

Lowering the minimum age requirement for train drivers from 20 to 18 years



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Ministerial Foreword



Britain has one of the safest railways in Europe for both passengers and rail staff, but they could not operate at all without the professionalism and expertise of the licensed train drivers that serve our network.

Since the railways began in Britain, train driving has always been a highly skilled profession. Today, train drivers are responsible for transporting hundreds of thousands of commuters and other passengers, and thousands of tonnes of freight goods across the country each day. They play a critical role in supporting economic growth, connectivity, environmental sustainability and a safe railway. For this reason, Britain has rightly enforced rigorous entry and monitoring requirements for train drivers to ensure they are well trained, fit for service and proficient in their role. With these high standards, Britain's train drivers are some of the most professional in the world.

The profession is, however, facing challenges. The average train driver today is 48 years old, whilst the overall workforce is projected to shrink over the next five years, owing to existing train drivers taking retirement, or leaving the industry. Whilst the demographic profile of train drivers ages, the number of young people entering the industry remains relatively low, with many young people opting for alternative careers or further education. The reasons for this are varied, but one of the reasons identified is the minimum age requirements for entering the licenced train driving profession, which is set in law at 20 years. By this age, many young people will already be set on alternate careers.

Following the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), the UK government intends to use the freedoms and opportunities afforded by Brexit to reform our laws to better suit the needs and priorities of the rail sector and wider public in Great Britain. The Department for Transport (DfT) has been working closely with the rail industry to understand how we can support the sector to attract new people to the industry to become train drivers, including widening opportunities for younger people from various backgrounds.

This consultation seeks the views of a wide range of consultees from the rail sector who have an interest in train drivers and the proposal to reduce the minimum age requirement for train drivers operating on the mainline in Great Britain from 20 to 18 years old. This will be the first consultation in a two-phase approach looking at opportunities to reform the regime for train driving in Great Britain following the publication of the second post implementation review (PIR) of the Train Driving Licences and Certificates Regulations 2010 on 19 May 2023. DfT will be working with the rail sector to develop proposals for wider reforms during 2024 and consulting on those proposals at a later date.

Huw Merriman MP

Minister of State for Rail and HS2

Executive summary

Introduction

The government is committed to ensuring the legislative regime for train driving in Britain is fit for purpose and serves the needs of train drivers, the rail sector, passengers and the wider public in general. This involves acting upon the views of the rail sector on how the train driving regime is working for them and implementing changes where necessary. The opportunities to do so have now widened following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, which allows the UK to change our laws according to our own needs and is now possible following the passing of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 which gives us the powers to reform retained EU law.

The proposal to lower the minimum age requirement to be a train driver in Great Britain is an action being taken by the government that reflects these ambitions. This forms part of our wider work with the rail industry to deliver mutually beneficial reforms to improve the sector's operational and financial sustainability for the future.

DfT published the findings of the <u>second post implementation review</u> (PIR) of the Train Driving Licences and Certificates Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/724) (TDLCR). These regulations set out the requirements to be a train driver in Great Britain, which includes a licensing and certification regime based on meeting medical, professional competence, psychological, educational, and minimum age requirements. Whilst the PIR concluded that TDLCR should be retained, it also identified issues with parts of the regime and areas that could be changed. The PIR therefore recommended that industry should be engaged to explore opportunities for reform in these areas.

One area within the responses we received to the PIR consultation was a broad consensus for change to the minimum age requirement to be a train driver, which is currently prescribed at 20 years. This view was expressed by a broad cross-section of the rail industry, including train operators and trade unions, during the second PIR of TDLCR. Whilst the PIR identified several areas for potential reform, including around prescription in the regulations and administrative burden of the regime, reducing the age requirements was identified as a priority area for change.

Since the regulations were first developed and then implemented, new research has been conducted indicating that the age limit for train drivers could be lowered, safely, using existing training, monitoring, and testing processes. There has also been a growing desire to increase the diversity and pool of train drivers in the rail sector.

Since the PIR was published in 2023, DfT has worked with the rail sector to follow up on the case for lowering the minimum age requirements. Our discussions indicate that lowering the age requirements could have several benefits, including improving access to the profession for school leavers, increasing the diversity and the size of the train driver candidate pool, and helping keep services running through planning ahead to replace those drivers retiring or otherwise leaving the industry.

Across the rail sector, including from train operators and trade unions, stakeholders stated that they are in favour of this proposal and would like to see the benefits realised as soon as practicably possible. DfT has also sought the views of the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), the rail safety regulator who administer the licensing regime for train driving, and the Rail Safety Standards Board (RSSB) who undertook research to explore the relationship between minimum age and train driving. The ORR has indicated they are supportive of the principle of lowering the minimum age requirements for licenced train drivers to 18 years, subject to industry preparations, and that this can be achieved without an impact on safety or performance. RSSB are also supportive of the lower age limit.

DfT therefore believes it is the time to explore this proposal formally, with a view to making the necessary legislative changes. We have therefore decided to launch a consultation on the proposal to lower the minimum age threshold from 20 to 18 years old at the soonest opportunity, so that preparations can begin to support a potential change to the regime. The consultation questions that you are invited to respond to are set out in Annex B. This department is not proposing to change the minimum age requirements for train drivers operating cross-border rail services in the Channel Tunnel, which is 20 years old.

The PIR did identify other areas for potential reform, including around the administrative burden of the regime, the amount of prescription (especially in the schedules), the effectiveness of existing processes, and the rigidity of the regime arising from the specific requirements being set within a law first introduced in 2010, amongst other areas.

Having held initial discussions with the rail sector on wider reform to address these concerns, DfT is of the view that more work is needed at this stage to develop comprehensive proposals that could address these other issues. At the same, DfT does not want to delay progress being made to implement improvements to the regime where there is both consensus for reform and a compelling case to do so – with the proposal to lower the minimum age requirements being the most advanced to date.

For this reason, the government has decided to take a two-phase approach to reform of TDLCR; a first consultation on the proposal to lower the minimum age requirement for train drivers with a view to implementing this change by summer 2024; followed by a second consultation on wider reforms to TDLCR which will be developed during 2024 and included in a separate consultation to be held at a later date.

Background

Legislation governing train driving in Great Britain

The requirements to be a train driver in Great Britain derive from EU law and were established when the UK was a Member State of the EU. In 2010, <u>Directive 2007/59/EC</u> of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the certification of train drivers operating locomotives and trains on the railway system in the Community ("the 2007 Directive") was given effect in Great Britain by the Train Driving Licences and Certificates Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/724) ("TDLCR").

The 2007 Directive established a common system for licensing and certifying train drivers across the EU to drive trains. This was with the aim of harmonising the disparate regulatory regimes that existed before. It was believed this would enable train drivers to move more freely between countries and employers, who may be railway undertakings (otherwise known as train operators) or infrastructure managers.

Under this system, train drivers are required to hold a licence issued by the national safety authority (in Britain this role is fulfilled by the Office of Rail and Road ("ORR")). A licence can only be issued on the basis that a driver passes mandatory medical, psychological fitness and general professional competence examinations, as well as meeting minimum educational (nine years of primary and secondary education and basic training to Level 3) and age requirements (20 years). Alongside the licence, to be able to drive on the mainline train drivers are required to hold a separate complementary certificate issued by their employer demonstrating that the holder has been trained on the infrastructure and the rolling stock that they will operate on in accordance with the employer's safety management system ("SMS").

The requirements in TDLCR are supplemented by several pieces of retained EU law (e.g., EU Regulations and Commission Decisions) and Rail Industry Standards (RISs) that detail the specific criteria and systems for licensing and certifying train drivers.

Minimum Age requirements

The minimum age requirements in TDLCR were prescribed at an EU level under the 2007 Directive and were a compromise negotiated between Member States when the Directive

was being developed. The Directive afforded some flexibility in this requirement, as Member States were permitted to issue licences to persons as young as 18 years old, but such licences would only be valid in the territory of the issuing Member State. Member States could therefore set a minimum age between 18 and 20 years for their own territory.

When the 2007 Directive was developed, some in the rail sector in Britain, including Rail Delivery Group's predecessor – the Association of Train Operating Companies – who represented the views of train operators at the time, expressed concerns about the safety risks associated with younger workers when the plans to transpose the 2007 Directive were consulted upon, and argued that the age requirement should not be lower than 20. In summary, this was because there was a perception that younger drivers may not be emotionally or cognitively mature enough to take on the responsibilities and tasks linked with driving trains. Ultimately, the UK decided to prescribe a minimum age of 20 years. This was consistent with the 2007 Directive, whilst recognising the desire from industry to resist calls to lower the age requirement further than necessary. This requirement continued to apply in Britain as retained EU law following Brexit.

The view that persons younger than 20 years would not be suitable for train driving is based on reasoning set out in the Rail Safety and Standard's Board's (RSSB) 2016 Paper Minimum Train Driving Age which discussed the relationship between adolescent motorists and higher road accident rates, citing emotional immaturity as a potential cause for collisions. Over time it has been recognised by a wide body of the rail sector that drawing a comparison between the experience of younger motorists and that of train drivers was potentially misleading, given train drivers are subject to a higher degree of regulation and monitoring and are subject to a different set of risks and controls compared to motorists. This is particularly relevant now owing to the degree of technological innovation that the rail sector has experienced in recent years, which has changed the train driving profession, the design of trains and the rail network itself. The 2016 RSSB paper concluded that there is no definitive evidence to support the current minimum age limit.

Immediately before 2010, the requirements to be a train driver were established by industry in mandatory Rail Group Standards (RGS) set by the Rail Safety Standards Board (RSSB). Under the RGSs, the minimum age requirement was set at 21 years old. There is currently no maximum age limit for train drivers.

Train Driving Age Demographics

There are approximately 24,000 licenced train drivers in Great Britain¹ with an average age of 48. Some of those who hold a train driving licence may not be actively employed in driving roles of course, so current driver number will be slightly lower. Most of these licenced drivers are male, representing approximately 90% of all licenced train drivers (see graph 1). The profile of train drivers is steadily ageing, with a large number of train drivers expected to reach retirement age in the next ten years. If not addressed, this could result in a shortfall in licensed drivers to the industry and could have wider repercussions on the ability to maintain or expand current service levels unless they can be replaced.





¹ Figures obtained from the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and accurate as of September 2023.

The case for change

There are several key arguments that challenge the rationale for continuing to prescribe a minimum age requirement of 20 years. Many of these are outlined in the RSSB's 2019 project, *Minimum age of train drivers* which explored the feasibility of reducing the minimum age of train drivers from 20 to 18. The arguments to support a change in the age requirements are discussed below.

Changes in competence management and train driver development

Since 2007, the rail industry's management of train drivers has matured significantly, including how train drivers' competence is supported and supervised by driver managers and employers. In particular, there is a focus on developing skills and competence of train drivers through experience. These competencies include technical skills and non-technical skills such as concentration and focus, hand-eye coordination, communication, decision-making, railway safety awareness, and how to respond to an emergency. This has been partly driven by how operators have worked to evolve and continuously improve their safety arrangements in recent years, which is established in their SMS and is a regulatory requirement that they must fulfil under the Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems Regulations 2006. As part of making these improvements, operators have taken numerous actions to enhance train driver training and supervision, so that they are equipped with how to deal with new risks and that areas of improvement can be identified and reflected upon. This reflects the culture of the industry today, which focuses on learning from experience and sharing and standardising good practice.

For these reasons, competence management is highly individualised today, with training and development plans now being prepared for individual train drivers and trainees according to their needs. This includes mentoring and one to one support for train drivers throughout their training and deployment based on years of experience and preparing resources to help drivers. These specific mitigations present an additional level of support and assurance for prospective train drivers that were less mature in the past. It should therefore be recognised that if the minimum age were to be lowered to 18 years old, younger trainees and train drivers would have better access to support and training than in the past.

New technology and safety controls

The network has seen investment and a significant roll-out in automatic train protection (ATP), train protection warning systems (TPWS), selective door operation and protection against wrong side door enabling, which adds another level of assurance to support train drivers in their role and mitigate risks that could occur while in service. These additional safeguards provide an extra level of protection from the consequences of human error. On-train data recorders (OTDRs) are also widely used by train operators now, which provides a means to assess whether a train driver has responded to an incident correctly and provide a way for them to learn from their experience and make improvements.

Immersive technology is also being used increasingly in driver training, allowing trainees to experience different scenarios upfront and develop the tools to deal with them, such as simulators. These are useful for improving risk and hazard perception for all train drivers by allowing them to experience and respond to rare and high-risk situations.

There are also new opportunities to enhance how the rail sector supports and trains drivers, such as greater use of augmented reality, virtual reality and gamification.

Improved selection and assessment of train drivers

The system for selecting and assessing train drivers' suitability is highly standardised and based on professional expertise developed over years of administering and working with train drivers. The current train driver psychometric process assesses the cognitive psychomotor and behavioural aptitudes associated with driving performance according to standards prepared by the British Psychological Society. Similarly, all train drivers have to pass medical examinations undertaken by doctors recognised by the ORR in line with General Medical Council (GMC) best-practice. All train driver trainees are required to undertake and pass a driver training programme that aims to develop knowledge, technical and non-technical skills, and experience. As part of their training, trainee drivers are required to typically undertake 225 hours of train driving with their driving instructor.

As is the case now, all future train drivers regardless of age would be subject to these highly rigorous selection and assessment procedures before they would be considered eligible to be a train driver.

Experience is a more accurate predictor of performance and competence than the effects of age

There is literature from RSSB that indicates that the development of experience is a key factor in how drivers perform, regardless of whether their age is 18 or 20. Experienced motorists have been shown to be significantly better at predicting hazards than inexperienced road drivers, have lower levels of collision risk and are involved in fewer accidents. It could be argued that exposure to, and experience of, different train driving situations through training would enable the development of the necessary technical skills,

knowledge and non-technical skills required for safe train driving, whether the train driver be 18, 19 or 20.

European experience

Since the introduction of the 2007 Directive, several major western railway companies have widened their recruitment net to enable young people to become fully qualified train drivers by 18 years of age. This is permissible within Member States that have prescribed a lower minimum age of 18-years-old, such as Belgium, noting that train drivers licenced at this age in the EU are only permitted to operate services domestically. The management and training of younger train drivers has often been integrated with apprenticeship schemes built in schools. These operators were surveyed by the RSSB in 2019 and cited positive outcomes for these train drivers in terms of their safety.

Supporting the profession

DfT recognises that lowering the age requirement from 20 to 18 years old could enable the following benefits to be realised:

- increasing the pool of talented, diverse trainees available to drive trains in the future
- overtime, helping to reverse the ageing profile of the train driving workforce
- improving access to the train driving profession for younger people
- encourage talented young people into the train driving workforce

View of the ORR

The ORR support in principle the proposal to reduce the minimum age requirement for train drivers from 20 to 18 years old subject to further consideration by the rail industry in Great Britain of:

- how the processes for selecting, training and monitoring train drivers might be improved to support the change
- enhanced supervision and monitoring of younger drivers for an initial period of time

This might require some adjustments or modifications to the existing guidance that the industry has developed and the processes and procedures employers have in place to ensure that their train drivers meet the other remaining requirements in the regulations. We believe that this could be achieved using existing measures and tools available to the rail sector.

Scope for further reforms

The PIR did identify other areas for potential reform, including around the administrative burden of the regime, the level of prescription in the requirements, the effectiveness of existing processes, and the rigidity of the legislative regime within which the requirements are established, amongst other areas.

Having held initial discussions with the rail sector on wider reform to address these concerns, DfT is of the view that more work is needed at this stage to develop comprehensive proposals that could address these other issues. At the same time, DfT does not want to delay progress being made to implement improvements to the regime where there is both consensus for reform and a compelling case to do so – with the proposal to lower the minimum age requirements being the most advanced to date.

For this reason, the government has decided to take a two-phase approach to reforming TDLCR; a first consultation on the proposal to lower the minimum age requirement for train drivers with a view to implementing this change by summer 2024; followed by a second consultation on wider reforms to TDLCR developed during 2024 to be held at a later date.

Subject to the outcomes of these consultations, any future legislative changes to TDLCR would use powers conferred under the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023.

Proposed legislative changes

DfT believes there is a strong case for lowering the minimum age requirement to be a train driver from 20 to 18 years old. To give effect to this change in policy, the government would need to lay legislation to reform the Train Driving Licences and Certificates Regulations 2010 using powers under the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023.

This change of policy will only allow those between 18 and 20 to drive on the domestic network in Great Britain. In relation to international services, such as services through the Channel Tunnel, it is a legal requirement that any driver must be 20 years old. The UK government has agreed this position with the French government in relation to "cross-border services" in the Tunnel, which means services between Calais-Frethun in France and Dollands Moor (for freight trains) or Ashford international (for passenger services) in the UK as well as the drivers on "Le Shuttle" service. This is established in the Agreement between the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the government of the French Republic concerning Train Driving Licences and Complementary Certificates in respect of Rail Transport through the Channel Fixed Link. We are considering how best to reflect this change of policy in the relevant legislation while also ensuring that the terms of the Agreement are met.

How to respond

See the <u>Ways to respond section of the consultation page on GOV.UK</u> to find out how you can respond to this consultation.

The consultation period began on 16 May 2024 and will run until 13 June 2024. Please ensure that your response reaches us before the closing date.

What will happen next

A summary of responses, including what DfT intends to do next, will be published within three months of the consultation closing on the GOV.UK website. Paper copies will be available on request.

If you have questions about this consultation, please contact:

rail.safety@dft.gov.uk

Rail Safety Team Floor 2, Zone 1 Department for Transport 33 Horseferry Road London SW1P 4DR

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

If you want information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.

In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on DfT.

DfT will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

This consultation by DfT is being carried out to gather views on the proposal to lower the minimum age requirements to be a train driver in Great Britain.

As part of this consultation, we will receive your email or home address when you submit your response. We may use this email or home address to ask you follow-up questions on any of your responses, unless you indicate that we should not ask follow-up questions.

Your consultation response and the processing of personal data that it entails is necessary for the exercise of our functions as a government department. DfT will, under data protection law, be the data controller for this information. DfT's privacy policy (open in new window) has more information about your rights in relation to your personal data, how to complain and how to contact the Data Protection Officer.

We will not use your name or other personal details that could identify you when we report the results of the consultation. Any personal information you provide will be kept securely and destroyed within 12 months of the closing date of this consultation.

Annex A: Consultation principles

The consultation is being conducted in line with the government's key consultation principles. Further information is available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance

If you have any comments about the consultation process, please contact:

Consultation Co-ordinator
Department for Transport
Zone 1/29 Great Minster House
London SW1P 4DR
Email consultation@dft.gov.uk

Annex B: Full list of consultation questions

We would welcome comments from stakeholders on the following questions:

Personal detail questions

What is your name?

What is your email?

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation? If so, who?

Are you a member of the public?

Are you employed by the rail industry?

Organisation details questions

What would you describe your organisation as? E.g. train operating company, trade union?

How many employees does your organisation employ?

Proposal questions

Do you agree or disagree with lowering the minimum age requirement for train drivers from 20 to 18?

If implemented, do you agree or disagree that there should be a period of enhanced supervision for drivers aged between 18 and 20?

How long do you think an enhanced supervision of younger drivers should be for?

Do you think the process for selecting, training and monitoring train drivers should be changed to support the change in minimum age requirements?

With regards to making, if implemented, the change to minimum driver age by summer 2024, do you agree with this timeframe? Or would you choose to do it sooner or at a later date?

Note: When sharing over your consultation response, please indicate if you would prefer us not to ask follow-up questions.

Annex C: List of those consulted

AAFER Ltd

Abbott Healthcare and Caritas Ltd

Abbott/Alere Healthcare Connections

Abellio Scot Rail Ltd

Alere Healthcare Connections

Amey

Arriva Rail London

ASLEF

Avanti West Coast

Babcock Rail

Balfour Beatty Rail

BHSF & RPS Consultant

BHSF Newhall Medical Pracrtice

BHSF Occupational Health Ltd

Blackpool Council

Blacktransport Ltd

BUPA

c2c

Chiltern Railways

Colas Rail

Cross Country Trains

DB Cargo

DB Cargo (UK) Ltd

DB Schenker Rail (UK) Ltd

DC Rail

Direct Rail Services

East Coast Trains

East Midlands Railway

Edinburgh Council

Edinburgh Trams

Ellan Vannin Health Ltd

Eurostar

Eurotunnel

Expedite Health Ltd

First MTR South Western Trains

Fit 4 Work

Freightliner

GB Railfreight

Global Workhealth Ltd

Govia Thameslink Rail Ltd

Govia Thameslink Railway Limited

Grand Central Rail

Great Northern

Great Western Railway

Great Western Railway and Heathrow Express

Greater Anglia

Guy's & St Thomas's NHS Foundation Trust

GWR

GWR/SWT OH Centre

Harsco Rail

Health Management Ltd

Healthwork Ltd

Hitachi Rail Europe

Hull Trains

independent

Independent Occupational Health Limited

Iqarus Clinic

Leeds Health Solutions Ltd

LNER

LNER

LNER Office, 1st Floor

LNER, Kings Cross Station

London Trams/Croydon tramtrack Limited

Loram UK

LRSSB

LS (TOC) LTD

LUAS

LUL

Manchester Metrolink

Manor Occupational Health

Medicals Plus Ltd

Medigold Health Limited

Mersey Rail

MTR Crossrail

MTR Elizabeth Line

Neptune Health

Network Rail

Northern Railway

Nottingham City Council

Nottingham Trams

NYMR

Occupational Health Bristol

Occupational Health Department, South West Trains

Occupational Health Solutions Ltd

Occupational Medical Services Ltd

Occupational Psychology Centre Ltd

OH Assist

OH3 Limited

Open The Door Ltd

Optima Health

ORR

People Asset Management Limited

Preventative Healthcare Company Ltd

RAIB

Rail Operations Group

Rail Transport Services

Railway Competence Group

RDG

RMT

RPS Group

RPS Health, Safety and Environment

RPS Occupational Health

RSSB

Salus Occupational Health

Scot Train

Scotrail

Sheffield Supertrams

Sigma Occupational Health Ltd

SLC Operations Limited

South Western Railway

South Yorkshire Passenger Transport (SYPT)

Southeastern

Southeastern Trains

Southern

Southern Railway

SPT (Glasgow subway)

Start Occupational Health Limited

Thameslink

The London General Practice

The Whitehouse

Thorney Close Action and Enterprise Centre

TOL

TOPHS Ltd

TPExpress

TransPennine Express

Transport Focus

Transport Focus/London TravelWatch

Transport for Greater Manchester (TFGM)

Transport for London

Transport for Wales

Transport for Wales

Transport for Wales Rail Limited

Transport Scotland

TSSA

Tyne&Wear Metro

UKTram

Unite

Victa Railfreight

Vintage Trains

Virgin Trains East Coast

Vizion Healthcare Ltd

VolkerRail

West Coast Railway Company

West Midlands Metro

West Midlands PTE

West Midlands Trains

Zosh Occupational Health Limited