



## Values Screening Tool for Firefighter Applicants

# Case Study

### The Context

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) is one of the largest in the country with 1500 employees and a turnover in excess of £75m. Merseyside was one of just 2 FRSs to be judged as 'Excellent' by the Audit Commission in 2006 and has maintained this status since. It has achieved 'Beacon Status' (a measure of excellence by government) on no fewer than 3 occasions, a unique achievement for a UK FRS.

These achievements have been supported through an emphasis on wider community engagement and service as the primary deliverable for MFRS. This has required a transformational shift to a values-led culture, where commitment to the community and the service are key drivers.

### The Challenge

To fully realise this transformation, MFRS sought to update their initial fire-fighter selection procedures. An essential requirement in the new recruitment process was for a robust and valid measure that could be used in the early stage of recruitment to inform decisions about the suitability of applicants in terms of a values-fit with the new culture amongst a very high volume of applications. Other aspects of the requirement included:

- capacity to provide rapid online evaluations of up to 6000 applicants per annum within a relatively short timescale
- capability to screen out unsuitable applicants as well as screen-in suitable applicants
- integration with an existing e-recruitment system
- resilience to attempts to circumvent the process through recording answers, collaboration, faking good, etc.
- automated reporting to provide feedback to applicants as well as to HR professionals managing the recruitment process.

### The Solution

SR&A consultants worked with MFRS senior managers, human resources staff and uniform and non-uniform staff at all levels to develop a measure that would both tap directly into the defined values model and identify broad personality characteristics that would support demonstration of the values.



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The values element of the screening tool assesses likely fit with the MFRS values model. The model incorporates 6 different themes that cover a range of values related to community service, team working and personal initiative.

The personality based element of the screening tool enables assessment along two dimensions derived from the 'big five' personality model commonly accepted in the psychological field. These two dimensions are referred to in the research literature as Alpha and Beta, but for use in the work context we prefer to refer to them as "Getting Along" and "Getting On".

The resulting measure has been successfully implemented to integrate with the existing e-recruitment software. Simple score reports are generated automatically and delivered directly to the HR and recruitment specialists. Template matching frameworks enable simple decisions on screening outcomes against both elements of the assessment, values and personality.

## **The Benefits**

All of aspects of the initial requirement have been successfully delivered, providing an accessible, online measure of values-fit that enables swift and easy screening of very large numbers of applications or enquiries in a cost effective manner.

We have undertaken rigorous validation studies of both elements of the screening tool within MFRS to demonstrate the efficacy of the tool and to ensure that the measure is not introducing unfair bias in terms of gender or ethnicity.

The screening tool has been used successfully for its original purpose of screening applicants for firefighter positions within MFRS. Due to the high level of acceptance of the tool within MFRS it has also been trialled in Assessment Centres for various levels of appointment up to senior management.