

FOI Request (received 29 May 2019) - Reference: DFI/2019-0194

I would be grateful if you would furnish me with the information requested below.

Theory Test

- 1) In November 2016, Minister Hazzard expressed his concern at the low pass rate for the theory element of the Taxi Driver Test, which was then standing at 16%. What is the current pass rate?
- 2) How many applicants have taken the theory test in each of the last 5 years?
- 3) How many applicants have passed the theory test in each of the last 5 years?
- 4) How many applicants have failed the theory test in each of the last 5 years?
- 5) Please outline the number of applicants, passes and fails broken down by Nationality (Northern Ireland, ROI, GB, Foreign Nationals) in each of the last 5 years?
- 6) Please outline the number of theory test re-sits in each of the last 5 years?
- 7) Please outline the number of theory test re-sits broken down by Nationality (Northern Ireland, ROI, GB, Foreign Nationals) in each of the last 5 years?
- 8) How much does the theory test cost?
- 9) Is there a maximum number of theory test re-sits an individual applicant may take and if so, what is that number?
- 10) How many applicants in each of the last 5 years have required an interpreter?
- 11) Who is responsible for paying an interpreter?
- 12) How is an interpreter appointed?
- 13) How is the interpreter used during the course of the theory test?
- 14) What safeguards are in place to ensure an interpreter does not assist the applicant other than with translation?
- 15) Is the pass mark for the theory test different for applicants who are foreign nationals?
- 16) Who devised the questions for the theory test? How often are they reviewed? Does the Department consider that some of the questions may now be irrelevant?
- 17) Has the Department investigated the cost and time frame to pass the theory test to become a taxi driver?
- 18) Please provide information with regard to the new periodic training for all taxi drivers which came into force on 31st October 2014

- 19) In June 2014, Minister Durkan indicated there was “too much enforcement activity addressing relatively minor licensing offences which reduces the resources available to address the illegal and dangerous taxis which are out there.” Please outline:
- i. How enforcement activity has changed to address this?
 - ii. What evidence is there to demonstrate its success?

Response (issued 26 June 2019)

Thank you for your email dated 29 May 2019 requesting information about the Taxi Driver Theory Test and Taxi enforcement. This has been treated as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You have asked:

- 1) In November 2016, Minister Hazzard expressed his concern at the low pass rate for the theory element of the Taxi Driver Test, which was then standing at 16%. What is the current pass rate?
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- 19) In June 2014, Minister Durkan indicated there was “too much enforcement activity addressing relatively minor licensing offences which reduces the resources available to address the illegal and dangerous taxis which are out there.” Please outline:
 - iii. How enforcement activity has changed to address this?
 - iv. What evidence is there to demonstrate its success?

In response to questions 1-4, the table below shows the number of candidates who have taken, passed, and failed the taxi driver theory test since its introduction in October 2014. It also shows the pass rate for each year. In addition, the table includes a more detailed breakdown for the most recent year, showing an improvement in the pass rate in each quarter in 2018/19.

Taxi Theory Tests Outcomes 2014-2015 - 2018-2019

Annual	Tested	Passed	Failed	Passed (%)	Failed (%)
2014-2015	64	7	57	10.8%	89.2%
2015-2016	648	136	512	21.0%	79.0%
2016-2017	1,136	217	919	19.1%	80.9%
2017-2018	1,174	243	931	20.7%	79.3%
2018-2019	1,301	369	932	28.4%	71.6%
Q1	352	87	265	24.7%	75.3%
Q2	304	77	227	25.3%	74.7%
Q3	314	87	227	27.7%	72.3%
Q4	331	118	213	35.6%	64.4%

Source: Theory Test Reports, Driver and Vehicle Standards Section

In response to questions 5 and 7, DVA does not hold information relating to the nationality of candidates for any tests.

In response to question 6, whilst not exactly what you have requested, the closest readily available figures we hold are as follows. Between the introduction of the Taxi Driver Theory Test in October 2014 and the end of January 2019, 1649 applicants have attempted the test and 4,101 tests have been delivered. Of those individual applicants, 616 attempted the test only once; 428 have attempted the test twice; 267 have attempted the test three times; 162 have attempted the test four times; 75 have attempted the test 5 times; and 101 have attempted the test more than 5 times.

In response to question 8, the taxi driver theory test costs £34. This link will take you to DVA's published test fees: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/driving-test-fees>.

In response to question 9, I can confirm there is no maximum number of theory test re-sits an individual candidate may take.

The table below contains the information requested in question 10:

Tests delivered with an interpreter	
Year	Number of tests
2014-2015	0
2015-2016	0
2016-2017	5
2017-2018	10
2018-2019	1

In response to questions 11-13, the candidate is responsible for paying for an interpreter. Interpreters are provided under the NICS Framework for face to face interpreting services by FLEX Language Services. The interpreter translates the questions and answer options from the English language text on-screen into the candidate's chosen language.

In response to question 14, all theory tests are closely invigilated by theory test centre staff in order to prevent fraud. CCTV is also used in all theory test centres. For the delivery of an interpreter assisted test, the interpreter sits remotely from the candidate and audio equipment allows the interpreter to listen to the test in English and translate this into the relevant language. The audio communication is one way only: the candidate indicates what information they want translated by clicking the text on screen and this is displayed on a duplicate monitor viewed by the interpreter. The interpreter has the option to either listen to the English language voiceover generated when the candidate clicks on the text and/or to translate the text directly as it is highlighted on their monitor. The invigilation staff identify the test centre location, date and time of the test at the beginning of the audio recording, followed by the interpreter who is required to state their name, the name of the candidate and the language in which the test will be conducted, prior to the commencement of the test.

Audio recordings are retained for a period of 3 months to facilitate investigations.

Interpreters are also required to complete and sign a declaration that they will not provide the candidate with additional assistance in the completion of their driving theory test.

In response to question 15, the pass mark is the same for all candidates.

In response to question 16, the questions in the test were developed by the DVA. They are based on the taxi syllabus areas, and include a wide range of topics relating to road safety, the environment, customer care, disabled passengers and documentation. The questions were reviewed in February 2016 as part of the post-implementation review of the taxi theory test. Questions are also reviewed in the event of a legislative or procedural change to ensure they remain relevant.

In response to question 17, the data emanating from the Taxi Driver Theory Test has been closely monitored since its introduction, largely due to concerns around the low pass rate from 2014 to 2018. Every quarter officials monitor and report on Taxi Driver numbers and the number of new Taxi Driver Licences issued. In addition, to get a better sense of the impact of the tests on applicants, officials have also periodically reviewed the issue in terms of number of attempts to pass the test and the related cost. We have not looked specifically at the time (in weeks or months) it takes to pass the test, but clearly there will be a correlation between this and the number of times it takes to pass the test.

A review undertaken in February 2016 found that, on average, applicants were passing the test on their third attempt, at a cost of £102. The same review found that 3 candidates had taken 7 attempts to pass the test, at a cost of £238. Figures for 2018 indicate that candidates took an average of 2.3 attempts to pass the test, at a cost of £78.20 (2.3 x £34).

In response to question 18 periodic training for taxi drivers was introduced on a phased implementation basis in October 2014. Drivers renewing a taxi driver's licence from 1 September 2016 must show they have completed the required amount of taxi driver periodic training. The training must be delivered by a training provider authorised by the Department for Infrastructure for this purpose and at least 3.5 hours must have been Disability Awareness training.

The initial amount of training required depends on the date on which the taxi driver's licence expired, as set out in the table below:

Date of taxi driver's licence expiry	Training required
1 September 2016 - 31 August 2017	7 hours
1 September 2017 - 31 August 2018	14 hours
1 September 2018 - 31 August 2019	21 hours
1 September 2019 - 31 August 2020	28 hours

On or after 1 September 2020	35 hours
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In response to question 19, since June 2014, the Driver & Vehicle Agency has continued to plan enforcement activities to ensure that its operational resources are directed at investigating complaints and targeting the most non-compliant operators. This intelligence led approach has included 'face to face' engagement with stakeholders to ensure that key issues affecting the taxi industry are fully understood and that enforcement action which is commensurate with complaints and problem profiles form the basis of developing effective operational plans.

DVA has continued to increase the number of offences that can be dealt with by way of a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) in lieu of prosecution so that court action is avoided. Although there is no definitive method to prove the success of these methods, the yearly statistics regarding taxi enforcement since 2014 have shown a decreasing trend in the numbers of files submitted to the Public Prosecution Service with a view to prosecution.

During the same period, DVA conducted 377 operator compliance audits which aimed to establish whether licensed taxi operators were compliant with taxi operator licensing requirements. In the case of those operators found to be non-compliant, officers allowed additional time to make the necessary improvements thereby avoiding enforcement action.

DVA is currently taking forward a Transformation Programme which will have a positive impact on the taxi industry. The ICT strand of the Programme will include the development of integrated ICT solutions for DVA in line with the NI Executive's Digital First strategy - looking at how DVA systems could be better integrated, how services to the public could be improved through digital channels and how the Agency can increase the use of technology for processing information. DVA Enforcement is developing an ICT system to support roadside operations and case management. It will build upon initial development work already completed to introduce electronic capture at the roadside using integrated hand-held tablet devices. This will phase out existing manual processes and back office processing to deliver a more efficient and effective service. Moreover, the system when fully developed will allow enforcement officers to have instantaneous information available to them at the roadside to better inform them on those operators, drivers and vehicles which present a greater risk of offending.

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