

# Nottingham City Transport

## Case Study

**Content:** This case study explores Nottingham City Transport's use of the NEO PI-R and d2 for recruitment and selection – saving them a total of £1.2 million.



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Nottingham has a long history of public bus transport, going back to the first horse drawn trams of 1878. For over a hundred years, the services were provided under the control of the council. However, the politics of the late 1980s changed all that. The Transport Act opened the market by deregulating the provision of public bus services. In response, Nottingham City Transport Limited was formed in 1986.

The company now runs a modern fleet of 386 buses throughout the City and outlying areas. These are driven by a team of more than 800 drivers supported by 160 technical and engineering staff. Between them, they carry 50 million passengers and cover over 12.5 million miles per year.

“Keeping such a large fleet of vehicles ready for the road is hard enough,” said Mike Lee, Training and Development Manager, Nottingham City Transport. “But making sure that we’ve enough qualified drivers is an even bigger headache.”

Mike took over responsibility for driver recruitment and training during 2005 and inherited a major problem :

“I found that about a quarter of all of our drivers were over 59 years old,” continued Mike. “That’s not a factor in their ability to drive the buses, but is a problem for us over the next five or six years as they take their retirement. We had to start planning for how we were going to manage replacing them in good time.”

In fact, recruiting drivers is a perennial problem for Mike and his team. Not only is there the attrition rate of current drivers to contend with, but the company is always looking to expand services and places a growth burden on Mike as well.

“To cover retirements, attrition and growth we need to produce over 100 new, fully trained drivers each year,” added Mike. “That’s a huge amount of recruitment, assessment and training that we need to undertake continuously.”

One of the areas that Mike chose to focus on was finding a way to reduce the drop-out rate from the drivers starting their training to them becoming licensed and ready for work.

“As you’d expect, we have a very rigorous training programme for our new drivers,” continued Mike. “It takes around six weeks and costs over £3,000 to train each driver. That means that every trainee that we put through the programme that doesn’t finish represents a sizeable loss of money to the company. And with a drop-out rate of one-in-three at the time it was an area that I really wanted to improve significantly.”

Mike decided that the best way to attack this was to spend more time on candidate assessment prior to starting the training course. So he mapped out a one-day assessment programme to cover all areas of concern.

Already familiar with the use of psychometric testing, Mike decided that these tools would be perfect for helping his team work out which candidates were mostly likely to make it through to their PCV licence and also to really want to drive buses for a living.

The problem that Mike faced initially though was the bewildering availability of psychometric tests. Which one, or ones, would make the difference he was looking for?

“I knew of the people at Hogrefe and decided to give them a call,” said Mike. “They were extremely helpful and spent quality time going through the options with me.”

Mike and Hogrefe agreed that the best way to determine which tests would really give Nottingham City Transport the exact insight that they wanted was to trial some and see which combination worked best. A pilot project was established where four Hogrefe tests were used on a representative sample of 50 current staff and the results examined carefully by both Mike and the Hogrefe team. The tests trialled were PPM, PASAT, NEO and d2.

“Whilst PPM and PASAT gave us some of what we needed, it was the d2 and NEO combination that really hit the nail on the head for us,” continued Mike. “d2 helped us make sure that the candidates had the basic focus of attention needed to drive a bus safely through our busy city streets, whilst NEO gave us a real insight into their personality in areas such as how they’d respond to dealing with the public in possibly stressful situations. We just couldn’t get this type of information from a traditional, and often subjective, interview.”

By January 2006, Mike’s team had their assessment and training centre up and running as they’d planned it and opened their doors for business.

“In the six months since January we’ve assessed over 250 candidates and recruited and trained around 100 of them,” said Mike. “The results have been brilliant and far exceeded our expectations. Our drop-out rate has fallen from one-in-three to one-in-ten. It’s made a huge financial difference to the company already.”

After the first six months, the reduced drop-out rate had saved the company an impressive £72,000. The further reduction in drop-out at training stage has secured a saving of £154,350. Not only that, but there have been further savings down the line. In the past, the drop out rate for fully-trained drivers was 28%. Since beginning the new recruitment and training process, this has fallen dramatically to just 9%.

“Companies should take note of this last figure – we certainly have. Clearly the financial savings involved are substantial, but there is a raft of other benefits to cutting attrition so significantly. Our operations team is much more satisfied as is it no longer short of drivers and operations are running more smoothly. As a result, the Operations Department holds HR in much higher esteem because better quality people are coming through the training and are staying in the job.

Relations with customers have improved as well. As a result of the behavioural/ temperament assessing using NEO PI-R and the introduction of ‘Violence at Work’ training, assaults on drivers are very rare occurrences now. Beforehand there were approx 40 assaults on drivers per year. This also introduces a cost saving, as some assaults in the past have cost us significant sums to settle. Improvements have been further echoed by reductions in the number of customer complaints. This can be directly attributed to the new system, as NEO helped measure the disposition amongst drivers for good customer service.”

“The inclusion of the Hogrefe psychometric tests early on in the process has allowed us to make better and faster decisions,” added Mike. “We are so confident in the test results now that we even use adverse NEO results as reason to stop the assessment straight away. That saves us a lot of time... and ultimately a lot of money.”

Nottingham City transport has been very impressed with Mike’s work and his use of psychometric testing. As a result, what started as a six month pilot has now become an integrated part of the company’s recruitment and training process. The company is now using the psychometric tests for other roles, such as garage supervisor, payroll administration and staff in our travel Centre.

“The key for me was the support given by Hogrefe,” concluded Mike. “Without their help during the pilot process we’d never have worked out the right mix of tests and results usage. We are now talking to them about producing a specific set of normalised data for us using all of the test results that we’ve accomplished so far. That’d make the NEO results even more perceptive and help us push the drop-out rate during driver training even further. I’m very pleased that I chose Hogrefe for this project.”

Since implementing the measures as part of their training programme, Nottingham City Transport estimates that the psychometric assessments had saved them nearly £1.2 million by August 2015. You can watch their success story on our YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/hogrefeltd](http://www.youtube.com/hogrefeltd)