

# Life as a Key worker under lockdown

Connor Moir: Firefighter, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

## Tell us about yourself

My name is Connor Moir and I am a Development Firefighter in County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, having joined the Apprenticeship scheme on a Level 3 Business Fire Safety Apprenticeship which began in May 2017.

I have been a member of the Young Apprentice Ambassador Network for two years now, taking pride in advocating apprenticeships as an alternative to further education and as a more than viable career path for young people.

## How has COVID-19 affected your job?

The emergence of COVID-19 has quite clearly brought challenging times for everyone, and this also applies for all emergency services, who have quickly had to adapt to the increasingly dynamic environment while still maintaining the high standards of service that we all endeavour to provide to our community.

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Life on a Fire Station is very team oriented. Most wholtime stations are separated into four watches (Red, White, Blue and Green), with each shift consisting of between five and ten people on one station at any one time for shifts lasting eleven hours on a day shift, and thirteen on a night shift. There is a lot of movement between stations as when people are sick or on holiday, people from different stations are detached in or others are brought in from other shift colours on overtime in order to maintain uniform fire cover across the county.

This obviously brings a challenge when trying to reduce the spread of a contagious virus, as the risk of potential cross contamination between watches and stations is very high. Additionally, Fire Stations are often used as centres for meetings, training courses and events such as open days where visitors, other emergency services and members of the public can use the Station freely.

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County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service was quick to respond to the information provided by the Government, starting with increasing communications regarding correct washing of hands and how to reduce the rate and likelihood of infection. Daily updates were and are still provided to all members of the Service and our working practices adapted as well along the way. In terms of life on a Fire Station, this was a gradual but significant change in our day to day running.

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The first significant changes that we experienced was the suspending of all but the most necessary community engagement activities, and all visitors to the station were restricted from entering. This community engagement did however take up a lot of our time on station, so the recent change means that we have more time to train and maintain our competency on the several hundred pieces of equipment that can be found on a County Durham and Darlington Fire Appliance, alongside maintaining our emergency response.

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In terms of our operational response we have been provided with more Personal Protective Equipment to be used in the event of coming across an incident where someone may be symptomatic of COVID-19, alongside a procedure of work that updates daily in line with Government advice. As crews, we maintain social distancing between each other, other watches, and the public, decontaminating both the appliances and the station at the end of each shift in preparation for the next crew coming on.

## Supporting the other Emergency Services

As time has progressed our colleagues in Fire Control have been working to ensure that the movement of Firefighters between stations via detachments are kept to a minimum, with pools of people local to each station being used for detachment and overtime. The Service has also been looking for ways in which we can do more to help out, especially for our colleagues in the NHS and North East Ambulance Service, with Firefighters being asked if they'd like to volunteer driving and/or disinfecting ambulances, making deliveries of food and medication to vulnerable people, and distributing Personal Protective Equipment between hospitals.

## How has your apprenticeship training helped?

My experience as an Apprentice has helped me in many ways to prepare for these pressing circumstances. During my apprenticeship not only did I gain several qualifications in Community and Business Fire Safety that enables me to carry out my Community Engagement work extremely effectively, but also to further develop the soft skills that come with working in a constantly changing work environment.

Every incident that we attend can vary wildly in the level of risk and complexity. As apprentice Firefighters we were trained and encouraged to dynamically risk assess situations to ensure the safety of ourselves, our colleagues and the community. Further training included the practical and more dangerous side of the job, this I have found to be equally rewarding, as part of a team I am able to help someone in their time of distress and need.

I am now able to competently navigate complex buildings in environments of extreme heat, smoke and darkness in search of casualties using Breathing Apparatus, extricate casualties that have become trapped following road traffic collisions using dedicated cutting equipment, and finally reassure the public when situations may seem bleak.

**“As Apprentice Firefighters we were trained and encouraged to dynamically risk assess situations to ensure the safety of ourselves, our colleagues and the community.”**

## Pulling together as a community

Finally, I'd like to use this opportunity to thank all members of our community. I see many people doing just what needs to be done, whether it is to stay at home alone, look after children or relatives in isolation or go to the frontline to provide retail, utilities, healthcare and emergency services. Each role is as relevant as the other in protecting our community at this very challenging time.