

NOTES ON THE WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS HELD AT
TYNE AND WEAR METROPOLITAN FIRE BRIGADE TRAINING CENTRE
BARMSTON MERE, SUNDERLAND, ON WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2003

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

Apology for absence was received from:

DCFO J Le Conte - Board U

4. NOTES OF THE 2002 SENIOR EXAMINERS WORKSHOP

The notes were agreed.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE WORKSHOP

Mr Stanley reported on the following item arising from the minutes of the 2002 Workshop:

Item 15 – Administrative Matters – Single Sitting

Following concerns by some Senior Examiners over the problems in releasing candidates to undertake the 2002 Part I written examination, due to resource issues, Mr Stanley agreed to refer the matter to the CACFOA representative.

Although this was done, CACFOA had advised that they would not be proceeding with this matter to the Board at the present time, but would continue to monitor the situation.

6. FUTURE OF THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

Mr Stanley gave a PowerPoint presentation on the implications for the statutory examinations with the introduction of IPDS from November 2003. He explained that final examination dates had been agreed for both the Part I and Part II examinations and after these dates no new candidates would be able to enter the statutory examinations. To provide for an orderly transition to the new system and to give due recognition to individuals who had passed or are studying to complete examinations, transitional arrangements had been agreed.

For the Part I written examinations, candidates with papers passed after entry to the final examination dates (see table below) would have further re-sit opportunities to complete their examinations.

However, for the Part II practical examinations where candidates either 'pass' or 'fail' in any one-year, 2004 would be the last examination.

He explained that arrangements could be made to re-schedule an absent candidate's test within the existing specified examination period, but only where the Senior Examiner could make appropriate resources and a date available.

The FSEB would be publishing detailed guidance to brigades as soon as the appropriate DCOL/DFmr letter had been issued. In addition, a Newsletter will be published and distributed to brigades which has been aimed at every potential candidate in the examination system.

Brigades would also receive reports showing every candidate in the examinations system and the credits obtained to date.

Changes to the Rules confirming the transitional arrangements would be published by the end of 2003 and the FSEB's web site www.fseb.gov.uk would also be updated to reflect the agreed changes.

FINAL EXAMINATION DATES

Leading Firefighters' Sub-Officers'	Part II Practical Examination Part II Practical Examination	March/April 2004 April/May/June 2004
Leading Firefighters' Sub-Officers'	Part I Written Examination Part I Written Examination	28 September 2004 7 October 2004
Station Officers'	Written Examination	23/24 February 2005

7. REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ASSESSOR FOR THE PRACTICAL TESTS

Mr Kerr reported that comments in his report were similar to those raised last year. He referred to the long running industrial action which had affected every aspect of the Service in some way. It was therefore to the credit of Senior Examiners and their staff that through their enormous commitment, the tests were able to proceed with relatively minimal disruption. Another reassuring aspect was the fact that candidates were well prepared, motivated and enthusiastic despite the additional pressures imposed upon them by the dispute.

Concerns were also in evidence on the progression of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS), which was not looking clear or optimistic. This had caused many potential candidates not to enter the examination system.

Mr Kerr then made the following points:

Rough Mark Sheets

Despite regular reminders, many examiners still seemed unwilling or unable to make adequate notes on the rough mark sheets, which had created difficulties when dealing with appeals against results. For the second year running, some appeals were upheld and re-tests awarded because insufficient information was available to the Appeals Panel on which to make a balanced and defensible judgement of decisions made.

Where examiners provided clear illustrations of good or poor performance to support their grading, these were extremely helpful, not only to the Senior Examiners in developing their recommendation to the Appeals Panel, but to the Panel members in reaching their final decision.

The identification of this 'poor practice' should be of a very real concern to everyone involved with assessments in the Service and particularly with implementing IPDS.

Appeals Procedure

As in the first year of the appeals process, the overall quality of evidence provided to support or challenge individual appeals was variable, ranging from extremely good to extremely poor. The best examples included clear, unequivocal recommendations from Senior Examiners based on concise, written evidence and accurately completed rough mark sheets. The worst examples consisted of inadequately completed, confusing rough mark sheets, with little or no supporting commentary and/or evidence.

Understanding of FSEB Guidance

Many examiners and some Senior Examiners appear not to be fully aware of the guidance issued by the FSEB, despite amendments being widely disseminated to everyone involved in the practical tests and confirmed at the Senior Examiners Workshops. This lack of awareness had resulted in inappropriate scenarios, and two separate drills being used instead of the required composite drills.

Dangerous Practices

There appeared to be widely differing interpretations amongst examiners of what constituted a 'dangerous practice'.

This has been addressed separately on the agenda.

Electronic Media

The use of PowerPoint in presentations had not appeared to have created any significant problems. However, some examiners still found these more difficult to assess against the relevant criteria than with a conventional presentation.

De-briefing

Poor quality of de-briefing of crews by candidates had been a recurring feature in recent reports. This has implications with the introduction of IPDS and the generally poor performance of de-briefing should be viewed seriously by brigades.

Fireground Procedure and Drills

Despite repeated reminders to Senior Examiners, some non-standard variations were identified again this year. Similar problems were also noted with the composite drills.

Senior Examiners' Reports

There is a requirement for Senior Examiners to submit a full and detailed 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 were once again asked to pay particular attention to the guidance when preparing their 2004 report.

Summary

Mr Kerr felt that his report seemed to contain rather more criticism than usual, which may well have been a reflection of the wide ranging changes currently affecting the Fire Service. Despite these concerns he was assured, as always, by the enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism which was so evident throughout the local boards.

Finally, he expressed his gratitude to the Senior Examiners for the absolute courtesy, hospitality and consideration shown to him throughout the country. Mr Wright endorsed these comments and thanked Mr Kerr for his report.

DO Currie, Senior Examiner, Board T, thanked Mr Kerr for his honesty and stated that the FSEB was held in high regard and that the examinations were not seen as a 'waste of time'. During this transitional period over the next few years it was still important for brigades to encourage candidates to continue to enter the statutory examinations.

8. ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT – 2004 TESTS

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

9. DANGEROUS PRACTICES

Mr Wright introduced Paper SE1/03 which reported that following the practical tests held during 2003, Senior Examiners had advised the FSEB of eight dangerous practices which had been identified in the Leading Firefighters' practical tests and six dangerous practices in the Sub-Officers' tests, as outlined in Appendices A and B of the Paper.

He reported that on three occasions, the reports showed that candidates were not informed of the dangerous practice prior to leaving the examination centre. In expressing his concern he confirmed the reasons why candidates should be so informed and reminded Senior Examiners of the correct procedure.

Two additional items were reported as dangerous practices (as outlined in Appendix A), but were not identified as such and were therefore omitted from the final report to members of the FSEB.

He also advised the meeting that two reported dangerous practices had not been submitted with the computer mark sheets; consequently, these were not available when the report to the Board had been produced and they had also not been reported to members of the Board.

Again, he reminded Senior Examiners of the FSEB's procedures in ensuring that dangerous practices are identified when the computer mark sheets are returned to the Board.

Senior Examiners were asked to note the report.

10. APPEALS AGAINST EXAMINATION RESULTS

Mr Stanley introduced Paper SE2/03, which summarised the results of those candidates who had 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 19 appeals were received from 18 candidates and for the Sub-Officers' examination, a total of 11 appeals from 11 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 Secretary had agreed to look at how the guidance could be strengthened to ensure that future appeals received would contain adequate information to assist the Appeals Panel.

Mr Wright emphasised to Senior Examiners that the Appeals procedure must be followed to the letter to avoid possible involvement with solicitors.

DCFO Bonney, local board 'L', asked that where appeals were overturned, feedback would be provided to Senior Examiners. Mr Wright confirmed that in these cases this would be done.

11. LEADING FIREFIGHTERS' PART II PRACTICAL EXAMINATION SECTION A – STANDARD DRILL

Mr Wright introduced Paper SE3/03, which reported that during the Part II 2003 practical tests, the FSEB became aware that due to certain problems in Board 'J', only 5 of the 13 standard drills could be used. As this applied a different standard to the requirements placed on candidates within other local Boards, on the grounds of fairness, an amendment to the Rules had been accepted by the FSEB to reinstate equity.

This amendment to the Rules had been approved by the Board, and Mr Wright confirmed that the Handbooks for the Senior Examiner/Examiners and Candidates would be amended accordingly. This amendment would show that for the Leading Firefighters' Part II practical examination in 2004, Section A test, the Senior Examiner of each local board would select any 5 of the 13 listed drills relevant to each brigade, and the list of these drills be published within each candidates' brigade on 1 December prior to the tests.

In response to SDO Dunnet's query, Local Board 'K', the list of 5 selected drills could be a different five for each brigade in the Local Board area.

12. SUB-OFFICERS' PART II PRACTICAL EXAMINATION SECTION A – COMPOSITE DRILL

Mr Wright introduced Paper SE4/03, which reported that during the Sub-Officers' Part II practical tests in 2003 a difficulty regarding the strict interpretation of the wording relating to the 'Composite Drill' had been brought to the notice of the FSEB. This resulted in different parts of the drill being undertaken and assessed separately.

He confirmed that the practical learning objectives of a composite drill should be undertaken **simultaneously** and that the candidate should be marked down if this objective was not clearly relayed to all crew members.

The amended page E141 'correct drill carried out' was circulated for clarification. Mr Stanley confirmed that this would be issued with the other amendments to the Handbooks.

Senior Examiners agreed the proposed amendments to the various Handbooks in accordance with paragraph 3.3 of the report.

13. SECTION 'C' – SUSPECTED COLLUSION

Mr Wright introduced Paper SE5/03 which reported on two suspected cases of collusion by candidates during the 2003 practical tests. When fully researched and after further consideration, these had not been regarded as collusion. Senior Examiners were therefore asked to note the content of this paper and ensure that their examiners were conversant with the guidance it provides and the need to interpret collusion carefully.

In addition, even if collusion is suspected, a candidate's lecture must never be stopped. Examiners should be advised that if they suspect that collusion has taken place, this should be discussed **after** the candidate has completed the lecture and left the examination room.

Mr Wright emphasised the need for caution when interpreting collusion, particularly, as many lectures prepared by candidates had been used as the basis for the provision of brigade lecture notes and were available on the brigade intranet system, or held by training sections within the brigade and made available to candidates. Furthermore, candidates are being encouraged to form study groups to share the information obtained and this should not be confused with one candidate producing a lecture pack and then reproducing it for others.

Senior Examiners and Examiners should be aware that similar presentations by candidates were likely to be produced without the intention to cheat or collude in their preparation.

14. SUSPENSION FROM THE STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

Mr Stanley presented Paper SE6/03, which outlined the decision reached by Members at the July 2003 meeting of the Board in approving a change to the Rules for the statutory examinations which dealt with candidates who were suspended from duty and wished to undertake the statutory examinations.

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. The following paragraph was approved 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.

15. OMBUDSMAN FOR STATUTORY EXAMINATIONS

Mr Stanley introduced Paper SE7/03, which outlined the decision reached by Members at the July 2003 meeting of the Board in approving the appointment of an independent consultant to act as Ombudsman for the FSEB.

The position was advertised in Fire Magazine and FINDS and four applicants were invited for interview on 5 June 2003, which were conducted by Mr David Stanley (Secretary) and Mr Harry Wright (Lead Assessor). As a result of these interviews, 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. Members of the Board subsequently endorsed the Chairman's decision.

Mr Stanley advised the Senior Examiners that the job purpose of the Ombudsman was to ensure that the statutory promotion examination systems and procedures were being applied with fairness and consistency for all candidates, whilst ensuring that any candidate or group of candidates were not being inadvertently disadvantaged.

16. BOARD PUBLICATIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Mr Stanley advised the Senior Examiners that the amendments to the Handbooks would be issued to brigades by December and would also be included on the FSEB web site www.fseb.gov.uk.

The biennial report of the National Assessor for candidates would also be prepared and issued to brigades by the end of the year.

Mr Stanley presented DO Steve Fryer, Senior Examiner, local Board 'D', with the Board's plaque for 'recognition of service' to the examinations. He thanked him for the excellent work he had undertaken over at least 5 years in his role as Senior Examiner, particularly in ensuring that such high standards are being applied by his local board examiners.

17. CLOSING REMARKS

Mr Wright stated that with the proposed changes going through over the next few months, it was almost certain that this would be the final Workshop for Senior Examiners.

He said that the changes that had been applied to the practical examinations over the years were due to the discussions and decisions taken by Senior Examiners at these forums. As a result, the examinations had been amended to meet the needs of the Service and although the future did not include the involvement of the FSEB, he was certain that the Service would still move forward under IPDS.

He expressed his sincere thanks for the kindness and hospitality extended to him on his visits which had always made him feel part of the 'Fire Service family'.

Mr Wright thanked SDO Harbottle, local Board 'A', for the excellent facilities and lunch provided by Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade and asked that the FSEB's appreciation and thanks be extended back to CFO Richard Bull.

Finally, he reminded Senior Examiners to advise the FSEB as early as possible of the dates for the 2004 tests, to ensure that both he and Mr Kerr could arrange their local board visits.

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