

**ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS**

# **On-call firefighters**

## **Information for potential employees**



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# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

## What are on-call firefighters?

An on-call firefighter is a paid person employed by a fire and rescue service who is 'on call' to respond to a range of emergencies and to engage with their community. They have everyday lives and jobs, until their pager sounds - then they become professional firefighters.

The work may be called 'part-time', but on-call firefighters are trained and experienced people on the front line, saving lives and protecting people and community assets. On-call firefighters are paid for their services, they receive thorough training and learn all they need to know about emergency situations as well as additional personal skills.

On-call firefighters come from all areas of the community. For example, they could be men and women who are at home, in full or part-time employment, working for themselves, studying at college or university, or not currently employed. They are exceptional people who give their time to assist the fire and rescue service and help protect their communities.

## Who can be an on-call firefighter?

Firefighters must be at least 18 years of age with a good all-round level of fitness and there is no upper age limit. On-call firefighters need to work or live within an agreed distance of a local community fire station as they must be able to get there within a specified time of receiving a pager alert, driving at normal road speeds. As we can't predict when they will be called out, on-call firefighters should have the ability to be flexible in their work or home-based activities.

Many employers are prepared to release on-call firefighters from their workplace from time to time when their pager alerts them to attend an emergency incident. Other on-call firefighters work for themselves or simply have time available to help serve and protect their community. When firefighters are on-call and their pager sounds, they need to be able to stop whatever they are doing and report immediately to their community fire station.

On-call firefighters need to have good communication skills together with personal skills such as courage, understanding, reliability, flexibility, determination, self-motivation, common sense, commitment, enthusiasm and the ability to work within a team. They also need to be able to reflect the current values set by fire and rescue services at all times.

Above all, being an on-call firefighter requires a real desire to make a positive difference and to serve the local community.

To be an on-call firefighter you will need to agree a minimum commitment of dedicated time, which could be during the night, at weekends, during the day or a



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Chiefs Council



Home Office

# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

combination of all. Additionally, you must be able to give periods of time in the first few years to undergo essential training.

## Why are on-call firefighters needed?

On-call firefighters are a vital part of today's fire and rescue service. They provide an effective, efficient service that gives emergency cover to more than 90% of the United Kingdom.

Fire and rescue services actively recruit people from their communities who can respond on an on-call basis at certain locations. This can be challenging in smaller towns and rural areas, because nowadays there are fewer people who both live and work in small communities. On-call firefighters are a crucial and highly valued asset to local services and communities.

## How often would I be needed?

The number of incidents that an on-call firefighter attends varies between community fire stations - you could be called out only two or three times a week for an hour at a time. Further discussion with your local fire and rescue service will be able to show you exactly what the call volume is likely to be at any given location.

You will be required to attend training sessions (commonly held on an evening) each week for two or three hours at your local community fire station for essential training and maintenance of fire and rescue equipment. There could also be times when you may need to attend additional training sessions and training courses to acquire new and essential knowledge, skills and understanding. Your local fire and rescue service may be able to offer flexible options for on-call firefighters to attend these required training courses.

We recognise that there will be times that unexpected family or work demands prevent you from being available and on those occasions, you will be allowed to 'book off-call'. In addition, you will also be entitled to paid annual leave.

## What do I get out of it?

The job of being a firefighter is quite unique. It can be unpredictable, exciting and rewarding, coupled with the satisfaction and respect that comes with providing a crucial service to your local community as part of a closely knit, professional team. You will learn new skills along the way such as firefighting, wearing breathing apparatus, road traffic collision procedures and fire safety, and there are opportunities to learn other transferable skills, such as leadership management, large goods vehicle (LGV) driving, first aid and trauma care and health and safety qualifications.

Additionally, once you have successfully completed your initial training there may be further opportunities to gain specialist skills and qualifications such as specialist operations or appliances, training, coaching and mentoring, fire and rescue service



**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council



Home Office

# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

strategic projects and promotion to a leadership role and incident commander. You will be part of an organisation that is very visible to the public and as such upholds the highest standards of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Joining a fire and rescue service is a great way of meeting new people – both the people you work with and those in the community who you help. There's a special kind of bond amongst firefighters that comes from working together as a team in conditions that are sometimes potentially dangerous or emotive. This helps bind the team together in a way few other jobs can.

As an on-call firefighter you will receive remuneration based on your hours of availability, plus an hourly rate when you attend incidents, weekly training sessions, training courses, community safety activities or carry out equipment maintenance, as well as paid holiday.

## **Holiday**

You will be entitled to four weeks paid leave, and after five years' service, this entitlement increases to five weeks.

## **Pension**

From the start of your employment you will be able to contribute to a firefighter's pension scheme, which the Service will also contribute to.

## **Information for your employer**

On-call firefighters who are planning on responding to incidents while at their place of work must have permission from their primary employer. It is important that employers understand what this involves and that they make appropriate contractual arrangements, so please ensure they receive the Information for Employers Guide this can be downloaded from [www.oncallfire.uk](http://www.oncallfire.uk).

Employers will also need to complete documentation confirming that an on-call firefighter can be released from work.

## **Becoming an on-call firefighter when you're self employed**

Some on-call firefighters are self-employed and include mechanics, accountants, bricklayers, plumbers, project managers and shop owners.

Many of these people have found that being an on-call firefighter has a positive impact on their business. This is because they have better links with local businesses and their communities and they are well known and trusted by the people in their area.

EC Drivers Hours and Tachograph Rules for Goods Vehicles (Regulation 561/2006)  
The EC Drivers' Hours and Tachograph Rules for Goods Vehicles (Regulation



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National Fire  
Chiefs Council



Home Office

# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

561/2006) limit driving time and ensure that proper rest periods are taken so that road traffic accidents are prevented. The rules apply to anyone who drives an 'in-scope' vehicle. 'In-scope' describes a goods vehicle over 3.5 tonnes, or a passenger vehicle with nine or more passenger seats.

All on-call firefighters applicants will be required to notify the fire and rescue service if their primary employment involves driving 'in-scope' vehicles. A member of the fire and rescue service will discuss hours of availability with individual applicants to ensure the proper rest periods and imposed limits are observed.

## Information for your partner/family

Without the support and encouragement of their partners and families, on-call firefighters would struggle to carry out their role.

This support does mean that occasionally the lives of partners and families can be affected. The main disadvantages to being on-call are:

- It is difficult to plan spur of the moment activities
- You can be called out in the middle of the night
- On-call firefighters cannot be relied on to be the sole-carer when on-call - alternative child or dependent care arrangements are needed to make sure you can respond to an emergency quickly.

However, having an on-call firefighter within the family does have its advantages too, such as:

- Serving and protecting the community in which you live
- Being a positive role model within the community
- Increased confidence and continual development of new skills
- Ability to assess risks
- Financial reward
- Being part of a close-knit professional firefighting family

## Personal appearance

On-call firefighters are expected to present themselves and dress in a professional manner whilst at work. A uniform that reflects the professional image of the fire and rescue service is provided and allows on-call firefighters to be appropriately dressed for the range of activities in which they are involved.

For safety reasons, jewellery including rings, earrings and body piercings may not be worn whilst on duty.

## General Information

**Vision:** Firefighters require a certain level of eyesight to enable them to carry out their role and must meet a required standard of vision when applying to join the fire service. Eyesight doesn't have to be perfect to be a firefighter, but applicants are required to undertake an eye sight assessment to become a firefighter.



**NFCC**  
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Chiefs Council



Home Office

# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

**Contact lenses:** for safety reasons, only soft contact lenses are acceptable.

If you have any doubts regarding your eyesight we suggest that you book an appointment with your optician and take the information provided to get their opinion.

## Comments from on-call firefighters

“I always knew that I would join the crew at my local fire station. I grew up around the station and its firefighters and it was something I had wanted to do for as long as I can remember. I even chose my job because it allowed me to devote time to be an on-call firefighter in the area.”

“It’s a great job. It gets you known in your community and gives you a chance to give something back. All the crew have different jobs and backgrounds and we bring all those skills together working as a crew.”

“I would recommend being an on-call firefighter. People are always glad to see you. We sometimes arrive at situations which are out of control and because of the training and skills we have we bring those situations under control. It’s the most satisfying job in the world.”

“For me the team work is the most important thing about being an on-call firefighter. We run towards trouble when everybody else is running away and we do it as a team, supporting one another as we work to protect our community.”

“I love being a firefighter and I see the benefits of employing firefighters in my business. As well as being excellent team players they have an awareness of safety and risk which is invaluable when you’re working with large agricultural machinery as we do.”

“It is a role I would recommend to anyone. It’s hard work but rewarding and the self-esteem and personal development you get from being part of the fire and rescue service makes it all worthwhile.”

“I find it really rewarding, we are trained to a very high standard and then we put that training to use helping people in our community and I get a great deal of satisfaction from that.”

“It was something I was interested in, so I went to the station on drill night and that was how it all got started.”

“At work people know that I’m a firefighter and it really does help me with my job, as well as the respect people show you I get asked about fire safety all the time and use my knowledge to help make my clients safer.”



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# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

“I would say to anyone thinking of joining that the more you put in the more you get out, but they should go for it. It’s a great way to give something back to the local community and I have made good friends through my role as a firefighter.”

## The selection process and how to apply

### The Selection Process

The recruitment and selection of on-call firefighter is dependent on the applicant living and/or working within a specified distance of community fire stations. The selection process is designed to assess essential criteria and personal attributes required for the role of firefighter, including: physical ability, awareness and mental ability. Your fire and rescue service may use either online or hand-written processes for your application or to assess specific criteria. Physical assessments will take place at one of your fire and rescue service establishments. The length of time it takes to complete the selection process varies and your local fire and rescue service will be able to provide you with information regarding timelines for all aspects of the process.

### Initial Contact

You can contact your fire and rescue service by visiting your local station, visiting your fire and rescue service website, through social media, calling your fire and rescue service telephone number or you may want to visit the national on-call Firefighters website – [www.oncallfire.uk](http://www.oncallfire.uk) where you can express an interest in joining your local fire and rescue service as an on-call firefighter.

Your fire and rescue service will ask you to complete initial documentation either electronically online or in written format and return this to the HR Department. The documentation asks for general contact information and for you to indicate when you would be available to be on-call and to respond to operational calls. This forms part of the recruitment process and you would need to be able to maintain this availability if successful in being offered a post as an on-call firefighter.

### Availability

Availability means how many hours you agree to be on-call and when those hours are (during the day and/or evenings and/or weekends). You will not be working for the agreed number of on-call hours, but the fire and rescue service will pay you to be “available”. You can go about your normal life at home or work, but if you get an emergency call requesting your assistance, you must be able to drop what you are doing and get to your local community fire station within a specified time. Staff at your local on-call community fire station will be able to provide you with a detailed explanation of on-call availability.

If there are vacancies at your local community fire station, and your availability matches when cover is needed, you may wish to request an application. Your fire and rescue service will make arrangements for you to complete a formal application.



**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council



Home Office

# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

If there are no vacancies, or the availability does not match when cover is needed, your details may be retained, and your local fire and rescue service will keep in touch with you in case their situation or your situation changes.

## Application

The application form asks for basic information and guidance is provided to help you complete the form. Some applications can be completed electronically and emailed to your fire and rescue service, whilst others use online or hand-written processes. If you do not have access to a computer an application pack can be posted to you.

## Interview

Upon receipt of a completed and successful application, you will be invited to attend an interview. The interview may be locally designed by your fire and rescue service, based upon their local requirements. It may also be competency based following the National Personal Qualities and Attributes (PQA) Framework. This means that, you will be asked questions about examples of when you have displayed certain behaviours such as working with others, problem solving, commitment to diversity and integrity.

Examples may be from your primary employment but in the case of young people, it could include school and other activities and in the case of those returning to work after a gap in employment, it could include taking part in community or voluntary activities.

The interview is an opportunity to discuss the next part of the selection process and the commitments of the role, and to confirm your availability and that you can respond from your home or work base to the on-call station within the required timeframe. The interview can also be used to identify if you may need any additional support prior to undertaking written and/or physical selection tests. You will also be required to provide evidence of permission to live and work in the UK.

## Interview Outcome

If you successfully pass the interview stage of the selection process you will be invited to continue to the next stage of the process, which consists of written and physical tests.

## Additional Support

Fire and rescue services may be able to offer candidates additional support sessions to help them prepare for the assessment day. These sessions are designed to help candidates who are ready, or nearly ready for the selection tests, to maximise their chance of passing the tests. During additional support sessions appropriately trained staff will conduct an initial physical assessment and provide advice and guidance on improving fitness levels as appropriate. The HR team will be able to discuss the



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# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

format of the written tests, provide practice papers to sit and information about other support available.

## Assessment Day

You will be invited to attend an assessment day to undertake specifically designed written and/or physical tests (your fire and rescue service may use online written tests). All candidates will have a maximum of three attempts to pass these tests. If unsuccessful after three attempts you may not be able to reapply for a specified period of time. However, your fire and rescue service will provide you with information regarding your performance and any required areas for improvement.

Your fire and rescue service may use locally designed written and physical tests based upon their locally agreed role requirements or they may use the National Firefighter Written and Physical Tests.

## National Firefighter Written Tests

These tests consist of a series of multiple choice questions designed to assess your abilities and aptitude for becoming an on-call firefighter. The tests are conducted in a classroom style environment or online and take approximately three hours to complete (including breaks).

They consist of three tests which need to be completed in a set time and include:

- Working with numbers
- Understanding information
- Situational awareness and problem solving

If you can evidence prior learning through a level two qualification in Maths and/or English, you may not be required to sit the Working with Numbers and/or Understanding Information test.

## National Firefighter Physical Tests

The selection process consists of several role related physical tests, some of which need to be completed within a specified time. All aim to assess your level of cardiovascular and muscular strength/endurance, with elements of manual dexterity also involved.

- Aerobic Fitness Test - Group multi-stage fitness test
- Ladder Climb - Confidence whilst working at height
- Casualty Evacuation - Lower and upper body strength test
- Ladder Lift / Lower Simulation - Lower and upper body strength test
- Breathing Apparatus Crawl - Confidence, agility and possible claustrophobia



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# ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

- Equipment Assembly - Manual dexterity
- Equipment Carry - Aerobic fitness, muscular strength and stamina

In each of the above tests you will be given full instructions and support from qualified staff.

## Assessment Day Outcome

If you successfully complete all the required selection criteria you will receive a conditional offer of employment which is subject to the outcome of the occupational health screening assessment and reference checking. If you are unsuccessful in the written or physical tests you will be advised at the assessment day and given feedback. The HR Department will then arrange for you to re-sit the test(s), provided this was not your third attempt.

## Occupational Health Screening Assessment

You will be asked to attend a medical appointment with your fire and rescue service occupational health department. Occasionally candidates may not be able to suitably demonstrate all the requirements of the occupational health screening assessment, and in these circumstances the fire and rescue service may offer a functional test to assess whether the candidate may fulfil the requirements of a firefighter's role. Where appropriate, the fire and rescue service will offer reasonable adjustments to the workplace to support candidates in being able to successfully fulfil the requirements of the role.

## Reference Checks

Reference checks will be completed by the HR Department. Two references will be required from a current and a previous employer. References will always be sought directly from the referee. The fire and rescue service will not rely on references or testimonials provided by the candidate themselves, or on 'open' references or testimonials, e.g. addressed 'To whom it may concern'.

## Offer of Employment

Once all aspects have been successfully completed to the required standards and satisfaction, a formal offer letter and contract of employment will be issued to you and arrangements will be made for your initial training and the provision of uniform, including personal protective equipment.

## Uniform

On receipt of satisfactory references and medical clearance, uniform and personal protective equipment is provided and must be worn whilst you are on duty. When wearing uniform, you should ensure that your conduct is professional at all times and uniform should not be worn at any time, other than for official fire and rescue service business.



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