Competence Development Guide for Dispatchers and Guards
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The RSSB research project T1068 ‘Supporting a fair culture: creating appropriate plans after incidents’, produced guidance on the creation of appropriate competence development plans (CDPs) for train drivers.

The research included a review of current industry practices and feedback gathered from:

- Staff, managers, and senior managers
- Rail Delivery Group (RDG)
- Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF)
- Rail Maritime and Transport Union (RMT)
- Network Rail
- The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB).

This guide is a revision of the T1068 guidance, as many of the principles described within the research can be applied to the creation of competence development plans for guards and dispatchers.

1.2 Aim of this guide

This guide sets out best practice principles and process for incorporating a fair culture approach to:

- support an organisation’s CDP process
- promote the competence development of guards and/or dispatchers
- help organisations further develop and meet the competence requirements of guards and dispatchers.

1.3 Who should read this guide?

This guide is intended to support guards and/or dispatchers and their managers in the development, implementation, and management of CDPs.

It will also be of interest to those responsible for developing and managing the overall CDP process and those assisting the process, such as union representatives, employee representatives, trainers, assessors and senior managers.

It should be noted that as each organisation has different processes and staff roles, there may be some differences between an organisation’s CDP process and the information contained within this guide. For example, terminology, staff and company responsibilities and triggers for CDPs, however the principles and the activities remain the same.
2 The Competence Development Plan Process

2.1 Overview

CDPs are part of the Competence Management System (CMS). They can be used to develop and improve competence where a requirement or development need has been identified.

Applying the CDP process allows organisations to meet regulatory obligations and help manage safety risk.

An overview of a generic CDP process is shown in Figure 1.

The major steps are:
1. Determining if a CDP is required, including the identification of competence requirement(s) and/or development objective(s) - described in Section 3.
2. Developing the CDP to meet the requirement(s) or objective(s) - described in Section 4.
3. Implementing the CDP and reviewing progress - described in Section 5.
4. Assessing and closing out the CDP - described in Section 6.

Figure 1: Generic CDP process

2.2 What benefits can CDPs bring?

2.2.1 Legal requirement

The ORR’s Developing and Maintaining Staff Competence document (ORR, 2016), sets out the requirement for a CMS including the obligation to identify and manage sub-standard performance and restore competence (Figure 2). The CDP process helps duty holders achieve this.

Moreover, CDPs may be reviewed by the ORR and by RAIB and British Transport Police if guards’ and/or dispatchers’ competence is relevant to an investigation.

Indeed, some investigations, such as the RAIB investigation into the passenger trap and drag at Hayes and Harlington Station (RAIB 2016), have identified deficiencies in the CDP process as a contributing factor to serious operating incidents.
2.2.2 Individual and company benefits

A useful way to understand competence is as a scale ranging from novice, not yet competent, competent, proficient and expert (see Figure 3).

Taking this view of competence means that development can focus on helping individuals achieve increased levels of competence as opposed to simply being deemed ‘competent’ or ‘not competent’.

The purpose of the CMS is to develop, achieve and maintain competence, through the initial and on-going development and assessment/measurement of guards and dispatcher’s technical skills and knowledge, and non-technical skills (NTS) required to consistently complete activities to the standard required.

CDPs support this by providing a structured process to help guards and dispatchers achieve and/or enhance their competence. Indeed, some companies use CDPs to support staff seeking to develop their competence from competent, to proficient and finally to expert.

In addition, an effective CDP process can:

- Increase guards’ and/or dispatchers’ confidence in their own abilities and increase their trust in the company to support them.
- Increase guard and/or dispatcher retention, supporting a long period of service.
- Allow greater availability of guards and/or dispatchers for service by minimising their time away from duty.
Help to control risks relating to guards and/or dispatcher’s competence, potentially helping to reduce the number of operational incidents and the associated costs due to disruption and loss, and the associated burden of investigation.

Allow the organisation to learn from operational experiences and to make organisational and/or job and workplace changes to support safe performance.

Contribute to good staff relations and a positive culture, as performance improvement and career development are conducted in a fair, open and effective way.

2.3 How does CDP relate to fair culture?

In a fair culture ‘front-line operators and others are not punished for actions, omissions or decisions taken by them which are commensurate with their experience and training, but where gross negligence, wilful violations and destructive acts are not tolerated.’ Such a culture has the following principles (see Figure 4).

Leadership, management, supervisory and employee commitment to safety and duty of care.

Commitment to developing people.

Commitment to learning from incidents, accidents and near-misses.

Involvement and engagement of staff.

A fair environment that encourages staff to question and challenge safety practices and report safety issues.

[1] www.eurocontrol.int/articles/just-culture
• Positive attitude to rules, procedures and delivery of effective risk control measures.
• A clear understanding of the risks associated with operations and the belief that they are significant enough to justify safety requirements.
• Clearly defined and understood roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.
• Effective two-way communication.

Figure 4: Principles of a fair culture

A fair culture recognises that everyone makes mistakes, may develop shortcuts, workarounds and routine violations in response to task demands or external pressures, and focuses on the system-wide contribution to safety. At the same time, fair culture asserts clear intolerance for reckless actions by staff.

It is accepted that even where a person is highly competent their performance can still be subject to error as a range of factors relating to the organisation, the job and workplace can affect performance.

Indeed, understanding human performance becomes an important part of investigations and competence development. Many incidents, errors and issues with competence can be caused by a combination of human performance and system failures. These factors can influence a person’s decision making and may lead to them making a mistake. Examples of individual and system issues (termed incident factors) are illustrated in Figure 5.
In a fair culture CDPs are not associated with punishment. Rather, they are seen as an important mechanism to help develop and enhance competence and human performance.

An example could be dispatching on a red signal: although the signal was displaying a red aspect, the dispatcher checked the signal and thought it was a single yellow, and so dispatched the train. The signal was difficult to see from the dispatcher’s location because the positioning of the signal had not been designed to take account of strong sunlight, and it was shining on the signal that day. This example involves:

- An error by the dispatcher and potentially not applying non-technical skills such as checking and taking a systematic and thorough approach.
- Equipment and environment issues, such as design and location of the signal and sunlight.

In a fair culture, the CDP process would focus on understanding how the dispatcher currently applies non-technical skills, the factors that affect their ability to apply these skills, and help them identify and use techniques to apply these skills.

In parallel, the organisation would look at the system changes required to support their dispatchers, in this instance equipment and environmental issues. This would not just focus on the location of the incident but consider organisational wide changes where similar issues may apply.

Within a fair culture CDPs are initiated where a requirement or development need has been identified, either by the organisation, manager or individual. As such, CDPs are not used just for post incident support, but as a proactive measure to support the competence development of guards and dispatchers.
Conducting CDPs within a fair culture can help to enhance their effectiveness, through promoting and encouraging:

- open and honest discussions
- participation in safety processes
- reporting and willingness to identify and discuss safety concerns and concerns relating to competence
- honesty and trust within competence development, assessment and incident investigations.

2.4 What can staff do to support the CDP process?

2.4.1 Dispatchers and/or guards

Dispatchers and/or guards should:

- Be clear that the CDP is a personal commitment to improve competence with the support of their manager and the company.
- Take a leading role in the development and implementation of their plan.
- Take ownership of their plan.
- Invest time and effort in improving their competence.
- Use the CDP as an opportunity to discuss personal performance and to develop skills and knowledge to support career development.

2.4.2 Managers

Managers should:

- Brief guards and dispatchers on the CDP process and how it works. This will be most effective with the participation of a union representative to demonstrate joint commitment by the manager, company and the union.
- Support the individual and recognise that even high performing individuals can make mistakes and/or needs support.
- Work with the individual to develop and implement the plan together. This should include respecting the individual as a professional, and listening to their views. Remember, it is the dispatcher/guard’s CDP and the manager is there to help facilitate and coach.
- Recognise the time commitment required in the development and implementation of a plan. This time should be considered an investment as it is better to get it right first time. As part of this, managers will need to manage multiple conflicting demands, and guidance is available (RSSB, 2008c) to help.
- Share experiences with other managers to improve plans and to maintain consistency across the company. This could be achieved through informal discussion, or formal peer-review of ongoing CDPs.
- Demonstrate leadership skills, for example trust, honesty, listening and coaching. You can find further guidance on leadership behaviours in Section 9.
### 2.4.3 Representatives

It may be relatively rare for a representative to be involved in the CDP process directly. It may be sufficient to be aware that the guard and/or dispatcher is involved in the process, and to check progress. They may get involved when an individual is being put on a CDP, depending on the reason for the CDP.

It is more likely a representative will become involved if there are problems agreeing the CDP objectives, achieving the CDP activities, if the guard and/or dispatcher has not met the CDP objectives at the time of final assessment, or if the guard and/or dispatcher’s case has been escalated to a Safety Review Panel. Again, this will depend on the reason for the CDP.

Representatives, such as Trade Unions, should:

- Represent the individual’s interests in the process by understanding their needs and ensuring that the process is being applied correctly.
- Check that the agreed plan will address the individual’s needs, and is achievable, and confirm that scheduled development activities are being completed.
- Demonstrate leadership skills, for example trust, honesty, listening and coaching. You can find further guidance on leadership behaviours in Section 9.

### 2.4.4 Employee representatives

Employee representatives (which may be a trade union member) may have a role in writing a company’s CDP policy and conducting consultation.

They may have a formal role in the CDP process in reviewing and approving CDPs, resolving disagreements about the guards and/or dispatcher’s objectives or actions, or as a participant in the safety performance review process. Again, depending on the reason for the CDP.

Employee representatives should:

- Recognise the CDP as a process that satisfies regulatory and employment obligations, and understand the contribution of CDP to industrial relations, competence development and management and the careers of staff.
- Recognise the importance of the CDP process and the principles of fair culture to develop competence, control operational risk and support engagement and participation.
- Consider trends in the number and type of CDPs and what this means in terms of CMS effectiveness and operational risk profile.
- Hold periodic reviews of the CDP process to:
  - Assess consistency between managers and locations.
  - Determine the extent to which CDPs are realistic, useful and being completed within the agreed timescales.
  - Assess the effectiveness of CDPs in terms of improving guards and/or dispatcher’s competence and confidence.
Where a CDP has been initiated due to an incident, the employee representative should also recognise the pressure within the company to respond quickly to such an event, particularly a serious one.

In these circumstances, there can be a temptation to speed up and reduce the scope and/or quality of the investigatory process and CDP process and to fast track disciplinary proceedings to achieve quick results.

This can result in individuals:

- Being blamed for an incident and unfairly linked to actions
- Being given a CDP that will be ineffective.

And it may reduce the company’s opportunity and ability to learn from the incident.

It is important for employee representatives to demonstrate leadership, to allow the investigation to proceed without interference, and not act before the full details are known. Further guidance on leadership behaviours can be found in Section 9.
3  Determine if a CDP is needed

3.1  Aim

The aim of this step is to determine if a CDP is needed.

As part of this it is important for the guard or dispatcher, manager, and the company to:

- Understand the range of factors that can affect human performance.
- Be clear that the CDP process is not a method of disciplining staff and does not need to be used just for post incident support.
- Be clear as to when a CDP should be used and the benefits it can bring.

This step includes:

1. Determining if there is a competence requirement(s) and/or development objective(s) that needs support.
2. If so, understanding and describing the competence requirement(s) and/or development objective(s).
3. Determining if a CDP is the most suitable method for achieving the requirement(s) and/or objective(s) and is therefore needed.

To help achieve this, the guard or dispatcher and their manager will bring together the available background information to build a picture of existing competence.

Background information can include:

- performance records and career plans
- training and assessment records
- relevant training needs analysis
- previous CDPs and incident reports, if applicable.

The manager and guard or dispatcher will review the background information to determine if there is a competence requirement(s) and/or development objective(s) that requires support and if so, understand and formalise the competence requirement(s) and/or development objective(s).

They will then mutually discuss and review the competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s) against their company’s CDP criteria to confirm that a CDP is appropriate. This decision should be recorded.

If the CDP process is not appropriate the manager and guard or dispatcher should determine the most suitable process and approach to achieve the requirement and/or objective.
3.2 How is competence defined within the CDP?

When understanding and describing the competence requirement(s) and/or development objective(s), it is important to understand what competence is and the components that make up competence.

It is also important to recognise and understand the skills and knowledge the guard or dispatcher already has and performs well, focussing only on those that require development.

Competence is the quality or state, of being knowledgeable and skilled to be able to perform a specific act or task consistently to an agreed level/standard. This agreed level/standard of performance can range from novice to expert.

Competence is the measurable outcome from the application of competencies (RSSB, 2013) and therefore when considering an individual’s competence development requirements or objectives, it can be useful to break competence down into the components described in Figure 6:

- Technical skills and underpinning knowledge – the practical skills and knowledge relating to the task, for example undertaking train dispatch, requires certain technical skills and knowledge for completing the train safety check and providing the correct signal to indicate the check is complete.
- Non-technical skills – Non-technical skills describe how someone carries out a task and includes categories of skills such as situational awareness, communication, decision making and workload management. For example, when performing dispatch duties, it is important that guards and/or dispatchers remain focused, concentrate on the task at hand and check that the task has been completed to pre-agreed standards.
- Functional skills – these are general skills for work and everyday life, for example in English language, numeracy and use of technology.

Competence may also encompass organisational behaviours and values.

Figure 6: Components of work place competence (RSSB, 2013, p.8)
3.3 If an individual is involved in an operational incident does it mean that they have a competence issue?

People can make mistakes in situations that are unfamiliar, ambiguous or rarely encountered, especially if the task is complex, uncertain, not well-supported by aids or equipment, or has little opportunity for error recovery. For example, a guard or dispatcher may be more likely to make an error if they are working at an unfamiliar station or on an unfamiliar route or if there is a major event planned in proximity to the station and the guard or dispatcher has not been given appropriate information or briefing.

People can also make mistakes in situations they encounter very frequently for example dispatching a train from the same location or on the same route each day.

While it is easy to attribute an error to individual competence it can be one of several underlying causes that led to an error, as illustrated in Figure 7.

Involvement in an incident does not necessarily mean that the individual involved has a competence issue, and there should be clear evidence that it is a competence issue, not primarily due to the factors described in Figure 7, before concluding that a guard or dispatcher requires competence development following an incident. This type of approach embodies the principles of fair culture.

3.4 Is a CDP always needed when a guards’ and/or dispatchers’ actions or competence contributed to an incident?

If the guard or dispatcher demonstrates a clear understanding of how their actions contributed to the event and the reasons for these, and there is no requirement for further competence development to meet required standards, it may be sufficient to record this with supporting evidence to justify the decision not to initiate further competence development.

As part of this, a coaching conversation should be undertaken discussing learning from the incident, understanding their part in the incident and why this happened, and the steps the guard or dispatcher will take to deal with similar situations in the future. Application of understanding and learning can then be monitored and assessed through the CMS.

It is also important to recognise that involvement in an operational incident or near miss represents a very powerful learning experience for both an individual as well as an organisation.

For example, in some organisations incidents or near misses are reviewed during training days or safety briefs to facilitate learning and demonstrate the principles of a fair culture.
3.5 Is the CDP a method for disciplining?

In line with the principles of a fair culture the CDP process is not a method of disciplining staff. The role of the CDP is to develop and improve competence.

Where a CDP has been initiated due to an operational incident the CDP process can be used to better understand why a failure in performance occurred and to then develop and improve competence. It also enables the individual, manager and company to gain confidence in the individual’s competence to perform at a particular level.

Where an incident, near miss or reported safety issue involves elements of competence and unacceptable behaviour (for example gross misconduct or negligent behaviour) the CDP and the disciplinary process should be conducted separately.

3.6 When should you use a CDP?

The purpose of a CDP is to develop and improve competence where a requirement or development need has been identified. This means they do not need to be used just for post incident support. CDPs can be used as a proactive measure to support the competence development of guards and dispatchers.

As such, you should use a CDP when:

An individual’s competence has fallen below the required standard in an area. This may be identified in performance monitoring, assessment, or in the investigation of an incident or accident, taking into consideration other potential factors affecting human performance and competence retention.

An individual and/or manager believes additional competence development would benefit the individual.
This may be identified through training needs analysis, performance review or management one to one discussions. Return to work programmes may also identify and recommend that an individual would benefit from competence development activities. The CDP process can be used to help achieve this development.

3.7  What can staff and the company do?

3.7.1 Guards’ and/or dispatchers’ responsibilities

Dispatchers and/or guards should:

- Be open and honest regarding competence requirements/objectives and communicate these clearly to their manager. Reasons could include, being in role or location for a long period of time, a personal feeling that they are not as ‘on the ball’ as they should be, an event which was not recorded as a close call or near miss but which had the potential to be. Equally, if the guard and/or dispatcher believes that a planned change in duties, or transfer to a different part of the operation will require different competencies or a greater level of competence in particular areas, they should talk to their manager, or another manager, as soon as they recognise that there may be a development requirement.
- Consider before meeting their manager, their strengths and weaknesses, and particularly where they feel they need assistance. It may help to discuss this with a colleague they feel comfortable speaking to.
- Consider if their line manager or another manager would be best placed to support their CDP. The CDP process is usually performed with the line manager, but it may be possible for a different manager to support the CDP if the individual feels that this would help them to get the best out of the plan. This should be discussed and agreed with the managers, ahead of the meeting.
- Be honest and open about their requirements, performance limitations and objectives as they are best-placed to explain where they need assistance.
- Work with their manager to understand and clarify competence needs and objectives, ensuring this is recorded.
- Review the requirement(s) and/or objective(s) with their manager to ensure it is accurate and realistic.
- Agree with the stated requirement(s) and/or objective(s) once satisfied they are accurate and realistic. The requirement(s) and/or objective(s) will form the basis of the plan.

3.7.2 Managers’ responsibilities

Managers should:

- Be proactive and identify guards and/or dispatchers who may require support. Equally, managers can anticipate if a planned change may affect competence. If this is a ‘significant’ operational, organisational or technological change then competence may need to be considered as part of the CSM-RA evaluation.
- Make sure their team knows that support is available and understand the purpose of the CDP process.
- Provide regular opportunity for private discussion, and welcome requests. For example, to increase awareness of the CDP process, the manager may share case studies of successful CDPs or invite guards and/or dispatchers who have completed CDPs to share their experiences with their colleagues.
• Make sure they clearly understand when a CDP should be used in line with company policy, the purpose of the CDP, and the benefits it can bring.

• Consider if they have the range of skills and experience to support the CDP process and determine if they require further development and support. Supporting CDPs requires managers to:

  • Understand and be able to use different management approaches to competence development, including coaching (RSSB, 2013, RSSB, 2010).

  • Understand non-technical skills, their benefits and techniques for application; and be able to talk about these and how they can improve performance (RSSB, 2012a, 2012b and 2016).

  • Be clear on the agreed levels of competence and professionalism required of dispatchers and guards.

  • Understand the company process and industry guidance (for example, RSSB, 2014) if involved in the CDP process as part of an incident investigation.

• Collect all pertinent information to review to understand areas of strength, areas for further development and other factors than can affect performance.

• Where applicable, review the investigation report 2, paying close attention to the root causes identified, the reported actions of the guard and/or dispatcher, and if they indicate a lack of competence. Some reports may not give sufficient information about the guard and/or dispatcher and the manager should aim to get this information from the investigators. Bear in mind that an event does not need to be serious to reveal an important competence gap. Equally, an operational event does not always mean that the guard and/or dispatcher requires competence development.

• Not make assumptions about a guard and/or dispatcher’s requirements or objectives. Keep an open mind, review information and discuss with the individual objectively.

• When reviewing information and discussing the situation it may be useful to consider:

  • The person’s understanding of the situation and/or their tasks.

  • The expectations of the company and the individual.

  • The person’s intentions and decision-making process.

  • What previous development action(s) has been effective or ineffective.

  • The person’s previous operational performance.

  • Other factors than can affect performance.

• Consider technical skills and knowledge, non-technical skills, functional skills and organisational behaviours and values described within the company competence management system.

• Consider the best place to hold the meeting. It should reflect the importance of the discussion but be private and comfortable. Ask if the guard or dispatcher would like anyone else to be invited, for example trade union representation.

• When meeting the guard or dispatcher explain the CDP process, its purpose and confirm that he or she understands it. Depending on why the CDP has been initiated and where applicable, the manager should be clear that a CDP is separate from the disciplinary process and that the aim is to support competence development.

• Recognise that the CDP meeting is a coaching conversation. It is important to allow the guard or

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2 Investigations should be a thorough and fair investigation, as outlined in RSSB’s Accident Investigation Guidance [https://www.rssb.co.uk/improving-industry-performance/safety-management-systems/accident-investigation-guidance](https://www.rssb.co.uk/improving-industry-performance/safety-management-systems/accident-investigation-guidance)
dispatcher to do the majority of the talking and to encourage them to identify the issues and potential solutions for themselves rather than direct them towards solutions.

- Record, confirm and mutually agree the competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s).

If the requirement and/or objective represents a common problem or underlying cause across your organisation, consider sharing the requirement(s) and/or objective(s) with the appropriate parties. In these cases, other methods, such as a formal change management process, may be more suitable for providing support to multiple individuals across the company and a CDP may not be appropriate.

If a manager does plan to share the requirement(s) and/or objective(s) it is important to explain this to the individual and ensure they understand why the information is being shared and are happy for this information to be shared. If the information is to be shared, offer them the opportunity for the event to be anonymised.

### 3.7.3 Company responsibilities

The company should:

- Define the criteria to be met for initiating a CDP and staff roles and responsibilities in the process.
- Identify criteria under which a CDP may not be required. Typically, this will be if:
  - There is no competence issue identified following an event
  - The guard or dispatcher is not considered to present an increased operational risk
  - There is no benefit expected from a CDP
  - An identified competence issue or need can be achieved through another process.
- Identify criteria under which a safety performance review[^3] is required before a CDP is considered, which may depend on the severity of the issue.

[^3]: A process initiated when there are serious concerns with the ability of the individual to perform competently. This may be initiated following a serious incident, findings from an investigation, failure to regain the required level of competence at the end of a CDP process, or involvement in repeated operational incidents. The process is staged, involving review by panels and appeals. It may result in removal of the individual from their grade.
Developing the CDP

4.1 Aim

Once it has been agreed that a CDP it is the most suitable method for achieving the requirement(s) and/or objective(s), the next step is to develop a plan to achieve the defined and agreed requirement(s) and/or objective(s).

The dispatcher or guard should be fully involved in creating and agreeing the plan.

The plan sets out an achievable schedule of development activity, monitoring and assessment, with clear criteria.

The plan and its duration should be proportional to the level of development required and the operational risk of the activities involved. The plan should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely.

4.2 What factors affect competence development and retention?

When developing a CDP it is helpful to consider the factors which affect competence development and retention, such as those shown in Figure 8. For example:

- The organisation, such as:
  - The value the organisation places on competence development, the CDP process and investment made in competence development and management.
  - Leaders and managers attitudes towards competence development and management.
  - The extent to which the organisation embodies a fair culture.

- The job, such as:
  - Consideration of the individual and manager’s workload on the completion of the CDP.
  - The type of job and tasks the individual undertakes and the competence required to complete these.
  - The type of working environment and team and how this will support and potentially hinder the completion of activities set out in the plan.

- Training and assessment, such as:
  - The type of training and assessment opportunities available to include in the plan.
  - The competence of trainers, managers and assessors to successfully determine and conduct the required training and assessment.

- The individual, such as:
  - The individuals learning style, experience and existing competence and what this means in terms of developmental activities.
  - Understanding their aptitude, attitude and motivation and what this means in terms of the type of activities to include in the plan and the support and coaching the manager can provide as part of the CDP.
4.3 What can staff and the company do?

4.3.1 Guards’ and/or dispatchers’ responsibilities

The plan will combine development activities with assessment and monitoring to help achieve the competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s) and demonstrate evidence of this.

Guards and dispatchers should work with their managers to agree these activities and the timescales, so the plan meets their needs and expectations. If they do not understand or agree with anything in the plan they should discuss this with their manager and/or representative as soon as possible.

In addition, guards and/or dispatchers should:

- Consider their preferred learning style and discuss this with their manager. Some people learn best by doing practical exercises, while others might prefer to watch a demonstration. Some might learn best by understanding why something works in theory, others by appreciating how something is used in practice.
- Have clear ideas about the best way to develop their skills and knowledge. This should be discussed with their manager to see if ideas can be supported by the company. If not, for example due to cost or availability of resources, the individual and manager should discuss the benefits of the development activity and consider if alternative activities could deliver the same development or experience.
- Determine how they will complete development and assessment activities in addition to existing work and other commitments. This is important in scheduling activities and selecting an appropriate duration for the plan.
4.3.2 Managers’ responsibilities

Managers should:

- Be aware of the training and development resources available in their company, and other staff or external parties who could help with the CDP. For example, they may have access to a simulator, training experts who can advise on competence or experienced guards and/or dispatchers who may be able to provide peer coaching and support.

- Not treat the plan as a ‘punishment’, but as an opportunity for learning and development. Remember - the purpose of a CDP is to develop and improve competence where a requirement or development need has been identified.

- Ensure that undertaking the development and assessment activities will lead to the achievement of the agreed competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s). It should be clear within the plan how each activity contributes.

- Make the CDP consistent with other plans developed for guards and dispatchers. Follow company guidance, discuss the plan with fellow managers, and hold a formal review of the plan by senior managers. The CDP should be recorded using the company template.

- Ensure the plan is realistic and achievable. As part of this consider the factors that may affect completion of the plan. For example, avoid scheduling activities in busy periods or during times when a large number of people are on leave. Where possible, schedule the activities to integrate with other scheduled CMS activities.

- Consider, when agreeing development activities, the individual’s learning style. Development will be more effective if it suits and supports the individuals’ learning style (RSSB, 2008b).

- For plans, prompted by an incident, start the CDP process as soon as possible and keep the individual informed about progress, particularly where the individual has been removed from duties. Periods of uncertainty, and being away from work can affect confidence.

- When agreeing monitoring and assessment activities, ensure that they measure the competencies that need development. Each activity should clearly relate to the requirement and/or objective.

- Recognise that monitoring on its own does not develop competence but is part of an overall approach to help determine the extent to which:
  - competence is being developed as planned
  - the requirement(s) and/or objective(s) will be met as planned
  - the suitability of the plan, and whether amendments are needed.

- Ensure the plan and its duration is appropriate and proportionate. A longer plan is not necessarily a better plan. A shorter plan can provide the same development benefit but with less disruption, less pressure on the guard or dispatcher and can be more cost effective. For example, a time effective short plan with more structured events closer together, perhaps followed up by monitoring and review of implementation, looking at how lessons learnt and new practises have been adopted and become the norm, integrated into everyday working habits. If the company sets a recommended range of plan lengths, it can be better
to select the lower end of the range, and only increase the duration when it is believed additional time is required to give the guard or dispatcher the opportunity to meet the requirement(s) and/or objective(s), and gain the evidence that this has been met.

- Consider how to support the guard or dispatcher’s plan alongside other commitments as this will have an impact on resources. Some activities may require the managers input and involvement.
- Make use of all resources available. For example, the manager may be able to draw on training staff to conduct certain development activities or use administrative support to manage the schedule and record progress; and technology may facilitate performance monitoring.
- Focus their time on supporting the individual, through coaching and one to one discussions, rather than just administering the plan.
- Confirm that the guard or dispatcher is satisfied that the plan will address their competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s), and can be achieved within the timescale. Record this agreement in accordance with company procedures.
- Aim to learn lessons from each CDP. In the course of developing the CDP identify areas for improvement beyond competence, for example, in company procedures, the design of tools or equipment, working practice and individual management style.

### 4.3.3 Company responsibilities

The company should have:

- A process, template or form for developing and recording CDPs.
- Processes for reviewing and approving CDPs. Different levels of review and approval may be required for different types of plan.
- A process for resolving situations where a plan cannot be agreed. For example, many companies state that such situations are escalated to a senior manager to resolve.

The company may also:

- Permit short, single day plans that allow guards and/or dispatchers to complete a development activity with no requirement for on-going monitoring. This is recorded in the individual’s competence record with an explanation about the skills and knowledge acquired.
- Permit interim plans that allow guards and/or dispatchers to be given additional support and remain in service before an incident investigation has been concluded. This option may allow the individual to return to work with appropriate support in place if the company is satisfied that they are competent for duty.
5 Implementing the CDP

5.1 Aim

The aim is to complete the activities in the CDP to achieve the competence requirement and/or objective(s).

During this phase, there will be direct and unobtrusive monitoring of performance and regular reviews to confirm that progress is being made and that the guard or dispatcher is benefitting from the plan.

The plan can be changed if required and unscheduled reviews may take place if circumstances change, particularly if the guard or dispatcher is involved in an operating incident. Monitoring and one to one discussion can help to determine if plans need to be changed.

5.2 What can staff and the company do?

5.2.1 Guards’ and/or dispatchers’ responsibilities

Guards and/or dispatchers should:

- Have lead responsibility in investing the time and effort to undertake the activities in the plan to achieve the competence requirement and/or objective(s).

- Consider how to keep track of the schedule, progress, learning and achievements. Adhering to a CDP can be demanding, especially over an extended period of time and tracking can be a useful motivator and demonstrates improvement and engagement with the process.

- In advance of each scheduled activity, confirm with their manager that it is going ahead, reconfirming its purpose and how it will help achieve the competence requirement and/or objective(s). Also, it is important to confirm who will be supporting the activity as it may not be the line manager.

- Consider how to benefit from any preparation, and how to get the best out of the session. This may also include determining if other development activities would be better and beneficial. Where this is the case, it is important to discuss this with the line manager to identify how the CDP can be updated.
5.2.2 Managers’ responsibilities

Managers should:

- Recognise the importance of the activities detailed in the plan and the role they play. Providing regular and consistent support to the CDP can be difficult, especially if a manager has multiple plans active, as well as other competing demands. If a manager is unable to attend a session, then they should arrange to reschedule or have someone else cover the session otherwise this can look like they are not interested or not prioritising the guard’s or dispatcher’s development. Managers should inform and agree with the individual of any changes in the plan.

- Record all development, monitoring, and assessment activities in a manner that follows company process. Managers should record all review meetings that are held, decisions taken during these meetings and reasons for these decisions.

The manager can consider ending the CDP early, if they are satisfied that the individual has achieved the competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s). This may require completion of an assessment activity. This should be discussed with the guard or dispatcher, recording reason for the decision to shorten or continue with the plan.

5.2.3 Company responsibilities

The company may:

- Set minimum periods for CDP review.

- However, the company should be open to the possibility of a member of staff asking for assessment outside these times and appropriate processes should be in place to manage this.

- Require an unscheduled review of the plan under particular circumstances. Typically, this will be needed if the guard or dispatcher is involved in an operating incident.
6  Assessing and closing out the CDP

6.1  Aim

The aim of this activity is to complete the final assessment and close the CDP.

Depending on the outcome of this assessment and the reason the CDP was initiated the guard or dispatcher may:

- Have their CDP closed and continue to maintain competence through the competence management system. Indeed, the improvement achieved during the plan should continue beyond the end of the plan. For example, tools and techniques developed in the plan, should become embedded in the individual’s everyday behaviour and assessed through the competence management system.
- Develop, in conjunction with their manager, a supplementary CDP to resolve any remaining issues.
- Progress to a Safety Performance Review if serious deficiencies remain.

Closing out of the CDP also provides an opportunity to share learning about the process and the activities undertaken within the plan.

For example, some companies hold follow-up workshop sessions with guards and/or dispatchers who are currently on, or have completed CDPs, to discuss how the company can improve their CDP process and the overall support they provide to guards and/or dispatchers.

6.2  What can staff and the company do?

6.2.1 Guards’ and/or dispatchers’ responsibilities

Guards and/or dispatchers should:

- Only accept the closure of the CDP if satisfied that their competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s) has been achieved. If the individual feels that they require further support, they should discuss this with their manager.
- Discuss their experiences of the CDP process with their manager. This is an opportunity to provide feedback on the process and the activities undertook.
- Consider if they wish to formally share experiences of the CDP process with other guards and/or dispatchers. This can be arranged through the manager or union representative. In a fair culture, sharing experience promotes learning among colleagues and the wider organisation.
6.2.2 Managers’ responsibilities

The CDP can typically end with a planned personal contact/private discussion, away from the front line, providing the opportunity to review the individuals progress and achievements and discuss next steps for the future.

As part of this, managers should:

- Confirm that the guard or dispatcher has met their competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s) and is satisfied that the CDP can be closed. If applicable confirm that the guard or dispatcher is ready to return to full duties.
- Confirm that the guard or dispatcher does not require any further or ongoing support with his or her competence. If they do, determine with them how this will be achieved.
- Discuss the individual’s progress and next steps as well as what else can be done to support them.
- Reflect on their own performance as part of the process and whether they upheld the principles of fair culture. The manager should seek feedback on how the process can be improved and how they can improve as a manager.

Completed CDPs may offer useful examples for educating other guards and/or dispatchers within the company. As such managers should:

- Recognise that the details of an individual’s plan are private, and should consider carefully what information to reveal. Confirm that the guard or dispatcher is happy to share this information before circulating to others within the company.
- Consider how lessons learnt can be distributed more widely in a fair and anonymised way in your organisation.

6.2.3 Company responsibilities

The company should have:

- Processes for recording closure of a plan.
- A process for escalation and a safety performance review.
- A process for sharing learning.
- Process for tracking trends over time and using this information to proactively manage safety.
7 Case studies

7.1 Non-technical skills review following an operational incident

7.1.1 Background

A GB railway undertaking (RU) implemented a non-technical skills based review for staff following operational incidents.

7.1.2 Implementation

The discussion is based on a coaching conversation, using non-technical skills and human performance information to help raise awareness of the potential for failures and for the member of staff to identify for themselves strategies for improvement. This results in a CDP which is written by the staff member to improve ownership.

7.1.3 Benefits

The RU has had very positive feedback, as illustrated by the following feedback provided by a dispatcher who had an operational incident and went through the non-technical skills review process.

‘Unfortunately, at the very beginning of my dispatch career, I had an attempt to dispatch against a red signal. I had to go through a few procedures and meetings to find out what had caused this and also to make sure it would not happen again in the future.

One of those meetings was with the Operations Standards and Control Systems Manager. Attempting to dispatch against red probably has a different impact on different individuals. The way it had affected me was that I had lost my confidence and was embarrassed about what I had done.

The meeting with the Operations Standards and Control Systems Manager helped me to understand that this could happen to anybody and it did not necessarily mean that I was a bad dispatcher.

All together the ‘brain work’ exercises, the tips and the conversations about my lifestyle in general, along with the observations made by the Operations Standards and Control Systems Manager have helped me a lot.

The development plan has made me aware that I have to stay focussed at all times no matter and I have gained my confidence back. I am very sorry that I attempted to dispatch against red but at the same time I think it has made me a better dispatcher. This development plan was without doubt useful to me and I would recommend (the process) to anybody.’
7.2 Applying a fair culture approach to competence development

7.2.1 Background

As a result of being involved in the T1068 research project one GB RU identified the need to enhance and reissue their company standard on supporting drivers who have had an operational incident or identified competence issue.

Although this example relates to drivers, the approach taken, structure of the standard and incorporation of a fair culture approach is likely to have similar positive implications if applied to guards and/or dispatchers.

Indeed, the RU has aspirations to develop and adapt this approach for other roles such as guards and dispatchers.

7.2.2 Implementation

The new standard requires managers to take a new approach as the duration and content of a CPD is now closely linked to the underlying causes of the event rather than the event type. In addition, the new standard provides guidance on when there is a need to escalate the competence concern to the next level within the organisation with the driver, manager and representatives being involved in each step of the process.

This work was carried out jointly with the trade unions. The Head of Operational Standards was also asked to accompany Drivers’ Company Council Representatives to the ASLEF Executive Committee (responsible for implementing strategy and policy) to brief them on the reissue process and gain their support.

Everyone from the top level of the organisation was engaged in the development and introduction of the new process. Operations standards were engaged in its application and provided additional support to local teams (the driver and their manager) to ensure the standard was accurately applied to each unique situation.

To communicate the revision and increase engagement and understanding, the revised company standard was rolled out with two day workshops for every driver manager and local union representative. The aim of the workshop was to help attendees:

- Understand why the standard was changing.
- Understand and apply the core principles of the standard to real situations.
- Make risk based decisions on the type of support plan, its content and duration.
- Decide when not to issue a support plan.
- Identify the right support plan for the driver’s support needs.

In the workshop, union representatives and managers worked together in small teams to consider actual events (operational incidents such as station overruns or SPADs) and apply the new procedures. Case studies were anonymised and groups worked together to identify competence needs and develop suitable plans.

This helped illustrate the practical implementation of the standard to identify competence development needs and create suitable plans for drivers.
7.2.3 Benefits

The engagement and use of the workshops has been hailed as a success and facilitated the development of a fair culture.

Several benefits have already been realised. For example, the new way of working encourages people to engage at different levels, both internally and externally to the organisation, and early indications are that these relationships are evolving which facilitates a fair culture way of working.

There is better empowerment at all levels of the organisation as well. Previously, resolution for all incidents involved escalation to the Operations Standards Team, however the new initiative allows minor competence challenges to be resolved at a more local level between a driver and their manager which implies empowerment, a better understanding of the process and the individual’s development needs.

Initial data analysis since the process was introduced has revealed productivity improvement and cost savings, primarily linked to more efficient use of time as issues can now be resolved at a local level.

The intention is to assess how the standard is being developed and implemented over the course of one year and during this time both formal and informal input and commentary are welcome from all members of the organisation and those who support them, for example unions.
8 Points to remember

In applying the CDP process, the following key points should be considered and applied:

1. A competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s) may be identified in incident investigations, through performance monitoring, assessments, or by the individual, manager or another who has the opportunity to do so.

2. The purpose of the CDP is to develop and improve competence and should only be initiated where a competence requirement or development objective has been identified.

3. CDPs do not need to be used just for post incident support. They can be used as a proactive measure to support the competence development of guards and dispatchers. Also, involvement in an incident does not always mean that there is a competence requirement.

4. The CDP process should embody the principles of a fair culture and be followed in an open and fair manner. All parties should be treated with respect.

5. The development of the CDP should be led by the guard or dispatcher with the manager providing advice, support and coaching. All parties involved should recognise and demonstrate the commitment required to deliver the CDP.

6. The CDP should be mutually agreed. It forms a commitment between the guard or dispatcher, the manager and the company.

7. The CDP should be tailored to the guard’s or dispatcher’s individual competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s).

8. Activities and timescales in the plan should be achievable and lead to the achievement of the individual’s competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s).

9. The CDP should be proportionate and appropriate to the individual’s competence requirement(s) and/or objective(s) and any related operational risk. This is not necessarily related to the consequences of any event.

10. The guard or dispatcher’s progress, improvements and achievements should be monitored with regular review meetings to discuss this.

11. The CDP should be adaptive to reflect the guard or dispatcher’s progress. It should be revised if it is not proving effective. The CDP may be finished once the objectives are accomplished.

12. The competence developed in the CDP should contribute to a long-term performance improvement for the guard or dispatcher. Where particular behaviours or actions have formed part of the CDP the guard or dispatcher should continue their use beyond the end of the plan.

13. The activities, observations and outcomes of a CDP should be recorded in the CMS.
9 Resources

9.1 CDP and competence development

Your own company’s CMS and CDP processes should be the main source of information.

The following resources provide additional information.

10. RSSB, 2012b. Manager NTS Tools. RSSB.
11. RSSB, 2016. A good practice guide to integrating non-technical skills into rail safety critical roles
12. RSSB, 2011. A model for optimising competence retention in the railway (skills fade)
9.2 Incident investigation

Your own company’s incident investigation processes should be the main source of information.

The following resources provide additional information, including guidance on the description and classification of human factor issues.


9.3 Fair culture

The following resources provide descriptions and information on fair culture (sometimes referred to as just culture).

22. Network Rail, 2012b. Guide to using the Fair Culture process. Available at: https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk
25. RSSB (2016) Supporting a fair culture - creating appropriate plans after incidents (T1068)

9.4 Leadership and management

The following resources provide information on leadership and management behaviours.
