

Guide to Selecting New Entrants

(How to identify and develop a potentially good driver from young or inexperienced candidates)

Training is a hot issue currently, not least due to the DCPC legislation rapidly approaching the end of its first five-year cycle.

BACKGROUND:

When an industry is facing staff shortages, it can be tempting to take shortcuts or reduce high standards of expectation from new entrants to the sector. This is something we cannot afford as we fight the shortage of LGV drivers in the UK. There are people of all ages, races and genders who may consider a career in our rewarding profession and many of them will approach local training providers who will in turn work with them to prepare them for the LGV testing regime.

The pass rate in the UK has been stuck at around 52% for at least 10 years – a woefully low level of performance, that would be even worse were it not for those operators who select candidates (and trainers) with care. The RHA has strong evidence from members that the chances of passing can be greatly increased when the potential employer controls the selection and training of new drivers. Some members have consistently achieved pass rates with their candidates well above 90%.

In this guide we set out to identify what characteristics and induction processes contribute to this difference.

SELECTION OF CANDIDATES:

Identifying suitable candidates for development as successful truck drivers is not as simple as reading application forms. The key attributes may not be apparent during interview. Following a recent pilot project offering work experience to candidates one member commented: "... candidates can show what they can do to employers who, based on their application form, might not give them an interview. But I don't want people who are good at interviews – I want people who can do the job".

This comment shows how important it is to get to know a candidate before allowing them to learn to drive.

An employment relationship works both ways, however, and we need to attract suitable candidates who will fit into our company requirements. Communicate opportunities for flexible working and chances to progress with the organisation as it flourishes.

Clearly identify what you want from a candidate by creating a thorough job description and considering what attributes you expect of the person who is likely to fill that description successfully.

Matters for consideration will include education, experience and abilities and will need to be matched against your job description.

BEHAVIOUR:

Training professionals refer to skills, knowledge and behaviours when identifying training needs, but for the moment we are concentrating on 'behaviours'. The training providers can address skills and knowledge later in this process.

People frequently refer to 'attitude' but attitude is difficult to measure and manage. However, we can identify and manage behaviour which is the reflection of a person's attitude.

Safe drivers will have certain attributes which will be clearly shown through their behaviour. These include:

- Patience
- High levels of concentration
- Tolerant approach to others
- Self-discipline.

These do not show on application forms and can be hard to identify in interview but will be revealed during a period of observation in the workplace.

EXPERIENCE:

Previous experience of using road craft can be an indication of possible suitability. Successful progression from bicycles to motorcycles, through to cars and vans can be a sound foundation for developing relevant skills such as anticipation, reading the road, understanding the capabilities of one's own and other vehicles. Probing questions regarding accident and insurance history can be revealing in these areas.

Once a potentially suitable candidate has been identified, the pre-training programme can begin.

You will also need to ensure the candidate is successfully inducted into the company on the first day.

A CULTURE OF SAFETY FROM DAY 1:

A safe approach to handling many tonnes of metal on the public highway is the foundation of all the other matters we will consider, and this must come from the employer.

In an ideal situation, a new candidate should be given a work experience period to ensure they have the necessary attributes. This can be achieved through a 'warehouse to wheels' programme or similar in larger operations, or smaller businesses may wish to work with local job centres, colleges and employment agencies to identify suitable candidates for further consideration.

During the work experience period, candidates should be taken through the company health and safety policy and any driver handbooks used. A training plan for the period should be agreed and commence with familiarisation of safe systems of work in place, along with suitable manual handling training, followed by familiarisation with any equipment used (hand pallet trucks, for example). Depending on your company structure, candidates should be sent out with established drivers, driver assessors or driver trainers to gain an understanding of the realities of the daily routine. Now is a good time to show them the more challenging shifts, runs or customers to gauge their responses to situations they would face once they have their LGV licence.

The established staff member will be able to advise you of the candidate's responses while on the road to matters such as punctuality, customer communications, enthusiasm or concern over the more demanding elements of the job.

If the candidate appears to be suitable, a test drive in the largest vehicle for which they hold a licence will indicate their skill levels in matters such as vigilance, concentration, road positioning, reading the road, speed of reaction, remaining calm in stressful situations, defensive driving techniques and tolerance of other road users.

Successful candidates should now apply for their medical and provisional LGV licence.

MENTORS AND TRAINING PROVIDERS:

Devise a training programme tailored to the individual and the job you require them to carry out. (See Driver Training Plan and Driver Training Record Sheet as examples)

At this stage a mentor from the established driving staff should be identified to support the candidate through the formal training programme and a training provider selected and booked for theory and hazard perception training, licence and DQC acquisition.

The mentor chosen should have the ability to train the candidate in 'dynamic risk assessments', identifying hazards and risks experienced in everyday activities the candidate will encounter.

During the period of licence acquisition training the candidate can continue to accompany drivers on runs and learn about company procedures and paperwork.

Practical experience in the workplace during this time will familiarise the candidate with use of tachographs, daily walk-round checks and safe loading practices, which will contribute to his knowledge in preparation for his Module 1,2, 3 and 4 tests.

Regular feedback between the mentor and the training provider should be a feature of this stage of training.

BEYOND TESTING:

Once the testing regime has been passed, a further period of on-the-job training and mentoring may be required.

In the meantime, the prospective driver's training record should have been completed daily and any areas of concern addressed. Only sign off the training record if your standards have been reached.

Following this guide will not guarantee a first-time pass for every candidate but will definitely improve your company's chances of getting well prepared new drivers who are far more likely to have passed their test first time and be loyal to the company which has invested time and effort in introducing them to their new career.