



REPORT

# Investigation into car driving test waiting times

Department for Transport and  
Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency



We are the UK's  
independent  
public spending  
watchdog.

We support Parliament  
in holding government  
to account and we  
help improve public  
services through our  
high-quality audits.

The National Audit Office (NAO) scrutinises public spending for Parliament and is independent of government and the civil service. We help Parliament hold government to account and we use our insights to help people who manage and govern public bodies improve public services.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), Gareth Davies, is an Officer of the House of Commons and leads the NAO. We audit the financial accounts of departments and other public bodies. We also examine and report on the value for money of how public money has been spent.

In 2024, the NAO's work led to a positive financial impact through reduced costs, improved service delivery, or other benefits to citizens, of £5.3 billion. This represents around £53 for every pound of our net expenditure.



National Audit Office

# Investigation into car driving test waiting times

**Department for Transport and  
Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency**

---

## **Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General**

Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed on 15 December 2025

This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the  
National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of  
Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act

---

**Gareth Davies  
Comptroller and Auditor General  
National Audit Office**

**4 December 2025**



## Investigations

**We conduct investigations to establish the underlying facts in circumstances where concerns have been raised with us, or in response to intelligence that we have gathered through our wider work.**

The material featured in this document is subject to National Audit Office (NAO) copyright. The material may be copied or reproduced for non-commercial purposes only, namely reproduction for research, private study or for limited internal circulation within an organisation for the purpose of review.

Copying for non-commercial purposes is subject to the material being accompanied by a sufficient acknowledgement, reproduced accurately, and not being used in a misleading context. To reproduce NAO copyright material for any other use, you must contact [copyright@nao.org.uk](mailto:copyright@nao.org.uk). Please tell us who you are, the organisation you represent (if any) and how and why you wish to use our material. Please include your full contact details: name, address, telephone number and email.

Please note that the material featured in this document may not be reproduced for commercial gain without the NAO's express and direct permission and that the NAO reserves its right to pursue copyright infringement proceedings against individuals or companies who reproduce material for commercial gain without our permission.

Links to external websites were valid at the time of publication of this report. The National Audit Office is not responsible for the future validity of the links.



# Contents

**Key facts** 4

**What this investigation is about** 5

**Summary** 6

**Part One**

Waiting times 11

**Part Two**

Changes in the number of car practical driving tests needed 18

**Part Three**

The government's response to the long waiting times 30

**Appendix One**

Our investigative approach 38

This report can be found on the National Audit Office website at [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)


If you need a version of this report in an alternative format for accessibility reasons, or any of the figures in a different format, contact the NAO at [enquiries@nao.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nao.org.uk)


The National Audit Office study team consisted of:


Kaye Dunnet, Henriette Tabbert, Tom Tyson and Paul Wright-Anderson, under the direction of Lee Summerfield.

For further information about the National Audit Office please contact:

National Audit Office  
Press Office  
157–197 Buckingham Palace Road  
Victoria  
London  
SW1W 9SP

 020 7798 7400

 [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)

 @NAOorguk

# 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

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

# Part One

## Waiting times

**1.1** This part of the report provides an overview of the current waiting time (the time between booking a test and when it will take place) for car practical driving tests (driving tests) and how this has changed over time. We describe how the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) measures waiting times, reasons for cancellations and the impact of long waiting times.

**1.2** DVSA is responsible for carrying out theory and practical driving tests for people who want to drive cars, motorcycles, lorries, buses and coaches, and specialist vehicles. Driving examiners (examiners) are civil servants employed by DVSA, and DVSA also has a role in testing and approving people to become approved driving instructors (instructors), who work in the private sector. By law, examiners need to meet certain criteria and pass an initial qualification and examination.<sup>1</sup> A person cannot be an active instructor and examiner simultaneously.

**1.3** DVSA releases the majority of test slots on Monday mornings at six o'clock, with additional test slots released throughout the week. Users can book an available test up to 24 weeks in advance. A driving test can be booked online or by telephoning DVSA's customer service centre. The booking system can be accessed by different users including members of the public, instructors, trainers, businesses and driving schools. Different users can perform different functions on the system (see Part Two).

**1.4** DVSA has conducted on average 1.69 million<sup>2</sup> driving tests each year over the last decade, with an average pass rate of around 48%. In 2024-25, DVSA provided 1.96 million tests and conducted 1.83 million tests,<sup>3</sup> with a pass rate of 49%. This is lower than 2023-24, when DVSA provided 2.07 million driving tests, and conducted 1.94 million tests by introducing additional measures to temporarily increase test slots for six months. DVSA managed this by asking its warrant card holders (those qualified to deliver driving tests but in other roles within DVSA) to stop their day role and instead sign up for doing driving tests.

1 Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1999. Available at: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1999/2864/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1999/2864/contents)  
 2 The average excludes 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the number of tests DVSA was able to conduct.  
 3 A 'provided' test relates to all tests conducted and where a test fee has been paid but didn't take place for reasons outside of DVSA's control. A 'conducted' test is where a test was carried out with a result of pass or fail.

## Current waiting times

**1.5** Before the COVID-19 pandemic, DVSA was usually reporting waiting times of less than seven weeks, its current target, or was within a few weeks of it, but the average waiting time for a driving test has been steadily increasing since 2020-21 (**Figure 1**). In September 2025, the average waiting time for securing a driving test in Great Britain was 22 weeks, compared with an average of just over five weeks in February 2020. To combat rising waiting times, DVSA published a seven-point plan<sup>4</sup> in December 2024 with a target to reduce waiting times to seven weeks by December 2025. In April 2025, DVSA reported that this was unlikely to be achieved until summer 2026. However, in the summer of 2025, DVSA updated its forecast model with the latest plan, which forecasts waiting times reducing to seven weeks by November 2027.

## Measuring waiting times

**1.6** As at September 2025 DVSA operated from 321 test centres across Great Britain. These are a mixture of permanent and remote test centres, outstations and customer sites.<sup>5</sup> Test centres are grouped into four areas across Great Britain:

- Scotland & North East;
- Wales & North West;
- Midlands & South West; and
- London & South East.

**1.7** DVSA measures the average waiting time using 240 permanent test centres. In September 2025, 70% of DVSA's 240 permanent test centres were operating at the 24-week maximum waiting time (**Figure 2** on page 14 and **Figure 3** on page 15). As at 29 September 2025, 32,660 tests were available in the 24-week booking window, 5% of all available slots, down from 15% of slots available in September 2024. Before pausing tests during the pandemic, the booking window for driving tests was 18 weeks. This increased to 24 weeks as a short-term measure to address the backlog during the pandemic. Since then, DVSA has struggled to address demand, and has therefore kept the booking window at 24 weeks.

**1.8** DVSA's waiting times metric shows the first week of each 24-week booking period in which at least 10% of tests are available. The metric is an indicator of the booking system capacity and does not show the average length of time an individual waits to secure a booking, or the time between securing a booking and taking a test.

<sup>4</sup> DVSA sets out plan to reduce driving test waiting times. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/news/dvsa-sets-out-plan-to-reduce-driving-test-waiting-times](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dvsa-sets-out-plan-to-reduce-driving-test-waiting-times)

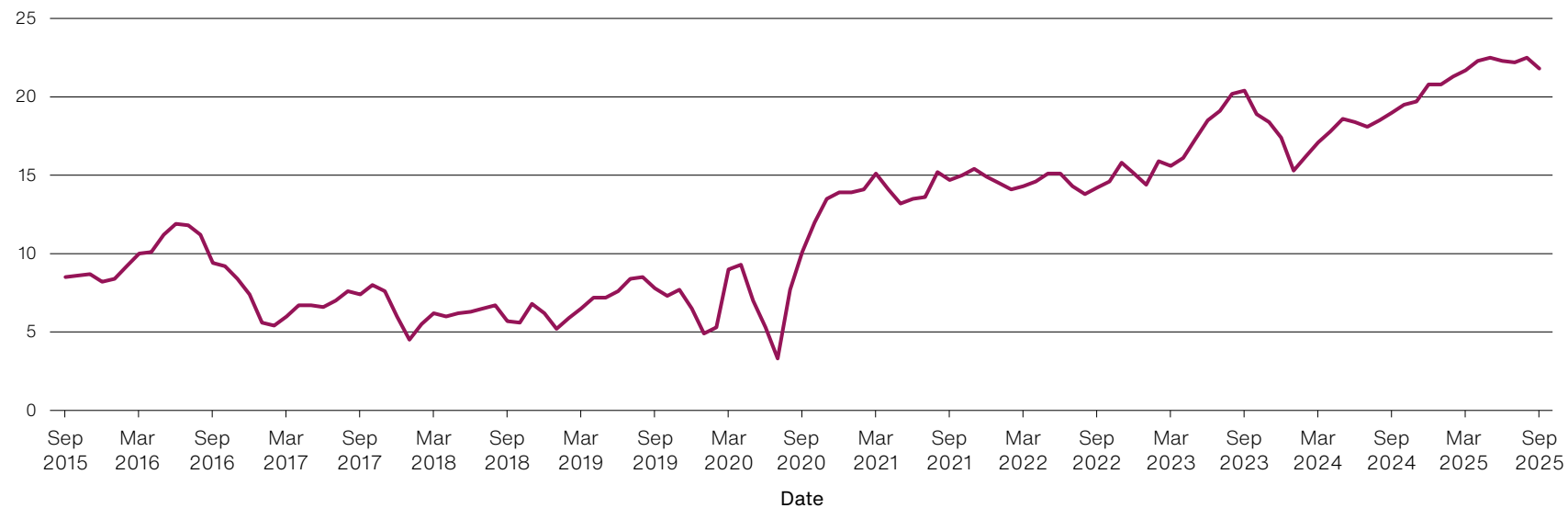
<sup>5</sup> Permanent test centres are where examiners are permanently based. Outstations have no permanent staff, but regular services operate from them. Remote centres operate less than once per week and are based on demand. Customer sites are provided by a partner – testing is carried out two days a week and has no permanent staff.

**Figure 1**

The national average waiting time for car practical driving tests in Great Britain from September 2015 to September 2025

**The national average waiting time for a car practical driving test has increased significantly since February 2020 (five weeks)**

National average waiting time in weeks

**Note**

- 1 The national average waiting time is based on the waiting times of 240 permanent test centres across Great Britain. 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.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data

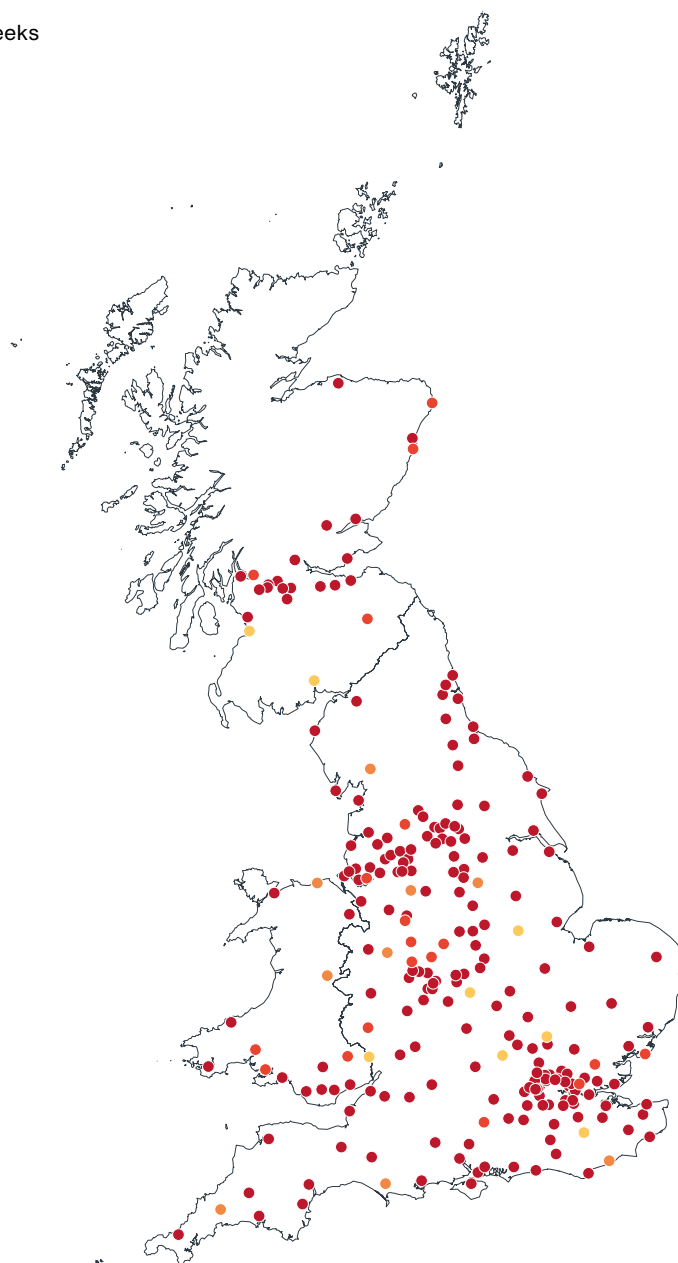
## Figure 2

Waiting times in Great Britain for car practical driving tests per test centre, September 2025

As of September 2025, only 73 out of 240 permanent test centres have a waiting time below 24 weeks

Waiting time in weeks

- 0–6
- 7–12
- 13–18
- 19–24



### Notes

- 1 The 240 test centres shown are the permanent test centres that the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency uses to calculate the national average waiting time.
- 2 The waiting time in weeks at each test centre 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.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data, Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2025

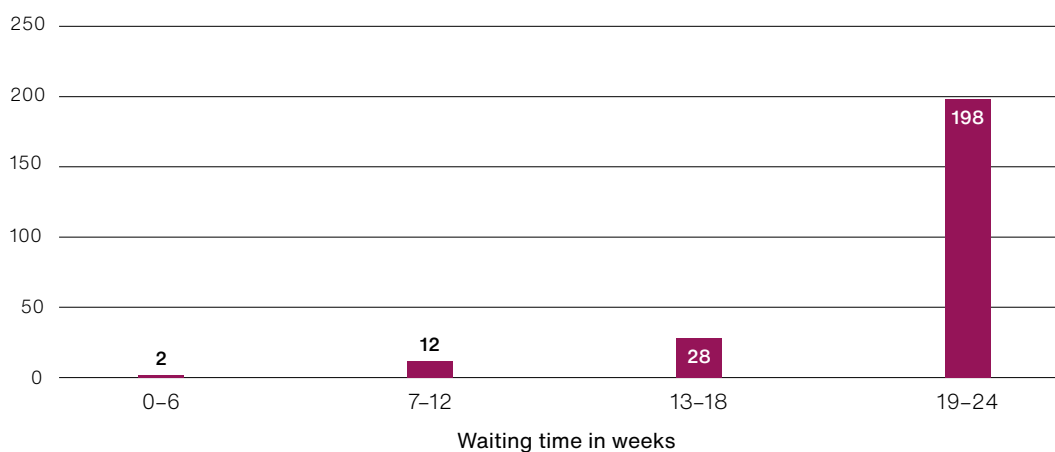


**Figure 3**

Waiting times in Great Britain for car practical driving tests per test centre, September 2025

Of the 240 permanent test centres, 83% had a waiting time of 19 to 24 weeks in September 2025

Number of test centres

**Notes**

- 1 The 240 test centres included are the permanent test centres that the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency uses to calculate the national average waiting time.
- 2 The waiting time in weeks at each test centre 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.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data

**1.9** The metric does not reflect individual experiences of waiting times and is not the most accurate measure of demand. As the average waiting time was 22 weeks in September 2025, if DVSA were to revert to an 18-week booking window, then its metric would show the average waiting time had reduced from 22 weeks to 18 weeks.

**Loss of tests**

**1.10** Each year, DVSA suffers with some of its testing capacity not being used. It is hard to measure or forecast this loss and, in some cases, it is outside of DVSA's control. Tests can be lost to learners cancelling test slots up to the time the test is due to take place, adverse weather conditions, learners failing to arrive at the test slot time and location, or sickness or unplanned short notice leave among examiners.

**1.11** DVSA lost 13% (257,662) of 1.96 million driving tests provided in 2024-25. Of these, 84,901 were cancelled by learners on the booking system. These slots cancelled by learners are released back into the system and are available to be booked. However, DVSA cannot identify how many cancelled slots are rebooked by other learner drivers, as the original booking is disassociated from the slot upon cancellation. The more days ahead of the test date that the booking is cancelled, the more likely it is that it will be filled by a new booking. Tests where the learner drivers fail to attend on the day cannot be resold. Three percent (52,054) of the total tests booked for the year 2024-25 were lost to learner drivers failing to attend. DVSA has been working on initiatives to reduce the number of failures to attend by learners.

**1.12** To help manage test losses from the examiner side, DVSA is seeking to improve the productivity of its examiners. Based on its utilisation data, DVSA estimates that each examiner is currently delivering just over six (6.1) tests per day whereas the maximum expected to be delivered is seven. There are several reasons why these tests are being lost; for example, 73,621 tests in 2024-25 did not take place as planned due to sickness absences by examiners. DVSA has set a target of examiners delivering an average of 6.5 tests per day, with much of this increased productivity expected to result from the introduction of a new booking system (see paragraph 3.18).

## **Impact of waiting times**

**1.13** DVSA aims to send a survey to learner drivers after they complete their theory test, before taking their driving test and after their driving test. The survey asks learners to select the top three reasons they needed to pass and the results show how a licence can help provide economic benefits, increasing access to employment opportunities and education, and enabling social mobility. In March 2025, of the 11,480 learners who responded,<sup>6</sup> 33% stated that one of their reasons they needed a driving licence was for commuting to work, and 31% needed it for a current or future job. Fifty-nine percent wanted the licence for greater independence and freedom, while 35% needed to drive for family responsibilities. Twenty percent of respondents said they needed a licence for education purposes, getting to college or university.

**1.14** The increasing waiting times have led to a substantial rise in third-party services offering the reselling of tests and test cancellation checkers – businesses using automated programmes or ‘bots’<sup>7</sup> to book and resell tests, usually at a higher price than DVSA’s standard charge for a test. Due to the increased internet traffic to the booking system because of bots, learner drivers who are ready to pass often face waiting times of many months. Their alternative is to pay a higher price to secure a more suitable test slot or potentially travel hundreds of miles to take a test at an earlier date. We explore the impact of the rise in third-party services in more detail in Part Two.

<sup>6</sup> 11,505 learner drivers in total responded to the survey, 25 of whom skipped this question.

<sup>7</sup> Bots are computer programmes that are designed to automate a process.

**1.15** The prospect of waiting nearly 24 weeks for a driving test has changed the way learner drivers engage with the booking system. Some learner drivers are booking driving tests before they start driving lessons, expecting to be ready to pass by the time the test date arrives as they are unlikely to be able to secure a test slot at the point they are ready. DVSA assesses this as a symptom of the high waiting times rather than a cause.

**1.16** DVSA's 2024 survey of instructors found that 52% of them reported some learners taking extended breaks from lessons (of three or more weeks), disrupting the learning process and leading to skill deterioration.<sup>8</sup> Nearly 90% of instructors responding cited high waiting times as the cause for the breaks, with approximately 65% citing learners' financial constraints.

<sup>8</sup> Working as a driving instructor survey: 2024 results. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-as-a-driving-instructor-survey-2024-results/working-as-a-driving-instructor-survey-2024-results](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-as-a-driving-instructor-survey-2024-results/working-as-a-driving-instructor-survey-2024-results)

## Part Two

### Changes in the number of car practical driving tests needed

**2.1** This part of the report describes the main factors affecting the change in demand for car practical driving tests (driving tests), and which are therefore determining how many driving tests the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) needs to carry out. It covers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, abuse of the driving test booking system, and understanding and forecasting demand.

#### Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on demand

**2.2** As with many other public services, the pandemic caused considerable disruption and resulted in a backlog of unmet demand.<sup>9</sup> DVSA twice had national suspensions of driving tests during the pandemic, and there were also national suspensions of driving lessons and of theory tests.

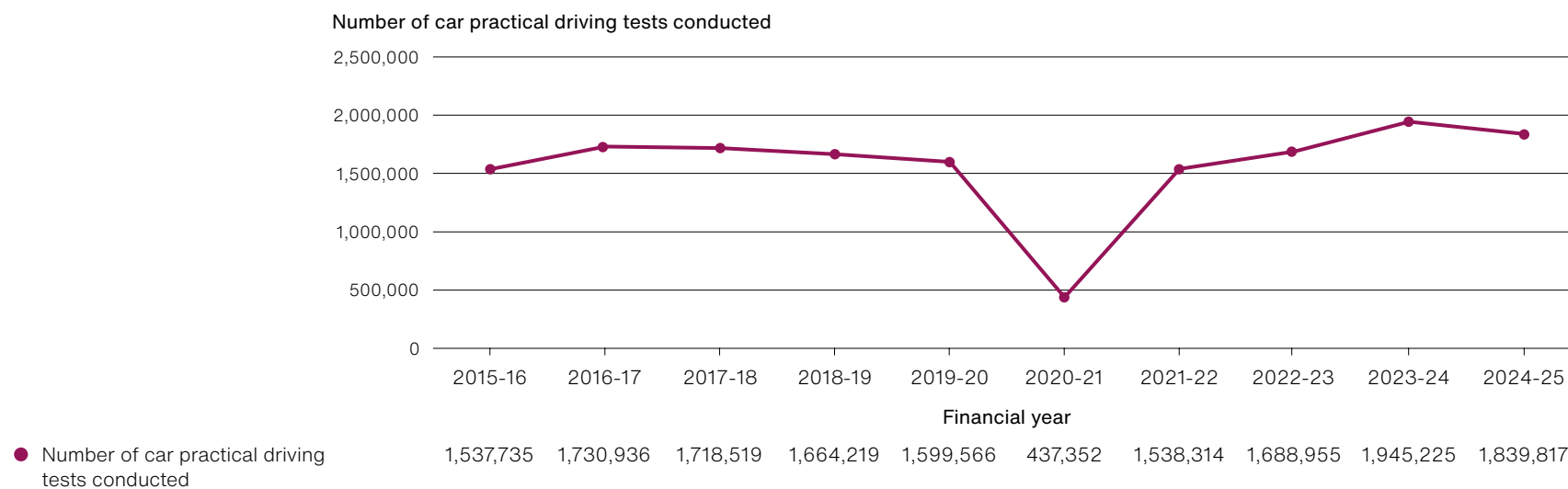
**2.3** DVSA estimates that it carried out 1.1 million fewer driving tests between April 2020 and March 2021 than it would have done were it not for the pandemic. **Figure 4** shows the number of tests conducted between 2015-16 and 2024-25. By comparing the average tests booked in the years 2015-16 to 2018-19 with the tests they conducted post-pandemic, DVSA estimated the size of the backlog and the progress in clearing it. The average number of tests conducted per year in 2015-16 to 2018-19 was 1.7 million. In 2021-22, DVSA conducted 125,000 fewer tests than this pre-pandemic average. Across the three years since then it has conducted a total of 485,000 tests more than the pre-pandemic average. DVSA assumes that some of the deferred demand from the pandemic is still entering its system. As of September 2025, DVSA estimated that around 400,000 bookings currently in the system are from the pandemic backlog and that around 360,000 driving tests from the backlog were still to come into the booking system.

<sup>9</sup> See for previous National Audit Office examples: Comptroller and Auditor General, *Reducing the backlog in the Crown Court*, Session 2024-25, HC 634, National Audit Office, March 2025. Available at: [www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/reducing-the-backlog-in-the-crown-court-1.pdf](http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/reducing-the-backlog-in-the-crown-court-1.pdf); Comptroller and Auditor General, *NHS backlogs and waiting times in England*, Session 2021-22, HC 859, National Audit Office, December 2021. Available at: [www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/NHS-backlogs-and-waiting-times-in-England.pdf](http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/NHS-backlogs-and-waiting-times-in-England.pdf); Comptroller and Auditor General, *Investigation into the management of driving licence applications*, Session 2022-23, HC 851, National Audit Office, November 2022. Available at: [www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/backlogs-in-driving-licence-applications.pdf](http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/backlogs-in-driving-licence-applications.pdf)

**Figure 4**

Car practical driving tests conducted, 2015-16 to 2024-25

Restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the loss of an estimated 1.1 million car practical driving tests between April 2020 and March 2021



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data

**The booking system**

**2.4** DVSA's booking system allows learner drivers – as well as approved driving instructors (instructors) or businesses employing instructors, such as driving schools – to book test slots. **Figure 5** sets out which requirements each group needs to fulfil to book a test, and which functions are available to them on the system. The Secretary of State for Transport announced in November 2025 that DVSA will allow only learner drivers to book and manage driving tests, from spring 2026.

**Figure 5**  
Booking requirements and privileges for learner drivers and approved driving instructors (instructors) on the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA's) booking system

**DVSA's booking system allows learner drivers and instructors to book car practical driving tests and change the test date and location**

Type of user	Booking requirements	Booking privileges
Learner drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Valid provisional driving licence number of a learner driver, with a valid theory test pass associated</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Can change a booking up to six times before needing to take the test or cancel</li><li>One test booking permitted per provisional licence number at a time</li></ul>
Instructors, driving schools, driver trainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Qualified instructor licence number</li><li>Valid provisional driving licence number of a learner driver, with a valid theory test pass associated</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Can charge learner drivers an additional fee for the service of booking a test</li><li>If learner drivers share their provisional licence number, bookings can be made with or without the licence holder's knowledge</li><li>Multiple bookings can be made at one time using different provisional licence numbers, with one test booking permitted per provisional licence number at a time</li><li>Can swap test slots between learner drivers</li><li>Can change the date and location of test bookings</li></ul>

**Note**

1 The Secretary of State for Transport announced in November 2025 that only learner drivers will be allowed to book and manage car practical driving tests, from spring 2026.

**2.5** The scarcity of driving test appointments after the pandemic relative to demand and the continued high waiting times (the time between booking a test and the date of the test) have led to an increase in third parties using DVSA's booking system. There are two main types of third party involved in booking driving tests.

- **Cancellation checker services:** These services offer to search for driving tests for learner drivers, using bots to find test slots that have become available as a result of new test slots opening and tests being moved or cancelled. They notify learner drivers when a test slot at the desired location and time becomes available. Depending on how the systems work, learners then either confirm that they want the test (and the system attempts to make the change for them), or log in and book the test themselves. Some cancellation checkers charge a one-off fee; others are subscription-based.
- **Resellers:** These individuals or businesses book test slots using learner driver licence details so they can resell them for a higher fee. A learner driver buying a test from a reseller will need to book any available test first, and the reseller can then swap their original slot with the one offered by the reseller. This can enable learners to buy a test at their preferred location and date. Resellers may use bots to identify and buy multiple slots, shortly after their release.

How third parties are exploiting the booking system

**2.6** Third parties are making use of two attributes of DVSA's booking system.

- **No identity checks or verifications:** There are no checks or verifications that the person making or changing the booking is the same individual linked to the learner driver or instructor licence numbers used to make it.
- **The possibility to swap tests and change time and location:** Individual learners can change the time and location of an existing test booking. Instructors can do the same and they can swap test slots between learners they are teaching, to put the most ready forward for a test.

**2.7** Third parties are using both learner and instructor details to book test slots for profit. Some learners provide third parties or instructors with their licence number to book a test on their behalf. Third parties and instructors can then continue to use learner licences to book, cancel, and swap tests, at times without the learner's knowledge. Some learners had more than 100 swaps carried out in their name. A limit on swaps was introduced in 2025, initially set at 30 but reduced to 10 in July 2025. The limit on the number of changes allowed was 10 during the pandemic but was subsequently reduced to six. In November 2025, the Secretary of State for Transport announced plans to introduce a new combined limit on swaps and changes of two.

**2.8** The same practices are taking place with instructor accounts, which are used by some businesses to make test bookings and do up to 10 swaps or time and location changes per test. Despite these limits, the number of tests that were swapped between learner driver licences increased from 39,000 in 2019 to 327,000 in 2024, representing 17% of all tests. This increase has persisted, as between January and September 2025, 188,000 tests were swapped, representing 16% of all tests conducted during that time.

**2.9** In December 2024, DVSA published a call for evidence on the experience of booking and managing driving tests. Of the 21,656 respondents,<sup>10</sup> 31%<sup>11</sup> said they had used a third-party reseller with some paying up to £500 in total to book a test slot. Learner drivers are also likely to be incurring higher costs through having to continue with driving lessons for longer until a test can be taken.

#### DVSA's actions to limit third party activity

**2.10** DVSA's booking system is almost 18 years old and has significant security and operational limitations. The high web traffic and bot activity being experienced on the system are causing infrastructure instability of the booking system, which is mostly limited to peak times. DVSA has scaled systems to better meet demand. Despite DVSA's attempts to reduce third-party activity, bot activity has increased substantially since late-2024. One indicator of bot activity on DVSA's booking system is the number of web requests through bot protection, which has increased from around 10 million per day in September 2024 to around 50 million per day in September 2025. The booking site for practical driving tests received over 94 million requests on its busiest day in September 2025. DVSA is deploying bot protection, but third parties develop bots at pace, quickly overcoming any new protection measures. For example, DVSA's introduction of a key anti-bot measure was neutralised by bot developers within one day.

**2.11** DVSA has no dedicated in-house resource assigned to bot defence but it is developing the skills of existing staff, with analysts becoming subject matter experts in bot mitigation, and DVSA's bot protection software contract includes external expert analyst support. DVSA has automated parts of its bot protection and relies on human intervention for bespoke configurations and investigative enforcement actions against third parties. DVSA told us it is continuing to look for additional measures to enhance its protection against bots.

10 Respondents included learner drivers, drivers with a full licence who had recently (within the last two years) passed their test, parents or guardians who booked a test for a learner, approved driving instructors or trainee driving instructors, driving schools and businesses that provide unofficial driving test booking or cancellation finder services.

11 There were 26,921 total respondents to the call for evidence, of whom 21,656 answered the question on the use of third-party resellers. The rest of respondents either skipped the question or stated they were unsure.



**2.12** DVSA's enforcement action against third parties who are abusing the system relies mainly on automated reports prompting time-intensive manual investigations and account suspensions. For example, DVSA manually carries out analysis when the same payment card is used by multiple businesses. Businesses using DVSA's booking system are required to employ at least one instructor and link a valid instructor licence number to their account. DVSA assumes all business accounts on their booking system are legitimate in booking tests for learners. It is only when DVSA observes (or receives intelligence from other sources of) wrongdoing that it investigates a business. This involves direct correspondence with the business and associated instructors. Some instructors claim their accounts were compromised or that they are not associated with the business in question.

**2.13** Between January and September 2025, DVSA closed 880 business accounts as a result of its investigations. In January 2025, DVSA introduced new terms and conditions for system users to book and manage tests on behalf of learner drivers. DVSA told us that it suspended 4,500 business accounts in 2022, which meant those business accounts could not be used until the business supplied DVSA with evidence of their compliance with DVSA's terms and conditions. There are 11,624 business accounts registered and able to book tests on DVSA's booking system. Without a detailed analysis of all business accounts, DVSA is unable to accurately determine the number of businesses profiting off its system, and cannot quantify the extent of the problem or what effect its enforcement action has had.

## **Understanding demand for driving tests**

**2.14** DVSA's measure of demand for driving tests is based only on learners who managed to book a test, and does not include those who want to book a test but are unable to do so. Therefore, DVSA's estimate of demand is capped by the 24-week booking window (see paragraph 1.7). DVSA estimates that in October 2025 there were 680,000 individuals who had valid theory test certificates and who may wish to book a test at some point, but who were not currently in the booking system. However, based on historical trends, DVSA would only expect around half of these to come through and book a practical test.

**2.15** DVSA's understanding of demand is further hampered by bot activity potentially inflating demand in its booking system. Because bots are booking up tests as soon as they are available, DVSA cannot distinguish which bookings are made by humans and which by bots. DVSA cannot therefore establish what is the true demand for tests.

**2.16** DVSA measures the waiting times at test centre level, and can determine regional trends in waiting times. However, DVSA cannot accurately determine the extent of regional variances in demand. This is largely because the scarcity of test appointments and the ability to change the test location after an initial booking incentivises learner drivers to book a test anywhere there is a free slot, and then to change it later, thereby blocking the test slot for other learner drivers looking in that location.

**2.17** Figures 6–8 illustrate the postcodes of learner drivers who have tests booked at three test centres across the country. The average distance of learner driver home postcodes to the three test centres in September 2025 was:

- 133 kilometres for the Inverness driving test centre (**Figure 6**);
- 89 kilometres for the Launceston driving test centre (**Figure 7** on page 26); and
- 13 kilometres for the West Wickham driving test centre (**Figure 8** on page 27).

**2.18** Some learner drivers might have booked a test at these centres because they are temporarily living near the test centre location; for example, university students. It should also be noted these distances are not the actual distance travelled. In some cases, they are an illustration of a booking pattern to secure a test slot in an available location, before changing it to a test centre closer to a learner driver's home postcode.

**2.19** Figures 6 and 7 illustrate the trend that learner drivers do not only book tests at test centres local to them, but right across Great Britain. The figures also show that there is variation in how far learner driver home postcodes are dispersed around the test centres. Figure 8 shows learner drivers with tests booked at the West Wickham test centre in September 2025, with learner driver postcodes more closely clustered around the test centre in London, as the London area historically experiences high demand.

## Forecasting demand for driving tests

**2.20** DVSA's demand forecasting mainly relies on economic variables to predict demand and includes variables to adjust for seasonal trends, such as a decrease in demand during winter months. Up until autumn 2023, DVSA was working under the assumption it was clearing the backlog of tests resulting from the pandemic. After working with Department for Transport (DfT) analysts in 2024, DVSA identified that additional factors were causing a significant increase in overall demand. DVSA now forecasts that demand will remain higher than it was before the pandemic.

**2.21** 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that not everyone with a provisional licence will learn to drive or apply for a test, and DVSA has limited data on the prevalence of foreign provisional licences or individuals using their foreign licences for the initial 12-month period.

<sup>12</sup> For 2024, the data on provisional licence applications from one of the top 10 countries were not available.

<sup>13</sup> Provisional licence applications data come from the Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency.

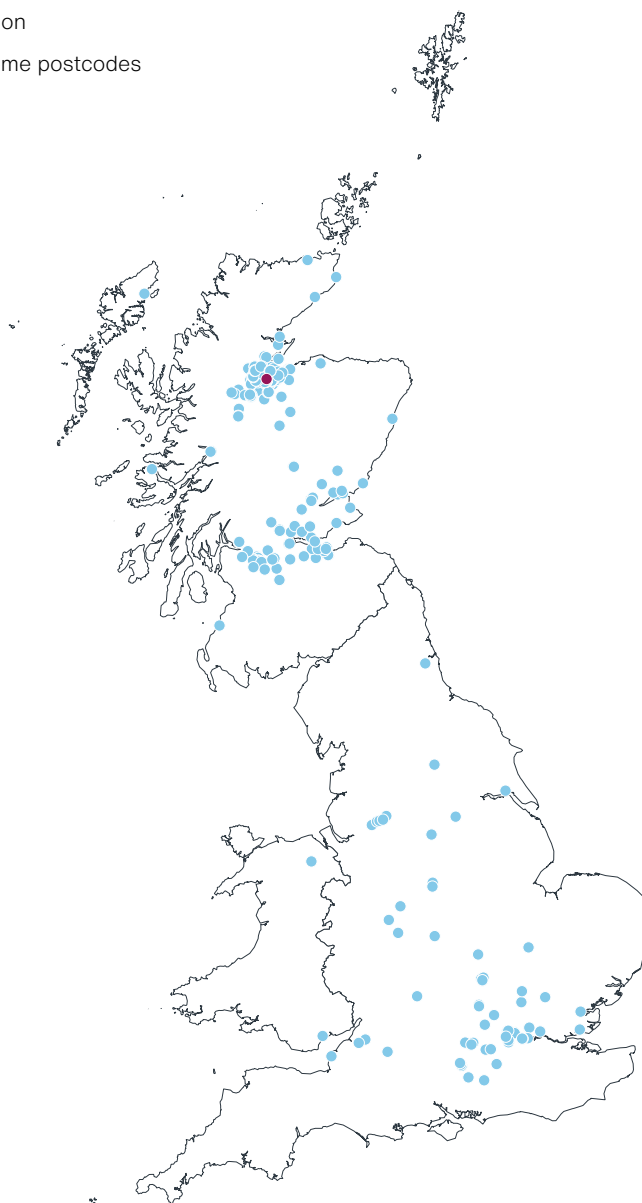
**Figure 6**

Postcodes of learner drivers with tests booked at the Inverness driving test centre, September 2025

**In September 2025, learner drivers from across Great Britain had car practical driving tests booked at the Inverness driving test centre, with an average distance of 133 kilometres between the learner driver's home postcode and the Inverness test centre**

● Test centre location

● Learner driver home postcodes

**Notes**

- 1 Each point represents one learner driver, except in 39 out of the 398 data points shown, for which each point represents two to four learner drivers.
- 2 Some learner drivers might have booked a test at this centre because they are temporarily living near the test centre location; for example, university students.

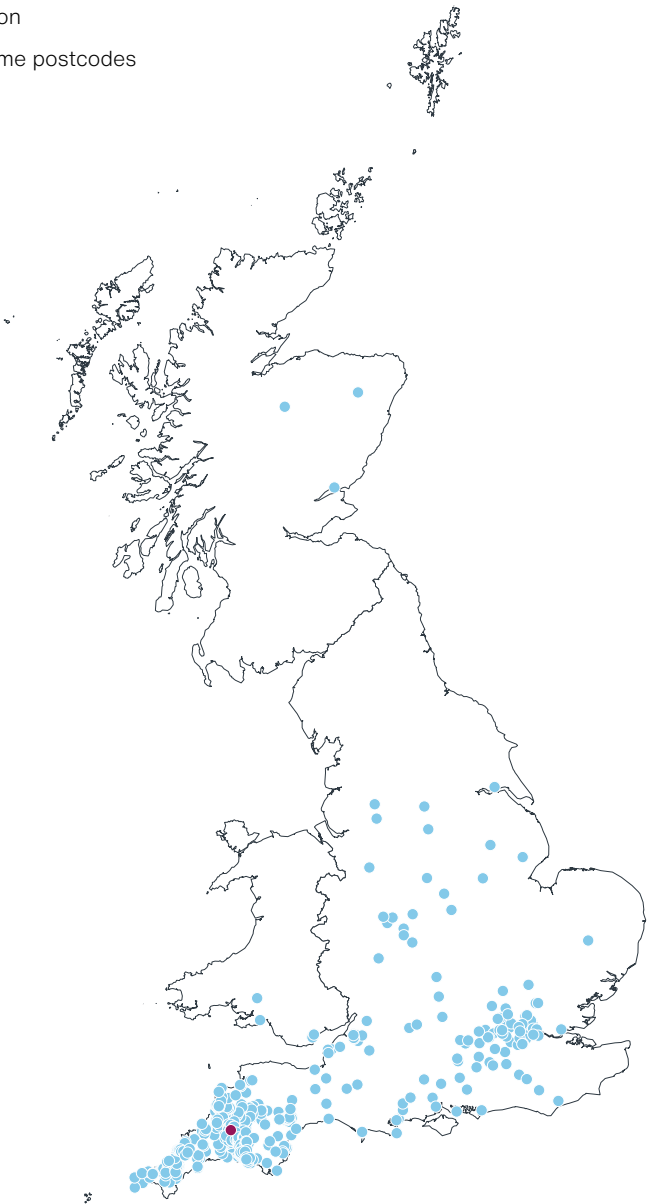
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data, Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2025

**Figure 7**

Postcodes of learner drivers with tests booked at the Launceston driving test centre, September 2025

In September 2025, learner drivers from across Great Britain had car practical driving tests booked at the Launceston driving test centre, with an average distance of 89 kilometres between the learner driver's home postcode and the Launceston test centre

- Test centre location
- Learner driver home postcodes



**Notes**

- 1 Each point represents one learner driver, except in 41 out of the 523 data points shown, for which each point represents two to four learner drivers.
- 2 Some learner drivers might have booked a test at this centre because they are temporarily living near the test centre location; for example, university students.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data, Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2025

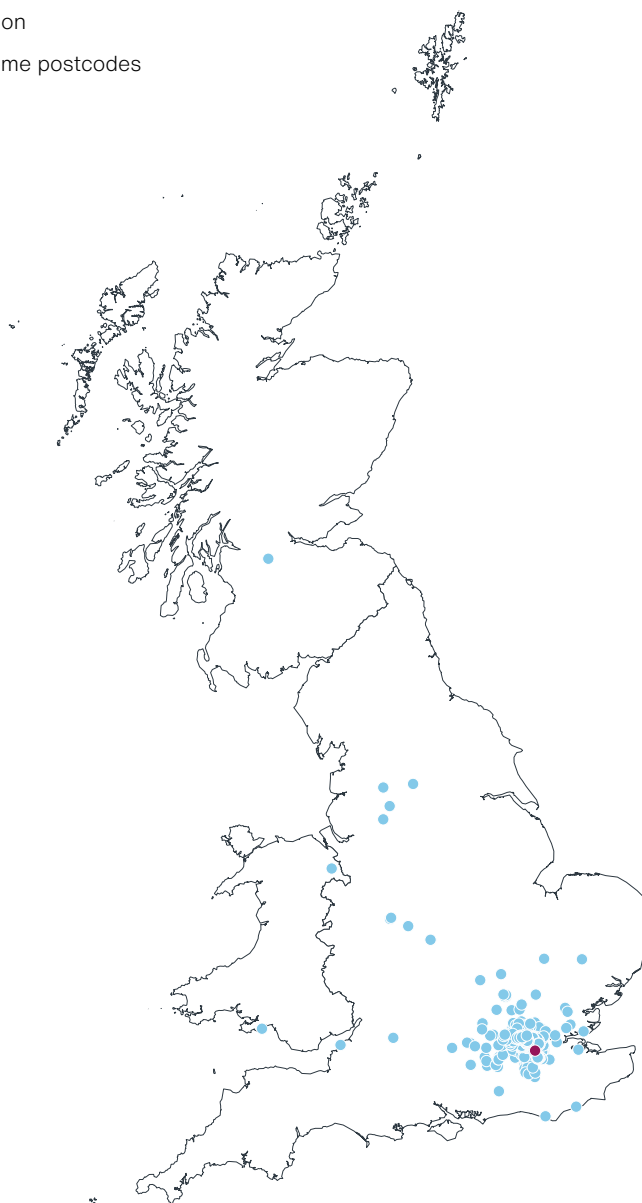
**Figure 8**

Postcodes of learner drivers with tests booked at the West Wickham driving test centre, September 2025

**In September 2025, learner drivers from across Great Britain had car practical driving tests booked at the West Wickham driving test centre, with an average distance of 13 kilometres between the learner driver's home postcode and the West Wickham test centre**

● Test centre location

● Learner driver home postcodes

**Notes**

- 1 Each point represents one learner driver, except in 65 out of the 1,233 data points shown, for which each point represents two to five learner drivers.
- 2 Some learner drivers might have booked a test at this centre because they are temporarily living near the test centre location; for example, university students.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data, Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2025

**2.22** Another indicator of sustained demand is the 43% increase in car theory test passes in Great Britain between 2019-20 and 2024-25, though not everyone who passes their theory test will go on to seek a driving test (**Figure 9**). DVSA identified an upward trend in the number of 17-year-olds passing their theory tests, a group who are too young to be affected by the pandemic backlog or expiring theory test passes.

**2.23** DVSA does not use data on provisional licences, immigration, or theory test passes directly in its demand forecasting. More recently, DVSA has been adjusting its demand forecast manually through a quarterly review group with DVSA staff from across the organisation, including operational management, finance, and customer insights. The group discusses the output of the forecasting model, makes manual adjustments based on demographic trends and other data sources, and agrees on a demand forecast level for each DVSA service. The demand forecast is used to consider how many driving examiners (examiners) are needed to try and reduce the waiting times back to seven weeks. As of October 2025, DVSA forecasts demand up to March 2028. DfT analysts reviewed DVSA's demand modelling and forecasting of waiting times in 2022 and 2024, but the modelling is not subject to other independent, external review. The model is not currently registered as DfT business-critical, though DVSA and DfT are considering whether that needs to change.<sup>14</sup>

## Forecasting waiting times

**2.24** DVSA's forecast of waiting times is sensitive to changes in demand and progress DVSA makes in increasing the number of examiners. DVSA's demand modelling informs its workforce planning, and the forecast waiting times. DVSA's forecast of when it will meet the seven-week waiting time target also relies on the successful ongoing recruitment of examiners.

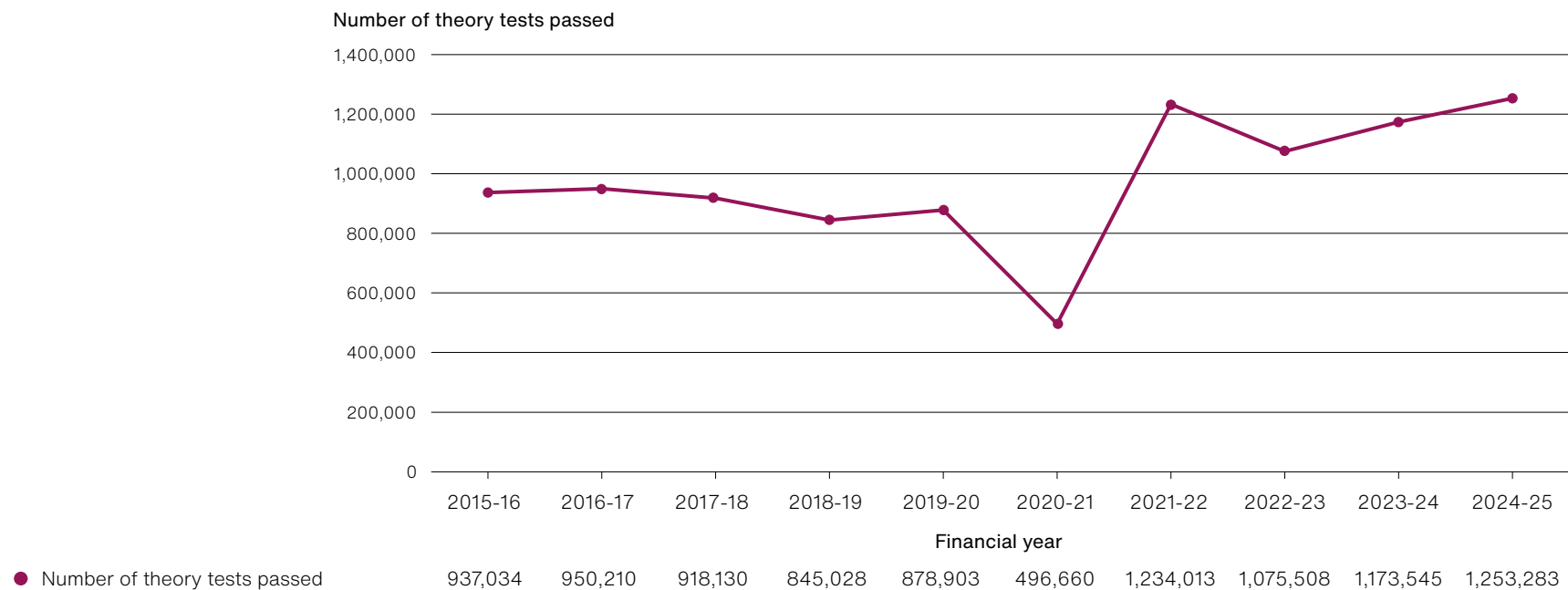
**2.25** The model assumes that DVSA will be successful in increasing the number of examiners by 18 per month from November 2025 until November 2027. This is optimistic considering that DVSA had employed only an extra 83 full-time equivalent examiners by September 2025 compared with February 2021 (Part Three). The forecast also relies on examiners conducting additional tests by doing an overtime equivalent to 8–16% of their normal working hours.

<sup>14</sup> The Macpherson Review criteria for judging if a model is business-critical are based on the extent to which: the model drives essential financial and funding decisions; the model is essential to achievement of business plan actions and priorities; or errors could engender serious financial, legal, or reputational damage or penalties. There are nearly 1,000 business-critical models in central government.

**Figure 9**

Car theory test passes in Great Britain, 2015-16 to 2024-25

The number of car theory test passes has increased significantly since 2020-21

**Note**

1 The significant dip in car theory test passes in 2020-21 was primarily due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data

## Part Three

### The government's response to the long waiting times

**3.1** This part of the report explains how the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) responded to the problems of increased demand and long waiting times (the time between booking a test and taking it) for car practical driving tests (driving tests). It also looks at the role of the governance mechanisms.

**3.2** Recognising the need to clear the backlog of driving tests building up, DVSA set up a driver test recovery project in early 2021. The initial plan was to clear the backlog of driving tests by summer 2022. DVSA assessed the project to have zero net cost, because the estimated £19 million of costs would be recovered through increased fee income. A key part of the plan was to increase the number of tests it could complete by recruiting and training 300 additional driving examiners (examiners).

**3.3** An additional effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was a reduction in the number of vocational driving tests for drivers of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs). This combined with a pre-existing HGV driver shortage and a reduction in the number of EU national drivers employed in the UK. In response to the priorities set by the government at that time, vocational testing became DVSA's highest priority at the start of the pandemic. DVSA nearly doubled the number of vocational driving tests by July 2022.

#### Increasing the number of driving examiners

**3.4** Increasing the number of examiners is the most straightforward and sustainable way of significantly increasing the number of driving tests that DVSA provides thereby reducing waiting times. In response to long waiting times in 2016, DVSA was able to increase its recruitment such that the examiner workforce grew by over 250 people. However, by 2019, overall examiner headcount numbers had fallen back towards 2015 levels.

**3.5** Since the pandemic, DVSA has struggled to recruit and retain examiners. By September 2025, DVSA employed 1,544 full-time equivalent (FTE) examiners, 83 (6%) more than it had in February 2021 and 78 more than it had in September 2015 (**Figure 10**). The number of examiners includes those in training and not able to provide tests.



**Figure 10**

Number of driving examiners, September 2015 to September 2025

In September 2025, the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) employed 1,544 driving examiners, 83 more than it had in February 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Notes**

- 1 The number of driving examiners is stated as full-time equivalents (FTE).
- 2 The number of driving examiners includes those in training and not able to provide tests.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency data

## Recruitment activity

**3.6** In mid-2024, DVSA increased its recruitment target for examiners from 300 to 450. DVSA set out in its initial seven-point plan that it would look to recruit an additional 450 examiners, but subsequent modelling showed that it will need to increase its examiners by a net 400, factoring in the attrition of examiners leaving.<sup>15</sup>

**3.7** In its attempt to increase its overall examiner headcount, DVSA launched 19 recruitment campaigns between February 2021 and September 2025. All 19 have now concluded, with applicants from 15 campaigns successfully completing training and filling 880 posts as qualified examiners able to conduct driving tests. From these 15 campaigns, however, less than 50% of posts were filled in each campaign (except one where 55% of posts were filled), with one campaign achieving only 12%. DVSA attributes a significant part of its failure to recruit enough examiners to pay and terms and conditions, which are constrained by the need to comply with wider civil service pay. By comparison, approved driving instructors (instructors) have the potential to earn more than examiners do, though they do not get the wider benefits of being a civil servant, such as a civil service pension. Although both roles require similar skills, there are differences in the competencies required between instructing and assessing learner drivers. DVSA has also found it hard to recruit women. In September 2025, around 75% of the examiner workforce were men.

**3.8** Historically, DVSA has run national recruitment campaigns, leaving a level of uncertainty over where applicants are likely to be based and risking gaps in roles where there is the greatest need. Although there is an ongoing need to recruit across all regions, DVSA has only targeted recruitment in specific regions twice in 19 campaigns. The latest campaigns have been split by region, targeting two areas at the same time: the first targeting Scotland & North East, and Wales & North West, and the second targeting the Midlands & South West, and London & South East. DVSA struggles to recruit, particularly in London and the South East, where there is especially high demand for tests.

**3.9** It takes DVSA at least seven weeks to train new examiners. Increasing the number of new recruits has required more DVSA resources to train examiners, and training has been a bottleneck in the process of increasing the workforce. In April 2025, DVSA decided it would need to double its permanent training capacity from 13 to 26 trainers, so that more new examiners would be able to start carrying out driving tests sooner. By September 2025, DVSA's training capacity had increased to 23, and efforts to appoint trainers from within DVSA were continuing.

**3.10** Trainers need to be warrant card holders, meaning applicants for the role come from within DVSA and predominantly the examiner workforce. DVSA is exploring whether some elements of the training can be conducted by other people outside of this resource pool. Without sufficient training capacity, newly recruited examiners have been unable to start work as quickly as expected.

<sup>15</sup> DVSA sets out plan to reduce driving test waiting times. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/news/dvsa-sets-out-plan-to-reduce-driving-test-waiting-times](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dvsa-sets-out-plan-to-reduce-driving-test-waiting-times)

**3.11** DVSA is also responsible for assessing instructors to be able to drive and instruct learners. DVSA provides ongoing instructor standards checks from the date of each instructor registering. These assessments ensure instructors operate at the national standards for driver and rider training. As a result of DVSA's focus on increasing the number of driving tests, delays have built up in the assessing of trainee and approved instructors.

- DVSA informed us that trainee instructors have their instructor qualification test booked to hold if there is no availability in DVSA's assessment system in the location needed. DVSA work from the book-to-hold list as test slots become available. DVSA told us that the average number of instructors on booked to hold has been over 5,000 since June 2025. DVSA has experienced more complaints from businesses and trainees as a result.
- In some cases, DVSA has not checked that approved instructors are performing at the required standard, and others have been assessed as failing the standards but not had a follow-up assessment. As a result, DVSA told us that a risk-based approach has been adopted to provide support to instructors who need it most. In November 2025, 2,940 approved instructors (around 7% of approved instructors) were known to be offering substandard instruction to learners. DVSA also told us that it does not hold complete data for 5,687 (13%) of instructors. DVSA recognises that rectifying this is a priority, because poor instruction leads to poor learner driver preparation for tests, and lower pass rates.

## Retention

**3.12** DVSA has also found it hard to retain its examiners. In 2024-25, 230 examiners left DVSA, an attrition rate of 14%. This is double the 7.1% attrition rate for the civil service overall.<sup>16</sup>

**3.13** DVSA attributes its high attrition rate to uncompetitive pay and safety concerns. The 2024 civil service survey showed that for the executive officer grade in DVSA (of which approximately 60% are examiners) satisfaction with the total benefits package compared to 2023 is lower by 9%. When asked if the pay is reasonable compared to people doing a similar job in other organisations, results show a decline in satisfaction by 4% from 2023. The largest group of examiners is represented by the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS). PCS told us that DVSA's focus on short-term fixes was contributing to the low morale of the examiner workforce. Examiners also face significant personal safety risks during their job; for example, from people who have failed their test. In 2024-25, there were 426 reported cases of examiners being assaulted, the majority of which were verbal.

<sup>16</sup> We asked DVSA for full data on starters and leavers to reconcile against its overall examiner FTE numbers. However, DVSA has been unable to provide data that fully reconciles the number of examiners starting and leaving and the impact on its overall net FTE position.

**3.14** In 2025, DVSA has taken some action aiming to improve retention. Working with DfT, it is introducing a one-off exceptional payment to reduce attrition over the next year, thereby increasing the capacity to carry out driving tests. Examiners who meet the criteria will receive a one-off payment of £5,000, made in two instalments in March and September 2026, at a budgeted cost of £12.5 million. DVSA believes this might achieve higher retention equivalent to 500 tests a month.

### **Other measures to increase the number of driving tests carried out**

**3.15** Since February 2021, DVSA has proposed and taken several short-term measures to increase the number of driving tests available but waiting times have not reduced as expected.

- **Use of other warrant card holders to carry out driving tests.** DVSA's workforce includes former examiners who are now in other roles but still authorised to carry out driving tests (warrant card holders). In 2023-24, DVSA asked its 220 warrant card holders to stop their day role and instead sign up for doing driving tests. This resulted in around 145,000 more tests delivered between October 2023 and March 2024. However, it was not sustainable, because it led to delays in other parts of DVSA, including vocational tests and standards checks of instructors.
- **Additional testing allowance.** This is an 18-month initiative from June 2025 aimed at incentivising examiners and warrant card holders to carry out 4% more driving tests per month (6,000–10,000 additional tests). Examiners are paid for each additional test they conduct in addition to their contract. DVSA reports that from June to September 2025, this led to 116,000 additional driving tests being conducted, costing DVSA £3.7 million. This is 43,179 more tests than a similar overtime scheme delivered in 2023-24. Around 58% of examiners participated in this initiative between June and September 2025, with most of them conducting between 70 and 110 additional tests.
- **Increase daily testing.** Since 2021, DVSA has been working on progressing examiner productivity to an eight-tests-a-day model. DVSA came close to piloting the approach, but a combination of consulting with unions and a timing study commissioned in 2023 deemed the eight-tests-a-day model unfeasible.
- **Ministry of Defence support.** In November 2025, the Secretary of State for Transport announced that the Ministry of Defence will be providing additional testing capacity through its examiners. The plan is to provide 36 additional examiners for one day a week for 12 months. Each examiner will focus on car practical driving tests but will flex to vocational testing if needed.

## **Longer-term measures to improve efficiency of test booking and to reduce demand**

### The booking system

**3.16** DVSA expects to complete the replacement of its 18-year-old booking system by 2030, with a staggered rollout of a new booking system starting in 2026. The new system is designed to replace the delivery of practical car and vocational driver and rider tests, the administration of instructor registers and recording of driver certificates of professional competence. Introducing the new booking system has taken years of planning. The outline business case was approved in May 2021 authorising procurement and early development, with DfT and HM Treasury approving the full business case in June 2025. On 1 September 2025, DVSA commissioned the build and assurance of the new booking system, with an estimated life-cycle cost over 10 years of £181 million, including an annual running cost of £17 million. The new booking system is intended to provide enhanced security against cyber-attacks.

**3.17** The new booking system is also expected to be more effective in tackling the use of bots, through the following features.

- DVSA expects a more dynamic booking approach that will enable learners to specify their desired test time and location, and the system then offers available slots that meet their preferences. DVSA wants this to reduce the need for learners to use third-party cancellation checker services, as well as reducing the time learner drivers spend looking for a booking.
- It will provide checks on the identity and contact details of learner drivers who are booking tests. This will be done by authenticating email addresses as part of the booking process and integrating the booking system with the GOV.UK one log-in service.

**3.18** DVSA also expects the dynamic booking tool to help it increase the utilisation of examiner time. The introduction of a new system will remove the manual interventions currently often necessary to achieve optimum utilisation of examiners. For example, a change in examiner for one test can impact their subsequent schedule for the day, which is currently changed manually. The new system is set to implement such reshuffling more intelligently.

**3.19** In November 2025, following on from a consultation, the Secretary of State for Transport announced that DVSA intends to introduce changes to the booking system in spring 2026, with only learner drivers being able to book and manage driving tests. Tests will only be restricted to change twice, either through changing a date and location and/or making a swap. Tests will also be restricted to be moved to driving test centres within a certain geographical area of the original booking.

## Preparing learner drivers for their tests

**3.20** DVSA wants learners to be better prepared for their driving test, which would cause the pass rate to increase and reduce the number of repeat tests. Since 2022, it has run the Ready to Pass campaign to promote better preparation for the test. It also wants to encourage more practice of key driving skills, with the expectation that the number of learners booking a test speculatively will drop. Some other countries already require their learner drivers to have received a minimum number of professional lessons – for example, Portugal (32 hours) and France (20 hours) – before they can take a driving test.

## Fees

**3.21** In line with managing public money principles, DVSA is expected to meet the costs of providing driving tests entirely through the fees it charges learner drivers. The fee for a standard test on a weekday is £62, and this has remained unchanged since 2009. As a result of increasing operational costs, the full cost to DVSA of a driving test is now around £86, meaning that at a deficit of £24 per test, DVSA had a deficit of £44 million on the service in 2024-25. In 2024-25, DVSA had an overall deficit of £30 million on services funded by fees, with a surplus on DVSA's light vehicle MOT service reducing the overall deficit.

**3.22** Since 2018, DVSA has been developing a long-term fees strategy to raise fees to a level at which income from fees covers the full cost of services. DVSA also considers that the driving test fee is cheap compared with the cost of driving lessons, and that an increase might reduce the number of learner drivers who take the test before they are ready. DVSA does not have the power to increase the fee, and any change will require legislation, subject to consultation and HM Treasury approval.

## The role of governance mechanisms

**3.23** Good corporate governance is fundamental to any effective public organisation and is achieved by holding public servants to the highest standards while allowing them to thrive alongside delivering public services. DVSA has an executive committee, chaired by the chief executive, which is accountable for the delivery of the annual business plan and for day-to-day management. There are two main layers of oversight of DVSA's executive committee.

- DVSA's board provides oversight and sets the strategic direction. It has a non-executive chair, three other non-executive directors and six executive directors. DfT does not have a board member, but representatives are invited to attend.

- As the sponsor of DVSA, DfT is expected to maintain an effective working relationship with DVSA, to facilitate accountable, efficient and effective public services. According to the framework agreement (2015) between DfT and DVSA, this involves DfT setting out what it wants DVSA to deliver, approving the agency's annual business plan, monitoring performance and providing support and challenge.

### The role of DVSA's board

**3.24** We examined the minutes of DVSA's board meetings for evidence on how it had functioned as a governance mechanism with respect to the issue of long waiting times for driving tests. The board holds regular meetings, including between eight and 10 a year from 2020-21 to 2024-25. There were high rates of attendance for the non-executive directors and for a DfT representative. 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.

### DfT's role

**3.25** 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. In 2022, DfT provided DVSA with assurance on the quality of the demand forecasting model, but from July 2024, DfT analysts have provided more detailed advice on why the model had not been reliably forecasting demand since the pandemic. DVSA told us that support from DfT is helping it to improve the modelling. In May to June 2025, DfT and DVSA ran a joint taskforce to support efforts to achieve a lasting reduction in driving test waiting times. Its report set out immediate and long-term options for reducing waiting times and improving the system. Some of these options are being adopted in DVSA's current recovery initiatives.

# Appendix One

## Our investigative approach

### Scope

- 1** The investigation was prompted by increasingly long waiting times for car practical driving tests (driving tests). We have been monitoring progress through correspondence and the regular reporting by the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) and Department for Transport (DfT) to the Transport Select Committee.
- 2** We investigated the factors affecting DVSA's ability to resume pre-pandemic levels of performance on driving tests. The report does not examine the overall value for money of the government's response to the issues with driving tests or other aspects of DVSA's operations. It looks at the waiting times for driving tests, the changes in the number of driving tests needed and the government's (DfT's and DVSA's) response to the long waiting times.
- 3** The report does not look at DVSA's vocational driving tests or at DVSA's car theory test (which learner drivers must pass before booking a driving test). The report covers driving tests in England, Scotland and Wales only, because tests in Northern Ireland are a devolved function and the responsibility of the Driver & Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland.

### Methods

- 4** In examining these issues, we drew on a variety of evidence sources as described in the paragraphs below. We collated and analysed the evidence using our investigative criteria as a framework. We looked across different sources of evidence to support each of our findings.



## Interviews with DVSA and DfT representatives

**5** We conducted a number of semi-structured interviews with officials from DVSA and DfT. Interviews took place between 7 August and 29 September 2025, conducted online. We interviewed representatives from:

- **Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency** (responsible for conducting car practical driving tests). We conducted online interviews with senior officials with oversight of:
  - the digital team, responsible for the running and security of the booking system;
  - the driver services team, responsible for operating car practical driving tests, driving test centres and driving examiners (examiners);
  - the enforcement team, responsible for enforcing compliance with terms and conditions of the booking system, preventing and monitoring bot activity, and suspension or closure of business accounts;
  - the people team, responsible for managing the recruitment process for examiners, training process and training team;
  - the finance team, responsible for managing income, costs and forecasting of financial information;
  - the modelling team, responsible for forecasting the current and future waiting times for car practical driving tests;
  - the policy team, responsible for the application and enforcement of policy;
  - the deployment team, responsible for deploying examiners to carry out testing;
  - the customer insights team, responsible for internal and external research, including customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups involving learner drivers and approved driving instructors (instructors); and
  - the chair of DVSA's board, responsible for working with the chief executive of the agency in the strategic direction of the agency.
- **Department for Transport.** We conducted interviews with senior members responsible for the sponsorship of DVSA, including the director general, Roads, Places and Environment Group. These interviews provided an understanding of how the sponsorship relationship works between the two organisations, how DfT supports and challenges DVSA and how this has changed in recent years.

**6** We also visited the Gillingham, Kent driving test centre on 12 August 2025 to interview driving test centre staff, examiners, instructors and learner drivers. We also accompanied three learner drivers on their car practical driving test, both to gain experience and insights of learner drivers going through the car practical test process and to better understand the role of an examiner.

### Interviews with stakeholders

**7** DVSA has a stakeholder forum with representatives from the motoring industry, predominantly driving schools providing employment to instructors and lessons for learner drivers. In some cases, these driving schools provide a training facility for people wanting to qualify as an instructor. We also interviewed motoring associations that represent and advocate on behalf of instructors.

**8** We provided an open invitation for representatives from those organisations to share their insights with us for the purposes of the investigation. We interviewed representatives from the following organisations:

- **The Learner Driving Centre (LDC).** A nationwide network of independent LDC driving schools, with about 400 instructors. The driving school has been a family business for 38 years and provides courses for both learner drivers and driving instructors.
- **The Automobile Association (AA).** The AA was created in 1905 and is the UK's largest motoring organisation, with more than 14 million members. The AA offers insurance services, vehicle maintenance, car finance services, roadside assistance and a driving school for both learner drivers and instructors.
- **The Red driving school.** A nationwide driving school that has been in the driver education industry for 18 years. The driving school has a network of around 2000 instructors across the UK and provides training for both learner drivers and driving instructors.
- **The Driving Instructors Association.** The largest professional membership body for driver and rider trainers in the UK.
- **The RAC Foundation.** The RAC Foundation is a transport policy and research organisation that explores the economic, mobility, safety and environmental issues relating to roads and their users. The Foundation publishes independent and authoritative research with which it promotes informed debate and advocates policy in the interest of the responsible motorist.
- **The ADI National Joint Council.** The UK's leading national driving instructor organisation. A professional body of working approved driving instructors, who have created a supportive space to train, represent, inform and protect driving instructors. They encourage improvement in the industry to develop safer road standards and educate drivers.

- **The Motoring Schools Association.** One of the longest-established national bodies for driver trainers in the world. Having started back in 1935 just before the introduction of the driving test, it is the senior association for driver trainers in Britain. The association provides members with information both electronically and in print.

9 We also interviewed representatives from the main union recognised by DVSA, the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) North West, who represent examiners and have contributed evidence to public sessions held by the Transport Select Committee. PCS provided a viewpoint from the perspective of the examiner workforce, providing insights on the impact of waiting times on the day-to-day life of an examiner, the relationship with DVSA and context for the current waiting times.

### Document review

10 We reviewed a range of published and unpublished documents provided by DVSA and DfT. We used this information to understand the current waiting time situation and how this differs geographically, how the waiting time is calculated, the actions DVSA is taking to reduce waiting times, how it forecasts demand and recruitment of examiners.

11 Our review encompassed over 350 documents, including:

- DVSA board minutes;
- modelling assumptions and outputs;
- workforce data for examiners including recruitment and retention, utilisation rates and diversity statistics;
- approved driving instructor standard check waiting times and backlog;
- driving test centre data for waiting times and learner driver postcode data;
- ministerial submissions and responses;
- DVSA published statistics, consultations and annual report and accounts;
- data on car practical driving services provided by international supreme audit institutions;
- financial data on income, recruitment, test fee deficits, and financial incentives;
- the booking system Driver Services Platform business case;
- survey data for approved driving instructors and learner drivers; and
- enforcement data.

## Data analysis

**12** We analysed data provided by DVSA and DfT to better understand how DVSA operate car practical driving test services and the circumstances surrounding the current waiting times for car practical driving tests. We analysed the data to understand how DVSA forecast waiting times, the assumptions it uses to inform strategic decisions, and how it is responding to the current delays with a review to meeting its seven-week target. We have also been able to consider the governance arrangements of the sponsorship of DVSA by DfT and how these have changed over time.

## Data limitations

**13** The data we analysed are collected and reported by DVSA and DfT, and already existed. We did not perform additional analysis of our own. We reviewed, challenged and presented the data provided by DVSA but did not validate the datasets in this report or provide assurance of their accuracy. We have noted where and if any data caveats or limitations exist throughout the report.





This report has been printed on Pro Digital Silk and contains material sourced from responsibly managed and sustainable forests certified in accordance with the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council).

The wood pulp is totally recyclable and acid-free. Our printers also have full ISO 14001 environmental accreditation, which ensures that they have effective procedures in place to manage waste and practices that may affect the environment.



National Audit Office

Design and Production by NAO Communications Team  
DP Ref: 017018-001

£10.00

ISBN: 978-1-78604-647-5