

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Driving tests availability](#), HC 437

Wednesday 4 December 2024

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Members present: Ruth Cadbury (Chair); Steff Aquarone; Dr Scott Arthur; Catherine Atkinson; Olly Glover; Katie Lam; Alex Mayer; Baggy Shanker; Rebecca Smith; Laurence Turner.

Questions 42–99

Witnesses

[II](#): Loveday Ryder, Chief Executive, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency; Lilian Greenwood MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport; and Emma Ward, Director General for Roads, Places and Environment, Department for Transport.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Loveday Ryder, Lilian Greenwood and Emma Ward.

Chair: Welcome to our second panel. One of our number has an interest to declare.

Laurence Turner: I draw the Committee's attention to the fact that I worked for the Minister between 2012 and 2016.

Q42 **Chair:** Thank you, Laurence. I was a member of this Committee when the Minister was the Chair of the Committee.

I want people to be aware that we received and published some written evidence ahead of this morning's session. We would welcome further evidence after this hearing from the Department and from DVSA, because this is a contracted inquiry, should you wish to address any questions that you were not able to answer today, and respond to any other points you wish to pick up from the evidence.

A huge welcome, particularly to the Minister, for your first time on that side of the Committee room.

Lilian Greenwood: It feels very strange.

Chair: And for me too. Would you all introduce yourselves?

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

Lilian Greenwood: Lilian Greenwood, Minister for the future of roads.

Emma Ward: Emma Ward, director general in the Department for Transport with responsibility for road transport, which includes the motoring services agencies.

Q43 **Chair:** Thank you very much. People are not able to get driving tests for months and months, meaning they cannot get to college or to jobs. They cannot get about and are dependent on public transport or other people to give them a lift. They are paying a fortune for a service that should cost £62. Minister, what is going wrong and how long will it take to turn it around?

Lilian Greenwood: Thank you, Chair, and Committee members. I am pleased that the Committee is doing this work. It is really helpful.

Waiting times for car practical driving tests are far too long. I spend a lot of time replying to letters from Members of Parliament on behalf of their constituents, and they are right to be raising it. That is why the Government are working to address the issue while upholding road safety standards. That is really important, and obviously it was an issue that came out in your earlier session. We take the problem seriously, and fixing it is a priority for me and our Department. All of us understand how important passing your driving test is. It is one of those rites of passage,



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like learning to ride your bike or the first time you are allowed to walk to school on your own.

Learner drivers who are ready to pass should be able to take their test but, as you have heard and as you said, Chair, thousands of people face the choice between waiting many months, paying exorbitant fees, or travelling hundreds of miles to take a test. Many of the important points were made in the earlier session. The problem started when tests were paused due to covid, and a backlog built up, but there is more to it than that. There was a lorry driver crisis which meant that, for a period, driving examiners were asked to focus on vocational tests rather than on car practical driving tests. That was a decision of the previous Government. Given the crisis in freight deliveries it was absolutely understandable, but it meant that the backlog grew.

The demand for driving tests has fundamentally changed since 2020. There has been a significant increase in the number of provisional licence holders who have passed their theory test and are now eligible to book a driving test. I think the previous Government, and DVSA themselves, had not appreciated that that change had occurred. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Given the rise in waiting times, learner drivers are, as you have heard, booking their tests before they start lessons, planning to be ready to pass by the time the test comes around. I don't blame them; it seems entirely logical. If you know that at the point when you're ready you are going to have to wait six months, you are not going to wait to book until the point when you are ready.

The mismatch between supply and demand has presented, as you have heard, opportunities to the unscrupulous. I want to correct something that was said in the earlier session, which is that every test booking has to be linked to an individual driving licence holder. You cannot have multiple tests booked on one driving licence. However, if you give away your details, someone can use your driving licence number to book a test, and of course they can be changed. With that caveat, apps have sprung up that use technology to find slots and charge learners for the service. Alex, you said you had someone from Dunstable who had a driving test booked in Cumbria. They have that booking, but then they might sign up with a bot to get a swap, so that they can cancel that test and have a new one nearer to home.

The online booking service, which as you have heard is the booking system used by instructors and driving schools to make bookings on behalf of their students, is also being exploited. Test slots are being booked using the details of a learner driver, but sold on the black market for, in some cases, absolutely huge profits. We are absolutely determined to stamp out these practices. We are determined to increase the supply of driving tests by recruiting more examiners, by making sure that people who come for a test are ready to pass and by dealing with the rip-off practices that are affecting desperate learner drivers.



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Four years on from when this started, the problem that we inherited as a new Government is complex. Fixing it is something like trying to put the genie back in the bottle. We are taking it seriously. We are determined to come up with effective, long-term solutions. There have been attempts that have sometimes led to an improvement in the short term but then deterioration. We need long-term solutions. Frankly, today's session will help us to do that, so I appreciate the opportunity to come and listen to the evidence and also to reflect with you today.

Q44 Chair: Before we move to what needs to change, could you let us know, Loveday, what are the current waiting times for people applying for a practical car driving test, for HGV tests and for part 2 and part 3 for ADI tests?

Loveday Ryder: I can answer most of that question, and I will explain why in a minute. In terms of car, as of 2 December, overall for GB it is 20.6 weeks. That breaks down into England, 20.6; Scotland, 16.1; and Wales, 12.6. You can see some regional variations there. For the vocational test, the target that we are hitting there, or thereabouts, is three weeks. That has been the case since the recovery period immediately post covid. For bike tests, for Mod 1 and Mod 2, we have a six-week SLA, and we have been largely hitting that. It is at 6.2 or 6.3 at the moment. It is a very seasonal demand for bike, but broadly speaking we are on six weeks.

In terms of ADI testing, we don't have a national waiting time statistic. The reason for that is that we have a system, which you heard mentioned in the previous session—"book to hold". What that means is that our team of ADI examiners look at where tests are requested around the country on the "book to hold" system, and then we deploy them nationally to try to clear down an area or a location. It makes it quite difficult to have waiting times, so we do not have the same sort of statistic for that.

Q45 Laurence Turner: During this hearing we have been talking about generalised problems, but they are particularly manifest in local areas, as we have heard. Birmingham was named earlier this year the fifth hardest area of the country to get a driving test. Could you talk through what steps you take to monitor particular hotspot areas, acknowledging that there is a problem across the whole country? Where there are particular local pressures, what measures are taken to identify them and, if possible, redeploy resources to address very specific hotspot areas?

Loveday Ryder: Clearly, we monitor the wait times at every single driving test centre that we have. There is a degree of national variation, as I said. The demand signal, if you like, is made a little bit more difficult. I am sure we will talk about the effect of the booking cancellation apps later, but where a test is booked is not necessarily an indication of where it will eventually be taken. For example, at Dumfries in Scotland, they conducted just over 1,700 tests, but they had 23,000 cancellations. That



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is the phenomenon of booking a test in one place and actually wanting to take it somewhere else. What that means is that it is quite difficult for us to do workforce planning and to recruit and retain examiners in the relevant places.

Notwithstanding that, we look at demand every week. Our figures are updated, and we look at what the wait times are. Certainly, in periods when we have not had wait times uniformly high across the country, to the extent that they are now, we try to get people to move from one location to another. We offer them an incentive to go to London and the south-east particularly, which is where we have been short. At one point we were moving between 60 and 80 people. They would come down on a weekly basis to take tests in different parts of the country. I have to say that we don't do so much of that now because there is an opportunity to get high wait times down in places that are more easily travelable. The cluster contracts that were mentioned in the previous session also mean we can get some flexibility to move people from a centre that maybe does not have a high wait time to one that has, and go with the demand. That is the job of the manager—moving people around to try to get wait times as uniform as we can.

- Q46 **Alex Mayer:** Some learner drivers may be watching this today. Do you have any message for them? What would you like them to be doing? Should they be trying at 6 am every Monday morning to get a test? Should they be using the third-party sellers? Should they give up? What would you suggest a learner driver does today? Is the DVSA sorry about the mess that is there at the moment?

Lilian Greenwood: First of all, on behalf of our Department and the DVSA, yes, I am really sorry that learner drivers are facing that problem. It is not a situation that anyone would want to encounter.

As we heard in the earlier session, this is something that is really important to people. For many people it can be the thing that allows them to get on with their life. In the wider Department we are working to make sure that being able to drive is not the only way for you to be able to get around, but that is a bigger policy question. Many people want to learn to drive, and we want them to be able to take their test.

There are some things that they can do. As you have already heard, the pass rate is just below 50%. One of the things that you can do as a learner driver is, as far as possible, to make sure that when you come to have your test you are in a good position to be able to pass it. One of the things that DVSA has done is produce the "Ready to pass?" campaign, which aims to ensure that learner drivers have the information they need to assess whether they are ready to pass. That is not to say there's not an important role for the driving instructor to work with them to say when they are ready, or not. That has a bit of an impact on the way that driving instructors have been able to swap tests. I will park that on one side because it is complex. It is making sure that you are ready. We know that if someone takes a mock test, it increases their likelihood of



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passing their actual test very significantly. I think it is 40% or something like that. That is something that, if people can do it, is helpful to do.

The waiting time is not actually a waiting time, as in, "If you went on today, that's how long you'll have to wait to get a test." The waiting time is when 10% of tests in that week are available to book. It is a slightly different thing. Of course, tests get cancelled all the time, and therefore slots become available. Yes, new slots are rolled out starting at 6 am on a Monday morning for 24 weeks hence, but at any time there will be additional slots coming up as a result of cancellations. If you look on the booking website regularly, you will potentially be able to spot them. The difficulty is that there are also bots doing that on people's behalf, at a cost, and obviously bots can move faster than human fingers. I understand why people do that. It is one of the reasons why we want to tackle the bots. Although you could argue that they provide a service, they are charging for something that shouldn't be needed for learner drivers.

Chair: We will come on to the bots issue.

Lilian Greenwood: Is there something more you want to add, Loveday, in terms of our advice to learner drivers?

Loveday Ryder: I can, but to echo what the Minister said, I would hate anyone to be under the misapprehension that we do not desperately care about getting this sorted out. At DVSA it is the top topic of our management attention, and we have worked tirelessly over the last four years to try to address the situation. It is priority one for us. I am desperately sorry for people who are struggling to get their tests. I empathise and feel for them. There is no complacency.

Q47 **Rebecca Smith:** Loveday, you addressed the question we asked earlier about regional variations in test availability. You talked about the Wales and Scotland illustration. What we meant was the south-west, south-east, midlands, and so on.

Chair: And London.

Q48 **Rebecca Smith:** Yes. Do you have that drilled down as well?

Lilian Greenwood: The regions are split by four zones. Zone A is Scotland and north-east England, and the average waiting time is 17.1 weeks before you get to 10% of available slots. In Zone B, which is Wales and north-west England, it is 16.8. In Zone C, which is midlands and south-west England, it is 21.4. In Zone D, London and south-east England, it is 23. London and the south-east are where the problems are the most severe. I actually have availability and waiting times for every single one of your constituencies. Generally, it is at the upper end. That is the reality of where we are at the moment. That is why it is such a priority to try to do something about the issue.

Chair: That is where we are now with waiting times. Let's move to what



is being done to try to reduce waiting times.

- Q49 **Katie Lam:** I understand that the DVSA is looking to replace, or perhaps has replaced, their driver services platform, which is basically booking and instructor registration. Has that happened? How is it going?

Loveday Ryder: It was identified as soon as we had to move bulk tests through covid that the platform we had was not really up to the job. We started, from the very earliest point, looking at alternatives. We ran some testing and some pilots looking at different technologies and we got a mock-up of the system that we would like to build. We are pretty confident that we have a good solution and a good set of requirements.

We have produced a business case. We have gone out to market. We are now in the governance period for the full business case, which has to go through all the relevant approvals, including Cabinet Office and Treasury. We hope to be able to let a contract in the spring and get going with development on that.

- Q50 **Katie Lam:** How long do you think it will take from then?

Loveday Ryder: It is difficult to say because it is an agile development. The system itself covers an awful lot of things other than just the car booking system. We will prioritise and start with the car booking system. If you don't mind, I am not going to commit myself to a time because we don't yet have a supplier and we haven't yet worked through that timetable, but it is priority one for the development as soon as it gets going.

- Q51 **Katie Lam:** There are targets, obviously, that the Department and the DVSA set for waiting times. I think the target for March this year was seven weeks' wait. How was that target arrived at? How was it set? What would have needed to happen for that target to be hit?

Lilian Greenwood: Emma, you are probably best placed to talk about that because it pre-dates me being in post.

Emma Ward: It does. The business planning process that the Department goes through with DVSA covers all of their services, not just driver services, but vehicle and enforcement as well. The business plans tend to set out a range of KPIs covering all of those.

You are right that the driver wait time target was retained at seven weeks. At that point, Ministers felt that it was important to set that ambition to get the service back to where it needed to be. I think you have heard in the evidence that you have had today, and I am sure you will hear as we go through the conversation today, about the range of interventions that the DVSA, with our support, has done over the last two or three years to try to get that into a better position. At this point in the year, it is very clear that we are not going to achieve that seven-week wait time. It is important that we continue to discuss what is a suitable



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ambition and target in the business planning process and, more importantly, that we continue to get to the root cause of the problem and ensure that DVSA is equipped to address and tackle it.

Q52 **Katie Lam:** Is seven weeks still the target now?

Emma Ward: We have not yet published the business plan for the current year.

Q53 **Katie Lam:** Is there one particular thing that you feel led to missing it by such a margin, or is it the cumulative effect of all the things we have already been discussing this morning?

Emma Ward: You have heard in the evidence today and from the written evidence that we clearly had a covid impact. We have definitely seen a shift in the demand picture and the way that learner drivers are now engaging with the system, perfectly rationally. The capacity within the DVSA in terms of numbers of driving examiners is probably the single biggest barrier to achieving that reduction in wait times.

Q54 **Katie Lam:** What I am getting at is that that was known when the target was set. Is it just that we have failed to increase that capacity, essentially?

Emma Ward: We will get on to it. Loveday may want to say a bit more, but DVSA has worked very hard to recruit new driving examiners. We have gone from a point where the churn rate for driving examiners was relatively high to it now starting to come down. It is more in line certainly with DFT and with benchmarks across the civil service, but we have continued to lose driving examiners at a rate which means that, as we recruit them, the overall numbers have not increased at all. Since 2020, we have managed to stay flat rather than increase capacity. What we need to do is increase overall capacity. It is both about attracting people in and, importantly, retaining them.

Q55 **Dr Arthur:** In terms of retention and recruiting new drivers, we heard from the trade union that a big factor is pay and conditions. I don't want to speak on behalf of the Committee, but I think people were quite surprised about the entry pay grade for such an important role. Are pay and conditions in DVSA an issue?

Emma Ward: The DVSA is part of the DFT pay framework. It is something that we keep under review all the time. We heard this morning that it has been difficult to retain people. We have an older workforce in driving examiners. I think pay is one of the issues, but post covid, like many sectors, we have seen attrition from the workforce as people decided not to come back. It is absolutely vital that we have a pay and reward system commensurate with the roles that people are invited to play. As we heard this morning, driving examiners play a really important role.



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Public sector pay has not kept pace over the last decade or so with the private sector. There is always a differential. It is right to draw a comparison, but public sector pay is never necessarily going to compete with private sector pay. Pay is just one part of the overall reward package. It is important to remember that. As part of Loveday's work on a long-term sustainable workforce strategy, we are keeping pay issues under review.

I think the PCS representative talked earlier about the EO grade and the fact that the DFT EO grading is not competitive across the civil service. I don't think that is the case. I am very happy to share, as follow-up in evidence to this session, some of the data on comparator DFT to other Government Department pay grades. At a London level our EO grade salaries are at the higher end, and national EO grade salaries are in the middle and median of wider Government Departments. It is something that we are going to have to keep under review as part of a longer term workforce strategy. What we have done is supported DVSA in incentives and allowances. That is obviously a short-term measure. If there is fundamentally a competitiveness issue, that will have to be looked at and addressed.

Chair: We have some more questions on recruitment and retention of examiners.

Q56 **Catherine Atkinson:** I will probably be directing my questions more to the DVSA and Loveday. We have been told that we have an examiner attrition rate of approximately 130 examiners per year. Why do you feel you cannot retain examiners, and what are you doing to improve that retention?

Loveday Ryder: Our attrition rate is about 12%. That 130 equates to about 12%, which is a pretty standard attrition rate. It was higher than that. As was alluded to in the panel session earlier, initially after covid we brought in temporary contracts, thinking that we would quickly clear the backlog and wouldn't need them for a lengthy period of time. The attrition rate in those temporary contracts, unsurprisingly, was very much higher. We had an attrition rate of about 19% through that period.

We quickly moved those contracts to permanent because we needed to give people stability. There is a huge investment in training up a driving examiner. If you only have a two-year longevity for that, it doesn't make sense. As soon as we made those contracts permanent, we saw the attrition rates come back down to something more commensurate with what we see for the agency as a whole.

Q57 **Catherine Atkinson:** Your DVSA 2023-24 business plan said that you would be asking your "people and external experts to help us shape our employee value proposition, (our offer), to attract and retain the best people to deliver our vision." In terms of the people we have heard evidence from already, there is some concern about who you have been liaising with, or the extent of that liaison. Can you talk a bit



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more about who you have asked and worked with, and what they have been advising?

Loveday Ryder: I am not particularly familiar with that sentence and what that was about—the employee value proposition. That would have been something for the agency as a whole, I presume.

Q58 **Catherine Atkinson:** The point is that you were going to speak to your own people and others about your offer, about what was going to be attractive in order to recruit and retain.

Loveday Ryder: What we have under way at the moment is a significant exercise across the agency, looking at the different services that we offer. We have enforcement, vehicle services and our driving examiner services. We have different conditions. Some have annualised hours. Some have a car to travel to and from work. Some have different allowances.

The picture that we see across the different services in DVSA shows a degree of flexibility and variability, which perhaps leads to a lot of perception of, “It’s not fair, they’ve got this, and we haven’t got that.” The background, I think, to what you are referring to is that we have done a lot of consultation and set up a programme of work to look at terms and conditions to see what can be done and improved within the gift of what we have, to be able to look at fairness between different parts of the agency and come up with the best package that is affordable for everybody.

Q59 **Catherine Atkinson:** It sounds like you have a particular issue with examiners and being able to speak to examiners, and therefore to PCS. Certainly the evidence we have had today is that it sounds like that interaction has not been as open and full, or the learning that it posed has not been taken on board as much as it could have been.

Loveday Ryder: We consult with PCS. We aim to have a good dialogue with PCS. We meet them regularly and go through all of our initiatives with them. On the initiative I am referring to, we engaged with PCS as well. There were some initial concerns about why we were doing that review. I think we are now engaging with PCS. It has taken us longer to make sure that we were doing it properly and we have PCS involvement in it.

There are issues in terms of the package and the perception of the package across the agency. I wouldn’t want to give the impression that it was just the driving examiners who had an issue. Different people have different perceptions of how their package plays. It is something that we are trying to do across the agency, to get fairness between all of our people at the EO grade and frontline services. Certainly, there is no intent not to engage with PCS. That is something we aim to do.

Q60 **Catherine Atkinson:** The staff satisfaction level on pay and benefits is only 15%, so it feels that there is a lot more discussion that needs to



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be happening to try to ensure that lessons are being learnt to increase that. We were specifically told about pay and culture, and not being paid extra for weekends or recompensed for having to do additional travel. What is being taken on board about that? What is changing so that we can turn that around?

Loveday Ryder: Some of those comments relate to what are termed the cluster contracts that I mentioned earlier. Those contracts ask people to work five days out of seven. Those five days will be at a basic rate rather than an enhanced overtime rate. The reason for doing that is to try to promote diversity and to make it attractive to people who can come out and work at the weekend, maybe when their partner is around to look after the kids. The thinking behind it was to try to come up with a different offer that might have been attractive, but also to try to offer our services over a seven-day period.

I am not trying to offer a driving test service that is equal over seven days. There are a number of locations where you would not get a driving test that was valid at 8 o'clock on a Sunday morning. You may not meet another car. We have to think about where we can offer driving tests, and when. Certainly, evenings and weekends are times when our customers would very much like to have driving tests. The legacy contracts that we had didn't offer us flexibility in that way. They were also tied to a particular location.

The rationale for the five and seven is to try to spread that around and enable us to cover the basic service. We did not always get volunteers for weekend working. That said, it is on a rota. We now have about 30% of our people on the new contract. That means the pressure on individuals to work a particular shift has dissipated, because we do not run the full services at weekends. Having said that, we offer a lot of overtime. Thankfully, lots and lots of our driving examiners take up the offer of enhanced overtime, for which they get paid.

There was a specific issue raised about the travel and expenses around the cluster. When the unions helpfully raised that, we addressed it, and they have now been equalised. It is important that people are not having to pay extra to travel around, when we are trying to do that to get the service covered.

Q61 **Catherine Atkinson:** Acknowledging the intention that you set out, if it seems to be having the opposite impact, and we are still facing really difficult attrition rates, at what point do you look at it again and decide that maybe it was not the best direction to go in, and change your mind?

Loveday Ryder: The attrition rates we are facing are not really difficult. We have a 12% attrition rate, which is pretty standard for the civil service. We have also done a deep dive into the difference between the legacy contracts and the new contracts. I am happy to confirm that the attrition rate is the same on both.



Chair: Some people have to go early. Baggy has a couple of questions on examiners.

- Q62 **Baggy Shanker:** We heard in the first panel—you were in the room listening to it—the trade union rep from the PCS making statements like, “The situation is not being taken seriously enough.” “There’s not enough collaboration.” “People just don’t seem to be concerned with making improvements that are needed.” What is your response to that?

Loveday Ryder: That is not my understanding or perception of the situation at all.

- Q63 **Baggy Shanker:** Are you prepared to take that away and look at it, or is it completely not your perception at all?

Loveday Ryder: I do not believe that to be the situation. From everywhere I sit and from everything I see, as I said earlier, it is our priority No. 1 as a management team and as an agency.

Lilian Greenwood: It is clear to me that industrial relations have not always been where I would want them to be as a Minister responsible for holding DVSA to account. I want us to be able to recruit and retain driving examiners. They are the people who provide the tests. I really appreciate the hard work that they do, and we want them to be happy in their work and feel that DVSA is a good place to work. Having a good dialogue with driving examiners and with their trade union representatives, including PCS, is something that I expect to see of the DVSA. It is certainly something that I will be talking to Loveday and my colleagues about. We won’t always agree; that isn’t the nature of it, but we absolutely should be having a dialogue, and we should be using the insights that driving examiners and their representatives have to help us to tackle the situation.

Chair: Rebecca and Katie have to go. I apologise. We shifted things around, but next time you get first dibs.

Let’s stick with the recruitment and retention questions.

- Q64 **Laurence Turner:** I want to ask about the point that was made by PCS in relation to violence against driving instructors and other forms of abuse and distressing behaviour as a contributor to poor retention. Do you recognise that description? Are you able to monitor these kinds of incidents? What steps are you taking from the employer’s side to protect driving instructors?

Chair: Instructors or examiners?

Laurence Turner: Examiners, sorry.

Loveday Ryder: We monitor it very closely. We monitor near misses as well as assaults that happen. It is not just physical, or just experienced by driving examiners. It is also quite a problem and prevalent in the contact centre, in terms of verbal assaults. People ring up very frustrated



that they cannot get a test and become abusive. We keep a very close eye on that, and on the overall numbers. Everything that happens is recorded on a form that is submitted. An analysis is done by the manager. There is a health and safety committee that meets to go through those, looking at trends over time. It is something that we take incredibly seriously as an agency.

With driving tests, a lot more assaults happened through the covid period. We operated something called curtailment to keep people safe. When you went out on a driving test, if you failed—even if you failed at the other side of the car park—we would curtail the test and say, “Well, you’ve failed. Come back in.” There didn’t seem any point letting it carry on in a covid situation. It minimised the risk by bringing them back. Our customers were, understandably, not very happy about that because they felt that they had paid their money, and they wanted the full test. You can imagine how disappointing that was. It led to quite a spike in aggression and disappointment from people. Since we stopped doing it at the end of the covid restrictions, the numbers have come down to a level that is more in keeping with what we had in previous years.

That said, it is very important. We have rolled out body cams for all our driving examiners. They can turn those on if it looks as though things are going to turn difficult. It is important to say that about 38% of all verbal assaults or physical assaults on driving examiners happen during the debrief at the end of the test. They are not actually driving. It is not that common to have it while the test is going on. It is usually when people are pulled over. We are rolling out de-escalation training. It is important for driving examiners to learn what language they can use, how they can calm people down and try to say the right things to de-escalate a situation.

If somebody at the theory test shows aggression, we put what is called a booking review marker on their account, which means that they have to ring up to make a booking. If they are violent or aggressive when they come for a second test, we make special arrangements to have somebody else in the car or to send them to a different test centre. There are various things depending on the seriousness. We use call recording now in our contact centre, and we go back through that, and we have an abuse line. We are always looking for opportunities to do more to protect driving examiners because it can be a pretty frightening job when you are out on your own and somebody turns nasty. We need to give them all the support we can.

Q65 Laurence Turner: If I can check that I have understood correctly, the levels of incidents are now broadly comparable to pre-pandemic levels. Is that correct, or are they higher?

Loveday Ryder: I don’t have that exact figure, but I can look it up and get back to you on that. They have certainly come down from where they were immediately after covid. We are setting ourselves a goal as an



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agency to try to reduce the number by 10% year on year just through our focus on trying to help and support people. It is a huge focus.

Lilian Greenwood: From my perspective, no one should be subject to abuse and assault at work, and we absolutely have to take action to address that. It was an interesting suggestion in the first session that potentially you could reduce it by not giving people their result at the end of their test verbally but by emailing them afterwards. I have a feeling that customers might not like that. People have an expectation now that when they take a driving test they are told the result at the end. Certainly, that seems to me something that could be considered as part of actions to tackle it if the most dangerous point is at the point at which you have delivered the bad news and you are having the debrief.

Catherine Atkinson: That was my question.

Chair: Okay.

- Q66 **Steff Aquarone:** It sounds like the debrief should at least take place back at base rather than when you are sitting next to each other in the car.

I am struggling to work out what the big change is that needs to happen. You have talked very eloquently about the tech being okay, the pay banding being okay and retention rates being okay, but we still need to get a bunch more driving test slots available. Doesn't that mean we just have to pay driving test examiners more? Isn't that the only way to do it? What is the big thing that I am missing if it is not that? Do we need to dump the model and recognise that having public sector pay bands for this chargeable service does not compute and does not fit together and we have to make it a freelance market? What is the big change that is going to unlock the problem?

Lilian Greenwood: One of the big changes is recruiting more driving examiners and absolutely ramping that up. There is always going to be an attrition rate in any role. You recruit people and some people leave. We need to make sure that the numbers that we are recruiting are significantly higher so that we see a net increase in the number of driving examiners. When I looked at the stats over the period from 2020 through to the middle of this year, that had not happened. It has gone up and then it has gone down again, and we need to get to a sustained increase. Of course, we have to look at pay and conditions, and that was one of the questions that I asked, but it is not immediately easy and straightforward. There is a job evaluation scheme in the civil service, so we couldn't suddenly just decide to increase the pay of examiners because they are on an equivalent EO grade.

- Q67 **Steff Aquarone:** Sorry to interrupt you, but when Government prioritise nursing recruitment they say they are going to pay nurses more. Surely, the Government could just say, "We're going to pay driving test examiners more."



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Lilian Greenwood: Not without increasing the pay of other people on the equivalent grade.

Q68 **Steff Aquarone:** Okay, so it really is that baked into the civil service pay structures.

Lilian Greenwood: Loveday can speak to this. It is not that people are not applying for the jobs. People are applying for them. There is quite a high drop-out rate between someone coming for interview and starting the training process and actually becoming a driving examiner. A question for me is whether we are getting the right people. Clearly, we need to look at terms and conditions in the broadest sense. It is not just about pay; it is about how people feel valued at work and about the broader conditions. Absolutely, we need to look at those and probably recognise that over the past 10 to 14 years we have been through a period when public sector workers faced pay freezes and pay restraint. Emma said it nicely. All of us sitting round this table know that that has been the case and that public sector pay fell behind the private sector over a period. I can't promise that we will address that immediately, but it is something that is a concern.

Q69 **Steff Aquarone:** Of course, but what are we going to do? It still does not answer how we are going to change the course of the river.

Emma Ward: The last time that DVSA recruited large numbers of driving examiners and we then saw the attrition rate, public sector pay had not increased for a number of years. In the last two years, it has increased for EO grades by 13%, so we are in a different position. Whether that is sufficient, we will see. We are now in the process of recruiting more. That recruitment process needs to be successful, as you heard from the PCS rep earlier today. That is the thing that will make the difference. If that proves impossible to deliver, we need to re-examine where we are at this point in time, but we are seeing the pay increase starting to filter through.

As we have all said, pay is but one element of a total reward package. It is important that people feel valued in an organisation and that they feel that they are doing a job that is worth while. I am very pleased to see that in the DVSA's most recent people survey results its engagement index has increased for the first time since I took this job in the DFT. We are starting to see a picture that is improving, but we all need to keep a very close eye on whether we are successful in both recruiting the numbers that we think we need and keeping the retention rate at a reasonable level.

Q70 **Chair:** The difficulty for this sector is that the pool of people who are going to be driving examiners almost exclusively comes from instructors, and that is the career choice that people make. As an instructor, the income, we understand, is growing. You have the advantage of being self-employed and having flexibility, although some would see being self-employed as a mixed blessing, versus less



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income. One point was raised that you don't offer part-time working. There is a whole sector of people looking for work who would do the job on a part-time basis. As I understand it, part-time hours are not currently allowed.

Lilian Greenwood: I don't think that is correct.

Q71 **Chair:** Have I got that wrong?

Loveday Ryder: We have part-time examiners, yes, and we allow that. Ideally, we would have lots more flexibility. The slight constraint that we have is that at the moment when we are trying to recruit and train people we are trying to focus on getting as many full-time people in as possible so that we can get the most driving tests out of it. That said, absolutely, there is a diverse workforce out there that we would dearly love to see come in, and where we can make that work we absolutely should. We have a number of part-time people at the moment. People do it as they go towards retirement. They step down their hours and flex their way into retirement.

Q72 **Catherine Atkinson:** There was a suggestion about trying to increase the number of those who are part-time instructor, part-time examiner. Is that something you are looking at? As a follow-on, what more can be done about addressing the drop-out rate?

Lilian Greenwood: There is a problem with that in that the legislation specifically says that you cannot be both a driving examiner and a driving instructor.

Q73 **Catherine Atkinson:** Can that be explored to see what would need to change?

Lilian Greenwood: There is a really big question about whether it would be appropriate that someone could be a driving instructor and a driving examiner, and it would require primary legislation to change it. It is one of the things that could be considered as part of an overall package of measures.

Catherine Atkinson: The drop-out rate?

Chair: Yes, the drop-out rate.

Loveday Ryder: Shall I give an example? We have run 15 campaigns since July 2021, and out of that—this shows you the drop-out—we had 1,600 passes, 1,300 offers, 921 went into training, and 694 came out into testing. Through our testing, we get a 25% drop-out once they are in testing. Quite often, we make an offer to someone and then they don't show up to the training course. We don't seem to have that much trouble recruiting to get the numbers in at the top of the funnel, but there is quite a lot of attrition through the process, through the checks and clearances in and then out of the training course. We always try to look at how we can improve retention through the funnel, but there is quite a drop-off. That gives you an illustration. The other thing about recruitment



is that it is not uniform nationally. There are certain areas where we could recruit more than enough driving examiners, and others where we really struggle.

Lilian Greenwood: It is particularly difficult in London and the south-east, where obviously wage rates are higher, so it is more difficult to entice people to become driving examiners. Those are quite shocking figures—to go from people who express an interest and apply for the job to people who actually end up working in the job. I want DVSA to understand why that is and whether there are interventions that can be made to improve retention of people while making sure that we end up with high-quality people becoming driving examiners. It is a really important and skilled role, and we want to make sure we are getting the right people through to do those jobs.

Q74 **Chair:** We have done a good session on recruitment and retention. We now want to focus on what you are actually doing and what your actual targets are on reducing the waiting times for practical driving tests. You said you were going to replace the driver services platform. How is that going? What are reasonable targets? Have your past targets been too ambitious? What is the current target?

Lilian Greenwood: Sorry, the past target?

Chair: Sorry. You set targets. Have they been achieved? What are your current targets, and by when for reducing waiting times?

Lilian Greenwood: The current target, as you heard earlier, is in the previous business plan, which is to reduce waiting times to seven weeks. It is clear that the DVSA is not going to reach that by the end of this year. You could talk some more, Loveday, about the measures that you have put in place to try to get us towards that. Obviously, I would like to see a big increase in the number of driving examiners and a big increase in the number of tests offered. It is about increasing the demand and tackling some of the things that are causing difficulties for learner drivers, particularly around technology and ending some of the rip-off practices. Loveday can say more about how to try to ensure that we offer a larger supply of driving tests.

Loveday Ryder: Yes. Since the beginning of covid, we have been offering incentives in terms of overtime. We wrote to people who had retired and asked them to come back. We asked people to sacrifice annual leave and buy back annual leave so that they would work. A lot of it was about trying to get people to work more hours. As this has gone on—we are now in year 3, year 4 post covid—we need to look at measures that are more sustainable, because, as was rightly raised earlier, it has been pretty relentless for us. We have been pulling back things like time we might spend on development with driving examiners, and some of the other investments in our people that we would like to do have been more problematic and difficult because of the pressure to keep going with testing, so we have been looking for more sustainable



solutions and things that we can continue. We also went through a period of about six months, as you heard before, when we pulled all warrant card holders into testing. Again, it made a difference; we saw wait times come down from over 20 weeks to just under 15, but, sadly, after six months that was unsustainable because there were all sorts of things that you heard about, such as the ADI quality assessment, which had to be put on hold, as well as all our policy development and the recruitment and training.

Q75 Chair: We want to move on to where you are now and what your targets are.

Loveday Ryder: We continue to strive to get waiting times down towards seven weeks and we are continuing to recruit. We have just embarked on trying to recruit another 450 people. We have done the first tranche of that. We have 106 in training and 115 going through the checking process. We have another tranche out there. We are hoping for another 200 offers to be made to start training in the spring. Our principal technique is around recruitment.

We continue to work with the "Ready to Pass?" campaign, which you heard about, and which is about making sure that tests are not wasted. You would be surprised how many get lost through people turning up in a vehicle that doesn't have an MOT test or without the right driving licence documentation, or they forget the test. We have brought in text messaging to remind people when their test is. There are all of those messages, and in particular the educative messages. We know that on average it takes 45 hours of lessons and 22 hours of practice to pass your test. It takes about six to nine months. The more we can get that message out to people to come when you have had that kind of level of experience and practice, the more it will help with the pass rates.

Q76 Chair: At the test centre, when you have slots and you want to fit each examiner into seven slots a day, what else are you doing to ensure that those slots are actually deliverable so that people cannot come to a test centre with the wrong car documentation or whatever? We have had some suggestions about a more flexible, interactive system, a semi-queue system, so that people who might be available on the day could take a slot if there is a cancellation and those sorts of things. What more are you doing to make sure that all of those seven slots for each examiner are actually filled and go ahead?

Loveday Ryder: In terms of slots that are available with no tests booked in, it is only about 1% of slots. The number for which you could take advance action and that do not sell is very small. On the fail to appears, we are at about 3% now. That is where a test is booked and an examiner is ready and somebody doesn't arrive. We have done a bit of exploration about why that happens and some analysis to see if there is anything more we can do there. The other number that is interesting is the number of people who cancel at three days and over. We are into the behaviour from the cancellation apps changing. The reason that tests are



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wasted or do not sell is that people have lost track of where their test is or they do not have the information about a test changing. The work that we need to do to look at how to remove the effect of cancellation apps and reselling is really important.

Chair: We are going on to bots and reselling, but there is a specific question about an accusation about DVSA personnel.

Q77 **Steff Aquarone:** I feel we ought to give you the opportunity to respond to this. In the written evidence from the DIA there was a suggestion that there were DVSA personnel selling test slots in closed social media groups. We asked them for more details. We are not able to validate their evidence at this stage. I want to put it to you for comment as it was published in the public documentation.

Loveday Ryder: We have a specific team that looks at fraud, including internal fraud. Through the period, we saw some allegations of internal fraud. It tended to be around the release of overtime slots. If an examiner decided they were going to work on a Saturday, they would make those slots available and then tell their local contacts, the driving instructors, "I'm about to put up my availability," and then they were able to book those. That was the sort of pattern that we saw. As a response, we changed their ability to release short-notice overtime to make sure that everybody had a fair crack at those slots. When we find allegations of fraud, we have an internal fraud team that works through that, and we take the appropriate action with the authorities. Regarding the particular thing you are talking about, I am not aware of specifics, but I know that where they are taken they are dealt with very seriously.

Chair: Catherine has a question about this whole mess, shall we say, leading to certain pressures.

Q78 **Catherine Atkinson:** There was a specific concern raised that pressure was being brought to bear on examiners to pass learner drivers even when they didn't think it appropriate. Could you address that concern? Is it something you would be willing to explore further considering it has been raised?

Lilian Greenwood: To come back to the broader point and then to yours, Catherine, as the Chair said, in terms of supply, increasing the supply of tests is the most important, and that is going to be achieved through recruiting and retaining more driving examiners and providing more tests—some of that is asking people to work overtime and weekends, and buy-back of annual leave, but I don't think that is long-term sustainable, albeit many people are doing it—and reducing wasted tests, as Loveday said. One of the ways we can reduce demand is by making sure that more people pass first time. That would be ideal. If you do not have people having to take second and third tests, that reduces the demand.



The Ready to pass? campaign is part of that. It ensures that when people come to their test they are ready and are more likely to be successful. The DVSA does work on trying to reduce the anxiety—if you have taken a driving test you know how nerve-racking it is—and making people feel as comfortable as possible taking their driving test, so that they are less likely to make silly mistakes even though they are genuinely a safe driver. Obviously, that would increase the pass rate, but we don't want the pass rate to be increased by any reduction in standards. It is absolutely essential that we maintain standards.

It is clear that if you are managing the system—Loveday might want to say more about this—you want to make sure that all your driving examiners, and we are talking about 1,500 people, are applying standards consistently. You don't want the idea that if you go for a test with person A you are more likely to pass than if you go with person B. Clearly, management have to work to make sure that everyone is working to consistent standards, and that is a really important part of the management role. Absolutely no one should be put under pressure to pass somebody when they are not meeting the standard. It is about maintaining standards. It is about ensuring consistency. I would be very concerned if there are examples, and clearly it would need to be investigated if anyone felt that they were being bullied or pressurised into passing someone when that candidate did not meet the standards required to be a safe driver and pass the driving test.

Loveday Ryder: We keep statistics of all the test routes and pass rates. When we had the period when the managers were testing full time, we did not have that kind of performance management and management supervision regime in place. Now the managers have returned to doing that. It is important for the sake of people coming for tests that we are consistent and that we offer a fair and consistent service, and that means looking in detail at the statistics to make sure that every test route is at the same level of difficulty, that examiner pass rates are consistent and the way that they grade and mark different things on routes is normed. A good manager will talk to the team and go through and check that people are marking things in the same way. It is really important.

Chair: Okay. Much of this session has been on car driving tests. We will come back to the question about third-party booking. Before we move on, Alex has a couple of questions about HGV testing because we have had the RHA bringing evidence to us.

Q79 **Alex Mayer:** We heard earlier that the Department for Transport either suggested or instructed you to prioritise HGV driving tests at the time when there was the big shortage of lorry drivers. Is that still the case?

Loveday Ryder: Having got to the three-week waiting time, we intend to keep it there. We now have a stable group. Generally speaking, about 15% of our testing is vocational and bike, and 85% is car. That is the



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historical split. We have no intention of changing that while we can maintain those SLAs.

- Q80 **Alex Mayer:** At the same time as the HGV lorry driver crisis, it made the bus driver crisis worse in the sense that some of the people who were bus drivers moved to be HGV lorry drivers because of better pay. The reason this has not come up as much is that most bus drivers are tested by delegated driving examiners. How much training does the DVSA have planned for the forthcoming year to create new delegated driving examiners?

Loveday Ryder: Every year we run a standard programme for people who want to become delegated examiners. We just maintain those levels. I do not have specific statistics on how many we are doing this year, but I have not heard that there are plans to either increase or decrease. Generally, the demand for delegated examiners has gone down slightly from the peak. We were dealing with some very heightened levels. We also had a backlog to clear. That is now cleared, and we just respond to demand as it comes in.

- Q81 **Chair:** Because of the crisis, particularly in HGV licence testing, there were more resources put into that, and hence you have come down to the three-week waiting period for them. Were additional resources put in from elsewhere in the DFT to that, or were resources shifted from car tests to HGV tests?

Loveday Ryder: We received assistance through the MACA process. We had military examiners come and help. They were able to come and help us for a few months, and during that period we recruited people from our general examiner group to be specialist trained to do the HGV testing. Not only were we trying to get more driving examiners in, but we took a group of them to replace the effort that we received through that process so that we could then keep and maintain the levels within the agency.

- Q82 **Chair:** So we lost examiners on the car side.

Loveday Ryder: We did, yes.

Chair: Right, and we are still paying the price for that from what we can see.

Loveday Ryder: We have not managed to increase numbers.

Chair: Right, okay. Let's now move on to the third-party or bots booking systems that are being used.

- Q83 **Baggy Shanker:** We have all spoken to constituents who have paid massive amounts of money to third parties, and the Minister indicated that in her introduction. None of the external reviews of the DVSA's bot mitigation methodology has suggested a change in approach. Would you tell us who did those reviews? Do you think the current system is working?



Loveday Ryder: A number of parties have looked at our mitigation around bot protection. I have it written here and I will look it up in a second. The parties who did that have not identified anything that we do not have in terms of our general protection. All the normal things you would expect to see such as CAPTCHA, queue rationing, a queue system on the front and rate limiting are things that we have in place. Nobody has yet been able to point to something we could do that would make our bot mitigation more effective. Clearly, there are things that the private sector uses with ticketing for big events, such as demand pricing, which makes it harder for bots to come in because they cannot always anticipate making a profit on that, but that is obviously not available to us. The other thing that holds us back is that it is not like ticketing for an event that is a one-off thing and it is once and done. We have to make sure that we have availability for people permanently and everyone has to be able to get into the system. That means that we are always trying to balance the customer experience with not locking things down so that it is really frustrating and difficult to get in, versus making sure that we have adequate protection there. If anyone can find anything more we can do, they are always welcome to come and have a look.

Lilian Greenwood: It is fair to say as well—Loveday can correct me if not—that because the DVSA's IT system is relatively old, as we already discussed earlier in the session, there is an intention to have an improved technology system, which might allow further protection measures to be put in place. If you log on to—I don't know if this is the right example—the HMRC website, you have to put in your GOV identification number. At the moment, that is not available with the DVSA, but it potentially could be in the future.

Loveday Ryder: Yes. At the moment, with the driving licence credentials, a trainer can book or an individual can book, so something where you have a two-factor authentication is not possible because you have to give your licence number and your credentials to your instructor, and they hold that. If we were to move to where just the individual could book their test, you would be able to do more in the way of two-factor authentication back to a mobile phone. The problem we often have with the cancellation apps is that the details of the individual don't get put in it, so when the test changes it goes to the booking broker rather than back to the individual. The complexities of the dual system we have at the moment make it very hard to lock it down with two-factor authentication, but it is absolutely something we are exploring in our replacement system.

Lilian Greenwood: It also means that the text to remind you to come to your test and what you need to bring with you doesn't necessarily get through to the person who is coming to take the test because they booked it through a third party, which again just adds to the wastage.

Q84 **Baggy Shanker:** You mentioned ticketing websites and resellers. They have managed to make massive strides in this area. I know that you



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are aware of that. Are there lessons that could be learnt? Are there conversations being had with their advisers and technical people?

Loveday Ryder: Yes. We have spoken to Gartner. There is Netacea; we went through the Department's digital supplier and talked to them. We have also, as you say, talked to people we found who have experience of it through big ticketing events. As I said, some things are available to the private sector that restrict access. If you block somebody, someone else will take that ticket to the event, whereas we have to be a bit careful about how tightly we lock it down, because we need everybody to be able to access and get in.

Q85 **Baggy Shanker:** Ultimately, I suppose this is for you, Minister. Is it something that you would be prepared to legislate against if the problem is not resolved?

Lilian Greenwood: We are absolutely considering all options in an attempt to clamp down on unscrupulous behaviour. We want people to be able to book a test at the price that the test is meant to be and not to have to pay a premium in order to be treated fairly. Absolutely, we are considering what our options are to be able to do that.

Q86 **Chair:** It strikes many of us as odd that the public sector is providing a service that people are paying over the odds for via third-party bots when even with some commercial ticket sellers, some gigs and so on, resellers are not there. With the right person's ID, there are many examples where you cannot pass your ticket on to somebody else, which is particularly true, like driving tests, where there is high demand for that particular event or gig.

Lilian Greenwood: There are just two things to say, Chair. One is that the system has allowed swaps to happen for a legitimate reason and encouraged it. I am happy to say a bit more about that in terms of driving instructors. It is not unusual for driving instructors to book tests on behalf of their candidates, although most people book direct. Imagine that you are a driving instructor and you have a range of candidates and you think that Jenny's going to be ready on this date, but when it gets nearer she isn't but Tom is. To be able to swap the test so that your candidate who is most ready can have that test slot, rather than the candidate you don't think is ready, is something that has been valued by both driving instructors and the DVSA. There is a legitimate reason. You could argue that we should not allow that at all, but it would have quite a big impact, including on driving instructors, if you made it impossible to swap tests. Loveday can say more about how she and the organisation have tried to reduce multiple swaps where that is felt to be gaming the system. There would be an impact from banning swaps altogether that might not be everything that we intended.

Chair: Thank you, Minister. That is a useful perspective.

Q87 **Steff Aquarone:** Generally, the lucidity of your responses suggests you have tried and are trying everything. At some point, something



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has to change beyond the things that are available to you at the moment. This is not provocative; it may be a slightly stupid thing to say. Is the test price too low? Would that not change things to some extent?

Lilian Greenwood: As you have already heard, the price of the test has not changed since 2009. One of the implications of that is that, as the way the DVSA operates is that the fees charged should cover the cost of delivering the service and at the moment they don't, the DVSA is, effectively, losing money on offering driving tests. There is no question: we are going to have to review fees, not just in the DVSA. I was very surprised, I will be honest, when I became a Minister to find that there was no automatic upgrading of fees, and therefore when you change the fee it becomes a big political decision. No one has changed it for 15 years, which seems quite a ludicrous situation.

Q88 **Steff Aquarone:** It is not just budget balancing, is it? It is also the behavioural consequences, because it is cheaper to book a test than it is to book another driving lesson in some situations. Loveday, you are nodding. What is your view?

Loveday Ryder: I quite agree. Suppose in good faith you book your test 24 weeks in advance, you get there and you are not quite ready. Do you cancel and face another six months, or do you think, "For £62, I'll have a go"? We know that £62 in the context of the overall cost of owning and running a car is not that much, and people will just use it as another driving lesson, which is not great.

Q89 **Steff Aquarone:** Who decides not to increase the price? Is it one of those hilarious things where nobody decides not to do something, and therefore someone has to decide to do it in order to do it?

Lilian Greenwood: Go on, Emma.

Emma Ward: There is no automatic ratchet in the legislation. It is a decision that requires political sign-off.

Q90 **Steff Aquarone:** Primary legislation?

Chair: It would be secondary legislation.

Emma Ward: Yes.

Q91 **Steff Aquarone:** There is legislative provision to actually change the price.

Emma Ward: Yes, which means it requires a ministerial decision.

Q92 **Chair:** I have a question. One of the previous witnesses raised the issue about what we learn when we are learning to drive and how we learn. Are we actually learning the right things? Are there some elements of risk in the driving environment, because ultimately this is all about safety? Should the curriculum be reviewed? It is also how we learn. Is it better use of e-learning for some aspects of the theory side



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that other jurisdictions apparently do much better?

Lilian Greenwood: Clearly, it is really important that the driving test is a road safety measure. It is about making sure that people have the skills and knowledge they need for a lifetime of safe driving, so it is important that we review what the content of the test is. Those of us who passed our driving test a long time ago will know that we didn't have a theory test back in those days; it was just a practical test. That has been introduced. I think I am right in thinking it includes things like sat-navs and the like, which were not a feature when I learnt to drive. Maybe, Loveday, you can say a bit more about how the content of the test has changed and how you review that.

Loveday Ryder: You are quite right. A portion of the test that is about independent driving has been an innovation. There are other things that we would like to do. More and more cars now have ADAS features: thinking about how they play into the driving test, thinking about whether it is still appropriate that we look at the same set of manoeuvres and whether we increase the amount of sat-nav driving that we do. We have a policy team now, not delivering driving tests, who look at the future of the test and keep it under review. Yes, we would like to—

Q93 **Chair:** Driving in the dark was mentioned as well.

Loveday Ryder: Absolutely, yes. If you look at the risk factors and the things that cause accidents for people, particularly early in their learning journey, it is rural roads, driving in the dark and driving with peers. All of those are risk factors.

Q94 **Chair:** Is there a timescale for that? How does the content of the learning and the testing change?

Loveday Ryder: We are members of international forums that compare what the UK does to ideas that come through other parts of Europe. There is a degree of research to work out a series of propositions. We would then run a consultation on that.

Q95 **Chair:** Is it an iterative and evolving process, or is it something where there is an official point at which the content is decided and then it doesn't change until it is decided again?

Loveday Ryder: The latter.

Q96 **Chair:** The latter. What is the timescale for that?

Loveday Ryder: New Ministers and new Government. We will be bringing forward a set of proposals in the future for that to be decided on.

Q97 **Chair:** Excellent. I know the Government and you, Minister, are doing a review on road safety, so I am sure that this all feeds in.

Lilian Greenwood: Absolutely. We are looking at road safety in the round. We know that there are particular groups, including young drivers,



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who are particularly at risk, so this could be one of the things that becomes a measure that falls out of that work.

- Q98 **Chair:** The other part of my question was learning techniques and more sophisticated use of e-learning and e-testing for those elements that do not need the practical side.

Loveday Ryder: Absolutely. You heard evidence from Carly earlier about the Milestones programme that she is looking at, and she is working with the Department to evaluate different learning techniques. It will be very interesting to see the evaluation of that and other ideas, and whether it can form part of what we might do.

Chair: Excellent.

Emma Ward: From a Department perspective, as you have heard, we have a road safety review, and strategy, hopefully, coming forward. It is important stuff. Tackling the wait times is absolutely the No. 1 priority so that Loveday and her team can start to lift their heads and horizons to the big technology changes coming forward in vehicles, how the driving experience is changing, how the demographic is changing and what that means for drivers, so that we can ensure that we do the work that enables them to adapt and change and keep pace with both technology and life. Most recently, my previous head of road safety moved to DVSA on secondment to boost the kind of policy thinking and resource that we have in place to do that longer-term thinking.

- Q99 **Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much. I don't think we have any other burning questions. I reiterate that if there are points that you would like to put to us in writing we very much welcome that. We thank the three of you and all today's witnesses. Your evidence, written and verbal, has been really valuable. As you know from MPs' inboxes, I am sure this will continue, so we will be continuing to put pressure on you until the waiting times come down and we get fewer emails on the issue.

Lilian Greenwood: We welcome that, Chair. From our perspective, it has been a really useful session. As I said at the start, this is a priority. We want to fix it. It is not an acceptable situation for your constituents who are waiting, and we want it to change. This has certainly been helpful for us. It is useful scrutiny and plays a valuable role. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes today's meeting.