

FOI Request (received 30 April 2021) - Reference: DFI/2021-0167

I wish to make a Freedom of Information request. I would like to know the following:

1. How many driving licences are issued per year?
2. How many of these are medical queries?
3. How many staff are there to process the issue of driving licences?
4. As Northern Ireland is part of the U.K. why are driving licences here not being handled by the DVLA in Swansea?

Response (issued 14 May 2021)

Thank you for your e-mail dated 30 April 2021 requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. You asked for the above information.

Please find set out below, in the ordered requested, the answers to your questions.

1. Information on the number of driving licences processed is published quarterly on the Department's internet site and can be found at - [Driver & Vehicle Agency Activity Statistics | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#). I would advise that the information in relation to the quarter ending 31 March 2021 has not yet been published but I can confirm that it will be available before the end of May 2021. Previous quarters are available at the link provided.

For your assistance, Table 5.1 details the number of Group 1 (car/motorcycle) licences issued and Table 5.2 details the number of Group 2 (lorry/bus) licences issued.

2. In response to the second part of your request, I regret to inform you that, while the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) holds information regarding the number of medical queries conducted, it is unable to provide you with the information sought. I must advise you that answering your request would exceed the appropriate limit, laid out under s12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Under the Act, the appropriate cost limit for the Department for Infrastructure is £600. For the purposes of the legislation, costs are calculated at a flat rate of £25 per hour. If answering a request would require greater than 24 hours at the flat rate, that request would be subject to consideration under s12 and the public authority would not be obliged to comply.

In order to determine whether the Department could meet your request, an estimate had to be made of the time it would take to obtain the requested information from our records.

This estimate was based on the information held for over 18,500 records where a Group 2 (lorry and/or bus) licence has been issued, the figures are based on the 2019/20 year Group 2 transactions as the 2020/21 year figures are not yet available.

Your request was for information on the number of medical queries conducted. While we hold information on the number of licences issued for a restricted period as a result of medical investigations and the number of applications refused or revoked, we do not hold a central record of the number of applications that were investigated and cleared, resulting in the issue of an unrestricted period licence. Therefore, in order to establish which records were subject to medical review, and cleared, each of the records for which a licence was issued, would need to be checked to determine whether a medical investigation was conducted.

In making our calculations, the Department took into account the costs it reasonably expected to incur in carrying out the following activities in complying with your request:

- determining whether the information is held;
- locating the information;
- retrieving the information; and
- extracting the information.

Determining whether the information was held by the Department and identifying its locations did not impact greatly on the cost calculations. However, retrieving and extracting the information from our records would be both time-consuming and costly. I should explain that the information you requested is held in the driver licensing database, however providing the level of detail required to meet the details of your request would necessitate a check on each record to determine whether it had been subject to a medical review or investigation.

It may be helpful if I explain further, the published statistics link provided in relation to your first question, also contains information in relation to the number of licences issued with a limited period duration following the completion of investigations on fitness to drive. The details are listed under the heading - Medical Renewals. However this figure does not include those applications where the driver has been medically investigated and the recommendation and licensing decision was that a full term licence could be issued.

Applicants for a first time Group 2 (lorry/bus) licence and all Group 2 drivers who are renewing their lorry and/or bus licence who are aged 45 and over are required to include a medical report with their application, therefore each of those applications will require a check to determine whether a medical condition has been declared and therefore whether further medical investigation is required.

All drivers who have an existing condition will be subject to review on each application to renew either a Group 1 or Group 2 driving licence.

Retrieving and extracting this information, in line with your request, would involve significant amounts of staff time. In the sample exercise carried out, between 5 and 10 minutes were needed to provide the information as requested, for each of the records. For the purposes of this exercise I have limited the number of potential records to be checked to those relating to the issue of a Group 2 (lorry and/or bus licence) which in the 2019/20 amounted to 14,780. However, to fully answer your question each first application and renewal application for a Group 1 and Group 2 licence would need to be checked. Processing your information request for medical investigations would, we estimate, easily exceed the appropriate limit, being more than fifty one times the 24 staff hours allowed.

The cost of complying with your request for information would be over £30,000 (excluding the first £600).

I can also advise that the published figures reflect the number of drivers who have their application granted and a driving licence has therefore been issued. The figure does not include those drivers who have had their licence refused or revoked following medical investigations. I can advise that in the 2019/20 year, we issued 868 refusal/revocation notices and in the 2020/21 year we issued 737 refusal/revocation notices as a result of medical investigations.

3. At 1 May 2021, there were a total of 58 staff working on processing Driver Licensing applications.
4. There are two separate licensing authorities for driver licensing in the United Kingdom. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea is responsible for the administration of driver licensing for those drivers who are resident in England, Wales and Scotland and the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) has responsibility for the administration of driver licensing for those drivers who are resident in Northern Ireland.

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