



# **Applicants for a Taxi Driver's Licence**

## **The 'Knowledge of London' Examination System**

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# Section A

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Before being licensed as a London taxi driver you will have to demonstrate that you are able to take passengers to their destination by the shortest possible route. To do this you must first learn the 'Knowledge of London' and then pass a series of examinations at the Public Carriage Office.
- 1.2 The following paragraphs describe in detail the examination system and explain how you progress through it. The description is supplemented by the flowchart at Appendix A.

## 2. Stage 1 - Introductory Talk

- 2.1 Following satisfactory character and medical checks, you will be invited to attend a presentation at the Public Carriage Office given by a Knowledge of London Examiner.
- 2.2 The presentation (which will last about an hour) is intended to give you, as an applicant, a broad understanding of what is required for you to become licensed as a taxi driver.
- 2.3 Before the presentation you will be given a booklet entitled a 'Guide to Learning the Knowledge of London', commonly known as the 'Blue Book'. This book explains how we suggest you go about learning the Knowledge and what is required from you when attending the PCO for examination. It also contains further information which complements the introductory talk.
- 2.4 The following outlines the main points that will be included in your Introductory Talk;
  - Firstly, the examiner will explain the difference between the All London and suburban Knowledge areas.
  - You will then be given detailed advice about how the area within the six-mile (9.65 km) radius circle from Charing Cross has to be learned. In order to complete the Knowledge you will need to know any place where a taxi passenger might ask to be taken and how to get there. To do this you will need to know all the streets, roads, squares etc. as well as specific places, such as parks and open spaces, housing estates, government offices and departments, financial and commercial centres, diplomatic premises, town halls, registry offices, hospitals, places of worship, sports stadiums and leisure centres, stations, hotels, clubs, theatres, cinemas, museums, art galleries, schools, colleges and universities, societies, associations and institutions, police stations, civil, criminal and coroner's courts, prisons, and places of interest to tourists. Such places are known as 'points'.

- The Blue Book contains 320 routes (known as 'runs'), divided into 20 lists of 16 which, when learned, will help you to gain a thorough knowledge of the six-mile radius. We will give you an overview of how the 20 lists have been specially structured to give a comprehensive coverage of the six-mile radius and to facilitate learning.
- Each run simply has a start and finish point (e.g. List 1 Route 1: Manor House Station to Gibson Square) and you must find and learn the shortest possible route between the two.
- You will be introduced to the concept of learning a 'dumbbell' of knowledge. This involves identifying important places in the ¼ mile (400 metre) radius circle around the beginning of the run, the important places along the run and in the ¼ mile radius circle around the end of the run. You will have to do this for all 320 routes in the Blue Book.
- You will also need to learn the routes in the reverse direction, given that the reverse route will most likely be different, because of local traffic schemes e.g. one-way streets and banned turns. Additionally, because of the different perspective presented by travelling in the opposite direction, you will notice places you haven't identified on the forward run.
- Throughout the presentation an example of a route from the Public Carriage Office to the British Museum is used. The examiner will show you how to plan, learn and describe this route in a way that demonstrates that you have the level of knowledge of London needed to be a taxi driver.
- In addition to the guide, you will need large-scale maps (a scale of at least 3 inches to 1 mile/50mm to 1 km is recommended) of central London and you will be shown examples of suitable maps.
- We will explain how you should use the Blue Book and a map to prepare runs. Ideally you should identify a route on the map as close to a straight line as possible between the start and finish points, writing down the route, including where to turn, before venturing onto the streets to learn it.
- You will be shown examples of places of interest along the route from the Public Carriage Office to the British Museum, to give an indication of what you need to learn.
- The examiner will explain how the character of central London can change throughout the day e.g. the West End of London is a place of shops and offices during the day, and a place of entertainment at night, and emphasising that you will need to learn both aspects of the area.
- You will be given information about Knowledge of London schools and the services they offer.
- You will be told that you have up to six months to learn the first five lists (80 routes) listed in the Blue Book, and you will be given the form which you should use to apply for your self assessment (see paragraph 3.1 below).
- The examiner will explain that, following the initial assessment, you will have a maximum of a further 18 months to learn the remaining 240 routes before applying for the Stage 2 written examination (see paragraph 4 below).

- You will receive a demonstration of the format of the written examination.
- The examiner will give you advice about attending a one-to-one oral examination (known as an 'appearance') (see paragraph 5 below), such as arriving in plenty of time, booking in at the Knowledge of London window on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, then waiting in the waiting room for an examiner to call you in to the examination room.
- You will be advised on what not to do when out learning runs, for example, don't enter premises, ring door bells or knock on doors to find out about buildings or the occupiers, because that may provoke a complaint from the occupiers of a building. (You will not be asked questions about places that are not conspicuous.)
- The examiner will give you advice about practising the routes for one-to-one oral examinations by 'calling them over' with another Knowledge.
- You will be told about the need to have a broad knowledge of the part of Greater London outside the six-mile radius, how you should learn this and how it is tested.
- Prior to being licensed you will also have to take a driving test in a licensed taxi. The examiner will outline what the test involves and when it needs to be taken.
- Finally, you will be reminded about your administrative responsibilities as regards informing the PCO about changes of address, medical condition, convictions, etc.

### **3. Stage 1a - Self Assessment**

- 3.1 The self-assessment lets you know whether you are doing things the right way. Better to find out at this stage than after you have spent many months doing it wrong! It allows you to check that you are learning the Knowledge in the right way and to the proper standard. The assessment takes the same form as the written examination described in Stage 2. After you have taken the assessment you mark your own paper. The possible answers are displayed on a screen, and you can compare your answers with the correct ones. A Knowledge Examiner talks you through the answers and is on hand to deal with any queries you may have. You don't have to tell anyone how well (or badly!) you got on. You are left with a fuller understanding of what is required when learning the Knowledge of London and the nature of the Stage 2 Written Examination. No record of these self-assessments is made.
- 3.2 At the self-assessment session, you will be issued with a form that you should use to apply for your Stage 2 Written Examination.

## Section B

### 4. Stage 2 - Written Examination

4.1 The written examination consists of two sections.

#### 4.2 Section 1

You will be required to write out five specified routes from the Blue Book. A Knowledge Examiner checks your answers to determine whether you have provided an acceptable route between the start and finish points. Each answer is worth up to 8 marks, i.e. a total of 40 marks is available for the section.

#### 4.3 Section 2

You will be presented with 5 maps showing either the start or end points of the routes used in section 1 of the examination. Each map displays a ¼ mile radius circle around the relevant point. All of the road names are removed apart from one which is left to allow you to identify the part of London involved. You are provided with a list of 2 roads, squares etc and 4 points of interest. Each of these has to be located on the map and each correct answer is worth 2 marks. Each correctly answered map is worth 12 points, i.e. a total of 60 marks is available for this section.

4.4 The total mark for the two sections is 100. The pass mark is 60%.

4.5 If you score between 50 and 59% (inclusive) another Knowledge Examiner will remark your paper.

4.6 If you are successful you progress to Stage 3. If you fail to achieve the pass mark you can apply to re-sit the written examination at a later date.

4.7 A fee is payable for each written examination you take. You can find the current fee on PCO form MHC/207 'London Taxi Driver Licence Fees and Additional Costs'.

### 5. Stages 3 to 5 - Oral Examinations

5.1 There are four stages of one-to-one oral examinations. In each of Stages 3, 4 and 5 you likely to have to take several examinations.

5.2 As you progress from one stage to another the intervals between examinations will become shorter. Initially, examinations can be up to eight weeks apart, reducing to three weeks at the Advanced stage.

5.3 A one-off fee is payable when you start one-to-one examinations (see MHC/207 for the current fees).

5.4 All one-to-one examinations are conducted by Knowledge of London Examiners. In the interests of fairness, you will be examined by different examiners in rotation. Therefore, during the one-to-one examination stages you will be seen by a variety of examiners.

- 5.5 Your first appearance will last approximately 30 minutes. Subsequent appearances will last up to 20 minutes.
- 5.6 Each examination will involve the examiner asking you to state the location of two specified points of interest. This can be a street, a square, etc. or a named building, in other words anywhere that a taxi passenger might ask to be taken. If you can give the correct locations of the two points you will be asked to describe the shortest possible route between the two.
- 5.7 During the course of one examination you will be asked four questions of this nature.

### 5.8 Marking System

- 5.8.1 The same marking system is employed for Stages 3, 4 and 5.
- 5.8.2 There will be a maximum of 10 marks available for each question giving a potential maximum of 40 for the examination.
- 5.8.3 You will be asked to identify the start and finish points of a run. If you fail to identify the location of a point you will be asked an alternative but you will be deducted one mark for each point you fail to identify.
- 5.8.4 Once you have successfully located the start and finish points you will be asked to describe the route between the two. Your answer will be scored out of the number of marks remaining from the original 10. You will lose marks if, for example:
- incorrect street names are given;
  - the route is not the most direct available;
  - the route involves making banned turns or U-turns, contravening ‘no entry’ signs or travelling the wrong way down one-way streets;
  - hesitancy in delivering the answer may indicate that you cannot recall the route quickly enough to be able to drive confidently and safely in London traffic.
- 5.8.5 Therefore, if you correctly identify the first start and finish points you are asked and call the run perfectly you will be awarded 10 marks for that question. Conversely, if you fail to identify 10 points the run cannot be attempted and no marks can be awarded.
- 5.8.6 The total number of marks scored over the four questions is translated into an overall grade for the appearance. Five grades can be awarded:

|       |          |                |
|-------|----------|----------------|
| 40    | Grade AA | Exceptional    |
| 36-39 | Grade A  | Very good      |
| 32-35 | Grade B  | Good           |
| 24-32 | Grade C  | Satisfactory   |
| >24   | Grade D  | Unsatisfactory |

5.8.7 The grades are translated into points, which, when accumulated in each stage of oral one-to-one examinations, will allow you to progress to the next stage. The number of points related to each grade is as follows:

|          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| Grade AA | 12 points |
| Grade A  | 6 points  |
| Grade B  | 4 points  |
| Grade C  | 3 points  |
| Grade D  | 0 points  |

5.8.8 The total number of points needed to progress to the next stage is 12. If you accumulate four D grades on any stage, regardless of the number of points already gained in that stage, you have to re-start the stage. If on the second attempt at the stage you again accumulate four D grades you will go back to the beginning of the previous stage (see diagram at Appendix A).

5.8.9 The examiners are allowed to award one U (for untested) grade per stage, this can take account of a performance that has been affected by illness, domestic problems, etc., treating each case on merit. A U grade does not affect your progress through the stage.

#### 5.9 Stage 3 Examinations - Basic Points and Runs

5.9.1 In Stage 3 questions will be mostly routes listed in Annex B of the Blue Book, although the start and finish points of some questions may be varied to include places of interest either on the route or within the  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile radius of either end.

5.9.2 When you have gained 12 points you will progress to Stage 4.

#### 5.10 Stage 4 Examinations - Intermediate Points and Runs

5.10.1 The start and finish points specified will again be places of interest on or within the  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile radius of either end of Blue Book routes, but both points of any one question will not be from the same Blue Book route. These questions are designed to allow you to show that you can link and combine Blue Book routes, enabling you to prove you can cope with more complex routes.

5.10.2 When you have gained 12 points you will progress to Stage 5.

#### 5.11 Stage 5 Examinations - Advanced Points and Runs

5.11.1 This is the final one-to-one examination stage covering the central six-mile radius circle. The questions will no longer be linked to the routes at Annex B and the examiner will ask questions that allow you to demonstrate that you have the necessary knowledge to take a passenger to any location in central London. At this stage you will have to prove that your Knowledge is up to date and topical e.g. awareness

of new tourist attractions, current theatre productions, changes in hotel names etc.

- 5.11.2 On gaining the required 12 points you will be required to learn the 25 suburban routes listed in Annex C of the Blue Book prior to the Stage 6 examination. Of these routes 21 radiate from the edge of the six-mile radius to the outskirts of Greater London and four from London Heathrow Airport.

## 5.12 General

- 5.12.1 At any point in Stages 3,4 and 5 the examiner may ask questions that focus on areas where you appear to have had difficulty in previous appearances.
- 5.12.2 The examination system is designed to allow you the opportunity to prove that you have the necessary knowledge to give a good service as a taxi driver. However, whilst there is no intention to cause unnecessary pressure or catch you out, as you progress through the one-to-one examination stages not only will you have to demonstrate a higher level of Knowledge but the precision and fluency of your answers will be expected to improve.

## 5.13 Driving Test

- 5.13.1 During Stage 5 you will be required to undergo and pass a driving test in a licensed taxi. The tests are delivered by the Driving Standards Agency on behalf of the PCO. You can choose to take the test at any one of five centres in the London area. Details of how to apply for a test are provided at the appropriate time.
- 5.13.2 The DSA sets and charges a fee for the driving test. You can find their current fees on PCO form MHC/207 'London Taxi Driver Licence Fees and Additional Costs'.

## **6. Stage 6 - Suburban Area Examination**

- 6.1 This stage is a single oral one-to-one examination. The questions are derived from the routes at Annex C of the Blue Book.
- 6.2 When you pass this examination you proceed to Stage 7
- 6.3 If you are unsuccessful you can attend for re-examination after an interval of approximately 2 weeks.

## **7. Accessibility**

The Knowledge of London examination system is able to accommodate any individual or special needs you may have through a variety of means e.g. a flexible appointments system, extended appearances if you have communication difficulties, accessible facilities for disabled candidates etc. If

you have any special needs that need to be taken into consideration during the examination process you should advise a member of the PCO.

## **8. Complaints and Appeals**

If at any time during the examination process you have a complaint or a query regarding your examinations you should contact the Knowledge of London Examinations Manager. All complaints and appeals are treated in confidence and will not have any adverse effect on your progress through the examination system.

## **9. Stage 7 - Final Talk and Presentation of Taxi Driver's Licence and Badge**

- 9.1 When you have passed the Stage 6 examination (and as long as you have met all the other requirements for licensing i.e. character, medical checks, taxi driving test) you can make the final application for the issue of your licence. You will need to show us your driving licence and pay the fee for the issue of a taxi driver's licence. You can find the current fee on PCO form MHC/207 'London Taxi Driver Licence Fees and Additional Costs'.
- 9.2 You will then be invited to remain at the PCO for the presentation of your licence and badge. You will join a group of other successful candidates to receive advice about your responsibilities as a taxi driver from a Knowledge of London Examiner. At the conclusion of the talk a PCO senior manager will present you with your licence and badge. You should set aside the whole morning for your final appearance, talk and presentation.

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## Section C

### Summary of the variations to the Knowledge of London examination procedure which apply to suburban sector applicants

#### 10. Introductory Talk (Suburban)

10.1 The examiner will explain the difference between the nine suburban sectors and the All London Knowledge area. The sectors are aligned to a London borough or groups of boroughs to correspond, as far as possible, to population density, i.e. to the likely amount of work available.

10.2 The suburban sectors (outlined in red on the map) are:

Enfield, Haringey and Waltham Forest

Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Newham and Redbridge

Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham

Bromley

Croydon

Merton and Sutton

Hounslow, Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames

Ealing and Hillingdon

Barnet, Brent and Harrow



10.3 Your nominated sector has to be learned in detail. You will be informed that you need to know any place in your sector where a taxi passenger might ask to be taken, including the type of points required by the All London applicant, (e.g. roads, gardens, parks, etc., as in paragraph 2.4).

10.4 The suburban introductory talk has the same format as the All London talk (see paragraph 2).

10.5 Annex A of the suburban edition of the Blue Book contains lists of routes for all nine sectors. The number of routes required to be learned for each sector varies according to the size of the sector. The area around the start and finish points that you need to learn is a radius of  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile (800m).

10.6 You are allowed up to six months to learn the Blue Book runs for your chosen sector.

## **11. Initial Assessment and Written Examination**

As a suburban applicant you will not be required to sit a self-assessment or written examination. Given the relatively small number of suburban Blue Book runs you need to learn, the additional levels of testing provided by the assessment and written examination are not considered necessary.

## **12. Stages 3 to 5 - Oral Examinations (Suburban)**

- 12.1 In all other respects the examination process is identical to that used to test All London candidates, except that it is related to the specific sector for which you wish to become licensed.
- 12.2 As London taxi drivers are obliged by law to accept journeys up to 12 miles from the point where the hiring begins, you will be asked questions where the start or finish points are major points of interest, e.g. stations, hospitals, etc., in the sectors adjoining your chosen sector. Such questions are introduced at Stage 4.
- 12.3 A one-off fee is payable when you start one-to-one examinations (see MHC/207 for the current fee for suburban one-to-one examinations).

## **13. Stage 6 - Central London Examination**

This stage is a single oral one-to-one examination. The questions are based on a list, issued to you at the end of Stage 5, of places you are required to know in central London (e.g. hospitals, railway termini, etc.). You must be able to tell the examiner the route from your sector to such places. You must also know the routes from your sector to London Heathrow and London City Airports. When you are successful in this stage and have met all the other requirements for licensing you will be invited to remain at the PCO for the presentation of your licence and badge (Stage 7). If you are unsuccessful you can attend for re-examination after an interval of approximately 2 weeks.

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Appendix A – Knowledge of London Examination System Flowchart

