

Report to	-	Licensing & General Purposes Committee
Date	-	23 October 2017
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Business Operations
Subject	-	English Proficiency Test for Dual Drivers

Recommendation to COUNCIL: That the English proficiency criteria or test be introduced for:

- 1) new applicants for licensed dual drivers; and
 - 2) existing drivers, who through an investigation are found by a licensing panel that his/her conduct or behaviour is a cause of concern and it appears that their ability to comprehend or communicate English is likely to be a factor.
-

Service Manager: Richard Parker Harding

Introduction

1. Minute LG15/17 adopted the policy (Convictions Policy) which made a requirement that any drivers applying for a dual drivers licence are required to demonstrate that they have a sufficient ability to both speak English and to understand spoken English, in order to provide the standard of public and private hire service expected by the Council.
2. It is important that the standard of conduct demonstrated by dual licensed drivers is proficient and that they are able to communicate in English with passengers and other road users. They must be able to discuss the fare or route with passengers, to occasionally discuss safety issues such as the use of a seat belt or talk about matters that could arise in an emergency.
3. In addition, it is expected that dual licensed drivers will have the necessary level of basic numeracy to be able to charge the appropriate fare and handle money appropriately.
4. It is particularly important that dual licensed drivers are able to read and understand information provided for them by the Council and other relevant authorities, such as the conditions on their driver's licence. Drivers are also required to contact us or to communicate with a passenger on occasion in writing; for example to let us know about changes in their health or of any criminal convictions or, in the case of a passenger, if an individual has a hearing impairment or requires a receipt.
5. The intention is therefore to introduce an assessment for every applicant who wishes to become a dual licensed driver to ensure that they have adequate English language skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. If they have an acceptable standard of English this should also mean that they will be able to demonstrate an acceptable level of skill in numeracy. It is deemed

that they will require these skills in order to carry out their role as a dual licensed driver within the district council area.

What is the level of English that we expect licensed drivers to have?

6. This has been considered and the view is that the level of English that is required is the equivalent of the standard reached in the early years of secondary school. It means that an applicant will be able to understand and deal with most situations likely to occur in the course of their job as a licensed driver.
7. For the purpose of driver licensing, it is expected that an applicant should have language proficiency equivalent to the level of B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale. Information on the CEFR scale is provided in Appendix A.

Will applicants be expected to take a test?

8. It should be emphasised that in the majority of cases a test will not be required. In most cases applicants will need to provide us with information about their qualifications that satisfies the licensing authority that they meet this standard without having to take and pass a test. More information about the kind of information that they could provide to satisfy licensing authority is provided in Appendix B.
9. In cases where it is not possible for an applicant to provide information that satisfies the licensing authority that their qualification meets the criteria, new applicants will need to undertake and pass an English language test with an approved English language test provider. If an applicant needs to take a test then there would be no limit set on how many times an applicant can take the test in which to pass.
10. If an applicant is required to take a test, they will be provided with details of acceptable test providers and of the type of qualifications that the Council will accept as proof that they have met the accepted standard. The cost of the test required will vary but it is understood that the cost of such a test is likely to be in the region of approximately £180 to £200.
11. The tests tend to involve the following type of assessment:

Reading and writing

- To answer questions on information contained in short pieces of text
- To be able to read a list of statements and decide whether they are true or false
- To read sentences or text that contain gaps and fill those gaps
- To write a short letter or story (about 100 – 150 words) on a given topic

Speaking and listening

- To be able to answer questions about familiar topics on, for example, their home, work or interests
- To be able to prepare a topic to talk about with an examiner and answer questions on the topic

- To listen to an audio recording of someone talking or a conversation and answer questions on what they have heard
- To be able to have a conversation with an examiner on a given topic

Who would need to meet this new criteria?

12. All applicants have to sit an internal Knowledge Test and this has required applicants to have a level of understanding of written English in order to understand the questions asked. Since the test has been introduced, no driver has been licensed without passing the test. The difficulty is that this has not provided an objective assessment of their spoken or verbal skills and this is therefore limited in its scope to test applicants where this could be a potential issue.
13. The introduction of the new assessment will mean that where an individual has not been able to provide satisfactory evidence of their level of competence in English, they will be required to take a test which provides them with a certificate from a recognised educational institution. More detail about this is provided in Appendix B.
14. The proposal is that this requirement will only apply to new applicants for a Dual Driver Licences and it is envisaged that the requirement to undertake a test is only likely to be required of a very small proportion of applications we receive.
15. In addition, if it becomes apparent during an investigation and subsequent licensing panel hearing that an existing driver's conduct or behaviour is a cause of concern and that it appears that their ability to comprehend or communicate in English is likely to be a factor, then a driver may be required to undertake and pass an English Language assessment in order to improve their skills in this area.

Conclusion

16. It is recommended that the Council adopts an English proficiency criteria or test for new applicants for a dual drivers licence.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director of Business Operations

Risk Assessment Statement

None identified.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF or CEFR) was put together by the Council of Europe as a way of standardising the levels of language exams in different regions. It is widely used internationally and all important exams are mapped to the CEFR. There are six different levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. These are as described in the table below.

Council of Europe levels	Description
C2 Mastery	The capacity to deal with material which is academic or cognitively demanding and to use language to good effect at a level of performance which may in certain respects be more advanced than that of an average native speaker. Example: <i>CAN scan texts for relevant information, and grasp main topic of text, reading almost as quickly as a native speaker.</i>
C1 Effective Operational Proficiency	The ability to communicate with the emphasis on how well it is done, in terms of appropriately, sensitivity and the capacity to deal with unfamiliar topics. Example: <i>CAN deal with hostile questioning confidently. CAN get and hold onto his/her turn to speak.</i>
B2 Vantage	The capacity to achieve most goals and express oneself on a range of topics. Example: <i>CAN show visitors around and give a detailed description of a place.</i>
B1 Threshold	The ability to express oneself in a limited way in familiar situations and to deal in a general way with non-routine information. Example: <i>CAN ask to open an account at a bank, provided that the procedure is straightforward.</i>
A2 Waystage	An ability to deal with simple, straightforward information and begin to express oneself in familiar contexts. Example: <i>CAN take part in a routine conversation on simple predictable topics.</i>
A1 Breakthrough	A basic ability to communicate and exchange information in a simple way. Example: <i>CAN ask simple questions about a menu and understand simple answers.</i>

If an applicant has attended a school, college or university in the UK

If an applicant has completed their secondary school education in the UK or have any UK secondary school level qualification which has been taught and examined in English, their level of English will be deemed sufficient.

Certificates of educational attainment will be required as proof that an applicant has completed their secondary educational in the UK or have been taught or examined in English.

Qualifications that the authority will accept as proof that standard of English are acceptable.

- UK GCSEs (2017) 1 to 9
- UK GCSE grades A* to G
- UK O level grades A to E
- UK CSE grades 1 to 5
- UK AS level – A to E / A level – A to E
- UK NVQ/BTEC/ City and Guilds qualification level 1 or above
- UK HNC/HND passed the first year of the course
- UK degree or higher (e.g. masters, PhD) To have been accepted and passed a module from the course (or equivalent)
- Other qualifications deemed to be equivalent to the above

Applicants will need to provide their original certificate(s). The Executive Director or Service Manager to have delegated authority to make such changes to reflect changes to academic qualifications.

What if an applicant's qualification is not from a school or college in the UK?

There are other ways that an applicant can demonstrate that they meet the standard without having to take the test.

Secure English Language Test

Secure English Language Tests (SELT) are required by the Home Office for many people wishing to settle in the UK. A SELT certificate in reading, writing, speaking and listening will be accepted as proof that an applicant's level of English is sufficient. Pass in (ISE (B1) SELT)

A non-UK qualification which has been taught and examined in English

If an applicant has been educated in English outside the UK to the equivalent of GCSE level or above, he or she will need to provide the local authority with their original certificate. For example, if an applicant went to school overseas and sat International GCSEs, this would prove that they have the required level of English. Similarly, if they went to university outside the UK and their degree was taught or researched in English they would have the required level of English.

Satisfactory evidence that the qualification was taught and examined in English would need to be provided. A letter from the teaching/examining institution is sufficient for this purpose but any evidence must be translated into English.

A qualification in English as a second language or as a foreign language

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) qualifications are designed to assess the English language skills of those who do not have English as their first language.

Different ESOL qualifications can assess different skill areas (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) within the English language. If an applicant has a certificate for an ESOL or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) qualification that proves proficiency in all four skill areas, then this may be sufficient. Applicants will need to provide their original qualification certificate.

Rother District Council does not approve English language course providers and applicants will need to obtain a recognised qualification from a recognised institution to prove that they meet the requirement.

Rother District Council will not automatically accept all ESOL and EFL qualifications but some examples of certificates that will be considered as proof that an applicant can meet the English language requirements are:

- ESOL Skills for Life (Entry Level 3, Level 1, Level 2)
- Functional Skills qualifications in English (Entry Level 3, Level 1, Level 2)
- International English Language Testing System (IELTS): Cambridge English Language Assessment
- Cambridge English: First (FCE)
- Trinity College: Integrated Skills in English (ISE 1)

The guidance on level of qualification accepted will be kept under review and may be updated from time by the Executive Director or Service Manager.