

## **MINUTES**

**BODY:** FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

**DATE:** 1 JULY 2003

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

**PRESENT:** Sir Graham Meldrum (Chairman)

## **CACFOA**

J Doyle  
R Elliott

## **CONVENTION OF SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

A Lafferty

## **FIRE BRIGADES UNION**

D Green (Substitute)

## **INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS**

J M Cowie

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION**

L Barron

## **SCOTTISH MINISTERS**

K Bradley (Substitute)  
R Virtue

## **SECRETARIES OF STATE**

G McManus (Substitute)

## **IN ATTENDANCE**

H E Wright (Lead Assessor)  
A MacInnes (Substitute) (General Assessor, Scotland)  
D J Stanley (Secretary)  
M A Malone (Senior Administrator)

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Barnes, Mrs J Clark, Mr A J Early, Mr M Fordham, Mr A Gilchrist, Cllr J Newman.

### **2. MEMBERSHIP**

2.1 The Chairman informed the meeting that Jagtar Singh, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Bedfordshire & Luton Fire and Rescue Service had been awarded the OBE and Roger Greet, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Dorset Fire & Rescue Service had been awarded the QFSM.

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

**RESOLVED:** To send letters of congratulations to Mr Singh and Mr Greet.

### **3. MINUTES**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2003 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

### **4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

4.1 Officers had nothing to raise.

### **5. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS**

5.1 At the April 2003 meeting of the Board, it was requested that a presentation on the Integrated Personnel Development System (IPDS) by a Member of the IPDWG would be helpful for Members.

5.2 Mr Eamonn Barclay Project Director, a member of the IPDWG gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Members to explain the background and structure of IPDS and updated them on the current situation for implementation, following the recent agreement of the pay negotiations.

## 6. PRINCIPLES OF WINDING DOWN THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

- 6.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB12/2003 which asked Members to consider revised timescales for winding down the statutory examinations once the Integrated Personnel Development Advisory Board (IPDAB) had confirmed the date that transitional arrangements would take effect and had agreed the degree of weighting that would be applied to the examination qualifications within the Integrated Personnel Development System (IPDS).
- 6.2 He asked Members to approve in principle final re-sit dates for candidates undertaking the statutory examinations to be as follows:

Leading Firefighters' Part I - Late February 2005 and Early September 2005  
Sub-Officers' Part I - Late February 2005 and Early September 2005  
Station Officers' - Early September 2005 and Late February 2006

He advised Members that in the event of successful appeals against absenteeism or deferred entry through extenuating circumstances, candidates would be entitled to have one further opportunity to re-take their examination on the following:

Leading Firefighters' and Sub-Officers' Part I - Late February 2006  
Station Officers' - Early September 2006

- 6.3 In accepting the above principles, Mr Stanley asked Members to approve that the rule changes outlined in paragraph 3.8 of the report should also apply.
- 6.4 The Members agreed to approve in principle final re-sit dates for the examinations as outlined in paragraph 2.1 and in agreeing these principles, approved the necessary rule changes as outlined in paragraph 3.8 of the report.
- 6.5 Mr Stanley advised Members that agreement to the changes required the continued support of the relevant stakeholders to the examination process and asked for brigades support in both the release of candidates for the extra examination dates and of officers to assist with the additional marking. Mr Elliott agreed to take forward the Board's concerns to CACFOA.
- 6.6 Mr Stanley stated that he would report the Members decision to the Integrated Personnel Development Advisory Board (IPDAB) at its next meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the re-sit dates for the examinations as outlined in paragraph 2.1 of the report be approved, in principle.
- (ii) That the necessary rule changes be made as outlined in paragraph 3.8 of the report.

## QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF LEADING FIREFIGHTER

### 7. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART II PRACTICAL TEST 2003

- 7.1 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 2003. (Paper FB13/2003).
- 7.2 Mr Wright informed the meeting that 819 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 735 (after withdrawals). Of these 84 (11.5%) had absented themselves, leaving 651 actually attempting the examination. (This included 3 RAF candidates, but the reports statistics do not include these candidates).
- 7.3 He reported that of the 648 candidates who attempted the test, 488 (75.3%) were awarded a pass and 160 (24.7%) failed. The 488 successful candidates are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Leading Firefighter.
- 7.4 He also asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.
- 7.5 Mr Wright reported that there was a reduction of 19 (-2.5%) in the number of candidates entering the examination when compared with the 2002 entries. There was an increase in the number (+25) and percentage (+4%) of candidates absenting themselves resulting in a decrease of 45(6.5%) in the number of candidates taking the test. However, the number of candidates passing the test increased by 7, and the pass rate improved by 5.9%.
- 7.6 Section A of the test provided a pass rate of 91.2% which is an improvement to that achieved last year (88.8%). The general standard of candidates performance observed over the years continued to improve. The general weaknesses identified related to inadequate observation of safety issues. Whilst improvement had been noted in the de-briefing of crews, many candidates still failed to use this as a training aid.
- 7.7 Section B showed an improvement in the pass rate 85.0% to that achieved last year (79.9%). It was difficult to identify general weaknesses by candidates, but again the lack of observance of safety issues had been recognised.
- 7.8 Section C provided a pass rate of (89.3%) compared to last year's pass rate of (87.6%) which confirmed the continued improvement shown by candidates over recent years. The main factor relating to the failure of candidates was a lack of preparation for the test.

- 7.9 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 to observe the tests in progress. Where improvements associated with the local board arrangements were considered necessary, advice was recorded in letters to the local examination boards. He confirmed that examiners were observed and questioned regarding assessing in general and their assessments were considered to be competent and fair.
- 7.10 With reference to the Restriction of Entry Scheme in paragraph 8, 11 candidates appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and the 11 were upheld.
- 7.11 Of the 19 appeals received against candidates' examination results, the Appeals Panel found in favour of 2 appeals with 11 unsuccessful. There were a further 6 appeals currently pending.

- RESOLVED:**
- (i) That the draft report be approved and submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Scottish Ministers, subject to minor amendments in paragraphs 7 and 12.
  - (ii) That the Board note the results of the appeals panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.

## **8. DANGEROUS PRACTICES IDENTIFIED IN THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' PRACTICAL EXAMINATION 2003**

- 8.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB14/2003 which reported on the dangerous practices identified in the Leading Firefighters' practical examination 2003.
- 8.2 The Board was asked to note the report.
- 8.3 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 the serious and unacceptable risk), a procedure which involves 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 briefed and provided with appropriate guidance at the conclusion of the examination before leaving the examination centre.
- 8.4 Senior Examiners had advised the Fire Services Examinations Board of six separate cases (five candidates) where the procedure had been applied following the Leading Firefighters' Part II Practical Test. The 'dangerous practices' identified including the following:
- (i) Committing breathing apparatus wearers into a simulated building involved in fire with instructions to split up and search separate rooms.

- (ii) Providing the pump operator with other duties which caused the pump to be left unattended whilst breathing apparatus wearers were committed inside a building to tackle a fire.
- (iii) Deploying and instructing breathing apparatus wearers without informing the Breathing Apparatus Entry Control Officer.
- (iv) Allowing breathing apparatus wearers to ventilate the building without directions to do so.
- (v) Committing breathing apparatus wearers into a building to deal with a cylinder containing liquefied petroleum gas believed to be leaking and on fire, without them wearing appropriate personal protection equipment.
- (vi) Failure to identify that the information recorded on the Breathing Apparatus Entry Control Board placed breathing apparatus wearers at incorrect locations.

8.5 The Members expressed their concerns on the number of dangerous practices reported and questioned what procedures were in place to ensure appropriate training and guidance was given, where appropriate, to the candidates.

8.6 The Chairman assured the Members that the procedures were taken very seriously in brigades and Mr Elliott said he was confident that each dangerous practice was being individually and appropriately addressed.

**RESOLVED:** That Paper FB14/2003 be noted.

#### **QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF STATION OFFICER**

#### **9. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2003**

9.1 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 for promotion to the rank of Station Officer (Paper FB15/2003)

9.2 Mr Wright informed the meeting that 1010 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 904 (after withdrawals). 178 (19.7%) absented themselves, thus the number of candidates who attended was 726. Of these 270 attempted all four papers. Of the 726 who sat the examination 269 (37.1%) were awarded a pass and are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Station Officer.

9.3 He also asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.

- 9.4 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 19 candidates (8.7%) appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 19 (100%) were upheld. These candidates will have one further year to complete their examination.
- 9.5 Mr Wright reported that as this was the third examination to use the changed system and syllabuses, more certain comparisons could be made with the results achieved last year. Paper 1 provided an improved pass rate of 47.2% compared to 38.2% last year; Paper 2 provided an improved pass rate of 50.2% from 44.4%; Paper 3 provided an improved pass rate of 43.0% from 32.7% and Paper 4, again improved to 62.1% from 55.7% in 2002.
- 9.6 He informed the Members that, as in previous years, there were extremes in the quality of scripts submitted by candidates, some being outstanding in their quality, whereas others suggested that many candidates were ill-prepared for the examination and for the rank to which they wished to aspire.
- 9.7 Mr Wright reported that there were no problems associated with the format of the examination, the venues or the instructions to candidates on the various question papers.
- 9.8 The Board was also asked to agree that the Top Candidates, Sub-Officer Simon Ashton from Merseyside Fire Service, should receive a framed certificate from the Board.
- 9.9 Mr Wright then reported on the outcome of the appeals against candidates' examination results. Four experienced examiners had remarked 47 scripts as a result of 37 appeals. Of these, the Appeals Panel agreed that 29 appeals were successful with 16 candidates now passing their examination overall. 18 appeals were found not to be proven.

- 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.
  - (iii) That Sub-Officer Simon Ashton be presented with a framed certificate at the Fire Conference 2003.

## 10. QUESTION PAPER AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2003

- 10.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners (Paper FB16/2003).

## 11. RECIPROCITY BETWEEN THE STATION OFFICERS' EXAMINATION AND THE GRADUATESHIP EXAMINATION OF THE INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

- 11.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB17/2003 which asked the Board to note the report.
- 11.2 He reported that at the January 1989 meeting, the Board agreed that the Lead Assessor and the Secretary should monitor the question of reciprocity between the Station officers' examination and the Graduateship examination of the IFE and report annually to the Board.
- 11.3 He informed the Members that although the reciprocal arrangements would be subject to review with the introduction of the Integrated Personnel Development System, it was important to inform Members that the reciprocal liaison was continuing. Members noted the comparative statistics as set out in the Report.

**RESOLVED:** That Paper FB17/2003 be noted.

## 12. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2004/2005

- 12.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB18/2003 which set out the funding requirements for 2004/2005 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.
- 12.2 The Board was also asked to agree the detailed estimated expenditure for 2004/2005 and note the actuals for 2003/2004.
- 12.3 Mr Stanley reported that figures for 2004/2005 had been increased by £32,000 for both the Leading Firefighters' and Sub-Officers' examinations to reflect the additional costs of the re-sit examinations and the additional marking expenses required for the winding down of the statutory examinations. However, he pointed out that there would be longer term savings on TSSG funding through winding down the examinations within the time period now agreed and consequently, not having to provide for funding through to 2008.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the actuals for 2003/2004.
- (ii) To approve the submission for 2004/2005 of
  - £476,741 plus inflation from LGA (England)
  - £28,281 plus inflation from LGA (Wales)
  - £52,707 plus inflation from the Scottish Ministers.

### 13. SUSPENSION FROM THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

- 13.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB19/2003 which asked Members to consider a change to the Rules for the statutory examinations which deals with candidates who are suspended from duty and who wish to undertake the statutory examinations.
- 13.2 Following an enquiry on the status of candidates who wished to undertake the statutory examinations whilst being suspended from duty, the secretariat took advice from the Employers' Organisation. Members were asked to approve the following paragraph for inclusion in the Rules for the statutory examinations which reflected a similar practice with the police examinations currently administered by the Employers' Organisation:

#### *Suspension*

Candidates who are suspended from duty will be required to provide written authority from their appropriate Chief Fire Officer/Firemaster allowing them to attend either part of the examination under whatever circumstances the Chief Fire Officer/Firemaster considers to be appropriate. This written authority must be handed in at the time of registration at the examination site; prior notification must have been received by the Board.

**RESOLVED:** That the amendment to the Rules as outlined in paragraph 2.1 of the report be approved.

### 14. OMBUDSMAN FOR THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

- 14.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB20/2003 which asked Members to confirm the Chairman's action in the appointment of Mrs Liz Barron as Ombudsman for the statutory examinations.
- 14.2 At the April 2003 meeting of the Board, Members had agreed to the appointment of an independent consultant to act as FSEB Ombudsman.
- 14.3 The position was advertised in Fire Magazine and FINDS which subsequently resulted in four applicants being invited for interview, which were conducted by Mr Stanley (Secretary) and Mr H Wright (Lead Assessor). As a result of the interviews, Mrs Liz Barron was recommended to the Chairman for appointment to the position and the Chairman's approval was sought in order that she could commence these duties with immediate effect.
- 14.4 The Chairman and Members congratulated Mrs Liz Barron on her appointment.

**RESOLVED:** That the appointment of Mrs Liz Barron as Ombudsman for the statutory examinations be approved.

**15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 15.1 It was agreed to meet on Thursday 22 January 2004 at the offices of the Employers' Organisation (EO), Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG.