

Mr. Les Skarratts,  
Fire Brigades Union,  
Hardman street,  
Liverpool 1.

22.nd October 2004.

Dear Les,

**Re: Co-Responder scheme.**

The Ambulance Service Union (ASU) views with great concern the growing tendency to "farm out" critical aspects of our job to other agencies and, indeed, individuals.

The recent development within Mersey Regional Ambulance Service (MRAS), to train 24 members of the Mersey Fire Service (MFS) in aspects of ambulance work, is clearly an attempt at cost-cutting rather than a desire to improve service delivery to the public. The mixing and matching of the roles of two different emergency services will not lead to a better service to the public but rather to a potentially disastrous "hybrid" service with blurred boundaries of responsibility and a vague notion of who is actually supposed to do what. This is not a recipe for greater efficiency but more accurately a route towards confusion, friction and misunderstanding. In its final analysis it is an early step on the slippery road towards a merging of two distinct professions in to a mish-mash "jack of all trades", money-saving outfit, which will inevitably lead to a lowering of professional standards all round.

There is neither the need, nor the desire for such an organisation amongst most ambulance and fire service professionals. The two services co-operate very well together at present because each knows, understands and adheres to the boundaries established for their respective professions. Anything which starts to blur those boundaries and muddy the waters about who is responsible for what, is likely to create more problems than it could possibly solve.

Ambulance and Fire service staff respect each others current levels of professionalism and training. We each of us know what our designated roles are at incidents. Both services work to extremely high standards of efficiency and professionalism. The logic of this must be that "if it isn't broken, then don't try to fix it". The suspicion, therefore, is that the developments are not related to better care for the public but for greater savings to the treasury. It is, in short, nothing more than a dressed-up cost-cutting exercise shamelessly masquerading as an improvement in services.

If there are areas which cannot be adequately provided with ambulance cover at the present moment in time, then the solution lies, not in providing some form of secondary level service to those communities via co-responders, but in giving that community the same resources as other places enjoy. In other words, providing a properly funded, fully trained and equipped, professional ambulance service. Why should people expect anything less?

The current managerial policy of trying to make up for shortfalls in ambulance cover by providing a secondary level service at certain times of the day and night and in certain geographical areas is not one which the ASU can support. To this end, the ASU supports the FBU in opposition to a co-responder scheme within Merseyside and, indeed, beyond.

I would be grateful if you would circulate copies of this letter amongst your members so that they can be aware of the position the Ambulance Service Union holds on this matter. For our part we will also be circulating this letter on all our stations.

Many thanks for your help and assistance in this matter,

Yours fraternally,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ray'.

Ray Carrick,  
Assistant General Secretary, ASU.