

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 1 JULY 2004

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

PRESENT:

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

D Green (Substitute)

INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

J M Cowie

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

M G Barnes
R James

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

J R Nicholls
R S Virtue

SECRETARIES OF STATE

S Ramsamy (Substitute)
E Wilson (Substitute)

IN ATTENDANCE

H E Wright (Lead Assessor)
D J Stanley (Secretary)
M A Malone (Senior Examinations Officer)
T Rosenberg (Senior Examinations Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Sir Graham Meldrum, Ms A Frost, Ms C Symes, Cllr P Corcoran, Cllr A Jones, Cllr J Newman, Mr I Simpkins, Cllr A Lafferty, Mr R Elliott, Mr J Doyle, Mr A Gilchrist, Ms R Winter, Mr M Fordham and Mr A J Early.
- 1.2 The Members elected Mr R S Virtue in the absence of Sir Graham Meldrum, to act as Chairman.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 The Chairman welcomed the following new Members:

Ms A Frost appointed as a representative of the Secretaries of State.
Mr J Nicholls appointed as a representative of the Scottish Ministers to
replace Mrs J Clark.

Cllr A Jones) appointed as representatives of the Local Government
Mr I Simpkins) Association to replace
Mr R James) Cllr L Barron, Mr J McCall and Mr R King

Mr R Winter appointed as a representative of the Fire Brigades Union, to
replace Mr M Harper.

- 2.2 The Chairman informed the meeting that Brian Hibbert, Chief Fire Officer, Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service and Assessor for the Fire Safety paper at Leading Firefighter level, Keith Newnes, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service and written examiner from 1993 to 1998 and John McCall, former Chief Fire Officer, Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service and one of the Local Government Association representatives on the Board from 2001 to 2003 had been awarded the QFSM.

- RESOLVED:** (i) To send letters of congratulations to Mr Hibbert, Mr Newnes and Mr McCall.
- (ii) To send letters of welcome to Ms A Frost, Mr J Nicholls, Cllr A Jones, Mr I Simpkins, Mr R James and Ms R Winter.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2004 were agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

4.1 Officers had nothing to raise.

5. PROGRESS FOR WINDING DOWN THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

5.1 Mr Stanley gave a progress report on the arrangements for winding down the statutory examinations. All brigades through Chief Officers, local board secretaries, senior examiners and potential candidates had now been advised of the implications for the transitional arrangements and had received a copy of the Board's Newsletter which explained the changes in detail.

5.2 Following mixed advice that had been circulated around brigades, Mr Stanley had written to all brigades stressing the importance of continuing with the statutory examinations as they had agreed transferability into the IPDS process.

5.3 Final syllabuses and bibliography had now been issued for all three levels of examinations and it was not the intention to amend the Candidate Handbooks further for the remaining re-sit examinations. However, forthcoming changes to fire prevention legislation and the repeal of the Highly Flammable Liquids, Liquefied Petroleum Gases Regulations 1972, would materially affect the bibliography at both Leading Firefighter and Station Officer level and have a significant impact on the depth of questions that could be asked.

5.4 Mr Wright further explained that the new Fire Safety Legislation, Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2004, was expected to come into force in Spring 2005 in England and Wales, but not in Scotland.

5.5 Mr Nicholls explained that the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2004 will be replicated in the Fire Scotland Bill and it was hoped that discussion regarding the Bill would commence in Spring 2005.

5.6 Mr Stanley reminded the Members that questions in the written examination are based on material that has been published at least nine months before the examination.

5.7 It was agreed that officers of the Board should investigate further the implications of the proposed new legislation and its impact at both Leading Firefighter and Station Officer level and recommend what changes, if any, would need to be made to the syllabus or bibliography.

5.8 Mr Stanley then reported that the Fire Service College had confirmed their willingness to hold the FSEB's historical records and, after December 2006, to hold the computerised records of candidate's data and examination results on CD Rom format.

5.9 Mr Nicholls explained that it would also be useful for the Scottish Executive to access the records for Scottish candidates and asked whether consideration could be given to holding such data separately or indeed duplicated between both bodies.

- 5.10 Mr Stanley confirmed that it was possible to extrapolate the information for candidates in Scotland onto a CD Rom and added that there would be no software implications for duplicating or splitting such data.
- 5.11 Mr Wright raised the issue of transferability of candidates between brigades in England and Wales, and with Scottish brigades and comment was made that if the data was separated rather than duplicated, this could present difficulties due to the transferability of candidates.
- 5.12 It was agreed that Mr Stanley should write formally to the ODPM, under their responsibilities for the IPDS process, for their advice on this matter.
- 5.13 Finally, following Mr Barnes' enquiry as to the legal position of FSEB following the repeal of the Fire Services Appointments and Promotion (England and Wales) Regulations 1978, Mr Stanley was able to confirm that the ODPM lawyers had indicated that they saw no issues for concern whilst the Fire Services (Examinations) Regulations 1985 remained in force. They had also confirmed the FSEB's status as a substantive body in its own right and therefore its role to continue to deliver the statutory examinations. The transitional arrangements were reinforced in the recently issued DCOL 4/2003 and DFmr 5/2003 letters sent to all brigades.

- RESOLVED:** (i) That officers of the Board investigate further the implications of the proposed new fire safety legislation and its impact on both the syllabuses and bibliography at Leading Firefighter and Station Officer level and recommend what changes, if any, may need to be made for the re-sit examinations.
- (ii) Mr Stanley would write to the ODPM, under their responsibilities for the IPDS process, to seek guidance on where and how the historical computerised candidate examination data should in future be held.

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 II PRACTICAL TEST 2004

- 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 II Practical Test 2004 (Paper FB10/2004).
- 6.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 746 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 661 (after withdrawals). (This included 1 RAF candidate, but the statistical reports do not include this candidate). Of these 91 (13.8%) absented themselves, leaving 569 actually attempting the examination.

- 6.3 He reported that of the 569 candidates who attempted the test, 451 (79.3%) were awarded a pass and 118 (20.7%) failed. The 451 successful candidates were now qualified for promotion to the rank of Leading Firefighter.
- 6.4 He informed the meeting that there were no appeals from absent candidates since these were the last practical tests to be held and candidates would be unable to carry forward any successful appeals.
- 6.5 The 23 candidates who failed to pass their Part II examination within the three year period would either re-sit their Part I examination or enter directly into the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) process.
- 6.6 He also asked the Members to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.
- 6.7 Mr Wright reported that there was a reduction of 74 (10.0%) in the number of candidates entering the examination when compared with the 2003 entries. There was an increase in the number (+8) and percentage (+2.4%) of candidates absenting themselves, which resulted in a decrease of 79 (12.2%) of candidates taking the test. The number of candidates passing the test decreased by 37, but the pass rate improved by 4.0%.
- 6.8 He informed the meeting that the reduced number of candidates entering the examination and the high absentee rate were believed to be mainly due to the lack of confidence on the period of validity of the promotion examinations under IPDS and when it would be introduced.
- 6.9 Section A of the test provided a pass rate of 92.6%, which was an improvement to that achieved last year (91.2%). The general standard of candidates observed during these tests over the years continued to improve. The general weaknesses identified continued to relate to inadequate observation of safety issues and a shortfall in the ability to command and control personnel. Whilst the debriefing of crews had been invariably adequate, it did not suggest that this was an area of strength with the majority.
- 6.10 Section B showed an improvement in the pass rate 87.2% to that achieved last year (85.0%). The general weaknesses yet again were the inadequate observation of safety issues, an inability to command and control personnel and the debriefing of crews.
- 6.11 Section C again provided an improvement in the pass rate 91.9% to last year's pass rate of (89.3%), which confirmed the continued improvement shown by candidates over recent years. The main factor relating to the failure of candidates continued to be the lack of effective preparation for the test.

6.12 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 overall these were considered to be competent and fair.

6.13 Of the 17 appeals received from 15 candidates against their examination results, the Appeals Panel found in favour of 5 appeals with 5 unsuccessful. There were a further 5 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.

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

7. DANGEROUS PRACTICES IDENTIFIED IN THE LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' PRACTICAL EXAMINATION 2004

7.1 Mr Wright introduced Paper FB11/2004, which reported on the dangerous practices identified in the Leading Firefighters' practical examination 2004.

7.2 The Board was asked to note the report.

7.3 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 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.

7.4 Senior Examiners had advised the Fire Services Examinations Board of three separate cases where the procedure had been applied following the Leading Firefighters' Part II Practical Tests. The 'dangerous practices' included the following:

(i) Two separate cases of allowing the appliance to be positioned and crew members to work in a dangerous position in close proximity to the entry point of the building in which there was depicted an un-vented compartment fire where the possibility of a backdraught or flashover could not be ignored.

- (ii) Having committed firefighters wearing breathing apparatus into a building to deal with a fire, provided the Breathing Apparatus Entry Control Officer with other duties that caused that officer to disregard responsibilities to the breathing apparatus wearers.

7.5 Only in one of these cases did the Senior Examiner consider it necessary to report the matter to the candidate's brigade to enable further counselling, guidance and/or appropriate training to be considered and provided.

RESOLVED: That Paper FB11/2004 be noted.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF STATION OFFICER

8. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2004

8.1 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 FB12/2004).

8.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 763 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 685 (after withdrawals). 180 (26.3%) absented themselves, thus the number of candidates who attended was 505. Of these, 214 had attempted all four papers. Of the 505 who sat the examination, 226 (44.8%) were awarded a pass and are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Station Officer.

8.3 He also asked the Board to note the results of the Appeals Panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix D.

8.4 The Board was asked to agree that the Top Candidate Firefighter Dan Quin from Surrey Fire & Rescue Service should receive a framed certificate from the Board.

8.5 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 11 candidates (5.0%) appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 11 (100.0%) were upheld. These candidates will have one further year to complete their examination.

8.6 Mr Wright reported that comparison made with the results achieved by candidates last year showed a further improved pass rate in all papers. Paper 1 provided a pass rate of 64.1% compared to 47.2% achieved last year; Paper 2, a pass rate of 57.0% from 50.2%; Paper 3, a pass rate of 67.5% from 43.0% and Paper 4 a pass rate of 71.3% from 62.1%.

- 8.7 He informed the Members that, as in previous years, there were extremes in the quality of scripts submitted by candidates, but there was a general feeling that the quality of the majority of responses were much improved than in previous years. This suggested that the high percentage of absentees had removed the majority of candidates who normally enter the examination with insufficient preparation to achieve any realistic hope of success.
- 8.8 Mr Wright reported that there were no problems associated with the format of the examination, the venues or the instructions to candidates in the various question papers.
- 8.9 Mr Stanley reported on the outcome of the appeals against candidates' examination results. Two experienced examiners had remarked 22 scripts as a result of 13 appeals. Of these, the Appeals Panel agreed that 5 appeals were successful with 2 candidates now passing their examination overall; 8 appeals were found not to be proven.
- 8.10 Mr Stanley informed the meeting of the Chairman's decision to disqualify a candidate found to be in possession of unauthorised material during the Station Officers' examination.
- 8.11 He also made the Members aware that two Chief Fire Officers had been informed in writing with reference to inappropriate remarks made in one candidate's script and of another candidate who had submitted totally blank scripts.

- 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 Dan Quin be presented with a framed certificate at the Fire Conference 2004.
 - (iv) That the Board note the decision of the Chairman to disqualify the candidate in possession of unauthorised material.

9. QUESTION PAPERS AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2004

- 9.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners (Paper FB13/2004).

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

- 10.1 Mr Stanley introduced Paper FB14/2004 which asked the Board to note the report and to agree that no further monitoring of the reciprocal arrangements would be necessary following the revocation of the Fire Services (Appointments and Promotion) Regulations 1978.
- 10.2 He reported that at the January 1987 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.
- 10.3 He informed the Members that the reciprocal liaison had continued during the 2004 examination, whereby Mr Wright and Mr Stanley had attended the IFE Marking Session and Mr Cox had reciprocated the arrangements with a visit to the Board's Station Officers' Marking Session. Members noted the comparative statistics as set out in the Report.
- 10.4 Members agreed that there seemed little point in continuing the formal liaison and monitoring of results and statistics to the Board of the IFE's Graduateship Examination following the changes in Legislation and the agreed transitional arrangements to wind down the statutory examinations.

- RESOLVED:**
- (i) That Paper FB14/2004 be noted.
 - (ii) That the Board agreed that no further monitoring of the reciprocal arrangements be necessary following the revocation of the Fire Services (Appointments and Promotion) Regulations 1978.

11. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2005/2006

- 11.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB15/2004 which set out the funding requirements for 2005/2006 under Section 78(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1998, which would be submitted to the Local Government Associations (LGA/WLGA) and to the Scottish Ministers for their approval.
- 11.2 The Board was asked to note the actuals and the reasons for any large variations from the budget for 2003/2004.
- 11.3 The Board is also asked to approve the submission for 2005/2006.

- 11.4 Mr Stanley reported that the original budget for 2003/04 had been prepared during the period of industrial action in the fire service and the uncertainty of when the introduction of the IPDS process would begin and figures needed to reflect the ongoing provision of candidates potentially entering the statutory examinations system during that period. Confirmation of the implementation of the IPDS process from November 2003 by DCOL and DFmr letters and re-affirmed through new legislation with the Fire Services (Appointments and Promotion) (England and Wales) Regulations in 2004 influenced candidates decisions as to whether to then continue with the statutory examinations.
- 11.5 Overall savings are therefore reflected at all budget heads in 2003/2004 as candidate numbers have generally decreased during that period. This has been most significant at Station Officer level where expected entries were reduced in 2004 by 24.5%.
- 11.6 The figures for 2004/2005 have therefore been amended down to reflect a more accurate picture of candidate numbers during this period. Although there was now a large surplus expected to be carried forward to 2005/2006, it had been recommended not to reduce the bid, but to offset this against the final submission for 2006/2007.
- 11.7 Mr Stanley explained that the budget for 2005/2006 reflected the final re-sit examinations at Leading Firefighter and Sub-Officer level as well as allowing for two further examinations at Station Officer level. Overall, however, the submission for 2005/2006 reflected a reduction of over 32% compared to that requested for 2004/2005.
- 11.8 Mr Barnes enquired as to what would happen to any financial surplus in 2006/2007. Mr Stanley confirmed that it would be transferred back to the Top Slice Strategy Group (TSSG).

RESOLVED: (i) To note the actuals for 2003/2004.

(ii) To approve the submission for 2005/2006.

- £324,537 plus inflation from LGA (England)

- £19,252 plus inflation from LGA (Wales)

- £35,880 plus inflation from the Scottish Ministers.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 12.1 It was felt important that Members continue to meet to discuss FSEB matters rather than being dealt with by correspondence and it was agreed to meet on Thursday 27 January 2005 at the offices of the Employers' Organisation (EO) Layden House, 76 – 86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG.