

# Put yourself in the driving seat



How to become a  
licensed taxi or private  
hire driver





# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Taxis</b>	2
<b>Private Hire Vehicles</b>	2
<b>Licensing requirements</b>	3
Age	3
Character	4
Medical fitness	4
Route finding skills	5
Driving ability	7
<b>Summary</b>	8
<b>Suburban taxi drivers</b>	9
<b>Private Hire drivers – further information</b>	11
<b>Equal opportunities</b>	11
<b>How to apply</b>	12



## Introduction

London's taxi industry has a worldwide reputation for quality of service earned over many generations. This reputation is in no small part due to the skills demanded of the drivers before they can be granted a licence. More recently the benefits of licensing have been extended to the private hire industry creating a combined industry of over 65,000 licensed drivers in the capital.

By becoming either a taxi or private hire driver you can play an important part in delivering safe, reliable and integrated transport to all those who live in, work in or visit London.

The opportunity to have a career as a licensed driver in London is open to all and Transport for London (TfL) is particularly keen to attract more women to these jobs. We want London's taxi and private hire industry to reflect the diversity of London's population and the people it serves.

Licensed taxi drivers and many licensed private hire drivers enjoy the benefits of being self-employed. In the private hire industry, some operators offer their drivers permanent employment. Either way, as a licensed driver you can have the freedom to work when you wish. This flexibility affords the opportunity to have a worthwhile career to meet your own personal circumstances and requirements.

This booklet tells you what is required to become a licensed driver of either kind.





There are two types of licensed vehicle in London:

## **Taxis**

A taxi 'plies for hire' and can be hailed in the street or can also be found waiting at a taxi rank. The majority of taxis can carry 5 passengers and all are wheelchair accessible. The fares charged by licensed taxis are regulated by TfL.

Taxis are also known as 'black cabs' or 'hackney carriages'.

If you want to ply for hire as a taxi driver you will need to obtain one of two types of taxi driver's licence, All-London or Suburban. An All-London driver is licensed to ply for hire anywhere within the Greater London area. If you wish to work as a taxi driver in central London or at London Heathrow Airport you need an All-London licence.

The suburban area of London is divided into nine sectors, based on borough boundaries and suburban drivers can ply for hire only within the suburban sector(s) for which they are licensed. Drivers may add additional sectors once licensed. For more information about suburban taxi drivers see page 9.

## **Private Hire Vehicles**

Private hire vehicles, which include minicabs, executive cars, limousines and chauffeur services, must be booked in advance through a licensed private hire operator.

Private hire drivers are not restricted as to where in London they can work as long as they only undertake bookings made through a licensed operator. Everyone who drives a private hire vehicle in London needs to obtain a private hire driver's licence.

## Licensing requirements

The Public Carriage Office (PCO) is responsible for administering the licensing of taxis and private hire services in London and acts on behalf of TfL, the Licensing Authority.

Whilst encouraging the provision of high quality services, the Licensing Authority's overriding consideration is the safety of the travelling public. In seeking to provide safe services, drivers of both taxis and private hire vehicles must meet five basic requirements:

- age
- character
- medical fitness
- route finding skills
- driving ability

To be able to serve the diverse population of London and its many visitors it is also important that you can speak, read and understand English.

### Age

To be a licensed driver you must be at least 21 years of age. There is no upper age limit, provided you meet the other licensing requirements. You can apply for an All-London taxi licence at the age of 18 but a licence will not be granted until you are aged 21.



## Character

The Licensing Authority has to be satisfied that the drivers it licences are safe, honest and trustworthy. Every applicant, therefore, is the subject of a criminal record check before being licensed. This is done by asking you to obtain an Enhanced Disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau, an agency of the Home Office (full details of how to do this are included in the application pack). We will also look at your driving licence to see if you have any driving convictions.

Having a driving or criminal conviction will not necessarily prevent you from becoming licensed – it depends what the conviction was for, the sentence imposed and how long ago it was.

## Medical fitness

Taxi and private hire drivers are professional drivers carrying passengers for hire and reward. The Licensing Authority has determined that for this reason applicants must demonstrate a higher standard of medical fitness than that needed for a standard DVLA driving licence.

The standards are based upon DVLA Group 2, and are similar to those required for drivers of large goods vehicles, buses and coaches. Details of the DVLA Group 2 Standards can be found at [www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk).

If you apply to be licensed you will be required to prove your medical fitness by undergoing a medical examination with your GP. It is difficult to cover all possibilities, but certain conditions such as epilepsy, poor eyesight, insulin treated diabetes and serious heart problems could result in an application being refused. If you are in any doubt about a condition you have, you may wish to consult your GP before you apply.

## Route finding skills

A fare-paying passenger will expect a licensed driver to be knowledgeable about London and to reach their destination by the most appropriate route.

There are substantial differences in this regard between what is required of taxi and private hire drivers because of the different way customers access the different kinds of service.

As taxis can be hailed in the street with no advance warning of where a passenger might want to go, a taxi driver must have a thorough knowledge of the capital. It is for this reason that taxi drivers have to learn the world famous 'Knowledge'.

If you want to be an All-London taxi driver you will need a detailed knowledge of all the streets and places of interest in central London with a more general knowledge of the major arterial routes throughout the rest of London.

If you choose to apply for a suburban licence you will be required to have a detailed knowledge of your chosen sector along with a more general knowledge of central London.

Once you have studied your chosen area you will be tested on your knowledge by PCO examiners in a series of examinations.







On average, it takes three years to become licensed as an All-London taxi driver, two years for a suburban driver. However, many applicants take much less time to complete the knowledge. This may seem like a long time but the rewards to be gained once you are licensed should make it worthwhile.

You can apply to start learning the All-London Knowledge from the age of 18 because of the time it can take to become licensed. Suburban applicants cannot apply until they are 21 because they have less to learn.

Because private hire journeys are pre-booked, private hire drivers have the opportunity to plan a journey in advance. They do not, therefore, need the detailed knowledge required of taxi drivers. Nevertheless, if you wish to be licensed as a private hire driver you will need to be able to demonstrate a range of route finding skills such as map reading and route selection, which allow you to plan a journey.

These skills are not currently tested but in 2006 a system will be in place to test the route finding skills of private hire driver applicants.

## Driving Ability

All licensed drivers must hold a full DVLA, Northern Ireland or European Economic Area (EEA) state driving licence. The other EEA states are:

Austria	Greece	Poland
Belgium	Hungary	Portugal
Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia
Czech Republic	Italy	Slovenia
Denmark	Latvia	Spain
Estonia	Lithuania	Sweden
Finland	Luxembourg	Iceland
France	Malta	Liechtenstein
Germany	Netherlands	Norway

Additionally, to obtain a private hire driver's licence you will need to have held one of the above licences for at least three years.

As a taxi has special features to assist people with disabilities, if you want to be licensed as a taxi driver you will need to pass a driving test in a licensed taxi, which will include a wheelchair loading element.

If you have a disability you can still apply to become licensed as either a taxi or private hire driver but you may have to have your driving ability assessed independently, in a suitably modified vehicle if appropriate.

## Summary

The table below summarises the requirements for taxi and private hire drivers:

	Taxi	Private Hire
Age	21	21
Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Criminal Records Bureau Enhanced Disclosure</li><li>• Driving history</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Criminal Records Bureau Enhanced Disclosure</li><li>• Driving history</li></ul>
Medical fitness	DVLA Group 2	DVLA Group 2
Route finding skills	Learning the 'Knowledge'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Map reading and route planning skills</li><li>• Tests to be introduced in 2006</li></ul>
Driving ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Full DVLA, NI or EEA driving licence</li><li>• Driving Standards Agency Taxi Driving Test</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Full DVLA, NI or EEA driving licence</li><li>• 3 years driving experience</li></ul>

## Suburban taxi drivers

The nine suburban sectors 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

The map below shows the borough boundaries with the sector boundaries indicated by the red lines.





There are currently over 3,000 licensed suburban taxi drivers. In addition there are 1,400 individuals studying the Knowledge for one of the nine suburban sectors.

If you are thinking of becoming a suburban taxi driver you need to make an informed decision on your choice of sector. You should ask yourself the following questions.

- **Are there too many drivers in my chosen sector?**
- **Is there enough work in my chosen sector bearing in mind the number of licensed drivers?**
- **Would I be better choosing a sector with fewer drivers?**

You are strongly advised to find out as much as you can about your chosen sector before applying. This can be done by observing taxi activity at different locations throughout the day and week, and by speaking to working taxi drivers.

Up to date details of the number of applicants and licensed drivers for each suburban sector can be found at [www.tfl.gov.uk/pco](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/pco)





## Private Hire drivers – further information

If you are thinking of becoming a private hire driver you need to make a decision where you want to work and what type of operator you want to work for.

A London private hire driver's licence does not tie you to working in any particular area or for any particular operator. There are over 2,300 licensed operators in the capital and it may be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I want to work as a minicab, executive or chauffeur driver?
- Do I want to work locally?
- Which licensed operators are near me?

You are strongly advised to find out as much as you can about the different types of private hire operator before applying. You can find your local licensed operators on our website: [www.tfl.gov.uk/pco](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/pco)

## Equal opportunities

In assessing applications to be licensed, the PCO applies the Mayor's policy on promoting equal opportunity and fairness. All applicants will be treated fairly regardless of ethnic or national origin, gender, disability, religion, age or sexual orientation.

## How to apply

If you require further information or wish to apply to be either a licensed taxi or private hire driver please contact us.

Telephone: **0845 602 7000 (all calls charged at the local rate)**

Fax: **020 7126 1897**

e-mail: **enquiries@pco.org.uk**

Write to: **Public Carriage Office  
15 Penton Street  
London  
N1 9PU**

Website: **[www.tfl.gov.uk/pco](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/pco)**

Our telephone lines are open between 8 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays).



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