



DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE

On-call Recruitment Guide

Version 1.2 June 2026

PASSIONATE ABOUT
CHANGING & SAVING LIVES

CONTENTS



3 Foreword

4-5 The role of a firefighter

6-7 The Code of Ethics

8 The recruitment process

9 Application form

10 Response check

11 Station visit

12-17 Availability

18 Online tests

20-21 Fitness and practical assessments

22-24 Pre-employment checks

25 Interview

26 Medical and eyesight standards

27-30 Development in role

31 Benefits of working for DWFRS

32 Next steps...

33 Further Information

FOREWORD

You can also develop skills such as first aid and leadership – which may then benefit you in your primary employment.

This digital booklet has been designed to give you an easy reference guide to what's involved in becoming an on-call firefighter.

Thank you for your interest in joining our Service and I wish you well if you decide to apply!



Andy Cole QFSM
Chief Fire Officer

On-call firefighters are a vital part of Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Responding to emergency calls from their place of work or home, on-call firefighters make up two thirds of our operational workforce and, nationally, they provide efficient and effective emergency cover across more than 90% of the UK.

The on-call duty system is reliant on people who are prepared to make themselves available to respond to emergencies when needed.

How much availability you can offer - and when - is something you can agree with your station management, and there is flexibility to book off when you need to.

Our on-call firefighters are dedicated to changing and saving lives, and all use excellent team working and problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to remain calm under pressure.

THE ROLE OF A FIREFIGHTER

On-call firefighters are paid professionals, who do the same work as their full-time (wholetime) colleagues. They come from all walks of life, and do an extraordinary job for the Fire and Rescue Service, playing a vital role in protecting the local community.

Around two thirds of the firefighters in Dorset and Wiltshire work on an on-call basis, making them extremely important to both the Service and the communities they serve. They live or work close to the fire station, and respond to a pager when needed, rather than crewing the station on a full-time basis.

They are contracted to be available during certain hours, fitting it around their home and work commitments. This is usually for between 60 and 120 hours per week, but it can vary. Between them, each fire station team will provide cover for weekdays, evenings, overnight and weekends.

This guide will give you an insight into the role of an on-call firefighter and the steps you will need to take to join our fire family.

Who are on-call firefighters?

On-call firefighters...

- Attend emergency calls
- May have other employment
- Are on an 'alerter' response
- Live/work close to the fire station when 'available'
- Have a good standard of fitness, which is maintained
- Commit to a number of 'available' hours per week (variable each week)
- Attend a weekly drill night, courses and extra training
- Are paid for their time and commitment to the role

THE ROLE OF A FIREFIGHTER

Types of incidents that firefighters can attend...

- Fire
- Road traffic collisions
- Alarms (domestic, commercial and carbon monoxide)
- Helping partner agencies, such as the ambulance service
- Flooding
- Water rescue
- Animal rescue
- Working at height

But it's not just about fires ...

Click the link below to see a video about who we are:

[We are Dorset & Wiltshire FRS](#)



THE CODE OF ETHICS

We are proud of our Fire and Rescue Service, and we recognise, respect and celebrate the contribution made by all of our people.

Everyone works in a safe environment where they feel supported, welcomed and able to thrive. Value-based leadership and good teamwork is clear to see throughout the Service.

Decision-making is at the lowest appropriate level, and people are encouraged and empowered to use professional judgement and discretion. If things go wrong, we learn and improve.

Our leaders are accountable and manage performance and behaviour, with everyone feeling a strong sense of belonging.

The principles

The Core Code sets out five ethical principles, which provide a basis for promoting good behaviour and challenging inappropriate behaviour.

The ethical principles have been produced specifically for Fire and Rescue Services by the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Local Government Association and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners.

Purpose of our Code

Public trust and confidence in our Fire and Rescue Service rely on us all demonstrating ethical behaviours. The Core Code sets out these ethical principles and helps us continuously improve our organisational culture and workforce diversity and assists us in supporting our community in the best way.

It is effective only when we all consistently demonstrate the ethical behaviours. Everyone in every Fire and Rescue Service is expected to follow the Core Code. This includes those working with, or on behalf of, the Fire and Rescue Service.

The ethical principles have been reflected within our policies, procedures, and processes to ensure they are embedded and at the heart of day-to-day activity.

THE CODE OF ETHICS



What are behaviours?

Performance at work is not just about what we do (our technical competence) or what we know (our knowledge and experience). This is all underpinned by our culture (how we do things around here) which is made up of our systems, structures, working practices and a whole host of variables – all which centre around our shared values. Behaviours describe the attitudes and approaches that we take to work and explain:



THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

- Application
- Pre-screening phone call (Fitness, Availability and Response Time)
- Response check
- Station Visit
- Online tests
- Fitness testing and recruitment day
- Pre-employment checks
- Interview
- Medical and eyesight test





APPLICATION FORM

Ready to apply?

The application form is on our website and can be found in the 'current vacancies' section (under Working for Us).

Make sure you've read all the steps in this guide before you complete the form, so you know what to expect - we want you to feel confident and informed before you apply!

[Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and
Rescue Service | Apply now!](#)

RESPONSE CHECKS

After you submit your application, as part of our pre-screening checks, we'll need to check how quickly you can get to your local fire station. This is called a response check.

Most stations require firefighters to respond within five to eight minutes, but this can vary slightly depending on location. We'll assess this from your home or place of work, based on where you have indicated you will be responding from and how you intend to travel.

What we consider:

- Your exact address
- Known traffic conditions
- Time of day
- How you will get to the station



STATION VISIT

Following the initial pre-screening phone call, where we will discuss your fitness, availability to respond and response times, suitable applicants will be invited to visit their local fire station.

This is a great opportunity to:

- Meet the station management team;
- Talk through the role of a firefighter;
- Discuss your availability - the hours you're able to provide cover; and
- Learn about the importance of fitness and what's expected to pass our assessments.

This visit is relaxed and informal, and a brilliant way to ask any questions you may have before progressing further.

Once the Watch Manager at the station is confident that you are able to demonstrate the required fitness levels, and can offer the availability needed, you'll be invited to sit the online tests.



AVAILABILITY

What does it mean to be on-call?

When we talk about availability, we mean the times you've agreed to be ready to respond to emergencies by being 'on-call'.

Most of our on-call firefighters offer between 60 to 120 hours of availability each week, depending on their lifestyle and other commitments.

How will I be called out?

We use a personal device called an 'alerter' (like a pager) to let you know there's an emergency. In some areas, we also back this up with a text message system.

Response times

Each station has its own response time (typically five to eight minutes), which we'll discuss this with you during your pre-screening phone call and in further detail at your station visit.

It's important to remember:

- You must be able to reach your station within your agreed response time;
- Firefighters are not exempt from the Highway Code; and
- You must always travel safely and legally to your station.

Things to consider before committing to being on-call

- Can you stay within the required distance of your station to meet your response time during your on-call hours?
- Are you able to wake up and leave quietly at night without waking the whole house?!
- If you get a call during the night, can you still manage to function the next day on reduced sleep?
- If you're out walking the dog, can you get back to the car quickly enough, drop the dog at home and respond to the station in time?
- If you're picking up your children from school, do you have a backup plan if you're called away?
- Could you be out the door quickly mid-shower, head full of shampoo?!
- And... what if relatives or friends pop round just as your alerter goes off?!

AVAILABILITY



AVAILABILITY

When do we need cover?

The cover needed varies by station and may change over time. Your application form asks you to outline approximately when you might be available. We will discuss the availability you can provide during your pre-screening phone call and explore how this aligns with the needs of the station you are applying to.

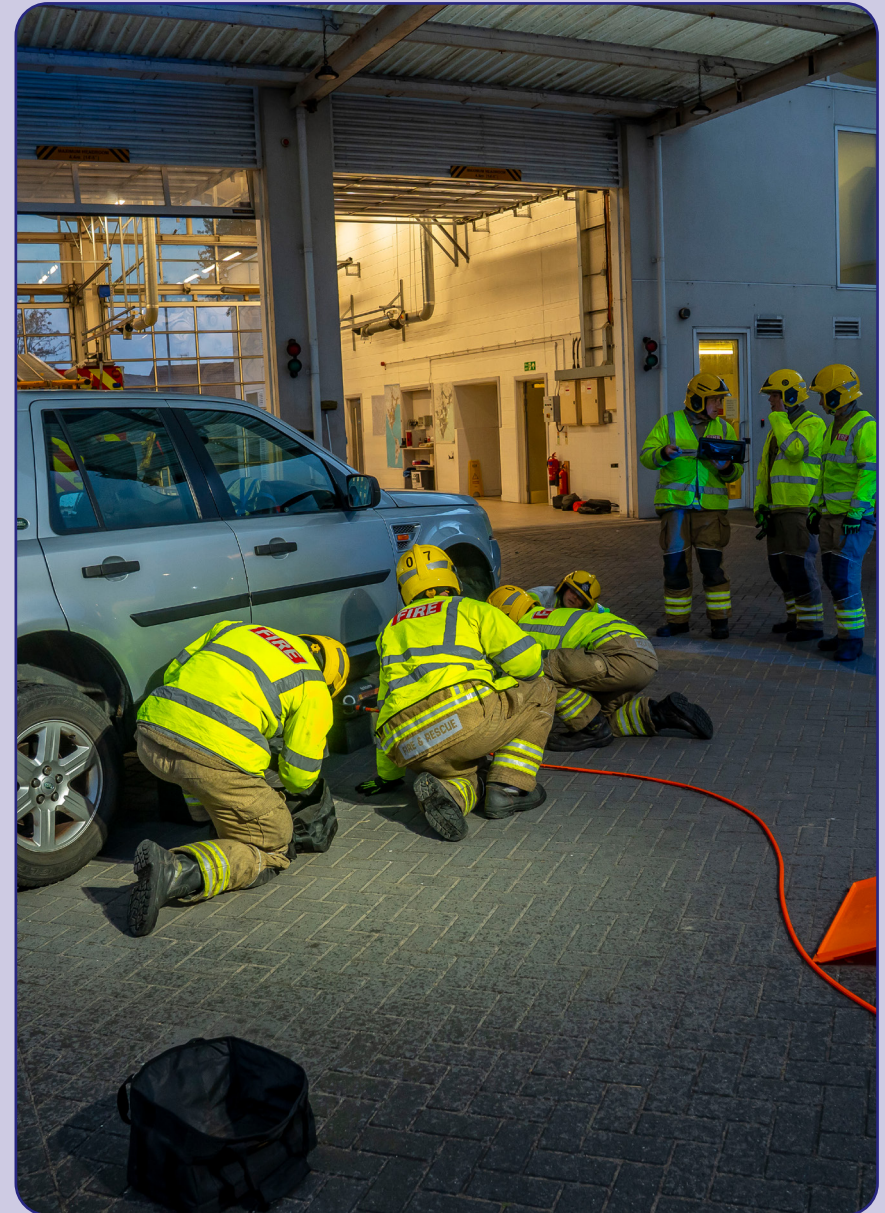
On-call availability is usually grouped into four types:

- Weekday day cover: Monday to Friday, 7am to 6pm
- Weekday overnight cover: Sunday to Thursday, 6pm to 7am
- Weekend night cover: Friday and Saturday nights, 6pm to 7am
- Weekend day cover: Saturday and Sunday, 7am to 6pm

Working another job? No problem – but let's plan ahead

If you have a main job (we call this your primary employment), it's important to:

- Discuss the on-call role with your employer;
- Check whether you can be released from work when your alerter goes off;
- Decide if you'll be responding only outside your main job hours; and
- Ask us for our guide: [Having On-Call Firefighters Work for You](#). If you wish, we can also talk to your employer directly to answer any questions.



AVAILABILITY

How you let us know you're available

You'll be asked to confirm your availability as part of the process, and this will form a part of your contract with DWFRS.

Here's how it works:

- You complete the form in 30-minute time slots to show when you're available.
- We ask for a minimum two-week pattern to help with planning.
- You can vary your availability week to week – for example, one weekend on, one weekend off.

Top tip: Print a copy of the availability you intend to offer, outlining the slots you think you can cover, and stick it by your front door. Every time you head out, check it – would you still have been able to respond?

More things to think about

- Have you talked with your partner, family and employer about the commitment?
- Will someone be able to take over at home or work when you dash off to a call?
- If you work early in the morning, are you booked off-call early enough to avoid being late?
- Can you respond from your place of work if needed?

Drill nights and training

Every station has a weekly drill night, which you'll need to attend.

During your first year, training is more intense – around 30 days of courses, which may require time off from your primary employment.

After that, most training and refreshers can be scheduled more flexibly, sometimes at weekends.

AVAILABILITY

Pay

Being an on-call firefighter is a paid role. You'll be paid for emergency call-outs, drill nights, training courses, routine equipment checks, and annual leave.

Your pay will vary based on:

- Your level of training and development;
- How many hours you're available;
- The number of incidents you attend; and
- Any community engagement work carried out.

[Full details of operational pay can be found on our website](#) - the document refers to 'retained duty system', which is another term for on-call firefighters.



AVAILABILITY

How long do fire calls last?

- Most calls last around an hour.
- Larger incidents may need crew rotation every four to six hours, depending on the physical demands.
- We understand you may need to call or message someone during an incident – for example, to organise childcare or update your employer. We support this.



ONLINE TESTS

Once you've reached this stage, you'll have one week to complete the online Assessment for Firefighter.

The assessment measures your personal preferences and values across 28 different behavioural scales which have been identified as predicting real-world firefighter performance and engagement.

What about English and Maths?

You must either:

Provide certificates showing you've achieved GCSEs (grades A-C or 9-4) in English and Maths, or hold a degree or equivalent qualification;

OR

Sit online tests in:

- English and/or Maths; and
- Mechanical reasoning.

Please note, if you take the online tests in English, Maths or Mechanical, we may also carry out a short follow-up check on your recruitment day to confirm your results. The role of an On-Call Firefighter is covered by the [Code of Practice on the English language requirements for public sector workers \(Part 7 of the Immigration Act 2016\)](#).

As a firefighter, you will need to speak clearly and confidently with members of the public and give accurate advice in English. Your spoken English will be assessed as part of the selection process.



FITNESS TESTING AND PRACTICAL ASSESSMENTS

Fitness testing and practical assessments

Being a firefighter is a physically demanding role, so a good level of fitness, strength and stamina is essential.

On receipt of your application, we will discuss your fitness levels with you during your pre-screening phone call.

You must be able to reach the required fitness standards before you apply.

Fitness and practical assessments are usually held on the first Wednesday of each month.

- Location: DWFRS Headquarters in Salisbury.
- You'll start with the Multi-Stage Fitness Test (MSFT), also known as the 'bleep test'.
- If successful, you'll move across to the Salisbury Assessment Centre (at the nearby fire station) to complete the eight job-related practical tests.

Multi-Stage Fitness Test (MSFT)

To pass the MSFT, you'll need to reach at least Level 8.8. This is the national standard and is designed to check your cardiovascular fitness and endurance.

A training plan is available on our website to help you prepare for the fitness tests. We can also set up a practice run of the MSFT at some of our stations (subject to risk assessment).

You'll need to maintain a good level of fitness throughout the entire recruitment process, including during the medical assessment, which involves the Chester Treadmill Walking Test.

Once you become an on-call firefighter, you'll need to stay fit as part of your role, with annual fitness assessments to make sure you're ready for duty.



FITNESS TESTING AND PRACTICAL ASSESSMENTS

The seven job-related practical tests

You'll also be assessed on seven practical tasks, these are:

- Equipment carry
- Casualty evacuation
- Breathing apparatus crawl way (rat run)
- Ladder climb
- Equipment assembly
- Ladder lift
- Ladder extension & ladder extend to lower

Want to see the tests in action?
[Click here to view the videos and practical test guide](#)



PRE-EMPLOYMENT CHECKS

Once you have successfully passed your fitness and practical tests, we'll begin your pre-employment checks. These are essential steps we must complete before offering you a formal contract of employment.

Here's what will be required:



Identity and Right to Work in the UK

- Identity check – verified using official ID and an in-person check.
- Right to work check – You must provide proof that you can work in the UK, such as a passport, visa, or Home Office share code.
- For further information, please refer to www.gov.uk/prove-right-to-work



Employment history

We require a minimum of three years' history, covering employment, education, or training. You'll need to:

- Explain and provide evidence for any gaps of three months or more.
- Submit a copy of your HMRC employment history, or self-assessment tax returns, if you are self-employed.



References

Please provide details for a referee:

- They must be your current or most recent employer (or teacher, if applicable).
- Referees must not be relatives and should have a professional email address for contact.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT CHECKS



Criminal Record (DBS) Check

A Standard DBS check will be carried out. We are unable to accept applications if you have unspent conditional cautions or convictions. Further information is available in our [Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy Statement](#).

You will be asked to declare any 'spent' cautions or convictions (unless it is a protected or filtered offence), and will be given the opportunity to provide an explanation of the circumstances surrounding their declarations. A Risk Assessment will then be completed using the National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC) Positive Disclosure Risk Assessment Template.

You'll also need to confirm five years of address history, and provide a Certificate of Good Conduct if you've lived outside the UK during that time.

If your circumstances regarding any offences change during the application process, you must inform us immediately.



Driving License Checks

Where applicable, we will request information regarding your driving licence to support the completion of a background check. You will be required to:

- Disclose any existing licence points prior to the check. Please note that failure to do so may be considered as part of your risk assessment.
- Notify us promptly if you receive any licence points at any stage during the recruitment process or throughout your employment with DWFRS.



PRE-EMPLOYMENT CHECKS



What you can do now

To help avoid delays later in the process, we recommend preparing the following as early as possible:

- Consider an eye test with your local Specsavers if you are concerned about meeting the eyesight standards.
- Locate and organise your ID documents – some may take time to obtain and could delay your progress.
- Check that all ID is in your current name and shows your current address.
- Register for an HMRC online account, if you don't already have one.
- Inform your referee that they'll be contacted – this helps avoid delays in receiving responses.
- Gather evidence to support your employment history, including:
 - o Any gaps longer than three months.
 - o Time spent living abroad (you may need a Certificate of Good Conduct).
 - o A full five-year address history.
 - o Evidence of previous name history (if applicable)
- Ensure you have acceptable proof of your current and previous addresses, such as a recent bank statement, utility bill, (dated within the last three months) or council tax or mortgage statement (dated within the last twelve months).
- Complete your pre-employment form (once requested) accurately and in full, so we can set you up on the payroll system without delay.

INTERVIEW

As part of your application, you'll be invited to attend an interview.

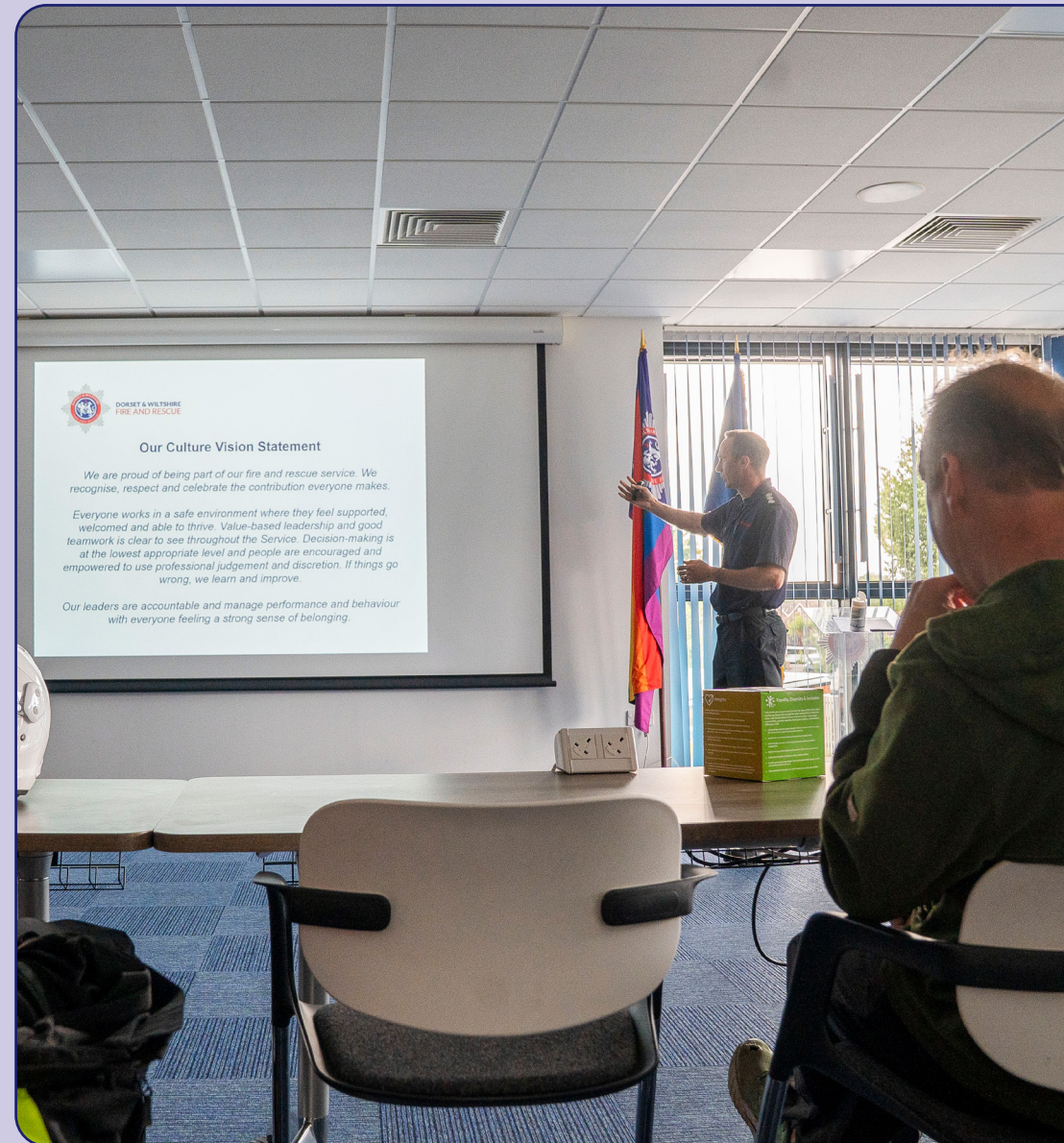
This is your opportunity to talk about:

- Your understanding of the firefighter role;
- The skills, experience, and personal qualities you would bring to the Service; and
- Your motivation for wanting to become an on-call firefighter.

Some of the questions will be based on the Fire and Rescue Service Code of Ethics, so it's a good idea to read through that beforehand. It covers the values and behaviours expected of everyone working in the fire service, such as integrity, respect, and professionalism.

During the interview, we'll also talk about the commitment and responsibilities involved in the role, including the impact it may have on your home and work life.

We'll ask you to reconfirm your availability, checking there haven't been any changes to your circumstances since this was discussed at your initial station visit.



MEDICAL AND EYESIGHT STANDARDS

You will need to undergo an eyesight test and medical examination as part of the recruitment process.

For your eyesight test, you will be asked to attend an appointment with one of our approved opticians, who will assess your vision in line with our eyesight entry standards (visual acuity, colour vision and field of vision) and advise the Service of any visual difficulties detected.

If you have any concerns about your eyesight – including potential colour vision issues – we strongly encourage you to book an eye test with your local Specsavers before embarking on the selection process. This will give you reassurance and help avoid the disappointment of completing the process only to find you do not meet the required eyesight standards at a later stage.

For your medical examination, which includes a hearing test, you will be invited to attend one of our Occupational Health Units.



DEVELOPMENT IN ROLE

While the aim is to complete most courses within the first year, we understand our on-call firefighters often juggle multiple responsibilities, so there is some flexibility to attend in the second year.

All attendance is paid, but you may need to take annual leave or unpaid time off from your primary employment - so we recommend discussing this with your employer early on.

Support and expectations

You'll be assigned a mentor or buddy to support you throughout your development. Some elements will require independent study, and you'll gain experience in using our digital systems. Don't worry, we'll guide you through these!

Over the two years, you will:

- Attend and pass probation reviews at two, three, four and five months.
- Complete a development folder (assignments, presentations, reflective practice) by around month twenty two.
- Pass three stage reviews following Basic Skills Acquisition (BSA), Road Traffic Collision (RTC) and Breathing Apparatus (BA).
- Build confidence in using our online systems.

Finally, you'll complete a final course assessment. Passing this marks your transition to a competent firefighter, with an increase in pay and the removal of development markings from your helmet.

DEVELOPMENT IN ROLE

Your journey as an on-call firefighter with DWFRS begins with a 24-month development pathway.

You'll start as a development firefighter, attending weekly drill nights and completing your first course - Basic Skills Acquisition (BSA) - at one of our training centres.

Key courses and timeline

During your first two years, you'll be required to complete several essential courses. The fixed dates are pre-course learning (one day, usually a Saturday) and Basic Skills Acquisition (ten days, Monday to Friday over two consecutive weeks).

There are also several flexible courses, which are pre-scheduled with a range of dates so you can choose what works best for you. These are:

- Corporate induction (one day within the first six months)
- Code of Ethics workshop (two hours within the first six months)
- Breathing apparatus (ten days, Monday to Friday over two consecutive weeks)
- Road traffic collision (five consecutive days)
- Immediate Emergency Care (four consecutive days)
- Breathing apparatus refresher (one day, 12 months post initial breathing apparatus course)

DEVELOPMENT IN ROLE

Supporting Neurodiversity and Individual Needs During the Recruitment Process

We actively encourage applications from people with all kinds of minds and believe that your unique strengths will be an asset to our team.

DWFRS values neurodiversity and we want everyone to have a fair opportunity to take part in our recruitment process. We recognise that everyone's needs are different, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. If you need support or accommodations at any stage, we are keen to put in place what works for YOU wherever possible.

Support may be helpful for many reasons. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Neurodivergence (for example autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia)
- Caring responsibilities
- Religion or belief
- Gender identity or affirmed gender status (including trans and non-binary applicants)
- English not being your first language
- Cultural requirements
- Any other personal circumstances that may affect how you take part in the process



DEVELOPMENT IN ROLE

Please talk to your Watch Manager or someone on the Recruitment Team to discuss your individual needs and how we might best support you through the recruitment process.

Examples of support we may be able to offer include (this list is not exhaustive):

- Arranging interviews at a particular time of day
- Providing extra time for written tasks or assessments
- Allowing short breaks during assessments
- Offering virtual interviews where appropriate
- Providing a quiet or low-distraction environment
- Allowing time for prayer or religious observance
- Offering flexibility around caring responsibilities
- Allowing additional time where English is not your first language
- Allowing a support person or interpreter

For neurodivergent applicants, you may choose to share supporting information (for example an EHCP, assessment report, or letter from education). This is not required, but it may help us understand what support would be most useful.

We are committed to providing an inclusive and supportive environment for all our staff. You are encouraged to attend our Neurodiversity network meetings, where we can support one another and share experiences.



BENEFITS OF WORKING FOR DWFRS

smarter working iconic location
parking on site union membership
mental health support free gym access
learning & development flexible working
pension scheme TRiM blue light card
discounts employee benefits continuous service
mindful employer counselling annual leave
physio sessions maternity adoption eye voucher
paternity health & wellbeing flu vaccinations
parental leave sports & social club fire fighters charity
leisure centre access
employee recognition

NEXT STEPS...

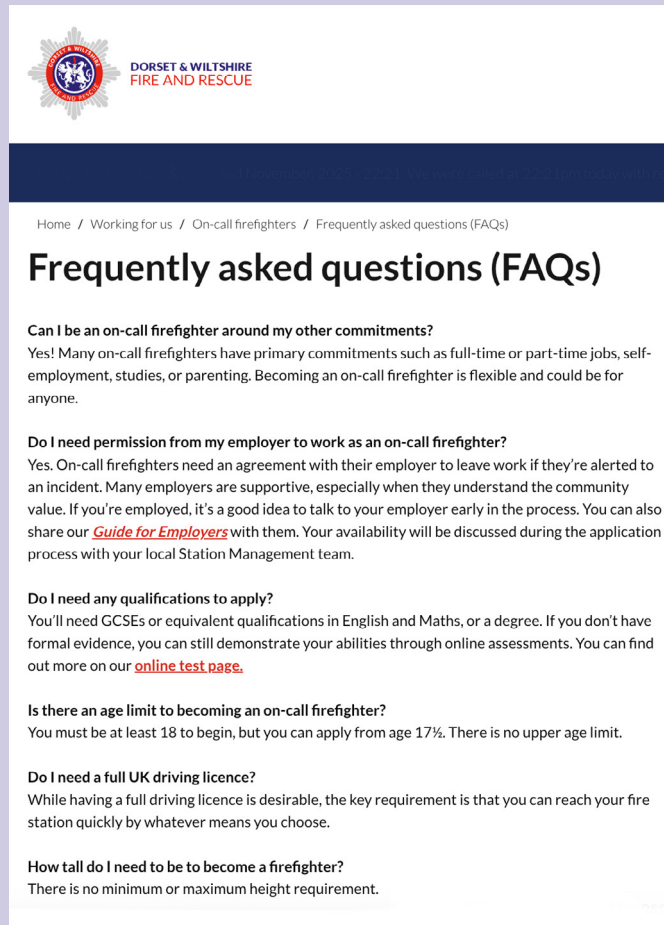
- Is this for you?
- Speaking to family members
- Primary employer
- Your fitness levels
- Consider an eye test if you are concerned about meeting standards
- Paperwork to support pre-employment checks
- Realistically think about the hours you can provide
- Are you available for the next steps in the process?
- Any further questions



FURTHER INFORMATION

Frequently asked questions

There is a wealth of information on our website about becoming an on-call firefighter, including some FAQs, [so please do take a look!](#)



The screenshot shows the website header for Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue, featuring their logo and name. Below the header is a dark blue navigation bar with the text 'Home / Working for us / On-call firefighters / Frequently asked questions (FAQs)'. The main heading is 'Frequently asked questions (FAQs)'. The content includes several questions and answers:

- Can I be an on-call firefighter around my other commitments?**
Yes! Many on-call firefighters have primary commitments such as full-time or part-time jobs, self-employment, studies, or parenting. Becoming an on-call firefighter is flexible and could be for anyone.
- Do I need permission from my employer to work as an on-call firefighter?**
Yes. On-call firefighters need an agreement with their employer to leave work if they're alerted to an incident. Many employers are supportive, especially when they understand the community value. If you're employed, it's a good idea to talk to your employer early in the process. You can also share our [Guide for Employers](#) with them. Your availability will be discussed during the application process with your local Station Management team.
- Do I need any qualifications to apply?**
You'll need GCSEs or equivalent qualifications in English and Maths, or a degree. If you don't have formal evidence, you can still demonstrate your abilities through online assessments. You can find out more on our [online test page](#).
- Is there an age limit to becoming an on-call firefighter?**
You must be at least 18 to begin, but you can apply from age 17½. There is no upper age limit.
- Do I need a full UK driving licence?**
While having a full driving licence is desirable, the key requirement is that you can reach your fire station quickly by whatever means you choose.
- How tall do I need to be to become a firefighter?**
There is no minimum or maximum height requirement.

Safer Recruitment

DWFRS is committed to ensuring the safety of children and adults at risk. This commitment is reflected in our recruitment, selection and vetting processes for roles with [Safeguarding](#) responsibilities. Refer to our [Policy Statement](#) for further information.

Customer Experience Surveys

If you exit the process at any stage, you will be invited to complete a customer experience survey. We value your feedback, and this will support us to make improvements.