

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 27 OCTOBER 2008

**SUBJECT: NORTH EAST REGIONAL FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN
2008 – RECRUITMENT PROCESS STATISTICS AND POSITIVE
ACTION ANALYSIS**

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The 2008 North East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Recruitment Campaign commenced on 4th February 2008 and was led by Tyne & Wear Fire and Rescue Authority. This report outlines the process and outcomes in relation to potential workforce representation and provides an indication into the effectiveness of this Authority's Positive Action Programme.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Application forms were available electronically from 4th February 2008 at 0800 hours up to 2359 hours on 11th February 2008. The closing date for application submissions was 1700 hours on 18th February 2008.

2.2 All 4,171 candidates who had registered their interest since the previous campaign were sent an e-mail notifying them of the imminent recruitment drive and how to access an application pack.

2.3 Delegates who had been part of the Positive Action Programme were also sent an application pack.

2.4 The campaign was advertised via all the participant Services' websites also through Jobcentre Plus, local intranet and all local strategic partners including Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Community contacts.

2.5 Prior to the commencement of the process, estimates from the three participating Fire and Rescue Services indicated that there were likely to be 60 vacancies to be filled from this recruitment exercise.

3 RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN PROCESS AND STATISTICS

3.1 In total 6,137 individuals requested an application form. 91% of applications were downloaded and equal opportunities information was recorded. 89% of the candidates downloading a form described themselves as 'Male' and 11% described themselves as 'Female'. Out of the 6,137 application requests, 96% of them described themselves as 'White'. A breakdown of the remainder is as follows:

1.84% Mixed; 0.62% Asian; 0.39% Black; 0.05% Chinese; 0.68% stated other or preferred not to say.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

- 3.2 A total of 2,532 applications were received, however this figure includes 48 late applications (received after 1700 hours on the 18th February) plus 48 incomplete application forms. An application return of 36% was achieved which is in line with normal application process statistics. Therefore a total of 2,436 candidates were considered and processed in this campaign.
- 3.3 A full breakdown of the statistics relating to the whole campaign can be found at Appendix 1.
- 3.4 A candidate is required to pass all stages of the recruitment process to be successful. Each stage is classified as a deselector;
- Stage 1 > Initial sift - candidates are eliminated by age (under 17.5 years); criminal convictions; current Wholetime Duty System Firefighter in an alternative Service; missing pages; and incomplete application forms.
- Stage 2 > 2nd sift – candidates are eliminated if they do not meet the scoring criteria which are set nationally for all the personal qualities and attributes (PQA) questions, e.g. Commitment to Diversity and Integrity – *Please describe a situation where you have interacted with people who are different from you in terms of disability, age, race, gender, religion and/or belief or sexual orientation.*
- Written > A candidate needs to attain a pass in all four psychometric test papers.
- Role related > A candidate is required to successfully carry out all 6 physical tests within the nationally specified timescales/requirements.
- Interview > Candidates must achieve a minimum overall pass mark and achieve a score of 3 or more in the Equality and Diversity questions. Due to the high pass rate (97%) of candidates successful at this stage in the 2006/07 campaign, the region agreed, in conjunction with the National Assessment Unit, to adopt a 'pilot' marking scheme which increased the minimum pass mark and implemented a minimum pass score for specific questions.

4 OUTCOMES

- 4.1 Overall this campaign saw a significant increase in the amount of candidates successful at each stage of the process compared to the 2006/07 exercise. The stage which created the greatest impact was at 2nd sift and this saw a 47% increase in the candidates successful through to written assessment in comparison to the previous campaign, and there are three main contributing factors;

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

- Overall there was a 21% increase in total amount of applications applying to the process.
- Question 1 on the application form, which relates to the PQA Equality and Diversity, was reviewed and the wording altered to give the candidate greater clarity on the information required.
- A question on the application form relating to 'Why you want to be a Firefighter' had been removed completely as it was a major de-selector and was nationally identified as a subjective question.

4.2 Equality and Diversity Statistics

- 4.2.1 There has been a 36% increase in the number of females applying to this recruitment drive and it is encouraging to note that proportionately more females have been successful through Stage 1 & 2 compared to the exercise in 2006/07. There also is a significant increase in the percentage of females through to written stage (135% increase compared to 2006/07 campaign).
- 4.2.2 Unfortunately, a high percentage of female applicants were unsuccessful at role related stage (64%) with the majority failing 2 or more of the physical role related tests. The assessments which caused the greatest impact were the equipment assembly, equipment carry and enclosed space. These assessments are designed to assess a candidates cardiovascular levels, upper body strength and claustrophobic tendencies;

Role related assessment

- 527 candidates invited to attend
- 396 candidates passed assessment
- 159 failed (includes 31 females)
- 24 candidates did not turn up for assessment

Failure outcomes – Role related Stage

Assessment	Total failed	Male	Female
Ladder Climb	36	31	5
Casualty Evacuation	0	0	0
Ladder Lift	11	1	10
Enclosed Space	57	46	11
Equipment Assembly	32	3	29
Equipment Carry	23	3	20

- 4.2.3 Encouragingly this campaign has seen a high increase in the percentage of female candidates who have successfully passed all stages of the tests, including final interview. When compared to the 2006/07 recruitment campaign, this represents a 155% increase in the amount of females successful in passing all stages.
- 4.2.4 Within this data the definition of BME candidates has been expanded and now includes all applicants who classify themselves as any other ethnic background other than 'White British'. BME candidates also fall within either male or female categories.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

In comparison to the 2006/07 campaign, there has also been a substantial increase in the number of BME candidates applying to become Firefighters equating to over a three fold increase. It is even more encouraging to report that there is an increase of 86% of BME candidates through to the written test stage and that there were five times more applicants successful at this stage compared to the 2006/07. However, although these figures are encouraging it is still evident that the written assessment had the greatest negative impact on the BME candidates. Over 57% of candidates who sat the written assessment failed.

- 4.2.5 Although 37% of BME candidates failed at role-related stage, their failure was spread evenly across all 6 assessments.
- 4.2.6 It is pleasing to note that this campaign has delivered a three fold increase in the number of BME candidates successful at interview stage compared to the 2006/07 campaign.

BME candidates Service preference breakdown

Service	No of candidates
Co Durham & Darlington	2
Cleveland	1
Tyne & Wear	10

- 4.3 Overall, the success rate of underrepresented candidates applying compared to the candidates successful at interview stage is comparatively similar; however, it is disappointing to note that the success rate of the BME candidates is lower than the 2006/07 campaign.

Category	Applied 2008	Applied 2006/07	Success at interview 08	Success at interview 06/07	% success rate 08	% success rate 06/07
Male	2233	1755	345	275	15.4%	15.6%
Female	191	143	23	9	12%	6.3%
BME	134	27	13	4	9.7%	14.8%

5 POSITIVE ACTION PROGRAMME

- 5.1 The Positive Action Programme which commenced in May 2007 and concluded in January 2008, just prior to the beginning of the current campaign (in accordance with legislative requirements), contained a core group of 80 female and BME candidates from the North East region. All candidates submitted an application form.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

- 5.2 It is worth noting that the proactive collaboration and promotion work with a variety of members of the BME community, such as the Compact for Race Equality in South Tyneside (CREST), has not only improved partnership working but has also encouraged a number of their members to apply to be Firefighters or for other corporate opportunities.
- 5.3 The programme delivered a range of classroom and fitness workshops covering all aspects of the recruitment process and the role. A specific workshop was devised purely for BME candidates who had expressed concerns regarding the written assessments; therefore it was disappointing to find a number of these candidates fail at this stage. These results indicate that there maybe greater issues regarding literacy and numeracy skills for this group of candidates.
- 5.4 All candidates who attended the programme were tracked throughout the process and a summary of the results are highlighted in table 1.

Table 1:

Category	Applied	Applied Pass	Written	Written Pass	Role Related	Role Related Pass	Interview	Interview Pass
Female	66	44	43	28	27 (1)	11	11	10
BME	18	13	13	4 (1)	4	4	1	1

** Numbers in brackets denotes number of candidates successful to that specific stage but failed to attend the assessment*

6 SUMMARY

- 6.1 Overall, the 2008 Firefighter Recruitment Campaign was successfully conducted using the National Firefighter Selection Process within the specified timescales by utilising the resources of the North East region. The support required to manage a project of this scale has resulted in a greater working cohesion with all colleagues within the region.
- 6.2 Although the Positive Action Programme had a positive impact on the success of the under-represented groups successful through the stages of the process, a new programme will be developed to ensure the next recruitment campaign is even more successful. A greater focus will be placed on the fitness levels for females and more external assistance will be provided for BME candidates relating to the required literacy and numeracy skills, which will aid them being successful at written stage.
- 6.3 All information and outcome data relating to the 2008 campaign plus details regarding the logistics of the process will be taken forward to the National Firefighter Selection Forum for discussion/implementation. The true outcome of this selection process will be evaluated when the trainees successful through this process have fully completed 3 months of their probationary period and their progress validated and evaluated.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Members are requested to:

- a) Endorse the actions of the Chief Fire Officer;
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The undermentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

National Firefighter Recruitment Tests