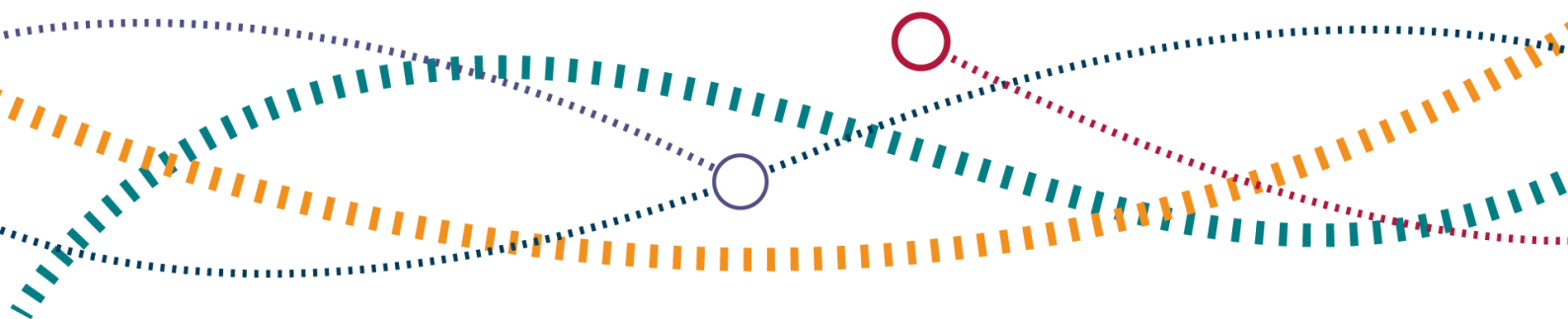




Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act 1920

Guidance for Heritage Railways and Tramways on the application to young volunteers

22 July 2026



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1. Introduction & Scope

Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance has been produced jointly by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) in accordance with the Employment Rights Act 2025.
- 1.2 It is guidance for heritage railways and tramways who provide opportunities for young people to benefit from the educational, social, health and welfare benefits of volunteering and gain experience in heritage railway and tramway operations.
- 1.3 It sets out the circumstances in which a young person volunteering at a heritage railway or tramway is, or is not, to be regarded as employed in an industrial undertaking for the purposes of section 1 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act 1920 (the 1920 Act), which restricts the employment of children and young people in industrial undertakings.
- 1.4 Following the guidance is not compulsory and heritage railway and tramway operators are free to take other action, but if they follow the guidance, they will normally be doing enough to satisfy the law.

Scope of the guidance

- 1.5 The guidance is relevant to any organisation that engages young volunteers on activities which could be considered to relate to a heritage railway or tramway as part of an industrial undertaking under the 1920 Act. This will include heritage railways, including funicular and miniature railways, and tramway operators in Great Britain. It may also be relevant to other duty holders, for example, organisations that maintain or repair railway or tramway vehicles.
- 1.6 The guidance applies to young volunteers who are aged between 14 years old and their minimum school leaving age. That's typically around the age of 16 years old but may occur before or after their 16th birthday.
- 1.7 The guidance does not apply to young volunteers who have reached minimum school leaving age. The minimum school leaving age for each railway or tramway's location can be checked using the guidance at Gov.uk. A link to that guidance is provided in Annex B.

2. Legislative Context

Legal framework for young people volunteering on heritage railways and tramways

- 2.1 The 1920 Act prohibits a child from working in an 'industrial undertaking'. The term industrial undertaking includes construction, reconstruction, maintenance, repair, alteration, or demolition of any railway or tramway and the transportation of passengers or goods by rail.
- 2.2 Activities such as serving food or selling tickets would not fall within the meaning of industrial undertaking as defined in the 1920 Act and are, therefore, not included in this guidance.
- 2.3 There are many activities within heritage railways and tramways that are suitable for young volunteers providing modern health and safety guidance and regulations are followed.
- 2.4 At the heart of all effective workplace health and safety is the risk assessment. HSE provides extensive guidance for employers on assessing the risks and hazards within the workplace and putting in place measures and controls to ensure that those risks are effectively managed.
- 2.5 The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA) protects employees and others who may be affected by work activities. This includes those volunteering for, or on behalf of an organisation.
- 2.6 Employers should provide the same level of protection to volunteers where they carry out similar activities and are exposed to the same level of risk as employees.
- 2.7 When taking on a young person in a workplace, whether as an employee or a volunteer, employers should be aware that they are likely to be new to the workplace environment and may be less aware of risks. They may lack experience and maturity or have not yet reached physical maturity. They may be eager to impress or please people they work with and may be unaware of how to raise concerns.
- 2.8 It is important to ensure that young people are suitably supervised by a competent person, and that they understand fully any training or information given to them.

- 2.9 Section 3(5) and Section 19 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 set out some of the duties of employers to protect young people in the workplace. Employers must also consider legally required age limits on the use of some equipment and machinery (for example forklift trucks and some woodworking machinery).
- 2.10 The Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems (Safety) Regulations 2006 (ROGs) require duty holders to have a safety management system setting out how their railway or tramway will operate safely and ensure that risks are managed effectively.
- 2.11 The safety management system should include arrangements for young volunteers and is the place to set out any particular considerations such as ensuring that supervision and training are appropriate and that tasks are suitable for the age, level of physical capability and maturity of the individual.

Circumstances in which a young person carrying out activities on a heritage railway or tramway is regarded as employed in an industrial undertaking

- 2.12 Under health and safety law, young volunteers are considered to be employed. Child employment law states that children can work part-time from the age of 14 and can only start full-time work once they've reached the minimum school leaving age.
- 2.13 Under the 1920 Act an industrial undertaking includes some dangerous work activities which are undertaken at heritage railways and tramways. Some of these higher risk work activities will not be suitable for young volunteers. Any activity which is a safety critical task under ROGs must, at all times, be carried out by people who are qualified and competent to undertake the activity.
- 2.14 A risk assessment approach should be used to identify which activities are suitable for young volunteers. This should take account of the type of railway operations e.g. the size of the operation and types of rolling stock in use as well as the age and personal characteristics of the young volunteer. There will be activities which are suitable for young volunteers to undertake at some railways but not at others because of different levels of risk.
- 2.15 Annex A of this guidance provides some illustrative examples of what are considered to be suitable and unsuitable activities within the context of the 1920

Act. It is not an exhaustive list, and each operator should use risk assessment to help them decide what control measures are suitable in their particular circumstances, to eliminate or minimise the risks as far as reasonably practicable.

Annex A: Suitability of Tasks for Young Persons

Tasks suitable for Young Persons aged 14 to 16 years

- A.1 This Annex has been produced in collaboration between ORR and the Heritage Railway Association (HRA). It provides illustrative guidance for the suitability of typical tasks undertaken at a heritage railway or tramway. The list may not be applicable for miniature railways (gauge below 350mm) where the risk associated with operations is potentially lower.
- A.2 This is not an exhaustive list and is intended to cover typical activities undertaken involving the construction, maintenance and operation of a heritage railway or tramway. The ORR document [Safety Critical Tasks – Clarification of ROGS Regulations Requirements. Railway Safety Publication 4](#) has been used to identify the majority of activities in the table.
- A.3 Given the variability of the nature, scale and complexity of operations within the sector, the table should be used as a guide and is not intended to be used as a prescribed list.
- A.4 Where a task is deemed to be suitable there is a minimum expectation that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment will be undertaken specific to the circumstances of the duty holder and that tasks are appropriately supervised.
- A.5 This risk assessment should also consider the physical demands of a task, bearing in mind the age and capabilities of the persons who may be undertaking it. In some circumstances such as the use of hazardous substances or work at height, the risk assessment should identify specific training requirements.
- A.6 Some activities are identified as requiring direct supervision by a competent person, for example assisting with tasks that could affect the safety of a train. This is likely to include close observation by a competent person whilst the task is being undertaken. Tasks are split into three categories, as shown in the table below.

Task categories and description

Category	Description
Likely to be suitable with supervision and suitable and sufficient risk assessment.	These tasks are likely to be suitable for young persons aged 14 to 16 years to undertake, however there should be a suitable and sufficient risk assessment undertaken relevant to the particular railway or tramway.
Likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person.	These tasks are likely to be considered not suitable for a young person to undertake, however under some circumstances they may be able to assist a competent person who is undertaking the task. The competent person retains responsibility for the task.
Likely to be unsuitable.	These tasks that are likely to be considered unsuitable for young persons aged 14 to 16 years to undertake.

Suitability of tasks for Young Persons aged 14 to 16 years

Operation of steam, diesel, and electric locomotives (including multiple units)

Tasks likely to be suitable with supervision and suitable and sufficient risk assessment

Task	Remarks
Cleaning of locomotives other than where a ladder is required to be used or where the person is required to be stood on an unguarded running board.	
Taking water from ground level.	

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Placing protection on a locomotive or unit to allow work in a maintenance location to commence.	Under direct supervision of a Fireman, Second man, Driver, Steam Raiser or equivalent.
Cleaning a locomotive and or tender from a ladder or running board.	
Topping up sanders.	In some cases, this may be subject to Working at Height risk assessment to minimise risk and appropriate training/qualification.
Oiling up locomotives and tenders.	
Filling boilers from stand pipes or topping up coolant systems.	
Preparation of locomotives for service, including trimming and topping up lamps, collecting fire irons, trimming coal where a fall is not possible, cleaning fires, climbing into cabs from ground level, emptying ashpans, operation of priming pumps, checking oil levels, fire lighting, and working in proximity to inspection pits.	
Emptying and or examining smokeboxes where this cannot be completed at ground level.	It may be appropriate to empty smokeboxes under direct supervision if there is a suitable platform to eliminate work at height risk, particularly at narrow gauge railways. This activity should not be undertaken near an open pit.
Operation of controls such as injectors, fuel lift pumps, lighting or heating controls, handbrakes etc.	Some lower risk tasks may be suitable with lower levels of supervision.
Operating valves and equipment located externally from the cab on the side of the locomotive where work at height is required to reach these.	

Task	Remarks
Relaying signal aspects.	
Safety critical communications.	Young person should not have lead responsibility. Telephone communication not likely to be appropriate.
Placing protection.	This should not include use of detonators.
Checking suitability of equipment is fit for use, i.e. fitness to run.	
Fuelling.	
Train driving.	Likely to only be acceptable to for training and experience of some controls only as long as supervisor is always in full control and additional controls are in place e.g. no other trains in operation.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Taking water where work at height i.e. climbing from the ground onto running boards, tanks or tenders to open filler valves.	Particularly likely to be unsuitable for saddle tank locomotives.
Handling detonators.	
Blowing down boilers.	
Dosing boilers with water treatment.	
Operation of knife switches and changing fuses.	
Pre use checks and testing of firefighting equipment.	
Conductor driving.	

Operation of On Track Machines (OTM), On Track Plant (OTP), Road Rail Vehicles (RRV), Trolleys, velocipedes and other rail-based equipment

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Travelling in the cabs of OTM/OTP/RRV.	Proper accommodation provided for young person i.e. second seat.
Operation of emergency stops.	
Operation of manually operated trollies.	
Checking and operation of motorised trollies (i.e. Wickham trolley).	Likely to only be considered acceptable for operations not conveying members of the public.
Operation of manual mechanically propelled trollies (e.g. pump trollies/velocipedes).	Where more than one person carried, young person should not be in charge of movement and supervised by a competent person.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Checking, bringing into service and operating in travel or work mode OTM/OTP/RRV.	

Shunting

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Checking vehicles are fit for movement.	
Operation of handbrakes.	
Communicating with signalling staff.	Young person should not have lead responsibility. Telephone communication not likely to be appropriate.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Coupling and uncoupling (whether in a siding or not).	High risk activity likely to be considered unsuitable. In some circumstances may be suitable where the risk is lower (e.g. non-complex narrow gauge operations) but should be subject to close supervision and suitable and sufficient risk assessment.
Controlling shunt movements.	High risk activity likely to be considered unsuitable. In some circumstances may be suitable where the risk is lower (e.g. non-complex narrow gauge operations) but should be subject to close supervision and suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

Station working – platform work, dispatch, booking office clerks, retail (not catering)

Tasks likely to be suitable with supervision and suitable and sufficient risk assessment

Task	Remarks
All other station staff tasks.	Cash handling subject to other legal requirements.
Station cleaning.	

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Train Dispatch including operation of Train Ready To Start (TRTS) equipment, where provided.	
Assisting with boarding and alighting including use of step stools/ ramps etc.	
Operation of barrows and other equipment on platforms.	

Train working – Guarding trains

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Train dispatch.	
Practising the Guards duties all types of trains.	
Preparation of rolling stock for service, including tanking and testing of doors and braking systems etc.	

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Authorising the controlled evacuation of a train or tram in an emergency.	
Protecting a rail vehicle stopped by accident, failure, obstruction or other exceptional incident.	May be authorised as part of a specific training exercise.
Use of detonators.	

Operation of points and signalling equipment

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Operation of hand points, ground frames, manual operation of point motors and lever frames.	
Booking work, use of block bells and instruments, movement of points and clearing of signals, operation of wire tensioners, releases and token exchanges, etc.	

Task	Remarks
Safety Critical communications.	Young person should not have lead responsibility. Telephone communication not likely to be appropriate.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Use of detonators, unless deployed using a detonator placer. Handling detonators is considered not suitable.	
Authorising trains passed signals at danger.	
Hand signalling.	
Pilot working.	
Blocking the line and arranging possessions.	Unless as part of a specific training scenario.
Controlling movements in and out of a possession.	
Controlling a movement within a possession.	

Operation of level crossing equipment

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Operating level crossing equipment and controlling signals locally.	
Operating level crossing equipment and controlling signals remotely.	
Communicating with Signalling staff.	Young person should not have lead responsibility. Telephone communication not likely to be appropriate.

Maintenance of traction and rolling stock (all rail mounted vehicles)

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Installation of components onto vehicles normally in service that has the potential to significantly affect the health and safety of persons on a transport system.	A young person may assist with testing and examination but cannot be responsible for confirming condition of equipment and systems.
Checking, examination or testing of components on vehicles normally in service that has the potential to significantly affect the health and safety of persons on a transport system other than those above.	A young person may assist with testing and examination but cannot be responsible for confirming condition of equipment and systems.
Installation of all other components onto vehicles normally in service.	
Checking, examination or testing of components on vehicles normally in service other than those above.	
Maintenance of vehicles normally in service including repair and reconditioning, examination, testing, alteration and day to day maintenance of vehicles in service or those that could be in service where these tasks could affect the safety of persons on a transport system.	The work should be checked by a competent person.
Maintenance of vehicles in service including repair and reconditioning, examination and testing, alteration and day to day maintenance of vehicles in service other than those above.	The work should be checked by a competent person.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Changing gas bottles on vehicles.	

Installation and maintenance of Permanent Way

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
The installation, examination and testing of new track, components and structures supporting the Permanent Way.	Checking to be completed by a competent person.
Maintenance, repair, reconditioning, examination, testing and alteration of the track, components and structures supporting the Permanent Way.	Checking to be completed by a competent person.
Inspecting track – patrolling.	
Inspecting a bridge strike.	Consideration should be given to the risk associated with the location, e.g. road traffic.
Inspecting earthworks, structures under bridges, culverts.	Consideration should be given to the risk associated with the location, e.g. work at height, road traffic etc.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Hand back for safe train operations.	
Imposition of speed restrictions.	
Commissioning of new infrastructure.	Shadowing but not actively working may be appropriate.

Installation and maintenance of signalling equipment

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Installing signal components.	Checking to be completed by a competent person. Young person should not engage in work at height to install components.

Task	Remarks
Maintaining signalling components.	Checking to be completed by a competent person. Young person should not engage in work at height to maintain components.
Installing and maintaining communication systems.	Checking to be completed by a competent person. Young person should not engage in work at height.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Installing or maintaining signalling power supply.	Cable running where no work at height required the system is electrically dead might be considered appropriate with appropriate supervision.

Supplying electricity to the transport system, to vehicles using it and to the telecommunications system

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Installing and maintaining communication systems.	Checking to be completed by a competent person. Young person should not engage in work at height.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Installing and maintaining the power supply and distribution system.	Cable running where no work at height required and the system is electrically dead might be considered appropriate with appropriate supervision.
Controlling and isolating the supply to the electric traction and signalling systems.	

Task	Remarks
Controlling and isolating other electrical supplies other than plugging in appliance to the existing fixed wiring using properly designed plugs and sockets.	

Protecting staff working on or near the line, on the lineside and taking possessions

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Person In Charge Of Possession (PICOP) Duties including line blocking, placing protection, communication with Engineering Supervisor (ES), signalling staff, train crew and control of movements.	
Protecting people working on or near the line, on the lineside and within possessions.	

Use of tools, machinery, plant and lifting operations

Tasks likely to be suitable with supervision and suitable and sufficient risk assessment

Task	Remarks
Bench fitting using hand tools.	May require more direct supervision depending on the task.
Manual cleaning of components on the bench, in situ or using a parts washer.	May require more direct supervision depending on the task. Appropriate training and arrangements should be in place for the use of harmful substances.

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Use of battery powered hand tools (not grinders, or cutting tools) e.g. sanding equipment, battery drills, impact drivers.	

Task	Remarks
Use of angle grinders with disc size up to 115mm for cutting, sanding and grinding.	
Use of machine tools likely to be found in an education environment e.g., Myford ML7 or Colchester Student lathe for tasks such as turning, parting, drilling and boring.	
Use of pillar drills bench mounted or floor mounted.	
Use of woodworking machinery with cutting faces or teeth e.g. saw benches, table saws, chop saws, planers, thicknessers, spindle moulders, bandsaws etc.	
Forge work.	
Use of CNC machinery.	
Operation of block and tackle.	
Operation of tractors and implements, not cutting equipment such as toppers.	Size and load restrictions apply
Work near water.	Risk will vary by location, but consideration should be given to the risks posed by working near water. In some cases, there is likely to be a low level of risk, however in other circumstances tasks may be unsuitable for young persons e.g. work near fast flowing watercourses.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Use of hand-held cutting tools fitted with a toothed blade e.g. circular saws, planers.	

Task	Remarks
Use of angle grinders with a disc size greater than 115mm.	
Mounting discs in grinders.	
Use of any other machine tool such as shapers, borers, wheel turning lathes, larger centre lathes, radial arm drills, mag drills, broaches, surface grinders, milling machines, band saws, mechanical hacksaws.	
Use of gas welding, cutting, or soldering equipment, including MAP gas or equivalent.	
Heating rivets.	
White metalling including furnaces.	
Control and operation of wheel drops.	
Operation of gantry cranes.	
Operation of hydraulic cranes e.g. Atlas/Hiab etc.	
Operation of electric, steam, diesel or other powered cranes.	
Checking lift equipment and slinging loads.	
Providing instructions to crane operators.	
Operation of tractors fitted with cutting equipment.	
Operation of masted forklift trucks.	
Operation of all terrain forklifts and telehandlers.	

Task	Remarks
Operation of plant such as dumper trucks, rollers, excavators, whacker plates, bull dozers, recovery vehicles, winches etc.	
Working at height on buildings.	

Other tasks

Tasks likely to be suitable with supervision and suitable and sufficient risk assessment

Task	Remarks
Cleaning rail vehicles internally or externally from a platform or ground level.	
Checking tickets on a platform or train.	Cash handling rules apply if tickets or excess fares sold.

Tasks likely to be suitable for a young person to assist with task, whilst being closely supervised by a competent person

Task	Remarks
Level crossing risk assessments.	
Personal Track safety competence when line open to traffic.	
Personal Track safety competence when line blocked to traffic.	
Cleaning premises.	
Vegetation Management/Offtrack tasks such as fencing, hedging, dry stone walling.	Most tasks are likely to be suitable to assist with however some tasks are likely to be unsuitable e.g. use of chainsaws, brush cutters and other powered machinery.
Painting using brushes including preparation activities.	Subject to COSHH assessment. May be unsuitable where lead-based paints are used.

Task	Remarks
Building activities such as brick laying, carpentry, painting, plumbing and electrical work.	Work may be completed to third fix, but young person should not work on live electrical systems.

Tasks likely to be unsuitable for young persons

Task	Remarks
Lone working where PTS required.	

Annex B: Interpretation and further information

Interpretation and further information

Topic	Further Information
Who is a duty holder?	A duty holder is the person responsible for carrying out a particular duty under health and safety law.
HSE guidance on risk assessment.	Managing risks and risk assessment at work: Overview – HSE
Guidance on child employment.	Child employment: Minimum ages children can work - GOV.UK
HSE guidance for young people.	Young people at work: Overview - HSE
HSE guidance for employers who engage volunteers.	Volunteering: How to manage the risks - HSE
ORR guidance on wholly volunteer run railways .	Wholly volunteer run railways and the law - June 2021
Health and safety legislation.	Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act 1920



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