

May 2006

Welcome to the latest edition of *Update*. It includes updates on the forthcoming merger of DVTA with DVLNI, the Road Traffic Bill and a compulsory training directive. I hope that you find the contents of this edition of *Update* both interesting and informative.

DRIVER TEST WAITING TIMES

The number of customers waiting for driving test continues to be much higher than we would like at around 8,000. Resources continue to be directed as far as practicably possible towards reducing this backlog, but even though we carried out more tests than ever before in 2005/06 (some 63,000, an increase of 37% on the previous year), the improvement in waiting times has not been as marked as we would have hoped. The underlying trend is however a positive one with a steady reduction in the backlog from a high of over 12,000 just after the strike to less than 8,000. The average waiting time for a driving test is currently 34 days although you will know that maximum waiting times can be considerably longer at some test centres.

Recruitment and training activities continue. Two new Driving Examiners are scheduled to join the Agency and will commence training on 29 May. Further interviews of applicants for the recent Driving Examiner competition will take place shortly. Arrangements have also been put in place to release a further two staff to attend training in LGV driver testing in June.

DVTA MERGER WITH DVLNI

On 21 March 2005, Secretary of State Peter Hain announced that a new Agency would be formed to bring together Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland (DVLNI) and Driver & Vehicle Testing Agency (DVTA). The merger decision is part of the Review of Public Administration and will mean that for the first time in the UK a single organisation will be responsible for both driver and vehicle testing and licensing. Work has now started on the development of what will be known as the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA).

DVA's first day will be 1 April 2007. A team comprising the Chief Executives and Directors of both agencies and senior members of the Road Safety Division of the Department, are working on a number of issues including Customers Services, Finance, Human Resources, Communications and IT to ensure that the transition to DVA runs smoothly for both customers and staff.

This team will also be responsible for consulting and involving the main stakeholders including ADIs and learner drivers as part of the process. No changes in services are envisaged ahead of 1 April 2007.

HAZARD PERCEPTION TEST FOR ADIs

We have become aware that there are some concerns about the results letter that is issued when instructors have undertaken their hazard perception test. The result shows an overall fail (because the software is designed to record a fail if the multiple-choice part of the test has been by-passed) and the concern is that this may mean their HPT pass mark will not be attributed to them. There is no need for this concern. Any instructor who has passed the test has had their file updated to show that this is the case. However, to provide further assurance we will now write to everyone who has passed the HPT to confirm the result and to advise them that their file will be noted. The multiple-choice section of the test need not be taken by any instructor.

The numbers of ADIs who have applied for and taken the voluntary hazard perception test is extremely small, but it is early days yet and we are hopeful that you will shortly inundate us with applications for the test. We know that there is some trepidation about the test and that some of you are fearful of failing it. We are looking at what we can do to provide some additional information which may make you feel more comfortable with the test and will let you know about this in due course.

AGENCY WEBSITE

The agency website has been updated so please log onto www.dvtani.gov.uk to have a look at it. As always we would encourage you to let us include you in our list of instructors which is now accessible from the practical driving test site under 'Find an Instructor'. You do not need to be on-line yourself in order to be listed. Being listed provides you with an additional opportunity to advertise your services, (although we know some of you are more than busy with referrals from family and friends, etc) and instructors who are listed have told us that they receive an increasing number of enquiries from learners who found their name on our web-site.

USE OF RESIDENTIAL AREAS FOR DRIVER TUITION

Omagh

Some time ago the Agency removed from its test route the Millbank Place/St Julian's Road junction in Omagh as a result of complaints from residents there. This area continues to be used for practice of the left hand reverse manoeuvre and this is causing annoyance and distress to residents living in the area. While use of the public roads in this way is the prerogative of anyone driving a vehicle who pays their road licence fee, we would ask you to consider the cumulative effect on residents of numbers of instructors and parents etc using the same junction to practice this manoeuvre. We would appreciate if you would make minimum use of this junction and discourage your pupils from using it when they are engaged in private practice with relatives.

Larne

A resident of the Sea Court estate has complained that the area is overused by driving schools for the turn in the road exercise and emergency stop manoeuvres. We would appreciate if instructors in the Larne area could alternate between this and other areas for practice of these manoeuvres.

TOP TEN DRIVING FAULTS

In response to a number of requests; most recently from the Northern Ireland ADI Association (NIADIA) and The Greater Belfast ADI Association (GBADIA), the Agency will shortly publish on its website the main faults attributed to candidates failing the driving test. A short explanation of each of the faults and how to address them will also be published. The top 10 are listed here for your information. It is intended to update the list twice per year as the list will inevitably change, not least as a result of our publishing it.

No	Top 10 Main Faults
1	Junctions Observation
2	Left Reverse - control
3	Steering
4	Mirror changing direction
5	Reverse parking control Gears
6	Gears
7	Move Away Safely
8	Left Reverse Observation
9	Move away under control
10	Normal Driving

ROADWORKS ON WESTLINK

Work began in January 2006 on major roadworks on the Westlink in Belfast. Work is expected to continue for four years. The concern that this work would have a major impact on driving tests from Balmoral Road is as yet unfounded. However, the Agency is working hard to establish access to the Lisburn Road via Lislea Drive, in the event of Boucher Road becoming heavily congested, Mallusk is also being considered as an option although roadworks are due to begin on the Hightown Road and carrying out more tests from Dill Road is also being considered.

COMPULSORY TRAINING DIRECTIVE

Having completed a formal consultation exercise, DVTA are continuing to work with the Driving Standards Agency in GB to implement the EU Directive requiring compulsory initial and periodic retraining of all bus and lorry drivers. This Directive states that all category C or D licence holders will have to take one weeks retraining every five years to be able to renew their professional licence. This training must take place at an approved training centre, and such centres will be continually monitored by DVTA to ensure the training meets the required standards. New drivers wishing to obtain a category C or D licence to drive professionally will have to complete a total of four hours theory testing and two hours practical testing.

PROPOSAL FOR A DRAFT ROAD TRAFFIC (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2006

A consultation document was issued in October last year on a proposal for a draft Road Traffic Order (Northern Ireland) 2006. The closing date for comments to the above address was 12 January 2006. Thank you to those of you who took the time to read through and consider the very lengthy document and provided responses. All responses should by now have been acknowledged. The timescale for the Order has slipped a little and it is now anticipated that the Order will be made in late Autumn.

ILLEGAL DRIVING INSTRUCTORS – ENFORCEMENT

In the last Update we informed you about the Agency's partnership with PSNI for the purpose of tackling illegal driving instruction. The Agency also makes use of its own Transport Enforcement Section to investigate illegal driving tuition. Whilst PSNI are advised of suspect illegal operators, DVTA's enforcement input is aimed at proactively investigating and where appropriate, instigating prosecution action against those who are engaged in illegal instruction.

The Agency recently implemented a new enforcement strategy, which includes an intelligence-led approach to targeting non-compliant vehicles and operators that pose the greatest risk to road safety. A new intelligence database has been developed which will be used in conjunction with Automatic Number Plate Readers (ANPR) and both will assist enforcement officers to target suspect vehicles whether used in connection with haulage, passenger transport or any other type of road transport non-compliance.

We will shortly take custody of two police specification liveried, Ford Galaxys equipped with ANPR. The use of these vehicles, along with anticipated new powers to enable enforcement officers to stop private motorists, will ensure that ADI enforcement is given an improved profile.

We welcome any information that may assist in identifying illegal driving instructors. Anyone who wishes to speak (in complete confidence) to an enforcement officer, can contact DVTA Enforcement Section on 02890 254120 or by e-mail on dvtaenforcements@doeni.gov.uk.

FEES

The Agency reviewed its fees on 1 October 2005 and we hope to be able to avoid any further revision until 1 April 2007.

2005 CUSTOMER SURVEY

The results of our 2005 customer survey indicate that only 74% of our driver test customers were satisfied with the booking arrangements for their test, while 84% were satisfied with the driving test procedures. 89% of our driving test customers were satisfied with our counter service. We are fairly confident that the low satisfaction level with booking procedures reflected the long waiting times for test dates and earlier in this *Update*, we advised you of the attempts that are being made to address these waiting times.

You will be interested to note that 64% of driver test respondents said that they had taken driving lessons solely with an instructor. A further 34% had taken lessons with both an instructor and family and friends. Only 3% had not used an instructor at all. Drivers told us that they received an average of 37 hours of tuition with 27 of these being with a driving instructor. What we don't know is if the survey respondents had passed or failed their test. We know that most of you already encourage your pupils to be fully prepared to take their test, but we feel that 27 hours tuition with an instructor is unlikely to be enough for most people learning how to drive. The Agency would encourage and support you in urging your candidates to attempt their first driving test only when they are up to test standard.

Finally, comments on any of the contents of this *Update* are very welcome.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R J Crosby', written in a cursive style.

R J CROSBY
Registrar