

# Trucking Lives Research Brief #2

## Are HGV Driver Training Courses Producing Job-ready Drivers?

22 May, 2024

### 1: CONTEXT

Workforce shortages in the logistics industry, including in truck driving in the UK, are commonly framed as a problem of 'skills shortages'. Policy interventions often respond by devising strategies to fund labour force skilling programmes; the aim being to increase the pool of 'skilled' people available to enter the labour market.

Interventions aimed at attending to truck driver shortages in the UK have focussed on initiatives such as the HGV Skills Bootcamp, apprenticeship schemes and inviting new entrants to enter HGV driving by signing up for a C and/or C+E licenses. Although numbers are hard to come by for the total number of drivers trained, [11,000 places](#) were said to be created on the government-funded HGV Skills Bootcamps that were rolled out in late 2021.

But does the completion of training and testing translate to learning the basic skills needed for an HGV driver job? Research with newly qualified drivers in the UK, conducted as part of the [Trucking Lives project](#), shows that HGV driver training courses would benefit from being reviewed and revised to plug key gaps in the learning outcomes of new drivers.

### 2. OUTLINE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The findings presented here are based on 27 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with recently qualified (2021-2023) Class 1 and Class 2 drivers in the UK, as well as online research conducted by the close monitoring of a Facebook group for new drivers in the UK and a truck driver discussion forum.

Participants were asked questions about their experiences of skills training, finding employment and charting a career as an HGV driver in the UK.

They were asked about their experiences of the practical driver training that prepares one for the Part 3 of the Driver CPC testing process, at the end of which, providing they pass, a candidate receives a formal licence to start driving HGVs (C and C+E licenses). Participants were also asked to reflect on if, and how well, the training and testing process prepared them for employment in truck driving.



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## 3. KEY FINDINGS

*'Passing the test is the absolute bare minimum... It does not prepare you for the reality. It's woefully inadequate, woefully inadequate, it really is. I say that as a trainer.'*

(Class 1 driver, formerly a car driver trainer)

Commonly training consists of a 4-6 day course with 20-25 hours of in-truck driving training. These are expensive courses, costing between £1,800 to £4,000 depending on the type of license applied for and the presence of intermediary firms.

Participant narratives consistently foregrounded the inadequacy of the training programmes offered by training schools in the UK. They argue that the training is narrowly focussed on teaching one 'how to pass the test' and that a lot more could be done to equip trainees with the actual skills needed to work as an HGV driver.

Specifically, they highlight:

- The need to rethink the off-road training and testing component of the license qualification, especially the reversing training and testing. This view was unanimous among participants. Currently, the test for reversing involves a simple 'S' shape manoeuvre into a bay.

- Although participants often passed the reversing test at the driving school, they recounted failing driving assessments and being anxious about reversing their vehicle in a job because real-life reversing manoeuvres were far more complex than what trainees were trained for and tested on.
- The need for road freight specific skills to be incorporated more extensively into the training and testing. Three areas were highlighted: a) the need for vehicle-specific driving training, especially handling a loaded truck, and experience in handling different types of vehicles e.g. curtain-siders, artics and rigids as well as flat-beds; b) the need for enhanced training in the use of dedicated equipment (e.g. tachographs, tail lifts); and c) the need for training in how to secure loads safely.

Currently, training courses teach aspirant HGV drivers driving skills but they pay little attention to the purpose of that driving, which is the movement of freight loads. As a result, new drivers adopt DIY-skilling practices to learn key job-related skills, relying heavily on videos posted by fellow truckers on YouTube, TikTok and other social media sites to learn the crucial skills needed for everyday work.

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## ***Why does the quality of HGV driver training matter?***

It could perhaps be argued that car driving training and HGV license qualifications are similar; that a test is only an indication of basic competencies, and that driving is a skill acquired over years of practice. But the average car driver does not carry the same amount of responsibility and liability as an HGV driver. Truck drivers drive for a living, they have to meet tight deadlines, and they are driving loaded vehicles weighing up to 44 tonnes.

Additionally,

- The quality of HGV driver training has a direct bearing on the insurance premiums that come with hiring new and young drivers. In turn that shapes the willingness (or not) of haulage companies to take on newly qualified drivers.
- There has been a shift in labour market entryways and in on-the-job-handholding practices in the road haulage industry. Currently, it is common for new drivers to rely on agency work to find a foot into the labour market. Agencies offer no handholding or shadowing for new drivers – so, new drivers are effectively on their own as soon as they have passed their test.
- The large gap between training and the reality of the job is likely to result in large numbers of newly trained drivers exiting the truck driving labour market almost as soon as they have been trained.

## **4. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Review, revise and streamline the content and teaching methods of the practical driving training courses. This could fruitfully be done in consultation with industry representatives, recently qualified drivers, insurance companies and training providers.
- Dedicate extended training periods to key aspects of road freight work, such as reversing, securing different kinds of loads, and using the tachograph, while simulating real-life scenarios.
- Enhance publicity and tackle the negative perceptions associated with HGV apprenticeship programmes (amongst haulage firms and prospective HGV drivers) to establish them as the primary pathway into HGV driving.

