

Fire and Rescue Service recruitment survey

December 2016



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Summary

Introduction

This online survey of chief fire officers and chief executives looked at recruitment in the fire and rescue service. The Home Office has made increasing the diversity of the firefighter workforce a key priority, and has suggested that recruitment opportunities arising from the ageing workforce of the service will make this possible.

The purpose of this survey was to examine the extent to which chief fire officers and chief executives think this opportunity to recruit will exist in practice. The results will inform the Local Government Association's (LGA's) work around diversity and recruitment in the fire and rescue service.

Methodology

The online survey was sent via email to chief fire officers and chief executives in all 45 fire and rescue services in England, and was in the field between 18 November and 19 December 2016. Responses were received from 40 fire and rescue services – a response rate of 89 per cent.

External recruitment - whole time firefighters

Respondents were asked whether they anticipated that their fire and rescue service will be externally recruiting whole time firefighters at any level over the five years following the survey.¹ The majority of respondents (36 respondents – 90 per cent) anticipated that their service would be externally recruiting whole time firefighters during the five years following the survey.

These respondents were asked in which years they anticipated this to happen. Recruitment was expected to happen throughout the five year period, but 2017/18 and 2018/19 were the years where recruitment was most commonly expected to take place, with 64 per cent (23 respondents) and 58 per cent (21 respondents) respectively saying that they expected to externally recruit whole time firefighters in these years.

The survey then went on to look at the level of recruitment that was expected to take place. Thirty five respondents were able to provide an estimate of the percentage of their existing whole time firefighter workforce that they expected to be replacing in total through external recruitment over the five years following the survey.²

The mean average proportion of the existing whole time firefighter workforce that these 35 authorities expected to be replacing over five years was 14 per cent.

¹ This question referred to external recruitment to all whole time firefighter positions rather than transferring retained firefighters to whole time firefighter positions, and also did not include the hiring of apprentices.

² This includes the three respondents who said that they did not expect to be undertaking any recruitment over the period.

External recruitment – retained firefighters

Respondents were then asked whether they anticipated that their fire and rescue service will be externally recruiting retained firefighters at any level over the next five years. This question did not include the hiring of apprentices. Most respondents (93 per cent – 37 respondents) expected to externally recruit retained firefighters.

These respondents were asked in which years they anticipated recruiting retained firefighters. The vast majority expected to undertake some recruitment during every year, with a peak of 97 per cent expecting to recruit in 2017/18.

The survey then went on to look at the level of recruitment that was expected to take place. Thirty two respondents were able to provide an estimate of the percentage of their existing retained firefighter workforce that they expected to be replacing in total through external recruitment over the five years following the survey.³

The mean average proportion of their existing retained firefighter workforce that these 32 authorities expected to be replacing over five years was 27 per cent (although this is being pulled up somewhat by a small number of authorities that were expecting to recruit a very high proportion – the median is 20 per cent)⁴.

Recruitment initiatives

All respondents who planned to undertake recruitment of either whole time or retained firefighters were asked whether they planned to put any recruitment initiatives in place to achieve an increasingly diverse firefighter workforce (more representative of females and people from black and minority ethnic groups or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community).

Eighty per cent (32 respondents) said that they did plan to put recruitment initiatives to encourage diversity in place, whilst 15 per cent (six respondents) said that they were considering doing this.

Examples given of recruitment initiatives included outreach and targeted work, engaging with young people from underrepresented groups, running taster sessions for specific groups, using social media for targeted advertising, and offering help with the recruitment process.

All respondents were then asked whether they monitor recruitment progress, from application to accepted offer of employment, in order to establish drop-out rates from different societal groups (females and people from black and minority ethnic groups or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community). Just under half of respondents (48 per cent – 19 respondents) said that they monitor recruitment

³ This includes the three respondents who said that they did not expect to be undertaking any recruitment over the period.

⁴ The mean average value is calculated by adding all of the values together and dividing by the number of values. As this can be skewed by a small number of very high or very low numbers, it can be useful to also look at the median, which is obtained by placing all of the numbers from highest to lowest and identifying the middle value.

progress for all of the groups mentioned in the question, with a further 28 per cent (11 respondents) monitoring some of the groups.

Introduction

This online survey of chief fire officers and chief executives looked at recruitment in the fire and rescue service. The Home Office has made increasing the diversity of the firefighter workforce a key priority, and has suggested that recruitment opportunities arising from the ageing workforce of the service will make this possible.

The purpose of this survey was to examine the extent to which chief fire officers and chief executives think this opportunity to recruit will exist in practice. The results will inform the Local Government Association's (LGA's) work around diversity and recruitment in the fire and rescue service.

Methodology

The online survey was sent via email to chief fire officers and chief executives in all 45 fire and rescue services in England, and was in the field between 18 November and 19 December 2016. Responses were received from 40 fire and rescue services – a response rate of 89 per cent. This is a very good response rate for a survey of this kind, and means that the results can be taken as representative of the position of the sector more widely.

Please note the following when reading the report:

- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.
- Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.
- The following conventions are used in tables: '*' - less than 0.5 per cent; '0' – no observations; '-' – category not applicable/data not available.
- As the response base is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore in this report absolute numbers are reported alongside percentage values.

Fire and Rescue Service recruitment survey

This section outlines the full set of survey results.

External recruitment - whole time firefighters

In order to gauge the extent to which the opportunity to increase diversity through recruitment will exist in practice, respondents were asked whether they anticipated that their fire and rescue service will be externally recruiting whole time firefighters at any level over the five years following the survey. This question referred to external recruitment to whole time firefighter positions rather than transferring retained firefighters to whole time firefighter positions, and also did not include the hiring of apprentices.

As Table 1 shows, the majority of respondents (36 respondents – 90 per cent) anticipated that their service will be externally recruiting whole time firefighters over the five years following the survey.

Table 1: Do you anticipate that your fire and rescue service will be externally recruiting whole time firefighters at any level over the next five years?			
	Number		Per cent
Yes		36	90
No		3	8
Don't know		1	3

Base: all respondents (40 respondents)

The 36 respondents who anticipated undertaking external recruitment of whole time firefighters during the five years following the survey were asked in which years they anticipated this to happen. As recruitment plans may not have been concrete at the time of the survey, respondents were asked to provide their best estimate of when recruitment might occur.

As Table 2 shows, recruitment was expected to happen throughout the five year period, but 2017/18 and 2018/19 were the years where recruitment was most commonly expected to take place, with 64 per cent (23 respondents) and 58 per cent (21 respondents) respectively saying that they expected to externally recruit whole time firefighters in these years.

Table 2: Please tick all the years in which you anticipate undertaking external recruitment of whole time firefighters

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
2016/17	15	42
2017/18	23	64
2018/19	21	58
2019/20	16	44
2020/21	13	36
2021/22	8	22
Don't know	2	6

Base: all respondents who expect to recruit whole time firefighters in the five years following the survey (36 respondents)

Please note that percentages will sum to more than 100 as respondents could select multiple answer options

The survey then went on to look at the level of recruitment that was expected to take place. Thirty five respondents were able to provide an estimate of the percentage of their existing whole time firefighter workforce that they expected to be replacing in total through external recruitment over the five years following the survey.⁵

The mean average proportion of the existing whole time firefighter workforce that these 35 authorities expected to be replacing over five years was 14 per cent. Table 3 shows how this was distributed across services, with the most common expectation being to replace either between 1 and 10 per cent or between 11 and 20 per cent of whole time firefighters (both at 34 per cent).

Table 3: Please estimate the percentage of your existing whole time firefighter workforce that you expect to be replacing in total through external recruitment over the next five years.

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
No recruitment expected (0 per cent)	3	9
Between 1 and 10 per cent of workforce	12	34
Between 11 and 20 per cent of workforce	12	34
Between 21 and 30 per cent of workforce	8	23
Total	35	100

Base: all respondents who knew in which years they were expecting to recruit whole time firefighters, and those who did not expect to recruit (35 respondents)

External recruitment – retained firefighters

Respondents were then asked whether they anticipated that their fire and rescue service will be externally recruiting retained firefighters at any level over the next five years. This question did not include the hiring of apprentices.

⁵ This includes the three respondents who said in Table 1 that they did not expect to be undertaking any recruitment over the period.

As Table 4 shows, most respondents (93 per cent – 37 respondents) did expect to externally recruit retained firefighters.

Table 4: Do you anticipate that your fire and rescue service will be externally recruiting retained firefighters at any level over the next five years?		
	Number	Per cent
Yes	37	93
No	3	8
Don't know	0	0

Base: all respondents (40 respondents)

The 37 respondents who anticipated undertaking external recruitment of retained firefighters during the five years following the survey were asked in which years they anticipated this to happen. As recruitment plans may not have been concrete at the time of the survey, respondents were asked to provide their best estimate of when recruitment might occur.

As Table 5 shows, the vast majority of these respondents expected to undertake some recruitment during each year, with a peak of 97 per cent expecting to recruit in 2017/18.

Table 5: Please tick all the years in which you anticipate undertaking external recruitment of retained firefighters		
	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
2016/17	32	86
2017/18	36	97
2018/19	35	95
2019/20	34	92
2020/21	32	86
2021/22	32	86
Don't know	1	3

Base: all respondents who expect to recruit retained firefighters in the five years following the survey (37 respondents)

Please note that percentages will sum to more than 100 as respondents could select multiple answer options

The survey then went on to look at the level of recruitment that was expected to take place. Thirty two respondents were able to provide an estimate of the percentage of their existing retained firefighter workforce that they expected to be replacing, in total, through external recruitment over the five years following the survey.⁶

The mean average proportion of their existing retained firefighter workforce that these 32 authorities expected to be replacing over five years was 27 per cent (although this

⁶ This includes the three respondents who said in Table 4 that they did not expect to be undertaking any recruitment over the period.

is being pulled up somewhat by a small number of authorities that were expecting to recruit a very high proportion – the median is 20 per cent)⁷.

Table 6 shows how this was distributed across the authorities, with the most common expectation being to replace between 11 and 20 per cent of the retained firefighter workforce (28 per cent). The variation seen here is much wider than for whole time firefighter recruitment, with one respondent giving an estimate of 100 per cent.

Table 6: Please estimate the percentage of your existing retained firefighter workforce that you expect to be replacing in total through external recruitment over the next five years

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
No recruitment expected (0 per cent)	3	9
Between 1 and 10 per cent of workforce	7	22
Between 11 and 20 per cent of workforce	9	28
Between 21 and 30 per cent of workforce	4	13
Between 31 and 40 per cent of workforce	3	9
Between 41 and 60 per cent of workforce	2	6
Between 61 and 80 per cent of workforce	3	9
Between 81 and 100 per cent of workforce	1	3
Total	32	100

Base: all respondents who knew in which years they were expecting to recruit retained firefighters, and those who did not expect to recruit (35 respondents)

Recruitment initiatives

All respondents who planned to undertake recruitment of either whole time or retained firefighters were asked whether they planned to put any recruitment initiatives in place to achieve an increasingly diverse firefighter workforce (more representative of females and people from black and minority ethnic groups or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community).

Eighty per cent (32 respondents) said that they did plan to put recruitment initiatives to encourage diversity in place, whilst 15 per cent (six respondents) said that they were considering doing this. Just one respondent said that no recruitment initiatives were planned.

⁷ The mean average value is calculated by adding all of the values together and dividing by the number of values. As this can be skewed by a small number of very high or very low numbers, it can be useful to also look at the median, which is obtained by placing all of the numbers from highest to lowest and identifying the middle value.

Table 7: Do you plan to put any recruitment initiatives in place to achieve an increasingly diverse firefighter workforce (more representative of females and people from black and minority ethnic groups or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community)?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	32	80
Under consideration	6	15
No, not currently planned	1	3
Don't know	1	3

Base: all respondents who expect to recruit retained or whole time firefighters in the five years following the survey (40 respondents)

The 32 respondents who planned to put recruitment initiatives in place were asked to provide details. Respondents provided a large number of examples, which most commonly fell under the following themes:

- **Outreach and targeted work:** including targeted advertising, engaging with community and support groups, places of worship and women's sports clubs.
- **Engaging with young people from underrepresented groups:** liaising with schools and colleges, as well as engaging young people through apprenticeships, young firefighters associations and cadet schemes.
- **Taster sessions for specific groups:** for example, to allow potential applicants to experience the point of entry tests.
- **Social media:** using sites such as Linked In, Facebook and twitter to target specific groups.
- **Providing help with the recruitment process:** including preparation sessions, fitness sessions and reviewing eligibility criteria.
- Other methods used by respondents included the use of mentors/champions from underrepresented groups, positive action recruitment events, positive action campaigns, working with Job Centres to encourage consideration from members of under-represented group of a fire service career and introducing more flexible working and job shares.

All respondents were then asked whether they monitor recruitment progress, from application to accepted offer of employment, in order to establish drop-out rates from different societal groups (females and people from black and minority ethnic groups or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community).

As Table 8 shows, just under half of respondents (48 per cent – 19 respondents) said that they monitor recruitment progress for all of the groups mentioned in the question, with a further 28 per cent (11 respondents) monitoring some of the groups; amongst these respondents the most commonly monitored characteristics were gender and ethnic origin.

Table 8: Do you monitor recruitment progress, from application to accepted offer of employment, in order to establish drop-out rates from different societal groups (females and people from black and minority ethnic groups or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community)?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, for all of the groups mentioned above	19	48
Yes, for some of the groups mentioned above	11	28
Under consideration	8	20
No, not currently planned	1	3
Don't know	1	3

Base: all respondents (40 respondents)

Further comments

Finally, respondents were invited to provide any further comments on recruitment and diversity in the fire and rescue service. Eighteen respondents (45 per cent) provided comments:

- Several respondents suggested that there should be a **nationally driven campaign** to help ensure that the service is viewed as a career of choice by a wider group of people, and increase awareness of the modern role of a firefighter.
- Some highlighted the fact that retained firefighters need to live within a short distance of their station. For some, this **catchment area is made up of predominantly white British** people, which impacts on their ability to recruit an increasingly diverse workforce.
- One respondent stated that they will be looking to undertake their new recruitment through the **new apprenticeship scheme** currently under development nationally, which was not covered by this survey.
- Finally, a range of **practical suggestions** were made, including:
 - offering flexible contracts, which may differ from the traditional whole-time and retained employment arrangements
 - developing a greater understanding of why individuals are not attracted to the service (for example is pay an issue?)
 - rethinking the idea that every firefighter needs to be able to do every job
 - creating schemes that support development such a supported two tier entry, managed promotion and active talent management
 - providing advice on what is positive discrimination if all delegates reach a standard
 - considering whether the national standards for fitness are appropriate for new recruits or whether they should that be a target to achieve as a probationer.

Annex A: Questionnaire

Background

1. Please amend the details we have on record if necessary:

Your name:

Your authority:

Job title:

Email address:

External recruitment - whole time firefighters

Please note that the questions in this section refer to **external recruitment** to all whole time firefighter positions rather than transferring retained firefighters to whole time firefighter positions.

2. Do you anticipate that your fire and rescue service will be externally recruiting whole time firefighters at any level over the next five years?

Please do not include the hiring of apprentices

Yes

No

Don't know

If yes to Q2:

3. Please tick all the years in which you anticipate undertaking external recruitment of whole time firefighters:

We understand that recruitment plans may not be concrete at this stage. Please provide your best estimate of when recruitment may occur.

Please tick all that apply

2016/17

2017/18

2018/19

2019/20

2020/21

2021/22

Don't know

If at least one year ticked in Q3:

4. Please estimate the percentage of **your existing whole time firefighter workforce** that you expect to be replacing in total through external recruitment over the next five years.

We understand that the exact figure will not be available. Please enter your best estimate to give us an indication of the scale.

Please write the percentage to the nearest whole number (i.e. 50%). If you don't know please enter DK.

%

External recruitment – retained firefighters

5. Do you anticipate that your fire and rescue service will be externally recruiting retained firefighters at any level over the next five years?

Please do not include the hiring of apprentices

Yes

No

Don't know

If yes to Q5:

6. Please tick all the years in which you anticipate undertaking external recruitment of retained firefighters:

We understand that recruitment plans may not be concrete at this stage. Please provide your best estimate of when recruitment may occur.

Please tick all that apply

2016/17

2017/18

2018/19

2019/20

2020/21

2021/22

Don't know

If at least one year ticked in Q6:

- 7.** Please estimate the percentage **of your existing retained firefighter workforce** that you expect to be replacing in total through external recruitment over the next five years.

We understand that the exact figure will not be available. Please enter your best estimate to give us an indication of the scale.

Please write the percentage to the nearest whole number (i.e. 50%). If you don't know please enter DK.

%

Recruitment initiatives

If yes to Q2 or Q5:

- 8.** Do you plan to put any recruitment initiatives in place to achieve an increasingly diverse firefighter workforce (more representative of females and people from Black and minority ethnic groups or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community)?

Yes

Under consideration

No, not currently planned

Don't know

If yes to Q8:

- 9.** Please briefly provide details of the firefighter recruitment initiatives you plan to put in place:

We may contact you for more information.

- 10.** Do you monitor recruitment progress, from application to accepted offer of employment, in order to establish drop-out rates from different societal groups (females and people from Black and minority ethnic groups or the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community)?

Yes, for all of the groups mentioned above

Yes, for some of the groups mentioned above

Under consideration

No, not currently planned

Don't know

If 'yes, for some of the groups mentioned above':

11. Please specify which groups you monitor recruitment progress for in order to establish drop-out rates.

12. If you have any further comments on recruitment and diversity in the Fire and Rescue Service, please use the space below.



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