

Thinking of becoming a driving instructor?

It's not as rosy as advertisers make out!

Unemployed?

Good redundancy package?

Want to make loads of money?

Easy – DON'T even think about becoming an ADI!

The driver training industry is being flooded with weak, newly qualified, and badly trained instructors, according to Professor Peter Russell, Director of DERF, the Driver Education Research Foundation.

Professor Russell warned the last Labour Secretary of State for Transport, Geoffrey Hoon – the situation has apparently got worse since then - that plans being developed by the Driving Standards Agency to control the spurious claims and poor recruitment strategies of some instructor training firms will be too late to save the industry from a glut of under-trained instructors.

As unemployment becomes a national problem, thousands of newly redundant workers are facing the challenge of getting jobs and earning money again.

When British Steel closed down its mills in the town of Corby, Northamptonshire in the early 1980s, many hundreds of redundant workers – seduced by national advertising campaigns telling them how much money they could earn as self-employed driving instructors – spent their redundancy packages on ADI training courses.

Then, as soon as they qualified for a trainee driving instructor's licence, they charged their eager clients less than half the price of the existing instructors in the area. The result of this became known as the 'Corby Effect'. Even though fewer than 27% of these new trainees eventually qualified as Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs), in the six months or so that they were offering cheap training, hundreds of fully qualified ADIs lost clients and faced unemployment themselves – except, in their cases, there was no redundancy package to fall back on.

Less than 27% failed to qualify and lost most of their redundancy money, some lost all of it.

And according to Professor Russell, it is happening again, only this time on a much greater scale. A fully qualified driving instructor has to pass three tests: a theory test, a driving test, and a test of ability to instruct. Having passed the first two, a partly qualified instructor (PDI) is allowed to give driving lessons for six months. After that, the instructor must pass the third test to be allowed to continue teaching people to drive. Would-be instructors are allowed three attempts to pass the third part, and if they fail they have to wait two years before they can begin at Part 1 again.

There is now a proliferation of national press and television advertising encouraging the unemployed to take instructor training at a cost of up to £4,000 a time. The

advertising is straightforward: no previous experience is needed and earnings of £30,000 per year, plus a free car and a guaranteed supply of clients, are there for the asking.

No one mentions that statistically over half of them will fail the theory test, lose their training fees and be back on the scrap heap. No one mentions that 60% of the survivors will fail to pass their advanced driving test to qualify for the trainee instructor's licence needed before they can begin to earn any money at all. No one mentions that more than 70% of those who gain trainee licences will fail to pass their instructional test.

Over 70% will not pass the exams and fail to qualify.

And, if they are in an area that already has enough instructors to meet the local need (there are now 46,000 ADIs nationwide, and half as many again partly-trained instructors), even those who succeed in qualifying by passing all three ADI tests may struggle to earn a reasonable wage, after paying their franchise fee, and/or motoring costs, plus all their business administration costs.

There were 44,000 ADIs when this article was written last year – there are now 46,000 plus thousands more in training. There are hundreds of ADIs in the area covered by the Blackburn and District ADI Association.

The Corby Effect led to chaos in the industry. If the selection, recruitment and training processes of new instructors are not changed soon, the results could well be catastrophic – and at the very time that the Department for Transport, with its commitment to road safety, is making plans to make the driving test more difficult.

(This article is from DIA, the largest ADI Association in the United Kingdom. Blackburn and District ADI Association thanks DIA and Professor Peter Russell.)
Courtesy of DIA