

How to


become a

London taxi driver

MAYOR OF LONDON



**TRANSPORT
FOR LONDON**
EVERY JOURNEY MATTERS

A black and white photograph of the London skyline. In the foreground, a black taxi is parked on a street. The taxi has a poster on its side for 'THE FESTIVAL' with the text 'WILL BE THERE 13 - 16 MARCH 2018'. In the background, several skyscrapers are visible, including the Citigroup building, the HSBC building, and the Barclays building. A fence runs across the middle ground.

**‘As the world’s greatest city
it is absolutely right that
we have, and continue
to have, the best and most
qualified cabbies in the world’**

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London

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Introduction

Taxi drivers have been an important part of London's transport system for centuries and you can play a key role in its future.

Why become a taxi driver?

Being a taxi driver is a very flexible career. You can work around family commitments, study demands, caring responsibilities – or just enjoy more of a work/life balance than you would get from a typical job.

You're your own boss, deciding how many hours and what time of the day or night you want to work. You can earn more by going out at busier times, in busier locations and by providing a great service you might earn tips from grateful customers.

A taxi driver has a unique understanding of London, you will never have two days that are the same and you'll see and interact with people from all walks of life. It's a lot more than just taking people from A to B.





Simply the best

It's recognised as being one of the toughest exam processes around, but the Knowledge is also why London's taxi drivers are considered the best in the world.

London's taxis are world-famous, in part because our taxi drivers know the quickest routes through London's complicated road network. Taxis can be hailed in the street and asked to go anywhere, so a thorough understanding of London's streets is essential.

Mastering the Knowledge typically takes students three to four years. It's a challenging but rewarding process and there's plenty of help and support available. Passing is a huge achievement and gives you a career where you are your own boss and have the flexibility to choose when and where you work.

Two types of badge

To become a licensed London taxi driver, you can either:

- Take the All London Knowledge which, once passed, allows you to work anywhere in Greater London
- Become a taxi driver in one of the nine suburban sectors. The process of becoming a Suburban taxi driver is similar to the All London Knowledge, except Suburban drivers can only be hailed in their chosen sector

More information on becoming a Suburban taxi driver is available online at tfl.gov.uk/tph

The Knowledge and taxis in London

The Knowledge of London test was introduced in 1865.

The story goes that it was brought in after the Great Exhibition of 1851, held at the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. Hundreds of thousands of people visited the event – with many going on to complain to the authorities about just how bad their journeys had been because cabmen didn't know the route. What was called for was a system that could test the cabmen's knowledge of the principal streets, squares and public buildings in London.

Today, London taxis and their drivers are as important as ever.

100 per cent accessible

London's taxis are 100 per cent accessible and offer a vital door-to-door service for vulnerable passengers and those with mobility issues.

When you think of London

In 2015, the black cab was voted the most iconic piece of London's transport design. No matter the time or place, you are never far away from one of London's 21,000 taxis. People all across London rely on taxis to get them from A to B as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Cleaner air for London

Taxis in the Capital are leading the way in cleaning our air. New state-of-the-art zero emission capable taxis have hit the streets and are replacing older, more polluting diesel vehicles.

Get in the know

Do you have what it takes to gain the Knowledge?

Passing the Knowledge ensures licensed London taxi drivers have a full understanding of London's intricate road network. You must learn and memorise 320 routes (known as runs) and various points of interest (known as points) within a six-mile radius of Charing Cross. Points include landmarks such as clubs, hospitals, hotels, theatres, embassies, stations and historic buildings.

In the final stage of the Knowledge, you will learn additional routes from central London to the suburbs and to and from Heathrow and London City airports, which takes about six weeks. There is more information on the different stages of the Knowledge in this booklet.

Getting started

You'll need a copy of the Guide to learning the Knowledge of London, also known as the Blue Book. This is where you will find a list of the 320 routes across London, as well as other information to help you during your studies. Find out more about the process and how to get your own Blue Book at tfl.gov.uk/knowledge.

The most important thing to remember is that while maps and guides are useful, you will only gain knowledge by physically travelling along the routes. Help and advice is available to all applicants and there are a number of Knowledge schools you can join which give training, and where you can meet fellow Knowledge students.

How and when you learn the routes is entirely up to you as you can fit your studying around any other commitments you may have.

The seven stages to success

The seven stages to becoming a licensed taxi driver include:

Stage 1: Self-assessment

To check you're on the right track, within six months of starting you can take a self-assessment, which is based on the first 80 runs in the Blue Book. This helps make sure that you're learning the Knowledge in the right way, and helps you to identify any problems in your learning process and how to fix them. It also helps you to build confidence for the next stage.

Stage 2: Written examination

When you are ready, you will sit a written examination which tests your knowledge of the Blue Book runs and the major landmarks (points) along the way. This is a multiple choice test with a pass mark of 60 per cent.

Stages 3-5: Appearances

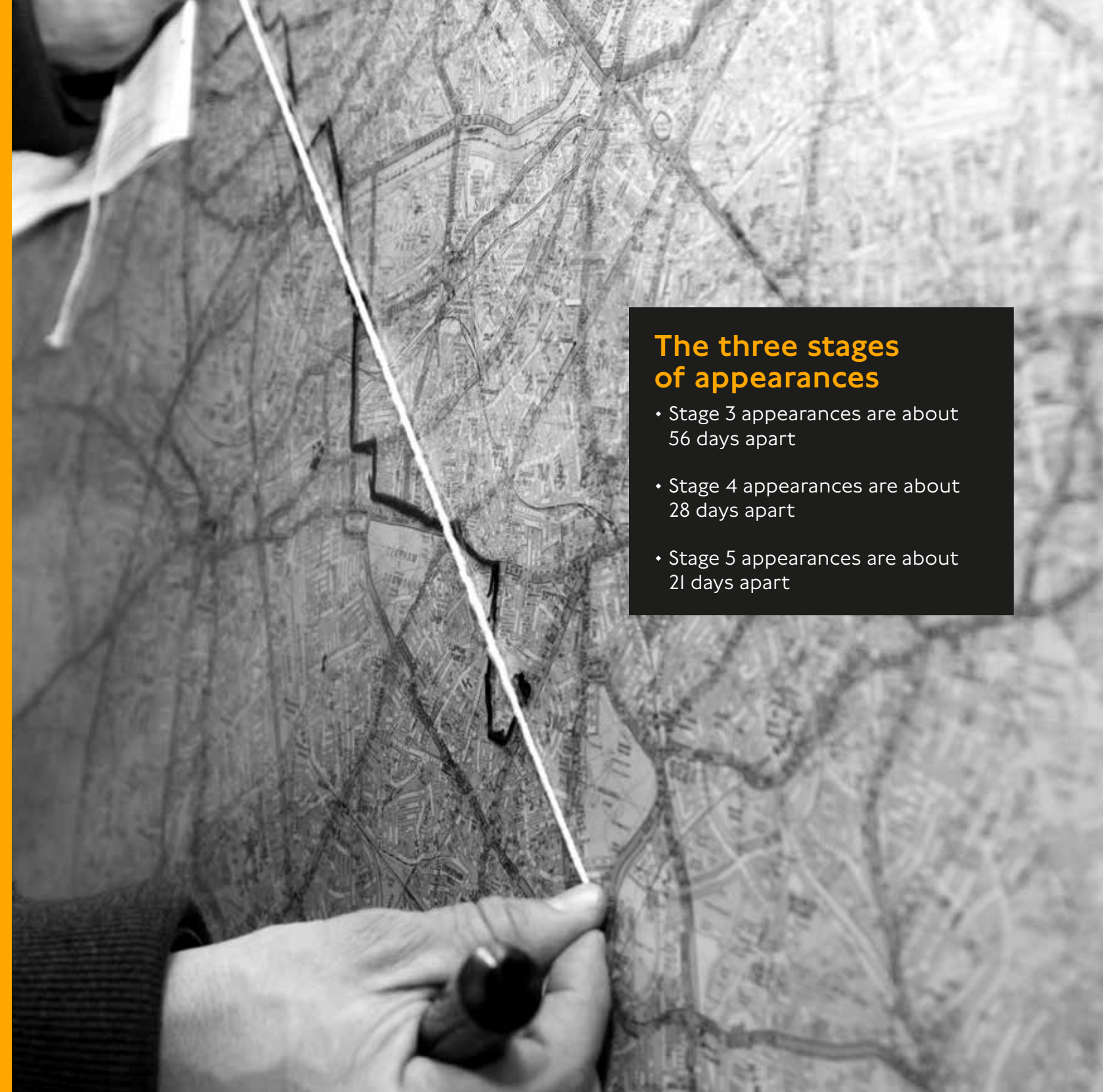
Once you have successfully passed the written examination, you'll be ready to begin working towards your stage 3 appearances. This marks the start of a series of one-to-one oral appearances with an examiner.

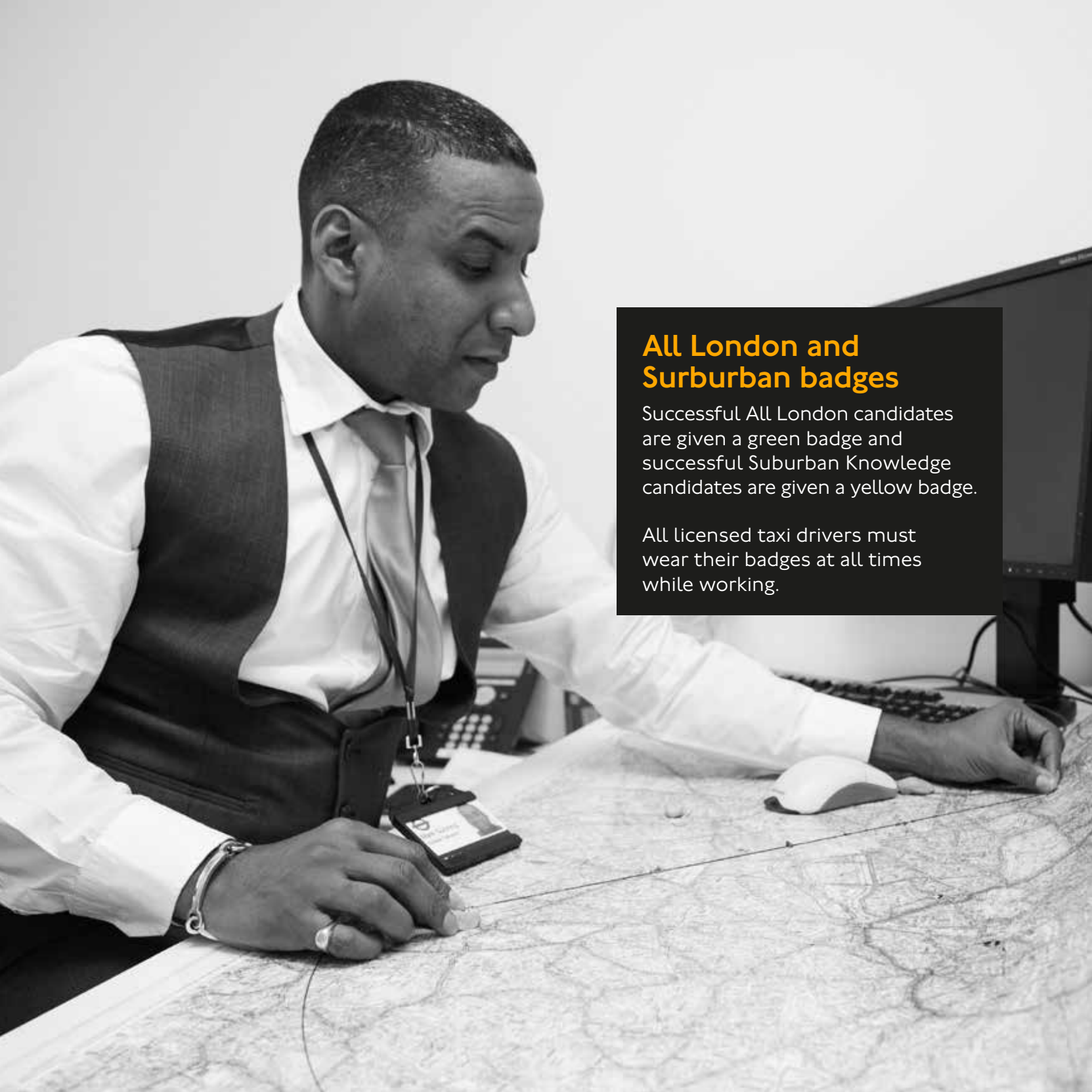
Each appearance usually consists of four questions about the shortest route between any two points in London. An appearance takes about 20 minutes and you'll get a mark from A to D.

Depending on your score you will accumulate points. When you have enough points you will progress to the next stage, when appearances will become more frequent. On average you will have to score on four appearances to accumulate enough points to progress to the next stage.

The three stages of appearances

- Stage 3 appearances are about 56 days apart
- Stage 4 appearances are about 28 days apart
- Stage 5 appearances are about 21 days apart





All London and Suburban badges

Successful All London candidates are given a green badge and successful Suburban Knowledge candidates are given a yellow badge.

All licensed taxi drivers must wear their badges at all times while working.

Stage 6: Suburban examination

By this time, you will have demonstrated to examiners that you have an outstanding knowledge of London and will be an expert in route planning. You will then need to put all the skills you have learnt into practice one last time by learning additional runs to demonstrate that you have a good working knowledge of London's suburbs.

Applicants for the All London Knowledge must learn the suburban routes from central London to the suburbs, and to and from Heathrow and London City airports.

Applicants for the nine suburban sectors must have knowledge of runs from their sector into central London.

This stage usually takes around six weeks to complete.

Stage 7: Licence application and pre-licensing talk

Well done! At this stage you can make the final application for your licence. You will then join a group of other successful candidates to receive advice about your responsibilities as a taxi driver from a Knowledge examiner. You will be given your long-awaited licence and are now ready to take to London's streets and start working!

Top tips for getting to grips with the Knowledge

- Set achievable short-term targets – for example, learning a certain number of runs by a certain date
- Do the runs in the order set out in the Blue Book – there's a reason for it!
- Do as much work as you can by travelling on London's roads – the more you do, the easier it becomes
- Recite the runs while you are exploring London as it will help you to remember the information
- Join a Knowledge school – this can make a big difference to how you go about learning. You will be with others who are also learning and can talk to people who are further along, and to instructors who have already passed
- Talk to your fellow Knowledge students to get advice and support while you're learning. It can be hard for friends and family to understand the process and talking to people who are going through it – or have already passed – can help you to keep your focus and determination
- Get yourself a call-over partner to practise what you have learnt – preferably this would be someone who is also learning the Knowledge
- Learning some of the history for the area of the run you're studying can make it easier to remember key points of interest
- Try to enjoy the process. London is steeped in history and is one of the most remarkable cities in the world. As a licensed taxi driver, your knowledge of London is immense and you can pass this on as you transport tourists, residents and workers around our great city

Join a Knowledge school – this can make a big difference to how you go about learning



Photo credit: Terry Gibbins

Knowledge candidates tell their stories

Former footballer Luke, 22, started his playing career at Charlton Athletic before going on to join Brighton.

'After my contract at Brighton ended, I started playing non-league football and one of the boys on the team told me he had just done the Knowledge. He gave me some great advice, "do this now because you'll be giving yourself a career and you'll still have time to play football".

'I was 19 when I started the Knowledge and it has given me another lease of life. It has made me grow up and take responsibility. I feel I have become a lot more mature. It's been difficult but I've learnt a lot about myself.'

Luke passed the Knowledge in June 2018.



Luke Colquhoun

Nikki, 34, continued to work for the emergency services while she studied the Knowledge.

'It has taken me four and a half years to get through the Knowledge. I wanted to do it before starting a family because it means I'll already have the tools to work as a taxi driver after I have children. It's all about work/life balance.

'I love the Knowledge. I'm a bit geeky and I didn't realise how much I love London until I started doing the Knowledge and getting to know the city better. I have learnt so much. I say to all my friends "why don't you do it?" But people are scared of the Knowledge; they say "I'll never be able to remember all that". But actually, if you take it bit by bit, everything comes together. Anyone can do it. It's all about commitment.'



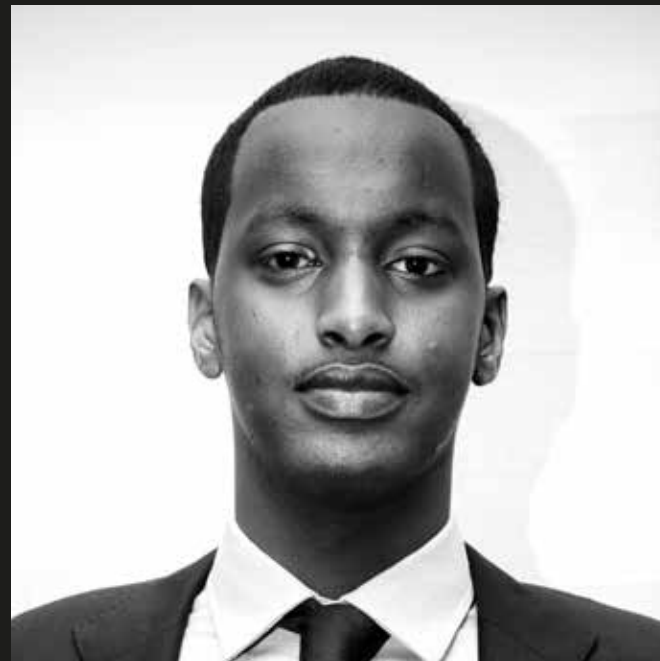
Nikki Lynch

Although he won't be able to use his licence until he is 21, Dahir passed the Knowledge when he was just 20.

'I started in May 2015, as soon as I got my driving licence and could go out on the moped.

'I did it young so I could get it out of the way and then go to university after I got my badge. Another motivation was the freedom it gives you. I want to travel the world and with a job like this, with no timetable, you can go on holiday when you want.

'The hardest part for me has been missing my social life because of the bike work. Now I've passed, my first priority will be to get used to the job once I get my badge in a year's time. Then, if I go to university in London, I'll be able to work in the evenings to pay my way through.'



Dahir Salah Abdullahi

Everyone has an equal opportunity to study the Knowledge, including those with disabilities, as 29-year-old Daniel is proving.

'I was 23 when I started, but had a six-month break after my first four appearances when I only scored once. I was obviously doing something wrong, then I met someone who was running a Knowledge school and he gave me some advice and the Knowledge made more sense to me after that.

'Even with my disability I've never really had a problem with putting the work in. In my opinion I'm just like everyone else who is doing the Knowledge. I just see myself as a normal bloke. I know other people may think "he's only got one leg, he must struggle with it", but as a taxi driver as long as you know where you are going that's all that matters.'



Daniel O'Leary

Frequently asked questions

How many taxi drivers are there in London?

There are around 24,000 taxi drivers in London, with about 21,000 green badge All London drivers and about 3,000 yellow badge Suburban drivers.

How long is it going to take me to learn the Knowledge?

It takes most people around three to four years, although the more time you put in the quicker you'll pass. Those who choose to study full time have been known to pass the Knowledge in two years. You can also fit it around work, study, or childcare and still pass. How long it takes to complete is entirely up to you.

What does TfL charge to do the Knowledge?

Information about the Knowledge fees is under 'How much will my application cost?' on our website: tfl.gov.uk/tph

Will I have to ride a moped to learn the runs?

The only way to learn London's roads and key points of interest is to physically travel along them. You can learn the runs any way that suits your learning style, be that on foot, cycle, moped or car. Most taxi drivers agree that riding a moped is the easiest.

Do I have to undergo any checks to apply?

You have to have the right to live and work in the UK and hold a full DVLA, Northern Ireland or other European Economic Area state driving licence.

You will need to meet the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) Group 2 medical standards in order to be a licensed taxi driver. Go to www.gov.uk for more information.

You will also need to apply for an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) criminal records check. More information about this process is on our website: tfl.gov.uk/tph

If I have a disability, can I still apply?

If you are physically able to drive a taxi, you can apply to do the Knowledge (see page 19). Reasonable adjustments will be made to make it possible for you to attend appearances. Contact the team in the first instance for advice and information about completing the Knowledge with a disability.

Your taxi can be adapted to make it easier for you to drive, just make sure that the adaptations are approved by our Policy and Standards team so your taxi will pass inspection.

How long do appearances last?

The first stage 3 appointment is 30 minutes and all of the rest for stages 3, 4 and 5 are 20 minutes each. You will be asked to recite four runs at each appearance.





You can start your application by registering online. You will be asked for some personal details so an account can be set up for you

Applying to become a taxi driver

To apply to become a London taxi driver, you must:

- Be at least 18 years old at the time of applying (although you cannot be licensed until you are 21 years old)
- Hold a full DVLA, Northern Ireland, or other European Economic Area state driving licence
- Have the right to live and work in the UK
- Meet DVLA group 2 medical standards and pass an enhanced DBS criminal records check

How to apply

Applying to become a London taxi driver couldn't be easier. You can start your application by registering online. You will be asked for some personal details so an account can be set up. Go to: tph.tfl.gov.uk

You can also request an application pack by calling 0343 222 4444.

Knowledge initial talk

Once you have been accepted on to the Knowledge, you'll get an invite to an initial talk with other successful candidates. At the talk you will get advice from a Knowledge examiner about the different stages of the Knowledge and the best way to approach your studies.

The benefits of being a London taxi driver

Work/life balance

Fit your work hours around family commitments (school runs and holidays). Or if you are a student, fit it around your studies

Freedom

You are your own boss, setting your own hours

Variety

Every day you will be meeting new people from all around the globe

Pride


Learning the Knowledge is a remarkable achievement

Heritage

London's taxi drivers are a much-loved part of the city's culture – and at the heart of its future

Camaraderie

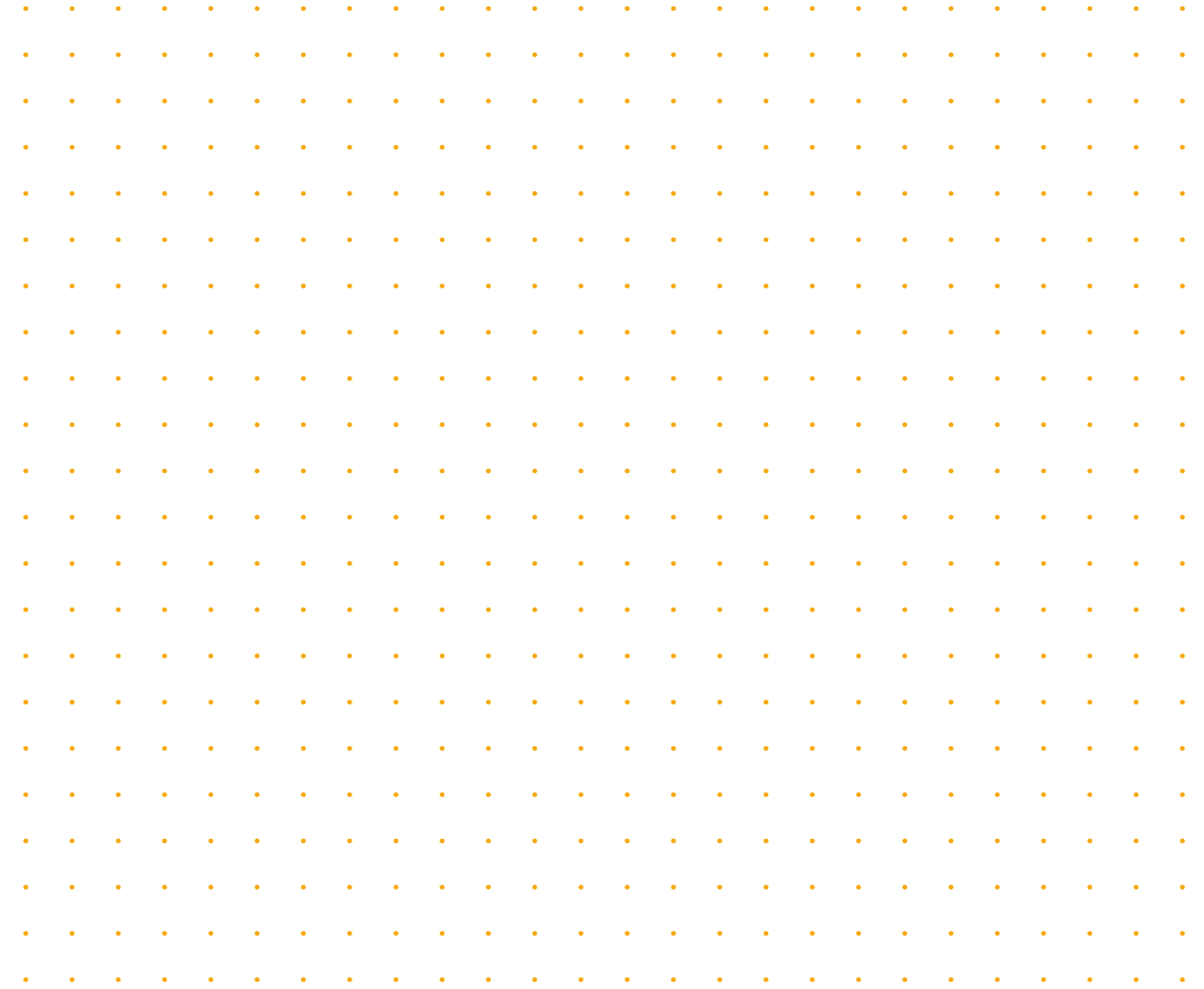
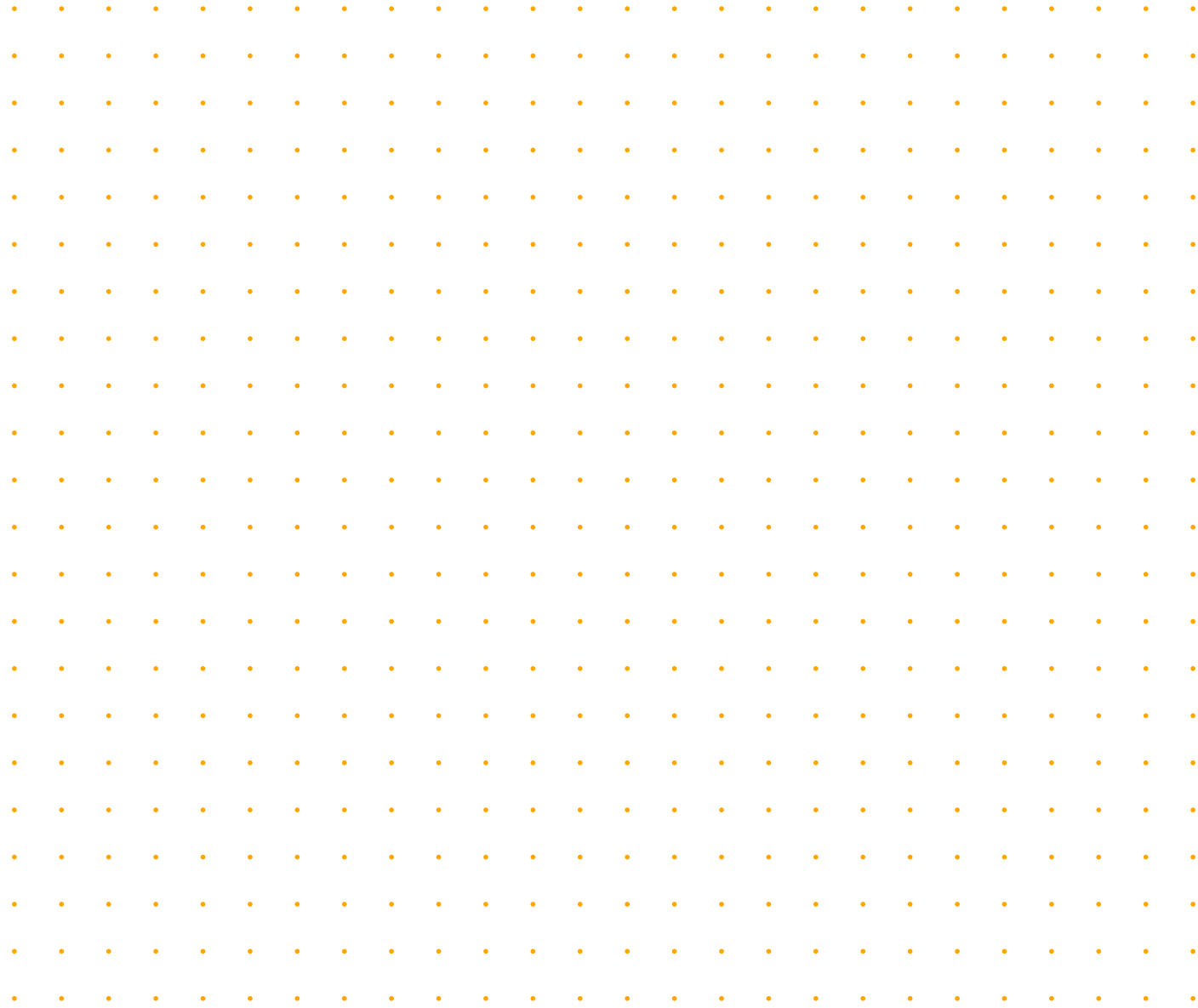
You are part of a close-knit community and many taxi drivers become life-long friends



‘One hundred per cent, do it! For me, the freedom of the job is the best part’

Jack, Knowledge graduate

Notes





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July 2018

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