

by Alan Haslehurst

Since 1st April 2006 all new applicants to the PCO for a Private Hire Driver's Licence have needed to undertake a topographical skills assessment **prior to being granted a full licence.**

This is possible because temporary permits are still being issued but they are subject to certification being obtained via an assessment prior to the grant of a full licence. From 31st December 2006 temporary permits will no longer be issued and **all new applications for licenses will have to be accompanied by a Certificate of Topographical Skills Assessment** issued by an accredited organisation.

The PCO has started the process of accrediting assessment centres and have to date granted accreditation to over 48 centres around London. The majority of these are Private Hire Companies with a few recognised training providers. LPHCA members make up 32 of these companies with a number still being processed.

The Assessment is designed to cover basic map reading skills and general topographical knowledge. To the experienced, the test seems to be very easy but in practice large numbers of new applicants are found to need some assistance to get to this foundation level.

The Accreditation Process

Applicants wishing to be accredited by the PCO need to provide details of how they will address the delivery of the tests in accordance with the specification laid down by the PCO.

This specification covers the test content which needs to be unique for each candidate and based in any area of London at the choice of the candidate. Companies are also required to demonstrate that they have suitably qualified assessors and an environment that is conducive to the delivery of the test in a quiet area. Additionally companies will be required to give details of any training and assistance they are able to give the candidates as well as the charges for both the assessment and any additional training offered.

The PCO have generally been responding to applications within 2 to 3 weeks of receipt. The assessment facilities will be visited and monitored by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which has now started visiting accredited companies. They will be auditing the centres and working with them to establish common standards.

As part of the LPHCA Topographical Assessment package application, templates are provided to simplify the process as well as advice on how to set up the centre and guidance on conducting tests.

Why should Companies become accredited?

The most common reason for companies to take on accreditation is to be involved in the continued supply of new drivers to the industry and ultimately their own circuit. If this were left to expensive training providers it could become a price barrier for new applicants as well as a non-localised service with only a few centres spread around London.

If companies leave it to other companies to carry out the tests they obviously will be first in line to offer new drivers employment and able to pick the most suitable candidates.

Various statistics abound but the most reliable must be those from the PCO, which claims over 6000 new licence applications are processed each year. The industry needs a constant supply of new entrants and should make every effort to involve itself in attracting and assisting new drivers.

Will the Assessment be part of a wider training program?

The assessment covers basic skills and should be seen as a starting point for drivers to embark on a career that provides continuous training and development. That being said, experience shows that many applicants require a small amount of training to get to the level where the test is not an obstacle.

Many LPHCA assessment companies now offer a short pre-assessment training session aimed at achieving the necessary standard to be granted a certificate.

The introduction of the Topographical Assessment has stimulated a lot of interest in the whole driver training issue. Presently the LPHCA is looking at the feasibility of extending the present offering to incorporate a number of additional modules which could potentially address ongoing driver development.

What are companies charging for the Assessment?

Most companies are setting charges on a cost recovery basis. Most candidates are on site for between 1 and 3 hours and will require the individual attention of a member of staff. Thus a charge of between £30 and £50 is both common and reasonable. Often the charge is refunded if the candidate subsequently joins the resting company. Those offering pre-assessment training do so for a small extra charge.

What are the advantages of the LPHCA Assessment System?

The application and accreditation process is made simple through the provision of standard templates and guidance.

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The preparation time for an assessment is reduced to a minimum. Under a manual system an assessor will have to establish the area for testing from the candidate and then prepare a unique test for that area. This could take nearly as long as the test itself. With the LPHCA system this is all done whilst you are taking the candidates details, a process that takes less than 5 minutes from start to finish.

With an automated system each assessment meets the PCO specification and is consistently delivered in the prescribed manner.

All records are kept and both the candidate answers and assessor comments are stored for later inspection.

PCO reporting requirements are incorporated within the system (in release 2) thus reducing the ongoing administrative costs.

Over 40 LPHCA members now have the system installed and we are now moving into phase 2 of the process with the release of a new enhanced version of the software as the magazine is being produced.

The cost of the system is £200 plus VAT in the first year with an annual renewal licence of £100 plus VAT.

Pricing for the system has been set at a low rate and supply is restricted to members only, as a service and benefit to LPHCA Graded Operators. With this pricing members have found that the investment in the system will be recovered within weeks of being accredited.

The LPHCA

By the time of publication The LPHCA will have had its Adult Learning Inspectorate visit. Any LPHCA members that are due an inspection should contact Steve Wright if they would like to know how it went and what will be expected.

The LPHCA's own Assessment process has been a great success with over 100 successful applicants having been assessed.

Candidates are offered the option of:

- An Assessment
- An Assessment with pre-assessment training
- An Assessment with post-assessment training
- An Assessment with pre-assessment training and post-assessment training
- Most candidates have chosen an Assessment with pre-assessment training.

The LPHCA needed to become an assessment centre to keep abreast of developments in the software and the ongoing PCO requirements, whilst at the same time providing an independent place for members to send their drivers if they did not have the facilities or room 'in house' to provide assessment.

We are pleased to say we have undertaken over 100 assessments and that candidates have been delighted with the process.

The assessment costs are lower for drivers who belong to or have been interviewed by LPHCA member's.

Cost of accreditation and training are:

Assessment Only

£25.00 LPHCA Member's Drivers
– others £35.00

An Assessment with pre-assessment training

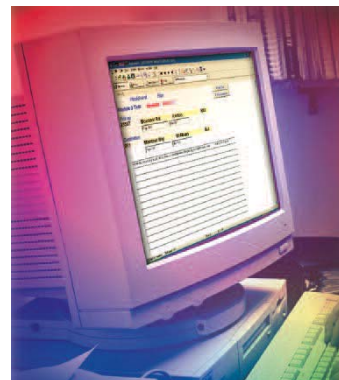
£50.00 LPHCA Member's Drivers
– others £60.00

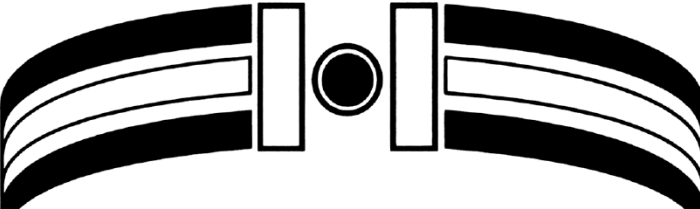
An Assessment with post-assessment training

£50.00 LPHCA Member's Drivers
– others £60.00

An Assessment with pre-assessment training and post-assessment training

£75.00 LPHCA Member's Drivers
– others £85.00





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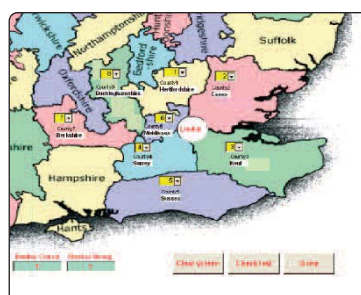
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for over 60 years)

Accountants and Auditors to LPHCA and several graded companies.

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**1107 Hinde Road, Harrow,
Middlesex HA1 1RU
Telephone: 02018427 1944
(5 lines)
Fax: 02018663 2081**





Any driver wishing to be assessed by The Association should call Gordon Foxwell on 07852 971536.

The assessments are done in The LPHCA's Private Offices at: 213 Kenton Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 0HD

Topographical Assessment UPDATE

Members who want to have the LPHCA Topographical Assessment Software installed the costs are:

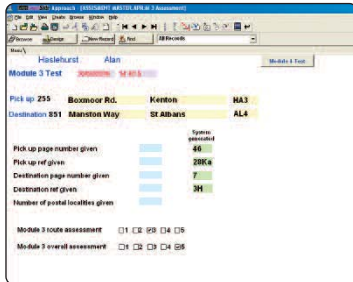
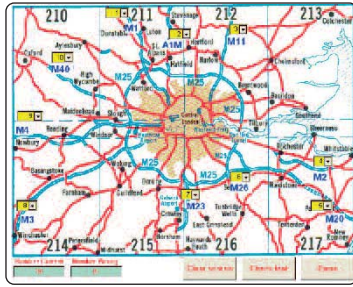
Topographical software is £200.00 plus VAT for Year 1 then £100.00 plus VAT per annum thereafter from Year 2.

The Year 1 cost includes - installation, software development, Lotus Software, data licenses, upgrades and support.

The Year 2 and ongoing per annum cost includes - data licenses, upgrades and support.

It is the Association's view that there should be as many topographical assessment centres in London as possible. We are delighted that LPHCA members form the great majority of certification providers and nearly all of them are using the Association's software.

The software is available for Graded Member Companies only. If you wish to have this 'strictly licensed' software and you are not a member at present please complete the Grading Application form in this magazine and forward to the association as soon as possible.



You've got to hand it to them...

The LPHCA's first three Topographical Assessment Candidates proudly hold their Certificates.

Muhammad Hayat Khan (top right), Keith Norris (bottom right), Sayid Abdul Raufi (bottom left)



FREE MONEY SAVING TELECOMS AUDIT FOR ALL LPHCA MEMBERS

As a highly valued member of the LPHCA you will enjoy huge savings on your telecommunications when using the LCC service. We are offering a Free (no obligation) Telecoms Audit. The LCC Telecoms Audit Check will provide your company with a summary report on all your service costs and will highlight any areas where you could be saving money. We can also provide you with suggestions on how to improve communications through new technology and services like broadband and voice over IP.

The following will give you an idea of additional services the LPHCA has negotiated on behalf of the members:

- First three Months line rental free!
- 30-Day Contract
- Up to 20% savings on all call costs
- Up to 12% saving on line rentals
- All BT services supported i.e. call minder, call waiting etc.
- 24/7 Support Cover
- One simple itemised monthly bill
- No paying quarterly in advance for line rentals
- Still use BT engineers for maintenance
- No minimum monthly call spend

To book your Free Telecoms Audit Check all you have to do is contact Charlie Kernan on 0800 65 222 56 or email ckernan@lcccommunications.com

LCC Communications

10A High Street, Stokesley, Middlesbrough TS9 5DQ.

