

# Streamlining Depot Driver Recruitment

The OPC shares news of a recent project reviewing and redesigning a depot driver recruitment process to help standardise processes and safety competence for a national train operating and maintenance company

**T**here is an old adage that says 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it'. However, it's also really beneficial to take a fresh look at tried and tested processes to see where modifications or improvements can be made ensuring they are all still suitable. Following some changing organisational dynamics, a depot operations team from a national train operating and maintenance company approached the OPC to help with a review of their depot drivers' recruitment process.

The challenge was to review and provide a standardised process that was a better 'fit for purpose'. Specifically, through the review, the aim was to ensure the assessment tools being used were correctly assessing for the safety-critical competencies required of a safe and effective depot driver, and that they also helped to identify key behaviours and attitudes required for a good team fit in new recruits. Additionally, there were opportunities to modernise the process using technology and to enhance the candidate experience – so no tall order!

## Role profiling for the depot drivers

A solid understanding of the key skills required for the client's depot drivers was an essential place to start in the project. Anita Ngere, Business Psychologist and Assessor at the OPC, spent time with job experts to complete a job analysis. This included teasing out some of the essential Non-Technical Skills (NTS) they were looking for in their depot drivers. It was also about reviewing some areas for standards/safety improvements and identifying the key behaviours and attitudes to fit with the team values.

Anita said 'I really enjoyed working alongside the depot driver experts to complete the role profiling exercise and analysis. The OPC team heard about the key personal characteristics they were looking for and listened to what already worked well in the existing recruitment process. There were also opportunities to reflect on some

quality performance or safety competence standards that they were looking to implement. Once we'd analysed the feedback and incorporated some learning from other projects we've completed on depot driver role profiling, we proposed an essential and desirable NTS matrix and comprehensive role profile for what makes a safe and effective depot driver.'

Some key NTS needed for safe and effective depot drivers:

- Concentration, checking and adhering to rules are key for depot driving.
- Depot drivers need to be good communicators.
- Anticipating risk in the depot.
- The need for a multitasker.

## Concentration and adhering to rules

As would be expected, the NTS of maintaining concentration is crucial in a depot drivers' role. They need to remain vigilant and focused whilst moving trains around a depot, and be able to deal with repetitive tasks, without losing concentration. Undertaking methodical checking, conscientiously, with a high level of attention to detail are also key skills needed. Adhering to and paying attention to speed restrictions and job instructions are vital when driving in a busy depot with all its daily variations, distractions and responsibilities. Checking and attention to detail link very closely with having a positive attitude to rules and regulations. It is important depot drivers are rules focused and that they're comfortable working in a 'rule-bound' environment.

## Communicating

In a busy depot, effective communication is also a very important NTS. Extensive information and instructions are exchanged between managers, drivers and the wider depot team every shift, and even on an hourly basis. Good depot drivers need to listen, receive and understand instructions about different tasks.

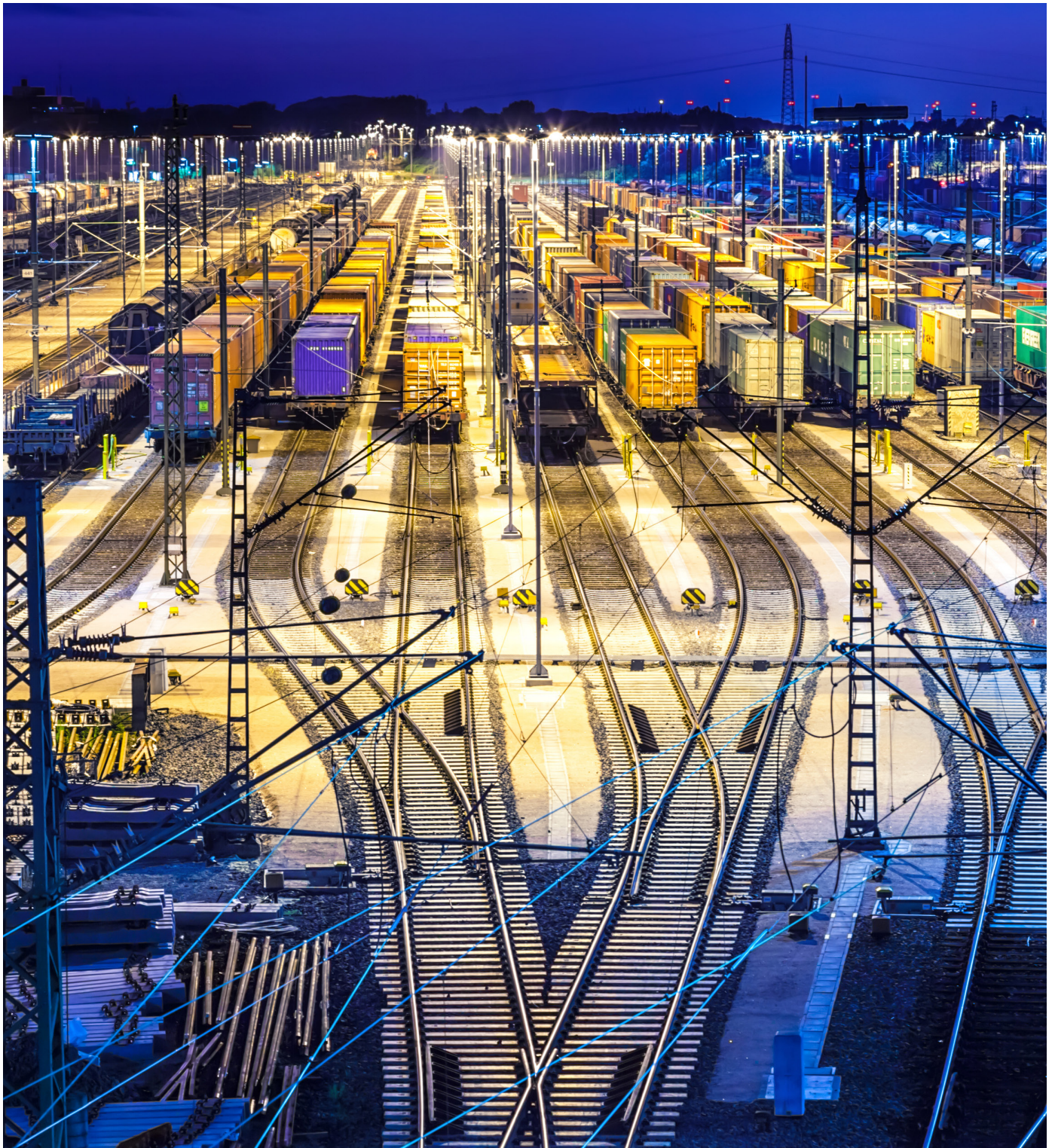
**'There's a lot more going on in a depot that can often mean a driver has competing demands on their concentration, possibly increasing the risk of a safety incident. We need drivers to be able to multitask effectively, switching appropriately between tasks and avoiding risks, especially when under pressure.'**

*A depot driver expert involved in the project*

They need to be able to retain and respond effectively to the information given, manage any conflicting priorities as well as maintaining concentration. Communicating clearly, staying calm under pressure, and being flexible and cooperative with colleagues are also key skills.

## Anticipating risk

In any safety critical environment, the ability to anticipate risk and make effective decisions to avoid them is essential. In a depot there are likely to be constant risks such as the distraction of engineers or cleaners working in close proximity to the line; a higher volume of traffic vs mainline



driving or different levels of lighting across a depot. But there are also more ‘dynamic’ risks that could occur whilst driving, such as radio communications in cab; differing drivers working alongside each other for each train movement, or people walking alongside or across the tracks in the depot.

The ability to remain vigilant, actively assessing situations for risks and responding swiftly with appropriate action is a key NTS to help keep a driver and their depot colleagues safe.

### Multitasking

The ability to multitask whilst maintaining concentration and assessing for risk was a key NTS that the operations team were specifically looking for in their depot drivers. Multitasking is all about a driver being able to manage high workloads, to prioritise and multitask without detracting from their core priority of driving safely. They must be able to allocate the right amount of focus and resource to each task, at the right time, with the right level of concentration – tuning into

the correct, most relevant duty whilst still completing an ‘on-going’ background task and not drifting into autopilot!

A depot driver expert involved in the project said ‘There’s a lot more going on in a depot that can often mean a driver has competing demands on their concentration, possibly increasing the risk of a safety incident. We need drivers to be able to multitask effectively, switching appropriately between tasks and avoiding risks, especially when under pressure.’

### A redesigned assessment tool matrix

Reflecting the new specific NTS matrix and comprehensive role profile required for the client's future depot drivers, the OPC proposed a new assessment tool matrix that enhanced and modernised the existing assessment tools already being used.

The redesigned matrix included some existing tests such as OPC Assessment's unique SCAAT (Safe Concentration and Attention Test) that assesses the capacity to maintain concentration on repetitive tasks. Some new additions that enhanced the process included the RSJT (Railway situational Judgement Test) – a test specifically designed to assess a candidate's safety judgements and how well they may manage working in a safety critical role. Another addition that was a priority to the team was the TDMT (Train Dispatch Multitasking Test). Although the TDMT is about train dispatching, it specifically assesses an applicant's ability to multitask and concentrate.

To modernise the recruitment process, these three tests formed a new online pre-screening stage to take place in depot. This digital stage will help provide a quality shortlist of candidates for a follow up face-to-face (F2F) assessment centre – saving time and cost as well as reducing candidate's travel and up-front time investment.

Once a short-list of candidates has been devised through the digital pre-screening, they will proceed to a F2F assessment centre which tests for an array of skills such as communication, vigilance, reaction times etc. A useful new assessment tool added into the F2F stage was the TRFS (Trainability for Safety Test) – an ability test that can help to evaluate a candidate's aptitude for learning and recalling safety-related information. Information in the TRFS mimics that found in the initial training programmes for a depot driver's role, thereby helping identify candidates who are much more likely to be successful through training and potentially, be more successful on the job.

The final stage is a bespoke structured interview that provides an opportunity for the operations team to explore a candidate's attitudes, values and relevant characteristics that contribute to being a safe and effective depot driver in their teams.

### Creating new bespoke norms based on actual applicant data

With the aim of providing a recruitment process that delivers candidates who are much more likely to perform successfully in the role, the OPC recommended reviewing and applying more appropriate, local norm groups for the assessment tools previously used in the process that were remaining in the process.

Norms are used to ascertain how a candidate has performed relative to others who have sat the assessment tools. Local norming involves collecting past test data for candidates regardless of whether they passed or failed – to create a benchmark

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*Anita Ngere, Business Psychologist and Assessor at the OPC*

data set against which to compare all future candidates. Using bespoke norms with off-the-shelf assessment tools enables the assessor to make more confident and accurate decisions about a candidate's suitability. They are able to make a stronger like-for-like comparison, benchmarking a new candidate against other previous applicants.

Anita Ngere from the OPC said: 'The norming work completed allows the creation of in-house 'cut off' standards for some of the existing tools already used, that are to be retained in the redesigned process. It means we can be more confident that any candidates passing the tests will perform at or above the standards required of them.'

OPC Assessment offers a bespoke norming service for its own tools, as a complimentary service for samples of greater than 100 candidates. For those clients who cannot create their own norm groups there are many off the shelf norms available.

### Enhancing candidate experience – practice materials redesigned

With any recruitment redesign, there is always an opportunity to modernise supporting processes and documentation. In addition to the digital pre-screening stage added early on, the client was also keen to improve their candidate experience too.

Candidate experience is a growing area of importance in the talent acquisition world. It can impact significantly on an organisation's reputation. A positive experience can help feed word-of-mouth referrals for future vacancies (with some potential time and cost saving benefits)


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*Jo Lawrence, Business Development Director at the OPC*

and contribute towards building early commitment and loyalty in new employees.

There is huge diversity of people applying for driver roles in rail, i.e., age, geo-location, gender, ethnicity etc, and there is also breadth in the neurodiverse ways in which people may differ in their social, learning, cognitive or communication choices. So, allowing applicants from these diverse backgrounds the opportunity to practice assessment materials ahead of time is very beneficial. It allows them the time and space to acquaint themselves with what actual test materials may look and feel like and practice the skills they may be testing for. They can also help candidates to manage their own anxieties and expectations.

Completing practise tests doesn't guarantee a pass or a job at the end of the process, but it can help provide a fair and inclusive opportunity for all candidates, in all their diversity, to do their very best on the assessment day.

Jo Lawrence, Business Development Director at the OPC concluded: 'Redesigning and refreshing a recruitment process is an opportunity to reinforce the best of what you have. This was a swift but thorough piece of work without huge investment. It has new effective assessment tools aimed at measuring key safety-critical NTS; an in-house digital pre-screening stage, and important new candidate practice materials. The project redesign helps provide the client with confidence that their improved process can help to select the best candidates who are more likely to succeed through training, and maintain or improve a team's high standard of safe, and skilled depot driving performance.' 



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