

The Craft of Heavy Vehicle Mechanics

Heavy vehicle mechanics carry out the routine servicing and repair of heavy vehicles such as trucks, buses and coaches. Many work for road haulage companies, bus and coach operators and commercial and industrial companies with fleets of heavy vehicles.

Central Aspects
Learning new practical skills
Learning how machines work
Repairing things
Working with vehicles
Learning and developing new craft-related skills

Secondary Aspects
Understanding and using physics
Being responsible for controlling or adjusting equipment
Understanding technical drawings and diagrams
Being accurate with numbers in counting, measuring and arithmetic
Practical skills and theoretical knowledge

Other Aspects
Being physically active and on your feet
Working with electricity or electronics
Lifting or carrying heavy items
Being interested in road or rail transport
Working in a noisy environment
Taking responsibility for own learning, including the allocation of study time

Work activities

It is very costly for a road haulage, bus or coach company to have a vehicle off the road and not earning money, so the mechanic's work is very important.

Each vehicle is serviced after a specified length of time or mileage, to replace, repair or adjust any worn parts and generally check, tune and adjust for good performance. As part of a routine service, mechanics check and change oil, and check and adjust brakes and steering. Parts for heavy vehicles are often more expensive than those for light vehicles, so mechanics usually have to repair rather than replace any faulty items they find.

As well as routine servicing of parts like brakes and carburettors, mechanics also carry out major overhauls at regular intervals. This involves stripping vehicles, checking and cleaning their parts, and then putting them back again as quickly as possible.

Mechanics usually cover the mechanical, hydraulic and pneumatic aspects of vehicles while auto-electricians specialise in their electrical and electronic systems.

Mechanics use a wide range of hand and power tools and measuring devices. They use jacks and hoists to lift and move heavy items. They may refer to technical manuals and drawings during their work.

Most of the work is in large garages, workshops or depots. Mechanics wear overalls or boiler suits and apply hand barrier cream to protect against dirt, oil and grease.

The work involves standing, crouching and lying under vehicles, and reaching into awkward spaces in the engine compartment. Mechanics may have to drive out to breakdowns to make repairs on the spot in all weathers or to bring back the vehicle.

Personal qualities and skills

You must have good practical skills and a high level of technical knowledge. You need to be physically fit to cope with bending, lifting and stretching, although you will use ramps and pits, hoists and jacks for heavy work. You will need nimble fingers to handle small parts and hand tools.

You should be logical and patient in tracing faults, and have good organisational skills to prioritise your workload. It is important for mechanics to have good communication skills and they must be able to explain faults and repairs clearly to people from non-technical backgrounds.

Pay and opportunities

Heavy vehicle mechanics, after training, earn around €20,000 plus a year.

Heavy vehicle mechanics usually work a 39-hour week. Early starts, late finishes, nights and Saturdays may be required.

During your apprenticeship you will be paid an apprentice rate. The actual rates paid may vary, depending on the occupation and employer. Generally, the rates will increase in a number of steps during the apprenticeship. You should seek details of rates of pay for apprentices from your prospective employer.

All apprentices are paid a training allowance by FÁS while attending off-the-job training phases 2, 4 and 6.

Opportunities arise from time-to-time for promotion to supervisor level. Many persons use an apprenticeship as a first step in proceeding to such occupations as instructors, teachers, training advisers, managers and owners of businesses.

Where apprentices and crafts persons have the necessary ability, initiative and basic qualifications, opportunities are available for advancement. These include advanced technological and management courses which are available in Institutes of Technology, schools of management, professional institutes, etc.

People anxious to advance themselves in their careers are advised to discover for themselves what opportunities are available.

Note: Wage and salary figures quoted under pay and opportunities are approximate and are for guideline purposes only. These may vary depending on experience or economic and local circumstances. Any variances are outside the control of FÁS.

The craft is designated for apprenticeship training and as such is governed by the statutory apprenticeship rules that have been made by FÁS