

SECTION ONE – BREATHING APPARATUS SKILLS ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Over recent years there have been fundamental changes to the skills firefighters require to be competent, safe and effective when using breathing apparatus at all incidents but at firefighting incidents in particular.

Modern building construction has brought about changes in the way some fires develop and with these changes, new dangers to our firefighters. Throughout the British Fire Service it has been necessary to develop new skills together with a greater awareness of these dangers to safeguard the health and safety of our staff.

This Brigade Order outlines how the skill levels and competence of operational staff will be assessed in the important skill of BA use.

BREATHING APPARATUS TRAINING

Staff can not be assessed in BA competence until they have had the opportunity to be trained in the skills necessary for the modern professional firefighter. Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is committed to give firefighters the best training in BA skills from initial training to ongoing training on station and advanced training at Training Centre.

This ongoing BA training is carried out on station and at the satellite training facilities of Oswestry, Prees, Shrewsbury, Ludlow and the Service Training & Development Centre, Telford.

District Officers and Station Officers attached to Stations as well as Incident Commanders will be trained and refreshed in current BA skills to enable them to support BA training on station. Stations will also be supported by Associate Trainers who can visit retained stations to support the development of individual firefighters or groups of staff.

In addition Watch/Station Commanders and Incident Commanders will monitor BA skills during incidents and feedback information to individuals and the Training Team where necessary through the debriefing system.

The method of BA training together with frequencies and objectives is contained in the Brigade Order on BA Training.

BREATHING APPARATUS COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT

All operational staff are required to attend a one-day BA assessment each year. This BA assessment is designed to compliment the ongoing BA training detailed in the Brigade Order on BA Training.

The day will consist of a morning assessment of the underpinning knowledge and skills needed to operate safely and effectively in BA. The afternoon session will be used as a confirmation exercise by allowing the delegates to demonstrate their professional skill in practical use of BA in a realistic simulated incident. In addition the day will give staff the opportunity to refresh and update their BA skills and knowledge in a controlled and safe environment.

PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT DAY

The assessment will cover only those skills essential for the safe operation of BA. Most staff will not need to do any special preparation.

However, all staff will have access to a number of assessment study packs giving them opportunities to refresh their competence if necessary. These details will cover what knowledge and practical skills will be tested and the method of assessment used. In this way they can have the opportunity to 'brush up' on any skill or knowledge before attending for the annual assessment. This information will be in addition to the training they will already have received on station, at the satellite training centres and at hot fire sessions at Brigade Training Centre, Telford.

The Brigade is determined to ensure that everyone is well prepared for their assessment, we do not want anyone to fail. If staff have any doubt about their competence prior to their assessment they can either discuss it with their Watch/Station Commander, their District Officer or with an instructor at Training Centre. It is far better to have the opportunity to improve before assessment than to fail.

ASSESSMENT

Assessors, qualified in both breathing apparatus instruction and trained in assessment techniques, will carry out the assessments of competence using standard assessment tools.

Staff will be assessed against the criteria set out in the briefing pack. This information will also be made available to Watch/Station Commanders and District Officers.

The assessment will follow best practise laid down by the NVQ Approved Centre, which include standards in the equality and fairness of assessment.

For each of the competencies the assessor will assess whether staff are:

- Competent
- Safe but requiring development
- Safe but requiring re-assessment
- Not yet competent

The Service will only be assessing those competencies that are considered to be;

- vital for the health, safety and welfare of BA wearers and their colleagues, and
- vital for the effective saving of life and protection of property whilst using breathing apparatus during firefighting operations.

The Breathing Apparatus Assessors will record the assessment of each member of staff on a standard form.

ACTION FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT

Each member of staff being assessed will be informed, verbally and in writing, at the end of the assessment day how they have performed. A copy of the assessment record will also be forwarded to the Watch/Station Commanders who will discuss the result with staff and take any necessary action.

Staff undergoing assessment will fall into one of four categories depending on the assessment result:

Competent

Competent means that the individual has demonstrated the required level of competence to remain a BA wearer in Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. They will be continually trained and assessed in the usual way on station and at incidents and will return to Training Centre for their annual assessment in approximately 12 months time.

Safe but Requiring Development

There may be a few areas of competence that need further development. If this is the case the individual will be given a programme of training to follow in the weeks after the assessment. A random sample of staff will be reassessed by Officers and/or instructional staff in the period after these assessments to ensure that they have been working on those development areas. All staff will also be continually trained and assessed in the usual way on station. If individuals need assistance in any way they should not hesitate to contact their District Officer or any of the Training and Development Staff – we are here to help.

Safe but Requiring Re-assessment

There may be service delivery risk critical areas of competence that need further development. If this is the case the individual will be given a programme of training to follow in the weeks after the assessment. By falling into this category does not make the individual or their team unsafe, but will require the individual to be assessed centrally. The member of staff falling into this category will be invited back to the Training Centre within a two month period for re-assessment.

Not Yet Competent

If an individual fails to demonstrate the basic skills and knowledge required to ensure their safety in BA they may be assessed as not yet competent. This means that they failed to reach the required standard and they are unsafe in the operation of breathing apparatus. To ensure their safety and the safety of their colleagues the Service must act. The following action will be taken.

- Following discussion with and a decision by the Contingency Officer the individual may be immediately taken off operational duties and their Watch/Station Manager, District Officer and the Training Delivery Manager will be informed.
- The Contingency Officer will immediately inform the Executive Officer of the decision
- All relevant officers will be provided with written information on what the individual should do to improve his / her competence and will be given a length of time to improve skills before being reassessed. This will be agreed between the individual and the assessor.
- All staff will be offered full support to return to operational competence which may include extra training hours or one to one tuition for example.
- Wholetime or Retained staff may, if there are a large number of areas where improvement is needed, be required to attend an intensive development course at Training Centre Telford or elsewhere in the Service, to help improve competence and allow them to return to operational duties as quickly as possible.
- After the agreed period the individual will again have their competence assessed by a different assessor to the previous one.

ACTION FOLLOWING RE-ASSESSMENT

After re assessment the member of staff will again fall into one of the 4 categories listed previously. If they are either Competent, Safe but Requiring Development or Safe but Requiring Re-assessment they will be able to go fully back on the run with increased supervision for safety. They will then carry on training and be continually assessed as usual on station or assessed centrally at the Training Centre should they fall into Safe but Requiring Re-assessment.

However if he or she should again be deemed to be not yet competent the following action will be taken:

- The individual will continue to be off the run from operational incidents and, in addition to the contingency Officer and the Training Delivery Manager and the Assistant Chief Officer will be informed.
- They will be issued with a formal written warning concerning competence. This will be backed up with information on what they should do and what the Service will do to

improve their competence, what will happen next and what they can do if they disagree with the assessment.

- The individual will be given a length of time to improve their skills before being reassessed. This will be agreed between the individual and the assessor. The period of time will be as short as is reasonably practicable.
- The member of staff will receive an agreed development plan that should bring them up to the required level of competence in a time agreed by the Training Delivery Manager, the individual and an assessor.
- The member of staff will be given training opportunities and any necessary information to help them.
- After the agreed period of time they will have their competence assessed for a third time. If they pass the assessment they will return to operational duty.
- If however, after the development time and your third assessment the individual is still **not yet competent** they will remain off the run and their training/assessment file will be sent to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer for a decision to be made about what more the Service and the individual can do to return to operational competence.

RIGHTS OF APPEAL

Every member of staff has a right of appeal against all levels of competence assessment if they feel aggrieved by the result. There are three levels of appeal.

Level 1.

This is a formal verbal appeal to the assessor giving feedback. Following this appeal the assessor will get another assessor to look at the assessment report, hear the member of staff's appeal and make a conclusion. This could be to change or confirm the assessment result.

If the individual is not satisfied about the conduct of this appeal they can go to **Level 2.**

Level 2.

This is a formal written appeal to a Principal Officer. The member of staff will be required to present in writing why they wish to appeal and on what grounds they want the appeal to be heard.

The Principal Officer will gather information from Assessors and the member of staff and may either change the assessment, confirm the assessment or require another assessment to be carried out.

If the individual is not satisfied about the conduct of this appeal they can go to **Level 3.**

Level 3.

This is a formal written appeal to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. As well as presenting in writing why they wish to appeal and on what grounds they want the appeal to be heard the individual will be required to state why they feel it necessary to come to this level of appeal.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer will arrange for an investigation to be carried out and based on the findings of this will either change or confirm the assessment result.

AUDIT AND REVIEW

The Training Delivery Manager will as necessary report to Policy Group the numbers of staff who have been deemed not yet competent.

As part of the report the Training Delivery Manager will also report on how many people have, following assessment, moved onto the appeal process.

A major part of the results of these assessments is the way that they will improve core skill training within the Service. If our core skill training in the Service is effective then the number of staff who fail assessments will be low. If however large numbers of staff fail to demonstrate competence then the training inputs will obviously be assessed further.

A NOTE ON ASSESSMENT FOR OFFICERS

As has always been the case line managers have a significant responsibility for the safety of their staff. This includes ensuring that they are safe and competent to carry out any role that is asked of them. Therefore requiring officers to assess their staff in a skill that they themselves have demonstrated, perhaps for many years, is not a new requirement. (They will have done this every time they have taken a drill or supervised an incident). However, it is recognised that perhaps for the first time officers may be being asked to assess and report on the competence of a more experienced firefighter. It is the officers' responsibility to ensure that they assess staff fairly and report on their competence accordingly.

The Training Delivery Manager and staff at the Training and Development Centre are available to assist managers in this.