

UNION MINIBUS TESTS – WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE DAY...

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

All check runs are carried out in long-wheelbase vans so that candidates under 21 years old and/or without 2 years experience will not have to undertake another check run to drive a long-wheelbase van or PCV when they eventually qualify.

These check runs enable candidates to drive these vehicles under controlled conditions, with an experienced professional driver there to assist if necessary to avoid making serious mistakes that may place the vehicle or occupants at risk.

It is important to note the following:

- The examiner is not an ADI instructor. They are not paid or employed to offer instruction or tuition. They are solely paid to examine your driving level and advise the University Union whether you are a driver with a sufficient standard of safety and competence to drive longer wheelbase vehicles.
- By undertaking a check run, candidates are confirming that they are already a safe and competent car driver. The examiner will not provide instruction in order to get candidates to the standard of a safe driver.
- **It is entirely possible to drive a long-wheelbase vehicle, such as a PCV with no prior experience** – the DVSA would not permit it if it were not safe. Many candidates pass first time, some on their second and some on their third. Not passing first time is not a big deal – it may be that candidates need a little more practice before they are confident about taking passengers onboard.

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 18 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 principles involved in driving PCVs and of the application of those principles, and can demonstrate proper control in a wide variety of situations.

The first half of the route will not be assessed as strictly as the second. This enables students to get used to the vehicle and make minor driving faults that are often associated with driving a longer-wheelbase vehicle for the first time.

A candidate will not be assessed as competent if they demonstrate **Persistent Driving Faults** or a single **Dangerous Faults**, as explained below.

A driving fault is one which in itself is not potentially dangerous. However, a candidate who habitually commits a driving fault in one aspect of driving throughout the second half of the check run, or demonstrates an inability to deal with certain situations, 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.

Some common causes of candidates not being regarded as competent are:

- Uncontrolled stopping at hazards such as an inadequate, late or harsh use of 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 their own car, arriving at a hazard slowly and in a controlled manner ready to stop smoothly if required.
- Erratic steering or removing both hands from the steering wheel
 - 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
 - Allowances are made for candidates in that this may be the first time they have driven a longer-wheelbase vehicle. However, in the second half of the check run, hitting the kerb three or more times will be considered to be persistent.
- Uncontrolled use of 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 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 side of the vehicle. Candidates must carry out frequent checks in the mirrors, and well before signalling and performing manoeuvres.
- Not allowing adequate clearance when passing parked vehicles and other obstructions.
 - PCVs are over seven feet wide. They require more space to manoeuvre.
 - If you don't know, take it slow.
 - If still in doubt, then get out. It is safer to park and alight from the vehicle when manoeuvring than to risk a collision.
- Cutting right hand corners, particularly where the view is limited, or failing to maintain lane discipline.
 - The rear axle of the vehicle will take the shortest route. If the front wheels cut the corner, the rear wheels will too. Take bends wide and slow.
- Failure to give precedence to pedestrians on a pedestrian crossing.

- Almost one out of three road accidents happen within a mile of a motorist's destination. Arriving back on campus is not the time to switch off – one candidate failed within 200 meters of the end of the check run by failing to give way to pedestrians on campus.
- Failure to apply or release the handbrake correctly and when necessary.
 - Rolling backwards when pulling off forwards is potentially dangerous, as is rolling forwards when reversing. Use of the handbrake enables safe control over the vehicle.

What can I do to prepare?

If you've read through this document, you should be well prepared already.

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.