

The Minibus Check Run



The University of Surrey
Students' Union

The responsibility of driving a [minibus] is one which should only be undertaken after careful consideration and proper training. Driving a minibus requires additional skills in order to be able to handle the vehicle safely; it's not simply like driving a large car.

(Guidance – Section 19 and 22 Permits, Department for Transport, 15th March 2019).

The Check Runs are carried out by a University of Surrey Students' Union examiner, in collaboration with the insurance provider Endsleigh, in order to establish that drivers are safe and competent before being permitted to drive long-wheelbase vans (3 seats), short and long-wheelbase Multiple People Vehicles (MPVs) (up to 9 seats), and long-wheelbase Person Carrying Vehicles (PCVs) (up to 15 seats).

In order to drive vans or MPVs, candidates must be over 19 years old and have a valid substantive EU driving licence for manual cars. Only candidates who are over 21 years old and have 2 or more years driving experience can drive PCVs.

Check runs are carried out in long-wheelbase MPVs so that successful candidates under 21 years old, or with less than 2 years driving experience, will not have to undertake another check run in order to drive a PCV when they eventually qualify.

Ordinarily, to drive a PCV, a driver would have to undergo a medical examination and pass an extended theory, hazard perception and practical assessment with the DVSA. The Department of Transport Small Bus Permit provides an exemption to this, so long as a driver can self-certify as able to pass the medical examination – see the DVLA guidance online at <https://tinyurl.com/group2medical> for more information, or ask the USSU Transport Team, or your examiner for more information.

It is important to note the following:

- **It is entirely possible** to drive a long-wheelbase vehicle safely without any prior experience, despite the guidance from the Department of Transport quoted above – the DVLA would not permit it if it were not safe. Most candidates pass first time, some on their second time, and a few on their third. It may be that candidates need a little more practice before they are confident about taking passengers on-board, so passing second or third time is nothing to be ashamed of.
- The examiners are not instructors. They are not employed to offer instruction or tuition, nor will they do so. In attending a Check Run, candidates are confirming that they are already a safe and competent car driver and believe that they possess the skills necessary to drive a long wheelbase vehicle safely.

What to expect on the day.

Candidates should report to the Student's Union reception where they will meet their examiner. Examiners are employed to examine candidates driving skills and competence, and advise the University Union as to a candidate's suitability to become an authorised driver.

The Check Run will take a little over one hour. It will consist of:

- Introductions between candidates and their examiner, and an opportunity to have a discussion about any concerns that candidates may have.
- Explanations of University Union policy on booking vehicles, collecting keys, and carrying out safety checks on vehicles prior to use.
- A drive of around 20 miles, incorporating dual carriageways, rural and urban environments including city ring-roads and a reverse parking manoeuvre.

To pass the Check Run, a candidate must demonstrate a reasonable standard of competence in handling the vehicle. The candidate must also be able to apply the rules of the Highway Code. They must show that, generally, they have an understanding of the principals involved in driving PCVs and of the application of those principles, and can demonstrate proper control in a wide variety of situations.

A candidate cannot be assessed as competent if during the Check Run they demonstrate:

- Persistent Driving Faults, or
- A single Dangerous Fault

A Driving Fault is one which in itself is not potentially dangerous. However, a candidate who habitually commits the same Driving Fault (such as hitting the kerb) three or more times, or who demonstrates an inability to deal with any of the situations encountered on the Check Run, cannot be regarded as competent to pass the Check Run.

A Dangerous Fault is one involving potential or actual danger to the examiner, candidate, the general public or property. If a candidate makes a Dangerous Fault at any point of the Check Run, they will not be regarded as competent to pass.

Common reasons candidates are not regarded as competent



Uncontrolled stopping at hazards due to inadequate, late or harsh use of the footbrake.

The University Union PCVs can weigh up to 4.25 tonnes. Candidates will have to brake earlier and smoother than they would ordinarily in a car – arriving at hazards slowly, in a controlled manner, ready to stop safely if required.

Observation skills

It is important that we are constantly on the look out for potential and developing hazards whilst driving, even when we are stationary such as waiting at traffic lights. Candidates who only look at the road that is immediately in front of them are often caught out by sharp bends and pinch points, arriving too fast and unable to stop smoothly. Take in as much information you can and use it to build a plan, then if necessary, communicate that plan with other road users through positioning and use of indicators.

Erratic steering or removing both hands from the steering wheel at any time.

It is vital to maintain control of the direction of the vehicle at all times. Erratic steering can cause the vehicle to become unbalanced and in extreme circumstances the vehicle could overturn.

Persistently hitting the kerb, cutting right hand corners (particularly where the view is limited) or failing to maintain lane discipline.

Allowances are made for candidates in that this may be the first time they have driven a longer-wheelbase vehicle. However, hitting the kerb or cutting the corner on offside bends three or more times will be considered to be a persistent Driving Fault.

Remember - If the front wheels nearly cut the corner, the rear wheels certainly will.

Successful candidates take sharp bends wide and slow, accounting for the length of the vehicle.

Failure to apply or release the handbrake correctly and when necessary.

Uncontrolled rolling backwards when intending to drive forwards is a dangerous fault, as is uncontrolled rolling forwards when intending to reverse. Use of the handbrake enables safe control over the vehicle.

Uncontrolled use of the clutch.

When driving a new vehicle, it takes some time to get used to the clutch position. However, candidates should be able to master the clutch quickly and the inability to move off smoothly will be treated in the same way as a Driving Fault.

Failure to make effective use of the mirrors.

One of the most common complaints of new PCV drivers is the lack of visibility to the rear, and the significant blind-spots to the sides of the vehicle. Candidates must carry out frequent checks in the mirrors, and well before signalling and performing manoeuvres.

Giving inadequate clearance when passing parked vehicles or obstructions.

PCVs are over seven feet wide. They require more space to manoeuvre.

Failure to give way to pedestrians on a pedestrian crossing.

Almost one out of three road accidents happen within a mile of a motorist's destination. One candidate missed out on a pass by not giving way to pedestrians who were on a pedestrian crossing, 200 meters from the end of the Check Run.

What can I do to prepare?

If you've read through this document, you should be well prepared already. Stay calm, and talk to your examiner on the day to discuss any concerns that you have. The only stupid questions are the ones that don't get asked!

The USSU Minibus Handbook has a great deal of helpful information available on USSU vehicles:

<https://tinyurl.com/ussuhandbook>

You can also have a read of the RoSPA guidance on driving minibuses:

<https://tinyurl.com/rospabus>

Try applying some of the principals of driving a larger vehicle when driving your own – brake earlier, arrive at roundabouts and junctions slower, and maintain two hands on the wheel unless you're changing gear or using the handbrake.

From all of us at the Union, we wish you the best of luck.