

Report 01/2020: Serious operational irregularity at Balham

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Summary

At around 19:05 hrs on Saturday 20 April 2019, a tamper, a self-propelled piece of on-track machinery, made an unsignalled and unauthorised move of about 600 metres, passing over Balham Junction, and entering platform 3 at Balham station, south London. The tamper could potentially have collided with a passenger train, which had travelled over the same junction in the opposite direction around 75 seconds earlier. The tamper stopped in the station, when the on-board crew realised that it was in the wrong place. There was no damage or personal injury.

The incident happened at the boundary of an engineering possession, where lines were closed for maintenance purposes. The plans for train movements out of the possession required the tamper, which had been working on the down line, to be crossed over to the adjacent up line while it was still inside the area under possession, and leave the possession on the up line. The crossing over move did not take place, and the tamper left the possession on the wrong line.

This happened because the person in charge of the possession (PICOP) provided incomplete information about the position of the tamper; the tamper driver and conductor driver did not query the instructions provided by the PICOP; and two signallers did not query the instructions provided by another PICOP. The standard of safety critical communications was poor throughout, resulting in no party having a clear understanding of the location of the tamper or the actions to be taken, and Network Rail's management of the PICOP role has been ineffective. Underlying factors were that the labour supplier which employed the PICOPs had not effectively managed its own policy on monitoring safety critical communications, and that Network Rail's strategy for improving and maintaining the standard of safety critical communications within the rail industry has been ineffective, and has not changed the work force culture or secured the adoption of good practice in respect of communications with and between signallers and other operations staff.

Recommendations

RAIB has made four recommendations, all addressed to Network Rail. The first calls for a review of the company's strategy for safety critical

communications involving its staff and contractors, to address underlying cultural factors and embed the use of standard communication protocols within the railway industry. The second covers a review of the process of handovers between signallers, during and at the end of shifts, to produce a structure which will give the incoming signaller full awareness of all relevant information about the location and intended movement of trains. The third recommendation relates to the provision of a suitable working environment for PICOPs, and the fourth to a review of that role, including the competency requirements and ongoing professional management of PICOPs. Two learning points relate to the need to test staff involved in safety incidents for drugs and alcohol, and the importance of not using mobile phones while driving road vehicles.

Simon French, Chief Inspector of Rail Accidents said:

Yet again we have investigated an incident in which a poor standard of communications played a crucial part. In this case, the way in which the key individuals talked to each other resulted in a misunderstanding. The consequences of the misunderstanding were that a very large item of yellow plant, a tamping machine, came out of an area where it had been working, onto a line where a passenger train had passed in the opposite direction only a short time before.

The role of person in charge of a possession (PICOP) is an important one. The PICOP controls the movement of trains into, within and out of engineering possessions. There were ten trains working in the possession near Balham, and giving their drivers clear and correct instructions is a vital job. It is not something that should be done from a kitchen table, or while driving a car. PICOPs need to be given adequate facilities for their work, and should make proper use of them.

Our investigation found a culture of poor communications among staff involved with engineering work. People were embarrassed to use the proper protocols when passing messages to colleagues. The aviation industry confronted this problem head-on many years ago, and now any pilot or air traffic controller who does not use the correct form of words and phrases would instantly stand out as less than competent. We found that, while train drivers and signallers have generally achieved a good standard of safety critical communications in recent years, the same cannot be said for engineering operations staff, even when talking to signallers. We are challenging the railway industry to come into line with aviation, and embed the same standards among its people.

In this case several of the people involved did not challenge information or instructions which were confusing, inconsistent with what they had just been told by someone else, or contrary to rules. This is not the first time this has led to trouble, and the consequences can be disastrous. In the collision between two

engineering trains in a possession at Logan in 2015, a locomotive and eighteen wagons were derailed and damaged. That accident also arose from a misunderstanding created by poor communications [report 13/2016](#), and we have investigated other collisions in possessions at Badminton [report 30/2007](#), Leigh on Sea [report 24/2009](#), Arley [report 12/2013](#) and Kitchen Hill [bulletin B1/2014](#).

These are all areas in which the industry has previously made efforts to improve, but for whatever reason, lasting change has not happened. I hope that this time implementation of our recommendations will make a real difference.

Notes to editors

1. The sole purpose of RAIB investigations is to prevent future accidents and incidents and improve railway safety. RAIB does not establish blame, liability or carry out prosecutions.
2. RAIB operates, as far as possible, in an open and transparent manner. While our investigations are completely independent of the railway industry, we do maintain close liaison with railway companies and if we discover matters that may affect the safety of the railway, we make sure that information about them is circulated to the right people as soon as possible, and certainly long before publication of our final report.
3. For media enquiries, please call 01932 440015.

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[UK space sector lands in Singapore](#)

More than 30 representatives from the UK space industry, universities and government will visit GeoWorks, ST Engineering, the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University, before attending the Global Space and Technology Convention on 6-7 February.

The mission builds upon the close ties built through the UK-Singapore 'Partnership for the Future' launched last year, and aims to deepen understanding of the growing space landscape and develop long-lasting partnerships.

Dr Graham Turnock, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency, said:

We have high ambitions to grow the UK space sector and must develop new, and strengthen existing, global partnerships to succeed. The UK Space Agency has already established strong relationships in the Asia-Pacific region through its International Partnership

Programme, supporting sustainable development through space technology, and we continue to raise the priority of this fast growing and exciting region more widely.

We hope to continue this journey and strengthen our trade and technology partnerships, emulating the UK's historic relationships in other sectors such as science and finance.

The Science and Technology Facilities Council's RAL Space in the UK and the National University of Singapore's Centre for Quantum Technologies (CQT) have already established a programme to develop new quantum space technologies. They are working together to build a small satellite to test secure communications based on the exchange of cryptographic keys across the globe, known as Quantum Key Distribution.

The UK Space Agency's International Partnership Programme funds projects in the Asia-Pacific region to support sustainable development goals, from using satellite communications to respond effectively to natural disasters, to monitoring fishing activity using satellite positioning.

The UK space sector employs 42,000 people and generates an income of £14.8 billion each year, with the value of exports standing at £5.5 billion.

The UK continues to be a leading member of ESA, which is independent of the EU, having committed a record investment of £374 million per year in November 2019.

National Apprenticeship Week 2020 in ODP

National Apprenticeship Week (NAW2020) brings together employers and apprentices across the UK and is a fantastic opportunity to put the spotlight on apprentices, focussing on the key theme for this year which is #LookBeyond. Everyone's experience of an apprenticeship is different, and National Apprenticeship Week is a chance for us to celebrate apprentices themselves, appreciate their hard work and focus on what makes them unique. During the week we'll be providing regular updates on social media and hearing from apprentices themselves who tell us what they think about their journey and how doing an apprenticeship has helped them both personally and professionally. We'd love to hear about what you are doing in your department so please email to let us know odp.crossgovernmentcommunications@hmrc.gov.uk.

Hear from our amazing apprentices

Lisa told us "I have gained more insight into what motivates me at work and

it has made me think what I want out of my role.”

Carlene said “I decided to do an apprenticeship because I wanted to do something different to my day job... I was also attracted to the prospect of gaining another qualification.”

Emily said she would “encourage everyone to have belief in their capabilities and take any opportunities life offers. Always strive to be the best version of yourself!”

Francesca added “The skills I’ve gained from learning and progressing through my apprenticeship have enabled me to develop ways of using feedback to enhance my performance, and four months into my apprenticeship I was promoted to team leader. The opportunity of leading a team has in turn allowed me to support my fellow apprentices and help them on their journey to achieving their apprenticeships”

Emma told us “I have gained a wealth of knowledge and I have so much more confidence than I did two and a half years ago. If you are thinking of applying for an apprenticeship, take the leap, it’s the best decision you will ever make”

Apprenticeship opportunities

Dean features in an HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) Surge and Rapid Response Team (SRRT) video on apprenticeships which you can view on YouTube here – [ODP A great place to be an apprentice, a great place to work.](#)

He has now moved into a full time role in HMRC and he told us this about his apprenticeship experience, “Having the opportunity to balance on-the-job experience with academic learning has helped me advance my career to the next level. It has given me the chance to lean into opportunities that would test my skills and knowledge, this directly improved my problem solving and confidence.”

Lee also features in the same video and has given us this insight into managing a team of apprentices, “Guiding staff through the apprenticeship has been a good experience for me and my team. Supporting them through induction to End Point Assessment and seeing staff use the knowledge they have gained to progress within their civil service career is the cornerstone to what apprenticeships can achieve for people in the workplace.”

Lesley also manages a team of apprentices in HMRC Surge and Rapid Response Team and has this to say about her experience, “The apprenticeship is a great way of embedding a culture of learning. In addition it encourages team working and problem solving amongst staff as they work together to overcome challenges.

From a manager’s perspective, I have seen the impact undertaking an apprenticeship has. Resilient teams, great time management and planning/prioritising skills are developed. The opportunity to undertake a work based project makes staff look at processes and continuous improvement

and some ideas are even implemented and become business as usual.

Collectively all staff who undertake an apprenticeship have built a solid foundation to progress their career within the Civil Service.”

Q&A with an apprentice

Lisa is completing her apprenticeship as part of the ODP Central Team and was interviewed by her colleague Kerry who quizzed her on her apprenticeship insights;

Kerry – Why did you decide to do an apprenticeship?

Lisa – I didn't like school if I am honest, and had no desire to learn. Wanted to be out with friends etc., as you do! So, being older and wiser, and being given the opportunity to learn whilst working and gain a qualification in the process seemed like a great thing to do!

K – What new skills have you learned?

L – Organisation, researching, & the biggest skill is having the confidence to give it a go! That is a skill for me in a lot of ways!

K – How has the apprenticeship benefitted you?

L – I wasn't supported in school, and never given the confidence to achieve anything, completing an apprenticeship has enabled me to grow in confidence and not give up when faced with a question and a blank sheet! I have just had a marking of 100% for an assignment, which is a real confidence boost!

K – What support have you had with your apprenticeship?

L – 100% backing from my Manager which really helps, and I am really lucky to have a fab tutor who really helps and encourages me.

K – What have you enjoyed most about your apprenticeship?

L – Knowing I have covered so much of the assignment requirement in the role I do has really made the apprenticeship enjoyable as I love my job!

Apprentice insights

Barry is currently completing his apprenticeship and has had the opportunity to join the ODP Events team, he has some really positive comments on the impact this opportunity has had on him, “Since joining the ODP Central Team as an apprentice, I have had the opportunity to design new systems, work on fascinating events and to travel to other departments; meeting truly inspiring people and top civil servants. It has opened my eyes to the scale and scope of ODP, reaffirming my commitment to the profession and showing me the opportunities within. I am excited about my future and proud to be ODP.”

Danny also works on the ODP Central team as an apprentice manager, he has used his past experience as an apprentice to shape his career, and he tells

us “I wouldn’t be where I am today without completing an apprenticeship.

Danny is pictured right with apprenticeship team colleague Kerry

Coming into the Civil Service as an apprentice helped me develop the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in my day job and developed me as a person. The support and understanding from my line manager was vital in ensuring I was given the time I needed to succeed, with all of the hard work that had to go into completing my apprenticeship.

I have had so many opportunities as a result of being an apprentice, such as being an apprenticeship ambassador, having the privilege of being nominated and winning HMRC’s Apprentice Professional of the Year 2019 and being fortunate enough to now be the Operational Delivery Profession Central Team Apprenticeship Manager.

Being a previous apprentice helps me in my role as an apprenticeship manager, understanding the challenges people face but wanting to ensure a quality experience for every learner and to get as much out of it as I did. I would encourage everyone regardless of age, background, ethnicity, that completing an apprenticeship can have such a positive impact on your life, professionalising you and offering a career pathway, in what is hopefully a long and successful career”.

‘Look Beyond’ with an apprenticeship this National Apprenticeship Week

- Hundreds of stakeholder events take place across England
- Use #AskAnApprentice and #AskAnEmployer online Q&A’s to share insights of apprenticeships with the wider community
- Push for the apprenticeships community to support social media activity

Business meetings, open days, celebration events and parents evenings all being held in workplaces, schools and training providers premises across the country. For the first time, National Apprenticeship Week includes weekend activity, with many employers opening their doors to young people and their parents at open day events.

National Apprenticeship Week, now in its 13th year, is the perfect opportunity to celebrate the benefits of apprenticeships. This year, the theme ‘Look Beyond’ celebrates the diversity in apprenticeships today. Bringing the whole apprenticeship community together, the Week celebrates the impact of apprenticeships on individuals, employers and the economy.

For those individuals and employers looking to find out more about

apprenticeships, current and past apprentices, and apprentice employers will support online Q&A sessions to answer questions about apprenticeships.

Individuals interested in finding out about apprenticeships can join the #AskAnApprentice Q&A on Twitter on Wednesday 5 February, whilst employers interested in finding out more about the business benefits in recruiting apprentices can join the #AskAnEmployer Q&A on Thursday 6 February. Both Q&A's run from 12 to 2pm. Just follow the relevant hashtag on Twitter to be part of the conversation.

Making a splash across social media on launch day, the apprenticeship community are asked to support the Week by:

- sharing the launch tweet – a film featuring brilliant past and current apprentices and apprentice employers, celebrating apprenticeship diversity
- adding the '[We're fired up](#)' badge to social media profiles
- taking part in the '[Making Impact](#)' social media series
- join [#AskAnApprentice](#) or [#AskAnEmployer](#) Q&A sessions
- host or attend an [event](#) and show your support for apprenticeships

Keith Smith, Director, Apprenticeships Group, ESFA said:

“There is much to celebrate in apprenticeships and National Apprenticeship Week gives the whole apprenticeships community opportunity to showcase the many brilliant apprenticeships available in England today.

“It is fantastic to see so many events taking place across England I am enthused to be invited to such a variety of events this Week. There's also lots happening across social media! Let's all get behind apprenticeships and celebrate the opportunities apprenticeships present to fire up careers.”

Keep up to date with news on National Apprenticeship Week by following @Apprenticeships on Twitter.

To find an event near you, visit the [NAW events website](#).

Find out more about [National Apprenticeship Week 2020](#).

[Dr Andrew Murrison co-chairs 15th meeting of UK-Kuwait Joint Steering Group](#)

The ministers thanked officials for progress made during the work of the Joint Steering Group. Signing a formal action plan, they expressed their

commitment to working together over the next 6 months to advance the close Kuwait-UK relationship to the benefit of both countries. The ministers also noted the success of the recent visit to Kuwait by the Duke of Cambridge in December 2019.

Ministers agreed to continue to collaborate on a wide range of issues, including trade, investment, migration, security, defence, cyber security, healthcare, education, higher education, scientific research, environment, culture and international development. Both sides highlighted the continued relevance of the Joint Steering Group to the bilateral relationship.

The discussions on defence focused on ways to strengthen cooperation between the two countries especially on training and joint exercises. The discussions referred to Exercise Desert Warrior, which was held in December 2019 and was attended by HRH the Duke of Cambridge. Discussions on security focused on combating shared threats, including protecting aviation interests through improved airport security and training.

Both Dr Murrison and Mr Aljarallah attended the signing of an MoU between Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and UK Department for International Development to establish a framework for operational co-operation including identifying ways in which collaboration between them can contribute to the realisation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and strengthen the global development efforts. They also attended the signing of an MoU between the Kuwait Society of Engineers KSE and the UK Engineering Council EngC , which will provide Membership to UK Chartered and Incorporated Engineers according to KSE requirements and the criteria needed to become members of KSE, EngC shall do the same according to EngC requirements and criteria needed for that.

Welcoming the productive discussions, Dr Andrew Murrison said:

The UK is proud of its strong relationship with Kuwait, a friendship which celebrated its 120th anniversary in 2019. Our partnership crosses multiple sectors, including trade, investment, defence, security, healthcare, education, scientific research, the environment, culture and international development. I look forward to seeing the fruits of our ongoing partnership continue to flourish as we move into 2020 and beyond.