



DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	HRMDC/11/4
MEETING	HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	11 APRIL 2011
SUBJECT OF REPORT	STREAMLINING OF ASSESSMENT & DEVELOPMENT CENTRES (ADCs)
LEAD OFFICER	Director of People and Organisational Development
RECOMMENDATIONS	That the recommendations as set out within Section 5 of this report be endorsed.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>As the national direction for common ADC processes diminishes this report sets the regional response to this, and summarises the work already undertaken to develop principles and a future ADC approach with specific proposals for DSFRS. The recommended approach for Supervisory and Middle Management ADC's in the future is to streamline these to a 3 exercise model – 2 role plays plus written exercise.</p> <p>This approach was presented to the SMB on 1st February 2011, who agreed for Devon & Somerset to implement the streamlined ADC approach.</p> <p>This approach reflects a process improvement, and additionally will result in longer term savings through increasing the number of candidates who can be assessed at each ADC event, reducing pressure on the assessors, predominantly taken from across operational posts for these events.</p> <p>Next steps agreed were to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain a streamlined ADC toolkit for piloting in the 2011/12 financial year • Carry out a wider review of how we assess technical knowledge across the service.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	<p>New toolkit development – a shared regional cost of around £10,000 assuming all FRS agree to proposals to follow a single model. Split across the 6 services this would mean c £1500 for DSFRS which would be manageable within the existing ADC budget (for 2010/11).</p> <p>Additional time cost requirements for piloting/retraining assessors etc. This is more than offset by a cost saving of typically up to £1,000 per candidate going through the ADC process in the future based on the regional cost model (see section 5 for more detail).</p> <p>Resource implications relating to a wider review of technical assessment will be scoped as this project progresses.</p>
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	<p>ADCs are open to all operational staff regardless of duty system, gender, age etc. These proposals do not affect the existing way in which ADC processes are managed, and individual needs will continue to be accommodated within any part of the ADC process.</p>
APPENDICES	<p>A. Proposed National Principles</p> <p>B. Revised Regional ADC Principles</p>
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS	<p>None</p>

1. **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Devon & Somerset FRS (and indeed the former Devon FRS and Somerset FRS) implemented and have been running the national ADCs now for around 5 years over which time the process, principles and systems have become accepted as normal practice for career progression. In August 2008 DSFRS implemented ADCs for RDS staff to provide parity for all operational staff.
- 1.2 Following the change of government, Bob Neill, the new Fire Minister has stated that 'services know best how to recruit and develop their own staff' which has signalled the ending of the original 'national' process providing FRS's more freedom and flexibility to design and use processes which suit their needs. It is also anticipated that as a result, the next national framework document in 2011 will not include any mandated requirement to carry out ADC's following a national common process. However, despite the apparent demise of the national ADC toolkit, it is important to recognise that the PQA framework remains and should still form the backbone of future processes for progression.
- 1.3 In the current economic climate, with increasing cost pressures and a need to streamline functions it is appropriate and timely to review the ADC process which currently is time consuming and costly, although is widely believed to deliver a good outcome in terms of identification of strong managers for our organisations.
- 1.4 With this backdrop, the ADC practitioners in the region have been working together since the summer of 2009 to review the ADC principles and model with the aim of developing a model for assessing the most suitable people for progression in our services. This model will still be underpinned by behaviours (PQAs) but also be more cost and time effective than the current ADC process.

2. **NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

- 2.1 The CFOA Strategic People and Organisational Development (POD) group have discussed ADC future at a national level. Additionally, the new fire Minister has publically stated that services know best how to recruit and develop their own staff. Therefore it is unlikely that a nationally mandated ADC process will emerge in the future. Following analysis into the issues surrounding the existing ADC model carried out by Cliff Sears and then much discussion as services started to divert from the national model, this group has now concluded that:
- Many services have moved away from a single national model, and there is unlikely to be any central dictate that reverses this trend
 - The principles underpinning ADC's are good HR practice and can therefore be expressed in a more generic way, and integrated into IPDS
 - Asking Skills for Justice or anyone else to develop further toolsets for the existing ADC model would be counterproductive – as fewer services are using the single model
 - Sharing of practice and models will be key to maintaining some consistency of approach and minimising duplication of costs in the future. This, together with accreditation of toolkits, may be a role that Skills for Justice play in the future.
- 2.2 A draft list of national ADC principles for the future have been written and are now being considered by the IPDS group to integrate within wider guidance. These can be found in Appendix A.

3. **SOUTH WEST REGIONAL PROJECT**

3.1 As mentioned above, within the South West region, a specific project has been underway since the summer of 2010, which has considered and developed the following:

Principles

3.2 Initially a number of principles were developed and agreed regionally relating to the ADC's themselves (e.g. levels at which they will apply, eligibility, links to performance management etc). See Appendix B draft set of regional principles. These are aligned with the national principles but provide more detail. In some cases, some of these were aspirational for some FRS depending on their current processes and practices.

Statistical Analysis

3.3 Sarah Cleaver, an Occupational Psychologist employed within Avon, has carried out some interesting statistical analysis of the existing ADC models. Whilst we would caveat that the sample sizes are initially fairly small, the key findings of the analysis are that:

- The current Stage 1 (ITOP) does not predict who is going to pass the ADC
- For both Supervisory and Middle Management ADC's, the same people could have been chosen/had the same ADC results if just the Role Play and the Multi Role Play exercises were used.

3.5 The next stage of statistical analysis will be to look at the Strategic ADC in detail, although this is more difficult due to the limited data available.

External benchmarking/research on other models

3.6 As part of the regional group's work, current systems and practices in use in other Fire & Rescue Services have been considered, and what other organisations, such as the Police do to identify those for career progression/succession planning.

3.7 Within the Fire & Rescue Services, an interesting model was identified that is being used by both South Wales and Scotland, which is also attracting a reasonable amount of national interest. This model is a 3 exercise model including a single role play, multiple role play, combined with a written exercise. This aligns to the outcome of the initial statistical analysis, whilst additionally including a written element, which services all felt strongly that it was important to include to ensure a reasonable level of written capability.

3.8 The police follow a model which consists of 7 consecutive role plays in an assessment day.

3.9 Another trend that emerged in internal research was the interest in introducing a technical knowledge test at some stage in the process – to ensure that the operational element is effectively covered. At this stage most are considering using technical knowledge as either an initial sift or post-ADC during role specific selection processes.

Consultation & Support

- 3.10 The regional CFOA HRMD committee have been kept apprised of each stage of the regional work, and have given their full support to the project. In addition, a paper was taken to the regional CFOA South West in January 2011 setting out the proposals where it was fully supported.

4. CURRENT SITUATION

- 4.1 As a reminder, and for those unfamiliar with the existing ADC toolkits, the current structure comprises:

Supervisory management level (Firefighter to Crew Manager)

Stage 1 – 2 part written exercise made up of the SJT (situational judgement test – multiple choice) and SimEx (simulation exercise - a timed written exercise broken down into various tasks)

Stage 2 – Full ADC made up of 5 timed exercises: group discussion, performance management role-play (1 to 1), multiple role-play, briefing exercise and in-basket (written) exercise, run over one day

Middle management level (Watch Manager to Station Manager)

Stage 1 – 2 part written exercise made up of the SJT and SimEx

Stage 2 – Full ADC consisting of 5 timed roleplay exercises: group discussion, performance management role-play (1 to 1), multiple role-play, team briefing roleplay and an in-basket (written) exercise, run over one day

Strategic management level (Group Manager to Area Manager)

Stage 1 – a timed 2 part written in-box exercise

Stage 2 - Full ADC consisting of 5 exercises: internal roleplay, external roleplay, multiple roleplay, analysis briefing report (written), analysis briefing and group discussion, run over one and a half days

In-band processes (Crew Manager to Watch Manager and Station Manager to Group Manager)

The national ADC toolkit provides for a two part structured interview for those wishing to progress within a managerial band. Within DSFRS, the current process for CM to WM is being run in accordance with the pilot arrangements as agreed by SMB in November 2009 (first stage in written form, second stage as structured interview), which also form part of the regional recommendations.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional Recommendations

- 5.1 The regional recommendation is to proceed with the 3 exercise model for ADC's (written exercise, single role play, multiple role play) with a view to piloting and introducing such a model as a pilot for Supervisory and Middle Management ADC's during 2011/12.

5.2 There is still discussion regarding the stage 1 (sift) process, with the possibility that more than one approach may be trialled with different FRS in the region. In some cases FRS will not potentially need to use a sift, and may therefore choose to take all candidates through the streamlined stage 2, although this may not enable them to achieve the maximum benefit from streamlining in terms of resource savings. Areas where practices may differ regionally include:

- **Stage 1/Sift Process** - the two main options under consideration are:
 - i. Technical knowledge assessment (the Employee Development group will be developing a framework for the use of question banks for this purpose); and
 - ii. Using the written test (from the ADC) as a sift in advance of the other two ADC elements being tested
- **Format/content of the written exercise** - the main options being considered here are:
 - i. a project based report carried out in an individuals' own time (which Avon FRS are currently piloting at Middle Management level) or
 - ii. A timed/exam conditions written exercise which includes writing a document in response to a case study exercise (which the majority of the regional FRS prefer).

Recommendations for DSFRS

Stage 1

5.3 With the sort of ADC applicant numbers DSFRS is used to receiving, the option of not having a sift process would not be feasible and more importantly, would not maximise the benefit of implementing a streamlined process in terms of releasing resources and reducing cost. On the basis of the statistical analysis, it would also not be an option to continue running the stage 1 in the current format.

5.4 It is therefore recommended that stage 1 is a test of technical knowledge. Whilst not a predictor of success at stage 2, this would offer a number of benefits, including:

- an additional measure in ensuring that staff have the required level of underpinning technical knowledge to carry out their role, an area which has caused some concern since the removal of the FSEB examinations
- reasonably quick and simple to run (using question banks and electronic systems eg. CPS), meaning that start to finish timescales for ADCs can be reduced, large numbers of applicants can be processed at a time, and marking is automated and instant
- removes the need for a technical assessment at the point of selection (for successful ADC candidates)
- is 'learnable' and easy to identify what unsuccessful candidates would need to focus on in order to pass in the future
- can provide valuable service-wide information on levels of technical knowledge to inform future workstreams and projects
- credit can be given to those holding IFE examinations, giving them direct access to stage 2 without having to sit stage 1 – this may in turn encourage more voluntary take up of examinations by staff (may need to consider validity periods for exams due to no CPD requirement from IFE)

- by being the route to stage 2, it would encourage a significant number of staff to revise and study in preparation, which in turn, would improve service-wide levels of technical knowledge
- puts more of a balance between technical knowledge and behavioural competence back into the process
- is likely to act as a self de-selection tool as candidates will decide not to apply rather than need to revise technical knowledge, where they are not prepared to put in the pre-work

Stage 2 (ADC)

5.5 It is recommended that stage 2 comprises a streamlined ADC process in accordance with the regional recommendations. This would include a single role-play, multiple role-play and a written exercise assessed against the PQAs, following the models in use in South Wales and Scotland. Benefits of this include:

- reduced time, cost and resources spent on ADCs (potential for up to 18 candidates to be assessed on one day, 3 times as many as currently with the same number of Assessors)
- maintaining the use of the exercises with the most proven statistical validity
- tools already available to purchase (although requires minor customisation) from South Wales FRS, with potential for future collaboration in developing and purchasing new tools
- cost of purchasing new tools shared regionally
- ability to continue working regionally, collaborating and providing ADC services to others where possible (through the trading arm)
- time requirement for staff to attend ADC reduced (making it much more accessible to RDS staff)
- time requirement for Assessors to attend ADC reduced
- allows for the written paper to be undertaken separately to the role-plays, reducing pressure on candidates, allowing for more flexibility in terms of arrangements and enabling large numbers to sit the written paper at any one time

In-band Processes

5.6 It is recommended that DSFRS continues to run the revised 2-stage process as outlined in the SMB paper in late 2009, with stage 1 as a written assessment and stage 2 as a structured PQA interview.

5.7 In summary, the recommendations for adoption by DSFRS are as follows:

that the Regional ADC Forum recommendations be followed, namely:

- (a) To implement a brief '3 exercise model' for supervisory and middle management levels ADCs
- (b) To develop and use a technical knowledge assessment as a sift mechanism (Stage 1)
- (c) To continue to run the in-band processes in line with recommendations agreed by SMB in November 2010
- (d) To contribute to regional work to carry out further statistical analysis on Strategic ADC's to develop a similar appropriate model for this ADC level

6. **COST AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

Potential savings

- 6.1 A regional cost model for each ADC place was developed several years ago, which is used for charging places across services where appropriate. It includes costs of assessors, estimated accommodation costs etc.
- 6.2 Based on this model, the current, full ADC model of 6 exercises has a cost per place of:
- £1,800 for Supervisory Management
 - £2,000 for Middle Management
 - £2,600 for Strategic Management.
- 6.3 This cost assumes that a full 6 candidates attend each ADC day. However, it should be noted that a venue cost has been factored into this model, and DSFRS currently use Severn Park as the venue for all ADCs using training points rather than cash. This needs to be considered in terms of potential savings. Furthermore, costs include a monetary value for an assessor, whilst the majority of assessors used for DSFRS ADCs are internally trained staff therefore the saving is more about releasing their capacity and time spent assessing.
- 6.4 On the basis of the streamlined model processing up to 18 candidates in a single day requiring 9 assessors, early estimates using the regional costing model are that this could reduce the cost per head per ADC by over 50%. For example:
- current costs for a single Supervisory ADC event covering 6 candidates are around £10,000* making cost per candidate around £1660
 - under the proposals would cost closer to £14,000* due to increased assessors and role actors but would cover up to 18 candidates, making the total cost per candidate around £800
- * based on regional costing model which includes venue costs which for DSFRS are paid in training points not cash*

Purchasing toolkits

- 6.5 Adopting the 3 exercise model requires purchasing existing toolkits and customising to suit our local needs. These costs are likely to be as follows: (bear in mind that these costs are for the region)
- Supervisory Management: £4,500
 - Middle Management: £4,500
 - Strategic has not yet been scoped, but early estimates would indicate around £6,000
- 6.6 Following discussions within the region, it has been agreed that assessor training/familiarisation on the new toolkits can be carried out regionally at no additional cost
- 6.7 Total external costs would therefore be in the region of £15,000.

6.8 Therefore if all 6 services agree to purchase the same model collaboratively, the total cost for each service would be around £2,500. This would be recouped in savings from any single ADC event under the new structure. However at this stage it is proposed that the supervisory and middle management tools are purchased, with a view to reviewing and scoping needs at strategic level in the coming months prior to making a decision on requirements. Therefore costs for the current financial year would be £1500.

7 **OUTCOME**

7.1 On 1st February the proposals above were presented to the SMB and they agreed to implement all of the recommendations made above.

7.2 Next steps agreed were to:

- Obtain a streamlined ADC toolkit for piloting in the 2011/12 financial year
- Discussion also prompted the requirement to more widely carry out a review of how we assess technical knowledge across the service, considering how this integrates with the ADC process and wider assessment of competence.

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Director of People and Organisational Development

Recommended Common National Career Progression/ADC principles

- The Job Description and Person Specification should be reviewed as part of an annual performance appraisal process.
- The outcome of the performance appraisal process will identify the individual's readiness for promotion/ progression.
- The performance appraisal (and therefore career progression) will be based upon a combination of 'what' an individual knows and achieves and 'how' an individual achieves it. i.e. it should cover
 - competence in role (skills, knowledge etc)
 - competencies displayed at work (behaviours exhibited compared to pre-agreed standards such as personal qualities and attributes/service values or a combination of both); and
 - performance (how successful individuals are in delivering their job).
- If a Services' Workforce Plan identifies the need to create a talent pool from which to select candidates for promotion before posts are available, then potential should be identified using some form of assessment process.
- If this is not the case then the assessment process should be designed to select directly for the specific job(s) in question.
- Individuals may be given the opportunity to develop prior to the selection for future roles or be expected to develop within role depending on workforce needs. Service development opportunities should be openly communicated to all employees.
- Individuals must be competent in their current role (as defined by workplace assessment protocols), before progression.
- Access to assessment and selection process must be fair and transparent and use objective assessment criteria.
- All assessment processes must follow assessment best practice and be quality assured e.g. designed by trained and qualified professionals, use trained assessors, offer feedback to all candidates and maintain data confidentiality.

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ADC PRINCIPLES

- The outcome from the performance appraisal process will identify readiness for promotion/progression.
- Assessment and Development Centres will continue to be used in the region, where required by services' strategic workforce plans.
- ADC's are not about identification of 'potential' but rather about identifying the most suitable individuals to develop further at that point in time, based on service needs.
- Behaviours, as currently defined by the PQA's, will underpin the ADC model
- Following ADC's, there will a development phase, which will normally take place before promotion.
- Once individuals have commenced development for a future role there is no need for them to 'retake' an ADC (i.e. validity periods become irrelevant).
- Selection for a post normally follows the development of an individual (although services have the flexibility to develop in post if appropriate).
- Post specific selection processes will apply based on individual service needs.
- ADC's will be used to progress between Firefighter and Crew Manager; Watch Manager and Station Manager; and Group and Area Manager levels.
- For progression between Crew and Watch Manager; and Station and Group Manager roles, individuals will be asked to submit a PQA application form in advance of role specific selection processes.
- Where an individual has already successfully completed an ADC to attain their current substantive post, the PQA application process for in-band is optional (for FRS's)
- For an individual to be eligible to apply for an ADC they must be competent in the role immediately below the ADC level to which they are applying.
- Similarly for an individual to be eligible to apply for a promotion, they must be competent in the role immediately below the role level to which they are applying.
- Individuals who are not performing at expected levels (as assessed at a performance appraisal or ongoing basis) or who are undergoing a disciplinary procedure, are not eligible to apply for ADC's or promotional posts.
- Services have the option to include a form of technical assessment at ADC in addition to the behavioural exercises. [Note this may form the initial sift stage]
- All PQA's will be measured at least once during the ADC process (best practice is twice).
- An overall assessment of performance at ADC will include assessment of the application/sift stages in order to give a complete picture of current abilities.
- All ADC's will apply to both wholetime and retained duty system staff. Services may choose to offer to other staff for development purposes if this fits with their workforce progression and development plans.
- Management of the ADC's will follow best practice as laid down by the BPS (e.g. use of trained assessors, centre managers, offering feedback to all candidates, right of appeal, data protection etc).