Post ADC Processes: Additional guidance notes

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Addressed to:
The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Chief Executive of the County Council
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer

Summary
This guidance note sets out the key principles which should be applied when using the results of ADCs to appoint individuals to specific roles. It also provides guidance for using the assessment Tools for direct recruitment of external applicants to the FRS.

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1.0 **Introduction**

1.1 The National ADC Project has delivered toolkits for the FRS to use to implement Assessment Development Centres for development and progression at Supervisory, Middle and Strategic Levels. These processes are now being rolled out across the FRS and have been well received. It is evident that some national consistency is being achieved which will support transferability between services and a common standard for progression within the FRS based on fair, open and objective assessment.

1.2 It is apparent that having implemented ADCs consistently, in accordance with the National Framework, there is a need to achieve consistency in the processes being used to appoint individuals who are successful at ADC to specific roles. This guidance note sets out the key principles which should be applied when using the results of ADCs to appoint individuals to specific roles. It contains some key elements which will comprise a standard approach to underpin the modernisation programme and the development of a consistent approach to recruitment, selection and progression. It also provides guidance for using the assessment Tools for direct recruitment of external applicants to the FRS.

2.0 **Background**

2.1 The ADC processes contained within the toolkits provide the means for achieving open, fair and objective recruitment, selection and progression across the FRS. These processes cover application, sifting via Initial Test of Potential, ADC Exercises, Assessor Guides, training notes, feedback and candidate and line manager briefings. Together the materials support a comprehensive guide and the tools to implement ADCs which deliver consistent assessment methods at the three key managerial levels and comparable processes for progression within each level.

2.2 It is essential to note that the ADC is designed only to assess potential. It is not in itself a selection process. It is accepted that competency relates to the individual and is sub-divided into “what they are like” – the personal qualities and attributes that they have – and “what they can do” – the knowledge, skills, understanding and experience they have. Competence relates to the job – the activities they are required to undertake. The distinction is important in understanding the different assessment methods required for each.

2.3 Whilst the behaviours assessed at ADC will be informed by the knowledge, skills, understanding and experience an individual has gained there is no knowledge based assessment during the ADC. Clearly, to select individuals for specific roles, consideration must be given to previous experience and skills which can be assessed in a variety of ways. For different roles the knowledge, skills and experience will be different. For example, finance qualifications and experience for a finance role, HR qualifications for HR and operational experience and skills for roles with an operational element.

2.4 The assessment of the wider aspects of the individual that comprise their competency for a specific role will need to be assessed after the ADC as part of a specific selection process.
2.5 The National Assessment Unit has identified a need to provide further guidance regarding the post ADC processes which are contained in this document.

3.0 **The Wider Human Resource Context**

3.1 Recruitment, Selection and Progression within the FRS should be seen within the wider context of Human Resource Planning and Workforce Development. The processes do not stand alone and should be fully integrated into business planning and workforce development cycle and activities. Effective Human Resource Management relies on a number of key elements and together they can provide the means to ensure that the FRS has the right people, doing the right jobs, with the right skills and competences to meet the needs of the business and to achieve its objectives.

3.2 HR Processes within the FRS include Performance Management which is central to the effective working of the organisation and the teams and individuals within it. Individuals require a clear sense of what is required of them and should be set personal objectives which are linked directly to those of the team and the organisation. These objectives determine what is required to be achieved in a given period. The National Occupational Standards (NOS) provide the standard to which an individual is required to perform and the role maps determine which of the standards are specifically applicable to each role. Workplace assessment is key to ensuring that individuals are performing to the right standard and that competency is developed and maintained.

4.0 **The Personal Qualities and Attributes Framework (PQAs) and the Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS)**

4.1 Extensive work was undertaken to define the behaviours required of individuals in each role and these are set out with the Personal Qualities and Attributes Framework (PQAs). The PQAs were developed from the role maps and provide a comprehensive framework on which to base assessment and development decisions. The PQAs are applicable across the whole range of activities performed by FRS staff.

4.2 The PQAs were subject to a further, extensive proving exercise during the National ADC Project. This involved focusing on a series of FRS based situations, including operational incidents, and analysing a range of behaviours to identify Ineffective (1) to Highly Effective (4) performance. The work tested the relevance and application of the PQAs across a wide range of FRS contexts using current role holders, their line managers and the teams they manage. No gaps were identified and the PQA Framework provides comprehensive coverage of the roles at each level.

4.3 From the PQA Framework the Generic Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales (Generic BARS) were developed. The Generic BARS provide a comprehensive and objective guide to effective behaviours which are specific to the FRS and can be used by individuals, line managers and HR professionals to assess behaviours in all areas of the workplace, in ADCs and other recruitment and selection exercises. For the ADC exercises specific BARS have been developed which provide the scoring for the exercises and the basis for assessment of potential.
5.0 Line Manager Involvement and Personal Development Review (PDR)

5.1 Effective line managers not only encourage members of their team, but provide regular and specific feedback to individuals against their objectives within the context of the NOS. Where this happens individuals have a realistic understanding of their abilities within their current role and are provided with role models for future development. IPDS has prompted better focus for development in role and the PDR captures workplace assessment.

5.2 Within the ADC process line managers have a pivotal role in preparing individuals for progression to new roles by providing development opportunities, providing feedback and encouragement and role modelling effective behaviours across all contexts. Although the decision to apply for progression rests largely with the individual, given the current inconsistency across the FRS in embedding effective PDR and workplace assessment it may be that, initially, FRAs may want to have a line manager recommendation of an application to attend an ADC. It is envisaged that, as PDR processes are developed the need for this will diminish. FRAs should be mindful, however, of the rare cases where line managers may block an individual seeking progression. It is also important to note that, although line managers are well placed to assess current competence, an ADC is designed specifically to assess potential which is very different and can only be achieved by simulating the demands of a future role. Clearly, HR will have a key role in screening out applications from those for whom outstanding issues such as long term or poor sickness record, disciplinary action or capability concerns remain current.

6.0 Competence in Current Role

6.1 Competence in any future role cannot be inferred by competence in a current role. It is intended that progression to a new role is based on assessment of potential to demonstrate the behaviours required to perform successfully at that level. That is what the ADC is designed to assess. This is not dependent on performance in any previous role. However, previous experience and those competences developed in the current role will impact on an individual’s ability to demonstrate potential for a future role.

6.2 Some FRAs require individuals applying to ADC to have demonstrated competence in their current role. In the short term this may provide some reassurance that individuals are ready for the next level but it should be noted that this can directly mitigate against any accelerated promotion, is directly discriminatory against those applying to join the FRS at managerial level from outside the FRS which could be subject to legal challenge. Most importantly, it provides no objective evidence of likely readiness to progress to a new role. In the longer term this requirement may lead to a return to “time served” as a basis for progression. It may hinder modernisation and prevent the FRS from making the best use of the skills and competences of the workforce. It is clearly undesirable to have individuals seeking to progress prematurely but this will be addressed by workplace assessment and, where necessary, capability measures. HR involvement should prevent such individuals from applying until those issues are addressed satisfactorily. Good line management and effective feedback on performance should help individuals to have a realistic appreciation of their abilities.
6.3 These processes are new to the FRS and these guidance notes offer a degree of flexibility in application without undermining the intention of achieving a nationally consistent approach to recruitment and progression across the FRS.

7.0 Post ADC Processes Flowchart
7.1 The flow chart and diagrams (see below) show the key elements which form the basis of the process post ADC.

7.2 The timing of individual elements of the flowcharts is likely to be determined by organisational and individual need. There may be a requirement for the development programme to be extended over a longer period, for example for Retained Duty System staff, or for people on secondment or with special needs.

7.3 It is important to recognise that the Post ADC processes are driven by the ADC results, specifically the range of PQA scores and not just total scores. It is essential to make an analysis of an individual’s suitability for a post based on the average PQA scores which give a very clear indication of strengths and development needs. This provides a risk based approach to aligning individuals to roles. Knowledge and skills are developed and assessed both during acquisition and application and work place assessment is the key to ensuring effective performance in role.

8.0 The Self Development Module
8.1 It is recommended that all individuals, irrespective of ADC results, complete a facilitated self development module which prepares them for feedback, allows an opportunity for discussions about career aspirations and a review of experience and skills. At this stage organisational needs and individual aspirations can be explored and any development needs identified. Individuals will then receive their individual and specific PQA based feedback and begun working on a Personal Development Plan. The focus in this module is on individual responsibility for development planning and action. Those who are successful at ADC may then be offered a more formal development programme once a new role is identified for them.

9.0 Workforce Planning Team/Professional Discussion
9.1 It is recommended that FRAs convene a Team which can review objectively all the information available on individuals who are successful at ADC (the recruitment pool). The Team is likely to be comprised of HR professionals and line managers. This review will include the Individual PQA analysis – not just the total score – and an assessment of the knowledge, skills, understanding and experience of the individual which can be compared to the Role Specific Requirements. This could be undertaken as part of a Professional Discussion following which a recommendation can be made to align the individuals in the pool to specific roles.
10.0 The Development Programme

10.1 There are some essential elements of a Development Programme including some Generic development, development of role specific and safety critical competences and assessment. The order in which these are delivered can vary according to individual and local need. The aim of this programme is to ensure that individuals have the right skills and competences to operate safely in a given role. Some elements will be required before an individual takes up a new role and some may be acquired as a result of development in role. It is essential to recognise the link between competency, competence and context so that the individual is assessed in the workplace and the application of knowledge skills and competence is assessed within the context of the job and across a range of circumstances.

10.2 Once assessment is complete the appointment can be confirmed. After this regular workplace assessment will be required to ensure that the individual maintains competency and develops additional competences. This will be supported by Performance Management systems and any further training and development needs identified and met through that process.

11.0 Direct Recruitment

11.1 The national assessment Tools can be used with all staff groups and for external applicants. The exercises provide a detailed, competency based assessment using the PQA Framework. The exercises themselves are non FRS specific. It is essential that external and internal applicants are treated fairly and equally and have the same opportunity to demonstrate their potential. This means using the right tools for assessment, at the right level and at the right time.

11.2 In practice FRAs are using the Tools as the first part of a selection process for internal selection and progression as described above. It is likely that, where FRAs are seeking to open opportunities for external applicants to access FRS roles, this to a specific role. The National Assessment Unit has provided External Application Forms which can assist with the first sift of external applications, after which applicants will access the ADC and selection processes in the same way as the internal applicants. It is likely that FRAs will want to offer a modified feedback report to unsuccessful applicants.

12.0 Strategic Level Appointments

12.1 At Strategic Level there are pronounced differences in the performance requirements for Area and Brigade Manager roles. This is reflected in the Role Maps, the PQA Framework and the Generic BARS for Area and Brigade Manager. The Strategic ADC focuses on the identification of potential to progress to the Area Manager role.
12.2 In practice appointments at Brigade Manager (Principal Officer) Level are likely to be direct appointments. They are open processes designed to attract a variety of applicants including those external to the FRS. This requires the design of a specific Assessment Centre which focuses on the assessment of potential to perform at the most senior level in the service. The PQA Framework and the Brigade Manager BARS provide the basis for this assessment of potential and the addition of specific activities (e.g. Psychometric tests/Interview/role specific exercises/presentations) to assess the competences required for the role will provide an Assessment/Selection Centre.

12.3 It is likely that applicants to these posts are already operating at Area Manager Level in the FRS or the equivalent in other sectors. They will have demonstrated the ability to perform at a Strategic Level in an organisation. The focus for appointment to Brigade Manager roles must be the identification of potential to perform at that level. The PQA based processes provided in the Toolkit for progression to Brigade Manager will be the basis for assessment for these posts. From the placing of the advertisement to the appointment of an individual to a post all applicants should be treated in the same way and subject to the same processes within the same timeframe.

12.4 As with all parts of the ADC Toolkit application of these guidelines will be subject to review and evaluation in partnership with managers and practitioners across the FRS.
POST ADC PROCESSES FLOWCHART

Pre ADC Sift
Internal PDRM/Internal Application Form/HR check
External Application Form/Sift

ITOP → ADC

Self Development Module (for all participants)
PQA Based Feedback
Career Aspirations/preferences Discussion
Skills and Experience Review
Individual and Organisational Development Needs identified
Personal Development Plan

Unsuccessful at ADC

Workforce Planning Group
Individual PQA Analysis
Assessment of Role Specific Requirements/Professional Discussion
Skills Gap Analysis
Recommendation of alignment of individuals to specific roles
Composition
HR/Workforce Planning Team
Line Managers

Continued
THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

SAFETY CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

The timing of assessment may vary according to individual and organisational need but is likely to be carried out just prior to taking up a new role. However this should not be used as an additional sift and should be undertaken in the acquisition phase.

Generic Development Programme

Based on the Development Modules and requirements of all individuals with potential to develop into new roles.

Role Specific Development

Based on the Development Modules and requirements of the individual for a specific role.

In Role

Development Continues

Workplace Assessment

Appointment confirmed

PDR

ACQUISITION - the sequence of these elements is flexible

APPLICATION