) entering the 2002 examination compared to the previous years entrants. The number of candidates passing the test was reduced by 63, although the pass rate increased by 3.7% to 72.2%. Overall, the pass rate in the examination reflected the high standard displayed by the vast majority of candidates.
- 8.7 Section A of the test provided a pass rate of 92.0% which was an improvement of approximately 4.5% to that achieved last year. It was reported that it was difficult to identify general reasons for the failure of the 8.0% of candidates, but a failure to demonstrate command, control and an interaction with the crews was the most common.
- 8.8 Section B of the test produced a pass rate of 84.4%, which was higher than that achieved last year. General weaknesses applicable to those who failed in this section were again difficult to identify, but the most common were inadequacies in the gathering and evaluation of information on arrival at the scene, risk assessment and observation of risk critical activities, together with an acceptance of poor application of procedures by crew members. The debriefing of crews indicated a trend of improvement, but there remains scope for candidates to develop interaction with their crews in order to identify development needs and learning issues.
- 8.9 Section C provided a pass rate of 84.9% which was an improvement to that achieved last year. The general weaknesses reported related to generic rather than specific plans on how they would deal with an incident at the risk, poor structure and inadequate preparation of their presentations.

8.10 He reported that the Lead Assessor, the National Assessor for the Practical Tests and the Secretary of the Board had visited a number of examination centres to assess the facilities provided and to observe the tests in progress. Where improvement associated with the organisation of the local board arrangements, were considered necessary, advice was given. Examiners were observed and questioned regarding assessments and were considered to be competent and fair. The efforts of all personnel involved in the tests were greatly appreciated.

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.

9. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2002

9.1 The Board considered the draft report to the Secretary of State for the Officer of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Scottish Ministers on the qualifying examination for promotion to the rank of Sub-Officer Part I Written Examination 2002 (Paper FB4/2003).

9.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter Adrian Brizzolara from Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service should receive a framed certificate at the Fire Conference 2003.

9.3 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 1657 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 1594 (after withdrawals). 341 (21.4%) absented themselves from the examination, thus the number of candidates who attended was 1253. The initial entries included 2 RAF candidates, but these are not included in the following statistics.

9.4 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme 47 (11.1%) candidates appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 43 (91.5%) were upheld.

9.5 Mr Stanley asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix 'D'.

9.6 Mr Wright reported that there was a decrease in the number of entries to the examination of 107 (6.3%). Of the 1253 who attempted the examination, 422 (33.7%) were awarded a pass, which in both numerical and percentage terms was better than those achieved in 2001.

9.7 He informed the members that there were some excellent scripts submitted by candidates, but these remained in the minority, and it continued to be evident that many were ill prepared for the examination.

- 9.8 Paper 1 – ‘Operations’ provided a pass rate of 35.2%, which was a reduction to that achieved last year (38.5%). The weaker responses related to road traffic accidents on a hill with vehicles on fire having various fuel systems and the science question on spontaneous combustion.
- 9.9 Mr Wright also referred to one dangerous practice which had been identified during the marking of this paper. This had been dealt with in accordance with the Board’s rules, with both candidate and Chief Officer advised of the dangerous practice.
- 9.10 Paper 2 – ‘Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement’ provided an improved pass rate of 39.0% compared to 29.9% achieved last year. Despite this improvement, weaknesses were evident in detailed knowledge and understanding related to the constituents and properties of smoke, important to automatic fire detection, the provision of screens when associated with automatic roof vents, and the reasoning applied when considering certain causes of fire.
- 9.11 Paper 3 – ‘Human Resource Management’ provided a pass rate of 42.5% which was a considerable improvement to the pass rate of 24.7% in 2001. The weaker areas were identified when questions delved more deeply into the level of knowledge and understanding related to assessment, and the techniques used in operational training.
- 9.12 Paper 4 – ‘Business Administration’ provided a pass rate of 81.9% which was also an improvement on the 60.8% pass rate in 2001. Many candidates would have achieved better marks if they had provided the formulae and calculations used, as stipulated in the question.
- 9.13 Mr Stanley also asked Members to note the decision of the Chairman in disqualifying one candidate who had been found in possession of unauthorised material at the examination centre.

- 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, subject to amendment of Table V relating to ‘Declined to Say’ figures.
 - (ii) That the Board note the results of the appeals panel for candidates’ examination results, as detailed in Appendix ‘D’.
 - (iii) That Firefighter Adrian Brizzolara be presented with a framed certificate.
 - (iv) To note the action of the Chairman in disqualifying candidate 88/0902 found in possession of unauthorised material.

QUESTION PAPER AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2002

- 10.1 The Board noted the Report of the Assessors and Examiners (Paper FB5/2003).

11. WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS OF THE PRACTICAL TESTS

- 11.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB6/2003 which reported on the Workshop held for Senior Examiners of Local Examination Boards.
- 11.2 The Workshop had been held on 2 October 2002 at the headquarters of the Greater Manchester County Fire Service and attended by the Senior Examiners or their representatives from 18 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 for the establishment and maintenance 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 the results of the appeals made by candidates on their examination results, the briefing of candidates, the use of wireless audio monitoring system, the future of the statutory examinations and the dissemination of results.
- 11.5 Mr Wright reported that those who attended the Workshop had agreed that it had again been a useful and constructive forum for exchanging views and discussing issues.
- 11.6 The next Workshop would take place on 1 October 2003 at Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade Training Centre at the invitation of the Chief Fire Officer.

12. FEES AND HONORARIA FOR ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS

- 12.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB7/2003, which detailed the proposed new fees and honoraria to be paid to assessors and examiners with effect from 1 April 2003.

RESOLVED: That the Board agreed to an increase in the fees and honoraria for the two year period commencing 1 April 2003:

- (i) the annual fee paid to the technical adviser for the Business Administration paper would be increased to £661.25 plus £40.50 per day for attendance at additional meetings.
- (ii) the honoraria paid to Assessors and Examiners would be increased to £45.75 and £33.00 respectively per examination marking session.

13. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2003/2004

- 13.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB8/2003 which asked the Board to note the detailed estimated expenditure for 2002/2003 and approve the budgeted expenditure for 2003/2004.
- 13.2 He reported that the estimated deficit of £3,673 at 31 March 2003 was due to the costs of the introduction of the new appeals scheme which had resulted in additional examiner time and changes to the computer software.
- 13.3 Industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union had caused the Board to re-schedule its October 2002 marking session over two separate periods which had further contributed to increased expenditure at both Leading Firefighter and Sub-Officer level. Increases in centre costs had also raised the probable expenditure for 2002/2003.
- 13.4 However, it was anticipated that the expected deficit of £3,673 as at 31 March 2003 could be offset by a reduction in the 'Review of Examination' costs and further computer savings during 2003/2004.
- 13.5 Mr Stanley reported that the Budget for 2003/2004 reflected the original submission approached at the July meeting, but now included an inflation allowance of 2.5%.

RESOLVED: That the estimated total expenditure of £525,300 for 2003/2004 be approved.

14. STATISTICS BY ETHNIC GROUPINGS

- 14.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB9/2003 which provided statistics reflecting the ethnic comparisons of both male and female candidates and by their examination success.
- 14.2 At the July 2002 meeting of the Board, Members had requested further information on the comparative breakdown shown in the ethnic grouping table by male and female candidates as detailed in the Secretary of States Reports.
- 14.3 Mr Stanley felt that the limitations of the data presented did not add to the information already provided in the Secretaries of State Reports and Members were therefore asked to note the report.

15. POLICY FOR DISABILITIES

- 15.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB10/2003 which asked Members to ratify the Chairman's action in agreeing a procedure and policy for disabilities as outlined in the accompanying Appendices which had now been included in the Rules for each level of the statutory examinations.

- 15.2 He reported that the Disability Discrimination Action (DDA) 1995 would come into force from 1 October 2004. The Act would place a number of obligations on employers to ensure that those with disabilities were not discriminated against.
- 15.3 He reported that Section 14 of the Act made specific reference to 'Qualification Bodies' and their responsibilities under the Act, including the need to make reasonable adjustment in the context of qualifications.
- 15.4 Questions were raised by Members on the cost implications of candidates providing a Specialist's report on the extent of their disability. Mr Stanley confirmed the Policy for disabilities was similar to that previously agreed for dyslexia which put the responsibility on the individual, but he was aware that some brigades had met those costs.

RESOLVED: That the procedure and policy as outlined in Appendices A and B of Paper FB10/2003 be agreed and circulated to Brigades.

16. OMBUDSMAN FOR THE STATUTORY PROMOTION EXAMINATIONS

- 16.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB11/2003 which asked Members to approve the appointment of an independent consultant to act as Ombudsman for the statutory promotion examinations.
- 16.2 He reported that as the administrative body for the Fire and Police examinations, the Employers' Organisation were seeking to ensure that wherever possible, it could apply consistent procedures to all of its examinations.
- 16.3 He reported that the appointment would ensure that candidates could have the right of appeal to an independent person against decisions of the Appeals Committees.
- 16.4 In agreeing the appointment, the Chairman confirmed that the appointment of an independent consultant to act as Ombudsman would be advertised nationally.

RESOLVED: That the appointment of an independent consultant to act as FSEB Ombudsman be approved and advertised in the Fire Journal and on FINDS.

OTHER ITEMS

17. LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' PART II PRACTICAL EXAMINATION

- 17.1 Mr Wright advised the Members that Section 'A' of the Leading Firefighters' Practical Examination required the candidate to conduct a Standard Drill from the Fire Service Manual-Training, using one crew. For this purpose, the FSEB had identified thirteen drills from which candidates could be examined on.

- 17.2 He reported that the London Fire Brigade had identified problems in being able to use all thirteen drills and this would again be an issue for the 2004 practical tests. After discussions with representatives of London Fire Brigade, and to ensure fairness to all candidates across the country, it was felt that all local examination boards should be allowed to select 'five' from the main list of thirteen.
- 17.3 Similar to other Sections of the examination, the list of five selected drills would be published within the candidate's brigade on 1 December each year prior to the tests.
- 17.4 The Board was asked to approve the amendment to the Rules for the Leading Firefighters' Part II Examination for Section 'A', which would need to be published by May 2003. After a brief discussion by Members of their concerns for the limitations of the drills used by brigades, they agreed that the amendment should apply to the 2004 examination.

- RESOLVED: (i) That the amendment to the Rules for the Leading Firefighters' practical examination be approved, that allowed for Senior Examiners to select 'five' from the published list of thirteen drills which would be circulated within the candidate's brigade on the 1 December each year prior to the tests.
- (ii) That supporting examination documentation also be amended and the changes reported to the Senior Examiners Workshop to be held on 1 October 2003.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 18.1 It was agreed to meet on Tuesday 1 July 2003 at the offices of the Employers' Organisation (EO), Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG.