



DRIVING INSTRUCTORS ASSOCIATION
SPECIAL REPORT • AUGUST 2026

DIA SPECIAL REPORT

The Real Driving Test Hustle?

A DIA Special Report on whether DVSA's latest PR ploy is designed to distract from wholesale test delivery failures — and the broader performance issues they're not as keen on the profession, and the wider public, focusing on.

Source: GOV.UK

**New examiners
recruited: 10,000 extra
monthly tests added last
year.**



**And online bots are
banned from hoarding
driving test slots.**

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In a week when Labour MPs were deployed like bots across social media to spread a Government agency's gospel on test recovery, DIA asks: is the real driving test hustle DVSA's own spin?

In this two-part special report we go behind the press releases and social media blasts, breaking down exactly where the issues in delivery are, and where and why measures to tackle them are falling short. We look beyond Category B test delivery and examine Part 2, 3 and Standards Check deficits — and why that should concern both our profession and the wider public. Plus: where's the new CEO, and what are they doing to lead the agency out of the abyss?

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PART ONE

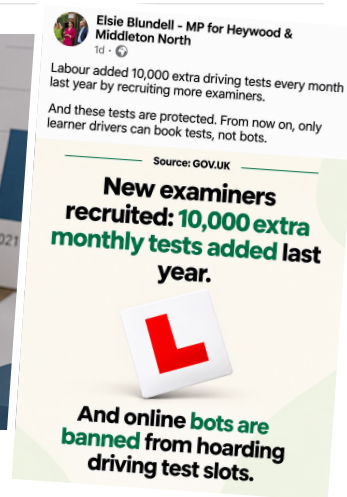
EXAMINER RECRUITMENT

Questions over net new examiner numbers

DVSA has issued Labour MPs with ready-made social media assets attributing an extra 10,000 tests a month to recruiting new examiners. But how successful, in real terms, has that recruitment actually been?



Examiner recruitment: the gap between targets and reality



"The problem is recruitment AND retention. That 10,000 sounds big – but before holidays, sickness etc., it equates to around 60 examiners across the whole nation."

— ADI, NORTH EAST

The underlying examiner workforce problem is well documented. The National Audit Office found that, despite 19 recruitment campaigns, DVSA had only **83 more examiners in place in 2025 than in 2021**, against an

ambition to add 400. It highlighted high exit rates, with perceived uncompetitive pay and safety concerns among the factors contributing to high attrition across both the trainee and existing examiner pool.

14%

Examiner attrition rate admitted by DVSA — roughly double the civil service average. This high turnover has continually wiped out recruitment gains.

In September 2025, DVSA said it had recruited and trained 271 examiners since July 2024 who were in post and delivering tests, while 80 remained in training, 83 were booked on future courses and 66 had received offers. It also acknowledged that existing examiners were continuing to leave.

By February this year, the workforce had risen to **1,556 full-time-equivalent examiners** — 108 more than a year earlier — according to figures given in Parliament. DVSA have more recently claimed that examiner numbers are at their highest level since 2019, and that they're close to delivering a quarter of a million additional car tests between June 2025 and May 2026 compared with the previous 12 months.

Granted, these are significant gains. They do not, however, remove the need to account for the gap between recruitment, successful training and productive deployment — and examiner attrition.

The Times succinctly summarised some of the problems in May this year: *"Red tape, poor pay and dangerous learners mean only 3 per cent of applicants qualify to grill new drivers."*

WHAT ADIS ARE SAYING

"Just a play on numbers, so you got an extra 62 examiners?"

"ADI, Devon"

"This is so far from the truth or reality it's astonishing! Here in the south west departing examiners have far outnumbered the recruitment drive since the pandemic."

"ADI, South West England"

"What you haven't said is the amount of driving examiners that the DVSA haven't been able to retain. You've lost nearly that amount due to poor salary and shocking contracts. The DVSA are an absolute shambles. Get rid of the top tier management and put in people who know what they are doing and who are in the driving instruction industry."

"ADI"

What's more worrying? Even some of those who have been recruited and trained haven't yet been deployed — as Part Two reveals.

PART TWO

DEPLOYMENT DELAYS

New examiners waiting to be deployed almost as long as pupils wait for tests

Successful candidates who have completed examiner training are sitting idle at home near test centres with long queues — and some are now considering other jobs, so long has their wait been.



Examiner training bottlenecks and deployment delays are leaving newly qualified staff idle — and some are walking away.

E-mails to DIA from applicants, trainees and those who have successfully passed examiner training — along with a dedicated Reddit thread on examiner recruitment — reveal a troubling pattern:

- Applicants successfully completing their driving and other assessments, but being informed they won't commence training until **six months after that**.
- Those who have successfully completed training waiting **more than four months to be deployed**, and now considering other jobs as they have been given no information on a likely start date.
- Accounts of stressful and demotivating experiences within the training process from trainees who subsequently dropped out — contributing to the high attrition rate the agency has experienced throughout its examiner recruitment efforts.

"When I met with senior management at the agency last month I raised this issue, and it was acknowledged by Directors that there had been a lag in deploying new examiners. However, we were assured they were getting on top of the issue."

— DIA CEO CARLY BROOKFIELD

This month we've received further intelligence that suggests the lag continues. We've asked DVSA for an update.

The irony is stark: at the same time as learner drivers wait months for a test slot, fully trained examiners — paid and ready — are sitting at home near centres with significant queues, with no clarity on when they will begin work. It is difficult to characterise this as anything other than a resource management failure.

PART THREE

| | BOOKING SYSTEM

Locked out and left waiting: pupils blocked from the booking system

Measures designed to keep bots and resellers out of the driving-test booking system are now catching ordinary learners — while trained examiners sit waiting to be deployed.



Anti-bot measures designed to block resellers are blocking ordinary learners too — with little recourse available.

For a learner driver searching for a practical test, persistence can feel less like a choice than a requirement. Appointments appear and disappear in moments. A suitable date may be months away; a cancellation closer to home can be gone before the page has refreshed. The obvious response is to keep looking. But what happens when looking too often begins to resemble the behaviour the system was built to stop?

DIA has been contacted by learners who say they have been blocked from the DVSA online booking service after repeatedly checking or acting quickly while trying to secure a test. In one case, a trainer said his pupil was **distraught** after

being told that her online access would be suspended for **12 months**. When she telephoned the contact centre, staff appeared unable to tell her how the problem could be resolved.

In a recent discussion on Reddit, another learner said they had received an email suspending their access to online booking, rearranging and cancellation services for a year. They denied using an unofficial app or knowingly breaking the terms, and wondered whether checking too frequently had been enough to trigger the decision.

"When appointments are scarce, entirely predictable human behaviour — refreshing a page, searching several centres or responding quickly to availability — may look mechanistic. Without clearer parameters, learners cannot easily know how to pursue a test energetically without putting their online access at risk."

DVSA's published guidance confirms that it monitors the service and can suspend online access when it detects activity that "does not look like normal personal use". The suspension applies to the driving-licence number and lasts 12 months. A learner can still book by telephone, but the online route — through which scarce appointments can be found and acted upon most quickly — is closed.

There is a review process. Learners can ask DVSA to reconsider, and the agency says it aims to respond within 10 working days. If the suspension is upheld, a further complaint can be made to its data-protection team. Yet the guidance does not explain what volume or pattern of activity crosses the line between an anxious learner repeatedly searching for an appointment and automated or commercial misuse.

PART FOUR

| | BOOKING SYSTEM ACCESS

A crackdown with unintended consequences?

The booking system has undoubtedly been exploited — but the crackdown has had serious unintended effects on legitimate users, while the bots continue to get through.

£500

Amount some learners paid to third-party resellers for a test with an official weekday fee of just £62 — with almost a third of DVSA survey respondents having used a reseller, per the NAO.

Since May, only learner drivers have been permitted to book or manage their own car tests. Driving instructors can no longer do so on a pupil's behalf. The DIA has questioned not only the effect of this change, but the process through which it was introduced. Although a consultation took place, the association argues it did not make sufficiently clear that the resulting rules would legally prevent instructors from booking tests for their pupils.

Removing instructors from the process has left learners to navigate a highly competitive booking system alone. For some, that means repeatedly checking for appointments, refreshing pages and acting as quickly as possible when a suitable test appears. These are understandable responses to scarcity, but they can also resemble the automated behaviour the system is designed to detect.

"Measures intended to stop commercial exploitation may be restricting the very learners they were supposed to protect."

Carly Brookfield, chief executive of the DIA, has asked DVSA for urgent advice for pupils and trainers on the type of activity that may result in a block, what learners should do when it happens, and whether contact-centre staff are equipped to help those who believe they have been caught incorrectly.

And the reality is, after all of these changes — bots are still accessing the system. 'Wins' in increasing detection rates don't mean you've eradicated all bot access: detecting and removing them means they are still able to get in.

DIA POSITION

ADIs are regulated, governable and have the professional knowledge to judge when it's time to book a test for a candidate. They have professional risk in using the platform properly — the majority won't risk their professional status by booking tests for pupils before they're ready. The question DIA has always asked, in this context: why did we disable what should be the professional gatekeeper in booking a driving test, versus enabling them to be the control? Making pupils book tests via a regulated professional would limit access — and that's a good thing, supporting better test resource management and helping assure new licensee competency and safety.

PART FIVE

COMMUNICATIONS & LEADERSHIP

Selective posts, undelivered updates and an invisible new CEO

Communications on test delivery recovery have seen the agency furnish MPs with updates to share — but not provide driver trainer stakeholders with the information they need, despite promises of monthly briefings.



The agency's social channels show few signs of the crisis unfolding in test delivery — while stakeholders wait for promised monthly briefings.

Despite a key NAO recommendation (December 2025) that DVSA more regularly publish meaningful metrics on waiting times, a scan of the agency's social media reveals very little mention of their driving test tribulations, how the agency is tackling them, or advice for

pupils. Instead: lots of perky posts about events attended and new initiatives in areas other than test delivery. Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn — you wouldn't look at the agency's own channels and think there even was such an issue.

THE PROMISE OF MONTHLY UPDATES

"This data publication is not a one-off. From now on, we will be updating the waiting times data on the second Wednesday of each month, covering the previous month's performance. To make sure this information is useful to you and your members, we will use each monthly data update as the basis for a regular newsletter briefing."

DVSA, in a letter to stakeholders, June 2026

Note to DVSA: we're still waiting for July and August's updates. Meanwhile, during July and August DVSA made a number of posts across social media — and whilst some referenced booking rule changes, none gave any real updates on progress tackling test waiting times. Nice posts about Wimbledon and Stonehenge though!

"Where's Warmington?"

Pondering where the new DVSA CEO is, and what she's actually doing at the agency, has become something of a game we've christened **"Where's Warmington?"**

Apart from a brief appearance at the Car Driver Forum in May — where only a handful of industry stakeholders had half an hour to hear her script on what she's going to do to make a dent in DVSA's many challenges — the industry has not really seen hide nor hair of the new Chief in the eight months she's been in post.

"We absolutely recognise that a new CEO should be focused on getting their head under the bonnet of this broken-down vehicle of an agency. But to not issue a single communication to a key customer base of licence-fee paying ADIs and Rider Trainers in eight months seems questionable."

— DIA, DIRECT FEEDBACK TO DVSA COMMS TEAM

NEXT WEEK

| | SPECIAL REPORT CONTINUES

Our special test delivery report continues...

A preview of what's coming in next week's DIA special report.

COMING NEXT

PDI pain continues on Part 2 and 3 tests — and ADI Standards Checks go unchecked

DVSA is under pressure to publish more regular data on Category B test recovery, but performance on Part 2 and 3 tests and the ADI Standards Check receives far less scrutiny outside our industry. Within the profession, whilst PDIs stress about long waits for qualifying tests, it may be a case of "not my problem" for many qualified ADIs with no interest in training the next generation — and equally, there are trainers who have been happy to evade any performance evaluation for several years. However, a severe shortage of ADI performance assessments should matter to all in our profession, and to the public, and is yet another symptom of a provider that simply can't provide, and a regulator that's not regulating.

PLUS

DVSA ADI and PDI fee income grows by a third — yet services to trainers more than halve

We look at how the regulator's revenue from trainer fees alone has climbed by a third over the last five years, whilst the paying customer has received less and less in return.

About the DIA

The Driving Instructors Association (DIA) is the UK's largest professional body for driver and rider trainers, providing professional support, expert guidance, industry representation, professional development and £25m PI & PL insurance. We represent, support and advocate for the profession – including holding regulators to account on behalf of our members and the wider public.

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