

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 22 JANUARY 2004

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

PRESENT: Sir Graham Meldrum (Chairman)

CONVENTION OF SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

A Lafferty

INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

J M Cowie

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

K Bradley (Substitute)

IN ATTENDANCE

H E Wright (Lead Assessor)

D J Stanley (Secretary)

M A Malone (Senior Administrator)

1. QUORUM

- 1.1 The Chairman explained that as there was not a quorum for the meeting, matters agreed would need to be ratified by all Board Members. The minutes would be circulated to Members for such formal approval.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Barnes, Cllr L Barron, Mrs J Clark, Mr A R Currie, Mr J Doyle, Mr A J Early, Mr R Elliott, Mr M Fordham, Mr M Harper, Cllr J Newman, Ms C Symes and Mr R Virtue.

3. MEMBERSHIP

- 3.1 The Chairman informed the meeting that Richard Bull, Chief Fire Officer, Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade and former LGA Board Member and Jeffrey Ord, Firemaster, Strathclyde Fire Brigade and former Board Assessor had been awarded the CBE and Eamonn Barclay, Senior Examiner Practical Tests, London had been awarded the QFSM.
- 3.2 It was agreed that letters of congratulations be sent in recognition of their honours.
- 3.3 The Chairman reported that following the retirement of Mr M Harper from the Fire Brigades Union, the Secretary had been informed that Ms R Winter would be his replacement.

RESOLVED: To send letters of congratulations to Mr Bull, Mr Ord and Mr Barclay.

4. MINUTES

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2003 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 5.1 Officers had nothing to raise.

6. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS – TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

- 6.1 Mr Stanley gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Members which provided an update on the agreed transitional arrangements which would be applied in replacing the statutory examinations by elements of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS).
- 6.2 He explained that the transitional arrangements would be operational during the period when the IPDS was formed within the Fire Service and the Fire Services Examinations ceased. The Integrated Personal Development Advisory Board (IPDAB) has overseen and approved the work for IPDS and had agreed that recognition would be given to both the Part I and Part II examinations within IPDS.
- 6.3 He also advised the Members of the six monthly re-sit dates which had been arranged to enable candidates to complete their written examinations.

- 6.4 Amendments to the current Appointments and Promotion Regulations would confirm the finalisation for the statutory examinations, although he had queried with the ODPM lawyers the need for clarification in the new Regulations for the FSEB's ongoing responsibilities, particularly as the 1985 Examination Regulations would be repealed.
- 6.5 Mr Stanley explained that the Secretariat's role on behalf of FSEB would be to wind down the examinations for completion by 2006. After that date there may be a need to access candidate result data and he had approached the Fire Service College for the longer term storage of such information together with the historical minutes and records of the Fire Services Examinations Board.
- 6.6 In response to Mr Cowie's query regarding quality assurance (QA), the Chairman explained that the ODPM would have overall responsibility for IPDS particularly for ensuring consistency of standards across all brigades. Edexcel was one such body already involved in the QA process discussions within IPDS.
- 6.7 A copy of the presentation would be sent to all Board Members.

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 I WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS 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 I Written Examination 2003 (Paper FB1/2004).
- 7.2 The Board was asked to agree that the top candidate Firefighter David Whitehead from Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue should receive a framed certificate at the Fire Conference 2004.
- 7.3 Mr Stanley reported that 2212 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 2099 (after withdrawals). The initial entries included 4 RAF candidates, but these were not included in the statistical reports. Of these 415 (19.8%) absented themselves, leaving 1684 actually attempting the examination. Of the 1681 local authority candidates who attempted the examination 565 (33.6%) were awarded a pass, which was a decrease in the numbers achieving a pass from 615, but an increase in the percentage pass rate from 30.3% last year.
- 7.4 He asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.

- 7.5 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 23 candidates (5.0%) appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 23 (100%) were upheld.
- 7.6 Mr Wright reported that the number of good quality scripts submitted were at a similar level to that of last year, but unfortunately, these remained in the minority. 167 (9.9%) passed none of the papers attempted which is a slight improvement in both numerical and percentage terms when compared to last years results of 210 (10.3%).
- 7.7 Paper 1 – ‘Operations’ provided a pass rate of 49.9%, which was slightly less than the pass rate 51.1% achieved last year. The weaker responses were recorded for the questions relating to the powers of the senior fire officer present for the control of operations at a fire, the responsibilities of the fire service should an accident occur at pressurised workings, and the factors to take into account as part of the dynamic risk assessment prior to committing firefighters when the possibility of a flashover or backdraught is suspected.
- 7.8 Paper 2 – ‘Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement’ provided a pass rate of 47.6%, which was an improvement on the pass rate of 36.1% achieved last year. The weakest response recorded was for the question which required positive actions that might be suggested to a group to reduce the number of false alarms received from automatic fire alarms.
- 7.9 Paper 3 – ‘Human Resource Management’ provided a pass rate of 42.8%, which was a slight reduction to last year, 44.0%. The better responses related to the questions dealing with the contract of employment and the COSHH regulations.
- 7.10 Paper 4 – ‘Business Administration’ provided a pass rate of 71.9%, which was an improvement to the 69.7% achieved last year. The weakest part of the paper related to the provision of a précis with many candidates failing to demonstrate any understanding of the requirements of a précis.
- 7.11 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 questions papers.
- 7.12 Mr Wright then reported on the outcome of the appeals against candidates’ examination results. Four experienced examiners had remarked 39 scripts as a result of 29 appeals. Of these, the Appeals Panel agreed that 28 appeals were successful with 22 candidates now passing their examination overall. One appeal was found to be unsuccessful.

7.13 Mr Cowie enquired whether brigades were still supporting candidates through pre-examination courses. Mr Wright confirmed that this was still continuing although they varied across the country.

- 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 firefighter David Whitehead be presented with a framed certificate at Fire Conference 2004.

8. QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2003

8.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners (Paper FB2/2004).

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF SUB-OFFICER

9. 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

9.1 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 Sub-Officer on the Part II Practical Test 2003. (Paper FB3/2004).

9.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 525 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 476 (after withdrawals). Of these 40 (8.4%) had absented themselves, leaving 436 actually attempting the examination. Of the 436 candidates who attempted the test, 324 (74.3%) were awarded a pass and 112 (25.7%) failed. The 324 successful candidates are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Sub-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 Members were 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 individually considered and the 5 were upheld.

9.5 Of the 12 appeals received against candidates' examination results, the Appeals Panel found 3 appeals successful with a decision to re-test, with 9 unsuccessful.

- 9.6 Mr Wright reported that there was an increase of 104 (+28%) of candidates entering the examination when compared with the 2002 entries. There was an increase in the number absenting themselves. However, this resulted in an increase of 84 (23.9%) in the number of candidates taking the test. The number of candidates passing the test increased by 70 and the pass rate increased by 2.1%.
- 9.7 Section A of the test provided a pass rate of 89.2% which is a slight reduction of 2.8% to that achieved last year. It had been difficult to identify general reasons for the failure of the 10.8% of candidates, but the lack of attention given to the command, control and safety aspects were the most common, which was a repeated reason for failure each year.
- 9.8 Section B of the test recorded a pass rate of 87.1% which was higher than that of 84.4% achieved last year and demonstrated a gradual improvement. The most common weaknesses identified were inadequacies in exercising the required level of command and a failure to relate the risk assessment process to required actions. A general improvement in the debriefing of crews had again been identified, but many candidates still need to understand its purpose and how it might be best applied.
- 9.9 Section C provided a pass rate of (87.6%) which again was an improvement to the 84.9% achieved last year. The general weaknesses identified related to the provision of generic rather than specific plans on how they would deal with an incident at the specific risk premises, the poor use of time available and the general opinion of examiners that candidate presentations had not been adequately prepared.
- 9.10 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 organisation of the local board arrangements were considered necessary, advice was given. He confirmed that examiners were observed and questioned regarding their assessments and these were considered to be competent and fair.

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.

10. DANGEROUS PRACTICES IDENTIFIED IN THE SUB-OFFICERS PRACTICAL EXAMINATION 2003

10.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB4/2004 which reported on the dangerous practices identified in the Sub-Officers' practical examination 2003.

- 10.2 The Board was asked to note the report.
- 10.3 Where a candidate applies, demonstrates or fails 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 involves a discussion between the examiners and the Senior Examiner is applied. Should they all agree that what has been observed constitutes a 'dangerous practice', the candidate is effectively briefed and provided with appropriate guidance at the conclusion of the examination before leaving the examination centre.
- 10.4 Senior Examiners had advised the Fire Services Examinations Board of six separate cases where the procedure had been applied following the Sub-Officers' Part II Practical Test. The 'dangerous practices' identified included the following:
- (i) Committing BA wearers into a building where 415v electrical apparatus was reported to be involved in fire, with a hose-reel for fire fighting purposes and instructions to 'isolate the electrical supply'. In addition to failing to ensure that the firefighters were provided with appropriate fire fighting media, the candidate also failed to ensure that the BA wearers wore the correct personal protection equipment.
 - (ii) With a firefighter using a charged line of hose and working branch from the head of a ladder, the candidate failed to ensure that a hose bucket had been provided to take the weight of the hose on the ladder. When this was brought to the candidate's attention, the candidate ordered the wrong delivery to be closed at the pump.
 - (iii) Demonstrating an inability to differentiate between 'offensive' and 'defensive' tactical modes.
 - (iv) Committing BA wearers with a hose-reel on a search and rescue mission to the first floor of a building on fire, having been informed of 'persons reported' but prior to discovering the location or severity of the fire. Having gained information that the fire had originated at the electrical intake at ground floor level and spread to also involve the first floor level of the building, a second BA team was committed with only a carbon dioxide extinguisher for their protection and to extinguish the fire. Although a main fire fighting jet was provided outside the building, this was neither at the entrance used by the second BA team nor sufficient in length to reach the furthest part of the building.
 - (v) Committing BA wearers to the first floor of a building when the fire was situated at ground floor level, also with a person needing to be rescued on the ground floor. The BA team was committed into the building above a fire prior to the necessary information being obtained regarding the fire. An attack on the fire at ground floor level commenced about five minutes after the first BA team was committed into the building.

- (vi) Allowing BA wearers to enter an unvented compartment fire in a building using the 'door entry procedure' without the provision of a charged line and branch standing by for their additional protection.

10.5 A Senior Examiner reported one case to the candidate's brigade to enable suitable counselling guidance and/or appropriate training to be considered and provided.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB4/2004 be noted.

11. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2003

11.1 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 Sub-Officer Part I Written Examination 2003 (Paper FB5/2004).

11.2 The Board was asked to agree that the Top Candidate Firefighter David Patrick Johnson from Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service should receive a framed certificate at the Fire Conference 2004.

11.3 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 1305 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 1274 (after withdrawals). 332 (26.1%) absented themselves from the examination, thus the number of candidates who attended was 942. The initial entries included 2 RAF candidates, but these are not included in the following statistics.

11.4 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 16 (4.1%) candidates appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 15 (93.8%) were upheld.

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

11.6 Mr Wright reported that there was a decrease in the number of entries to the examination of 322 (20.2%). Of the 941 who attempted the examination, 245 (26.0%) were awarded a pass, which in both numerical and percentage terms was a decrease to those achieved in 2002.

11.7 He informed the Members that whilst there continued to be some excellent scripts submitted by candidates, these remained in the minority. Indeed, it was noted that the number of candidates who appeared to be inadequately prepared for the examination had increased.

11.8 Paper 1 – 'Operations' provided a pass rate of 38.4%, which was an improvement to that achieved last year (35.2%). The weaker responses related to the incident command structure at an incident and the disadvantages and hazards associated with the use of high expansion foam.

- 11.9 Paper 2 – ‘Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement’ provided a slightly improved pass rate of 41.4% when compared to 39.0% achieved last year. Weaknesses were evident in the knowledge and understanding of foam pouring systems installed in buildings, the installation of automatic fire alarms and their connection to alarm receiving stations and brigade controls, liaison with the Police Service during fire investigations and situations where fraud could be a motive for arson.
- 11.10 Paper 3 – ‘Human Resource Management’ provided a pass rate of 42.1%, which was similar to last year, 42.5%. The weaker areas were displayed in the responses to questions on the methods used to assess the performance of personnel, scenario based training using live casualties, the investigation of incidents and the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.
- 11.11 Paper 4 – ‘Business Administration’ provided a reduced pass rate of 67.3%, which was disappointing when compared to the 81.9% achieved last year. A weakness was evident in producing a frequency chart and in the interpretation of information from tables.
- 11.12 Mr Wright also referred to one dangerous practice which had been identified during the marking which related to a science question. This had been dealt with in accordance with the Board’s rules, with both the candidate and Chief Officer being advised of the dangerous practice.

- 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 Firefighter David Patrick Johnson be presented with a framed certificate at Fire Conference 2004.

12. QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2003

- 12.1 The Board noted the Report of the Assessors and Examiners (Paper FB6/2004).

13. WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS

- 13.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB7/2004 which reported on the Workshop held for Senior Examiners of Local Examination Boards.

- 13.2 The Workshop had been held on 1 October 2003 at the Tyne & Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade Training Centre and attended by Senior Examiners or their representatives from 20 of the 21 local examination boards and by officers of the Board's Secretariat. It was chaired by the Lead Assessor.
- 13.3 The Workshop provided a mechanism for the establishment of common national standards of assessment across the local boards and facilitated an exchange of information and views on the administration and conduct of the practical tests.
- 13.4 A number of issues were dealt with at the Workshop, particularly the results of the appeals made by candidates on their examination results, the future of the statutory examinations, dangerous practices identified by Senior Examiners, the application of national equity on the standard drills, clarification of 'collusion' by candidates, and new rules regarding candidates suspended from duty.
- 13.5 Mr Wright reported that all those who attended the Workshop had agreed that it had again been a useful and constructive forum for exchanging views and discussing issues.
- 13.6 He reported that as the practical tests in 2004 were scheduled to be the last applied under the auspices of the Fire Services Examinations Board, there were no plans for a Workshop following those tests. Mr Wright, the Lead Assessor had therefore thanked all the Senior Examiners and their representatives for the manner in which they had assisted the Board in the application of those tests and the discussions that had taken place at the Workshops over the years had ensured that they continued to be related to the needs of the Service.

14. REPORT OF THE ASSESSOR ON THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' AND SUB-OFFICERS' PRACTICAL TESTS 2002 AND 2003

- 14.1 The Board noted the Report of the Assessor (Paper FB8/2004).

15. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – BUDGET 2004/2005

- 15.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB9/2004 which asked the Board to note the details of the improved situation for 2003/2004 and approve the budgeted expenditure of £588,074 for 2004/2005.
- 15.2 He reported that the 2003/2004 probables showed a decreased expenditure due to a reduction in candidates in 2003. The increase in printing and postage costs reflected in the Board's Newsletter and amendments made to the Rules to each candidate's Handbook, as a result of the need to publicise the transitional arrangements into IPDS.

15.3 As reported at the July meeting of the Board, figures for 2004/05 had been increased to reflect the first of the additional re-sit examinations at Leading Firefighter and Sub-Officer level. Although expenditure would be seen to increase in 2004/2005, the budget deficit would be more than off-set by the estimated surplus at 31 March 2004.

15.4 Mr Stanley reported that the budget for 2004/2005 reflected the original submission approved at the July meeting, but now included an inflation allowance of 2.5%.

RESOLVED: That the estimated total expenditure of £588,074 for 2004/2005 be approved.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

16.1 It was agreed to meet on Thursday 1 July 2004 at the offices of the Employers' Organisation (EO), Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG.

16.2 The Chairman emphasised the importance of attending the July meeting, particularly as there will be a need to agree the final budget for 2005/06 for winding down the examinations. He also suggested that it may then be appropriate to handle matters of further meetings through correspondence.