



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

# **Developing a New College of Fire and Rescue**





Government of the United Kingdom  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

# Developing a New College of Fire and Rescue

Presented to Parliament  
by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
by Command of His Majesty

May 2026



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# Developing a New College of Fire and Rescue

## Scope of the Consultation

### Topic of this consultation:

This consultation seeks views on how the establishment of the College of Fire and Rescue could best support future capability, professional development and resilience across the fire and rescue sector, as well as contributing to wider sector objectives. It covers:

- The proposed strategic aims that the college should seek to achieve;
- The functions it could fulfil;
- Potential delivery and funding models for the college;
- Interaction between the college and the National Framework, which sets out the government's priorities for fire and rescue authorities; and
- Legislative requirements to support the establishment of the college.

We would also welcome comments on any potential impacts of these proposals on groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

### Geographical scope:

These proposals relate to England only. However, we aim to work closely with colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to consider how the college could be designed in a way that would add value for fire and rescue sector colleagues across the UK if they chose to opt into some of its services.

### Impact assessment:

We have completed an internal, high-level assessment of impacts that is proportionate to the stage of policy development. The findings from this consultation will allow us to refine our policy proposals and to publish a more detailed impact assessment alongside the government's formal response to this consultation.

## Basic Information

### Body responsible for the consultation:

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

### Duration:

This consultation will begin on 20 May 2026 and run for eight weeks, closing at 11:59 pm on 15 July 2026.

### Enquiries:

For any enquiries about the consultation, please contact:

[collegeoffireandrescue@communities.gov.uk](mailto:collegeoffireandrescue@communities.gov.uk)

### How to respond:

You can respond to this consultation by completing an online survey at <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/fire-and-rescue-service/college-fire-and-rescue>. This is the department's preferred route for receiving consultation responses, as it enables us to analyse the responses as efficiently as possible.

Alternatively, you can email your response to [collegeoffireandrescue@communities.gov.uk](mailto:collegeoffireandrescue@communities.gov.uk)

or send a written response to:

College of Fire and Rescue Consultation,  
4 NW, Fry Building,  
2 Marsham Street,  
London,  
SW1P 4DF.

If you are responding via email or in writing, please make it clear which questions you are responding to. It would also be very useful if you confirm whether you are replying as an individual or submitting an official response on behalf of an organisation, and include:

- your name
- your position (if applicable)
- the name of your organisation (if applicable)
- an address (including postcode)
- an email address; and
- a contact telephone number.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this consultation. Your views will help shape and enhance the design of the College of Fire and Rescue.

## About this Consultation

This consultation document and consultation process have been planned to adhere to the consultation principles issued by the Cabinet Office.

Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent, and where relevant, who else they have consulted in reaching their conclusions when they respond.

Information provided in response to this consultation may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes: these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and UK data protection legislation. In certain circumstances, this may include personal data when required by law.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, as a public authority, the department is bound by the information access regimes and may therefore be obliged to disclose all or some of the information you provide. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your computer system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the department.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will at all times process your personal data in accordance with UK data protection legislation. In the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties. A full privacy notice is included below.

Once you have reviewed this consultation, if you are not satisfied that it has followed the consultation principles or you have any other observations about how we can improve the process, please contact us via the complaints procedure<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-local-government/about/complaints-procedure>

# Personal Data

This section explains your rights and gives you the information you are entitled to under UK data protection legislation.

Please note that this section only refers to personal data (your name, contact details and any other information that relates to you or another identified or identifiable individual personally). It is not applicable to the other aspects of your response to the consultation.

## 1. The identity of the data controller and contact details of the Data Protection Officer

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is the data controller. The Data Protection Officer can be contacted at:

[dataprotection@communities.gov.uk](mailto:dataprotection@communities.gov.uk)

or by writing to the following address:

Data Protection Officer  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF.

## 2. Why we are collecting your personal data

Your personal data is being collected as an essential part of the consultation process, so that we can contact you regarding your response and for statistical purposes. We may also use it to contact you about related matters.

We will collect your IP address if you complete a consultation online. We may use this to ensure that each person only completes a survey once. We will not use this data for any other purpose.

### Sensitive types of personal data

Respondents should refrain from sharing personal or special category data outside of the administrative questions in the Citizen Space questionnaire.

Please do not share special category personal data or criminal offence data if we have not asked for this unless absolutely necessary for the purposes of your consultation response. By 'special category personal data', we mean information about a living individual's:

- race;
- ethnic origin;
- political opinions;
- religious or philosophical beliefs;

- trade union membership;
- genetics;
- biometrics;
- health (including disability-related information);
- sex life; or
- sexual orientation.

By ‘criminal offence data’, we mean information relating to a living individual’s criminal convictions or offences or related security measures.

### **3. Our legal basis for processing your personal data**

The collection of your personal data is lawful under article 6(1)(e) of the UK General Data Protection Regulation as it is necessary for the performance by MHCLG of a task in the public interest/in the exercise of official authority vested in the data controller. Section 8(d) of the Data Protection Act 2018 states that this will include processing of personal data that is necessary for the exercise of a function of the Crown, a Minister of the Crown or a government department i.e. in this case a consultation.

Where necessary for the purposes of this consultation, our lawful basis for the processing of any special category personal data or ‘criminal offence’ data (terms explained under ‘Sensitive Types of Data’) which you submit in response to this consultation is as follows. The relevant lawful basis for the processing of special category personal data is Article 9(2)(g) UK GDPR (‘substantial public interest’), and Schedule 1 paragraph 6 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (‘statutory etc and government purposes’). The relevant lawful basis in relation to personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences data is likewise provided by Schedule 1 paragraph 6 of the Data Protection Act 2018.

### **4. With whom we will be sharing your personal data**

MHCLG may appoint a data processor, acting on behalf of the department and under our instruction, to help analyse the responses to this consultation. Where we do so, we will ensure that the processing of your personal data remains in strict accordance with the requirements of the data protection legislation.

Your responses may be processed by artificial intelligence (AI) to analyse the responses to the consultation more efficiently. These tools assist in identifying and mapping themes in consultation responses, **but do not make decisions** and all outputs are reviewed by staff for accuracy and reliability. Where data is processed by AI, MHCLG will take reasonable and proportionate steps to remove personal data from the consultation responses before using an AI tool but this cannot be guaranteed. Respondents should refrain from sharing personal or special category data outside of the administrative questions in the Citizen Space questionnaire. The AI tool processes data securely and does not copy or share data. The data will only be accessed and used by those authorised to do so. Data used in AI tools is not used for training the AI model.

MHCLG will take steps to check AI outputs for accuracy and identify and eliminate bias.

### **5. How long we will keep your personal data for**

Your personal data will be held for two years from the closure of the consultation, unless we identify that its continued retention is unnecessary before that point.

## **6. Your rights**

The data we are collecting is your personal data, and you have considerable say over what happens to it. You have the right:

- to see what data we have about you
- to ask us to stop using your data, but keep it on record
- to ask to have your data corrected if it is incorrect or incomplete
- to object to our use of your personal data in certain circumstances
- to lodge a complaint with the independent Information Commissioner (ICO) if you think we are not handling your data fairly or in accordance with the law.

You can contact the ICO at <https://ico.org.uk/>, or telephone 0303 123 1113.

Please contact us at the following address if you wish to exercise the rights listed above, except the right to lodge a complaint with the ICO:

[dataprotection@communities.gov.uk](mailto:dataprotection@communities.gov.uk)

or at

Knowledge and Information Access Team  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF.

**7. Your personal data will not be sent overseas.**

**8. Your personal data will not be used for any automated decision-making.**

**9. Your personal data will be stored in a secure government IT system.**

We use a third-party system, Citizen Space, to collect consultation responses. In the first instance your personal data will be stored on their secure UK-based server. Your personal data will be transferred to our secure government IT system as soon as possible, and it will be stored there for two years before it is deleted.

## Foreword from the Secretary of State

On the day this consultation is published, it will be close to nine years since the tragic night of 14 June 2017, when the terrible events at Grenfell Tower took the lives of 72 innocent people. It was an entirely preventable national tragedy.

Government remains determined to do right by the bereaved, survivors and residents of the Grenfell community who were so profoundly impacted. As part of this, we must make sure we deliver meaningful and long-lasting change to improve the lives of all residents across the country.

The Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry reports, published in 2019 and 2024, exposed the deep systemic failures that contributed to the fire.<sup>2</sup> They also created a clear and unambiguous mandate for change across the entire fire and building safety system. Every member of the public deserves to feel safe and secure in their home, especially from the threat of fire. We must and will do better. The status quo is not an option: we will deliver the fundamental change required. We owe this to the Grenfell community, to the country and to the memory of those who lost their lives.

The government has accepted all findings from the Inquiry's final report and is taking forward all recommendations. We have already made strong progress towards this. At the point of publication of this consultation document, 19 of the 58 Phase 2 recommendations are complete, as well as two outstanding recommendations from the Phase 1 report. This includes implementing requirements that will provide greater safety to disabled residents in high-rise residential buildings. You can find the latest reports setting out our progress against the recommendations on gov.uk.<sup>3</sup>

But delivering the recommendations alone will not be enough. Grenfell exposed fundamental weaknesses: fragmented responsibilities, inconsistent standards, and unacceptable variation in professional practice. We must address these underlying causes if we are to create a system the public can trust.

Recent advancements include changes to the Building Safety Regulator to strengthen oversight and improve the way in which safety responsibilities are being carried out across the built environment. These reforms support our commitment to a regulatory system that is more consistent, better integrated and capable of adapting to future needs. The Single Construction Regulator prospectus published in December 2025 sought views on potential further steps towards reducing fragmentation and improving competence across the sector.<sup>4</sup> We are also consulting this spring on proposals to strengthen and professionalise the fire risk assessor sector, including measures to improve competence and consistency.<sup>5</sup>

We have already implemented the Inquiry's recommendation to bring responsibility for building safety policy and fire policy under one department and have set out this government's intentions for fire and rescue reform over the course of this Parliament. Our

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<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report)

<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/collections/grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-government-progress-reports](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-government-progress-reports)

<sup>4</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/single-construction-regulator-prospectus](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/single-construction-regulator-prospectus)

<sup>5</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fire-risk-assessors-profession/fire-risk-assessors-profession](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fire-risk-assessors-profession/fire-risk-assessors-profession)

reform programme includes updating the Fire and Rescue National Framework and exploring changes to the role of the fire and rescue authority so our fire and rescue services are enabled to prepare for and respond to new and emerging threats.

The College of Fire and Rescue, another Inquiry recommendation, is the cornerstone of this reform programme. This consultation marks a significant step forward in its development. The establishment of the college will be a watershed moment for the fire and rescue service. The case for a national college is clear: professional development, leadership pathways, and the adoption of evidence-based practice vary significantly across the country. A stronger, more consistent system is essential if we are to raise standards everywhere and ensure the public receives the same level of service regardless of where they live.

Since the publication of the Inquiry report, this government has worked with fire and rescue leaders to understand how the College of Fire and Rescue could contribute to strengthening sector professionalisation and competence. I would particularly like to thank the members of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Fire and Rescue Reform: their knowledge and guidance have been invaluable for the development of this consultation.

I would also like to express my thanks to our colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for their continued engagement. We remain open and eager to share our learning, while recognising that fire is ultimately a devolved matter and so each government will continue to shape its approach to reflect its own needs.

This consultation invites views on the potential form and functions of the College of Fire and Rescue. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on how we can make the college a success. Through your feedback, we can shape the college into a leading national institution that sets high standards for the fire and rescue sector. It may take time to realise its fullest potential, and we will certainly need to make adjustments and improvements along the way to ensure we get it right, but we intend to deliver this much-needed reform.

By doing so, we honour the memory of those who lost their lives at Grenfell and help make sure such a tragedy can never happen again.

**The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP**

**Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government**

# Foreword from the Minister for Building Safety, Fire and Democracy

The fire and rescue sector plays a vital role in protecting communities, and it is essential that the systems that support it evolve to meet changing risks and public expectations. My focus is on building a more coherent and accountable building and fire safety system, supported by clear professional standards and modern regulation.

This reflects the wider programme of reforms the government is taking forward in response to lessons identified by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.<sup>6</sup> Our programme for reform seeks to ensure the fire and rescue service has the tools and support it needs to adapt to the risks and priorities of today and for the future. This will be achieved through greater joint working across the fire and rescue sector to better understand risk and demand, and delivered through a diverse, highly capable workforce that enables continuous improvement.

The proposal to establish the College of Fire and Rescue is a core part of this reform work. Fire and rescue services have long highlighted the need for greater alignment in training, leadership development and professional learning. A national college offers a practical way to accelerate and embed those goals by providing a clear structure for consistent implementation. It will bring together core functions the sector has identified as necessary, including setting and maintaining national training and leadership standards, coordinating high quality learning and development pathways, and updating competency frameworks. The college will also act as a central organisation for accreditation, quality assurance and sector-wide guidance, as well as offering specialist training in emerging and high-risk areas. Over time, it will support research, evaluation and continuous improvement to help services adopt best practice and respond confidently to new challenges.

Across the country we have seen the benefits that modern training facilities bring, supporting specialist capability and improving operational resilience. A national College of Fire and Rescue could build on these assets by making full use of existing facilities alongside flexible virtual platforms, ensuring learning is accessible to all staff regardless of location and supporting a more inclusive approach to development. This consultation also takes account of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's recommendation to establish a college with clear functions and a defined structure. Your insight will be essential in shaping a college that reflects the needs of the sector, supports long-term resilience and contributes to the highest standards of public safety.

I am grateful to the many partners from across the fire and rescue sector who have already contributed their insight to shape the early development of these proposals. Their perspectives represent the breadth and diversity of the sector, and their input has helped ensure these proposals are grounded in practical experience. As we move into this consultation, we are now seeking further detailed views and insights to refine and develop our approach.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report)

I encourage all who wish to help shape the future of fire and rescue to share their views through this consultation.

**Samantha Dixon MBE MP**

**Minister for Building Safety, Fire and Democracy**

# Introduction

On 15 June 2017, in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, the then Prime Minister announced there would be a public inquiry to examine the cause and establish the facts surrounding the fire.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry, which was chaired by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, was split into two parts. The first phase examined the events that took place on the night of the fire, including how the fire started, how it spread and the emergency services' response. Evidence was gathered through a seven-month hearing in 2018, and the findings were published in October 2019. The Phase 1 report made 44 recommendations to fire and rescue services (FRSs), other emergency services and government, particularly relating to the building and fire safety sectors, in order to remedy the failings identified.<sup>7</sup>

The second phase of the Inquiry examined how the building was so seriously exposed to the risk of fire, the adequacy and role of fire safety legislation and building regulations, and the response in the first seven days after the fire. The Phase 2 report was published in September 2024, and the full government response was published in February 2025.<sup>8</sup>

The Inquiry identified a number of institutional failings in the fire and rescue service. The Phase 2 report identified potential improvements to be made in relation to the training offer for firefighters and control room staff, approaches to training and assessing incident commanders, implementing lessons learned from previous incidents, and ensuring control room staff are effectively integrated into services.

The Phase 2 report made a total of 58 recommendations to address the Inquiry's findings. One recommendation was for the government to establish an independent national College of Fire and Rescue; a central body equipped to provide education and training across the board to nationally approved standards. In its response to the report, the government accepted the recommendation in principle and announced its intention to consult on the most appropriate functions, structure and delivery model for the college. This consultation seeks views on these questions to inform the college's design.

The government's 2024 manifesto committed to working with fire and rescue sector partners to inform policy. To deliver this we established the Ministerial Advisory Group on Fire and Rescue Reform (MAGFRR). Bringing together sector leaders and partners, the group has developed a shared vision for a reformed fire and rescue sector and endorsed four reform priorities for government during this Parliament, including the College of Fire and Rescue.

In March 2025, a task and finish group (TFG) dedicated to the College of Fire and Rescue was established through the MAGFRR. The TFG brings together sector leaders and experts from within and beyond the MAGFRR to develop proposals on the form and functions of the college.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report)

<sup>8</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report);  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report-government-response](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report-government-response)

The TFG met on seven occasions between March 2025 and the launch of this consultation, undertaking focused sessions on the college's potential functions, delivery models and funding options. The proposals in this consultation have been closely informed by TFG members' collective advice and guidance.

Although responsibility for fire and rescue is devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we are keen to explore whether and how the college's outputs could be accessible to fire and rescue sector organisations and staff outside England. We have engaged extensively with our colleagues in the devolved nations, and will continue to do so as we shape the design and implementation of the college.

References in this consultation to an independent national College of Fire and Rescue relate to the establishment of a new, sector-specific body focused on professional development, training, standards and research for the fire and rescue sector. The proposed College of Fire and Rescue would be distinct from the further education sector.

# Our Vision for Change

## Why do we need a new College of Fire and Rescue?

Approaches to professional, operational and leadership practice differ across the 44 FRSs in England. While some variation in operational expertise is expected as a result of different local risk profiles, several aspects of service management could benefit from greater consistency across the sector. Service leaders are not currently trained to and assessed against the same benchmarks; training for firefighters is not widely quality assured; and there is no standardised approach for identifying sector-wide research priorities, disseminating findings and ensuring that any subsequent changes in best practice are consistently implemented.

Organisations such as the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and Fire Standards Board (FSB) have taken steps to help increase consistency across the sector since their establishment in 2017 and 2019 respectively. However, there remains a case that some national functions needed to support the professionalisation of fire and rescue would be best delivered by an independent organisation that would carry out these functions as its primary role. The College of Fire and Rescue could build on existing foundations to help raise standards further, strengthen the professional development offer for the fire and rescue sector workforce, and improve service delivery outcomes for the public.

There is broad cross-sector support for the creation of an independent college: 75% of respondents to the previous government's 2022 white paper on reforming the fire and rescue service either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to establish a college to lead the professionalisation of the sector, and members of the College of Fire and Rescue TFG have also expressed broad support for the idea.<sup>9</sup>

Previous reviews of the fire and rescue sector have also consistently highlighted the need for an independent professional body to lead reform efforts and promote best practice. For example, the 2002 Independent Review of the Fire Service advocated for the establishment of a new body to determine strategic principles for FRSs, provide technical expertise, undertake research, set standards for delivery and create links between individual services.<sup>10</sup> The 2010 Fire Futures Review predominantly argued in favour of a localised approach but suggested the government should create a national body with responsibility for horizon scanning, knowledge management, service standards, equality and diversity, shared procurement activity and workforce development.<sup>11</sup> More recently, the 2023 'Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services' spotlight report and 2023-24 State of Fire and Rescue report by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) suggested a college could nurture future leaders, promote consistency, set national standards, develop professional practice and help

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<sup>9</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service/outcome/response-to-the-fire-reform-white-paper-accessible-version](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service/outcome/response-to-the-fire-reform-white-paper-accessible-version)

<sup>10</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20060821205527/http://www.irfs.org.uk/docs/future/index.htm>

<sup>11</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136129/empowering\\_and\\_protecting.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136129/empowering_and_protecting.pdf)

embed values and culture across FRSs.<sup>12</sup> HMICFRS' 2024-25 State of Fire and Rescue report also stated that 'to help support reform and professionalise the sector, it is critical to establish a College of Fire and Rescue.'<sup>13</sup>

For the purposes of this consultation, references to the functions of the College of Fire and Rescue relate to activity that would take place in England. This is because responsibility for fire and rescue is devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and FRSs in each of these nations have their own governance structures, operational arrangements and professional frameworks. However, we envisage fire and rescue services and authorities in all parts of the UK would be able to access the college's outputs and resources, and those operating outside England would be free to determine which, if any, elements of the college's offer they may wish to engage with or adopt. We will continue to work closely with the devolved governments as the policy develops in order to ensure our approach remains aligned where appropriate and supports collaboration across national boundaries.

## **What should a successful College of Fire and Rescue seek to achieve?**

Through extensive engagement with key sector partners, we have developed a set of proposed strategic aims for the college. These build on the detailed recommendations made by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry regarding the college's potential scope, and incorporate areas where we could potentially go further to fully grasp the opportunities the establishment of the college could offer.<sup>14</sup>

The core strategic aims for a College of Fire and Rescue could include:

- **Leading the continued professionalisation of fire and rescue by increasing the consistency of both standards and training** across fire and rescue services and fire and rescue authorities (FRAs). This will help strengthen performance and improve outcomes, as well as enhancing staff engagement, public trust and the safety of both firefighters and the public.
- **Improving leadership development for fire and rescue staff at all levels**, ensuring consistency across services and authorities, that senior FRS and FRA leaders are equipped with the skills they need to address the strategic challenges facing the sector, and that effective pathways are in place for supporting progression into senior leadership.
- **Improving the sector's culture** by promoting and embedding positive behaviour, integrity and professionalism at all levels.
- **Promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of fire and rescue sector staff.**

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<sup>12</sup> <https://assets-hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/uploads/values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services.pdf>; <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/publication-html/state-of-fire-and-rescue-annual-assessment-2023/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/publication-html/annual-assessment-of-fire-and-rescue-services-in-england-2024-25/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d818059084b18b95709f86/CCS0923434692-004\\_GTI\\_Phase\\_2\\_Volume\\_7\\_BOOKMARKED.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d818059084b18b95709f86/CCS0923434692-004_GTI_Phase_2_Volume_7_BOOKMARKED.pdf)

- **Promoting high-quality research and data** from any relevant sectors in the UK and internationally, ensuring that actionable findings can be consistently translated into best practice across FRSs.
- **Enhancing multi-agency interoperability** by creating opportunities for emergency services to communicate and coordinate more effectively, especially by sharing learning and understanding of risks. This would help strengthen best practice, reduce duplication and support improved outcomes for the public.

We have identified seven potential functions that would provide the college with the practical foundations to bring about real change and enable it to achieve these core aims. These functions are:

- **Leadership and Command.** The college could help ensure core leadership skills, values and behaviours are embedded at all levels of seniority and strengthen the quality, consistency and effectiveness of command training.
- **Recruitment and Training.** The college could set more consistent training standards for fire and rescue sector staff, enhance and quality assure the sector's training offer, set consistent standards for entry into the fire and rescue profession, and offer advice and guidance to support effective recruitment by individual FRSs.
- **National Standards.** Building on the foundations laid by the FSB, the college could develop and maintain national standards for the fire and rescue sector and support services and authorities to implement them consistently.
- **Research and Data.** This function could help promote high-quality research, horizon scan to identify new and evolving risks, ensure that relevant domestic and international evidence is disseminated across the sector, and support services to act on new findings.
- **Culture and Integrity.** The college could offer support and guidance on approaches for embedding a positive working culture across the sector. It could also host a barred list to prevent employees dismissed for gross misconduct from applying for new roles in other FRSs.
- **Health, Safety and Wellbeing.** The college could provide access to physical and mental wellbeing support for fire and rescue sector staff, share best practice and promote awareness of guidance on issues relating to health and wellbeing, such as suicide prevention. It could also offer cost efficiencies through centralised procurement of mandatory health and safety training that is undertaken by staff in every FRS.
- **Assurance.** This function would oversee areas of the college's activity, checking they are applied consistently and meet expected quality standards. It would seek to provide proportionate assurance that offers value for money, strengthens coherence and avoids overlap with the roles of other organisations across the sector.

The next sections of this consultation document discuss each of these potential functions in greater depth.

To offer value for the sector and the public, we would need to do more than simply transfer existing NFCC work into a new organisation. By building on the platform provided by existing work across the sector and delivering some or all of the functions set out in this consultation, the new College of Fire and Rescue could bring clear and lasting benefits. By strengthening leadership capability at all levels and supporting more consistent recruitment and training, the college could help build a confident, skilled and professional workforce. Through its national standards and research and data functions, it could support more consistent implementation of best practice, leading to improved firefighter safety and more reliable services for communities. A focus on culture, integrity and wellbeing would promote a healthier and more supportive working environment, while a strong assurance function would help ensure improvements are applied consistently and provide better value for money across the sector.

## Questions

- 1) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college's strategic aims should include:
  - a) Supporting services and authorities to consistently deliver against national professional standards for the fire and rescue sector?  
Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know
  - b) Increasing the consistency of training across the sector?  
Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know
  - c) Improving leadership development for fire and rescue staff at all levels?  
Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know
  - d) Strengthening the sector's culture by promoting and embedding positive behaviour, integrity and professionalism at all levels?  
Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know
  - e) Promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of fire and rescue sector staff?  
Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know
  - f) Promoting high-quality research, data and good practice?  
Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know
  - g) Enhancing multi-agency interoperability across emergency services?  
Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

- 2) Are there any comments you would like to offer to explain the rationale for your responses to questions 1a-1g?
- 3) Are there any other guiding principles that you would like to see captured in the college's overarching strategic aims?
- 4) Are there any additional functions that you think a college would need to fulfil in order to effectively deliver against the proposed strategic aims and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's recommendations?

# Leadership and Command

This chapter sets out the potential role the College of Fire and Rescue could play in strengthening leadership and incident command training and in improving national alignment across the sector. It also outlines possible approaches, including closer working alongside academia, to support the development of staff in these areas. This matters because effective and consistent leadership and command are essential for safe and effective decision-making during complex incidents.

## The Current Landscape

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendation to establish a College of Fire and Rescue did not explicitly identify leadership as one of its proposed functions. However, it is clear that leadership should be treated as a distinct area of focus. Sector partners have consistently highlighted the fundamental role that empowering, professional leadership plays in ensuring effective, efficient and well-run FRSs.

Leadership is relevant at all levels in the fire and rescue service, not just at senior levels. The NFCC website's Leadership Development page states:

'Anyone who supports, inspires, and influences others is demonstrating leadership. It is not limited to senior roles, good leadership exists at every level and in every role within the fire and rescue service. Each of us is responsible for promoting and displaying the right behaviours, ensuring we deliver the best service to our communities.'<sup>15</sup>

We also recognise the importance of incident command as a distinct entity. While the Grenfell Tower Inquiry did not specifically recommend this as a potential function of the college, it identified systemic leadership issues during complex, rapidly evolving incidents and produced a series of incident response recommendations. The Inquiry observed that senior commanders would benefit from enhancing their capability in applying national incident command guidance, maintaining effective operational oversight, adapting strategic decisions as situations evolve, and supporting clear and reliable communication between the incident ground and Fire Control.

## The Potential Role of a College of Fire and Rescue

We consider that the college could play an important role in helping to ensure incident management is effectively and consistently carried out at all levels, from routine day-to-day emergency call attendance to large scale, less frequent but higher impact incidents. Effective command and leadership are relevant across the workforce, supporting staff at every level to apply sound judgement, coordinate others and maintain safe working practices. We are therefore consulting on a college function covering both leadership and command.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://nfcc.org.uk/working-in-the-fire-sector/career-pathways/leadership-development/>

This section of the consultation focuses specifically on training for leadership and command. More generalist training is covered in the later section on training in the round (pages 24-27).

## **Leadership**

The NFCC offers a wide range of leadership development programmes for staff at all levels, including supervisory, middle and executive leadership pathways delivered in partnership with recognised professional bodies. Further information on the full leadership offer is provided in Annex A.

The establishment of the College of Fire and Rescue offers an opportunity to enhance leadership development across the sector by creating a more consistent offer for staff at every level. While the NFCC already offers a suite of leadership programmes, these are voluntary and vary in their delivery model. The college could build on this foundation by developing a more integrated and accessible leadership offer, introducing more blended pathways that combine virtual and classroom-based learning to promote interaction and shared development between services whilst retaining an online only option to ensure training is accessible to all.

There is a clear opportunity for the college to build on the positive work of the NFCC by providing leadership training across all levels and setting national leadership training standards. Establishing consistent standards would ensure that all staff receive a comparable level of development and support regardless of the FRS they work in, helping to raise leadership capability across the sector and contribute to a more confident, professional and well supported workforce. The college would also be responsible for driving the implementation and monitoring of the NFCC leadership framework, which sets out the competence requirements for leaders at all levels, and would play a critical role in shaping a consistent approach to programme design, content, delivery, quality, learner assessment and evaluation.

## **Command**

Fire and rescue services currently access a range of training that supports fire officers in their operational command roles, although much of it is delivered through individual services rather than a single national system. A range of external providers currently deliver command training that spans the four levels of incident command based on NFCC operational guidance. Courses may offer accredited and scenario-based development to support officers at each stage of command responsibility. It is essential this training continues to align with, and ensure the operability of, the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP).<sup>16</sup> More information on command training is provided at Annex B.

The NFCC provides incident command guidance and foundational knowledge that is translated into training courses by external providers and individual services. The national programmes delivered through the NFCC help to further develop the knowledge and skills needed to operate in roles involving command responsibilities, but are primarily

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<sup>16</sup> [www.jesip.org.uk/joint-doctrine/principles-for-joint-working/](http://www.jesip.org.uk/joint-doctrine/principles-for-joint-working/)

leadership-focused rather than providing dedicated command training. Together, these opportunities support officers at different levels, but they vary in approach and availability, meaning there is no single, consistent national route to developing command competence.

Academic research also plays a role in improving various forms of fire and rescue staff training, especially in relation to command. An example of this is THINCS<sup>17</sup> (The Incident Command Skills), which is a behavioural marker system used to assess and develop the command skills of incident commanders.<sup>18</sup> This was developed by Cardiff University and Dr. Sabrina Cohen-Hatton (current Chief Fire Officer at Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRS) in conjunction with the NFCC. It directly correlates with national operational guidance for incident command and reflects work done to identify the specific non-technical command skills applicable to UK commanders in an FRS context. It also complements existing associated operational training specifications.

We consider there is clear value in the college playing a role in incident command training, at a minimum by setting consistent national standards and course content and by creating stronger partnerships with academia to support continuous improvement. There may also be scope for the college to carry out elements of command training directly, promoting shared learning and greater interoperability across FRSs.

## Conclusion

Through our engagement with sector partners, it has become clear that the college could play a significant role in developing professional leadership and command training across the fire and rescue service. These insights have helped shape the college's emerging priorities by highlighting the importance of building strong leaders and ensuring officers receive the right training to make sound decisions during incidents of any scale or degree of complexity.

In both leadership and command, academia can play an important role in strengthening learning content and approaches, drawing on research and evidence to provide insights into particular areas of such training that could be developed and strengthened. This model is well established in other professional settings, such as the UK Defence Academy, which partners with Cranfield University and University College London.<sup>19</sup>

We have treated leadership and command as a distinct function of the college. However, we recognise the natural links to the separate training and recruitment section of the consultation, as developing effective leaders and incident commanders is closely connected to how staff are trained and recruited into the service.

We welcome your views on the proposals in this chapter, including any opportunities or challenges we should consider. We are also keen to hear any relevant experience or evidence that could help shape the college's future leadership and incident command offer.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://thinCS.uk>;

<sup>18</sup> <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/129607/14/THINCS%20System%20Users%20Guide%20v1.7.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> [www.da.mod.uk/what-we-do](http://www.da.mod.uk/what-we-do)

## Questions

- 5) How important is it for the college to play a national role in developing **leadership** training across fire and rescue services?

Very important / Fairly important / Not very important / Not at all important / Don't know

- 6) How important is it for the college to play a national role in developing **command** training across fire and rescue services?

Very important / Fairly important / Not very important / Not at all important / Don't know

- 7) Which approach do you think the college should take in delivering **leadership** training, recognising that the college would continue to set and maintain national standards for leadership?

- a) The college runs all leadership training directly.
- b) The college runs all initial leadership training, with refresher training and ongoing professional development delivered regionally by services.
- c) The college sets national standards, but all leadership training is delivered at regional level.
- d) None of the above.

- 8) Which of the following approaches do you think the college should take in delivering **command** training?

- a) The college runs all command training directly.
- b) The college runs all initial command training, with refresher training and ongoing professional development delivered regionally by services.
- c) The college sets national standards, but all command training is delivered at regional level.
- d) None of the above.

- 9) What improvements, if any, do you feel are needed to the current leadership training offer?

- 10) What role should the college play in creating a more consistent national approach to command training? This training would ensure senior officers are prepared for managing routine responses to major incidents.

# Recruitment and Training

This section of the consultation explores how a national College of Fire and Rescue could strengthen both recruitment and training across the fire and rescue sector while preserving essential local flexibility. It sets out the current landscape, identifies challenges such as inconsistent entry standards and variation in training quality, and outlines how the college could help mitigate these. The section also seeks views on the appropriate balance between national consistency and locally delivered training, and on how the college could support fair, inclusive and high-quality recruitment and ongoing professional development.

For the purposes of this consultation, we are considering recruitment and training separately. Recruitment is a time-limited process that applies either to entry into the service or to internal candidate progression, whereas training includes both the initial preparation required for operational readiness and the ongoing development that continues throughout a firefighter or staff member's career.

## Recruitment

### The Current Landscape

As part of this consultation we are exploring whether a national College of Fire and Rescue could help improve the way firefighters are recruited. A national body could set consistent entry standards and define clear pathways into the profession: this would be similar to the model used in policing, where national recruitment standards ensure applicants meet shared expectations across forces. In policing, a national sift takes place which is comprised of two assessments:

- a Situational Judgement Test, which evaluates a candidate's decision making in scenarios relevant to the role; and
- a Behavioural Styles Questionnaire, which assesses typical workplace behaviours and preferences.<sup>20</sup>

A college could develop comprehensive and standardised assessment tools, drawing on assessment processes already used in policing and tailored to the requirements of the fire and rescue sector. It could also provide clear national guidance so every FRA and FRS can run fair, inclusive and evidence-based recruitment. This will help support a high-quality workforce that reflects the communities FRAs and FRSs serve. By setting strong expectations, monitoring fairness, and helping services identify and remove barriers for underrepresented groups, the college would mirror the benefits of national recruitment guidance seen elsewhere in the public safety sector and ensure FRA and FRS recruitment practices are on a par with the best in the public sector.

However, we do not intend that the College of Fire and Rescue would replace local autonomy. Local services would continue to run recruitment campaigns, determine workforce needs, and in the majority of cases make final hiring decisions (noting the read-

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<sup>20</sup> [www.joiningthepolice.co.uk/application-process/get-ready-to-apply/what-does-the-sift-involve](http://www.joiningthepolice.co.uk/application-process/get-ready-to-apply/what-does-the-sift-involve)

across to the barred list discussed in the culture and integrity chapter of this document). The potential role of the college would be to guide, support and provide national consistency.

This consultation seeks views on which powers and responsibilities the College of Fire and Rescue should have to strengthen recruitment procedures while preserving local flexibility.

## Questions

11) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the College of Fire and Rescue should play a part in the recruitment process across fire and rescue services?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

12) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the College of Fire and Rescue should set national entry standards for new firefighters?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

13) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the College of Fire and Rescue should develop national assessment tools, such as situational judgement tests, fitness standards and values-based assessments?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

14) What specific competencies, behaviours, or qualifications should a national set of entry standards include?

15) How could the College of Fire and Rescue provide national consistency in recruitment while still allowing fire and rescue authorities to retain their local autonomy?

16) What role do you think a national college could play in supporting internal recruitment and progression within the fire and rescue service?

## Training

In this consultation, we are considering other aspects of training separately from leadership and command while still recognising the links between them. Training covers a wide range of areas including core operational skills, specialisms and workplace-related issues relevant to fire and rescue sector staff. Leadership and command relate to the additional responsibilities involved in managing people and incidents. Separating these areas helps ensure that their specific needs, challenges and improvement opportunities can be examined more clearly.

## The Current Landscape

Fire and rescue services across the country play a vital role in safeguarding communities. To do this safely and effectively, fire and rescue personnel must receive high-quality training and maintain the skills needed to respond to emergencies.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires FRAs to ensure their staff are trained, but it does not prescribe how training should be delivered and to what standard.<sup>21</sup> This has led to variation in the delivery and consistency of training across the country. For example, new firefighter training courses run by individual services vary significantly in their content and duration, even after accounting for specific local needs.

Most services currently align their training to the national operational guidance produced by the NFCC: this provides a comprehensive foundation for operational learning across the sector, although its adoption remains voluntary and is not subject to formal external audit.<sup>22</sup> Some services may use alternative or legacy frameworks, which can lead to variation in approaches to training and competence across the country.

There are also wider forms of learning associated with the workplace, including the skills and awareness needed to create a positive culture and constructive behaviours within FRSs while also supporting staff wellbeing and resilience.

A national college could provide a consistent baseline standard that supports greater coherence across the system while retaining a degree of flexibility for services to incorporate their local contexts as appropriate. Discussions at the College of Fire and Rescue TFG highlighted the need for clearer and more consistent national training standards, strengthened assurance mechanisms, and updated competency frameworks that reflect emerging risks such as those posed by lithium batteries. They also stressed the need for a mechanism to update these frameworks quickly when significant changes or new issues arise. The group emphasised that raising the standard and consistency of training across the sector would increase public safety, improve sector resilience and increase public confidence.

More consistent national training standards would also support greater workforce mobility by enabling firefighters to move more easily between FRSs across England. This would reduce barriers created by local variation in roles, training and competence requirements. Over time, this could broaden career opportunities, support skills development and help services respond more flexibly to workforce pressures.

Establishing a more standardised national approach to training would require careful consideration of available facilities, opportunities for digital delivery, professional expertise, accreditation and financial sustainability. A detailed understanding of current capacity, potential demand and opportunities for joint working will also be important in shaping any future model.

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<sup>21</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents)

<sup>22</sup> <https://nfcc.org.uk/our-services/national-operational-guidance/>

## The Potential Role of a College of Fire and Rescue

We acknowledge that there will need to be a balance between training delivered locally and training provided directly by the college. New firefighter and other forms of practical operational training should continue to be delivered by individual FRSs. This would ensure such training reflects local risks, equipment and operational practice.

This consultation seeks views on how best to balance national consistency with essential local aspects of training, and how operational and specialist development can be strengthened across the sector. To deliver these outcomes, we envisage that the college could play a role in five areas:

- **National Training Standards and Frameworks.** This could involve developing and maintaining clear national training and competency frameworks, ensuring these frameworks align with existing national guidance and standards, and keeping the frameworks up to date as risks, technology and community needs change.
- **Approval and Accreditation.** The college could approve or accredit training programmes and providers, set clear expectations for the quality of training, and offer a recognised national quality mark so FRSs are aware when training meets agreed standards.
- **Assurance and Continuous Improvement.** The college could provide assurance of training courses, help services renew and strengthen their training arrangements, and share good practice, lessons from incidents and wider sector learning.
- **Leadership and Professional Development.** The college could support the development of national leadership pathways, promote the recognition of qualifications across different services, encourage career progression and help improve mobility across the fire and rescue sector workforce.
- **A Training Knowledge Centre.** This could serve as a central source of expertise on training, supporting FRSs and FRAs across several areas.

If a training function were to be established within the College of Fire and Rescue, we would also need to consider how FRSs could demonstrate alignment with any training frameworks it produces. This will include considering what evidence of compliance would look like, how adherence to national training standards should be recorded, and whether services would be required to adapt or benchmark their existing training provision against centrally produced products.

We recognise the clear links between any future college recruitment and training function and its leadership and command function, as the way staff are recruited, trained and developed forms the foundation on which effective leadership and confident incident command are built. A consistent, high-quality approach to recruitment and training therefore directly supports the college's wider aim of strengthening leadership and command capability across the fire and rescue sector.

We are seeking your views on how national training, assurance and development should be shaped to strengthen consistency while supporting the delivery of training at local level.

## Questions

17) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college should act as a national lead for training standards?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

18) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the College of Fire and Rescue should maintain a national definition of firefighter competence?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

19) To what extent do you agree or disagree that fire and rescue services should be required to demonstrate alignment with college-approved training frameworks?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

20) What role should a national college play in shaping and supporting firefighter training and competence across the country?

21) What would be the benefits and challenges of introducing a national accreditation system for training quality?

## National Standards

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 2 report stated that the responsibilities of a future College of Fire and Rescue should include 'developing national policies and standards to ensure the safety of firefighters and the public'.<sup>23</sup> The government's 2024 manifesto also highlighted the importance of such standards in underpinning effective service delivery by FRSs. A comprehensive framework of evidence-based standards can help improve consistency and performance across the fire and rescue sector, as well as boosting confidence in the services that it provides.

The establishment of a college therefore provides an opportunity to review the sector's approach to standards and consider how we can best build on existing work in this area. This chapter seeks views on what a future college standards function should look like, how the term 'national standards' could best be defined, and how the impact of these standards could be maximised.

For the purposes of this consultation, the term 'national standards' refers to professional and operational standards developed by a future college and applicable in England. However, as set out in the 'Our Vision for Change' section, we envisage that services and authorities in other parts of the UK would be able to choose whether to adopt any of the standards produced by the college.

### The Current Landscape

The standards currently in place across England are developed and maintained by the Fire Standards Board (FSB), which is led by an independent chair and receives administrative support from the NFCC.<sup>24</sup> The FSB has published an initial suite of 19 standards for FRSs to follow: these cover a range of topics relating to service leadership, operational competence and ethics.<sup>25</sup> Each standard is developed by a group of relevant subject matter experts, and is then subject to open consultation prior to publication. The standards are also regularly reviewed to ensure they remain accurate and up to date.

The standards developed by the FSB set out core principles for FRSs to follow and high level outcomes to aim for, but do not specify precise service delivery outcomes to be achieved: instead, they allow FRSs the flexibility to decide how best to meet the standards in their local areas. There is currently no legal requirement for FRSs to implement the standards, or for FRAs to assure themselves that their local services are doing so. However, the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, which sets out the government's priorities for FRAs and which they must have regard to when carrying out their functions, references the professional standards produced for the sector and states that HMICFRS will have regard to them as part of its inspections.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.firestandards.org/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.firestandards.org/standards/approved/>

<sup>26</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aec5974ed915d42f7c6bf18/National\\_Framework\\_-\\_final\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aec5974ed915d42f7c6bf18/National_Framework_-_final_for_web.pdf)

The standards are also complemented by the national operational guidance produced by the NFCC.<sup>27</sup> This guidance provides a technical knowledge base that supports incident commanders and firefighters to identify the risks posed by particular incident types and the most suitable mitigations for these. However, adoption of this guidance is voluntary and is not subject to formal external audit.

## The Potential Role of a College of Fire and Rescue

We envisage that the FSB's current functions would transfer to the college once it is established. The college would therefore be responsible for the development and maintenance of national standards, as well as supporting services to implement them. It could act as a central, trusted body that would bring together evidence and expertise to make sure the standards reflect national expectations, emerging risks and new learning from across the sector, as well as making a tangible difference to service delivery outcomes for the public.

We recognise there are diverse views across the sector on the most suitable and effective form for standards to take, particularly on questions such as whether they should be primarily **principles-based or outcome-focused**, the most appropriate **balance between service delivery standards and service management standards**, and the extent of the **flexibility that FRAs should have** to shape their response to the standards. Through this consultation, we are seeking views on how national standards could best be defined in order to maximise their benefits for both the sector and the public.

We will also need to consider the most appropriate legal status for the outputs of the college's standards function to have. While the current standards allow FRAs to determine how best to respond in light of the risk profiles in their local areas, mandatory national standards could provide greater consistency. We have identified two areas where mandatory national standards could be especially impactful:

- **Ethics.** The 2021 publication of the Core Code of Ethics for the sector was an important step forward in ensuring all FRSs develop and nurture a positive working culture. However, there is still work to do to fully embed the code and its principles across the sector. HMICFRS' State of Fire and Rescue report for 2024-25 stated that while the majority of services have incorporated the code into their work, some still need to make substantial improvements relating to workplace culture.<sup>28</sup> During HMICFRS' round three inspections, which took place from 2024-25, a quarter of FRSs in England (11 of 44) received a grade of 'requires improvement' with regard to how well they promote positive values and culture, with a further four services being graded as 'inadequate' in this area.<sup>29</sup> A college standards function could build on the current non-statutory code and accompanying FSB ethics standard to develop a statutory code of ethics for the sector.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://nfcc.org.uk/our-services/national-operational-guidance/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/annual-assessment-of-fire-and-rescue-services-in-england-2024-25/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/annual-assessment-of-fire-and-rescue-services-in-england-2024-25/>

- **Operational safety and best practice.** Where the college or wider sector identifies changes in operational best practice that are expected to lead to improved outcomes and reduced risk, the college could publish mandatory national standards on these topics. This could involve capturing some strands of the national operational guidance maintained by the NFCC in the form of mandatory national standards.

We therefore intend to provide the college with the power to publish mandatory national standards where appropriate. To give structure to this process, we would look to develop a framework of tests to be met before a standard could be made mandatory. The Secretary of State would also remain able to request that the college produces a mandatory standard on any topic that meets these thresholds, and as set out in the separate section on powers to direct and intervene in the running of the college (pages 47-50), may also have the power to direct the college to amend existing standards or create new ones. We envisage that the overall suite of standards published by the college would contain a mixture of mandatory and advisory standards.

To support the implementation of mandatory national standards, we could seek to place the requirement to follow them onto FRAs in England. This would form an important part of their role in holding chief fire officers to account for the exercise of their functions. Further work will be required to determine how any mandatory standards could be most effectively enforced, including whether this could appropriately form part of HMICFRS' inspection programme, whether this could be monitored by the college's assurance function, and how any mandatory standards could best be captured in the National Framework.

A national standards function would be closely linked to several of the college's other proposed areas of work. For example, we envisage that the research and data function would support the process of keeping national standards up to date by sharing information about emerging evidence and best practice. This document also refers to national standards in relation to training, both in broad terms and in the specific context of leadership and command. Depending on the model adopted for assessing the extent to which services are following any national standards produced by the college, there may also be a direct connection between the college's standards and assurance functions.

No decisions have yet been taken on the form that a college standards function should take or the legal powers that it should have. We are seeking your views to help us shape a comprehensive, high quality and transparent approach that strikes the right balance between consistency and local flexibility and enhances the overall effectiveness of the fire and rescue service.

## Questions

22) To what extent do you agree or disagree that a national standards function should be included as part of the college?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

23)How do you think the term 'national standards' could be defined to maximise the benefits of standards for the sector and the public?

24)To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college should be granted the power to publish mandatory standards?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

25)Please outline the reasons for your response.

26)To what extent do you agree or disagree that it would be helpful for a college to publish a mandatory standard relating to ethics?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

27)To what extent do you agree or disagree that it would be helpful for a college to publish mandatory standards relating to aspects of operational safety and best practice?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

28)Please outline any other standards you think should be made mandatory, and explain why you feel that making them mandatory would be more effective.

29)How do you think adherence to any mandatory national standards published by the college could be most effectively assured and enforced?

## Research and Data

Research and data are the backbone of evidence-based decision-making across the fire and rescue sector. They enable services to anticipate risks, allocate resources effectively, and continuously improve operational practices. Without a coherent, sector-wide framework, FRSs cannot fully harness the value of research and data to drive consistent improvement.

**Research** refers to the structured generation of evidence to inform policy, practice, training and strategic decisions.

**Data** refers to information collected and analysed by FRSs to support operations, performance monitoring and planning.

This consultation invites views on how a College of Fire and Rescue could help build a more consistent, modern, and effective approach to research and data collection and dissemination.

### The Current Landscape

#### Research

The Academic Collaboration, Evaluation and Research Group (ACER) brings together academics with an interest in fire and rescue research, supports prioritisation of research requests aligned to FRS priorities, and helps interpret emerging evidence for use across the sector.<sup>30</sup> Fire and rescue services also undertake applied research themselves, particularly evaluations of operational equipment and local studies relevant to service delivery. Other organisations, including representative bodies and parts of the private sector, also commission or carry out research to inform practice and understand risk.

Recent projects funded by government have focused on issues such as electric vehicle fires and personal protective equipment for firefighters, but there is no shared national process for prioritising or coordinating future research of this kind.

At present, there is no single standardised approach for how research should be conducted, shared or prioritised. Therefore, there is a risk of multiple FRSs and government undertaking similar or identical projects, with little sight of concurrent activity. Smaller services often lack the resources or expertise to commission or interpret research, creating an imbalanced system and resulting in rural or demographically distinct areas being underrepresented in sector-wide evidence. Furthermore, research is frequently driven by goodwill rather than structured governance, and priorities are often set locally without alignment to national objectives. This results in missed opportunities for joint working and innovation, and in some cases, services investing in solutions that have already been proven ineffective elsewhere.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://nfcc.org.uk/about/how-we-are-structured/organisational-learning/acer/>

## Data

Fire and rescue services are making greater use of predictive analytics to anticipate risk and target prevention activity, supported by emerging data management frameworks developed by the NFCC to improve data quality, governance and interoperability. Real-time data feeds relating to incident reporting, local risk information, weather systems and other public datasets are enhancing situational awareness and enabling more effective resource deployment. However, at the same time, the sector continues to face challenges, including fragmented data systems, inconsistent definitions and variable analytical capability across services.

The introduction of the Fire and Rescue Data Analysis Platform (FaRDaP) marks a significant step forward, providing a secure national system for consistent incident data capture and supporting operational intelligence, policy development and strategic planning.<sup>31</sup> FaRDaP is owned and run day-to-day by the MHCLG National Fire Data Collection team, who now operate the live national service supporting 48 FRSs across Great Britain. Together these developments reflect a sector moving towards a more coherent, high-quality and insight-driven data environment, while recognising the need for continued investment in capability, standards and national coordination.

The issues relating to data mirror those seen for research. Data collection and sharing remain decentralised across services, leading to inconsistent definitions and methods for similar metrics. Without standardised frameworks and governance, the sector cannot fully exploit advanced practices such as predictive analytics or real-time data integration. However, these ongoing challenges should be viewed alongside the progress made through the establishment of FaRDaP, which has significantly strengthened the quality and accessibility of data. This is particularly evident for incident statistics, which are comprehensive and continue to improve.

Fire and rescue services currently face challenges in establishing consistent data sharing agreements, largely due to differences in local governance arrangements and organisational priorities. This inconsistency makes it difficult to share information effectively across the sector and limits opportunities for joined-up analysis. There is a strong case for exploring centrally procured and maintained data sets, which would ensure equal access to high quality, standardised information for all services regardless of size or resources. A national approach to data sharing frameworks could reduce administrative burden, improve comparability, and enable better evidence-based decision-making across the sector.

## The Potential Role of a College of Fire and Rescue

A new College of Fire and Rescue could play a transformational role in improving the ways in which research and data are governed, shared and used across the sector. We envisage a college could have several areas of potential impact:

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<sup>31</sup> <https://mhclgdigital.blog.gov.uk/2026/01/21/our-journey-to-delivering-the-fire-and-rescue-data-platform/>

- **National Governance and Standards.** The college could set professional research standards, establish clear competence expectations, and provide leadership to ensure research and data are managed and used consistently across all services. A light touch, sector-wide impact evaluation framework would set out the methods, data, and processes needed to determine the difference an intervention has made and test whether services are offering value for money. Routine evaluation would ensure lessons are captured consistently and feed into national standards and guidance.
- **Consistency in Research and Data Methods.** A college could develop shared research methods, national data definitions and common approaches to data collection, supported by international research and communities of practice, enabling aligned working and more reliable comparison of information across services.
- **Training and Professional Development.** The college could design and deliver learning for leaders, analysts, operational teams and firefighters, helping to build skills in research methods, data literacy and evidence-based decision making. These aspects of the college's role would be closely linked to its training function.
- **Stronger Collective Working and Partnerships.** A college could help build sector-wide networks and partnerships with academia, government departments, other emergency services and industry, supporting shared learning and joint problem solving. This also includes proactive international engagement, making use of established global networks to inform good practice and improve professional collaboration.
- **Shared Tools and Platforms.** The college could host national tools and platforms such as a central research portal, shared digital tools and standardised data systems, thereby improving access to information and reducing duplication of effort.
- **Support for Innovation.** By championing new technologies, including predictive analytics and real-time data integration, the college could help services move from reactive to more proactive and preventative approaches.
- **Horizon Scanning.** As part of its research function, the college could also undertake horizon scanning to identify emerging and evolving risks such as those relating to electric vehicles, battery energy storage systems and climate-related hazards. This would help ensure insights on future risks are gathered, assessed and shared consistently across the sector, complementing existing activity undertaken by bodies such as the NFCC and ACER.
- **Guidance on Implementation Challenges.** The college could help services anticipate and overcome practical, cultural and financial challenges linked to improving research and data systems, providing support throughout transition and implementation.

The research and data function would underpin all elements of the College of Fire and Rescue. Research, evaluation and horizon scanning would help keep the college's work current and evidence-based, informing national standards, training, leadership development, culture and integrity. An integrated approach to research and data would enable FRSs to adopt best practice, make informed decisions and manage emerging risks.

We would like to invite feedback on how the college's research and data function could best operate, the role it could most usefully fulfil and how it could connect with other functions.

## Questions

### Research

30) To what extent do you agree or disagree that there should be a standardised approach for the way in which fire-related research is commissioned, conducted and shared?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

31) Which forms of research do you think it would be most helpful for the college research and data function to focus on? Please select all that apply.

Leadership research / Operational research / Scientific research / Social science research / Technical research / None of the above / Other

32) If you selected 'other' in response to the previous question, please specify what other form(s) of research you think the college should focus on.

33) To what extent do you agree or disagree that research commissioned within the sector should meet minimum quality and methodological standards?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

34) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college should act as a central coordinator and distributor of research and subsequent findings?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

35) What would make research more accessible and useful for policy, training and operational decision-making?

### Data

36) To what extent do you agree or disagree that nationally agreed data definitions and standards should be introduced to enable consistent comparison between services?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

37) To what extent do you agree or disagree that a consistent national approach to data sharing would improve trust and support better learning across services?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

38) To what extent do you agree or disagree that all services should receive support to build data skills and capability, regardless of size or resources?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

39) What barriers currently exist to sharing data across services, and how could a national approach help overcome them?

# Culture and Integrity

Culture within FRSs has come under significant scrutiny in recent years. This section sets out how a College of Fire and Rescue could support the sector in embedding consistently high standards of professional conduct.

## The Current Landscape

Concerns about culture within FRSs came to a head in November 2022 following the publication of an independent review of London Fire Brigade (LFB). This report, led by Nazir Afzal OBE, highlighted evidence of an ‘institutionally misogynist and racist’ service.<sup>32</sup>

The LFB report prompted further independent reviews in FRSs across the UK. These findings reinforced concerns already identified through HMICFRS’ Round 2 inspections, which rated over half of services as ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ on culture, values, fairness and diversity.<sup>33</sup>

HMICFRS’ 2023 Values and Culture report expanded on this, highlighting evidence of ‘racism, sexism and homophobia and a culture where staff, including managers, didn’t always feel confident to challenge poor behaviour, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination’ in at least 11 services.<sup>34</sup> Their 2024 Standards of Behaviour report later recommended that each service in England should integrate a case management system to address the limited use of organisational learning and sharing of lessons learned with staff on misconduct.<sup>35</sup>

The Ministerial Advisory Group on Fire and Rescue Reform (MAGFRR) has established a task and finish group (TFG) on culture and integrity, which aims to set a sector-wide vision for culture. While the work of this TFG runs separately to that of the equivalent group for the College of Fire and Rescue, one of its roles is to ensure the wider fire and rescue reform programme, including college design and implementation, is grounded in a clear understanding of the current culture landscape and reflects the sector’s culture and integrity goals.

## The Potential Role of a College of Fire and Rescue

This consultation seeks views on how the College of Fire and Rescue could support and drive a consistently positive culture within the fire and rescue service. The college’s culture function would embed and champion the highest standards of professional conduct across the sector. This would be achieved through two culture-specific strategic objectives:

1. **Supporting reform of recruitment, leadership and training** to ensure a positive working culture is instilled across all members of staff. This would align with our

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/about-us/improving-our-workplace-culture/independent-culture-review/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/frs-assessments-year/2023-2025/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/publications/values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/publication-html/standards-of-behaviour-handling-misconduct-in-frs/>

proposed training function for the college and would accredit the training courses, practices and standards provided on culture and integrity, ensuring they are of a high standard that can be delivered with consistency across the fire sector.

- 2. Ensuring information on best practice, misconduct outcomes, cultural improvement and lessons learned is shared across the sector.** In alignment with its research function, the college could collate and use anonymised data (to protect victims of misconduct), alongside examples of effective working practices and instances where behaviours, policy or practice fell short of expected standards. It could then share these insights across the sector, helping to promote a culture of transparency and openness while encouraging sustained improvements in culture and professionalisation.

The design of the college culture and integrity function would need to be undertaken in close coordination with design of other fire and rescue sector reform initiatives to ensure coherence and avoid duplication in activity to drive a positive culture. In the first instance this will be facilitated by the Culture and Integrity TFG; if that group concludes its work, oversight will fold back into the MAGFRR itself.

## Barred List

We are also seeking views on whether to introduce a fire and rescue service barred list. A barred list is a register of individuals dismissed for gross misconduct. The list, which would be held by the college, would prevent those individuals from re-entering the fire and rescue profession and in doing so help facilitate a workplace where fire professionals can feel safe and flourish, as well as maintaining public confidence.

This proposal follows a recommendation in the HMICFRS Values and Culture report, which suggested the introduction of a list as part of a suite of proposals to strengthen the handling of misconduct within the sector.<sup>36</sup>

This is not unique amongst blue light and public services: the College of Policing operates a barred list for police forces,<sup>37</sup> and last year the NHS introduced a barred list for senior management dismissed for gross misconduct.<sup>38</sup>

One of the main concerns that is relevant to the issue of a barred list is vetting and its limitations, which create the potential for individuals to be employed in another FRS having been dismissed for gross misconduct.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that vetting is approached and practised inconsistently between FRSs, including how vetting applies to both internal and external candidates and how often existing staff are rechecked. These concerns are particularly significant given that fire and rescue personnel often work with vulnerable people. While Disclosure and

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<sup>36</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.college.police.uk/ethics/barred-list>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/leading-the-nhs-proposals-to-regulate-nhs-managers/outcome/leading-the-nhs-proposals-to-regulate-nhs-managers-consultation-response>

Barring Service (DBS) checks<sup>39</sup> are in place, we are aware that these checks are constrained in their effectiveness, particularly where misconduct does not meet the threshold for criminal conviction. Separately, where an individual leaves a service before a misconduct investigation has concluded, there is currently no consistent mechanism to alert a recruiting service that unresolved concerns existed in a previous role. Independently from any decision to implement a barred list, we intend to engage further with the sector to determine how vetting processes could be improved.

Even if vetting were carried out to a high and consistent standard across all FRSs, it may still have gaps that a barred list could address. For example, if an individual applies for a new role in an FRS having been dismissed from their previous position for gross misconduct, the vetting process would not usually identify this issue if:

- The individual concealed their previous employment; and
- The misconduct did not result in criminal action or conviction.

A barred list would provide a mechanism to address this gap by enabling information sharing between FRSs and the college, which would require supporting legislation.

We recognise there are diverse opinions on the merits and drawbacks of a barred list. These have been discussed at the College of Fire and Rescue TFG and through bilateral engagement with sector partners.

We are aware of concerns, particularly from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), that the barred list could undermine the progress made by the sector in response to reports on fire and rescue service culture. These concerns have led to queries regarding whether there is a need for a barred list, whether the sector could require services to conclude any disciplinary processes they open, and whether requiring new recruits to provide references from any former FRS employment could be an effective alternative model.

We are also aware of views in favour of a barred list, including from the NFCC and LFB, to address concerns over the limitations of information provided by the DBS checks. There are potential personal, service delivery and reputational risks from employing an individual dismissed from another service for gross misconduct if further incidents of gross misconduct occur.

We recognise there will be a number of detailed policy considerations and risks connected to a barred list, including determining a route of appeal, how spent convictions are dealt with and how to assess whether an individual has been rehabilitated since a previous dismissal. These are considerations we will explore with our partners should the consultation analysis justify taking the barred list proposal further.

While our focus is on the potential for a barred list, we are also keen to explore whether the College of Fire and Rescue should also host an **advisory list**. The College of Policing hosts an advisory list, which complements their barred list, capturing any individual who retires or resigns before the conclusion of their misconduct investigation. We envision that the College of Fire and Rescue could maintain an advisory list for the fire and rescue

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about>

sector and therefore address the same gap with the fire sector's barred list. The intention would not be to prejudice future employment, but to alert a recruiting service to unresolved concerns that may warrant further enquiry, subject to appropriate safeguards.

We are mindful that an advisory list would be particularly complex and would require careful consideration to ensure it is fair, proportionate and operable, while balancing safeguarding, natural justice and the need for decisions to be based on full and accurate information. If the feedback from this consultation justifies exploring this further, then we will work with our partners to ensure these details can be satisfactorily resolved.

We recognise that organisational culture underpins many aspects of the sector's work and the college's potential functions. While this chapter addresses culture directly, the views shared in response to it will inevitably inform and influence wider policy development across multiple areas of the college's future design.

## Questions

40) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college should collect and share anonymised data on culture and misconduct from and with other fire and rescue services and authorities?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

41) How else could the College of Fire and Rescue promote positive culture within the fire and rescue service?

42) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the establishment of a barred list?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

43) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college should host the barred list?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

44) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college should also host an advisory list?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

45) What benefits or concerns do you see with the introduction of a barred and/or advisory list?

# Health, Safety and Wellbeing

This section considers the role of health, safety and wellbeing within the fire and rescue sector, and explores whether and how a College of Fire and Rescue could potentially add value in this area. While this was not listed as a potential college function in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry report,<sup>40</sup> these topics are of paramount importance for the effective running of a professional service.

## The Current Landscape

At present, work relating to the health, safety and wellbeing of fire and rescue staff is primarily sector-led. Employers are responsible under the Health and Safety at Work Act for ensuring, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. Services support their staff with the physical, psychological and social demands of frontline and operational roles. This includes monitoring fitness, carrying out assessments and managing injuries, alongside providing occupational health services and access to specialist mental health assessments.

It is considered good practice for mental health support to be monitored through the governance arrangements of each FRA. Where appropriate, the potential psychological impact on personnel should be recognised as a local occupational hazard and may be reflected in the authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the FSB has produced a Leading and Developing People Fire Standard which sets out clear expectations for FRSs to have appropriate health and wellbeing policies in place.<sup>42</sup> This aligns with the National Framework and supports services in promoting a culture that prioritises the wellbeing of their workforce.

Much of this support is shaped by the work undertaken by the FBU and the Fire Fighters Charity. The NFCC's Health and Wellbeing Framework<sup>43</sup> supports staff across the sector to manage their physical and mental health through five principles, which ensure:

1. Everyone in the fire and rescue community has personal responsibility for their wellbeing, with support from their organisational structures.
2. Individuals receive wellbeing support from the moment they enter the service through to retirement.
3. The proactive, preventative mindset used in community fire prevention is also applied to the workforce.
4. Wellbeing is discussed in a consistent way that helps reduce stigma and ensure clarity between staff, teams, and leadership.

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report>

<sup>41</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/glossary/community-risk-management-plan/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.firestandards.org/standards/approved/leading-developing-people-fsc-led01a/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://nfcc.org.uk/our-services/people-programme/health-and-wellbeing-framework/>

5. Wellbeing is integrated into everyday culture, leadership, planning, and operational practice.

The Fire Fighters Charity provides a range of care and support to the UK's fire services community and their families, recognising the physical, psychological and social impacts that service can have both during and after service. Through their healthcare and wellbeing support, individuals access timely care and support to manage their personal wellness, to adapt to conditions, injury or illness, to be well enough to return to work and to transition to life after service. This is alongside support offered to families, including during bereavement, relationship challenges, and retirement.

The Fire Fighters Charity and the NFCC also support suicide prevention and postvention across the fire sector. The Fire Fighters Charity has developed online resources which are included in the NFCC's toolkit to ensure clear and consistent access to advice and guidance.

The FBU has also played a significant role in this area. For example, in 2025 they commissioned the University of Central Lancashire to conduct one of the largest studies of mental health in UK fire services, building on a 2019 Mind study which found that 60% of participating fire service workers reported personal experience of mental health problems.<sup>44</sup> The FBU's mental health policy calls for negotiations with employers to establish a contractual, employer-funded mental health and wellbeing service for operational (Grey Book) staff.<sup>45</sup> In relation to physical health, the FBU runs campaigns such as DECON: Prevent and Protect to reduce health risks from fire contaminants, and advocates for improved protections and safer practices to reduce musculoskeletal injuries.<sup>46</sup>

Other fire sector unions also undertake work relating to health, safety and wellbeing. The Fire Officers Association (FOA) and Fire and Rescue Services Association (FRSA) sit on the NFCC's Health and Safety Committee and meet with fire and rescue leads at the Health and Safety Executive when issues arise. The FRSA also provides members with access to an industry-leading app designed to help improve mental and physical health, as well as a confidential helpline that can signpost them to qualified counsellors and advisers. The Fire Leaders Association also provides independent professional advice, confidential wellbeing support, peer networks, coaching, advocacy and access to specialist legal and HR expertise. It seeks to promote safe, ethical and resilient leadership to ensure sector leaders can navigate complex organisational, cultural and personal challenges.

Cross-sector trade unions representing FRA staff, including UNISON and GMB, also undertake work relating to issues such as workplace health and safety compliance, stress, fatigue and mental wellbeing. This activity is primarily focused on control room and Green Book staff rather than those in operational firefighting roles.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2025/02/20/call-firefighters-participate-ground-breaking-national-mental-health-research>; <https://www.scribd.com/document/707747280/2019-Survey-Fire-Service-Summary>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.fbu.org.uk/policies/2019/mental-health-fire-and-rescue-service>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.fbu.org.uk/blog/decon-prevent-and-protect>

## **The Potential Role of a College of Fire and Rescue**

We believe a health, safety and wellbeing function within the College of Fire and Rescue could complement the work already undertaken across the sector and link to other college functions. This could include ensuring leaders have sufficient awareness of these issues and of the legislative requirements they need to follow, as well as providing tools to support staff. It could also work with the culture and integrity side of the college to help remove any stigma around a firefighter's physical and mental health and ensure conversations on these topics can be held without fear of embarrassment.

We also believe consistency should form an essential part of the health, safety and wellbeing function. The college could ensure greater consistency of, and access to, support and guidance for physical and mental wellbeing by ensuring all existing materials are available in a clear and accessible way, such as via a repository that can be drawn upon by anyone who needs access. The college would be well placed to share best practice guidance across the fire and rescue sector, and we would consult with the devolved governments on how this aligns with their own arrangements.

The college could also ensure physical and mental wellbeing is measured, assessed and judged in an equitable and consistent manner across the fire and rescue service. While managerial discretion will always be encouraged, the college could support services to monitor fitness in a consistent way. It could also support services in their assessments, reasonable adjustments and more generally help services support their staff under the Equality Act. This could potentially be achieved through the development of a national standard on these topics.

Furthermore, the college's research function could enable further studies on health, safety and wellbeing to complement and support a modern fire and rescue service. It could also have the potential to launch pilot schemes and initiatives, and open opportunities for collaborative work with charities that may not have had an opportunity to work with the fire and rescue sector.

The impact of contaminants on fire staff is an extremely important aspect of health and safety. We anticipate this will form part of the college's long-term focus when it is fully established: in particular, its research and data function could help address evidence gaps, and its training function could help support knowledge and implementation of the most up-to-date decontamination protocols.

The college could also deliver potential cost benefits for the sector by centrally procuring mandatory health and safety training, which individual FRSs often commission separately.

On 16 April, the government announced its intention to co-produce a Firefighters' Concordat on Health and Wellbeing, to develop a bespoke health monitoring offer for firefighters, and to undertake new research to improve understanding of the long-term health risks firefighters face and the most effective forms of support. The concordat will be jointly designed and developed with the sector, bringing together national and local government, the NHS, fire chiefs, employers, the FBU and other sector unions, and firefighters themselves. This work is being taken forward through the Ministerial Advisory Group on Fire and Rescue Reform.

The College of Fire and Rescue would be well placed to assist with the implementation of the concordat as part of its health, safety and wellbeing function and its research function.

## Questions

46) To what extent do you agree or disagree that a health, safety and wellbeing function should be part of the college?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

47) To what extent do you agree or disagree that this function should also focus on decontamination?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

48) To what extent do you agree or disagree that a college health, safety and wellbeing function should procure the health and safety training that is mandatory for all service staff to complete?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

49) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college should support work intended to address the fire community's physical, emotional and psychological needs?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

50) What benefits and challenges could the establishment of a college health, safety and wellbeing function bring?

# Assurance

This chapter sets out initial thinking on a potential assurance function for a College of Fire and Rescue, including how the college could review the quality and consistency of its own training, add value to existing sector activity such as the FSB's feedback programme,<sup>47</sup> and offer advisory support to services on local training delivery.

## The Current Landscape

There are several existing assurance mechanisms in the fire and rescue sector, each with a distinct purpose. HMICFRS provides independent inspection of service performance and organisational effectiveness, while the FSB gathers feedback from FRSs on the use and effectiveness of individual national standards.<sup>48</sup> However, there is no single body responsible for assuring the quality and consistency of nationally developed training or for reviewing how products are applied across services. As a result, there is a gap between operational inspection and professional learning assurance, and a risk of duplication or unclear responsibilities if new assurance activity is introduced without clear boundaries.

## The Potential Role of a College of Fire and Rescue

Given the number of potential functions for a college, it is important that governance and assurance mechanisms are created. For example, where the college is delivering training courses directly or is setting the course content to be provided by individual FRSs, there should be some form of assessment of the overall delivery standard to give assurance that the training is being delivered consistently and to a high quality.

There is potential for some of this work to be outward facing: for example, in determining the use of and effectiveness of fire standards regardless of whether they are mandatory or advisory. Outward-facing assurance could involve the college looking across FRSs to understand how consistently national standards, guidance, and college-developed products are being applied, identifying where practice varies, and highlighting areas of good practice or where further support may be needed. The FSB has already created a programme to gather feedback from all FRSs on specific standards, and we would like to seek views on where a college could add value to this process.

Inward-facing assurance, by contrast, could focus on the college's own products and services. This could include assessing whether its courses remain current, evidence-based and of a high quality, and ensuring training content continues to meet sector needs. The government is mindful that a college assurance function would need to complement rather than duplicate the role of HMICFRS' inspection programmes. The intention would be for college assurance to focus on professional development, training quality, application of college-developed standards and learning, and the identification of good practice and areas for improvement.

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.firestandards.org/you-said-we-did/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/fire-and-rescue-services/how-we-inspect-fire-and-rescue-services/#questions>; <https://www.firestandards.org/you-said-we-did/>

HMICFRS would continue to provide independent inspection of service performance and organisational effectiveness. Clearly defining the purpose and scope of college assurance against the role of HMICFRS will be important in reducing duplication and preventing unnecessary burden on FRSs, and the government will look to do this as part of our response to this consultation.

A college assurance function could also potentially provide some form of advisory service for FRSs. This could, for example, offer assistance regarding the way training is delivered at a local level.

We have treated assurance as a broad area that will require careful consideration across many potential functions of the college. Both inward and outward assurance would need to be worked through in more detail, including how they might operate alongside existing inspection and standards activity. We recognise further development will be needed after the consultation period to understand how these different forms of assurance could work in practice, and the views gathered through this consultation will be essential in shaping that work.

We welcome your views on the assurance approaches described in this chapter, including where the College of Fire and Rescue could add value to existing sector activity and how the inward and outward facing functions should be shaped.

## Questions

51) How important is it for the college to have an assurance function?

Very important / Fairly important / Not very important / Not at all important / Don't know

52) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the college's assurance function should:

a) Focus solely on its internal activities?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

b) Extend to issues affecting fire and rescue services more broadly, such as the delivery of training in local areas?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

53) To what extent do you agree or disagree that it would be helpful for the college to have a dedicated mechanism to provide advice to fire and rescue services?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

54) What, if any, additional thoughts, insights or experiences would you like to share regarding the above questions?

55) What types of assurance or support from the college would give you confidence that national standards are being used effectively?

## **Powers to Direct and Intervene**

This chapter outlines initial thinking on the powers government may need to ensure effective governance of a future College of Fire and Rescue. It considers how to balance the college's independence with the need for government to act in the public interest where necessary, including the option to confer new functions over time. It also highlights the importance of clear and transparent intervention parameters and the need to work with devolved administrations where responsibilities extend beyond England.

### **The Current Landscape**

The government is responsible for fire and rescue policy in England, including the power to set national strategic priorities through the Fire and Rescue National Framework, a requirement established under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.<sup>49</sup> While the Act does not itself create a professional body, it provides the legislative foundation from which government may establish an organisation that promotes the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of FRAs.

### **The Potential Role of a College of Fire and Rescue**

The government's powers to direct or intervene in the college's operations will shape the balance between the college's independence, which will be essential to its credibility, and the government's responsibility to ensure national priorities are achieved effectively. Striking the right balance is vital: government must be able to act where necessary in the public interest, while the college must be protected from unnecessary or undue interference that could compromise its professional autonomy.

Given the breadth of functions a future College of Fire and Rescue may be asked to undertake, it may also be prudent to include an optional power in legislation enabling the Secretary of State to request that the college assumes new responsibilities beyond its initial agreed scope. This would enable the college's role to evolve over time in response to emerging needs. For example, proposals in policing indicate a move towards police officers becoming a regulated profession, comparable to doctors or social workers, which would require a designated professional body to hold and maintain an approved register of regulated practitioners.<sup>50</sup> Including a flexible power would therefore ensure, should similar regulatory reforms be introduced in the fire and rescue sector in future, the college could be empowered to take on such functions.

Clear and transparent parameters for intervention would be critical. They would help ensure accountability, provide clarity for staff and sector partners, and support public confidence in how the college operates. Without defined boundaries, there is a risk that uncertainty around when and how government may intervene could weaken trust and create or add to operational instability.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-and-rescue-national-framework-for-england--2>;  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/from-local-to-national-a-new-model-for-policing>

Powers enabling the Secretary of State to direct, intervene in, or confer additional functions upon the college would need to be considered in consultation with the devolved administrations, recognising that FRSs in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland operate within distinct legislative and governance frameworks. If the college were to serve the fire and rescue sector outside England, it would also be necessary to establish decision-making arrangements that reflect and accommodate the needs and views of all sponsoring governments.

This chapter sets out several potential models for government powers and invites views on the degree of authority government should have. These models range from intervention powers to be used only in exceptional or emergency circumstances through to more regular forms of oversight or direction. We are particularly interested in understanding what the public and sector partners believe is the right level of involvement to maintain both independence and accountability.

Early engagement with sector partners, representative bodies and experts via the College of Fire and Rescue TFG has confirmed that clarity on this issue will be essential to:

- Guarantee and protect the college's independence while ensuring its work continues to contribute to wider national objectives, including any future responsibilities that may be conferred through the optional power for the Secretary of State to assign new functions.
- Provide a clear mechanism for government action in the public interest during critical or unforeseen situations, where intervention may be necessary to protect safety, uphold standards, address significant risks or require the college to take on additional responsibilities.
- Remove ambiguity that could undermine trust, create confusion about responsibilities, or lead to uncertainty in how decisions are made.

We are now seeking your views to help shape a balanced and transparent approach that supports both strong governance and the college's ability to operate with credibility and confidence.

## Government Power Options

### Option 1: No Formal Powers (Advisory Relationship Only)

Government would have no statutory powers to direct the college, relying instead on partnership and influence.

- **Advantages:** Maximises independence; encourages a sector-led approach.
- **Disadvantages:** Limited ability to respond to systemic failures and urgent risks; does not provide powers to assign new functions.
- **Implications:** Requires strong governance and transparency to maintain confidence.

## Option 2: Powers to Intervene in Exceptional Circumstances

Government could issue directions only in defined emergency or public interest situations, such as when there are national safety concerns or significant financial challenges. It would have no formal powers to set day-to-day strategic objectives for the college.

- **Advantages:** Provides a safeguard without undermining autonomy.
- **Disadvantages:** Requires clear definition of 'exceptional circumstances' to avoid misuse.
- **Implications:** The option to assign new functions could only be used in circumstances that meet the definition of exceptional circumstances.

## Option 3: Routine Oversight and Direction Powers

Government would have statutory powers to direct the college on strategic priorities and operational matters. These powers could enable the government to direct the college to take specific actions such as making amendments to existing national standards or creating new ones. These powers would be available as a backstop: government should still aim to achieve its preferred outcomes through negotiation in the first instance.

- **Advantages:** Ensures alignment with government policy; strong accountability.
- **Disadvantages:** Risks politicisation; may reduce sector confidence in the college's independence.
- **Implications:** Requires clear governance framework and transparency regarding any government interventions.

## Option 4: Hybrid Approach

Government would set strategic objectives and retain reserve powers for intervention in exceptional circumstances, but day-to-day operations would remain independent.

- **Advantages:** Balances autonomy with accountability; mirrors models in similar bodies.
- **Disadvantages:** Complexity in defining boundaries; risk of unclear responsibilities.
- **Implications:** Requires detailed statutory guidance and reporting mechanisms, with the optional power to assign new functions available but used only through defined processes.

We have treated potential powers of direction and intervention as a distinct issue, but recognise that this topic may have implications for whether and how the college is included within the National Framework, and that further work will be required after the consultation to understand and address these interdependencies.

We are now seeking your views to help shape a clear and balanced approach to government powers that supports strong and transparent governance, protects the college's independence, and ensures government can act in the public interest when necessary.

## Questions

56) Which model do you prefer?

No powers / Exceptional circumstances only / Routine oversight / Hybrid

57) Please briefly outline why you believe this to be the best option.

58) To what extent do you agree or disagree that government should have reserve powers to intervene in exceptional circumstances?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

59) To what extent do you agree or disagree that government should have routine powers to direct the college in non-exceptional circumstances?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

60) What views do you have about granting government powers to direct, intervene and assign new functions?

61) If intervention is limited to exceptional circumstances, in what specific situations do you think the government should have the power to step in?

# Inclusion of the College of Fire and Rescue in the National Framework

When we refer to the College of Fire and Rescue being included within the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England,<sup>51</sup> we mean ensuring the college actively supports the implementation of the National Framework and works in alignment with its priorities. We would therefore like to seek views on whether the college should be formally reflected in the National Framework. The National Framework sets out the priorities and objectives for FRAs, supports the discharge of their statutory functions, and may include any other material the Secretary of State considers appropriate. As part of this consultation, we are interested in views on how inclusion within the National Framework might help support the college's role, and what benefits or risks this approach may create.

The requirements set by the National Framework promote public safety and the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of FRAs. Incorporating the college into the National Framework could increase alignment between national priorities, national standards and workforce development, but may also introduce new governance and resource considerations.

The government has set out four reform priorities which it believes can provide the foundations for future change. A central element is to provide the fire and rescue sector with clearer strategic direction through an updated National Framework.

We have been engaging with partners across the sector about what a revised National Framework could include. The commitment to establish a College of Fire and Rescue remains central to our long-term vision for the sector. However, fulfilling this commitment requires detailed design work and careful consideration. Should a decision be taken to include the college in the National Framework, the detailed arrangements would not be set out in the next version, but developed and introduced in a later update. However, it is proposed that the forthcoming Framework would provide guidance for FRAs and the NFCC on the preparatory work needed to ensure readiness for the college's implementation.

This chapter invites views on the implications of including the college within the National Framework, including how the college's role in setting and supporting national standards would interact with existing national expectations around prevention, protection, joint working, and accountability. Clarity on this issue will be essential to:

- Ensure consistent standards and training across England, supporting the National Framework's requirement for FRAs to have regard to national priorities and expectations.
- Increase alignment between college programmes and sector-wide reform, including workforce modernisation and collaboration with national bodies such as the NFCC.

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<sup>51</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aec5974ed915d42f7c6bf18/National\\_Framework\\_-\\_final\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aec5974ed915d42f7c6bf18/National_Framework_-_final_for_web.pdf)

- Help identify and manage potential impacts on governance, resources and local autonomy by providing clear expectations from the outset, reducing uncertainty.
- Support the readiness of FRAs and the NFCC for when the college is implemented.

## Questions

62) To what extent do you agree or disagree that including the College of Fire and Rescue in the National Framework would improve overall coherence in the fire and rescue sector?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

63) To what extent do you agree or disagree that including the College of Fire and Rescue in the National Framework would improve national consistency in training and ongoing development?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

64) To what extent do you agree or disagree that including the College of Fire and Rescue in the National Framework would lead to long-term improvements in public safety?

Strongly disagree / Tend to disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Tend to agree / Strongly agree / Don't know

65) What are the main benefits and risks of incorporating the College of Fire and Rescue into the National Framework?

# College Users and Delivery Models

## Users of a College

To design the college in the most effective way, it will be important to have a clear understanding of who its users could be. Given the strategic priorities outlined in the 'Our Vision for Change' section (pages 14-18), we envisage that FRS personnel would be the primary and majority users of the college.

However, we are also of the view that a successfully run college would operate a model that would not be exclusive to FRS staff. Some of its functions could cater to a larger proportion of the fire and rescue sector workforce: for example, in addition to courses targeted at FRS staff, the training function could include an offer relating to leadership and governance matters for FRA members, as well as potential delivery of courses for the wider fire sector in the longer term. The college could also have the ability to generate income by providing courses and services to both the private sector and international organisations: this is discussed in further detail in the funding chapter of this document (pages 57-59).

## Physical Delivery Models for the College

We consider there to be three broad approaches for delivering the College of Fire and Rescue in practical terms:

- A larger headquarters and training site plus a virtual platform.
- A hub and spoke model. This would involve a smaller headquarters that would deliver some training and other functions, with the remaining elements of the college's work delivered either at existing facilities owned by local FRSs, such as the National Resilience Centre of Excellence, or via a virtual platform.
- An entirely virtual platform.

The government has worked with sector partners to identify key considerations for the model that the college should adopt. It is our view that a successful model is one that supports higher professional standards across the sector, makes more effective use of technology and provides the best possible value for money.

With that in mind, the government would have concerns about the model of a larger headquarters supported by a virtual platform. In recent years FRAs have invested in improving local training facilities: this therefore presents an opportunity for in-person training to be provided across a range of locations rather than at one primary headquarters, thereby providing better value for money. A single headquarters model would also increase costs for FRSs in sending their personnel to a primary location, as well as the amount of time that FRS staff would need to spend away from their day-to-day roles. This is exacerbated when considering the needs of on-call staff, who have less availability to attend courses, and staff working at more geographically distant FRSs such as those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We also do not consider an entirely virtual platform to be an appropriate delivery model. While such an approach may reduce costs, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 2 recommendation envisaged an organisation with a physical building and staff from across the fire and rescue sector present in person to provide training and education.<sup>52</sup> A wholly virtual model would also lose the benefits that can be drawn from face-to-face training and interaction between staff from different services.

The government's preferred approach is a hub and spoke model with a smaller headquarters and the ability to use venues in different locations. Operations and some training would take place at the headquarters, with other elements of the college's work taking place at facilities that already exist in FRSs across the United Kingdom. This would make training more accessible and enable FRSs to keep costs down.

This section should be read in tandem with the chapter on implementation scenarios (pages 60-62), which outlines potential approaches for delivery of the college.

## **College Status – Organisational Delivery Model**

We recognise that the organisational status of the college will be an area of significant interest to partners across the fire and rescue sector. We therefore wish to take account of your views to help inform implementation design and governance.

Each of the options below has different implications for governance, independence, sector confidence, cost and the speed at which the college could be established. We will consider feedback on the benefits, risks and feasibility of each model before determining a preferred approach.

### **Option 1: Standalone Public Sector Organisation – Arm's Length Body (ALB)**

Under this model, the college would be established as a new public body, funded in part by government but operating independently with its own governance and leadership. This structure is used by several national professional bodies across the public sector, including the UK Defence Academy. Under this model, the ALB would be sponsored by MHCLG.

#### **Benefits**

- **Autonomy and Governance:** Clear, independent governance with transparent accountability to ministers and Parliament.
- **Public Confidence.**

#### **Risks**

- **Future Proofing:** ALBs can be susceptible to funding reductions, deprioritisation or closure by future governments.

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/publication-of-the-grenfell-tower-inquiry-phase-2-report>

- Complexity and Lead-In Time: Creating governance structures, transferring staff and establishing legal powers may take longer than other delivery options.

## **Option 2: Merge the College with an Existing Public Sector Organisation**

This approach would integrate the college within an already-established organisation. Variants of this approach could include:

### **A. Hosted by a Lead Fire and Rescue Service**

A lead FRS would oversee the college, drawing on existing operational expertise. This is similar to arrangements for National Resilience in Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service,<sup>53</sup> which oversees training packages provided nationally.

#### **Benefits**

- Access to operational capability and infrastructure.
- Lower setup costs through making use of some existing systems and structures.

#### **Risks**

- Perception of Bias: Some sector partners may be concerned about one FRS holding national responsibilities.
- Governance Complexity: Local governance structures may not align well with national functions.
- Capacity Impacts: Some concerns that hosting an organisation of the size and scale of the college could place strain on local operations.
- Scalability: The college is expected to be larger and more complex than current FRS-hosted national functions.

### **B. Hosted by the National Fire Chiefs Council**

#### **Benefits**

- Leverages the NFCC's national expertise, existing partnerships and work in this area to date.

#### **Risks**

- Integration Risks: the NFCC's current operating model may require significant adaptation due to the organisation's charity status.

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.merseyfire.gov.uk/about/what-we-do/national-resilience/>

- Organisational Independence: some sector groups could question whether sufficient independence would be maintained.

### **Option 3: Wholly Private Organisation**

Under this model, a private provider would deliver college functions. Engagement to date suggests sector concerns about this option, particularly relating to its affordability, accessibility, accountability and alignment with the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's recommendations. These concerns lead us to consider this option unsuitable, but we would welcome views on this from respondents to the consultation.

### **Summary**

The government is examining several potential delivery models for the College of Fire and Rescue. Each option has different advantages and challenges. Feedback from this consultation will inform the government's decision, helping to determine which approach best supports the fire and rescue sector, provides strong public value, and delivers on the long-term vision to raise professional standards and national capability.

### **Questions**

66) How important is independence from existing organisations (such as individual FRSs, the NFCC, the police) for the college?

Very important / Fairly important / Not very important / Not at all important / Don't know

67) Please state your preferred organisational delivery model and provide reasons why this is your preferred option.

68) What do you see as the main benefits or opportunities associated with each organisational delivery model option?

69) What risks or drawbacks do you think each organisational delivery model option may present, and how could these be mitigated?

70) What principles should guide the government's decision on the final delivery model for the College of Fire and Rescue, and are there alternative models or hybrid approaches the government should consider?

71) Do you have any additional comments on how the college should be established (such as hub and spoke model, virtual, large headquarters)?

# Funding Models for the College

The funding model chosen for the college will determine its long-term sustainability, independence and ability to provide high-quality services. This chapter invites views on potential funding options, including whether a blended approach combining government support, sector contributions and income generation offers the most resilient solution. Depending on the final design and delivery model of the college, its overall costs may exceed current sector investment in the functions specified in this consultation. The challenge is to minimise financial impacts on services and set up the college in a cost-efficient way, including incorporating investment and income from outside the sector.

At TFG meetings, sector partners have emphasised the importance of a sustainable funding model for the college. This will be critical to:

- Guarantee the college's independence and stability.
- Protect against future financial and political pressures.
- Provide high-quality services to FRAs and the wider fire and rescue sector.

## Funding Model Options

We are considering the following options, noting that a blended approach consisting of two or more options may offer the greatest resilience:

### Section One – Government Funding Model Options

#### Option 1: Fully Funded by Government

Under this approach all college costs would be met by central government. Although this would provide short-term certainty for the college's finances, we do not view this as a sustainable approach long term.

- **Advantages:** Provides short-term certainty; clear demonstration of government commitment.
- **Disadvantages:** Future funding is highly dependent on the outcomes of spending reviews and sets a precedent not seen in similar bodies (such as the College of Policing).
- **Implications:** May face greater challenge on value for money grounds.

#### Option 2: Government Grant (Partial Government Funding)

This approach would form part of a blended funding model, with the college funded partly through an annual government grant and partly via one of the options set out in section two.

- **Advantages:** Builds on existing NFCC model; provides baseline stability.
- **Disadvantages:** Dependency on annual reviews.

- **Implications:** Requires careful transition planning and clarity on grant funding.

## Section Two – Blended Funding Model Options

### Option 3: FRA Membership Fees

This option would require FRSs or FRAs to pay annual fees to access college services. This would potentially require the college to be provided with a charging power set out in legislation, for which parliamentary and HM Treasury approval would be necessary.

- **Advantages:** Encourages sector investment and engagement; mirrors NFCC approach regarding its membership fees.
- **Disadvantages:** Adds financial pressure on FRAs compared with fully funded government options, as there would be a membership fee for both the NFCC and the college; risk of non-payment during budget constraints which would affect the college's ability to achieve its strategic aims.
- **Implications:** Fee levels must be proportionate; combined NFCC and college fees must be affordable.

### Option 4: Charging for Services

Under this model the college could generate income from training, qualifications and consultancy for FRAs, the private sector and international clients, subject to express powers set out in legislation and necessary consents.

- **Advantages:** Generates additional income and innovation; supports reinvestment back into the college.
- **Disadvantages:** Administrative complexity; risk of perceived commercialisation; competition with existing providers; income can vary from year to year.
- **Implications:** Requires robust governance and pricing strategy; tax implications to be addressed.

## Questions

72) What are your views on the various funding model options?

73) What concerns, if any, do you have about introducing membership fees for FRAs?

74) How could charging for services be designed to avoid disadvantaging smaller FRAs?

75) Are there innovative funding approaches (such as partnerships or private finance initiatives) that you believe should be explored?

76)How likely is your organisation to be willing to pay a membership fee for the college?

Very likely / Likely / Neutral / Unlikely / Very unlikely / Don't know

77)What level of annual membership fee would be acceptable for your organisation?

None / Less than £5k / £5k–£10k / £10k–£20k / £20k+ / Don't know

# Implementation Scenarios

This chapter provides some options for how the college could begin operating and how it could develop. It sets out a structured basis for comparing the level of ambition, resourcing requirements and implementation considerations associated with each option. Together, these scenarios illustrate the range of viable approaches and will support decision-makers in determining the most appropriate model for the college's initial launch.

## **Option 1: Transfer of existing NFCC functions and programmes with the possibility of further growth**

Under this scenario, the college would focus on core areas and programmes that are already being actively worked on by the NFCC. These include leadership, training, standards, research, wider culture work (not including the barred list) and recruitment. The intention would be to develop these areas of work further and consider other functions at a later stage depending on funding and capacity constraints.

### **Advantages**

- This option would enable the college to become operational more quickly, avoiding delays associated with designing and resourcing a wider set of functions from the outset.
- It would offer the potential for government to review and potentially scale up the college's remit at a later date rather than committing to a large operating model from day one.

### **Disadvantages**

- This approach would mean that potential college functions such as an enhanced command function and a barred list would be delayed or removed.
- It may offer limited opportunity to scale up classroom-based training in areas such as leadership.
- This model may offer limited visible momentum to sector development and professionalisation at this stage.

## **Option 2: Transfer of existing NFCC functions and programmes but with a transition plan to full capability**

This approach would involve introducing the model in stages, beginning with a smaller number of functions but setting out a clear and structured transition plan to implement all remaining functions. This would allow the model to develop progressively towards a more complete set of functions, with scope to expand and deepen each function as the model matures. For example, the research function could be introduced initially at a smaller scale and later expanded through joint work with academic institutions.

## **Advantages**

- This option would support smoother implementation by allowing governance, staffing and systems to scale up in an orderly way, reducing pressure on delivery teams and increasing the likelihood of a stable and effective launch.
- Financial investment would be spread over time, enabling the college to grow sustainably from a smaller starting base.
- This approach would allow the most flexibility to increase or reduce college functions in line with national priorities.

## **Disadvantages**

- There would be a risk that parts of the sector may expect the college to operate at full capacity from day one, potentially leading to perceptions that a phased approach reflects a lack of ambition or momentum.
- This option could result in uncertainty: communication and expectations would need to be carefully managed for the sector to remain confident in the college.

## **Option 3: Full capability from day one**

Under this model, all of the college's functions would be fully planned, designed and operationalised at a single point in time. This means that from the outset, each function would need to be clearly defined, appropriately resourced and ready to deliver.

The college would then begin operating on day one with the complete suite of functions active, rather than phasing in capability over time. This approach would therefore require a comprehensive and coordinated implementation effort, with dependencies, processes and governance arrangements established in advance to ensure that all functions could operate effectively from launch.

## **Advantages**

- The college would be conducting all of its intended functions from the outset, and in doing so, completely fulfilling and potentially going beyond the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's recommendations.
- This option would ensure comprehensive national coverage and consistency from the outset, with all functions fully designed, resourced and governed together. This would reduce the risk of gaps, duplication or uneven gains that can arise from phased implementation.

## **Disadvantages**

- Requiring all college functions to launch simultaneously may delay the point at which it could begin operating.

- Increased activity from the start may cause more initial difficulties compared to other approaches.
- This option would require a larger upfront financial investment because all functions would need to be designed, staffed and made operational at the same time, with no opportunity to phase costs or learn lessons before committing further resources.

## Summary

Option 2 outlines a potential route for the initial opening of the college that balances ambition with practical deliverability. It builds on activity already taking place in the sector, while avoiding the operational and financial pressures associated with implementing all the college's functions from the outset. This model includes features such as a manageable resourcing profile, time to establish governance and systems, and the opportunity to show early development without exceeding capacity. It also sets out a structured progression pathway toward the maximum model as evidence, capability and revenue develop. We currently feel that the risks linked to this phased approach would be manageable, while increasing the likelihood of long-term stability, success and sector confidence. However, we are seeking views on the most appropriate option to take forward.

## Questions

78) Of the options outlined above, which would be your preference?

- **Option 1:** Transfer of existing NFCC functions and programmes with the possibility of further growth
- **Option 2:** Transfer of existing NFCC functions and programmes but with a transition plan to full capability
- **Option 3:** Full capability from day one.

79) Please explain why this would be your preferred option.

80) If you have any remaining comments or reflections about the various options, including the relative priority of the various proposed college functions, please include them here.

## Equality Impacts

In developing our plans for the college, we will need to consider the potential impacts that the options outlined in this consultation document could have for members of the fire and rescue service workforce and the public. In particular, we will need to consider whether any of the proposals could have different impacts on individuals or groups with different protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. These characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

These impacts could relate to the design and scope of the college's functions or the way in which the college is structured and implemented. For example, basing the college at a single physical location could disadvantage some groups within the fire and rescue workforce as those based in remote locations, with disabilities or with caring responsibilities may be less able to attend in person.

We will conduct a more detailed impact assessment as part of the process of developing and finalising our policy proposals. Through this consultation, we would like to gather further evidence on potential equality impacts to support this analysis.

### Questions

81) Do you believe that any of the proposals set out in this consultation could have a differential impact on individuals or groups who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?

Yes / No / Don't know

82) If yes, please describe the potential impact(s).

## **Next Steps and Implementation**

This consultation will be open for eight weeks, closing on 15 July 2026. It will be complemented by further engagement with sector partners to inform the development of our policy proposals. We will use insights from the consultation and accompanying stakeholder engagement to refine our plans, and will publish a government response setting out an agreed route forward in due course.

Primary legislation will be required to implement several of the proposals set out in this consultation, such as a barred list for the fire and rescue sector and the ability for the college to issue mandatory national standards. If these proposals are taken forward, we will seek to introduce the necessary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

## About You

To support our analysis of responses to this consultation, we have included a short series of questions about you and, where relevant, your organisation. This information will help us understand the potential impact of our proposals on individuals and organisations, including those with protected characteristics.

83)What is your age?

- 18 to 34
- 35 to 49
- 50 to 64
- 65 or over
- Prefer not to say

84)Which of the following best describes your gender identity?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to say

85) If you selected 'prefer to self-describe', please specify:

86)What is your ethnic group? Please select the option that best applies.

- White (including English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, or any other White)
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- Asian or Asian British
- Black, African, Caribbean or Black British
- Other ethnic group
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

87)If you selected 'other ethnic group', please specify:

88)Are you responding as:

- An individual
- A representative of a fire and rescue service
- A representative of a fire and rescue authority
- A representative of another fire and rescue sector organisation
- A representative of a company
- Other

89)If you selected 'other', please specify:

90) If responding on behalf of an organisation, please provide the organisation's name:

91) Which of the following best describes your role? Please select all that apply.

- Member of the public
- Firefighter or operational staff member
- Chief fire officer or senior fire and rescue service officer
- Fire and rescue authority member
- Local authority or partner agency employee
- Leader or manager in a representative organisation
- Member of a representative organisation
- Other

92) If you selected 'other', please specify:

93) Which nations of the United Kingdom do you operate in? Please select all that apply.

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland.

# Annex A – NFCC Leadership Development Offer Summary

## Supervisory Leadership Development Programme (SLDP)

The SLDP builds consistent, people-focused first line leadership capability across the fire and rescue sector. It is designed for new, existing and aspiring supervisory leaders across all roles. The programme is delivered through four modules covering personal impact, outstanding leadership, service delivery and organisational effectiveness.

- **Module 1 – Personal Impact**
  - Awareness of self
  - Being inclusive
  - Taking responsibility
  - Communicating effectively
  - Courageous conversations.
  
- **Module 2 – Outstanding Leadership**
  - Leadership styles
  - Engaging your team
  - Providing direction
  - Developing others through feedback
  - Coaching others.
  
- **Module 3 – Service Delivery**
  - Planning and priorities
  - Problem solving
  - Decision making
  - Building relationships.
  
- **Module 4 – Organisational Effectiveness**
  - Organisational purpose and culture
  - Managing change
  - Managing risk.

## Middle Leadership Programme (MLP)

The Middle Leadership Programme strengthens leadership capability for managers working in complex environments. It focuses on behavioural leadership, developing others and shaping organisational culture. It is suitable for middle managers across all FRS functions.

- **Module 1 – Personal Impact**

- Enhancing self-awareness
  - Personal growth and development
  - Creating an inclusive workplace
  - Effective communication and engagement.
- **Module 2 – Outstanding Leadership**
    - Leading from the middle
    - Identifying and nurturing talent
    - Creating a high performance culture through effective performance management
    - Coaching and developing others.
- **Module 3 – Service Delivery**
    - Achieving improved outcomes
    - Optimising resources for service delivery
    - Creative problem solving and sound decision making
    - Collaborating for success.
- **Module 4 – Organisational Effectiveness**
    - Driving and cascading vision
    - Dynamics of organisational and team culture
    - Achieving success through risk management and mitigation
    - Leading effective and sustainable change.

## **Executive Leadership Development Programme (ELDP)**

The Executive Leadership Development Programme develops strategic leaders who can address emerging challenges, shape cultural change and lead transformation. It is designed for existing and aspiring senior and principal officers. The programme comprises three modules delivered over ten months, using a blend of online and in-person learning at Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University.

- **Module 1 – Outstanding Leadership: Leading in Complexity**
  - Leadership theory and practice
  - Leading high performing teams
  - Leading strategic change
  - Leadership resilience
  - Strategic talent management
  - Inclusive and ethical leadership practice.
- **Module 2 – Leading Service Delivery: People and Performance**
  - Organisational culture
  - Engagement and wellbeing
  - Using data for decision-making
  - Performance management

- Talent management
  - Human resources practices, employee relations and employment law
  - Contemporary issues in the United Kingdom Fire and Rescue Service.
- **Module 3 – Leading Organisational Effectiveness**
    - Strategy, financial planning, public audit and emerging strategic priorities
    - Stakeholder management, cross agency working and collaboration
    - Corporate risk and governance
    - Organisational communication and social media
    - Innovation and Sprint methodology.

## **Leadership Framework and Core Learning Pathways**

The Leadership Framework defines national leadership behaviours and expectations, as well as setting out career development guidance for all staff across operational and corporate roles. It provides behavioural benchmarks at all levels and supports career planning and competency development.

## **Coaching and Mentoring Portal and Toolkit**

This portal supports professional development through structured coaching and mentoring. It is available to all staff seeking or offering mentoring or coaching. The offer includes a national matching system for coaches and mentors, along with the NFCC toolkit that provides guidance on effective practice and ethical standards.

## **Talent Management Toolkit**

The Talent Management Toolkit helps services identify, nurture and deploy leadership talent. It is designed for human resources and organisational development teams and those responsible for leadership planning. The toolkit contains tools and templates covering the full talent cycle and is aligned to NFCC values and the Leadership Framework.

## **Annex B - Command Training Offer**

Fire and rescue services across the UK use four levels of incident command to manage emergencies of increasing scale and complexity. Level 1 covers initial incident command at the operational front line. Level 2 provides tactical oversight of more complex incidents. Level 3 enables senior officers to take strategic command of large or protracted incidents. Level 4 relates to executive level command for major or multi-agency emergencies. Each level requires specific training, assessment and continuing professional development to maintain competence and assurance.

### **Incident Command Level 1**

This is usually delivered in-house through a five to six day course, followed by an accredited assessment. Accreditation commonly aligns with Skills for Justice standards. Once qualified, commanders take part in annual continuing professional development, and they are typically reassessed at set intervals, either annually or every two years. Competence is maintained through ongoing monitoring, including maintenance of competence records, assurance processes such as incident monitoring by in-house assurance teams, and participation in training, exercises and simulated scenarios.

### **Incident Command Levels 2 and 3**

These are often delivered by external training providers, with courses aligned to the Skills for Justice framework. Continuing professional development arrangements vary according to available resource and the size of the command group. In a mid-sized service, smaller command groups of six to eight may meet every six weeks for continuing professional development, with all commanders at that level meeting quarterly for thematic sessions. Themes are normally drawn from internal organisational learning boards or national learning, and are complemented by regular exercises, simulations and logging of command hours and operational experience.

### **Incident Command Level 4**

This training is also commonly outsourced, with a typical two-year cycle for refresher and reassessment. Continuing professional development at this level differs between services but is generally held quarterly and incorporates senior command development, including Multi Agency Gold Incident Command, Strategic Coordination Groups and major incident training. Commanders at this level also continue to log command hours.

Training approaches differ between services. For example, some services qualify all Incident Command Level 1 personnel to watch commander level for resilience, whereas others train only crew commanders until they progress. Some services require Institute of Fire Engineers qualifications at defined command levels, and senior roles may have requirements linked to the Executive Leadership Programme.

Most services now use a blended learning model that incorporates virtual reality, practical simulation and real operational experience to support competence and assurance.









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