



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Work of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, HC 1645](#)

Wednesday 5 July 2023

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Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Mr Ben Bradshaw; Jack Brereton; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 1–83

Witnesses

I: Loveday Ryder, Chief Executive, DVSA; and Peter Hearn, Director of Operations (North), DVSA.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Loveday Ryder and Peter Hearn.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to today's session of the Transport Select Committee. For the purposes of our records, I invite you to state your name and position.

**Loveday Ryder:** I am Loveday Ryder, the chief executive of the DVSA.

**Peter Hearn:** I am Peter Hearn, operations director for the north.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you for giving us your time this morning. The DVSA last appeared in person in front of this Committee in October 2021. How would you sum up your performance overall since then?

**Loveday Ryder:** I will cover the work of the DVSA to begin with. The DVSA is a road safety organisation. Our mission is to keep Britain moving safely and sustainably. We have three main services: with drivers, to conduct theory and practical driving tests; on goods vehicles, bikes as well as cars; and to regulate the driver training industry. With vehicles, we test heavy goods vehicles and buses on an annual basis. We regulate and accredit providers of the car MOT scheme. In enforcement, we carry out roadside checking of commercial drivers and vehicles and assist the traffic commissioners with licensing and monitoring companies that operate goods vehicles, buses and coaches.

In terms of our performance since we were last here, it has been a challenging couple of years. We have continued to recover from the pandemic. I am really proud of the tremendous hard work that our people have put in across the agency, and their continued commitment and dedication to meeting our objectives.

Since we last spoke to the Committee, we have achieved some notable successes. In our driver service, we have continued to bed in and refine our new theory test booking service, which we launched in summer 2021. We have high levels of customer satisfaction, and we are meeting customer demand. We have focused on building our vocational testing capability to ensure that we can meet industry needs. We now have low wait times and have trained three times more new examiners than we would normally have done.

In vehicle services, we have rolled out a new computer system to help authorise testing facilities to manage their accounts and to gain a real-time view of their testing results and invoices. We have been working with industry to implement the recommendations of the heavy vehicle testing review. For our MOT service we continue to perform well. We have 4 million customers for our MOT history service, as well as our MOT reminder service.

In enforcement, we have continued to keep the roads safe by using intelligence and technology to continue to focus on the serious and serial



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non-compliant while encouraging operators who show exemplary practice through our earned recognition scheme. We have been working hard to achieve our service level agreement with the traffic commissioners.

We have also launched our new vision for the agency since we were last in front of the Committee. That is our vision to 2030. That has taken us to trying to focus on putting customer needs at the heart of what we do, improving the services that we offer and working in partnership with industry so that we can keep Britain moving safely and sustainably.

**Q3 Chair:** Thank you. You said that it has been a challenging period. What would you identify as the main challenges, where your performance may not have been what customers would expect?

**Loveday Ryder:** We still have some big challenges. Our principal challenge, which I am sure will not be a surprise to you, is the car practical driving test backlog recovery, which has sadly not recovered to the level that we had hoped to achieve.

Despite that, I still want to acknowledge the tremendous effort that has been put in to make progress across our agency and across the industry, from our contact centre dealing with customers who have been ringing in to try to book tests, to those in deployment working hard to make the most of every available slot; those in comms working to help people not to come forward until they are ready to pass; those in the training industry who are promoting and working on their training standards; those recruiting and training our new examiners; and of course to our examiners themselves. It really has been a huge endeavour, but I recognise that we have some way to go.

**Q4 Chair:** My colleagues will want to probe a bit further on that topic in a minute. Your business plan has been delayed. Why is that?

**Loveday Ryder:** Our business plan is a process whereby we work with the Department and with our partner agencies as well. It is important that we get that right. It is currently with the Department and I know that it is the Department's intention to publish it as soon as we can.

**Q5 Chair:** "As soon as we can" in Government terms can be very elastic. Are we likely to see it before the summer recess?

**Loveday Ryder:** I believe that is the genuine intention and hope.

**Q6 Mr Bradshaw:** You have signed it off, but it is in the Department waiting for ministerial sign-off, along with a long list of other things.

**Loveday Ryder:** It is currently with the Department.

**Q7 Chair:** What problems does this delay in publication cause in your planning and forward programme?

**Loveday Ryder:** We published a three-year strategic plan, so our direction of travel was very clear. We are under no illusion about where we need to focus and what our priorities are. In practical terms, we have



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a set of draft KPIs that we are working to. We will be monitoring our performance against that.

**Q8 Chair:** We understand that a public bodies review of the DVSA is due to take place this financial year. Can you tell us any more about the timing and scope of that?

**Loveday Ryder:** I believe that the process is about to commence, in the autumn. We have not yet had contact with the team, but we know it is coming very soon.

**Q9 Chair:** Your last business plan stated that you had set “challenging targets” to increase recruitment from under-represented groups. What were those targets and have you achieved them?

**Loveday Ryder:** In short, we have not managed to achieve the targets that we set. We were quite ambitious. Primarily, we wanted to set a target to signal that that is where we wanted to go and to show that we were serious in our intention. We set targets for recruiting a higher percentage of females. At the moment it is only 30%. We wanted to increase the number of disabled colleagues and we wanted to focus on increasing the number of young people and people from ethnic minorities. They were the areas.

At the moment, we are operating from a fairly low base. The target we set was to increase those levels. I think we have achieved a couple of them and some have been quite close, but there is certainly more that we want to do in that area and we will continue that next year.

**Q10 Chair:** Your business plan also said that in 2022 you would appoint your “first board-level champion for diversity”. Many other bodies have had such champions in place for a long time. Why has it taken DVSA so long?

**Loveday Ryder:** That is a good question. I don’t know the background or the history. I know that we had a new chair of our board a couple of years ago. It was an early priority for him, and we moved on that quickly.

**Q11 Karl McCartney:** Ms Ryder, the warm words you have repeated twice now about your staff are obviously good for them to hear, but the Chair of the Committee asked you a specific question about what the problems were and why you had failed to improve. What are the problems? You didn’t give us any.

**Loveday Ryder:** Do you mean particularly in terms of the car practical driving test?

**Karl McCartney:** Yes.

**Loveday Ryder:** Let’s go straight to the car practical driving test. What we set in the business plan was that we wanted to achieve a lower wait time by December 2022—a time of nine weeks. We did not manage to achieve that at all. The current wait time that we are looking at is about 17.3 weeks, so clearly a lot higher.



Q12 **Karl McCartney:** Why hasn't that improved?

**Loveday Ryder:** To start with, to set the context, we lost 74% of our business through covid. We estimate that about a million tests were not carried out at that point. That is a serious impact for any business. Clearly, we were constrained in the action we could take. We needed to preserve standards. We could not compromise the rigour or independence of the test. We put in place a comprehensive plan that looked at the supply, the throughput and the demand. We have been working on that plan.

Q13 **Karl McCartney:** How long have you been working on that plan?

**Loveday Ryder:** Since we returned from the pandemic in April 2021. We were putting the plan together, also, while we were—

Q14 **Karl McCartney:** Two years plus.

**Loveday Ryder:** Absolutely. On supply, we have been working on getting retirees back into the workplace. We had our managers testing. We pulled in all other warrant card holders, or many of them, and we were relying heavily on overtime and weekend testing. We focused on our utilisation rates within the business, on leave buy-back and, of course, on the massive recruitment campaign that you alluded to.

We have actually managed to recruit 474 new people, who have entered the business since March 2021 and have entered active testing. On throughput measures, we have introduced text messaging to try to reduce the number of people who do not turn up, because we were getting a large number of wasted test slots. We have plugged that gap, or certainly improved it to pre-pandemic levels. We have also focused communications on what people should bring with them to the test. We were losing a number of tests where people were turning up in the wrong sort of vehicle or with the wrong paperwork. That is just a waste.

On demand, we have put a lot of focus on the Ready to Pass? campaign, which you may have seen. We have been trying to work with people coming forward for their test, to encourage them not to come forward until they are ready. We have introduced mock tests, working with driving instructors. We found from our research that a lot of people coming forward thought that the test was too hard, which would indicate that they did not understand the standard that they needed to achieve. We have given all our guidance to driving instructors so that they can conduct mock tests before people come through. We are seeing a 20% increase in the pass rate for people who have done mock tests over those who have not, which is quite notable.

We have been supporting the driving instructor industry to swap tests where they need it, so they can put the right people to the front of the queue. We have encouraged parents and candidates to listen to driving instructors and only come forward when they are ready. We have been taking a risk-based approach to trying to support improving standards in



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driver instruction, and focusing on the areas where people could do with a bit of support.

**Q15 Karl McCartney:** Thank you for that. It was quite a long answer to my initial question. Obviously, the people working on the customer-facing side of your organisation have been doing sterling work. How many of those who are working in the back offices and central offices are still working from home? What is the proportion in the office?

**Loveday Ryder:** As you can imagine, we are a highly operational organisation. With enforcement, people doing vehicle testing and the driving examiners, there is actually a relatively small proportion who are office-based. They work in our central admin hubs. Of those, we are following Government guidelines around at least two days in the office, but for the vast majority—

**Q16 Karl McCartney:** At least two out of five days.

**Loveday Ryder:** At least, yes.

**Q17 Karl McCartney:** How many people are doing five days per week, do you think?

**Loveday Ryder:** The operational people are doing five days a week. That will be over—

**Q18 Karl McCartney:** I am not asking about those, am I?

**Loveday Ryder:** In terms of the admin ones, we don't hold statistics on the exact numbers.

**Q19 Karl McCartney:** Would you provide those to the Committee, please?

**Loveday Ryder:** We don't collect them because we operate out of 300 or 400—

**Q20 Karl McCartney:** As the person in charge of the organisation, roughly how many of the people in your central hubs do you think are doing four or five days a week as opposed to the minimum of two?

**Loveday Ryder:** I am afraid we do not collect the data. I am afraid I do not have it.

**Q21 Karl McCartney:** You have no idea roughly at all.

**Loveday Ryder:** We are very consistent in what the policy is, and we ask people to follow it. What I will do is look at what data we have and see what I can send to the Committee.

**Q22 Karl McCartney:** I appreciate that. I have one question on MOTs. What is your and your organisation's view on the potential of changing the MOT regime in the UK? I will ask Peter the same question in a second.

**Loveday Ryder:** It is a really good thing to keep this under review and to ask the industry and take views. Clearly, Europe has different models



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for the MOT, and vehicle technology is changing all the time. Combining the consultation with a call for evidence about the future of the MOT has been really useful. It is clear that there has been great engagement in that process from the industry. We will continue to work with the Department and take that where it goes.

Q23 **Karl McCartney:** And your view is?

**Loveday Ryder:** My view is that it is a good idea to ask the question and to look at the evidence that comes back.

Q24 **Karl McCartney:** Peter, do you have a different view?

**Peter Hearn:** Obviously, there is a revolution going on in vehicle design and technology, so the timing of this is good. We are not there yet. It is to come, but I think it is a good time to reflect on it. As Loveday said, there is a different model in Europe, so another reflection would be a different model, in that they operate after four years and then every two years. We have to constantly review it and look at what the information and the statistics tell us. We know where we are now. We have a great track record of safety in this country. You would not want to compromise that.

**Karl McCartney:** I'm pleased to hear that.

Q25 **Gavin Newlands:** To go back to the car practical test backlog, what progress has been made? What is the current backlog on practical tests, and how quickly are you getting through the backlog? Realistically, when will you get through it?

**Loveday Ryder:** It is clearly a moving feast. It has been impacted by a number of areas.

Q26 **Gavin Newlands:** We accept that the pandemic was a big issue, but in bald numbers?

**Loveday Ryder:** As I said earlier, we lost about a million tests from the pandemic. We have since made available a million test slots. If you are trying to assess overall progress, on one level you could say that we have actually now, and with the people who have booked, recovered that capacity, but it still doesn't feel like that for people. There are a number of test centres where the wait time is sitting at 24 weeks.

The way we look at it, and the way we try to measure progress, is to look at the number of available slots. Before the pandemic we were looking at 45% slack in the available slots that people could book. When things were bad, that got right down to 3%. It was creeping gradually up, so as we came to December 2022, we were seeing the levels get higher. We had reached about 15% available slot capacity within the booking window. We were quite encouraged by that. We thought that the trend was going in the right direction and that we were making progress.



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Sadly, we have been affected by industrial action and the cross-Government pay dispute. We had to hold back tests in order to be able to give people whose tests were cancelled an alternative slot. Therefore, again, we saw the available slots coming right down, to about 6%. We are now in a period where industrial action has been paused and that level has come back up to about 9%.

In terms of where we would like to get to, it is important to say that we are profiling an extra 7% on our demand forecast. Not only do we have the covid effect to deal with, but we are actually seeing pressure and demand in our forecasting rise by about 7%, which we are profiling in. We are seeing a change in customer behaviour as well. Quite understandably, I think, people tend to book their test earlier in their driving journey, maybe before they have even had a lesson.

Q27 **Gavin Newlands:** That is possibly because they have to because of the wait.

**Loveday Ryder:** Absolutely.

Q28 **Gavin Newlands:** I am not quite clear from your answer: are we now essentially in pretty much the same situation as we were immediately out of the pandemic? Is that where we are, roughly?

**Loveday Ryder:** We were seeing a steady improvement, as I say, up until the industrial action part started. We are currently predicting to be at about 12 weeks by the end of our business year.

Q29 **Gavin Newlands:** There is a whole raft of data that it would be quite useful for you to furnish the Committee with after this.

**Loveday Ryder:** I am very happy to.

Q30 **Gavin Newlands:** You mentioned that some centres are at 24 weeks. What is the average at the moment? Did you give an average?

**Loveday Ryder:** Yes. At the moment, 17.3 weeks is the national average. Obviously, that varies in England, Wales and Scotland.

Q31 **Gavin Newlands:** That is what I am going to come to. There are geographical disparities. What is the average in Scotland, for instance? I am just picking that at random, obviously.

**Peter Hearn:** Obviously. Scotland is 16 weeks and Wales is at 14 weeks. It varies because there are different circumstances, different environments and different staffing levels. In Scotland at the moment, it is 16 weeks.

Q32 **Gavin Newlands:** Below the national average.

**Peter Hearn:** It is below the 17-week national average.

Q33 **Gavin Newlands:** It is a bit of a reversal from the position during the pandemic because of our different rules at that point in time. Are there





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parts of England that are particularly bad at the moment? What parts of England are struggling?

**Loveday Ryder:** London and the south-east particularly. It is because of the buoyant labour market and our difficulties in attracting and retaining people to carry on testing.

Q34 **Gavin Newlands:** In terms of test availability, my colleagues will come to block-booking and bots shortly. On pass rates, there is clearly quite a disparity between centres, let alone different parts of the country. That must be a bit of a concern. Surely, the law of averages would say that they should be pretty much the same.

**Loveday Ryder:** I cannot comment on individual disparities. I do not have that data in front of me. The overall trend in the pass rate pre-covid was round about 45% or 46%. We have seen it go up, and we are now looking at 48% or 49%, which I take to be wholly positive. It means that people are heeding the messages about being better prepared.

To ensure that we have consistency, we of course work with driving examiners. They look at the local statistics and at the different test routes that are being used. As part of quality control, we go through that picture to make sure that there aren't any concerning inconsistencies.

Q35 **Gavin Newlands:** The theory test is valid for two years. On test availability, people are saying that the average is 17 weeks, but all of us have constituents who have had their theory test lapse without being able to secure a test. The Government have said that they do not plan to change that in legislation. Have there been any discussions between the DVSA and the Government with regard to that particular issue?

**Loveday Ryder:** It has not come up again since it was first discussed after covid, no.

Q36 **Gavin Newlands:** It has not come up, but you have not pushed the Government for some relaxation in any way at all.

**Loveday Ryder:** I believe it involves legislation and therefore, no, we have not taken forward that conversation.

Q37 **Gavin Newlands:** A five-minute SI would change it temporarily. You mentioned that you had a plan to recruit 300 staff, which you have struggled with. Can you give us a number as to how many you have actually recruited out of the 300?

**Loveday Ryder:** There are 474 that we have recruited and have entered active testing. Obviously, you have attrition in that number as well.

Q38 **Gavin Newlands:** What is the net?

**Loveday Ryder:** No, sorry. You then have to add attrition. We are losing about 15 driving examiners per month to attrition. It is a constant continuation of recruitment. We never stop. We are doing a big



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recruitment in London and the south-east at the moment. We will keep going, but it is hard work.

Q39 **Chair:** I have one supplementary before I turn to Jack. When you are trying to recruit people, what is the biggest barrier? Is it purely salary levels or are there other impediments that you hear about?

**Loveday Ryder:** We need to recognise that we have to attract people in a very buoyant labour market. We attract a lot of people from being driving instructors as well, and you can imagine that at the moment, with the waiting lists, that is a fairly lucrative thing to be doing. We are tied into the civil service pay framework, so we are primarily struggling to attract.

Initially, we were recruiting for fixed-term appointments. There was a limit to the attractiveness of that. We were going for two years, hoping that we would then not need so many numbers. Now we recognise that we are seeing continued attrition, and therefore we are in the process of converting those into permanent positions. We are seeing an uptick in attractiveness for the permanent options, quite understandably. We are hopeful that recruitment will continue more strongly because of that.

Q40 **Chair:** Of the 474 you mentioned, roughly how many are on fixed two-year contracts and how many are permanent?

**Loveday Ryder:** I think the majority came on fixed term, but we are now in the process of going through and making them permanent. We have signalled to people that that is what we are doing.

Q41 **Jack Brereton:** I want to ask first about the pass-rate issue. Are driving instructors meant to stay within a certain limit in terms of the average that are being passed by a centre? Isn't there a 10% ratio, or is that just a myth?

**Loveday Ryder:** It is a myth. I actually meet all the new driving examiners who come in. It is really important for them to know that it is their decision to make. They are sitting next to the candidate in the car. They are experiencing the drive and they need to make that decision themselves. There is nobody who leans on them, "Oh, you're passing too many." We absolutely do not do that.

In fact, I mentioned earlier trying to increase our customer-centricity as an organisation. One of the ways I would like to do that—I say this to the driving examiners—is by saying, "How many tests do we lose because people are nervous and make a silly mistake?" One of the roles that we can play is to help people relax and feel as good as they can, so that what we are testing is their driving and not their nerves. The more we can get that message over and can help driving examiners to do that, the more, I hope, the pass rate would rise even further.

Q42 **Jack Brereton:** Don't you think, though, that the fact that people have to wait so long to take the test—we have seen figures that a very high



proportion of individuals have to take a break in their learning because they are just not able to get a test at the point at which they are ready—is going to lead to many more people making silly errors because they have not had experience right up until the actual test? They have had to take a break for financial reasons. People cannot continue to pay for lessons indefinitely when it might be months and months until they are likely to get a test. Isn't that going to result in more people not being necessarily test-ready at the point at which a test becomes available?

**Loveday Ryder:** I agree that that is a risk. What we say to people is that the people who are the best prepared are the ones who have lessons but also do lots of private practice. I quite understand why people cannot take lessons necessarily all the way through while they are waiting for the test, but practising privately is something that we would absolutely encourage. We know that that makes a big difference to people's readiness.

The other thing is that if you know you will be waiting a long time if you fail, the pressure that you put on yourself to pass must be very great. That is why it is all the more important that we try to do our best to take the edge off it, try to help people relax and to drive as comfortably as they can.

Q43 **Jack Brereton:** On the tests that are available, concerns have been raised that an increased proportion of tests at certain centres are being allocated to HGV tests rather than car tests. Are we seeing, in some cases, HGV drivers being prioritised over car tests because of the need and demand for HGV drivers?

**Loveday Ryder:** When we spoke to this Committee last time, we had the MOD helping us. We have put a tremendous amount of focus on increasing our own capacity so that we could continue the three-week waiting time for vocational and build that up as the MOD left. As I said earlier, we have managed to do that really well. We have also now trained enough people to enable the delegated testing to go on, so that industry can get access to delegated testers as well. I wouldn't say that we are putting any more into that now. We have reached capacity level and we are holding the three-week target.

Q44 **Jack Brereton:** Has that abstracted from car tests?

**Loveday Ryder:** It is the same group of people. We do not recruit people straight in to do vocational testing. They come in through the car route and then move.

Q45 **Jack Brereton:** So it has.

**Loveday Ryder:** Yes, it is the same group.

Q46 **Jack Brereton:** So car tests have reduced as a result, okay. On the wider issues, we have seen a number of individuals who had to retake some of their theory test because the two-year limit had timed out. Do



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you not think that that period should be extended? Surely, it is totally unfair that individuals who have passed their theory test with no problem have to retake it all over again because of the lack of availability of tests. Do you think that is acceptable?

**Loveday Ryder:** I do not want to reopen the Government's decision on that through covid. I genuinely think that the people who are losing it now are probably people who have taken the test a couple of times. It is not that they cannot initially get a test, which I think was probably the situation straight out of covid. It is people who are coming back. It is sad and I feel sorry for them. The reason that we need them to have a current theory test is that it is really important that they keep refreshing those theory skills. They are going to need them.

Q47 **Jack Brereton:** We should all be taking it every couple of years then, shouldn't we, if that applied?

**Loveday Ryder:** We get that practice from driving independently; you develop that ability.

Q48 **Jack Brereton:** If you say so. There has been a lot of concern about scams and fraud of the system as a result of the massive backlogs and the issues that we have. Are you aware and concerned about the scale of that problem?

**Loveday Ryder:** I am extremely concerned about the problem. It is quite a complex issue. There are two issues going on, if I can cover them both.

The first thing is that, ultimately, this problem will go away when the wait times come down. We were not seeing this level of activity beforehand. It has sprung up on the back of scarcity of test slots. We expect the ultimate cure is when waiting times come down.

The other thing that is important is that we do not employ or encourage anyone to provide a cancellation service. The apps and bots are not approved by us. The downside of it is that they make it harder for candidates who are not using them to get a test. They result in people paying more for their test than the official test fee. It also means that if changes come through to the test, people who have booked through an intermediary might not get to hear of them. It is a wholly bad thing.

Q49 **Jack Brereton:** Do you have any data on the scale of this problem?

**Loveday Ryder:** Data is very difficult because it is a difficult thing to get hold of in those senses. If we take the two issues, first there is the bot issue. This ranges among companies that have built a business model around a cancellation service. It is reasonably priced. We do not offer it. You could say it is a legitimate business offering a service that customers want. What they do is pull repeatedly on our system, looking for availability. You book a test somewhere you do not want. The cancellation service then swaps it for somewhere you want. That is the



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mode for the big businesses. We are also seeing enterprising individuals getting code and doing their own solutions. The bot is a very diverse problem.

We have employed what we call advanced bot protection software. We have a group that meets every week on that. We have employed things like CAPTCHA and different business rules. We are constantly increasing and changing them. It is a balance to avoid disrupting legitimate customers. When we twist the rules too high, people start to get error messages and things like that, and it becomes very frustrating for the legitimate human user if you constrain it too much. We are constantly balancing it. When we make changes, you watch and sometimes within a few hours they have coded around them. In a couple of days, the traffic will come back up again. It is a constant battle to keep on top of those bot things.

The other thing that is worth saying is that our booking system is end of life. We are building a new booking system, or are planning to. When we do that, we intend to put a cancellation service into the booking system, which will do for free what some of these apps are doing at the moment because we cannot.

Q50 **Jack Brereton:** Has there been any enforcement taken around it? Do you have powers to do that?

**Loveday Ryder:** Reselling tests is not illegal, so we do not have an ability to clamp down on it in that sense. What we have done is to try to restrict access to our trainer booking system. There is a public booking system where individuals can book in, but we have a system where the training industry can use and book tests. What we have done is change the terms and conditions in that system so that there are three things as a condition of use. One is that you cannot misuse people's data. You can only book tests with their licence details if they know about it. You cannot use a bot and you cannot sell tests at a profit. We have made those conditions of use on the business side of the booking system.

Q51 **Jack Brereton:** How many accounts have you closed down as a result of breaches of those terms?

**Loveday Ryder:** The terms have just come in. We have been monitoring it for a couple of months. We have just started enforcing. We have begun sending out warning letters.

Q52 **Jack Brereton:** You have not closed any accounts down.

**Loveday Ryder:** We have. When we first realised that there was a problem with the booking system, we closed 7,400 inactive accounts and 4,700 accounts were suspended. We have closed 107 businesses for having multiple accounts. We have blocked 70 accounts for misuse. There have been 244 warning letters for suspected misuse. Basically, I meet the team every week, and every week we investigate the next batch



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where we think there is abuse and we start to suspend all those accounts. Every week the numbers go up more and more.

Q53 **Chair:** I have a couple of quick supplementaries before I turn to Greg. You said that the reselling of tests is not illegal. Should it be made illegal?

**Loveday Ryder:** It is definitely something that it would be interesting to look at. It would help enormously if we could. I will be honest that the thing that has been a surprise to me is the degree to which people will go to exploit the situation. For example, we came across a phishing email that had been sent out purporting to be from DVSA asking driving instructors to send details of provisional licence numbers so that people could exploit the system. There are a lot of people out there who are trying to exploit the situation. If we had more ability to do something it would certainly be welcome.

Q54 **Chair:** You mentioned you have a new online system being developed. When is that likely to be in place?

**Loveday Ryder:** We have done what is called a discovery and an alpha phase, which is where we have done the technical investigations. We have looked at what it would do and we have consulted people about what they need the system to do. We have worked out the technology. We are going through the governance process now, getting business cases approved and things like that. Hopefully, we will get that soon, and we will be able to go out to market. Then we need to develop it, but we will do agile development whereby we get something that can be usable as soon as possible rather than waiting until a big release at the end.

Q55 **Chair:** Can you give us an idea of when it is likely to be in place? Is it a couple of months, a couple of years?

**Loveday Ryder:** Realistically, it will probably be a couple of years before it is fully functional, but we hope to start developing it this year.

Q56 **Greg Smith:** Just one more on the driver testing regime before we look at HGVs and public service vehicles. In my constituency, which is entirely rural, I get multiple reports a week of six-month waits to get a driving test. Is there any analysis of need for a driving test? If you live in a rural community, you are much more car dependent than if you live in a big urban centre like London, Birmingham or Manchester. Is there any analysis of the impact for someone living in the countryside that not getting a test for six months has on their ability to enter the workplace, get a job or be able to get to work and everything else that having a car and being able to drive opens up for them?

**Loveday Ryder:** We did something similar through covid, where we had cases for emergency workers, who were able to access a test earlier. We have not done it for rurality. In a rural test centre, some of the factors are that if somebody retires or leaves, if it is a small centre, capacity will have a big drop very quickly while we recruit and get somebody else into



that gap. Sometimes rural centres can go through a gap while we fill and put somebody back in.

The other effect that we are seeing in rural centres that is concerning—it links back to the bots point—is the fact that people book tests in other centres where they are not, as a way of hoping to get a cancellation in a more urban place. What happens as they get closer is that, if they do not manage to achieve the cancellation, they are faced with a choice. They drive to the rural constituency where they do not live and take the test, and for some of them that means trying to ring up local driving instructors to see if they will take them in their car. A lot of driving instructors do not approve of that and will refuse it. They end up taking their own vehicle to a rural constituency where they do not live and sit a test there. We are seeing an evening out of demand in quite a strange way. It is another effect of the black economy of the tests.

**Q57** **Greg Smith:** Can we move to HGV and PSV driver testing? What have you done to improve the service, the wait times and the application process for those seeking to take their test to drive HGVs, buses and so on?

**Loveday Ryder:** The vocational testing wait time is three weeks. We have maintained the HGV testing since December last year. There is not a problem with it.

A lot of bus testing is done by the bus companies themselves with our delegated testers. As I say, we have managed to catch up with the backlog we had in allowing them to train more delegated testers. As far as I am aware, the bus companies are able to test, and they have the testers they want. The tests they do themselves will be in their gift. The ones coming through us are within three weeks.

**Q58** **Greg Smith:** On the bus point, we have received evidence as a Committee, and I have heard from some operators as well—I appreciate this point has crossover into DVLA, but the Government need to work together—that a provisional bus licence is required before training for learner bus drivers. That is perfectly reasonable and I am not disputing it, but there has been a delay in those who wish to become bus drivers getting provisional licences, which has led to a huge drop-out rate, meaning that there are lots of vacancies across all operators—bus, coach and so on—not least the problem that a lot of bus drivers jumped ship when the salaries went up for HGVs. What are you doing with the DVLA to try to speed up that process so that we are not seeing a significant number of people who want to go into driving buses and coaches saying, “I’m just giving up”?

**Loveday Ryder:** I don’t want to pre-empt the DVLA. I am conscious that you have them coming next. I know the Confederation of Passenger Transport has come up with some ideas about this and it is working through them with Ministers. We will continue to work with the



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Department and with DVLA to do what we can to work out whether there are better solutions to the problems, or things that can be taken forward.

- Q59 **Greg Smith:** Can we move to vehicle testing in this sector? The 2021 heavy vehicle testing review concluded that the testing system resulted in very heavy cost to the industry. Your business plan stated that you would work with industry to improve flexibility, never challenging safety but improving flexibility and certainty. What progress have you made?

**Loveday Ryder:** My observation initially, coming into it, was that because we are a Government department we focused very much on, "You ask for a testing slot, we will give it to you, and we won't let you down." I think it was an important thing to demonstrate that we could do that. In fact, we are very reliable in providing the resource that industry asks for.

You will notice a change of emphasis in our vision, which is that we want to keep Britain moving. There is a sense that we are here to serve industry and to help enable them to keep their vehicles on the road. Optimising utilisation and DVSA's testing slots probably does not feel like quite the right answer. Actually, it has been great. We have been able to help 36 new authorised testing facilities to open so far as a result of removing the moratorium. I know that there were over 80 applications in the pipeline and being considered. If industry wants more testing from us, we are looking very hard at how we can make that happen and how we can facilitate it. We are but a small part in a big system, and we need to recognise that.

- Q60 **Greg Smith:** Members of the earned recognition scheme requested greater flexibility in having to demonstrate their high standards. Is that reasonable, and what are you doing to progress it?

**Loveday Ryder:** As you know, there is a call for evidence out at the moment. We presented four options for that, looking at whether you could have reduced frequency for testing and whether some form of delegated testing would work for earned recognition operators, or a reduced form of test. The other thing, and perhaps less complicated to do because it does not require any legislation, would be to offer better service—maybe some kind of a premium service for earned recognition to get what they need in terms of testing.

We are genuinely interested to see how that comes back. A shout-out for earned recognition operators. They do a great job and are fantastic in the standards that they put together. I think it is absolutely right that we should examine it to see whether there are any dividends for them. They help us not to have to focus our enforcement on road activity with them. It would be good if there was a way forward whereby something could be done to help them.

- Q61 **Greg Smith:** You had quite an ambitious target and planned to get 516 vehicle standard assessors by the end of the financial year. Are you going





to meet that?

**Loveday Ryder:** We have 518 in post at the moment, which is the number that—

**Greg Smith:** You have? That is a straightforward answer. Thank you.

Q62 **Chair:** I want to return briefly to MOT testing, following up on questions from Karl earlier. How would the DFT's consultation on MOT testing affect your processes and capacity?

**Loveday Ryder:** This is car MOT testing?

**Chair:** Yes.

**Loveday Ryder:** The things that were being looked at were changes in frequency or moving three to four years. Clearly, it would affect the fee income that we were seeing through the MOT. That would be the most immediate change. There is also the call for evidence, which will be looking at the composition of the MOT test. That would affect how we accredit and work with the industry to make sure that the test was modified in whichever way was brought forward.

Q63 **Chair:** If they were to go ahead in that way, do you think you would be able to manage it all?

**Loveday Ryder:** It would definitely be material in the way that we raised our revenue from industry. We raise fees in a whole bunch of ways. We also receive income from the Department. It would just change the balance of that, I think.

Q64 **Karl McCartney:** Has your organisation looked at the safety aspects of electric vehicles and people who work on them? Would you be looking for the DFT to bring some regulations into being that would ensure that people were kept safe if they were working on EVs?

**Loveday Ryder:** I am going to hand over to Peter on that one, if I may. I know we have done something, but Peter will have the details.

**Peter Hearn:** We are obviously working with the Department around autonomous vehicles and what is developing. We have also put in place a team to look at vehicle and driver testing, for those very reasons. An electric vehicle, for obvious reasons, can be very dangerous if you do not understand some of its complexities. That team is in place. We are now looking at that, and we will adjust our guidance and the training aspects of what we do for our examiners right across the organisation as a result.

Q65 **Karl McCartney:** I am thinking more generally. If an EV is involved in an accident, and I am there, I am not going to touch that vehicle until somebody comes along, tests it and tells me that it is safe to. That is unfortunate for the occupants.

**Peter Hearn:** Exactly, yes.

Q66 **Karl McCartney:** Other countries across Europe—you two have both



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mentioned other countries across Europe and the regimes they have in place—have safety regimes in place for people dealing with EVs.

**Peter Hearn:** As I say, part of the work we are doing is right across the organisation. It is not just for the testing elements. It would be for roadside enforcement and accident investigation.

Q67 **Karl McCartney:** They are not in place yet?

**Peter Hearn:** We have started that journey. We have started to talk to staff about it, but we are still finalising some of the detail. There is a much bigger piece of education that we all need to do for the wider public—

Q68 **Karl McCartney:** Do you have any timescales on that?

**Peter Hearn:** We are actively working on it as we speak. The team is in place.

Q69 **Karl McCartney:** Six months, a year, two years?

**Peter Hearn:** I would have thought within the next few months we will start to see that emerging clearly. It is a safety critical issue for us.

**Karl McCartney:** Thank you very much for that, Peter.

Q70 **Chair:** To follow on from that question, cars will increasingly have driver assist and self-driving technologies. How are you going to ensure that those are fit for purpose in testing in the future?

**Peter Hearn:** It is a fairly similar process. We need to understand that in a lot of detail, which is why we have put this team together, with support; we are working with the Department and with the technical expertise in the Department as well. Of course, it is going to impact not just on the vehicle's MOT—the mechanical check—but on the driving test. We need to be prepared for that and understand what it would look and feel like, and how we adjust the test as a consequence. Some of these things may remove some of the need to assess that in the future. We need to understand that better.

Q71 **Chair:** There are a couple of other questions from me and then some final ones from Gavin. You set a target of 28,000 traffic offences and serious roadworthiness defects to be detected. How did you set that target? Is it useful to have a target of that nature?

**Loveday Ryder:** Realistically, on enforcement targets, what we tend to do is look at what we achieved last year and push it a little bit and try to see if we can do a bit better. Enforcement activity is always about prioritisation. We receive income for our enforcement for non-GB directly from the Department, and for the GB enforcement we get money from the MOT scheme and the heavy goods testing scheme.

We have a fixed budget. Within that budget we are always looking for opportunities to prioritise and to get the biggest bang for our buck. I



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mentioned earlier the use of technology and strategic targeting, and whether there are ways that we can do an exercise where we focus on a particular area. As an example, we recently checked commercial vehicles that were on the road that had no MOT on them. As a result, we were able to write to a load of people and say, "Your MOT isn't there." Many people said, "Oh sorry, we've forgotten," and renewed it. For the ones who did not, we were able to target our enforcement activity. For us, it is always about trying to prioritise and target within the budget that we have to get the most effect. As I say, the targets are usually just 10% more than last year or a bit extra.

Q72 **Chair:** How representative of the problem do you think 28,000 is? Does it scratch the surface or is it a good portion?

**Loveday Ryder:** It is difficult to say. We did 120,000 roadside stops this year and 20,000 is the number of vehicles we prohibited. We took £3.86 million in fines. There were 3.4 million tachos checked. That is just a part of it. The other thing is that the people we have working roadside spend 55% of their time doing follow-up visits. There is quite a long tail to these stops and to the prohibitions in terms of research work and going through and trying to identify the operators that really are operating non-compliantly and are at the serious end of the scale, so that we can work out how to target and get them either to a public inquiry or into the court system.

Q73 **Chair:** One last question from me. Do you have any thoughts on the recommendations in the traffic commissioners function review?

**Loveday Ryder:** The traffic commissioners function review is very welcome. We took part and gave evidence to that. We will be working closely with the Department on how we can take those recommendations forward. A number of them require parliamentary time.

Q74 **Gavin Newlands:** Now for something a bit more niche. Last week, the Minister announced in a Westminster Hall debate that there is to be a review of the regulations on weight limits of volumetric concrete mixers. Has any discussion taken place with officials in the DVSA with regard to that? I take it from the expression on your face that the answer is no or, "I don't know."

**Loveday Ryder:** I am really sorry, but that has not come across my desk. We can find out.

Q75 **Gavin Newlands:** If you could, I would be grateful. I have a more general question in that regard on volumetric concrete mixers. If there are to be changes in the regulations, how much do you engage with the construction industry on these matters, and also National Highways with regard to weight limits? Can you give me an idea about how much discussion is had?

**Loveday Ryder:** We try to engage with industry a lot on things like that. We meet National Highways all the time. Obviously, we work through the



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trade bodies. We also have a forum where we meet industry and talk about their concerns. I cannot say specifically where it would have come up, but we certainly have all the right opportunities to have those conversations.

**Q76 Gavin Newlands:** If nothing else, you will be doing a bit of reading about volumetric concrete mixers on the back of this. I look forward to your correspondence on it.

**Loveday Ryder:** I used to be a civil engineer, so I know about concrete mixers.

**Q77 Karl McCartney:** I hear Gavin's last comments about you reading up on them. This perhaps refers to MOTs as well, but do you believe in the maxim, "If it's not broken, don't fix it"?

**Loveday Ryder:** I cannot think why I would not.

**Q78 Karl McCartney:** I am pleased to hear that. Obviously, on the question Gavin has just asked you, these concrete mixers have been on the roads for a number of years with no problems that anybody can discern at the moment, so why would we change the regulations that are in place? I would say exactly the same in relation to MOTs.

**Loveday Ryder:** As with all these things, we try to look at evidence. We work through data in terms of how we make policy. I will go away and find out.

**Q79 Karl McCartney:** Peter, are you aware of any?

**Peter Hearn:** I guess the alternative to that is that technology develops and things change in the manufacturing of some of these vehicles. You have to keep abreast of that. You have to understand that part of development. Any change in policy would have to take all of that into account. It might operate fine as it is, but there might be opportunities or things you need to consider from a design or build perspective that has moved on in time.

**Q80 Mr Bradshaw:** There is also the importance of design for vulnerable road users such as cyclists. Concrete mixers are pretty terrifying, I have to say, if you get up beside one. To improve the sight line for the driver is a good thing for all heavy goods vehicles.

**Peter Hearn:** Yes.

**Q81 Grahame Morris:** Might I take you back to one of the initial answers you gave to the Chair? I seek some clarification about how the DVSA is planning to deliver the service for driving tests. Is it correct that the DVSA is seeking to move away from providing driving tests at the existing dedicated centres and to providing tests at community centres, cafés and local authority leisure facilities? If that is the case, what will be the consequences for the 174 or more existing test centres? Did you say that consultation was going to be starting in the autumn?



**Loveday Ryder:** To give a bit of context before I get into it, in Scotland and in some of our outlying geographies we already operate that mode of testing: a community centre here or a shared building there. It is a model that we are used to because it works very well for outlying geographies. What we wanted to do was to see whether it would offer better customer service, so we have been working on some pilots. There have been four different venues that we have been piloting it through, with a view to seeing whether it offers customers more flexibility, better facilities and just what the model can do. It would maybe save money on the driving test estate as well, although I know it is not primarily driven by the need to save money. We have conducted those pilots. We have some results in and we are now working through what the impact is on our business model and what opportunities there are, but no decisions have yet been taken.

Q82 **Grahame Morris:** Where were the pilots? Were they in geographically diverse locations?

**Peter Hearn:** They were, yes. We did some in Scotland at a theory test centre. We did some in Yorkshire at a community centre. We have had a range of facilities on a small scale. We are now obviously going to look to see how that reflects on a slightly larger scale and see whether it is viable. Clearly, if we can offer more choice to the customer by having multiple sites that we may use only one day a week, that is better for the candidate. It will be more local for them. It is something that will evolve. It is not something that will happen overnight.

Q83 **Grahame Morris:** I have a suspicion that it could be fraught with problems where there are no dedicated premises, and members of the public do not even have facilities to do paperwork. There are issues around safeguarding, for example, for the public. I will be interested to see the results of that when they are available.

**Peter Hearn:** They are clearly issues that we want to address and we have started to address them as part of this. Obviously, the driving test by its nature is out on the road and the time spent in the test centre is relatively small. It is a meet and greet really, and then we are out conducting the test. There are some factors. We have occasions when we need to retreat. There need to be some welfare facilities and toilet facilities. All those are features that we will obviously make sure are available as we start to evolve this and test it.

**Chair:** Thank you. That brings us to the end of this session. Thank you for your time this morning.