

BOARD PAPER

Item Number	Item 3 – Paper 1
Title of Paper	Quality Assurance and Review Cycle
Decision or Information	For decision
Date of Meeting	16 February 2021
Presented by	CPO
Attachments	Appendix A – Extract from Quality Assurance Report – Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, to confirm that Quality Assurance, details of which were circulated by email to Board members separately, has been satisfactorily completed on the four Fire Standards listed below:

- Emergency Response Driving
- Operational Response
 - Operational Preparedness
 - Operational Competence
 - Operational Learning

Second, to request that the Board consider and agree an appropriate review cycle for a Fire Standard once published.

Recommendations and decisions required

The Board is asked to:

- Note the extract from the quality assurance report attached in Appendix A;
- Agree to the final approval of the first four Fire Standards based on completion of Quality Assurance; and
- Consider the proposal for the review cycle for Fire Standards.

Background Information

Quality Assurance

The quality assurance process has been designed to provide assurance for the Board that the NFCC has followed the agreed Fire Standards development process. Quality Assurance will be undertaken on every Fire Standard using independent assessors appropriate to the content of the Fire Standard.

The NFCC commissioned the initial Quality Assurance process through Gifford James Limited, a consultancy company who have previously provided quality assurance consultancy on National Operational Guidance. They have completed an independent assurance exercise on the first four Fire Standards. This initial exercise was treated as a “pilot” to allow the NFCC to test the process and learn from it and to refine the Quality Assurance arrangements if required.

The full report will be circulated by email to the Board for information before the Board meeting, but an extract which summarises the recommendations is at *Appendix A* for information. Most of the recommendations highlight the need to refine the development process, improve collation of evidence to show the process has been followed and to document the processes used in support such as the consultation analysis process. The NFCC CPO will fully review the report and act on these recommendations, refining processes where needed.

Keeping Standards under Review

It is essential that Fire Standards remain current and relevant. Therefore, it is important that they are periodically reviewed. The intention is to identify the proposed review date for each Fire Standard when it is published on the website. The review of a Fire Standard needs to happen sometime after the Fire Standard has been published to enable the Standard’s impact to be evaluated effectively.

The proposed periodic review process suggested below mirrors that used for the suite of National Operational Guidance which used a three-year review cycle. A timetable of review dates will be kept, and the Board will be alerted as a review date approaches so that it can commission work to initiate the review process.

Review work will be phased to provide an even and manageable workload. Having said that, the Board will always have the ability to ask for a standard to be reviewed at any time; and to suggest alternative review points dependant on the nature of the standard.

Any review will take into consideration the following:

- whether the benefits identified have been realised;
- other external influences on the sector or drivers for change that have or are likely to have an impact on the Fire Standard;
- feedback from HMICFRS based on its inspection findings; and
- feedback from services through the network of Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) in liaison with the NFCC implementation team.

As mentioned above, the three-year cycle is that adopted for the maintenance of National Operational Guidance which works effectively. Therefore the Board is asked to consider and agree whether a three-year review cycle is the appropriate timeframe for periodic review of Fire Standards?

Exceptionally, with regard to the first four Fire Standards it is suggested that an interim review is carried out after 18 months (starting in July 2022 and paced in alignment with capacity of the team to review) to allow an assessment to be made of their impact on services. This would include an assessment of levels of successful implementation and to gather overall feedback and learning to inform future Fire Standards. However, if the Board feels that they should be subject to a three-year review cycle, (if that is what is agreed), then their reviews would be in January 2024.

APPENDIX A

Extract from Quality Assurance Report for Emergency Response Driving and National Operational Guidance

Provided by Gifford James Limited

OVERARCHING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As both of our reviews highlighted similar findings, this section shows the combined findings and recommendations in respect of the Emergency Driver Training Response Fire Standard and the three Operational Response Fire Standards.

Communications

We understand that in six months' time (from February 2021), Workplace will no longer be free. We understand that alternatives are being considered and that not all FRs might decide to continue with Workplace. It is relied upon as an important means of communication regarding Fire Standards including peer review and consultation. Without this platform there is a possibility that messages will become diluted.

We recommend this be raised as a risk with the CPO Portfolio Office.

Fire Standard content development

The Assessor's guide we wrote, based partly on the development process and partly on our knowledge of how the CPO develops products, prompted us to seek evidence of tasks, activities or decisions. Many of these could not be evidenced through documentation or meeting minutes, and often we had to rely on conversations with CPO personnel or copies of email correspondence provided to evidence specific questions we raised.

We recommend you update the development process in light of the learning from this assurance exercise. This should include process mapping the development standard in such a way as to express various roles being responsible for various tasks, hand-offs, decision points, and where certain documentation is required.

We noted some particular areas of the development process we recommend need strengthening:

- **the appointment of a named strategic lead early on in the development process**
- **the use of a Commissioning Brief**
- **advice around the development of implementation plans, and guidance for Fire Standard development teams as to what they should contain**
- **build in routine monitoring of the development process to ensure regular adherence to the development process. This needn't be onerous and could be done by an internal colleague and based around a checklist. But it will ensure continual adherence, ensure important steps are done, and collect evidence along the way thereby making end-project assurance efficient and fuller.**

Although this assurance concerns the first four [pilot] Fire Standards, the development process has been written to apply to revisions and updates to existing Fire Standards too.

We recommend:

- **during the update of the development process, you consider how it might need amending if it were attending to updates of existing Fire Standards as opposed to the development of new ones**
- **the Fire Standard development process should be renamed Development and Maintenance process to reflect its role in maintaining already published Fire Standards**

Task lists for Fire Standards development and Implementation (Operational Response only) were not kept up to date and not fully detailed. We feel this hinders the ability to track progress during a Fire Standard's development, and the ability to help evidence when items had been actioned and how.

We recommend that Task Lists are kept up to date and when tasks are RAG-rated for their level of completion this is also dated.

Version control of Fire Standards was inconsistent and various files (documents and presentations) were not dated.

We recommend you define arrangements for document version control and document management. In particular, clear version numbers and dates should be shown on documents that are being used for (1) peer review (2) post peer review incorporating any changes (3) consultation (4) post consultation incorporating any changes (5) final draft for submission to FSB (6) approved versions for release.

Peer Review

We wonder if there was an underlying sense that for these Fire Standards, because the source content already existed those drafting the standards would also have been the natural choice peer reviewers. While we saw good intent for peer review, we believe it was lacking in its breadth of input from key stakeholders and subject matter experts. We suspect this was due to the infancy of Fire Standards, the development process, and lack of clarity over purpose and method for peer review. We heard that peer review is much improved for the current Fire Standards in development.

We recommend you document the purpose and method for peer review of Fire Standards, which can be applied consistently in future Fire Standards development.

Consultation

We were told that the methodology of the consultation process for Fire Standards will follow that of the CPO. This is not yet documented. We understand that the FSB expects all services to respond to consultations and for the CPO to chase and extend deadlines where required. While we saw good intent and effort for consultation, this assurance exercise surfaces a number of areas in which clarity over the consultation method will benefit the development of Fire Standards, for instance:

- i) The minimum number/percentage of responses required to render a consultation valid
- ii) the ideal duration for consultation
- iii) scheduling of consultation

We recommend you clarify and document the CPO methodology for consultation, and the FSB determine if any adaptation is required specifically for Fire Standards.

Fire Standards Development Process - Stage three: Review

We could not ascertain any policy for the review period for Fire Standards.

We recommend you determine a policy for reviewing Fire Standards once published. This should have a default position of a set frequency (3-yearly seems reasonable and would align with NOG) but allow for variation due to factors such as level of risk, changes in legislation, outcomes of HMI inspections, PESTLEO factors, and so on.

Given that the development of these Fire Standard was itself a pilot, we recommend a review of them, in the region of 18 months from publication, in order to refine any content of the Fire Standards and improve any implementation support.

Implementation

It is clear that consideration is being made for implementation support. Additionally, the existence of the Digital and Data Programme within the CPO provides the opportunity to consider and pursue a digital solution for implementation support that could apply for all Fire Standards.

We recommend you determine the options for digital solutions for implementation support, making these available for each Fire Standard project team. Consider developing an implementation 'template', along the lines of the NOG Strategic Gap Analysis. This will enable each Fire Standard development team to prepare questions oriented around the topic of the Fire Standard, enabling FRs to self-assess themselves in order to identify what gaps to address.

We recommend you establish an evaluation methodology, i.e. *is this Fire Standard delivering benefit over and above the cost (time, money, resource) of implementing it?*

Similar work is already underway in NFCC programmes that can be adapted to suit this purpose.

We were told that for the Operational Response Fire Standards the implementation guidance handbook is scheduled for completion in February 2021. Additionally, the Driver Training Advisory Group has advised that they will be providing implementation support to services for the ERDT Fire Standard. While the implementation of these Fire Standards is outside the remit of this assurance exercise this is clearly an important piece of support for FRSs.

We recommend you ensure:

- **the completion and distribution of the Operational Response Fire Standard guidance handbook and associated support for FRSs**
- **the delivery of support to FRSs from the Driver Training Advisory Group**

Fire Standards assurance

This assurance exercise was itself a pilot, to test the assurance process as well as provide assurance over the development of these first Fire Standards. We conducted the assurance based around an Assessor's Guide that we wrote based on the development process and our own knowledge of how the CPO run projects and develop products.

We recommend you use the learning from this assurance exercise to produce a template assurance specification that defines the approach to assurance and requirements from it, that can be issued to assurance providers when tendering for assurance engagements.