

HOW TO IMPROVE THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HGV DRIVERS: FINDINGS FROM THE TRUCKING LIVES SURVEY

POLICY BRIEF

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Ensuring resilient and sustainable supply chains is an important national policy objective. Supply chain disruption can be short lived or long lasting; it can also be geographically localised or widespread, but with global supply chains every ripple can have substantial consequences.

A key issue affecting supply chain sustainability in the UK is the shortage of drivers of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs). Insufficient numbers of drivers to move goods to and from ports, to warehouses, factories, distribution centre and supermarkets is a major impediment to the smooth running of supply chains.

While the UK is not alone in facing this challenge, it is an issue that the UK government can ameliorate. In 2023, 33 actions were quickly implemented by the government, aimed at recruiting new HGV drivers and retaining the existing workforce. Yet this was done with only limited understanding of the actual workforce and their experiences of HGV driving work.

In April 2023, the UKRI Economic and Social Research Council-funded Trucking Lives project surveyed 1,980 current and former HGV drivers.

The findings pinpoint continued significant challenges for HGV driver recruitment and retention. They also highlight the incompatibilities some drivers experience between their job and their life outside of work. Most concerning, more than half of current HGV driver respondents had considered quitting in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Paying attention to HGV drivers' experiences suggests actions might usefully be targeted to:

- Combat the systemic devaluation of HGV drivers and limited awareness of their importance to supply chains;
- Address the inadequate provision, access and quality of roadside services, worsening traffic congestion and road closures, and ill-equipped vehicles;
- Counteract logistics' neglect of workers. Logistics shapes the 'where to' of HGV driving jobs, but it is concerned with moving goods efficiently, not with the people who move goods. The software and data management systems which make up logistics can insist on working patterns that are incompatible with life outside of work. They also shape the ways that work is allocated and coordinated amongst drivers and;
- Address differences in HGV drivers' experiences influenced by personal (e.g., age, gender) and work (e.g., contract type) characteristics.

CONTEXT

Securing and retaining a skilled HGV workforce is of utmost importance to ensure that goods are moved as and when needed. Without this workforce goods stand still. The consequence is economic turmoil and potential social breakdown. But retaining the HGV workforce necessitates the job of an HGV driver being viewed as appealing in relation to other work possibilities. Appeal relates to a combination of perceived prestige, pay rates, hours, and how work tasks are experienced. The findings of the Trucking Lives survey of 1,980 current and former HGV drivers show that the appeal of HGV driving cannot be assumed. A range of actions is required to recruit and retain a diverse workforce to ensure supply chain sustainability in the medium term.

FINDINGS

In order to design strategies to recruit and retain the workforce, there is a need to address:

- The systemic devaluation of HGV drivers and low recognition of the vital work that HGV drivers do;
- The inadequate provision, access and quality of infrastructures, and;
- Logistics' concern with moving goods efficiently, not with the people who move goods.

Social and professional value reflects the explicit and implicit treatment of HGV drivers in work and public spaces, including disrespect at delivery sites and aggression on the road. The survey found that almost a third (32%) of current driver respondents had experienced discrimination at work, increasing to 50% of current female HGV drivers. Female HGV drivers were 2.7 times more likely to experience discrimination at work than male drivers.

HGV driving infrastructures include services (food, toilets, showers), roads and the vehicles driven. But the provision, access and quality of these infrastructures vary. Being denied access or provided with low quality infrastructures can contribute to mental and physical health issues, with 54% of current drivers reporting that the job had a negative impact on their physical health, and 32% for mental health. The nature of a mobile job – and particularly one in vehicles too large to access some sites – means that provision for basic necessities must be assured.

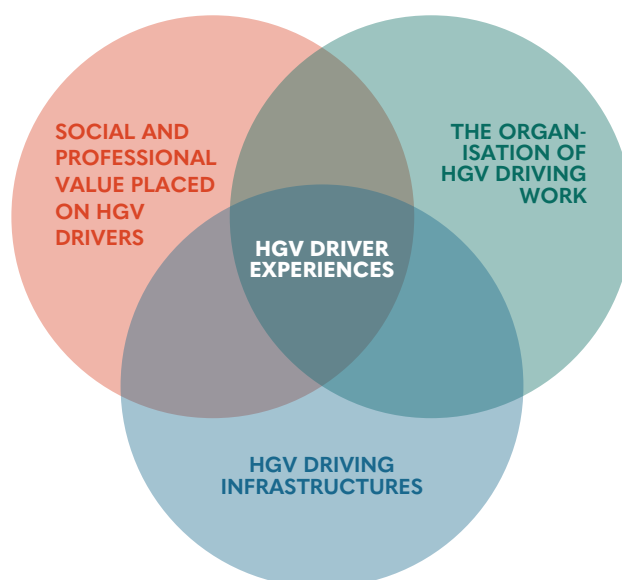
The organisation of HGV driving work recognises the incompatibilities between the system of logistics and the needs of HGV drivers. Drivers with caring responsibilities (34% of sample) were more likely to have considered quitting, report lower levels of job satisfaction and difficulties combining their work with caring tasks. The structure of HGV driving work tends not to allow for diverse work arrangements, our research showing low levels of availability and uptake of arrangements including part time working (14%; 4%), flexitime (10%; 5%), and reduced hours for a limited period (17%; 6%). Yet we found that drivers working part time hours were less likely to consider quitting than those working full time hours. So, offering a greater diversity of work arrangements might contribute to higher retention rates.

Taken together, these findings show how sustained neglect of this workforce and the work that they do can only be rectified through meaningful recasting of HGV driving work as valued work. This valuation can come through fair and transparent financial rewards, through provision of and access to high quality amenities and through the reorganisation of freight work to offer more diverse work pathways and do-able jobs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- Recruiting into the sector necessitates HGV driving being viewed as an appealing occupation, with appropriate respect, remuneration and advancement prospects.
- Retention of HGV drivers requires the above, as well as working conditions that are compatible with life outside of work.
- To achieve this requires interventions which sit across the three dimensions of worker experience (Fig 1.)

Figure 1. Three Dimensions of HGV Driver Experiences



To address the **systemic devaluation of HGV drivers**, a change of language and behaviour is needed. Findings show how negative treatment occurs in a range of situations. This is an important risk to supply chain resilience. Indicative actions could include the introduction of campaigns to communicate the role HGV drivers play in the national economy and in daily lives, and modification of the car driver's licence test to incorporate more information on sharing the roads with HGVs, including details on stopping distances and manoeuvre space.

To **improve driving infrastructures**, there needs to be specific recognition of the requirements for a mobile workforce, to which HGV drivers belong. While the committed investment in roadside services is a positive first step, clear enforcement of health and safety regulation on access to services at depots and warehouses is also required, along with a comprehensive network of sites across the UK including secure parking proximate to logistics hubs and providing required services.

To **reorient logistics to admit drivers** and their needs, activities are required that build recognition of the diversity of personal and work characteristics. Policy activities could include working across the sector to design career pathways which reflect the needs of diverse workers and offer clear progression, so as to retain workers. Investment in cross-sectoral training for haulage operators on themes including unconscious bias, diversity and communication would benefit the sector, as would the establishment of a sectoral mechanism for reporting and acting on worker harassment. Attention could also usefully be turned to cross-sectoral training for haulage operators in the unintentional effects of software and data management systems.

By recognising HGV driver experience as sitting across these three dimensions and acting accordingly, policy interventions can secure supply chain sustainability through maintaining workforce stability.

The Views from the Cab report can be downloaded from the Trucking Lives website: www.truckinglives.co.uk/outputs

ABOUT THE TRUCKING LIVES PROJECT

The Trucking Lives project is a three-year research programme funded by the UKRI ESRC as part of the Transforming Working Lives portfolio. It is focused on understanding and making visible the everyday work and life experiences of the UK's HGV drivers. If you would like to see more about the Trucking Lives project, check out our website at www.truckinglives.co.uk, find us on social media, or email: truckinglives@conted.ox.ac.uk

