



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND VOCATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS**

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The FBU's position on workforce development, assessment, vocational qualifications and related matters has developed continually since this debate emerged in 1994. It evolved further with the 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement, the introduction of the Scheme of Conditions of Service Sixth Edition 2004 and, most recently, when various concerns were raised by delegates at Annual Conference 2008. These concerns resulted in resolutions being either carried or remitted for the FBU Workforce Development Group (WDG) to consider in more detail.

The WDG has continued with this work throughout the past year and was assisted by the production and distribution of an Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) Code of Practice document. This Code of Practice, developed by the now disbanded IPDS working group (on which the FBU was represented) outlined a best practice guide for Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in relation to areas including Assessment Development Centers', vocational qualifications and the Initial Test of Potential process.

To assist the WDG a Head Office Circular (2007HOC0693SS) which asked officials to give some information on available vocational qualifications within their respective FRA was issued. Initial reports showed that out of the **fifty** responses only **eleven** FRAs were not using Scottish/National Vocational Qualifications (S/NVQs) in some guise. It also showed that in all but three of those FRAs using S/NVQs, they were being used to measure competency in role. Many indicated that they were mandatory for new entrants to the service. The information received also highlighted that many FRAs using vocational qualifications were not applying them consistently. For example many did not offer vocational qualifications to the entire workforce but ignored members working the retained duty system (RDS) completely and were only offering them to new employees on the wholetime duty system (WDS). This apparent misuse was taking place without FBU approval or involvement. This information and the concerns raised at conference indicated that a structured FBU involvement in the processes around workforce development and vocational qualifications was necessary. To highlight this, conference should be aware that there are at least thirty eight FRAs currently using vocational qualifications. In some instances this is in FRAs where other sections of the workforce are being discriminated against because of their role, length of service and/or duty system in which they are currently employed.

Elsewhere officials have reported concerns with how competence in role is achieved, either by using the NJC rolemap or the vocational qualification '*Operations in the Community*.' These issues include the perceived lack of technical input individuals receive. The Executive Council has considered all these concerns and has acted to assist officials. This action includes authorising an education course 'Understanding Qualifications and Workforce Development in the UKFRS' which will be available to officials during 2009. This course is designed to refresh officials' knowledge of areas such as IPDS and vocational qualifications, using all the resources available. This will include an FBU guidance document based on the IPDS Code of Practice. This resource and the related course will also enable officials to challenge management on all areas of workforce development whether it is related to competence, vocational qualifications, IPDS or the way in which promotions are assessed and managed.

To enable officials to be confident that within their FRA there is a consistent approach to competence they must be confident that there is an agreed level for all to work towards.

They must also be confident that when this level is achieved the individual is both confident and competent to carry out their role safely. This level is nationally accepted as the relevant NJC agreed rolemap but information has shown that in practice the '*Operations in the Community*' level 3 vocational qualification is often being used to measure firefighter competence. Although this raises other issues that will need addressing such as ensuring that a robust assessment and verification is in place, it may assist in other areas where disputes of competencies are ongoing, such as when transferring from RDS to WDS is being discussed.

In order to monitor and influence the way that competence is achieved and assessed, FBU officials must firstly understand the workforce development processes. It is only then that improvements in their delivery and consistency can be achieved.

Robust systems of workforce development are essential to the genuine modernisation of the UK Fire and Rescue Service and, if members can achieve a vocational qualification whilst performing their role, we should not oppose this. Our concern is to ensure that the systems around any qualifications within the service are robust, respected and understood.

The Executive Council is acutely aware that the task of influencing the implementation of vocational qualifications across the UK Fire Service is not going to be a straightforward process. There is currently considerable variation between FRAs around these issues. There is no suggestion that vocational qualifications (especially as currently established) will be the 'cure all' remedy for competence within the UK Fire Service. Nevertheless the debate around these issues can allow the FBU to argue for a benchmark to be laid down and can give us an opportunity to address the inconsistencies that remain within and between FRAs. For this reason officials should be encouraged to attend the 'Understanding Qualifications and Workforce Development in the UKFRS'

Considering the details in this statement Conference is asked to agree;

- That Brigade Officials commit to attending the course '*Understanding Qualifications and Workforce Development in the UKFRS*'. This will be organised through Head Office and delivered to Regions;
- That Conference does not oppose vocational qualifications which have been subject to agreement with the FBU through the national processes available;
- That local Officials will challenge areas of inconsistency in the ways in which workforce development is implemented within each FRA;
- That the FBU should continue to focus on the need for Fire & Rescue Services to provide high quality training for Firefighters to carry out their duties safely and in the professional manner we have come to expect;
- That the Workforce Development Group will continue to monitor progress around these issues so as to assist the Executive Council in providing further advice to officials.