

Recruitment Activity Feedback

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Lisa Vickers, Human Resources Manager, on 01743 260211 or Alan Taylor, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260210.

1 Purpose of Report

This report details the feedback from the Human Resources and Training Department on their experience of implementing the new recruitment tests and procedures for wholetime firefighter recruitment, which are likely to become mandatory from April 2007.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to recommend to the Fire Authority to agree that it:

- a) **Does not** adopt the national application form for retained duty system recruitment;
- b) **Does** adopt the job related tests for retained duty system recruitment; and
- c) Agrees that the findings within the report are copied to the new National Assessment Unit to inform decisions about future use.

3 Background

Over the last 3 years a new national process for the recruitment of firefighters has been under development. The National Framework Document 2006-08 states that:

Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) will now use the new national processes in place of their existing firefighter selection processes. It is expected that all FRAs will have these national processes in place by April 2007 at the latest – however Authorities are strongly encouraged to begin using these processes as soon as possible, both to introduce greater consistency of approach across the country and to ensure that the tests can undergo a rigorous



validation process using data collected from the performance of real candidates...the Practitioners' Forum made it clear that there should be national standards for firefighter selections tests which would apply across all duty systems. In order to ensure the tests are effective and the standards set are appropriate the Practitioners' Forum has asked that there be an 18 month review period for the tests.'

Recent changes in the way this Authority plans its recruitment meant that it would be recruiting in 2006 but was unlikely to do so again until 2008. Officers, therefore, took the opportunity to access the new national arrangements to see how they would work in wholetime recruitment. From that experience it would be possible to make a judgement about using the same processes and tests for future retained recruitment.

The wholetime recruitment process was completed in December and currently eight firefighters are on their initial training course at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

4 Feedback from Application/Written Tests

The application sift saw an unusually high number of applicants go out at first sift (83%) and officers would recommend that further research is carried out into the design of, and marking scheme for, the application form. Common sense would indicate that with an 83% fail rate we may be missing good candidates due to a minor failing by them at application form stage.

We made considerable investment (£2,500) in equipment to be able to use the new tests/software. Our resulting experience was mixed and Appendix 1 details the experiences and comments on specific elements. One of the main issues with the software was that it would not enable us to operate the normal business process of inputting applicant details as the applications came in. It needed to know the total number of applications before it would allow any data inputting. For example, this meant we were required to wait until the closing date, when we had received 428 applications before we could commence data input. This reduced lead in times between elements of the process considerably.

The scanner purchased was unreliable and was not actually used as all information had to be manually input twice, taking a day each time, before we could get resulting scores out of the system. There was very little support available centrally for the team (only one individual from the Department of Communities and Local Government). At one point we were told that the person, who had written the software, had subsequently left and could not, therefore, assist with operational problems encountered.

Conversely, after all that effort in marking the written tests, 56 out of 69 (81%) passed the written tests.

In summary, candidates were more than likely to fail the application form stage and more than likely to pass the written tests. This is unusual in



general recruitment practice and we do not intend to use the application form element of the process again for wholetime recruitment, unless it is significantly modified.

5 Feedback from Physical Tests

Following completion of new national firefighter selection tests at the Training Centre from 19 - 21 August 2006 feedback was encouraged and collated from the individuals, who assisted us in facilitating the day. We sought feedback on both the tests themselves and the control and co-ordination from a management perspective.

The comments and internal recommendations as a result are shown in the table at Appendix 2.

Appendix 3 shows the gender comparisons of pass and fail rates for the various tests.

Overall the feedback tells us that, whilst most of those involved in the testing thought that the tests had good face validity, they were not convinced that the tests were sufficiently robust in testing aerobic fitness. This was further borne out by the level of failure/issues of those who reached the final stage medical.

Whilst the number of females tested (8) was significantly lower than men (48), a greater proportion of them were unsuccessful at the physical tests stage. Overall there was a 34% fail rate at physical stage.

Officers, therefore, strongly recommend that either the medical entry standards are reviewed nationally, or that the medical element of the process is brought forward to reduce the amount of time wasted by taking applicants through the selection process, when their standard of fitness is lacking.

6 Applicability to the Retained Duty System

It has been indicated in the National Framework that the desired position is that the same recruitment practices should be used for both wholetime and retained recruitment.

The physical/job-related tests have face validity and on the whole seem well structured. Subject to a review of medical standards, officers would be happy to use these in future for both wholetime and retained recruits. We do, however, have concerns about medical standards and are keen to see a national review of these.

However, 83% of wholetime applicants failed the application form stage. Whilst applications to the Retained Duty System in Shropshire are rising they are not rising to a level where officers feel it would be reasonable to lose 83% before any other form of process has taken place. It is, therefore, recommended that we do not adopt the national application form for Retained



Duty System recruitment and that we continue to use our internal form until we can be confident of any other system.

7 Financial Implications

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. Expenditure for equipment was made from existing budgets.

8 Legal Comment

Section 21(1) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 obliges the Secretary of State to prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework. Section 21(7) provides that Fire and Rescue Authorities must have regard to the Framework when carrying out their functions.

Whilst there is no requirement to comply with the Framework there should be a justifiable reason for not doing so. The Fire Authority must ensure that if it adopts a different application process this complies with all legislation, including the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006.

9 Equality Impact Assessment

In accordance with the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) an Equality Impact Assessment is attached.

10 Appendices

Appendix 1

Feedback Regarding Wholetime Recruitment 2006 and Firefighter Application Management System (FAMS)

Appendix 2

Firefighter Selection Tests (Physical)

Appendix 3

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service National Firefighter Job Related Test Results 2006

11 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.



Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	*
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	*
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*





Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service EQIA number

Initial Equality Impact Assessment Form

Directorate	Human Resources, Training and Development	Department/Section	Human Resources
Name of officer	Lisa Vickers	Job title	HR Manager
Name of Policy/Service to be assessed	National Firefighter Selection Tests	Date of assessment	12 th February 2007
New or existing policy	New		

1. Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the policy/service	The aim of implementing the national firefighter selection process across all duty systems would be to ensure consistent and fair recruitment of staff.		
2. Are there any associated objectives of the policy/service?			
3. Who is intended to benefit from the policy/service and in what way?	Employees and Authorities nationally through consistency of approach in recruitment.		
4. What outcomes are wanted from this policy/service?	Consistency of approach in recruitment across duty systems		
5. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the policy/service?	Authority and employees		
6. Who implements the policy/service and who is responsible for this?	HR Manager		
7. Are there any concerns that this policy/service could have a differential impact on the following groups and what existing evidence do you have for this? Yes or No, please detail in boxes below.			
8. Age	Y	N	In its current format it is potentially discriminatory on age grounds due the information used to constitute the candidate number
9. Disability	Y	N	The tests have been designed to test for the requirements of the post.
10. Gender	Y	N	The tests have been designed to test for the requirements of the post.



11. Race	Y	N	The tests have been designed to test for the requirements of the post.
12. Religion or belief	Y	N	The tests have been designed to test for the requirements of the post.
13. Sexual orientation	Y	N	The tests have been designed to test for the requirements of the post.
14. Dependant/caring responsibilities	Y	N	The tests have been designed to test for the requirements of the post.
15. Could the differential impact identified in 7-14 amount to there being the potential for adverse impact in this policy/service?	Y	N	Age information could be used to discriminate as it is available to administrators/those sifting
16. Can this adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group or another reason?	Y	N	Please explain for each equality heading on a separate piece of paper.
17. Have you consulted those who are likely to be affected by the policy/service?	Y	N	Nationally developed process required to be used locally.
18. Should the policy proceed to a full impact assessment?	Y	N	No, this is at testing stage only at present. Shropshire's findings should be sent back to inform further development of these tests before release
19. Date by which full impact assessment to be completed			
20. Reason for non completion			

I am satisfied that this policy has been successfully impact assessed.

I understand the Impact Assessment of this policy is a statutory obligation and that, as owners of this policy, we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this process.

Signed: (Assessing person)		Date:	
Signed: (Line Manager)		Date:	
Please note that this impact assessment will be scrutinised by the E&D Officer			



**Feedback Regarding Wholetime Recruitment 2006 and
Firefighter Application Management System (FAMS)**

Description of Activity/Problems	Comments/Issues								
Firefighter Applicant Management System (FAMS) Training									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAMS Training attended by Human Resources Officers at Fire Service College • “Hands on” practical course using software to input dummy application details and process example letters and score sheets • Overall impression of the software was good • Left training session with free FAMS software + user manual • Equipment purchased: <table style="margin-left: 20px; border: none;"> <tr> <td>Scanner</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£1,800</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Software</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Printer</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£200</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£2,500</td> </tr> </table> 	Scanner	£1,800	Software	£500	Printer	£200	Total	£2,500	<p>Good training – left with good overall impression of FAMS</p> <p>Financial resources required to purchase equipment</p>
Scanner	£1,800								
Software	£500								
Printer	£200								
Total	£2,500								
Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Application Form and Job Pack Details									
<p>Hard copies of the following National Fire Service materials were received from DCLG:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Test Admin Instructions • National Firefighter Questionnaire (NFQ) and National Firefighter Application (NFA) Tests Administration Log (used per test) • NFQ Practice Booklet (sent in invite to W tests letters) • NFA Practice Booklet (sent to invite to W tests letters) • Physical Tests Route • Risk Assessments • Physical Tests Scripts and Standards • Fitness Information Talk (handed out at W Tests for info) • Equipment Specifications • Interview Practice Booklet • FAMS Technical Specifications • Application Form <p>Blank application form also sent via email and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service logo and details were added.</p>	<p>Good – added logo and contact names</p>								



Application Packs Sent	Comments/issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 759 applications sent out following advertisement in local newspapers and on www.shropshirefire.gov.uk • A total of 2,321 hits received during July 2006 on the wholetime recruitment information web link • Human Resources Temp x 2 days to assemble packs = £114 • + 1 day x 2 Human Resources Assistants to complete packs & send. 	<p>Cost of packs (printing) and time taken to assemble & send</p>
Application Forms Returned	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 428 application forms returned (56%) • Noted – the example personal qualities and attributes (PQAs) answer shown on the application form tended to be “copied” in a high number of applications! An example on equality and diversity may have been more useful, as a poor result on this PQA stopped application proceeding any further. • The Pre-Application Checklist 1 and 2 tick lists generated a high number of telephone calls. Callers asked a range of questions, e.g. colour blindness, age, convictions etc. Most questions asked were around the prompt “Have you made any other application to be a firefighter?” • Job pack details – did not include any specific information on PQA, which may have assisted applicants in PQA terminology/style. 	<p>Standard of applications varied, many fell down on not providing clear PQA evidence.</p> <p>Telephone queries high and need to be reduced in future</p> <p>Need to add information about PQAs for Firefighters</p>
DCLG – Sifting Guidance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Sifting guidance received which was very prescriptive and easy to follow • Sift 1 = 20 applicants rejected due to incomplete forms • A further 79 applicants had missed to tick an answer showing commitment to practise and actively promote “Our Values” – (page 17 of application form). A decision was taken to forward these to Sift 2 stage. • 408 applications were examined at Sift 2 stage • 339 applications were rejected and 69 proceeded. • Sift 1 took 2 x Human Resources Assistants x approx 2 days • Sift 2 took a team of 2/3 Trained Assessors x total of 4 days 	<p>Sifting guidance clear but too time/resource intensive to implement</p> <p>Huge number (83%) of applications was rejected at this stage. This is much more than we would expect at this stage.</p>



FAMS Software	Comments/issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To open a “live” recruitment FAMS requires knowledge of the total number of applicants. This is restrictive and means that we cannot input applications as they are received. • Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service had 428 application forms returned. This number took 2 x Human Resources Administrators a total of 3 days to input. • FAMS also requires knowledge upfront of which Ability Tests will be used - Version A, B or C and this was not confirmed until we made contact with DCLG • Ability Test A confirmed over telephone by DCLG 	<p>FAMS was restrictive and did not allow normal business processes to operate, i.e. we couldn't input applicant details as received</p> <p>Not clear at the outset what version should have been used</p>
FAMS – Inputting	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The candidate number that is generated is shown in very small font • This is long and is made up of National Insurance number + date of birth – personal data is, therefore, passed on to Sift 2 stage and testing administrators. • FAMS would not accept all postcodes (depended on numbers of digits). • On at least one occasion FAMS copied personal data from previous record into a blank field (raising accuracy doubts). • FAMS denied any data field amendments once record/s was entered. • The Data Prep report does not show complete telephone numbers. • FAMS software is installed on a stand-alone PC and is, therefore, restricted to one user at a time. This was impractical with large application numbers. 	<p>Candidate no. is too long and made up of info (i.e. date of birth) allowing potential discrimination on age</p> <p>No sequential number generated</p> <p>Need to enable more than one user at a time to facilitate faster processing</p>
Application Scoring	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 administrators input application scores from “Sift 2” Sheets – this was a quick and efficient part of FAMS. The drawback, however, was the system would not accept “scores” in any lesser number than the whole 69 expected. Again from a practitioner’s point of view acceptance of partial jobs would be a time-management advantage as jobs could then be continued on to completion. 	<p>Overall the scoring system was good but it should allow inputting as we go</p> <p>Restrictive to wholetime.</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing and printing application form results - report of Pass/Fail produced confirming numbers from above sifting exercise. • No actual “score” just pass/fail • No standard “unsuccessful” letter provided by FAMS • 	<p>Need to develop a standard ‘Unsuccessful’ letter</p>
<p>FAMS –Preparation for Written Tests</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample NFQ and NFA details sent to all candidates with invite letters. • FAMS used to create and print personalised written test papers • Experienced problems with testing Scanner equipment 	<p>The ability to create the written test papers was good but the scanner could not be made to work, despite considerable support from our IT department.</p>
<p>Ability Tests – 4 - 8 September</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability Tests – 4-8 September = full attendance • Written Test Admin Instructions followed and read to all candidates – all very clear and along with pre-test material led to very few queries or questions being raised. • NFQ and NFA Tests Administration Log –used and found to be useful 	<p>Good scripts and advance information</p> <p>Log - good</p>
<p>FAMS – Scoring of Written Ability Tests</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAMS system would not accept the “results” in any lesser number than the whole expected 69. This delayed our inputting - we had planned daily input of results Monday - Friday. This would have enabled us to “mark tests” on completion of written ability tests. 	<p>Restrictive and did not allow us to deal with each day as it occurred. We had to save all scoring till the end</p>
<p>Scanning Test Answer Sheets</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tried scanning test answer sheets with assistance of IT. Experienced many problems with the scanner, e.g. scanner did not recognise candidate number, read question numbers (1-4) instead of answers (A-D) etc. • Scanning attempts = Half day x 2 Human Resources Officer + IT Officer lost time • Monday pm/Tuesday am = manual input (69 x 4 = 276 papers x 214 answers = 59,064 manual data inputs) • Tuesday am – system fail 	<p>Failure of scanner cost in terms of <u>£ + time lost</u> at a crucial time where time was at a premium</p> <p>Manual data input was huge and raised potential for human error</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No quality check available. Confidential acetate of NFA Version 'A' <u>answers requested but not provided</u> – DCLG offered assistance with marking from “Water for Fish” if problems continued – further manual input however required. • Used FAMS to check test answers – missing information – and again tried manual input NFQ, NFA Working with Numbers, NFA Understanding Information, NFA Situational Awareness and Problem Solving – Tuesday pm/Wednesday am manual input. Only able to use one PC (restricted to one Human Resources officer inputting at any one time) • Wednesday am – system accepted no further missing information • Viewed results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56 out of 69 passed written tests (81%) • 13 failed (19%) • Again no actual “score” produced just Pass/Fail 	<p>Disaster!</p> <p>All manual data had to be re-entered</p> <p>Restricted by only being able to use one computer</p>
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Firefighter Selection Tests (Physical)

Feedback Comments	Recommendations
The number of candidates for each session was appropriate.	For future testing the maximum number of candidates for one session will be fifteen. This should allow us to test a number of candidates over a period of time without unduly impacting on the organisation.
The number of staff for each session was appropriate.	The number of staff required to facilitate the sessions was calculated on a test by test basis. Additional information from Staffordshire reinforced the decision.
The sessions appeared resource intensive and we should consider cutting back in future.	
The test did not sufficiently test aerobic capacity. Consider adding the bleep test as well.	The equipment carry had the largest failure rate out of all the tests. It would be too onerous on individuals to expect them to undertake the bleep test as well. In future consideration might be given to conducting a small scale medical during the tests. This should hopefully reduce the number of failures at medical stage.
Too much time was allocated to the confined space.	The time given over to complete the test was in accordance with the laid down national standard. The tests were facilitated by a qualified breathing apparatus instructor, who withdrew any candidate appearing confused or disorientated during the test.
Provide safety glasses for candidates carrying out equipment assembly, as the helmet visors were smoke stained and obscured vision.	In future a pair of safety glasses will be made available. This will remove the need to use helmet visors.
Candidates responded well to the test - they were better than previous.	The feedback from candidates was very positive.
The test where effectively managed.	



Good to pair up the Casualty Evacuation and the Ladder Lift	As these two tests could be undertaken with greater speed than the others tests, it seemed appropriate to facilitate them as one test. This balanced the timings more effectively throughout the session.
The kickboard for the ladder lift should be more robust.	The size of the kickboard will be increased for future testing.
Use the same personnel to administer the test for consistency.	During each session individuals assessed the same test to generate consistency. However, over a period of days and individual commitment it was not possible to replicate this approach.
I would have benefited from reading through test instructions beforehand.	For the next testing days, we will attempt to deliver a briefing session for those assisting with the tests.
A minimum of two people are required for the equipment carry.	In the future, assistance for this test will be provided from the ladder test station.



Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

National Firefighter Job Related Test Results 2006

	Total	Ladder Climb	Casualty Evacuation	Ladder Lift	Equipment Carry	Confined Space	Equipment Assembly
Male Pass	35	48	47	48	47	40	40
Male Fail	13	0	1	0	1	8	7
% Male Fail	27	0	2.5	0	2.5	17	15
Female Pass	2	8	8	6	3	6	3
Female Fail	6	0	0	2	5	2	5
% Female Fail	75	0	0	25	62.5	25	62.5

