Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

The purpose of this booklet is to provide information on the various career options within Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service. Several job roles in our organisation are outlined along with the selection and training process, where applicable.

Background to NIFRS

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) serves the entire population of Northern Ireland, an area of over 5500 square miles, with a population of 1.7 million. NIFRS Headquarters is situated at 1 Seymour Street, Lisburn. We have four Area Commands and a Training Centre (situated in Belfast). There are 14 Districts, 67 Fire Stations, 51 of which are Retained (part-time), 2 are Variable Crewed (cover is provided by Wholetime staff 1100-2300hrs per day, supported by Retained staff), 8 are Wholetime (full time) and 6 are Combined Wholetime/Retained Stations. We have 1 Volunteer Fire Station on Rathlin Island.

Everyday we are helping to save lives and this is not only by fighting fires. In addition to this our work involves many challenges including responding to road traffic collisions, floods, collapsed buildings and attending specialist rescue incidents. We also carry out proactive work to educate and promote community safety through talking and engaging with different groups, explaining the risks of fire or installing smoke alarms. Behind the scenes there are many other roles that the public doesn't see; the Firefighter (Control) Operators who take 999 calls and mobilise fire appliances, administration teams, IT specialists, accountants, technicians and more.

Diversity within NIFRS

NIFRS prides itself on the services it provides and the close contact maintained with the community. Diversity is increasingly evident in our community and we are striving to reflect and promote this amongst our staff. We are aiming for an inclusive organisation irrespective of gender, age, race, disability, religion, political opinion, marital status or sexual orientation. Having a diverse workforce made up of people from different backgrounds, with different life experiences, ideas, skills and talents enables us to deliver a better service to our community.

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

Women in the Fire & Rescue Service

We actively encourage females to consider firefighting as a viable career. We are under-represented in the numbers of females who apply for Firefighter vacancies and who work on our Fire Stations. However, this is improving with more women becoming interested and applying to become Firefighters and the number of female Firefighters employed in NIFRS has steadily increased in recent years. We wish to demonstrate that women are valued at all levels within our organisation in a variety of occupational roles, including that of Firefighter. We endeavour to achieve this through raising the profile of firefighting as an attractive and challenging career choice for women. This can be helped through positive endorsement in the media and also by Careers Advisers and teachers in schools and colleges, particularly with female pupils and students. We have also worked towards creating and sustaining a working environment that enables women to undertake their role effectively. This is in addition to providing mechanisms to assist **all** employees in maintaining work-life balance and a fulfilling career. Specific outreach measures are taken from time to time to raise gender awareness.

Jobs within NIFRS

Jobs within NIFRS are broken down into Operational, Control and Support roles.

Operational Roles include the following:-

- Firefighter
- Crew Commander
- Watch Commander
- Station Commander
- Assistant Group Commander
- Group Commander
- Area Commander
- Assistant Chief Fire Officer
- Deputy Chief Fire Officer
- Chief Fire Officer

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

Control Centre Roles include:-

- Firefighter (Control)
- Crew Commander (Control)
- Watch Commander (Control)
- Station Commander (Control)
- Assistant Group Commander (Control)
- Group Commander (Control)

Support Staff Roles include:-

Support Staff roles are undertaken at our Headquarters in Lisburn and at our four Area Commands, District Commands and Training Centre locations. These roles include-

- Receptionists/Telephonists
- Supervisory/Managerial roles
- Information Technology Officers/Assistants
- Human Resource Officers/Assistants
- Finance Officers/Assistants
- Transport Workshops/Mechanics
- Communications Technicians
- Payroll/Accounts Officers/Assistants
- Purchasing Officers/Assistants
- Stores Personnel
- Manual Technicians
- Estates Officers
- Internal Audit roles
- Health and Safety roles

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

Recruitment and Selection Processes within NIFRS

The role of a Firefighter

To be a front-line Firefighter it is necessary to have good composure and understanding. A Firefighter may need to react quickly in a crisis, or communicate vital information with clarity.

Our Firefighters advise people on fire prevention, escape routes and hazards at home and in business. They visit schools to teach and work with children to raise awareness of dangers like fireworks and matches. Our Firefighters also get involved in the wider community to promote safety initiatives and inspect buildings to make sure they meet fire safety regulations.

Much of the job involves working with the public. This means successful applicants must have good communication skills whether they are out and about visiting peoples' homes to provide fire safety advice, dealing with an emergency or organising activity within the team. Our Firefighters need to be able to listen to people, empathise and make themselves understood.

Successful applicants should enjoy working as part of a team. Much of the job will involve working together which means being considerate, resourceful, innovative and decisive. A Firefighter may need to accept directions, on other occasions they will be asked for their views and input.

Within NIFRS we have two categories of Firefighter - Wholetime and Retained.

Our Wholetime Firefighters are employed in a full-time capacity and work a shift system on a 'Watch' basis. Wholetime Firefighters can work at any of our 8 Wholetime Stations or Combined Wholetime/Retained Stations.

Retained (Part time) Firefighters are an essential part of our organisation and they serve the community within which they live/work. We have 53 Retained Fire Stations across Northern Ireland. Retained Firefighters respond to pagers when an emergency call is received and must live or work within 5 minutes of the fire station. Clearly, flexibility is the key and an applicant will need to be either self-employed or have an employer who is supportive and willing for them to leave work at a moments notice to attend an emergency.

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

All our recruits must meet some essential standards:-

- Must be able to demonstrate the necessary skills and experience to be a Firefighter
- Have a current driving licence or be prepared to obtain one when eligible. Adjustments will be made, where reasonable, should a disability prevent applicants from driving.
- Have good eyesight.

Meeting these criteria is just the start of the process to assess an applicant's abilities. An applicant will have to undergo a range of both written assessments (working with numbers, understanding information, situation awareness and problem solving), as well as physical/practical tests. The physical tests involve a breathing apparatus exercise, ladder climb, hose running test, dead lift and ladder extend exercise. Following on from successful participation in the written and physical tests, an applicant would be required to attend an interview and then undergo a medical. Appointment is subject to satisfactory medical and ophthalmic examinations, and medical and fitness standards are high.

What aspect of the Trainee Firefighter Course did you most enjoy?

"On the whole it was a very intense course. It was both physically and mentally demanding but I got out of it what I put in. I enjoyed all areas of the course for different reasons but the aspect I got most out of was the Breathing Apparatus module.

During the course I had the opportunity to work more closely with the staff and my fellow trainees. We began to rely on each other more and started working better as a team. It was hard work and we all put the effort in because we didn't want to let our team mates or the staff down. I definitely noticed a change in the whole squad after we'd all been through the BA (Breathing Apparatus) training".

Ben Torney, Firefighter, NIFRS

If successful in the selection process, a candidate will undertake a Trainee Course over the next 12-17 weeks**.** Upon passing the Course, he or she will be placed at their station. A two year probationary period then follows.

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

For those considering applying for a front line position such as a Firefighter, it might be beneficial to start a fitness programme. It is important for everyone to check with their doctor before they commence a fitness programme. Some of the best ways to improve fitness include swimming, running and circuit training. It also helps to build upper body strength for tasks such as lifting and climbing. However, Firefighting is not just about physical fitness. To be able to do the role well mental agility and communication skills are also important. This is also the case for other roles in our organisation.

"When I'm socialising with my mates, all dressed up out on the town, they often say to people "Guess what she does?" Some of the big blokes don't believe it and say "How could you carry me out of a burning building?" The answer is technique and training."

Vicky Shakesby, Humberside Fire and Rescue Service

The role of a Firefighter (Control)

Each time someone in Northern Ireland dials 999 and requires the Fire & Rescue Service, the call is passed to our Control Centre. Within the Control Centre, a Firefighter (Control) will use the information available to them and a range of sophisticated technology to evaluate each situation and despatch fire appliances and other resources needed to deal with the incident as appropriate. Whatever the incident a Firefighter (Control) must keep in touch with the Firefighters at the scene and other Fire & Rescue Service officers who are either in attendance or otherwise involved. If front-line staff demand additional information, or extra resources and specialised equipment are required, then again it will be the Firefighter (Control) who will respond to their needs.

An applicant for a Firefighter (Control) vacancy must have:-

- 5 GCSE's A,B,C or equivalent (including English Language);
- Keyboard qualification such as RSA Stage 2 in Word Processing or equivalent;
- Working knowledge of Windows environment;
- Good oral and written communication skills; and
- Have a current driving licence or be prepared to obtain one when eligible. Adjustments will be made, where reasonable, should a disability prevent applicants from driving.

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

"Once at my position in the Control Centre, I along with other Firefighter (Control) Operators on my Watch commence our shift by collating the Wholetime stations staffing levels. This is to ensure sufficient staff on stations to crew and and manage all the appliances. Officer availability is also checked. Throughout the shift, I pack in a mixture of duties. These include answering and mobilising fire calls, radio communications and monitoring incidents from start to finish. I also complete computerised statistics after each incident from which reports can be drawn, along with many other administrative duties. During each shift I am also expected to carry out elements of training, to develop my skills and keep me up-to-date with policies and procedures."

Dean McWhirter, Firefighter (Control) NIFRS

Initial training for this specialised role will be intensive during the first month. On completing this part of the initial training, a Firefighter (Control) will be attached to a Watch Team, working under close supervision for the duration of their probationary period. Regional Control Centre staff undergo training throughout their careers.

Support Staff Roles

Varied work goes on behind the scenes in support of service delivery. Management and Support Service functions vary across NIFRS, ranging from Finance, Human Resources, Information and Communications Technology, Estates and general Administration. For these posts, entry requirements are dependent upon the area of work and the skills required. Some may require professional qualifications e.g. Human Resources Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development membership, accreditation by examination from accounting bodies and specialised IT analyst/computer programming expertise.

Finance

Employees working within Finance can have varied responsibilities including accounting, invoice monitoring and payment, payroll processing etc. In order for staff to carry out these roles effectively, we ask that for some posts applicants must have both professional experience and qualifications.

Human Resources

Human Resources support all areas of the Service in relation to recruitment and selection, employee resourcing, employee relations and equality and diversity. The Human Resources Directorate is also responsible for overseeing training and occupational health in the workplace. To work in Human Resources, staff need specific training in Human Resources issues and many staff are required to be professionally qualified.

Information Technology

Information Technology is used both in mobilising our appliances across Northern Ireland and in facilitating our administrative functions. In order for staff to carry out roles effectively within our IT Department, we ask that some post holders must have both professional experience and qualifications.

Administration

Administration supports the day-to-day running of NIFRS, through a range of roles and functions such as Personal Assistant, administrative support (e.g. Clerical Officer) and Secretarial Support (Clerk Typist). Administration staff are employed throughout the different Departments at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters and Area/District Command locations. Some examples of the administrative roles are outlined below.

The roles of Clerk Typist, Clerical Officer and Telephonist

Clerk Typist

Post-holders are required to provide efficient and effective clerical, secretarial and administrative services. Duties can vary depending on work location and Department. However, they can include distributing mail, operating a switchboard, typing documents, designing presentations, reprographics, filing and other administrative work.

To be shortlisted for Clerk Typist posts, applicants must demonstrate on their application form that they possess the following:-

- A minimum of 3 GCSEs at 'A', 'B' or 'C' grades or equivalent including English Language.
- RSA Stage 2 Word Processing or equivalent.
- Good communication skills.

In addition an applicant may be required to demonstrate on their application form that they have a working knowledge of Microsoft Office e.g. Excel, Word, and Outlook software. The selection process for this position will also include an Assessment Centre.

Clerical Officer

Depending on work location and Department, Clerical Officer duties can vary and may include telephonist/reception duties, arranging travel for Service staff, checking invoices and raising appropriate paperwork to enable payment, updating computerised records and receipt and distribute mail, supervisory management, participation on appropriate recruitment and selection panels, typing of reports including confidential matters etc.

To be short-listed for a Clerical Officer post, applicants must demonstrate on their application form that they possess the following:-

- A minimum of 5 GCSEs at 'A', 'B' or 'C' grades or equivalent including English Language and Mathematics.
- Computer keyboard experience, knowledge, and understanding of Information Technology systems including various packages, e.g., Word, Excel.
- RSA Stage 2 Word Processing or equivalent.
- Good communication skills, both oral and written.

Depending on work location and Department, an applicant may be required to demonstrate on their application form their experience of working in an office environment and experience of Telephonist/Receptionist duties. Some Senior Clerical Officer posts may stipulate a preferred recognised qualification appropriate to the area of work or appropriate experience in that field. The selection process for this position will also include an Assessment Centre.

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

Telephonist/Receptionist

The main purpose of this job is to provide a telephonist and reception service at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters, greet visitors, operate a PA system, operate a security system and handle internal mail.

To be short-listed for the post, applicants must demonstrate on their application form that they possess the following:-

- A minimum of 3 GCSEs at 'A', 'B' or 'C' grades, or equivalent (including English Language).
- Previous telephonist/receptionist experience in a busy working environment.
- Previous computer keyboard experience.
- RSA Stage 2 Word Processing or equivalent.
- Good oral communication skills.

In addition an applicant may be required to demonstrate on their application form that they have a working knowledge of Microsoft Office e.g. Excel, Word, and Outlook software. The selection process for this position will also include an Assessment Centre.

Recruitment Process for Clerical positions

Short listed applicants will have to undertake a job related assessment centre, and if they have successfully completed the assessment centre, will then attend an interview.

Technical Development and Transport Roles

Support staff roles within this area include Communications Technician, Manual Technician and Workshop Mechanic. These roles provide essential back-office support to NIFRS. Our Communications Technicians maintain communications technology across our locations and our Manual Technicians support Stations and Departments by providing a daily delivery service between location. The Transport Workshops ensure that our vehicles and appliances are serviced, equipped and road-worthy.

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

Workshop Mechanic

Transport Workshops are currently situated at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters in Lisburn. However, a number of our mechanics are mobile in that they attend to our vehicles at our other Fire & Rescue Service locations.

Applicants must have:

- Served a full certified apprenticeship which included one module on heavy vehicles;
- Post apprenticeship experience working on heavy vehicles, light petrol and diesel vehicles;
- The ability to work unsupervised;
- A current LGV Driving Licence (Category C); and
- A positive and flexible attitude

The selection process for this position will also include an Assessment Centre. Short listed applicants will have to undertake a job related assessment centre, and if they have successfully completed the assessment centre, will then attend an interview.

Manual Technician

Manual Technician roles include driving, delivering mail, constructing flat pack office furniture, transporting heavy items between locations, cleaning and maintaining NIFRS vehicles. The job can also entail driving to other NIFRS locations or other places, as required.

Applicants must have:

- A current LGV Driving Licence (Category C);
- A minimum of 12 months' experience of driving vehicles exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum authorised mass; and
- A minimum of 6 months' experience of maintenance and cleaning in a working environment.

In addition, applicants may have to demonstrate their experience of driving and cleaning in a workshop environment.

Short listed applicants will have to undertake a job related assessment centre, and if they have successfully completed the assessment centre, will then attend an interview.

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

Further Information

The information contained in this guidance may be updated from time to time in accordance with changes to our functions and roles. Should you have any queries relating to the various roles within NIFRS please contact the Recruitment & Promotions Officer or the Diversity Officer at:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service
Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters
1 Seymour Street
Lisburn
BT27 4SX

Or alternatively please telephone: 028 9266 4221

We advertise our vacancies in the Belfast Telegraph on Tuesdays and also on in the Newsletter and Irish News on Thursdays. Retained Firefighter vacancies are advertised in the local press. Details of our vacancies can also be found on our website **www.nifrs.org**