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Circular: 2024HOC0421MW

Date: **11/11/2024**

To: **All Members**

Dear Brother/Sister,

Non-compliant apprentice schemes

It has been brought to the attention of Head Office that one or more Fire and Rescue service (FRS) is implementing or has implemented apprenticeship schemes that fall short of the democratically agreed position of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

A brigade secretaries circular has been issued today, setting out how officials must immediately challenge any local apprenticeship scheme to ensure the policy of the union is upheld.

The policy is very detailed and set out below, however a key point to note, is that any fire apprentice undertaking operational duties of a firefighter (including operational training) and/or being posted to or working at an operational fire station should be in receipt of agreed national Grey Book rates of pay.

The policy is as follows:

- Earnings potential should be as high as reasonable practicable i.e. higher than 30 hours per week
- Under no circumstances should *Fire Apprentices* work longer than 42 hours per week. Apprentices under 18 years of age should not work more than 40 hours per week. The number of weekly hours worked whilst at college should be as determined by the college but should not exceed 40

- Accordingly, *Fire Apprentices* should work a consistent number of hours across different fire and rescue services. The Union would seek a 35 hour working week for Fire Apprentices whilst not at college
- Under no circumstances should a *Fire Apprentice* under the age of 18 work between the hours of 10pm and 6am
- Under no circumstances shall *Fire Apprentices* work for more than 8 hours per day
- *Fire Apprentices* shall have two clear days of work/ college each week
- *Fire Apprentices* shall not be asked to work on a Saturday or a Sunday unless for a specified and unavoidable purpose which is essential for their development. In any event this shall occur no more than an average of 4 times per year and will be compensated by not being required for work in the following week. The compensatory time will be at time and half for the hours worked and any travel time in excess of 1 hour. In any event there will be no work required or requested of a *Fire Apprentice* at the beginning or the end any week in which he/she is committed to attending college
- Apprentices under 18 shall have a rest break of 30 minutes every 4.5 hours. The FBU will seek agreement that *Fire Apprentices* will receive at least 1.5 hours rest break in an 8 hour working day whilst not at college, and shall take any rest breaks which are of a longer duration alongside other co-workers
- *Fire Apprentices* under 18 shall have a period of 12 consecutive hours' daily rest
- Until and unless a *Fire Apprentice* is on development pay no *Fire Apprentice* should work night shifts
- Until and unless a *Fire Apprentice* is on development pay no *Fire Apprentice* should be asked to work earlier than 8am and no later than 7pm
- Until and unless a *Fire Apprentice* is on development pay no *Fire Apprentice* should be asked to work on any public holiday announced by, or observed by, the government of the country in which the *Fire Apprentice* works

We should aim for the junior firefighters pay rates to be applied to all 16-17 year old

- The starting rate for any apprentice must not be lower than the rate for a 17 year old junior firefighter
- We support the principle of targeting appointment of *Fire Apprentices* to address the diversity profile of the fire and rescue workforce - in terms of ethnicity, gender, and where practicable, sexuality and gender self-identification (LGBT)
- Appointment processes must not be discriminatory in respect of the age of applicants
We support the principle of not restricting applicants with disabilities subject to those disabilities not posing a risk to the individual's health and safety in the working environment, especially the operational environment. Such disabilities should not be such as to impede operations on the incident ground unless suitable remedial measures or adjustments can mitigate the issue

- There needs to be robust standards in respect of fitness and strength, which must take into account the realistic prospect of fitness and strength improving to the appropriate standard for operational firefighters
- Fitness and strength standards need to accommodate a projection that takes into account the effects of ageing
- The Grey Book encourages all employees to join a trade union. *Fire Apprentices* should be treated no differently. To that end we will seek agreement whereby each fire and rescue service will make arrangements for the Fire Brigades Union to meet with apprentices during work-time on the first day of their employment as apprentices. This 45 minute (minimum) access will be programmed in as part of the induction process
- Subject to meeting all the required employment standards, all *Fire Apprentices* be placed on development pay as in development firefighters with Grey Book contracts after no more than two years of having commenced their apprenticeship
- Whilst in the pre-development phase of the apprenticeship
 - We will seek agreement that *Fire Apprentices* will have more leave days than the minimum specified in the government arrangements
 - No *Fire Apprentice* should be asked to work on any public holiday announced by, or observed by, the government of the country in which the *Fire Apprentice* works. *Fire Apprentices* will not have to surrender any of their holiday leave as a consequence of them not working on public holidays
 - *Fire Apprentices* will have the same rights under the discipline and grievance procedures as Grey Book employees
 - *Fire Apprentices* will have the same rights in respect of maternity, paternity childcare and dependency arrangements as Grey Book employees
 - All *Fire Apprentices* will be supplied with a contract of employment setting out their terms and conditions in working arrangements
 - No *Fire Apprentice* will be allocated a work location which is difficult to access by public transport
 - Each *Fire Apprentice* will have regular hours
 - All time served as an apprentice will count for service continuity purposes
 - The FBU leads will report back on the implications in respect of pensionable service, if any, in respect of *Fire Apprentices* - in particular for *Fire Apprentices* who are employed when they have attained the age of 18
- The fire apprenticeship scheme should be consistent with and compliant with the NJC competency framework
- Prior to *Fire Apprentices* being placed on development pay and being required to perform the normal duties of a firefighter in development, all *Fire Apprentices* will be provided with the quality training provision that yields normal training inputs and testing received by Trainees

- FBU leads will take the necessary steps to provide further information in respect of the arrangements in hand to develop a standard for fire apprenticeships and the relationship between the government's apprentice qualifications plan and the NJC's competency framework
- Unless in a Development or Competent phase
 - *Fire Apprentices* will not be counted as part of a "watch strength". They will to all intents and purposes be supernumerary
 - *Fire Apprentices* will not be deployed or attend operational incidents including not riding an appliance or other vehicle when it is mobilised to operational incidents
 - *Fire Apprentices* will not be asked to carry out lone working
 - For reasons of safety and experience, *Fire Apprentices*, especially those under 18, who are "left" at a station will not be asked to respond to callers
 - FRSs should plan activities so that *Fire Apprentices* are not left in remote locations, and further should be provided with the means to travel should this occur
- The number of *Fire Apprentices* and spending on apprenticeships by and FRS will not exceed the minimum required by the government's apprenticeship levy principles

If you believe your service does not operate an apprenticeship scheme in accordance with the policy above, you should promptly raise this with your brigade secretary; details of which can be found at www.fbu.org.uk/regions-nations

Yours in unity,



Matt Wrack
General Secretary