



HM Fire Service Inspectorate

**Operational Training and
Development in the Scottish Fire
and Rescue Service**



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Integrity, Objectivity, and Fairness.

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

As Chief Inspector of His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland, it is my pleasure to introduce this thematic inspection report, which considers current arrangements for Operational Training and Development within the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

In an occupation where staff are regularly exposed to hazards and consequent risk, there is a need to ensure that operational training and personal development is delivered appropriately and to a high standard. The Service's operational training strategy and vision, as well as complementary policies, procedures and systems in place are a positive indication that it has processes to develop as a learning organisation. I am pleased to commend the Service, and its staff, for this clear commitment to continuous operational improvement.

This report serves as a constructive evaluation, driven by evidence, and is intended as a tool to assist the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in continually refining and enhancing its systems and processes. Our goal is to build upon the existing and mature learning tools in place and provide a roadmap for further improvements, creating a safer environment for those who work hard to protect our communities.

It is important to note that this report reflects a specific point in time and the Service continues to make progress and improvements beyond its development and publication. The recommendations presented within this report are born out of a desire to nurture the positive atmosphere that the Service has worked diligently to cultivate. Each recommendation is presented with the hope of encouraging meaningful change and progress. It is imperative to view these suggestions not as shortcomings but as opportunities for growth and refinement.

In conclusion, I am grateful for the cooperation and dedication of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in assisting us to carry out this inspection and for their efforts in the pursuit of improved firefighter and community safety.

Robert D Scott QFSM

HM Chief Inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

June 2026

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Executive Summary

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) demonstrates a strong strategic commitment to operational training and development, underpinned by a clear vision to operate as a learning organisation. This inspection identified a highly motivated workforce, committed instructors, and senior leaders who are openly focused on improvement and firefighter safety. The Service has invested in modernising training approaches, strengthening quality systems, enhancing national consistency and responding to known risks, particularly following the disruption caused by Covid19.

However, the inspection also found that the current operational training and development system is operating under sustained pressure. Long-standing capacity constraints, ageing infrastructure, fragmented digital systems and increasing organisational demand have combined to limit the Service's ability to consistently deliver training to the desired standard across all roles and locations.

Training capacity remains the most significant operational challenge. Instructor vacancies, particularly within core, area-based and driver training teams, have resulted in training staff working beyond sustainable levels. This has led to increased reliance on goodwill, pressure on leave and professional development, reduced time for review and improvement activity, and a heightened risk of skill fade, if not addressed. The Service has acknowledged this risk and undertaken its own capacity analysis, which supports the need for further investment in training resources.

The inspection identified driver training as the most acute area of risk. Instructor shortages, lengthy qualification pathways, anticipated regulatory changes and a long-standing shortfall in qualified drivers present a material challenge to operational resilience. While refresher training performance remains strong, acquisition rates are not yet meeting organisational targets. The Service is actively reviewing its driver training model and has already introduced mitigations to improve capacity and delivery.

Quality assurance systems are in place and well designed, including ISO-accredited processes, non-conformance reporting and audit arrangements. However, these systems are not yet operating cohesively or consistently enough to deliver the continuous improvement anticipated. In particular, non-conformance and audit activity is underutilised, customer satisfaction data does not yet provide a reliable indicator of training quality, and issues of standardisation persist between locations and instructors. The Service has recognised many of these shortcomings and has begun strengthening its assurance arrangements.

Training assets and infrastructure represent a further constraint. While significant investment has been made in recent years, particularly in fire behaviour training facilities, the training estate faces a substantial maintenance and replacement backlog. In some locations, temporary measures relating to welfare, hygiene and contaminant control have become established practice. These conditions are known to the Service and are captured within a structured, risk-based Training Strategic Asset Management Plan, which provides a clear and transparent roadmap for improvement. Achievement of this improvement would ultimately be subject to further investment and capital funding.

The inspection also highlights broader organisational challenges relating to leadership and talent development. Despite clear strategic intent, development capacity is limited, formal leadership pathways are not yet fully established, and opportunities for structured development and succession planning are inconsistent. This is recognised by the Service, and recent work to strengthen leadership development and modern apprenticeship routes represents a positive step forward.

Culturally, the Service benefits from a strong ‘can do’ ethos and a workforce committed to public safety. However, this culture can at times mask systemic pressures, reduce escalation of issues and prioritise compliance over confidence in competence. Addressing this will require continued leadership focus, clearer communication and greater use of evidence-based learning to inform improvement.

In summary, the SFRS has a clear training vision, committed personnel and a willingness to confront difficult issues openly. The challenges identified in this report are largely structural and systemic rather than reflective of individual or local failure. With sustained investment in capacity, infrastructure, systems integration and leadership development, the Service is well placed to translate its strategic ambition into consistently high-quality training outcomes that support firefighter and community safety across Scotland.

1. Background

1. This thematic inspection by His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) examines Operational Training and Development (OTD) within the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). The inspection was prompted by findings from recent Service Delivery Area (SDA) and thematic inspections, which highlighted both strong OTD practice and areas of concern raised by staff.
2. In particular, in our West SDA (WSDA) report¹ we recommended that *'the Service should conduct a review of its leadership and management development processes to provide a national standard and syllabus for delivery at all levels'*. In our North SDA (NSDA) report² we recommended *'the SFRS should review the training and organisational development outcomes that it is seeking for developing existing leaders and managers...and...that the NSDA reviews its delivery of core skill Training for Operational Competence (TfOC) training'*. As these themes appeared consistently in multiple reports, we determined that a full examination of the SFRS OTD system across the organisation was required.
3. The Service's long term vision³ details that *'as a confident, modern, efficient, outward looking, learning organisation, our mission remains clear'*. The Service also details in its Strategy 2025-2028⁴ that people are an aspect of its operating environment and that they *'will ensure that firefighters are suitably and competently trained to safely resolve operational incidents...firefighters will receive high-quality training... to maintain and develop their competencies... and that...our people will receive the leadership and management skills they need to match their role and enhance professional standards'*. The three-year delivery plan⁵ details that the Service will *'prioritise the safety of our people, with a clear focus on training, professional standards, competence and continuous improvement'*.
4. It is clear that the Service aims to be a Learning Organisation (LO) and believes it has the necessary training and development processes to support this. Training and development is important for all staff groups and the Service should of course provide suitable systems and opportunities for staff working in corporate functions as well as those responding to incidents, However, our inspection focused specifically on training and development of those engaged in the operational sphere, as this represents one of the most critical components of the LO framework and directly underpins the Service's highest risk operational activities. The 'People' concepts of Organisational Learning and LO are terms normally intricately linked to training and development.

1 [HMFSI Inspection of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service - West Service Delivery Area](#)

2 [Inspection of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service North Service Delivery Area | HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland](#)

3 [SFRS Long Term Vision](#)

4 [Scottish Fire And Rescue Service Strategy 2025-2028](#)

5 [SFRS Three Year Delivery Plan 2025-2028](#)

5. Organisational Learning could be described as the process of creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge within an organisation and was the subject of a recent Operational Assurance (OA) thematic inspection by HMFSI. Whilst the LO is an organisation that facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself. A LO is *'where employees at all levels are constantly learning and improving their skills. The goal is to create an environment where people are encouraged to explore new ideas, question old practices, and work together to solve problems'*⁶. As such, OTD within the SFRS could be seen as a function of the LO process that attempts to ensure the Service facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself.

6 thesystemstinking.com - What is a Learning Organisation

2. Introduction

6. In a SFRS context OTD has two distinct facets, which are Operational Training (OT) and personal development. OT sits as a distinct function within the Training, Safety and Assurance (TSA) Directorate, whilst development is the responsibility of the People Directorate Head of Function (HoF) with management happening across a number of teams forming part of the People Directorate. In the main, staff development is the responsibility of a team called Organisational Development (OD).
7. We understand the term OD is normally synonymous with the transformational aspect of Human Resource Management (HRM), with the aim of creating a planned, systematic approach to improving an organisation's effectiveness, adaptability, and overall performance through people, processes and culture. This strategic approach does not apply solely to the SFRS OD team. To avoid confusion with broader HRM terminology, this report refers to the OD team as Talent Development (TD), which the Service also utilises.
8. It is understood that training focuses on improving employees' skills and abilities for their current role, while development supports broader, long-term career growth (Appendix 1). Historically, both OT and TD sat together as Training and Employee Development, but the organisation has since divided them between two directorates of TSA and People, respectively.
9. Our inspection outline sought to consider the SFRS training vision and strategy and how it is applied in relation to operational skill acquisition, skill maintenance, training delivery and training asset provision within the Service. In addition, the inspection also considered the people aspects of development and how this is interlinked in relation to TD, talent acquisition as well as Modern Apprenticeships (MA) incorporating Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ).
10. Our priority was to understand whether the Service is delivering its vision of developing people as its most important asset. It was also our intention to examine the relationship between training and development to understand how these two aspects interact to support employees in all parts of their role within the Service, from point of entry to exit. In doing so, we hoped to assess how effectively and efficiently both training and development support the Service's vision as well as continuous improvement.
11. When undertaking this inspection, we followed established practice utilised in previous inspections. Our inspection framework provided a structure to our work, which was risk-based, proportionate and focused on the provision of OT and TD throughout the Service. During the course of this inspection and taking particular account of our stated purpose, we focused in general on the following areas:
 - organisational strategy, policy arrangements, delivery model, systems, assets and procedures for training and development that are currently in place;
 - governance, and the structures in place to ensure appropriate management oversight;

- responsibilities for delivering training and development and the discharge of legal obligations;
 - scrutiny, audit, monitoring and measuring performance to ensure internal compliance, oversight and continuous improvement;
 - review and analysis of data which should support audit and monitoring;
 - consideration of the SFRS as a LO; and
 - staff development processes which support the application, understanding and implementation of training and development.
12. The inspection outline set out the terms of reference for our team to work within and guided our fieldwork as detailed above. As is often the case, new areas of interest arose during the fieldwork process and these are also set out within the report. This thematic inspection into the SFRS OTD provision and cultural aspects that could impact upon their delivery was based on key lines of enquiry. Ultimately our key lines of enquiry focused on strategy, management, performance, acquisition, maintenance, delivery processes as well as asset provision. The findings for each of these key lines of enquiry are set out within this report alongside complementary additional findings. Our report includes a number of observations, areas for consideration, as well as noted areas of good practice and recommendations.
13. Whilst conducting our inspection, we have come to appreciate that OTD is both an aspect of competent firefighting as well as leadership, management and command. As such, responsibility for it cuts across most staff groups within the SFRS. Furthermore, many uniformed staff have both command and management responsibilities intrinsic to their role, which required effective leadership in both. Whilst examining the evidence throughout this inspection we identified that nomenclature used in the vast array of documents can be interchangeable, confusing, and may seem complicated to the unacquainted. Consequently, we feel it necessary to provide a brief explanation to some terms for clarification.
14. For the purposes of this OTD inspection there are five main staffing groups and four main managerial categories. The first main staffing group is that of firefighter, which is the operational entry level of the Service and also forms the majority of career operational staff needing developed and trained. The remaining groups are managerial. These are Director, Strategic, Middle and Supervisory Manager as detailed in Table 1 below.

Management Role	Command Role		
Supervisory Manager	WC/CC	IC	OiC
Middle Manager	SC/GC	IC	FDO
Strategic Manager	AC	IC	FDO
HoF/Director	DACO/PO	IC	FDO

Table 1 – Role nomenclature comparison

15. Crew Commander (CC), Watch Commander (WC) and corresponding support staff grades are designated supervisory managers. Station Commander (SC), Group Commander (GC) and corresponding supports staff grades are middle managers. Area Commander (AC) and corresponding support staff grades are strategic managers and Deputy Assistant Chief Officer (DACO) and corresponding support staff grades are Head of Function (HoF) whilst Principal Officers (PO) and corresponding support staff grades are the Chief Officer, Deputy Chief Officer or Directors.
16. From a command aspect, all uniformed commanders from PO down to CC may be conferred the role and responsibilities of Incident Commander (IC) depending on the size, scale and type of incident. A Flexi Duty Officer (FDO) is a commander providing supervision for more complex incidents, normally working the Flexi or Continuous Duty Shift system. As such, FDO refers to those officers operating as SC or above.
17. Throughout the documentation related to OTD the terms 'incident', 'event', 'training' and 'exercising' are used routinely to describe aspects of service delivery that OTD should encompass. For the purposes of this inspection report and simplicity the term 'incident' can be applied to non-operational events that impact the organisation as well as training for, exercising for, preparing for and responding to operational incidents, including all operational control room activity that supports this.
18. It should be noted that during the inspection, the Service implemented changes to its senior management structure, altering DACO responsibilities for the SDAs. These adjustments did not materially affect our inspection or its conclusions.
19. Lastly, this report represents a snapshot in time, and many of the issues identified have long-standing, historical origins. While not explicitly referenced, we note that, during the inspection process, the Service proactively undertook analysis and implemented actions aimed at securing additional funding, capacity, and resources for training and development; this remains an ongoing effort. We also recognise that the continuing strategic service review programme and service delivery review project are likely to influence future training and development, with a strategic ambition to realign additional capacity that may be realised. However, our inspection findings are based on the service delivery standards and the organisation's established training requirements in place at the time of our fieldwork and inspection process.

3. Operational Training – Management

20. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSAW) provides the legislative framework for occupational Health and Safety (H&S). The legislation sets out the statutory duties on both employer and employee in relation to H&S at work. This includes a duty as an employer to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all its employees. Additionally, employees have a duty under the act to take reasonable care for their H&S and to cooperate with the employer to comply with their duties.
21. Specifically with regards to training, the Service has a duty within the act to provide training for all operational personnel to maintain them as safe and effective in their respective roles. There is a general duty on the SFRS in respect of *‘the provision of such information, instruction, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of (their) employees to cooperate in fulfilment of that duty’*⁷.
22. The Fire Standards Board is an independent body which oversees the identification, organisation, development and maintenance of professional standards for Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) in England, with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) as an integral partner. As a member of the NFCC, the SFRS has access to these agreed professional standards. In relation to OTD the Fire Standards Board details that there is a requirement to meet a standard for leading the service, leading and developing people as well as operational competence. In relation to leading the Service they detail that an FRS should have *‘leaders at all levels’*⁸.
23. In respect to leading and developing people the standard states that a FRS should *‘train and develop employees, including leaders, so they are competent in their respective roles; provide continual professional development to employees, including leaders, so competency is maintained and developed; identify, encourage and nurture talent, providing career pathways for all; and nurture, develop and prepare leaders as they progress within the organisation’*⁹. Lastly, in relation to operational competence the standard details that a FRS should *‘base its training for operational and fire control employees on NFCC Operational Guidance and Fire Control Guidance; and train its operational and fire control employees so they are competent to carry out operational activities safely and effectively’*¹⁰.
24. The United Kingdom (UK) national standards for operational response are published by the NFCC on the National Operational Guidance website. This guidance is the basis for all SFRS operational procedures and internal guidance on operational subjects. This guidance is used to formulate SFRS policy and procedures as well as their training standards and is followed by default in the production of all TfOC training material.

7 TSA, Training, Policy, TfOC, Version 1.0 19 March 2024

8 [Leading The Service - Fire Standards Board](#)

9 [Leading and Developing People - Fire Standards Board](#)

10 [Operational Competence - Fire Standards Board](#)

Strategy

25. The SFRS Training Vision and Strategy (TVS) 2023-2028 details that it fully supports the intended outcomes of the SFRS strategic plan 2025-2028, aligns to the SFRS long term vision and supports the training functions journey of continuous improvement. The TVS is to provide *'clarity and resources to ensure we work safely, collaboratively and progressively to deliver excellence in operational training'*¹¹. It details more specifically that the training function will:
- provide **clarity** and direction on how training will be delivered, who will deliver it and when it will be delivered;
 - ensure the appropriate **resources** are made available to deliver training through a flexible delivery model, to ensure that we deliver training in the most effective and efficient way;
 - ensure training is delivered **safely**;
 - work **collaboratively** with all stakeholders ensuring cross-directorate engagement to deliver the training ask of the Service and embed a culture of collective responsibility for training across all levels of the Service; and
 - work **progressively** to ensure we continually explore new ways of working as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.
26. It also details that the TVS will be delivered to ensure, that the four operating principles, set out within the SFRS long term vision, of progressive, people-centred, inclusive and connected are at the heart of all they do. The strategy details that its implementation will ensure that a blended learning approach, including realistic acquisition, refresher training and continued application of the TfOC framework, meets the organisational training need of the SFRS and ensures staff are suitably trained to safely respond to incidents.
27. The TVS 'on a page' (Appendix 2) details the component parts of the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) cycle and states that areas of focus for the training function should be to:
- develop individuals, teams and training instructors;
 - create capacity;
 - provide training delivery infrastructure;
 - be progressive and innovative;
 - recognise and appreciate our people;
 - continue to deliver our training continuous improvement programme;
 - define operational training related roles and responsibilities;
 - continue to build a positive and inclusive culture;
 - be service delivery led when providing training;
 - be centrally co-ordinated and locally delivered; and
 - be engaging and connected.

28. The TVS is a user-friendly document which is available on the SFRS intranet site for all staff reference. This clearly demonstrates a link between organisational strategy upwards and delivery downward. The document sets out clearly the ambition of the organisation and senior training managers over a five-year period. Staff within the training function are generally very aware of the document and frequently fed back that it is used by senior management at functional engagement and communication sessions. Awareness of the document outwith the training function tended to be limited to more senior Service Delivery (SD) managers. Its use in day-to-day training development and influence on daily management throughout the organisation appeared to be extremely limited, this may be a reflection of it being a strategy rather than a document for everyday reference.
29. The Service believes that the document was developed in robust consultation and engagement with SD partners predominantly, as proposed changes could potentially have had a direct impact on the local management of training within the SDAs. Some members of SD staff we met, believe the consultation outcome and in particular proposed localised changes were not positive and have yet to be convinced that the aspirations of the TVS have been realised. In addition, many staff believe the TVS to be overly ambitious and that it has not improved training within the SDAs since its publication. As such, winning the hearts and minds of the SD staff would seem to be ongoing and further engagement may be appropriate to illustrate the benefits.
30. On balance, we found the TVS to be a well-constructed document that sets out a five-year plan, which is only partially complete. Senior management within the training function appeared committed and engaged to the vision, which is providing a clear roadmap for the focus of their ongoing investment and management. The Service believes that the TVS will ensure appropriate resources are made available for training and that there has been significant work done to increase capacity and efficiency in delivery that evidences progress toward this. In time it is hoped that they will be able to demonstrate its benefits fully to those still unconvinced.

Good Practice 1



The development of a clear vision and strategy for training within the SFRS is a positive development and staff should be commended for providing this strong leadership.

31. To deliver and resource the strategy, it was originally envisaged that three frameworks called Skills Maintenance, Training Delivery and Training Assets would be developed. In practice, one holistic document was developed, encompassing all three aspects and was named the Training Function Framework (TFF)¹². The purpose of the TFF was to signpost the underpinning operational competence, standards, delivery models and resources required to deliver training outcomes. It is intended to provide a comprehensive approach to developing and maintaining the skills and competencies of SFRS personnel, ensuring they are well equipped and trained to perform their crucial roles safely.

¹² TSA, Training, Framework, Training Function Version 1.0 2 April 2025

32. To achieve this the TFF has been aligned to the guidance model contained within the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publication Health and Safety Guidance 65 (HSG) - managing for health and safety. It is known as the 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' cycle, which is structured to encourage continuous improvement. It is our intention to explore many of these aspects throughout this report. The main elements of the cycle in relation to OT are:
- Plan;
 - Standards / Expected Outcomes
 - TNA
 - Do;
 - Training Delivery
 - Skills Maintenance
 - Training Assets
 - Check; and
 - Quality Assurance
 - Responsibilities
 - Performance Evaluation
 - Act.
 - Governance and Continuous Improvement
 - Performance Improvement Plan
33. The TFF is available on the SFRS intranet site for all staff reference and is signposted as the enabling document for the TVS. Staff within the training function are generally aware of the document but frequently fed back that it is not something they would generally reference day-to-day. Again, awareness of the document outwith the training function tended to be limited to more senior SD managers.
34. Its use in day-to-day training development and influence on daily management throughout the organisation appeared to be limited. We found the link to the HSG model encouraging and can understand the signposting to many of the different aspects. However, as an enabling document to the TVS it seemed to lack the depth to clearly demonstrate how all the aspects of training fit together, to ensure continuous improvement, and may be one reason why staff do not routinely use it to drive the way they work.

Area for Consideration 1:

The Service should consider reviewing the training function framework to better demonstrate the link between the training vision and strategy and training policies, processes and procedures.

Policy, Process and Procedures

35. The SFRS H&S policy¹³ details that the Service is ‘committed to the continual improvement and compliance with its legal duties under the HSAW, and other supporting regulations, to ensure the safety of...staff and others who may be affected by...activities in the communities we serve’. To achieve this, the SFRS has developed a TfOC policy¹⁴ which details that ‘the outcomes and operating principles found within our Training Vision and Strategy and will be applied using procedural notes for distinct roles within the organisation. This will ensure that the blend of technical and practical training is of a high standard and is available for all operational roles. This policy will also support the development of our Skills Maintenance Framework, ensuring that these two documents align.’
36. The following generic three-step process is the foundation of the TfOC system:
- Step 1 – New Skill (or Role) Required – this process will involve selecting individuals based on service needs to achieve SFRS Target Operating Model (TOM) and/or to acquire specialist skills as identified by the TNA;
 - Step 2 – Acquisition Training – this will be the initial piece of the training process, designed to equip the selected candidate with the new skills, subject matter area or role to successful completion. This training can encompass a combination of both practical and theoretical components, self-directed study, remote e-learning, or a mix of these methods; and
 - Step 3 – Maintenance Training – once the candidate is deemed competent in role, they will enter the maintenance phase. This phase will include the training required to keep the skill, subject matter area or role current. Activities to be conducted and recorded can be practical training courses, exercises, theoretical self-study, or e-learning. To maintain currency of competence each activity will be required to be repeated at a minimum frequency, typically a 36-month cycle.
37. In addition, to the TfOC policy, the training function has developed a number of policies, procedures and guidance documents that support training processes. It is not the intention to specifically detail these other documents in this section but to signpost that the most relevant to this inspection will be discussed later in the report. It is noted that Service documentation indicates a strong link between relevant statute and standards with the inclusion of a learning ethos in strategy, policy, process, models and procedures. This whole structure would appear to provide a positive foundation for the management of OT.

13 SFRS, SA, HSPolicy , Version 9.0 2 October 2025

14 TSA, Training, Policy, TfOC Version 1.0 19 March 2024

Governance

38. The training function has published a Training Function Governance Arrangements document¹⁵, which details *‘arrangements and processes in which the business will be managed together with the authorisation and consultation/engagement processes which underpin them’*. The document goes on to detail the structures and work streams such as the Training Management Team (TMT), Functional Management Team (FMT), Directorate Management Team (DMT) and the Training Safety and Assurance Board (TSAB). In addition, it also details the communication, review and engagement processes for SDAs as well as employee and H&S representatives.
39. HMFSI inspectors observed that there is a linear process for routinely managing OT input and outputs to achieve improved outcomes. Most commonly, there are informal meetings held between teams and their supervisory and middle managers on a daily and weekly basis, as part of normal management process. This process is then formalised firstly through the TMT, which is then reported through the FMT. The FMT subsequently reports to the DMT and ultimately to the TSAB. For scrutiny purposes, the TSAB reports to the Strategic Leadership Team via the People Committee.
40. The purpose of the TMT meeting is to provide an informal forum in which to discuss work of the training function including reviewing tasks and functional activity in order to provide support where needed. The TMT is chaired by one of the functional ACs and we understand that the membership has recently been expanded to include all middle managers. The scope of the TMT includes responsibility to manage and co-ordinate the day-to-day business of the training function, provide updates from SFRS governance meetings attended by the ACs and HoF, as well as carrying out a review of actions, including self-audit.
41. The purpose of the FMT is to support objectives of the TSA Directorate in line with the TVS, SFRS strategic plan and Annual Operating Plan. FMT meetings provide a formal forum for the consideration of business, review of performance and discussion of the work of the training function. The FMT is chaired by the HoF. The scope of the FMT includes, but is not limited to:
- regular review of performance and progress against the Performance Management Framework (PMF);
 - monitoring progress of business aligned to the TVS;
 - review, agreement, scrutiny and implementation of training function business, including policies and procedures; and
 - supporting the management of risks contained within the TSA directorate and training function risk registers.

15 SFRS, TSA, Training Function, Governance, Version 2.0 20 July 2025

42. The purpose of the TSA DMT is to support the development and implementation of objectives contained within the SFRS strategic plan and associated Annual Operating Plans. TSA DMT meetings provide a formal forum for consideration of business, discussion, monitoring and review of performance against agreed directorate and SFRS key performance indicators on a regular basis, and identify areas for improvement in line with TSA and SFRS priorities. The DMT is chaired by the TSA Director. The scope of the TSA DMT is to:
- undertake a strategic review of TSA performance to ensure the delivery of appropriate standards;
 - provide visible leadership to promote positive behaviour within TSA; and
 - review TSA policies and procedures.
43. The TSAB provides a forum where the strategic review of operational performance is undertaken. The purpose of the TSAB is to support the SFRS in meeting its statutory obligation in relation to H&S both in the operational and non-operational environment and to support the continuous improvement of training delivery within SFRS. It should be noted that at the time of publication the Service confirmed the intention to dissolve the TSAB with the creation of a leaner governance structure and Strategic Management Board. We note that the TSAB has been a successful forum for managing training issues and hope that the Strategic Management Board is equally successful.
44. Middle managers from training and their corresponding Local Senior Officer (LSO) Single Point of Contact (SPoC) are scheduled to meet as a minimum, on a quarterly basis, to ensure the TNA is being progressed with no issues relating to local training delivery. Training function ACs meet with the designated SDA training SPoC quarterly or as necessary, to discuss any issues, challenges and good practice. Training function ACs, accompanied by the Training GC SDA liaison, meet individually with each LSO on an annual basis. These meetings are intended to be informal, however, notes of any relevant discussion points are captured and circulated by the training function. Staff reported that these meetings generally happened and there was regular engagement between all operational workplaces.
45. In addition to these standard governance meetings, we also found that there were numerous other strategic, working and practitioner groups that complimented the governance and management of the training function. Examples of these included the Operational Competence Strategic Group (OCSG), the Management Review Group (MRG), the Operational Competence Technical Working Group and the Breathing Apparatus Practitioners Group. It is not the intention to specifically explore these other fora in this section but to signpost that the most relevant to this inspection will be discussed later in the report.
46. It is important to note that the training function participate in the risk management process for the Service and have identified a risk of a potential inability to maintain or improve training delivery due to insufficient capacity being available within the training function to meet current demand. They note that this could result in current and future negative impact on currency in operational skills and capacity, associated legal and regulatory compliance and financial and reputational cost.

47. In addition, they also detail that there is a risk of an inability to maintain or improve training delivery due to the limited finance/budget available for capital investment, condition and location of the training estate and therefore lack of access to appropriate facilities. They believe this could result in current and future negative impact on currency in operational skills and capacity as well as associated legal, regulatory, compliance, financial and reputational cost. The Service notes that there are a number of control measures and mitigations to both these risks now in place, with many addressed throughout this report.
48. During the course of this inspection, we observed that the Service has a mature formal OT governance structure that is used for both internal and external information input and output management. It involves clear scope, lines of reporting as well as key stakeholder and business partners who can contribute and engage at an appropriate level. Action plans and responsibilities are developed and monitored to ensure the effective management of tasks and timelines.
49. HMFSI found that although structured formal governance operated effectively between strategic and middle managers, the informal weekly meetings between middle and supervisory managers seemed to be very sporadic and infrequent in nature. Many staff reported that they rarely came together as a group or team to discuss functional business and were generally unaware of the genesis of decisions or tasks. The main reasons cited for this, was generally the pressure of workload, scheduling, capacity, managerial style and sometimes geography. We found that these pressures resulted in managers finding it difficult to invest time in good communication, governance and engagement with staff, resulting in a level of detachment from the TVS.

Area for Consideration 2:

The training function should review its governance process to ensure there is robust communication and engagement processes between middle management, supervisory management and the teams below them in the structure.

Systems

50. The Learning Content Management System (LCMS) is a platform hosted on the Service intranet, used by SFRS to facilitate the management and delivery of training materials and e-learning resources. This system allows for the creation, storage and distribution of educational content tailored for firefighters and other emergency response personnel. It supports various learning modules, assessments and resources that are essential for ongoing and development within the fire service. The material and learning resources aligned to the TfOC system are all hosted on the LCMS, which is available Service-wide. Training function managers can monitor the information input and are able to extract data for assessment and analytics.
51. PdrPro is a training and competence management and recording system, purpose-built for FRSs', access is gained via unique internet login details to the host company's platform. PdrPro helps track, manage and develop competencies for firefighters and the Service has adopted a suite of products and services, including the LearnPro Learning Management System and pdrPro Competency systems.

52. This provides a robust, role-based framework that ensures every team member, from frontline firefighters to specialist operators, maintain the skills, certifications and readiness required to respond safely and effectively. All learning and development outwith the TfOC LCMS system is managed and recorded on pdrPro. The implementation of pdrPro has enabled SFRS to move away from paper-based tracking to a digital system. Since its introduction, pdrPro has become a cornerstone of the SFRS's learning and development strategy, helping the organisation to deliver training solutions for all operational staff.
53. In addition, to these two main systems, the training function also uses Microsoft based software applications both nationally and locally to manage the TNA, course scheduling, course planning, venue bookings etc. The three systems detailed do not interface with each other particularly well making control and coordination very cumbersome, which requires a great deal of manual intervention. Staff reported that these issues made their role less effective, inefficient and open to human mistakes.
54. These issues are further compounded by the fact that interface with the People Directorate systems is also limited. This creates difficulties in the coordination of competencies and skills for workforce planning across the two directorates as well as SDAs. HMFSI is aware that the SFRS Strategic Service Review Programme embarked upon delivering the People Payroll Finance and Training (PPFT) project to deliver a joined-up software system.
55. The training function collaborated with the wider PPFT project to explore the potential for interlinking systems across the SFRS. This work involved gathering requirements and evaluating a range of vendors who might be able to meet those needs. However, the Service ultimately concluded that the specific requirements of the training function could not be fulfilled within the scope of the PPFT project. It is worth observing that we highlighted in our culture thematic inspection, potential failings of the business case and system specification process for the PPFT. The Service has subsequently reported that the PPFT project has been terminated following exploration of shared services with Scottish Government, a new outline corporate system business case has been approved, and a project established.
56. As a result, the training function has initiated its own procurement process to identify a system that better aligns with its needs and can integrate effectively with other relevant SFRS systems. They believe this independent approach offers a clear advantage in that it increases the likelihood of securing a solution that fully meets the training function's requirements. It is hoped that this would avoid the compromises necessary if had it remained within the broader PPFT framework.
57. Reports from the Training Continuous Improvement Project (TCIP) have detailed that the desire is to ensure that training, planning and recording systems are procured, interlinked and that compatible databases are utilised to avoid duplication of data inputs. Reports from the TCIP also detailed that the project team wish to support the SFRS's digital strategy to ensure that electronic systems are interlinked and that compatible databases are utilised to avoid duplication of data inputs e.g. iTrent, Gartan etc. Senior managers within training are confident that a new training software package will be delivered in the near future and will make improvements.

Area for Consideration 3:

The training function should ensure that the new software system currently being procured can interface with the new people software system to guarantee that effective and efficient coordination of development, competencies, skills and subsequent workforce planning can be achieved.

Structures and Administration

58. In many organisations, which have responsibility for their own training, there exists a simple relationship between, those requiring training and the person responsible for training delivery. In this model (Figure 1) anyone requiring training for their staff would be classed as the 'Customer'. The person with responsibility for training, the HoF, would be classed as the 'Supplier'. Ordinarily the Customer identifies what training they require and discusses this need to the Supplier. The Supplier then determines how best this need can be met and either, designs and delivers an internal solution, or procures a suitable product from a third party 'Provider'. Like all good suppliers they should, of course, ensure the customer is engaged in this process and is satisfied with the proposed solution. As detailed previously there is evidence to suggest routine scheduled SD engagement to discuss and agree their training needs.

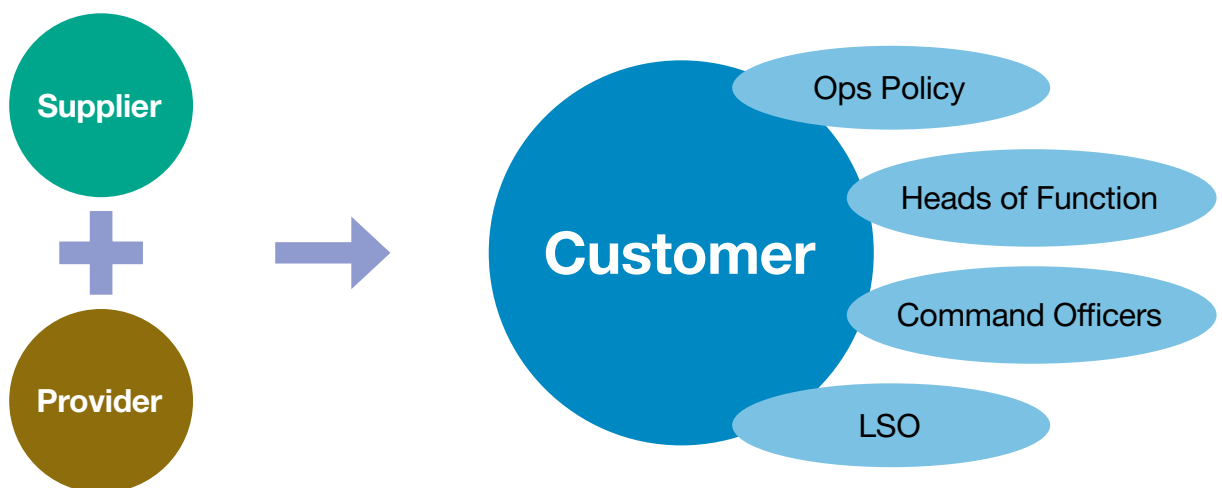


Figure 1 – Traditional Training Model

59. SFRS would seem to follow this basic model and in respect of OT the customers vary and include operational policy developers, LSOs, HoF and command officers. The majority of customers sit within the SDAs and are either station-based or manage and support these stations. Historically, LSOs had dedicated locally based training staff and that would allow them to coordinate and prioritise a degree of local training, thereby having some responsibility and control for supply.

60. However, with the advent of the TVS, these local staff have been brought within the training function and LSOs are now predominantly customers. The training function believe that this model provides a lot more flexibility in the use of capacity and supports their desire to have staff being trained locally but coordinated nationally. It should be noted that the majority of training is delivered internally with a heavy balance of OT being the supplier with limited use of other training providers. The Service do stress that it has attempted to shift away from a traditional supplier/customer model in recent years towards a more collaborative approach which recognises that responsibility for effective training is shared across the organisation at every level of management.
61. The structure and capacity of the training function is built around the TOM concept used throughout the Service and can be roughly broken down by uniformed and support staff as detailed in Table 2 below (all data within the report supplied by SFRS, October 2025). The table illustrates that the current agreed TOM is 245, whilst the Actual staff in post is 214, which is an approximate vacancy rate of 13%. The majority of these vacancies are currently within the WC and support staff instructor posts.

	WSDA	ESDA	NSDA	TOM	ACTUAL	%
DACO	1			1	1	100%
AC	1		1	2	2	100%
GC	3	2	2	7	7	100%
SC	5	5	5	15	14	93%
WC	51	22	30	103	88	85%
CC	29	20	25	74	69	93%
SUPPORT	17	11	15	43	33	77%
TOTAL	107	60	78	245	214	87%

Table 2 – Uniformed Staff TOM and Actual comparison by SDA area

62. Within the training function, staff are assigned a post within various different families or teams performing a purpose. Table 3 below demonstrates the TOM and actual staffing comparison by team and post. Many of the families have a relatively small TOM with the actual staff in post figure being either full or in deficit by single digits. However, it should be noted that SDA based instructors had a vacancy rate of 10%, core instructors 14% and driving instructors 18%.

	WC	CC	Support	TOM	ACT	%
Management Team				25	24	96%
Business Support	1		1	2	2	100%
Learning & E-Dev	3	3	8	14	11	79%
SMARTEU	2			2	1	50%
Area-Based Instructor	23	36		59	53	90%
Core Instructor	49	24	5	78	67	86%
Driver Training	5	7	16	28	23	82%
Incident Command	8	1		9	8	89%
Rope Rescue	4			4	4	100%
Water Rescue	5	1		6	6	100%
Specialist	3	2		5	4	80%
Fire Ground Tech			13	13	11	85%
TOTAL	103	74	43	245	214	87%

Table 3 – Staff TOM and Actual comparison by job family

63. If management and admin posts are discounted, Table 4 illustrates that the current agreed TOM for instructional posts is 198, whilst the actual staff in post is 173, which is a vacancy rate of 13%. It details that the actual uniformed and support instructional staffing for the WSDA is 75, East SDA (ESDA) is 44 and NSDA 54. This indicates that the WSDA is carrying a vacancy rate of 12%, the ESDA an 8% and the NSDA 17% for instructional staff. It is understood that vacancies are specific point in time and open to fluctuation and recruitment processes on a dynamic basis.

64. Whilst it is difficult to draw conclusions from these calculations alone, it does demonstrate that vacancies within the ESDA seem to be within a more tolerable limit, whilst that of the WSDA and NSDA are more challenging and may indicate pressure on staff and the subsequent delivery of training within the area. The vacancies within the ESDA are predominantly SDA based instructors, the WSDA a mixture of SDA based, core and driving instructors, whilst in the NSDA it is predominantly core and driving instructors.

	WC	CC	SUPPORT	TOM	ACTUAL	%
WSDA	51	29	5	85	75	88%
ESDA	22	20	6	48	44	92%
NSDA	30	25	10	65	54	83%
TOTAL	103	74	21	198	173	87%

Table 4 – Uniformed Instructional Staff TOM and Actual comparison by SDA area

65. There would appear to be a high vacancy rate within training, which is predominantly driven by unfilled posts at SDA support, core and driving instructor level. The data would suggest that the highest factor is in the NSDA with the WSDA also being affected. We found that the position detailed above mirrored our feedback. Many staff within the training function, detailed that vacancies were a routine issue and had a negative impact on capacity, workload and the subsequent delivery of training. Some reasons for vacancies and staff turnover were cited as retirements, inefficient workforce planning processes, promotion criteria, attraction and marketing, Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) and trouble filling 'hard to fill' posts, which are historically those predominantly in remote rural locations.
66. It is noted that the training function has worked hard to streamline T&Cs and to make them uniform across the organisation. A recent change to harmonise these, in particular working hours, has had an impact on training delivery. Instructors are now required to carry out more work nationally, which is reported to sometimes reduce hours available for instruction locally, which can be a source of frustration particularly for station-based support. There is also now a requirement for instructors to provide targeted availability to deliver courses at weekends where necessary, which attracts a salary enhancement.
67. It was also reported that T&Cs do not align to the start and finish times of courses and the goodwill of staff has to be relied upon in many instances to ensure training delivery. This goodwill often comes at the expense of time in lieu leave being accrued by instructional staff, which in turn can impact planning for subsequent training delivery. This situation would seem to be a vicious circle and difficult to manage. The Service detailed a strategic commitment to address additional capacity within training, which will hopefully allow the reassessment of T&Cs in the future.

Area for Consideration 4:

The training function should consider the review of its instructor terms and conditions to identify where changes could be made that will ensure more efficient and effective training delivery balanced against staff welfare.

68. On a more positive note, the training function have proactively engaged in workforce planning processes and developed an innovative staffing solution in order to fill routine and/or 'hard to fill' posts, with a degree of success. The training function recently introduced new training support CC roles for remote rural areas including on the islands of Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland. These personnel assist with core training work including preparation of trainees for phased assessments, Breathing Apparatus (BA) refreshers, Road Traffic Collision (RTC) refreshers etc. In addition, the loss of the hard border for instructors between training areas, initiated by the TVS, has allowed for more flexibility and support, particularly in the NSDA. These innovative approaches mean a semi-permanent training instructor presence in some of the more difficult to reach areas of the SDA.

Good Practice 2



The training function has worked hard to develop innovative staffing solution for 'hard to fill' geographical posts and should be commended for this. They should continue to look for opportunities to ensure quality training is delivered to all parts of the organisation.

69. We were told that staff, predominantly uniformed instructors, were routinely being encouraged to exit the training function, to gain operational experience and gather evidence in order to progress into middle management. It is understood that some staff may need to do this dependent on their prior experience but the advice seemed to be arbitrary with no real evidence base or formal criteria to back it up. This advice seemed to be self-destructive for the training function with the effect of encouraging the transfer of credible, competent and experienced instructors outwards. It is unclear as to the exact origins of this advice but its genesis has been attributed in some part to feedback from interview panels following unsuccessful promotion processes. The Service detailed that it is committed to developing supervisory managers within the function, could not guaranteed progression to middle manager within the same function, for a variety of reasons, on all occasions and that the issue was inextricably linked to the talent management challenges, explored later within this report.
70. In addition, the posting and training of new instructors inevitably causes a lag in training delivery and consequent drop in performance. There did not seem to be a reciprocal process that SD staff should need to seek functional experience for promotion and as such, the constant two-way flow of engaged and motivated staff was not apparent. This issue is not a criticism of training management but more a comment of what would seem to be an absence of guidance on career pathways and talent management within the Service as a whole. We found this overall aspect disappointing and believe that the training function should work more proactively with regard to keeping its best people in place.

Recommendation 1



In the absence of a formal Service career pathway document, we recommend that the Service should consider reviewing guidance and support provided to managers that would proactively encourage the retention and development of staff, to promote continuity within training.

71. The industry standard for the number of training staff to employee ratios for technically based organisations can vary and is not generally stated for UK FRSs . Additionally, we were unable to find an applied model for training staff levels for the organisation, workplaces or SDAs with the structure and numbers assigned seemingly historical and developed organically. The Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics (FSOS) 2024-2025¹⁶ detail that the Service has approximately 7,556 staff of which 6,468 are operational, excluding Operations Control (OC), as detailed in Table 5.
72. Therefore, the TOM training function staff number of 245 would provide a rough overall staff ratio to employees of 1:26. However, if the TOM figure of 198 for instructional staff only was used this would raise the ratio to 1:33. When this is analysed by SDAs, it can be demonstrated that the ratio is fairly consistent and that no one area has a massively disproportionate amount of staff per employee as per the TOM.

	Ops staff	All Function	Ratio	Instructor staff	Ratio
National	6,468	245	1:26	198	1:33
WSDA	2,672	107	1:25	85	1:31
ESDA	1,569	60	1:26	48	1:33
NSDA	2,227	78	1:29	65	1:34

Table 5 – TOM ratio to training function staff

73. If the same analysis is conducted on the actual training function staff number of 214, it would provide a rough staff ratio to employees of 1:30 detailed in Table 6. However, if the actual 173 figure of instructional staff was used this would raise the ratio to 1:37. When this is analysed by SDAs, it can be demonstrated that the ratio is fairly consistent across the WSDA and ESDA, whilst there is a slightly higher instructor to staff ratio in the NSDA, which is potentially aligned to the higher vacancy rate.

	Ops staff	All Staff	Ratio	Instructor staff	Ratio
National	6,468	214	1:30	173	1:37
WSDA	2,672	93	1:29	75	1:36
ESDA	1,569	55	1:29	44	1:36
NSDA	2,227	66	1:34	54	1:41

Table 6 – Actual ratio to training function staff

74. As detailed, there is a directorate identified risk of an inability to maintain or improve training delivery due to insufficient capacity being available within the training function to meet current demand. The training function submitted a 'Capacity and Resourcing Needs' analysis paper to the Strategic Leadership Team in January 2025, which details the challenges linked to training function capacity versus predicted organisational training requirements. The paper stated that they conducted a national capacity analysis, as well referring to historic time and motion studies, which sought to

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map overall capacity against future SFRS organisational training requirements and to then offer recommendations.

75. Their analysis found that job families and commensurate workplaces were generally working over 100% capacity, ranging from 80% to 166%. They found that on average the training function was working at 112% to meet the organisational training requirements. It concluded that there were a number of managerial options for improvement with a subsequent recommendation that between 18 to 20 additional instructor staff would be required to meet the needs. It was pleasing to observe the training function's focus on developing more capacity as per its commitment in its TVS.
76. HMFSI found that the position detailed above mirrored the feedback provided during interviews. Many staff within the training function, predominantly within the core and SDA support family groups, believed they were working over capacity to get the job done. This resulted in staff not taking their allocated amount of annual leave, having difficulties in reclaiming compensatory leave, sacrificing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities as well encountering ongoing difficulties in prepping for, assuring and review of courses. This situation was exacerbated by some staff being redirected to work on other Service-sponsored projects or carrying out a dual role. It should also be noted that we found that the capacity of staff carrying out management or development roles to be challenged also, and that this appeared to have a detrimental bearing on training performance management, which will be explored later in this report.

Recommendation 2



We recommend that the Service continue to review its training capacity in line with organisational requirements in order that it can redirect any future additional resources to training delivery and its performance management.

77. The Service historically sponsored the creation of an administrative team called 'Team C' who sit within the structure. The team has approximately 13 members reporting to a team leader. They are dedicated solely to the scheduling of training and working across the other staffing teams to minimise the impact of training absences from appliance and command officer availability. Team C perform the training scheduling role and it is far more efficient for instructors not to have to do this. There are other teams that consider operational and FDO cover so there is a need for constant communication and engagement between the teams. Team C reported that systems are 'clunky' and they are using an old system aligned to a legacy FRS. Systems do not 'talk to each other', which results in inefficiency and potential human error. There is a need for systems to be far more 'joined up' so that skills, competencies, capacity etc. can all be factored easily, which the new training software system will hopefully support.
78. The Chief Officer is ultimately responsible for the discharge of the legal obligations that apply to the content of the H&S policy and training. Whilst the Director of TSA is the strategic lead for training and provides strategic direction and policy. The HoF has the delegated responsibility from the Director of TSA for functional strategic management.

79. The TFF details that it is essential for operational station-based supervisory managers to maintain competencies, provide relevant ongoing training and that core skill responsibility lies with:
- training instructors – acquisition of skills;
 - training instructors and operational based supervisory managers – firefighters in development; and
 - training instructors and operational based supervisory managers – maintenance of skills.
80. The TFF then goes on to detail training responsibilities as:
- operational supervisory managers maintain and manage staff competencies;
 - SPOCs oversee local training compliance and needs; and
 - LSO SD managers manage station-based staff competence and currency of staff qualifications and skills.
81. It is clear that all staff within the training function were aware of the role that they are carrying out and were clear as to their responsibilities regarding the tasks for actual delivery of training day-to-day. However, we could find no comprehensive list of responsibilities that defines roles from DACO down through the training function, which was confirmed by some staff who were simply aware of the day-to-day task they had to do. We were unable to find further guidance regarding roles and responsibilities and found direction on this area of management to be incomplete and relatively light.
82. We found that many staff were not as clear to other responsibilities, which was particularly stark when questioned about performance management and the review of training. Staff, particularly those below middle management, generally did not appear to place importance on the need for this aspect of their role and seemed solely focused on the task at hand. Whilst it is commendable that staff are very focused on delivery of training, it is also concerning that opportunities may be being missed to change the training function and for continuous improvement because staff have not been directed or developed to appreciate this responsibility.

Area for Consideration 5:

The training function should consider reviewing its policies and guidance to ensure that all staff are aware of their full responsibilities and that they are developed to understand and deliver on this.

4. Operational Training – Performance

83. The Service has a PMF 2023-2024¹⁷ extended to 2025-2026, which defines how the SFRS will manage its performance and how it uses information to inspire change and improvement. It also provides *‘the Board with the relevant information on... performance to support their role in scrutinising the Service’* and has Key Performance Indicators (KPI) 22 – 29 relevant to training performance. From a training perspective, the director and HoF have responsibility to:
- develop plans to align functions with relevant priorities of the strategic plan and ensure performance measures and targets are proportionate and fit for purpose;
 - celebrate good performance and ensure good practice is shared throughout the organisation;
 - develop a sound process of tracking performance and ensure action is taken to deal with areas of poor performance and risks, as well as developing areas of good practice and innovation;
 - ensure all functional staff understand their performance requirements across their relevant function; and
 - benchmark performance across relevant functions.
84. As detailed, training is a function within the TSA directorate and, as previously stated, its TVS is designed to provide clarity and resources to ensure they work safely, collaboratively and progressively to deliver excellence in operational training. To accompany this strategy, and as part of the PMF process, training provide quarterly performance business reports to TSAB and the People Committee. Within these reports strategic actions and training KPIs, are reported along with trend analysis and contextual narrative.
85. To complement the PMF process the training function have developed a Quality Management System (QMS) Policy¹⁸ that states the training function *‘uses the expertise of our highly skilled training and support staff to manage all aspects of training and development requirements for the modern service. We have developed our quality management system to ensure that the consistent high standard of training is delivered across the country, irrespective of location, trainers and resources available’*.

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Measuring

86. The training function KPIs are set internally and are aligned under the PMF 'Outcome 2: communities are safer and more resilient as we respond effectively to changing risks'. They have a set of national high-level quantitative quarterly measurements, which are:
- KPI 22 – Percentage of TfOC core skill delivered;
 - KPI 23 – Percentage of TfOC specialist skill delivered;
 - KPI 24 – Percentage of TfOC FDO module completion;
 - KPI 25 – Percentage of incident command (IC) in currency;
 - KPI 26 – Percentage of core skill in currency;
 - KPI 27 – Percentage of specialist skill in currency;
 - KPI 28 – Percentage of training course delivered; and
 - KPI 29 – Percentage of customer satisfaction.
87. Performance data was provided by the Service for the five-year period from 2020-2025. Some information is incomplete for the 2020-2022 period as Covid19 impacted on training completion. Table 7 illustrates the average percentage for each year and the target set by the Service.

KPI	20/21 Avg.	21/22 Avg.	22/23 Avg.	23/24 Avg.	24/25 Avg.	Target
KPI 22			79%	73%	74%	95%
KPI 23			81%	82%	81%	95%
KPI 24			72%	80%	84%	95%
KPI 25			93%	97%	96%	91%
KPI 26	68%	68%	62%	68%	82%	73%
KPI 27	88%	92%	93%	104%	111%	90%
KPI 28	100%	92%	92%	90%	86%	95%
KPI 29	100%	100%	100%	100%	98%	95%

Table 7 – KPI average percentage for each year

88. KPI 22 measures completion of core operational skills modules across Wholetime (WT), Retained and Volunteer Duty System (On Call) and Day Shift Duty Staff. Despite efforts, such as LSO performance meetings, online engagement sessions and station visits, completion over the last three years has ranged from 79% (22/23) to a low of 73% (23/24). The most recent yearly average of 74% remains well below the 95% target and shows a declining trend. Although factors such as sickness and duty systems affect delivery, the consistent shortfall is a negative issue.

89. KPI 23 measures completion of advanced, support, and emerging risk TfOC modules for WT, On Call and Day Shift Duty System staff. Despite support from LSO performance meetings, online sessions and station visits, completion over the last three years has ranged narrowly between 81% and 82%. This remains well below the 95% target and shows a slight downward trend. While factors such as sickness and duty systems affect completion, the consistent shortfall remains a negative issue.
90. KPI 24 measures completion of FDO modules within the TfOC framework. Despite collaboration between the training function, Service Delivery and Directorate teams, completion over the last three years has ranged from 72% (22/23) to 84% (24/25). This remains below the 95% target, though performance is improving with an upward trend. While factors such as sickness can affect completion, the consistently low results remain a negative issue.
91. KPI 25 measures the percentage of IC personnel who remain in currency through National Training Standard (NTS) acquisition and refresher courses. The IC team works with Central Staffing (CS) and Workforce Planning (WP) to ensure sufficient course provision and address attendance issues. Over the past three years, completion has ranged from 93% (22/23) to 97% (23/24). This exceeds the 91% target and shows a positive upward trend, which is positive.
92. KPI 26 measures completion of core skills currency based on NTS acquisition and refresher courses. Over the past five-years completion rate ranged from 82% in 2024-2025 and a low of 62% in 2022-2023. The most recent year is well above the 73% target and likely aligns directly with the Service's strategic decision to establish a centrally formed training function and to prioritise delivery of the BA Recovery Plan as a critical enabler for restoring and maintaining operational competence. The Service believes that the significant uplift in this particular performance reflects the combined effect of increased coordination, focused resource deployment, revised scheduling, and deliberate prioritisation of BA refresher training following the disruption of the Covid19 period. The sustained upward trend is encouraging and indicates a more stable and sustainable improvement trajectory for this performance measurement.
93. KPI 27 measures completion of Specialist Rescue currency through NTS aligned acquisition and refresher courses. The specialist rescue team works with CS and WP to plan and schedule sufficient courses and address attendance issues. Over the past five years, completion has ranged from 88% (20/21) to 104% (23/24). This significantly exceeds the 90% target, showing a slight upward trend which is positive. While the consistent overperformance may raise concerns about potential over allocation of capacity, the nature of these specialist skills means development of additional resilience is understandable. Nonetheless, the Service should remain alert to how this may be perceived, particularly in comparison to other areas facing performance challenges.
94. KPI 28 measures the percentage of training courses delivered against those scheduled in the training plan. The training management team monitors all scheduled courses to ensure deliverability, making adjustments such as merging low attendance courses, reviewing venues, and coordinating with CS to address capacity issues. Over the past five years, completion has ranged between 100% in 2020-2021 and falling to 86% in 2024-2025, remaining below the 95% target with a downward trend. Course cancellations are influenced by organisational priorities, capacity constraints, resourcing and sickness. The shortfall may also reflect resources diverted to the post-Covid19 BA recovery plan.

95. KPI 29 measures candidate satisfaction with training delivery. The training team encourages survey completion and monitors feedback to improve the learner experience. Results have remained consistently high and ranged between 100% over a number of years and dipping slightly to 98% in 2024-2025. While this exceeds the 95% target, the slight downward trend and the reliability of this measurement are examined later in the report.
96. Examples of other data available and measurement were BA recovery course completion rate data, Driver Training (DT) course completion rate data and course pass rate data. We found that there is a significant amount of training related quantitative data being generated from both an input and output perspective. Historic data and related KPIs are tried and trusted metrics that provide an indication of improvement. The use of the data, its quantitative measurement and publication quarterly would suggest performance is being actively tracked and measured in large part.
97. Throughout our fieldwork, staff shared both positive and negative views on training performance, but few instructional or station-based staff could provide quantitative measures for their roles or qualitative evidence demonstrating continuous improvement. Most examples were anecdotal and reflected personal experience rather than measurable outcomes. Overall, while the training function collects extensive data, it seems to struggle to use that information to demonstrate to all staff groups how performance outcome has improved across the organisation. This issue is similar to that highlighted in our OA thematic report. Nonetheless, the Service can demonstrate effective measurement of training performance for reporting purposes.

Monitoring

98. Training performance is monitored Service-wide utilising the training function governance arrangements¹⁹ detailed in Diagram 1, which illustrate the informed routes for performance reporting. The TMT provides an informal forum to discuss training activity and performance. The FMT offers formal oversight of business matters and performance. The Training Director chairs the monthly DMT, which reviews Directorate business and monitors performance against indicators. Additional performance monitoring occurs through the Training Safety, Assurance and Improvement Group, OCSG and MRG before matters reach the TMT. Training performance reports are submitted quarterly to the Training Continuous Improvement Board.

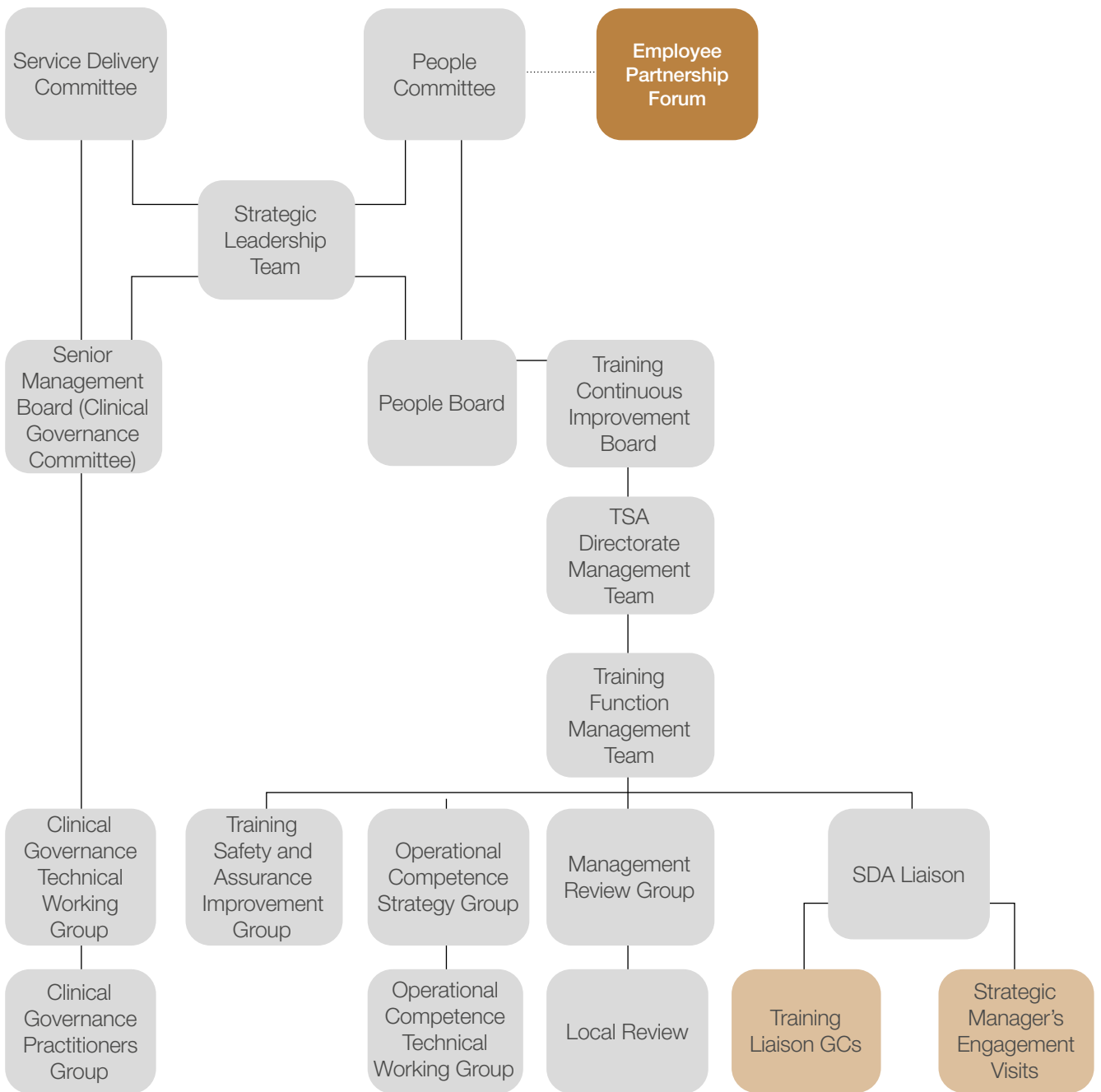


Diagram 1 – Training function governance arrangements

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99. It is understood that LSOs have scheduled management meetings within their area and that training performance reports are provided for management assessment. Performance dashboards are regularly circulated and made available to managers at LSO level to help them manage, support, and develop operational personnel. Reports for all relevant stakeholders include data sets aligned to KPIs over that reporting year. Relevant training function middle managers and the identified LSO SPOC liaise on a quarterly basis to ensure the TNA is being progressed and checking that there are no issues locally relating to training delivery.
100. Training function strategic managers also liaise with SDA training SPOCs for each SDA on a quarterly basis as necessary, to discuss any issues and also good practice. In addition, there is also a requirement for middle managers responsible for local Training Centres (TC) to liaise with LSO management teams to discuss performance issues on a routine basis. Performance is therefore being monitored on a regular basis by station and/or watch based managers, LSO management teams and TC SCs. This supports the functional commitment to achieving agreed competency rates as well as forming a measuring tool.
101. We found both functional and LSO senior management teams to be very aware of the need to monitor performance. We also found that meeting structures for doing this were very mature, albeit quantitatively based. That said, we found most supervisory managers to be unaware of the need to monitor training performance and that performance was routinely viewed as supplementary to the role.

Quality Management

102. A QMS is a formalised system that defines and documents an organisation's processes, procedures and responsibilities for achieving quality policies, practices and objectives. It helps an organisation coordinate and direct its activities to meet customer and regulatory requirements, as well as continually improve its effectiveness and efficiency.
103. The training function have a QMS Quality Policy²⁰, which details relevant aspects of the training function such as:
- objectives;
 - structure;
 - course design;
 - resourcing;
 - infrastructure;
 - processes and procedures;
 - review; and
 - measurement and analysis process.

²⁰ TSA, Training, Policy, QMS Quality, Version 6.0 22 December 2021

104. The QMS assurance process details that it is predicated on a series of inputs which are monitored and developed by an assurance team to build outputs. These outputs are then analysed and assessed firstly by the MRG and then the TMT, hopefully culminating in improved outcomes as per Diagram 2 below.



Diagram 2 – Training QMS assurance process

105. In particular, the training function employ and are certified to the International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001:2015 as part of their QMS. We observed reports that demonstrated audits had been conducted, the scope of the audits and that non-conformance to the standards that had been noted. This particular output demonstrated that training should be delivered to an agreed standard and that it is being monitored for any drop in that standard, which was positive to note. It is understood that the number of these inputs and outputs in the assurance process is very comprehensive, which in theory should provide the MRG and TMT with a fully accurate picture of quality and performance generated by the QMS.
106. The training function issues a customer satisfaction survey to all course attendees. Previously paper-based and completed before leaving the venue, it was reported that the system often produced skewed results due to reluctance to give critical feedback and pressure to finish training course attendance quickly. The survey is now issued electronically after the course, resulting in fewer responses but more meaningful feedback. Despite the changes, KPI 29 continues to report of those questionnaires submitted, customer satisfaction levels were close to 100% over the last five years.
107. Whilst this improvement is welcome, previous HMFSI inspections show that staff consistently raised concerns about facilities, course cancellations, equipment, appliances, standardisation, welfare, outdated materials and joining instructions. Whilst the accuracy of the questionnaire data collected is without reproach, this ongoing feedback to inspectors calls the usefulness of this KPI into question, as near perfect satisfaction scores contradict long-standing issues and may provide management with an inaccurate picture. Additionally, many training staff seemed to rely on this metric alone to judge course performance, whereas the achievement of high satisfaction rates should not be the sole indicator of improvement.
108. As detailed previously the training function has a Non-Conformance and Corrective Action²¹ procedure that covers the raising, recording of non-conformances and how to initiate and record corrective actions to prevent recurrence. A non-conformance is defined as *'a failure to meet one or more requirements. These might be training function requirements, procedures, policy, training standard, supplier requirements, candidate requirements or Quality Management System (QMS) standard requirements'* and corrective action is defined as *'any action deemed necessary to eliminate the causes of non-conformities to prevent recurrence and are appropriate to the effects of the non-conformities'*. An example may be the inability to conduct an exercise due to an insufficient number of Thermal Image Cameras. The system is a helpful tool for identifying one off or consistent issues and trends with performance.
109. Although only eight non-conformance reports were submitted in 2024-2025, suggesting most courses ran without major issues, staff consistently reported problems such as outdated or defective appliances and equipment, system failures, limited staff and appliance availability and inadequate welfare and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provision. These recurring issues indicate that non-conformance may be significantly under reported and that training delivery is routinely hindered by unresolved systemic challenges. The Service reported that this issue is commonly discussed at management and development meetings to highlight its importance and are attempting to embed an active reinforcement learning and escalation culture.

21 TSA, Training, Procedure NCCA, Version 1.0 30 May 2024

110. Many staff reported frequent issues that hindered timely and effective training delivery. Although problems were often raised through line management, few seemed to be escalated through the formal non-conformance process. We also noted a strong focus on delivering training rather than improving it, with a limited culture of continuous improvement at instructor level.
111. A British Standards Institute (BSI) assessment report provided by the Service would seem to support this as it details, in respect of the National TC (NTC), the process for non-conformity and corrective action was not fully effective. As such, we concluded that non-conformance is not used extensively to drive performance through the MRG. We believe, there is significant formal under reporting of non-conformance and that the 'can do' delivery culture, whilst very commendable, would appear to be inhibiting continuous improvement.
112. The Service employs an OA process that endeavours to manage the quality of operations and encourage all staff, predominantly operational staff, to add to continuous improvement outcomes. The system is also designed to support learning from training and exercising with training deemed to be the acquisition and maintenance of skills and knowledge, whilst exercising is the testing of the skills and knowledge. Our thematic inspection of OA stated that *'training and exercising would seem to be a proactive process born from the need to learn from how the Service is designed to respond to known incident types. In essence, training and exercising will stress test the equipment, procedures and training prior to attending incidents'*²². Our report stated that we found almost no evidence of training being debriefed in a format that would formally assist in the improvement process. We recommended that the Service review how and when it debriefs training and exercising to ensure that there is suitable proactive learning to enhance organisational learning.
113. To support this assertion, we observed and were provided with examples of staff identifying potential training improvements but struggling to get them to a forum where they could be assessed for merit. Consequently, we do not believe that the Service, or specifically the training function, are being provided with any meaningful data by staff, which would inform them of potential improvements identified or needed in training.
114. One aspect that seems to exemplify the issues detailed previously is that of standardisation. *'Standardisation is the practice of establishing and implementing uniform procedures, guidelines, or criteria to ensure Learning and Development processes consistently meet defined quality benchmarks. It provides a structured framework that supports the consistency of processes, outcomes, and evaluations across all aspects of a learning programme...for those who deliver regulated training, standardisation is not optional, it's a requirement'*²³. Although the Service has policies, procedures, lesson plans, NTS documents and audits intended to maintain consistent standards, several potential factors continue to undermine standardisation. These include; limited capacity, high staff turnover, insufficient staff development, potential cultural differences, geographical challenges and legacy working practices, all of which can negatively affect consistent application of standards.

22 [HMFSI Thematic Inspection of SFRS Operational Assurance](#)

23 [What is standardisation - Skills for Justice](#)

115. We found that the issue of standardisation was consistently an area of frustration and concern for SD and functional staff alike. Examples of different standards of training between geographic locations, TCs and instructors were cited. Some examples even recounted differing standards being applied within the same training course between the morning and afternoon. Training managers were keen to point out that in their experience training could be delivered differently dependant on factors such as the local work and legacy service culture, background, knowledge, experience and credibility of the instructor.
116. Whilst we accept that these aspects may have merit and a have a bearing on the customer experience, we found that the topics and instances reported to us could not routinely be explained away by this. Some of the standardisation issues referred directly to incorrect application of agreed national standards. To reinforce this position, we found little evidence that training management believed standardisation was an issue for the training function and little evidence of standardisation events being conducted across the instructor cadre that would help to reinforce this aspect of performance.
117. The MRG would seem to be an appropriate forum within the assurance process for assessing quality and performance of training. There is strong evidence that there are inputs and outputs being considered by the training function to identify improvement. However, given our concerns regarding the veracity of customer feedback, non-conformance under reporting, limited OA reporting and standardisation concerns, we believe the effectiveness of this system could be improved.

Recommendation 3

We recognise that the Service has several quality management systems and assurance systems intended to support continuous improvement. However, we found they do not operate cohesively and are not delivering the required improvement anticipated. We recommend the training function should review these systems to ensure they work together as intended.

118. It is worthy of note that the Service has recognised some of these potential deficiencies and has invested resource by transferring a strategic training manager into the Safety and Assurance function. The intent is to refresh and strengthen the approach by developing an overarching assurance framework built around three core elements of Training Assurance, Safety Assurance and OA, with Organisational Learning integrated throughout. The Service has strengthened its assurance function by adding one SC and two WCs.
119. The assurance team is developing a Training Assurance Implementation Plan and has begun reviewing existing policies, procedures, training standards, and the role of the MRG and QMS. Initial inspections and audits at TCs and stations will begin shortly, allowing the team to refine its approach through early learning and feedback. A later phase will introduce independent audits evaluating how training is applied in real operational environments. This direction is encouraging and demonstrates a clear commitment to improving Organisational Learning and training performance.

Audit

120. Audit is quite simply ‘a detailed examination of the quality of something’²⁴ and can also be defined as the ‘on-site verification activity, such as inspection or examination, of a process or quality system, to ensure compliance to requirements’ and ... ‘performance’²⁵. As such, it is an integral part of the management of training and a robust programme of audit would be expected. To enable an ethos of continuous improvement the training function detail that a suite of specific training assurance documents and procedures that outline the formal auditing process should be implemented.
121. They state that ‘training audits shall be implemented in due course for training delivery and themed, specific to confirm knowledge and understanding. Competent auditors who have knowledge and experience or access to technical advice of the theme being audited shall conduct the audits’²⁶. The functional QMS identifies that the MRG is responsible for ensuring compliance with processes and procedures through regular internal audit and that, where necessary, appropriate risks, threats and opportunities are identified to ensure continuous improvement.
122. The TFF details that, to ensure high-quality and cost-effective training, several processes will be implemented, which are:
- TC inspections to identify good practices and address issues;
 - QMS which includes internal and external audits to monitor adherence to ISO requirements and quality assurance processes;
 - mechanisms to collect feedback from candidates and instructors to identify improvements; and
 - governance structures to provide scrutiny and assurance at all levels.
123. From an internal audit perspective, the training function follows a procedure titled Gen 3.2 – Maintaining High-quality Training Delivery²⁷. The purpose of the document is to detail the procedure for reviewing and improving the quality of training delivered by training function staff and covers all aspects of training delivery for WT and On Call, driving courses, training carried out within LSO areas and specialist course programmes.
124. Overall responsibility for the procedure lies with the AC (Design and Development). GC and SC managers must ensure compliance at their respective TC locations. For centrally coordinated programmes and training delivered in LSO areas, the responsible SC conducts audits. The GC for quality assurance oversees the procedure’s effectiveness and reports findings to the MRG.
125. At regular intervals, each SC or a nominated competent person must observe a randomly selected training session, theoretical or practical. After observation, the SC completes a training delivery audit form (Gen11) and promptly discusses any findings with the instructor. Any deficiencies should be recorded with corrective actions, followed by a timely recheck to ensure they have been resolved. Copies of all Gen11 forms must be available for internal and external audit.

24 [Cambridge Dictionary](#)

25 [What is an Audit? - Types of Audits & Auditing Certification | ASQ](#)

26 TSA, Training, Policy Procedure, Training Delivery Assurance, Version 3.0 22 December 2021

27 TSA, Training, Procedure, Gen 3.2, Version 2.2 30 May 2024

126. A further review should then take place as soon as practicable to ensure the deficiencies have been resolved. The SC should review, on a continuous basis, the course evaluations completed by all students at the end of courses and discuss with the GC any trends or deficiencies that may be observed.
127. Training management provided examples of completed Gen11 audits, demonstrating that audits form part of the performance process. However, during our inspection, we found little evidence that this procedure is applied routinely; almost no staff interviewed recalled being audited. We also found no evidence of its use within LSO areas or for external courses. Additionally, the requirement to conduct audits at 'regular intervals' is vague, and this lack of clear expectations may contribute to the limited application of the procedure.
128. There was concern that limiting audit responsibility to the SC creates a risk of insular practice. Although peer-to-peer reviews were reported and potentially offered useful 360-degree feedback, they operated more like informal debriefs than true audits. While this approach is positive, it is insufficient as the sole method of quality assurance and many instructors did not recognise its limitations.
129. As such, we found the concept of this document to be well founded and that it sets out a desire for auditing the quality of training being delivered by instructors. However, the limited application of the procedure we observed, as well as other inhibitors, was disappointing. Consequently, we believe that a real opportunity to improve performance within training is being missed.
130. We found a programme of TC inspections in place, with the 2024-2025 schedule completed and around half of the 2025-2026 programme underway. Inspections are to be conducted internally by two SCs from outside the host TC and cover key areas including resilience, training delivery, H&S, people, as well as staff knowledge and understanding. Specifically, they inspect:
- resource maintenance;
 - PPE maintenance;
 - equipment maintenance;
 - maintenance and awareness of operational and other service issues;
 - TC and ancillary equipment subject to regular checks;
 - TC workforce planning and availability of personnel;
 - TC process to monitor and maintain appropriate documentation;
 - Covid19 Workplace Risk Assessment and Management Plan completed and reviewed;
 - TC staff maintaining a record of their competences or development;
 - personnel in development phase receiving support and mentoring;
 - reporting and monitoring of H&S events;
 - H&S records being maintained;
 - managing attendance process effectiveness;

- career management process effectiveness;
 - TC has an appropriate distribution of skills and personnel availability;
 - monitoring of TC stock, consumables and inventory process;
 - TC personnel knowledge and awareness of SFRS objectives, policies and procedures; and
 - performance information made readily available to personnel.
131. The current inspection programme is comprehensive, but its peer review nature may limit independence and risk bias. In contrast, the SD Community Fire Station inspection model uses a GC as lead, providing stronger impartiality and may be more suitable in this instance. The existing process focuses heavily on maintenance standards, procedures, documentation, workforce planning and staffing, which supports improvement. However, it does not assess the quality of actual training delivery standards, leaving a significant gap in assurance.
132. The Service employs two specific OA audit processes for stations, which are the pre-incident Community Fire Station audits as well as pre-incident thematic audits. The former is administered and managed by LSOs whilst the latter is administered and managed by the TSAB. The Community Fire Station audit and inspection programme measures pre-incident station preparedness and is designed to complement the 'during incident' and 'post-incident' review processes within the OA system. Elements of the pre-incident station audit include training but are limited to record inspection and a practical demonstration.
133. We concluded from previous inspections that a notable practice within the audit process is that station personnel are required to demonstrate both core practical and technical skills through a training scenario selected from the FRS Manual: Volume 4 – Foundation Training and Development. We stated²⁸ that *'the practice of physically demonstrating operational competence for the audit is extremely important and there is an argument that it could form a larger part of the audit. Staff generally had the opinion that this part of the audit was frustrating and that routinely conducting a 'standard drill' as defined in the manual may not significantly improve standards.... there was general agreement that other operational preparedness could be audited'* as well.
134. We found that the Service had conducted very few thematic audits and none specifically for training. We detailed that there is a need for regular thematic audit in some format as it can focus on routine trending issues and provide recommendation for improvement. As such, we recommended that the Service should consider conducting more thematic audits as the recommended changes from robust data analysis are tangible and can be aligned to continuous improvement. Consequently, we do not believe that the specific training audits of the OA system is driving strong improvement within training or within SDAs. We believe the positive direction of travel and subsequent action plan developed by the SFRS as well as changes to the OA team in response to our OA thematic inspection should improve this situation, if completed.

135. A BSI audit evaluates an organisation's compliance with standards such as ISO 9001, assessing whether systems and processes meet regulatory, quality and efficiency requirements. The SFRS has an established programme of BSI audits, with evidence of both completed and planned assessments. We were also advised that Driver Training Centres and examiners undergo regular external audits by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, which staff believe helps maintain high standards in that area.
136. The Service has the right audit procedures on paper, but implementation is weak and inconsistent, meaning training delivery quality is not reliably assured. TC inspections are happening, but they focus on facilities, not instructional standards. Limited thematic auditing and underuse of existing procedures mean the organisation is missing opportunities to learn and improve. The audit framework is well designed but poorly applied, leaving a critical gap in the quality assurance of training delivery.

Area for Consideration 6:

The training function should consider reviewing and reinvigorating the audit processes to ensure that they are receiving maximum information for continuous improvement.

Benchmark

137. It is clear that the training function is part of the process for utilising information from throughout the UK via NFCC National Operational Guidance, National Resilience and NTS, which helps to inform training delivery and development. Other examples of benchmarking include:
- utilising NFCC National Operational Guidance and The Road Safety Act 2006 draft regulations as benchmarks for Driver Training Standards;
 - visits to other UKFRSs have been undertaken by the BA Group, notably to South Wales, Bedfordshire, Durham and Darlington and Greater Manchester FRS to benchmark BA, Compartment Fire Behaviour Training (CFBT) and Tactical Ventilation. These visits have involved comparing syllabuses of courses, delivery methods, facilities and processes for managing contaminants;
 - benchmarking extrication NTS is currently underway as part of a comprehensive review of extrication training across the Service;
 - examining the alignment between existing RTC operator and RTC instructor qualifications and the United Kingdom Resue Organisation / NFCC Extrication Competency Framework. Development pathways for all extrication related skills are also being benchmarked against external providers, particularly United Kingdom Resue Organisation; and
 - engaging in the 'EXIT' project, which aims to evolve current extrication practices with a stronger emphasis on casualty experience and clinical outcomes. As part of the EXIT project, training and guidance are being benchmarked against contemporary research, with ongoing collaboration between the Service and the Scottish Ambulance Service.

138. We were also informed that the training function has been represented at the Emergency Services Training Collaboration Group, NFCC Driver Training Advisory Group, the NFCC Tactical Firefighting Group and the NFCC Operational Training and Education Group which allowed for a degree of benchmarking by meeting attendance. We found good evidence that benchmarking was a tool being routinely utilised by the training function to compare the standard of training against other UK FRSs and organisations.

Good Practice 3



The training function has worked hard to develop relationships within the UK FRS. They have proactively used these relationships to benchmark aspects of training to identify continuous improvement and should be commended for this. They should continue to look for opportunities to benchmark training for all aspects of operational training.

Scrutiny

139. The PMF²⁹ identifies training as a corporate governance matter embedded within SFRS structures, including the Board, its sub committees and the Strategic Leadership Team. Scrutiny takes place quarterly at the Board and People Committee, and every six months at the Strategic Leadership Team. The PMF also notes the TVS as a further source of assurance. Training is regularly scrutinised through quarterly and annual performance reports to the Board and People Committee, combining quantitative KPIs with qualitative commentary.
140. In 2019, the training function reviewed the development of SFRS operational staff, producing 56 recommendations for the TCIP. The programme has since expanded, with the 2023 TCIP Action Plan updating all outstanding actions, assigning ownership to functional leads, and establishing a process to capture new improvement recommendations. The Action Plan is maintained as a live document, with updates reviewed at TMT meetings. There are currently 78 recommendations: 70 completed, seven in progress, and one discontinued. The training function remains responsible for progressing the eight outstanding items, and these are monitored through TSA governance and scrutinised by the Training Continuous Improvement Board, TSAB and People Committee.
141. In summary we found the performance of training to be proactively managed with good quantitative measurement, which is monitored and scrutinised in a mature structured way. We also found that the training function employed a QMS, accredited to an ISO standard, which appeared to be maintaining and driving standards. However, we found that issues with customer satisfaction measurement, under reporting of non-conformance and standardisation all highlighted that the process may not be as effective as it is believed to be. In addition, we also found significant gaps in the provision of audit, which should be addressed.

5. Operational Training – Delivery and Skills Maintenance

142. As detailed previously, the TVS implementation will ensure that a blended learning approach, including realistic acquisition, refresher training and continued application of the TfOC framework, meets the organisational training needs of the SFRS. The TFF has been developed to provide a comprehensive approach to developing and maintaining the skills and competencies of personnel, ensuring they are well equipped and trained to perform their crucial roles safely. The TFF supports the TVS and is made up of three key elements, which are training delivery, skills maintenance and training assets. The framework has been developed in accordance with the HSE HSG model of ‘Plan, Do, Check, Act’. ‘Check’ and ‘Act’ have been covered in the performance section of this report. The specific concepts of ‘Plan’ and ‘Do’ will be explored within this section.
143. In relation to ‘Plan’, the TFF details there is a need to define standards and expected outcomes as well as develop a TNA. As detailed previously the Service has clearly defined targets within the PMF, which are measured, monitored and scrutinised. The training function also has a NTS Overarching Principle³⁰ document, which details the standard to which all training design and delivery should adhere, and it is designed to ensure that all personnel providing front line operational activities are doing so to the expected level of competence.
144. Detail within each training standard allows individuals to understand the links between their training and all elements of their development. Only these documents, in their most up-to-date edition, provide the accepted standard for training design and delivery. Only the approved materials developed by training staff, associated with each standard should be used to develop staff in line with the standards.
145. The training function work with a set of NTS with lesson plans built from them that detail outcomes. Central to the above process is the production of a suite of SFRS NTS for each identified training family. These documents are published and set out the recognised national pathway to attain competency and maintain currency within each identified skill and attribute. Although not exhaustive, the NTS also detail annualised maintenance training requirements, anticipated frequency of training and the details for any subsequent recertification process.
146. NTS also detail how over-arching accreditation and quality management are built into the training methodology for each skill and attribute. Whilst the training function has evolved across the lifetime of the Service, NTS still remain the critical foundation element for the quality and consistency of training programmes and practices across SFRS. In terms of quality assurance, the ongoing process of continuous review within a document review schedule ensures as much as reasonably practicable that each NTS is procedurally compliant, accurate and up to date.

30 TSA, Training, NTS Overarching Principles Version 1.0 08 November 2022

147. In relation to the current suite of published NTS the training function is currently conducting a systematic review of all SFRS NTS to be conducted across the fiscal years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027. Furthermore, to promote the appropriate level of cross-directorate engagement and also with a view to ensuring alignment with a specified scope and a fixed timeline, the Service has elevated the work to a designated project and is overseen through the formation of a project board.
148. We found that staff were very aware of the NTS and routinely used the associated lesson planners for course delivery. We did encounter instances of lesson plans and course material being out of date and instructors having to skip sections or excuse the poor training material to course attendees. This seemed to be a source of frustration for staff and was synonymous with the issue surrounding staff having to deliver constantly at the expense of review and development processes. The training function detailed that there was also an ongoing process of reviewing all the NTS, which we found to be a positive improvement process and hope that this also brings improvement in the associated training material.
149. The TNA process is essential for identifying and addressing skill gaps. It analyses reports to highlight discrepancies in TOM requirements, schedules courses accordingly, and assigns an LSO area SPOC to oversee training needs and compliance. Now more mature, the process is supported by clear guidance. Previously completed annually, the TNA is now reviewed quarterly using a Microsoft based system, allowing SPOCs to identify required skill sets more accurately. Staff viewed the shift to quarterly reviews positively, noting that it improved accuracy, responsiveness, and flexibility.
150. In relation to the HSG Model and the specific area of 'Do', the TFF details that the two main aspects are training delivery and skills maintenance. The aspiration is that training will be delivered through a variety of approaches, including:
- instructor-led training, traditional classroom-based instruction;
 - eLearning, delivered primarily through the LCMS platform;
 - blended learning, combines face-to-face and eLearning;
 - virtual reality provides immersive simulation training;
 - on-the-job training, real-time instruction in the actual work environment; and
 - external instructors, utilised when appropriate.
151. Core skills are defined as the basic and fundamental skills required for any role. The nature and criticality of these skills is such that they need to be performed instinctively and regularly repeated and/or rehearsed. The core skills syllabus consists of a collection of activities which must be undertaken and demonstrated at defined frequencies. For the purposes of this report core skills also include standard incident types, new and emerging risks as well as any other supporting topics deemed necessary. Examples of core skills may include BA, Fire Behaviour, RTC, Safe Working at Height, Ladders, Electricity etc.

152. Specialist skills are those required by a sub-section of operational personnel only. This may result from the specialist capability and equipment held at the Community Fire Station they are working at or may be allocated to the individual to meet a strategic need. Examples of specialist skills may include Emergency Response Driving (ERD), high reach appliance operator, heavy rescue vehicle operator, marauding terrorist attack, water rescue, rope rescue or animal rescue etc.
153. Core TfOC modules were revised in 2022, with core skills maintenance now delivered over 12 months and advanced skills maintenance over 36 months. Content is provided through LCMS and updated regularly by OCSG, Operational Competence Working Group and the Learning and Electronic Development team. These changes have been well received, with staff reporting that the streamlined modules and improved video content reduce computer-based time and allow greater focus on practical training. The training function appears to be making proactive improvements to this aspect of training delivery.
154. That said, we found that there was still an element of staff who believed the blend of training was moving too far towards digital solutions as opposed to practical. However, the Service believes that a more holistic ‘blended learning’ approach to knowledge and skills maintenance is key to ensuring firefighter safety within a modern FRS. It is understood that the Service is still developing the blended learning experience as part of their TVS, but many of the staff we spoke to felt that the balance was not yet correct.
155. One recurring TfOC theme is specifically related to the use by On Call staff. On Call retained staff are allocated between two-to-three hours per week for a training night and two-to-three hours per month for On Call volunteers. This normally also includes the need to conduct equipment and safety checks as well as routine administration. It was reported that many of the packages were still far too comprehensive to be delivered and understood within a single training night and inhibited practical training. It was described that some, for example General Data Protection Regulation, could take up to three or four training nights to finish, which was a significant portion of training time in the year.
156. This issue was highlighted in our report of 2020³¹ where we detailed that *‘there is excessive theory content in TfOC modules. The time required to deliver the depth of content, and to complete online assessments and update training records, left staff with very little time to conduct practical training, a concern that was consistently raised across the Service’*. The impact could also be exacerbated by limited access to the training and information and communication technology systems at station level as well as operational turnouts during the training night.
157. The Service detailed that this issue will always be a challenge where compliance related modules are concerned and the content is mandated and inflexible. The training function itself has limited input regarding the content of such modules as they are designed and populated by the relevant Function and would fall beyond the scope of OT. They report that there has been continuous development to streamline training modules without sacrificing rigour or impacting firefighter safety.

31 [HMFSI report - Training of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’s retained duty system personnel](#)

158. Another recurring theme is that some TfOC modules do not reflect the actual risks faced by remote rural On Call stations, particularly those on islands, such as training for railway incidents where no railways exist. Despite this, staff still feel pressured to ‘turn modules green’ for compliance, even when the training is irrelevant to them. This has led to frustration and reduced confidence in the credibility of the system. The Service noted that when the TfOC packages for each quarter are issued, stations can request elements of training to be removed, but this is rarely requested. We understand that work has commenced to review training packages for On Call stations with a dedicated manager within the LED team tasked with this work package.
159. We found that the model for ‘what’ training is being delivered and maintained provides clear structures and improvements in the design and delivery of OT, particularly the modernised and streamlined TfOC programme. However, it also surfaces cultural and practical challenges, especially the perception that digital learning is overpowering practical skills development and a misalignment between the TfOC design and the realities of the On Call duty system. These tensions point to a need for further refinement to ensure training remains practical, accessible and role-appropriate. But also, the need for the training function to engage with SD staff to explain the benefits of blended learning better.

Area for Consideration 7:

The training function should continue to review training for operational competence content to ensure that it is fit for purpose and in particular that it is appropriate for staff constrained by the terms and conditions and duty pattern of being retained or volunteer On Call.

160. As detailed in Table 8 below, for core skill acquisition and firefighter development, training is delivered by training instructors, with station-based supervisory managers sharing responsibility for workplace development. Both groups also support ongoing core skills maintenance. The TFF emphasises that supervisory managers must manage staff competencies and provide regular training. Specialist skill acquisition and refresher training are delivered by training instructors, qualified supervisory managers, or external providers. As noted earlier, the training function aims to deliver training locally while coordinating it nationally.

	Training Instructor	Supervisory Manager	Qualified Supervisory Manager	External Instructor
Core Acquisition	X			
FF in Development	X	X		
Core Maintenance	X	X		
Specialist Skills Acquisition	X		X	X
Refresher / Reassessment	X		X	X

Table 8 – Designated role for delivery of training

161. The majority of on-station training is delivered by watch supervisory managers, as outlined in their role map. They are supported by training SD support instructors and On Call Support WCs, who provide essential assistance to station-based personnel. It is recognised that both the SD support instructors and On Call Support WC's fulfil an essential role and provide invaluable support to station-based staff. However, to deliver this model effectively, supervisory managers must have the skills, knowledge, competencies and be confident as well as credible in their role. Significant WT staff attrition in recent years, due mainly to pension remedy retirements, has increased the need to develop newly promoted supervisory managers so they can meet these expectations.
162. Historically and in a more stable condition, supervisory managers may be developed with courses such as, methods of instruction training, instructor qualifications in RTC and/or BA as well as other managerial skills. In addition, the Service has historically utilised unofficial mentoring and coaching as a development tool, which can be highly effective when used correctly. We understand that the process of providing instructor qualifications to newly promoted staff has been limited due to historic training strategy and that levels have reduced significantly over a long period of time.
163. Throughout our inspection we were presented with frustration and concern from staff that the current cadre of supervisory managers have not been upskilled and developed sufficiently and the organisation has failed to react to this risk appropriately. In addition, the high turnover of staff has diminished the ability of the organisation to rely on mentoring and coaching, as many experienced staff have left the organisation in a short period of time. Also, there was a feeling from middle managers that the training culture on stations was not as effective as it could be and that there was an over reliance and expectation on the training function for the delivery of training. Some of these issues have been recognised by the training function and we are aware that they have implemented a process to reestablish instructor qualification levels and improve instructor revalidation procedures within station-based supervisory management.
164. In addition to on-station supervisory managers, training instructors have a significant role to play in the effective and efficient delivery of training. As detailed, there would seem to be a high vacancy rate within training, which is predominantly driven by unfilled posts at area, core and driving instructor level. The current data would suggest that the highest vacancy rate is in the NSDA with the WSDA also being affected. We found that the position detailed above mirrored our feedback and that we encountered the highest levels of frustration regarding capacity in these areas.
165. This vacancy issue appeared to be impacting on the ability to deliver courses as programmed, which has led to the cancellation of some courses, sometimes at late notice. The instructor shortage also often results in members of other training teams being used to supplement the gaps, which consequently impacts other areas of training delivery. Many staff within the training function, detailed that vacancies were a routine issue and had a negative impact on workload and the subsequent delivery of training.

166. The vacancy rate within the instructor cadre was a continued point of discussion throughout our inspections. The attraction and retention of staff would seem to be a constant source of frustration for management, particularly for remote and rural areas. T&Cs seemed to be a barrier with weekend working, workload, remuneration, requirement to travel nationally all being negative examples cited. In addition, the T&Cs also seemed to inhibit the effectiveness of functional management as they do not align with many of the course start and finish times, which ultimately impacts on overall capacity.
167. The vacancy rate also seemed to be exacerbated by the lack of a clear organisational career pathway with experienced and qualified staff reporting being encouraged to leave the training function for pre-promotion operational experience in the absence of an organisational talent management process for managers and functions to follow. On a positive note, the training function have recognised some of these issues and developed staffing solutions to fill routine and/or hard to fill posts. The introduction of new roles within Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland is a good example of innovation to improve performance for an identified risk and more are required to deal with other issues.
168. As detailed, the training function introduced a new TVS. It was recognised that the requirements identified through the TVS and TFF could not be met with the existing instructor structure and capacity. To address this, the Service restructured training into a single training function by merging all local SDA training staff with the national instructor pool as detailed previously. This transition was completed in April 2024. However, some SDA staff remain concerned about the loss of local control, are sceptical that the changes will improve long term local performance and perceive the shift as further centralisation that reduces local flexibility and autonomy.
169. This issue was exemplified by the redeployment of a training SC based in the NSDA who had SD liaison as their functional responsibility. The unintended consequence of this has been a loss of a dedicated role to consider SDA training issues that are identified and the subsequent administrative capacity to deal with them. As we understand it, a SD SC now has responsibility for this role alongside their other duties and examples like these continue to feed improvement scepticism.
170. Whilst SD staff view the introduction of the TVS as not being wholly positive, the training function believes that the consolidation of the instructional staff has been beneficial as it has led to more efficient use of the instructional staff capacity. The strategy is a clear and innovative attempt from the training function to start to address many of the historic training issues and they should be commended for its development. However, it would seem that there is still a need to continually review the impact of the changes to ensure continued SD engagement.
171. Fire Ground Technicians (FGTs) provide essential logistical support at TCs, preparing drill yards and facilities for daily courses. Team sizes range from one to five depending on location. Despite working with basic Microsoft-based systems and physical props, FGTs were consistently enthusiastic, organised and solutions focused. Their main frustrations related to limited capacity and frequent challenges with equipment, appliances and facilities. Daily routines were not well documented, with tasks often learned informally from colleagues, creating a risk of knowledge loss, particularly for smaller teams.

172. Training support for On Call stations is delivered by the training function through scheduled instructor visits. However, staff reported wide variation in how often these visits occur, some stations receive consistent monthly or quarterly support, while others have gone many months without a visit. We were also told that former structured support schedules have largely lapsed, with visits now often arranged on an ad hoc basis. Overall, the approach appeared inconsistent, varying across LSO areas and SDAs.
173. Managers acknowledged that past visit arrangements lacked structure and that improved planning is needed to fully support the TfOC. They felt the current Service-wide approach is inconsistent and that good practice is not routinely shared. A new initiative in one area introduced a tiered support model, ensuring every On Call station receives at least one scheduled instructor visit per quarter as a minimum. It is understood that this practice is now being adopted across the function.
174. The frequency of visits varied, based on local management factors, including the number of WT staff dual contracting at each station. Where less support was needed, visit frequency was reduced. Despite some challenges, this new approach would seem to enable a more consistent, measurable level of support across the Service. The introduction of On Call support WCs in recent years has also strengthened training delivery, particularly in remote rural areas. We have observed that their contribution is viewed as a positive and effective enhancement to On Call training support.
175. We noted ongoing difficulties attracting and retaining support staff instructors within DT, where vacancy levels remain high. Challenges include T&Cs and the inability to offer salaries competitive with the external market. Although the current DT model relies mainly on internal delivery and this approach is valued by many staff, concerns were repeatedly raised that it is unsustainable. Staff believe the model may be unable to meet future demand, especially given anticipated legislative changes. The Service is aware of these issues and is actively reviewing the DT model, which will be discussed later in the report.
176. In summary, the roles and responsibilities for 'who' is delivering and maintaining training are clearly defined, but a persistent vacancy gap is limiting delivery. The limited development of station-based supervisory managers may be affecting training quality, although efforts are under way to upskill them with technical qualifications. Attraction and retention issues within the instructor cadre are further constraining capacity. To alleviate these pressures, the training function has introduced innovative solutions, such as new roles in hard to fill areas, a more consistent On Call support model and changes introduced through the TVS that demonstrate a continued commitment to improvement.

Area for Consideration 8:

It is clear that capacity will continue to be an issue for the training function moving forward. The training function should consider accelerating the drive to up skill station-based watch commanders and linked training processes as this will hopefully spread the burden wider and release more functional capacity.

177. The Service maintains an operational TOM with defined skills required to ensure safe and effective teams. The TNA supports this by identifying skill requirements in partnership with workforce planning. To achieve and maintain competence, the training function must deliver both acquisition training for new skills and ongoing maintenance/refresher training for existing skills. This requires an appropriate balance between training volume (quantity) and training effectiveness (quality) to ensure both compliance and competence are achieved.
178. From an acquisition perspective, training ranges from lower-risk skills such as knot tying to high-risk, complex skills including BA, ERD, rope rescue and water rescue. Course duration varies from a few days to several months or years. Acquisition training is usually delivered and assessed internally by qualified instructors. Staff generally viewed these courses positively, reporting good learning experiences and strong competence outcomes, reflected in consistently high 'KPI 29' satisfaction scores. Most concerns focused not on quality, but on volume, highlighting continuing capacity pressures.
179. The approach to maintenance and refresher training differs from acquisition training. TfOC is the primary system for recording the maintenance of core and advanced skills. As detailed core modules run on a 12-month cycle and advanced modules on a 36-month cycle, delivered through LCMS with completion monitored via established governance processes. Staff must complete each module and assessment to 'tick it green', which then demonstrates maintenance of competence and generates performance data. Feedback on TfOC was mixed: while staff welcomed recent improvements and updated content, concerns remained about the system's effectiveness.
180. Many staff reported that the system promotes a 'tick box' culture, with completion focused more on compliance than genuinely maintaining competence. The training function detail that there is consistent messaging that the focus should be on competence. TfOC attainment for core, advanced and FDO modules currently sits at 74%, 81% and 84% respectively, well below the 95% target and showing a downward trend. Limited auditing and low levels of exercising further hinder the Service's ability to accurately assess competence once initial skills have been acquired.
181. Many operational skills require renewal every three-to-five years, with refresher training and assessments forming a significant organisational workload. Although mainly shorter than acquisition courses, refreshers still consume substantial capacity. Current attainment rates for core, advanced and IC refresher courses are 82%, 111% and 96% respectively, against targets of 73%, 90% and 91%. The overall upward trend indicates increasing delivery. Refresher training is mainly delivered face to face by qualified internal instructors, with some external support. Staff generally viewed these courses positively and raised no major concerns about quality or standards, reflected in the consistently high 'KPI 29' satisfaction scores.

182. Some refresher course concerns focused on currency lapses, compliance-driven processes and limited use of practical application evidence. Staff reported frequent issues with ICs, ERD drivers and instructors falling out of competence currency due to a cumbersome monitoring system and the significant impact of missing deadlines. Many felt refresher training emphasised compliance over genuine skills updating, with BA and IC training noted in particular. Given the large number of BA wearers and ICs, this may reflect the perception of a system geared toward throughput, where quantity can overshadow quality. The Service did provide evidence of proactive benchmarking processes designed to encourage that quality is a factor constantly being considered in delivery.
183. Many staff were frustrated that practical evidence from incidents or exercises could not be used to maintain or extend competence currency. Although the current system ensures compliance, it generates high training volumes, creating pressure on capacity and giving the impression that quantity outweighs quality. It also fails to recognise the skills of experienced staff who could reduce this burden if operational evidence were accepted. Notwithstanding, the Service have reported that current guidance, resourcing, systems etc. impact viability and it is acknowledged that the practicality of achieving this for some skills would be challenging.
184. Overall, the competence model is heavily compliance-driven, inefficient, and takes limited account of strong evidence gained through real incident attendance or on-station training. The system delivers acquisition training effectively, but maintenance and refresher training are strained by limited capacity, a perceived compliance-driven approach and the inability to use operational evidence to demonstrate ongoing competence. We believe this creates inefficiency, frustrates staff and misses opportunities to adopt a more modern, flexible, risk-based model.

Area for Consideration 9:

The training function should consider how it utilises other sources of evidence to prove competence, which would hopefully encourage a better balance to the perceived culture of compliance over competence.

185. The TVS and TFF place an importance on practical training and state that training will use a blended model combining face to face, on the job, digital and virtual reality methods. We observed most of these elements in use, though virtual reality is still developing. Staff generally felt the blend was appropriate, though some expressed concern about an increasing shift toward digital learning due to its flexibility and efficiency. While digital methods offer clear benefits, physical training remains vital for interaction, feedback, teamwork and practical skills, all essential in a technical, hands-on organisation. We found no major issues with the current balance but note the need for the Service to remain alert to maintaining an appropriate mix.
186. Training is essential for safety in the fire service but must be balanced against the need to provide a continuous 24/7 operational response. Removing staff from the operational TOM requires careful planning, whether for short or long-term training. Training may occur while personnel remain available for deployment, under strategic reserve with limited availability, or Off The Run (OTR) with no operational commitment for the duration of the training.

187. Most station-based training is carried out while staff remain available for operational deployment and is usually completed efficiently with only occasional disruption. Staff may use strategic reserve to attend off-station or site-specific training when required. Station management teams and OC organise most on-station, off-station and site-specific training. In the WSDA, up to six appliances can be placed on strategic reserve during day shifts and up to nine at night. In the East and North SDAs, arrangements are less formal, and although appliances can be placed on reserve, the likelihood of recall to operational duties was reported as higher, resulting in inconsistency across the Service.
188. We found that use of the strategic reserve has declined, with SD managers increasingly struggling to secure authorisation from OC. SD staff expressed frustration at reduced opportunities to train and maintain competence, particularly in complex specialist skills. Training, OC and SD personnel all reported that withdrawing staff from operational cover is a persistent and growing barrier to training. Staff reported that some of these aspects may point to a potential cultural issue, rather than any specific strategic guidance, in that training may not hold the correct value when compared against prevention and protection activities, station routines or rest periods.
189. Training teams acknowledged these challenges and are seeking to standardise the approach. We were also advised that CS and operations function have agreed revised crewing and buffering rules, though it is unclear whether this has yet resulted in meaningful improvements.

Area for Consideration 10:

The Service should review arrangements for appliance strategic reserve to provide a consistent system allowing staff to maximise training, balanced with operational commitments.

190. Training at training facilities or external providers normally requires taking either whole crews or individuals OTR, coordinated through CS. The TNA informs scheduling, with Team C populating the training planner and liaising with customers to nominate appliances or students. CS, OC and station managers then arrange any required moves to ensure operational cover. The training team use the scheduler to assign instructors, resources, equipment and welfare provision. Course directors receive attendance lists and are responsible for preparing course materials and briefing instructors before delivery.
191. This is a somewhat simplified summary of the process and we are aware that there are many moving parts that require management. It would appear that the training function utilise systems such as LCMS, pdrPro and Microsoft packages to manage training, whilst the People Directorate use a software package called iTrent. The iTrent system among other functions, stores personal records including qualifications, skills and competencies. Station management teams have limited access to iTrent reports and the training systems, relying mainly on engagement with the directorates for up-to-date information or their own manual records kept at station level. It was reported that the use of available iTrent reports can be limited by the restricted awareness of SD management teams.

192. It is understood there is a heavy reliance on individuals at stations monitoring their own competence currency and indicating the need for further training or assessment. It is therefore conceivable, due to the numerous moving parts, that there may be occasions where communication and administration fail to identify a training need with a subsequent negative impact on SD.
193. This situation aligns with the accounts provided to us of ICs, ERDs and instructors dropping out of competence currency. The resultant impact being that the skill becomes unavailable for operational deployment and there may be a necessity for the individual to complete training again, which is an inefficient and ineffective use of capacity. It is understood that the training function are in the process of scoping and procuring a new training software system that will streamline many of the issues discussed above and it is hoped that it should also encapsulate the management of skills, qualifications and competencies to allow for improved training planning.
194. To deliver the TVS there is an organisational capacity required. We believe that there is a need for capacity to release people from their operational commitment for training. The capacity of instructors to deliver the training and capacity of personnel to maintain their competence are also factors that require consideration. We understand that the Service has an operational TOM and commensurate duty systems that are designed to provide a continuous operational response to an agreed standard and skill set. In recent years, the maintenance of this provision has been under increasing pressure due to budgetary constraints within public services. We have observed that the training function, as a supplier, and the SDAs as customers are both finding it increasingly difficult to release staff for training whether that be OTR or on strategic reserve.
195. Additionally, we have already identified that training has a TOM, which is designed to provide the capacity for expected training and future workstreams and emerging issues. This capacity is under pressure as the vacancy rate, particularly within the instructor roles, may be having a negative effect on delivery. This is allied to the Service's own analysis of capacity where they detail that many of the training teams were working way over 100% to deliver against the organisational need.
196. Staff consistently reported struggling to maintain their CPD, prepare or debrief courses, review materials, or proactively improve training. Many also found it difficult to take leave or time off in lieu. As detailed, the training function recognises these issues and believes an additional 18 to 20 instructors are needed to meet demand and future workstreams. While we cannot confirm the accuracy of this figure without deeper analysis, it is clear the training function requires staffing to its agreed TOM, and that any new organisational capacity should be prioritised for improved training delivery, but also to review and develop training in line with the principles of continuous improvement.
197. We visited several stations with additional specialisms, such as rope rescue, water rescue and heavy rescue, which required a commitment to additional training and maintenance of skills. Most crews viewed the extra training positively, with minimal impact reported. The training function highlighted its recommendation to expand the use of Knowledge Applied Training and Assessment (KATA) sessions across Height, Water and Urban Search and Rescue capabilities. These sessions provide risk-based, scenario driven, refresher and maintenance training, helping crews sustain competence through realistic, applied learning.

198. Their hope is that it has improved training efficiency by reducing duplication, strengthened assurance through structured Subject Matter Expert oversight, and delivered measurable improvements in operational readiness and safety. KATA is now embedded as business-as-usual within specialist rescue team, supported by robust quality assurance processes and recorded outcomes in pdrPro. We found that where these sessions had been delivered, they were well received with staff reporting positive learning experience. That said, not all staff were aware of the concept and we remained unconvinced that the process had been fully rolled out.

Good Practice 4



The development of the knowledge applied training and assessment system would seem to be a positive innovation and is going some way to filling a potential gap in training delivery. The innovation should be commended and applied consistently to all areas of the Service.

199. Where some remote WT stations (such as Inverness, Elgin, Oban and Dumfries) have been allocated multiple specialisms, staff reported increasing difficulty maintaining these skills. We were told that higher station workloads, competing training demands and limited access to strategic reserve make regular, high-quality off-station training challenging. While we cannot fully triangulate these concerns, we remain unconvinced that the current training regime provides sufficient assurance in the operational competence expected of these personnel. We could find no evidence to demonstrate that the Service analyses the impact of the applied SD model for a station, balanced against the expectations of training and other workload.
200. In summary, we found that the current model for delivering training is under significant strain due to structural and capacity challenges, competence risks, operational pressures and local inconsistencies. While the strategic intent is clear and improvements are underway, the model is still struggling to meet organisational needs, creating a real risk to maintaining competence and operational resilience.
201. The training function envisage that training will be conducted on-station, off-station, at TCs or at site-specific locations for skills such as rope rescue or water rescue etc. The Training Strategic Asset Management Plan (TSAMP) has been developed in conjunction with members of the training and asset function to establish and maintain a sustainable training asset portfolio. It is the intention to look more fully at the TSAMP later in this report and as such, commentary on aspects of building infrastructure, vehicles and equipment will be reserved at this point.
202. On-station training is the most common method of delivery. LCMS and TfOC materials are accessible via the Service intranet and stations are equipped with varying degrees of equipment such as smart boards, projectors, computers or laptops. Recently renovated stations generally reported good working environments and adequate IT provision. However, many stations, particularly On Call, consistently raised concerns about poor internet connectivity and limited computer access. On Call staff felt these issues hindered effective learning, often completing modules at home instead. This is especially problematic given the Service's reliance on blended learning, digital content, and the need for supervised, team-based training.

203. In general, drill yards, towers and equipment allowed effective on-station practical training. However, some towers were unusable due to a range of known safety concerns, and some yards were too restricted because of station layout or nearby buildings. At certain stations, limited space and ageing infrastructure also made training difficult in poor weather, alongside issues with dignified facilities (DF), welfare provision and contamination control (ConC). These challenges are known to the Service and documented within the TSAMP, with investment prioritised accordingly.
204. We found that site-specific locations were effectively used for specialist training such as rope rescue and water rescue. These sites were properly identified and risk assessed and staff were generally positive about their use, albeit some training had been restricted for resource, safety and finance issues. Increasing restrictions on gaining OTR or strategic reserve status frequently led to sessions being interrupted, postponed or cancelled at short notice, which negatively affected development, motivation and morale.
205. We also found limited evidence of stations designing and delivering off-site routine training. This is consistent with the findings of previous HMFSI reports. Historically this type of training was routine, but its use would seem to have declined. Staff attributed this to a lack of confidence in completing planning, risk assessments and approvals, as well as perceived bureaucracy. It is also possible that the current SD model and restrictions on accessing strategic reserve status further inhibit this type of activity. Where it did occur, it was well received and increased enthusiasm due to its variety and realism.
206. For the training function to achieve its overall objective to develop and deliver high-quality training they believe it is essential to provide fit for purpose national training facilities. We observed and were informed of a variety of functional issues at each site, both positive and negative. It is the intention to explore these in more detail later in the report as detailed previously. Currently, the SFRS has 13 training locations:
- Dreghorn (WSDA);
 - Dumfries (WSDA);
 - NTC, Cambuslang (WSDA);
 - Dundee Airport (NSDA);
 - Invergordon (NSDA);
 - Inverness (NSDA);
 - Kirkwall (NSDA);
 - Oban (NSDA);
 - Perth (NSDA);
 - Portlethen (NSDA);
 - Stornoway (NSDA);
 - Sumburgh (NSDA); and
 - Newbridge (ESDA).

207. Much of the maintenance training, such as casualty care, hazmat, knots and lines, RTC extrication, water awareness, safe working at height, IC, driving and trainee phases is delivered on-station. However, some training requires attendance at TCs, including Recruit training, BA refresher, CFBT, tactical ventilation, IC and DT courses etc. Although TCs are primarily reserved for scheduled courses, they are available for operational crews to book. We found little evidence of local crews using these facilities. It is unclear whether this is due to limited development opportunities, perceived bureaucracy, or restrictions linked to the current SD model and strategic reserve requirements.
208. We visited most training facilities during this and previous inspections. While all were in use, the NTC, Portlethen, Newbridge, Perth and Invergordon operated as the primary hubs. Staff were generally content to attend these centres and, although they preferred local access, they routinely travelled to other sites when required. The training function appeared to use all locations where practical to balance local delivery with national coordination. Functional and SD staff recognised that not every course could be delivered at every venue and accepted the need for flexibility. Although there were occasional instances of excessive travel or last-minute cancellations, these were infrequent and did not raise significant concern.
209. Following SFRS reform, several training sites in the ESDA were closed, leaving Newbridge as the only dedicated TC for that area. Although significant investment has been made at Newbridge, staff noted that its location and restrictive transport links make access difficult for some remoter stations. While flexible use of other sites, such as the NTC, Perth, Dundee and Dumfries, helps meet demand, this arrangement highlights a possible under provision of training facilities within the ESDA, potentially on the east side of the City of Edinburgh or the Scottish Borders.

Area for Consideration 11:

There would seem to be a potential gap of facility provision within the ESDA, which may be affecting efficient delivery of training. The Service should continue to review service delivery across its training estate and considering enhancing provision should resourcing and finance permit.

210. Staff reported historic concerns about a punitive assessment culture at some venues, which created anxiety and discouraged learning. Most staff interviewed now feel the environment has improved and assessments are less intimidating. We are pleased to hear that cultural change has occurred, however inconsistencies in training delivery between venues remain a common frustration. These differences undermine confidence in the process, and there is a clear need for the training function to strengthen and maintain standardisation across all TCs.
211. The directorate can use external providers when additional expertise, capacity or specialist skills are required. Although external provision can offer greater cost effectiveness, efficiency and flexibility, use of this model remains limited. Some staff have attended specialist RTC, water and rope rescue courses externally. However, several managers felt the Service has not fully explored external options that could better meet operational needs and reduce pressure on internal resources and capacity.

212. This issue was particularly evident in the DT model, where relying solely on internal instructors and assessors was not meeting the required number of qualified drivers. While the Driver Training Centre teams themselves were highly regarded, staff expressed frustration with a model that no longer appeared effective. Many believed that a blended approach, including the use of external providers, would deliver better results and improve SD outcomes. Directorate management confirmed that significant work has been undertaken to review DT arrangements, maximise capacity and make use of limited outsourcing. They detailed that they have previously piloted the outsourcing of DT which proved to be challenging in terms of delivery. Following that a procurement process was conducted to identify an external provider to deliver DT, this process was unsuccessful as no viable supplier could meet all requirements in terms of time, quality and cost.
213. In summary, the model for 'where' training is delivered works in principle, but its effectiveness is undermined by practical issues. Persistent information and communication technology problems, limited access to strategic reserve, under provision of facilities in some regions, inconsistent use of TCs, and significant standardisation gaps, all restrict delivery. Although staff value recent improvements, they remain constrained by infrastructure limitations, access challenges and inconsistent practices across the Service.

Recommendation 4



It is understood that the training function is moving towards a more blended approach for training with increasing reliance on digital applications. We would recommend that the Service review the information and communication technology infrastructure available at station, particularly On Call to ensure that the model can be delivered in the way it is envisaged.

OT – Skills In Focus

214. The Service trains for a wide range of operational skills, which are too many to mention in this report. However, there are a number of skills that we received consistent feedback on and feel that it is necessary to report some of these in more detail.

Trainees

215. WT trainees complete a 16-week course at a SFRS TC. High trainee numbers have required more flexible delivery models, including switching some cohorts to a 'four on/four off' duty pattern instead of the standard five-day week. These adjustments, combined with increased demand, have created capacity and scheduling pressures, particularly at the NTC where most training occurs. Staff delivering the programme were consistently engaged, knowledgeable and enthusiastic, though the sustained workload has had a noticeable impact on them.

216. Following graduation, trainees enter the Red, Amber and Green development phases, each concluding with practical exercises and formal assessment. Successful completion of the green phase assessment and verified portfolio allowed trainees to be designated as competent firefighters. However, as noted in SDA reports, some trainees who completed their development plans experienced delays in being signed off due to a shortage of assessors and verifiers nationally. A recent His Majesty's Inspector of Education audit of the MA/SVQ process resulted in several recommendations being progressed by the People Directorate. While many of the underlying issues have been addressed, the impact is still being felt to a degree by trainees and the watch officers responsible for supporting them. This matter is discussed later in the report.
217. There was also consistent feedback from supervisory managers that trainees arriving on station did not exhibit a level of competence in skills that they considered the most important. Examples given, were lack of consistency from instructors, too much emphasis on community safety and not enough emphasis on basic skills such as casualty care, RTC and BA. Some examples provided indicated frustration of students that they had not been given the opportunity to extinguish a live fire at any point in their training course.
218. The Service reported that this particular issue was addressed in the first priority phase of the BA recovery plan and that the trainee foundation course is under continual review, with reduced community safety content and increased focus on core operational skills, including BA. Ongoing debriefing has led to improvements, including an additional week to strengthen BA and casualty care training. A longer BA phase is currently being piloted and will be evaluated soon. The training function stated that graduation from the trainee foundation course is a 'false horizon', where only minimum safe levels of competence have been achieved in order to form part of an operational crew. The majority of development towards full competence should occur during the 33 month development phase on-station. Despite this belief and the ongoing changes to the course, there remains a clear disconnect between the level of competence expected by stations and what the Service believes the course should deliver.
219. On Call firefighters have an agreed modular development pathway, incorporating a two-week Task and Task Management course followed by two weeks of BA training, as well as other training such a casualty care, RTC, water rescue and safe working at heights. This initial training can be a barrier, as it often affects their primary employment and/or annual leave. The Service is working to improve recruitment and initial training through its national On Call improvement programme. We understand that some On Call training is being delivered in modular format over weekends, thus taking pressure off of trainees in relation to their primary employment. Those who attended weekend modules reported positive experiences. The Service should continue to prioritise and expand this approach.

Good Practice 5



It is pleasing to note that the training function are developing innovative solutions to course delivery, which will allow a more flexible approach for On Call course attendance. The development should be commended and used as a future model for improvement.

BA

220. Trainees have historically been given an initial two-week course in BA, with the skill then further developed throughout the phases of reaching competence. All other staff maintain their BA competence with incident attendance, on-station training and refresher training and assessment. Historically, BA wearers were given BA, Tactical Ventilation and CFBT refresher training on a three-yearly cycle. However, following the post Covid19 period, where much of the training was suspended for a period, the Service required to develop and instigate a BA recovery plan which incorporated all three disciplines into one day. It is important to recognise now, the unique circumstances that led to this problem in the first place and the excellent efforts of those concerned in addressing the shortfall and resetting the foundation on which to build.
221. It should also be acknowledged that the development and delivery of the plan has required significant functional capacity. The new 'three in one' course enabled the Service to train and assess large numbers of BA wearers more quickly and to reset at an agreed baseline following the disruption of Covid19. Although the recovery plan has delivered positive results, it has now been extended twice and continues to place substantial demands on the training function. The plan's main outcomes are widely reported across the SFRS and therefore are subject to extensive scrutiny.
222. Staff expressed mixed views about the three-in-one BA course. Many recognised its importance in demonstrating BA competence and reported positive experiences at TCs. However, they also felt the previous system, where BA, CFBT and Tactical Ventilation were taught separately, provided more focused learning. This reflected wider and previous concerns about compliance taking precedence over competence, and quantity over quality. Staff also questioned the significant functional capacity required for the BA recovery plan, noting its impact on other training areas. Overall, they felt a balanced model between the old and current approach would be more effective. The Service acknowledges these issues and intends to review the BA refresher course prior to the recovery plan concluding. It reported that the next iteration of BA training being developed would reflect current guidance, benchmarking, best practice and should negate concerns regarding compliance and quantity.

Good Practice 6



The Service has ploughed considerable resources into the breathing apparatus recovery plan, probably at the expense and prioritisation of other training projects. Although there is a degree of criticism surrounding elements of the plan it should be recognised for providing a high level of comfort that most staff have been assessed to an agreed standard over a relatively short period of time. Those staff involved should be commended for the excellent work which brought about the course development and delivery.

223. Other commonly reported BA training issues included limited practice in natural offensive ventilation, training temperatures that were too low, and insufficient opportunities for controlled fire extinguishing. While some limitations stem from Service policy and contemporary guidance, many staff still felt the refresher training did not adequately prepare them for critical operational tasks. This reflects long-standing concerns, with previous inspections also noting frustration at the lack of realistic hot wear BA training.

224. Staff reported that BA training had become overly assessment-driven, creating a negative learning environment. An example of this focused on the Service's strict assessment of BA entry control. Although understood to be absolutely critical, the perceived aggressive nature of the assessment process contributed to staff discomfort, particularly among On Call staff who worried that failing refreshers may have a negative impact on fire cover for their community. Although many noted that the overly forceful assessment culture was historic and has eased considerably, some staff still remain wary of attending TC courses. It should be noted that some staff also reported that the training culture has shifted positively from being assessment-focused to offering a more supportive learning experience. While maintaining high standards is essential, especially for BA, there is a risk that the approach becomes counterproductive if it undermines confidence and learning.
225. Historically, there was a practice whereby many supervisory managers routinely held the BA instructor qualification, enabling them to train and assess BA skills at station level. Since the SFRS's inception, both the qualification and its practical use have declined. The training function have now reinstated BA instructor training for supervisory officers, which is a positive step. This will strengthen the supervisory development pathway and increase training capacity. It is important that future processes make full use of qualified BA instructor staff to share the training workload and support the wider training function.
226. From 2022-2025, 72% of operational staff completed the BA TfOC module, while 82% received BA refresher training. For WT staff, TfOC completion was 83% and refresher completion 85%. For On Call staff, TfOC completion fell to 65%, with 81% completing refresher training. These figures show BA competence and refresher activity are being delivered, but TfOC attainment remains well below the 95% target—particularly for On Call staff. Refresher attainment exceeds the 73% target, reflecting the positive impact of the recovery plan.
227. Whilst the recovery plan is ensuring all staff receive the three-in-one course promptly, it remains concerning that TfOC completion levels, particularly for On Call staff are still low. Although several factors may influence these results, the consistently poor attainment represents an ongoing organisational risk and this performance should be improved

Driver Training

228. The ability to drive safely under blue light conditions is essential for effective operational response. To maintain this capability, the Service relies on a cadre of uniformed and support staff within DT to deliver and assess ERD skills. However, a 23% vacancy rate in support roles and an overall 18% vacancy rate in DT means the Service barely runs enough courses to keep up with Service need.
229. The SFRS has aligned its driver training to the NFCC Driver Training Framework in preparation for Road Safety Act 2006 Section 19 implementation. A key risk has been identified regarding Approved Driving Instructor (ADI) qualifications. The NFCC guidance requires existing ADI qualified staff to complete 'Train the Trainer' courses to develop new instructors and holding an ADI licence as a mandatory prerequisite. The Service currently has only four ADI qualified instructors, and there is no contractual requirement or incentive for staff to retain this qualification or undertake the necessary training.

230. We were made aware of these two perceived risks to the Service regarding DT standard changes in the future. It is envisaged that changes to standards and courses may need to be instigated due to the adoption of NFCC and Road Safety Act 2006 Section 19 requirements. The changes are much more onerous and could negatively impact capacity and resilience of both the training function and organisation as well as potential changes to instructor T&Cs. Many staff raised their concern regarding these issues and the ability of the training function to maintain an acceptable level of service delivery when implemented. In mitigation, the Service reported being very engaged in the statutory consultation process as well as detailing that changes to business process and mapping in preparation of Section 19 challenges was well advanced.
231. Attracting and retaining both uniformed and support staff in DT continues to be challenging. While staff are recruited internally, many have not progressed to instructor level or leave the training function before they have attained any qualification. Support staff recruitment is also difficult, as current T&Cs are less competitive in the wider market, resulting in the very few ADI qualified instructors. That said, it is understood that a job evaluation process has resulted in upgrading of the posts which may assist in future recruitment campaigns. Although the Service has explored alternative delivery models and used external providers, this has not significantly increased capacity as yet. Efforts such as contract variations and market rate allowances are ongoing, but maintaining the TOM remains difficult.
232. The process for qualifying to drive a fire appliance under blue light conditions involves several stages: obtaining a provisional Large Goods Vehicle Category C (Cat C) licence, completing a General Practitioner medical, passing the theory test, completing the Cat C course, an extended period of familiarisation driving and finally passing the Cat C ERD course. Reported timescales range from 9 to 18 months, averaging around 12. The linear nature of the process means each stage is vulnerable to delays or failure and requires constant oversight by training and local SD managers. FDOs must also complete a Category B ERD course before responding under blue light conditions in service vehicles. The Service has struggled to maintain this qualification for newly promoted officers, resulting in some being restricted to normal road speeds, which reduces effectiveness and supervision at more complex incidents.
233. The SFRS staffing model is that two drivers are assigned to each watch per appliance and a further one additional for the station. If there are specialist appliances at the station, then that appliance should have a further two drivers. For an On Call station, 60% of the personnel should be qualified as drivers, which can be flexible depending on contract levels at each station. The qualification of driving has historically been a contentious issue as, although it sits within a firefighter's role map, the option has been to seek volunteers rather than to compel. In more recent years, firefighters' entering their amber phase of competence have been encouraged to enter the driver pathway, which has delivered a degree of success.
234. Many stations do not meet the required provision and continue to experience significant driver shortages. Previous reports highlighted limited resilience across all SDA areas, and a 2020 review identified a shortfall of 270 drivers within the WT duty system. Recent data shows staffing at only 82% of the TOM. Updated analysis, based on the requirement for two drivers assigned to each watch per appliance and 60% of On call personnel, indicates an overall shortfall of around 700 drivers (279 Wholetime and 426 On Call).

235. These figures exclude CCs and WCs who retain driving qualifications and who can provide support. For example, 291 WT CCs are eligible to drive, which would raise driving numbers above the TOM. Several On Call stations also remain significantly below their overall staffing TOM, which impacts the driver numbers. Overall, driver numbers have changed little over the past five years. While relying on supervisory managers to cover shortfalls is sometimes necessary, it is not sustainable for effective service delivery. On Call staffing shortages remain a persistent issue and affect more than just driver availability.
236. The training function has recently reviewed DT practices to maximise capacity, including limited outsourcing. The Service reports that ERD reassessment rates remain stable, though instructor shortages caused by resignations, promotions, and sickness continue to affect delivery. Pilot reassessment models have been introduced to free capacity for acquisition courses, and new timetables are in place. Recruitment efforts are ongoing, with additional instructors expected to support preparations for the increased demands associated with Section 19.
237. There remains a clear shortage of drivers, with many staff spending long periods assigned solely to driving duties. Some reported rarely performing non driving roles for months or even years. Driver shortages also affect leave, contribute to overtime fatigue, lead to unwanted transfers, and cause frequent detached duties. The issue of having to drive on your own personal licence with the risk of penalty if involved in an accident, would also seem to be a factor in low uptake levels. Low staffing levels have also resulted in firefighters' being promoted into supervisory roles, further reducing driver resilience. These factors create a self-perpetuating cycle: fewer drivers increase reluctance to undertake the qualification, which in turn worsens the shortage. In our experience, the 'driver issue' remains one of the most significant factors negatively affecting morale at station level.
238. Driving safely under blue lights is a critical skill, and the training rightly prioritises competence and quality. However, the lengthy training process is slow to adapt to organisational changes. This is compounded by shortages of qualified drivers, limited instructor capacity and cultural barriers that reduce interest in the role. Upcoming changes to national driving standards are expected to increase the demands on training further. Many staff believe the current driver training and provision model is already under significant pressure and many view it as the most serious risk to operational delivery. The training function is aware of these issues, has begun adjusting course delivery and continues to review the delivery model.
239. From 2022-2025, 72% of operational staff completed the Driving TfOC module, while 82% undertook refresher training. Completion for Wholetime staff was higher (84% TfOC, 77% refresher) than for On Call staff (70% TfOC, 91% refresher). These figures show active engagement in driving competence training; however, TfOC attainment for both groups remains well below the 95% target, whereas refresher completion exceeds the 73% target.

240. Refresher training is performing well and consistently exceeds targets. However, TfOC completion rates remain low. While multiple factors may contribute, this shortfall continues to present a significant organisational risk and must be addressed. We found DT to be one of the most acute and systemic risks to SFRS operational effectiveness. A combination of instructor shortages, long qualification pathways, changing national standards, recruitment difficulties and cultural resistance means the Service is potentially facing a significant and growing shortfall in qualified drivers.

Recommendation 5



We found driver training to be one of the most concerning aspects of our operational training assessment and can understand the overwhelming sense of concern throughout the Service. We recommend that the Service review its driver training provision to enhance instructor capacity, improve training processes and increase driver levels.

Incident Command

241. IC training is delivered according to the level of incident a manager may be required to take charge of. All operational managers from PO to CC may act as Incident Commander depending on incident scale and type. Supervisory managers complete an Incident Command Assessment (ICA) or Incident Command Level 1 (ICL1); middle managers complete ICL2; strategic managers complete ICL3; and Heads of Function or Directors complete ICL4. The development and training pathway is detailed in Table 9 below.

Level	Incident Command	
ICA	Assessment	This level is designed for the temporary supervisory officers or those who have not yet completed a full ICL1 course, required to command and control operations at a task-focused supervisory level.
ICL1	Initial	This level is designed for the officer required to command and control operations at a task-focused supervisory level.
ICL2	Intermediate	This level is designed for the responding tactical commander who will demonstrate the ability to review and determine incident status, assume responsibility, take over command and control operations at middle manager level.
ICL3	Advanced	This level is designed for the officer who tactically commands the largest and most serious incidents, usually on-scene or at an appropriate location, characterised by the requirement for tactical co-ordination.
ICL4	Strategic	This level covers the role of strategic command of an incident or event. This commander typically will direct the strategic response of SFRS as well as contributing to the overall strategy objectives of partner agencies.

Table 9 – IC levels and training pathway

242. Each course balances operational, tactical and strategic learning dependent on the role. ICA and ICL1 are typically delivered on mock firegrounds using live role players and scenario-based exercises. ICL2 to ICL4 are delivered in mock Incident Command Units using information and communication technology-based scenarios and live participants, reflecting the greater complexity of higher-level incidents.
243. Candidates are assessed against the appropriate National Occupational Standards with outcomes being either Satisfactory, Satisfactory Confirmation of Understanding or Major Development Needs identified. Acquisition courses are delivered on a WP basis with refresher courses routinely being delivered to ensure a three-year currency is maintained. In order to meet the National Occupational Standards candidates are taught principles of incident command and a systematic and structured process to work through, utilising tools and memory aides for assistance.
244. The IC team at the NTC is responsible for delivering and assessing IC training. Some instructors at other TCs also deliver ICA and ICL1 acquisition and refresher courses. The team is small in numbers and currently has one unfilled post. The team has reduced significantly in size since the SFRS was formed. Capacity has consistently been reported as a challenge.
245. Like their core instructor colleagues, the team focus heavily on delivering courses to meet organisational demand and at the time of our inspection were operating beyond capacity. This left little time for CPD, performance improvement, course review, or enhancing training materials and the learner experience. The TCIP recognises the need to allocate dedicated time and resources to review, expand and develop incident management training and assessment materials in line with the evolving role of a modern fire and rescue service, which we welcome.
246. We received positive feedback on ICL courses, particularly during acquisition training where new concepts were learned. However, many officers felt the courses focused too heavily on following a rigid process to pass the assessment, rather than developing adaptable operational command ability. Refresher courses were also criticised for functioning more as memory tests than opportunities to build competence, echoing findings from our 2020 Command and Control thematic inspection.
247. There was a perception, particularly around refreshers, that the process focused more on compliance than on developing competence. The Service has since introduced FDO CPD sessions, now part of routine IC business. The IC team has been tasked with regularly reviewing course content, speakers and scenarios, with new examples such as a high-rise incident in ICL1 and a storm/flooding case study in ICL3. FDO CPD events have also been delivered to all four command groups using virtual reality enabled online sessions, allowing officers across Scotland to take part in shared IC scenarios and support peer learning. These developments were well received and may help shift previous perceptions.
248. A process for assessing initial incident command competence, the On Station Assessment of Incident Command Competence (OSAICC) was reported during our fieldwork. Delivered through three online sessions followed by a practical scenario, OSAICC is now routinely used across SDAs for firefighter development. Although not formally part of the Incident Command Development pathway, it appears to be increasingly accepted as a method of incident command learning and assessment.

249. During Covid19, students could not attend courses in person, so remote virtual ICL courses were introduced. Some participants felt this reduced effectiveness due to limited personal interaction and peer-to-peer learning. Although accepted as a temporary measure, the digital format has remained in use until recently. Functional management have now indicated that remote ICL courses will be phased out. However, given the challenges of delivering training to commanders in remote rural locations, continued exploration of innovative digital solutions is to be encouraged.
250. It is noted that the Service trialled using the OA process to reaccredit IC currencies, aiming to ease training capacity pressures and use operational evidence as proof of competence. Following review, it was concluded that OA is not suitable for IC reaccreditation due to operational, governance and assurance concerns. The pilot was therefore closed, with assurance that existing reaccreditation processes remain sufficient and preserve the integrity of the IC qualification framework. While we accept the current OA limitations, we hope the concept will be revisited once improvements allow, as we believe evidence gained through operational activities has scope to provide an efficient and effective means of supplementing and demonstrating IC competence.
251. From 2022-2025, 77% of operational staff completed the IC TfOC module, while 95% completed refresher training. Among WT staff, TfOC completion was 82% and refresher completion 97%. For On Call staff, TfOC completion fell to 72%, with 95% completing refreshers. This shows IC competence training is being delivered, but TfOC attainment remains well below the 95% target, particularly for On Call staff, whereas refresher completion consistently exceeds the 91% target.
252. Although several factors may influence this, the continued shortfall represents a clear organisational risk and requires improvement. Overall, IC training is aligned with national standards and well structured. Delivery, however, is constrained by limited capacity, an assessment driven culture, and insufficient developmental focus. While initiatives such as OSAICC and some digital solutions show promise, the system remains overly compliance focused, restricting deeper learning and reducing confidence in the refresher processes.

Area for Consideration 12:

There are significant concerns that incident command courses focus too heavily on passing assessments rather than developing real command capability. The training function should continue to review incident command training and assessment methods to ensure a better balance between demonstration of genuine competence and simple compliance.

6. Operational Training – Assets and Equipment

253. The TFF details that the training function need to provide fit for purpose TCs to achieve its overall objective. As detailed the training function has 13 main facilities, five designated TCs and eight Training Sites as detailed in Figure 2.

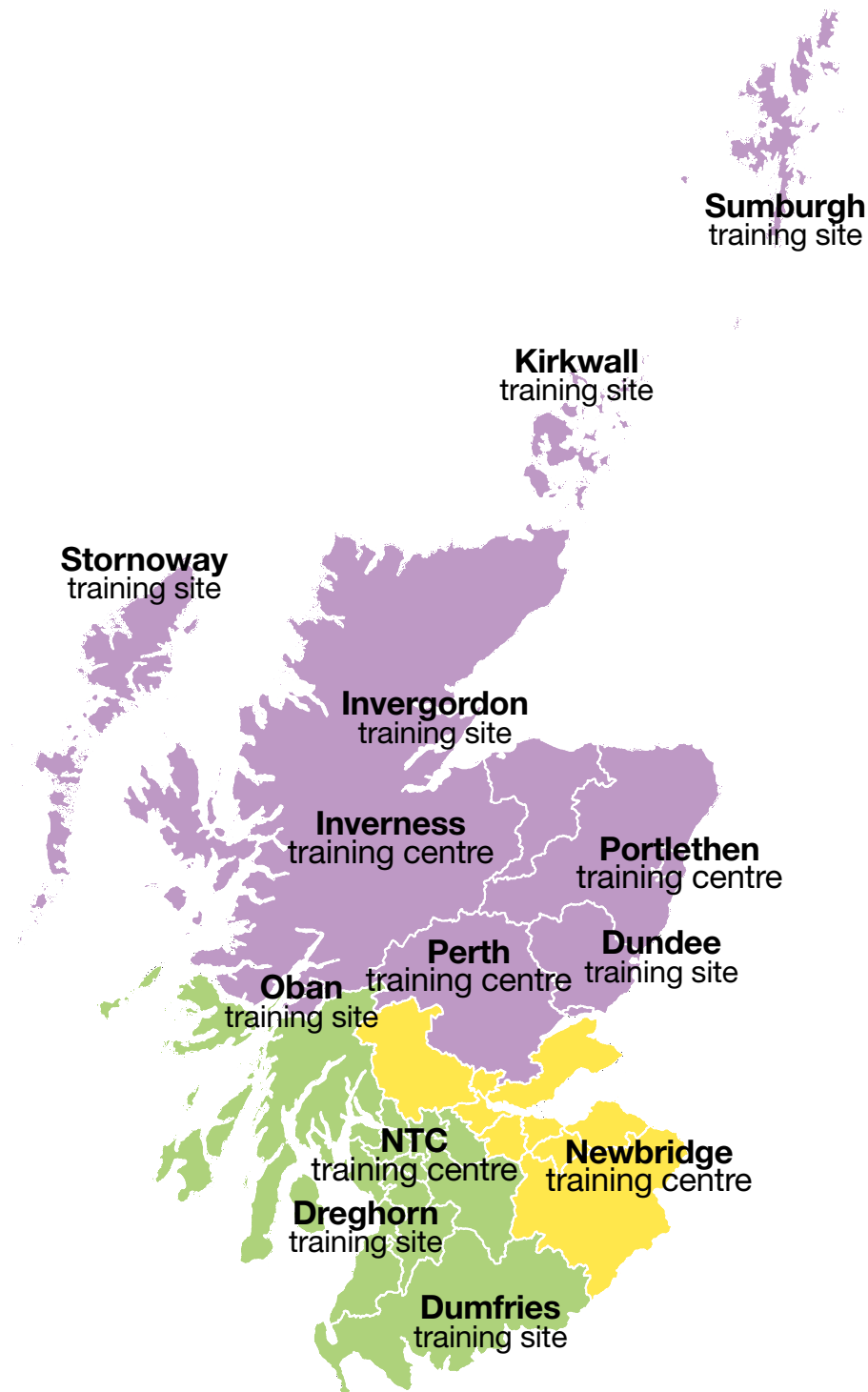


Figure 2 – Map of Training centres and sites across Scotland

254. The main instrument for ensuring appropriate assets, equipment and vehicles are available is the TSAMP. The main focus of the TSAMP is to establish and maintain a sustainable training asset portfolio which enables the SFRS to develop and maintain the operational skills of its firefighters safely and effectively. The TSAMP also provides a property overview which details the condition and suitability together with areas of concern across current key training facilities and forms the basis for the prioritisation of the current capital programme relating to property within the training estate.
255. The training function state that the TSAMP *‘aligns to our strategic intentions to modernise, be more innovative, diverse and inclusive, as a learning organisation where staff are supported through better training. To achieve this, we must ensure our training assets remain functional, compliant, and safe while providing value for money. By implementing proactive maintenance, lifecycle management, and strategic investments, our TSAMP can continue to serve as a vital resource for the fire service, providing top-tier training facilities, vehicles and equipment for current and future firefighter safety’*³².

Good Practice 7



The development of the training strategic asset management plan utilising cross-directorate collaboration, is a strong example of good practice. It provides a clear roadmap for facility improvement and investment, supporting effective strategic planning.

256. Whilst approximately £26m was invested from 2013 onwards, in upgrading key training facilities such as Dundee, Stornoway, Orkney, Shetland, Portlethen and Newbridge, investment and maintenance have not kept pace. As a result, the Service reported that the training estate now faces a £31m property maintenance backlog and an £11m fleet investment backlog. The training function currently manages five TCs, eight training sites and 26 training blocks, along with 91 fleet assets. Priority areas for investment include DF, ConC, CFBT smoke capture improvements, fleet replacement and equipment renewal. In 2023-2024, 6% of scheduled courses were cancelled due to asset unavailability.

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Buildings and Facilities

257. We found that staff were generally happy with the training facilities but appreciated that improvements could be made. We observed many of the buildings and facilities and believe that, in the main, the Service has appropriate assets at its disposal to train staff effectively and efficiently. The training village at NTC and facilities at Newbridge are of particular note. Some other good examples include collapsed structures, industrial facilities, aviation incidents and CFBT units.



Image 1 – NTC Urban Search and Rescue Facility



Image 2 – NTC CFBT Facility



Image 3 - Newbridge Industrial facilities



Image 4 - Dundee HIAL aviation facilities

258. The 2024-2025 capital programme for the training estate was prioritised using 'condition' and 'suitability' data, combined with demand. This risk-based approach aligned with wider SFRS property prioritisation. Opportunities for deliverability within the financial year were also considered. Following consultation between the training function and asset management teams, a comprehensive project list was created and refined based on available funding and the feasibility of delivering the highest-priority work.
259. The TSAMP details that each building and facility has been assessed with regard to its 'suitability' and 'condition'. The number of issues identified are far too many to detail in this report but suffice to say that it is detailed and we are confident that the Service has an accurate picture of this aspect of its estate. The document details percentage of properties in satisfactory or good condition is 59%, whilst the percentage deemed to have satisfactory or good suitability is 70%.

260. The Service provided a priority list of work for these facilities that includes the upgrade of CFBT training rigs and smoke capture, DF, ConC, BA maintenance and welfare facilities as detailed in Table 10.

	CFBT	DF	ConC	BA Maintenance	Welfare
NTC	X				
Newbridge		X	X	X	
Inverness					
Perth		X			
Portlethen		X	X	X	
Dreghorn	X				
Dumfries		X	X	X	
Dundee Airport					
Invergordon	X	X	X	X	
Kirkwall	X				X
Oban	X	X	X	X	
Stornoway	X				X
Sumburgh	X				X

Table 10 – Priority upgrades planned for training facilities

261. We found that installation of new CFBT facilities had been completed across all seven of the facilities identified and represents the majority of investment in training to date. On a number of the sites there still remained snagging issues as installation had been recent, which was the main source of frustration for staff using them. The Service has also invested in a structural collapse simulator at the NTC to provide a modern, safe facility for Urban Search and Rescue training.



Image 5 – Structural collapse simulator facility investment

262. There is a strong need to invest in both Perth TC and Dundee Training Site, which currently operate together to serve the area. Perth functions as the main TC but lacks CFBT facilities, while Dundee provides CFBT but has limited welfare, DF and ConC provision. As a result, staff attend Perth for general training, travel to Dundee for CFBT, then return to Perth or their stations for welfare, cleaning and BA maintenance. This arrangement is inefficient, impacts hygiene and ConC, and complicates training delivery. To address this, the Service has committed major capital investment at Perth TC to introduce CFBT facilities along with improved DF, ConC, BA maintenance and welfare provision.
263. Planning approval has been secured and main works will proceed to maximise 2025-2026 spending, with completion expected by August 2026. Adaptations at the Dundee site, including a covered disrobe area, changing space and external sink are scheduled for completion by the end of 2025-2026. This investment is welcome, as current arrangements are inefficient and compromise effective training delivery.
264. There is a continuing need to upgrade DF, ConC and BA maintenance facilities at Dumfries, Oban, Invergordon, Portlethen and Newbridge, as well as welfare facilities at Kirkwall, Stornoway and Sumburgh. These improvements form part of an ambitious capital investment plan for 2026-2031. However, a directorate risk remains that limited capital funding may restrict the Service's ability to deliver these upgrades, with future budget allocations likely to influence what can be achieved.

265. A contaminants workshop held last autumn agreed a series of actions to strengthen fire contaminant control across training facilities. These included prioritised compliance checks at CFBT locations, updated zoning maps, improved welfare procedures at key sites and the development of options to ensure HSE compliance. This work is welcome, as we observed several ongoing concerns during the inspection, including long term temporary measures for BA maintenance in open air and continued reliance on temporary zoning signage, both suggesting that permanent, agreed controls had not yet been fully implemented or prioritised.



Image 6 – Typical example of temporary Contamination Control measures.



Image 7 – Typical example of Temporary Zoning Measures

266. Instructional staff were frustrated that frequent equipment failures, poor maintenance and missing parts routinely disrupted training. They felt maintenance was largely reactive, with limited planned upkeep after initial construction contract. These issues led to cancelled or restricted courses and consumed significant instructor time, worsening existing capacity pressures.
267. Maintenance issues also affected the candidate training experience, particularly around smoke generation. While staff preferred CFBT units using carbonaceous fuels, they accepted that a percentage of training should rely on artificial smoke. However, smoke machines were often inoperable or missing and replacements produced insufficient smoke for the size of the training spaces. This frequently led to unrealistic training conditions that did not reflect operational challenges. Despite this recurring problem, we found little formal reporting, suggesting the feedback process is not functioning effectively.

268. TC staff were generally positive about their working environment, though many highlighted areas for improvement. At the NTC, instructors were mainly based in a former reception area of the practical facilities building that felt makeshift, overcrowded and unsuitable for focused work, inclusiveness, welfare or welcoming visitors. Beyond the priorities identified in the TSAMP, staff also raised concerns about inadequate storage, underuse of space, poor workmanship, design flaws and unfinished projects. These issues contributed to frustration and a sense that their views were not being heard, reflecting wider concerns about weak feedback loops across the training function.
269. Despite significant investment in the training estate, particularly new CFBT facilities and major upgrades planned at Perth and Dundee, persistent operational, maintenance and welfare issues continue to hinder training effectiveness. Ongoing implementation problems, equipment failures and weak feedback mechanisms reduce the impact of improvements, contributing to instructor frustration, inefficiency, reduced training realism and increased risk to both safety and capacity.

Area for Consideration 13:

It is understood that the interim contamination control measures for breathing apparatus training have been in place for a long time and appear to have become normalised. The training function should consider reviewing and reprioritising these issues and invest in permanent, long-term solutions.

Appliances

270. There are 91 vehicles assigned to the training function, including operational appliances for driver and recruit training, as well as cars, vans and minibuses. Recommended maximum ages vary by vehicle type: 15 years for fire engines, 12 years for light appliances/vans, and seven years for cars. Currently, 65% of the 18 tonne fire engines and 28% of the light fleet are beyond their recommended age.



Image 8 – Typical example of ageing training appliance

271. The age and condition of training vehicles appears to be a consistent source of frustration. Frequent faults and breakdowns led to course cancellations or restrictions, and some vehicles were no longer deemed roadworthy or had terminal faults. While allocating end of life vehicles to training is to a degree understandable, the poor condition of the fleet affected morale and created significant challenges for course delivery.
272. Dealing with these issues consumed significant instructional time and worsened existing capacity pressures. Many training vehicles lack modern safety features such as Electronic Stability Programme, meaning staff train on outdated appliances but return to stations to drive vehicles equipped with Electronic Stability Programme. As a result, an extra familiarisation day is required on the station appliance, temporarily taking it OTR. This would seem an inefficient practice, which could be rectified by providing appliances that fit more with what to expect back at station.

273. Fleet discussions are underway to confirm the vehicle replacement schedule. The training function has formally raised concerns about current fleet challenges and their impact on day-to-day operations. Fleet recognised the need for clearer communication and improved replacement processes. As a result, six-to-eight new fire appliances are to be allocated to the training function each year, rotated into operational use on a cyclical basis. This is a positive step that should improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Good Practice 8



The cyclical innovative appliance allocation approach delivers clear benefits, hopefully improving training efficiency, effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Equipment

274. The deployment of equipment across the country is informed by risk analysis. Consideration is given to the level and type of courses, the capacity of TCs to deliver those courses and the demand to ensure maintenance of competencies. Equipment used in the training environment should match the standard and type currently in operational use in front line fire stations.
275. The TSAMP details that the approximate number of items of equipment allocated to training is:
- 1,200 new items of PPE;
 - 4 to 6 sets of PPE per instructor;
 - 264 self-contained BA sets;
 - 135 BA cylinders;
 - 120 digital radios;
 - 43 hydraulic rescue equipment cutters;
 - 52 hydraulic rams;
 - 33 hydraulic rescue equipment spreaders;
 - 29 thermal imaging cameras;
 - 12 combi tools;
 - 26 hydraulic rescue equipment power packs;
 - 32 e-draulic spreaders;
 - 42 e-draulic rams;
 - 40 e-draulic cutters;
 - 29 reciprocating saws;
 - 123 ladders;
 - 30 light portable generators;
 - 12 rescue boats;
 - 12 outboard motors;
 - 201 lengths of fire hose; and
 - 6 BA compressors.

- 276. The training function holds a substantial amount of equipment, as detailed above. Although over 60% of it is more than 10 years old, statutory inspections and compliance checks, carried out through a contracted service, ensure all items remain certified and safe to use. Staff feedback on equipment quality was generally positive, with minimal issues reported. In 2023-2024, 98% of equipment was tested within required timescales.
- 277. The relationship between the assets team and the SDAs has been widely discussed in previous inspections. Training staff were generally positive about the quality of equipment and PPE provided, and they recognise the value Assets brings to operational training. Recent improvements, such as new purpose-built BA set washing machines and dryers were well received and seen as contributing to ConC. However, staff were frustrated that limited budgets meant these investments have not yet been rolled out across the full estate.



Image 9 – BA washing machine investment

278. Functional staff frequently expressed frustration with how they perceive asset management function to operate and provide services. Their concerns echoed those raised in the SDAs, particularly around equipment not being issued, returned or replaced in a timely manner, even when items were essential for training and approval had been granted by budget holders.
279. We recommended in our NSDA report that asset management function should *'consider the process for the repair or replacement of...equipment and introduce a system that gives regular feedback to station-based personnel regarding the progress or any delays in the repair or replacement of kit and equipment'*³³. We also noted in previous SDA inspections that staff were frustrated with the Service's structure and governance. Staff thought that they were not adequately empowered and lacked autonomy to really improve the organisation. This was normally connected with the concern that the Service seemed to be too centralised now, the perception was that functions generally worked in silos to their own agenda.
280. We believe this recommendation remains valid for both functional staff and SDAs. The TSAMP includes an action for assets to attend meetings with training and to provide earlier notice of asset replacement or refurbishment. Assets are working to improve transparency in allocation and communication across the asset management process, which is welcomed
281. In summary, the equipment inventory would seem good and staff value the quality of the equipment, but it is ageing. The equipment is safe and certified due to a strong inspection and testing regime. Slow repairs, inconsistent replacements and poor communication persist with Assets as per previous inspections and the previous recommendation on the need for transparency and process improvement remain extant.

PPE

282. The SFRS has taken steps to reduce firefighter exposure to contaminants, including reviewing decontamination processes for appliances, personnel and PPE during both incidents and training. A specialist cleaning and repair contract ensures PPE is properly decontaminated and maintained in line with manufacturer instructions and British Standards. To strengthen ConC, 600 new PPE sets were issued across the training function, 200 each to NTC, Portlethen and Newbridge, with instructors receiving four sets each to ensure a consistent supply of clean kit. Portlethen has also trialled on-site structural fire kit washing machines. Structural firefighting PPE was widely praised, with no concerns raised about cleaning turnaround times.

Good Practice 9



The innovative personal protective equipment allocation approach delivers clear benefits, improving staff welfare, training efficiency, effectiveness and continuous improvement.

283. There appeared to be confusion over the appropriate level of PPE for support staff, specifically FGTs. Staff across the training estate reported inconsistent allocations, such as variations in powered respirators as well as difficulties obtaining initial or replacement kit from stores. This appears to stem from the absence of an agreed standardised PPE inventory with Assets for FGTs, resulting in ad hoc issue based on perceived need and location.
284. In summary, there would seem well resourced improvements to PPE ConC and instructor kit availability. However, FGT PPE provision is inconsistent, unclear, and not aligned across sites, posing a potential safety and compliance risk until a standardised inventory is established.

Area for Consideration 14:

The training function should consider reviewing the provision of PPE for FGT to ensure a consistent allocation and issue across every training site.

Stations

285. Stations were generally satisfied with their training facilities, though some highlighted issues with training towers. Of the 240 towers across the estate, 54 (23%) are in poor condition. While tower-based training is not essential, since off-site training can be used, towers remain valuable for ladder work and Safe Working at Height training. It is therefore unfortunate that so many are in disrepair. Although the Service must prioritise investment, the condition of these facilities suggests they have received low priority in recent years.
286. Persistent national contract issues continue to limit the availability of scrap cars for RTC training, as we have reported in previous inspections. Many stations reported receiving only one vehicle per year, which must be used repeatedly to practice key stabilisation and cutting techniques. Supply also appears inconsistent across the country, with remote rural stations particularly affected. As a result, personnel often cannot undertake a full range of realistic training activities comparable to those required at operational incidents.
287. It would seem that key operational training infrastructure is significantly under-resourced, affecting the Service's ability to maintain essential firefighter competencies. In addition, environmental and logistical constraints (ageing towers, limited RTC training vehicles) are creating a gap between required training standards and what can realistically be delivered on the ground. These issues appear longstanding, indicating systemic challenges rather than isolated deficiencies and previous recommendations remain extant.

7. Operations Control

288. OC provides essential command, control and communication functions across its centres in Edinburgh, Johnstone and Dundee. Although linked to fireground operations, OC has distinct technical Learning and Development (L&D) needs focused on mobilising and command and control systems. Historically, OC has been somewhat separate from station-based processes, creating gaps in policy, systems and procedural alignment, an issue also highlighted in our recent OA thematic inspection.
289. It should also be noted that OC have been engaged in the process of developing and implementing a New Mobilising System (NMS) for a number of years, which has had a high impact on resourcing and capacity in the teams. Allied to this has been a high turnover of staff, which has required considerable effort to recruit and train new operators on a continued basis.
290. It is clear that OC staff fall under the same strategic requirements for health and safety, professional standards, and long-term organisational vision and strategy as the wider Service. While bespoke technical training and leadership development are required, the existing TFF would seem to be written primarily for station-based and fireground personnel. The training function reported that the production and publication of a new Training Standard for OC is a component part of the project plan within the Training Standards Review Project, which will be completed in the future. As a result, there is a clear gap as no dedicated OC training policy, procedure or guidance currently exists.
291. OC previously had six dedicated training staff, but a recent restructure reconfigured the team, redistributing posts into functional roles supporting routine OC management, trainee work and NMS projects. A SC and two WCs are now permanently based within the Learning and Electronic Development team to produce bespoke OC training packages. While additional support from functional officers is planned on a project basis, staff expressed scepticism that this will be achievable given existing capacity pressures.
292. Historically, OC training relied on Microsoft-based presentations and pdrPro materials, which were adequate but with many considered outdated. The Service is now migrating this content to the LCMS/TfOC platform to support a more modern learning approach, though progress is slow due to limited capacity. This shift is positive, aligning OC watch-based training with the station TfOC model and placing routine training delivery with watch-based WCs. That said, watch-based staff within OCs reported concerns that they had not been developed to be the main provider of training and that current systems and material were inadequate to do this effectively.
293. It should be noted that the actual staffing for OC as reported in the FSOS was 171. This gives a rough training instructor to staff ratio of 1:57, which is in excess of the 1:37 calculated for other uniformed staff. Staff reported concerns about this aspect of the change as they were concerned that the three dedicated training officers in OC are assigned to Learning and Electronic Development and are not routinely instructing or able to provide support. In addition, they also expressed concern that the reassigned training staff now in other roles would find it difficult to support routine training, given the management workload and various large-scale projects OC have ongoing.

294. We could find no performance management process for OC training. When we asked staff, we found that there was no clear process for measuring and monitoring training and could find no reporting either quantitative or qualitative. This seemed in part due to recent changes but also a lack of historical process. As such, we were unable to definitively say whether training was being delivered in quantity and to what quality.
295. Training was normally conducted at OC in dedicated training rooms utilising personal computers that also have the mobilising system installed to allow for practice. We found that due to the ongoing changes to the NMS, many of the training facilities, hardware and access to systems were restricted. Staff were understandably frustrated by this situation but understood that improvement would be ongoing as the NMS was delivered.
296. It is clear that the management of OC had a strategic direction and altered structures to meet the need of ongoing operational management as well as projects. OC is essential and staff are proactively working to develop training for the teams into a contemporary TfOC model. However, there is no OC-specific training framework, insufficient training capacity, outdated or incomplete training materials and no performance monitoring. All of which is exacerbated by operational disruption caused by the ongoing NMS roll-out, high staff turnover and consequential trainee course. This creates a significant risk that OC staff may not receive consistent, adequate or assured training.

Recommendation 6



We recommend that the operation control training model and structure be reviewed following the implementation of the new mobilising system project to identify where improvements could be made and whether the current systems and structure provides enough capacity to support watch-based teams in operations control.

8. Talent Development – Management and Performance

297. The Service's long-term vision describes a confident, modern and outward-looking LO. Its strategy commits to providing staff with the leadership and management skills needed to enhance professional standards. The three-year delivery plan prioritises staff safety through high-quality training, professional standards, competence and continuous improvement. In relation to OTD the Fire Standards Board details that there is a requirement to meet a standard for leading the Service, leading and developing people as well as operational competence.
298. In relation to leading the Service they detail that an FRS should have leaders at all levels. In respect to leading and developing people the standard states that a FRS should train and develop employees, including leaders, so they are competent in their respective roles; provide continual professional development to employees and identify, encourage and nurture talent, providing career pathways for all.
299. The LO is an organisation that facilitates the learning of its members and where employees at all levels are constantly learning and improving their skills. As such, talent management could be seen as a function of the LO process that attempts to ensure the Service facilitates the development of its members and continuously transforms itself. It is therefore worth remembering that, in general, training refers to the process of increasing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees for doing their job better, whilst development refers to the overall growth of employees and is more long-term career orientated. As such, People Directorate and specifically TD have responsibility for this aspect of the LO.
300. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) define talent management as *'the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention, and deployment of those individuals who are valuable to an organisation, because of their potential or critical role'*³⁴. A coherent talent management strategy directs investment in people and supports broader organisational objectives. Talent management activities, can include activities such as:
- recruitment (TA);
 - building talent 'pools';
 - succession planning;
 - life-long learning;
 - leadership and career development;
 - performance management;
 - employee engagement; and
 - employee retention.

301. The People Directorate includes TD, Talent Acquisition (TA), WP and MA, which collectively manage talent related activity. According to the CIPD, talent is developed through targeted L&D such as coaching, mentoring, formal training, secondments and networking. Talent management should align with wider L&D activity and outcomes should be evaluated to ensure return on investment. This report therefore focuses on leadership and career development, with particular emphasis on the TD team.

Strategy

302. The SFRS has a long-term vision that informs its strategy and three-year delivery plan. Directorate plans then translate these priorities into functional and team level work. The Service currently has no dedicated people strategy to set out its overall approach to TD. The 2025-2028, three-year delivery plan commits to creating one, aimed at strengthening leadership capability, improving employee experience, and supporting organisational performance. It goes on to specify that year one actions (25/26) will be to:
- develop and publish a SFRS people strategy;
 - develop and design a culture and leadership vision and strategy, identify key priorities and develop and implement a revised culture action plan;
 - design and commence delivery of the leadership and management development framework; and
 - review the SFRS values to ensure alignment to the SFRS strategy and culture and leadership revised approach.
303. We were provided evidence of an early engagement session with the People Committee regarding the development of a people strategy and that the strategy has been drafted and consulted upon, ahead of going through formal governance.
304. The Directorate reported that it has an interim People Model which is linked to the Services' strategy, three-year plan and Annual Operating Plan. The people model details the strategic priorities, directorate and core deliverables for each team. That said, we found limited awareness of this model whilst speaking to directorate staff and that there was not a team plan providing more detail on routine TD tasks. A draft Management Development Framework document was created but it did not pass early governance stages and has since been discontinued. However, aspects of development course delivery contained within the document are still being continued.
305. The Service has documented that development of the organisational culture and leadership programme remained a key focus with strategic leadership and management workshops, a culture development group and SFRS Board engagement all planned. A draft programme problem statement, programme vision, outcomes, high level potential measures and short list of organisational culture and leadership activities have been developed for consideration by the programme board. A Leadership and Management Development Taskforce (LMDT), chaired by senior managers, has been established to build a consistent SFRS-wide framework, delivered locally. A case for funding has been made, to enable a more strategic, future-focused approach to workforce development, noting that the existing learning and development budget is predominantly allocated to compliance and regulatory training.

Area for Consideration 15:

There is a need for a clear, coherent people strategy that defines how the Service will deliver talent management and develop as a true learning organisation. The People Directorate should progress this work to completion as it should be the foundation for all related future people initiatives.

Policy, Process and Procedures

306. The People Directorate has policies and procedures on topics such as appraisal, CPD payments, MA, recruitment and selection, Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) as well as manager competence, all of which are related to and have aspects of TD. However, there is no people or talent policy or framework, which could illustrate the specific course or actions adopted to deliver TD. We are aware that there is an interim approach to continue the delivery of a Leadership Essentials for Supervisory Managers course and the NFCC leadership development programmes in parallel to the design of the Leadership and Management Development Framework (LMDF).

Governance

307. We found that TD is informally managed through informal daily and weekly discussions between staff and managers. The Directorate does not hold FMT meetings due to the fact that it is a standalone Directorate with no multiple functions. Formal governance occurs through the DMT, which reports to the Strategic Leadership Team via the People Committee. The DMT ensures the Directorate's strategic and operational activity aligns with the Service's strategic ambition. It also provides a forum to identify, maintain and fulfil the Service's legal responsibilities as an employer, including scrutiny of people policies, procedures, compliance and training to support workforce safety, wellbeing and competence.
308. The DMT is chaired by the Director of People on a monthly basis. The scope of the DMT is:
- ensuring the Directorate is well designed, flexible and effectively resourced with a strong commitment to training and development for all Directorate employees;
 - ensuring a safe and healthy working environment is provided for all Directorate employees;
 - enabling and encouraging the Directorate to be progressive and innovative in how it is designed, organised and operates;
 - supporting the development of Directorate staff to develop and maintain the skills, knowledge and experience required to support the SFRS in meeting its strategic goals and ambitions; and
 - develop collaborative and innovative leaders that represent the Directorate across all areas of SFRS activity and service transformation.

309. In general terms the DMT should focus each meeting on the following broad areas, which will be managed through a standing agenda:
- performance;
 - risk and audit;
 - work plans and projects;
 - budget;
 - workforce planning and resourcing;
 - learning and development;
 - H&S;
 - equality and diversity;
 - positive action;
 - employee experience and engagement;
 - policy development and review;
 - reward and benefits;
 - wellbeing and absence; and
 - employee relations.
310. In addition, to these governance meetings, we found that a Learning Partner Group (LPG) supports Directorate governance. The LPG prioritises and informs planning for L&D initiatives with budgetary, legislative or statutory impact. Chaired every six weeks by the Deputy HoF responsible for TD, the group brings together representatives from across the organisation to review and discuss LNA inputs and outputs.
311. Lastly, it is important to note that the Directorate participate in the risk management process for the Service and have a notable risk that the organisation's L&D budget is predominantly allocated to compliance and regulatory training, due to limitations on the available funding. In addition, they also detail that there is a risk that the Directorate is unable to deliver against stated commitments and objectives or provide timeous support to wider SFRS projects and change initiatives, due to limited resources and capacity brought about by the current financial context and competing organisational priorities.
312. We believe that whilst the Service has strong ambitions around developing its people and becoming an exemplary LO, the current people structures lack a coherent strategy, adequate procedures and formalised governance. The work on a culture and leadership framework is in progress, but still at an early stage and challenged by limited capacity and competing priorities. There is a broad recognition that the organisation must build clearer pathways for leadership and development, introduce a Service-wide people strategy with supporting processes and strengthen governance for TD.

Recommendation 7



We recommend that the Service should develop clear talent development policy, procedures and governance frameworks to complement any strategy and guide the day-to-day delivery and management of people initiatives.

Systems

313. The main system used by the People Directorate is the iTrent software package. iTrent is a human resource and payroll software system designed to streamline various human resources processes. It offers functionalities such as employee data management, recruitment, performance tracking, payroll processing, and compliance management. It aims to unify human resource and payroll within one integrated platform, automating complex payroll processing and workforce analytics. The system holds a number of different data streams relevant to TD, competency, skills and currency being some of the main ones.
314. The other system used by the Directorate is pdrPro, which is a training and competence management and recording system as detailed previously. It provides a robust, role-based framework that ensures every team member from frontline firefighters to specialist operators maintains the skills, certifications, and readiness required to respond safely and effectively. All learning and development outwith the TfOC LCMS system is managed and recorded on pdrPro. In particular to People Directorate, it is used extensively for trainee firefighters working through the MA/SVQ process.
315. In addition, to these two main systems, the team also uses Microsoft based software applications both nationally and locally to manage the LNA, course scheduling, course planning, venue bookings etc. The systems detailed above do not interface with each other particularly well, making control and coordination very cumbersome and it requires a great deal of manual intervention. Staff reported similar issues to training, in that these issues made their role more less effective, inefficient and that it inevitably was open to human mistakes.
316. These issues are compounded by limited integration between people and training systems, which makes it difficult to coordinate competencies, skills and workforce planning across both directorates and the SDAs. Although the SFRS Strategic Service Review Programme explored a unified PPFT system, it could not meet the training function's needs. As a result, training has begun a separate training systems project procurement process. It is understood that the statement of requirements and outline business case for the people payroll and finance system has been agreed and approved, including integration requirements. It is essential that the people element of people payroll and finance system aligns with the training systems project to ensure shared database access and avoid duplicated data entry.

Area for Consideration 16:

The People Directorate should continue to engage proactively with the training system project, confirming that both systems can interface to ensure that effective and efficient coordination of development, competencies, skills and subsequent workforce planning can be achieved.

Structures and Administration

317. Similar to OT, in organisations which have responsibility for their own development, there exists a simple relationship between, those requiring development and the person responsible for the delivery of development. In this model (Figure 3) anyone requiring development for their staff would be classed as the 'Customer'. The person with responsibility for development, the People HoF, would be classed as the 'Supplier'. Ordinarily the customer identifies what development they require and discusses this need with the supplier. The supplier then determines how best this need can be met and either, designs and delivers an internal solution, or procures a suitable product from a 'Third-party Provider'. Like all good suppliers they should, of course, ensure the customer is engaged in this process and is satisfied with the proposed solution.

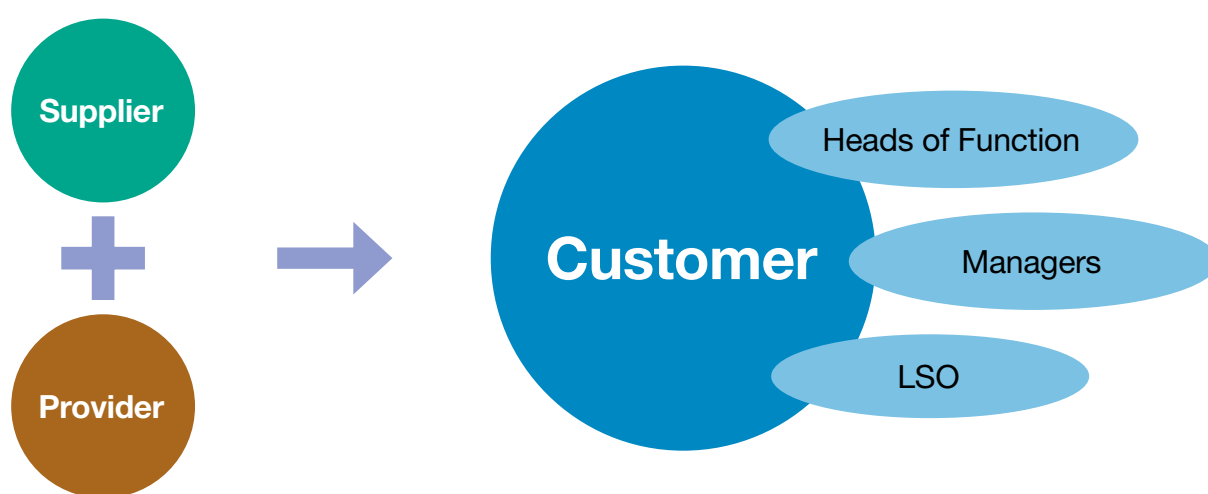


Figure 3 – Traditional Development Model

318. SFRS would seem to follow this basic model and in respect of development the customers vary and include, LSO's, HoF and managers. The majority of customers sit within the SDAs and are either station-based or manage and support these stations. There would seem to be an equal balance of supplier and provider in the people model, probably necessitated by the lack of capacity and the limited resources and course material internally.
319. The TD team consists entirely of support staff and is managed by a deputy HoF who also oversees the equality, diversity and inclusion team. The team's TOM is six posts: one People Manager, one Lead People Advisor and four People Advisors (circa 5.7 full time equivalent), with no administrative support. Staff consistently reported that limited capacity restricts their ability to design, develop and review courses. No clear industry benchmark for development staff ratios exists, and we found no evidence that the Service's staffing model is based on any recognised standard.
320. Limited resources and competing priorities mean the Directorate may be unable to meet its commitments or support wider SFRS projects in a timely way. We were provided information that demonstrated the People Directorate has highlighted the capacity and financial challenges to strategic leadership and the Board on a number of occasions, which has recently resulted in a limited interim increase in capacity to support project work. The People Committee have questioned how management

and leadership development can be delivered at greater pace and scale. People Directorate managers highlighted that progressing the large supervisory management cohort would take considerable time and noted that while alternative approaches to releasing staff for training are being explored, capacity to deliver and the organisation's ability to absorb learning remain constrained.

321. The FSOS 2024-2025 shows the Service employs 7,556 staff, including 6,648 operational staff (excluding OC). We acknowledge that TD and OT perform different functions; however, TD's small team of around seven, including the senior manager, contrasts sharply with the training function's staffing levels. This highlights a significant capacity risk within TD and suggests current resources do not align with the organisation's strategic ambitions. The absence of administrative support further compounds these pressures as facilitation staff capacity is limited.
322. We recognise that TD is a core element of modern HRM and is therefore appropriately placed within the People Directorate. However, there is a clear gap between the organisation's ambitions and the team's current capacity and structure. Our findings confirm staff concerns that the existing TD setup is insufficient to meet organisational needs, and it is unlikely to do so without significant restructuring and additional resourcing.
323. Withdrawal of staff from operational cover continues to hinder development, and the historic agreement allowing a number of appliances to be taken OTR for development is increasingly difficult to sustain. Some SD management teams have also been reluctant to release staff for TD courses, citing low confidence in the product and limited return on investment. As a result, there now appears to be a broader confidence issue in both the developmental products and the TD process, which may require focused engagement to redress.
324. The Chief Officer holds overall responsibility for staff development, with the Director of People providing strategic leadership and policy direction. The HoF, acting under delegated authority, manages the People function. Team members have clear job descriptions and annual objectives are set as part of their appraisal process. However, there is no clear, comprehensive description of roles and responsibilities from HoF down through the team. Staff reported knowing their day-to-day tasks but lacked broader guidance, highlighting an absence of structured direction in this area.
325. The Service aspires to be a LO, but its TD environment is under-strategised, under-resourced and inconsistently applied. A clear people strategy, a coherent leadership and development framework, significantly increased TD capacity and budget, integrated systems, and stronger governance and accountability are needed. Until these gaps are addressed, TD will continue to lag behind operational training and leadership capability will remain a barrier to long term organisational improvement.

Recommendation 8



We recommend that the Service review its development team capacity to ensure organisational needs are met, prioritising any future resources for talent development and its performance management.

Performance

326. The Service PMF defines how the SFRS will manage its performance and how it uses information to inspire change and improvement. It also provides *‘the Board with the relevant information on...performance to support their role in scrutinising the Service’*. As detailed in this report previously, the PMF has agreed measurements for training (KPI 22 – 29), however there are currently no measurements for TD, albeit we understand that indicators are being developed as part of the organisational culture and leadership programme.

Measuring

327. In our NSDA inspection we found that development programmes are ongoing, and requests allowed personnel to access online training packages. We learned that the Service at that time reported 2,250 supervisory level managers who may require leadership and management training. It was expected that the 2,250 would increase when middle and strategic level managers were also considered. Throughout the year of 2024 the Service reported that a total 160 candidates accessed the first of three days proposed training with a further 35 candidates accessing Franklin Covey modules, which we reported as a concerning gap at that time.

328. The development available to supervisory managers includes the Franklin Covey supervisory leadership programme, the NFCC supervisory leadership development programme and internal SFRS programmes such as people management and leadership essentials. Based on an estimated cohort of 2,090 supervisory managers as detailed in Table 11, only 310 have attended development in the past five years, around 15%. It should be noted that the delivery has increased nearly sevenfold from 2023-2024 to 2024-2025, which is a significant improvement. These figures exclude locally delivered development, which is discussed later. Although delivery is definitely increasing, opportunities remain limited, and more than 85% of supervisory managers have received no formal development in the last five years.

	Workforce	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	Total
Supervisory	2,090	0	0	20	37	253	310
Middle	332	0	31	32	59	53	175
Strategic	62	0	1	3	10	0	14

Table 11 – Development course provided over five-year period

329. Development for middle managers includes a range of programmes such as Franklin Covey leadership courses, the NFCC middle manager leadership development programme, SFRS management development framework sessions and Charter Management Institute qualifications. Of the estimated 332 middle managers, 175 have received development in the last five years, around 53%. This does not include locally delivered training, which is discussed later. Although delivery is increasing, opportunities remain limited, and the data indicates that there is potentially a significant portion of middle managers who have had no formal development within the past five years.

330. Development for strategic managers includes Franklin Covey inclusive leadership, Chartered Management Institute Level 7 qualifications, and the NFCC executive leadership programme. Of an estimated 62 managers, only 14 have undertaken development, around 23%. These figures exclude locally delivered programmes. While participation is increasing, opportunities remain limited, with potentially more than 75% of strategic managers receiving no formal development in the past five years.
331. It should be noted that high turnover in staff previously detailed may account for some of the challenges within this period. Participation and completion information is reported quarterly, including to Strategic Leadership Team and People Committee. No performance targets appear to exist, and there was no plan or process reported to HMFSI to close the gap between staff who have received development and those who have not.

Monitoring

332. The People Director chairs the DMT every six weeks, providing formal oversight of business activity and monitoring performance against agreed indicators. L&D is a standing agenda item. According to the DMT terms of reference, outcomes are escalated through the appropriate governance routes. TD performance is reported quarterly to the People Committee, supported by the LPG, which offers additional monitoring. The LPG reviews LNA requests and submits recommendations for governance scrutiny each quarter. L&D activity linked to the LNA process and LPG is reported to the Strategic Leadership Team and People Committee quarterly.

Quality Management

333. As stated, a QMS is a formal system that documents an organisation's processes, procedures and responsibilities to meet quality, regulatory and customer requirements, and to support continuous improvement. Staff reported that courses were delivered to a good standard and attendee feedback was routinely gathered. Although the TD team issues a customer satisfaction survey (Gen12) for every course, we found limited evidence of a formal QMS or assurance process being used to evaluate or drive improvement.

Audit

334. As stated previously audit is an integral part of the management of training and a programme of audit would be expected for development also. We found no evidence of a formal audit system being used to assess improvement or value for money.

Benchmark

335. It is clear that the people function are part of the process for utilising off-the-shelf courses via NFCC framework. As such, it is understood that FRS throughout the UK will have delivery models and courses used in similar-sized organisations. In addition, there is also the potential that other organisations outwith the UK FRS may also offer insight into improvements in performance. The People Directorate reported that there was routine sector collaboration within the NFCC People Culture and Leadership programme. However, we found limited evidence that benchmarking was a tool being routinely utilised by the Directorate to compare the standard of development provision.

Scrutiny

336. The PMF identifies people as a corporate governance matter integrated into SFRS structures, including the Fire Board, its sub committees and the Strategic Leadership Team. Scrutiny occurs quarterly at the Fire Board, People Committee and Strategic Leadership Team. TD is routinely reported through quarterly and annual performance reports to these bodies. While these reports contain both quantitative and qualitative information, the absence of KPIs means scrutiny relies heavily on subjective commentary, limiting the Service's ability to easily measure progress or demonstrate improvement.
337. In summary, leadership and management development within the Service is significantly under resourced, weakly measured and inconsistently delivered. While operational training benefits from strong performance structures, the development environment lacks equivalent systems. We acknowledge that there is ongoing progress of management and leadership development through a programme of work. However, the organisation cannot demonstrate significant improvement in leadership and management capability, creating a strategic risk to both leadership capacity, performance and future succession planning.

Recommendation 9



We believe that there is poor performance management for talent development and we would recommend the People Directorate strengthen its management by implementing more robust systems for measurement, monitoring, quality assurance and audit to improve scrutiny and oversight.

9. Talent Development – Delivery

338. The Service is expected to deliver TD through a coherent strategy that includes a clear pathway for staff progression, a learning needs analysis, as well as defined standards and targets. This should integrate course access, coaching, mentoring, secondments, networking, performance management and induction into a single, end-to-end framework that supports continuous development from entry to exit.
339. The TD team previously developed a draft Management Development Framework, but it did not progress completely through governance and has since been discontinued. The Service is now delivering an organisational culture and leadership programme, which includes leadership, development and improvement activities. As part of this, a LMDT project has been established, led by two HoF and involving representatives from across the organisation. The LMDT is responsible for co-designing a comprehensive LMDF to help build a high performing, future ready organisation. A workshop held in Autumn 2025 focused on reviewing existing learning and development information and resources across the Service. Themes that were identified as priority for further consideration at the workshop were to:
- identify priority learning needs for supervisory and middle managers;
 - source, catalogue and share existing development tools for supervisory and middle managers;
 - evaluate learning approaches applied in local areas and functions; and
 - identify resources/subject matter experts which could support the development, design and delivery of the leadership and management framework.
340. It is our understanding that the LMDT has a timeline, targets and milestones set for the project, which indicate a pilot and phased roll out by Q2 of 2026. The main LMDT principles are:
- foundations first and build from there;
 - one size does not fit all;
 - flexible content and delivery model;
 - collegiate approach to development and delivery;
 - national programme, delivered locally;
 - blend of in-person and online;
 - combination of facilitator-led and directed self-learning;
 - incorporate coaching and mentoring; and
 - what is achievable within the timeframe.

341. The immediate priority of the Service is to develop supervisory managers, with a launch planned for Spring 2026. Middle and strategic manager development will also be considered within this timeline. While significant effort is being invested in creating the LMDF, it may be some time before it is fully operational for all staff groups. Currently, the Service has no clear or consistent pathway for proactive staff development. Opportunities are limited, inconsistently applied and largely focused on those already in post, resulting in a system that is haphazard, untargeted and unsystematic.

Good Practice 10



There is a clear need for stronger strategic direction and a defined development pathway to guide the effective allocation of capacity, funding and resources. The creation of the leadership and management development taskforce and the forthcoming leadership and management development framework is a positive step toward achieving this and should be completed as soon as possible.

LNA

342. The Service has an LNA process, which is managed and governed by the LPG. The LPG supports talent development and has terms of reference which are:
- recommending prioritised L&D-based legislative, strategic, mandatory and role specific needs;
 - ensuring that functional and area L&D needs are reviewed and prioritised throughout the year enabling and encouraging a consistent and transparent process;
 - supporting the TD team's planning and budgeting processes by ensuring that LNA returns are completed and prioritised promptly, enabling effective forecast of budget requirements on current development needs as part of the financial and business planning processes;
 - keeping the TD team informed of any operational issues that impact on function or area's learning priorities or delivery plans;
 - supporting the sharing of information within their functions/areas on the progress of the L&D delivery so that managers at various levels know what has been delivered and who has attended development;
 - agreeing a consensus on how to address role-specific needs, as well as rolling/ annual requests; and
 - providing an opportunity to discuss the process and its associated challenges and risks, whilst generating solutions to enable a more efficient LNA process and build on collaborative working.
343. The LPG meets every six weeks, to make recommendations and decisions on investment of the L&D budget, which in turn is reported on a quarterly and annual basis. Although, no specific financial or non-financial resources are allocated to the LPG, the group does manage the L&D budget to support the L&D programmes and initiatives that incur financial charges within their function/area.

344. The LPG work on principle of prioritisation which are:
- statutory: this category stands alone as it focusses on the legislative and regulatory training needs that must be met to ensure the Service meets its legal responsibilities and remains compliant with its regulatory frameworks;
 - job specific/required: this category focusses on the learning and development and certification that is required for people to carry out their duties. It refers specifically to the development that must be in place and maintained for the individual to fulfil their job, e.g., Practising Certificate for solicitors, Category B certification for some driving roles;
 - priority 1: development that is essential in the next 12 months to support the person fulfil their current role and should focus on the requirements within the current job description. (This category should also cover those who have started but not completed Priority 1 training, and people who have started a course/qualification which is continuing over more than one year;
 - priority two: development that would allow the person to perform their role more effectively in the next 12 months or would support them in their career development aspirations (This would include succession planning within the functions); and
 - organisational training: learning/development required to be undertaken by SFRS employees to enable the SFRS to deliver its services as a public service organisation. This can range from compliance requirements e.g. General Data Protection Regulation, H&S training to organisational security and safety.
345. The LPG is an active forum that manages the LNA process for the People Directorate. Applications for L&D are reviewed, prioritised and either approved or declined using established prioritisation principles. However, most priorities, other than priority 2, are heavily focused on mandatory training, refreshers and recertification required for current roles, rather than longer term development for future progression.
346. The centralised L&D budget for 2024-2025 was approximately £422k, a 10% reduction from 2023-2024. The figure used for year-end calculations was £417k. Previous years have also seen significant reductions due to wider public finance pressures. Of this total, 44% (£185k) was already committed to recurring requirements such as Scottish Union Learning and Cyber Security, leaving £237k for all remaining L&D activity. To ensure effective use of this reduced budget, the LPG applied its prioritisation framework when making quarterly recommendations. Reported expenditure was £403k (97%), reflecting minor variations between allocated and actual spend. The breakdown of monies allocated in the year is detailed in Table 12 below.

Area	Percentage	Allocated
Organisational	32%	£133.5k
Financial and Contractual Services	15%	£63k
Prevention, Protection and Preparedness	40%	£168k
People	6%	£24k
Strategic Planning Performance and Comms	2%	£7k
Training Safety and Assurance	2%	£7.5k
Totals	97%	£403k

Table 12 – LNA funding and percentages

347. During our inspection, managers advised that most of the LNA budget was committed to organisational or compliance related training such as refreshers and recertification, estimated at 85–90% each year. The information reported to the People Committee for 2024-2025 and illustrated in the Table 12 would appear to support this assertion. We can therefore assume that, based on the current budget, approximately £40k - £60k would be available per year for non-compliance development of staff.
348. Of the £133.5k organisational budget, 73% (£97k) was pre committed to cyber security and the Union Lifelong Learning Partnership, which is a collaborative effort between trade unions and educational institutions to provide flexible and accessible learning opportunities for union members. Of the remaining £36k, around £28k funded MA/SVQ activity for firefighters, assessors and internal verifiers. This would seem to have left roughly £8k for NFCC management licences and conference/event attendance. Realistically, only about £8k, around 2% of the annual LNA budget and between 13% to 20% of the discretionary (non-compliance) budget was available for external management courses.
349. The figures provided represent only a single year, but feedback from staff suggests that limited funding for leadership and management development is indicative of past experience and organisational behaviour. Development for future roles, priority 2, continues to be deprioritised in favour of mandatory compliance training. This imbalance helps explain the significant gap between the number of staff identified as needing development and those who actually receive it.
350. Our fieldwork and feedback from managers at all levels confirm that the LNA process has been overtaken by the volume of training demands and now seems to function more like a TNA. The current balance between compliance related training and staff development is unsustainable. Too little funding is directed toward genuine development, meaning the organisation is not prioritising the development environment required to become a true LO.

Recommendation 10



We are concerned that the learning needs analysis is being used primarily for compliance rather than development. We recommend the Service review the learning needs analysis budget and processes, including how it is allocated and prioritised, to identify improvements.

351. Managers across all levels consistently reported feeling unprepared for their roles following promotion. Interviews with supervisory, middle and strategic managers highlighted limited access to formal development beyond TfOC and refresher training and minimal opportunities to apply learning in practice. This was reflected in widespread gaps in policy knowledge, operational assurance, risk assessment, planning, performance management, and understanding of organisational strategy and values reported in our previous reports.

352. Historically, command, management and leadership development in the UK FRS was delivered through the Fire Service Examination Board. Staff could gain Leading Firefighter, Sub Officer and Station Officer qualifications ('tickets') through exams, demonstrating commitment and aptitude. Holding a ticket made staff eligible for promotion and for development for the next role. Development was centrally funded and delivered through institutions such as the Fire Service College, the Scottish Fire Service College and higher education partners and external providers. Courses were often completed after promotion, though many staff attended them beforehand.
353. This balance of leadership, management and command training once allowed FRSs to target limited resources toward staff development before promotion. After the Fire Service Examination Board was dissolved, the Integrated Personal Development System was introduced to modernise this process, but it has since fallen into disuse. Current promotion and development systems now prevail. It is not the intention to promote the previous systems as exemplar but to merely highlight that there was at least a rudimentary process for targeting development with limited resources and then the ability to do this prior to staff landing in role. While the previous model was not perfect, it at least provided a structured, proactive means of developing staff in advance of taking on new roles.
354. Staff expressed reluctance to adopt a 'sheep dip' approach to development and the Service has emphasised that the LMDT should avoid a 'one size fits all' model. However, the current system lacks transparency in targeting staff for development and provides little opportunity to prepare individuals before they enter new roles. HMFSI considers this a significant weakness and recommended in our culture inspection that the Service continue to undertake analysis and review of course allocation to ensure fair and equitable distribution of funded courses to support the SFRS in its objectives.

National Delivery

355. We were informed that the Service has been developing staff in three main ways. Firstly, they invested in the online Franklin Covey model and a number of staff were enrolled in courses. Staff feedback on the development was mixed with some enthusiastic whilst other were less so. However, this contract ceased and finance was redirected for use in other programmes.
356. Secondly, the Service has begun investing in the NFCC middle manager leadership development programme and the supervisory leadership development programme, each costing around £55 per candidate. Both online programmes cover topics such as personal impact, leadership, service delivery and organisational effectiveness, This is supported by blended learning elements including 360° feedback, learning logs, masterclasses and work-based activities. TD designed and now facilitate wrap around facilitator-led sessions to support and embed learning from the NFCC online programmes which incorporates peer support opportunities throughout the programme rather than a purely self-led approach. Staff who completed these programmes generally reported positive learning and development benefits.

357. It was reported that the Service continues to deliver supervisory and middle management leadership development programmes, with two additional cohorts scheduled before the end of 2025-2026. With the continued success of NFCC supervisory and middle manager programmes, these courses are seen as essential in the development of the LMDF and further investment is planned.
358. Lastly, we found that the Service delivers an internal leadership essentials for supervisory managers course for aspiring, temporary and substantive supervisors across all staff groups. The syllabus covers leadership foundations, culture and behaviour, self-awareness, communication, feedback, balancing support and challenge, and handling difficult conversations. The course is delivered online and demand has been high, with sessions regularly oversubscribed even when additional places were offered.
359. TD reported that course administration was handled entirely by facilitators, resulting in wasted internal capacity. Staff also noted difficulties getting candidates released from duty to attend, along with some resistance to attending training in their own time. Despite these issues, feedback on the course was generally very positive, with staff describing it as professionally delivered. TD staff should be commended for the course development and delivery in the face of limited capacity, support and resourcing.
360. We found no evidence of ongoing development opportunities for strategic managers and many staff consistently reported that they had received no formal development either before or after promotion.
361. The Service has invested in some external development courses and created internal programmes to complement them, demonstrating a commitment to staff development. However, the NFCC pathways do not fully meet all SFRS development needs and it is unclear whether internal courses adequately address these gaps. Significant shortfalls also remain in development provision for strategic managers.
362. Throughout this part of the inspection, we found the range of courses, their volume, and their content unclear, with no coherent plan to manage the scale of development required. While this is partly explained by the issues surrounding the management development framework and LMDF, it remains unclear whether the Directorate's focus is primarily transactional, improving managers' performance or transformational, developing leadership capability.
363. We were not convinced the Directorate had a clear vision or could fully grasp the scale of the task, pending the LMDT outputs. Much of the current development approach appeared to be interim, whilst the LMDF and associated processes are being created. In the absence of an agreed pathway with adequate support and resources, progress is being limited by the lack of straightforward policy or guidance outlining the purpose, requirements and processes. Many managers echoed this, describing central course allocation, administration, communication and organisation as confusing and inconsistent.

Local Delivery

364. Across both past and recent inspections, staff consistently reported limited access to centrally organised development opportunities. Many felt unprepared for promotion, noting that development to support progression is scarce and usually only offered after successfully achieving a promoted post. Several also highlighted a lack of support for further education or academic qualifications. A number of FDOs raised concerns about inadequate induction development, citing gaps in leadership training, attendance management, conflict resolution, discipline and H&S.
365. There is a perceived lack of transparency in how development courses are allocated, with many offered at short notice. Staff feel opportunities depend on being 'in the right place at the right time', creating a sense of unfairness. Releasing personnel for training is often difficult due to competing priorities and issues such as time off, using time off in lieu and digital access adds further confusion. Many reported that work demands reduce the time available for development and that the centrally offered programme feels fragmented, lacking coherence, structure and alignment with local needs. A consistent theme was the absence of a clear development pathway or central support for those seeking career progression.
366. Across all SDAs, managers were clearly committed to supporting their staff despite the challenges highlighted earlier. Many SD management teams created their own leadership and management training to compensate for limited centrally delivered development. We observed locally run supervisory and middle manager sessions for both On Call and WT staff, often focused on 'back to basics' skills needed for newly promoted personnel. Some areas also delivered more advanced transformational leadership sessions, most notably in the City of Glasgow, which were well structured, comprehensive and highly valued by participants.
367. Local areas have recognised gaps in staff non-technical development and created their own courses to address them. However, delivery varies significantly across the LSO areas, resulting in inconsistent organisational messaging. Contributing factors may include competing priorities, geography, workforce profile, duty systems, management capacity, resources and budget. This inconsistency risks unfairness in how staff performance and potential are assessed. The LMDT is gathering information on all local approaches for possible inclusion in the new LMDF, which we support and encourage.

Good Practice 11



Recent inspections identified several effective local service delivery area development initiatives created to compensate for the absence of a national system. This innovation and use of local capacity are commendable, and capturing these approaches to inform the leadership and management development framework is a positive and constructive step forward.

Coaching and Mentoring

368. Coaching aims to improve workplace performance by developing specific skills and behaviours, sometimes enhancing attributes such as confidence and communication. It typically runs for a defined period or becomes part of an ongoing management style. Coaches are usually line managers or external specialists. Mentoring involves an experienced colleague supporting the development of a less experienced individual through questioning, listening and guidance. Unlike coaching, mentoring relationships are longer term and work best when they move beyond directive advice, allowing learning for both participants. Mentors are usually more experienced peers.
369. The effectiveness of any coaching or mentoring system depends on clearly identifying performance gaps, selecting suitable coaches or mentors, managing relationships well and evaluating outcomes. The system should specify when coaching or mentoring is the appropriate intervention, ensure models used are credible and relevant and set clear criteria for choosing external coaches or mentors. It should also emphasise creating a positive learning environment.
370. The People Directorate should play a central role in designing and delivering coaching and mentoring as part of the organisation's talent management approach. Line managers are also key to fostering this environment and must be developed accordingly. During a recent scrutiny session, management recognised the importance of coaching and mentoring but confirmed that no formal network currently exists. While informal coaching and mentoring take place across the Service, discussions highlighted potential challenges around capacity and capability when considering more formal approaches.
371. Staff reported that most of their development came from informal mentoring, often without a clear distinction between coaching and mentoring or between peer and senior support. Those who received mentoring generally found it valuable, but the organisation's heavy reliance on this approach is concerning, especially given the high staff turnover in the last five years due to pension changes and retirements etc. Many newer managers now have less experience than their teams, potentially reducing the effectiveness and consistency of informal mentoring. While mentoring remains valuable, reliance on informal mentoring as a primary method of development is potentially no longer viable. Senior managers acknowledged this concern, recognising that many current mentors may lack the necessary experience or development themselves.
372. Local areas have recognised the lack of formal mentoring and have begun developing their own solutions, most notably in Lanarkshire, where a structured strategy, guidance and staff agreement system has been created. However, as with local development activity, mentoring and coaching remain inconsistent and lack continuity, raising concerns about fairness. We were also informed of an informal mentoring system being introduced for strategic managers, sponsored by the Service, but found no evidence that it forms part of a wider organisational strategy. It is also unclear whether the LMDT is gathering information on these various local and organisational approaches.

Managing Personal Performance

373. The CIPD detail that performance management has no standard definition. It can be described as setting objectives, providing feedback, improving performance, supporting learning, development, reward and recognition and career progression. It also covers managing underperformance. Effective performance management can support employees to perform well, maximise their contribution, help them learn and develop and motivate people. Performance management processes can help managers to:
- align the efforts of their team with organisational goals;
 - support employees to become effective performers and continue to develop their skills, knowledge and experience;
 - identify and address any areas of underperformance fairly and in a timely manner;
 - recognise and reward good performance; and
 - create clear expectations around performance for employees.
374. The Service has a personal performance management process, which is known as the performance appraisal process and applies to all employees. The Performance Appraisal Policy³⁵ states the SFRS *‘is committed to developing all employees to their full potential and to improving service delivery. The SFRS Performance Appraisal Policy will be used by individuals and reviewing managers to help improve performance and service delivery by focusing on both the achievement of objectives (‘what’ is done) as well as an appraisal of skills, knowledge, behaviours and competencies (‘how’ it is done)’*. The policy details the objectives, principles, procedure, guidance for managers as well as setting roles and responsibilities. It also details the need to train reviewing managers on the use of the appraisal process as part of the leadership development framework.
375. The policy states that performance appraisal is a joint discussion between an employee and their manager to review the past year, set objectives and identify development needs for the year ahead. Its purpose is to align individual contributions with SFRS strategic goals, values and vision. The process includes formal review meetings and ongoing one-to-one discussions, resulting in an agreed plan with measurable objectives and CPD. It also assesses readiness for advancement, with development opportunities and course allocations expected to link to the LNA process.

35 People, Policy, Performance Appraisal, Version 4.0 14 December 2023

376. We previously found that use of the appraisal system was inconsistent, more common among WT than On Call staff. Many perceived it as a ‘tick box’ exercise with little benefit, as good or poor performance was rarely recognised and development requests seldom progressed due to the constraints previously mentioned. Understanding of the system’s role in effective management was limited and the process for allocating development courses appeared opaque. Staff frequently felt that opportunities depended more on luck than on meaningful appraisal outcomes.
377. Staff, including those responsible for producing required reports, recognised the value of appraisal in principle, but were largely dismissive of the current process. Their lack of confidence that appraisals lead to meaningful development created scepticism and the resulting frustration made the system feel more demoralising than motivating.
378. Given ongoing challenges, including training issues, staff turnover, and reduced mentoring the value and effectiveness of the appraisal process appear to have diminished. This was compounded by unrealistic expectations that the TD team and LNA can support development for large staff numbers. The HMFSI recommended the appraisal policy be reviewed in its recent culture thematic, senior managers recognised the need to review the policy and process, but limited capacity has delayed the review.

Secondments and Temporary Promotions

379. A secondment is a temporary placement where an employee works in another area to support organisational needs, provide cover or gain experience. The Service uses secondments to HMFSI, Scottish Government Fire Resilience Unit, Scottish Multi Agency Resilience Training and Exercising Unit (SMARTEU), the Fire Brigade Union and fire safety organisations, offering both business benefits and staff development. However, opportunities are limited by budget and capacity. There is no formal process to assess their value and secondments are not integrated into TD or organisational learning, although the experience gained can support promotion within TA processes.
380. In addition, the Service also employs a temporary promotion process, which allows staff to fulfil a role above their current role for a defined period. The driver for the promotion process is normally to fill a gap in the TOM with aspects of operations and/or management being the need. During this temporary period, staff are able to gain experience, develop in post and start the process of meeting competence criteria. The Service does not have a specific strategy, policy or procedure that defines the use of secondments or temporary promotions with a talent management strategy.

Networking

381. Networking involves building professional relationships that support career development, knowledge sharing and mutual benefit. It can occur formally or informally, in person or online, and helps individuals exchange information and create useful professional connections.
382. We were informed that staff sometimes attended events and conferences to network for issues such as black and minority ethnic staff and women in the fire service as well as representative body business. We welcome this and understand the importance of promoting networking for these aspects of organisational life. That said, we found that those opportunities offered were restricted and that there was also limited central sponsorship for other formal or informal networking.
383. As detailed, staff previously attended the Fire Service College, Scottish Fire Service College and other external providers for development. Although course content and duration were sometimes criticised, many staff valued the informal networking these opportunities provided. Such interactions allowed personnel to share operational and management experiences with colleagues from across the UK FRS, people they might otherwise never meet, offering useful benchmarking and subtle but meaningful development.
384. This informal exchange of learning was valuable, should not be underestimated and may be of particular relevance given the size and scale of the SFRS. While not an ideal system, it did provide a basic networking mechanism that has not been replaced. The Service currently has no strategy or policy for networking and the largely localised approach to training and development may also restrict wider networking opportunities and limit proactive staff development.
385. In addition, we also observed the positive use of the weekly command meetings to discuss issues. These meetings were routinely heralded by new and inexperienced FDOs as a positive forum to discuss and listen to issues as well as received targeted development. We highlighted the strengths of these meetings in the past but observe that they remain relatively informal and form no part of a talent management process. We found no other evidence of structured networking outside staff attendance at management and engagement meetings.

Induction

386. An employee's first impressions of an organisation strongly influence how well they settle in and how satisfied they feel at work. According to CIPD, induction helps employers welcome new staff, support their integration and ensure they have the knowledge needed for their role. Effective induction can also reduce turnover and absenteeism while strengthening the employer brand. We found a strong example of induction with the FDO induction handbook³⁶.
387. This handbook supports FDO induction by outlining key areas for discussion with the line manager, including pre-employment engagement, initial integration, required pre learning, LCMS access, system permissions, equipment lists, mandatory courses and familiarisation with relevant equipment, policies and systems. The process includes ongoing mentoring and line manager sign off, providing a clear and well structured, recordable induction pathway.
388. We observed a strong induction programme for WT, On Call and OC trainees, delivered as part of their foundation training. We are also aware the Service does have an induction process document, an induction guidance document for line managers and an induction check list. Some directorates, areas and departments also provided their own induction input covering topics such as code of conduct, sickness procedures, equality and diversity, H&S and senior manager introductions. However, these local approaches did not appear to be guided by a corporate strategy, policy or procedure, resulting in inconsistency across the organisation. The Service does not currently have a defined induction policy as part of a greater talent management strategy.

Recommendation 11



Talent development is predominantly centred on course delivery and an inclusive interlinked talent management system is lacking. We recommend the Service should strengthen its approach by ensuring robust coaching, mentoring, performance management, secondment, networking and induction processes are embedded within the future leadership and management development framework.

Talent Acquisition

389. TA is a strategic, long-term process focused on identifying, attracting and selecting high-quality employees who can meet both current and future organisational needs. Unlike recruitment, which typically fills immediate vacancies, TA prioritises building a workforce aligned with organisational vision and strategy. Although TA is part of the wider HRM framework, it is distinct from TD. As TD was the main HRM focus of this inspection, TA has only been referenced where it directly interacts with development processes.

10. Modern Apprenticeships

390. MA are a unique blend of work and study, allowing individuals to earn a wage while gaining industry recognised qualifications. These apprenticeships are designed to help employers develop their workforce. The programs are structured to provide valuable work experience from day one, leading to the acquisition of accredited qualifications recognised by industry. The qualifications undertaken within the MA are SVQs. SVQs are work-based qualifications that assess the skills and knowledge people need to perform their job role effectively. The qualifications are designed using national occupational standards and are aligned to the standards body, Skills for Justice.
391. The MA is designed to give the necessary firefighting skills that trainee firefighters need to succeed in the Service. The MA in firefighting is designed to be at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 7. It includes qualifications in core units of an SVQ in emergency fire service at SCQF Level 7 and SVQ emergency fire service: operations in the community at SCQF Level 7. During the apprenticeship, trainees are expected to learn how to:
- take responsibility for effective performance in fire and rescue;
 - search for, rescue and support endangered life;
 - resolve fire and rescue operational incidents;
 - support the development of colleagues in fire and rescue;
 - contribute to fire safety solutions to minimise risks; and
 - drive fire and rescue service vehicles.
392. Trainees also need to develop core and meta skills in:
- numeracy;
 - communication;
 - working with others;
 - information and communication technology;
 - problem solving;
 - self-management;
 - social intelligence; and
 - innovation.
393. Qualifications Scotland is Scotland's statutory awarding body and applies rigorous external scrutiny to the Service's processes for evidencing and accessing MA programme funding. To meet these requirements, the Service must maintain qualified assessors, verifiers, and appropriate systems. In recent years, the Service fell below required Qualifications Scotland standards and did not maximise available funding, leading to increased audit activity, tighter scrutiny and enforced changes to its processes.

394. These challenges generated considerable negative feedback in earlier inspections. After graduation, trainees enter a development phase with Red, Amber and Green assessments. Supporting and assessing this phase was resource intensive and some trainees who had completed their plans struggled to be signed off as competent due to a shortage of national SVQ assessors and verifiers. Additional evidence requirements also caused delays, prolonging the time taken to achieve competence and receive the associated salary.
395. The Service reported that it had strengthened its Directorate by recruiting additional sector competent staff, bringing greater credibility and expertise to the MA/SVQ team. This investment has resulted in a stronger assessor and verifier training programme, improved processes and support, better resourcing, and maximised funding streams. Interviews indicated clear improvements in the management of the MA/SVQ process, giving us confidence that it is now on a stable footing.
396. We received evidence that Qualifications Scotland recently carried out a routine assessment of the Service. They confirmed that issues identified since 2023, particularly around knowledge assessment and recording of observations for both assessor and verifiers have been resolved, with appropriate technology now in use. Qualifications Scotland reported high confidence in the Service's resourcing, candidate support, and assessment and verification processes. This confidence was echoed by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Skills Development Scotland who carried out similar assessment, audits and assurance visits.
397. The Service has addressed many of the challenges previously identified, though a minority of trainee firefighters and their watch officers are still experiencing the effects. Nonetheless, we are confident that significant progress has been made and the Directorate deserves credit for these improvements.

**Good
Practice 12**



In previous inspections, and to some extent in this one, the modern apprenticeship and Scottish vocational qualification system received significant criticism. However, the Service has invested in additional resources and capacity, resulting in clear and measurable improvements. The Service and staff involved should be commended for this turnaround.

11. Conclusion

398. The SFRS has strong strategic intent but delivery is strained. The organisation has a clear TVS, a structured TFF, a desire to be a LO and committed and knowledgeable staff. However, execution is being held back by structural and capacity limitations across almost every major component of OTD. It is understood that OT and TD are part of two separate directorates, but there remains the question as to whether this structure is still appropriate, given the limited capacity of both aspects and clear link between the two disciplines. There is a need to understand whether improvement in efficiency and effectiveness could be made with closer alignment.
399. OT is under significant pressure with capacity being the biggest risk. Instructor vacancies and organisational ambition mean that many teams operate well above capacity and sustainable levels. The consequences are that staff sometimes struggle to take annual leave, time off in lieu or CPD time, there is short notice course cancellations, there is an overreliance on goodwill, limited time for quality improvement, limited time for course preparation and increased risk of skill currency lapses, with difficulty delivering the TVS as intended.
400. Systems are fragmented and inefficient and the three major platforms of LCMS, pdrPro and iTrent do not integrate particularly well. This causes a heavier administrative burden, manual data management, missed or delayed currency alerts and difficulties in workforce planning. A new training system is being procured, but integration with the new people system is essential.
401. Training quality assurance is not functioning as effectively as it could. The Service has ISO 9001 certification, non-conformance reporting, TC inspections, customer feedback loops and internal audit procedures that could all provide high-quality continuous improvement. In practice, several issues undermine confidence which are; that customer satisfaction scores are unrealistically high, non-conformance is significantly underreported, standardisation varies between instructors, venue and SDA audits are rarely conducted in many areas and any OA learning is not feeding fully back into training. The result is a system that measures quantity well but struggles to measure or improve quality. Its pleasing to note that the Service has invested capacity in the OA team to start to drive improvement in this area.
402. The training delivery model has strengths, but key weaknesses persist. Things that work well are; acquisition courses are generally viewed positively, updated TfOC content is perceived as an improvement, KATA sessions show strong potential, innovative On Call solutions are being piloted, innovative recruitment for hard to fill posts and the BA recovery plan delivered at scale. Persistent problems include: TfOC still seen as a tick box exercise, On Call duty systems limit ability to complete modules, unrealistic training content persist for remote rural stations, inconsistent instructor support to On Call stations, strategic reserve is harder to access across SDAs and training at station is often hindered by information and communication technology, space or building condition.

403. DT is perceived as the most serious operational risk area. The report flags DT as under extreme pressure, due to high instructor vacancy rates, very few ADI qualified instructors, a long linear training pathway, new Section 19 requirements increasing demand, an ongoing reported shortfall of circa. 700 drivers nationally, some FDOs being unable to respond under blue lights and a cultural reluctance to undertake driver training from many station-based staff. This cocktail was described as one of the greatest threats to operational resilience by many SD staff.
404. IC training is competent but overly process driven. There was a good structure and alignment to national standards, new CPD and virtual reality initiatives were generally welcomed. However, assessments are often seen as ‘memory tests’, too compliance focused with not enough developmental value. Capacity constraints limit improvement and TfOC attainment levels remain low for IC modules. There is a risk that command competence may be maintained procedurally, but not behaviourally.
405. Assets, facilities and equipment require major investment. There is an approximate £31m property backlog, an £11m fleet backlog as well as issues with equipment, classrooms, towers, welfare and BA facilities. Many temporary ConC set ups are now treated as permanent. There is an old training fleet with a large percentage of main appliances beyond recommended age. Various examples of positive progress are the new CFBT installations, PPE investment, major capital investment in Perth and Dundee as well as the cycle-based appliance replacement model emerging. There is a view that a further training facility in the ESDA is needed to enhance training due to travel restrictions. The TSAMP is a particularly good document and provides a roadmap for dealing with many of these issues. Overall, the estate condition is limiting training realism, capacity and safety.
406. The OC training team has been subject to a strategic alteration in recent times with a significant reduction in the size but with closer alignment to the training function. Whilst the closer association is a positive innovation, OC training remains a significant organisational gap. OC suffers from: no OC-specific training policy or framework, limited training team capacity, outdated or incomplete materials, limited performance monitoring, negative impact from the NMS roll-out and recruitment as well as a training staff ratio significantly higher than that of station-based counter parts. This represents a risk, especially with high turnover and technology change.
407. TD is critically under-resourced and there is sympathy for staff attempting to deliver the current products being offered with extremely limited capacity. The Service aspires to be a LO, but there is no published people strategy, no established leadership or development framework in place, limited budget with limited staff having had any development in the past five years or longer. There is a challenge getting staff released to be developed due to strain on the TOM. There is heavy reliance on informal mentoring despite declining experience. Local areas are filling gaps independently which should be commended but is resulting in inconsistency and potential unfairness. The appraisal system is widely viewed as ineffective and the LNA process is dominated by compliance training, not development. There is limited use of wider processes and systems that would make up a holistic talent management system. TD is considered the weakest part of the wider OTD system, but it is hoped that the new people Strategy as well as the LMDT and consequent LMDF will significantly improve performance in this area. Despite all these issues, TD staff continue to deliver development which is well received and receives positive feedback, for which they should be commended.

408. MA/SVQ processes have improved significantly. There has been a strong recovery after Qualifications Scotland issues, better assessor and verifier training, improved processes and technology, greater confidence from Qualifications Scotland auditors and better resourcing and governance. This area is now viewed as performing well and is considered a real success story, following Service investment.
409. The report surfaces several pervasive cultural factors: a positive ‘can do’ mentality masking systemic issues, underreporting of problems, a lean towards compliance over competence, drain of experienced staff from function, pervasive overcentralisation concerns, siloed functions of training versus people and the perception of prioritisation of other tasks over training. These cultural issues link directly to many operational and developmental challenges.
410. The SFRS has a clear vision and committed people, but its training and development systems are overstretched, overly compliance-driven, and constrained by limited capacity, ageing assets, fragmented systems, and underinvestment, particularly in driver and personal development. Instructor shortages, uneven training quality, and operational pressures further restrict access to learning. In short, the ambition and commitment are strong, but the infrastructure, capacity, and systems require significant investment and reform.

12. Recommendations, Areas for Consideration and Good Practice

Good Practice

Good Practice 1: The development of a clear vision and strategy for training within the SFRS is a positive development and staff should be commended for providing this strong leadership.

Good Practice 2: The training function has worked hard to develop innovative staffing solution for 'hard to fill' geographical posts and should be commended for this. They should continue to look for opportunities to ensure quality training is delivered to all parts of the organisation.

Good Practice 3: The training function has worked hard to develop relationships within the UK FRS. They have proactively used these relationships to benchmark aspects of training to identify continuous improvement and should be commended for this. They should continue to look for opportunities to benchmark training for all aspects of operational training.

Good Practice 4: The development of the knowledge applied training and assessment system would seem to be a positive innovation and is going some way to filling a potential gap in training delivery. The innovation should be commended and applied consistently to all areas of the Service.

Good Practice 5: It is pleasing to note that the training function are developing innovative solutions to course delivery, which will allow a more flexible approach for On Call course attendance. The development should be commended and used as a future model for improvement.

Good Practice 6: The Service has ploughed considerable resources into the breathing apparatus recovery plan, probably at the expense and prioritisation of other training projects. Although there is a degree of criticism surrounding elements of the plan it should be recognised for providing a high level of comfort that most staff have been assessed to an agreed standard over a relatively short period of time. Those staff involved should be commended for the excellent work which brought about the course development and delivery.

Good Practice 7: The development of the training strategic asset management plan utilising cross-directorate collaboration, is a strong example of good practice. It provides a clear roadmap for facility improvement and investment, supporting effective strategic planning.

Good Practice 8: The cyclical innovative appliance allocation approach delivers clear benefits, hopefully improving training efficiency, effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Good Practice 9: The innovative personal protective equipment allocation approach delivers clear benefits, improving staff welfare, training efficiency, effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Good Practice 10: There is a clear need for stronger strategic direction and a defined development pathway to guide the effective allocation of capacity, funding and resources. The creation of the leadership and management development taskforce and the forthcoming leadership and management development framework is a positive step toward achieving this and should be completed as soon as possible.

Good Practice 11: Recent inspections identified several effective local service delivery area development initiatives created to compensate for the absence of a national system. This innovation and use of local capacity are commendable, and capturing these approaches to inform the leadership and management development framework is a positive and constructive step forward.

Good Practice 12: In previous inspections, and to some extent in this one, the modern apprenticeship and Scottish vocational qualification system received significant criticism. However, the Service has invested in additional resources and capacity, resulting in clear and measurable improvements. The Service and staff involved should be commended for this turnaround.

Area for Consideration

Areas for Consideration 1: The Service should consider reviewing the training function framework to better demonstrate the link between the training vision and strategy and training policies, processes and procedures.

Areas for Consideration 2: The training function should review its governance process to ensure there is robust communication and engagement processes between middle management, supervisory management and the teams below them in the structure.


Areas for Consideration 3: The training function should ensure that the new software system currently being procured can interface with the new people software system to guarantee that effective and efficient coordination of development, competencies, skills and subsequent workforce planning can be achieved

Areas for Consideration 4: The training function should consider the review of its instructor terms and conditions to identify where changes could be made that will ensure more efficient and effective training delivery balanced against staff welfare.

Areas for Consideration 5: The training function should consider reviewing its policies and guidance to ensure that all staff are aware of their full responsibilities and that they are developed to understand and deliver on this.

Areas for Consideration 6: The training function should consider reviewing and reinvigorating the audit processes to ensure that they are receiving maximum information for continuous improvement.

Areas for Consideration 7: The training function should continue to review training for operational competence content to ensure that it is fit for purpose and in particular that it is appropriate for staff constrained by the terms and conditions and duty pattern of being retained or volunteer On Call.



Areas for Consideration 8: It is clear that capacity will continue to be an issue for the training function moving forward. The training function should consider accelerating the drive to up skill station-based watch commanders and linked training processes as this will hopefully spread the burden wider and release more functional capacity.

Areas for Consideration 9: The training function should consider how it utilises other sources of evidence to prove competence, which would hopefully encourage a better balance to the perceived culture of compliance over competence.

Areas for Consideration 10: The Service should review arrangements for appliance strategic reserve to provide a consistent system allowing staff to maximise training, balanced with operational commitments.

Areas for Consideration 11: There would seem to be a potential gap of facility provision within the ESDA, which may be affecting efficient delivery of training. The Service should continue to review service delivery across its training estate and considering enhancing provision should resourcing and finance permit.

Areas for Consideration 12: There are significant concerns that incident command courses focus too heavily on passing assessments rather than developing real command capability. The training function should continue to review incident command training and assessment methods to ensure a better balance between demonstration of genuine competence and simple compliance.

Areas for Consideration 13: It is understood that the interim contamination control measures for breathing apparatus training have been in place for a long time and appear to have become normalised. The training function should consider reviewing and reprioritising these issues and invest in permanent, long-term solutions.

Areas for Consideration 14: The training function should consider reviewing the provision of PPE for FGT to ensure a consistent allocation and issue across every training site.

Areas for Consideration 15: There is a need for a clear, coherent people strategy that defines how the Service will deliver talent management and develop as a true learning organisation. The People Directorate should progress this work to completion as it should be the foundation for all related future people initiatives.

Areas for Consideration 16: The People Directorate should continue to engage proactively with the training system project, confirming that both systems can interface to ensure that effective and efficient coordination of development, competencies, skills and subsequent workforce planning can be achieved.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: In the absence of a formal Service career pathway document, we recommend that the Service should consider reviewing guidance and support provided to managers that would proactively encourage the retention and development of staff, to promote continuity within training.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Service continue to review its training capacity in line with organisational requirements in order that it can redirect any future additional resources to training delivery and its performance management.

Recommendation 3: We recognise that the Service has several quality management systems and assurance systems intended to support continuous improvement. However, we found they do not operate cohesively and are not delivering the required improvement anticipated. We recommend the training function should review these systems to ensure they work together as intended.

Recommendation 4: It is understood that the training function is moving towards a more blended approach for training with increasing reliance on digital applications. We would recommend that the Service review the information and communication technology infrastructure available at station, particularly On Call to ensure that the model can be delivered in the way it is envisaged.

Recommendation 5: We found driver training to be one of the most concerning aspects of our operational training assessment and can understand the overwhelming sense of concern throughout the Service. We recommend that the Service review its driver training provision to enhance instructor capacity, improve training processes and increase driver levels.


Recommendation 6: We recommend that the operation control training model and structure be reviewed following the implementation of the new mobilising system project to identify where improvements could be made and whether the current systems and structure provides enough capacity to support watch-based teams in operations control.

Recommendation 7: We recommend that the Service should develop clear talent development policy, procedures and governance frameworks to complement any strategy and guide the day-to-day delivery and management of people initiatives.

Recommendation 8: We recommend that the Service review its development team capacity to ensure organisational needs are met, prioritising any future resources for talent development and its performance management.

Recommendation 9: We believe that there is poor performance management for talent development and we would recommend the People Directorate strengthen its management by implementing more robust systems for measurement, monitoring, quality assurance and audit to improve scrutiny and oversight.

Recommendation 10: We are concerned that the learning needs analysis is being used primarily for compliance rather than development. We recommend the Service review the learning needs analysis budget and processes, including how it is allocated and prioritised, to identify improvements.



Recommendation 11: Talent development is predominantly centred on course delivery and an inclusive interlinked talent management system is lacking. We recommend the Service should strengthen its approach by ensuring robust coaching, mentoring, performance management, secondment, networking and induction processes are embedded within the future leadership and management development framework.

13. Methodology

About HMFSI

HMFSI is a body that operates within, but independently of, the Scottish Government. Inspectors have the scrutiny powers specified in section 43B of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005. These include inquiring into the state and efficiency of the SFRS, its compliance with best value, and the way it is carrying out its functions.

HMFSI Inspectors may, in conducting inspections, assess whether the SFRS is complying with its duty to secure best value and continuous improvement. If necessary, Scottish Ministers can direct Inspectors to investigate anything relating to the SFRS as they consider appropriate.

We also have an established role in providing professional advice and guidance on the emergency response, legislation and education in relation to the FRS in Scotland.

Our powers give latitude to investigate areas we consider necessary or expedient for the purposes of, or in connection with, the conducting of our functions.

The SFRS must provide us with such assistance and co-operation as we may require enabling us to conduct our functions. When we publish a report, the SFRS must also have regard to what we have found and take such measures, if any, as it thinks fit.

Where our report identifies that the SFRS is not efficient or effective (or best value is not secured), or will, unless remedial measures are taken, cease to be efficient or effective, Scottish Ministers may direct the SFRS to take such measures as may be required. The SFRS must comply with any direction given.

We work with other inspectorates and agencies across the public sector and co-ordinate our activities to reduce the burden of inspection and avoid unnecessary duplication.

We aim to add value and strengthen public confidence in the SFRS and do this through independent scrutiny and evidence-led reporting about what we find. Where we make recommendations in a report, we will follow them up to assess the level of progress.

We aim to identify and promote good practice that can be applied across Scotland. Our approach is to support the SFRS to deliver services that are high-quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local and national needs. The terms of reference for inspections are consulted upon and agreed with parties that the Chief Inspector deems relevant.

How This Inspection Was Carried out

The purpose of this inspection was to examine the provision of OTD within the SFRS. An inquiry by the Inspectorate can be self-directed or can be subject to direction by Scottish Ministers. This inquiry into the SFRS was self-directed by the Chief Inspector.

The following persons contributed to the Inspection and to the report:

Robert Scott QFSM, Chief Inspector

David Young, Assistant Inspector

John Joyce QFSM, Assistant Inspector

Brian McKenzie, Assistant Inspector

Graeme Fraser, Assistant Inspector

Calum Bruce, Inspection Support Manager

When undertaking this inspection, we followed established practice utilised in previous thematic inspections. This inspection outline framework provided a structure to our work, which was risk-based, proportionate and focused on the SFRS OTD Policy and procedures.

We conducted early engagement with the Service and established a SPoC who facilitated a number of different methods of evidence gathering and analysis. These being:

- a. desk top data review of documents and data supplied by the SFRS. We undertook a sense check and assessment of the content of procedural documents;
- b. numerous face-to-face and virtual interviews with SFRS staff who are responsible for the provision of, management, and training necessary for service delivery;
- c. observation of training courses and induction processes; and
- d. observation and demonstration of the systems used for the management of OTD.

14. Glossary of Terms

AC	Area Commander
ADI	Approved Driving Instructor
BA	Breathing Apparatus
BSI	British Standards Institute
CC	Crew Commander
CFBT	Compartment Fire Behaviour Training
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
ConC	Contaminants Control
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CS	Central Staffing
DACO	Deputy Assistant Chief Officer
DF	Dignified Facilities
DMT	Directorate Management Team
DT	Driver Training
ERD	Emergency Response Driving
ESDA	East Service Delivery Area
FDO	Flexi Duty Officer
FGT	Fire Ground Technician
FMT	Functional Management Team
FRS	Fire and Rescue Service
FSOS	Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics
GC	Group Commander
HMFSI	His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate
HoF	Head of Function
H&S	Health and Safety
HRM	Human Resource Management
HSAW	Health and Safety at Work
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
HSG	Health and Safety Guidance
IC	Incident Commander

ICA	Incident Command Assessment
ICL	Incident Command Level (Level 1, 2, 3 and 4)
ISO	International Standards Organisation
KATA	Knowledge Applied Training and Assessment
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
L&D	Learning and Development
LCMS	Learning Content Management System
LMDF	Leadership and Management Development Framework
LMDT	Leadership and Management Development Taskforce
LNA	Learning Needs Analysis
LO	Learning Organisation
LPG	Learning Partner Group
LSO	Local Senior Officer
MA	Modern Apprenticeship
MRG	Management Review Group
NFCC	National Fire Chiefs Council
NMS	New Mobilising System
NSDA	North Service Delivery Area
NTS	National Training Standard
OA	Operational Assurance
OC	Operations Control
OCSG	Operational Competence Strategic Group
OD	Organisational Development
OiC	Officer in Charge
On Call	Retained or Voluntary Operational staff
OSAICC	On Station Assessment of Incident Command Competence
OT	Operational Training
OTD	Operational Training and Development
OTR	Off The Run
PMF	Performance Management Framework
PO	Principal Officer
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment

PPFT	People Payroll Finance and Training
QFSM	Queen's Fire Service Medal
QMS	Quality Management System
RTC	Road Traffic Collision
SC	Station Commander
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SD	Service Delivery
SDA	Service Delivery Area
SFRS	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
SMARTEU	Scottish Multi Agency Resilience Training and Exercising Unit
SPOC	Single Point Of Contact
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
T&C	Terms and Conditions
TA	Talent Acquisition
TC	Training Centre
TCIP	Training Continuous Improvement Project
TD	Talent Development
TFF	Training Function Framework
TfOC	Training for Operational Competence
TMT	Training Management Team
TNA	Training Needs Analysis
TOM	Target Operating Model
TSA	Training Safety and Assurance Directorate
TSAB	Training Safety and Assurance Board
TVS	Training Vision and Strategy
UK	United Kingdom
WC	Watch Commander
WP	Workforce Planning
WSDA	West Service Delivery Area
WT	Wholetime Duty System

Appendix 1

Difference between Training and Development³⁷:

Basis	Training	Development
Meaning	Training refers to the process of increasing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees for doing work.	Development refers to the overall growth of the employees. These are learning opportunities that are designed for employees to grow.
Aim	Its main aim is to help the employee to do the job better.	Its main aim is the overall growth of employees.
Orientation	It is job-oriented.	It is career-oriented.
Scope of learning	It has a narrow scope as it is a part of development.	It has a broader scope as it includes training.
Suitability	It is more suitable for technical staff.	It is more suitable for managerial staff.
Skills	It involves teaching technical skills.	It involves teaching technical, human, and conceptual skills.
Duration	It is a short-term process.	It is a long-term process as it is career oriented.
Level of trainees involved	Trainees are non-managerial here.	Trainees are managerial here.
Depth of knowledge imparted	Knowledge is imparted for doing a specific kind of job.	Knowledge is imparted for the growth of an employee in all respects.
Initiative in learning	Employers take the initiative in providing training to their employees.	Individuals take initiative by themselves for their growth and development.

Appendix 2

TRAINING VISION & STRATEGY ON A PAGE

TRAINING VISION & STRATEGY

- SKILLS MAINTENANCE FRAMEWORK
- TRAINING DELIVERY FRAMEWORK
- TRAINING ASSETS FRAMEWORK

OUR VISION
Clarity and resources to ensure we work **safely, collaboratively** and **progressively** to deliver **excellence** in operational training

OUR VALUES

- Safety** (We value)
- Teamwork** (We value)
- Respect** (We value)
- Innovation** (We value)

TRAINING FUNCTION PROCESS COMPONENT PARTS



- OUR FOCUS IS TO**
- DEVELOP INDIVIDUALS** / TEAMS AND TRAINING INSTRUCTORS
 - CONTINUE TO BUILD** A POSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE
 - CONTINUE TO DELIVER** OUR TRAINING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME
 - BE SERVICE DELIVERY LED** WHEN PROVIDING TRAINING
 - PROVIDE TRAINING** DELIVERY INFRASTRUCTURE
 - BE PROGRESSIVE** AND INNOVATIVE
 - DEFINE** OPERATIONAL TRAINING RELATED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
 - BE ENGAGING** AND CONNECTED
 - BE CENTRALLY CO-ORDINATED** AND LOCALLY DELIVERED
 - CREATE** CAPACITY
 - RECOGNISE AND** APPRECIATE OUR PEOPLE



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