

Loveday Ryder's letter to all driving instructors – Restart and recovery

I'm Loveday Ryder, and I became the Chief Executive of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in January 2021.

Before I tell you a bit more about myself, I wanted to give you an update.

I'm pleased we were able to share the proposed restart dates for services in England and Wales. We want to give you as much information as we can, as soon as we can, so we can help you plan to reopen your businesses and start teaching again.

We could not have done this without support and input from the driving instructors' National Associations Strategic Partnership (NASP). They gave us valuable feedback on the time needed between lessons and tests restarting. Based on this, we introduced a 10-day gap before tests restart to help make sure learners whose lessons and driving practice were disrupted by the pandemic have the opportunity to prepare for their test.

In Scotland, the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced details of the updated Strategic Framework for COVID-19 on 16 March. This included a timetable of when restrictions can start to be lifted in Scotland.

As part of this the First Minister of Scotland confirmed driving lessons could potentially restart on 26 April. We are working closely with the Scottish Government to agree restart dates for our services and will share these dates as soon as we can.

I now want to tell you a little bit about me, my background and career, to reflect on the impact of the pandemic on the driver training industry and update you on how we've learned throughout the situation and how that feeds into our recovery plans.

About me

I'm a Civil Engineer by background, so I've spent time designing and building roads in the past.

Most recently, I was the Chief Executive of an organisation providing specialist digital technology services to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). I'm really delighted to be moving up in scale again, joining DVSA.

Our mission of helping everyone stay safe on Britain's roads is so important.

I'm looking forward to spending the coming months learning about the industry and working with you and DVSA colleagues to help recover our services and rebuild and strengthen our relationships with you and the rest of our customers.

Impact of the pandemic on the driver training industry

The last 12 months have been extremely hard for everyone. And I know many of you, your families and the driving instructor community have been hit particularly hard. Some of you may have lost colleagues, be facing financial hardship or feeling isolated.

In DVSA, we've also lost colleagues. So it's vital we make sure that the measures we put in place to restart testing will help keep you, your pupils and our examiners safe.

I want you to know we appreciate how difficult the past 12 months have been for you and your pupils. We're incredibly aware of how the pandemic has impacted your businesses, lessons and pupils' tests. We know how frustrated and disappointed your pupils feel.

Our communications

We know many of you felt unhappy with the way we have communicated with you during the pandemic.

Despite our best efforts it has not always been possible to engage and communicate with you in the way we would want to. So, as part of our restart and recovery plan, we want to work with you to try and improve this.

We'll do everything in our power to share clear information with you, as soon as we can, to keep you up-to-date on anything that will affect you, your businesses and your pupils.

I'm also really keen that you have the opportunity to:

- give feedback on our plans
- get involved in conversations with us
- help us develop and shape our recovery plan and our future products and services.

We will work with NASP and share more information on how you can get involved at a later date.

Recovery plan

There are currently 420,000 car tests in the backlog and the national average waiting time for a driving test is 17 weeks.

We know this will pose challenges for everyone in the coming weeks.

We'll do all we can to reduce the backlog safely and as quickly as possible to help the driver training industry recover. We plan to do this by testing as many people as we can, as soon as we can.

To help us do this, we've already run a successful recruitment campaign for driving examiners. We received over 5,000 applications and are now in the process of reviewing these applications and setting up interviews.

But this is only one of the actions we are taking to reduce the backlog.

We've started to share our outline plans with NASP to get their feedback and views. We'll share these plans with you as soon as we can.

Encouraging learners to pass first time

We also planning to run a campaign to encourage learners to take their test only when they are confident they can pass. This will help them to avoid a lengthy wait for a retest and help us by not adding to the backlog of tests.

You can help us by identifying your pupils who are ready for their test and those who need more support and practice.

I hope you will support our efforts and work with us to make this campaign a success.

We will share more information with you about the campaign after we've been able to confirm the restart dates in England, Scotland and Wales.

Keeping you updated

There are challenging times ahead for all of us. By working together, we can help to reduce the backlog, help your industry recover and help people stay safe on Britain's roads.

We'll share your feedback on our full recovery plan with you as soon as we're able to.

I'll write to you again after we've been able to confirm the restart dates in England, Scotland and Wales. To give you more information to help you and pupils prepare for the restart of lessons and tests.

I also urge you to keep up to date with NASP website at <https://n-a-s-p.co.uk/>.

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

I hope that you, your family and your friends remain safe and well.

Yours sincerely,

Loveday Ryder

Chief Executive
Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency