

EDUCATION - RESPONDING TO MODERNISATION

Education, Training and Development of Officials - responding to modernisation

Introduction

The past three years have seen the biggest period of change in the Fire Service since the years immediately following the Second World War. The 'modernisation' agenda has affected all aspects of the work of the Fire Brigades Union. This has resulted in various strands of work and discussion as the Union develops strategies for the way forward.

In particular the 'modernisation' agenda has created new challenges for local Officials. For example, the issues currently confronted by Brigade Officials are very different to those faced ten years ago. Examples of some of the new issues confronting Officials include:

- Negotiations on shift and Duty Systems;
- Second Contracts;
- Wholetime/Retained;
- Local ARAs.

In addition to these local issues, Officials throughout the FBU are also affected by changes and developments affecting the structures within which we operate. These include:

- New pension arrangements;
- Revised NJC constitution and related issues;
- Grey Book procedures (including the new protocol on industrial relations);
- New equality legislation;
- The development of the equality and diversity agenda within the Fire and Rescue Service;
- The impact of devolution.

Education - the key to the Union's future

Education and training has always been central to the work of the FBU. Following the national dispute there was some disruption to the programme. This was further exacerbated by the financial difficulties which emerged in 2004/2005. This disruption has also affected the provision of education and training at local level. A national programme has been re-started, although gaps remain. We have held very successful National Schools in 2006 and 2007.

Seminars have been held for Brigade, Regional and Sectional Officials on a range of issues over the past two years and the Executive Council has already agreed that there should be regular such events. In the responses received to the Officials Seminars held in 2006, it was clear that there is a significant desire on the part of Officials for more such training.

It is clear that the development of a programme of education/training which matches fully the needs of the FBU for 2008 and beyond is a major task. Some of the issues which may need to be addressed include:

- Full details of the current position within each Region;
- Demands for training and development from Sectional Officials;
- Training needs analysis;
- The development of a series of new seminars/training events dealing with specific aspects of Union activity;
- Ensuring an integrated approach across Regions/Sections and the national programme;
- Preparing the FBU for various possibilities in relation to the external regime for trade union education.

Such a major task requires the investment of resources. As a result of discussion around this issue, the Executive Council agreed to engage full time support for a two year period. This will allow this vital area of work to be developed in a structured and systematic way.

Developing a strategy for the future

The National Officer, the FBU Education Advisor and the Education Committee will now conduct a review of training and education based on the changing situation and the developing needs of our Officials. The results of this review will be reported to Annual Conference 2009.

This project will involve consultation with every Brigade, Regional and Sectional Committee of the Union so as to ensure that the concerns of all officials are considered.

In the interim, arrangements have been made to ensure that a National School continues to be held. Training for Brigade, Regional and Sectional Officials will also be organised to address the urgent issues arising from the 'modernisation' agenda.