

NOTES ON THE WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS HELD AT THE
THE GREATER MANCHESTER COUNTY FIRE SERVICE HEADQUARTERS,
MANCHESTER ON WEDNESDAY 2 OCTOBER 2002

1. ATTENDANCE

As shown on Appendix A.

2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Lead Assessor, Mr Harry Wright welcomed the Senior Examiners and their representatives to the meeting. He then introduced Mr Kerr, National Assessor Practical Tests and the Secretariat.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

SDO C Bryce	-	Board B
ACO R Walsh	-	Board I
SDO E Barclay	-	Board J
DCFO J Bonney	-	Board L
Mr T Craven	-	Board L
ACFO C Palmer	-	Board O
DO J Hoey	-	Board Q
D/Fmr D O'Donnell	-	Board R
DCFO D Finn	-	Board U

4. NOTES OF THE 2001 SENIOR EXAMINERS WORKSHOP

The notes were agreed.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE 2001 WORKSHOP

Mr Stanley reported on the following item arising from the minutes of the 2001 Workshop:

Item 10 – Dangerous Practices

It was reported that the scheme for Dangerous Practices was now included in the Senior and Examiners Handbooks, the Instructions to Candidates and the FSEB web site.

Item 11 – Appeals System

The Appeals Scheme was approved at the July Board Meeting and had been applied to the 2002 Practical and Written examinations.

Item 12 – Dyslexia – Establishing a Policy

It was reported that a Dyslexia Policy had been established. The Rules had been amended and the Policy had been included on the FSEB web site.

Item 13 – Composite Drills

Mr Wright reported that the agreed combination of Composite Drills for the Section B Tests had been promulgated to Brigades.

Mr Sivell, representing Board J, raised the issue that it was not feasible to use L4 ladder drill within London Fire Brigade. Whilst acknowledging the problem, it was felt to be a local issue and after discussion, it was agreed that there were sufficient composite drills from which selection could be made.

Item 15 – Board Publications and Administrative Matters

Mr Stanley reported that a summary report of the Senior Examiners financial returns had been presented to the January 2002 Board meeting. Members had found the information useful, but no firm conclusions could be drawn from the figures. It had been agreed to promulgate the report to all Senior Examiners for information only.

6. REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ASSESSOR FOR THE PRACTICAL TESTS

Mr Kerr referred to the ongoing review of personal and organisational development (IPDS) and its likely implications for the future of the statutory promotional examinations. He reported that during his visits this year, there had been a very tangible feeling of candidates and examiners 'going through the motions' and that the practical tests were no longer relevant. This had been disappointing when the examinations were still the avenue to promotion until such time as legislation changes. Mr Kerr then made the following points:

Rough Mark Sheets

Despite regular reminders, many examiners still seemed reluctant to make adequate notes on the rough mark sheets, which had resulted in appeals being difficult to review. It was worth noting that some appeals had been upheld and re-tests awarded, because insufficient information was available to the Appeals Panel on which to make a balanced, defensible judgement.

Many examiners provided comprehensive notes, with clear illustrations of good or poor performance to support their grading. The importance of comprehensive, relevant evidence to any assessment process is essential and should be readily understood and accepted by examiners.

Mr Stanley subsequently tabled a revision to the existing rough mark sheets which included a revision to each form to enable examiners to record in more detail their comments in explaining 'where' and 'why' the candidate had not met the requirements of the marking scheme. This was felt particularly important now that the candidates have the right to appeal against their result. Despite discussions over local variations to the form already used by local boards, it was agreed that the Board's version should be adopted as the national standard for future practical tests.

Appeals Panel

The appeals process highlighted a number of issues. In addition to the limitations of some rough mark sheets, the overall quality of evidence provided to support or challenge individual appeals were very variable, ranging from extremely good to extremely poor. One point worth noting was the risk associated with 'throw away comments' by examiners or supporting staff, which could very easily be misinterpreted by the candidates. This need for caution should be emphasised to all those involved with the tests.

Preparation of Examiners

There were some indications this year of examiners who were less than adequately prepared. This was evident from some of their actions, eg the number of questions that they believed should be asked during the lecture section of the tests. He asked that Examiners be reminded of the need to read and understand fully the guidance issued by FSEB.

Appearance and Bearing

The trend of Brigades moving away from traditional styles of uniform has accelerated, with a majority now adopting a less formal approach. Some examiners still had difficulty with the changes.

Electronic Media

The use of Powerpoint was increasing, although surprisingly, still in the minority.

De-briefing

Poor quality of de-briefing of crews had been a recurring feature in recent reports. Despite the continuing development of de-briefing procedures within brigades, this continued to be an area of consistently poor performance. He felt that this should be of concern to brigades particularly with the introduction of IPDS, and the overall concept of performance management.

Fireground Procedure and Drills

The introduction of a range of standard exercises was intended to provide consistency throughout all Boards and had been fairly successful in 'levelling the playing field'. For some reason, however, a number of non-standard variations had crept in again this year, despite the clear guidance from the FSEB. It is vitally important that the standard exercises are adhered to, in order to avoid confusion or accusations of unfairness. Mr Wright asked all Senior Examiners to re-visit their Fireground procedure exercises to ensure that they were in accordance with the guidance issued in the Senior Examiners Handbook.

A similar concern was expressed with the Composite Drills, and in particular not to include individual drill numbers on the candidate cards to avoid unnecessary confusion.

Senior Examiner's Report

There is a requirement for Senior Examiners to submit a report on the practical tests to the FSEB. If the reports are compiled in accordance with the guidance in the Senior Examiners Handbook, they are immensely valuable in evaluating the overall outcomes of the tests. Unfortunately, the quality of reports submitted by some local boards was extremely variable and Senior Examiners are asked to pay particular attention to the guidance when preparing future reports.

Mr Stanley explained that the statistics provided by the Board were firstly to confirm the actual number of candidates present/passing/failing etc and secondly allowed Senior Examiners to then present these in a more helpful and informative way, particularly for the benefit of their own local board members.

Summary

Mr Kerr was reassured by the enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism, which was evident throughout the country.

Finally, he thanked the Senior Examiners for the courtesy and hospitality shown to him during his visits. Mr Wright endorsed these comments, but also added reference to the unfortunate occurrence at one centre of an examiner's mobile phone going off during a candidate's test. He asked Senior Examiners to remind all examiners not to take such equipment into the examination areas as this only gave candidates the opportunity to use such disturbances as the basis for an appeal, should they be failed.

7. ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT – 2003 TESTS

The equipment list for the items to be used for the Leading Firefighters' Section C Test was circulated. The Chairman confirmed that Senior Examiners should select three items of equipment from the list of eight, which were known to be available within each brigade.

Mr Sivell from local board 'J' asked that Item 8 – 'Thermal Imaging Camera' be changed since it had already been used within the three year period. This was agreed and it was replaced by 'General Purpose Tools and Equipment'.

8. DANGEROUS PRACTICES

Mr Wright introduced Paper SE1/02 which reported that following the Leading Firefighters' practical tests held during 2002, Senior Examiners had advised the Fire Services Examinations Board of four dangerous practices which had been identified. Although there was discussion over some of the practices identified, Mr Wright explained that only one case was referred to a candidate's brigade to enable any possible further training/counselling or guidance to be given to the candidate.

Senior Examiners were asked to note the report, which had also been presented to the members of the Board on 2 July 2002.

9. APPEALS AGAINST EXAMINATION RESULTS

Mr Wright introduced Paper SE2/02, which summarised the results of those candidates who appealed against their examination results in the Leading Firefighters' and Sub-Officers' practical tests.

Following the introduction of the appeals against examination results, candidates were given 28 days from the date of their result letter to appeal in writing direct to the FSEB.

For the Leading Firefighters' examination, a total of 21 appeals were received from 20 candidates and for the Sub-Officers' examination, a total of 20 appeals from 17 candidates.

Although only a few candidates were successful with their appeals, a small number had been referred back to the Senior Examiners for 're-testing'.

The timing of the de-brief was raised in relation to the number of appeals received. Whilst it was acknowledged for the need to be aware of the quality of the de-brief and to practice caution in order to avoid appeals, Mr Wright again reminded Senior Examiners that the de-brief was not part of the examination process. Disappointment was noted that the Board has been unable to charge candidates a fee for their appeal.

It was also agreed that the return of appeals documentation from brigades to the FSEB should be extended from 14 to 21 days.

10. BRIEFING OF CANDIDATES PRIOR TO AND FOLLOWING THE PART II PRACTICAL TESTS

Mr Wright introduced Paper SE3/02, which outlined new guidance to be issued by the FSEB to Senior Examiners for briefing candidates prior to and following their Part II examination. Mr Wright explained that the appeals received this year had forced the Board to re-examine its procedures to reduce the possibility that candidates could submit appeals based on them feeling unwell or circumstances that occurred on the day affecting their performance.

The following proposal was put to Senior Examiners:

- (i) To require the candidate to declare, when signing their 'candidate mark sheet' that he/she is fit and suitably prepared to undertake the examination. Any candidate who fails to sign the 'candidate mark sheet' will not be eligible to attempt the examination and will be expected to leave the examination centre.
- (ii) Any candidate who attends the examination without disclosing information regarding sickness or any other extenuating circumstances that might affect or unfairly influence their examination performance will not be eligible to submit either as grounds for consideration of special circumstances or as an appeal.
- (iii) Any illness/injury which has only become apparent to a candidate on the day of the examination should be reported to the Senior Examiner before the briefing of candidates that precedes the examination. It will be the decision of the candidate as to whether he/she attempts the examination or reports sick and does not attend.
- (iv) Candidates will be advised within the guidance issued, and reiterated in the briefing provided by the Senior Examiner prior to the commencement of the examination, that if anything untoward occurs during the examination itself that he/she considers affected their performance, he/she must so inform the Senior Examiner before leaving the examination centre. A record should be made of any such information received from a candidate and retained with the candidate's rough mark sheets.

Senior Examiners agreed to the new declaration and the candidate's mark sheet would be amended accordingly. A new procedure would be included in the Senior Examiners Handbook and Mr Wright asked that Senior Examiners ensure that the briefings to candidates included this for the 2003 tests.

In response to a query on examination results forwarded for the personal attention of the Chief Officer, Mr Stanley advised that this was Board protocol. However, with the approval of the Chief Officer, he was happy to receive either a different address from headquarters or the name of an appointed officer at their brigade nominated to receive ALL Board correspondence, including candidate result letters.

11. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CANDIDATE AND EXAMINER

DO A Wilson, Senior Examiner Board 'P' introduced a wireless audio monitoring system for examiners which consisted of two receivers for examiners and one transmitter for the candidate. The system enabled the examiners to listen to the candidate during the practical examinations, without intrusion. Senior Examiners could also use a set to monitor the examiners assessments. Candidates had also been favourable of the system.

Overall, it was agreed that it was a good system, which also had many benefits beyond the examination system, and Mr Wright was happy for brigades to consider its use for future practical examinations.

A section in the Senior Examiners Handbook, under 'Guidance on Best Practice' would be included and DO Wilson could be contacted if other Senior Examiners required any further information about the system.

12. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE HANDBOOKS

Mr Wright introduced SE4/02, which reported on the proposed amendments detailed in the Appendices attached to the report. In particular, one of the Appendices clarified the asking of only TWO questions for the lecture section of the examination would also be included on future rough mark sheets.

Senior Examiners accepted the proposed amendments apart from Appendix 4, Section B Test – Candidate's Card, which stated 'Persons Reported' in the Sub-Officers' Tests. After much discussion it was agreed to vote on whether to retain or delete this information from the Candidate's Card. The vote was 9 – 5 in favour of its deletion and the Senior Examiners Handbook would be amended accordingly.

In response to a question from Mr Cooper, it was agreed to extend the advice given to Senior Examiners for dealing with borderline information on reviewing results.

13. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

Mr Stanley gave a Powerpoint presentation on the future of the statutory examinations following the recent meeting of the Integrated Personnel Development Advisory Board (IPDAB) on the 19 September. IPDAB had determined the principles for transitional arrangements for replacing the statutory examinations by elements of the new Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS). The significance to the practical examinations was that these would be replaced by workplace assessment. Effectively, there will be no new entrants to the examinations system after 1 April 2004, which meant that currently the 2003 practical tests would be the last. However IPDAB has stressed:

‘that as with all components of the IPDS, the phasing out of the examinations in this timescale assumes a successful conclusion to the negotiations currently underway on pay and conditions of service and an agreement on the introduction of a role based structure aligned to the IPDS. Of course, all of this assumes the expected revocation of the Statutory Appointment and Promotion Regulations. Implementation dates may need to be reviewed dependant on the speed of progress in this arena’.

There was some concern expressed at the timescales for implementation and therefore, the need to have appropriate assessment systems in place to replace the Statutory Examinations. However, Senior Examiners were grateful to ‘receive’ the update and where requested, copies of the presentation were forwarded to them.

Mr Stanley further informed that the FSEB’s web site would also be updated to reflect the principles for the transitional arrangements, so that candidates were also aware of the changes. It was hoped that this would be done to link in with the advice being issued on the IPDWG (Fire POD) web site and in line with information to be published to brigades by the ODPM in the form of a DCOL letter.

14. DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

Mr Stanley introduced Paper SE5/02, which asked Senior Examiners to note the administration problems encountered during the 2002 practical tests that had led to unnecessary delays for candidates in the dissemination of their results.

Senior Examiners agreed to address the administration problems within their local examination board area, which could only assist in improving future dissemination of candidates’ results.

15. BOARD PUBLICATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION MATTERS

Mr Stanley confirmed the following:

- Amended pages to both Handbooks would be issued mid November 2002.
- Candidates mark sheet to be amended for candidate's signature to confirm their fitness to undertake the examination.
- Following concern by some Senior Examiners over the problems in releasing candidates to undertake the 2002 Leading Firefighters' Part I written examination, due to resource/manning difficulties, Mr Stanley agreed to refer the matter to the CACFOA representative on the FSEB in order that they might investigate the matter further with a view to bringing any report for consideration by members to the January meeting of the Board.

16. 2003 WORKSHOP

The next Senior Examiners Workshop would be held on Wednesday 1 October 2003 at the Tyne & Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade Training Centre, Barmston Mere, Sunderland, at the kind invitation of Chief Fire Officer Richard Bull.

17. CLOSING REMARKS

Mr Wright thanked Mr Wilson and Mr Stanley for their presentations and the Senior Examiners for their valued participation in ensuring a helpful and constructive Workshop.

1. ATTENDANCE

Mr H E Wright	Lead Assessor
Mr I Kerr	National Assessor, Practical Tests
Mr D J Stanley	Secretary
Mrs M A Malone	Senior Administrator

<i>NAME</i>	<i>REPRESENTING BOARD</i>
SDO P Harbottle	A
DO R Rowland*	B
SDO K Nolan	C
SDO S Beckley	C
DO S Fryer	D
DO A Marsh	E
ADO M Smart	F
DO P Kilby	G
DO I Mills	H
SDO W Brown*	I
Mr K Sivell*	J
SDO A Dunnet	K
DO M Blake	M
DCFO P Appleby	N
DOI A Wilson	P
ADO I Glover*	Q
DO J Jamieson*	R
DO D Cooper	S
DO W Currie	T

*Representing Senior Examiner