



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

FIREFIGHTER FITNESS STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the interim arrangements in place for assessing Firefighter fitness, in support of the aims set out in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services' Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

This guidance outlines the interim fitness standards and assessment protocols applied in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). The fitness standards applied by the SFRS are in line with current best practice and may be amended in negotiation with representative bodies to reflect any new developments or agreed national standards. The Service acknowledges that research is currently underway in relation to Firefighter fitness and will ensure any relevant outcomes are considered.

The fitness standards applied by the SFRS aim to promote good health and fitness amongst employees. Firefighting is a physically demanding occupation and it is essential that firefighters (FF's) have sufficient levels of fitness to enable them to carry out their tasks as safely and effectively as possible. As such, this requires higher levels of fitness than most other occupations and therefore the FF role map sets out a specific requirement for FF's to maintain levels of personal fitness. Where an employee fails to meet the minimum interim standard, appropriate support arrangements will be available to assist them in achieving the necessary improvements.

Fitness levels may decline with age and whilst this may be mitigated by fitness training, diet and other lifestyle changes, it is acknowledged that there may be a general decline in fitness as a result of the ageing process. All operational personnel will be provided with support to maintain their fitness for the duration of their career.

In developing these fitness standards, the SFRS commits to ensuring that all FF's are provided with adequate support to maintain the fitness standard, however, it remains the responsibility of employees to adopt and maintain a proactive approach to their personal fitness.

2. FITNESS STANDARDS & ASSESSMENT FREQUENCY

2.1 Fitness standards & assessment frequency

The current standard of aerobic fitness for entry into the SFRS is 42 mlsO₂/kg/min.

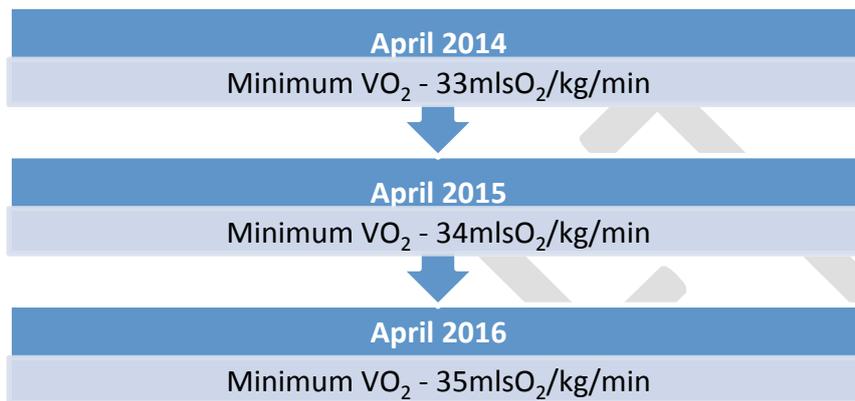
A process of fitness assessment and development is required to ensure that operational personnel maintain a minimum standard of personal fitness in order to safely perform operational tasks. Firefighters are required to undergo a fitness assessment on a three yearly basis. However, an individual may be required to undertake more frequent assessments if additional health risk factors are identified and agreed by Occupational Health/Fitness advisers. Firefighters may be temporarily withdrawn from operational duties where an aerobic capacity is below the interim minimum standard and a remedial support programme will be provided.

Firefighters demonstrating an aerobic capacity within a 20% range above the minimum interim standard should remain on operational duties but will be provided with a fitness programme to ensure they are continuing to make personal fitness improvements. For example, in year 1, an individual demonstrating an aerobic capacity ≤ 39.6 mlsO₂/kg/min will remain on operational duty but will be provided with appropriate support and guidance to facilitate further improvement. This figure will change to ≤ 40.8 mlsO₂/kg/min in year 2, and 42 mlsO₂/kg/min in year 3. The purpose of providing targeted support to those within this 20% range is to ensure individuals are fully aware that they are nearing the interim minimum standard and pro-active steps will be required on their behalf to prevent any further declines. There will be no requirements for individuals in this range to undertake additional assessments, however they should be fully aware that pro-active steps will be required to improve their personal fitness levels.

Fitness programmes and guidance along with access to specialist support will be available to assist employees in achieving the necessary improvements.

2.2 Interim arrangements

The SFRS recognises the range of legacy arrangements in place in relation to Firefighter Fitness, including the application of various fitness standards across the antecedent organisations. Therefore, the implementation framework detailed below seeks to harmonise these arrangements across the SFRS:



2.3 Firefighter Fitness Working Group

Fitness standards must reflect the occupational demands of firefighting and the SFRS commits to working with the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) to determine both the minimum and optimum safe standard. As such, a 'Firefighter Fitness Working Group' (FFWG) has been established in the SFRS to review the existing and emerging evidence for Firefighter fitness. Therefore, the interim arrangements may be amended in negotiation with representative bodies to reflect any new developments or agreed national standards. In addition, any relevant outcomes or recommendations made by the Firefighter Fitness Working Group may in due course inform the review of the interim arrangements.

The scope of the FFWG shall include a review of the following:

- existing evidence (literature review)
- emerging research
- impact of age and gender (and other protected characteristics as appropriate)
- fitness testing procedures
- fitness support and guidance

2.4 Supporting employees who are temporarily removed from operational duty

If a Firefighter demonstrates an aerobic fitness level below the minimum interim standard (as detailed in the previous implementation framework), they may be temporarily removed from operational duty.

In cases where it is agreed that a Firefighter should be temporarily removed from operational duties, the Firefighter will be notified as soon as reasonably practicable. In cases where a Firefighter has been temporarily removed from operational duties, the Service will provide support mechanisms and employee support programmes to assist them in improving fitness levels. If any medical issue(s) and/or any mitigating factor(s) are presented, a referral to Occupational Health will be initiated.

In general, a review period of three months will be allocated to allow for the required increase in physical fitness. This may be reduced if there is a rapid increase in physical fitness levels or whereby the initial test result was near the interim minimum standard. The Occupational Health/Medical Advisor may advise if there are any extenuating health factors, which should be considered, thereby extending the review period. Details on the agreed actions required to improve fitness levels, including relevant targets and timescales will be made in writing to the employee and maintained on the individuals file. The monitoring arrangements implemented throughout the review period will be agreed and documented.

2.5 Supporting employees towards a return to operational duty

At the end of the review period, a further fitness assessment will be conducted to establish current fitness levels. If the individual demonstrates an aerobic fitness equal to or greater than the interim minimum standard, they will return to operational duty. If the result remains below the interim minimum standard, a further agreed review period will be applied. In most cases, this will be a further 3 months.

2.6 Recurring periods of remaining unfit for operational duty

In instances where a Firefighter fails to achieve the required level of physical fitness over a 6 month period, a further 3 month review period will be applied, after which, if the interim minimum standard has not been achieved, a case conference will be convened to determine recommendations for future action. The outcome of such may include the following:

- an agreed period of continued support
- managed as a work performance matter
- reasonable adjustments and/or redeployment within role
- ill-health retirement/early retirement

The flow chart in Appendix A outlines the above process in more detail.

2.7 Representative bodies

Recognised representative bodies will be informed immediately by SFRS of any potential unsatisfactory work performance, meetings or case conferences and be afforded the opportunity to attend.

3. FITNESS ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE

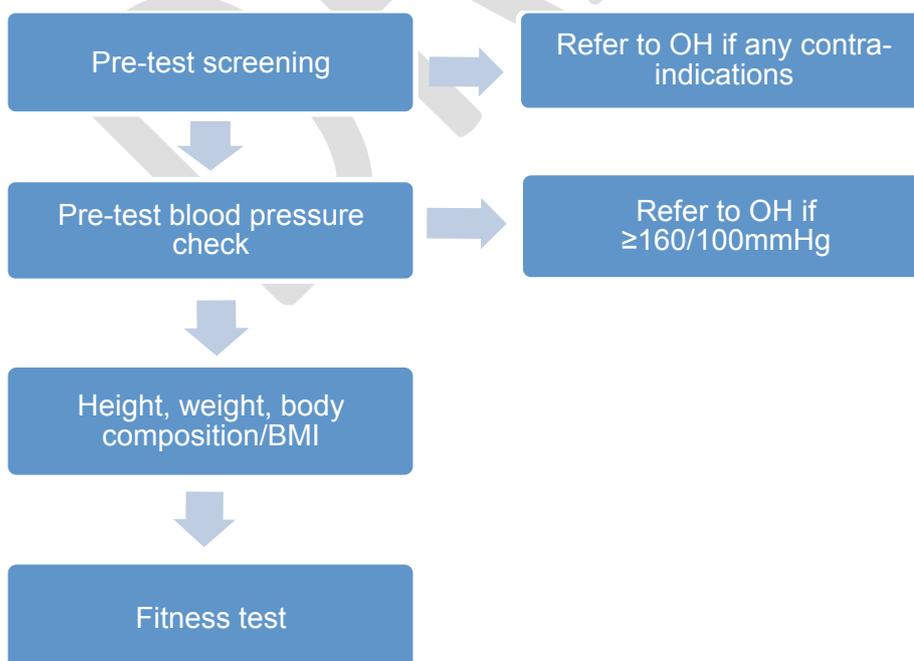
3.1 Pre-activity screening

The Fitness Advisor should ensure that there are no medical contra-indications to undertaking fitness assessments by completing a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire PAR-Q.

The Fitness Advisor will carry out the following pre-test measures; blood pressure, height, weight, BMI/body composition and current physical activity levels to ensure the safety of the employee whilst undertaking the fitness test. The Fitness Advisor will consult with Occupational Health/Medical Advisor if there are any doubts regarding the individual's suitability to take part in moderately vigorous exercise.

3.2 Blood pressure

Resting blood pressure will be measured prior to undertaking a fitness test. If this is found to be high (e.g. greater than or equal to 160mmHg Systolic and/or 100mmHg Diastolic) the test would not be conducted and a referral would be made to Occupational Health.



4. FITNESS ASSESSMENT PROTOCOLS

4.1 Fitness Assessments

The Fitness Advisor will explain the test protocol in detail prior to the fitness assessment.

The following fitness tests will be used within the SFRS:

- Chester Treadmill Walk Test (CTWT)
- Chester Step Test (CST) (not to be used as a decisive test)

The fitness assessment protocols are detailed in the Firefit guidance document 'Fitness for Fire and Rescue, Standards, Protocols and Policy' Stevenson et al, 2009.

It is recognised that it may be necessary to consider individual circumstances when selecting the most appropriate fitness test, therefore depending on circumstances alternative tests may be selected, such as a treadmill ramp protocol test with a gas analyser or the Multi Stage Shuttle Run Test (MSSRT)

In circumstances where there is any uncertainty of the test result gathered, either the CTWT or a ramp protocol test with a gas analyser should be conducted as the decisive test. On request from the Service Medical Advisor, an alternative test may be conducted to ascertain a measure of aerobic fitness, such as a non-weight bearing cycle ergometer test.

5. MAINTAINING FITNESS

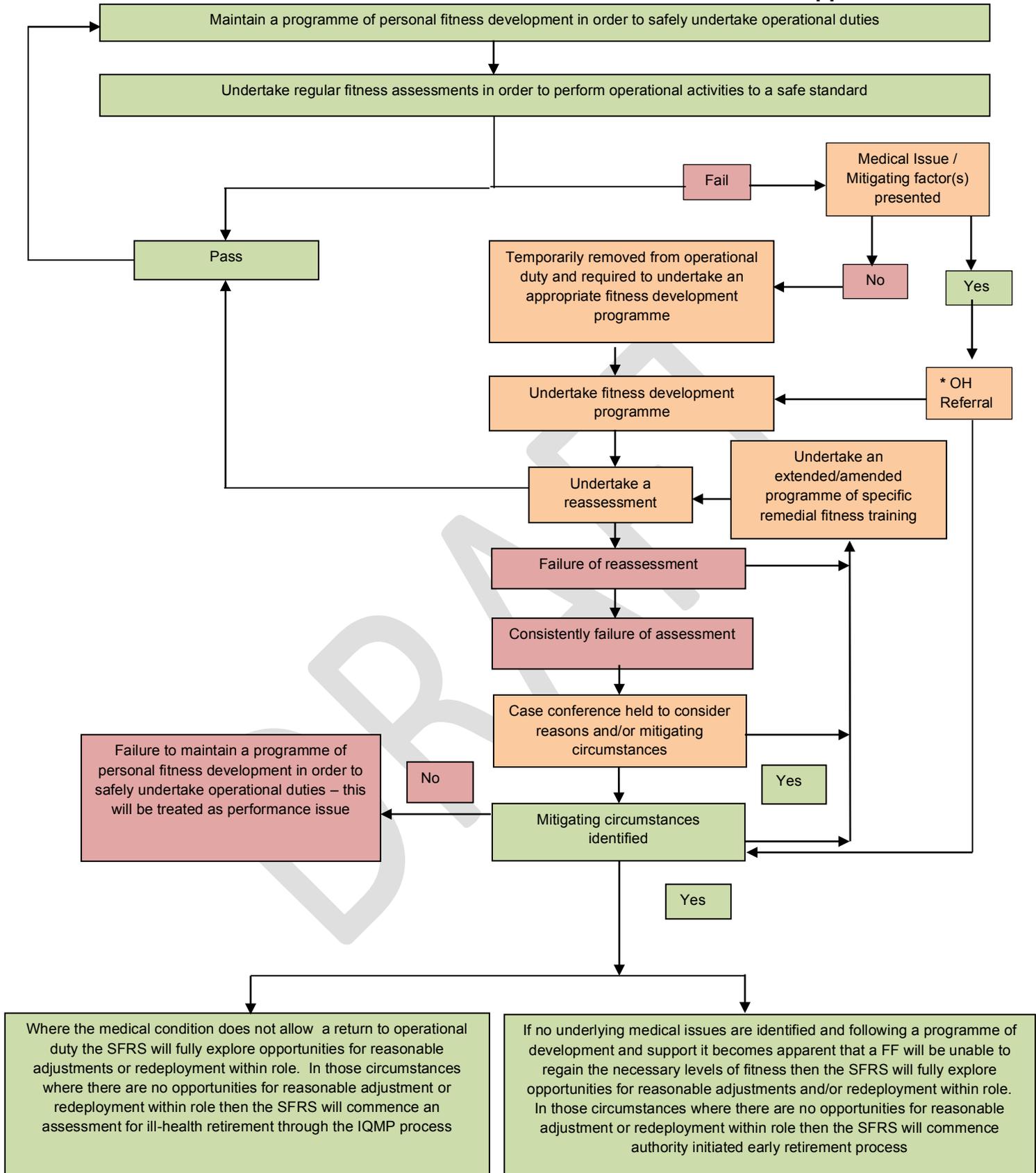
All employees will have access to support and a range of relevant resources designed to help achieve and maintain appropriate levels of fitness. The Service will develop a 'SFRS Health and Fitness Guide', which will provide information, guidance and advice on a range of health, fitness and lifestyle issues. Access to specialist fitness support will also be available in each Service Delivery Area.

6. REVIEW

This document will be reviewed annually or as any new or national guidance becomes available. In addition, any relevant outcomes or recommendations made by the Firefighter Fitness Working Group may inform the review of the interim arrangements.

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Appendix A



* OH referral will provide the supportive mechanisms necessary to facilitate a return to operational duties or where this is not possible due to medical or mitigating factors, the OH referral is the first step in considering other options, such as reasonable adjustment, redeployment or ill health / early retirement.