



The Fire Brigades Union

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TO: ALL MEMBERS

Dear Brother/Sister

FIREFIT VALIDATION TESTS - FBU MEMBERS ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE

The FBU has been focussing on fitness standards as part of our challenge to show that the government's arguments that firefighters can maintain operational fitness until age 60 are flawed.

Part of the evidence we previously submitted in our pension campaign related to the ongoing work of Firefit. In addition to this we have been discussing the recommended safe fitness standards that were outlined in the latest report '*occupational fitness standards for operational UK fire and rescue personnel*' by Dr James Bilzon.

The standards identified in this report relate to the demands placed on operational firefighters during a series of tasks undertaken by volunteers in earlier trials. These tests were based upon essential tasks which are carried out by operational firefighters on a regular basis. The tests were undertaken at an agreed pace where participants wore firefighting kit and gas analysis testing masks. The tests confirmed that the safe recommended fitness standard for firefighting roles was 42.3VO₂ and that below this standard a firefighter could not be guaranteed to be able to safely and effectively perform the essential part of their role.

However, it is important to note that there will be individuals who can meet the same standards of activity without this level of VO₂. This is due to variations in human physiology. It is also important to note that the standard arises from the work-related tests and not vice versa. The key issue is the ability to perform work related tests.

This report and subsequent presentation from Dr Bilzon has proved very helpful and has helped us in our discussions designed to achieve an occupational fitness standard for all UK firefighters.

This is being opposed currently by the national fire service employers who want each FRS to be able to decide its own fitness standards. This position is being opposed by the FBU and we are attempting to build a strong case to show the only logical way to deal with firefighter fitness is to have an occupational fitness standard. The union has argued that there is no logic in the employer's national position.

The FBU position on a professional safe standard for all UK firefighters was debated at our recent Conference and agreed:

1. On the need for an occupational fitness standard for all firefighters in the UK.

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2. That this standard should be based around the recommended fitness standard of 42.3 VO₂ for all firefighting roles.
3. To immediately explore the extent of employers' duty of care responsibilities in relation to this and challenge as appropriate.
4. That 'during career' tests and standards must be objectively and clearly linked to the requirements of the job.
5. To explore the issue of differing fitness levels for firefighting roles and other roles in more detail and agree a position in the future.
6. To support the request from Firefit to involve members in the selected brigades.
7. To communicate this position to members.
8. For FBU officials to formally meet with the Firefit Chair to discuss their work in more detail.
9. To ensure that all ongoing work is closely monitored and any decision is revisited if necessary in the future.

Work is progressing on all these areas and officials have already met with the Firefit Chair, Justin Johnston.

Firefit has now designed a during-career test that has been designed to be linked to the requirements of the role. The union has suggested some amendments to an earlier assessment programme which incorporates this during-career test and we will be discussing this further.

Firefit now intends to run a series of validation tests for this during-career assessment in the following brigades:

- GMC
- Merseyside
- Buckinghamshire
- Leicestershire
- West Yorkshire

We have discussed these with the Firefit Chair and in line with the Conference decision we have agreed to write to members in those Brigades, encouraging them to volunteer to participate.

We have also been invited to observe these tests and in at least one brigade have been informed that brigade officials will be participating. We are encouraging members to participate because we would like these tests to involve a wide range of firefighters, taking account of age and gender. It is important to note that the FBU has not signed up to anything in relation to fitness and is continuing to monitor the situation as a whole. These are discussions which are still under way. Further reports will follow.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally,



MATT WRACK
GENERAL SECRETARY