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Prime Minister

CENTRALLY CO-ORDINATED EFFICIENCY EXERCISES 1983

I refer to your Private Secretary's letter of 26 January seeking proposals for the 1983 scrutiny programme.

As my officials have discussed with Mr Cassels, I propose this year to undertake a scrutiny of the Driving Test Organisation. This is a major activity, involving on the 'L-Test' side 1,300 examiners undertaking up to two million tests a year. In addition, a further 100 examiners conduct 35,000 HGV and 10,000 PSV tests a year. Test bookings are handled by about 260 executives and clerical staff in the Traffic Area Offices, which are separately organised. This network is, of course, spread across the whole country in units of varying sizes, and its responsiveness to demand as measured by waiting times is a matter of considerable public interest. It provokes a good deal of correspondence from MPs when there are long delays in securing tests. I am confident that this is a worthwhile area for scrutiny and would welcome any improvements in efficiency which can be identified, provided of course that they are consistent with the maintenance of our high test standards and of a satisfactory service to the public.

I attach a more detailed note setting out the information requested.

In addition, my Department will be taking part in the multi-departmental review of procurement and contract procedures by reviewing those procedures relating to road construction contracts. This should be carried out during the summer, and as soon as the central terms of reference are received for this study detailed proposals will be drawn up and a scrutiny officer identified.

Finally, although my Department is not taking part directly

2

in the multi-departmental review of Departments' internal consultancy, inspection and review capabilities, my officials will provide an input by keeping MPO informed of progress on the PRIMUS electronic mail project, which is being undertaken in my Railways Directorate as part of DI's information technology programme; they have already been in touch with Mr Beesley of MPO about this.

I am copying this letter to Janet Young and Mr Cassels.

MA.

DAVID HOWELL

11 February 1983

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

CENTRALLY CO-ORDINATED EFFICIENCY EXERCISES: SCRUTINY PROPOSAL

Subject

The driving test organisation

Cost of activity

The gross cost of 'L-testing' is some £25m a year, and of HGV testing some £2m, but over time fee income has to cover costs.

Number of staff

1300 'L-test' examiners; 100 HGV examiners; 350 bookings, admin, training and HQ staff: total 1750.

Reasons for selecting subject

A manpower intensive area where management changes linked with new technology and perhaps some rationalisation of locations should provide scope for more efficient use of resources, which would help restrict the cost to industry and the public.

Terms of reference

"To consider the effectiveness of the management and administration of the driving test organisation, and in particular whether changes are required to enable the best use to be made of resources in meeting the demand for tests."

Starting date

Early April

Finishing date

Early-mid June

Examining officer

Dr Michael Harryman, Principal Scientific Officer, age 34, currently working in Operational Research Division, who has recently investigated the scope for computerising driving test booking procedures.


Reporting procedures

Interim report to Mrs Chalker at half-way stage. Discussion with Mrs Chalker if necessary at that stage and also on presentation of full report.

Additional information

A detailed note on the driving test organisation is annexed.

2



## DRIVER TESTING


### INTRODUCTION

1. There are three different categories of driving test in Great Britain: the so-called L tests which must be passed in order to obtain a full ordinary driving licence and the two vocational driving tests required for the additional licences need to drive heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and (in most circumstances) public service vehicles (PSVs).
2. Since March 1982, the L test for motorcycles has comprised two parts. Candidates for Part II can not apply until they have passed Part I.

### ORGANISATION

3. DTT (Driver Testing and Training) Division comprises an HQ Division and a national operational network of driving examiners. It now forms part of the Road and Vehicle Safety Directorate. At HQ under the Senior Principal as head of division there is one administrative branch (DTT1) responsible for driver testing policy and the management of the organisation and an operational branch (DTT2) lead by the Chief Driving Examiner. One of his deputies is responsible for driver testing and below him are five Assistants whose major function is as inspecting officers. This branch also mans the Driving Establishment at Cardington. A third branch (DTT3) is concerned with the Register of Approved Driving Instructors but is outside the purview of this Scrutiny.
4. The testing itself is organised on a traffic area basis and the Clerks to the Traffic Commissioners act as DTT's agents in the administration of driving tests in their areas; in particular they arrange test bookings. For operational testing each traffic area is divided into sectors run by a supervising examiner (= HEO at top of scale) who is responsible for around 30 examiners who work from driving test centres in his sector.

2



## L TESTS

5. For L testing and driver licensing purposes vehicles are divided into 13 groups. Passing a test on a class of vehicle within a group entitles a person to a full driving licence for any vehicle in that group. A full licence for certain groups provides either a full or provisional entitlement to driver vehicles in other groups. In practice the vast majority of L tests are on motor cars (or vans) or motorcycles. The present fee is £13.00 which is likely to rise by an as yet unannounced 50p in June 1983.

6. In 1982 there were 1.89m applications for L tests. This compares with 1.83m applications in 1981 and a range of 1.42m and 2.04m during the preceding ten years. The level of demand tends to fluctuate and has hitherto proved hard to predict for more than a few months ahead. One clear factor is the number of re-applications which depends on the pass rate. In 1982 this was 48% overall, having increased marginally each year since 1975, when it was 45%.

7. The number of L testing examiners budgeted is 1340 at 1.4.83 and 1250 at 1.4.84. with a contingent call on an extra 30 posts if need be. Currently there are 1362 in post and an expected annual wastage (through retirement etc) of c.100. The budget figures are based on what is needed given an estimated annual demand of 1.85m applications to maintain average waiting periods of 14 weeks in London and 10 weeks outside. The present average wait for an L test is 14½ weeks in London and 6 weeks outside. The examiners work from 318 full time centres from which a further 117 centres are manned occasionally. Except at very small centres, a senior driving examiner (=HEO) is in charge of basic grade examiners (EO level).

8. The L test usually lasts 45 minutes, with some 30-35 minutes on the road. Its content is of long standing and is prescribed in regulations. The test for motorcycles, uniquely, comprises two parts. Part II essentially corresponds to an L test in a car. Part I is an off street machine handling exercise. The Department provides a limited facility for Part I tests at HGV driving test

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centres. But the intention is that specially appointed training bodies should conduct the bulk of Part I testing on their own sites within the framework of suitable training courses. The fee for a Departmental Part I test is £12.50 and for a Part II test, the L test fee of £13.00 also applies.

#### HGV TEST

9. There is a separate network of HGV driving test centres. These have a manoeuvring area on site for the test exercises which cannot safely be conducted on the road (and which is also used for Part I of the motorcycle test.) There are 60 permanent manned centres, and staff from these man a further 16 on an occasional basis. 52 of the centres are on joint sites with HGV vehicle testing stations. The latter are due to be privatised in the early summer but the Department will retain driver testing facilities on the joint sites except at four little used locations.

10. Senior driving examiners (= HEO) (SDEs/HGV) conduct the HGV tests. 97 are presently in post. The test appointment lasts 2 hours. Demand for HGV tests has slumped since the onset of the recession. There were 34,032 applications in 1982, marginally more than in 1981 but substantially less than the 54,000 applications during 1979/80. 34,677 tests were conducted in 1982. The size of the examiner force has been reduced in consequence but the low demand was an important factor in the 35% increase of the test fee in September 1982 to £59.50.

#### PSV tests

11. DTT provide the services of SDEs/HGV to the Traffic Commissioners for the conducting of PSV tests (though Passenger Transport Division not DTT have policy responsibility). Last year HGV/SDEs conducted 9663 tests. Demand has fallen from a recent annual average of 14,000 tests to below 10,000 in 1982.

#### Delegation

12. Although the Department of Transport itself conducts the bulk of driving tests, the Armed Services, Police and Fire Service conduct L and HGV tests on their own personnel under the driver licensing regulations. Additionally some large concerns, notably the Post

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Office, have delegated authority to conduct L tests on their staff and some 4,000 or so delegated tests are conducted in this way annually.

7



14 FEB 1983

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

26 January 1983

D/F

Dear Private Secretary

Centrally Co-ordinated Efficiency Exercises 1983:  
The Scrutiny Programme

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The programme of Centrally Co-ordinated Efficiency Exercises proposed in the Lord Privy Seal's minute of 26 November has been agreed by Ministers. It envisages up to 30 further departmental scrutinies and 3 multi-department reviews.

I am writing to invite proposals for the scrutiny programme. Ministers are asked to send these to the Prime Minister by 11 February and to copy them to the Lord Privy Seal and Mr. Cassels.

The target size of the scrutiny programme has again been kept small, having regard to other work in hand or in prospect. So topics should be substantial and significant in terms of the activities or policies of the department. Wherever possible they should also promote the Government's longer-term aims for improving Civil Service management. The Prime Minister will have these factors in mind when considering their suitability for inclusion in the programme.

Specific areas likely to provide strong candidates for scrutinies are:

- (1) Whether the policy processes in use provide Ministers with the right material at the right time on which to take decisions and with adequate information and methods by which to assess the cost-effectiveness of the action taken.
- (2) Large executive questions which are relatively self-contained.
- (3) Areas of work involving specialist groups (e.g. lawyers and accountants).

(4) The arrangement by which advice, information and help are provided to the public and outside bodies (e.g. the preparation and publication of advice - leaflets, articles, films, advice and information provided by visits).

(5) Administrative tribunals (e.g. appeals boards).

(6) The efficiency and value for money of selected Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

Ministers are invited to put forward at least one scrutiny. Those in charge of larger departments are invited to propose more than one. Each proposal should, as in previous years, contain brief information on:

(1) Subject: the policy, function or activity to be examined.

(2) Cost of the policy, function or activity, and the number of staff involved.

(3) Reasons for selecting the subject.

(4) Terms of Reference.

(5) Proposed starting and finishing dates.

(6) Names of examining officers, if known, and Ministerial reporting arrangements. (In selecting staff to conduct scrutinies Ministers are asked to bear in mind the importance of putting examining officers in charge who have the questioning mind and good judgement fundamental to the scrutiny technique).

Work on scrutinies should not start before proposals have been agreed by the Prime Minister. The programme should begin as early as possible in the year but there is no need for all scrutinies to start on a common date. Notes of Guidance for examining officers will be re-issued shortly and briefing for examining officers will be arranged subsequently.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries of all Ministers in charge of Departments and to Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir Douglas Wass, John Sparrow and John Cassels. Ian Beesley (273 5226) in the Rayner Unit can provide further advice if it is required.

Yours sincerely,

*Robin Butler*

Robin Butler