

MINUTES

BODY: FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

DATE: 5 JULY 2005

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

PRESENT: Sir Graham Meldrum (Chairman)

CACFOA

R Elliott

CHIEF FIRE OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION

E Barclay (Substitute)

CONVENTION OF SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

A Lafferty

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

M Fordham

INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

J M Cowie

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

R James

A Jones

SCOTTISH MINISTERS

J Nicholls

SECRETARIES OF STATE

S Ramsamy (Substitute)

P Chapman (Substitute)

IN ATTENDANCE

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Doyle, Mr A J Early, Ms G Newton, Ms C Symes, Mr R Virtue and Ms R Winter.

2. MEMBERSHIP

2.1 The Chairman informed the meeting that Stephen McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire Fire Brigade had been awarded the CBE.

2.2 It was agreed that a letter of congratulations be sent in recognition of his honour.

RESOLVED: To send a letter of congratulations to Mr McGuirk.

3. JULY 2005 MEETING OF THE BOARD

3.1 Since the Board did not meet in January 2005, the Agenda and Papers were circulated by post to Members who were asked to submit any comments or observations, none of which were received.

4. PROGRESS FOR WINDING DOWN THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

4.1 Mr Stanley gave a progress report for winding down the statutory examinations and informed the Members that the impact of candidates choosing to enter the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) process had been quite significant which had resulted in a reduction in candidate numbers at both the entry stage and again with high absentee rates on the examination day. However, the agreed process that had allowed for the examinations to be taken over 6-monthly cycles had been successful, without any logistical problems for candidates or brigades.

4.2 He informed the Members that September 2005 would be the final opportunity for candidates in the examination system to undertake their Leading Firefighter or Sub-Officer written examinations. The estimated numbers would be around 50 candidates only for each examination.

4.3 The Station Officers' 1st re-sit examination was also scheduled to be held in September 2005 for candidates in the examinations system who had previously passed at least one paper, with approximate numbers expected

to be around 90 candidates. Those who fail to pass in September would have one more opportunity in February 2006 to complete their examination.

- 4.4 Mr Stanley advised the Members that provision had been put in place to fund any possible Station Officers' 3rd re-sit examination in September 2006. This would only be necessary to accommodate any candidates who had submitted a genuine appeal, which had been upheld.
- 4.5 He then reported that the Board had held its final formal marking session in March at the Daventry Hotel and recognition had been made to all 13 Assessors, the majority of whom were currently serving principal officers, for their work and dedication to both the setting and marking of the examination papers. Recognition had also been made to the panel of examiners for their immense commitment to the examinations marking process over the years. He confirmed that limited support would be required from Officers in marking the papers in October and finally in March 2006.
- 4.6 In conclusion, Mr Stanley informed the meeting that as previously agreed, arrangements would be made to formally transfer FSEB historical records and candidate results to both the Fire Service College and the Scottish Executive by December 2006. He would also continue to advise brigades, local boards and candidates of the implications of the changes as the transitional arrangements progressed. A letter would be sent to Chief Officers next year to advise brigades of the position post December 2006.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF STATION OFFICER

5. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE EXAMINATION 2005

- 5.1 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 FB13/2005)
- 5.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 389 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number entered was 374 (after withdrawals). 129 (34.5%) absented themselves, thus the number of candidates who attended was 245. Of these 88 attempted all four papers. Of the 245 who sat the examination 112 (45.7%) were awarded a pass and are now qualified for promotion to the rank of Station Officer.
- 5.3 He also asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix D. Of the 5 appeals received, two were successful in now passing their examination overall.

- 5.4 Mr Wright informed the Members that this was the last occasion on which candidates could enter this examination and continue to use the opportunities available to them within the flexible system. Those who had not taken this opportunity, together with those who would now enter the fire & rescue service, would in future be assessed as part of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS).
- 5.5 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme, 9 candidates (5.7%) appealed to the Board. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 8 (90.0%) were upheld. These candidates will have one further attempt to complete their examination.
- 5.6 Mr Wright reported that comparisons made with the results achieved by candidates last year showed a further improved pass rate in all papers with the exception of Paper 4. Paper 1 (Operations) provided a pass rate of 70.8% compared to 64.1% last year; Paper 2 (Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement) a pass rate of 70.5% from 57.0%; Paper 3 (Human Resource Management) a pass rate of 68.8% from 67.5% and Paper 4 (Business Administration) a pass rate of 64.3% compared to 71.3%.
- 5.7 He informed the Members that the reduction in numbers sitting the examination had provided a general improvement in the quality of scripts submitted by candidates, although there remained a number of candidates who appeared to have entered the examination with insufficient preparation to achieve any realistic hope of success.
- 5.8 Mr Wright reported that an unfortunate printing error in one question had been brought to the attention of the Board which had been taken into account when the overall marks achieved by candidates were determined.
- 5.9 The Board was also asked to agree that the Top Candidate, Firefighter Paula McAllister from Northern Ireland Fire Brigade, should receive a framed certificate from the Board.

- 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 Firefighter Paula McAllister be presented with a framed certificate.

6. QUESTION PAPER AND REPORT OF THE ASSESSORS AND EXAMINERS ON THE PART I WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2005

- 6.1 The Board noted the Question Papers and Report of the Assessors and Examiners (Paper FB14/2005).

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF LEADING FIREFIGHTER

7. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART 1 WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2005 – 1ST RE-SIT

- 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 1 Written Examination 2005 – 1st Re-sit (Paper FB15/2005)
- 7.2 Mr Stanley reported that 248 candidates had initially entered the examination. However, the final number of candidates entered was 247 (after withdrawals). Of these 61 (24.7%) absented themselves, leaving 186 actually attempting the examination. Of the 186 candidates who attempted the examination, 116 (62.4%) were awarded a pass, which was an increase in percentage terms to the 44.8% achieved last year.
- 7.3 He 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, 1 candidate (1.5%) appealed to the Board following his absence from the examination. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, the appeal was considered and upheld.
- 7.5 Mr Wright reported that as part of the transitional arrangements, candidates could only enter this examination who were already in the system and had achieved a pass in one of the four Papers in accordance with the flexible system when taking the examination. Those who had failed to achieve the necessary passes in the specified time, together with new recruits to the fire & rescue service, would in the future be assessed as part of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS).
- 7.6 He informed the Members that the reduction in the number of candidates sitting the examination had provided a general improvement in the quality of scripts submitted, especially by those candidates taking Papers 1 and 3. Those who appeared to enter the examination with insufficient preparation to achieve any realistic hope of success seemed to be more numerous in Papers 2 and 4. Weaknesses were evident in the knowledge and

understanding of how to deal with a young child who had used the telephone system to make a false emergency call to the fire & rescue service and the drafting of a letter in response to a letter of complaint from a member of the public.

- 7.7 Paper 1 (Operations) provided a pass rate of 82.0%, which was an improvement to the 77.0% achieved last year. Paper 2 (Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement) provided a pass rate of 72.1%, which was a reduction to the pass rate achieved last year of 76.0%. Paper 3 (Human Resource Management) provided a pass rate of 72.4%, which was a tremendous improvement when compared to the 43.7% achieved last year. Paper 4 (Business Administration), which covered the key skills of communication, provided a disappointing pass rate of 48.7% when compared to the previous year's pass rate of 86.0%.

- 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.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF SUB-OFFICER

8. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS ON THE PART 1 WRITTEN EXAMINATION 2005 1ST RE-SIT

- 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 Sub – Officer Part 1 Written Examination 2005 1st Re-sit (Paper FB16/2005).
- 8.2 Mr Stanley informed the meeting that 226 had initially entered the examination. This was the final number entered since there were no withdrawals. Of these, 68 (30.1%) absented themselves, leaving 158 actually attempting the examination. Of the 158 candidates who attempted the examination, 92 (58.2%) were awarded a pass, which was an increase in percentage terms to the achievement of 31.8% last year.
- 8.3 The Board was advised that under the Restriction of Entry Scheme 5 (6.2%) candidates appealed to the Board following their absence from the examination. Under the delegated authority given to the Chairman, all appeals were individually considered and 5 (100.0%) were upheld.
- 8.4 Mr Stanley asked the Board to note the results of the appeals panel for candidates' examination results, as detailed in Appendix D, that reported all 3 appeals upheld.

- 8.5 Mr Wright reported that as part of the transitional arrangements, candidates could only enter this examination who were already in the examination system and had achieved a pass in one of the four Papers in accordance with the flexible system of taking the examination. Those who had failed to achieve the necessary passes in the specified time, together with those now entering the fire & rescue service, would in the future be assessed as part of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS).
- 8.6 He informed the meeting that there were 133 candidates with credit passes within the examination system, who would seem to be able to continue to work to achieve this qualification. However, 47 candidates were identified as having failed to successfully complete the examination within the set period, with the result that only 86 candidates would now be able to progress towards achieving a full pass.
- 8.7 He informed the Members that there was a general improvement in the quality of scripts submitted by candidates taking Papers 1 and 3. Whilst there continued to be candidates who attended the examination with insufficient preparation, these seemed to be more numerous in Papers 2 and 4. Weaknesses identified were in the knowledge and understanding of the investigation of causes of fire and calculating the capacity of storage tanks and bunded retention areas for tank contents.
- 8.8 Paper 1 (Operations) provided an improved pass rate of 55.9% compared to 45.4% achieved last year. Paper 2 (Fire Safety, Education and Enforcement) provided a pass of 54.6%, which was a reduction on 64.7% achieved last year. Paper 3 (Human Resource Management) provided a greatly improved pass rate of 65.1% when compared to 35.9% last year. Paper 4 (Business Administration), which covered the key skills of application of number, provided a disappointing pass rate of 59.1% when compared to the previous year's pass rate of 86.6%.

- 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.

9. FUNDING OF THE BOARD – ESTIMATES 2006/2007

- 9.1 Mr Stanley presented Paper FB17/2005, which set out the funding requirements for 2006/2007 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.
- 9.2 The Board was asked to note the actuals and the reasons for any large variations from the budget for 2004/2005.
- 9.3 The Board was also asked to approve the submission for 2006/2007 of £175,450, which would be funded from cumulative balances.
- 9.4 Mr Stanley reported that the original budget for 2004/05 had been prepared to reflect the first phase of the agreed transitional changes to the examinations, which saw them foreshortened to six-monthly cycles to facilitate the movement of candidates into the IPDS process.
- 9.5 Overall savings were reflected at all budget heads in 2004/05 due to the subsequent reduction in expected candidates and in particular, significant savings were identified with reduced supervisory costs and examiner expenses. With the majority of brigades now able to use rooms/conference facilities within their own premises, there was again significant savings identified for examination centre hire costs.
- 9.6 The figures for 2005/2006 have therefore been revised to reflect more accurately the expected candidate numbers that will now be left in the examination system and it is expected to show a further reduction in expenditure of approximately £77K. Costs had also included the first phase of the staffing wind up costs during this period.
- 9.7 The submission for 2006/07 of £175K reflected the final staffing wind up costs and the provision for any possible 3rd re-sit Station Officers' examination. However, with the agreement at the July 2004 meeting and subsequently approved by the Resources Panel to carry forward any surpluses identified in 2005/06, the overall surplus now expected at 31 March 2006 of £281K would meet the expenditure required for 2006/07.
- 9.8 Members should note that any cumulative surplus identified at the close of FSEB business at 31 March 2007, would be returned to the appropriate funding bodies in line with the percentages agreed in the report.

- RESOLVED:** (i) To note the actuals for 2004/2005.
- (ii) To approve the submission for 2006/2007 of £175,450

OTHER ITEMS

10. FUTURE FSEB MATTERS

10.1 Sir Graham Meldrum outlined proposals to the Members for future reporting and approval of FSEB matters. He informed the members that the three reports that would need to be prepared in future were:

- (i) The Secretary of States Reports on the final examinations.
- (ii) Any dangerous practices reported.
- (iii) Finance Paper(s) to report on the final FSEB funding.

10.2 In view of the reduced Board business he suggested that it would not be appropriate for Members to formally meet in the future and asked for their agreement to handle matters by 'Chairman's approval'. However, the secretariat would continue to circulate the reports by post for any comments or observations.

- RESOLVED:**
- (i) That Members agreed that this would be the final formal meeting of the FSEB but that appropriate Reports and Papers would continue to be circulated.
 - (ii) That 'Chairman's Approval' would be sought, if required, for any future FSEB matters.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

11. INTEGRATED PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

11.1 Mr Barclay was asked to update Members on the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS).

11.2 He explained that the work of the IPDS hub would finish by the end of the year and thereafter the stewardship would pass to the Fire Service College. Extensive work had now been completed and published around the necessary tools required in the assessment and development centres and that there had been positive take up at firefighter and management levels, particularly in Scotland, that had led to appropriate NVQ awards. In response to a question from Mr Cowie regarding quality assurance between brigades within the IPDS process, Mr Barclay explained that systems and checks were already in place as part of the verification process, but accepted that they were still working around some of these quality issues with the appropriate external bodies.

CLOSING REMARKS

The Chairman thanked the Secretariat for the production of the 'History of the Fire Service Statutory Examinations', which had been tabled to Members. He also extended his appreciation to the Members, FSEB staff, Assessors, Examiners and all those people who had contributed to the success of the fire service examinations over the years.

Mr Wright and Mr Stanley responded with sincere thanks to Sir Graham and the Members of the Board for their much-valued support.