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# DVSA Covid Recovery Dispute

David Roan explains the pressure Department of Transport workers have been under to get through the backlog of DVSA car driving tests to 7 weeks by April 2024.

It was never going to be easy coming out of two lockdowns, maintaining normal work levels whilst also trying to catch up on deferred tests as well. The fact is that driving test appointment waiting times have been a complex and high-profile problem for three years now. The reasons and solutions are arguably an article in their own right, but I would like to focus today on the equality angle.

On 5 July, DVSA's chief executive appeared before the transport select committee on the subject. This resulted in a hastily conceived recovery plan tasked at reducing the car test wait to 7 weeks by April 2024. The adopted strategy was simple: increase test throughput by reactivating all warrant card holders (WCH) and putting them onto full time test duties, enhancing this by incentivising overtime to all WCHs.

This is where the problems began. Local driving test managers (LDTM) were stripped of their management duties in favour of conducting driving tests. No effective equality impact assessments took place prior to implementation, no meaningful union engagement. Several LDTMs had taken on the role because medically they were no longer able to conduct full driving test programs. LDTM reasonable adjustments aside, their teams were now largely supported by managers with precious little experience of driving test delivery.

Overtime incentives were set in tiers, effectively only offering significant financial benefits to examiners able to conduct 40+ additional tests per month. Anyone with time dependent medical needs or caring responsibilities was effectively excluded or placed at significant detriment. Reasonable workplace adjustments suddenly became more of a workplace inconvenience. As is often the case, carers and those with disabilities are disproportionately affected.

PCS has pushed hard within DVSA for:

- equality risk assessments to take place urgently,
- LDTMs to be given reasonable time to manage their teams and worksites,
- reasonable workplace adjustments to be honoured,
- WCH staff with relevant medical needs not to be forced back into full time testing under threat of disciplinary,
- for overtime incentives to be re-evaluated so those with disabilities or care responsibilities are not detrimentally affected.

Early in November, a trade dispute started between PCS and DVSA, with membership ballots announced. This process closed on 13 December with a resounding message sent back from DVSA membership. PCS achieved a 59.1% ballot response, smashing the anti trade union legislation minimum engagement 50% threshold, with an astounding 90.5% voting in clear support of industrial action. This will empower PCS to challenge attacks on the terms and conditions of all members, and particularly those of us requiring reasonable adjustments and a safe working environment.