



National Firefighter Selection Process
Firefighter PQA Interview
Technical Manual



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Please note: This material has been developed specifically for use with the Firefighter PQA Interview. It is not to be used for any purpose other than that for which it was originally designed.

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- Cambridgeshire
- Cheshire
- Cleveland
- Cornwall
- Cumbria
- Devon
- Dorset
- East Sussex
- Gloucestershire
- Greater Manchester
- Hampshire
- Hereford and Worcester
- Highlands and Islands
- Humberside
- Isle of Wight
- Jersey
- Lancashire
- Lincolnshire
- London
- Lothian & Borders
- Merseyside
- Mid and West Wales
- North Wales
- North Yorkshire
- Northern Ireland
- Nottingham
- Oxfordshire
- Somerset
- South Wales
- South Yorkshire
- Staffordshire
- Strathclyde
- Surrey
- Tyne & Wear
- West Midlands
- West Sussex
- West Yorkshire
- Wiltshire

Section One

Introduction

- 1.1 This document records the development of the Firefighter PQA Interview and presents important technical information.
- 1.2 The document is split into the following sections:
 - proper use of the Firefighter PQA Interview
 - overview of the Firefighter PQA Interview
 - the development of the Firefighter PQA Interview
 - technical Information for the Firefighter PQA Interview

Section Two

Proper use of the Firefighter PQA Interview

- 2.1 The Firefighter PQA Interview is for use only as part of the National Firefighter Selection process. This document outlines standards concerning the use and availability of the PQA Interview and is in line with those guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and current opinion concerning best professional practice in the use and supply of assessment tools.
- 2.2 Cautionary Note – Assessment tools and their results are for use by appropriately trained and authorised users only. It is the responsibility of authorised users to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to safeguard the security, confidentiality and proper use of the PQA Interview and candidates' assessment results.

Section Three

Overview of the Firefighter PQA Interview

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The purpose of this section is to present an overview of the PQA Interview, the rationale behind its development and information on its administration. The Guidance notes for Interviewers and the Interview Report Form should be examined to gain a full appreciation of its scope (e.g. questions, scoring, etc.) and administration.

3.2 Development rationale

3.2.1 The rationale for the development of the PQA Interview has been guided by the following criteria:

- The PQA Interview has been designed to assess candidates against a sub-set of the National Firefighter Personal Qualities and Attributes (PQAs) in order to select those people who have the potential to become effective Firefighters.
- While it was important that the PQA Interview gathered information about core PQAs that are important for being a Firefighter, the questions have been designed so as not to disadvantage those without direct knowledge and experience of the Firefighter role.
- As with all the assessment tools used as part of the National Firefighter Selection process, the PQA Interview has been developed to promote a positive and accurate image of the role of Firefighter.

3.3 Composition of the interview

3.3.1 The interview follows a clear structure and uses a set of standard questions to achieve a fair and consistent approach. The interview assesses 5 of the Firefighter PQAs:

- Working with Others, Commitment to Excellence, Commitment to Development and Commitment to Diversity and Integrity are assessed via a set of standard questions. The questions are designed to focus on specific examples or situations from the candidate's experience that best illustrate their past performance against these PQAs.
- Effective Communication is assessed by an evaluation of candidates' verbal communication during the interview overall.

3.3.2 Equal time in the interview is devoted to each of the PQAs that are assessed by questioning, with the exception of Commitment to Diversity and Integrity which is given more attention. The rationale for this was:

- To acknowledge the importance of Commitment to Diversity and Integrity within the FRS, in line with the Bain Report and White Paper.
- To allow sufficient questions to cover the breadth of the whole PQA (i.e. both the diversity and honesty dimensions of the PQA).

3.3.3 The PQA Interview lasts for up 1 hour and is split into 4 sections:

- Introduction – 3 minutes
The initial part of the interview outlines the structure and logistics of the interview. It serves as an introduction to the interview itself and allows expectations to be set between the interviewer and the candidate.
- Warm up questions – 10 minutes
This section consists of a number of questions covering the candidate's interest in becoming a Firefighter. It is designed to relax the candidate and therefore it is not assessed.
- PQA questions – 45 minutes
This section is sub-divided into 4 sections:
 - *Working with Others – 10 minutes*
There are 2 essential questions, with a time allowance of 5 minutes per question.
 - *Commitment to Excellence – 10 minutes*
There are 2 essential questions, with a time allowance of 5 minutes per question.

- *Commitment to Development – 10 minutes*
There are 2 essential questions, with a time allowance of 5 minutes per question.
- *Commitment to Diversity and Integrity – 15 minutes*
There are 3 essential questions, with a time allowance of 5 minutes per question.
- Close – 2 minutes
This final section of the interview consists of a summary of what has been covered and a wrap up of the interview.

3.4 Practice booklet

- 3.4.1 The provision of preparation guidance to candidates prior to assessment is recognised by the Commission for Racial Equality and Equal Opportunities Commission as one of the methods by which organisations can ensure all candidates have the same opportunity to prepare adequately for testing. Research suggests that such guidance may, in turn, help minimise any potential adverse impact associated with the use of psychometric tests.
- 3.4.2 A Practice Booklet has been developed for the PQA Interview. The purpose of the booklet is to allow candidates to familiarise themselves with the style of the Interview, the type of questions asked and how to structure their answers. It also provides useful information for candidates on preparing for the Interview. The booklet should be sent to candidates prior to their attendance at the Interview.

3.5 Administration of the PQA interview

- 3.5.1 The interview has been designed to be carried out by a panel of two, with a designated interviewer and a separate note taker. Detailed guidance notes are provided for the interviewer.
- 3.5.2 During the interview the note-taker is responsible for taking comprehensive notes of what the candidate says. They are expected to record at least 70% of what is said in order to create an accurate record of the Interview. It is recommended that these notes are retained 6 months.

3.6 Scoring and feedback

- 3.6.1 The assessment of the interview is completed after the close of the interview. The interviewer and note-taker review the notes captured during the interview and the note-taker is responsible for completing the Interview Report Form (IRF). There are comprehensive IRF guidance notes provided detailing how to record and classify evidence and complete the IRF. An answer key has been provided at the back of the document to guide the award of scores for each PQA and the overall outcome.

Section Four

The Development of the Firefighter PQA Interview

4.1 Overview of the development process

4.1.1 The PQA Interview has undergone a rigorous three stage development procedure designed to ensure that the final PQA interview is as fair and effective as possible.

4.1.2 Figure 1 presents an overview of the development process. More detail about each stage of the development process can be found below.

Figure 1 – Overview of the PQA Interview Development Process

Stage 1: Defining the Concept

- National Firefighter PQAs reviewed to identify those that would be assessed most effectively by the Interview
- Specification for the PQA Interview developed



Stage 2: Interview Design and Question Writing

- Sample of existing Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) interviews reviewed and consultation completed with service recruitment personnel to collect best practice and define user needs
- Initial sample of trial questions written by Business Psychologists according to strict guidelines to ensure all questions met the highest standards
- Initial draft interview reviewed as part of a workshop attended by FRS recruitment personnel from across the country and trialled with a small number of 'mock' applicants
- The Interview Report Form revised to follow the format of the Interim ADC Interview Report Form
- Questions reviewed by Business Psychologists and Equal Opportunity Experts



Stage 3: Piloting

- Revised draft version of the interview piloted with a small group of Positive Action Day attendees
- The materials were further modified as a result of feedback concerning the usability of the interview materials, suitability and effectiveness of the questions and PQA indicators, the design of the Interview Report Form, etc



Stage 4: Standardisation

- Final version of the Interview conducted with 135 actual Firefighter candidates
- Analysis undertaken to inform final cut off scores

4.2 Stage 1: Defining the concept

4.2.1 The starting point for the development of the interview was the National Firefighter PQAs. The PQAs were reviewed to identify those criteria that could be assessed most effectively by an interview. This 'sub-set' of PQAs was then further refined by considering the extent to which an assessment by interview would enhance the effective assessment of the PQAs overall given the combined focus of the other selection tools that comprise the National Firefighter Selection Process. As a result of this review, five PQAs were identified for assessment by interview (i.e. Working with Others, Commitment to Excellence, Commitment to Development, Commitment to Diversity and Integrity and Effective Communication).

4.3 Stage 2: Interview design and question writing

4.3.1 The format for the first draft of the interview was informed by a review of a sample of existing Firefighter selection interviews and by consultation with FRS recruitment practitioners. This review and consultation process led to the development of an initial interview format that:

- Incorporated existing elements of FRS 'best practice'
- Introduced new elements or practices that would have the most likelihood of supporting effective assessment; and
- Took into account users' perspectives of the operational and organisational context in which the interview was to be used (e.g. constraints on interview length and time).

- 4.3.2 Following the design of the interview format overall, an initial set of questions was written by a small team of Business Psychologists. The aim at this stage was to develop questions that examined the breadth and depth of a candidate's experience in relation to the PQA areas. Only the fairest and most effective questions were selected for use.
- 4.3.3 A Firefighter interview workshop was held to review the questions, materials and process. The workshop was attended by Firefighter recruitment personnel of mixed gender and race and from FRSs representative of each the five best value groups. Feedback on the interview process and materials was collected as part of group discussion and following a trial of the materials with a small number of mock candidates.
- 4.3.4 At this stage of the development process changes were made to the PQAs and design specification in the light of the Bain Report and the White Paper. As a result the importance of the assessment of the PQA Commitment to Diversity and Integrity was raised so that candidates failing to reach a basic level would be rejected. The Interview Report Form was also modified so that the structured scoring format followed that of the Interim ADC Interview report form
- 4.3.5 The interview questions and process were reviewed by external Equal Opportunity experts to ensure that the content was fair to all minority groups. Minor changes were made to the questions and Interview Report Form as a result of this review.

4.4 Stage 3: Piloting

- 4.4.1 Piloting of the materials was completed in order to collect feedback concerning the usability of the interview materials, suitability and effectiveness of the questions and PQA indicators, the design of the Interview Report Form, etc. PQA interview skills training was provided to all interviewers prior to piloting to ensure a minimum level of understanding of how to complete an effective PQA interview.
- 4.4.2 The PQA Interview materials were piloted with 20 potential firefighter applicants at a Positive Action Day (Hampshire, May 2005). Once again, the interview materials were modified as a result of feedback to create a final version to take forward to standardisation.

4.5 Stage 4: Standardisation

- 4.5.1 The final interview was completed with 135 candidates during 2005 as a formal part of two FRSs' Firefighter recruitment processes.

4.5.2 Assessment and scoring of the applications was completed under close supervision from a business psychologist from Water for Fish. The objective was to collect representative norm Group data from 'live' applicants. The data from the standardisation sample was analysed to inform the cut-off scores, where two important issues were considered:

- Minimum level of requirements for the role (as defined by coverage of the PQA indicators); and
- The likely number of applicants that would be screened out at any given cut-off.

4.5.3 Demographic statistics for the standardisation sample can be found in Appendix A. Restrictions in the demographic data collected by the participating FRSs meant that it is not possible to show disability data for the standardisation sample.

Section Five

Firefighter PQA interview Technical Information

5.1 Section contents

5.1.1 This section contains the following technical information and data:

- Summary statistics – standardisation sample
- Adverse impact; and
- Validity.

5.2 Summary statistics – standardisation sample

5.2.1 Evidence collected during the interview is evaluated by completion of the rating scales defined in the Interview Report Form (IRF). A separate rating scale is completed for each PQA (please see the IRF for a detailed definition of each rating scale). This results in five PQA total scores, with overall performance at interview being determined by summing each of the PQA total scores to arrive at an overall total (maximum score = 77). Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics for the standardisation sample interview scores.

Table 1: Interview score descriptive statistics					
	Sample size	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean score (raw score)	Standard Deviation (raw score)
Working with Others (2 questions, maximum total score = 14)	135	2	14	9.16	2.95
Commitment to Excellence (2 questions, maximum total score = 14)	135	1	14	8.16	2.90
Commitment to Development (2 questions, maximum total score = 14)	135	2	13	8.50	2.69
Commitment to Diversity and Integrity (3 questions, maximum total score = 21)	135	1	20	12.52	3.85
Effective Communication (indirectly assessed)	135	4	14	11.63	2.28
Total Score (maximum score = 77)	135	15	72	49.97	12.68

5.2.2 Table 2 below summarises analyses completed to examine potential interview mean score differences between Male and Female candidates.

Table 2: Male/Female interview mean score differences				
	Sex	Sample size	Mean score (T score)	Standard Deviation (T-score)
Working with Others	Male	124	9.0	2.98
	Female	11	10.9	1.81
Commitment to Excellence	Male	124	8.1	2.96
	Female	11	9.2	1.94
Commitment to Development	Male	124	8.4	2.74
	Female	11	9.5	1.75
Commitment to Diversity and Integrity	Male	124	12.3	3.92
	Female	11	14.7	1.95
Effective Communication	Male	124	11.5	2.32
	Female	11	12.7	1.34
Total Score	Male	124	49.3	12.91
	Female	11	57.1	6.41

- 5.2.3 While the results in Table 2 suggest that Female candidates attain higher mean scores for each of the PQAs and for the Total Score when compared to Males, these results cannot be generalised to what might be found in a larger sample due to the small sample size of female candidates (n=11). Further monitoring will be completed in the future when more data becomes available.
- 5.2.4 An analysis of mean differences between White and Black and Minority Ethnic candidates could not be conducted at this stage due to insufficient data (Black and Minority Ethnic candidates = 1). Again, this will be monitored in the future as more data is collected.

5.3 Adverse impact

- 5.3.1 The number of participants from minority groups was below the threshold required in order to conduct meaningful and reliable analysis. Therefore, levels of adverse impact and mean differences between the test performance of majority and minority groups were not examined.
- 5.3.2 As soon as sufficient minority data has been collected such analysis will be conducted.

5.4 Validity

- 5.4.1 Further information concerning the interview's validity will be presented once the data on 'live' Firefighter candidates become available.

Appendix A

Standardisation Sample Statistics

A1 Demographics: PQA interview

Table 3: Interview/FRS		
FRS	Number of Participants	%
Cleveland	71	52.6
Hampshire	64	47.4
Total	135	100.0

Table 4: Interview/Sex		
Sex	Number of Participants	%
Male	124	91.9
Female	11	8.1
Total	135	100.0

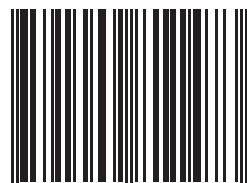
Table 5: Interview/Ethnic Origin		
Ethnic Origin	Number of Participants	%
White	132	99.2
Black and Minority Ethnic	1	0.8
Total	133	100.0

Table 6: Interview/Age		
Age	Number of Participants	%
16-20	16	12.3
21-25	53	40.8
26-30	38	29.2
31-35	13	10.0
36-40	10	7.7
Total	135	100.0

Table 7: Interview/Disability		
Disability	Frequency	%
Yes	3	2.3
No	127	97.7
Total	135	100.0

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