



About the Fire & Rescue Service

We all have our own idea of what the Fire & Rescue Service does. TV dramas and blockbuster movies show firefighters as heroes tackling fires and putting their own lives at risk. However the reality is that fighting fires is only part of what the modern Fire & Rescue Service delivers.

Fighting fires and saving lives is still a key element of today's Fire & Rescue Service. However just as important is the work that takes place to prevent fires and accidents from happening in the first place. To help achieve this, the Fire & Rescue Service work closely with the community, talking to people, listening to issues and concerns, providing advice and expert knowledge and developing new solutions.

Firefighters advise people on fire prevention, escape routes and hazards at home and in business. Visits to schools help to raise the awareness of dangers like fireworks and matches with young children whilst building inspections ensure that businesses are meeting their fire safety regulations.

In addition, there are now many new challenges that have to be faced - unpredictable environmental factors like floods and storms, transport incidents and unforeseen events like oil spills and the growing threat of terrorism. Protecting society against all these dangers requires a forward-thinking approach and new kinds of skills and knowledge.

Regardless of your background, gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, the Fire & Rescue Service will treat you with equal respect - perhaps that's what makes it such an enjoyable and rewarding place to work.





Firefighter

Every year, thousands of men and women apply to become firefighters. Being a firefighter is rewarding, the work is varied and exciting and held in high public regard. There are also great opportunities to develop a wide range of skills - from life saving and team building to educating youngsters and running training programmes.

Related sites

- Fire Officers Association - www.fireofficers.org.uk
- Fire Brigades Union - www.fbu.org.uk
- Retained Firefighters Union - www.rfuonline.co.uk
- Women Firefighters Awareness Campaign - www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG_185018
- Networking Women in the Fire Service - www.nwfs.net

The role of a firefighter

Today's firefighter responds to a wide range of emergencies including road traffic accidents, chemical spillages and the new threats associated with terrorism. Working closely with the community is an equally important aspect of the role and requires a different set of skills and techniques.

What's involved in being a firefighter?

As a firefighter you will be called upon to tackle a wide range of emergency situations where your problem solving skills and initiative will be vital to resolve issues quickly and calmly. A sensitive approach will be required when dealing with members of the public who may be distressed and confused.

Today's firefighter also works closely with the community to increase the level of awareness and so prevent incidents from occurring in the first place. Being able to communicate effectively to schools, community groups, voluntary organisations and others is important, as is treating people with dignity and respect regardless of their background or culture.

The attributes required

There are certain personal attributes that you will need to help you fulfill your role as a firefighter. They include confidence, resilience, adaptability, effective communication, integrity and a commitment to diversity.

The role of the firefighter is continually changing as new techniques and equipment are introduced. As well as responding to emergencies, you will also be expected to work closely with the community:

- to prevent fire and accidents from starting in the first place
- educating the community by visiting schools, community centres and people in their own homes.
- advising people about planning escape routes within their own homes in case of a fire.
- actively seeking to understand and to value diverse individuals and groups.

Training and development

As a firefighter you will be expected to undertake a continuous training programme by attending lectures, exercises, practical training sessions and other forms of training to maintain competence levels.

You will be expected to take responsibility for developing your own skills and ensuring that your fitness levels are maintained as the work can be demanding, both physically and mentally.

Retained Duty System (On-Call Firefighters)

For Firefighters, saving lives and protecting communities is all in a day's work. But while the majority of firefighters are full-time employees of the Fire and Rescue Service, an additional 30 per cent of our crews have jobs elsewhere and are 'on-call' with their local fire station.

On-Call Firefighters provide emergency cover to over 90 per cent of the UK. There are over 14,000 On-Call Firefighters in England, protecting our rural communities and they are responsible for operating 60 per cent of all fire engines.

On-Call Firefighters make up an invaluable part of the team, heading to their fire station only when needed in an emergency. They are paid volunteers who, just like full-time firefighters, are trained to deal with everything from extinguishing burning buildings to providing first aid.

They come from all walks of life and could be full-time parents, office staff, manual workers or any profession you can think of. But while On-Call Firefighters are ordinary men and women, they do an extraordinary job for the Fire and Rescue Service and are integral to keeping their local fire station crewed and protecting the local community.

In England at any one time there are more On-Call Firefighters providing emergency cover than their full-time colleagues. The only difference is that they aren't based at a fire station.

A flexible system

On-Call Firefighters carry an alerter. They let the fire station know when they're available so they can respond immediately to emergency calls at any time. Many have an arrangement with their employer, so they can be On-Call for the Fire and Rescue Service whilst at the same time remaining a valued employee. Others choose to devote only evenings and/or weekends to being On-Call. Your Fire and Rescue Service will ensure that it's a system geared to suit both the employers and the employees that they release to be On-Call.

Being 'On-Call'

On-Call Firefighters have to live or work within about five minutes of their local fire station in order to respond to call outs quickly. They are called out on average two or three times a week but the commitment varies around the country and between different fire stations. Their duties can include:

- Responding to emergency calls – they could be tackling a chemical spill one day, or extinguishing a burning building the next;
- Delivering community fire safety information. This could include provision of information to businesses, schools and people more vulnerable to fire, through to engaging with young people to reduce anti-social behaviour and fire-setting;
- Reducing risks and hazards in the community through the identification of health and safety issues.

Joining Up

If you are interested in becoming an On-Call Firefighter or would like to find out more, contact your local On-Call fire station for further information.



Becoming a firefighter

Information on the selection process that candidates will face when applying for the role of a firefighter.

If you're thinking about becoming a firefighter, this section will provide you with the selection process that you will need to go through together with some information on the different duty systems available within the Fire & Rescue Service.

Initial application

The application form provides the Fire & Rescue Service with your personal details such as work history or qualifications. The application questionnaire asks you questions about your suitability for the role of Firefighter e.g. team working.

You will also be asked at the application stage to complete a declaration of any criminal convictions that you have that are unspent (under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974). This information will be considered should you be successful at the interview stage.

Any unspent convictions will be considered on an individual basis, taking into account the circumstances surrounding the offence. If you have a conviction that is now considered spent, this does not have to be declared.

The Fire & Rescue Service is guided by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. This means that anyone who considers themselves to have a disability can apply. Part of the application form will ask if you have any disabilities and these will be looked into by the Brigade Doctor on an individual basis. A decision will then be made as to whether you would be able to perform the duties of a Firefighter with any reasonable adjustments required.

Applicants who meet the essential requirements are invited to the next stage of the selection process.

Psychological tests

This section consists of three different tests which assess applicants ability to process information, problem solve and work with numbers. There is also a questionnaire to assess their personal qualities and attributes.

The following are the three National Firefighter Selection Tests (NFST):

- **Understanding Information**

This test is used to assess an applicant's ability to read and understand written information of the type that a Firefighter is likely to experience. The test involves the applicant reading and understanding a variety of written information including fire safety details, memos, newsletters and extracts from a training course manual. Applicants will need to extract the relevant information from these to answer 25 questions covering six different scenarios.

- **Situational Awareness**

This test is used to assess an applicant's ability to ensure the safety of themselves and others and their ability to use information to solve problems.

The test requires applicants to read descriptions of situations or scenarios that they are likely to face when working as a Firefighter.

There are 30 questions that each require the applicant to choose one of four available answers that most closely describe what they would do in that situation. No specific knowledge or training as a Firefighter is required to be able to answer the questions but applicants will need to consider the safety of themselves and others and use the information provided to decide how best to respond.

- **Working with numbers**

This test is used to assess an applicant's ability to understand and work with numerical information of the type that a Firefighter is likely to experience. There are 32 questions covering six different scenarios which require the applicant to perform combinations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division as well as estimations of numerical data.

The National Firefighter Questionnaire (NFQ)

The NFQ is used to assess an applicant's attitude and motivation in relation to seven scales, each based on one of the Fire & Rescue Service Personal Qualities and Attributes (PQAs):

- Working with Others - works effectively with others both within the Fire & Rescue Service and the community.
- Commitment to Diversity and Integrity - understand and respects diversity and adopts a fair and ethical approach to others.
- Confidence and Resilience - maintains a confident and resilient attitude in highly challenging situations.
- Commitment to Excellence - adopts a conscientious and proactive approach to work to achieve and maintain excellent standards.
- Commitment to Development - committed to and able to develop self and others.
- Situational Awareness - maintains an active awareness of the environment to promote safe and effective working.
- Openness to Change - is open to change and actively seeks to support it within the Fire & Rescue Service and in the community.

The assessment consists of 127 questions, each designed to explore a certain aspect of one of the seven scales. Applicants will not require direct experience or knowledge of the Fire & Rescue Service to be able to answer the questions.

Physical tests: This section consists of six different tests which assess an applicant's physical competence and their confidence and ability to follow instructions.

Ladder Climb: This is a physical test of confidence and the ability to follow instructions. Applicants must ascend a 13.5 metre (45 foot) Fire & Rescue Service ladder to a point two thirds of the full working height, take a leg lock and remove their hands from the ladder and look down to the assessor to identify a symbol placed flat on the ground at the foot of the ladder. Applicants will be assisted if necessary by the safety officer.

Casualty Evacuation: This is a physical test of upper and lower body strength and co-ordination. A 55kg (8½ stone) dummy is dragged backwards around a 30 metre (100 foot) course around four cones guided by a safety officer. Applicants will need to complete this exercise in a given amount of time.

Ladder Lift: This is a physical test of upper and lower body strength and co-ordination. The bar of a ladder lift simulator weighing 30kg (4½ stone) is to be raised to a height of 182cm (6 foot) assisted if necessary by the safety officer.

Enclosed Space: This is a physical test of confidence, agility and identification of claustrophobic tendencies. Applicants wear a breathing apparatus facemask and negotiate a crawl and walkway with clear vision. Halfway through the route their vision is obscured and they retrace their steps to the start/finish point. A safety officer will provide assistance if necessary. Applicants will need to complete this exercise in a given amount of time.

Equipment Assembly: This is a physical test of manual dexterity. Applicants must assemble and then disassemble a portable pump following a demonstration by the safety officer.

Equipment Carry: This is a physical test of aerobic fitness, stamina, upper and lower body strength and co-ordination. Applicants will need to carry items of equipment over a 25 metre (82 foot) course around two cones. This is not a test of memory as the safety officer will remind applicants of the sequence of events. The equipment will consist of one 30 metre (100 foot) hose reel tubing on a drum, two coiled 70mm soft suction hoses, one 100mm hard suction hose and suction strainer in a basket and one 33kg (5 stone) barbell. Applicants will need to complete this exercise in a given amount of time.

Interview, references & medical: The interview may be run by senior officers or an external company. You will be asked questions relating to your knowledge, skills and attributes to determine your suitability for the role of a Firefighter.

Ensure you are well prepared, have done research into the Fire & Rescue Service and the post you hope to fill, turn up on time and in a presentable manner.

References and Medical Check

References

References will only be sent for if you are successful at interview, prior to your medical. You will need to supply one personal referee and details of your current or previous employer for references to be obtained.

Medical

You will be asked to attend a medical where you will be examined by the Fire & Rescue Service Doctor and your medical records obtained from your GP. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire covering your medical history and will then be subject to a series of tests including:

- Hearing test - you will sit in a sound proof booth wearing headphones and will be asked to press a button when you hear a sound.

- Step test - you will be asked to step up and down on a box whilst your heart rate is monitored and the rate if step is gradually increased.
- Lung function - you will be asked to blow hard and long down a hollow tube until all your lung capacity is fully exhaled - a reading is taken and assessed accordingly.
- Physical stamina - you will be asked to squat on a machine designed to test your back and thigh strength and then pull a specified measurement.
- General tests - you will finally see the doctor who will test your reflexes and discuss your medical questionnaire with you.

