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# **Review Of The Topographical Knowledge Examination Process**

## **Report**

**May 1999**



**METROPOLITAN  
POLICE**

RECOMMENDATIONS

## **MANAGEMENT SUMMARY**

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CIS Consultancy Group Report P98/092A - Scoping Study For A Review Of Cab Driver Licensing - identified the need to address a number of issues surrounding the testing of prospective cab drivers' Knowledge of London. This Report details the steps which have been taken to date to identify in more detail the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the existing Knowledge testing process, and to present options for amending and improving the system.

As recommended in the Scoping Study Report, further investigation was conducted through the use of Focus Groups, with the intention that the Focus Groups would identify the skills required of licensed drivers and would therefore assist in the identification and presentation of options for a redesigned topographical knowledge testing system.

In all, five Focus Groups were held, comprising:

- Public Carriage Office Knowledge of London Examiners;
- Current students engaged in the Knowledge of London testing process (two groups);
- Existing licensed cab drivers (two groups).

The detailed findings from each set of Focus Groups are set out in appendices to the full Report.

Following consideration of all of the information obtained during the Focus Groups, Scoping Study and subsequent interviews with PCO staff, the report presents three options for the development of the topographical knowledge testing process. Briefly, the options are:

- Option 1 - A revised "paper and pencil" system, incorporating personal Appearances before Knowledge Of London Examiners.
- Option 2 - A fully computerised testing system which would replace "one-to-one" Appearances.
- Option 3 - A combination of Options 1 and 2 which would utilise a computerised system for the early stages of the testing process, and "one-to-one" Appearances for the final stages.

The Report invites the Sponsors to indicate which of the options presented is favoured, following which, as part of the agreed programme of work, CIS Consultancy Group will develop the chosen option to a point at which a user requirement for the proposed system has been prepared.

The Report also discusses whether there is a need to positively identify and test for candidates' possession of specific skills felt to be essential in a licensed driver. The Sponsors are invited to consider the issue and to indicate whether they wish CIS Consultancy Group to undertake further work to:

- Produce an agreed list of "essential skills".
- Refine the list of "essential skills" and identify their individual attributes.

- Identify the attributes that are measurable.
- Identify which of the measurable attributes would produce reliable information if measured.
- Agree which of the measurable attributes should actually be measured.
- Produce costings for the implementation of the measures.
- Identify options for the Sponsors and recommend the most suitable.

As a result of the Focus Groups it has also been possible for CIS Consultancy Group to identify a number of issues which both the Licensed Drivers and current candidates feel require some attention. The full Report identifies these issues and, for discussion purposes, they are grouped under three broad headings, namely:

- PCO-Related Issues.
- Issues External To The Remit Of The PCO.
- Other Skills Required By Licensed Taxi Drivers.

In recording details of the issues raised it is accepted that the PCO does not have direct control over a number of them, whilst others would require the PCO to examine and redefine its role in relation to the licensed trade in London. Whilst the aim is to promote discussion between the PCO and the licensed cab trade, certain of the issues raised will be subject to further consideration as a result of CIS Consultancy Group's agreed programme of work with the PCO, such as:

- The provision of constructive feedback following Appearances.
- The operation of the complaints system.
- The identification and use of "realistic" routes in the topographical knowledge testing process.

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## **2. MAIN FINDINGS**

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As recommended in the Scoping Study Report, further investigation was conducted through the use of Focus Groups, with the intention that the Focus Groups would identify the skills required of licensed drivers and would therefore assist in the identification and presentation of options for a redesigned topographical knowledge testing system.

In all, five Focus Groups were held, comprising:

- Public Carriage Office Knowledge of London Examiners;
- Current students engaged in the Knowledge of London testing process (two groups);
- Existing licensed cab drivers (two groups).

Set out below are brief summaries of the findings from each of the Focus Groups. The detailed findings are attached at Appendices A, C and D respectively.

### **2.1 Knowledge of London Examiners Focus Group**

Results would suggest that examiners feel uncomfortable about placing the candidates under undue pressure during Appearances. For instance, candidates must obtain 12 points to progress from one stage of the Knowledge testing process to the next, and the 12 points must be achieved within a total of seven Appearances. Examiners felt that a candidate was placed under undue pressure if, when going to the seventh Appearance within any stage, he/she was unlikely to gain sufficient points to bring their total to 12, with the result that the candidate would be sent back to the beginning of the stage. The fact they could not advance more superior candidates, or give feedback to candidates, was also seen as unsatisfactory.

The examiners commented on how they would like to make the candidates feel more relaxed and confident. They also would like to aid the development of the candidates and knowing each candidate's current stage within the knowledge testing process would help them in achieving this. Furthermore the examiners said they would like to give the candidates longer than fifteen minutes for the Appearance.

It was clear from the results that the examiners could not easily differentiate between the scales or the grades in the current marking system. There is also concern with regard to the high level of subjectivity related to this aspect of the marking process. There is a great deal of importance in the current system placed on what the examiner 'perceives' to be the best/shortest/most direct route. It is accepted that these are highly experienced individuals who obviously have a great deal of knowledge - but if all the candidates are to be treated with equal fairness, there needs to be a more objective marking system in place. For example, one that is based on a syllabus type document that both the candidates and examiners are working from.

The examiners felt that the previous marking sheet was less time consuming and more structured than that currently used. They felt that a three-point scale could be used instead of four, with Correct/Incorrect either side of a middle category, but that the existing system is unique and not well-suited to a highly structured marking scheme. There was also concern about the fact that grade D's and E's are too similar. If both can be awarded for zero points then why have both?

Following completion of their Focus Group, and having had sight of the views attributed to them, the Knowledge Of London Examiners have provided their own account of their discussion in relation to certain of the issues raised and these are set out in Appendix B.

## **2.2 Current Candidates Focus Group**

The candidates feel that there is little doubt that the standard of London's Hackney Carriage drivers is extremely high. Furthermore, it is clear that the elements of structure which have been incorporated into the process are seen as an improvement.

The philosophy behind the 'Blue Book' is good in practice; however the candidates feel that the flexibility used by the examiners during the Appearance reduces the value of the routes learnt. They felt that the routes could be more realistic. Additionally the fact that the routes from the Blue Book should get progressively harder as the candidates move through the system does not seem to be happening - there seemed to be a lack in differentiation between the different stages. They commented on the uncertainty about how the grades were quantified and the fact that A's and B's were very rarely awarded. Also the days between stages were noted as being inconsistent, for example a "21 day Appearance" could in practice often not be booked for less than 31 days from the date of booking.

Candidates could not understand why they could not carry over from one stage to another any excess points that they might have gained. Generally there was a feeling that there were hidden agendas within the system and that they were treated with a certain amount of contempt by the examiners. There were comments from both groups that points could be easily manipulated as and when the examiners felt it appropriate to do so. There was little consistency amongst different examiners' methods of assessing the Appearances.

The candidates feel there is a need for temperament to be assessed due to the nature of the job - but the relationship between exactly what is being tested and what is experienced in 'real life' needs to be questioned.

## **2.3 Licensed Driver Focus Groups**

The licensed drivers felt that the high standards of the current system needed to be maintained. They thought that the type of pressure the Appearance places on candidates was a good temperament test for future drivers. The current method of Appearances was felt to instil a high standard of topographical knowledge in candidates.

Negative aspects of the administration process concerned the lack of preparation provided by the Public Carriage Office for the candidates. There was a draconian feel to the system which created a sense of fear in the candidates, causing them to be unable to ask questions. The routes given during the appearances were felt to be unrealistic and unstructured, with different standards amongst different examiners. Feedback was not given to candidates and examiners were generally seen as having their own agendas. Again the number of days between appearances was commented on - in that they were inconsistent with the published procedure.