

**Wholetime Firefighter**

**Recruitment and positive action case study – 2020**

**Introduction**

During 2020 the Service undertook a selection process to recruit wholetime firefighters for entry in to the organisation from April 2021. The last such process took place in 2017/18. Planning for this work began shortly after the national lockdown was instigated, which made the management of the process and positive action campaign even more challenging than in previous years.

As a result of this work, 28 new firefighters (including 2 transfers from other Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) and an employee from an NFRS oncall section ) will be entering the workforce over the next 18 months; 14.28% of these new starters will be from BAME backgrounds and 17.86% will be women

**Planning**

The planning and execution of the Service’s positive action campaign, took place from May, in conjunction with planning of the recruitment process. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Service worked with an external consultant to deliver on-line testing for mechanical reasoning, literacy and numeracy and situational judgement.

The branding used in advertising wholetime firefighter positions was an important factor to consider. The Service built on a previous campaign it had developed using the slogan ‘Yes You Can’ which was used on the Service’s recruitment advertising and literature. Role models from a diverse range of backgrounds were recruited to feature within the campaign. These people comprised of firefighters, Crew and Watch Managers across the Service.

**Resourcing**

Further to advertising a secondment opportunity, a crew manager was temporarily deployed to the Organisational Development and Inclusion (ODI) team to help manage the positive action process. The Service’s positive action activity was designed around the stages of recruitment.

**Awareness events**

Awareness events were delivered to increase understanding of the role of a firefighter, the job-related test standards and the recruitment process, both providing the opportunity for participants to find out more and to deselect themselves if aspects of the role did not suit

A large proportion of the positive action activities were open to all but targeted to improve the diversity of attendees. Based upon feedback from previous recruitment campaigns, which highlighted the stages at which different groups of applicants were least successful, activities took place prior to the recruitment process: These included -

* Zoom webinars (x 8 sessions approximately 170 people attended);
  + Familiarisation with the role
  + Overview of the process
  + Fitness and strength education
* Interview mentoring sessions (x 3 sessions approximately 120 people attended)
* Literacy/numeracy practice sessions x 6 sessions (BAME candidates only);
* Face-to-face fitness sessions (x 10)

**Marketing and communication**

The Service used a range of methods to attract interest in its positive action activity, including facebook live interviews, radio interviews/advertising, social media advertising (messages created to reach target groups based on the demographics selected), mail shots, posters placed in targeted locations and YouTube films. The Service also used its community contacts to share and promote its careers advertising through their social media channels. It should be noted both the social media posts and the use of community contacts and groups were powerful means of attracting the Service’s target groups to its positive action activities.

The festivals the Service would usually attend including local Pride events and Carnivals were cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions thus it was necessary to use more direct marketing strategies.

Advertising took place with Radio Kemet, Radio Dawn and Radio Faza (all aimed at ethnic minority audiences). Personal messages from firefighters about their experiences were used as part of the adverts. Interviews also took place on these radio stations about the reasons for undertaking positive action, dispelling myths and promoting the Service’s careers.

Short films were also produced of a diverse range of internal role models discussing their careers, advice and experiences, these were uploaded to YouTube and shared through the Service’s social media channels.

WhatsApp groups were also used during this campaign to assist candidates and provide a platform for answering questions or concerns. Through this group, the candidates had been able to share ideas, motivate one another and answer each other’s questions.

**RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

The process took the form of an application form, literacy and numeracy tests, job related tests (JRTs), assessment centre and references, criminal records checks and a swimming test. It was decided to test that applicants can swim 25 metres (untimed) to ensure water confidence.

The recruitment process itself opened on 24 August 2020. Within less than a week, over 600 applications were received at which point the application process was closed. Candidates were directed to complete the online tests. The next stage included the JRTs which took place internally over three weeks.

An assessment centre was originally planned to be face-to-face, but this was changed to a Zoom presentation and interview due to limitations resulting from COVID-19. Over 120 interviews took place. 95% of the interviews were balanced in terms of gender and 30% were represented by BAME panel members. The latter number was not as high as the service would like and is an area the organisation will seek to improve for future interview panels.

**RECRUITMENT FIGURES**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| All | | White British | | BAME | Prefer not to say | | Female | | Male | LGBT | Disability |
| Applications | 646 | 481 | 99 | | | 66 | | 78 | 568 | 52 | 27 |
| Online Tests | 563 | 425 | 86 | | | 52 | | 63 | 500 | 44 | 27 |
| JRTs | 242 | 199 | 32 | | | 11 | | 20 | 222 | 22 | 15 |
| Interview | 132\* | 107 | 16 | | | 9 | | 10 | 122 | 15 | 6 |
| Successful | 28 | 21 | 4 | | | 3 | | 5 | 23 | 5 | 2 |

\*includes six transferees

The success rate for BAME applicants was generally fairly level throughout the process, with 15% at application stage and 14% successful at appointment stage which is slightly above the last census figure of the BAME population being 12% in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

Women made up 12% of applicants and 17% were successful at interview, demonstrating high performance through the process.

Whilst lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gender (LGBT) candidates represented 8% of all applicants, the success rate of those identifying as LGBT was 17.9%. This is far better than previous campaigns and may indicate that LGBT applicants consider the service to be a supportive employer.

Of those applicants who declared a disability, 7% were successful at interview compared to 4% of all applicants. It should be noted that the physical requirements of the job are not conducive to making reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants, as would normally be the case for non-operational roles.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this recruitment process and the associated positive action work in advance have been very successful given the barriers presented by Covid-19 restrictions. Positive action activity has been delivered very differently compared to previous recruitment campaigns. Attraction rates of women, LGBT applicants and people from BAME backgrounds to firefighting roles needs to continue to improve further in order to make a marked difference to the make-up of the workforce in the future. The awareness, mentoring and fitness sessions have been an instrumental part of the positive action campaign.

The Service is very much aware of the value of retention and an induction process for the new employees will be used, this will include ‘Off-Station Support’ in the form of a buddy or mentor who will help the individual with any ‘cultural’/welfare issues which they may come across as they settle in to the organisation. Some lessons can be learnt from this campaign to shape future work within this area, these are detailed below.

**Lessons Learnt**

* Use of social media advertising aimed at the Service’s target groups for its positive action events proved to be an effective means of attracting interest.
* Radio advertising, using role models from the Service was a useful tool to attract interest and raise awareness, however a longer term presence on local radio targeted at BAME communities would help with awareness of what the Service does.
* An ongoing relationship with BAME communities needs to be developed and maintained in order to build trust in the organisation as an employer of choice. The Service’s Community Engagement Plan needs to be implemented over the next 18 months in order to assist with this.
* The positive action work the Service undertook was communicated internally, in addition the work undertaken to raise awareness of what positive action is, has been useful in dispelling myths.