

**DSA joint meeting with ADI associations
held in Nottingham on Wednesday 9 November 2011**

Present:

DSA: Rosemary Thew - Chief Executive
Jane Ide – Director of Engagement & Communication
Lesley Young – Deputy Chief Driving Examiner
Mark Magee - Head of Modernising Driver Training
Charles Morton – Registrar
Elizabeth Smith – Operational Systems Manager

ADI NJC: Lynne Barrie, Neil Peek, Linda Western
DIA: Steve Garrod
DIDU: Barry Kenward, Cameron Smith, Sue Papworth
MSA: John Lepine, Peter Harvey
UNITE: Rob Harper, Dave Hickenbotham
DISC: Gavin Brownlie
IAM: Simon Best
AA: Roger Schofield

Policy Developments and Modernising Driver Training (MDT)

Mark Magee gave a brief update on policy developments. A meeting of Officials had taken place with the Minister, Mike Penning, the previous week. Ministerial priorities were confirmed as modernising driver training (including embedding the right skills, modern qualification processes, the ending of the trainee licence scheme, mandatory CPD, robust registration and quality assurance, and better information for consumers) and increasing the scope and availability of remedial education. Pending evidence becoming available from the current 'learning to drive' trial, decisions relating to how people learn to drive had been deferred.

DSA were also still exploring the option of a single register for trainers in all disciplines. Ensuring that trainers had the required skills and ability to teach was at the core of MDT. Some of the issues still to be determined included whether it would be possible to conduct check tests for LGV or whether check tests for car would also cover LGV.

In regard to the timeline, the moratorium on small businesses continued until 2014. The regulations would be complex but it was hoped that consultation could commence in spring 2012. It was likely that changes would be introduced from April 2014 but if this could be achieved sooner it would.

In summary, there was strong ministerial support for this area of work and this was a real opportunity to effect positive change by working in partnership.

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Author: E Turner

Branch: CEO

Foreign Languages

A further meeting with the Minister had been scheduled. Consultation would need to be conducted before any decision was made to change the service.

Registrar Issues

Find Your Nearest

Charles Morton explained that the “Find Your Nearest” facility was an important tool for communicating information about instructors. This provided a platform to build on for the future. Over the two months that the site had been running it had had around 10,000 customer “hits. It was easy for instructors to join – it involved going onto the website and completing a simple registration process. Of around 47,000 instructors on the Register, 33,000 had now signed up; however only 5,500 of these had signed up to the voluntary Code of Practice and commitment to completing CPD. There was concern that many instructors still did not fully understand the concept of CPD and it was felt that this may be preventing them from committing to it. Charles recognised this and said that he had submitted a request that the two be “uncoupled” to allow instructors to sign up to the Code of Practice only. This would also allow the flexibility of adding other information in the future.

DVLA photo

Changes to technology could not be effected immediately and required due process to be followed within DSA. Requests were then dealt with in “batches” throughout the year. One such batch of enhancements had been effected that week and included the facility for instructors to request that DSA used the existing DVLA licence photograph for use on the registration certificate. This would enable certificates to be renewed entirely on-line. The option to renew by paper or to renew on-line but send identification and photos by mail would continue.

These developments were welcomed by the meeting.

Unofficial driving test booking websites

Both DSA and the industry had been concerned for some time that unofficial driving test booking websites were in operation that charged unsuspecting members of the public a fee for booking driving tests on their behalf. Both the Trading Standards Office and the Advertising Standards Authority had now advised that such sites would be investigated and, where appropriate, prevented from trading. This was a positive step. DSA asked the groups (through their members) to encourage candidates to book their tests through the official DirectGov site. John Lepine asked whether this had implications for instructors who may book tests on behalf of their pupils and charge a fee for doing this. Charles did not see any problem with instructors continuing to do this, as long as they made clear to their pupils that a fee was being charged.

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You Tube

DSA's 'YouTube' site had now received more than 4 million hits, proving to be an effective method of communication. Charles encouraged the associations to include links to the site on their own websites.

New powers of suspension of ADIs were being put into place, effective from 6 April 2012. These would allow the Registrar to immediately remove from the Register individuals who had admitted or been found guilty by a court of serious misconduct, such as sexual assault. This was welcomed, however Charles agreed to check that this presented no conflict with the right for an instructor assessed at low standard to have a check test with a pupil before any suspension. **Action: Charles Morton.**

New Powers of Suspension

The new powers of suspension did not apply to motorcycle trainers. Since there had been no instances of alleged sexual assault against motorcycle trainers, it was not deemed necessary. A motorcycle trainer did not have any formal right of appeal against suspension (for example for demonstrating poor standards); however, in practice they could appeal to the Chief Driving Examiner. Rob Harper suggested that it would be preferable for any appeal to go to someone independent of DSA, such as the Transport Tribunal. This was noted.

There had been some concern about the poor standards of instruction demonstrated by those wishing to exchange ADI licences obtained in other parts of Europe for GB certificates. Many of these were proving to be at Grade 1 level, and were automatically suspended until the level was improved. **Action: Charles Morton to publish data on numbers of ADIs at Grades 1-6.**

ADI Fees

Cameron Smith asked why DSA insisted on ADI fees being paid 4 years in advance and asked if this could be changed to an annual fee. Charles explained that the fees were not spread evenly over the 4 years, since the CRB check was "front-loaded". If a move to annual fees were to be introduced but the ADI certificate was for a 4 year period the implications would have to be fully thought through, for example what would happen in the event that an ADI defaulted in, say, year 3 – would the certificate be suspended? There would also be additional administrative costs in managing annual payments. **Action: Charles Morton to provide a breakdown of the ADI registration fee and how fees were used.**

Operational Issues

Elizabeth Smith gave a brief update on operational matters.

Waiting Times for Car Tests

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Overall, the average waiting time for car tests was 6.7 weeks. However, DSA recognised that there were still numbers of centres which had waits higher than 9 weeks, particularly in London and the South East and other hotspots such as Norfolk and Cambridge. Rosemary Thew acknowledged that this was unacceptable and assured the meeting that this was being addressed. Recruitment of examiners was focused on those areas with longest waiting times and additional slots were being opened up wherever possible to meet demand. Whilst the chart presented disguised longer waits at individual centres, Rosemary assured attendees that she and the senior management team were fully aware of the problem areas and that they were being addressed. The recruitment process continued, and examiners were now starting to come through from Cardington. This, coupled with a recent fall in demand, should ease the situation in the long wait centres.

Cameron Smith asked whether DSA could “blitz” particular centres to get waiting times back under control, by putting more examiners in for a short time. Rosemary explained that most of the high wait centres were already testing to capacity. Whilst staggered testing may be an option in some centres (and was indeed being utilised), it was not always possible to operate a staggered testing arrangement because of the physical environment and restrictions on routes.

There was some suggestion from the group representatives that candidates were being turned away at some centres whilst there appeared to be an examiner available who could have conducted the test. Elizabeth Smith explained that Test Centre Managers had been given additional management periods which should be used to cover short notice examiner non-availability. Data collated as part of management information showed that this was having a positive effect, minimising the number of test slots lost. Lesley Young said she would be very concerned if tests were not being conducted where an examiner was available and asked that any evidence of this happening be sent to her so that she could investigate.

Whilst DSA could not guarantee that waiting times within every test centre would be brought below 9 weeks, Rosemary Thew gave an assurance that everything possible would be done to do so.

Examiner Recruitment

As mentioned above, the recruitment exercise had not yet concluded. To date 33 people had completed training, 84 were planned to complete training before the end of the financial year and a further 100+ examiners were planned for the next financial year. Recruitment was focused on London and other ‘hotspots’.

Neil Peek asked what background checks were carried out on applicants. Rosemary confirmed that they underwent a full CRB check and completed a health declaration. Although references were not obtained by DSA direct, but by the DfT Shared Services Centre, the process still included seeking references.

Neil asked why DSA examiners did not undergo CRB checks every 4 years, as instructors were required to do. Rosemary explained that this was not necessary. As Civil Servants, examiners were subject to the Civil Service Code and were required to declare any convictions. They were subject to various checks, including a robust quality assurance process and performance appraisals. If DSA became aware that an examiner had been found guilty of an offence, appropriate action would be taken, including removal from post.

John Lepine asked whether the lack of a specified retirement age for examiners had caused problems for the DSA. Rosemary acknowledged that this did mean that we could no longer predict retirement levels and many examiners wished to partially retire, effectively coming back as part-time examiners. However, at least 3 months notice was required. John asked whether DSA might consider people coming into the job on a part-time basis, such as ADIs who were struggling financially, or who wished to expand their experience. Lesley Young explained that European legislation did not allow this as it stipulated that an individual could not be a driving instructor and driving examiner at the same time.

DSA Cancelled Tests

There were now measures in place to minimise short-notice cancellations and some progress had been made to keep cancellations below one percent. Every effort was made to avoid cancellations, however it was acknowledged that in some instances short-notice cancellation was unavoidable. Where possible, examiner resource was moved around to reduce the wait for candidates whose tests were cancelled at high wait centres, and where DSA had previously cancelled a test for a customer, their new appointment would be given priority.. Where this was not possible, all requests would be considered on a case by case basis, but Rosemary stressed that candidates must be realistic. It was not always possible to supply an earlier date and there were no powers under the regulations to extend the life of a theory test certificate. There was no process for ADIs to advise their local test centre when a test was booked for a candidate whose theory test certificate was due to expire. Candidates should not wait until the theory test certificate was in danger of expiring before applying for a date.

The request for a process to enable fast track bookings for DSA cancelled tests was noted.

The recent IT release enabled DSA to send an email notification of cancellation to the email address provided on booking the test. This did not extend to notifying the ADI (unless that was the email address provided). Elizabeth asked the groups to encourage candidates to supply both email addresses and mobile telephone numbers when they book their test on-line. Rob Harper asked DSA to also notify the ADI of any cancellation. Elizabeth said that ADIs who provide details of their availability would avoid an appointment being booked for a test date on which the ADI was not available. Rob Harper said this was not working, and Elizabeth asked him to send any examples of this, as problems experienced in 2009/10 had been fixed.

Bad weather

Elizabeth advised that DSA was installing answerphones in test centres for which messages could be updated remotely. This would enable candidates to phone the test centre for updates in periods of bad weather. This was welcomed.

Rob Harper asked whether DSA could have a virtual central noticeboard which in periods of bad weather could be updated to show which test centres were closed. Elizabeth said this information would be gathered and the website would be updated.

There was a perception that the extent of weather conditions that prevented tests from being conducted differed from centre to centre. Some test centre managers decided to close a centre when there was snow on the car park, despite there being no problem with the condition on the roads; others were more flexible and agreed that the test could commence on the public road rather than the DSA car park. There also seemed to be a reluctance to declare a centre closed, which meant that candidates had to travel to the centre, in many cases, only to find that the test could not go ahead. Rosemary said she did not recognise this problem. It was Sector Managers who made the final decision on whether to close a centre, based on the recommendation of the Test Centre Manager and taking local weather forecasts into account. Tests should go ahead whenever possible. It was often difficult to make a decision locally in time to notify the first candidate of the day but decisions were taken as soon as possible to minimise inconvenience to customers. Clear guidance had been issued on managing bad weather conditions.

Neil Peek asked whose responsibility it was to clear the snow on LGV manoeuvring areas. There had been problems last winter in getting this done. Rosemary acknowledged that there had been problems last year but explained that there was now a contract in place with Interserve for clearance of snow on DSA sites. VOSA was responsible for this on their sites and the requirement to clear areas used by DSA had been clarified.

Olympics

Elizabeth outlined some of the preparations underway to manage the effect of the 2012 Olympics and its impact on test delivery.

Taking testing to the customer

Trials were underway in four locations: Ashford, Louth, Ayrshire and Dunbarton. Feedback to date had been encouraging with no major issues. Trials were being developed in a further three areas: Warrington, Wiltshire and Barry. All of the trials were taking place in areas with no permanent test centre provision.

On-line booking service

A new on-line booking service for ADIs was being launched at the end of 2012. This would allow instructors to view available slots, manage multiple bookings, make secure payments, store 'favourite' test centres, update their business details and view bookings online. The service was intended to support instructors in managing their business schedules and was welcomed by the meeting.

All instructors/schools who wished to use the site would be required to sign up to the terms and conditions of use (currently being developed). Care would be taken to include various checks and balances to prevent abuse. Instructors would be able to book multiple slots, and would have some flexibility in changing the details of candidates, but no slot would be able to be booked without candidate details being provided.

Test centre facilities

The groups welcomed the decision to restore radios to test centres. Whilst appreciating that coffee was no longer available because of the need for efficiencies, there was concern that paper cups were increasingly no longer supplied at some centres which had water fountains. Elizabeth confirmed that there was no reason why cups should not be supplied.

Action: Elizabeth Smith to arrange for a note to be sent to all test centre managers encouraging them to keep the cups supplied.

Communication

Jane Ide advised that her team had started to review DSA's stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure that the Agency was speaking to the right people about the right things.

DSA's poster policy was also being reviewed. Whilst DSA was happy to support the associations by displaying posters which advertised local events, the volume of posters coming through was putting pressure on resources. It may be that the policy would need to be simplified and some restrictions applied to make the process more manageable.

There had been some confusion about DSA's approach to providing speakers for meetings and events. Jane stressed that the Agency was always willing to consider requests, but that it may not always be possible for someone to attend, depending on current demands and available resource. It was important to ensure that DSA representation was appropriate and that messages were consistent. Whilst it was absolutely right that test centre managers were able to talk to instructors locally, and there was no wish to prevent examiners from building good relationships with ADIs, there had to be some control. For this reason all requests for attendance at local meetings and conferences were to be referred to the Engagement team.

DSA had this year launched three iPhone apps – Theory Test Lite (free), Theory Test Stand Alone and Theory Test Kit. The main theory test app was on sale for £3.99 and consistently appeared in the table of the top ten educational apps. Candidates seem to be

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buying the books and the apps together. In January 2012 a new Highway Code app would be launched. Jane encouraged the groups to promote these.

It was hoped that in due course the apps could be developed for use on other phones.

HPT Film Clips

It was recognised that the clips currently used in the HPT were dated and needed to be refreshed. This exercise was underway and would complete by 2013. At the end of the meeting Peter Weddell-Hall showed some animated clips that had been developed. The intention was to be able to update clips more quickly and more frequently and to strengthen the links between the theory test and the HPT to enable theory to be incorporated into real life scenes.

The pass rate for the theory test was generally high, but the groups felt that some candidates were struggling with taking the theory and HPT at the same time. **Action: Lesley to provide statistics on numbers of candidates who pass one part but fail the other. Lesley Young to consider whether it would be possible to “uncouple” the theory and HPT tests, so that if a candidate failed one part they could just re-take that element (within a limited timescale).** It was felt that this would help some candidates, particularly those with special needs. However, it would require a change in regulations and could have considerable impact on fees.

Bay Parking

ADIs were increasingly finding it difficult to find places where learners could practice the bay parking manoeuvre, since local authorities and supermarket chains seemed more reluctant to allow their car parks to be used. Lynne Barrie asked whether consideration could be given to removing this manoeuvre from the test. Lesley Young stressed that bay parking was included in the test for very good reasons and was entirely appropriate. There was strong evidence of its value and candidates performed very well on this manoeuvre compared to the other two reverse parking manoeuvres. Whilst DSA would keep this under review, Lesley was not convinced that this was a problem which justified removal of the exercise. She undertook to look into any issues relating to bay parking in specific test centre areas.

Standards on minimum test vehicles

DSA had no plans to regulate for a specific type of vehicle, such as to require vehicles to have 4 doors. Developments in vehicle technology were a continual challenge but generally DSA would not take issue with safety or visual aids and these would probably be acceptable. However, any mechanism that took control of anything that a driver should do, such as braking or parking, was likely to be deemed unsuitable. So gadgets such as distance control would be required to be switched off. **Action: Lesley Young to consider publishing general advice to this effect.**

CPD

There was general support for CPD but there was concern that many instructors did not understand what CPD was or what it meant for them. Taking account of CPD on check tests could provide an incentive. Rosemary agreed that CPD was an important aspect of MDT. Most professions now required people to undergo CPD to keep their skills up to date. Mark Magee explained that the current CPD templates had been published a couple of years ago and would be updated shortly to reflect the published DSA National Driver/ Training StandardTM. DSA, the Minister and the groups were all keen to make progress on CPD but any move to make it compulsory would require regulation.

The groups shared concerns about the quality of CPD courses being variable and that no quality assurance was in place. It was clear that a lot of ADIs were already doing CPD, without really appreciating that they were. But CPD courses were delivered commercially and instructors needed better protection.

Pass Plus

A decision on the future of Pass Plus had been put on hold until completion of the Learning to Drive trial and decisions around whether learners should be allowed to drive on motorways. This was a big part of Pass Plus. Meanwhile, Mark was keen that discussions with the insurance industry continued. DfT were leading on the consultation around an increase to the motorway speed limit and there was a possibility that learners on motorways could be considered as part of this. Mark to progress.

Change to Secretary of State

Justine Greening had had an initial discussion with Mike Penning about priorities. There was no indication, thus far, of any change in approach.

Logbooks

The Learning to Drive trial was ongoing. Gaining valid evidence relied on getting sufficient numbers through the practical test. The trial documentation included a workbook setting out a range of different scenarios that ADIs might wish to use. The Minister was generally supportive of logbooks, but they were likely to be used for learner reflection rather than as the ADI's record. Logbook use may also eventually feed into the insurance position. Any requirement for a logbook to be used would require consultation and regulation.

Medical Appraisals

Medical appraisals were now being carried out by DTAMs, who were not otherwise programmed to conduct practical tests, so there was little impact on service delivery. Since fewer ADIs were coming through on qualification tests, the DTAMs could manage volumes for the time being.

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There being no further business the meeting closed. The groups agreed to reflect and revert to DSA on whether a further joint meeting should be scheduled.