



Crew to Station Manager on-line assessments - Shropshire FRS



The Plan

Shropshire FRS had booked a series of assessments for promotions to:

Crew Manager (wholetime & on-call)

Watch Manager

Station Manager

These were due to begin in March 2020 as part of a trial agreed with Representative Bodies to determine whether this new method of assessment, the VCA Career Progression Gateway (CPG) would be acceptable as a replacement to the organisation's previous face to face / traditional assessment process.

Feedback would be sought from candidates and staff after the process with regards to the realism, fairness, convenience and cost of the new online assessment trial.

Consistent Annual Promotion Activity

The purpose of having assessments at three management levels back to back was;

- a) to address the number of vacancies anticipated through retirement over the next 18-24 months and
- b) to establish the clear and consistent practice of assessment for promotion from Crew to Station Manager level, predictably delivered during the same two months of every year going forward.

Why Change?

The previous assessment process was considered too resource intensive, both financially and physically. With the introduction of the NFCC Leadership Framework it was seen as a timely opportunity to make a change to an assessment process based on more up-to-date criteria.

Why VCA's CPG System?

Shropshire FRS were seeking external support to their promotions process to provide a transparent, unbiased, and expert service. They recognised that they neither had the expertise nor time to develop reliable assessment exercises, which can withstand best practice scrutiny and deliver valid results. They were pleased to feed into the exercise development phase by providing content research interviews and trial candidates, thereby having confidence that the exercises were relevant for their organisation's needs.

Concerns Prior to the new Process

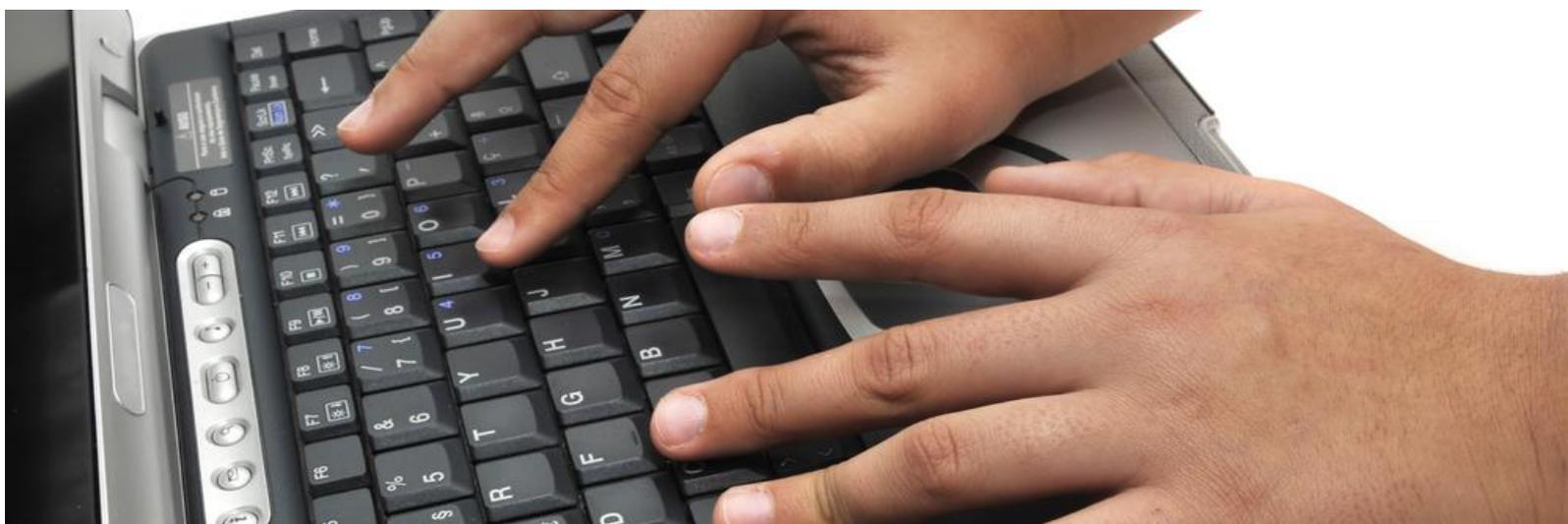
The main concern was how candidates might feel about using laptops/computers to complete their assessments; apart from a few issues logging-in with the first process, these were quickly resolved and this was not an issue.

Unprecedented Factors

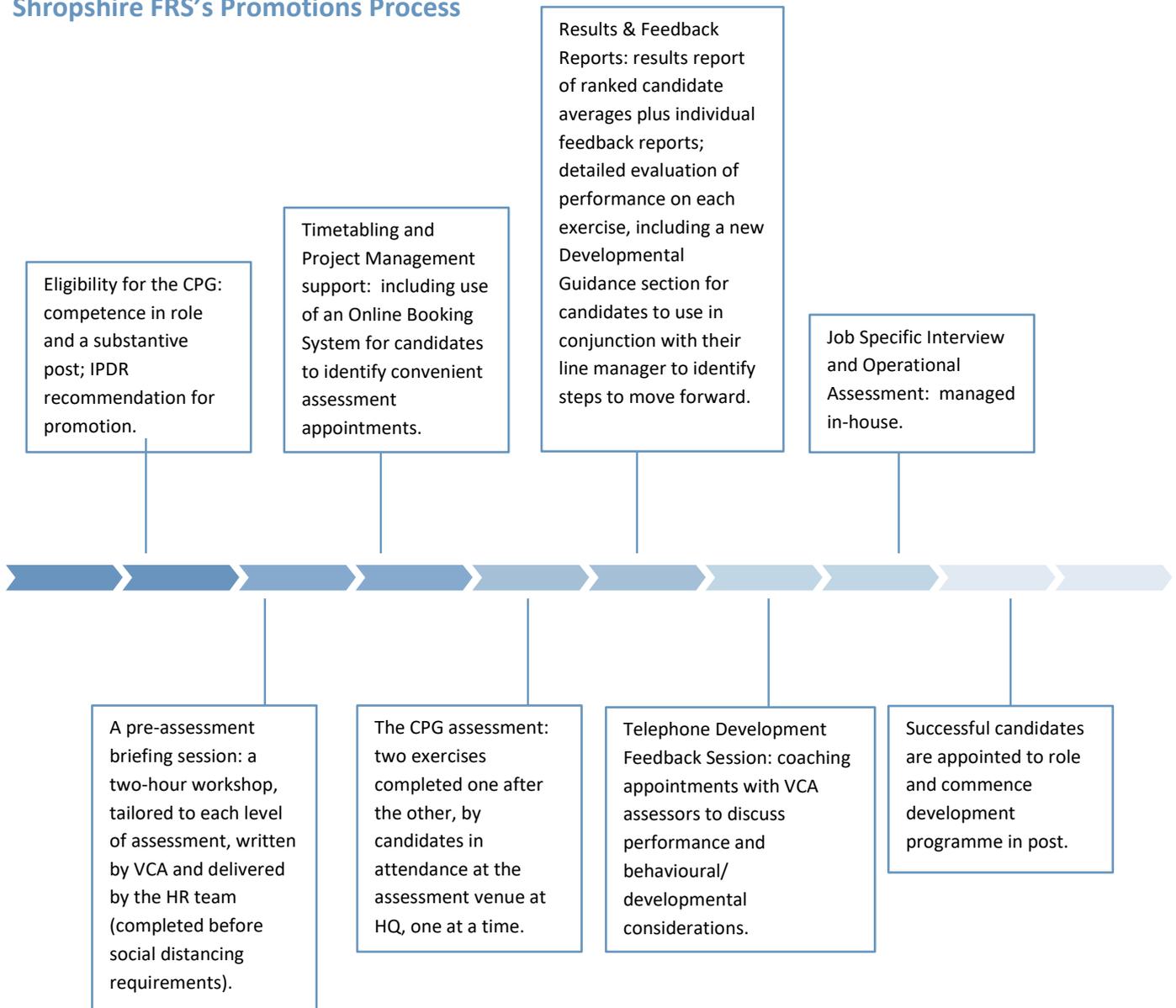
When the global pandemic took hold the same month, Development Officer and Project Leader Donna Trowsdale confirmed that the projects would continue as planned, with the aid of some hastily developed but remarkably effective protocols to comply with new rules for social distancing.

An Online Assessment System

The CPG system was perfectly placed to meet Shropshire FRS's needs without disruption, utilising VCA's online assessment system for the two elements of the assessment, the Case Study and telephone Role-play.



Shropshire FRS's Promotions Process



Events

Each of the processes ran remarkably smoothly, despite extra demands on the IT infrastructures of a largely remote working HQ workforce, and a cohort of candidates experiencing a new assessment procedure at a time of considerable uncertainty. VCA were able to support Shropshire FRS with strong Project Management and a flexible approach, which was also reflected by the client.

VCA assessed candidates for the following promotions:



Each candidate completed the Case Study and telephone Role-play using the online CPG system. They made appointments to attend their assessments using VCA’s online booking form, saving internal administration time.

In terms of results, comparison data showed a good level of consistency between the performance averages across other FRS’s, which also supports the reliability of the exercises. Slightly lower than this average were the on-call Crew Manager results, although more data is needed to explore more fully.

Developmental Coaching

Initially Station Managers were offered a developmental feedback session with VCA assessors to discuss assessment performance and options to support future development. However, when it became apparent how beneficial this coaching session is was, it was made available on request to candidates at other levels.

Following completion of these 45-minute sessions, a summary review of culture, themes and development areas, as evident from the discussions, was shared with the client, with due consideration to candidate confidentiality.

Client Feedback

Feedback about the CPG process has been positive, highlighting the **“ease of planning, reduced costs and physical resources required”** compared to previous events.

“It was much easier than running a traditional ADC as there were less people, i.e., actors and assessors that had to be briefed beforehand; I was able to set up the rooms the day/evening before unlike in an external venue you can only have access that morning.

Also, having the role of Centre Manager removed from my responsibility, this provided me with the opportunity to speak with candidates before and after their assessments to address any concerns they may have had.” Donna Trowsdale, Development Officer.

Praise was also given for the accessibility and flexibility of the relevant and convenient system. Particular reference was made to the use of external assessors, therefore removing any potential bias and creating **“a fairer, more transparent process for the candidates.”**

Consistency across exercises for all three management levels was also cited as a plus, as well as the responsiveness and support provided by VCA throughout the process.

When asked if the client would recommend the CPG to other FRS, they commented:

“You really won’t be disappointed. I cannot believe how easily VCA have delivered 4 processes over the period of two months, whilst in the middle of a global pandemic!”

Candidate Feedback

Booking system

“The assessment slots were really easy to book I managed to do mine on my phone”

Management of the event

“The process was managed and scheduled especially well considering COVID19 restrictions.”

“I felt the process was ran smoothly on the day, all questions and queries were answered to help create a calm atmosphere. Each laptop was set up for the specific candidate and there were no issues with functionality of the laptops.”

“The experience was more pleasing and less stressful than an ADC assessment centre, even with the COVID-19 restrictions of social distancing etc. the process was managed smoothly with a member of the HR dept available to assist where required i.e. logging onto the system.”

Exercises

“I feel that the fire and rescue service-based case study and role play are crucial as these provide more realistic scenarios that candidates are likely to be faced with”

“I liked the fact that the CPG is based on a fictional Fire Service, I felt that this allowed the content to be relatable. The new NFCC Leadership framework is clear and concise allowing for a rounded approach to the CPG topics.”

“It was good that the scenario for the second part related to the first assessment, making it easier to remember background information and not get confused between scenarios whilst on the phone”

Briefing session and support materials

“The workbooks and presentations explained the process well. I felt like I had a good idea of what to expect”

“I certainly feel that both the workbook and presentation were a great help in terms of my preparation for the CPG. I was able to use the workbook to look over how the CPG works, with the example questions providing a good insight into how the leadership qualities relate to a response. The presentation was beneficial as this allowed me to view the layout of the assessment beforehand which provided me with an idea of what would be expected on the day.”

Savings

Shropshire FRS calculated that using the **CPG saved them £34,800** from their previous process (an average of £600 per candidate).

Next Steps

The Brigade Order has been written and the VCA CPG is now part of Shropshire's HR processes. Further assessments will now be carried out in November 2020, as the start of the annual assessment process to generate a pool of candidates for interview as and when vacancies arise.