

JOB PROFILE: TRAIN DRIVER

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Want a fast-moving career?

Train drivers can travel at speeds of up to 200kph as they drive trains all over the country.

Train drivers operate their trains along tracks; they have to maintain the speed of the train, stopping when necessary, both at stations and at signals.

It is a demanding job; train drivers can be responsible for over a thousand people at a time on busy routes and the ability to remain alert and work calmly under pressure is very important to undertake the role safely.

Train drivers usually work around 35 hours in a week, though this can rise to 42, spread over 4 or 5 shifts which can include early starts and late nights as well as weekends and bank holidays. Most of their time is spent in the cab of the train, often alone, although they will spend time in stations or depots on rest breaks or waiting for their next train to arrive.

However it's not just about driving – many drivers have to make announcements to passengers as well as maintaining regular contact with control teams who monitor train movement and progress and liaising with station and depot staff to ensure that they are safe to depart. Drivers also have to be aware of other issues that could affect train operations, such as faults, engineering works and signalling problems.

There is no getting away from the fact that this can be a high pressure job. However it can be rewarding – once qualified, train drivers are well paid and receive good benefits.

ENTRY

There is a lot of competition to become a train driver. The number of applications usually outweighs the number of jobs available when trainee driver positions are advertised. And if you make it through the application stage, you have to go through several rounds of tests measuring aptitude, concentration and reactions as well as medical testing before you even get the chance to be interviewed. You will also be tested for drug and alcohol misuse.

Trainee drivers are recruited by train operating companies (passenger and freight) who will usually advertise vacancies on their websites. Trainee vacancies are not very common as many companies will recruit from within their workforce instead. You might want to consider applying for other rail jobs, such as train guard or on-board staff, to get you started and to enable you to show commitment to getting an understanding of how the rail industry works.

Applicants need to show commitment to learning to become a driver. It is not a quick process and requires remembering a lot of information. Flexibility is also important because of the hours and shifts you would be expected to work.

There is no upper age limit for becoming a driver, though some companies require applicants to be over the age of 21 before applying.

You do not need any particular educational qualifications to become a train driver, though many companies will ask that you have a sound basic education (GCSEs/S levels including Maths and English). You do need, however, to be generally fit and healthy, with good hearing and vision. Train Operating Companies will check your health rigorously during recruitment.

QUALITIES & SKILLS

To be a train driver you need:

- to be able to maintain concentration for long periods of time while working alone
- to be able to make quick decisions, calmly
- good coordination and reactions
- strong observational and communication skills
- high levels of safety awareness
- the ability to learn and remember regulations and routes

TRAINING

It can take up to one year of training before you can drive a train on your own.

During this time you will learn about topics including rules and regulations of train driving, train handling skills, route knowledge, traction types, fault finding, signalling, basic engineering, health and safety and dealing with emergencies. You will also drive a train, and get up to 300 hours experience of driving alongside an instructor.

Some train operating companies also have probationary periods, which are used while you are establishing your route knowledge. It is important to understand the features of any route you are driving. You need to know when you have to stop as sometimes you have to start braking miles before you can see the station you will be stopping at. Once you are able to demonstrate sound route knowledge

and have been passed as competent on the trains you will drive, you are signed off and available to be booked into driving jobs.

Once you are working as a driver you can work towards an NVQ level 2 in Rail Transport Operations (driving).

PROGRESSION & SALARY

Trainee drivers can earn around £17500 while they are training, which can rise to over £20000 once they have completed their initial training.

On completion of the probation and all training, salary can rise to around £30000.

Pay will vary depending on hours worked, employers and locations. In some cases overtime is also available.

Drivers can progress to become instructors or driver managers, looking after trainee drivers or teams of drivers.

FIND OUT MORE...

For further information and advice visit:

GENERAL RAIL ADVICE

- Careers In Rail Website

www.careersinrail.org

- The Railway Register

www.railwayregister.care4free.net

- GoSkills

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