

Free HGV training provider 'inundated' with applications amid driver shortage

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A driver agency that has offered to stump up £5,000 training costs for new HGV drivers has been inundated with applications.

Pertemps Driving Academy is offering training at sites in Worcestershire, Yorkshire and, soon, Bristol, as it seeks to fill massive shortfalls in the sector.

It has had more than 5,000 people apply for the training roles since it launched the scheme last month. In return, new recruits sign up with a two year-contract with the agency.

John Poliquin, Director said: "It has been really hectic to say the least. We have been overwhelmed with interest. We currently have 25 people in the training scheme and another 25 coming up behind them..

"It's a mixed bag of people – people looking to change careers, wanting to give it a go for financial reasons and people who already have the LGV C class licence for rigid vehicles who want to train to drive artics with the class E.

"We will look to train see as many people in the industry as

we can.”

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Pertemps Driving Academy [launched the scheme to offer free training](#) in return for two years service from new recruits.

A number of other big name firms have schemes in place including Co-Op and Aldi.

Aldi has an [ongoing recruitment scheme for its apprentice drivers](#). The course takes up to 15 months and the starting salary is more than £10 an hour.

The Government is also offering to pay up to £7,000 for logistics businesses to take on new staff under its Large goods vehicle (LGV) driver C and E (level 2) Apprenticeship scheme.

The scheme takes around 13 months.

There are hundreds of businesses offering the course listed on the Government website with [a tool to search for apprenticeships in your area](#).

The UK has an estimated shortfall of 90,000 lorry drivers, a problem that has worsened after an exodus of European drivers due to Brexit and a backlog of driver training testing during Covid.

And that's on top of a historical shortage of drivers.

The government announced plans to encourage more new drivers on to the road by freeing up to 50,000 HGV test slots.

Transport secretary Grant Shapps told the Commons on Monday that eliminating the need for some car drivers who want to tow a trailer to take an additional test will allow about 30,000 more HGV tests every single year.

Talking about the HGV test itself, he said: "Tests will also be made more efficient by removing the reversing exercise element and vehicles with trailers. The uncoupling and recoupling exercise, having that test separately carried out by a third party so, it's still being done.

"Third, we're making it quicker to get a licence to drive an articulated vehicle without first having to get a licence for a smaller vehicle and this will make around 20,000 more HGV tests available every year."

The changes are part of a plan to address widespread supply chain issues caused by the driver shortage, which has hit a range of sectors including food, drink and medicines.

Mr Shapps said the changes, which still need to be approved by parliament, would generate additional test capacity "very rapidly".

He added: "These changes will not change the standard of driving required to drive an HGV, with road safety continuing to be of paramount importance."

But Mr Poliquin said he was concerned about the changes, arguing that removing the reversing element in the test itself is a 'backward step'.

"I don't think that tackling the backlog of tests by cutting parts of that test is the right thing to do.

"Our job is to get drivers on the road who feel confident and are capable and I don't think that the number of extra tests you would get done in a week by cutting those important elements, like reversing, will help that."

The Road Haulage Association (RHA) has also raised concern that changes like removing the reversing manoeuvre from the test – which makes it shorter – and assessing it separately is a step backwards when it comes to safety.

Brian Kenny from the RHA said: “According to HSE, there’s about seven people knocked down and killed in yards each year with vehicles reversing.

“I think it is a step back. More than one person is one too many, as far as we’re concerned.

“Going forward on the roads should be assessed and should be tested. It’s equally important to test properly how an individual reverses and manoeuvres off the road.”

ParcelHero has also warned it is a step too far.

Head of Consumer Research, David Jinks M.I.L.T, says: ‘Of course, everyone is concerned about the growing truck driver shortage, which is creating empty supermarket shelves and threatening to blight Christmas. However, splicing and dicing the HGV test is, quite frankly, an astonishing “solution” to the problem.

‘Merging the separate rigid and articulated tests cuts too many corners. The gap between obtaining a level C licence for driving a standard truck and level C+E for driving an artic existed for a reason: to ensure drivers gained experience before mastering an articulated truck. Likewise, dropping the reversing exercise and the coupling and uncoupling elements of the main test, and farming them out to third party testers, is a jaw-dropping compromise.

‘Furthermore, the decision to drop the separate test for car drivers to show they can manoeuvre with a larger-towed vehicle, such as a trailer or caravan, will also make our roads more dangerous.”

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