

SECTION ONE – TACTICAL FIREFIGHTING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

In the move to a competence based approach to training there is now a requirement for the Service to carry out competence assessments of all staff against the knowledge and skills set out in the National Occupational Standards for Fire and Rescue Services.

In the future on wholetime Watches and Retained stations the vast majority of these assessments will be carried out by Watch/Station Managers, but until this group of staff have themselves been deemed competent as assessors (this could take up to three years) there is a need for all front line operational staff to be assessed centrally.

This Brigade Order outlines how the skill levels and competence of operational staff will be assessed in the important skills of tactical fire fighting.

These central assessments will be run until all operational fire-fighters and their Junior Officers have been assessed which will take three years after which date it is expected that all Watch and Station Managers will be competent to continue the assessments locally.

All officers required to assess skills must be deemed ‘sector competent’ and so it is for this reason that the future assessors (station and watch managers) will all initially require the same assessment as their fire-fighters.

TACTICAL FIRE FIRE-FIGHTER TRAINING

As with the BA competence assessments that all staff undergo annually fire-fighters can not be assessed in these core skill competences 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 core skills from initial training to ongoing training on station..

This ongoing training is principally carried out on station but undoubtedly the vast majority of skills are demonstrated and practised operationally.

In addition to this assessment Officers in Charge and Incident Commanders have been and will continue to monitor core skills during incidents and feedback information to individuals and the Training Team where necessary through the debriefing system.

The method of core skills training together with frequencies is contained in the Individual Training and Development Records issued to all fire-fighters.

TACTICAL FIRE FIRE-FIGHTER COMPETENCE ASSESMENT

All front line operational staff are required to attend a one-day tactical fire fire-fighter assessment within the next three years (2003 – 2005). Staff will be informed as to when they should nominate themselves for these assessments. This assessment is designed to compliment the ongoing core skills training detailed in the Individual Development Records and that identified by the fire-fighters themselves following incidents and after debrief.

The day will consist of a range of both individual and group assessments that will be grouped in 4 areas:

- Assessments of competence in the fundamentals of fire and fire development
- Door procedures
- Fire fighting techniques
- Ventilation techniques and procedures

The assessments will predominantly be practical in nature with the emphasis being on the skills needed to maintain safety on the incident ground and the competence to deliver a professional service.

PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT DAY

The assessment will cover only those skills and knowledge essential for safe application of those core skills every fire-fighter demonstrates on a regular basis. The vast majority of staff will not need to do any special preparation.

However, all staff will have access to assessment study packs giving you opportunities to refresh your competence if necessary. These details will cover what knowledge and practical skills will be tested and the method of assessment used. In this way staff can have the opportunity to 'brush up' on any skill or knowledge before attending for the assessment. This information will be in addition to the training they will already have received on station.

The Service is determined to ensure that everyone is well prepared for their assessment; we do not want anyone to be embarrassed by not being as professional as they would wish. If individual have any doubt about their competence prior to assessment they can either discuss it with their Officer in Charge, their District Officer or with an instructor at Training Centre. It is far better to have the opportunity to improve before assessment that to struggle during it.

ASSESSMENT

Assessors competent, and where applicable qualified, in both the core skills assessed and 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 Officers in Charge and District Officers.

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

For each of the components of the core skills the assessor will assess whether the individual is:

- 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 fire-fighters and their colleagues, and
- vital for effective fire fighting operations.

The Core Skills Assessors will record the assessment of each member of staff on a standard form and record this on the competence data base kept at the Training and Development Centre.

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 your Officer in Charge who will further discuss the result with you and take any necessary action.

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

Competent

Competent means that, in the opinion of the assessors, the individual has demonstrated the required level of competence in all the core skills assessed. They will return to station and continue with training and development that has ensured that they have maintained their competence to this date.

Safe but Requiring Development

There may be up to two areas of competence that need further development. For example the individual may not be very sure how to cool gases effectively and may not understand when to ventilate appropriately **but** generally were deemed safe by the assessors.

If this is the case the member of staff will be given a programme of training to follow in the weeks after the assessment and will be more closely monitored at incidents to ensure safety until they have demonstrated the required competence to their OIC.

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. Individuals will also be continually trained and assessed in the usual way on station.

If any member of staff needs assistance in any way they should not hesitate to contact their District Officer or any of the Training and Development Staff – they are here to help.

Safe but Requiring Re-assessment

There may be a larger number of 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. They 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 a large number of the basic skills and knowledge required to ensure their safety when tactical fire-fighting they may be assessed as not yet competent. This means that they failed to reach the required standard and may be unsafe in the operation of tactical fire-fighting. 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
- The individual will be provided with written information on what they should do to improve their competence and will be given a length of time to improve their 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 they will again have their competence assessed by a different assessor to the previous one.

ACTION FOLLOWING RE-ASSESSMENT

After re assessment the individual 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 the individual should again be deemed to be not yet competent the following action will be taken:

- They will continue to be unable to attend operational incidents and, in addition to the people above the Assistant Chief Officer will be informed.
- The member of staff will be issued with a formal written warning concerning their 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 them and the assessor. The period of time will be as short as is reasonably practicable.
- They 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 their third assessment they are still **not yet competent** they will remain off operational duty and their training/assessment file will be sent to the Assistant Chief Officer for a decision to be made about what more the Service and the individual can do to return the member of staff 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 Assistant Chief 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 Assistant Chief 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 staff in a skill that they themselves have demonstrated, perhaps for many years, is not a new requirement. (Officers 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 fire-fighter. It is the responsibility of all officers to ensure that they assess staff fairly and report on their competence accordingly.

The Personal Development Officer and staff at the Training and Development Centre are available to assist all staff in this.