

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: The work of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, HC 1002

Wednesday 25 November 2020

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 25 November 2020.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Lilian Greenwood; Simon Jupp; Robert Langan; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 1 - 64

Witness

I: Gareth Llewellyn, Chief Executive, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (via video link).

Examination of witness

Witness: Gareth Llewellyn.

Q1 Chair: This is the Transport Select Committee's oral evidence session on the work of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency. Would our sole witness introduce himself?

Gareth Llewellyn: I am Gareth Llewellyn, the chief executive of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency.

Q2 Chair: Good morning, Gareth. Thank you for being with us. This is the first session of the Transport Select Committee where we will investigate the work of the agencies responsible for building and delivering the transport network across the UK. It is great to have you as the DVSA before us. We know that your time there is coming to a close, so it is particularly good to get your thoughts on your tenure and what more needs to be done. Would you introduce the responsibilities of the DVSA, and then we can take it from there?

Gareth Llewellyn: When you get out of your car at your house, your parents' house, your children's house or your friends' house, you probably do not give much thought to the fact that you arrived there safely, but the fact that you have is down in no small part to the fantastic people who work at the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency. They do an incredible job. Many of them are not highly paid, and they probably do not get recognition either, but the work they do is absolutely tremendous.

Today, I have people out on the roadside, some of them working 24/7, looking for, for example, cheat devices in HGVs that allow the driver to switch off the tachograph, the braking system or the speed limiter, so that they can drive as long and as fast as they want for hours and hours on end. That poses a huge risk to you. The enforcement side of our activities is hugely important.

I also have people today who will be standing in a pit inspecting heavy vehicles—HGVs and buses—to make sure that they are roadworthy. They will be picking up things like shock absorbers that have become detached, braking systems that do not work and steering systems that are compromised, as well as doing emissions testing and so on. Again, all of that is intended to protect you.

We provide the driving tests for virtually everything, from motorcyclists through to cars, traction engines, tractors and heavy vehicles. Those people are out there doing that task today, even though social distancing is sometimes quite tricky for a driving examiner when they are 8 inches away from a candidate. In 15% of the cases where they are testing a candidate, they have to grab the steering wheel to avoid a serious accident. That is a challenge that probably not many of us would wish to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have. We are there to make sure that only the safest people can get on the roads.

Prior to the practical test, you need to take a theory test. That is the world's largest online test, which we outsource at the moment, but we are in the process of insourcing it, ready for next year. Every year, 2.1 million theory tests are taken. We know that people use Bluetooth devices to get somebody outside the test centre to give them the answers, because they cannot be bothered to learn the highway code, and some will actually pay others to impersonate them on that test. We do our darndest to make sure that those people are caught and put away. Again, if they get on the road, they are the people who put you at risk.

My people do an absolutely incredible job. It is sometimes a dangerous job. We have staff at the moment who are given additional protection because they are being targeted by people they are investigating. If you are a driving examiner and you have just told a 17-year-old that they have not passed the test, lots of testosterone comes out at that point, so there is quite a lot of physical and verbal abuse that they have to manage in real time.

Rather sadly, 27 years ago this month, two of our MOT inspectors were shot dead in a garage in Manchester when they were doing their job. It is a very dangerous job. They do it with aplomb. They do it without recognition, and they do an absolutely fantastic job. Their job is to help you stay safe on the roads by testing people, testing vehicles and making sure that people on the road who do not stick to the rules are pulled aside and, if necessary, prosecuted.

Q3 Chair: Thank you very much for the overview, and for explaining the difficult work that your members of staff carry out to keep the UK traffic network safe and enforced.

You are standing down in days. Looking back on your four and a half years in the role, what do you consider to be your greatest achievements and what are the challenges that you have undertaken, and perhaps still have to pass on to your successor?

Gareth Llewellyn: To be clear, none of the achievements is down to me. As I said, the organisation is full of very committed and professional people. The credit for anything that has been achieved over the last four or five years is due to them, to be honest.

We were a failed merger of two previous Government organisations, both of them trading funds. We have come together to create quite a compelling vision as to what the future of road safety could look like. They have achieved all of their business plan targets for the last three years, which is an absolutely outstanding performance.

In the driving world, we introduced a new version of the driving test back in 2017. We introduced sat-nav and independent drive to try to make



HOUSE OF COMMONS

sure that the driving test reflected the real-world environment that people were driving in at the time, and to ensure that we tested candidates on things like rural roads where we knew that there were more accidents than driving around a housing estate, for example.

It also meant that we could test people's ability to drive while distracted. We ask questions like, "Can you switch the windscreen wipers on while you are driving?" We all take that for granted, but a new driver will sometimes struggle to work out where in the car you switch the windscreen wipers on. That is what we do on a daily basis, so it was important to change the test.

We moved to digital capture of the test last year. All driving tests are now captured on iPads. That provides a huge opportunity in the future, which we may come back to a little later. That project won Project Team of the Year at the IT Industry awards this month. That was a fantastic achievement. As I said, we are insourcing the theory test, and that takes us on a journey eventually to putting the theory test in virtual reality, so that it can be an immersive experience. I think that has benefits for plenty of people beyond those who actually want to drive.

On the MOT side, 3 million people use our MOT reminder service, which is free. You can put your email address or your phone number in, and we will give you a warning four weeks before your MOT is due, and then two weeks, to make sure you do not miss it, to keep your vehicle safe. We won an award for our use of artificial intelligence on the MOT database to identify people who were selling MOT certificates without actually doing the test. That won the UK IT Industry award last year. We digitally captured test results from heavy vehicle testing. All of that is done on iPhones by our staff now, and in the last couple of weeks we have launched the Find the ATF facility on gov.UK. If you are looking for a test for your vehicle, you can now identify the nearest ATF. In the Chair's constituency, there are tests available up to Christmas in St Leonards, for example. That provides better customer information.

On the enforcement side, we launched earned recognition. Operators that out-perform have special recognition within our organisation, and we do not pick them up on the roadside. We allow them to carry on their business without interruption. That gives us a better opportunity to focus our resources on those that deserve our attention.

All our staff on the roadside have access to an app that was developed in-house that gives them all the intelligence on the vehicles they encounter. They type in the registration number and it gives them all the history, all the prohibitions and all the concerns we have, such as issues about drivers hours, which we have never had before.

We have worked with other partners. We work with Network Rail, for example, making sure that drivers are aware when they do the daily walk round that they should look at the height of the vehicle, so that they do



HOUSE OF COMMONS

not strike a bridge and take the railway network out. That type of education is hugely important.

We have done quite a lot of work on EU transition. We were not destined to do the permit system for UK hauliers, but we stepped in and did that for the Department. We are in the process of putting in equipment on the M20 and the M2 ready for Operation Brock. That will all be finished before the end of the month. I classify the work we have done on EU transition as like trying to stick the tail on a donkey, when the donkey hasn't actually been born, you don't know whether it is going to be born and it may not be a donkey either. The ability to deliver that activity in the timescale, with the uncertainty, has been a huge achievement for the staff in DVSA.

On the finance side, we are a trading fund, or at least we are at the moment. We have kept our finances in order. We have generated a surplus so that we can reinvest in the business, and in the IT to make services better for the public. We have not had a fee increase for a decade. We have paid off all the debts from the previous two trading funds as well.

Finally, more of our people want to stay working for DVSA for three years than the civil service average. People are generally now happier working for the organisation, which has been a key thing. We are nothing without the people in the organisation.

Those are the things that the staff have achieved. It is a tremendous achievement over the last four and a half years. As I said, none of those things is down to me; they are down to the great people who work here.

As for the challenges, the first is obvious. We need to get through Covid. Whatever services need to be delivered in the future, I can only do that if I keep my people safe. We need to manage the services in a Covid-secure way and get to a point where our staff are vaccinated, so that when they deliver services to the public they are not at risk of infecting others. Clearly, if you are a driving examiner and you have six strangers with you every day, 8 inches away, your R value can potentially be 6. Vaccinating driving examiners and other staff is a good thing to do because it stops infection more generally.

When we are in recovery, as the organisation has a good track record of delivering services to various constituencies, I have no doubt that they will get through that, but it will take time. Obviously, we have suspended services in various parts of the country. People will need to be patient as we get back and deliver some of those services.

There are some huge opportunities. We have generally taken decisions by trying to hit the sweet spot of road safety, user experience and value for money. I will give you examples of what can be done in that space, because I think there is still quite a lot to go after. On user experience, having digitised the driving test, when the driving examiner presses



HOUSE OF COMMONS

"End" at the end of the test, the system generates whether the person has passed or not. That information goes across to DVLA. There is no reason why we could not give them an electronic version of their driving licence in their Apple wallet before they have left the test centre. That would be great customer service. Those people deserve to know, and have proof, that they have passed the test, and that we believe they are secure to drive on the roads. It should not have to go to another agency and wait for a hard copy.

On value for money, we do a lot of authorisations in our business. We approve MOT garages and MOT testers. We approve authorised testing facilities. We approve driving instructors. We do pretty much all the approvals for operators of HGVs and buses. In all of the other cases, if we have a problem with somebody who has an authorisation, we take them to court, but in the operator world there is a group called the traffic commissioners. I am firmly of the view that we do not need the traffic commissioners any more. They are anachronistic. They were probably okay in the 1930s, when a major sat in the seat and pronounced on road safety, but the reality is that we have a good track record of enforcement through the Courts and Tribunals Service, and we should be doing that for operators as well. That will save us millions and millions of pounds, not necessarily in terms of people but in simplifying systems and removing unnecessary estate. It will literally save us millions of pounds.

Coming back to the road safety argument, from the data it is pretty clear that, if you have an HGV that is one or two years old, the likelihood that you will fail your annual test is about 3% of the fleet. If you have a vehicle that is 12 years old, 33% of those fail every year. My suggestion would be that we do not ask owners of vehicles that are one to two years old to come in for an annual test. We should leave them on the road, because they do not pose a significant road safety risk. We should test those that are 12 or more years old many more times—twice or four times a year, because that is where the road safety benefit is. It is a zero-cost option to the public; we would still be testing the same number, but we would only be testing those that deserved our attention, rather than those that are new.

There is still plenty to go after, and my successor will have a fantastic time. She has some great people around her, and the opportunity to exploit the potential challenges and opportunities will be huge.

Q4 Chair: Thank you for that, Gareth; particular thanks for opening up about where things can be done better. If you can do that all the way through our session, we can only help ourselves in that sense and help the industry. We encourage you to keep on those lines.

In that vein, are there any additional powers that would make the DVSA more effective in its duties? You touched on the traffic commissioners and whether they are required. You also touched on more regular testing for older HGVs and testing less for the new ones. What further powers do you think the DVSA should have to do a better job?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Gareth Llewellyn: I am not sure that it is necessarily powers. One of the features of DVSA is that we are a trading fund, so the vast majority of our income comes from fees and charges. Pretty much the only area on which we receive money from the Department is for enforcement for non-GB operators. It would be a much better situation if, effectively, the fine reflected the offence. At the moment, the fines for some of the offences that we see in non-GB operators are so small that the driver actually brings with him the money to pay them. It should be much more significant to prevent things from happening.

I referred to the cheat device earlier. We found a circuit board in the light switch of a driver's bunk that enabled him to drive without a speed limiter and, effectively, with less braking and no tachograph. That puts a huge number of people at risk, but there is only a £300 fine. We forced him to go and change his tachograph, but it is only a £300 fine. It needs to be much more. If it was, we could put that entire basis on to cost recovery, and then we would not need any money. That is one of the most important things to push for.

When it comes to driving tests, our biggest challenge, to be fair, is that most of our driving test centres are on leasehold, and leasehold costs increase year on year. As I said, we have not had a fee increase for 10 years. There is only so far you can take the business model when costs are increasing but income is decreasing in real terms.

One of the areas we have considered is whether we move, on a pilot basis, to a meet and greet system. We might be able to meet and greet candidates in various locations that make it more convenient for them, such as a supermarket, leisure centre or other places. Of course, that will need quite a lot of careful management. I know that people are concerned about whether their constituents get tested in their constituency. We may be able to increase the variety of places where we can meet and greet people and improve the service, and reduce the cost, which then means that we do not have to put up the fee of the driving licence quite so quickly.

Chair: We might return to that. I will hand over to the members of the Committee. It may well be that we are guided by some of the casework we get as constituency MPs. Our constituents are also consumers.

We are now going to look at the impact of coronavirus on the work of the DVSA, which you touched on.

Q5 **Ruth Cadbury:** Could you give us a sense of how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted on the organisation and delivery of your services?

Gareth Llewellyn: I don't suppose I am any different from many in terms of the impact that Covid has had on my business. The very first wave, going back to early March, was quite an interesting time. As an aside, when I went to management college I must have missed the module that said how to manage in a pandemic, if indeed there was one.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I remember sitting in our boardroom with my directors, watching the Prime Minister make announcements. That is how we were learning about the various restrictions that were coming on us. They were happening in pretty short order, if you remember. I think on 12 March the announcement was, "We are not, repeat not, closing schools, but if you have a mild cough that is continuous you should isolate for seven days." A few days later it was, "If a member of your household has those symptoms, you should isolate for 14 days." Then, "You should shield people for 12 weeks." Then of course we had the announcement on 18 March that schools were closing.

In that period, I was losing staff. They were either off because they had a cough, which quite rightly they assumed could be Covid, or they were off because they were shielding elderly parents. The demographics of my organisation is such that that is quite common, because we have lots of people who are in their 50s, and their parents are older than that. In some parts of our business, of course, we have lots of people with lots of children, and they were going off as well. In the very early days, I had no feel for whether I would have the right number of people to deliver services the following day. It was literally eroding on an hour-by-hour basis.

I took the decision on 18 March, which I think was a Wednesday, that we would suspend all the services for the following two days to try to work out what we had left and what we could do. That was probably one of the most difficult decisions I have ever taken. Reflecting on it, I would probably take it again. I ran the risk of tens of thousands of customers turning up on the Thursday and the Friday with nobody to provide them with a service. That in itself would have given rise to unnecessary travel, which at that time we were clearly trying to avoid.

Over those four days, we worked up a new standard operating procedure for keeping driving examiners safe when they are 8 inches away from a candidate and the guidance is that you need to be 2 metres away. With Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive, we were working our way through the hierarchy of control, to work out what we could do to keep people safe. We were also working with the Department, asking what we should be doing, as we knew some of our activities were going to be more difficult to deliver in a Covid world.

The agreement was that we would suspend services for driving and for vehicle testing for 12 weeks, for different reasons. For driving tests, it was so that we could focus our effort on critical workers. We delivered about 7,000 tests for critical workers in that period—effectively, from March through to late June.

There are some interesting stories. I had an email from a lady called Caz, who was a paramedic in London. She was also working on the air ambulance. The advice at the time was not to use public transport. She needed a motorcycle test so that she could get to work that was critical



HOUSE OF COMMONS

for the nation. We worked our socks off to make sure that she had the test as soon as possible. She passed, and then she was able to get to work.

On the vehicle testing side, we took the view that we needed vehicles on the road to restock supermarkets; if you recall, you could not get toilet rolls for love nor money. We did not bring those vehicles in for tests. We made sure that they stayed on the road, but we diverted our resources to make sure that new vehicles like ambulances were on the road as fast as possible. The likes of WAS ambulance service posted a really good story about how we opened the site and made sure our people were there as soon as vehicles were ready for test. They were on the road the same day.

We tested trailers that were coming back into service. They had been taken out of service for a while, and we needed them back in service to help with deliveries to shops. We effectively reshaped the business over a weekend. That made a huge difference to the following 12 weeks, but of course we were losing money because our services were no longer generating income. We needed the Department to step in.

Other than Sweden, we are the only country that has maintained roadside enforcement. Our enforcement people kept going. That is to their credit because they were receiving drivers from places like Spain and Italy, where we knew the infection rate was higher than it was here. They were still having to deal with those people. We had to make sure that we kept people safe, so we introduced new operating procedures. They did not get into the cab. They took the driving licence off the driver with one of those grabber sticks you see people picking litter with. We made sure that we carried out inspection of vehicles to keep people who were still on the road as safe as possible. It has been a really interesting journey.

One thing I want to be clear about is that I have a duty of care to my people under the Health and Safety at Work Act. My job is to keep them safe, and sometimes that means that it takes pre-eminence over other decisions. I need those people because, obviously, we will not be able to restart services if they are not there. Making sure that as few of our people as possible get Covid has been my primary concern.

Q6 Ruth Cadbury: What other support have you given staff and instructors during this difficult period? Most of the driver and vehicle testing staff will not have been working during the two lockdowns. What have they been doing?

Gareth Llewellyn: There are quite a few questions there.

Ruth Cadbury: Sorry.

Gareth Llewellyn: No, that's fine. Driving instructors, who obviously do not work for us, were saying in the very early days, "DVSA, you need to tell us how to keep people safe." Actually, that is not my job. They have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

legal accountability under the Health and Safety at Work Act, so we encouraged them to look to the HSE for advice on how to undertake risk assessments for their activities. We gave them copies of the standard operating procedure that we had developed. For some people, as sole traders, that was probably a good starting point for them.

In terms of support for staff more generally, we are very fortunate because we have invested heavily in mobile technology; everybody has either iPads, iPhones or Surface Pros. I could literally talk to everybody at the same time. In fact, I have a directors live session this afternoon when I will be doing exactly that. Because we had that mobile technology, we were able to deliver support to our frontline staff and everybody across the organisation quite quickly. We have given them updates on mental health; posture when dealing with laptops; financial planning; and physiotherapy advice. We have 63 mental health first aiders in our organisation who were able to help people who were struggling.

We have kept some of the offices open because there are people around our patch who feel less safe at home, and we want them to come into work if that helps them feel safer. There are people who live in fairly small places, and asking them to work from home all the time can be quite tricky for their work/life balance. We ask them to come into the office if they so wish. There has been quite a lot of support for our people all the way through. I have personally done quite a few videos for all staff. We have a monthly directors live, where people can ask us questions in real time to try to overcome some of the anxieties that they obviously feel.

As regards redeployment, we have not asked our clinically extremely vulnerable people to work, for obvious reasons. Some of them had decided to, but we have now taken the view that they should not because potentially they are at higher risk. For all the other staff—the driving staff and our vehicle standards assessors—we have tried to redeploy them. Quite a few of them are working in our customer contact centre, dealing with inquiries from the public. Some are involved in our finance team to help our finance through some of the transition. We have loaned some to DWP. We have reservists and special constables who have been called up. We have had people in Wales delivering prescriptions, and drivers driving patients to and from Nightingale hospitals. It has been a huge effort.

If people cannot fit into those categories, we have given them additional volunteering days so that they can volunteer for local charities. I do not want people sitting around doing nothing. We have three members of staff who have decided, come what may, they will not do anything other than their driving examiner job, even though they are fit and well enough to work. For those three people, we are not paying them.

Ruth Cadbury: Thank you very much.

Q7 **Grahame Morris:** Thank you for those answers, Mr Llewellyn. I want to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

clarify something and take up a couple of issues that have been raised with me by the trade union and employees of DVSA.

I was reassured to hear your reference to the duty of care to employees. We all appreciate how difficult it is to do a driving test in close proximity to someone taking the test, perhaps, as you said, 14 inches away. It is very difficult or impossible to ensure adequate distancing. I fully understand that the risk assessment for your standard operating procedures was undertaken by Public Health England. I believe it was they who recommended reducing the number of daily tests from seven to five to allow for cleaning in between, so that the vehicles could be properly cleaned and sanitised in preparation for the next student taking their test.

In relation to the critical workers you mentioned, we are coming up to 2 December and a number of regions and areas are going to go from national lockdown into perhaps tier 3 areas. In those circumstances, will critical tests for essential workers be conducted only by volunteers? You referred to a number of your staff who were 60 and over, some looking after elderly parents and some themselves with underlying health conditions. Is it your intention to seek volunteers to carry out those tests for essential workers? Do you have any particular comments on that?

Gareth Llewellyn: Thank you; some really great questions there. The decision to move to five tests a day was not with Public Health England. There were some ongoing discussions with the Health and Safety Executive around the hierarchy of control. We started off right at the top: could we substitute the driving test with something that was completely different? For example, there could be a driving examiner in the car behind and the candidate in the car in front. That is something we already do with mod 2 motorcycle tests, for example. We took the view that there was as much danger there as anything else.

We worked our way down the hierarchy of control. The ideal at that time, of course, was that both the driving examiner and the candidate would have a Covid test, and we would know that both of them were free from Covid. That would easily be the best option, but of course at that time the number of Covid tests available was quite limited. Clearly, they were being directed at the NHS, which I fully understand.

We then looked at engineering controls. Could we put a Perspex screen between the candidate and the driving examiner? The variety of cars we deal with would make that tricky, and of course, as I said, on 15% of occasions the driving examiner needs to grab the steering wheel to avoid a serious accident. That would compromise their road safety, so that was not really feasible either. We landed on what they term "administrative controls", which are the cleaning of the vehicle; the wearing of face coverings, which I will come back to in a second; and some adjustments, such as candidates not being allowed in the driving test centre. That happened in a conversation with the Health and Safety Executive.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

We then put the standard operating procedure to Public Health England. At that point, we said we thought it would only be five tests a day. In fact, in the early days it was much lower than five tests a day. We were only recommending about five tests a week for our volunteers. In the early part of Covid, we were only using volunteers. We were not forcing people to do practical driving tests, because of nervousness about our understanding of the virus and making sure that the standard operating procedure worked.

I have the upmost admiration for my volunteers. They stepped in at a time when society particularly needed driving tests for critical workers. They did so, working with us to shape the standard operating procedure, and they have given us an immense amount of confidence that the standard operating procedure works. That is really important.

Bear in mind that the standard operating procedure was not based on one test today or five tests, or whatever. The fundamental basis was that you have to assume that every vehicle you get into is contaminated, and every candidate you are sitting next to is infectious. If you start from that basis, the standard operating procedure, if you adhere to it properly, should protect you in every circumstance.

When we decided to open up public booking again, we believed that that standard operating procedure, with all the experience of our volunteers and the constant discussions with HSE and Public Health England, was sufficient. As I said, we tested a lot of people through volunteers—over 7,000 critical workers. I have not reviewed the constraints of the new tier system that was announced yesterday. We are doing that a little later with my executive colleagues, so I cannot comment on how we will deal just with essential workers, but I am confident that the standard operating procedure will now work wherever.

Q8 **Grahame Morris:** I am grateful for that explanation. Could I seek some clarification? You mentioned that you are having meetings later today to discuss what is going to happen after 2 December when we come out of the national lockdown. What are your initial thoughts, given that it has worked effectively? There was a terrible death toll, particularly among bus drivers, at the outset of the pandemic, and particularly in the big cities, before adequate disinfection and screening and other measures were put in place. Is it your intention to continue those stipulations and standard operating procedures after 2 December, so that you run tests with driving examiners who are volunteers, and that you are going to restrict the number to five per day?

While you are thinking about that, can I ask about different areas of the country being under different levels of lockdown? We had the statement yesterday explaining it. I do not fully understand it myself, I must confess. There are regulations in relation to moving from one area, say a tier 3 area, to a tier 2 area. There is a particular issue that has arisen in Scotland, and perhaps I could raise that with you. The advice for areas under restrictions is clear. If you live or work anywhere there are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

protective measures in place, at whatever level, you should not travel to another area to avoid them.

One of the exceptions is travelling from a level 3 area, not from a level 4 area, for the purposes of driving lessons or for taking a driving test. What I am not clear on is this. Are the DVSA trying to circumvent this golden rule by sending driving examiners from tier 4 areas to conduct tests in lower-tiered areas? It seems, on the face of it, to undermine the very reasoning behind having the restrictions in the first place. Could you give any reassurance in that regard? We certainly would not want driving examiners or instructors to be doing anything that they should not be doing. Any instructor who falls under the above restrictions should not be providing lessons or indeed tests in the local authority area. That is my interpretation. I wonder if you agree with me.

Gareth Llewellyn: I am rather grateful that you think I have that level of influence over the Scottish Government. As a national body working within the Department for Transport but affected by decisions that are taken elsewhere, I have to say that understanding how those decisions are made and the consequences that they have for my business has been one of the biggest challenges. The variation across the patches is sometimes challenging for us to work out what we need to do.

Let me take Wales, for example. In the firebreak in Wales, it was clear from the Welsh Government that they did not want driving lessons or driving tests to take place. We had a subsequent conversation with them and said, "Would you be willing to allow us to test ambulance drivers?" That is what we call a category C. It is not a basic car test. It is upgrading your licence from the basic car to be able to drive an ambulance. We felt that in support of people who need healthcare that was an important thing to do. The Welsh Government agreed, so driving examiners are testing ambulance drivers. It is not a huge number, because it was only a 17-day lockdown.

In England, the decision was made by the Cabinet Office that we would stop tests in lockdown. We have stuck to that, so we are not doing tests at the moment, but we had a similar conversation about ambulance drivers, and we continue to test ambulance drivers in England because, again, we see that as an important contribution to the country's recovery from Covid.

In Scotland, the decision was announced by the First Minister. They were very clear that they did not want tests or lessons to continue. The movement of people in and out of the various tiers was their decision and not ours. If you think I am circumventing anything, I do not have that level of influence, to be fair. We offered, even in level 4 instances in Scotland, to test ambulance drivers, if the Government wished. They declined.

We have a very clear focus. Our job is to try to make sure that the country gets through the pandemic and is not suffering from a shortage



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of ambulance drivers because of issues that we are responsible for. We are keen that we continue that.

To clarify one of your earlier comments, we are currently at six tests a day, not five tests. Our experience with the standard operating procedure has told us that there is plenty of time to make sure that we adhere to that.

To give you a little bit of reassurance, 83 people in our organisation have contracted Covid. The vast majority of those people contracted it from friends and family who had already had Covid. We have three people who have been in hospital. One contracted Covid having been in hospital for a previous non-Covid related issue. One of them was extremely clinically vulnerable and has not worked for us for the entire period since March. Rather sadly, he was probably at higher risk because he was in that category. The third person was on a ventilator and is now recovering well. We believe he caught Covid when he visited a motorcycle training school, and the people he met there passed it on to him. To our knowledge, we do not have a big issue with people dying.

I have worked in the safety space for the vast majority of my career. I spend my life trying to look after people and protect them. I am not going to put them in an environment where I believe they are at unacceptable risk, which is why we have worked so hard on the standard operating procedure, and consult Public Health England every fortnight, and the Health and Safety Executive on a very frequent basis, to make sure that our understanding is up to date.

Q9 Karl McCartney: Bore da, Mr Llewellyn, and thank you for speaking to us today. I am going to throw a few curved-ball questions at you, which maybe you will or will not answer. I thought it was an opportunity for you as a senior practitioner at this stage in your career to either give an agency or professional view, or, if you prefer, your personal view on a number of issues. You might be prepared for some of these questions because they are coming from me, or you might not, but you might want to give me a score at the end.

First of all, do you think the perceived benefits of all-lane running outweigh the safety implications, because of the vehicles on our motorways and the speeds that they travel?

Gareth Llewellyn: If I responded to that question in real time, I would probably be giving you a very cursory answer, so to be fair it is better if, as an organisation, we give that a degree more thought and write to you on that basis.

One of the things we work hard on is making sure that the vehicles that get on to motorways are roadworthy and that the drivers are not tired and stick to their statutory rest periods. In my early days in the job, it was bizarre to suddenly pull over an HGV driver who had been cooking on his dashboard as he was driving.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q10 Karl McCartney: How many lorries on our roads in the UK have lane wandering notification?

Gareth Llewellyn: I honestly don't know the answer to that.

Q11 Karl McCartney: Not many, we'd probably say; only the more modern ones.

Gareth Llewellyn: I don't know. I cannot give you an answer, and if I did it would be misleading.

Q12 Karl McCartney: I look forward to the written answer from you. I will try a second question. You might know about Denby Transport's long vehicles. We have talked a little about the use during the pandemic of haulage vehicles and other trailers being brought back into use. There has been a shortage of HGV drivers as well. Dick Denby and his colleagues have had a vehicle with a computer-controlled trailer that has been around for many years. That would obviously help with bulky items, be they kitchen roll, toilet rolls, cornflakes or whatever.

For some reason, the Department for Transport and yourselves have stopped them testing that trailer on UK roads, although it is used in three European countries, so far. When he took it out on the road, he was told to take it back into the yard, which he did, but he has never been taken to court for that. Do you have any views or thoughts on that issue?

Gareth Llewellyn: The standards for HGV vehicles, and buses for that matter, are pretty clear. If there is any adaptation to those vehicles that takes them outside the limits, they need an IVA—an individual vehicle appraisal—which our people would do. We look at length, and we have taken action against particularly car transporters, where the length is too great and therefore manoeuvring is very difficult.

We tend to have an approach in our enforcement about education first and foremost. We let people know where the rules are because not everybody reads every rule. If you are a man, you generally do not look at the rulebook; you just throw it out the window and then hope for the best. It is a male issue. We will not take enforcement action on the very first occasion. That is probably what is sitting behind that particular issue, although I do not know the details of Denby vehicles.

Q13 Karl McCartney: I will give you a little bit more information. Denby Transport has been around for over 10 years. Various Ministers of Transport and Secretaries of State for Transport have driven the vehicle. As I said, it is a computer-controlled trailer, which means that it is as manoeuvrable as any other vehicle on UK and European roads. It just seems that somebody in the Department for Transport is determined that they are not going to be able to even test it on UK roads, never mind that there are a number of them out there to help and assist with the haulage that needs to take place as we move forward.

I'll move to a question on motorways. Obviously, you and I look at vehicles. They have improved over the years. When we look at the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

highway code, do you think that the current speed limit on UK motorways is the right speed, or do you think that, because of the improvements in stopping distances and braking times, we could easily, and within safety regulations, see an increase in speeds on motorways of up to, say, 85 mph?

Gareth Llewellyn: I am going to give you a “No comment” on that, for two reasons. First of all, I do not enforce speeds on motorways.

Q14 **Karl McCartney:** But you would agree that vehicles are safer now than they were 20, 30 or 40 years ago.

Gareth Llewellyn: They certainly have more safety features than they had 30 or 40 years ago. The question you probably need to ask is whether people are capable of using them. It is fascinating to me that you will take a driving test—I will not cast aspersions as to how old you are—and the technology you took your driving test on was not modern, put it that way. You might get into a brand-new hire vehicle tomorrow and nobody tells you how to use the safety features on that brand-new hire vehicle.

Part of the challenge we have—this is not just a DVSA issue—is how everybody in the country keeps their skills up to date in how best to use the technology that is emerging. You do not want to go down the route of regular retesting of people. There is quite a big financial burden on the country of doing that, and obviously we want to try to avoid that. Giving people the best possible advice and experience about how to make the best use of new safety devices on vehicles is quite a challenge. It is something that DFT will certainly need to think about.

Q15 **Karl McCartney:** For the sake of clarity, 6 February 1986: a Rover 216. Do you think the removal of classic cars from the MOT regime was the right decision?

Gareth Llewellyn: Before I joined, I had a very fascinating conversation with Richard Parry-Jones. Richard was my chair at Network Rail, but prior to that he was the chief designer for Ford for most of his career. He knows cars inside out, better than many people. One of the interesting things he said to me was that at some point you could look at the frequency with which you test vehicles based on spikes in after-market parts. The point at which you start seeing an increase in production and sale of specific parts that you believe are a safety risk is the point at which a vehicle may be struggling to remain safe on the roads.

That is quite a big shift from where we are at the moment. It could well take you into the space of vehicles that are relatively old, like the ones you have suggested, which obviously are not used that often because classic cars are generally not on the road as everyday transport. If you start seeing big spikes in after-market parts for that area, it might tell you that you might need to do something different.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The policy for MOT does not sit with DVSA. Our role is to manage the digital platform that interfaces with 23,000 garages. The policy for MOT sits very clearly with the Department for Transport. Moving issues on to a risk basis, where you identify those that pose a greater risk to road safety than others, is probably a good thing in the longer term because it focuses your effort on those parts of the industry that require your attention.

Q16 Karl McCartney: The final question from me moves from classic cars to electric vehicles. Electric vehicles and their maintenance can be very dangerous indeed. If you get an electric shock from an electric vehicle, you are not recovering—it's game over. With your safety hat on, what regime are you putting in place, or have you put in place, for your employees and colleagues to work with, look at or investigate electric vehicles?

Gareth Llewellyn: If you ever spend time with one of our vehicle standards assessors, it is an extension of what they do on a daily basis, if I am honest. I spent an entire day nominally as the apprentice to one of my lead trade union reps in a pit at Milton Keynes under a variety of vehicles. It was a fascinating day, although clearly I am so incompetent that I cannot become his apprentice. What you realise is that they come into contact with huge amounts of electricity, even today on normal vehicles. The size of batteries on HGVs is absolutely enormous. They have inbuilt in their guidance already the ability to stay safe from that type of risk. It is not just electricity risk; they are exposed to all sorts of risks underneath vehicles all the time.

You raise a good question on the general car MOT scheme. I will need to come back, having had consultation with the Vehicle Certification Agency, about the best regime for making sure that MOT garages stay safe in dealing with electric vehicles. I think electric vehicles—

Q17 Karl McCartney: As a country, we are quite a way behind other countries in dealing with the ramifications of electric vehicles and, if there is one mistake by a person, that's it. You are not going to get your heart restarted.

Gareth Llewellyn: I am very mindful of that. I spent eight great years as the group director of safety for National Grid. If anybody knows anything about the risks of electric safety, unfortunately you are probably talking to him. It is making sure that people have the right equipment and the right operating procedures to stay safe. We have that in the heavy vehicle world already, for the reasons I have just explained. Extending it into the MOT world is something that will obviously be a priority.

Karl McCartney: Sooner rather than later, definitely. Thank you.

Chair: Mr Llewellyn, we want to move on to the issue of vehicle driver and rider training, and testing being suspended during large parts of this year because of Covid.



Q18 Simon Jupp: Good morning, Mr Llewellyn. Thank you so much for your time.

My first question is regarding notice. How much notice did the Department for Transport give you to suspend driver and rider training and testing in England earlier this month, when we had national restrictions imposed in England?

Gareth Llewellyn: Probably not as much as I needed. One of the things I understand in this process is that there are a lot of moving parts, and we are not the highest priority. That is not surprising in the grand scheme of things. We had done some prior work about what might happen in a second lockdown. Obviously, we had the experience of the very first one. It is not so much the decision, which was relatively quick; it is the clearance of communications to customers that takes a little longer. Things are never done in parallel. They tend to be done in sequence.

Clearly, the issue for me is how you inform customers that their test in two days' time is no longer going to take place, and what we might do about it. The sooner we can tell those customers, the better. That is probably one of the learning points from the pandemic more generally. It is how you speed up a process that works exceptionally well in business as usual; submissions and approval of communication—business as usual—work extremely well. Having spent most of my life in the private sector, I think that probably one of the best things about the public sector is the debate that takes place and the approval process, but when you are in crisis mode it does not work as well. You need to take decisions faster, otherwise you run the risk of lots of people wondering what it means for them, and that is quite understandable.

Q19 Simon Jupp: Despite the lack of time, it was more of a customer-facing communications issue than it was within the organisation. You could respond quite quickly within the organisation, but then getting the message out, and having it understood by various partners and those you impact, was a trickier issue.

Gareth Llewellyn: Yes, that has always been the issue, to be honest. I can quite easily tell my people, "As from tomorrow testing is suspended," but getting to the 10,000 customers who might turn up tomorrow is more difficult. I would not want them turning up if we were to cancel tests for tomorrow, clearly, because that is unnecessary travel. That level of communication is important. Not everybody is good at looking at their emails, so giving them advance notice about the fact that their test in three or four days' time is going to be cancelled is really important.

When it comes to theory tests, the situation is a bit more difficult. We are reliant on Pearson VUE as our principal supplier. They require three days' notice to run the script to cancel tests, and then they put revised test dates into what they call a virtual booking system. It is actually based in the US, which has caused a few concerns for people: "Why is my test



suddenly in Michigan in America?" We are required to go through that process to be able to give people a sign of where their test is being moved. That takes a bit of time as well. The gap between the decision and the communication landing with the customer is the bigger challenge.

Q20 Simon Jupp: What particular challenges did you face during the suspension of learning and testing during the first lockdown? What have you done differently this time as a result?

Gareth Llewellyn: I go back to one of the answers I gave earlier. Things were moving so fast in March. It is easy to reflect on what we know about the pandemic now, but what we knew about the pandemic at that time was significantly less. I don't know about you, but we were looking at countries like Iran, Italy and Spain and seeing the challenges that they were facing. Suddenly, it was on us, within about a week, from about 12 March through to 18 March. I took the decision to suspend testing on the Thursday and the Friday, 19 and 20 March. I will be honest: that decision was not very popular in certain quarters, but it was absolutely essential because, as I said before, I did not know how many people I would have at work on the Thursday. I ran the risk of thousands of customers turning up and having nobody there to test them. I did not think that was fair either.

One of the things that we reflected on with the Department was how we could make sure that Ministers take those decisions in the future, which they have since then, and that we had done enough prep work behind for certain scenarios. We had already been through scenario planning for a second lockdown. We had assumed it might be national rather than regional. The regional lockdowns caused us a little bit of difficulty because our booking system, for driving tests in particular, is not regionally based. We do not restrict people to certain parts of the country for their driving test. If we shut down in England but open it up in Wales, anybody from England can still book a driving test. That is the way the system worked. It is not surprising, because you never design an IT system to operate in a pandemic. Nobody would spend the money to do that.

It has been a tricky process, but the decisions being made by the First Ministers in Wales and Scotland, and more latterly by the Prime Minister in England, have helped. We thought that those decisions were coming, and we could do a little bit of preparation beforehand.

Q21 Simon Jupp: I want to grab on to what you were talking about when it comes to the issues with the tiered system. Obviously, we return to that next week in England. We have had notice now of what the tiers will look like. Across every tier, will driver training and testing resume immediately?

Gareth Llewellyn: I go back to the answer I gave one of your colleagues earlier. I have not personally gone through the restrictions that were announced yesterday; I spent my time preparing for the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

conversation we are having at the moment. My executive is meeting this afternoon to go through the restrictions and to work out what they actually mean. Are we restricted in terms of lessons and testing in tier 3? I don't know. Once we have got through that review, we will be in a better position to understand what our position is.

Q22 Simon Jupp: An awful lot of Members of Parliament and the public are also waiting for clarity on the size at which the tiers will be administered. Whether they are district level, county level or region will have a huge impact on what you do, won't it?

Gareth Llewellyn: It will. Again, because our booking system and scheduling system for driving tests is not based on that approach, quite how we manage it will be a particular challenge. The lockdown in Leicester was relatively straightforward because it came before we had opened up the booking system for the general public. We were able to manage that quite easily. We can stop testing at certain test centres in any locality, because our deployment system says that we do not deploy driving examiners in that test centre for that period. What it does not enable us to do, though, is identify people who live in that vicinity travelling somewhere else for their test. That is very difficult.

If you are at university and you have your provisional driving licence, the chances are that your address is your home somewhere else in the country. Even then, we would not know whether that person was based in one part of the country or another. The system just does not allow that.

Q23 Simon Jupp: I genuinely wish you good luck with that in the coming days as it all becomes clearer, or not—depending.

What was the rationale behind the decision not to allow key workers in England to access lessons and emergency tests, as was the case during the lockdown in March?

Gareth Llewellyn: The challenge in March was that we made it clear that we were going to offer tests to critical or key workers, whatever the definition was at the time, and, as you might recall, the list was quite long. We opened up a system whereby they could book their test. We had close on 40,000 people claiming to be critical workers. When we ran through the list, there were a lot of people who were just taking a chance. We knew that, because some of them were turning up at tests, and when our driving examiners asked, "What do you do?", some of them were students who said, "I just took a punt and hopefully I got a test."

We are trying to avoid going back into that situation because the manual workarounds to ensure that we know who in the list is a true critical worker is very difficult. For the length of time that we have these lockdowns, we have taken the view that we should limit it to ambulance drivers who are needed by the NHS, and work with the various ambulance services to try to identify those people and get them into the testing regime as fast as possible. If we did not do that, we could end up



with a vast number of people claiming to be critical workers, and then we would disappoint them in what is a very short lockdown period.

Q24 Simon Jupp: When you could re-register to get booking slots, tests and things like that on 21 August, I hear that you had close to 7 million website visitors—almost as many as I get for my website. How will you ensure that your website is able to cope with the surge in demand that it will receive once your services reopen, and that it will not crash, because it did back then, didn't it?

Gareth Llewellyn: It did indeed. It is an interesting insight that 7 million people hit the system, when we only do 1.8 million driving tests in a year. People were guilty of doing what I do when I book Glastonbury tickets. You have four or five devices open and hope that one works. That was part of the challenge and the reason that the system fell over. We did not anticipate that people would do that. Once they had got their test, people were leaving their devices on, which did not help either.

At the time, we had decided that, rather than the traditional 18-week booking window, which we normally operate in business as usual, we would constrain it to six weeks. The reason we did that was that we were at five tests a day at the time. We anticipated, not knowing what we know now, that we would move to six tests a day. If you move from five to six tests a day, you have to take the entire six weeks and rebook it. If we went to seven tests a day, we would have to do that again.

We felt that it was important to limit the window to six weeks. We had a quarter of a million people, effectively, booking very few slots in a six-week period. Associated with the fact that people had multiple devices, that led to the problems we faced when we first opened the system. We then put, as Glastonbury does, a Queue-it system on the front, which helped to manage the number of people able to access the system for the second week we ran it, but it was still only a six-week booking window. That worked well; the system did not fall over. We updated our payment engine as well, which helped people coming out at the other end.

There are still a lot of frustrated people, and I completely understand. It is a tricky situation. We ended up opening an 18-week booking window. Doing that once solved most of the problem, because the vast majority could go in there and book a test. The test may be further away than they wanted, but they were able to get a test and most of the noise disappeared.

There were some interesting experiences. There was a chap called Harry, a 17-year-old who passed his theory test on one day and his practical test the following day. The reason he did that was that he was prepared to move to another test centre where there were vacancies. He passed his test in St Albans, a place he had never been to before, but he booked the test because he could see that there was a slot available. One of the behavioural issues that we have seen is that people are very reluctant to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

move away from their local test centre, mainly because they have experience of driving the test routes there.

That is not a very good assessment of how good you are at driving. In fact, I suspect that Harry is now a better driver because he was able to cope with an unknown route in a place he had never been to before. There are tests still available; for example, in England between the end of the lockdown period and the end of January, I have over 2,000 test slots available, but people seem reluctant to book them because they are not in the place where they want them. I do not believe I am under an obligation to give a driving test in a place that the candidate wants. They should be prepared to take the test anywhere. The outcome of it is that we are giving you a licence to drive anywhere in Great Britain, and abroad for that matter, so you should be prepared to drive on any roads.

The challenge we faced with the English lockdown was that we had 400,000 people in what was then a 20-week booking window; 137,000 of those were in the lockdown month. Do you upset 137,000 people by moving their test date, or do you upset 400,000?

Q25 Simon Jupp: Tricky. Out of interest, are there any particular hotspots in the country where tests are currently more oversubscribed than others? Do you have quieter areas? For my own personal interest, I would not mind knowing what the south-west is looking like, for example; I am MP for East Devon. I am intrigued by the level of uptake in different parts of the country.

Gareth Llewellyn: Off the top of my head, I cannot give you that on a regional basis, but you can go on to gov.UK and find out the availability of certain places. I know that there are 63 tests available between now and Christmas within an hour of the Chair's constituency.

Simon Jupp: Lucky East Sussex. On that note, I will hand back to the very lucky Member of Parliament for Bexhill and Battle, Huw Merriman.

Q26 Chair: Thank you. That will be good news for my daughter, who I am teaching to drive at the moment in East Sussex.

I had representation from some driving instructors who were saying that it is still the case that while the test is going on the driving instructor waits at the test centre. They were saying that it was unsafe to wait because the waiting-room was too small and was not Covid compliant, but the centres tend to be in places where there is nowhere else to go and nothing else to do.

Right at the very start, you were talking about the fact that the test centre may be no more, and you might be able to meet with your examiner outside Sainsbury's and then go for your test. Is that the way things are trending?

Gareth Llewellyn: I would not say it is trending, Chair. It is something that we are giving some thought to. As I said, the vast majority of our



testing estate is leasehold. Leasehold costs tend to rise, and if you do not get the fee increase associated with it, somewhere something breaks.

The waiting-room issue has been a particular challenge for us. In order to ensure that our driving examiners are Covid secure, we have had to move some of them into the waiting-room to guarantee that there is a 2-metre distance from colleagues. That then means that we cannot allow instructors in. Even if we allowed instructors in, we could not guarantee that waiting-rooms are cleaned all the time to provide protection both for them and for our driving examiners.

We have some test centres—Goodmayes in London is a good example—where we have 30 driving examiners. Effectively, once an hour, you would have 90 people there: 30 examiners, 30 candidates and 30 driving instructors. Maintaining social distance is important for everybody. We do not actually meet the candidate in the driving test centre any more. We meet them outside.

We are involved in a pilot at the moment, which we are running, to look at the test centres we have. Some of them have supermarkets or fast-food shops within a five-minute walk, in which case we would expect the driving instructor to go there while the test is being undertaken. In some places, it is possible to open the waiting-rooms because our driving examiners are not there, and they may have a separate entrance. We are doing our best to see whether we can open those, but there will be some where we will not be able to open the waiting-rooms, because Covid secure is the primary goal.

In the pilots we have been running, interestingly, half the driving instructors do not want to go into the test centre anyway. They feel more comfortable outside. That has been a particular challenge. Of course, when we get to vaccinations for everybody, that risk will in itself disappear.

The point about the meet and greet is both an estates issue and about increasing public choice. Is it better to meet people in an area where there is a bigger car park, where it is more convenient and at a time better for them, rather than asking them to try to park somewhere close to a test centre that might not have car parks?

Chair: You could end up saving money and the driving instructor who had lost his car for an hour would have a better environment to spend time in, so it sounds like a positive move.

Let us move to another matter that has generated some feedback from across the country. It relates to driver shortage on LGVs and HGVs. This Committee has looked before at driver shortages. There are question marks as to whether we can get people trained up and tested faster.

Q27 **Greg Smith:** As the Chair has just said, we have received some pretty stark evidence, to be honest, particularly from the Logistics Skills Network. I believe they have written to you as well. Their assessment is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that, even before lockdown 1, they believe there was a 60,000-strong shortage in LGV drivers, and the restrictions have added 30,000 to that waiting list. They provide evidence, for example, that the lost capacity is the equivalent to the delivery of 40,000 tonnes of food and medical supplies within the United Kingdom every single day. Do you agree with that assessment?

Gareth Llewellyn: I have not seen the bulk of that assessment, but let me be clear. The shortage of drivers is nothing to do with DVSA's performance. Let me give you a few statistics. Before we went into lockdown in England, we had 6,500 vocational tests booked through to the end of the calendar year. There are 2,300 vacant slots. If there is an over-demand for our services, I am not seeing it.

The trend for vocational testing over the last two or three years has been down in demand. I think the issue is not so much the capacity. It is certainly not a capacity issue for DVSA because we are not overwhelmed with candidates for vocational testing. If you drive around the country, you will see signs saying, "HGV drivers wanted." You see it on the back of buses: "Come and join us. We need bus drivers." There is an image issue for the industry.

If you cast your mind back to 2008, Jeremy Clarkson made some very pejorative comments about HGV drivers, which I will not repeat here, but the industry needs a really good attraction strategy because it is a really important industry. Unless we have drivers, we will have shortages of toilet rolls in pandemics, for example, and we will not get the food to the people who actually need it, but that shortage of drivers is not down to anything that DVSA has done.

Q28 **Greg Smith:** That is very interesting; thank you very much. Can I dig into that a little bit? I stress that this is off the back of evidence that has been submitted to us as a Committee, so that we can better understand what is happening.

It has been put to us that in a normal year—we all wish we could have a normal year again—around 70,000 LGV driver tests take place. That has stacked up from 2016 all the way through to 2020. Apparently, this year there have only been 631. That strikes me as a pretty stark difference. Is that true?

Gareth Llewellyn: We have been in lockdown, as you know, and we have not been doing vocational testing for HGV drivers or bus drivers, with the exception of critical workers, for that period. What I can share with the Committee, after this meeting, are the demand curves for vocational testing over the last three years and the throughput—effectively, the number of people we test. Demand for our services has been down this year, and last year, compared with previous years. As I said, I am going into lockdown now in England with 2,300 vacant slots. Nobody is knocking my door down saying, "Please test Johnny."

Q29 **Greg Smith:** The 70,000 number we have been given seems like a very



high number. Is that what a normal year looks like, or is that not where the demand would sit? Forget Covid lockdowns and 2020 for a minute. Let us go back to 2018 and 2019. Is that what a normal year looks like?

Gareth Llewellyn: Off the top of my head, I cannot tell you whether that is normal demand. We normally put through about 1.8 million driving tests, but that includes car, motorcycle and vocational. I will have to come back to you on the specific number. Bear in mind that the pass rate for vocational is 50%, so, even if there are 70,000 people applying, you will only end up with 35,000 drivers.

Q30 **Greg Smith:** That is very interesting. We all want to see a robust logistics network in the United Kingdom. We all want the food to make it to the shelves and the medicines to make it to the pharmacies and the hospitals. What practical steps do you think the DVSA could offer to try to play your part? I accept that people have to come forward and say they want to be large goods vehicle drivers or heavy goods vehicle drivers, but what practical steps do you think the DVSA could take to assist in that training and testing process to encourage more people into that profession, so that our fantastic UK haulage firms have the workforce they need?

Gareth Llewellyn: It would be easy for me to be slopey-shouldered, because DVSA is a delivery agency; we just deliver tests. I think there is intelligence in the system around the value of what acquiring an HGV licence means for both the individual and the country more generally. It may be that part of my response to your question is feeding that type of colour around acquisition of a driving licence back to the Department, so that the Department can work with the industry more broadly on a good attraction strategy to bring people into the industry.

As you rightly say, it is a valuable industry. It is not being constrained by the testing practices of DVSA, but we can probably bring some colour to what it means to acquire a driving licence. For some people, particularly coming out of Covid where we may end up with more people searching for jobs, that might be quite an important time.

Greg Smith: Thank you very much.

Q31 **Gavin Newlands:** As is so often the case, Greg asked the question I was going to ask, but I will see if I can frame it in a slightly different way. The point you made, Mr Llewellyn, about the number of drivers year on year is a good one. It is very difficult at the moment to attract drivers to the sector. Wages could, and should, be higher. Working conditions are very poor due to the lack of truck stops, or the reduced number of truck stops, around the country. There is a huge gender imbalance in the driver sector as well. In addition, costs of licensing and training of up to £4,000 are extremely difficult for employers. Some of them have to pay an apprenticeship levy on top of that, without any access to that training funding.

I hear what you say about the DVSA being a delivery agency and that



some of these issues are larger than that. You leave the role in just over a month's time. What would you do to try to fix the sector, attract drivers and make it easier for logistics companies to hire HGV and LGV drivers?

Gareth Llewellyn: The answer I am going to give is not because you happen to be from north of the border; there is actually a good example occurring there. Under pre-level 4 lockdown, we felt under an awful lot of pressure for theory tests in and around Glasgow because the apprentice programme around apprentice vocational testing was starting to become quite attractive to people. Demand for theory tests in Scotland was rocketing. Indeed, we had to open a couple of pop-up centres there to be able to cope with demand. I would look at the apprenticeship scheme, because clearly it is having an impact where other schemes may not.

Q32 **Gavin Newlands:** That worked just as well as it did in rehearsal; thanks for that, Mr Llewellyn. Is there nothing else that you would add on how we make the sector more desirable?

Gareth Llewellyn: I would go back to something I mentioned earlier. It is so easy to see an HGV driver as just sitting there and driving a truck, but it is what that actually delivers. I gave the example of Caz earlier. The reason it was important for me to give her a motorcycle test was that she contributes to society. She is on the London air ambulance, and nothing in a pandemic or in general life is as important as that.

We do not paint that picture for HGV drivers very well: what do you, sitting in the seat, do for society? When you do that, you understand what the value is. Medicines do not get moved around the country and food does not get moved around the country. You end up with supermarkets running dry, and then people are, effectively, hoarding food, as we saw in the early part of the pandemic. You need to be able to tell that story. What does it feel like to be an HGV driver, and what benefit do you bring to society? I think that would be a more compelling case.

Gavin Newlands: Thank you.

Q33 **Chair:** I want to drill a little more into some of the questions that Greg Smith asked. We have been consistently told as a Committee through our mailbag that there is a shortage at the DVSA of examiners for getting people through large goods vehicle testing. Do you dispute that? I am not just talking about this Covid year, but before that; there have been delays because there is a shortage of examiners.

Gareth Llewellyn: To go back to when I first joined, that was absolutely right. There was a shortage, and we ran what we called the 300 Project to try to bring in new people from a variety of locations to increase our capacity to meet practical driving tests for cars and for vocational.

The key thing to remember about our organisation is that we do not pigeon-hole people. A lot of our driving examiners are dual-qualified. They are able to balance whether we do a car test, an HGV test or, in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

some cases a car test and a motorcycle test, because the demand is very rarely flat in any of those scenarios. To go off on a slight tangent, every 40-year-old in the country wants to get on a high-powered motorbike and go to Wales in the spring. Motorcycle tests go through the roof at that particular point, but very few people want to take their test in January.

How we manage our workforce so that we can flex across all of those schemes is really important. There is no sense at the moment that we have a shortage of LGV examiners. As I said, at the moment the demand is not there. If there was demand, I would be out recruiting people to be able to meet it.

- Q34 **Chair:** Can you account for why we would be told that there is a shortage? It does not make sense that someone would come to us and say, "I've got a problem," when in fact they should not have one at all. It just does not make sense. I am not saying that you are not giving us the correct picture, but it is slightly baffling being stuck in the middle. We are being told by those who train drivers and try to get them through the test that there is a shortage. You are telling us that there is not a shortage. I am struggling as to where to go and wondering if you can help me.

Gareth Llewellyn: I think sometimes the core message that we have a shortage of vocational drivers bleeds across into, "Therefore, part of the problem must be with DVSA and they must not have enough people to be able to do the test." I can give you very strong evidence that says that that is not the case. I honestly—

- Q35 **Chair:** I will just stop you there, Mr Llewellyn. This is not coming from those who are trying to recruit. This is coming from those who are trying to train. Therefore, it is much closer to the ground in that sense. They are saying that they cannot get people through their test because they do not have the DVSA resource to have the test taken. You would say that is not reliable evidence.

Gareth Llewellyn: On a national basis, we have spare capacity at the moment to do vocational testing. We have had that for a while, and the demand has not been there. That is not to say that in certain locations there isn't a challenge, of course. I cannot guarantee that at one test centre there has never been a problem in delivering tests. On a day-to-day basis that will certainly happen somewhere in the country, but more generally I do not have a problem with meeting demand for vocational testing.

Part of the solution, if we move into solution mode, might be that training schools rely on the local test centre, which is understandable, but moving their candidate to another part of the country where there is spare capacity may be the answer in the short term.

- Q36 **Chair:** How about the idea that you delegate examiners to the training centres, so that, when there is a constraint in the way we are talking about, somebody can be seconded or authority can be delegated



HOUSE OF COMMONS

downwards? Does that have any attraction to you as being more efficient?

Gareth Llewellyn: Delegation occurs in certain sectors—for example, for the fire service and some of the big operators, where they have delegated authority to test their own people. Those are businesses rather than training schools. We try to separate the training from the test. It is important that there is some independence in that process.

Q37 **Chair:** You have been quite innovative in talking about what the car centres may look like, or lack of car centres, so that you could modernise the approach that way. Do you not think there is something to be said for delegating down to centres, understandably with the right controls in place? That may be a way of at least ironing out any bumps in terms of one side saying this and the other side saying that it is a different picture.

Gareth Llewellyn: The answer may be in something I mentioned earlier, which is earned recognition. I will quickly give an outline of what that scheme is and why the principles can be applied in other areas.

For HGV operators and bus operators, we audit them. We have a series of auditors that check their roadworthiness and the way in which they record drivers' hours. They must have a digital system for recording both, selected from a pre-authorised list by us. There is a whole series of KPIs that they need to report back to us. If KPIs do not go outside certain boundaries, they remain members of earned recognition, and we do not pull them over on the roadside. At the moment, as an aside, in the Covid world, they have a 12-month exemption from the annual MOT test. Those are people who know how to manage their vehicles. We have confidence in what they do and the systems they use.

We piloted earned recognition in that space, but with the knowledge that it could help elsewhere. Where we have good training schools, either in the motorcycle industry or indeed in the vocational industry, we can use that concept over a period of time to see whether we can delegate, but we are not at that stage at the moment. We need to understand how earned recognition will work for operators at the moment, and check that the principles around which the scheme are built would hold up in other areas. That may be an issue for you going forward.

Q38 **Chair:** A final point goes back to the figures that Greg referenced. Surely it will be the case, because freight will continue to be transported, that with such a long period of time when there has been inactivity due to Covid, there is going to be a heck of a backlog to get drivers through. One would like to hope that there will be great demand from those who want to train as drivers, not least looking at the jobs market. Are you in a good position at the DVSA to be able to get those tests through fast, or do you think that you are going to need a lot more resource to be able to deliver them quickly?

Gareth Llewellyn: I have confidence in my people; they have plans in place to recover the backlog. On a parallel issue, when we reopened HGV



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and bus testing in July, the industry was very clear: “DVSA can’t cope with the backlog and will not be able to deliver.” But we have. We met all our requirements. We do not have vehicles waiting for tests.

Q39 Chair: I appreciate you don’t now, because we are still fallow, but we hope that we are going to come out of this and that lots of people will want to become drivers because there is a good job market where there is a lot of requirement for them. Are you ready, when normal returns, to get those recruits through the system?

Gareth Llewellyn: The example I gave you about vehicle testing was that the industry was adamant that we could not do it. With the right plans in place, we can. The right incentives to staff have enabled us to have the right level of resource. We are doing exactly the same both for car practical testing and for vocational testing. We have incentives in place for our examiners to work overtime and on Saturdays and Sundays, and for managers who are warranted—effectively, all driving examiners have a warrant to be able to undertake the test—to be testing for a proportion of the time as well, to try to reduce the backlog as far as possible.

The thing that we need the public, in the case of cars, and trainer bookers, in the case of vocational, to do is to use earlier slots if they are available. Please don’t waste them. It might mean that you have to travel further, but the opportunity to have a test earlier is always there.

Chair: Again on Greg’s point, perhaps you would show us the data that demonstrates how you were able to fix the problem from some years back, and that the demand and supply was awry, and potentially what the DVSA will do to meet the challenge as we return to normal. We do get a lot on this, Mr Llewellyn, and there seems to be a very different picture that we are being told about on the ground from what you have told us in the DVSA. We would be keen for a little more evidence.

My apologies to colleagues for taking too long on that. Back to Simon on suspension of MOTs.

Q40 Simon Jupp: In my constituency of East Devon, I have had garages contact me because MOTs were not suspended during the current lockdown, unlike earlier in the year, and garages are working through the backlog that was created as a result of the first suspension. To what extent were you involved in that decision making, and was it primarily made for economic or safety reasons?

Gareth Llewellyn: We were not involved in it. It was a departmental decision, so I cannot answer the second part of that question. They decided to suspend the MOT for, initially, six months. We went back to them on the basis of that decision, and asked them what they wanted to do with safety recalls, which is one of the reasons I have been in front of this Committee on three previous occasions. We agreed that unless it was absolutely safety critical—there is a whole variety within safety recalls, as you might remember—we would allow garages to fix that as part of the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

normal course. We were not involved in the decision around the suspension of the MOT.

- Q41 **Simon Jupp:** An awful lot of garages closed during the first lockdown. That must have had a big impact on what you can do anyway and your concerns generally over the standard of cars on the road, surely?

Gareth Llewellyn: It would have done. You need MOTs to ensure that vehicles are safe on the road. MOTs were still done in that period. It is surprising how many were done, even in the first part of lockdown. We turned off most of our services, so our income dropped. The Department stepped in. We made a request of the Department for about £51 million to see us through from June to October. In the end, we handed £16 million back because the income from services came back far faster than we thought, and a big proportion of that was from MOT testing anyway.

I know the decision to suspend MOTs was taken by the Department. I do not know whether it was for safety or economic reasons. I cannot answer that question, I am afraid.

- Q42 **Simon Jupp:** We know that half a million more MOT tests were carried out in September this year than they were last year, obviously making up for the backlog. With that in mind, and with the enormous strain it would have caused on garages up and down the country, are you concerned by the impact this surge could have had on the quality of checks, given the stresses and strains on staff?

Gareth Llewellyn: I have no evidence to say that there has been an impact on quality. Again, I cannot answer that question; although we have people who inspect MOT garages, because of Covid, we have had to manage that very carefully. The number of garages that we have been inspecting over this period, while it has been relatively high, has not been up to the normal levels. All that said, we had a target to increase our investigation of garages that had serious defects in their assessment process by about 5%, and I think we have increased it by about 43%. We have people out there checking whether garages are doing the right thing, but it has been in the context of the rules set down for MOTs rather than a Covid-related activity.

- Q43 **Simon Jupp:** Going back to the checks you provide on garages themselves, can you give us any figures as to the proportion of checks you have managed to carry out this year in comparison to last year, and the impact that the pandemic has had on that important part of your work?

Gareth Llewellyn: The tricky part with the last component is that you do not know whether it is Covid related or is generally competence by the garage or the tester. I do not think you would be able to split that out. We can certainly give you an assessment of the increase in the number of visits that we have undertaken, and the level of issues we have found in garages.



Some of that has been desk-based. As I mentioned very early on, we use artificial intelligence to run through MOT records. We have a database of over 500 million. That artificial intelligence is able to identify where garages are granting MOTs without the car being there. In one of the very first activities, we spotted a garage in the north-east giving 40 MOT certificates off one lane in one day. That is fantastic productivity, if you ever get round to that; it is virtually impossible. We had covert surveillance out there the following day, and that person is now in prison. At the very serious end, we can take some very strong action. As I said, we have spotted an increase in the number of serious defects at MOT garages, but it would be almost impossible to distil out whether that was because of Covid or general competence in the workforce.

Q44 Robert Largan: I want to look at another kind of testing. This might be a bit of a niche issue, but it is certainly one worth covering. I have been talking to quite a few businesses that modify minibuses, often to make them wheelchair accessible. The testing required for that through the DVSA is individual vehicle approval—the IVA. I have been told that there are quite a few problems with DVSA testing in this area. Lots of testing is being cancelled, often with 24 hours' notice. Then they have to wait up to two months to be able to rearrange testing, which is obviously causing a huge amount of problems for businesses in that area.

Similar to what was talked about when it came to driving tests, the reason that is often given is that there are no examiners available. It would be worth hearing your thoughts on what could be done—if that is right and there is an examiner shortage in that area—to try to improve testing in the IVA field.

Gareth Llewellyn: Thank you for that question. Unlike the answer I gave for vocational testing, where I am clear that the constraint is not with DVSA, in the IVA space it is down to us. We do not have enough specialist testers, and it is a very specialised job. To give you an example, when we had our last executive meeting at one of our sites outside Bristol, there were two McLarens in there that had been converted from Le Mans racing cars into road cars. Making the assessment about whether that is safe or not is a very complicated job.

We do everything from that through to ambulances, which we referred to earlier, and kit cars that have been in a garage for three years and suddenly come out and need a test, through to catering cars and mobile homes that have been developed. It is such a broad space that having the technical expertise to do that has been a challenge. We are in discussions at the moment with the Vehicle Certification Agency and the Department for Transport about changes we might wish to make to that scheme to make it work better for customers, while of course maintaining the safety aspect of it.

Q45 Robert Largan: One of the pieces of feedback I get is that individual staff at the testing centres are excellent, but when it comes to communication there is a real problem. I gather that there was a move



away from the previous flexible booking system to a central one, which does not seem to have worked. Do you think that this is going to be about processes and systems, or is part of the problem simply resource? Is it difficult to have the resources and enough people to do that niche job?

Gareth Llewellyn: It is a combination of all of those. One of the biggest challenges for us is that quite often we do not know the volumes that are about to appear next week or next month, because they can come from various sources. That requires, for us at least, a better relationship with some of what I call the bulk manufacturers who are not part of the type-testing process that VCA runs. It might be a company that converts flatbeds into motorhomes, but they only do 100 a year. To understand when those 100 are likely to be ready for us to test them, we should have a better relationship with that type of customer and be able to work out when we have the right resource in the right place to do that.

It is very difficult with kit cars. When the paperwork is submitted for that type of test, we have to give a test in 15 days, yet it could have taken three or four years for the person to build it in their garage. It is almost impossible to understand what the future demand in that space might look like. There is no doubt that there was a problem in the up-front paperwork aspect of seeking an IVA scheme. You obviously have to provide evidence of the construct of the vehicle, so that we know exactly what to test against. I think we have probably solved most of that.

I do not think the booking system is the issue. I think it is the unpredictability of demand and not having enough people to meet demand when it gets to peak level. What that might point you to is actually a different model completely, maybe redrawing the boundaries. If you are what I would term a mass manufacturer but at a relatively low level, why is that not part of a normal type-testing approval process run by the VCA, as it is for all big manufacturers? In other places, if it is single vehicles, could we just move them into the MOT scheme? There are some very complicated vehicles out there that need a very specialist test to make sure that they are safe on the road. I would not suggest we do that any other way.

- Q46 **Robert Largan:** That is interesting to hear. I have another couple of points related to that. One thing that is quite concerning is that I have been told that there are so many difficulties in getting IVA tests that some manufacturers are now taking advantage of what is considered a loophole. They are having the test under the national small series type approval, and then afterwards informing DVLA that the vehicle is now a minibus and is wheelchair accessible. Therefore, they are getting round all the rigorous tests of the IVA. I gather that is now being considered as an option by a few companies to get round the delays. I would be interested to know your thoughts on that and whether that loophole needs to be closed.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Gareth Llewellyn: Thank you for raising that. That is the first time I have heard that there is a loophole that is being exploited. If you are able to send us some evidence of that, we will investigate it to see whether that loophole provides an opportunity or results in a safety risk. We will assess it on that basis. As I said before, we are looking at options with the Vehicle Certification Agency and DFT to make delivery of the scheme more sensible. I do not think it will be as it is at the moment.

Going back to something I mentioned earlier, if you are in the semi-mass modification of cars, for example, and you are producing pretty much the same vehicle but in relatively small numbers, why does each one actually need an IVA test? It does not seem right. There must be something in that space whereby we can improve the system, and then make sure that the rather limited resource we have, which is highly specialised, is devoted to the things that need the specialist test and pose the greatest risk to road safety if we get it wrong.

Q47 **Robert Largan:** That is an encouraging answer. I will certainly write to you with a bit more information on the loophole. A final issue is again about trying to improve the way that these tests might work.

This is looking at the POTFs—the privately operated testing facilities, sometimes called authorised testing facilities. A manufacturer would have one of those testing facilities on site, and the examiner would come and carry out the testing there to make things more efficient, particularly when manufacturers are quite some distance from the handful of testing centres that there are.

I gather that that was being pursued and now seems to have come to a halt. I would be interested to know your thoughts on whether the option of privately operated testing facilities is going to be revisited. I know of businesses that have invested in having the facilities on site in anticipation of being allowed to do that, and then the DVSA stopped going ahead with it. They have put all the money in and now cannot have one of the facilities on site. Is that going to be looked at again, or is it now dead?

Gareth Llewellyn: There are two separate issues. I am a bit ambivalent as to where the test actually takes place. It could take place in an authorised test facility, in a POTF or at one of our own sites. The key thing is whether we can deliver the right level of service to the customer, so I am a bit ambivalent on that.

There is a more general point on the opening up of new testing facilities. When next generation testing was introduced—way before my time—it was in part a response to try to exit from Government estate. Testing was undertaken on about 90-odd locations that DVSA and its predecessor owned. It was moved out to the private sector. It is now at around 500 authorised test facilities. Remember that the fleet has remained exactly the same. We are spreading resource across a considerable extra estate, which, by definition, makes the whole process less productive.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I took a decision, probably 18 months ago, not to approve any more authorised test facilities. We were getting into a situation where the utilisation of my people at the existing test facilities was getting too low. To give you an example, since the start of this financial year we have failed to turn up at a testing facility on only two occasions in the whole year, but the testing facilities have cancelled 1,660 because there were no vehicles coming in to test. The more testing facilities I open up, the more that problem will arise.

Part of the challenge for the future is working out where you want your test facilities. There are parts of the country where there are probably still not enough. If you are in the Lake District you will still have to travel quite a long way to get to a testing facility, but when you have four or five within a 10-mile radius, it begs the question whether that was originally the right model or not.

Robert Largan: Thank you very much for those answers. They have been really helpful. I will certainly be writing to you.

Chair: Mr Llewellyn, you touched on road safety in part of your answers to Robert Largan. We are going to ask you now about the review of the highway code.

Q48 Lilian Greenwood: Earlier this year, the DFT ran a consultation on proposals to review the highway code to improve road safety for vulnerable road users, particularly cyclists and pedestrians. I know that the DVSA has a role in developing and publishing the highway code. What level of involvement did you have in deciding on those proposed reforms to the highway code, which, as I say, are designed to better protect vulnerable road users?

Gareth Llewellyn: Thank you for the question. The highway code is actually the DFT, not the DVSA. We publish it, but only because we have the publishing relationship with the TSO. DFT determines what changes in the highway code. As you know, they are required to go out to consultation, and any changes to the code itself have to be laid in Parliament for 40 days afterwards.

Changes to the annex of the code do not need that level of consultation, but for the main aspects they need consultation. In the formal sense, we are not involved in changes to the highway code. Having said that, there is constant interaction between my people—particularly my policy leads—and DFT to understand what needs to change in driver training in particular, which then feeds through to driver testing, that will improve road safety. We constantly exchange ideas, but ultimately it will be for the Department to determine which changes take place. The next one, for example, is safety on smart motorways, which Highways England is discussing with the Department. That is the next consultation that will take place—in early spring next year, I think.

Q49 Lilian Greenwood: Do you think that the training provided to drivers needs to improve to protect vulnerable road users? Is that something you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are particularly looking at? Obviously, pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and increasingly scooter riders are vulnerable. Do you feel that they are sufficiently considered and dealt with in the training?

Gareth Llewellyn: The fact that about 50% of candidates turning up for a driving test fail tells you a big story. We need to improve driver instruction and training. That is a really big priority for me and for the organisation. I would much prefer it if every candidate who turns up at test is fully competent to drive for the rest of their life. That is the whole purpose of the DVSA. Anything we can do to improve that is really important.

There are some driving instruction associations—DIA is a great example, with Carly Brookfield—that have done some great work on modular learning. We need to get people to understand that a driving licence is a privilege and not a right. It is a privilege to be able to drive on our roads; you have a weapon that can kill people, and it is important that you know how to drive safely. Having plenty of training before you arrive for test is so important. One of the reasons for the change to the driving test was to make sure that it was more relevant and more testing of people's ability to be on the road.

The thing that sits on the horizon that gives me a lot of hope—I have referenced it on a few occasions—is that the theory test has been outsourced for nearly 16 years and in September next year the DVSA will be running it. One of the reasons behind that is that at some point in the future, when technology is more accessible and broadband speeds are better around the country, we will put that on to virtual reality, so that it is an immersive experience for people before they get on to the road. You can experience risks that you may only encounter once in your driving lifetime, but you can experience them before you ever get in a car and you can know what it feels like.

You have probably driven around the roads and seen the leaping deer on the sign, but I wonder whether you have ever experienced a deer jumping out in front of you in real life; probably not. I would love to know what it feels like before it ever happens to me. That sort of immersive experience will be hugely important. We could make it available to six-year-olds who get on a bicycle for the first time. We could make it available to, as you say, horse riders. I could envisage taking a tipper truck driver and putting them on a bicycle next to the tipper truck, and they can experience what it feels like to have that tipper truck turn left in front of the bicycle.

That move to an immersive experience and an understanding of risk will be the game-changer for road safety. It requires more development of the virtual reality component, and obviously better broadband across the country, because the size of the visual movie clips is pretty significant. If we can get to that point, I think it will create a huge change in the way we instruct people.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q50 Lilian Greenwood: That is really interesting. Some of the things in the review are establishing guidance on passing distances and speeds when overtaking vulnerable road users like cyclists and horse riders. Do you have a view on those things even though you suggested that the DVSA is not directly involved?

Gareth Llewellyn: We will, because the information that we pick up through the driving test will give us an insight into how much of a problem that is for people arriving at our test centres. We regularly feed that information through to the Department, and I hope they consider it in the work they do in arriving at a change to the highway code.

One of the great advantages of digitising the capture of the driving test that we have done in the last year is that we now have very granular information about where and when people struggle to control a vehicle safely. We have never had that before; everything prior to that was recorded on paper, as you know, and there were errors on 800,000 of those pieces of paper every year that needed to be corrected. We had no information about why people were struggling to drive on the test. Having digitised that—it is an immensely successful project and it has won awards—we have that information, and that is going to be hugely valuable.

Q51 Lilian Greenwood: This is going slightly off topic, so it is not about the highway code. As you know, the Committee has separately been doing some work on young and novice drivers. It is very clear that the bar you have to cross to become a driver is quite high, with the theory and practical tests, but you go from being a non-driver to being a driver and able to drive everywhere.

There has been a quite a lot of discussion about the possibility of a graduated driving licence, which maybe breaks that down into some steps as you develop your experience. Do you have a view on the value of its not being such a binary thing between being a non-driver and a driver, and whether there is a place for that sort of gradation?

Gareth Llewellyn: I am totally against it. I am sorry if that does not land very well with the Committee. All it says is that there was not sufficient instruction prior to you taking the test. It is the pre-test instruction that we need to solve and professionalise so that, when people come for a test, we know that if they pass they are capable of driving anywhere at any time.

It is rather odd that we do not test people at night. If we were able to test in low light conditions, it would also increase our throughput, which would reduce the backlog we now have because of lockdown. The only reason we cannot do that is that we have to do the eyesight test on the day. That is ludicrous because we are asking people to stare at a number plate on a chain-link fence. If you go to Specsavers, they do not do that. It is quite possible to do an eyesight test either beforehand or in a digital



HOUSE OF COMMONS

way. That means we can test people in the dark, because they could be driving in the dark the following day.

We need to get them to learn and to drive in the situations that they will find themselves in for the majority of their life—we may come back to post-test training in a second—and do that before they come to test, rather than put in additional provisions afterwards to limit whether they are capable of driving in certain circumstances.

We have struggled with the inform, educate, and advise part of our agenda, because funding has always been an issue in that we do not make a huge amount of money. That needs reinvigorating. For all of us, as we heard in an amusing comment earlier on, life has changed on the road since we took our driving test, and the technology in cars has changed. We need to focus on giving people better information about the things they can do to stay safe after they have taken their test. That is for all of us.

Q52 Lilian Greenwood: Going off track again, we are seeing a big growth in electric bikes and e-scooters. There is no requirement for people to take a test before riding those. Do you think that is right? Is it completely unnecessary given the speeds they go at? I am curious as to your view on that.

Gareth Llewellyn: I do not have a particular view, to be honest. At the end of the day, if they pose a safety risk to anybody, they should be tested, and they should become part of the formal system. It will be for others to judge whether they are, at a certain level of complexity, a safety risk. As I said very early on, the whole purpose of DVSA is to make sure that people stay safe on the roads. If there are areas where Government are concerned that unsafe activities are taking place, they should come under the bailiwick of DVSA.

Q53 Lilian Greenwood: The review of the highway code is being undertaken. Do you think that the pandemic and subsequent changes in travel behaviours, perhaps with more vehicles on the road as people avoid public transport, and possibly more cycles and pedestrians, will impact the outcome of that review?

Gareth Llewellyn: I do not know whether it will impact the outcome of the review. I am not close enough to the review to understand where it is at the moment. What you have highlighted, though, is a concern for me. It is as much a concern in the context of when autonomous vehicles come on to the road. For me, the highest risk period is when we have a mixed economy. If we have a mixed economy, with lots of people on the road on bicycles, motorcycles or in manual cars, alongside autonomous vehicles, managing that flow in a safe manner will be a bit of a challenge unless there is segregation.

It is virtually impossible to see scenarios where, in cities as congested as where I live, you could ever put in infrastructure to keep autonomous



HOUSE OF COMMONS

vehicles separate from manually operated vehicles. The future is going to be challenging. There is no doubt that my successor has plenty of opportunities to improve road safety—they will not come short, that's for sure—and she has some brilliant people around her to do that.

Lilian Greenwood: Thank you. I will hand back to the Chair, with apologies if I have strayed into the next area.

Chair: You have tee-ed it up nicely.

- Q54 **Greg Smith:** I would like to return to the subject of the driver learning process. For what it is worth, it was very interesting to hear your answer to Lilian Greenwood's question about getting new drivers—whatever age they are—ready before they take their test, so that once they have taken their test, they should be safe across all road types and conditions.

We heard evidence from the Roads Minister, Baroness Vere, as part of the inquiry that Lilian spoke of a few moments ago. She talked about piloting a more modular learning process that in some ways will play to some of the points you made: different conditions, different road types, rural as well as inner-city or urban driving, and so on. Given that the Minister has announced those pilots, what work is the DVSA doing to be ready for that with a framework for testing against those modules or guidance as to how the pilot can be best evaluated?

Gareth Llewellyn: There are quite a few questions in that. I referenced the work that Carly Brookfield at DIA is doing on the modular approach. It is a really important piece of work. I would not set that at odds with the driving test we have at the moment. Part of the challenge for any candidate is ensuring that they are not just being trained to drive particular test routes at their local test centre. That is the worst possible thing. To be fair, you can understand why some instructors feel forced into that because parents want their child to be able to pass as soon as possible, but you also want them to be able to drive safely for the rest of their life.

Having a modular approach that breaks down the sort of experience that you need prior to testing is really important; the test is no longer about reversing around a corner in your housing estate. It is about whether you can drive safely at 60 mph on a rural road and handle a car at complex roundabouts and junctions. It is all those sorts of things. A modular approach that breaks down the learning activity and ensures that there is enough focus on each of those boxes, so that when you get to the test you are adequately prepared, is a really important step. We have good enough relationships with DIA and the Department to make sure that we will be involved in the evaluation process, because, if what comes out of that is that we need to make adjustments to the test, we will do so.

- Q55 **Greg Smith:** To be clear, you are still of the view that it will be down to driving instructors to ensure that everyone has gone through each of those modules and everybody still takes one final test; or is work being done to see if each of those modules can be evaluated in their own right,



so that the state can say before a licence is issued, “Yes, candidate A, B and C can definitely drive at night. They definitely are competent in very wet or snowy conditions”? How we do that in snowy conditions is a difficult challenge. Is it down to instructors to change the way they teach—a lot of instructors teach very well—or is it going to be a case of examining each different module?

Gareth Llewellyn: You raise a good point. We have not come to a conclusion about whether the test itself should change as a result of the modular approach. Intuitively though, it is not so much about doing each bit in the module in isolation. It is how you string all those things together in a journey that proves that you can manage all of the aspects safely. Very few of us would ever start on a rural road and end on a rural road with no traffic around. You might have to do the other components as well.

How you make sure that you can demonstrate the full range of activities in a test matters a huge amount. The challenge is whether you can do that in a place you are not familiar with. That is the issue we need to get candidates to understand. It is good to be able to take your test in a place you do not know or on a route you do not know, because, if you pass, you have achieved the right level and standard to ensure that you and the people around you stay safe.

Q56 **Greg Smith:** We heard evidence in that previous inquiry from the Under 17 Car Club. If you have not heard of them, it is a project where, before learners are able to go on the road to learn, they are taken on to private land, on to skid pans, and given experience of different sorts of power of vehicle, front-wheel drive, rear-wheel drive, and different conditions.

You talked a lot about virtual reality and immersive experiences earlier, which would be very welcome. What would be your view from a testing perspective about the first step on the learning ladder being done in a manner similar to the Under 17 Car Club, off-road, on private land with lots of different real experiences of the way vehicles handle?

Gareth Llewellyn: It would be rather hypocritical if I said that was not a good idea, since both of my children drove at Mercedes-Benz World long before they were capable of driving on the road. What you have identified is that it is a really good thing for any candidate to have more skills and experience before they come to test. If they can do that off-road and in different conditions, we should encourage it. It would make the testing process a whole load easier, we would see a greater pass rate, and those people would be better prepared for the future.

My challenge is for the people at the other end of the spectrum. I remember when we launched the sat-nav test with Andrew Jones in Manchester in 2017. We had one candidate who passed on her 19th occasion because she only ever took the test; she did not take lessons. We need to get away from that behaviour. It is immensely valuable to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have as much training as you possibly can before you get to the test. That is the best way of passing first time.

Greg Smith: Absolutely.

Q57 Ruth Cadbury: I would follow that by saying not just lots of lessons, but lots of real driving practice on roads. I had delayed tests. I had been driving supervised for almost a year before I passed my test first time.

You have answered a lot of questions about driver lessons, driver training, and the testing regime. But millions of drivers on the roads took their tests some time ago—some of us, decades ago—when driving conditions in the UK were very different. If the highway code changes that are being consulted on go through along the lines that the Government intend, it will make some significant changes such as the hierarchy of road users, different priorities for people walking and cycling at junctions, and safe passing distances and speeds. How do you envisage that different culture being embedded among existing licensed drivers? I can see that it is not so difficult to change the learning and testing regime.

Gareth Llewellyn: You raise a good point. DVSA's role in post-test education is particularly unclear. We took the view in our strategy that it was something we ought to move into because the road environment is changing, the number of people on the roads is changing, and vehicles are changing. You get to 70 or 80 years old, and the sorts of cars you learnt in were very different from the ones you are driving now. It is not clear what DVSA's role and responsibility is in that. I do not think it has been clarified. It is something we would wish to be involved with.

Going back to the immersive experience I spoke about earlier, outside the test, there is a possibility for us to provide that type of information to existing drivers to understand how the road environment has changed and how they might interact, because we would own all the content and we would be able to provide it in a different form. Aside from the highway code, which is knitted together with example theory test questions and other bits of information, the theory test app the DVSA produces is the highest grossing app on the UK app store for Apple. It is widely used.

The material is there for encouraging people who already drive, and probably think they are brilliant, to update their driving skills. We hope that we will have the immersive experience at some point in the future, but who promotes that and who ensures it happens is tricky. I used to think I was a perfect driver until I went on a course with a former UK champion driver and realised quite how rubbish I was. Sometimes it is quite a salutary moment to understand that you need to increase your skills.

Chair: Mr Llewellyn, I am conscious of time. We have taken a lot of yours, and we should wrap up in 10 minutes. We have a few more sections, but Members are going to try to embed a question per section. I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

encourage brief answers from you if you could. First of all, over to Lilian Greenwood on vehicle recall and enforcement powers.

Q58 Lilian Greenwood: In the last Parliament, this Committee recommended strengthening your enforcement powers over manufacturers in cases of vehicle recall, and we were told that those powers were to be reviewed. You wrote to me in June 2018 explaining that you did not have the complete suite of investigatory powers. In the case of the Vauxhall Zafira fires, you needed to work with Luton trading standards.

To what extent have the powers been enhanced? You said at the time that you felt you could still do things by working with trading standards, but, given the state of local government finances, how confident can you be about relying on working with trading standards bodies to give you the powers that you need?

Gareth Llewellyn: I owe the former Committee a debt of gratitude. The fact that you surfaced this issue brought to the fore what powers we had and whether they were already there. When I first joined, I was very clearly told that we did not have investigation powers for safety recalls and we would not be able to force a manufacturer to undertake a recall. That was the legal view. As a result of the first two appearances before the Select Committee, we had secondary legal advice that confirmed we had those powers already. We have changed our processes.

In the past, we sent out letters to a number of manufacturers saying, "You need to undertake this recall; if you do not, we will take action against you." That formal stance is generally the backstop because I prefer that it is all done as a matter of course under the code of practice. Those letters have resulted in the action that we wanted being taken, so we are in a much better space. There are more recalls now than there were at the time I appeared before you over Vauxhall, and that is a good thing because they are being managed well between us and the industry.

Q59 Lilian Greenwood: Are there areas that are still a cause for concern like compliance with recall notices? Are you generally satisfied that these things are now working more effectively?

Gareth Llewellyn: I am satisfied that they are working more effectively. There is always an issue with being able to locate cars that are quite old; often they have been sold on three or four times, they are not taken to main dealers, and sometimes the owner's details have not been updated to DVLA. It is difficult to see how either we or the manufacturer can ever get to those people to force them to undertake the recall.

Q60 Lilian Greenwood: Another of the areas that the predecessor Committee called for was commissioning more independent testing of vehicles called to recall. Has that transpired in practice and, if not, why not?

Gareth Llewellyn: I do not think we need to go down that route. The clarity of powers and the changes in process that we have put in place



HOUSE OF COMMONS

mean that I do not have a major concern now about the quality of recalls or about their timeliness. The social media level at the time of the Zafira fires was absolutely horrendous. We do not see that any more.

It feels as though manufacturers take the issue more seriously. The workshops we have had with them have been productive. The code of practice has been changed and we have strengthened our stance on manufacturers who are not quite playing ball, and it is proving beneficial.

Lilian Greenwood: That is good to hear.

Chair: Thank you, Mr Llewellyn, for helping us to shine a light on that issue.

Q61 **Gavin Newlands:** Mr Llewellyn, correct me if I am wrong, but I think you indicated earlier that during the pandemic the UK was the only country in Europe doing roadside checks. How are you undertaking those checks safely and how many safety problems are you identifying with commercial vehicles on the road? Has your access to the number plate recognition service helped you to target unsafe drivers of vehicles?

Gareth Llewellyn: For clarity, and for the record, GB and Sweden were the only two in Europe undertaking road safety.

I tip my hat to the people in my enforcement group; their efforts in maintaining road safety all the way through the pandemic have been absolutely fantastic. Early doors, we decided that we would only undertake roadworthiness checks, effectively checking the structure of the vehicle. Rather than leaving a vehicle that had problems on our site, we would ask them to go off to a garage and send us the receipts for the maintenance so we could tick off that particular issue. That worked rather well.

What we refused to do in the early days was to allow our examiners to get into the cab, because, quite often, some of those vehicles were coming from places in Europe where the infection rate was higher. We have adapted that to be able to get hold of the driver's licence, and we do a drivers hours record remotely by either ANPR cameras or contacting the organisation. In the lockdown period, between March and July, there were 90,000 encounters that resulted in about 12,000 serious defects being found and 2,300 offences being issued. We did some sterling work there.

One thing I want to put on record is that there has been a lot of call from industry for delegated testing of HGVs and buses, not drivers but the delegation of the annual test. We had that by default from March through to July, because we gave a three-month exemption from the annual MOT test. On the roadside though, that led to a significant increase in the number of vehicles we found with one or more serious defects. Business as usual, we pick up about 9% of encounters that have one or more serious defects. In April, it was 15%; in May, it was 16%; and in June, it was 15%. That is a 60% increase in a couple of months, which tells you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that operators were not maintaining their vehicles at the point when we were not doing the annual test. That tells you two things: our roadside enforcement activities are really important because we are picking them up and stopping them causing a road safety issue; and there is huge value in the annual MOT test.

Q62 Grahame Morris: Earlier, you mentioned that the majority of income for the DVSA comes from fees and charges rather than from Government grant. In April, your funding model is going to change from being a trading fund to an agency. Could you briefly explain what effect that change is going to have on your operations, and could you mention why the organisation has not published a business plan for the current year?

Gareth Llewellyn: The decision to take away our trading fund status was rather ludicrous because it was an administrative exercise that means virtually nothing. Our services will continue. We will continue to charge fees and make charges. The vast majority of our income will come from that source. We will have very little income directly from Government. That is in a business as usual sense.

In the Covid sense, we are in a difficult place because we have suspended some services, so the Department is helping us out. I do not understand why the decision to remove the trading fund status happened, and what the importance was. If anything, it will increase our costs because we will need more people in our finance team to take us back into the Department and consolidate our accounts, so it will make us less efficient. I question the wisdom of that happening.

As regards the business plan, there was an agreement with the Department that none of the agencies would produce a business plan at the start of this year because they wanted us to focus on delivering services under Covid. We report performance to the Minister once a month anyway, and those statistics will appear in our annual report and accounts at the end of the year.

Q63 Grahame Morris: Can you elaborate on that? It is a very interesting answer. The financial targets that were set originally had the intention of achieving £800,000 of financial surplus. Obviously, there has been an impact from Covid and it has not been possible to deliver that. Can you elaborate on the financial targets and what was achieved over the last year?

Gareth Llewellyn: In the last financial year, we were on track for a £12.2 million surplus, and as a trading fund we would effectively reinvest that in new services and new technology. We turned off our services midway through March, so we ended up with a deficit of about £800,000, but we had reserves of about £51 million. In that context, we were not insolvent, if you take my meaning. As we have gone through this year, a lot of services have been turned off and income has dropped.



We asked DFT for support, which they were good enough to give us because a lot of our activities are still required. We did not need all the financial support that was originally given to us, so we passed a significant amount back. We have an agreement for another £30 million between October and the end of the year to see us through to that point. That agreement was pre-England lockdown though, so we will need to evaluate the impact that the current lockdown in England has on our finances, because it is about 80% of all our testing activity more generally. We will have to take another view as to where we get to.

I still believe, under business as usual, that DVSA is a good enough organisation to generate a surplus. There are opportunities for efficiencies. I talked about the abolition of traffic commissioners, which would generate millions of pounds per year and improve the ability to prosecute operators through the Courts and Tribunals Service, which is a more modern way of regulating, and it will reduce estate. Some of our estate issues around the driving test will make us more efficient and provide a better service to the public. There are plenty of opportunities, but there is still a lot of work to do in DVSA, and the people who work there deserve support.

Q64 Chair: Mr Llewellyn, we wish you very well. I think you have four days left in post. We thank you very much for all the time you have given to us. What is next for you? I assume it is not a role as a traffic commissioner.

Gareth Llewellyn: Actually, I have 35 days left, so unless I have made a mess of this particular interview and it is only four days, hopefully there is a slightly longer run-in to my departure.

I came to DVSA thinking that it was a four-year turnaround for the organisation. It has been a fantastic journey. I have enjoyed every minute of it. It has been a real privilege to be chief executive here, and now it is time to devote a little bit more time to my family.

Chair: We all wish you well. You have been very gracious about all that your team has achieved. I am sure they would be gracious in saying that it was under your leadership. Thank you for being so open about the challenges that remain, as well as the achievements. I wish you and all of the team at DVSA very well for the end of the year. I am sorry the departure party will not be bigger. That is the new normal. Thank you again for all your evidence.