



REPORT

Investigation into car driving test waiting times

Department for Transport and
Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency

Key facts

22 weeks

average waiting time for a car practical driving test in September 2025

70%

of driving test centres operating at the 24-week maximum waiting time in September 2025

November 2027

when the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) expects waiting times will reach seven weeks

£62	standard weekday fee charged by DVSA for a car practical driving test (driving test)
Up to £500	reported amount a learner driver may pay to a third party for booking a driving test
£44 million	financial deficit on driving tests in 2024-25, as a result of operating costs exceeding the fee for driving tests
43%	increase in theory test passes between 2019-20 and 2024-25 increasing the demand for driving tests
1.1 million	driving tests that could not be carried out in 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DVSA estimates
1.96 million	driving tests provided in 2024-25, with 1.83 million conducted and the rest not conducted for reasons outside of DVSA's control
1,544	full-time equivalent (FTE) driving examiners (examiners) employed by DVSA in September 2025
83	increase in examiner FTE since February 2021
327,000	driving tests swapped between learner drivers by driving instructors, businesses and driving schools in 2024
880	business accounts closed by DVSA for breaching its terms and conditions between January and September 2025, with 11,600 business accounts now active on DVSA's system

What this investigation is about

1 The Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is an executive agency of the Department for Transport (DfT). It employs around 4,600 people across Great Britain and is responsible for improving road safety. This includes setting standards for car driving and conducting tests of competence to drive a car. DVSA has similar responsibilities for motorcycles and other road vehicles. Car practical driving tests (driving tests) can be booked by members of the public who hold a provisional driving licence and have passed the driving theory test and they can also be booked by approved driving instructors (instructors), businesses and driving schools on behalf of learner drivers.

2 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the provision of driving tests was severely disrupted. Driving tests were suspended due to several lockdown restrictions between March 2020 and April 2021. DVSA has taken a number of measures to try and address the resulting backlog and reduce waiting times for a test. However, waiting times have remained persistently long.

3 We conducted this investigation given continuing concerns by learner drivers, instructors and external stakeholders about the length of time learner drivers are waiting between booking a test and taking it. The Transport Select Committee previously held an evidence session into the issue in December 2024 and also heard evidence from the Secretary of State for Transport and DfT's Accounting Officer in November 2025. The Secretary of State announced at that November 2025 session three additional measures that DVSA will be taking in 2026 to try and bring down waiting times.

Our scope

4 In this report we examine the factors affecting DVSA's ability to resume pre-pandemic waiting times for driving tests. The report does not examine the overall value for money of the government's response to the issue, or other aspects of DVSA's operations. It looks at:

- waiting times for driving tests (Part One);
- changes in the number of driving tests needed (Part Two); and
- the government's (DfT's and DVSA's) response to the long waiting times (Part Three).

5 The report does not look at DVSA's vocational, motorcycle or other types of practical driving tests or at any of DVSA's theory tests. The report covers car practical driving tests in England, Scotland and Wales only, because tests in Northern Ireland are a devolved function and are the responsibility of the Driver & Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland.

Summary

Key findings

Waiting times

6 The average waiting time for booking a driving test in Great Britain was 22 weeks in September 2025. This is up from just over five weeks in February 2020 and similar to the waiting time in December 2024 (21 weeks). In December 2024, DVSA published a seven-point plan to reduce the waiting time to seven weeks by December 2025. Although it continues to implement this plan, DVSA is now forecasting that it does not expect to meet its seven-week waiting time target until November 2027. This will require DVSA to accelerate the increase in the number of driving tests it carries out, primarily by increasing its workforce by 18 driving examiners (examiners) every month (paragraphs 1.5, 2.24 and 2.25, and Figure 1).

7 In September 2025, 70% of DVSA's 240 permanent test centres were operating at the 24-week maximum waiting time. DVSA's booking system allows learner drivers to book an available test up to 24 weeks in advance. The percentage of available slots to book in DVSA's system was 15% in September 2024 but had fallen to 5% in September 2025 (paragraphs 1.3, 1.7, and Figures 2 and 3).

8 DVSA's measure for waiting time is not a good indicator of how long most individuals end up waiting for their test. DVSA uses an average waiting time metric to report the agency's performance. This is a measurement of the first week in the 24-week booking window where at least 10% of slots released to the public are still available. The metric therefore does not show the average length of time a learner driver has waited to secure a booking or the time between booking and taking a test (paragraphs 1.8 and 1.9).

9 The length of time people are waiting to book a driving test through DVSA is resulting in people paying third parties to secure tests. Because the waiting time at most test centres is nearly 24 weeks for a test, many learner drivers may not take the test at the right time for them. Some learner drivers book a test, or swap a test booking, by paying a third-party reseller of test slots or a test slot cancellation checker service. Around 31% of respondents to a DVSA survey used a third party to book a test and in some cases paid up to £500, a significantly higher price than DVSA's standard weekday test fee of £62. Lengthy waits may have adverse effects on the economy, with around 30% of respondents reporting that they needed to drive for their job (paragraphs 1.13, 1.14, 2.5, 2.9, 3.21, and Figure 5).

Changes in the number of car practical driving tests needed

10 DVSA estimates that it could not provide 1.1 million driving tests due to the COVID-19 pandemic and has not yet caught up on that backlog. DVSA estimates that it conducted 437,000 tests in 2020-21, compared with the 1.7 million tests it conducted on average per year between 2015-16 and 2018-19, the four years prior to the pandemic. In 2021-22, DVSA conducted 125,000 fewer tests than that pre-pandemic average but across the three years since then it has conducted a total of 485,000 tests more than the pre-pandemic average. As of September 2025, DVSA estimated that around 400,000 bookings currently in the system are from the pandemic backlog and a further 360,000 driving tests from the pandemic backlog were still to come into the booking system (paragraph 2.3, and Figure 4).

11 DVSA's demand modelling has been slow to adapt to external factors that have increased demand for tests. Until autumn 2023, DVSA assumed that it just needed to clear the backlog of tests resulting from the pandemic, based on the data it was using. Since then, it has identified additional factors it believes are causing a sustained increase in overall demand. Between 2019-20 and 2024-25 there has been a 43% increase in theory test passes, increasing the number of people likely to want to take a driving test. In addition, people from countries whose driving licences are not valid in Great Britain after 12 months need to apply for a provisional licence, and complete a theory and practical car test to obtain a driving licence. Data on provisional licence applications from the 10 countries with the most applications show 98,000 applications in 2018, increasing to 339,000 in 2024. Overall, there has been a steady increase in provisional licences over the last 13 years from 7.2 million in November 2012 to 10.4 million in August 2025. More recently DVSA has been using such data sources to manually adjust its forecasts rather than feeding this data directly into its demand model (paragraphs 2.20 to 2.23, and Figure 9).

12 DVSA has struggled to understand the true level of demand for driving tests. DVSA measures demand as being only those who manage to book a test, which excludes those who want a test but are unable to book one. DVSA estimates that there are currently 680,000 individuals who have valid theory test certificates who may wish to book a test at some point but are not currently in the booking system. It estimates that around half of these will come through to book a test based on historical trends. The scarcity of test appointments after the pandemic has led to a proliferation of third-party resellers, often using automated programmes ('bots') to book up test slots. This has potentially inflated demand in DVSA's booking system. It has also led to changes in learner drivers' behaviour, with some booking tests before they are ready, or booking tests in locations where they do not intend to take their test, in order to later change the test time or location (paragraphs 1.14, 1.15, 2.5, 2.14 to 2.18, and Figures 6 to 8).

13 DVSA's attempt to reduce abuse of its test booking system by bots has been limited by the age of its booking system and its ability to withstand the substantial increases in web traffic driven by bot activity since late-2024. The booking system has been in place for almost 18 years and is therefore operationally limited. High levels of bot activity can limit human use of the booking system, creating high levels of web traffic, instability of the system and severe lack of availability of tests for human users. To counter this bot activity over the last five years, DVSA has installed anti-bot protection software, which is supported by expert analysts from its supplier. This was initially successful but web traffic on the booking system increased five-fold between September 2024 and September 2025. DVSA told us it continues to look for additional measures to enhance its protection against bot activity (paragraphs 2.10, 2.11 and 2.15).

14 DVSA has acted to reduce reselling of tests by instructors. DVSA has identified some abuse of the booking system, with both learner and instructor details being used to book test slots. Some learner driver licence details were used to repeatedly book and swap tests at levels that far exceed normal use, and DVSA closed 880 business accounts between January and September 2025 due to breaches in the terms and conditions of the booking system. In January 2025, DVSA introduced new terms and conditions for system users to book and manage tests on behalf of learner drivers. The impact of increased enforcement activity is not yet known (paragraphs 2.7 to 2.8 and 2.13).

DVSA's efforts to increase the number of tests carried out

15 DVSA has only 83 more full-time equivalent (FTE) examiners in September 2025 than it had in February 2021, with the agency aiming to increase its net FTE examiner numbers by 400. DVSA set out in its initial seven-point plan that it would look to recruit an additional 450 examiners but subsequent modelling has shown that it will need to increase its examiners by a net 400 taking into account the rate of attrition of examiners. DVSA recognised in early 2021 that it needed to recruit additional examiners so that it could increase the number of driving tests carried out. DVSA has run 19 recruitment campaigns between February 2021 and September 2025, with less than 50% of posts filled in each completed campaign bar one. There is high attrition of existing examiners leaving DVSA. In 2024-25 the attrition rate for examiners was around 14%, compared with 7.1% for the civil service overall. DVSA has particular difficulty recruiting sufficient examiners in London and the South East, where there is a high level of demand for tests. DVSA has also introduced a one-off exceptional payment of £5,000 to be paid to examiners in two instalments in 2026 to try and reduce attrition (paragraphs 3.2, 3.5, 3.6 to 3.8, 3.12 and 3.14, and Figure 10).

16 DVSA has used measures to increase the number of tests carried out in the short term, but these are not sustainable long-term solutions. In 2023-24, DVSA asked all of its 220 staff who were qualified to be examiners, but at the time in other roles in the organisation, to join examiners to conduct driving tests. This resulted in around 145,000 more tests between October 2023 and March 2024 than expected but led to delays in other areas of DVSA, including vocational test waiting times and standards checks of instructors. In June 2025, DVSA introduced an additional testing allowance to incentivise examiners to carry out 4% more tests per month. This resulted in 43,179 more tests being delivered between June and September 2025 than a similar overtime scheme in 2023-24. The Secretary of State for Transport announced in November 2025 that DVSA will be temporarily boosting its testing capacity by making use of 36 examiners employed by the Ministry of Defence (paragraph 3.15).

17 DVSA has some longer-term measures planned, but these are unlikely to contribute to any significant reduction in waiting times in the next 12 months. DVSA has approval from DfT and HM Treasury to implement a new booking system expected to be rolled out between 2026 and 2030 at a lifetime cost of £181 million. DVSA expects the new system to be more effective in tackling the use of bots and to deliver improved functionality – including better security features – as the current system has significant security and operational limitations. In preparation for long term plans, DVSA held a consultation on the booking system to inform changes to the system that require legislative changes. In November 2025, the Secretary of State for Transport announced that following on from that consultation DVSA plans to allow only learner drivers to be able to book a test on the booking system, that geographical limits will be placed on where tests can be moved to, and that the number of changes learner drivers can make to their tests will be limited to two. It intends for these changes to come into effect in spring 2026 (paragraphs 2.10, 3.16, 3.17 and 3.19).

Fees and governance

18 DVSA had a deficit of £44 million on driving tests in 2024-25, because of the fee being lower than the cost of providing a test. The standard fee charged by DVSA for a weekday driving test is £62, which has not changed since 2009. DVSA calculates the full cost of delivering a driving test as around £86. DVSA has been seeking to increase the fee since 2018. Despite DVSA's objective to fully recover the cost of delivering practical tests, each test is delivered at a deficit of £24 (paragraphs 3.21 and 3.22).

19 DfT had limited involvement in helping DVSA tackle driving test waiting times up to mid-2024. Prior to 2024, DfT largely left DVSA to try and resolve the issue, though it did produce a joint report with DVSA in 2021 looking at ways in which waiting times could be reduced. DVSA's management was regularly reporting up to its board that waiting times would be reduced, only to subsequently report that the previously-advised recovery date was now delayed. Since mid-2024, DfT has stepped up its involvement with the analysis of demand modelling and in 2025 it set up a joint taskforce with DVSA to develop an action plan for tackling waiting times (paragraphs 3.24 and 3.25).

Concluding remarks and recommendations

20 The failure over nearly five years to resolve the problem of long waiting times for car practical driving tests has exposed underlying issues at DVSA. Its system for booking tests is not working well for learner drivers. It has not been able to recruit and retain enough examiners to increase capacity, and its operational forecasting did not identify the underlying causes and sustained nature of the increases in demand, other than that relating to the pandemic backlog. Consequently, DVSA has been unable to adapt at pace or to recover from the pandemic, and this has undermined engagement of the workforce and external stakeholders' confidence in DVSA. Learner drivers in particular have suffered in terms of long waits and having to pay third parties to obtain access to a public service.

21 Building on the changes to the booking system announced in November 2025, DfT and DVSA now have a good opportunity to restore acceptable levels of service to learner drivers. To do this, DfT and DVSA should:

- review current governance arrangements between the two organisations and agree appropriate levels of support with arrangements that enable DVSA to develop and implement effective responses to challenges such as abuse of the booking system;
- increase the supply of test slots by exploring what would need to be in place to enable DVSA to successfully deliver its recruitment and retention strategies so that it is better able to scale up its workforce and respond quickly to any increasing backlogs;
- examine causes of increased demand including assessing whether appropriate measures are in place to ensure that bookings for car practical driving tests are coming from those who are ready to take a test; and ensure that they are continuously improving demand and forecast modelling; and
- explore and evaluate whether there are alternative metrics to measure waiting times for car practical driving tests that will more accurately reflect the actual waiting times of learner drivers.