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## KNOWLEDGE IS THE SAME FOR EVERYBODY SAYS MAYOR

On 10 October 2007 The Evening Standard published an article by Andrew Gilligan titled 'Ken's Ethnic Knowledge angers the black cabbies'. London's taxi trade press was carrying articles about the new scheme at the same time, including reports on the demonstration held by the LCDC. The Mayor told reporters from the trade press: "There has been a lot of debate about the London Development Agency-funded scheme to make London's taxi trade more representative of the Capital's population. I would like to deal with some of the myths and lies which have been whipped up around this.

"The first thing I want to say is that London's black cabs are an icon respected around the world because of the skill and knowledge of cab drivers and I am determined that will remain the case. The scheme is designed to help address the fact that only one in twenty cab drivers are Black or Asian and only 1.6 per cent are women by encouraging more people from these groups to consider a career as a black cab driver. That will be good for the trade and good for London.

"This scheme does not water-down the Knowledge. Those on the scheme will have to undergo exactly the same arduous qualification process as anyone else, over the same time period, and to the same high standard. All the scheme will do is support a small number of women and people from communities that are currently under-represented in the trade in preparing to take the Knowledge and meeting some of the costs. Once they are in the examination room they will be examined in exactly the same way as every other candidate.

"I can assure all those who use taxis in London, existing taxi drivers, and anyone who is studying the Knowledge or thinking of doing so, that the Knowledge is the same for everybody. I will not allow it to be otherwise. All



**Courtney Connell, an examiner at the PCO, also a taxi driver, featured in Evening Standard article**

applicants who come to the Public Carriage Office will be examined in the same way by the same group of examiners to the same high standard. Examiners will not know whether candidates have, or have not, been part of the LDA scheme.

"The scheme is not a fast-track. The suggestions in the press that there are targets to get people through a "quickie" Knowledge in a year are complete rubbish and, similarly, no-one will be allowed through who cannot speak and understand English.

"The only people who will qualify to become taxi drivers will remain those who have passed the rigorous and demanding Knowledge test; there will be no exceptions."

The Mayor has also written to The Evening Standard but the paper has so far refused to print his letter, which is presented below.

Dear Sir,

*It is highly revealing that Andrew Gilligan is opposed to the scheme to help make London's black taxi trade more representative of the city it serves (Ken's Ethnic Knowledge angers black cabbies, 10 October).*

*London is a place of tremendous diversity with around a third of its citizens from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background. Yet only one in twenty taxi drivers are Black or Asian. Over half of Londoners are women, yet they make up only 1.6 per cent of black cab drivers.*

*The training scheme, funded by the London Development Agency, aims to help rectify this. It will help women trying to balance work, childcare, and study. And it will support people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities to hone the various skills they need in order to drive black cabs.*

*It is ridiculous for the London Cab Drivers' Club to suggest that anyone who can't speak English will be able to become a licensed taxi driver. Indeed the majority beneficiaries of the scheme are likely to have been born here and speak perfect English. It is equally wrong to suggest that any ethnic group will be excluded. To take the example raised by Andrew Gilligan, Jewish people are clearly an ethnic minority and if they are under-represented among black cab drivers relative to London's population they will be eligible for this scheme.*

*Whenever anything is done to address the exclusion of women or ethnic minorities from particular jobs or industries, it is always claimed by some, as in this case by Andrew Gilligan, that this will lead to lower standards. The only people who will qualify to become black cab drivers will remain those who have passed the rigorous and demanding Knowledge test. There will be no exceptions.*

*These points were made to Andrew Gilligan before he wrote his piece but he did not let the facts get in the way of a good story. Finally, the suggestion that the scheme is illegal positive discrimination which will fast track people through the knowledge is also false. It is not anticipated that it will reduce the average time it takes anyone to master the knowledge. The highest standards will be maintained but the taxi trade will be more representative of the city it serves.*

*Yours sincerely, Ken Livingstone*

