



Huw Merriman MP  
Chair – Transport Committee

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**Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency**

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Dear Mr Merriman

Thank you for inviting me to the hearing of the Transport Committee on 21 July to discuss the work of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). I agreed to write with further details around some of the issues raised by Committee members.

Firstly, I would like to reiterate how proud I am of the DVLA staff who have worked throughout the pandemic and continue to work so hard to serve the millions of people across the UK who rely on our services. As highlighted previously, the vast majority of customer interactions with DVLA are digital, and our online services have continued to run as normal without any delays throughout the pandemic. In what have been extremely challenging circumstances, our staff processed and dispatched 8.8m driving licences, 16.3m vehicle registration certificates (V5Cs) and made 506,277 medical licensing decisions in 2020/21. Our contact centre staff answered more than seven million queries including 4.8 million calls, 1.5 million webchats and more than 950,000 emails. Overall, DVLA customer satisfaction with services received was 92.54% as measured by our monthly customer satisfaction research conducted by our user experience research and design team. We also maintained our position in the top five Public Services National Organisations in the UK customer satisfaction research conducted by the Institute of Customer Service.

Staff safety has been our priority throughout the pandemic. We have gone over and above Welsh government guidance on Covid safety measures, sending 547 operational staff (plus an additional 61 pregnant staff) home in January/February on full pay in response to concerns around new variants at that time. We have worked closely with Public Health Wales, Swansea Council's Environmental Health Team and the Health and Safety Executive throughout the pandemic and all those organisations are satisfied with the actions we have taken to keep staff safe. In April, the Health and Safety Executive carried out enquiries into our Covid safety measures and formally confirmed they had not found anything of concern with our Covid controls.

Our online services continue to be the quickest and easiest way to deal with us and customers who transact with us online usually receive their documents within a few days. Last year, of the 46.7m customers who taxed their vehicles, 98% chose to do so digitally, either online or through our automated telephone service. Our digital and automated interactions rose to 1.5



billion showing motorists chose quick and easy ways to deal with us with 90% of all interactions being made through these routes.

The cumulative impact of industrial action and having had fewer operational staff on site means that we now have a live queue of work of around 1.5 million with a constant flow of applications being processed and new applications being received. In normal circumstances, given that we receive around 300,000 items of mail each week, we usually have around 400,000 items in our building being processed.

However, social distancing restrictions and the further reductions in the number of staff on site due to sending home staff in January and February (as outlined above) for the best part of five months during the second national lockdown has clearly had an impact on our work – particularly around the 60,000 items of mail we receive every day. This has been further impacted by the ongoing industrial action by members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union.

I understand the impact these delays are having on some customers and I can assure you that we are working as quickly as we can to process these applications and get people's documents back to them.

The Committee asked some specific questions for which I have provided answers below:

#### Application Turnaround Times

- [The Chair asked for the number of people who submitted paper applications who have been waiting for more than ten weeks for their application to be processed.](#)

Paper applications are taking on average between six and ten weeks from receiving the application to processing and dispatching the relevant documents to the customer. There may be longer delays for more complex transactions, for example where we need to establish a driver's medical fitness to drive.<sup>1</sup> We are processing paper applications in the order in which we receive them and we publish those dates on GOV.UK, which is updated weekly.

As at 19 August, out of the 1.5 million noted above there were 167,695 individual cases that were older than 10 weeks. Included in this number are complex casework transactions, for example, those where we need medical information or where the transaction requires further investigation before it can be processed. Non-medical casework can arise where incorrect information is provided with an application or where there is conflicting information on our records. Casework can also occur when there are markers on the record to indicate that applications may be suspicious or fraudulent, for example where a vehicle has been previously notified as destroyed, or a driver previously notified as deceased. Some of these cases can require liaison with courts, the police or other agencies to enable the application to be completed.

The recent guidance from the British Medical Association and Royal College of General Practitioners allowing doctors to carry out medical examinations on the behalf of DVLA going forward will help with reducing the waiting times for driving licence applications involving a medical condition. I have attached a copy of this along with a media article aimed at medical professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> The PCS Union incentivised Drivers Medical staff to strike for the whole of August

- The Committee requested a breakdown on the average time, that all vocational licences and any medically-related licences are currently taking to go through the system

### *Vocational Driver Licensing*

Vocational licence applications or renewals can either be straightforward or, as with other licences, there may be a medical condition involved that needs to be investigated or medical examinations carried out. This is particularly important for vocational drivers as the medical standards for drivers of lorries and buses are much higher than those for drivers of cars and motorcycles because of the size and weight of the vehicle and the length of time the driver may spend at the wheel.

The table below shows the average processing times for each of these types of application from April to July 2021.

	<b>Non-Medical Vocational Licences</b>	<b>Medical Vocational Licences</b>
Average	13 working days	70 working days

We have issued over 24,000 medical vocational licences during the same period.

### *Calls to the DVLA Contact Centre*

- How many phone calls went unanswered at the DVLA during the last year, how long the average waiting time was for them to be answered and has this improved over the course of the year?

We have a maximum of 1,170 lines available to us and a line can be utilised either by an agent talking to a customer or by a customer using our automated Interactive Voice Recognition service. We have a number of messages that we give to customers to keep them informed of potential waiting times. Our system calculates the average time a customer is likely to be waiting to speak to an advisor based on the number of customers in the queue and then plays the relevant message.

We actively manage call queues and adjust the number of lines available to match resource. This allows a greater number of customers to connect to our system, reducing the number of customers who receive busy messages or engaged tones. Throughout much of the pandemic, messages advising customers of queues up to ten minutes had been sufficient as most calls were answered within this timeframe (although this is still significantly above pre-Covid waiting times of between one and one and a half minutes). Given the current volume of progress chasing calls we have recently added another message to advise customers that their call could take up to 30 minutes to answer. To avoid excessive waiting times, a “real-time” team within the contact centre regularly adjusts the lines available to customers in line with the number of agents available to respond at any given time. At times, therefore, the caller will not be able to connect to the system and will instead either hear an engaged tone or receive a message to call back later.

Waiting times have fluctuated over the course of the pandemic. The average waiting time for a call to be answered was around five minutes through September 2020 until the end of November.

As the second wave of the pandemic progressed and peaked in December, the increasing trend in Covid cases in the community was reflected in the infection rate at DVLA and the number of staff having to self-isolate. The call waiting time peaked at the start of December but then dropped during the first quarter of 2021, due in the main to the leasing of an additional building which allowed us to safely accommodate more contact centre staff. The call waiting time rose between March and June due to the impact from reductions in staffing levels and from April, the industrial action by the PCS Union.

A combination of more staff returning to work and limited industrial action targeted at the contact centre saw the average speed of answer drop throughout July and August, with our most recent figure showing an average waiting time of 9.9 minutes.

### *Unmet Call Demand*

The number of calls that we have been unable to answer have also been affected with the trends reflecting the call waiting times outlined above.

It is important to note that the unmet demand numbers are not a reflection of the individual number of customers who are unable to get through as most calls will be from a smaller number of callers who are making multiple calls. For example, for the five weeks up until 19 August, the numbers reflect an average of six calls being made by each customer.

The attached graph at **Annex A** shows the weekly unmet demand figures over the last year. These are not unique calls as many customers will have redialled a number of times.

### *Building Risk Assessments*

- The risk assessment for each of DVLA's buildings do not contain a maximum number of people who should be in the building at any one time

As we have a maximum number of socially distanced workstations on each floor in each of our buildings, this naturally dictates the maximum number of staff we are able to accommodate within each zone on each floor. Staff are still not permitted to move between zones or floors. The maximum number of workstations, and by extension the maximum number of staff who can be accommodated in each building, is referenced in the overall risk assessment.

### *Historic and Classic Vehicles*

- Would the DVLA consider engaging more widely with stakeholders across the historic and classic vehicle sector to explore collaborative ways of working in the future?

We have been in touch with the Historic and Classic Vehicles Alliance and we have had an initial meeting with them to discuss matters of mutual interest and how we can work together more closely.

I hope this information is helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Lennard', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Julie Lennard  
DVLA Chief Executive

# Weekly Unmet Demand Vs Individual Customers

