

Slaughterman Training and Assessment

Training to be a slaughterman is a four-step process.

First, trainees are issued with a provisional licence, which is free and lasts for three months. Provisional licences state the species, type of equipment and the operations for which the holder is licensed. While working on a provisional licence, a trainee can work only in the presence, and under the direction, of a holder of a full licence covering the same species and type of equipment.

Next, a trainee slaughterman is assessed to determine whether or not he has the necessary level of competence, knowledge, skill and understanding of the importance of animal welfare to allow a registered licence to be issued. He must show an understanding of the relevant statutory requirements, including Codes of Practice, and how they work to protect animals. There is no formal exam. Instead, practical skills are observed and this may be in just one session or over a period of time. The cost is £40, but up to five people can be assessed in one go, bringing down the cost to just £8 each.

If deemed appropriate, the trainee will be issued with a certificate of competence by an Official Veterinarian (or OV, previously known as an Official Veterinary Surgeon or OVS).

And finally, he is issued with a permanent licence, costing £20, which is valid for life throughout Great Britain. There is no reassessment ever.

We share the view of the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) that there is much wrong with this system.

In most cases, the certificate of competence is carried out by an OV who may, in some cases, also be responsible for the basic training of that individual. In reality, there is likely to be much pressure on an OV to certify trainee slaughtermen. Surveys of vets and meat hygiene inspectors who work within abattoirs reveal tensions that routinely escalate to the point where vets and inspectors are being bullied and harassed by abattoir workers.¹ If an OV were to refuse to issue a certificate of competence, this could cause serious problems with the abattoir management.

Of this system, FAWC states: 'There must be some concern that this does not sit comfortably with the OVS's accreditation and enforcement roles. In our view, the same OVS should not be



the trainer, issuer of a certificate of competence and enforcement officer.'²

Additionally, while the relevance of a certificate of competence is heavily reliant on the expertise of the individual OV, there is no requirement on the OV to have reached any level of competence, either on the operations or on assessment.³

'Fit and Proper Person' Test

According to Defra: 'Registered Licences may be suspended or revoked if the holder is no longer considered a fit and proper person to hold a slaughter licence.'⁴ However, Defra does not specify who should exercise this judgement or the criteria by which a person should be judged to be 'fit and proper'.

We believe that such a test should be applied before issuing a licence and that the OV should be able to refuse to issue a certificate should he or she consider that the applicant is not a 'fit and proper' person.

A debate needs to be held about what constitutes a fit and proper person. While it is not possible to exclude everyone with a criminal record from working as a slaughterman, we believe anyone with convictions for violence, sexual assault or animal cruelty should not be permitted to stun or slaughter animals.

Of those applying to become a slaughterman, the Defra questionnaire asks for any animal cruelty convictions to be disclosed. We do not believe that such convictions automatically disbar a person from becoming a slaughterman. Currently, no trainee has to undergo Criminal Records Bureau checks, so there is no way of knowing whether an applicant has failed to disclose relevant information. Disclosure of convictions for violent or sexual offences is not even requested.

There are many documented examples of abattoir workers who have committed violent offences against people and animals. While we do not know whether this is disproportionate when compared with other professions, we believe that being convicted of certain offences should disbar individuals from working with animals at the most vulnerable and distressing time of their lives.

We are not privy to data about how many current slaughterhouse workers have convictions for violence and cruelty, although we understand from 'whistleblowers' who have come forward since the publication of our investigation that this is not uncommon. There is a significant number of cases where abattoir workers have committed such crimes and the following cases serve as examples of people we believe should fail the 'fit and proper' person test and be barred for life from working in slaughterhouses:

(The dates in brackets refer to the conviction, not the crime.)

Crimes Against People:

- Nathan Morgan, a slaughterman from Aberaeron, was jailed for kicking and punching a passer-by. (2009)
- Patrick Colleran, who worked at a Bristol abattoir, was convicted of raping two women. (2008)
- John Smith, a slaughterhouse butcher, killed his wife. He had already been convicted more than once of assaulting her. (2007)
- Peter Newbery, an unemployed slaughterhouse worker, sexually assaulted and murdered two teenagers in a care home on the Isle of Man. (2003)
- Paul Weedon, a slaughterman from Oxfordshire, slit the throat of a pensioner. (2003)
- Drew Affleck, a former slaughterman from Ayrshire, set fire to a house, killing three people. (2003)
- A Lancashire slaughterman, Paul Harry Smith, was jailed for beating up his pregnant girlfriend. (2003)



- Jason Baldwin, a former slaughterman in Surrey, killed and butchered a neighbour. He had already been sacked from his job for attacking a colleague. (1996)

Crimes Against Animals:

- A Derbyshire slaughterman was 'disciplined' for allowing chickens to enter the scalding tank while still alive. (2009)
- A man was sacked from an East Anglian abattoir for improperly killing pigs and allowing them to be put into the scalding tank while still alive. (2006)
- Arran Parkinson, a slaughterman from Oldham, was sacked after kicking a sheep and gloating over dead animals. (2005)
- A former slaughterman, Paul Stevenson from Chesterfield, was jailed after stabbing and beating his dog to death. (2005)
- Jason Robinson, a former abattoir worker from Essex, was convicted of illegally killing sheep. (2001)

Summary

Under the current system, there is no need for slaughter training and evaluation to be independently scrutinised, no formal exam, no need for the assessor to have reached any level of competence and no need for staff re-training or reassessment at any point in the future. All that is needed is to want to be a slaughterman, to be 18 years old and able to pay £28. It is not only essential, in our view, that rigorous procedures are introduced at the point where a licence is first issued, but also that licence holders undergo periodic assessment and, where appropriate, retraining.

- 1 UNISON, MHS Members Survey, 2008
http://www.unison.co.uk/acrobat/UNISON_MHS_MembersSurvey2008.pdf
- 2 Farm Animal Welfare Council, 'Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, Part 1: Red Meat', June 2003, paragraph 270
<http://www.fawc.org.uk/reports/pb8347.pdf>
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Defra, 'Animal Welfare: Guidance Note on the Licensing and Training of Slaughtermen'
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/welfare/slaughter/guidance.htm>