

Cambridge City Council adopts innovative technology from TestReach to enable flexible and secure delivery of private hire and taxi licensing examinations



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Background

Cambridge City Council is a licensing authority responsible for managing the license application process for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage drivers licences, within the City of Cambridge. To obtain a driver’s licence, applicants must participate in an online training course regarding safeguarding and equality. They must then pass one safeguarding test and a driver knowledge test. Once both tests are passed by achieving at least 80%, the applicant can move to the next stage of the process.

In the past, applicants had to come in-person to Council offices during working hours to complete their exam, which was invigilated by a Council staff member. This approach offered very little flexibility in the time the exam could be taken, with the same slot being issued to multiple applicants. This meant taxi trade members may have needed to take time off work, at a time they wished to be working. Furthermore, council staff would be required to invigilate exams, removing them from other work requirements.

Solution

The COVID 19 pandemic necessitated a change in approach. The Council considered outsourcing training and exams, but this was not a preferred option due to the importance of maintaining control over the quality of the knowledge base used for the examinations.

The decision was taken to use remote proctoring as a solution. By choosing TestReach, Cambridge City Council could guarantee that the quality and security of the exam process would be maintained to the highest standard. Features of interest included:

- Question banking functionality allowed different topic areas to be segregated, which could then be assessed and reported on individually.

- Randomised exam papers could be delivered to each applicant while still testing the same topics, in order to protect question content.
- Immediate marking on submission of the exam.
- Results could be issued to the applicant via a PDF report, with guidance on where they had performed well or poorly.
- Live remote proctoring - an integral part of the TestReach application – providing a robust, reliable and secure exam delivery mechanism.
- TestReach supervisors have a good understanding of the underlying application, which ensures a professional and supportive service when monitoring exams and prevents cheating.
- On-demand availability of exams, so that applicants had the flexibility to pick an exam time that suited them.
- Up to three re-sits were available for failed applicants.
- A pass mark could be specified for each topic, rather than an ‘across the board’ mark, ensuring that applicants had the required knowledge in all areas.

Results

Most importantly, there is a much improved candidate experience, which is a very positive outcome for the Council. In addition, prior to TestReach, it was possible for someone to pass the whole exam while still being deficient in certain subjects. Now there are controls in place to ensure that candidates must achieve at least 80% in each of the subject areas in order to pass the exam.

An extensive question bank has been created in which there are many knowledge questions, grouped into different pools within a detailed taxonomy. The exam consists of a randomised paper pulled from these question pools (linear on-the-fly testing – LOFT), which protects the

exam content and enables exams to be offered on demand.

When results are issued to the applicant, they receive a clear PDF report showing how they have performed in each area, so if they fail, they can focus their study before the next attempt.

This flexible on-demand approach to exam timing has enabled improvements in quality, as it allows candidates more time to study all relevant material before taking the exam. Previously, for the safeguarding exam, training and the exam were both completed in one day.

“Because applicants can now take the exam at a time that suits them, rather than on the same day as the training, it means we can now provide videos on subjects like safeguarding which applicants can watch as often as they wish before sitting the exam. Overall, this will increase knowledge and retention of the key points that are really important,” said Wangari Njiiri, Environmental Health and Licensing Support Team Leader at Cambridge City Council.

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