



Ein cyf/Our ref: WQ80337

John Griffiths MS
Member of the Senedd for Newport East

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4 November 2020

Dear John

Further to the holding reply to WQ80337, regarding the provision of driving lessons for those not classed as critical workers during the coronavirus outbreak, I am writing to provide you with an update.

Driving lessons and tests were suspended in England, Wales and Scotland for three months from 20 March as part of the lockdown rules that were put in place at that time. A new date for anyone whose test was cancelled was automatically sent out by the Driver and Vehicles Standards Agency (DVSA). Those classed as a critical worker could still apply for an emergency driving test.

Services resumed over the summer, subject to compliance with Coronavirus Regulations.

However, with coronavirus spreading rapidly in every part of Wales we have had to act quickly again, before it continues to accelerate and our NHS is overwhelmed. We therefore introduced a short, sharp, shock to slow down the virus and buy us more time – a national fire break was put in place from 6pm on Friday 23 October until Monday 9 November. It applies to everyone living in Wales and replaced the local restrictions which were in force in some parts of the country.

My officials have been in continuous discussion with DVSA on the procedures to be adopted during the fire break period and I appreciate the frustration of those who had driving tests booked at this time. However, the fewer points of transmission that occurs, the more effective the fire break period will be. The First Minister did reflect on the sheer volume of over 3,300 tests that were scheduled over the firebreak period, before coming to a decision to pause DVSA services in Wales.

All candidates with tests booked during this fire break period should have been advised to reschedule their test. DVSA will be rescheduling tests for those that did not contact them by 23 October. There is currently no charge for rearranging tests with DVSA.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Due to unprecedented demand for driving tests following the end of national lockdown, DVSA is extending its booking window to 18 weeks to make hundreds of thousands more tests available across the UK. As a result of the lockdown most tests sold out quickly. This means many of the tests in Wales will have to be rescheduled for early 2021.

Prior to the fire break period, there were over 17,300 Welsh candidates with driving tests booked. DVSA decided not to reschedule all of these tests as the impact would have been far greater on a larger number of Welsh candidates.

Given the short length of the firebreak DVSA is unable to introduce a critical worker priority service in Wales on this occasion. However, DVSA is working with emergency service driver trainers in Wales to reschedule emergency vehicle driving tests as quickly as possible following the end of the fire break period.

DVSA is also adding a small number of additional tests each month by offering driving examiners overtime. By checking DVSA's booking service regularly, candidates may find an earlier test date as these tests are added to the booking system each month.

I would encourage your constituents to keep updated on current guidance by visiting our website at <https://gov.wales/coronavirus> and the DVSA's website at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-driving-tests-and-theory-tests>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Skates', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ken Skates AS/MS

Gweinidog yr Economi, Trafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru
Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales