Retained Firefighters / On Call Firefighters Recruitment Communications

Qualitative research with OCFF, potential OCFF and employers

Final Report
June 2016
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I Introduction

A. Project Background

The Strategic Communications team at the Home Office is looking to develop a communications strategy, and will develop communications products¹, which can be used by Fire and Rescue Services to support the recruitment of On Call Firefighters¹ (OCFFs).

The strategy and content developed by the team will be adapted and used by individual Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) as required and appropriate to their area and specific recruitment requirements.

For effective recruitment, any messages developed into campaign materials will variously² need to:
- Raise awareness of OCFFs – who they are, what their role entails and what their responsibilities are
- Present the role in a way that engages potential OCFF recruits and encourages further investigation and applications
- Help improve consent levels amongst employers for their staff to be OCFFs

To help inform development of the strategy and communications products, audience insight work was needed with those with experience of the role or applying for the role (current OCFFs, ex-OCFFs and unsuccessful applicants), potential OCFFs and potential supporting employers.

This project was undertaken over two iterative stages:
- **Stage 1** - An exploration of the audience ‘landscape’ to:
  - Understand overarching needs from communications (the full range of what potential OCFFs and supporting employers need to know and why)
  - Inform development of specific messages, as well as message territories that introduce the role, in a way that meets these needs
- **Stage 2** - Testing of the developed messaging ideas to understand:
  - Which messages and territories work best with different audiences (e.g. by gender, other demographic differences or area)
  - Any messaging hierarchy
  - Key primary and secondary messages
  - Where the target audience would expect to see these messages

B. Research Aims and Objectives

The overall aims of the research were to inform the OCFF recruitment communications approach by:
- Understanding which motivations/barriers influence individuals to apply for OCFF and whether these vary by rural/urban locations
- Understanding the motivations/barriers to employers agreeing to staff being OCFFs

¹ For example, the materials can be tailored to the specific target audience for the communication (reflecting local demographic profile or priority groups for recruitment), detailing specific local role(s) for recruitment and personalising with own FRS logo
² Depending on the specific target audience for the communication
• Generating and testing message territories and messages to understand the extent to which these resonate with target audiences and how they might be optimised

To meet these objectives, the research explored the following areas over the two iterative stages:

**Stage 1**

i) **Individuals (current and ex-OCFF, unsuccessful applicants and potential OCFF):**

• **Perceptions of OCFF brand/image:**
  – What is the range of positive and negative associations and values? How does the term “Retained Firefighters” work within this? Is there a better alternative (and why is it better) such as ‘On Call’ Firefighters or another term?
  – What are potential OCFFs’ expectations of the role? Do they know about the other work which OCFFs do, e.g. fire prevention work within the community / vulnerable groups?

• **Recruitment motivations and decision-making:**
  – What motivated / would motivate them to apply? What do they feel fits well with their needs at the moment?
  – What reservations / concerns or other barriers did they / would they have?
  – In what context did they apply? Were they actively looking for new career/add-on to current career?
  – Why did they specifically apply for the OCFF role? How did they become aware of OCFFs? Where would potentials expect / need to hear about OCFFs?
  – What options did this / would this compete against, if any?
  – What dissatisfactions in other roles were they / are they looking to move away from, if any?

• **Recruitment experiences:**
  – Was the application process easier/harder than anticipated / what do they expect from the recruitment process?
  – How did / would family/ friends react?
  – How did / would their employer react? How they overcome this reaction?
  – What did they learn through the experience of recruitment that was surprising – both positives and negatives?

• **Employment experiences:**
  – As an OCFF, all positives and negatives with regards to the role and employment set up
  – How have their skills developed since joining? How has this impacted ‘employability’ with other prospective employers outside FRS?
  – For ex-OCFF, reasons for leaving? Anything that would have encouraged them to stay?

ii) **Employers who employ OCFF or may consider employing OCFF:**

• **Awareness of OCFFs:**
  – How did awareness come about?

• **Perceptions of OCFFs:**
  – Understanding of benefits and barriers to employees
  – Understanding of benefits and barriers to employers

• **Experience or expectations of experience within company:**
  – How do OCFFs affect the company – all practical positives and negatives, e.g. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), resourcing, finances, reactions of other staff (OCFF role or selves valued, resented, etc?), experience of OCFFs as employees, etc

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3 Note: Many existing On Call Firefighters are also Whole Time Firefighters
Stage 2

Individuals and employers: Understand for any communications ideas tested:

- **Take out:**
  - What do the audiences understand is being communicated?
  - Does anything cause confusion or jar with the audience?
  - Does take out align with communications objectives?
  - Are there any areas of concern which are off-putting?
- **Engagement:**
  - Do the messages resonate with the audience and engage them? If not, why?
- **Response to language:**
  - Is the tone of voice right?
- **Channels:**
  - Where would they expect to see these messages?
  - When would they expect to see these messages?
- **Messaging territories:**
  - What message territories are the most compelling and why?
  - Does the audience understand what to do next? Do the message territories prompt the audience to find out more and take action?
  - Are there any gaps which the audience are looking for information on which aren’t covered?
  - Overall effectiveness/impact: Which messaging territories appear to have most traction and why?
- **Messaging content and hierarchy:**
  - Within territories (for individuals or employers as appropriate), which messages are primary/lead and why?
  - What is important secondary messaging to deliver and why?
  - Are there any gaps which the audience are looking for information on which aren’t covered?

At each stage, a full discussion guide was developed for comment and approval by the client team. A wide range of stimulus material was also used to support discussion. See Appendices 3 and 4 for full details.

C. Method and Sample

Overview of method and sample

Given the exploratory and developmental nature of the objectives, a qualitative approach was undertaken overall.

The two stages included the same range of audiences but included slightly varying methods and sample sizes to fit with the specific needs of that stage’s objectives.

Stage 1

Four On Call Firefighter audiences were included in Stage 1, each of whom could contribute a relevant point of view:
- **Current On Call Firefighters** - Those who can speak from the perspective of those who are currently engaged in the service and have an ‘insider’s’ view of what the role is about the motivations for doing it
- **Ex-On Call Firefighters** - Those who have had reason for leaving the service and may have opinions that are important bear in mind when communicating about benefits or scope of the role (as well as retention issues)
- **Unsuccessful Applicants** - Those who were recently inspired to apply for the role of On Call Fighter and can share what triggered this decision as well as any experiences that may be pertinent to consider in recruitment communications
- **Potential On Call Firefighters** – Those who are the ultimate audience for recruitment communications; men and women in a range of current circumstances (working in a range of current jobs or not working) who are open to taking on a secondary role in public services and are within an appropriate range in terms of fitness level

Each audience was interviewed via face-to-face in-depth interviews. This method was selected as the most appropriate way to cover the objectives of the stage, exploring personal details about: their individual journey, experiences with, expectations from and perceptions of the Fire and Rescue Service and the On Call Firefighter role; personal motivations and factors to consideration of and making decisions on specific career choices; and responses to a range of stimulus material.

Specifically, the one-to-one method allows a substantial amount of time and privacy to explore each individual case. A reasonable number of interviews over a wide range of individuals (in terms of experience, demographic profile and area), who are un influenced by other participants, also allows analysis of factors which are common across a relatively diverse set of individuals, as well as those which are more unique or appear specific to smaller sections of the audience.

In-depth telephone interviews were also undertaken with current and potential supporting employers. Again, this allows appropriate time and space for the interviewee to articulate any views. The method also allows for privacy, which is important to some business respondents who are cautious about sharing policy and practice publicly. The interviews were undertaken by telephone for several reasons: to help encourage recruitment (as these are more flexible and involve less time and effort on the part of the employer); as the interviews were relatively short (requiring discussion of experience or expectations only) and did not require stimulus material.

The original intention was to include both current employers and employers who have rejected supporting On Call Firefighters in this stage, through contacts provided by the Fire and Rescue Services. Unfortunately, but perhaps unsurprisingly, only current supporting employers were willing to take part.

As a substitute for the rejecting employers, potential employers, who were unaware of the role of OCFFs, were included instead. As these represented a range of attitudes in terms of how ‘cold’ or ‘warm’ they were to the idea of supporting On Call Firefighters (both initially and in response to further information about the role), it can be assumed that this sample included some who may well reject support of On Call Firefighters in the future.

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4 See Recruitment Screener in Appendix 2 for detail of questions asked of Potential OCFFs to ensure suitability for the project

5 By contrast to group discussions whereby respondents need to ‘share’ the time available to articulate their own opinions, which may also influenced (in terms of what they are willing to reveal or whether they are willing to appear different to others in the session) by the ‘public’ setting amongst other individuals who they are not familiar with and a desire to conform within the group
Group discussions were used as the main method for interviewing potential OCFFs in Stage 2. This method, which allows for debate and discussion between participants, works well for testing and development of communications ideas (the main focus of Stage 2). By contrast to Stage 1, less privacy and space was required for discussing personal experiences.

However, face-to-face in-depth interviews were retained as the way to interview current and ex-On Call Firefighters. This audience was included in Stage 2 as a ‘sense check’ only (given they are not the recruitment target) so overall sample numbers were deliberately low. Using an in-depth interview methodology, however, meant a relatively wide range of individuals (with each person uninfluenced by others) could be represented across different areas.

Employers in Stage 2 were interviewed via face-to-face in-depth interviews. This was considered the optimum method for a range of reasons: face-to-face is preferable where the respondent is being asked to look at stimulus material; as noted above, individual sessions are preferable when the audience may be cautious about revealing policy, practice and opinion in public; the participating employers were very different from each other in terms of sector and workforce, therefore more time and space is needed to articulate how they see the role and communications of it relate to their specific context.

Table 1 below summarises the sample achieved across the project as a whole, the methods used and the locations represented.

### Table 1: Summary of overall research approach and sample

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Sample (50 respondents):</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 25 individual in-depth (face-to-face) interviews with current OCFFs (16), ex-OCFFs (4) and unsuccessful applicants (5)</td>
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<td>• 13 individual in-depth (face-to-face) interviews with potential OCFFs</td>
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<td>• 12 individual telephone interviews with employers, 7 who have supported OCFFs and 4 potential supporters</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Locations included:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North (Cumbria, Manchester, Yorkshire)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Midlands (Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>East of England (Norfolk)</td>
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<td></td>
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<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Sample (50 respondents):</th>
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<td>• 12 group discussions (4 respondents in each) with potential OCFFs</td>
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<td>• 8 individual in-depth (face-to-face) interviews with current OCFFs (4) and ex-OCFFs (4)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 10 individual in-depth interviews (face-to-face) with potential employers and 1 individual telephone with a current supporting employer</td>
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<td>Presentation of findings and reporting</td>
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6 All individual depth interviews were conducted face-to-face unless specified in the table as telephone
Appendix 1 includes a detailed breakdown of the sample across the two stages and further information on the specific criteria respondents conformed to and represented within the sample.

Recruitment

Potential OCFFs were free-found using an independent field agency, which sourced individuals to reflect a range of locations (representing predominantly rural, significantly rural and predominantly urban areas). See Appendix 2 for Recruitment Screener used by to ensure participants fitted the target definition.

For the current OCFFs, ex-OCFFs and unsuccessful applicants, a number of individuals were put forward by different Fire and Rescue Services as potential participants. A proportion of these nominated individuals were interviewed; those who took part were selected by Define to reflect a range of demographic criteria (e.g. area, gender, length of experience) alongside availability at the time of visiting the area.

General sample limitations

The main value of qualitative research is in providing understanding of the different topics covered in this research through the detailed conversations that highlight the rationale and perceptions of the audience.

The relatively small number of individuals included within this qualitative research project limits the extent to which the findings can be extrapolated to the widest population (for each population group represented). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative samples do not carry statistical significance.

However, a robust strategy was applied to the qualitative sample design of this project. A purposive approach was used to ensure that a wide range of example individuals were included within each audience sub-group. Within qualitative research a theme only needs to appear once to have relevance. However, as dominant themes reported in this research emerged multiple times across different interview sessions, individuals and locations, it can be assumed that these are shared to an extent within the target population.

In line with the above, communications products being developed by the Home Office will draw insight from both this specific project and information and data from other sources available through the Retained Duty System Working Group and FirePRO.

Verbatim quotes from respondents and their attributions

Attributions have been given to verbatim quotes to give a broad indication of respondent type. However, some respondents from both the potential OCFF and employer samples shared similar characteristics (e.g. ‘male’, ‘potential OCFF’, ‘North’); therefore quotes with the same attribution may be drawn from one or more individuals meeting those criteria.

Where details within the quote may have revealed a respondent’s identity, these have been edited to remove or change any potential identifiers and protect identity, without changing the meaning of the quote.

Define research team

The research team from Define included: Joceline Jones, Claire Vernon, Danica Minic, Dulcie Denby-Brewer, Katie Wise, Kirsten Sear, Dawn Riding and Angus Smith.
Acknowledgements

Together with the project team at the Home Office, the research team would like to extend our thanks to the Fire and Rescue Services who helped source participants for the study and contributed to the development of stimulus material used in the project.

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II  Executive Summary

The overarching communication needs of the potential OCFF audience are consistent, with a common overall journey or set of information needs that provides a base from which to consider the communications strategy.

However, a critical issue is a lack of awareness of the OCFF role which highlights an important initial challenge for recruitment communications and a specific consideration for the recruitment communications strategy. Without knowing that OCFF roles exist (and the relatively wide range of people that are suitable) potential OCFFs in any given area are unaware that this additional role may be something of interest to them and are therefore not primed or open to recruitment communications (which are assumed to relate to Whole Time Firefighters).

A name that describes the role in accurate and differentiating terms from Whole Time Fighting would be a short cut to understanding; however, this appears not to exist. As such, within the recruitment communications strategy, there is a specific need to educate the public about what and who OCFFs are and the basics of how the role works. If awareness can be increased, recruitment communications are more likely to reach a wider group of potential OCFFs.

With general awareness-raising being addressed by discrete communications activity, recruitment communications need to focus on the key motivations for joining the FRS.

This research identified four primary and three supporting motivations that apply across the potential OCFF audience.

One motivation – the idea of having occasional access to an exciting and challenging role - stood out as both having impact across a wide audience (men and women, different capabilities, current roles and geographical areas) and helping define the role. It therefore provides a helpful lead message for OCFF recruitment communications.

The other motivators provide additional benefits with wide appeal and can be communicated at a secondary level through messages or images; specific direction for which is detailed in this report. Further information on practical details is also required but is lower priority in the first instance (sought at a second stage of the audience journey) and can therefore be supplied in follow up information provided online or in print.

The overarching communication needs of potential supporting employers also appear consistent, with a common overall journey that provides a base from which to consider the communications strategy for this separate audience.

Again, at the core of the journey is a lack of awareness of the OCFF role (how it works for individuals, supporting employers and FRS) and no existing perception of the value of OCFFs to a local FRS and its community. This highlights two issues and two areas for communications work.

In the current knowledge ‘vacuum’, many employers are reliant on OCFFs themselves passing on information about the role by word of mouth which can lead to both misinformation/misunderstanding and a low appreciation of benefits to the employer. Key facts would therefore ideally be clearly and consistently provided.

An example solution generated within the research was a simple ‘fact sheet’ comprising core messages around benefits to employers and practicalities of how the role works for OCFFs.
and employers. Potential recruits could pass this directly to employers. Online information or the option to call the FRS or a central point of contact could provide further support for those with questions or seeking further detail.

Awareness-raising more generally amongst employers about the role and benefits is also likely to bring returns as this can help create a ‘warmer’ environment for employees who ask, and potentially even proactive promotion of the role when the benefits are understood.

There is a range of ways in which to achieve this, for example face-to-face or published PR opportunities. However, information is likely to need to be pushed since, without any prior knowledge, employers have no reason to proactively seek information out.

In terms of overarching motivations for employers to support OCFFs, this research highlighted three reasons to get involved that had traction across the wide range of employer types and will work as primary messages to encourage support:

- Bringing expertise around fire-safety into the business
- Up-skilling staff (in a range of ways)
- Being a pillar of the community (which offers potential to enhance reputation or deliver corporate social responsibility aims)

However, there are some differences between potential employers in terms of which primary messages are most important to them. Differences reflect patterns by employer ‘demographic’ (nature of workforce, area type). Therefore, depending on area, profile of local business and communications activity, there may also be opportunities for FRS to target communications by matching organisation and potential benefits to them more specifically.

* * * * *
III  Detailed Findings

1.  Potential On Call Firefighters

1.1 Overview of motivations and barriers to considering the OCFF role amongst potential OCFFs

A key objective of this research was to understand what motivates individuals to consider being an On Call Firefighter (OCFF) as well as what might be preventing potential OCFFs from expressing interest in and applying to undertake the On Call Firefighter role. By understanding these, communication content can be developed to reflect motivations and address barriers appropriately.

These motivations and barriers are summarised in sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 below. They are also referenced in the context of messages which work to address them in Section 1.4 and which provide direction for communications content.

1.1.1 Motivations to considering the OCFF role

Current and ex-OCFFs as well as unsuccessful applicants in this sample highlighted two practical triggers to joining the FRS as an OCFF. Many had known someone who is already in the role and has a positive level of job satisfaction, which had facilitated transmission of information about what the role is, how it works and the motivations for and satisfaction from doing it. Some had been keen to be Whole Time Firefighters but had not been able to pursue this through lack of vacancies. Investigation, however, had revealed the OCFF role as an option that they could do “part-time” or as a supplement to another job.

What motivated these current and ex-OCFFs and unsuccessful applicants to pursue the role and apply was very much in line with what potential OCFF respondents reported in this research.

Indeed, for all those with an existing or latent soft interest in firefighting roles, the motivations to become an OCFF are extensive. Almost all individuals within this sample who felt the OCFF role is or might be appropriate for them recognised a relatively large set of reasons why they found the OCFF role appealing.

Individuals can vary in terms of which single motivation is most dominant for them personally; however, their overall range of primary motivations for doing the OCFF role tended to be shared. These include (broadly in order of influence for this sample):

- The potential for excitement and challenge (some of the time)
- The associated status that comes with the role (firefighters are considered a special kind of person for being both sufficiently selfless and physically talented to be able to do the job)
- The potential to really make a difference to someone’s life by saving them from death or rescuing them from harm
- Playing an essential role within a community
- Being part of a team that delivers an important service and achieves valuable outcomes together and has a strong bond

7 Those who are open to undertaking a role within public services in addition to their current job and who show sufficient physical attributes for application to be an option
Having a 'universal' set of primary motivators is helpful in providing direction for recruitment communications content.

The motivation of part-time excitement and challenge is particularly dominant and works well as a lead in for communications; however, other motivations are also valuable to communicate since each provides a (further reason) for becoming an OCFF. Given all motivations have impact, the challenge for recruitment communications is finding ways to communicate each of them without overloading the audience with information. However, responses to stimulus material indicate appropriate imagery can be used to cover multiple motivations. A wide range of messages can also be included in supporting information that potential OCFFs come across once exploring the role a bit further.

Findings also suggest that FRS communications might also be able to adjust the main focus to target some specific audience groups where these are a priority or to reflect the profile of the area. Indeed, women, those with few current qualifications and those in significantly rural areas appear to be drawn more strongly to specific motivators than other audience groups. See Section 1.4.4 for further detail.

1.1.2 Barriers to considering the OCFF role

The barriers to considering the role are also relatively consistent across the potentials audience, irrespective of demographic.

Initial barriers arise from considering firefighter roles generally and the accompanying assumptions about who is eligible or appropriate for this kind of job and the level of vacancies available. Indeed, potential OCFFs over the age of 25 in this sample often reported a belief that firefighting is out of reach as a career.

Specifically, there is a general assumption that firefighters are primarily young men (except for those in management positions), which generates further expectations or beliefs that the career is not open to open to women or to those who are older (e.g. 30+ or even those over 25).

I guess I was thinking it’s something you apply for when you’re young. Late teens, early 20’s ... and after that you don’t really get in [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

Generally, I think of firefighters as young men. I’m mid-40s so probably people younger than myself. I think of myself as not going into something different [Potential OCFF, Female, South East]

There is also widespread assumption that being a firefighter is both a career for life and oversubscribed. This creates an impression that recruitment opportunities are very few and far between.

The fact that they’re asking for firefighters is remarkable. My understanding of the fire service is that there is one position advertised every 10 years or so, and 10,000 people countrywide apply for it, they just don’t recruit anymore [Potential OCFF, Male, North]

I heard it’s one of the hardest services to get into [Potential OCFF, Female, South West]
Specifically, once the potentials audience understand that a much wider range of people can apply, questions relate to how fit an applicant needs to be or whether any existing qualifications are required.

*Do you need any qualifications? [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]*

*You’ve got to be quite bright, I presume [Potential OCFF, Female, South East]*

*What is the criteria – is there an age range, abilities, health, fitness? [Potential OCFF, Female, South East]*

There are also questions about how the role can work alongside another main job. This is very hard to imagine and the assumption is that On Call Firefighters may be needed to cover ‘night shifts’ through the week, which feels onerous and a significant challenge to take on. Specific questions cover things like:

- ‘How many hours will they need to be on call and what does this mean for other aspects of life?’
- ‘What is the likely level of call-outs?’

*My first thoughts were all questions... What’s the pay? What qualifications might I get out of it? How many hours would it be a week? How would that work around what I already do? [Potential OCFF, Male, South West]*

*Is it part time? Is it on the side? I don't feel like fires are really common... [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]*

Importantly, an additional barrier exists which precludes consideration of the OCFF role at all. Within this sample, potential OCFFs who had no current connection with an OCFF (as friend or family) were completely unaware of the role.

*I never knew there was a role like that...you can do part-time.. So fit with your main job? [Potential OCFF, Female, South West]*

They were also unable to guess what the role might entail and how it might work from the name. Indeed, an ‘On Call Firefighter’ was just assumed to be ‘a Whole Time Firefighter who is on call’.

This is a critical barrier to overcome. Without knowledge of the role, the general public (and audience of potential OCFFs within this) will assume that any recruitment communications for OCFF relate to whole time firefighting. While both roles will be relevant to some individuals, who will then find out about OCFFs through application, many others will disregard both the role and recruitment communications as irrelevant to them.

1.2 The overall communications journey for the potential OCFF audience

As the motivations to become an OCFF are clear, these provide a base from which to develop compelling communications to invite application to the FRS. However, the range of barriers above indicates that the overall recruitment communications strategy needs to extend beyond ‘recruiting now’ communications and address other points in the overall audience journey.

Diagram 1 below illustrates the overall journey for potential OCFFs and the five stages that any individual needs to move through to get to the point of application.
Diagram 1: The recruitment communications journey for potential OCFF

Importantly, the diagram shows that the audience is starting from zero awareness and needs to understand what an OCFF is before any of the subsequent considerations become relevant.

Information to answer questions around who the role is relevant to and general feasibility is also essential to convey before any individual can reach a point where they will reflect on whether the role is for them or not and what the next steps to finding out more an applying might be.

1.3 A recruitment communications strategy to address the journey

The length of the communications journey and the steps within it indicate that a recruitment communications strategy needs to include three strands.

Each strand needs separate, discrete communications activities focused on the one of the following aims:

- Help raise awareness of what OCFFs are so that ‘recruiting OCFF now’ communications are understood in the right context and recognised as relevant by the wide potential applicant audience
- Advertise vacancies / that FRS are currently taking applications at points of need
- Set expectations on the scope of the role accurately through the course of the application process

In more detail:

Communications activity to raise awareness of what OCFF are

Awareness-raising communication is required which helps move the potential applicant audience through the first three stages of the journey by helping them understand:

- *What an OCFF is* – That an OCFF is not a Whole Time Firefighter but someone who works as a fully qualified firefighter in an occasional capacity in addition to their full time role or other commitments
- *Who the job is relevant to* - That lots of different types of people are OCFFs representing a wide range of ages, backgrounds and different genders
- *How the role is broadly feasible* – That the level of being on call and frequency of call-outs mean it is manageable as a second role
Primary messages and information should therefore help address these questions. However, given that the ultimate purpose of raising awareness is to help with recruitment, these communications should also look to touch on some of the benefits around the role, and/or questions around application, that will further help with understanding and help build interest.

Given the level of detail needed, channels that offer the opportunity for more explanation and ‘longer form’ messaging lend themselves particularly well to awareness-raising communications.

Within this, information on FRS websites is likely to be useful to help educate people who might be interested in the role. However, unless they are interested in a career as a Whole Time Firefighter they are unlikely to look for information proactively and the issue around awareness will persist.

Obviously it would have to be on the website, but unless you wanted to do it in the first place... [Potential OCFFs, Female, South West]

With this in mind, some ‘push’ communications will also be important. The following channels were suggested or felt to be appropriate when prompted with respondents: PR (e.g. articles, news stories, public engagement exercises), station open days and a ‘fact sheet’ that can be made available in various settings.

Newspaper stories would be quite good because I do read the local paper. If it was not an advert but it was so compelling that someone had saved someone’s life [Potential OCFFs, Female, South West]

Open days are a good chance to have a chat to firefighters and get an honest opinion on what it’s like [Potential OCFF, Male, North]

Feedback from current and ex-OCFFs highlights that is important in any awareness-raising communications to make it clear that OCFFs are comparable to Whole Time Firefighters in terms of skills and capability. There is some sensitivity around being considered inferior (and which is contributing to dissatisfaction) which communication could inadvertently reinforce if appropriate care is not taken.

Timing of awareness-raising communication activity is also a consideration. In order to prime the general public (and potential OCFFs therein) for recruitment opportunities when they arise, awareness-raising activity should be relatively continuous. Specifically, if awareness of the OCFF role is raised outside of recruiting periods, when the need for recruitment arises, the public will be better primed to understand recruitment advertising.

The audience for awareness-raising communications is also broader than potential OCFFs alone. If the wider population understand that the OCFF role exists, they will be able to pass on this knowledge by word of mouth as well as signpost the role to appropriate individuals.

**Communications activity to advertise vacancies**

Clearly, it is important to signal when there are vacancies to fill and a requirement to recruit new OCFFs into the FRS.

To draw potential OCFFs towards the role, it is important to highlight the emotional benefits and features that they find compelling, since these are the reasons why they would consider the role in the first place and will apply to join.

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8 ‘Proactive’ communication that pushes information or messages to a passive audience who are not actively searching for information and therefore need to discover it incidentally
However, as mentioned, this will only work for potential OCFFs if the role is already understood. While awareness-raising communications may have laid the ground for this, until OCFFs are widely known it would be prudent for recruitment communications to err on the side of caution and include some dominant messages that communicate the nature of the role as ‘part-time’ or a ‘second job’.

Communication channels suggested by the target audience as ideal for ‘recruiting now’ communications included: **local advertising** (press, radio, notice boards and other distribution options), **station banners** and **Facebook advertising**.

- *Local newspapers would be good if they’re recruiting locally* [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]
- *If you stick it on BBC Yorkshire you’re bound to get a bit of take-up because then people know it’s here, not nationwide* [Potential OCFF, Male, North]
- *I really believe in adverts on the back of women’s toilet doors. You always read them … You need to direct it at women. As a woman, if I saw that on the back of a toilet door, I’d think “oh, that’s something to think about”* [Potential OCFFs, Female, South West]
- *They could pass out leaflets at school for kids to bring home to their parents* [Potential OCFF, Female, North]
- *They could use community notice boards, I can think of 2 near the fire station* [Potential OCFF, Female, North]
- *Station banners – I drive past everyday on my way home from work* [Potential OCFFs, Female, South East]
- *Facebook because everybody has Facebook...* [Potential OCFFs, Female, South East]

Given the range of questions that arise when the OCFF role is introduced, it is important for ‘recruiting now’ communications to be supported with further information. These additional sources need to cover the detail given by separate awareness-raising communications (the first three stages of the journey) as potential OCFFs may not recall these or want questions clarified once interest is raised.

However, further information is also essential to help set initial expectations accurately around the role, while answering initial questions and providing further detail on what the job entails.

- *You don’t want to waste anyone’s time. You want certain questions about how feasible it’s going to be answered before you go to the station ideally.* [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

Suitable channels for providing this support include: **Local FRS website OCFF pages** (e.g. role information and case studies), **fact sheets** for potential OCFFs and a **helpline or face-to-face opportunities** for asking questions.

- *You can only get so much out of a website; you can’t ask it questions, or you can, but you have to wait a few days* [Ex-OCFF, Male, South East]
- *Fact sheet...Joe Bloggs attended 50 fires last year? He attended 20 road traffic collisions? That’s something for when you’re in your job, those statistics...* [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

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5Organisation of information and appropriate signposting will be key to making sure content is accessible
I’d ring a helpline because I don’t use Facebook [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

Setting expectations during the course of the application process

As noted above, ‘recruiting now’ communications will need to headline the motivations to becoming an OCFF that generate sufficient interest to encourage potential OCFF to take a next step (such as exploring further information about the role or making an application).

However, to support successful recruitment – and to help mitigate issues around retention – it will be important for ongoing communications from each FRS during the recruitment process to continue to convey information and messages about the role that appeal but also to supply important information about how the job works practically and the full scope of the role.

This information may well be available in written form but dialogue will be helpful in helping to set expectations of the role in any individual FRS accurately, improving understanding of the non-firefighting elements of the role as positive\(^\text{10}\) and providing a method by which potential OCFFs can continue to ask questions and gain answers that support their interest in the role.

1.4 Messaging content and direction for the potential OCFF audience

1.4.1 Introduction

A number of messages and images were tested through the course of this research project to understand directions on focus, language and overall content.

In Stage 1, some simple ‘starter’ messages alongside some existing recruitment materials were used as stimulus\(^\text{11}\) to prompt discussion around the OCFF role and start to explore what kind of messaging and information the potential recruitment audience would find compelling and helpful.

New messaging stimulus was developed for testing in Stage 2 based on analysis of both responses to this stimulus and the broader motivations and barriers discussed as influencing interest in the role.

For Stage 2 stimulus, a range of messaging territories (based around core motivational themes), plus other messages to address specific questions and information needs, were put forward by the research team. These suggestions were reviewed and developed further in a workshop involving members of the Home Office strategic communications team and policy colleagues. Outputs from the workshop (updated territories, messages and imagery to use as further stimulus) were then circulated amongst FRS and further Home Office colleagues for additional comments.

Exploration of this stimulus in Stage 2 generated some clear direction around content for communications campaigns – both awareness-raising activity and specific recruitment communications.

These messages are detailed in Sections 1.4.3 and 1.4.5 below.

1.4.2 Learning around messaging content from current and ex-OCFF

Overall, there were some differences between current and ex-OCFFs and potential OCFFs when considering messages.

\(^{10}\) Where these are required/in contract

\(^{11}\) See Appendix 2 for reference
Current and ex-OCFFs were both more likely to mention their role in and contribution to the community as a key motivator to being in the FRS and a point of particular satisfaction. This is in contrast to potential OCFFs who, while often considering this a positive benefit to the role, did not see it as one of their main motivations to join.

This difference appears to be explained by the benefit of experience of hindsight. Despite current and ex-OCFFs feeling this was an important feature of the role to convey in recruitment communications, most tended to confirm that it was other elements of firefighting that had drawn them to the role initially (much in line with the potential OCFF in this sample). With this in mind, priority should be given to potentials’ views in terms of the primary messaging focus recruitment communications.

That said, current and ex-OCFFs also expressed caution about overpromising ‘action’ to potential OCFFs in order to avoid disappointment and a negative impact on retention. However, discussions around this, as well as with potentials, highlighted the need for and importance of the third communications strand mentioned earlier: communications during the recruitment process.

Current and ex-OCFFs felt it was critical to manage expectations on scope and reality of the role during the recruitment process, such as level of call-outs and the amount of work that involves excitement and challenge versus more mundane tasks.

However, potential OCFFs were eager to receive ongoing detail to help them understand how it would work and showed themselves to be open to explanation that lowered expectations around the extent of ‘action’. This was felt to not, in itself, be a problem when the role was understood as ‘part time’ and there is some latent fear around personal safety. Indeed, for many potential OCFF recruits, the idea of gaining the benefits of being a firefighter through a relatively low amount of active service can be seen as a benefit.

1.4.3 Summary of messages for use with potential applicant audience

Table 2 below lists out the messages that were shown within this research to work for the potential applicant audience.

They are organised in terms of the stage of the journey outlined in Section 1.2 above and each messaging theme that sits under each stage.

As mentioned earlier, whether these messages should be used as primary, secondary or tertiary messages depends on the type of communications activity (awareness-raising or ‘recruiting now’):

- For awareness-raising communications a greater emphasis should be placed on messages pertaining to stages that explain the role, who it is relevant to and give an indication of how it is feasible, while touching on the benefits of the role if possible

- For recruitment communications, the main emphasis needs to be on motivations or benefits of the role, touching on other messaging areas where possible

Overall, given the extent of motivations or benefits to communicate, appropriate imagery is likely to be particularly high value, given the potential to convey multiple motivations at the same time.

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12 This caution is in line with other FRS stakeholders
13 Messages included are either as tested or adapted/adjusted to reflect improvements suggested by the research
Table 2: Overall messaging matrix for potential OCFFs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey stage</th>
<th>Key theme/concept to communicate</th>
<th>Example messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What is an OCFF?    | Nature of role as ‘part-time’ and secondary to another job | • A role you can do alongside your life  
• An extra role for you to make a difference to your neighbourhood  
• Do you want a satisfying new role that works around your current life?  |
| Who is the job relevant to? | Relevant to all types  
Specifically, open to:  
• Men and women  
• Range of ages  
• Those with no or few qualifications | • Men and women from all sorts of current jobs and walks of life are OCFF. Anyone with the right qualities can do the role/apply  
• You don’t need any specific qualifications to become an On Call Firefighter, but you will gain loads of new skills  
• You don’t need any specific qualifications to become an On Call Firefighter. The training will give you new skills and qualifications if you want to take them  |
| How does it work / is it feasible? | Broad parameters around level of commitment /impact on life  
Potential for flexibility | • On average, you’ll be called 2-3 times a week for around an hour  
• There is typically some flexibility in sorting out cover when on call  |
| Is it worth it for me (motivations and benefits)? | ‘Part-time excitement’ | • Enjoy an extra challenge alongside your every day job / life  
• On Call Firefighters are needed by Fire and Rescue Services to handle emergency incidents in their area.  
• An active, hands on, practical role that offers you something different than your normal job. We’ll train you and give you the skills to respond to any situations firefighters are needed for.  
• It’s not a full time role but on the occasions when you’re needed it can make all the difference in the world  |
| | ‘Status’ (as “someone who can do the role”) | • On Call Firefighters make a real difference  
• On Call Firefighters are ordinary people who help deal with extraordinary situations  |
| | ‘Value to the community’ | • Responding to emergencies in the neighbourhood  
• Join your local On Call Firefighter team for exceptional training and the chance to help people in your area  |

Note: Imagery can be particularly helpful in conveying relevance to different types/beyond stereotypes.
therefore be used with care. While it is helpful to illustrate scope of the role and should feature in supporting information to make this clear, it should not dominate ‘recruiting now’ communications since for most it is not a primary motivation for becoming an OCFF.

**‘Rescuers from harm’**

- *The Fire and Rescue Service works alongside other emergency services*

Note: The strongest imagery that conveys ‘part time excitement’ above, tends to also convey the rescue aspect of the role (since this is the outcome).

**Training and skills**

- Training includes emergency medical trauma care and first aid, health and safety and risk assessment
- We’ll train you and give you the skills to respond to any situations firefighters are needed for
- We support you all the way: through our training you’ll develop the skills and qualities that help you do this critical job
- Specialist training in rescue techniques and medical emergency means you can make a real difference
- Training as an On Call Firefighter can lead to educational and vocational qualifications
- Training as an On Call Firefighter can help you improve your confidence and leadership skills

**‘Camaraderie’**

- Join our crew
- Train together, work together, save together
- Protect your community/local area together
- Work with like-minded people from your local area

**Pay and benefits**

Note: Specific messages around pay and benefits not tested. However, illustration of example of pay for a certain level of call-outs was useful for both demonstrating level of remuneration and likely call out.

**Can I manage the application process?**

- Availability of guidance and support on requirements
- Invitation to find out more by asking

- *The recruitment process is thorough but you will be supported throughout*
- *The Fire and Rescue Service will help you prepare for the tests with advice on fitness and what to expect*
- *On Call Firefighters are required to maintain good general levels of physical fitness throughout their careers*
- *Find out more a local open day at your local fire station*
- *Questions about application? Go and have a chat with firefighters at your local station*

See Appendix 5 for examples of imagery that work well and less well against these specific messaging themes.


1.4.4 Differences within the potential OCFF audience and opportunities for targeting

As noted earlier in Section 1.1, the messaging needs of potential OCFFs appear relatively universal, with the most dominant primary motivator common to all and other primary and secondary motivators having more or less impact by individual but still appealing across the board.

However, there are some sub-groups within the audience for whom specific themes or messages have particular salience and appeal.

In exploring key differences between segments of the potential OCFF audience, three factors stood out. These reflect subtle rather than significant differences in motivations but nonetheless highlight potential differences in emphasis that might be utilised if targeting recruitment materials towards particular groups or areas.

Women

All respondents in this sample were strongly drawn to the idea of helping with medical emergencies and developing skills in this area, sometimes over and above fighting fires. However, there is some difference in terms of how dominant this was between male and female respondents, indicating this may be a consideration if looking to target women in particular.

While for men in this sample, this feature appears to be of equal appeal to other key elements of the role (fighting fire, using equipment); for women, this element often dominated as the strongest motivation and/or a more obvious fit with their skills and capabilities.

I like that it shows they work with side by side the ambulance and the police service

[Potential OCFF, Female, North]

The tweet brings the importance of the job in there, you’re saving lives

[Potential OCFF, Female, North]

Those with lower level qualifications or without formal qualifications

Those respondents in routine and manual occupations with little by way of formal qualifications were particularly inspired by some features of the role:

– The implicit status that being a firefighter carries (commanding respect and authority through ability to deal with emergency and the perceived bravery and commitment required to do so)
– The potential to access training that provides recognised skills and qualifications from a ‘nil start’

Indeed, for those who lacked current job satisfaction and who felt (in hindsight) that they had underachieved, these features of the OCFF role offered several significant benefits.

Definitely all the training and the communication skills and stuff like that is sort of crying out to me

[Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

I think the fact you can develop your skills is a really good thing and you don’t have to go back to college to get qualifications

[Potential OCFF, Female, South West]

I think a big thing is the skills and training that you’re gonna take with you for the rest of your life

[Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

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\(^{14}\) Example within stimulus material
For these individuals, likely to be in low paid roles, the remuneration was also considered to be a valuable top up to their current wage.

(In response to earning example) That looks alright... would make a difference to me [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

**Those living in more rural areas**

Those respondents from smaller and more rural areas were more likely to recognise and experience a ‘local community’. As such, messages about contributing to this community were seen as more credible and meaningful.

While this tendency was demonstrated more often by current and ex-OCFF in this sample, it was still present amongst potential OCFFs and therefore likely to be relevant to the potential applicant audience.

I like the idea of helping in the community, going into schools to tell them about fire safety, helping old people that appeals to me [Potential OCFF, Male, East of England]

Helping the community is a big thing. Helping the community would definitely draw me to the job [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Our fire ground is quite small ...It’s where my daughter goes to school, where all her friends live. They all know me and when they see us in the truck they wave. That puts a smile on our faces [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

### 1.4.5 Messaging direction for potential OCFFs

This section outlines the needs behind each of the messaging areas detailed in *Diagram 1, The recruitment communications journey for potential OCFF* (page 16) and the messages that work to meet these, summarised in *Table 1, Overall messaging matrix for potential OCFFs* (page 21).

Where relevant, this section also provides insight on why certain messages are less effective or insufficient on their own to meet a communications need.

**Messaging need: ‘What is an OCFF?’**

Given the overall issue of lack of awareness with the OCFF role, and that the name ‘On Call Firefighter’ does not provide a ‘short cut’ to understanding the role, Stage 1 respondents were asked to consider and suggest any possible developments or changes that might provide an alternative solution.

No suitable alternatives emerged from discussion. Examples of alternatives which were either put forward for exploration or suggested by respondents are set out below and were felt to have comparative or more significant weaknesses than On Call Firefighter. For example:

- **On Call Firefighter:** This name was felt to be true but does not distinguish OCFF from Whole Time Firefighters as all are considered to be ‘on call’ when on duty

  They are on call so that’s right ... but so’s any firefighter aren’t they if it’s their shift? [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

- **Duty firefighter:** similarly to ‘on call’, ‘duty’ was felt to simply describe the integral element of covering a shift and therefore not distinguish OCFF from other firefighters
Duty doesn’t really tell you that it’s on call. It doesn’t define what your job is I don’t think
[Unsuccessful OCFF, Female, North]

- **Part-time:** This descriptor was felt to be closest to describing the role but was acknowledged as not indicating that this role is an ‘additional’ job rather than a main job over limited hours

- **Retained firefighter:** The word ‘retained’ lacked meaning to most so they were unclear as to what the role involved.

  *I don’t think retain says you have to go there when you’re called so on call is better* [Potential OCFF, Female, South West]

  *Like, you say retained, does that mean they’re employed, like a sub-contract, sub-letting kind of thing...it sounds to me like if you get a call on your pager, you’ve got to go – but if you’re in full-time work, it’s kind of hard to do that.* [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

- **Reserve firefighter:** The term ‘reserve’ was suggested by some respondents given its use within the armed forces for those who are trained and deployed on occasion, not employed fulltime and more than likely holding another full time role. However, rather than conveying these useful attributes to OCFF role, it was widely disliked for generating negative connotations. Specifically, respondents felt it implied that the role was “not real” or “second rate” in some way.

  *I don’t like reserve firefighter because it doesn’t sound like you’re fully trained and fully there* [Current OCFF, Female, South West]

  *Reserve firefighter – ‘What you just help them out when they’re busy?’ That’s what it sounds like* [Potential OCFF, Male, East of England]

- **Community firefighter:** The term community was also considered problematic. Not helping to define the role as paid part time, it also borrowed negative connotations from PCSOs, positioning OCFFs as “not proper firefighters”.

In light of this, no alternative names were taken forward for discussion in Stage 2. Instead, some specific messages were explored that can act as qualifying lines to the name or can be used (prominently) in recruitment communications to make it clear that the role is not full time.

Messages tested in Stage 2 that worked well in this regard included:

**A role you can do alongside your life**

> ‘Alongside’ is good, it sounds more like something you do alongside your job, like maybe even in working hours rather than having to dedicate every hour there is outside of working hours [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

**An extra role for you to make a difference to your neighbourhood**

> It’s a chance to do something a little different on a part time basis [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

**Do you want a satisfying new role that works around your current life?**
It’s telling you it’s not going to be boring and mundane, it’s going to be different and it is different! The fire service is challenging; a “challenging new role”, I would have put. People are often looking for a challenge, something new [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

**Messaging need: ‘Who is the job relevant to?’**

Overall, two points need to be made clear in terms of relevance of the role. The potential applicant audience needs to understand quickly that the role is relevant to a wide range of types of people (men and women of all ages, not just those who are super-fit or have ‘superhuman’ qualities’) and, for some, who don’t have any qualifications, that no existing qualifications are required.

Messaging needs to specifically address two existing assumptions or expectations that:

- Firefighting roles are applicable to males only
- You can only join the FRS when young

With this in mind, it is essential to illustrate that all types of people can do the role. This information is critical at the point of considering recruitment information and application and therefore needs to be included in specific recruitment information: recruitment advertising, supporting website information and application materials.

However, it is also valuable to get this point of relevance across in broader awareness-raising materials to a wide audience. Doing so will help resolve an initial barrier to consideration that firefighter recruiting communication materials are simply not relevant to anyone other than young males.

Responses to stimulus material used in the research indicate that images are particularly useful in conveying relevance to different people; obvious cues like varying age, gender and size help overcome stereotypes and preconceptions that the role is for fit young males only. However, where the person(s) illustrated are “not me”, this can also work against perceived relevance.

Given that ideal images may not always be available or feasible and/or might exclude some types, specific messages that convey the idea of wide relevance are also useful to include in supporting copy.

However, none of the example messages tested in Stage 2 of the research were felt to work particularly well:

- They come from all walks of life and work experience
- They come from all walks of life, trades and industries
- Office workers, builders, stay at home mums – you name it ...

While each of these messages go some way to explaining a wide range of people they were all criticised in some way as not ideal. Specifically, the first two messages were felt to highlight relevance to non-skilled or manual professions but to overlook/exclude those in more professional roles (and therefore imply that it might not be right for them).

The phrase ‘stay at home mums’ was felt to make the points clearly that the role is relevant to different people than you would expect and that anyone can apply. However, it also raised questions around credibility. As ‘stay at home mums’ tended to be associated with mums of young children, respondents got distracted wondering how being ‘on call’ could work in that scenario or whether it was an “appropriate” career choice for a mum of young children.
‘Walks of life’ was also resisted in the context of the messages above as implying ‘drop outs’. However, part of the issue with this phrase seems to be the relative dominance of it in the tested messages, given respondents suggested retaining it to convey the role is open to those who are currently unemployed.

Indeed, feedback from respondents indicated that a message that might work better is:

Men and women from all sorts of current jobs and walks of life are OCFF. Anyone with the right qualities can do the role/apply.

However, in this example, although ‘walks of life’ is still included it is offset by ‘all sorts of current jobs’ (which was felt to better express range of job type from unskilled to trade to professional) and ‘right qualities’ (which was felt to make a broad assertion about aptitude). In this context, it was felt to convey that the role might be open to someone who is currently unemployed.

As mentioned above and earlier, it was very important for some within the potential applicant audience to understand that no existing qualifications are needed. Those respondents in this sample with fewer/no qualifications currently, tended to assume that many careers are now out of reach, including the FRS.

One message stood out as working well to counter this assumption clearly:

You don’t need any qualifications to become an On Call Firefighter, but you will gain loads of new skills.

However, this tended to set the entry requirements so low that some of those in professional roles felt that it was specifically talking to those without any qualifications and therefore excluded those who were more highly qualified.

Adding the word ‘specific’ was suggested as a solution, helping the message to stretch to cover both ends of the qualification spectrum.

You don’t need any specific qualifications to become an On Call Firefighter, but you will gain loads of new skills.

Those with fewer qualifications currently were also motivated by the idea of being able to gain qualifications on the job. With these points in mind, the following message is likely to be strong too:

You don’t need any specific qualifications to become an On Call Firefighter. The training will give you new skills and qualifications if you want to take them.

That would have been appealing to me because my grades at school, weren’t very good and I was always looking to see if I need qualifications. If I’d seen that it would have made me join [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Messaging need: ‘How does it work / is it feasible?’

Once the audience understands that the OCFF role is part-time in nature, connected to unplanned call-outs, and a second job, key questions arise around feasibility.

You’ve got to make yourself available for all these hours. How does that work practically though? [Potential OCFF, Female, South East]
You’d need to know how it works a bit more, when you’d be on call and what you have to commit to on days and hours and is there any flexibility in that? [Potential, Male, Herts, 2] I think it’s comes down to, it’s for anyone who can make it work around their life [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

Without any indication of how the role really works in terms of level of commitment and call-outs, there is an assumption that it will involve night time shifts/call-outs only. When this ‘night time’ assumption is resolved, it is still hard for potential OCFFs to imagine how the role works and therefore to assess if it’s a possibility for them.

This information is critical at the point of considering application and therefore needs to be included in general website information and application materials.

However, including messages in awareness-raising communications would really help as lack of understanding and recourse to assumptions will prevent investigation of the role in the first place.

The overall messaging requirement is for information that explains or illustrates how it is flexible without overpromising. Therefore, there is also a key role for ongoing communication from the FRS through the course of the recruitment process to set expectations accurately.

Messages which tested well in terms of conveying both the level of commitment and some degree of flexibility, and therefore encourage further exploration, included:

**On average, you’ll be called 2-3 times a week for around an hour**

**There is typically some flexibility in sorting out cover when on call**

Both these messages were felt to be clear and helpful, overcoming initial barriers to consideration that arise in response to queries on how the role works. Although there may be variation by FRS, current staff suggested that flexibility was possible and this helps make the job work for them.

2-3 times for an hour at least gives you a fair idea of what to expect, I know it’s very unpredictable but at least an idea [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

Flexibility is really important, things come up in family life so that's essential for making it possible [Potential OCFF, Male, South West]

The flexibility is good because if I’m busy with my children I can ask someone for cover [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

**Messaging need: ‘Is it worth it for me?’ (motivations and benefits)**

Motivations and benefits messages fall into seven themes as detailed in Table 2 below. Four of these themes are primary motivations and should be conveyed to some extent by all communications (certainly ‘recruiting now’ communications but also awareness-raising communications where the opportunity arises).

Two further themes are secondary and are therefore also important to convey; however, they should not overshadow primary themes as, while they are compelling reasons to join the FRS, they are not strong enough to motivate action for many (unless seen in the context of the primary motivations). As such, these are important to communicate at the next step of exploring ‘recruiting now’ communications, for example, in supporting web information, fact sheets and face-to-face communication from the FRS.
The final benefit theme is tertiary (lower importance) and needs to be addressed in detailed recruitment information (written or face-to-face) only.

Table 3: Motivation and benefits themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>‘Part-time excitement’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Status’ (as “someone who can do the role”)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Value to the community’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘Rescuers from harm’</td>
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<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Training and skills</td>
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<td>Tertiary</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A number of specific messages were tested to convey these themes and many of these messages appear successful, providing options to use when developing communications.

Detailed below is the rationale for why each theme engages potential OCFF as well as example messages which convey this theme effectively. Further detail on imagery, highlighting specific examples that work well and less well in illustrating the themes below can be found in Appendix 5.

Primary motivation: ‘Part-time excitement’

Most potential OCFFs in this sample considered being a On Call Firefighter to be an exciting role, with excitement coming from:
- Responding to emergencies and accidents
- Working under pressure
- Using exciting equipment
- Dealing with the danger of fire

If I said to people I’m an On Call Firefighter, most of them would say to me ‘wow so if you get a call any minute, you’ve got to be there, you’ve got to go do it? Wow, that’s exciting!’ [Potential OCFF, Male, East of England]

I think saving people, the adrenaline and the uniform gets me [Potential OCFF, Female, South West]

Current and ex-OCFFs were also clear that excitement had been a key draw to the role for them and it was an important element to focus on to engage new staff.

I was drawn for the adrenalin rush of it, so different to my daily desk job [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

I can’t say it’s the buzz, because usually you’re going to someone who isn’t very well, but there is that shot of adrenalin when the alerter goes off [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

As mentioned earlier, these current or ex-OCFFs expressed some caution about overpromising the number of high-adrenalin call-outs to ensure potential OCFF were not misled; however, there is potential to set expectations via follow up information and during the enquiry and application stage.

Despite this need to manage expectations, current OCFFs felt that excitement was a powerful benefit to convey in recruitment communications. The responses of potential applications endorse this approach. Aside from finding ‘excitement’ compelling, by comparison to whole time firefighting, the OCFF role is also seen by many as having the benefit of just dipping in to this life, rather than living it full time. With this in mind, they are expecting and open to information that establishes parameters.
Messaging with regards to excitement was tested in Stage 2 in the form of a narrative which, on the whole worked well to convey the role by:

- Connecting excitement to attributes of the job and training that give the potential excitement rather than promise of action
- Helping define the role as additional rather than full-time
- Through the above, indicating that both the role and associated excitement is occasional

**Enjoy an extra challenge alongside your every day job / life**

On Call Firefighters are needed by Fire and Rescue Services to handle emergency incidents in their area\(^1\).

An active, hands on, practical role that offers you something different than your normal job. We’ll train you and give you the skills to respond to any situations firefighters are needed for.

It’s not a full time role but on the occasions when you’re needed it can make all the difference in the world.

Describing the attributes of the role worked well to convey the potential for excitement but also to define the role. Importantly, while these messages together indicated the potential for excitement, they neither over-promise (‘can make a difference’, ‘not a full time role’) nor overplay the success that the On Call Firefighters might deliver.

* I’d be up for the challenge and I’d want to go and prove them I have what it takes [Potential OCFF, Female, South West]

* The positive is that it offers you something different to your normal job; so some people might be bored just sitting around a desk, and then it will make them feel, ‘can I make a difference?’ and put the skills that they probably don’t know they’ve got to work [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

* “Active, hands on, practical role” appeals to me [Potential OCFF, Male, North]

For some, the idea that the firefighting experience was available part-time rather than full-time was a specific benefit of the OCFF role. Indeed, for these individuals, it was seen as offering access to the firefighter life and emotional benefits this would bring but with less chance of downsides (such as being stressed or overwhelmed with the responsibility or negative experiences).

* That added challenge and excitement for me is the most appealing thing they’ve said so far, when you’re young it’s a dream job so to be able to get a little slice of that is great [Potential OCFF, Male, South West]

Reference within the narrative to other supporting benefits (training, skills, making a difference) was felt to further strengthen the job proposition. Specifically, respondents recognised that having the skills to respond in an emergency situation could bring benefit to their personal lives too.

A range of imagery was explored, some of which worked well to convey excitement at the right level.

Imagery that positively supports and conveys part-time excitement touches on the practical firefighter role in different rescue circumstances (whether fire, flood, road traffic accidents or other)

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\(^1\) This line was tested as ‘On Call Firefighters are needed to help Fire and Rescue Services’ however, as there was some indication that ‘help’ indicated that the OCFF was in a supporting rather than full fire fighting role, this was adjusted to ‘On Call Firefighters are needed by Fire and Rescue Services’
and ideally illustrates the impact it has (helping people) and/or the value of training they care about (medical emergency, equipment use).

Examples that worked well within the stimulus material included those which showed: Medical emergency (quite often a ‘new’ consideration for the potential OCFF audience; teamwork (with others per se and with other emergency services specifically); and a positive outcome as the victim has survived and is in care.

I like the idea of being in the middle of it like this, it’s exciting [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

I think it would be really good to see the best and most important part of the job, successfully rescuing and saving people [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

An image which showed rescue from floods and one illustrating rescuing a stuck individual were not as inspirational as a medical emergency, however they were still helpful in conveying other circumstances in which role is essential and people benefit.

Helicopters, boats, saving lives. These draw me in [Potential OCFF, Male, North]

The action shots show you the adrenaline rush you want from a job like this [Potential OCFF, Male, North]

Although from a different sector, respondents particularly liked a past Territorial Army recruitment advert, which was used as part of the stimulus for discussion. They felt there were several things about it that were positive and transferable to firefighting image selection or use. Specifically, the flame is an ‘at a glance’ indication of fire. Secondly, in combination with the line ‘back in the office on Monday’, the image clearly conveys a part-time or occasional element to the experience being shown.

“Back in the office on Monday” appeals to us who work in offices. It shows you the physical job you’re after [Potential OCFF, Male, North]

I like that, it really fits in with the whole something different from your boring office job thing [Potential OCFF, Male, South West]

Imagery showing the kit and equipment use (hose, engine) were felt to contribute to the experience of excitement, support the idea of a hands on, practical role and also convey ‘fire service’ at a glance. Overall, however, these appear to have less pull than those that manage to convey the impact of the firefighter role too.

Maybe just to catch your eye initially though, so it’s recognisable you do need your stereotypical fire truck, fire, uniform [Potential OCFF, Male, South West]

We all know it’s fires so maybe promote the other parts, the positives like team work and the variety of the role that people may be less aware of [Potential OCFF, Male, South West]

Images that supported the idea of excitement but were slightly less helpful were those which reminded potential firefighters of their own vulnerability for example showing extreme heights or ‘Hollywood style’ blazes.

Some example images were also shown to respondents which illustrated fire situations through homes or business scenarios that they might ‘recognise’. However, none of these landed well. Overall, none of the examples contained enough emotional benefit to provide inspiration and drive
interest. However, the relatively low quality of photography within the examples shown is likely to have exacerbated issues with impact and appeal.

**Primary motivation: ‘Status’ (as “someone who can do the role”)**

Potential applicants feel that that the role implicitly carries status which carries through to the individuals that do it. For example, status comes from:

- Firefighters occupying an essential role in a community, since the impact of no FRS provision is potentially catastrophic
- Firefighters putting themselves at risk of the conduct of their duties and are therefore genuinely more selfless and courageous than other individuals, warranting respect
- Firefighters being fit and having a high level of physical prowess (strength)

Although none considered themselves to be overt ‘status-seekers’, the implicit status that the role carries was felt to be a significant benefit. This is because, relatively unusually, status is felt to be a credible by-product that is earned through the features of the role and its delivery.

> *It’s true that they’re a very respected member of the community, I think that respect and the way people view you appeals to a lot of people* [Unsuccessful OCFF, Female, Midlands]

> *They put their lives on the line to save others, such a courageous job to do, it’s so respected* [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

Current and ex-OCFFs were less keen to openly recognise status as a motivation for joining the FRS, with some indications that this reflected negatively on them and made them look ‘self-centred’. However, some did acknowledge that the role does carry respect and that contributes to a positive experience.

The stimulus development workshop following Stage 1 highlighted concerns within the FRS about addressing status too overtly. With this in mind, messaging was developed to focus on the personal qualities that facilitate respect and status rather than overtly addressing this as a benefit.

Overall, responses to the narrative\(^\text{16}\) on this theme (which deliberately looked to suggest attributes that would lead to the conclusion of status rather than refer to it overtly) were positive. Both the narrative and its individual messages were compelling as they were felt to focus the audience on the importance of the role rather than over-celebrating individuals. However, the narrative was less helpful overall than the ‘excitement’ variant above in explaining the role in terms of what it means practically.

As such, it is not suggested as an overall angle for development. However, particular messages from the narrative that work well to remind of the positive status of firefighters implicitly and should be retained for use include:

**On Call Firefighters make a real difference**

‘Make a real difference’ was felt to be a powerful phrase, implying both potential impact on others and the positive aptitude of person.

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\(^{16}\) Narrative as tested: **On Call Firefighters make a real difference.** They respond at any time where rescue is needed. We ask for the right attitude. But we support you all the way: through our training you’ll develop the skills and qualities that help you do this critical job. **On Call Firefighters are ordinary people who help deal with extraordinary situations.**
People do jobs to make a difference, so I think talking about that piques my interest. [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

On Call Firefighters are ordinary people who help deal with extraordinary situations

This message was felt to imply that the role is open to anyone who has a combination of ‘the right stuff’ and right training.

It doesn't matter what your qualifications are, they're looking for personal qualities [Potential OCFF, Male, North]

The language stood out, critical, extraordinary, really short, sharp and punchy... geeing me up to want to do it! [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

Not every Tom, Dick and Harry can turn up and do this [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

Some of the imagery explored with respondents was also felt to help remind about the positive status (rather than communicate it specifically) which was felt to be an appropriate and positive approach. However, other images were felt to inadvertently ‘cross a line’ by communicating it too explicitly. It should be noted that status is unlikely to have been the intention behind either of the images that were used as examples, but it is interesting to the ways in which they either subtly reinforce or accidentally undermine on this dimension.

Primary motivation: ‘Value to the community’

Many potential OCFFs were drawn to the idea of community in two slightly different ways:

- Genuinely contributing and being central to its survival, i.e. having a particular, identified role in it
- And, to some extent, being recognised for this (although most wanted external recognition to be low key rather than overt)

It’s really helping people and providing something for your community because we’re going away from a sense of community now, you need this to keep it going. [Potential OCFF, Male, East of England]

However, discussion at the end of Stage 1 highlighted some caution around use of the word ‘community’ as, while it’s common language, not everyone identifies with community in their area and it is also seen a relatively political term. With these cautionary points in mind, messaging developed for Stage 2 looked to shift the essence of a narrative on this benefit of the role towards ‘local’ rather than ‘community’.

Overall, the narrative developed to headline benefits of the role with regards to community did not strongly engage respondents. While some specific messages within it had some value, value to the local community seems to lack traction as the main entry point to the role. Specifically, respondents felt it took away from the more exciting aspects of the job and, in this way, made it something less than what they wanted or expected.

It’s pretty boring, firefighters are heroes, this isn’t singing their praises enough to sell it [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

17 Tested narrative: On Call Firefighters are at the heart of the community. Responding to emergencies in the neighbourhood, On Call Firefighters rescue people from harm – fires, road traffic accidents and other incidents. They also help prevent fires happening in the first place by giving fire safety advice and support to local people at community events. Every local area needs their skills from time to time. Join your local On Call Firefighter team for exceptional training and the chance to help people in your area.
This takes the excitement away for me [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

The ‘heart of the community’ thing just makes it sound like a social project rather than fire fighting. There wasn’t much fire fighting mentioned in these [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Makes me think I’d get all the crap jobs! Going to schools and the elderly, washing the truck rather than actually helping [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

The messages about local impact that stood out as having some value and are therefore worth retaining at a secondary level included, those which stressed that the impact of doing the job would be on the doorstep:

Responding to emergencies in the neighbourhood

Join your local On Call Firefighter team for exceptional training and the chance to help people in your area

If you’ve lived in an area for a while, it would mean a lot to save those local people wouldn’t it, they could be friends, neighbours, when you have a connection to the place you live [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

It looks interesting, a very varied job, all sorts, helping people, you’d get some good skills out of it too, ideal if you care about helping people [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

Images relating to the community element of the role (versus firefighting within the community) were of relatively low appeal and could also be polarising.

While most potential OCFFs claimed to not mind this side of the job, recognising the activities as important and a natural extension to the firefighter role, it is not what they are looking for as a contrast to their day job or home life. As such, it was felt that if these images dominated, the role would look far less appealing. Rather, they should be shown but at a secondary level.

I think community is good to show, it looks hugely rewarding, more investment, more time with people getting thanked and told well done for your work [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

Furthermore, for all, these ‘preventative’ images also diminished sense of urgency for recruitment.

For all these reasons, images illustrating the community aspects of the role should not dominate recruitment advertising. Rather, the full scope of role (to include community work) should be introduced at the next stage of exploration (e.g. in supporting material, and well explained during the recruitment process).

The one helping the elderly – I’m a bit like “I don’t know how to use a drill. [Potential OCFFs, Female, South West]

Putting up smoke alarms is a bit boring isn’t it.. it’s something I’d do in my own house [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

This could almost be a separate role from the firefighters, it’s totally different [Potential OCFF, Female, North]
In terms of detail, for some, images that showed speaking to groups were specifically off-putting to those who considered this a personal weakness.

*I'm not very good at public speaking so that would put me off, but that's just me personally.* [Potential OCFFs, Female, South West]

The example giving an overt call to be the ‘heart of community’ was also fairly strongly disliked. Touching on status (see earlier) this was felt to be arrogant in overall tone and focus yet childish in execution.

*A grown man isn’t going to be interested in that. The community focus is good but not done like that* [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

**Primary motivation: ‘Rescuers from harm’**

A highly appealing element of the OCFF role relates to the protection of others, with regards to both:
- Rescuing people from harm
- Keeping people safe through prevention and damage limitation

While this is a feature of other emergency services, the FRS stands positively apart from many other uniformed services as:
- For firefighters, the circumstances for taking action are always considered valid (by contrast to the army or the police where people may take issue with the objective or rationale for action)
- ‘Success’ from taking action is the highest return imaginable, for example, stopping someone from dying
- The, risk of ‘failure’ is seen to be quite low but also excusable as firefighters have to work within the constraints of the situation as well as their constraints of skill and there will be many variables beyond their control

Feedback from the stimulus workshop after Stage 1 highlighted that with regards to the firefighter role, ‘rescuing’ is more accurate than ‘protection’. A narrative was therefore developed to reflect this focus.

While intending to focus on the key elements of rescue and protection, the tested narrative\(^\text{18}\) raised some sensitivity around ‘over-blowing’ importance and was generally disliked.

*This feels less about the people and the community and more about being a macho man* [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

However, one individual message within the narrative about the connections between the FRS with other emergency services had value and is worth retaining to explain role. Indeed, many potentials were enthused by the idea of working alongside other emergency services; as this added to both the sense of teamwork and the overall sense of urgency/importance.

The Fire and Rescue Service works alongside other emergency services.

Imagery that was felt to positively support and convey part-time excitement touches on the *practical firefighter role* in different rescue circumstances (whether fire, flood, road traffic accidents or other)

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\(^{18}\) Narrative as tested: **Help rescue people from harm.** The Fire and Rescue Service works alongside other emergency services. When fires, road traffic accidents and other incidents strike, On Call Firefighters help people by keeping harm and damage to a minimum. Specialist training in rescue techniques and medical emergency means you can make a real difference. You can also help prevent fires happening in the first place by helping to educate local residents on fire prevention and safety
and ideally illustrates the impact it has (helping people) and/or the value of training they care about (medical emergency, equipment use).

The tweet example was particularly well received and may have potential as a tactical device in a campaign. It is noted here as the main theme is about rescue but the content spans a range of other motivations. The story implicit within the tweet supported various important motivations: rescuing, providing medical care (new news in terms of a skill for many), status (as the incident warranted great respect and was suitably low key as the ‘hero’ of the situation is unknown and unnamed) and to some extent challenge or excitement in dealing with an emergency.

The tweet brings the importance of the job in there, you're saving lives [Potential OCFF, Female, North]

I like the tweet, it shows the rewarding side, saving lives and keeping families happy [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

However, what worked particularly well was the genuine display of gratitude and evidence of rescue from someone who had benefitted, since this was the ultimate goal that potential OCFF wanted to achieve. Hearing this from a third party also reduced concerns that celebrating any of these aspects of the role by firefighters themselves might be perceived as bragging.

Images showing rescue from flood and animals were relatively helpful but not ideal. The flood image was confused with the RNLI. Animals also tended to polarise the audience. For some, it was a reminder of the variety of ways in which to help people and emotional attachment to pets. For others, the image diminished the value of the role or raised stereotypical images of cats stuck up trees, etc.

The one on the boat too, floods, that's another thing to show variety [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

How rewarding it would be if that was you... there aren't many things you get thanked for these days [Potential OCFFs, Female, South West]

Secondary motivation: Training and Development

Training and development is ‘new news’ to potentials and considered a high value benefit. This is especially the case with training for dealing with medical emergencies, which appeals to all. However, for some, the idea of gaining qualifications and skills is also compelling. Potential applicants see a direct benefit to themselves in gaining these skills. Medical emergency skills might enable them to help family and friends as well as the public. Awareness of these skills also contributes to positive perceptions of status.

For those with fewer qualifications currently, the opportunity to gain formal qualifications now can facilitate the personal development that they wish they had obtained previously.

Despite being ‘new news’, messages around training and development are not a lead angle for recruitment communications since many are already in current employment and it’s not necessarily something they are looking for in the first instance. However, it is considered a significant reward once recognised and is a real reason to consider the OCFF role; therefore it should stand out as clearly as possible in any information (recruitment or awareness-raising).

Overall, messages are needed that convey the scope of skills qualifications acquired through OCFF training in compelling terms.

19 Tweet example can be found in both Appendix 4 and 5
The specialist medical training is important to tell people in case they are doubting themselves as to whether they’d know what to do in an emergency. [Potential OCFF, Male, North]

A message that was particularly high value to respondents was the following:

Training includes emergency medical trauma care and first aid, health and safety and risk assessment.

Training to handle emergency medical trauma care was felt to be a significant benefit to joining the FRS lending both self-esteem and personal value.

I think a big thing is the skills and training that you're gonna take with you for the rest of your life, is quite a major thing [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

I was really interested in all the new skills you learn, doing something so different from my career in [xxx] was exciting, learning so many new things, was a challenge...and the training is very high level [Current OCFF, Male, North]

It's good to say about the first aid, trauma care and risk assessment training because it's an important part of it [Current OCFF, Female, North]

Additional messages about training that work well included those that implied a supportive culture alongside high value training. The idea of support for an important job is compelling and encouraging as it makes it feel more doable/within reach:

We'll train you and give you the skills to respond to any situations firefighters are needed for.

We support you all the way: through our training you'll develop the skills and qualities that help you do this critical job

Messages were also liked that connect training and skills to specific outcomes – whether this is success in the role of formal qualifications, although the latter has more impact for those without many qualifications currently.

Specialist training in rescue techniques and medical emergency means you can make a real difference

Training as an On Call Firefighter can lead to educational and vocational qualifications

Training as an On Call Firefighter can help you improve your confidence and leadership skills

Indeed the second two messages have value but only to certain sections of the potentials audience and even for these, these benefits are a nice to have rather than a primary reason to join. Therefore, they are worth communicating but at a secondary level in website, verbal and supporting recruitment material.

These ones are better because they’re telling you a bit about what they do, and all that, like the training, and obviously this one’s good because no financial costs, all things like that,

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20 This message is a development of the tested version ‘Training includes emergency first aid, medical trauma care, risk assessment and health and safety’. Changes were made as the most compelling benefit (medical trauma) was felt to get lost/diluted in the order
because that could worry people if they have to pay to do the training and things like that [Potential OCFF, Female, East of England]

World-class training will get you ready for immediate service

The above message was particularly liked by current OCFF as it validates their value and skills.

That’s a big one, world class training, it sounds top notch and immediate service, you haven’t got to go away to uni, you do your training and get straight on the job [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

However, this message does not stand alone well for potential OCFF as training needs to be qualified for ‘world class’ to have meaning. Immediate service can also be slightly overwhelming for any potentials who feeling familiarisation with the role is as critical as ‘skilling up’.

Secondary motivation: Camaraderie

Many current and ex-OCFFs talked about the camaraderie in their FRS team being a key part of role satisfaction. This benefit also appeals strongly to potentials and provides another reason to consider the role and think ‘it’s right for me’.

The camaraderie is great, I never thought there would be such a social side to it [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

We all know it’s fires so maybe promote the other parts, the positives like team work and the variety of the role that people may be less aware of [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

However, despite this overall appeal, it is not a driving reason to join. Indeed, example images or recruitment materials that were considered to address this explicitly were often rejected as cheesy and trying too hard.

Rather it is a secondary benefit that should cut through from recruitment communications (advertising or supporting information) at a secondary level and without dominating. It is also less appropriate as a focus for wider awareness-raising unless observed (e.g. In station open days).

Overall, camaraderie is potentially easier to show via images than mention explicitly; however, some messages did work for potentials and provide options for communications going forwards:

Join our crew

Train together, work together, save together

Protect your community/local area together

Work with like-minded people from your local area

Indeed, while none of the messages below were felt to be an overwhelming drawn to the role, none were rejected and all worked to get across the idea of a close team, especially if alongside a supporting image.

Current and ex-OCFFs also feel that messages and imagery conveying this aspect of the FRS is a positive reflection of the service and good for morale when seen.
You would become like a family wouldn’t you, it’s different that in the office or whatever, you train together and do this role, and you have similar interests and values wanting to do that job [Potential OCFF, Male, East of England]

Basically, you’re getting new siblings. You train together in the gym, work as part of a team and keep each other safe. Training is fun. Working means you get something done and saving is the outcome. It’s the whole point of i. [Potential OCFF, Female, South West]

It says you’re going to be training together to help save people; it’s in the community; you’re going to be like-minded with the same type of desire really [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Images can be powerful in conveying camaraderie especially if people shown feel real to the audience, rather than actors. Images that were liked variously gave an overall impression of being invitational and were felt to show a genuine and happy team. Naturally happy faces were felt to show enjoyment and positive interaction, both of which were compelling.

It looks fun to work as a team... That one works because she looks happy, and it’s like they’re working together [Potential OCFF, Female, East of England]

Tertiary motivation: Pay and Benefits

Pay and benefits, and messages around these, were not a key area of exploration in this research.

However, pay and benefits do not appear to be a critical consideration. Some in the potential applicant audience see the additional OCFF role as an almost voluntary role; however, they are happy to be reimbursed for their commitment.

I saw it was a couple of grand of something a year but that doesn’t come into it. I don’t need to earn more money so that wouldn’t come into it; I’d do it to help people [Potential OCFF, Male, South West]

The pay would be a bonus really [Potential OCFF, Male, East of England]

That said, others in the audience who are currently on low incomes see the pay and benefits as useful potential top up to their current earnings. In these cases, information around pay and benefits is more interesting.

This wouldn’t put me off, I’d look into that, the hourly rate is pretty good actually so if you’re doing this as your second job it would top it up [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

It’s not going to make you rich is it?! [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]

That looks alright... would make a difference to me [Potential OCFF, Male, South East]

However, even amongst those for whom pay and benefits information has more impact, this only becomes critical at the point of considering application and therefore needs to be included in application materials/job specification only. There appears to be no requirement for messages around pay and benefits in ‘recruiting now’ or awareness-raising communications activities.

I think it should be made clear that it’s paid but it should be left to the person interested to ask that question [Current OCFF, Female, Midlands]

The stimulus used to illustrate pay and benefits is not recommended as messaging. However, it is included below for reference (Diagram 2) and it is worth noting that responses to it were generally
positive. Specifically, respondents found it helpful in conveying the broad pay structure and amount, as well as an example of what the take home pay might be.

**Diagram 2: Stimulus material to illustrate pay and benefits of the OCFF role**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual retainer &amp; Additional payments</th>
<th>On Call 120 hours per week</th>
<th>On call 60 hours per week</th>
<th>Hourly Rate</th>
<th>Disturbance payment per call-out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainee fire-fighter</td>
<td>£2,224</td>
<td>£1,112</td>
<td>£10.15</td>
<td>£3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development fire-fighter</td>
<td>£2,316</td>
<td>£1,158</td>
<td>£10.58</td>
<td>£3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent fire-fighter</td>
<td>£2,964</td>
<td>£1,482</td>
<td>£13.53</td>
<td>£3.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: 120 hours a week (full annual retainer)
As a competent firefighter, Mike gets an annual retainer of £2,964. He’s on call 515 hours a month and last month got called out 5 times, for 2-3 hours each time, meaning he earns an additional £181.80 for the 12 hours he worked.

Example: 60 hours a week (day crewing retainer)
Sarah is a development firefighter on call for 60 hours a week. She receives an annual retainer of £1,158 for being on call for 257 hours a week. Last month, she was called out 4 times, for one hour each time, meaning her additional pay was £57.92 for 4 hours worked.

**Messaging need: ‘Can I manage the application process?’**

Across the sample there was a general expectation that the application process for firefighting roles is tough. Recruitment information can also make the application process seem daunting and put off those with lower confidence from trying.

With this in mind, information to help potential OCFFs understand the application process as accessible and the availability of support is critical at the point of considering application. This therefore needs to be included in general website information and application materials.

However, there is also a role for some messages in awareness-raising communications to help reduce barriers at this early point that might prevent further investigation.

The overall need is for messages that help position the application process in terms that make process seem accessible to all. The potential OCFF audience is realistic about the recruitment process needing to be challenging; however, the idea that support from the FRS is available for understanding both what is required, and how to achieve it, has an impact for some on whether or not they will explore further.

The messages below were well received for being honest about a need for fitness, explicitly addressing the idea that support is available but also giving and direct invitation to ask for more information from the FRS.

**The recruitment process is thorough but you will be supported throughout.**

**The Fire and Rescue Service will help you prepare for the tests with advice on fitness and what to expect**

**Find out more a local open day at your local fire station**

*It’s thorough so you’re going to have a few stages of getting in, but they’ll support you [Potential OCFF, Female, North]*
Local open days would be good, informal chat, going along to see what it’s all about [Potential OCFF, Male, South West]

For some with lower confidence or more concerns around personal suitability, the invitation to ask at the local fire station was insufficient on its own and needed to be accompanied by a message relating to support (which legitimised the idea that they could consider the role, even though they do not fit the stereotype).

The message below about the need for ongoing fitness was generally liked for being upfront about needing to make a long term commitment to fitness without being overwhelming. Indeed, some potential OCFFs saw the requirement to remain fit for the job as a long term benefit:

**On Call Firefighters are required to maintain good general levels of physical fitness throughout their careers**

The message below was a less successful example of inviting potential OCFFs to find out more by speaking to current firefighters. However, the issue is with the construction of the message and the words used rather than the sentiment. The word ‘worried’ was resisted as, while it reflects the reality of what people might be feeling, it draws attention to a negative experience they would want to avoid.

**Worried about application? Go and have a chat with firefighters at your local station.**

*Maybe use a different word than “worried”. The door’s always open and once you get someone through the door, they’re so much more likely to get a feel for what it is and they’re more likely to apply [Current OCFF, Female, Midlands]*

As such, the following was suggested as an alternative:

**Questions about application? Go and have a chat with firefighters at your local station.**

The following message is also a useful example of when language used in recruitment and application materials is insufficiently audience-friendly. This message really did not work for respondents who found it:

- Hard to understand - specifically the technical terms and the last phrase which lacked meaning with more context about the role
- Positioned the FRS as for technical types or those with high level expertise in fitness which can be off-putting

**The key fitness components for fire fighting are aerobic (long-term) endurance, muscular strength, muscular (short-term) endurance and flexibility. Optimum physical fitness for firefighters translates into being able to carry out fire fighting activities successfully and without undue fatigue.**

*Far too wordy, it’s totally overwhelming, I think you need to be fit and have muscular strength but I don’t think many people would feel they could meet this criteria, when in actual fact maybe they could [Potential OCFFs, Male, South West]*
2. Potential supporting employers

2.1 Overview of motivations and barriers to considering supporting OCFFs amongst potential supporting employers

As with potential OCFFs, a key objective of this research was to understand what motivates employers to consider supporting an On Call Firefighter as well as might be preventing them from doing so. By understanding these, communication content for employers can be developed to reflect motivations and address barriers appropriately.

These motivations and barriers are summarised in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 below. They are also discussed in the context of messages which work to address them, and therefore provide direction for communications content, in Section 2.4 below.

2.1.2 Barriers to considering supporting OCFF

As with potential OCFFs, a key barrier to supporting OCFF is a complete lack of awareness and understanding of both what OCFFs are and the potential benefits that supporting OCFFs might bring.

Like potential OCFFs, employers who have never heard of the role are starting from ‘zero’ awareness and are unable to deduce from the name ‘On Call Firefighter’ what the role entails. As a result, they can jump to different conclusions about what it might mean for their business. Many assume it is a voluntary role and so, in effect, by supporting On Call Firefighters they are being asked to subsidise the local Fire and Rescue Service. Whether this assumption is considered positively or not, depends very much on the individual and business.

Some current and ex-OCFFs reported not having any explanatory information to pass on to their employers, which had made the process of getting support somewhat harder. They did not always feel equipped to explain it in helpful terms and/or to justify the request for support.

Without specific information, employers find it hard to spontaneously recognise benefits to their own business from supporting an On Call Firefighter. Indeed, when they understand the basic premise of the role (the need to release staff at short notice for call-outs and potentially for training), they are more likely to see drawbacks which can act as barriers to support. Concerns arise around the impact on productivity, availability of cover during call-outs, negative impact on other staff and the associated ‘costs’ that any of these might bring, such as paying for more staff to ensure cover or manpower is available, staff dissatisfaction, and so on.

With this in mind, there is a clear requirement for information that explains the role in terms of its scope, practicalities and the responsibility of OCFFs and employers in a consistent and accessible way. However, information also needs to introduce specific benefits to the employer to help offset any concerns that this information might raise.

2.1.2 Motivations to supporting OCFF

When presented with ideas for what these benefits might be, some employers do recognise these as credible and potentially even quite valuable.
Discussion with current supporters, and responses of potential supporters to messaging stimulus outlining potential benefits for employers, highlighted the following as valid reasons to support OCFFs. As such, these should form the basis of any messaging on benefits directed at employers:

- Bringing expertise around fire-safety into the business
- Up-skilling staff (in a range of ways)
- Being a pillar of the community, which offers potential to enhance reputation or deliver corporate social responsibility aims
- Helping facilitate a local FRS that can directly benefit the business and its employees
- Offering a way of demonstrating positive company values
- Providing a means of boosting staff satisfaction (and therefore helping with retention of own staff)

Messages that tested well to convey these benefits are detailed below in Section 2.4.

2.2 The overall communications journey for the potential supporting employers audience

Diagram 3 below illustrates the overall journey for potential employers and the three stages that they need to move through to get to the point of support.

Diagram 3: The recruitment communications journey for potential supporting employers

Overall, the employer journey is about navigating and addressing the barriers that currently impact on consideration of supporting an employee as an OCFF. Information that meets the needs of each stage is essential to allow consideration. For example, information about benefits alone cannot be credible/believed unless detail is given around what an OCFF is and how the role works. Similarly, information about the practicalities of the role alone is unlikely to be persuasive and needs to be delivered alongside an idea of what the benefits are to employers.

2.3 A recruitment communications strategy to address the employer journey

Overall, the journey for employers is less complex than for potential OCFF so the strategy required to address their needs is simpler too.

To support recruitment drives, we have identified a need for two sources of information aimed at employers:

- **A one pager with key facts about the role**: This would support potential OCFFs in gaining support and offers potential for some tailoring depending on the business. Professional and
official information from the FRS is considered validation of both the employee request and the importance of the role.

One page of key facts - that could be useful. A hotline for questions [Potential Supporter, SME, Estate Agent]

- **Information on websites with content directed at employers**: This would act as a source for employers to seek further information if they require it. A valuable add-on would be a facility to ask questions or chat in the event of specific queries not answered by general content.

  I’d Google it straight away and look for information on the website about how it works, but if the fire service were here—I’d have someone who could answer my blunt questions and I wouldn’t just hear the nice bits [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

  A website would be useful if it had all the facts ... [and] I would certainly use a helpline if someone approached me to ask how to support them as a company and what the company has to do [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

These information channels were either spontaneously mentioned by employers or agreed with when suggested. Current and ex-OCFFs also mentioned that the existence of communications to hand directly to employers would have helped with their own recruitment process.

While **more general awareness-raising communications activity** is not essential for employers (as it is for potential OCFFs), there are indications that this may have value if opportunities for this are available. If the role and its benefits to businesses are more widely understood and considered to be a real gain, there is a possibility that companies might actively promote support and recruitment opportunities within their company.

‘Always on’ or occasional awareness-raising activity may therefore be helpful via channels such as PR in local press and business/trade communications, both of which were suggested as appropriate channels for reaching employers.

For both supporting information supplied on websites and awareness-raising activity, employer were particularly interested in case studies that showcased and illustrated how the role works and the returns to the employer.

  Good for showing how people do manage to combine their roles, I guess that’s reassuring to hear how others are doing it, helps you to understand how it all works [Potential Supporter, Micro, Retail]

### 2.4 Messaging content and direction for the potential supporting employers audience

#### 2.4.1 Introduction

A number of messages and images were tested within Stage 2 of this research project to understand directions on focus, language and overall content.

Messaging stimulus was developed based on analysis of discussion in Stage 1 about experiences of employers who were currently supporting OCFFs and some potential employers who had not yet considered this. The stimulus therefore considered key questions posed by potential supporting employers and benefits either reported by existing supporters or which are theoretically available.
Four narratives were developed to test the relative strength of different lead benefits as well as different ways of expressing these. Some further individual messages were also developed to communicate aspects such as:

- What an OCFF is
- How the role works practically
- Other secondary benefits

2.4.2 Summary of messages for use with potential supporting employers

Table 4 below lists out the messages that were shown within this research to work for the potential supporting employer audience. These are organised in terms of the stage of the journey outlined in Section 2.2 above and any messaging theme that sits under each stage.

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21 Messages included are either as tested or adapted/adjusted to reflect improvements suggested by the research
### Table 4: Overall messaging matrix for potential supporting employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey stage</th>
<th>Key theme/concept to communicate</th>
<th>Example messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What is an OCFF? | Nature of role as ‘part-time’ and secondary to another job | • A valuable second role employees can do alongside their main job  
• On Call Firefighters are paid – there is an annual retainer for the hours they are on call and an hourly rate for the time they are on call-outs |
| How does it work / is it feasible? | Broad parameters around level of commitment/impact on business  
Potential for flexibility | • On average, you’ll be called 2-3 times a week for around an hour  
• There is typically some flexibility in sorting out cover when on call  
• Training can take place out of work hours e.g. Weekends, evenings, in leave  
• Sufficient notice for training days is given to allow for leave or cover to be planned |
| Is it worth it for my business (benefits)? | ‘Supporting your local community’  
‘A firefighter for your business’  
‘Develop your staff’ | • Every On Call Firefighter makes a difference to your local community  
• On Call Firefighters are essential to save lives  
• Supporting your staff to be On Call Firefighters contributes to keeping the local community safe.  
• Bringing expertise and practical skills into your business  
• On Call Firefighters receive exceptional quality training in a range of areas including emergency first aid, medical trauma care, risk assessment and health and safety  
• They can share and apply their expertise and knowledge within their workplace - conducting internal training or taking on specialist roles to increase company resilience  
• A small time out of the business can bring large gains for your business.  
• Develop your staff with new skills and capabilities  
• Training and experience gives On Call Firefighters wide-ranging skills: problem-solving, teamwork, communication skills.  
• A small time out of the business can bring large gains for your business.  
• Your staff will come back with many new skills and above all confidence and a team ethos. |
| Staff motivation and satisfaction | | • Motivate your employees by supporting them in a secondary role  
• Improve loyalty and retention by supporting them as OCFF  
• Demonstrate your company values by enabling staff to achieve their personal goals |
| Corporate social responsibility | | • Supporting On Call Firefighters is corporate social responsibility with returns to your community |
As mentioned earlier, all employer communications need to draw messages that meet audience needs across the three stages and therefore need to convey both the practical information and some or all of the benefits outlined in this table.

The breadth of benefits communicated will depend on the type of activity and channel. However, as detailed below, there is some potential for targeting depending on the type of business, as specific benefits can have varying relevance or priority depending on the nature of the business and its location.

Indeed, while supporting information provided on a website should look to address all benefits and cover the potential interests of any type of employer, fact sheets or PR activity could look to communicate all benefits (to appeal to the widest audience) or be tailored to meet a more specific need, depending on needs at the time.

2.4.3 Differences within the potential supporting employer audience and opportunities for targeting

In this research, responses to the different narratives, each of which highlighted a specific benefit theme, indicated that businesses vary in terms of which benefits have most value to them.

This preference was reflected in certain characteristics about the business, indicating that a broad typology of businesses exists which can be used to consider which benefit might be most useful to headline if there is an opportunity to tailor or target communications to a business/businesses in a local area.

Locally run/owned customer facing businesses were particularly drawn to the benefits that would help raise their profile or enhance their standing in the community. They felt that supporting OCFF would say something positive about their own values and understanding of the local area. Examples of businesses in this sample falling into this type included:

- Local Hotel (chain)
- Local Estate Agent (chain)
- Local Cleaning Supplier
- Local Civil Engineers

Supporting the local community is good and if there was some positive PR then that makes it attractive. [Potential Supporter, SME, Cleaning Supplier]

To tell the truth, we would use the information that we employ On Call Firefighters to advertise ourselves. [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

If we did have a retained firefighter then that would be a bit of a PR coup for us. [Potential Supporter, SME, Estate Agent]

Businesses with employees in specialist roles were particularly drawn to the idea of practical skills that would benefit the business and help save money. Examples of businesses in this sample falling into this type included:

- Manufacturing company
- Construction company
- Education
- Furniture manufacturing
- IT development
This is appropriate for industry, the benefit to the business is clearer, getting hard skills we can use to increase resilience [Current Supporter, Large, Furniture Manufacturing]

Health & safety and first aid. We’ve had accidents on site, there’s always potential it could be needed. It would be an advantage to have someone trained so well [Potential Supporter, Potential Supporter, SME, Construction]

Interchangeable skills, utilising them as a business, leading in projects, health & safety, risk assessment, knowing what to do in an emergency [Potential Supporter, SME, Manufacturing]

Businesses with lower skilled employees were particularly drawn to the idea of being able to develop the skills of their staff at low cost, as this would benefit them directly as well as help motivate staff in relatively low satisfaction jobs. Examples of businesses in this sample falling into this type included:

- Restaurant (chain)
- Retailer
- Wholesalers

We need good skills to deal with customers I can see how this would develop them - communication skills, reliable, teamwork very useful to us [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

I think the level of training and the discipline that these people must have would be a very good example within an organisation, I would like to think that they have qualities that would be very good to have in your business [Potential Supporter, Micro, Retail]

However, while there is variance in terms of what might be primary, key benefits also work as secondary or tertiary drivers so can be combined in communications.

2.4.4 Messaging direction for potential supporting employers

This section outlines the needs behind each of the messaging areas detailed in Diagram 3, The recruitment communications journey for potential supporting employers (page 43) and the messages that work to meet these, summarised in Table 1, Overall messaging matrix for potential potential supporting employers (page 45).

Where relevant, this section also provides insight on why certain messages are less effective or insufficient on their own to meet a communications need.

Messaging need: ‘What is an OCFF?’

Employers have two key needs in relation to understanding more about what an OCFF is:

- All employers want to know the role can fit around the current job of their employee and not be to the detriment of it.
- However, it is also essential for them to understand that the role is paid as, where it is assumed to be voluntary, this can raise negative perceptions from the employer. Knowledge about payment is also essential to create an accurate and fair basis on which to agree release with the employee

It’s a bit peevish of the fire brigade that they need more people but don’t want to pay for it so get volunteers like this [Potential Supporter, SME, Retail]
Knowing they are paid means if they have to be out for a whole shift you don’t have to pay them twice, obviously if it’s a short time and they are back in you wouldn’t dock their pay for that [Current Supporter, SME, Hotel]

We only found out recently that it is a paid role. We had still been paying them when they went on call as we didn’t want to punish them for it but now we think they should come back and finish their shift, or have a reduction in pay if they don’t come back to work [Current Supporter, Large, Manufacturing]

A message that was felt to work well in giving an introductory definition of the role was:

A valuable secondary role employees can do alongside their main job

The words ‘valuable’, ‘secondary’, ‘role’ and ‘alongside their main job’ were all key to the message working well.

I’d rather support someone in a second role than second job which sounds like it would impact too much on what they do at work [Potential Supporter, SME, Haulage]

Implies it’s obviously part time, which is good [Potential Supporter, SME, Software Development]

The term ‘valuable’ places some importance on the role and suggests that it will be rewarding for the employee. ‘Secondary’, ‘role’ and ‘alongside their main job’ are all reassuring that the role all imply that their current role takes precedence which is essential.

A message that was felt to work well in conveying the role is paid was:

On Call Firefighters are paid – there is an annual retainer for the hours they are on call and an hourly rate for the time they are on call-outs

This was felt to be clear as starter information but for some potential employers it raised immediate questions around how this might work technical and relative responsibilities of the employer versus FRS. These queries indicate that more detailed information or the opportunity to ask questions on pay is essential.

I don’t understand how they get paid? They must be paid in some way? How does it work in terms of double employment? Is there HR issues, tax issues? [Potential Supporter, Micro, Retail]

Messaging need: ‘How does it work / is it feasible?’

As a name, ‘On Call Firefighter’ was broadly understood to mean they are on call and so used as needed, but this did raise immediate queries about the amount of time they are on call.

On call’ makes me worry they would be running off from every shift [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

Indeed, even when they understand the role as secondary, employers are very concerned about the level of commitment and impact on the business. As such, they want reassurance that the needs of the business will come first.

Specifically, they want to know how many hours they will be on call, how many of these hours are in work time and the typical frequency and length of call-outs in work hours.
It’s not clear about how it works and the logistics of employing someone like that [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

I’m assuming they have shift patterns where they’re on call, perhaps 8 hours a day or whatever, during that period they could have to up and go at any time, but then during the rest of the week they’re unemployed essentially [Potential Supporter, Micro, Retail]

I’d need to know how often, how long but it’s just not going to be predictable is it [Potential Supporter, Micro, Retail]

Some supporters in this sample had only agreed to ‘out of work’ hours.

Once the need for OCFF training is understood, there are also questions around when this and the notice likely to be given for taking time off. Some mentioned a need for a minimum of two weeks' notice. And many expressed a preference for training to be done out of work hours, in annual or unpaid leave.

I’d be concerned about the amount of notice of time away from the business and how much time away from the business they’d need [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

If this person is coming in and they’re working part time or full time or and they’re popping off where needed are they also going to have time to do training? What’s expected, how much on call time do they need to dedicate? [Potential Supporter, SME, Manufacturing]

Awareness of some flexibility within the role was also key to acceptance for some supporting employers. These respondents felt that restrictions would inevitably mean that there would be a negative on the business, at least at times.

I’d expect flexibility. If my employee says they want to be on call on a Wednesday afternoon, and I say we’re doing something important at that time, I’d expect them to be able to find cover from another firefighter [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

I’d be lying if I said it doesn’t affect the company (supporting RLNI). If they get called out whilst on a job for us, they have to go, then I have to mobilise other employees in the area to get there pretty sharpish to finish the job [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

Messages which tested well in terms of conveying both the level of commitment and some degree of flexibility, were those which worked well for potential OCFFs too. Both these messages were felt to be clear and helpful, overcoming initial barriers to consideration that arise in response to queries on how it work. Flexibility was particularly important for businesses that need to accommodate peak hours in the week or peak seasons.

On average, you’ll be called 2-3 times a week for around an hour

I think 2-3 times a week for about an hour then we can cover that easily [Potential Supporter, SME, Estate Agent]

What’s really good about that I’ve now got a figure to work with—I didn’t have a clue before. It makes it sound like not a big deal [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

From my perspective, it’s dispelling the myth it would be onerous and you’re allowing them to come and go as they please [Potential Supporter, SME, Estate Agent]
There is typically some flexibility in sorting out cover when on call

Typically there’s some flexibility and that could be important for us for times like Saturday mornings [Potential Supporter, SME, Estate Agent]

However, some wanted information that would back up these messages, for example through the supporting website.

How is it an hour? How would you leave work, put a fire out and come back working behind the bar in an hour [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

**Messaging need: ‘Is it worth it for the business?’ (benefits)**

As outlined earlier, employer respondents acknowledged six main benefits to supporting an OCFF. These are detailed in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Employer benefits to supporting an OCFF**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Supporting the community: Being a pillar of the community, which offers potential to enhance reputation or deliver corporate social responsibility aims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A firefighter for your business: Bringing expertise around fire-safety into the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop your staff: Up-skilling staff (in a range of ways)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protecting your workforce, your site, your community: Helping facilitate a local FRS that can directly benefit the business and its employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Offering a way of demonstrating positive company values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing a means of boosting staff satisfaction (and therefore helping with retention of own staff)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four narratives were developed for testing in Stage 2, each one taking one of the four primary benefits as lead message and building a supporting story beneath it. The purpose of testing narratives in this way was to understand whether any have particular traction and if any are more universal in their appeal.

Three of the narratives worked well and one less well. However, it was notable that those which worked well tended to resonate more strongly with different types of businesses. Indeed, this finding indicates that the primary benefit for supporting OCFFs will depend on the nature of the business and the potential for specific benefits to make a real difference.

Messages that work well in support of the different benefits are detailed under each main benefit theme below.

**Benefit theme: ‘Supporting the local community’**

Messaging around making a difference to the local community works at two levels:
- A primary driver in terms of positive reputation or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- A secondary nice to have for those businesses where another benefit is dominant

As such, messages on this theme are likely to beneficial to all businesses. However, their relative prominence within a communication should be considered in terms of the type of business and whether or not the benefit is primary or secondary to them.

Specific messages under this theme that worked well within the research include the following:

Every On Call Firefighter makes a difference to your local community
All businesses were happy to support and make a difference to the local community and it was felt this message made this impact clear. This helped trigger ideas of PR opportunities for some.

It’s a really strong statement; we support the local community whenever possible—we do seminars at Derby College and buy locally so that would be a key attraction [Potential Supporter, SME, Construction]

On Call Firefighters are essential to save lives

The reminder that OCFFs are essential to saving lives was useful to remind employers of real value to the role.

They say ‘On Call Firefighters save lives’, I think that’s the way it is now with government cuts, and we all need to embrace that [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

Supporting your staff to be On Call Firefighters contributes to keeping the local community safe.

While a few felt this message was slightly pressurising, all agreed it was true and reflected a real positive impact from support.

They are an essential part of our services, and there is pressure on them. This way, the firefighter can protect their community and supplement their income... [Potential Supporter, SME, Estate Agent]

Benefit theme: ‘A firefighter for your business too’

Many employers were interested in the idea of an OCFF bringing direct benefits to their business through the skills they would acquire in the role.

Messages that worked well to communicate this, as well as the specific skills and knowledge that would be available included:

Bringing expertise and practical skills into your business

The above message was felt to be a helpful introduction, indicating clearly that there are direct benefits to be gained and inviting employers to find out more.

This is a positive approach. It’s saying what they can do, rather than what they can hypothetically become [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

On Call Firefighters receive exceptional quality training in a range of areas including emergency first aid, medical trauma care, risk assessment and health and safety

Detail on what expertise would cover was also helpful as employers could generally relate at least one element back to things they needed to provide. However, some raised questions about whether

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22 Adjusted from tested version which included reference to your business, which was felt to tip the tone into blackmail: Supporting your staff to be On Call Firefighters contributes to keeping the local community and your business safe

23 Tested as the following narrative: A firefighter for your business too. Give your business an extra level of safeguarding. On Call Firefighters receive exceptional quality training in a range of areas including emergency first aid, medical trauma care, risk assessment and health and safety. They can share and apply their expertise and knowledge within their workplace - conducting internal training or taking on specialist roles to increase company resilience
it meets the specific needs of their business and wanted access to further information that would qualify this.

It’s a good thing, we already have those provisions, but not under one person, so that might be a more cost-effective, efficient way...because one person would have overall responsibility and be more proactive [Potential Supporter, Large, Education]

I don’t know if insurance companies would recognise safeguarding, but that is of interest to me [Potential Supporter, SME, Cleaning Supplies]

That training would save me money, but would it be valid with our health and safety people? [Potential Supporter, SME, Cleaning Supplies]

They’d be clued up on hazards and could spot something and help make the business safer [Potential Supporter, SME, Cleaning Supplies]

They can share and apply their expertise and knowledge within their workplace - conducting internal training or taking on specialist roles to increase company resilience

The idea of transferable skills had traction for some as this was potentially money-saving.

They’d already have the fire training and we currently pay an outside company to train everyone so if we didn’t have to and this person could do that it would be fantastic [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

It makes sense that they would have really good training and could bring that into the office [Potential Supporter, SME, Construction]

It’s well-worded, to the point, paints a good picture, about quality of training, that can be shared in the workplace, so then it’s not one person, it’s other people...it looks like they’re trying to transfer that knowledge to others [Potential Supporter, SME, Software Development]

A small time out of the business can bring large gains for your business

The idea of an exchange was also liked by some, who felt this helped resolve the decision to support time out. This message stands as a support to the idea of bringing in expertise but equally well in support of messages about developing staff (see later).

It says a small time out the business which sounds good. On call would make me worry they’d be running off every shift [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

In order for us to operate and meet our insurance we have to have a level of training. It’s unlikely that something would happen that means we need a firefighter [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]
Benefit theme: ‘Develop your staff’

Most potential OCFF in this sample considered being a firefighter to be an exciting role, with excitement coming from:

**Develop your staff with new skills and capabilities**

This message was liked as implying benefits to both the individual and the business. The individual would develop and in doing so gain satisfaction but also skills and capabilities that could benefit the business.

*I think the first part is a two pronged attack; there’s the training they get doing something else and as a firefighter. It can be portable into your business as well* [Potential Supporter, SME, Estate Agent]

**Training and experience gives On Call Firefighters wide-ranging skills: problem-solving, teamwork, communication skills.**

Most respondents saw a benefit in the specific three skills listed above (problem solving, teamwork, communication) and could translate how these would benefit their staff.

*If one wanted to do it and develop their communication and leadership skills they could bring the new skills into the business* [Potential Supporter, SME, Cleaning Supplies]

*I like where they’ve listed the skills that firefighters learn. Problem solving skills are something I always look for—in this industry you’re always questioned by customers and need to think on your own and work around things* [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

*I like that, it’s a different set of skills so it opens your eyes to what they can bring to your business, less about training more how I can use their transferable skills and attributes* [Potential Supporter, SME, Manufacturing]

*Some people need the opportunity to develop their skills. We have to get tenders out or problems on site, you need to think pragmatically. Dealing with heavy equipment and working as a team is really valuable in construction* [Potential Supportor, SME, Construction]

*It has a mutual benefit, with the training and team building. It has a positive effect on the employer* [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

A small time out of the business can bring large gains for your business.

As previously, this was felt to be a strong message that spells out a benefit to the business and indicates that the business gains more than it gives which seems a good deal.

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24 Tested as the following narrative: **Develop your staff with new skills and capabilities.** Training and experience gives firefighters wide-ranging skills: problem-solving, teamwork, communication skills, openness to change, situational awareness and commitment to excellence. Offering staff this opportunity can mean you get more engaged, reliable and experienced people in return. A small time out of the business can bring large gains for your business.

25 The original line included three further skills: openness to change, situational awareness and commitment to excellence. However, as respondents found the benefits of these less clear, the message was felt to be clearer and stronger with these removed.
I like that it’s just a small time for big gains. If they’re expanding their knowledge, skills and experiences then that’s going to feed back into the business [Potential Supporter, SME, Construction]

I’m helping the community, but also my business as well [Potential Supporter, SME, Estate Agent]

It’s open and honest, it is potentially going to take time out of your business but it will be small and have big gains, quite reassuring [Potential Supporter, SME, Manufacturing]

Your staff will come back with many new skills and above all confidence and a team ethos.

This last message was felt to further support the idea of development, with confidence and team ethos universally recognised as helpful.

Benefit theme: ‘Protecting your workforce, your site, your community’

Messages tested under this theme were less successful overall.

While the sentiment around helping to keep your workforce, site and community safe was agreed with and felt to be a benefit, the messages that expressed this had lower impact than some of the messages about community above.

This was largely to do with language. Employers felt that ‘protection’ was most strongly associated with finance and insurance, so it jarred slightly (feeling slightly alarmist) in the context of firefighting. Furthermore, words like ‘partnership’ implied a higher level of responsibility than they wanted to take on.

Further benefits

Other messages identified as having impact with respondents related to:
- The potential for staff motivation and satisfaction
- Corporate social responsibility (for those for whom this was relevant)

Messages which were felt to work well to convey the potential for staff motivation and satisfaction included the following:

Motivate your employees by supporting them in a secondary role

Improve loyalty and retention by supporting them as OCFF

Most could see how supporting an employee as an OCFF would increase motivation, loyalty and retention, given an employee who asked would want to do this role.

The idea of helping with retention was particularly compelling for those businesses where retention was problematic, e.g. Service industries (catering, hotels etc).

26 Tested as the following narrative: Protecting your workforce, your site, your community. Be part of a community based partnership, working with the Fire and Rescue Service to benefit your business and the local community. Help protect your employees, your business and your community. Supporting an employee to be an On Call Firefighter will help assure protection for your business and your local community against the worst that can happen.
We know it works when you invest in people you get more rounded and loyal employees. That interests us [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

However, it is important that these messages are seen in the context of the role being secondary/less important to reduce concern around current job and OCFF role competing with each other.

I think the retention of staff can go two ways; if an employee finds out that they can’t make the on call role work with his role in my company, he might be inclined to stop working here [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

Demonstrate your company values by enabling staff to achieve their personal goals

This message had less relevance for smaller businesses without defined ‘company values’ and more resonance with larger organisations that did.

I like that because if they really love that role and you engage them in your role and they understand the offset, you’re scratching each others backs a bit, a bit of give and take and I think employees really do appreciate that and work better for it [Potential Supporter, SME, Manufacturing]

I think the retention of staff can go two ways; if an employee finds out that they can’t make the on call role work with his role in my company, he might be inclined to stop working here. [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

The following was felt to be a niche message as it only had traction amongst larger organisations with a corporate social responsibility policy. It also works less well as a written message and was reported as likely to work better in face-to-face situations where engagement opportunities exist.

Supporting On Call Firefighters is corporate social responsibility with returns to your community

For us it’s about leading the way in supporting the community, it is very much part of our CSR. What our OCFFs have achieved makes you proud [Supporter, Large, Furniture Manufacturing]

It is responsibility, from a corporate and social perspective...if it’s ever needed, we’re not just talking about fire here, are we, it’s other areas – health and safety, trauma, medical care... [Potential Supporter, SME, Software Development]

I want to support the community and we could do PR on that and it’s good to feedback into the community [Potential Supporter, SME, Construction]

2.4.5 Direction on imagery

Imagery is not a critical component for employer communications and has the potential to be polarising. As such, images should be used with caution.

Where there is room for illustration (e.g. when it is beneficial to break up text), images that were felt to be more valuable were those that depicted skills and the value of the role. For example, medical skills, saving, helping, solving problems, teamwork and communication skills.
This one’s good—it’s aimed at me as a business owner because I can see them working together—I can see what they’re doing and the skills they can bring back to the business [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]

You want to show the skills they gain and how that could translate into our business [Supporter, Large, Furniture Manufacturing]

The fire and rescue side of things for me is what really gets across how amazing these people are, what they do and why I’d want to support them [Potential Supporter, Micro, Retail]

Images connected to the community aspect of the role, such as those showing OCFFs in schools, in the homes of vulnerable individuals, or fitting smoke alarms, polarised employers. While some felt the tasks they showed were important, for others they reduced perceived urgency and importance of the role. Given the risk of distancing employers, such images are worth avoiding.

As an employer, I wouldn’t like to see images of On Call Firefighters fitting gas detectors, because I’d be thinking that that’s on my time, they should be at work [Potential Supporter, SME, Civil Engineering]

If I looked at that, I’d be like why are they sitting with a load of kids on company time? They need to be justified in being called out [Potential Supporter, SME, Cleaning Supplies]

That’s interesting, they’re working in schools and care homes and stuff, I can see that making sense, the reserve people doing those roles ... Doesn’t say a lot to me about their “on call” role though, that would be scheduled surely? [Potential Supporter, Micro, Retail]

Images that suggest the employee will be at risk of harm should also be avoided. These raised concerns about both personal loss to the employee and their family, as well as loss to the business, and served to make respondents feel irresponsible for supporting them.

Burning buildings look dangerous and you’d be worried about the staff [Potential Supporter, SME, Construction]

It’s less good to show the fire I think, it makes me think of the risks, of awful things happening to them so instead I’d focus on images that highlight their skills and training that would be attractive to an employer [Potential Supporter, SME, Manufacturing]

If one of our employees got hurt or killed, where’s the liability? Would their relatives receive compensation? What insurance is in place? Who’d pay for that insurance? [Potential Supporter, Large, Education]

I can’t imagine them doing this in an hour—that’s a massive inferno. I wouldn’t want them coming back covered in soot! [Potential Supporter, SME, Catering]
3. Additional learning from current and ex-OCFF and unsuccessful recruits

3.1 Introduction

Given the scope of discussion within this research around motivations and experiences, there was an opportunity to capture additional feedback from current and ex-OCFFs and unsuccessful applicants around their experience of application and/or employment.

Different themes or issues that arose related the following:

- **Application process**: Managing expectations of the process; helping to get employers on board with supporting the applicant; and improving the application process
- **Training**: Experience of initial and ongoing training
- **Elements of the contracted role impacting job satisfaction**: potential for and experience of flexibility, restrictions and commitment; level and experience of call-outs; changes in FRS culture; perceived divide between OCFFs and Whole Time Firefighters

Each of these issues generated some suggestions around potential developments to process that might help improve the overall application and employment experience and therefore potentially positively impact recruitment or retention.

3.1.1 The application process

**Managing expectations of the application process**

A number of respondents mentioned that they felt they hadn’t felt adequately informed about the application process and this had led to some frustrations or negative experiences that they felt could have been avoided or reduced.

While most felt that the scope of the application process was largely as they’d expect, some felt they would have benefitted from additional information on how the process is organised, as well as some information around relative difficulty and the need to prepare.

> They were a bit scattered when I applied; they didn’t get back to me for a while which was a bit like, I don’t know. And then when I did hear back, the training day was a really short time. So a bit of notice would have been good [Current OCFF, Female, South West]

> The first time I applied It was a long and detailed application form, then one day written exams and they were very vague about how long we’d be there or what we’d be expected to do, turns out it was in and out within an hour and a half so I wasted a day off [Unsuccessful OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Women in particular reported that they were not sufficiently informed or prepared for the level of fitness required and some failed their first applications as a result.

> It was the shuttle run, my running let me down which once I found out about it I knew it would but it was only a week before... I’d worked really hard, I’d lost 4 stone to get onto this, was going to the gym every day working on my strength but not my cardio so much [Unsuccessful OCFF, Female, Midlands]
I would add more help and guidance in getting yourself up to that fitness level because some are very specific to the fire service, like hose running. I think a lot of people fail that because they don’t know how to do it [Current OCFF, Female, Midlands]

The overall purpose of the information mentioned as missing is to help potential OCFFs manage their application (and other time) appropriately and help reduce the potential for failure as a result of ‘not knowing’ or mis-matched expectations.

However, a by-product of providing helpful information is a positive reflection on the FRS as both efficient and thinking about the needs of its employees. All information would obviously need to be encouraging and supportive in tone while being accurate in content.

Helping to get employers on board with supporting the applicant

Another area of information highlighted as missing was material for applicants to provide to their employers. Some felt this had made it hard to gain support or that their employer had not fully understood what is required.

I think if my employer was better informed about what would happen I think it’d be more helpful. It wouldn’t take too long for someone from the local station to pop in and explain it to them [Current OCFF, Female, North]

Improving the application process

A number of recruits criticised the overall length of time taken to complete the application process, as they felt this could impact overall motivation levels but could also feel slightly unprofessional.

Some also felt the order didn’t make sense. Given the medical is a ‘hard gateway’ which determines whether or not you are eligible, it was felt this should take place near the start of the process.

You can’t do them on the same day but I had a medical after I passed the other tests and they might all be for nothing because if there’s a problem with the medical I can’t change that. It’s difficult (to improve order of steps) because you might fail any one of them. Certainly out them closer together; I remember it being a very long, drawn-out process [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

Similarly, it was felt that the formal interview should come at the start of the process if it is a genuine ‘filter’ of applicants. Indeed, it seemed odd that they might be rejected at this stage if they had successfully completed all of the other tests, which involved time and money on the part of both the FRS and individual.

If you’ve gone through all that and then they fail you on the formal interview, they’ve wasted all that time [Ex-OCFF, Male, South East]

For some unsuccessful applicants, there was a sense of frustration that they are not just able to retake the element of the application that they failed on. It was suggested that reapplications within a certain time period should allow for just retaking weaker areas, to reduce the risk of putting people off completely.

I failed the job related test, just the one! I was in the process of reapplying but the problem is you have to take everything again not just the one you failed ... I just found it so frustrating that I’d have been having to go through everything again, it was only 2 months between applications [Unsuccessful OCFF, Male, Midlands]
Some also held a perception that the application process has become too hard and impersonal and would people off applying for a role that is secondary rather than primary employment.

Now it’s hard work to join up. We struggle to get people to join up now [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

They’ve made it more complicated now with the psychometric testing. The physical testing is a lot harder as well. They’ve made it very difficult to recruit retained people for what is a part time job. They seem to have lost the understanding that this isn’t your main job. [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

3.1.2 Experience of initial and ongoing training

There was an overall sense amongst respondents that the training to become qualified is becoming more difficult and protracted over time.

Although some acknowledged that efforts were being made to shorten the process, they felt the time required for training was a significant burden and a cause of drop out. Frustration was also connected to the idea that there “must” be solutions that are lower impact on the individuals taking part. They felt this was important and a better system would offer a fairer exchange, given OCFFs are doing the role for little pay.

When they join up, the training is longer and more spread out. They use all their holiday entitlement on the training which isn’t fair on their families [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

They need to be more flexible ... When I did the breathing apparatus training, it was spread over 4 weekends – now it’s over 3 weeks. Someone’s coming in as a part-time job and being told “you’re going to have to take 3 weeks off to do this course” – that could be your whole holiday [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

As a general consensus, being on the job in under six months was felt to be reasonable.

Some also commented on how strict and formal training camps feel, especially in direct contrast to the friendly, welcoming environment many have witnessed when visiting stations.

Training school is quite regimented, it’s like the army camp [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Drill nights were largely enjoyed, mostly for the social aspects and a source of ongoing training.

We do a lot of training using PowerPoint but we have a good laugh doing it. It’s not all about fire [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

However there were some who did not always experience benefits, and instead saw giving up extra evenings as an inconvenience.

The only other thing is training commitments: one night a week for drill night, weekend exercises and additional training that you’ve all got to do. Either you’ve got to take it off in the week as holiday or you’ve got to do it at the weekend, which, again, affects your family [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

You’ve got drill night as well and if you miss a drill night due to work, which I’ll have to 1 in 4, you have to make it up at another station, all for not a very great amount of money [Ex-OCFF, Male, South East]
Some would prefer drill nights to focus on more practical training, for example refreshers, as it was felt that the lecture or PowerPoint format of many sessions was harder to take in and to an extent less satisfying.

I wish there were more opportunities for refresher days, because I’m quite a slow, hands-on learner and you get railroaded through your training. I wish there was a chance to renew your skills more often [Current OCFF, Female, North]

It’s a challenge to maintain my skills. You go out and do your job but then you go back to the training centre and it’s alien [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

3.1.3 Elements of the contracted role impacting job satisfaction

Restrictions and commitment versus flexibility

The level of commitment was reported as a particular source of difficulty for those with families as the restrictions that come with the role impact directly on family life.

Most reported that their families had been very supportive of their role, particularly in cases where they were an OCFF before becoming a family. However, restrictions on where they can move home, time spent with family and missing big events can all start to take their toll and be an influencing factor on leaving the service.

You can’t be left alone with a child so when you’re on call you need childcare arrangements. It can put strain on relationships. I think it does (enrich your life) in a selfish way but I don’t think it does in a family way [Current OCFF, Female, Midlands]

A retained role has a big hit on your family. You have to say “no” sometimes to your family to provide cover [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Improvements in flexibility were felt likely to help offset some of these negatives.

Indeed, where flexibility was experienced it was felt to be a key benefit of the OCFF role. However, it is experienced in different ways – and to a much greater or lesser extent – by different individuals.

Some respondents who were satisfied with their current OCFF role experienced a high degree of flexibility through the specific combination of the OCFF role and other job or interest they had, or had procedures within their local FRS which helped.

I do prefer the retained side of things. You’ve got a bit more freedom as such ‘cause I still enjoy my building and if I was whole time I’d have less time to do it. I can book off the hours I need to do building and then go back on call [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

I thought the main problem would be the lack of flexibility but it is so much better than I thought. We have a WhatsApp group to ask for cover if you need to go off call and that really makes a difference [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

However, some others who had more fixed commitments felt that there could be a lack of support from the fire service in terms of finding ways to juggle their other commitments, be that work or lifestyle.
I don’t agree that there’s always flexibility, it’s not always that easy. I never, for example, when my children were ill, I had to take my hours out, but I had to make my hours up...within a week. So then I had to find another day to add my hours [Current OCFF, Female, South East]

Many claimed that restrictions on flexibility had increased the level of inconvenience and disruption to their lives generally and for some of the ex-OCFFs this was a contributing factor to leaving the service.

They used to have like a peg board at the station, just put their names on, and it’d tell whether they were on duty or not...the new system is, they sign up to x amount of hours a week... [Ex-OCFF, Male, South East]

It was getting more restrictive, when I was younger you used to be able to get off for an hour or so just to walk your dog, pick up your shopping or whatever and that wasn’t really an option anymore which was getting my back up a bit too [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

So I have to book a whole day’s leave for an hour’s [dentist] appointment, which isn’t convenient, or I have to move the hours to make it up to the service, which is more convenient for them than it is for me [Ex-OCFF, Male, South East]

Frequency and experiences of call out

Many respondents mentioned that they had found there to be fewer call-outs than they had expected at the point of joining the service. For some, type of call out was also different from what they anticipated: blazes were recognised as rare in reality with false alarms and minor jobs more likely.

I went in thinking I’d be fighting fires, but that’s actually quite unlikely... You do go in with the mindset that you’re going to doing big jobs but it is quite calm in reality. You go and help old people who have fallen over [Current OCFF, Female, South West]

While level and range of call-outs varies from station to station there was a general consensus that it was important to try manage expectations better, giving people enough reason to take up the role (and feel it is not so low that it is not worth it) while not misleading them.

I expected to be a bit busier, you think everything needs a fire service but there’s a lot we’re not needed for... so it’s kind of glammed up more than it is... but I think it needs to be, if you were told you would be going to grass fires at 4am you wouldn’t sign up for that would you [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

However, low number of call-outs creates issues in practical terms too. Some can find that the overall pay begins to not justify the level of commitment required and inconvenience this can have on daily life.

Now it isn’t as much money to me as it was before and we’re not getting as many calls. I’ve had two this year and one I didn’t get out of the Land Rover – 2 calls for all those hours [Ex-OCFF, Male, South East]

We were also getting less call-outs, I went 2 months without anything so that was also part of it [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

This is not offset by increasing the number of hours they are on call, as pay for this is very low and hard to justify against the restrictions being ‘on call’ requires.
There was a bit of pressure to do 84 hours and I was already putting in 65 hours and not getting much free time, but I was only getting about £200 a month so the loss of freedom and amount of commitment needed just wasn’t balancing against the minimal financial gains [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

For those in areas where medical responses are increasing, this had helped increase job satisfaction for some. Whilst this was not what had initially drawn them in, these emergencies were considered to offer those key benefits of adrenaline and vital, life saving community work.

I think we’re down to 160 (fire-related callouts) last year but I’ve possibly done 3 or 4 hundred on the ambulance side, so that’s taken off dramatically. There are plans to go further with the medical response [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

We have a first response vehicle now, so in remote areas we can respond quicker ... we’re first aid trained anyway but we’re up skilled a little bit to do a basic paramedic role, it’s great people could have heart attacks in the village and 9 times out of 10 we arrive before paramedics [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

We can save lives, in those situations it’s a matter of minutes between life and death so if we’re responding faster in my eyes that can only be a good thing [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

However, for some current OCFFs, the shift in role was felt to come with downsides. As a result, training has increased, requiring more time and usually taking up annual leave.

Some also felt that medical trauma is very separate from fire fighting and so there should be more choice in terms of whether it was adopted into an individual’s role or job description.

In the five years I’ve been here it’s changed dramatically. It was just a first aid at work qualification; now we do trauma care if you lose your arm or leg. There’s a lot more to take on board and it’s hard work to stay on top of all your training modules [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

It’s changed dramatically – it’s not just fires and road traffic accidents, there’s the medical side to the fire service as well. That’s something that’s coming in that might not be everyone’s cup of tea and I don’t think they should be forced into it necessarily. If you want to be a fireman, you want to be a fireman, you don’t necessarily want to deal with that type of call; it should be optional [Current OCFF, Male, South East]

Changes in FRS culture

Alongside the changes in lessening flexibility and increased training as mentioned, there was a sense amongst those who have been in the retained service for some time that the service as a whole is becoming more restrictive and regulated, with an increase in administration and bureaucracy.

Objection to this was not just resistance to change or modernisation. Longer-standing staff felt that the service was losing touch with the fact that this is their second role, with expectations of them that are too high and in some cases, a lack of sufficient equipment to support new demands.

I found the bureaucracy side of it frustrating – I couldn’t get anything done [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]
We’re expected to sit in front of a computer and update all of our activities, like the drills and shouts we’ve been on. We’ve got 2 rubbish computers, 12 firefighters, and we’ve got 2 hours and we’ve got a lot of other checks to do, so it’s a nightmare [Current OCFF, Female, North]

If you’re a full time firefighter and you’ve got 12 hour days, you’ve got plenty of time to update your personal development record, but retained firefighters don’t have that. I’m behind on mine because I’m preoccupied with starting my own business [Current OCFF, Female, North]

Perceived division between Whole Time and On Call Firefighters and difficulties in switching to Whole Time role

Some reported a significant sense of division and difference between On Call Firefighters and Whole Time Firefighters, both from within the service and in terms of public perception.

It was felt that much of the public have no idea of the difference between retained and whole time, assuming that they are all just “Firefighters.” However, where the difference is known, OCFFs feel there is a perception that retained firefighters are “not real” firefighters or are a cost-cutting exercise and therefore less qualified and competent.

There will always be a divide between us and whole time I think, they’re classed as the “real firefighters” even by them themselves... people see us as the cheaper version but actually I see us as more competent because they work two days, two nights whereas we work much more and do much more as a service [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

There’s a bit of a divide between whole time and retained around equality, but I think there’ll always be that bit of a divide, I’d expect there to be because it’s their full time job [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

This can be a bone of contention for On Call Firefighters who feel equally qualified and competent, and in some cases to be putting in more hours than Whole Time Firefighters. Additionally, because many of them have other roles, they feel that they bring a wider, more varied skill set to the role than someone who goes straight in to whole time at a young age.

I’d say sometimes it can be a full-time role because sometimes the hours can be unfriendly. That’s something I didn’t realise when I joined. We don’t get that down-time that whole-time have. One week I didn’t have a full night’s sleep – we were out every night [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Indeed, some felt that On Call Firefighters are getting more hands on experience because their work is only comprised of responding when needed rather than filling work hours with “what if” training.

In the retained fire service, it’s not ‘What If?’ it’s just happening...If you go to a house fire, your training kicks in; if you go to RTC, your training kicks in [Ex-OCFF, Male, North]

It was also raised that the retained service can often be more passionate and community-minded than the whole time service. This was largely due to it being their extra role requiring significant sacrifice rather than a main job and source of income, but also expressed through happenings such as retained officers not striking alongside Whole Time Firefighters.

Obviously you get paid but you don’t get paid a lot...If you’re saving somebody who lives near you, it’s a really good feeling, yeah. Round here, when the fire brigade went on strike, most of the retained stations didn’t go on strike, because it’s our community. Like you’re
more loyal to your own community I would say. And [my town is] a small town; you know everybody. [Ex-OCFF, Male, North]

As a retained firefighter, we don't do that. We don't fit fire alarms – that's a whole-time thing [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Some respondents also held frustrations around the inability to transition to a whole time role. In some cases this related to lack of opportunity and in others to lack of success in winning a position. This was particularly frustrating for those who had joined the FRS as a retained firefighter as a route in to becoming whole time.

Many felt that, as they are equally as qualified and responding to the same situations, it should be a relatively straightforward transferral. However, in reality opportunities are rare and the application is itself difficult and not always seen as fair.

I did have the intention to eventually progress into whole time, I figured because I had my other job with my dad it was fine to go part time and I thought once I was in it it would be easier to transition to whole time, but it's actually really hard, I haven't even had an opportunity to go for it yet [Current OCFF, Male, Midlands]

My intention originally was to be whole time and I just saw retained as a way in [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

I wanted to be a full time firefighter but they very rarely recruit, I think they’ve only recruited twice in the last 12 years [Current OCFF, Female, North]

One respondent raised the point that securing a whole time role it is likely that would have resulted in being asked to leave the retained service, in which case the career would no longer be financially worthwhile or able to rival salaries available elsewhere. This also seemed nonsensical, as the FRS would then have to spend time and money recruiting and training a new person rather than just utilising existing expertise.

It’s likely that if I’d have become whole time I’d have been asked to leave retained but financially I’d have probably needed both [Ex-OCFF, Male, Midlands]

Some raised that making it easier to make this transition may increase retention by allowing retained firefighters to fulfil their aspiration and feel valued and equal in their competence. Additionally, as it is seen as such by many, would mean that the retained service could be marketed as a pathway to a career as a Whole Time Firefighter.

* * * * *
IV Conclusions and recommendations

Engaging the potential OCFF audience and encouraging applications to the OCFF role

1. To help reach, engage and encourage potential OCFFs to apply to the FRS, the recruitment communications strategy needs to consider **three core, but separate, strands of activity:**

   a) **Communications to raise awareness of what OCFFs are:** The audience is starting from a point of ‘zero’ awareness and the name ‘On Call Firefighter’ is insufficient to convey the nature of the role and who it is relevant to. Indeed, in many cases, people do not know they are the target audience, and raising awareness that the average person can do the role is essential.

   With this in mind, the audience of potential OCFFs needs some detail about what OCFFs are, how the role works and who can do it, in order to gauge personal relevance. Without this, ‘recruiting now’ communications do not cut through to the general public and audience of potential OCFFs as they are assumed to relate to Whole Time Firefighter and are not recognised as relevant.

   b) ‘Recruiting now’ communications: At the point of need, advertising is needed to signal vacancies and a current recruitment drive. These communications need to headline the benefits of the role in order to capture attention and encourage further investigation.

   c) Ongoing communication between the FRS and potential OCFFs during the application process: The research highlighted various opportunities for communication during the recruitment process to both improve the application experience and help positively manage expectations about the role (which can prevent disappointment that might arise from mismatches between assumptions and reality).

2. **Awareness-raising communications activity needs to be pushed at the audience as potential OCFFs are not proactively seeking information.**

   Awareness-raising communications are relevant to a wide range of people within the general public that are non-typical in terms of recruitment communications. Communicating to a wider local population will help improve understanding both amongst those who might consider the OCFF role themselves and others who can signpost and encourage those who are a potential fit.

   Channels that offer the opportunity for more explanation and ‘longer form’ messaging lend themselves particularly well to awareness raising. As such, the following were suggested or felt to be appropriate for push communications when prompted: PR (e.g. articles, news stories, public engagement exercises), station open days and a ‘fact sheet’ that can be made available in various settings. Other opportunities may also exist.

   Information on FRS websites is likely to be useful to help educate the general public who might be interested in the role. However, unless they are interested in a career as a Whole Time Firefighter they are unlikely to look for information proactively and the issue around awareness will persist.

   Timing of awareness-raising communication activity is also a consideration. In order to prime the general public (and potential OCFFs therein) for recruitment opportunities when they arise, awareness-raising activity should be relatively continuous. Specifically, if awareness of the OCFF role is raised outside of recruiting periods, when the need for recruitment arises, the public will be better primed to understand recruitment advertising.
3. ‘Recruiting now’ communications activity also needs to be pushed through appropriate channels.

Those suggested by the target audience as ideal for ‘recruiting now’ advertising included: local advertising (press, radio, notice boards and other distribution options), station banners and Facebook advertising.

Once attention has been caught, potential OCFFs require further information sources from which they can explore for further details. For example, local FRS website OCFF pages (e.g. role information and case studies), fact sheets for potential OCFFs⁵ and a helpline or face-to-face opportunities for asking questions.

The challenge for ‘recruiting now’ communications is conveying as many benefits as possible, since there is a wide range that boost interest in the OCFF role. The more that are recognised, the more compelling the role is likely to be and the greater the likelihood of encouraging further exploration and application.

4. The formal or informal communications that take place during the recruitment process may be both written or face-to-face.

While this strand is less key in initiating applications, it has particular importance in helping set expectations appropriately which will impact on retention.

Indeed, as ‘recruiting now’ advertising can only headline a few key messages and full exploration of supporting information by potential OCFFs is not guaranteed, it is important for face-to-face communications from the FRS during the recruitment process to accurately describe the role and set realistic expectations of the commitment, level of call-outs and likely range of tasks.

5. The table below outlines a bank of messages that appear to work well in explaining elements of the role to potential OCFF.

The order in which they are organised reflect the key stages of the journey that potential OCFFs need to progress through. They need to understand some basics around the role and its feasibility in order that it, and the associated benefits, are recognised as relevant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey stage</th>
<th>Key theme/concept to communicate</th>
<th>Example messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What is an OCFF?    | Nature of role as ‘part-time’ and secondary to another job | • A role you can do alongside your life  
• An extra role for you to make a difference to your neighbourhood  
• Do you want a satisfying new role that works around your current life? |
| Who is the job relevant to? | Relevant to all types  
Specifically, open to:  
• Men and women | • Men and women from all sorts of current jobs and walks of life are OCFF. Anyone with the right qualities can do the role/apply  
• You don’t need any specific qualifications to |

⁵Organisation of information and appropriate signposting will be key to making sure content is accessible
| How does it work / is it feasible? | Range of ages  
Those with no or few qualifications | become an On Call Firefighter, but you will gain loads of new skills  
You don't need any specific qualifications to become an On Call Firefighter. The training will give you new skills and qualifications if you want to take them |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Is it worth it for me (motivations and benefits)? | Broad parameters around level of commitment /impact on life | On average, you’ll be called 2-3 times a week for around an hour  
There is typically some flexibility in sorting out cover when on call |

Note: Imagery can be particularly helpful in conveying relevance to different types/beyond stereotypes  

| Is it worth it for me (motivations and benefits)? | ‘Part-time excitement’ | Enjoy an extra challenge alongside your every day job / life  
On Call Firefighters are needed by Fire and Rescue Services to handle emergency incidents in their area.  
An active, hands on, practical role that offers you something different than your normal job. We’ll train you and give you the skills to respond to any situations On Call Firefighters are needed for.  
It’s not a full time role but on the occasions when you’re needed it can make all the difference in the world |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ‘Status’ (as “someone who can do the role”) | On Call Firefighters make a real difference  
On Call Firefighters are ordinary people who help deal with extraordinary situations  
Note: The idea of positive status can be supported by imagery which illustrates the attributes and circumstances from which positive status is earned |
| ‘Value to the community’ | Responding to emergencies in the neighbourhood  
Join your local On Call Firefighter team for exceptional training and the chance to help people in your area |

Note: Imagery that illustrates preventative elements of the OCFF role in the community polarises and should therefore be used with care. While it is helpful to illustrate scope of the role and should feature in supporting information to make this clear, it should not dominate ‘recruiting now’ communications since for most it is not a primary motivation for becoming an OCFF.
| 'Rescuers from harm' | • The Fire and Rescue Service works alongside other emergency services  
Note: The strongest imagery that conveys 'part time excitement' above, tends to also convey the rescue aspect of the role (since this is the outcome) |
| Training and skills | • Training includes emergency medical trauma care and first aid, health and safety and risk assessment  
• We'll train you and give you the skills to respond to any situations On Call Firefighters are needed for  
• We support you all the way: through our training you'll develop the skills and qualities that help you do this critical job  
• We support you all the way: through our training you'll develop the skills and qualities that help you do this critical job  
• Specialist training in rescue techniques and medical emergency means you can make a real difference  
• Training as an On Call Firefighter can lead to educational and vocational qualifications  
• Training as an On Call Firefighter can help you improve your confidence and leadership skills |
| 'Camaraderie' | • Join our crew  
• Train together, work together, save together  
• Protect your community/local area together  
• Work with like-minded people from your local area |
| Pay and benefits | Note: Specific messages around pay and benefits not tested. However, illustration of example of pay for a certain level of call-outs was useful for both demonstrating level of remuneration and likely call out. |
| Can I manage the application process? | Availability of guidance and support on requirements  
Invitation to find out more by asking  
• The recruitment process is thorough but you will be supported throughout  
• The Fire and Rescue Service will help you prepare for the tests with advice on fitness and what to expect  
• On Call Firefighters are required to maintain good general levels of physical fitness throughout their careers  
• Find out more a local open day at your local fire station  
• Questions about application? Go and have a chat with firefighters at your local station |

6. The range of messages selected from this at any one time depends on the type of communications activity.
Communications to raise awareness of what OCFFs are: In these longer form communication opportunities it is ideal to convey as much as possible to educate about the role and, where possible, the benefits form doing the job.

‘Recruiting now’ communications: These shorter form communications (adverts) have more limitations so it is important to highlight benefits. Of these, ‘part time excitement’ appears to have universal appeal. Messages that support this also help clarify the role as secondary (e.g. to a main source of income), which is important to reinforce. However, given the value and appeal of all benefits it is useful to reference as many as possible where the opportunity exists. Imagery also potentially offers a way to communicate multiple benefits in one strike.

A further consideration, however, is if specific groups are being targeted or are present in a local audience. In this sample, women, those with fewer qualifications currently and those in rural communities all show a particularly strong connection with specific benefits which can be reflected in tailored communications.

Ongoing communication between the FRS and potential OCFFs during the application process: There is potential to reinforce the benefits of the role through the recruitment process. However, as mentioned, there should be a specific objective to ensure understanding of the potential recruit in relation to the scope of the role in the particular area and likely level of call-outs, to help manage expectations and avoid any disappointment. This does not have to be a ‘let down’ from the initial recruitment promise. As long as expectations have not been set inappropriately high, indications are that potential OCFF are open to information that qualifies the role and extends their understanding.

Encouraging support amongst employers

7. The key need for employers is accessible communications that explain the practicalities of the role and the benefits to the business at the point at which an employee requests to join

Like potential OCFFs, many employers are starting from a point of zero awareness and have many concerns, assumptions and questions around how the role might possibly work. Very few spontaneously recognised benefits to their business. Rather, most assume that the impact will be negative.

With this in mind, employers need a simple fact sheet that outlines key features of the role and how it works as well as potential benefits for the individual and organisation.

This needs to be supported by online information and possibly a helpline or similar that enables employers to find out more on particular points of interest or concern (such as hours required and pay and insurance responsibilities). Supporting information is also an opportunity to provide case studies which showcase the benefits to individuals and organisations.

8. Despite the start point of zero awareness, separate awareness-raising communications activity is not essential for employers as the potential applicant will act as a proactive channel to get information into employers hands

While it is not essential, there is still likely to be benefit in broader awareness-raising if opportunities arise. Specifically, growing understanding of the benefits of supporting OCFF might make them more receptive at the point of introduction by a potential recruit or even proactive in terms of encouraging application amongst employees or hosting recruitment communications.

9. The table below outlines a bank of messages that appear to work well in meeting the information needs of potential supporting employers.
The order in which they are organised reflects the key stages of journey that employers need to progress through. They need to understand some basics around the role and its feasibility in order that it, and the associated benefits, are recognised as relevant.

**Overall messaging matrix for potential supporting employers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey stage</th>
<th>Key theme/concept to communicate</th>
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</table>
| What is an OCFF? | Nature of role as ‘part-time’ and secondary to another job | • A valuable second role employees can do alongside their main job  
• On Call Firefighters are paid – there is an annual retainer for the hours they are on call and an hourly rate for the time they are on call-outs |
| How does it work / is it feasible? | Broad parameters around level of commitment/impact on business  
Potential for flexibility | • On average, you’ll be called 2-3 times a week for around an hour  
• There is typically some flexibility in sorting out cover when on call  
• Training can take place out of work hours e.g. Weekends, evenings, in leave  
• Sufficient notice for training days is given to allow for leave or cover to be planned |
| Is it worth it for my business (benefits)? | ‘Supporting your local community’  
‘A firefighter for your business’  
‘Develop your staff’  
Primary  
Secondary | • Every On Call Firefighter makes a difference to your local community  
• On Call Firefighters are essential to save lives  
• Supporting your staff to be On Call Firefighters contributes to keeping the local community safe.  
• Bringing expertise and practical skills into your business  
• On Call Firefighters receive exceptional quality training in a range of areas including emergency first aid, medical trauma care, risk assessment and health and safety  
• They can share and apply their expertise and knowledge within their workplace - conducting internal training or taking on specialist roles to increase company resilience  
• A small time out of the business can bring large gains for your business.  
• Develop your staff with new skills and capabilities  
• Training and experience gives On Call Firefighters wide-ranging skills: problem-solving, teamwork, communication skills.  
• A small time out of the business can bring large gains for your business.  
• Your staff will come back with many new skills and above all confidence and a team ethos.  
• Motivate your employees by supporting them in a secondary role  
• Improve loyalty and retention by supporting them as OCFF  
• Demonstrate your company values by enabling staff to achieve their personal goals |
| Corporate social responsibility | Supporting On Call Firefighters is corporate social responsibility with returns to your community |

10. As each of the primary benefits are considered relevant by all employers, communications aimed at employers will ideally include reference to all of them.

While there is some variation in terms of which benefits are most interesting, all are seen as valuable.

11. However, there is some potential for tailoring communication to target needs more specifically.

As outlined earlier in this report, different types of businesses are likely to connect more strongly with specific benefits. Some secondary benefits such as CSR are also only relevant to larger organisations. With this in mind, where the profile of the business is known, some tailoring is possible.

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