



There has been a gradual shift in focus of the Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) from the driver to the transport manager. John Kendall investigates the aims of Operator CPC

Smooth

Mention the Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) in the past year or two and most people involved in the transport sector would assume you're talking about the Driver CPC. That's only to be expected, since this qualification will affect all HGV and passenger vehicle licence holders as it is phased in over the next four years.

In some ways, it is regrettable that the regulations use the same terminology for the Operator CPC. Although the two share the same objective – to ensure that drivers and operators demonstrate the required professional competence to discharge their responsibilities – the qualifications and their respective requirements are very different.

You don't need Transport Engineer to tell you that running a transport or passenger transport operation is a demanding business. As if that wasn't enough, the demands of risk management, in all its forms, and of ongoing changes in transport-related legislation, mean that operators need to keep themselves well informed. Fortunately, there is plenty of help from organisations such as IRTE, the Freight Transport Association (FTA) and the Road Haulage Association (RHA).

Getting back to basics, ensuring that transport operators are 'professionally competent', or otherwise employing transport managers who are deemed to be so, does not give specific information about what operators need to know to gain a CPC. The simple reason why anyone would need to have an Operator CPC is to enable them to hold an operator's licence, which is a requirement for all hire and reward operations.

No Operator CPC: no O-licence. The exception remains own-account haulage. Since the haulage operation is not designed to generate income as a direct result of transport, only a restricted O-licence is needed in these circumstances, for which no Operator CPC is warranted.

That said, Operator CPCs come in different shapes and sizes: indeed, there are four separate certificates representing the main qualifications. They all amount to OCR Level 3 Certificate of Professional Competence, but in national road haulage, international road haulage, national passenger transport and international passenger transport.

OCR is a reference to the examinations board that sets the tests on behalf of the Department for Transport – the Oxford and Cambridge and RSA Examinations Board. Candidates have a range of

The seven units of Operator CPC

Unit 1:	Understanding the Legal and Business Context for Road Transport Operations
Unit 2:	Understanding National Road Haulage Transport Operations
Unit 3:	Understanding National Road Passenger Transport Operations
Unit 4:	Managing National Road Haulage Transport Operations
Unit 5:	Managing National Road Passenger Transport Operations
Unit 6:	Managing International Road Haulage Transport Operations
Unit 7:	Managing International Road Passenger Transport Operations

operator

options regarding study for their certificates. They could undertake a full-time tuition course, usually lasting for five days for the national certificates. Courses for the international certificates are usually three days longer.

These are, however, likely to be the most expensive study options, particularly if the course involves overnight stays. Also, not all transport operations will be able to release a member of staff for up to a week and a half. On the other hand, the advantage is that the course is covered and completed in a relatively short period.

However, it is also possible to follow a home study course. This is likely to be cheaper, but requires a fair amount of self-discipline to set aside the time needed to complete the work. The advantage is that candidates can follow the course when it's convenient to them. Some training providers will offer training at company premises, too.

Modular learning for operators

Such courses are modular, with candidates selecting the relevant units for the qualification they require. In total, there are seven units.

Unit 1 consists of 30 multiple-choice questions. Units 2 and 3 comprise 40 multiple-choice questions. And Units 4 and 5 relate to a case study, with eight extended response questions. Finally, units 6 and 7 are assessed by extended answer questions.

Each of the national CPCs will require passes in three units and they are effectively self-selecting. Unit 1 is common to both; then taking the CPC in National Road Haulage, for example, would require passes in Units 1, 2 and 4. For the International CPCs, passes in four units are required – effectively the national CPC, plus the additional relevant international unit. Hence the longer courses. Currently, CPCs for Northern Ireland differ, in that the national Units 2 and 3 cover specific issues relevant to operations there.

There are some exemptions to the CPCs, if the candidate can demonstrate that he or she holds a recognised alternative qualification, but none of these represents a short-cut. Currently included among the exemptions are those who are Honorary Fellows, Fellows or Members of the Society of Operations Engineers, and hence IRTE.

Unit 1 covers many areas, some perhaps more obvious than others. For instance, transport contracts, types of businesses, how companies are

formed and dissolved, taxation, health and safety legislation, and the working time directive might be expected subject areas. On the other hand, you might not have considered practices relating to public relations and marketing among the things you need to know about. Full details of the course content for each unit and past examination papers are available for free download from the OCR website (www.ocr.org.uk). A simple search for 'transport cpc' will lead you to the relevant documents.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) is the body tasked with ensuring that examinations are carried out under acceptable conditions. At least one copy of the JCQ booklet, 'Instructions for Conducting Examinations', should be available in every examination room. The pages are also available for free download from the JCQ website (www.jcq.org.uk). The instructions are not specific to CPC examinations, but are those drawn up for a wide range of public examinations, including City and Guilds and GCSE.

The examinations are quite challenging, as might be expected for individuals who will have the responsibility of running a transport operation for profit, and be bound by a number of complex national and international regulations. OCR publishes the pass rates and, for 2009, these rates by unit can be seen in Figure 1.

In general, the pass rates appear to be quite reasonable. Since all of the candidates have to take Unit 1, the 62% pass rate is very encouraging. It is difficult to comment generally on the rates, because there are a number of course providers throughout the country and the results do not show the pass rates for candidates that hail from these training establishments. OCR employs centre inspectors, recruiting an additional 70 last year. These inspectors are tasked with maintaining standards by making unannounced visits to CPC centres at least once a year. TE

Figure 1: The percentage of candidates (transport managers) who took the examinations in each unit to earn their Operator CPC

Unit 1	62%
Unit 2	50%
Unit 3	58%
Unit 4	54%
Unit 5	37%
Unit 6	73%
Unit 7	68%

