



HAPPY TRAILS

You're hired. It's what any apprentice wants to hear from a prospective employer, and with trailblazer apprenticeships overhauling the previous training model and responding to employers' needs, would-be technicians have never had more opportunities.

Although launched in 2016, the roots of trailblazers stretch back to 2012 when the government commissioned entrepreneur and former Dragon's Den TV investor Doug Richard to review the apprenticeship model and make recommendations that would make them more rigorous and relevant to companies. These were subsequently accepted, and the next few years involved employers and training providers forming groups in their relevant sectors to develop the new standard. As a result, the bus and coach engineering technician apprenticeship and the heavy vehicle service and maintenance technician apprenticeship were launched in 2016.

In April, IMI assessed four apprentices at Arriva's Edmonton, London bus depot (assorted pictures above). A second assessment was planned for May at S&B Automotive Academy, according to Barry Williams, IMI end-point assessment manager for the south. Also in April, IMI carried out its first end-point assessment for the heavy goods vehicle technician trailblazer, of three apprentices at Easton

Trailblazer apprenticeships for bus, coach and HGV technicians turned three years old in 2019. As the first wave of apprentices now finish their assessments, hopes for the programme's future remain high, reports Chris Tindall

DOWN TO A 'T'

No sooner have apprenticeships had a shake-up than another new educational standard - T-Levels - comes along. Starting in 2020, these two-year courses follow GCSEs and are equivalent to three A-Levels, and have also been developed in collaboration with employers. They are designed to offer students a mixture of classroom learning and on-the-job experience during an industry placement of at least 315 hours, which is approximately 45 days.

Lloyd Mason says: "The proposed T-Levels are planned to deliver a qualification to Level 3, which is the same level as the apprenticeship standard. Level 3 is accepted by the bus and coach and HGV industry as a skilled engineer; I don't believe a school leaver with a Level 3 technical qualification will have the same competences as an apprentice who will have spent three years in the workplace and with technical training."

& Otley College (Norfolk); for that, City and Guilds is another end-point assessor.

Independent training consultant Lloyd Mason (at far left in main image above), who also chaired the employer-led bus, coach and HGV trailblazer group before retiring from Arriva earlier this year, explains that the assessment has changed. Previous apprentices gained their technical certificate after passing a written test. Marks towards the overall results were gained by passing end-of-block tests.

Under the trailblazer, the employer, training provider and apprentice must all agree that the apprentice is ready for the end-point assessment. Mason says: "Unlike the framework apprenticeship, which only assessed skills and knowledge, the trailblazer also assesses behaviours. First, the apprentice undertakes a written exam consisting of two one-hour multiple-choice papers and a two-hour test. The pass mark is set at 70%. Next, the apprentice is observed conducting a vehicle inspection lasting up to 90 minutes and given 120 minutes to diagnose and repair a fault on a bus or coach. The third part is a one-hour professional discussion, where the apprentice's learning journey and behaviours are assessed. An independent engineering manager is present and, to be successful, the apprentice must pass all three assessments." The trailblazer is graded pass, fail or distinction, he adds.



PITFALLS IN TRAILBLAZERS – AN ACCOUNT FROM VBRA

The commercial vehicle division of the National Body Repair Association, VBRA, began to research the possibility of a trailblazer apprenticeship for the vehicle bodybuilding industry in March 2017, according to its special projects manager Gerry Braddock.

He says: "For over 20 years there has been little provision for this industry, with employers being forced to compromise by using the existing engineering framework for any apprentice training. CV body repair is catered for with body repair technician and paint technician apprenticeships. The thing that isn't is bodybuilder apprentices."

He recalls: "With the help and guidance of some very positive training providers, this all led to a proposal that was put before the Institute for Apprenticeships. Our relationship manager guided us through the minefield that led to many setbacks and disappointments. It became apparent that we would have to compromise and use existing new standards. The facts are simple: when developing a new trailblazer standard, you cannot include anything that already exists in any other standard."

Instead, it has decided to follow other new trailblazers. They are: engineering operative (Level 2; ST0537); engineering technician (Level 3; ST0457); engineering fitter (Level 3; ST0432); metal fabricator (Level 3; ST0607). "They are all based on delivering a versatile skilled apprentice who is completely at home in the workshop of their employer. We realise that the use of these standards is a compromise, but this is the way with the new standards for all," he says.

Training providers offering these new apprenticeships include Hull Training, SETA Training of Stockport and Training 2000 of Blackburn.

Braddock concludes: "We await the commitment of other training providers, but without the commitment of employers, this is difficult."

A WORK IN PROGRESS

Mason says that while he believes trailblazers remain a "work in progress" as employers, training providers and apprentices become familiar with the new requirements, he firmly believes that they will be a great success. "The career prospects for an apprentice entering the sector have never been better. Employers are looking for highly skilled technicians to work on ever more complex vehicles and to become managers in the future. I also believe the opportunities for female apprentices are greatly improved, with employers more prepared to make the adjustments necessary to accommodate diversity.

"An apprentice starting out today will have the choice of becoming a technical expert, going into management, or getting involved in special projects such as business excellence and lean engineering as operators look to make marginal business improvements that give them the edge over competitors."

Among the employers involved in creating the HGV technician standard is Volvo Group UK. Its first apprentices will not take their end-point assessment until August 2020 at the earliest, but Adam Plastow, the group's commercial academy manager, says it provided "a key voice" in the changes.

"We always developed very competent technicians; however, the standards enable us to do it without being governed by restrictive

qualifications, and they enable us to adjust the content requirements when we need to."

MAN Truck and Bus UK says that the opportunity to have a say in the layout of the standard, how apprentices achieve the qualification and also end-point testing by an independent assessment body also appealed. Paul O'Cain, MAN head of UK service, says the trailblazers were required "to ensure the basic underpinning knowledge needed to qualify as an apprentice is maintained throughout the programme. For example, something a tech apprentice may learn in year one could be tested at the end of year three, not learned once and forgotten under the previous framework."

Another engineering apprenticeship is also currently under consideration. Mason says that the Level 4 Road Transport Engineering Manager is being developed in response to employer demand to provide a structured training programme and a recognised qualification for an engineering manager, although the current emphasis has been on getting the technical apprenticeship bedded down. **TE**

FURTHER INFORMATION:

T-Levels – www.is.gd/isoyug

HGV apprenticeship – www.is.gd/oxamiz

Bus apprenticeship – www.is.gd/vorona

Manager apprenticeship – www.is.gd/olumar