

Wholetime firefighter recruitment frequently asked questions

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Suitability

I have a disability; can I still become a firefighter?

Yes. Under the Equality Act anyone who considers themselves to have a disability can apply to join the fire service. A disability is defined by the Act as: Anyone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

You will be asked if you have a disability as part of the recruitment process and to give details of the type of adjustments you may require in order to take part in the selection process and to fulfil the role of a firefighter, should you be successful. Each case will be considered on an individual basis and if reasonable adjustments can be made to enable you to take part in the selection process and to fulfil the role of a firefighter, then your application will proceed.

I am dyslexic; will I be able to cope with the written tests? Dyslexia is classed as a disability and you will be asked if you have a disability as part of the recruitment process. Although the first 2 online tests are not timed, the ability tests are. The Situational Judgment Test and the Behavioural Styles Questionnaire are designed in such a way that dyslexia should not impact on the results. You can take as long as necessary, but don't walk away from your computer during the test. Complete the test in one sitting. The ability tests can be adjusted to allow extra time for individuals who are dyslexic. Before you are invited to do the those tests, you will be asked to indicate whether you are dyslexic and provide evidence in relation to this.

What if I'm colour blind?

You will be able to apply. If you get to the medical stage of the recruitment process, the severity of your colour deficiency will be assessed and a risk assessment will be made.

I have a beard for religious reasons, will I have to shave it off in order to be a firefighter?

Unfortunately yes. The Service respects everyone's religious beliefs but there are health and safety reasons as to why facial hair cannot be accepted. As a firefighter you will be required to wear a facemask when you are wearing breathing apparatus. To ensure that the

facemask forms a seal around the face, it is necessary to keep the face shaven to prevent any dangerous airborne chemicals entering the facemask.

Can I become a wholetime firefighter if I wear glasses/contact lenses or have had corrective eye surgery?

Yes. You may be asked to supply a recent document with eye test results from your optician and part of the recruitment process will include a medical. This will include an eye test and our Occupational Health Physician will determine whether your vision meets the standards to become a firefighter

The vision standards for eyesight are:

Visual Acuity

- Use of aids to vision should be possible at the recruit stage.
- Corrected visual acuity should be 6/9 binocularly, and a minimum of 6/12 in the worse eye.
- The minimum uncorrected vision for recruits should be 6/18 in the better eye and 6/24 in the worse eye for both full time and retained Firefighters.
- The current 6/60 unaided limit should be retained for serving Firefighters.
- An upper hypermetropic limit of +3.00.
- Testing for myopic corrections is no longer required.
- VA testing protocols must be better defined (e.g. for Snellen, distances, ambient lighting and use).
- Vision must be binocular.
- Be able to read N12 at 30cm unaided with both eyes open (applicants aged 25 and over).
- Be able to read N6 at 30cm unaided with both eyes open (applicants under 25 years of age).

Visual Fields - Normal binocular field of vision is required.

Contact Lenses

The use of modern, Soft Contact Lenses (SCLs) is now considered safe. Silicon hydrogen contact lenses for extended wear are suitable for the fire ground. Rigid (gas permeable) contact lenses are NOT suitable for use on the fire ground due to risk of visual disability and discomfort associated with foreign bodies becoming trapped beneath the lens. DSFRS do not give any financial contribution towards the costs of contact lenses.

Refractive Eye Surgery

If you have had laser surgery you will also need to provide the following:

- The date of surgery: (Applicants will not be considered until they are 12 months post surgery).
- Evidence that all medication relating to the surgery has stopped.
- Details of the pre-operative refractive error.
- A report following slit lamp examination confirming that the eye has returned to normal and that there is no loss of transparency over the pupil area.
- A report following refraction, topographic examination and pachymetry to confirm that there is no keratectasia.
- Details of post-operative corneal thickness and any post-operative complications.
- Evidence of satisfactory visual performance using a technique sensitive to the presence of scattered light and aberrations, e.g. using a low contrast log MAR chart.

The costs for provision of this information will rest with the applicant.

I struggle sometimes to hear things, will this be an issue?

Firefighting staff need to have a minimum hearing level to be considered fit for role which would normally be H2. Individuals who are below H2 may require a capability assessment before any decisions can be made on fitness for the role. It is unlikely that individuals with hearing below the H3 level (with aids if appropriate) would be safe on the fireground. The worse ear is used to grade the individual in their placement within the Service

What if I have special requirements?

You need to indicate this online when asked for the information as part of the application process. This will enable us to make the necessary arrangements on your behalf. If you do not supply this detail in advance, the assessment staff may not be able to accommodate you. Please note that this information will not be requested until after the online test stage.

I have some body tattoos. Will this be a problem?

Tattoos to the body are permitted providing that, where visible, they are not of an offensive nature and they do not detract from the positive public image of the Service. Facial tattoos are not generally permitted as it is felt they may detract from the positive public image of the service, however an assessment would be made on an individual basis to take into account religious and cultural beliefs.

What if I have Asthma?

Asthma does not necessarily prevent you from becoming a firefighter. Firefighters are exposed to smoke and other toxicants as part of their job. These are irritating to the lungs and upper respiratory tract and can exacerbate the symptoms of wheezing in firefighters with Asthma. Your condition will be assessed at the medical stage by our Occupational Health Department, after which a decision will be made as to your suitability for the role of firefighter.

Is it ok to have a body piercing?

In the interests of health and safety, all piercings must be removed before starting operational duty.

Registration**Where can I get an application form?**

The application process will be detailed on our website once recruitment commences.

Can I register/apply more than once?

No – you only have one opportunity to apply on the online system. The System Administrators can see all attempts and only the first attempt will be considered. All additional attempts by the same individual will be deleted. If it is found at a later stage that you have come through as a result of multiple attempts, your application will be removed from the process.

Is it important that I submit my details correctly?

Very important. If you do not register with the correct details consciously or unconsciously, your application will be removed from the process. Similarly, if we find later on in the process when checking relevant documents that you have not submitted the correct details, you will be removed from the process as an eye for detail is essential in the role of a Firefighter and it is in line with our Core Value of Honesty, clarity and accountability.

What happens next if I am unsuccessful with my online registration? After you register, you will need to complete the eligibility questions. If your application fails at that point you will

be receiving an email notification of that. Any communication in relation to passing or failing stages is done through a recruitment system and you will be informed by email how you are progressing through the process. You need to ensure those emails don't end up in your junk email box. Due to the high volume of interest we regret that it is not possible to inform you verbally of the result of your application or provide feedback.

How long does the selection process take?

There is usually a large response to any Wholetime Firefighter recruitment campaign. The selection process for the initial training course starting in August will take approximately 6 months.

If I'm unsuccessful at any stage, can I re-sit?

No. You have to be successful at each stage of the recruitment process to progress to the next stage. We do not have the facility to allow candidates to re-sit or re-take any assessments.

Eligibility

What does eligibility to work in the UK mean?

You are eligible to work in the UK, and therefore don't need to obtain a work permit, if any of the following apply:

- You are a British citizen
- You are an European Economic Area (EEA) citizen – see list below
- You are a Swiss national

EEA countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

Nationals of certain countries, such as Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria, may require special permission to work in the UK.

You will also need to apply for a UK residence card or be able to prove your right to work in the UK as an EU citizen (for example, a valid UK National Insurance number).

Am I a Commonwealth Citizen?

In British nationality law, a Commonwealth citizen is a person who is either a British citizen, British Overseas Territories citizen, British Overseas citizen, British subject, British National (Overseas) or a national of a country listed in Schedule 3 of the British Nationality Act 1981.

I am looking to transfer from another brigade?

We are currently not taking any transferees. However, you can still apply through the normal recruitment process with all other applicants.

What if I'm already a wholetime firefighter in another fire and rescue service?

You will be expected to complete the entire application process including all assessments.

What if I'm an on-call firefighter in another fire and rescue service?

You will be expected to complete the entire application process including all assessments.

I've recently passed the Firefighter Selection process with a different Fire and Rescue Service and I am on their holding list. Do I still need to apply and go through your recruitment process?

Yes, our processes may differ from those used within other Fire and Rescue Services and in the interests of fairness, it is vital that all candidates have been assessed in the same way.

How old do I need to be to apply?

You need to be 17 years and 6 months old at time of application to ensure that you are 18 years by the time the training starts in August.

Do I need qualifications to become a firefighter?

Yes, you will need 4 GCSE grades A* to C including English and Maths and a Science subject or equivalent/higher qualification. For general information and guidance on qualifications, please visit

www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/compare-different-qualification-levels

I have an IFE Level 2 Certificate. Does that meet the requirement of the 4 GCSE's?

This qualification is GCSE level and covers Fire Science, Operations and Safety; it is an assurance of education at this level across Science and Maths subjects. You would only need English and one other GCSE at A-C grade in addition to that.

Why do I need qualifications in English, Maths and a Science Subject to be a Firefighter?

The role has evolved and Firefighters are required to use a variety of different technical equipment in order to safely undertake the role. Firefighters are also encouraged to pass the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) Certificate and to be eligible for promotion further IFE qualifications are required.

If you did not study GCSE's and are unsure of what is an equivalent qualification please visit <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/compare-different-qualification-levels>

I have an IFE Level 3. Will that satisfy the 4 GCSE requirement?

It does.

Why will applicants need 4 GCSEs A* - C when this has not been the case previously and we do not ask this of our on-call firefighters?

The role of a wholetime firefighter is increasingly technical – IT equipment, understanding the science of fire behaviour, the mechanics of the wide ranging operational equipment we use etc – and we wanted to reflect this in our recruitment criteria to ensure we attract the right calibre of applicants. As an organisation without multi-level entry we need to ensure we employ a broad range of staff; from those who will be content to remain as wholetime firefighters to those who will one day reach senior levels of command within the fire service. It is important therefore that we set our recruitment criteria in such a way that attracts people with the range of abilities required for the modern day fire and rescue service. We do not insist on this for on-call firefighters as we appreciate that the role is different to that of the wholetime firefighter. The wholetime firefighter requires a broader range of skill sets than on-call firefighters due to the limitations of the time that can be spent on training and the limited opportunity to undertake specialist work/role.

Will you accept international qualifications?

We will accept international qualifications as long as they are equivalent to the England and Northern Ireland framework. For information on European qualifications please visit: [ofqual ~ qualifications-in-europe](#)

Will I need to produce my qualification certificates?

Yes, candidates who are shortlisted to attend the fitness testing stage will be required to bring in their certificates or confirmation from the awarding body. Photocopies will not be accepted. It is the candidates' responsibility to ensure that they have their certificates and failure to show them when required may result in withdrawal from the process.

What if I have lost my certificates?

If you have lost or no longer have your certificates then please visit [ofqual ~ getting-a-replacement-certificate](#). It is the candidates' responsibility to ensure that they get sufficient evidence of their qualifications by the time of the fitness testing stage.

How does my NVQ relate to GCSE's?

NVQs are offered in a range of subjects at various levels: Level 1 is a basic or Foundation Level. Level 2 is equivalent to GCSEs or First Diploma Level. Level 3 is equivalent to A Levels or Extended Diploma Level. Level 4 is equivalent to a Foundation Degree or Higher National Diploma.

How do I evidence my international qualifications and skills?

UK NARIC www.naric.org.uk is the designated United Kingdom national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills. Do you need an official document that states how your international qualifications compare to UK qualifications? If so, request a Statement of Comparability. You can apply online for any of these UK NARIC services, and upload your certificates to their website.

Why do I need a driving licence?

The ability to drive is an essential part of the role of a Firefighter, whether this is to get yourself to courses at distant locations, provide cover at or visit remote communities or to drive the appliance to incidents. Therefore you must have a full UK manual driving licence.

Do I have to have passed my driving test by the closing date or can I pass it by the course date?

You need to have passed it at the time you complete the eligibility questionnaire, which is at the very beginning of the process.

I haven't passed my driving test but hope to have passed before the start of the training course. Can I still apply?

No, not for the Wholetime vacancies.

I have points on my licence. Does that preclude me from applying?

No. However, there is a restriction on driving vehicles under blue light conditions if you have more than 6 points on your licence.

Can I apply if I was unsuccessful in the previous recruitment process?

Yes, as long as you meet the initial entry criteria you are able to apply.

I attended a new recruits course but was unable to complete this, can I apply again?

Please note that applicants who have been unsuccessful in completing a new recruits course within the last 2 year period are not eligible to apply for the role of wholetime firefighter.

Why is there a requirement to swim in the criteria?

Firefighters are 'in-water trained' and are expected to perform in-water rescues. We therefore need Firefighters to be able to swim and be confident in water to the levels we have set in the essential criteria.

Can I apply if I have a criminal record?

Yes, but only if your convictions are 'spent'. For rehabilitation periods please see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-guidance-on-the-rehabilitation-of-offenders-act-1974>

I live outside of the Devon and Somerset. Can I still apply?

Yes.

What is the maximum age you can apply to become a Firefighter?

There is no maximum age.

Online Tests

When will I need to do the online tests?

You will only be asked to do the Situational Judgment Test and the Behavioural Styles Questionnaire after the registration deadline.

Can I do the written tests at Service Headquarters?

No, all the tests must be completed online

What ability tests will I have to do online?

Numerical Reasoning: Questions will require you to interpret and analyse numerical information that is presented to you either in a graph, a table or a short passage. To correctly work out the answer, you will be required to calculate basic numerical equations that are equivalent to GCSE level. The questions will be constructed in such a way that you will first have to consider how the problem can be solved and to identify the correct information necessary to do so, before performing the calculations. You are allowed the use of a calculator.

Verbal Reasoning: Questions will be presented as short passages of information about a specific topic. Candidates will be asked whether certain statements can be deemed true, false or not possible to say, based solely on the information provided. All prior knowledge should be disregarded for the purpose of these questions, as they aim to assess the candidate's innate ability to interpret and evaluate verbal information. They are not concerned with learned knowledge.

Mechanical Reasoning: Questions will comprise images and contain very little text. You will be required to apply cognitive reasoning to mechanical, physical and practical concepts in order to solve related problems. Again, prior knowledge is not necessarily required as these tests assess innate cognitive ability.

How will you know I have done the tests myself?

At a later stage in the process, when you attend one of the assessments, you will be required to undertake a verification tests on a computer provided for that purpose. These tests will provide us with the confirmation that the results from the online tests were from you.

When will I find out if I'm successful in the online tests? If you are successful at the Situational Judgment Test or the Behavioural Styles Questionnaire you will be notified within 1-2 days of the completion deadline. It will take longer after the ability tests, possibly up to 10 days. Please ensure that emails from our recruitment system don't end up in your junk email box.

Fitness/swimming tests

Are the recruitment standards different for men compared to women?

No. The assessments are the same for both genders.

Would somebody's physical size have any bearing on their application?

No – this is a popular misconception, because there used to be restrictions on height, weight and chest expansion. Candidates are expected to pass strength and fitness tests as part of the recruitment process. The tests are at a level that's achievable by men and women of all different builds who maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.

How fit do you have to be to become a firefighter?

You will need to be reasonably fit and maintain your fitness levels throughout your career as a firefighter. You will be required to undertake two fitness tests, with the second one specifically to determine your aerobic capacity is at least a VO2 max level of 42. The first test will be a bleep test at which you need to reach at least level 8.6. You are also required to maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle throughout your career and regular fitness tests form a part of that.

What is a recognised effective swimming stroke?

Any of the following: breast/back stroke, front/back crawl, butterfly.

Why is there a requirement to swim?

Water rescue is a specialist role which you may be asked to perform. The essential criteria requires you to be able to swim and be confident in water.

What does the swimming test involve?

The test may include any or all of the following:

- Jump / dive into deep water
- Swim 50 metres in less than 70 seconds
- Swim 100 metres continuously on front and/or back in deep water using a recognised stroke e.g. front crawl, back stroke, breast stroke or butterfly.
- Tread water for 30 seconds
- Surface dive to the floor of the pool
- Climb out unaided without ladder/steps and where the pool design permits.

Will the test be in a normal swimming pool?

Yes

What do I need to wear for the fitness/swimming assessment?

As this stage includes a fitness test, you are advised to wear comfortable clothing, which does not limit your ability to exercise, and sport shoes. For the swimming test you will need a bathing suit/trunks and you should bring a towel.

What if I can't make an assessment date or the training course date?

The dates of the assessments and training course dates are made known at the beginning of the recruitment process. If you are unable to make any of the dates you will not be able to continue with the recruitment process.

What will happen if I forget to attend an assessment or arrive late to any of the assessments?

You will be withdrawn from the recruitment process.

What will happen if I forget to bring photographic ID and any requested documentation to assessments or interviews?

We need to ensure that the person we are assessing is the person that is applying for the role of wholetime firefighter; therefore if you do not bring photographic ID to each stage of the process you will be withdrawn.

Practical tests**How will you contact me to let me know to attend practical tests / interview / medical?**

All correspondence will be by email. It is important that you check your email regularly for invitations to the different parts of the process.

Emails will only be sent to the email address you registered your account with.

Presentation**What will be expected of me at the presentation?**

You will be asked to give a presentation on a topic you are familiar with or for which you may need to do some research. The presentation assesses your ability to stand in front of people confidently and giving them information about a subject, something modern Firefighters do regularly in the community.

Interview**What happens at the interview?**

This will be a behavioural interview, meaning that the questions asked are focused on your past experiences. The interview panel will consist of two or three members of staff and you will be asked questions relating to your skills and personal attributes to determine your suitability for the role of a firefighter.

How can I prepare for the interview?

As this will be a behavioural interview, meaning that the questions asked are focused on your past experiences, it is useful to think about examples from your past which may evidence questions you expect an interviewer might ask considering the job and duties of a Firefighter.

Medical**What does the medical include?**

The medical currently includes:

- measurements of height, weight and blood pressure
- urinalysis (urine tested for various abnormalities)
- eye test – near and distance vision
- breathing test (lung function)

- hearing test (audiometry)
- fitness assessment.

What do I need to wear for the assessment?

As the medical includes a fitness test, you are advised to wear comfortable clothing which does not inhibit your ability to exercise and sport shoes.

References

Who should I use as a reference?

References must include at **least two** positions with separate employers and, as a minimum, **cover the last 3 years** of your employment and/or training history. Any gaps in the 3 years will need to be accounted for and verified when we obtain the employment clearances. You should provide the names and full contact details of the people who have agreed to supply references. Referees will be required to comment on your competence, personal qualities and suitability for the post. This may be your line/department manager, or someone in a position of responsibility for any work experience or placement undertaken. If you are a student or trainee this should include a teacher/tutor at your education institution.

I have not been in employment for 3 years. How can I provide references for that period?

If you have not been in employment or education for a minimum of 3 years then you should seek one reference from your last known employer/teacher/tutor and a personal reference. Personal acquaintances must not be related to you, or have any financial arrangement with you.

I can only provide 1 reference covering the 3 years. What do I need to meet the reference requirements?

you should seek one reference from your last known employer/teacher/tutor and a personal reference. Personal acquaintances must not be related to you, or have any financial arrangement with you.

What detail will I be asked to provide for my References?

Yes. ensure applicants check with their referees for their latest email address and also to ensure they type in the correct email address.

Vetting & Pre-Employment Checks

Why do you do security & pre-employment checks?

Fire Service personnel often visit security sensitive buildings when carrying out the duties of their role. To ensure that the people we employ are suitable to enter these premises and maintain the security standards in relation to them, we follow the Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS). This Standard is a guarantee for the public, our partners and stakeholders that we have employed who can be trusted and relied on and involves verification of identity; nationality and immigration status; employment history (past 3 years) and criminal record.

What security checks will you be carrying out if I'm successful and at what point will you do the checks?

Currently we carry out Basic Police Act Disclosures (PAD) through Disclosure Scotland but we will soon look to undertake Standard Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) checks for all of

our firefighter in place of the PAD and you should be prepared to undertake this higher level security check. The vetting checks are requested to ensure that you have not been convicted of a criminal offence which makes your employment in the role of a Firefighter unsuitable. This application is made in line the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This check will be carried out when you have been successful at the presentation and interview stage.

How do I know if my conviction is 'spent'?

For rehabilitation periods please see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-guidance-on-the-rehabilitation-of-offenders-act-1974>

Training

Where will I need to attend training?

The initial training will be based at Severn Park, Bristol. Further training could be at any location within Devon and Somerset.

How long is the training course?

The initial training course is an assessed full-time course. It is compulsory to attend the full course and successfully pass all parts of the course. The course is continuously reviewed to ensure the content meets the requirements of the role and more details of the course will be available during the recruitment process. The course is 8 weeks in duration. The course is on a full board basis.

Employment

Where are the vacancies?

The vacancies are not linked to any particular Fire Station and decisions about your posting will be made only after the training stage. Therefore, you should be prepared to be working anywhere in Devon and Somerset.

Can I choose which station to work at?

Unfortunately no, we can only take into account where the Service has vacancies.

What will I be paid as a Firefighter?

Firefighters start on a salary of £22,237 during the 8 week initial training course. You will then be placed on the development rate of pay of £23,162 during your probationary period. Once you have been deemed as competent, your salary will increase to £29,638.

What are the hours of work?

Wholetime firefighters are required to work a flexible shift pattern equivalent to 42 hours per week which will include a mix of days and nights and weekends.

Can I have a second job?

Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service has a policy on secondary employment. Employees cannot engage in this without first obtaining written approval.

Are there any career prospects?

Yes there are opportunities for development and promotion. This could be moving into a specialist area such as fire protection (enforcing legislation in non-domestic premises) or becoming a manager.

How many jobs are there?

The number of vacancies available depends on a number of factors such as retirement rates and organisational needs. We are therefore unable to provide specific numbers at this stage.

Will I have to pay for my uniform?

Uniform is provided free of charge including any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that will be issued to you.

How much annual leave do wholetime firefighters get?

Wholetime firefighters have 30 days annual leave, plus 8 bank holidays per year.

What is the start date of employment for the Wholetime position if the applicant is already On Call or joins from a different Fire Service? And is the course shorter?

All individuals who are successful through the current wholetime recruitment process regardless of their background will be attending the 8 week recruit course which starts on 14 August. Current DSFRS On Call employees may not need to attend parts of the induction, which starts on 9 August.