



Research Paper Two

Gender and

Firefighter Training

MFB Gender Equity Research Project 2004

Paper Two:

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This paper is the second of three papers documenting the broad issues surrounding gender in fire services internationally and locally. Staff input into the MFB gender research conducted in 2003-2004 was confidential and all three papers now form part of the educational strategy arising from the confidential research findings.

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FOREWORD

This report is the culmination of significant contributions involving Training and Education staff and recruit trainees in the MFB.

The MFB specific findings included in this report emerged from extensive consultation involving individual face to face interviews and observation of both classroom and fire ground activities. The findings within this report reflect those issues which emerged in the research process.

The project team would like to thank the the recruit training team and trainee recruits who cooperated and volunteered their time. This project would not have been possible without them.

This scope of the research did not extend beyond identifying and reporting on those issues that may impact on gender equity within the MFB recruit training process.

The project team would like to acknowledge those individuals who courageously shared experiences during our discussions. We would also like to acknowledge the great work many Training and Education staff are undertaking to continuously improve gender equity within the training process.

**Georgia Prattis
Access and Equity Advisor
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I have spent time within the MFB it is easy to be impressed by the uniformed and corporate personnel and their commitment to their profession and the public. Many women and men engaged with me robustly about the gender issues and challenges and contradictions they see facing the MFB. I appreciated all these conversation for their honesty and commitment to making the MFB a more gender balanced workplace. It was not only the formal group and individual interviews but the informal conversations in corridors and on the fireground that were so important to me in understanding the complexity of the gender and firefighting issues.

Thank you to all those who gave interviews and contributed both positive and difficult experiences from their fire service work. As so many interviewees said, the positive must not be lost in fixing up the not so positive. Everyone spoke of the rich and rewarding times their MFB work had given them alongside the more difficult experiences. It is important to note here too that both women and men have felt the cost of the gender imbalance.

I cannot write the acknowledgements without thanking a few people who have assisted the project in very significant ways. Georgia Prattis as the Access and Equity Advisor, has been unswerving in her commitment to social justice and a fairer and more gender balanced MFB. It is always difficult to stand up for gender issues in any organisation and Georgia never took her attention off the long term road map and professionally supported the research process with that endearing commitment of hers. The project would not have happened without her. I would also like to thank CEO Peter Akers, Jim Carlisle, Kirstie Schroder, Mick Swift and Louise Cannon for their clarity and commitment at very different times and in very different ways. They all stood up for the issues at important times in the project and gave clarity and insights that were fundamental to the long term potential of this project. Last but not least, Dr Dave Baigent from the Fire Research Unit at the Anglia Polytechnic University in the UK gave so much invisible support to the project from overseas. His earlier cultural research findings and his own experience and insights as a firefighter and academic researcher were crucial in reinforcing many of the emerging issues for me.

There were many challenges for me as an academic researcher walking into an organisation such as the MFB. I was definitely the outsider. I was welcomed by so many women and men who shared their experiences and went out of their way to spend time explaining and describing the history and the issues. Thank you for your courage and candour and this series of public papers has been written with your contribution clearly in mind.

Sue Lewis

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Preamble

This Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) project makes history in metropolitan fire fighting services in Australia. It is the first large scale fire industry 'gender research project' in Australia and as such has had particular challenges and dilemmas. The MFB is not alone in having mostly male operational fire fighters. In many ways the findings and issues directly parallel those elsewhere in the fire industry internationally. Research around the world to understand the masculine history of firefighting has generated uncomfortable findings and will generate diverse views: these findings also represent an opportunity to reflect and implement a progressive set of policies and programs.

This paper is one of a series of three background information papers prepared as part of a gender equity project for the MFB. The first paper focused on the gendered culture of firefighting around the world and the issues for women and men as they become firefighters today. This paper forms the second in the series and focuses on gender issues in training and the third paper focuses on gender issues in recruitment and selection processes. All three papers contain a summary of the relevant findings from the Gender Equity Research Project within the MFB and a list of associated recommendations from the MFB Gender Equity Five -year Framework which is forming the basis of an Action Plan currently being implemented within the MFB.

The Gender Equity Research Project for the MFB was based on the premise that any change program must be based on a clear picture of the existing cultural dynamics within the MFB in order to understand the ways in which these cultural factors perpetuate the under-representation of women and ameliorate efforts to address the gender imbalance. The MFB wanted the information and organisational knowledge to plan an effective change program.

Firefighters around the world are heroes in the hearts and minds of the public and nowhere was this more globally transparent than in the tragedy of 9 / 11 in New York. However research into the culture of firefighting worldwide has also shown disturbing and quite 'uniform' characteristics have been normalised by many under the guise of tradition and herein lies the challenge for all fire services in accommodating difference in the future. The formal ways 'things have been done' are coupled to the justifiable public hero role and image but the informal ways things have been done off the fire ground have not always matched this image.

The professional and the personal attitudes surrounding discussions of gender in any organisation can be complex and sometimes contradictory to the theoretical field of what is known about gender and organisational life. The research and organisational experience of gender relations in most male dominated organisations indicate that developing and acting on a gender-based change strategy in the MFB will be complex. Gender issues are still too often viewed as a nuisance and as a threat to the successful image of firefighters around the world.

However, it is also timely and provides an opportunity for the MFB - judging by the data from around Australia - to become a national and international leader in the field. As the

leadership of the MFB already know, gender balance will only be achieved with committed, consistent and thoughtful leadership over time. Developing and implementing the change strategy will require both strong executive leadership by all in the MFB as well as 'collaborative' leadership that resides in the hearts and minds of many firefighters and managers. A 5 year framework is proposed.

Each year of the Five-year Framework (2004/2005 –2009/2010) will have a key focus to enhance the central objective to achieve significantly more representation of women within the operational and corporate strands of the MFB. Year One 2004/2005 is targeted at operational leadership in recognition of the critical under-representation of operational women and the importance of making the most of each recruitment selection round. It does not mean that the issues for corporate women will be ignored alongside this emphasis: there will be strategies for corporate women in 2004/5 but even more in 2005/2006 when corporate women will assume a more central focus.

The MFB Gender Equity Five -year Framework is based on four key recommendation areas with specific actions and indicators of success within each area:

- Leadership and Accountability
- Organisational Development
- Recruitment and Retention of Women Firefighters
- Training and Placement of Recruit Firefighters

These headings arise out of the literature on successful organisational change as well as the specific issues and sensitivities surrounding the issue of gender in fire services worldwide. The wholesale transplant of generic change strategies into a culture such as the MFB will not succeed. Fire services around the world are having difficulties making the cultural changes required and only a sustained, multi-layered and long-term plan will work over time. There are no quick or simple solutions to this complex issue.

Summary of the Cultural Context for Firefighter Recruit Training

This paper builds on the understandings and literature on firefighter culture outlined in Paper One. Please read Paper One in conjunction with this second Training Paper. The following summary includes the important gender issues in relation to recruit training.

Firefighting has been socially and organisationally shaped over time as a male occupation and it is not inherently so.

Stereotypical masculine values, attributes and attitudes are pervasive in fire service cultures and these are all very important in the firefighter job. Such a situation however leads to a lack of gender balance both at the broad cultural level in fire services and in terms of the leadership models and templates.

The more stereotypical feminine values, attributes and attitudes are currently not valued alongside these in balance. There is a tendency for more feminine styles to be put down through constant jokes, ridiculed and avoided at all costs where women are often judged as 'tokens' and honorary men.

There is a very real sense in which the standard of behaviour appropriate for women as firefighters is determined by group male behaviour which leaves women judged according to their participation in, or response to, traditional male behaviours such as joking, competition, sport and drinking.

A more gender balanced fire service culture will exemplify, respect and value, a range of leadership styles and templates on which firefighters model themselves.

When gender and firefighting is discussed within operational contexts, misunderstandings arise from gender issues being heard as criticisms and a perception that masculine attributes are being judged as 'negative'. These are misconceptions and must be addressed in any cultural change program.

Change programs in fire services are not about replacing masculine attributes with more feminine attributes. Gender attributes are not about alternatives. The focus is on developing an organisational culture where both feminine and masculine attributes are valued and accepted, within the one person as well as between people.

Local issues that impact on training

Firefighting in the MFB is a highly masculine culture and is characterised by a command and control authority style which operates both on and off the fireground and spills over into interactions off the fireground where it is not appropriate.

There are a number of powerful myths surrounding the discussion of gender issues in the MFB and some of these are 'women are treated the same', 'a woman can't carry you out of a fire', 'they are taking a job from my son or nephew', 'women are lowering the standards', and putdowns of difference are dismissed as 'it's just a joke'.

A culture of bullying and coercion is normalised too often in firefighter/firefighter and firefighter/management interaction.

There is a broad lack of understanding about equity and diversity issues in the training of recruits and more broadly across the whole organisation and there is a need for an outcomes based approach in the future. On the whole, firefighters articulated that the culture of the group was not something that needed to be questioned in relation to equity and diversity. 'First tell us what the problem is' was a common perception.

Most of the cultural reproduction processes in firefighter training appear to have relied more on *assimilation* and less on *accommodation*. *Assimilation* is the process whereby a person who joins the group changes their beliefs and actions to fit those of the group. *Accommodation* however is the process whereby a group changes its beliefs and actions to fit those of a person who joins the group. There is a strong emphasis on fitting –in to the existing culture and practices which provide a set of contradictions for a modernising fire service.

Despite the formal hierarchical rules, the importance of 'never dobbing on your mates' is evident as an informal rule overriding the formal rules and regulations in fire services around the world. The dangers are well known in this pact: loyalty to the group can override formal policies and procedures and accountability and lead to complaints and illegal practices being overlooked. Evidence of inappropriate behaviour becomes very difficult to substantiate.

Some firefighters expressed the view that women firefighters had to learn to put up with the treatment they received or they were not up to the job. A job defined by masculine standards and norms. Again this shows a lack of understanding and training about gender equity issues, responsibilities and legal obligations.

In summary the issues for women that need to be understood and integrated into all training, recruitment and marketing strategies are that women firefighters:

- are paradoxically both invisible and extra visible when they want to be neither
- are challenged to show a sense of humour by accepting anti-women jokes; to do otherwise is to suffer worse hyper-visibility as women
- cannot complain about their treatment or they will draw attention to themselves which produces a new round of putdowns and marginalisation (for example, taking pornography down is blamed on women complaining, not on the legislation that makes it illegal)
- behaviour is seen as representative of their social category as women rather than themselves as an individual
- have to work hard to have their achievements noted or acknowledged
- visibility renders women reluctant to put themselves forward for management development knowing they will be the subject of even more scrutiny

- either find a way to measure up as an honorary man or can be history in many fire stations.

Section 1. Overview of Firefighter Recruit Training Issues

1.1. United Kingdom equality and fairness reviews of firefighter training

The fire service industry in the United Kingdom (UK) has researched the provision of fire service training and management over the past 10 years and is currently taking a new direction to training in many parts of the UK (ODPM 1999, Bain Report 2002, White Paper 2003). These materials and findings are a useful backdrop to this MFB paper on the gender issues surrounding firefighter training. Both this paper and the 5 year framework build on some of the strategies and successes from these initiatives.

The research for this MFB Project included attending the UK Fire Research Conference held at The Fire Service College at the Moreton-in-Marsh facility in November 2003 and interviewing key players in the London Fire Brigade Training College, the UK research project for the cultural audit of recruitment and training (Baigent 2003), and the Equalities Unit at the national Fire Service College (Moreton in-Marsh). The conference focused on the review and reform of fire services in the UK coming on the heels of *The Independent Review of the Fire Service – The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives* (December 2002 and known as the Bain Report) and the *White Paper ‘Our Fire and Rescue Service’* published by the UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (June 2003). Interestingly, equality and diversity issues are central to the community safety emphases covered in these documents and the national imperatives contained in the global concerns about terrorism.

The UK fire service had already undergone a thematic review of equality in the fire service through the Currie report; *Thematic Review of Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service* (Robin Currie 1999). This national report was initiated after the Brixton riots which saw fire service personnel attacked during the riots and raised many questions for fire services in the UK which had predominantly white male employees at the time. The head of this Review – Robin Currie – was subsequently made the head of The Fire Training College at Moreton-in-Marsh and has been an equality and diversity driver and champion through this appointment. To assist in implementing these equity and diversity and other changes, an integrated continuous education strategy based around an Integrated Profession Development System (IPDS) has been introduced which will “reform the closed working culture to promote diversity” (ODPM 2003).

Recent reviews of firefighter recruit training in the UK provide a useful background for considering the wider challenges for gender integration within the fire service here. In the UK, the training of recruit firefighters is undergoing a transition from a paramilitary approach in the past to an adult learner model more approximating university or TAFE learning environments. One way of summarising these approaches to training within fire service organisations has been outlined by Baigent and Rolph (2003) where a cultural audit

of fire service training at 13 centres and the national Fire Training College (Moreton-in-Marsh) showed a system in transition from a 'paramilitary and regimented bullying' approach in the past to a more progressive adult learning model.

Regimented centres were characterised by military trappings such as formal codes of address at all times (all trainees are referred to as recruits and staff as Sir/Maam), all movement is either marching or doubling, uniform and accommodation inspections take place frequently, and punishments are handed out on a regular and often punitive basis. These versions of training apparently still exist in the UK. The more common cluster of training centres were those in transition to a more progressive model and were characterised by the use of adult learner terminology such as students, use of first names for staff and students, unrestricted movement around the public sections of the training centre, the drill ground as the only site of shouted commands, and no formal inspections of dress or accommodation. Here individual students are approached if their uniform or behavioural standards are not maintained at the required level and there is no public shaming of individuals for their different pace of learning or approach to learning tasks. Students are also not held responsible for the mistakes of others. These characteristics are more like a University or TAFE college environment where the principles of adult learning assume the responsibility for learning resides with the student and a respectful learning environment is provided by the institution.

An adult learning environment traditionally encourages respect of different views, a questioning of authority and conventional wisdom, the development of autonomous learners, fosters argument and discussion, values excellence of individual performance and flexibility of style and approach. Many of these educational values create tensions when faced with the regimented authority required on the fireground but not within the rest of the learning required. As many in the fire service have long recognised, these tensions have been and will continue to be worked on in the future. They do however pose particular challenges for the integration of women and culturally diverse groups.

This challenge is being played out in the MFB context, as many experienced firefighters were quick to point out, through the place and importance of discipline as fundamental to the operational and technical sides of fighting fires. On the one hand fire services are still needing to train for the discipline of the fire ground and the life and death situations that can arise AND on the other hand they need to educate their firefighters to develop and learn a complex set of professional skills for people management and new roles such as EMR and community fire safety and prevention. The fundamental challenge for fire services around the world is moving from an old paradigm command and control organisation to a new paradigm organisation whilst still training staff to respond to the hierarchical model on the fire ground. The challenge within this framework is to diversify the management and leadership styles within the organisation to match the changing roles and expectations. These challenges are highly relevant to equality and diversity issues.

In the London Fire Brigade (LFB), equality and diversity issues in training were sharply focused after the Thematic Review in 1999 and four years ago, the Training College was closed down for a year and all trainers redeployed before restarting with new trainers. The

shutdown met a number of organisational goals including the facilitation of a shift from a militaristic/regimented model to a more progressive educational pedagogy. The London Training Unit is now headed by both an expert educationalist and uniformed training manager sharing the leadership of the Training College. This partnership is seen as important in reflecting the two equally important aspects of firefighter recruit training for the modernised fire service: technical firefighter expertise and educational curriculum and teaching expertise.

1.2. The London Fire Brigade model

All London Fire Brigade (LFB) trainers have train-the-trainer qualifications and have to undertake mandatory equality training through the Equality Unit in the LFB. The system is a competency-based approach to national training standards and all trainers have to meet the new national standards (see attached Trainer Guidance Notes for LFB). They have also introduced development records as a way of monitoring the training process. Program monitoring is undertaken on a regular basis and involves observation sessions, review meetings with trainers and feedback sessions. At the end of every recruit training course there is a 'debrief' session with all the recruits alone with one of the senior trainers who has not taught on the course. There is a semi structured set of questions that are used to evaluate the course curriculum and teaching and the learnings provide feedback into the next recruit course.

The LFB is training 420 – 480 recruits per year in 16 batches of 30 recruits (for 2004). This size creates inbuilt flexibility with concurrent courses and the capacity to recourse students easily on a fitness or injury or mastery learning basis. The course is broken up into 4 modules over 16 weeks with the first 9 weeks in London followed by the remaining 7 weeks on a fire ground in Lancashire. The LFB has a continuous system of recruit selection that feeds batches of recruits into training groups and hence the LFB can regulate the numbers of women so they never train in a solo woman situation. The LFB recruit training is now regarded as more progressive than the culture in some of the stations and hence they now prepare recruits for the reality of a more regimented culture of some fire stations. The ongoing tensions are the universal ones of training recruits 'to think for themselves versus obeying orders on the fire ground'.

1.3. Victoria Police moving to TAFE/university providers of training

The wider context for gender and recruit training issues for the MFB is the significant move by the Victoria Police to transfer the education and training of policing practice to TAFE /University providers over the next 2 years. This is part of a national strategy that will see police training move to post secondary educational institutions. This re-accreditation will see the development of Glen Waverley as a University campus where Police Trainers would continue to provide the technical and legal components of policing with the remainder being delivered through a TAFE/University provider. The Victoria Police see

many cultural and educational advantages of this reform where 'police student recruits' will mix and study for part of their degrees with the wider community.

Matched against the Baigent and Rolph (2003) model the MFB is clearly in transition to a progressive educational model but the important intersections for this paper are how the current model impacts on a change program aimed at forming a more gender balanced MFB in the future.

Section 2. Gender Issues in Training Programs

2.1. Research Context

The research surrounding recruit Course 89 was conducted in the spirit of a quality review process and the research methodology was qualitative again to reflect the nature of the task. The research schedule covered a range of classroom and fire ground observation and classroom assessment tools, as well as curriculum review and interviews with trainers and trainee recruits. The observations included both classroom and practical training components such as basic hose drill, Mark 4 Pumper, Breathing Apparatus and the simulated experience at Fiskville Fire Training ground. The trainer and trainee interviews were designed to a one-hour interview at the start, middle and conclusion of the recruit-training course. Some of these final recruit interviews were delayed until the commencement of work in a Fire Station and consequently these interviews provided retrospective training insights from the perspective of starting work in a fire station. There were also many informal conversations at the Training College site in Abbotsford and the time and energy given by the trainers was very generous. This project did NOT aim to evaluate training styles or individual performance of trainers but was aimed at training processes and their implications for a more gender balanced fire service.

2.2. Background skills not valued

Baigent asserts that the cultural pattern of undervaluing the background skills and experiences of firefighters prior to joining the fire service is part of the phenomena of 'fitting in' to such a masculine and hierarchical culture (Baigent, 2001). Skills and experiences gained in previous work experiences are not valued: there are clear messages that recruits know 'nothing' and this creates a sense of levelling between recruits and a clear hierarchy in relation to the trainers (Baigent 2003). These patterns were observed in the local context. There clearly needs to be more recognition of prior learning and the importance of valuing the broad range of skills the MFB is attracting. There were many recruits in recruit course 89 who had post-secondary qualifications and extensive professional experience. This can be valued in an adult learning environment alongside the importance of learning new technical and operational skills.

The implications for women and men when faced with this devaluing of background skills and experience can be different. It is useful to insert a quote from 'Gender linked differences in style' (Section 1.8. Background Paper 1) to illustrate the gender implications of this approach:

"There are many frames in the literature about gender linked preferences in styles and values but a useful matrix appears in Cornelius (1998) and is summarised below. Cornelius developed this matrix out of extensive workplace research in Australia to illuminate more understanding about what

women and men most frequently disagree about in the workplace. Cornelius (1998) emphasises that these values are not mutually exclusive.

Perspectives	Feminine Stereotype	Masculine stereotype
Use of power	Equality: prefer to share power with others rather than use power over them – create a level playing field.	Status: shouldering responsibility and measure status by output, position, resources or strength.
Interacting style	Agreement: emphasise similarities and common ground - keep the peace.	Competition: enjoy the challenge of competitive strategies- accept some aggression as part of the 'rough and tumble'
Focus of attention	Feeling: believe the feelings, and sometimes intuition or creativity are what really matter.	Actions and objects: focus on the external world and happiest when doing tasks.
Comfort zone	Interdependence: believe we don't get anywhere alone nor do we have to – see people as a resource.	Autonomy: aim to be an independent, powerful contributor to the organization – make tough decisions.

Remember that this research by Cornelius has collated tendencies only and many women and men will be more likely to hold values more usual of the opposite sex. This matrix means that women often tend to give higher priority to equality and sharing power with others rather than using power over them. Men however are more likely to measure status by output, position, resources or strength. Women are also seeking to emphasise similarities and common ground more often than men, whilst men enjoy the challenge of competitive strategies. Women however are more likely to orient to and value the internal world of emotion and tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty whilst men focus on the external world or the world of ideas and are happiest when dealing with actions and objects. Women are more in their comfort zone through the collective group activity and seeing people as a resource for support, information and advice. Men however are more comfortable being an autonomous, independent powerful contributor to an organisation.'

There are many ways in which the devaluing of previous skills and experience can undermine the new learning context for recruits and particularly for women and men facing a hierarchical, competitive, task focused and technical environment which differs significantly from their previous experience. Women also have a tendency to attribute perceived failure to internal inadequacies whereas men are more comfortable blaming the

system or environmental factors for an adverse result (Head, 1998). When recruits are facing being the only woman in their syndicate group or the only Asian man in their syndicate group then these issues become even more critical to feeling a competent learner in a new environment.

2.3. Military and adult learning balance

There are tensions operating around the paramilitary and academic learning issues surrounding firefighter training both locally and around the world. An overemphasis on paramilitary command and obedient responses can produce a conforming culture where any questioning or difference is seen as insubordination rather than healthy enquiring. The 'command and control' imperative is seen and understood as important in relation to the operational side of firefighting but has less relevance when applied to other aspects of the job (Baigent 2003). Operational duties, although a core and vital activity of firefighting, usually take up a small percentage of time for a firefighter and the contemporary role places more emphasis on a range of leadership and management roles where automatic obedience is not relevant.

As discussed in section 1, most fire services are in transition from a more military model to an adult learning model. An adult learning environment traditionally encourages tolerance of different views, a questioning of authority and conventional wisdom, the development of autonomous learners, fosters argument and discussion, values excellence of individual performance and flexibility of style and approach. Many of these educational values create tensions when faced with the regimented authority required on the fireground but not within the rest of the learning required. They do however have particular challenges for the integration of women and culturally diverse groups into the MFB. Men – and it is important to keep remembering that not all men - are more comfortable as a group in the more military style culture. The new training culture must learn from what we know about gender and culture and learning.

2.4. Social cohesion vs task cohesion

Fire service cultures around the world are characterised by a strong group identity that has both task and social cohesion dimensions. Both are clearly important to the cohesion of the fire service and the strength of the social at times can outweigh the task cohesion. The balance is critical for the focus to remain on the task cohesion to create superior performance and keep the focus on achieving skill development and mastery. An overemphasis on social cohesion of the group can create a narrowly focused 'in-group' characterised by excessive loyalty to the group rather than to the task at hand. One of the clear dangers in this dynamic is the risk of group loyalty overriding task performance and spilling over into a narrow homogenous group where difference is not welcomed.

2.5. 'Protecting your patch'

Where social cohesion of the group overrides the task cohesion then misplaced loyalty is in danger of displacing professional integrity. Despite the formal hierarchical rules, the importance of 'never dobbing on your mates' is evident as an informal rule overriding the formal rules and regulations in fire services around the world. This cultural assumption was evident in the local research. This cultural assumption creates particular difficulties for women or anyone different. The cycle is that if a firefighter wants to complain about anything – whether trivial or very serious -then everyone will think again and again. To complain is to be the target of bullying and coercion. This ensures that no one ever complains. Particularly the women. For to complain is to disregard the strong informal rules of the firefighters and hence to be rejected by the group cohesion and face ridicule and exclusion. Few would come forward to substantiate a complaint.

'Not dobbing on your mates' leaves women particularly vulnerable in fire services. Women are highly visible and would be severely targeted for exclusionary practices if they made any official complaints. The risk for the fire services is that if there is a sexual harassment or bullying situation happening to a woman, management may not hear about it until it is too late and becomes a legal and costly incident for individuals rather than managed appropriately. The worst case scenario would be a woman unable to report sexual assault for fear of 'dobbing on a mate' who holds considerable social and group power. This has happened in the UK in a now well-known and damaging incident. (Tania Clayton awarded \$UK Pounds200,000 in 1996).

2.6. Accusations of favouritism

The sensitive issue of 'special treatment for women' or favouritism is a cultural issue for all male dominated occupations as they seek to create more gender balance. It was particularly mobilised in the recruit training environment where the new recruits were noticed and the selection process was a topic of conversation. Here the gossip had the women selected because the government insisted on more women. Favouritism was also very mobilised in training where the women have to prove themselves in a different way from the men recruits. They have a sharper focus on being watched and assessed (see Paper1) and this was very evident both on and off the fireground.

The existence of any dedicated programs for women makes women a target for comments by men and women about favouritism. 'Women-only' training for the physical aptitude tests has been an example of this in the UK and the US and more recently here. The negative afterimage of 'favouritism' comments leaves women doubting that they have been selected as a recruit on the basis of their skills and abilities. The MFB is no exception to this pattern.

This misunderstanding needs to be tackled directly by trainers and management as the comments act as a 'drip' that eats away at the sense of self worth of the women and will undermine participation in any programs planned for the future. Women do not want to participate in women's recruitment and retention programs if they are going to be the butt of constant putdowns and derogatory comments for the following weeks and months.

Section 3. Summary of Local MFB Findings

3.1. Overall issues

The current model of 'in house' training reinforces an assimilationist model for trainee recruits where the existing cultural norms of the MFB and traditional ways of doing things are reproduced. Within this model, gender issues in the MFB training are still viewed from the position of men as standpoint (or women within the culture are used as tokens to support this masculine standpoint). This means that the skills and perspectives of firemen and their 'ways of doing things' are normalised.

The researcher's observations suggested that women are still treated as 'tokens' in the fire service culture and the impacts of these set of practices have not been addressed by the MFB.

Current education and training needed to implement the MFB equity and diversity policies and professional standards was not adequate. There is a need for further training and clarification of the legal EEO and sexual harassment policy knowledge of trainers and recruits on the training ground. This research did not identify any gender equity management and training and little evidence of the skills of managing women in male dominated learning environments or fire stations.

The lack of recognition of the different experiences and perspectives of women is far more important than any intended discrimination against them.

In the long term, the provision of 'in house' training models such as the MFB recruit training should be reviewed and reconsidered. Currently, the learning experience is undertaken solely within the MFB cultural environment and thus unintentionally reproduces the masculine narrative of the firefighter. This said, the commitment of trainers to doing their best was clearly evident throughout the training program.

Gender issues are difficult to raise and discuss and this constraint was a common experience at the fireground. Making gender reform both valid and valued will be an important part of any leadership and change strategy.

3.2. Specific issues for the women as recruit firefighters

Women as recruit firefighters are just as paradoxically invisible and extra visible in recruit training when they want to be neither. Women recruits had to constantly deal with their recruitment being viewed as 'favouritism' not merit and their presence viewed as 'lowering the standards' in the eyes of some other male recruits.

Due to their visibility, women cannot complain about any of their treatment or they draw attention to themselves which results in further putdowns, charges of favouritism and special treatment.

Sexual jokes denigrating women are normalised amongst many recruits and amongst a few trainers. Some trainers (not all) elevate stereotypical masculine characteristics to higher status than stereotypically female characteristics. Feminine values and characteristics are typically disparaged alongside other points of difference that may be perceived as a threat to the culture.

There were a number of incidents observed where male recruits assumed an air of authority when telling female recruits what to do.

Some male recruits were observed being dismissive of females in group tasks and fire ground practical contexts and this extended to male recruits describing the inferior capabilities of all female recruits in general as if it was an assumption.

Joking was a very powerful tool for making it clear whose behaviour was unacceptable early on in the recruit course. The clear outcome of many of these jokes was to make sure the group humiliation through laughing meant that you did not repeat the behaviour. The joking drew on stereotypes to categorise and denigrate particular people or groups and the target for many jokes are women or behaviour associated with being feminine in stereotype terms.

Recruit women firefighters were constantly irritated and annoyed about the way they were putdown as women by some - not all - trainers and recruits.

Women are the constant butt of jokes. This phenomenon has to be understood by men through considering the cumulative effect rather than the individual remark or putdown. This is a daily 'drip' where each comment accumulates into a continual focus on your difference. This drip makes the workplace at best an uncomfortable place to work and at worst an intolerable place to work.

The generic EEO Training provided in the Recruit Training was inadequate and counter to the MFB policy goals of mainstreaming gender and cultural diversity outcomes for the service. All trainers and training programs must be culture specific in their design and delivery. A generic approach to EEO training that was evident falls into the trap of normalising the firefighter as male.

'We treat everyone the same' was often heard in the recruit training course particularly when gender was discussed. Equal treatment does not lead to equal outcomes. One example was the composition of the syndicate groups where the decision was made to distribute the women singly in each of 5 syndicate groups. Every woman consequently experienced the majority of the practical instruction in syndicate groups from the standpoint of being on their own in a group of 5 men. Every male recruit experienced the course from being in the majority. The paradox for women was that they were made highly visible on their own in each syndicate group and in danger of being singled out for social isolation as a female.

3.3. Fitting -in

There are strong assimilatory pressures on all recruits to 'fit-in' in these first weeks of training. It was clear from observations that the donning of the uniform and the willingness to please and pay back the honour of being chosen from so many applicants heightened this sense of wanting to 'fit in'.

There are messages of leaving behind pre-existing skills and status eg 'you know nothing'. The impression is conveyed that previous career and education knowledge is not relevant to the fire service and that you have to wipe your previous identity and start again at 'ground zero'. This also created a sense of levelling between recruits and a clear hierarchy in relation to the trainers.

An overemphasis on paramilitary command and obedient responses can produce a conforming culture where any questioning or difference is seen as insubordination rather than healthy enquiring. The 'command and control' imperative is seen and understood as important in relation to the operational side of firefighting but has little relevance when applied to learning other aspects of the job.

Some of the dress rules illustrated this confusion where all recruits were expected to wear the same clothes to class irrespective of individual differences in body metabolism or size. Here individual differences were subsumed under the guise of military uniformity in a situation that had nothing to do with fire ground discipline. Some of the women were observed to suffer under this 'group rule'.

This divide was described by trainers and recruits alike as 'formal on the fire ground and informal in the classroom'. All recruits and trainers seemed to accept the importance of having someone who comes in as 'the ogre' and 'rears at the recruits' to instil a sense of discipline and obedience. This paramilitary presence and enforcement of a formal discipline code was a major aspect of the training evident on the training ground.

There was a strong group identity reported by all the trainee recruits. Many of the recruits expressed enjoyment of the social bonds and camaraderie that quickly developed in the group of recruits.

Despite the formal hierarchical rules, the importance of 'never dobbing on your mates' was evident as an informal rule overriding the formal rules and regulations. This cultural assumption was evident in all the interviews with trainers and recruits. This, it should be noted, is a somewhat common Australian cultural norm and is strongly adhered to within the MFB.

Section 4. Recommendations

4.1. Changing the culture

The following recommendations have been designed around the international and local findings as well as the advice from a two-week information gathering tour in the UK in late 2003 (See Project Reports). For each of these key recommendations, there are a series of key actions required with target dates, people accountable and success indicators listed in the 2005 Implementation Plan. These form Year 1 of the MFB Gender Equity Five Year Framework currently being implemented (see Gender Equity Implementation Plan for 2005). The following section 4.2 includes the key recommendations pertaining to recruit training from this Implementation Plan.

The culture of fire fighting services around the world has been described more fully in Paper One in this series. Firefighting is defined and redefined around the world as a job characterised by the skills men are perceived as having and women are normalised as lacking in the job. The script for the successful firefighter has been reiterated many times in other studies as well as here in Melbourne (WFS 2004, Baigent 2001, Bucke 1995). These stories will need to be one of the sites of action as it is here that - however unintentionally - men's behaviour is normalised and women remain the problem to be solved.

Firefighting is one of the most sex-segregated professions in the world of work and the task of developing a more gender-balanced fire service is at the core of the challenges coming out of this study. Firefighting has been marked as men's work and hence describing the problem itself becomes problematic. The future training of recruits is an important site for implementing the change model for a more gender balanced fire service.

4.2. Recruitment and retention of women firefighters

Key recommendations:

1. Ensure the recruit training team is trained in the skills and understandings of teaching women in a male dominated setting.
2. Redevelop the equity and diversity training for all recruit trainers and new recruits in line with organisational policies and practices to forge a more gender balanced fire service.
3. Develop, trial and evaluate a Trainer Guidance Manual (see London Fire Brigade version attached) to address issues such as equality and fairness / health & safety, attendance, time-keeping and punctuality, attitude and behaviour, dress considerations, forms of address, contact / socialising with trainees, and confidentiality.

4. Place women and culturally different recruits in syndicate groups so they are as close as possible to 50/50 eg 5 women in 2003 intake divided into 2 groups of 3 and 2 and not distributed as a single woman in each of 5 syndicate groups.
5. Monitor and evaluate the experience of recruit training with the course Sponsor.
6. Identify appropriate stations for recruit placement with the gender equity criteria embedded into rostering decisions.
7. Provide management assistance and support to Officers in Charge at mixed gender stations.
8. There must be a woman trainer on every Recruit Training course in the future to ensure the safety and reporting procedures are in place for women recruits in training.

Section 5. References

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ATTACHMENT

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE FROM THE LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

SOUTHWARK TRAINING CENTRE

TRAINER GUIDANCE

April 02

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1 *Introduction*

- In recent years the London Fire Brigade has been undergoing major structural, operational and cultural changes, all of which have had implications for trainers. The role of a trainer therefore, now requires greater knowledge and skills than ever before.
- Cultural changes in society and within the Authority have dictated the need for greater personal accountability. Development records were introduced to record and audit the personal knowledge, skill and understanding of all levels of uniformed staff. Trainers, therefore, are required to exemplify the highest standard with regard to their own development and that of others.
- The 'Thematic Review of Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service', produced by Her Majesty's Inspectorate Team (September 1999), identified the existence of a militaristic atmosphere in some brigades, which deterred certain sections of the community from joining. This report placed a duty upon the LFB to change its culture, in order to create a working environment that is both accessible to all and free from any inappropriate influence. Trainers therefore, need to come to terms with this change themselves, and endeavour to create the required environment within which others may flourish.
- The focus now placed upon risk assessment, community fire safety and equalities training, places a responsibility upon trainers to fully appreciate the scope of these issues themselves. They must then educate others and, as far as is reasonable, ensure that these requirements are complied with.
- Targets for the recruitment, retention and career progression of ethnic minority staff, and women, in the fire service were set out in the 'Home Secretary's Employment Targets' (July 1999) and Fire Service Circular 1/2000, respectively. Once again, these placed a responsibility upon trainers to appreciate the need for these measures and to endeavour to create a safe and tolerant working environment that will benefit everyone.
- The purpose of this document is therefore, to provide guidance to trainers regarding their role and responsibilities with respect to the above.
- If Trainers find themselves unable to comply with the requirements of this guidance note, then a posting at the Training Centre may not be for them.

2 *Equality and Fairness / Health & Safety*

- The London Fire Brigade is committed to the achievement of equality and fairness. It aims to ensure that all individuals are treated with dignity, respect and common courtesy. It also strives to ensure that no one is disadvantaged through discrimination or organisational practices on the grounds of sex, marital / parental status, colour, race, nationality, or age.
- It encourages **all staff** to take responsibility for health and safety issues and ensures that adequate arrangements are in place to support all managers.
- Implicit within this is the expectation that everyone will work together to achieve the highest possible standards in health and safety practices.
- Our aim is to maintain higher standards of health and safety than are required by law.

- Senior managers will consult all staff and representatives, to encourage the development of appropriate standards, procedures and practices.
- Senior managers will also ensure that all staff has the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding that they need to support our health and safety policy.
- This document is produced to give guidance to instructional staff at Southwark Training Centre (STC) with regard to the above. It provides information that will allow trainers to give professional instruction whilst maintaining and developing an environment that is safe, healthy and free from both discrimination and inappropriate behaviour.
- These guidance notes reflect the requirements of the Watch Commander Role Map; (relevant references are shown where applicable).
- Guidance given in this document is predominantly aimed at trainers and should be acted upon directly, following receipt.

3 *Attendance, Time-keeping and Punctuality (Element 4.5)*

- The attendance at work of training staff is laid out in the Authority's, 'Absence Control Policy'. Please see your line-manager for any clarification or explanation, if required.
- Trainers are employed under the Grey Book, nine-day fortnight conditions of service, and are required to work from 0830-1630 hrs. With the consent of Line Management, these hours may differ, e.g. whilst conducting off-site Real Fire Training courses.
- Trainers are requested to attend a morning briefing at 0820 hrs every working day in the trainer's office area, South Block (room SB4.9). Trainers must be rigged appropriately, as far as is reasonable, for the first session of the day. The briefing will be taken by the Duty ADO and will provide the opportunity to share any important information, H&S issues, etc. and to identify any matters affecting the day's programme e.g. trainer(s) not present due to sickness / delay, trainer required for out-duty to a local training venue, etc.
- It should be noted that training sessions, starting with roll call, must commence promptly at 0830 hrs.
- On Wednesday mornings when trainers have their morning meeting, the procedure will be as follows:

Trainers are requested to attend the morning briefing at 0820 hrs; they must then...

conduct trainee's roll call, before...

attending the trainer's meeting.

- If for any reason a member of staff is delayed in attending for duty, or needs to finish before 1630 hrs. the relevant line-manager (or duty ADO) must be informed and approval given.

4 *Leave (B.O. 231-233)*

- Trainers will normally be required to take two rota days per month in accordance with the 9-day fortnight (Grey Book) conditions. It is however, recognised that as it is not always possible for rota leave to be taken as it occurs, Trainers will be allowed to accrue a maximum of 5 rota days. In certain circumstances and with the agreement of their Line Manager, this number may be exceeded.
- Scale 'A' and 'B' leave should:
- be agreed with the line manager
- be pre-booked
- be taken within the prescribed times as detailed in Brigade Orders.

5 *Roll Calls, Inspections, Attitude and Behaviour (Element 4.5)*

- Trainers who conduct the first session of any day are responsible for ensuring that a **roll call** takes place promptly at 0830 hrs. All trainees and trainers for that session must attend roll calls. If any trainee is not present for roll call, the Course Director / Duty ADO and Admin Support (FFDG), must be informed.
- Trainees clothing and equipment should be checked to ensure that it is available and fit for purpose.
- Trainees must be dressed in the clothing required for the first session of that day unless instructed otherwise. Trainers must be dressed appropriately. It will be necessary for the trainer to plan ahead for roll calls; for example where they will take place, and what rig is required. Communication with the course prior to the day in question may be necessary in order to achieve this.
- Relevant routine information should be imparted as well as that which is of operational interest, or related to health and safety.
- Roll calls will take place (as separate courses) in training areas 2 & 5 or, in the case of inclement weather, in the Sir Frederick Delve suite or garage.
- All trainers must, periodically, check the trainee's locker rooms to ensure tidiness, security of personal possessions and that no inappropriate material is displayed. Any incidence of new damage to lockers or other fixtures / fittings, must be reported to the line-manager (or duty ADO).
- All trainers are responsible for monitoring the personal turnout, attitude and behaviour of trainees, during their training. Any issues arising from this must be dealt with promptly. A personal interview must be carried out as soon as possible (preferably the same day), and an appropriate entry made in the individual's personal development record.

6 *Dress Considerations (Element 4.5)*

- **Fire Helmets:** Trainers appointed in the rank of Temporary Station Officer should attend the STC store and exchange their helmet for a substantive Station Officer's helmet. Otherwise, for FFDG trainers, Firefighter or Leading Firefighter helmets must be exchanged for a Sub. O. helmet.
- **Fire Gear:** Whilst engaged in any operational training, trainers and trainees must wear full personal protection equipment (PPE) in the prescribed manner; e.g. braces should not be worn tied up around the waist. Relaxation of the PPE dress code may be made in exceptional circumstances, following a full risk assessment by the lead trainer.
- **Undress Uniform:** Where undress uniform is worn by any member of staff, it shall be worn complete, i.e. with black tie and cap. Lanyards must **not** be worn.
- **Workwear Uniform:** When moving about the site, blouson jackets must be zipped up. Within the confines of Southwark Training Centre (STC) caps need not be worn. When workwear uniform is worn in a public place, caps will be worn at the discretion of the trainer.
- **Trainee's Uniform:** Trainees will wear the appropriate rig for the next activity e.g. tee shirt, jogging bottoms and training shoes, for work in the gymnasium.
- **Trainer's Uniform:** When moving about STC trainers will wear service shoes, undress trousers / skirt, a white shirt with black tie, appropriate rank markings and their name badge. Otherwise, they should wear the appropriate rig for the next activity.
- **Trainee's Locker Rooms / Shower Areas:** With due regard to being employed in a mixed gender work force, trainers must ensure that trainees are aware of the need to maintain a high standard of decency at all times. Whilst utilising the shower or locker areas, all personnel must, as an absolute minimum, wear a tee shirt, shorts and footwear (or similar).
- **Dress Code For Meal Breaks etc:** Trainees must be told to dress appropriately for lunch and other breaks, in view of the standards required in the restaurants at STC.

7 *Forms of Address (Element 4.2, 4.5)*

- Trainers must instruct trainees to address staff as follows:
- Male staff to be referred to as "sir" and female staff as "ma'am".
- If trainers wish to use a more familiar form of address between themselves and the trainees, such as 'Sub' or 'Guv', they may do so.
- In the presence of trainees, staff should address each other in an appropriate manner and tone.
- Trainers should address trainees either as Mr / Ms (surname) or by the person's forename.

- When addressing groups, generic terminology must be used at all times to avoid offending or alienating individuals. If there is any uncertainty regarding what is considered to be acceptable / unacceptable terminology, the Training to Succeed department must be contacted for guidance.
- Should an error in terminology occur, corrective action must immediately be taken as follows:
 - an immediate and public acceptance of the error must be made and
 - an explanation must be given to any offended party(s).

8 *Contact / Socialising with Trainees (Element 4.5)*

- Trainers are the initial major influence upon any trainee's perception of the organisation. It is essential therefore, that all trainers set and maintain the highest standards that they would expect from trainees regarding attitude, dress and behaviour. Trainers should lead by example and be role models to all trainees.
- It is essential that the working relationships between trainers and trainees be kept strictly at a professional level. The impartiality of a trainer must be maintained at all times, and over-familiarity with a trainee may compromise this.
- Trainers must remain approachable and supportive at all times, whilst retaining a certain 'professional distance' from the trainees.
- This is in view of the fact that a trainer may have to make difficult decisions about the development / employment of a trainee and this will need to be done in an informed and objective manner.
- With the above in mind, **socialising with trainees out of work time is strongly discouraged** other than at 'passing out' celebrations, when those Trainers who have had direct involvement with the course may attend if invited.
- Even in these circumstances, the professional conduct of the Trainer will provide an example to Trainee's and therefore, the highest personal standards must be maintained.
- It is somewhat inevitable that within any workforce, personal relationships will develop. Relationships between trainers are of no concern to management, provided that there is no adverse effect upon other trainers, trainees, or their own work performance.
- **Personal relationships between trainers and trainees however, are quite a different matter.** In all respects, trainers hold an influential position within the training centre. This fact is not lost on trainees and should be born in mind in all dealings with them. The perceptions generated in the minds of trainees as an outcome of any interaction, must be a major consideration for trainers. For these reasons **such relationships are strongly discouraged whilst the persons involved are both at STC.**

9 Confidentiality (Element 4.5)

- Trainers may be privy to confidential information concerning trainees, other employees or work related issues. Such information must be handled sensitively and, where reasonable, the confidence respected.

10 TRAINING AREA Conduct (Element 4.2, 4.5)

- When conducting training sessions, trainers need to remain aware of the need to instruct and inform all trainees in an atmosphere of safety. It may sometimes be necessary for the trainer to raise his / her voice in order to be heard clearly above other background noises.
- It is not acceptable however, for the trainer to raise his / her voice toward a trainee who has made an error, or who has not achieved a specified target, unless the immediate safety of that individual or other trainees, is at risk.
- **The use of foul and abusive language is not acceptable under any circumstances.**
- De-briefs will be used to identify developmental training needs and to give praise for competent work carried out. They are not to be used as an arena for apportioning blame or castigating individuals.
- All trainers must work towards creating an atmosphere within which trainees can freely express concerns and views, and ask questions openly, without fear of criticism or ridicule. Responses given must be supportive and positive.
- When a trainer has occasion to observe another trainer's input, any questions regarding content, accuracy or style should only be addressed in private and at the end of the session. Any developmental feedback, or modification to the training given, must only be undertaken by the original trainer.

11 Movement About STC (Element 7.2)

- When moving about the site's training areas when sessions are being undertaken, the circulation routes (usually marked by yellow lines) must be followed. Trainees must be informed that it is customary and polite to acknowledge the presence of courses involved in training, by signalling to the trainer for permission to pass.
- If no training is being undertaken in a training area, and after conducting a full risk assessment, any member of staff may move directly to their intended destination without following the yellow-lined circulation route.
- When directing members of the public to any given point, the circulation routes must be followed at all times.

12 *Documentation (Element 4.5)*

- All staff must ensure that they are in possession of a current identification card, complete with recent photograph. This means of identification must be available at all times.
- Where parking is required at STC, a vehicle-parking permit must be obtained from the Resources department and displayed on the relevant vehicle.

13 *Personal Development (ELEMENT 3.2)*

- The Development Group management team will strive to provide all trainers with opportunities for personal development. Staff will be informed of all such opportunities as they arise and, where finance allows, places on external courses and at the Fire Service College will be offered where appropriate.
- All trainers attached to FFDG will be monitored periodically regarding their performance, using selected elements from the Watch Commander Trainer Development Record. Where development needs are identified, suitable development action plans and development opportunities will be made available.

14 *Trainer / Trainee Meetings (Element 4.2)*

- These meetings are held on Wednesday mornings at 0830 hrs. A Firefighter Development Group ADO will attend and chair the trainee's meeting. He / she will generate a record of the meeting and any action points agreed. Senior officers will attend trainer's meetings at their discretion, or if requested to do so.
- Trainer's meetings should be conducted with an agenda formulated by the 'chair' and brief minutes of the meeting must be taken. Relevant names should be recorded as those designated to take action. Minutes of the meeting must be made available to all interested parties and a copy placed in the designated file, situated in the Training Support Office (part of the ADO's office).

15 *FBU Meetings (B.O. 203/9)*

- In accordance with agreed industrial relations policy, FBU meetings may be held at STC. The standing arrangements for such meetings are as set out in BO 203/9 i.e. permission to hold a meeting must be sought from the Group Commander.
- Permission to attend external Union meetings must be obtained in the usual way i.e. by completing the Industrial relations forms IR1 and IR2.

16 Authority Values (Element 4.5)

- It is incumbent upon all Authority employees to be fully aware of, and to uphold, the values adopted by the Authority. In no other place is this more important than at STC, because these values and behaviours are taught and nurtured during basic training. It is essential therefore that all staff are consistent in their attention to such values as equality and fairness at all times whilst at work, and that no mixed-messages are communicated. It would be unacceptable, for example, for a trainer to teach a session about sensitivity to other work colleagues and then to be heard making *questionable* comments or telling *dubious* stories.
- It is particularly important for trainers to remember this, when they attend Trainee (off-site / residential) Real Fire Training courses. Although it may appear that trainers are off-duty when the working day has ended, in fact, their responsibility to represent the interests of the Authority has not ceased and employees may be held accountable for their own actions and possibly those of others.