

Report title

Implementation of Revalidation of Incident Command Competence – Update – Part 2 - Assessment of Incident Command Skills for Promotion

Meeting

Corporate Management Board

Date

24 February 2016

Report by

Head of Development

Document Number

020/16

Summary

The Brigade is currently implementing a process for the revalidation of incident command that will provide organisational assurance that officers are performing at the required level. As well as providing an auditable trail of incident command practice and development, this process encourages continuous improvement through the uptake of professional development opportunities.

This paper sets out a number of options to complement and utilise the revalidation process in order to demonstrate the capability of commanders to perform at the next operational level. This can be used to provide resilience on operational rotas, and to replace the command assessment element of the promotional process.

The paper details a number of initiatives which ensure Inclusion is a thread through the process including the use of operational mentors and the provision of targeted interventions for those who show potential from under-represented groups.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The option to allow substantive and competent officers to access the incident command related training and development courses applicable to the command role above, and to include a stretch element to revalidation ICEs to assess competence at more than one level of command is accepted. This would replace the operational assessments as currently run.
- The interim measure of providing a decreasing number of incident command exercises for promotional processes is accepted.
- Authority for action required for the implementation of these recommendations is delegated to the Head of Development and Training, to be progressed through the revalidation of

incident command cross-directorate Implementation Group. Progress would be reported to CMB every two months through the regular implementation updates.

Background

The Revalidation Process

1. A revalidation process for incident command was approved by the Corporate Management Board on 16 December 2015. This process was developed to mitigate a significant corporate risk, namely the occurrence of a death or serious injury as a result of our staff not operating a safe system of work (CRR1). A process to ensure the revalidation of incident command competence will serve as a key control measure for CRR1, support firefighter safety by ensuring that the Brigade has the necessary evidence of the ongoing competency of those making risk critical command decisions.
2. In summary, the revalidation process includes a:
 - a. knowledge test to ensure that officers' technical and procedural knowledge is appropriate to operational role;
 - b. command exercise to ensure officers' can demonstrate command skills appropriate to operational role; and
 - c. minimum number of command hours and a log of continuous professional development to demonstrate the consistent application of command skills and knowledge in the workplace.
3. The revalidation process focuses on the development of command skills and knowledge. The application of a minimum command hours encourages officers to seek out and record development opportunities. This also supports a theme that emerged during the Staff Engagement Phase 1 workshops, where staff repeatedly echoed their priorities as being 'competence of staff' and 'ensuring they are assessed correctly'.
4. A recent MOPAC audit identified succession planning as an area for improvement. In order for officers to progress, it is key that they are able to demonstrate their capability at performing incident command to the level required of the role that they are applying for. A key factor in successful succession planning will be, therefore, to ensure that an appropriate number of officers have demonstrated the appropriate level of operational skills to enable them to progress into the predicted vacancies.
5. The proposals recommended in this paper seek to support the ongoing development of commanders and to ensure that officers have the opportunity to achieve and demonstrate command competence at the next level. This paper examines three options that will provide organisational assurance that incident command performance is at the standard expected throughout the operational promotional process. This will support succession planning and ensure that there are adequate levels of qualified officers available to fill predicted vacancies.
6. The recommendations contained in this report seek to encourage the uptake of further development opportunities, thus reducing risk to individuals and to the Authority.

Current Promotional Assessments

7. Current promotional processes for senior officers require candidates to have their command performance formally assessed at an Incident Command Exercise. Promotional processes for WM and CM require a less formal assessment of command, where operational knowledge of command is assessed using a table top exercise. These processes in their current format are

resource intensive, and place a significant demand upon the teams that facilitate them, namely the Recruitment Team and the Operational Review Team. Table 1 illustrates the time spent on the design, administration, facilitation and assessment of the incident command exercise element of current promotional process. These figures were provided by the Recruitment Team and the Operational Review Team and are based on an average from the past three years of assessment centres.

Table 1. Average resource requirements for the administration of the Incident Command Exercise element of the promotional processes for SM to DAC.

Incident Command Exercise element of ADC	Training Units	ORT Assessment (days per process)	ORT Design/ Admin (days per process)	Role Play (days per process)	Recruitment Team Administration (days per process)	Total Officer Days (per process)
Station Manager	46 (£2,933)	26	16	15	1	42
Group Manager	23 (£1,466)	18	5	13	1	37
Deputy Assistant Commissioner	11 (£701)	14	5	5	1	25

8. The operational element of the assessment centres are relatively inexpensive in terms of training units, costing an average of 80 per year (cashable equivalent of £5,100). However, they are resource intensive in terms of officer time for design, facilitation and assessment. It should be noted that supporting the operational element of the promotion processes are not part of the PMF workload for the Operational Review Team, so the impact on officer time is significant.
9. These processes also frequently cause issues with scheduled training. In order to prioritise the delivery of the Incident Command Exercises, pre-planned training courses may be cancelled or rescheduled in order to release the required resources, which include both the Babcock facility and the trainers. Rescheduling the training has frequently proved challenging. Additionally, Babcock require the number of candidates anticipated in advance in order to allocate the appropriate resources. The actual number is difficult to predict and frequently results in less ICEs being needed, with insufficient time to reschedule training.

Access to Promotion and Operational Rota Resilience

10. The revalidation process has been designed to also be able to replace the operational assessment element of the current promotional process. The revalidation process offers an ongoing opportunity for incident commanders to demonstrate their competence at a given command level. For revalidation purposes, this covers officers substantive command role. This may be extended to demonstrate competence at a higher level in order to access promotion. Individuals would be required to hold a valid pass at the relevant level in order to be eligible to apply for promotion.

11. The burden would be reduced on the assessment process and additional resilience would be provided for operational rota groups, as there would be a group of officers qualified to be able to cover the operational rota of the next level in order to cover short term operational short falls.
12. Such a process would also support succession planning for operational posts by ensuring that there are adequate levels of qualified officers available to fill predicted vacancies without any prolonged delays. This supports the work being carried out by Development and Training's Organisational Development team, following the recent MOPAC audit, which highlighted a gap in current provision.

Current Command Performance at Promotional Assessments

13. Currently, incident command for senior officers is only assessed on entry to that role through an incident command exercise (ICE) at promotional assessment centres. The average scores of incident command exercises (ICE) at entry to role over the last three assessment centres are set out in Appendix I. The pass mark is set at 75%. Candidates who achieve between 50% and 75% are considered to require development and those who score below 50% fail the assessment outright.
14. To give an indication of the current performance of incident commanders entering these levels over the past three assessment centres, 25% of candidates passed the Station Manager ICE with no development required (achieving a score of 75% or above), 25% passed the Group Manager ICE and 36% passed the DAC ICE.
15. The revalidation process has a focus on encouraging the uptake of development opportunities associated with command that will improve command performance at the level officers are currently performing at.
16. This paper presents options for using the revalidation process as part of the promotional process that will enable officers to develop at the next command level. An increase in success at assessable command elements would be expected as a result of the focus on prior development. This would improve officer's readiness for promotion as well as improving performance on the incident ground in role.

Options

Option 1 – Prior Development and operational assessment as a pre-requisite to promotion

17. It is proposed that officers who pass the revalidation process at their current level without any development needs should be eligible to access both the training and revalidation process appropriate for the next command role as a development opportunity.
18. The incident command 'knowledge profile' used for the knowledge test for SM and GM is the same, as is for DAC and AC. Therefore the same knowledge test applies for SM and GM, and again for DAC and AC. However, when moving from WM to SM or GM to DAC, the higher level knowledge test would be required.
19. Once an officer has taken the training and passed the revalidation process at the higher level, they would be eligible to apply for a promotion. This pass would last for two years from the date of gaining it. If they are not successful in gaining a promotion during this time, it is proposed that the officer could apply for revalidate at the higher level again

without needing to undertake the development training a second time.

20. It should be noted that the requirement to undertake a certain amount of command hours at the level above would not apply to those seeking access to promotion.

Resource Implications

21. This option would require an increased number of delegate places on Incident Command Development Courses at all levels. The full resource requirements are set out in Table 2.

Table 2. Additional Incident Command training requirements

Current Role	Aspiring role	Average number of candidates per year (assessed over past 3 assessment centres)	Current number of IC development courses	Projected additional delegate spaces required	Likely number of additional IC development courses required	Projected impact on training units¹
CM	WM	190	28	81	5 x WM IC Development courses	140
WM	SM	46	4	6	1 x SM IC Development courses	14
SM	GM	23	1	13	2 x GM IC Development courses	100
GM	DAC	11	2	5	2 x DAC IC Development courses	4

22. This option would require an additional 105 delegate places on incident command development courses. This would require 258 training units. This number can confidently be met from within the annual training plan and budget.
23. This option will ensure that individuals will be better prepared to operate at the next role immediately on accepting a promotion. Organisationally, this will provide a pool of qualified and prepared individuals to support rota shortages. However, this option would take a full cycle of revalidation processes to become fully embedded. It is anticipated that this period is likely to last around 1-2 years from implementation of the revalidation process. With this option there will be a lead in time whereby individuals will need to pass both the revalidation process at their substantive level, access optional training and pass the knowledge test and ICE at the level above. This may leave a temporary organisational shortfall over the next 1-2 years which would need to be addressed with interim measures.
24. This option would require interim measures, such as a decreasing number of operational assessment centres are run over the next 2 years. When a promotional process is run, candidates may either attend the ICE as part of the process or have completed a higher level

¹ It should be noted that these courses are currently under review as part of the course review for incident command. The training units per course are liable to change. The figures provided are illustrative only.

ICE through the revalidation process prior to applying for promotion, which would provide a pass. A similar process has been successfully applied to the 2014 DAC and 2016 AC and DAC promotional processes where those that had already passed an ICE at the relevant level were granted a pass, and a number of ICEs were offered for other candidates.

25. This option would not reduce the amount of operational assessments required under the current promotional process, rather the assessments would be delivered on a candidate-directed basis. Therefore this option is not recommended.

Option 2 - High scorers are eligible for promotion

26. Currently, officers who score 75% or above, pass the operational assessment and knowledge test elements of the revalidation process with no development requirements.
27. This option would enable those officers with a high score during the revalidation exercises to access the command role above. Currently, there is no pre-defined high score for ICE or knowledge tests. The pass mark is 75% making the median score within this upper quartile 87.5%. It is recommended that as the a high score is rounded to 85% or higher.

Resource implications

28. This option would not have any significant resource implications as it would utilise the revalidation process that is currently being implemented. It would also negate the requirement for the operational assessments for promotion, therefore reducing the burden on the Recruitment team, ORT and the scheduling clashes that arise from the current process.

However, this option does not offer any opportunity to test commanders at a higher level of command. This may be particularly difficult for command roles that relate to a different National Occupational Standard – for example, when assessing a WM against WM7 (for CM/WM), who would need to be assessed against ESFM2 to operate as a SM. This may pose a risk to the Authority in the case of a post-incident inquiry, as the individual would be operating at a level that they have not been assessed against, or developed in. This option therefore is not recommended.

Option 3 – Introduce Assessable elements to Incident Command Development Courses at all levels

29. Currently, only the Operational Fire Incident Command Skills Development course (LIM replacement) has an assessable element within it.
30. All Incident Command Training courses are currently under review. This offers the opportunity to change the course structure and content, including adding an assessable element to development courses.
31. Under this option, substantive, competent officers who seek promotion may access the Incident Command development course for the role above. This development course would include an assessment of their competence to operate at that command level.

Resource requirements

32. This option would require the same increase in delegate spaces for Incident Command development courses as outlined in option 1 (paragraph 21-22), which can confidently be met from within the current training budget.
33. Unlike option 1, this option would not require additional revalidation assessments to be conducted as they would be included within the course structure, reducing the additional scheduling burden. However, as these additional assessments would be contained within the course structure they would still require additional LFB officer days in order to conduct the assessment, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. Additional Assessor requirement for Incident Command training courses with an assessable element.

Current Role	Aspiring role	Predicted number of delegates per year²	Predicted number of IC development courses	Projected Assessor requirement (officer days³)
CM	WM	190	33	95
WM	SM	46	5	23
SM	GM	23	3	12
GM	DAC	11	4	6

34. This option has the potential to be burdensome, with up to an additional 136 officer days required to conduct assessments. This could be relieved by using Babcock trainers to provide LFB with ‘confirmation of skills’ for Crew Managers who are aspiring to be Watch Managers, as used in the revalidation process for this level of command. However, an additional 41 officer days for assessment would still be required. Again, this option would not reduce the amount of operational assessments required under the current promotional process, therefore is not recommended.

Option 4 – Stretch Incident Command Exercises

35. A further option is for ICE assessments used for revalidation purposes to build in size and complexity to that expected of the incident command level above. This would allow an assessment of command competency at the officers substantive level and the level above. For example, a SM would be expected to take charge of an incident of 5-6 pumps, and a GM 7-10 pumps. The SM ICE would begin as a 5-6 pump incident but would build in scale and complexity to a maximum of 10 pumps, thus providing an opportunity for the officer to demonstrate competence to GM level. Further details are given in Table 4.
36. WMs who successfully pass the revalidation process would be required to book an ICE at SM level, as it would not currently be possible to demonstrate competence at this level though Babcock facilitated ‘confirmation of skills’ at their ‘Maintenance of Incident Command Skills’ course (which replaced the SMIRC). Further discussions are required with Babcock to explore the viability of building a stretch ICE for WM to SM.
37. If successful at the knowledge test and ICE, commanders would be deemed as risk assessed to access temporary operational duties for the role above. Therefore the need for them to undertake the operational element of the promotion process for the period would be negated.
38. As in previous options, individuals should also be eligible to access the training courses offered for the next level of command, although attendance on a course would not necessarily be a pre-requisite for accessing the tests. Completion of the courses would still be mandatory as part of newly promoted individuals standard development programme.

² Current delegate numbers included in the 16/17 SoTR plus additional aspiring candidates

³ Based on 2 LFB officers assessing 4 candidates per day

Table 4. Stages of assessment to access promotion process

Current Role	Aspiring role	Additional training provided	Knowledge test	Incident Command Exercise
CM	WM	Yes	Based on CM/WM knowledge profile	Confirmation of skills during Operational Fire Incident Command Skills - Maintenance
WM	SM	Yes	Based on SM/GM knowledge profile	Access SM revalidation process (stretch objectives not assessed)
SM	GM	Yes	Based on SM/GM knowledge profile	Stretch ICE in revalidation process
GM	DAC	Yes	Based on AC/DAC knowledge profile	Stretch ICE in revalidation process
DAC	AC	Yes	Based on AC/DAC knowledge profile	Stretch ICE in revalidation process

Resource Implications

39. A much smaller number of Incident Command Assessments would be required in order to accommodate external applicants who would be unable to access the ongoing schedule of revalidation tests. There may also be a small impact on the schedule of training in order to allow successful individuals to access courses at the role above, although as detailed in option 1, this can confidently be met from within the training budget.
40. There is a risk that this option would require a subjective assessor judgement as to whether the officer was competent in both levels of command, or just the substantive role being carried out. Therefore this option would require further consideration around objective assessment criteria for both levels of command being considered. This is particularly salient for command roles that relate to a different National Occupational Standard – for example, the jump from WM7 (for CM/WM) to ESFM2 (for SM/GM).
41. This option would streamline the current assessment process, offering officers the opportunity to demonstrate competence at more than one level of command without increasing the number of assessments required. This option also provides the opportunity for individuals to access the training for the higher level of command, meaning officers are better trained and increasing the chances of success at assessment.
42. This option is in line with current work streams for Accelerated Career Development Opportunities, which focus on methods to identify potential in order to offer additional development and accelerated promotion opportunities.

Recommended Option

43. It is recommended that Option 4 is adopted, which promotes prior command development and operational assessment as a pre-requisite to promotion. By training and preparing individuals to operate at a higher level of command, individuals will demonstrate competence at their current level and be ready to operate effectively immediately on accepting a promotion. It also reduces the amount of assessments an individual officer is required to take, thus reducing the current assessment burden on LFB officers. Therefore, a pool of qualified individuals will be immediately available to support rota shortages.

44. For this option to be fully effective, it will take a full cycle of revalidation processes to embed. It is anticipated that this period is likely to last around 1-2 years from implementation of the revalidation process.
45. This option would result in an increased number of Training Units for delegate spaces for incident command development courses (approximately 258 TUs per annum), some of which will be offset by the training units and officer hours required by the current promotional process (approximately 80 TUs and 104 officer days per annum). This requirement will be met from within existing training budgets.
46. This option would require further work in order to develop appropriate assessment criteria to allow assessors to objectively mark at more than one level of command. Also, in order to negate potential scheduling issues, all revalidation ICEs should include the stretch element. Further discussions with Babcock will be progressed in order to establish the viability of developing stretch ICE objectives for WMs during the standard revalidation process.
47. It is recommended that the delivery of this recommendation is delegated to the Head of Development to be discharged through the 'Revalidation of Incident Command' working group, which includes representatives from Operations, Development and Training and the Operational Review Team. Full details will be included in the Revalidation of Incident Command policy, which is currently being developed.

Operational Mentors

48. Operational mentors are being introduced in the second phase of the implementation of the revalidation of incident command. Mentoring is a supportive form of development with a focus on helping individuals manage their career, improve their skills and achieve both individual and organisational goals. It is recommended high-scorers are offered the opportunity to become an operational mentor, that can support the development of individuals who are aspiring to their level of incident command.

Implementation Timescales

49. It is proposed that the recommended option is included within the implementation plan for the revalidation process. Full timescales will be developed with the Implementation Group and included in the implementation updates provided via the Commissioners Working Group.

Equality and Inclusion

50. One of the possible reasons for staff from under-represented groups may be reluctant to attempt promotion could be because it may be perceived that a lack of success may be more visible due to the small numbers of individuals in under-represented groups. The rolling system allowing access to promotion proposed here may go some way to mitigating this, as the event is lower profile than a formal assessment centre. This, combined with prior access to training in preparation for the next level of command is intended to support the development of individuals and increase their confidence and performance. It is anticipated this will have a positive impact on the diversity of operational staff at senior officer level. It is anticipated that operational mentors may provide support and direction to improve both command performance and confidence, in line with other planned inclusion initiatives.

Industrial Relations

51. The proposals included in this paper supports the development of commanders and ultimately aims to improve firefighter safety by ensuring command competence at the point of entry to each role. In recognition of the need to engage with trade unions it is proposed that they are briefed on the revalidation process and are invited to consult on proposals.

Conclusion

52. A recent MOPAC audit identified succession planning as an area for improvement. The proposals recommended in this paper seek to support the ongoing development of commanders and to ensure that officers have the opportunity to achieve and demonstrate command competence at the next level. This will support succession planning and ensure that there are adequate levels of qualified officers available to fill predicted vacancies.

Recommendations

53. It is recommended that:

- The option to allow officers substantive and competent officers to access the incident command related training and development courses applicable to the command role above, and to include a stretch element to revalidation ICE's to assess competence at more than one level of command is accepted. This would replace the operational assessments as currently run.
- The interim measure of providing a decreasing number of incident command exercises for promotional processes is accepted.
- Authority for action required for the implementation of these recommendations is delegated to the Head of Development and Training, to be progressed through the revalidation of incident command cross-directorate Implementation Group. Progress would be reported to CMB every two months through the regular implementation updates.

Head of Legal and Democratic Services comments .

54. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services has reviewed this report and strongly supports its recommendations. These will provide assurance that the Brigade is meeting its statutory and other duties to staff and the community.

Director of Finance and Contractual Services comments

55. This report sets out four options for the revaluation of incident command and recommends adopting option 4 - ICE assessments. None of the options set out above have additional budget requirements, except for increases in delegate places for incident command development courses. This will result in an increase in the number of Training Units (TU)required .
56. The recommended option 4 requires 258 TUs per annum. As set out in paragraph 45 above, some of the TUs required will be offset by the TUs and officer hours required by the current promotional process and the remaining TUs will be met from within existing training budgets.

Consultation

Name / Role	Method consulted
Director of Safety and Assurance	Discussion/Circulation of this report
Director of Operations	Discussion/Circulation of this report
Head of Training Assurance	Discussion
Head of Operational Assurance	Discussion
Head of Human Resource Management	Circulation of this report
Head of HR Operations	Circulation of this report

Appendix I: Results of Incident Command element over the last 3 Assessment Centres

Station Manager ICE	Number of Candidates	Average score	Pass (75%+)	Require Development (50-75%)	Fail (<50%)
2012	58	58.95%	12 candidates (21%)	25 candidates (43%)	21 candidates (36%)
2014	32	55%	3 candidates (9%)	17 candidates (53%)	12 candidates (38%)
2015	50	71.05%	20 candidates (40%)	27 candidates (54%)	3 candidates (6%)
3 year Total	140		25% of candidates	49% of candidates	26% of candidates

Group Manager ICE	Number of Candidates	Average score	Pass (75%+)	Require Development (50-75%)	Fail (<50%)
2012	27	53.06%	5 candidates (9%)	10 candidates (37%)	12 candidates (44 %)
2013	20	77.47%	12 candidates (60%)	8 candidates (40%)	0 candidates
2014	24	67.46%	8 candidates (33%)	13 candidates (54%)	3 candidates (12.5%)
3 year Total	71		25% of candidates	44% of candidates	21% of candidates

Deputy Assistant Commissioner ICE	Number of Candidates	Average score	Pass (75%+)	Require Development (50-75%)	Fail (<50%)

2011	12	68.03%	2 candidates (17%)	9 candidates (75%)	1 candidate (8%)
2013	6	63.52%	3 candidates (50%)	1 candidate (17%)	2 candidates (33%)
2014	15	71.78%	7 candidates (47%)	7 candidates (47%)	1 candidate (6%)
3 year Total	33		36% of candidates	52% of candidates	12% of candidate s