# Initial Wholetime Firefighter Apprenticeship Course

## Overview of the course

All new Firefighter apprentices will complete a 13-week initial training course. At the end of the course, an apprentice will have the knowledge and skills needed to safely, effectively and efficiently carry out their role.

Successfully completing the initial course will mean an apprentice is ready to be posted to a fire station where they will continue their development to become a competent Firefighter.

The course has two distinct phases:

**Phase One Initial Training**

Phase One lasts for eight weeks and is typically completed at an external residential training venue.

This will be an apprentice’s first introduction to the Fire Service and its policies, procedures, and protocols that govern how they carry out their firefighting duties.

The initial course will cover the following subjects, and includes a combination of theoretical and practical input:

**Core Skills:**

Organisational structure – this introduces the rank structure of the Fire Service, and the role of a Firefighter within it.

Words of command – these are an agreed set of words and phrases used to communicate tasks quickly at an incident.

Fire Service equipment – apprentices will learn how to operate a wide range of firefighting equipment such as:

* Ladders – used to allow safe access and egress for firefighters and casualties.
* Hose reels – used for rapid intervention firefighting or small fires.
* Hoses – used for delivering large volumes of water and fighting large fires.
* Pumps – operated by trained firefighters to simultaneously regulate and supply water to an incident, which can be taken from the main water supply via a fire hydrant or an open water source such as a river or lake.
* Salvage – equipment used to salvage personal or high-value property belonging to the occupants or owners of a property at incidents attended by firefighters.
* Foam – used to extinguish specific types of fires.
* Standpipe key and bar – equipment used to access a fire hydrant to supply water to a fire engine, then pumped to firefighters at an incident if required to extinguish a fire.
* Lines – rope (otherwise referred to as a line) is used in the fire service for various functions such as hauling equipment up or lowering it down. They are also used for securing objects together or stabilising vehicles.

Throughout this phase of the course, theoretical input will be given on additional core subjects that a Firefighter comes across in their Fire Service career, including:

* Building construction
* Aircraft and helicopters
* Pumps and pumping operations
* Trench Rescue
* Animal Rescue
* Working in a confined space
* Lifts
* Hoses and Hydrants
* Fixed installations – fire suppressions systems such as sprinklers
* Electrical installations
* Railways
* Incident Command

**First Aid:**

Once the Core Skills element is complete, the apprentices will move onto First Aid training which is also referred to within the Fire Service as casualty care.

The Fire Service attend a wide and varied range of incidents meaning Firefighters may be faced with casualties that require a broad range of clinical skills.

At the end of this element, the apprentice will have the most up to date knowledge and skills to administer a high standard of immediate emergency care to members of the public at an incident.

**Breathing Apparatus (BA) and Fire Behaviour Training (FBT):**

One of the most risk-critical elements of firefighting is how to tackle fires safely and effectively. This element can be physically and mentally challenging but it is a rewarding step to becoming a Firefighter.

BA and FBT training gives the apprentice an in-depth look at the science of fire and how it can occur. It also covers the protocols and procedures used to extinguish a range of different fires.

There is significant emphasis on the protective equipment used by Firefighters, which ensures they can operate safely in high temperatures.

The apprentice will learn how to move safely around a property in limited visibility using techniques such as landmarking, touch, thermal imaging cameras, and effective communication. The training also covers safely searching a property and working in risk areas to look for casualties and safe techniques to extricate them.

**Road Traffic Collision (RTC):**

In this part of the training course, the apprentice will learn how to safely and effectively attend an RTC.

This element includes the legislation surrounding RTC’s and all of the key principles of how RTCs are dealt with by the Fire Service.

The apprentice is taught how to operate on various road networks and the importance of collaborative working with other emergency services and external agencies such as Highways England.

Some of the subjects are as follows:

* Working with police and ambulance
* Extrication techniques
* Car and LGV construction
* Stabilising vehicles
* Specialist tools used to perform extrication
* Protocols and procedures used at an RTC
* Casualty care at an RTC
* Effective communication
* The different roles adopted by Firefighters at an incident
* Dealing with vehicles on fire
* New vehicle technology
* Alternatively fuelled vehicles

**Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT):**

This part of the initial training course will cover at how the Fire Service deals with a range of incidents involving fuels, chemicals, biological, radioactive, or nuclear materials.

The incidents can take the form of fires, RTCs involving spills, explosions resulting in the leaking of hazardous substances into the atmosphere or deliberate acts of criminal or terrorist intent.

The training will look at safety protocols to deal with these incidents and the protective equipment and specialist tools on which the apprentice will receive training.

Another essential part of the HAZMAT course will look at environmental protection and the effect these types of incidents as well as firefighting activities can have on the environment.

**Assessment**

Towards the end of phase one, the apprentices will be given a range of written assessments to confirm their knowledge and understanding of what they have learned during the course.

To assess their practical skills the apprentices will participate in practical scenarios that simulate a range of incidents. The scenarios are designed to challenge the apprentices in a safe environment, whilst enabling the instructors to assess their skills and knowledge.

**Wellbeing**

Throughout the initial eight weeks, the safety and wellbeing of the apprentices is paramount. The instructing staff will ensure that all of the apprentices are treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and are a valued part of the team throughout the course.

Any unacceptable behaviour, either witnessed by or reported to instructing staff, will be dealt with consistently, in accordance with policy in a timely manner.

The course can be physically and mentally challenging, so from day one apprentices will have access to a range of supports including:

* Occupational Health
* Employee Assistance Programme
* Physiotherapy
* Benenden (members only)
* Trauma Support
* Blue Light Champions
* The Firefighters Charity

**Phase Two Training**

The next phase of the initial WT Firefighter Apprenticeship Course is held at RBFRS’s Training Centre, which is at Whitley Wood Fire Station in Reading.

It is a six week consolidation course designed to build on the initial knowledge and skills acquired during phase one of the course. During this phase, the apprentices will learn the subtle differences in policies, procedures and protocols of RBFRS and make sure they are ready to join a watch as an operational Firefighter.

RBFRS Instructors will provide more in-depth training on the core skills detailed above and familiarise apprentices with RBFRS equipment.

**Organisational Awareness**

An organisational awareness day will introduce other departments within RBFRS, to give an understanding of the broader aspects of the role of a Firefighter and the Service. This includes:

* Safeguarding
* Human Resources / Resourcing and Development
* Finance
* Communication and Engagement
* Information technology systems used within RBFRS
* Information Governance
* Health and Wellbeing
* Built Environment Programme
* Say-so
* Firefighters Charity

Towards the end of the six weeks, apprentices spend a day shift at an RBFRS fire station. They will train and attend incidents (under supervision) with the watch. This is an excellent opportunity for apprentices to experience life in their new workplaces.

**Final Scenarios**

At the end of the course, there are two days of realistic scenarios designed to assess the apprentices to determine whether they have achieved the standard required of a Firefighter. The scenarios will be significant, involving other members of RBFRS including existing Firefighters, Incident Commanders and live casualties, to add realism to the scenarios.

**Graduation Ceremony**

The 14 weeks culminate in a graduation ceremony, which recognises the enormous effort and achievement shown by the apprentices in successfully completing the Wholetime Initial Firefighter Apprenticeship course.

The ceremony is an opportunity for the apprentice to demonstrate to their friends and families their firefighting skills.