

Line Manager Interviews for Train Driver Selection

RDG-OPS-GN-080

Issue 1- March 2026

About this Document

Explanatory Note

The Rail Delivery Group is not a regulatory body and compliance with Guidance Notes or Approved Codes of Practice is not mandatory; they reflect good practice and are advisory only. Users are recommended to evaluate the guidance against their own arrangements in a structured and systematic way, noting that parts of the guidance may not be appropriate to their operations. It is recommended that this process of evaluation and any subsequent decision to adopt (or not adopt) elements of the guidance should be documented. Compliance with any or all of the contents herein, is entirely at an organisation's own discretion.

Other Guidance Notes or Approved Codes of Practice are available on the [Rail Delivery Group \(RDG\) website](#).

Executive Summary

This guidance note addresses concerns expressed by members of RDG's Train Drivers Academy (TDA) Recruitment Practitioners Group (RPG), that current train driver recruitment practices may inadvertently disadvantage neurodivergent candidates, or those with limited work experience (particularly younger candidates). It sets out considerations for interviewers about question types, their application in train driver selection, how to score candidates consistently and fairly, and what to include in pre-interview packs. It then sets out potential strengths-based interview questions in a bank organised by categories, structured mainly through the RSSB non-technical skills model.

Issue Record

Issue	Date	Comments
1	March 2026	First issue

This document is reviewed on a regular 2-year cycle.

Written/Prepared by

Andrew Taylor
Operations People Specialist, Rail Delivery Group

Kai Alves
Traincrew Project Manager, Rail Delivery Group

Anastasia Younger-Gray
Traincrew Support Officer, Rail Delivery Group

Authorised by

Ashleigh Carroll-Dickson
Industry Lead – TDA Practitioners Group

Tina Rees
Acting Chair – Train Drivers Academy Board

Contents

About this Document	2
Contents	3
1 Purpose and Background	4
1.1 Purpose	4
1.2 Background.....	4
2. Considerations for Interviewers	4
2.1 Question types	4
2.2 Application of question types in train driver recruitment.....	5
2.3 Question categories – essential/non-technical skill levels.....	5
2.4 Interview scoring.....	7
2.5 Pre-interview pack	7
2.6 Interview logistics.....	8
3. Strengths-Based Question Bank	9
3.1 Preparation and motivation questions	9
3.2 Situational awareness questions	10
3.3 Diligence questions.....	11
3.4 Communication questions	12
3.5 Decision making and action questions	13
3.6 Workload management questions	14
3.7 Cooperation and working with others questions.....	15
3.8 Self-management questions.....	16
3.9 Equity, diversity and inclusion questions	17

1 Purpose and Background

1.1 Purpose

This guidance note presents a curated selection of strengths-based questions that assess skills, alongside guidance on when and how to incorporate hypothetical and scenario-based questions.

It includes a bank of interview questions designed to broaden the range of tools available to interviewers. These questions aim to give all candidates, regardless of their background or experience, the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths, potential, and suitability for the role.

This will support interviewers in selecting the most appropriate question format at each stage of the recruitment process, helping to ensure a fairer and more inclusive experience for all candidates.

1.2 Background

Concerns were expressed by members of RDG's Train Drivers Academy (TDA) Recruitment Practitioners Group (RPG), that current train driver recruitment practices may inadvertently disadvantage neurodivergent candidates, or those with limited work experience (particularly younger candidates). RPG set out to explore more inclusive and effective approaches to interviewing such applicants. During the production of this guidance, they observed that many existing interview questions rely heavily on competency-based formats, which often require candidates to draw on prior work experience they may not yet have had the opportunity to gain, or may have difficulty recalling/expressing.

There are several recognised types of interview questions used in recruitment, each designed to assess different aspects of a candidate's suitability. Common formats include situational, competency-based, behavioural, and strengths-based questions.

Before conducting an interview, it is standard practice to prepare a structured bank of questions to ensure consistency and fairness across candidates. When selecting these questions, it's important to consider how different formats may advantage or disadvantage candidates depending on their level of experience and ability to express themselves in an interview format.

Additionally, following a research idea submitted by TDA, RSSB published a 'knowledge search' report in November 2025: [Neurodiversity in employment: recruitment, training, and support \(S393\)](#), detailing a range of recommendations from recent literature to aid the recruitment of neurodivergent employees, some of which will also support younger candidates' ability to show their full potential at interview. Some of the content of this guidance note comes from these recommendations (where RSSB is acknowledged, it is from this source) and further reading of the knowledge search is encouraged¹.

2. Considerations for Interviewers

2.1 Question types

Situational

These present hypothetical scenarios and ask candidates how they would respond. They are future-focussed and assess problem-solving, judgement, and decision-making skills.

¹ [Neurodiversity in employment: recruitment, training, and support \(S393\)](#) For clarity of reading, references cited by this RSSB knowledge search are not explicitly referenced in this guidance.

Example: Imagine you notice that a colleague is being excluded from team discussions. What would you do?

Competency-based

These focus on specific skills and past experiences. Candidates are asked to provide examples that demonstrate their ability to perform tasks relevant to the role. The STAR technique (Situation, Task, Action, Result) is commonly used to structure responses.

Example: Can you tell me about a time when you helped create a more inclusive environment at work?

Behavioural

These explore how a candidate has approached real-life challenges, aiming to understand their mindset, values, and working style. They are often used to assess cultural fit and alignment with organisational values.

Example: Tell me about a time when you had to work towards a challenging goal. How did you approach it?

Strengths-based

These focus on what candidates enjoy doing and where they feel most energised. Rather than relying on past experience, they aim to uncover natural talents and motivations, making them particularly useful for assessing potential.

Example: What do you enjoy about working with people from different backgrounds or perspectives?

2.2 Application of question types in train driver recruitment

Entry-level train driver interviews often rely on competency and situational questions, which are effective for assessing technical and safety-related skills. However, these formats can disadvantage candidates without prior work experience, or those who may struggle to recall good examples from previous experience. RSSB give the example of autistic people, who can experience difficulties in recalling episodic memories.

In such cases, strengths-based questions offer a more inclusive alternative. They focus on personal attributes and motivations, helping interviewers better understand a candidate's potential – especially valuable when recruiting younger applicants, career changers, or neurodivergent candidates.

When using any type of question, it can be helpful to candidates to avoid ambiguous wording, as this can force the candidate to rely on reading the interviewers' intentions or interpret social cues. Just like in job adverts, wording that is explicit is helpful as it avoids the need for the candidate to 'read between the lines'. (RSSB)

2.3 Question categories – essential/non-technical skill levels

In the question bank below, the strengths-based questions are organised into sections. Seven of these align with the categories of the [RSSB Non-Technical Skills Model](#).

This model is widely understood in the rail industry, but other similar models are used in education. An example is the [Skills Builder Universal Framework of Essential Skills](#). This is particularly useful for interviews, as it breaks down each of the 8 essential skills in the framework into 16 steps of increasing mastery.

Being specific about what skills – and at what levels – you are expecting from a candidate can be helpful to neurodivergent candidates. Ideally, this should flow from the job description but being specific about the criteria you are looking at in an interview is also important, avoiding 'generic social skills where autistic people may be lacking, such as 'teamwork' and 'good communication skills', regardless of whether these are really essential for the job.' (RSSB)

Through an industry workshop the 4 categories of the Universal Framework, each with 2 skills, has

been mapped to the RSSB model's categories:

Universal Framework Category	Universal Framework Essential Skill	Possible RSSB NTS Categories
Communication	Listening	Communication
	Speaking	
Creative Problem Solving	Problem Solving	Decision making and action Diligence Confidence and initiative
	Creativity	
Self-management	Adapting	Workload management Situational awareness Diligence Self-management
	Planning	
Collaboration	Leadership	Co-operation and working with others Self-management
	Teamwork	

The table below shows highest step that the workshop mapped each of the essential skills to, for the train driver role. Note, this does not mean that other steps are irrelevant, nor that all steps below the highest mapped level are relevant (e.g. the highest-level step mapped for 'speaking' is step 14, but step 9: 'Sharing visuals' has no relevance to the train driver role).

Universal Framework Category	Universal Framework Essential Skill	Highest step mapped to train driver role
Communication	Listening	Step 8: Questioning – I ask open questions to understand more
	Speaking	Step 14: Constructive communicating - I maintain clear and constructive communication in challenging situations
Creative Problem Solving	Problem Solving	Step 7: Evaluating options - I choose between possible solutions based on success criteria
	Creativity	Step 5: Suggesting improvements – I create ideas to make something better
Self-management	Adapting	Step 15: Managing risk – I actively manage risk
	Planning	Step 10: Involving others – I engage others to achieve goals
Collaboration	Leadership	Step 14: Emotional intelligence – I respond to others' emotions to lead effectively
	Teamwork	Step 11: Resolving conflicts – I work collaboratively to resolve unhelpful conflicts

(If you are viewing this guidance note electronically, the blue text in the table is hyperlinked to the relevant page on the Skills Builder website for more information.)

The tables above may be useful for determining:

- What level/step you expect from a candidate for each skill. Note that the levels above are for a

qualified train driver – you may want to consult the Universal Framework to identify if a lower step is more appropriate for selection, which can then be developed through training/coaching.

- What questions from the bank in section 3 you want to specifically choose, which provide the candidate with the opportunity to demonstrate their capability/potential to the appropriate step level.
- Whether a candidate meets the expectation you set – the extra detail and examples from the Universal Framework can help you look for language and evidence that supports scoring.

2.4 Interview scoring

It may be worth reviewing the scoring system used, as this may identify differences between limited experience and limited ability. A simplified three-tier framework can help interviewers assess candidates more equally:

- **Not capable:** The candidate shows no understanding or capability. This may reflect a lack of exposure rather than a lack of potential. Responses may be vague or unrelated to the competency being assessed.
- **Semi-capable:** The candidate demonstrates some understanding and relevant behaviours, though responses may lack depth or consistency. This level often indicates emerging potential that could be developed through training and support.
- **Capable:** The candidate provides clear, relevant examples that show a good grasp of the competency. Responses reflect confidence, consistency, and alignment with role expectations.

This approach helps distinguish between candidates who haven't yet had the opportunity to gain experience and those who may need further development. It also supports inclusive recruitment by recognising potential and avoiding penalising candidates for limited opportunities.

If experienced candidates consistently score at the semi-capable level, this may prompt further discussion to explore whether their experience translates into capability. This ensures the scoring system remains fair and reflective of actual performance.

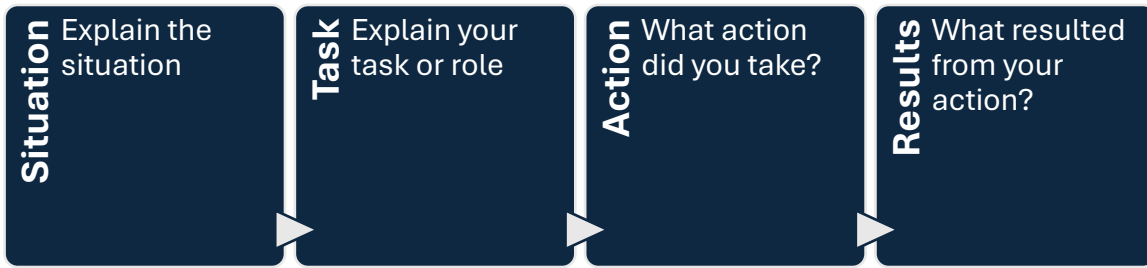
RSSB point out that successful performance in a job interview is often contingent on interpersonal communication skills such as the effective use of verbal and non-verbal communication, presentation skills and impression management. These are areas where autistic candidates may struggle, even if they can do the job in question. Notably, where neurotypical candidates understand that certain interview questions (e.g. about prior experience) require a degree of impression management, autistic candidates may give a literal response that does not cast them in such a positive light.

To mitigate any disadvantage this may confer on candidate, neurodiversity training can help interviewers to understand that behavioural traits of neurodiverse people that may be perceived as outside social norms should not be a justification for scoring a candidate lower or rejecting them entirely. Even training for interviewers who are themselves neurodivergent can be helpful, as neurodivergence presents in many different forms and characteristics.

2.5 Pre-interview pack

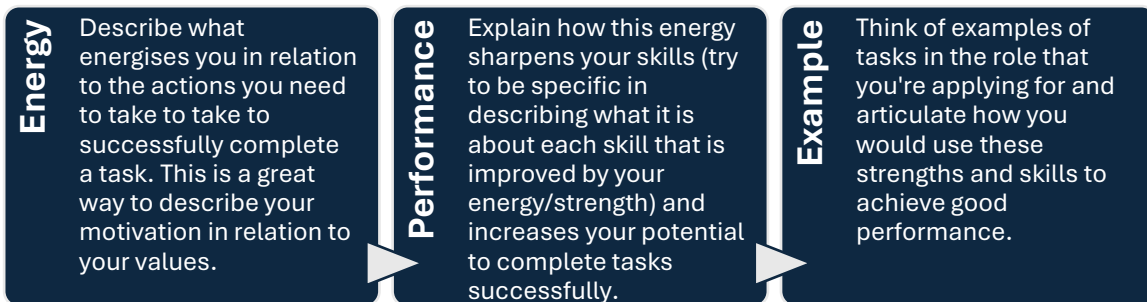
To give all candidates a fair opportunity to showcase themselves during the interview, a pre-interview pack could be shared in advance. This pack could outline the topics to be covered, the structure of the interview, and the format of responses expected. You may also want to include some of the questions in advance, as this increases the chances of candidates, especially those who are neurodivergent, giving the best account of themselves and showing their potential.

The STAR method is a useful framework for structuring answers for behavioural and competency-based questions. Sharing this with candidates can help them prepare more effectively and respond to questions with greater clarity and confidence.

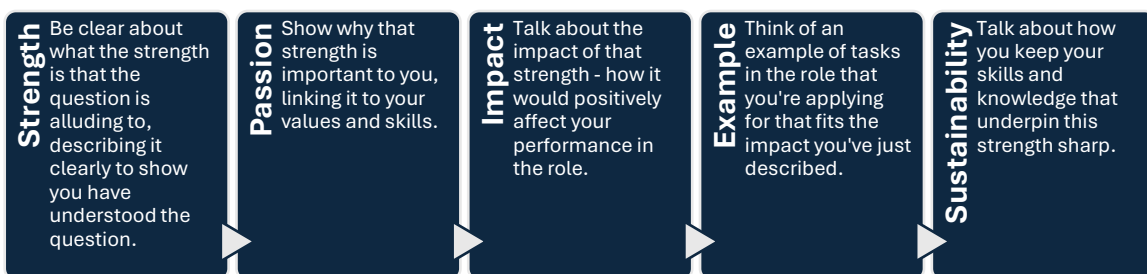


However, if you are using strengths-based questions about natural preferences, energy, motivations or what you enjoy, you may want to consider helping your candidates prepare by giving them information about the EPE or SPIES models.

The EPE model is simple, intuitive, authentic and quick, but can be light on detail.



The SPIES model provides a richer insight into a candidate's motivations, balanced with impact, but candidates must be aware that it may be too long or complex for simpler questions.



Candidates may also want to use a combination of these models if the question comes in two parts. For example, "What strength helps you lead others, and can you give me an example?" could start with EPE or SPIES, then pivot to STAR for the evidence.

2.6 Interview logistics

Interviews can be intimidating – particularly for young people with limited experience of high-stakes selection processes – and may be especially anxiety-inducing for neurodivergent candidates. RSSB note that many autistic people prefer structure and routine, and that deviating from this such as when attending an interview can increase anxiety.

Interviewers can help create a psychologically safe interview environment by considering factors such as room layout, noise, lighting, and access to additional resources.

3. Strengths-Based Question Bank

3.1 Preparation and motivation questions

About you

- What do you enjoy doing, and what are you naturally good at?
- What kind of tasks or environments help you feel focussed and at your best?
- What have you done to prepare for this interview?
- What do you expect the day-to-day responsibilities of a train driver to be like?
- What strengths do you think you could bring to the train driver role?
- What aspects of the train driver role do you think you might find challenging? And how do you think your strengths could help you overcome those challenges?
- What do you think will be your biggest challenge/fear and how do you think you will overcome this?

Challenges of the train driver role (internal candidate)

- How has your experience at [operator company] prepared you for the train driver role?
- What do you anticipate will be your biggest challenge in transitioning to this role, and how do you plan to overcome it?

Challenges of the train driver role (external candidate)

- What research or steps have you taken to understand what being a train driver involves? If so, what have you learned?
- How do you think working in the rail industry (and specifically in the train driver role) will be different from your current working environment [which could be an educational establishment]?

3.2 Situational awareness questions

Attention to detail

- What kind of tasks do you naturally pay close attention to, even without being asked?
- You're asked to check a document that's already been reviewed by others. How do you approach it?

Overall awareness

- You are given an hour to complete a task. How do you make sure you're progressing well enough to complete the task on time? [This could be in a timed examination context, for example.]
- What kind of information do you find easiest to take in and remember and why do you think that is?

Maintain concentration

- What helps you stay focussed for long periods, especially when working alone?
- When do you find it easiest to concentrate, and what kind of environment supports that?
- What techniques do you use to stay focussed during long or complex tasks?
- Have you ever struggled with staying focussed? What did you do to improve?

Retain information

- How do you usually take in and remember important information, especially when there's a lot to absorb?
- What would you do if given an important piece of information that you needed for a task later in the day?

Anticipate risk

- What risky situations do you think you might encounter on the way home from this interview?
- When given a task to complete, how do you identify what things might go wrong, so that you can take action to avoid this?

3.3 Diligence questions

Systematic and thorough approach

- How do you make sure you don't forget key steps when following a process?
- What kind of tasks do you enjoy that require you to be thorough and methodical?
- How do you stay motivated when tasks involve routine checks or detailed procedures?

Checking

- How do you check your work for accuracy?
- What kind of tasks do you do which are easy to be careless in and how do you avoid making mistakes?

Follows rules and procedures

- What do you enjoy about working in an environment where rules and procedures are important?
- What makes you feel confident when working in a safety-focussed role?

Situation-based questions for this category

- If you were assigned a task you've never done before, how would you ensure it's done correctly?
- Suppose you're working on a task and realise you've made an error that could affect others. What would you do?
- Imagine you notice someone not following a procedure correctly, how do you respond?
- If a new procedure had just been introduced and you thought there was a better (perhaps safer or more efficient) way of doing it, what would you do?

3.4 Communication questions

Listening

- What helps you ensure you take everything in when someone is giving you important information?
- What do you enjoy about listening to others and understanding their perspective?
- When do you feel you're at your best as a listener?

Clarity

- What gives you confidence that you're getting a message across clearly?
- How do you go about explaining things in a way that's easy for others to follow?

Assertiveness

- When do you feel most comfortable speaking up or sharing your perspective?
- What helps you stay calm and clear when you need to be firm or direct, perhaps when someone is not really listening to you?
- What kind of situations bring out your confidence in communicating clearly and respectfully?
- Sharing information
- What strengths help you communicate well with people who might not understand something straight away?
- When you've got a lot of information to share, how do you choose which pieces of information are important?
- How do you make sure everyone is on the same page when working together?

Situation-based questions for this category

- You're given instructions that are unclear or incomplete. What do you do to ensure you understand them correctly before acting?
- You're in a situation where someone is not following the correct communication procedure. How do you assert yourself while keeping the conversation respectful?
- You have to share some information with someone. How do you make sure the information you share is clear and easy to understand?

3.5 Decision making and action questions

Effective decisions

- What kind of decisions do you feel most confident making, and why?
- When do you enjoy taking responsibility for making a decision that affects others?
- What helps you feel sure that you've made the right decision?
- Do you prefer making decisions independently or collaboratively? Why?

Timely decisions

- What helps you make a good decision when you're under time pressure?
- Do you prefer taking time to weigh up decisions, or do you prefer to act quickly and instinctively? Why?
- What kind of situations bring out your ability to act quickly and responsibly?

Diagnosing problems

- Have you ever done something differently the second time around?
- What helps you spot what's going wrong and figure out how to fix it?
- What kind of problems do you enjoy solving the most?
- How do you feel when you're given a problem with no clear solution?

Situation-based questions for this category

- You're following instructions that seem unclear or possibly incorrect. What steps would you take to clarify and make the right decision?
- You're unsure about the best course of action, but waiting could cause delays. How do you make a confident decision quickly?
- Imagine you're reviewing a report and notice a minor inconsistency. What steps would you take?

3.6 Workload management questions

Selective attention

- When you've got lots of tasks that all need to be completed at the same time, how do you ensure quality doesn't suffer?
- What strategies do you use to stay focussed when switching between tasks?

Prioritising

- You're faced with multiple tasks and limited time. How do you decide what to tackle first?
- You're under time pressure and someone asks for help. How do you decide whether to assist immediately or continue with your task?

Calm under pressure

- How do you manage your emotions during high-pressure situations?
- What strengths help you recall information under pressure or in time-sensitive situations?
- How do you manage nerves or pressure before something important, like an exam or interview?

Situation-based questions for this category

- If you had multiple deadlines to meet, what strategy would you use to prioritise tasks?
- Can you walk me through how you plan your day or week when you have competing priorities?

3.7 Cooperation and working with others questions

Considering others' needs

- What do you enjoy most about working in a team?
- What kind of situations bring out your ability to be thoughtful and considerate?
- How do you make sure everyone feels included and respected in a group or team setting?

Supporting others

- What do you enjoy about helping someone feel more confident or supported?
- What do you enjoy more - sharing ideas or helping others develop theirs?

Treating others with respect

- How do you respond when someone asks for help or advice?
- How do you make sure people feel heard and valued when you're working with them?
- What kind of situations bring out your natural ability to be fair and considerate?
- How would you approach giving feedback to someone who is wrong about something?
- How do you respond when someone has a different opinion or approach than you?
- What do you enjoy about working with people from different backgrounds or perspectives?
- Why do you think respect is important in roles where safety and teamwork are essential?

Dealing with conflict or aggressive behaviour

- How do you handle differences of opinion in a group setting?
- How do you feel when someone strongly disagrees with you and expresses it in no uncertain terms?
- When you feel angry or stressed, how does it affect how you act?

Situation-based questions for this category

- A colleague tells you "It's good enough" in a tone that suggests they won't welcome criticism. How do you respond if you notice a detail that's off?
- A disagreement gets out of hand and the other person raises their voice to you. How does that make you feel and how does it affect your response?
- If you had to collaborate with a challenging team member, how would you handle the situation?
- You're trying to resolve a problem, but someone is being uncooperative. What could you do to get them on side?

3.8 Self-management questions

Motivation

- What motivates you?
- How do you stay motivated?
- What drives you to go above and beyond?
- Do you enjoy working to your own goals, or to those set by others? Why?

Confidence and initiative

- How do you approach new or unfamiliar situations?
- What do you enjoy about taking the lead or being the one who has to make a decision?
- What kind of situations bring out your natural drive to take the initiative?

Maintain and develop skills and knowledge

- How do you stay motivated when learning something new, especially if it's challenging?
- What kind of tasks make you want to improve and get better at them?
- What do you enjoy about learning and remembering how things work?
- What strengths help you pick up new information or skills quickly?
- How do you make sure you're always improving in the things you do?

Prepared and organised

- What tools or techniques do you use to stay organised and meet deadlines?
- How do you make sure you're on time and prepared for important commitments like school, work, or appointments (or this interview!)?
- Do you prefer planning things in advance or reacting as things happen? Why?

Situation-based questions for this category

- What tools or techniques do you use to stay organised and meet deadlines?
- How do you make sure you're on time and prepared for important commitments like school, work, or appointments (or this interview!)?
- Do you prefer planning things in advance or reacting as things happen? Why?

3.9 Equity, diversity and inclusion questions

- What do you enjoy about working with people from different backgrounds or perspectives?
- What kind of situations make you feel strongly about fairness and equal treatment?
- What does treating people equally mean to you, and how do you put that into practice?
- What kind of team environment helps you feel included and valued?
- What kind of behaviours do you think help build a respectful and inclusive workplace?

Situation-based questions for this category

- Someone new joins your team. How do you make them feel welcomed, included and respected?
- Some team members are making fun of a colleague behind their back. How would you respond?

Rail Delivery Group

