

Proposed legal change to support medical licensing applications

- Public consultation reveals strong support for measures allowing different types of healthcare professionals to complete medical questionnaires as part of the medical licensing process
- Move will result in a speedier process to complete medical questionnaires
- Delays caused by coronavirus (COVID-19), and industrial action continue to be reduced for medical licensing applications, with normal turnaround times expected by September 2022

Measures have been brought forward to change the law to allow more healthcare professionals like specialist nurses to complete DVLA medical questionnaires. This will help speed up the return of medical information needed to make a licensing decision following the pandemic and industrial action.

By law, all drivers must meet the medical standards for fitness to drive and each year DVLA makes over 500,000 medical licensing decisions. To help make these decisions, DVLA often requires questionnaires to be completed by a driver's doctor or consultant.

Currently, the Road Traffic Act 1988 only enables registered medical practitioners (doctors who are registered with the General Medical Council) to complete DVLA medical questionnaires.

This has contributed to delays to medical applications throughout COVID-19, particularly as DVLA medical checks were understandably deprioritised at times during the pandemic and in December 2021/January 2022 where NHS resources were needed to support the booster vaccination programme.

[This proposed change in the law](#) will enable more people – who must be registered with certain professional bodies – to join the list of those able to complete medical questionnaires required as part of the medical licensing process.

DVLA Chief Executive Julie Lennard said:

We were pleased to see that the consultation responses supported the idea of increasing the range of medical professionals who are able to complete DVLA medical questionnaires. This is in line with the way GP practices and hospital teams increasingly work and will improve the process for those notifying DVLA of a medical condition. This will also ease the pressure on hard-working doctors by widening the number of medical experts who can provide the necessary information.

Today's announcement follows a public consultation launched on 8 November 2021, the response to which has been published today. The consultation received over 400 responses, including from the general public and medical professionals, with 82% of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing with the proposals.

The proposed law change will mean that any healthcare professional registered with the following Councils will be legally authorised to complete DVLA's medical questionnaires:

- The General Chiropractic Council
- The General Medical Council
- The General Optical Council
- The General Osteopathic Council
- The Nursing and Midwifery Council
- The Health and Care Professions Council

Reasons expressed for supporting the change included the provision of more flexibility and that it may result in quicker licensing decisions by DVLA.

Transport Minister Baroness Vere said:

Changing this law makes sense. Doing so will safely improve the application process for hundreds of thousands of motorists across the country, whilst easing the pressure on our doctors and consultants. It's great to see these important proposals progress into law.

DVLA handles millions of transactions every year and there are no delays with online services, which have been working as normal throughout the pandemic. Customers are encouraged to use these services where possible.

The vast majority of transactions are back to normal processing times. There are also no delays to HGV applications, with straight forward applications being processed within around five working days.

Restoring your Railway: passengers to see Dartmoor Line services doubled

- new hourly service introduced on the Dartmoor Line, doubling the current service in boost for local economy
- passenger numbers have exceeded expectations, with 50,000 journeys being made in the first 20 weeks since the restored line reopened

From 15 May 2022, services on the popular Dartmoor Line will be doubled – giving passengers travelling between Exeter and Okehampton the option to travel more frequently with hourly trains.

The line reopened last November, restoring a regular, year-round service for the first time in almost 50 years and is part of the government's £500 million manifesto commitment to 'Restore Your Railways'.

With more frequent services between Okehampton and Exeter, the upgraded Dartmoor Line offers new links for work, study and leisure travel. It will benefit students heading to the colleges in Exeter, as well as tourists travelling to Dartmoor, easing congestion on local roads and helping boost the local economy.

The line was the first to reopen under the flagship programme and was fully restored in just 9 months. It was delivered £10 million under budget, transforming a mothballed former freight railway to regular passenger services.

The restored line has been hugely popular, with more than 50,000 journeys undertaken in the first 20 weeks since the line reopened, more than double the number predicted. Passenger numbers at Crediton have also increased by 39% against pre-pandemic levels.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

The huge success of the Dartmoor Line shows that when you get the service right the public will respond with increased demand.

This is one example of the bright future in store for our railways as we begin to reform the sector in the run-up to the creation of Great British Railways. Put the customer first and you'll get the results.

The Department for Transport, Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR) alongside project partners Devon County Council, Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership and Dartmoor Railway Association (DRA), have worked together to reopen this line ahead of time and under budget.

Benefitting from the application of [Rail Project SPEED](#) approaches, the Dartmoor Line has been transformed into a successful, full 7 days a week passenger operation.

Rail Minister Wendy Morton said:

I am so proud to be here today to see the amazing work completed on the Dartmoor line and the beginning of a new hourly service between Okehampton and Exeter.

After speaking with regular users of the service, it's clear how

central it already is to the community, residents and businesses.

By not only restoring this great railway, but doubling the number of daily services, it will bring even greater benefits to local people for generations to come.

The [Restoring Your Railway Fund](#) was launched in January 2020 to reinstate axed local services and restore closed stations, many of which were cut following Dr Beeching's report on 'The Reshaping of British Railways' in 1963.

The fund is focused on delivering schemes that can level up the country, reconnect cut-off communities, improve access to jobs, homes and education and boost opportunity across the country, with a further £16 million being committed to Restoring Your Railway projects in the south-west peninsula. This includes:

- £5 million towards Wellington and Cullompton stations
- £7.88 million towards Edginswell station (Torbay)
- £3.11 million towards Marsh Barton station (Exeter)
- £50,000 towards Tavistock to Plymouth
- £50,000 towards Mid Cornwall Metro

Michelle Handforth, Network Rail's Wales and Western Regional Managing Director, said:

I'm delighted our recent upgrades have enabled the Dartmoor Line services to increase to hourly, which will undoubtedly bring a further boost to tourism, the local community and regional economy for many years to come.

This Sunday will mark another momentous milestone in the history of the Dartmoor Line as we celebrate the return of the first hourly services in nearly 50 years and I am extremely proud that we have delivered on this promise we made to the government.

Mark Hopwood, GWR Managing Director, said:

Delivered £10 million under budget and within 9 months, ahead of time, since opening, the line has averaged around 2,000 journeys made every week – supporting local businesses, greater access to education and work for thousands who live locally and providing a gateway to explore Dartmoor for visitors.

This increase to hourly services will further increase the benefits from the reopening of this railway line and I am delighted we are able to mark the occasion.

The demand for services shows just how important good rail

connections are for the community they serve.

To make the restoration possible, Network Rail's team of engineers worked tirelessly to deliver a huge programme of work to physically reopen the line in just 9 months, including laying 11 miles of new track and installing 24,000 concrete sleepers and 29,000 tonnes of ballast in a record-breaking 20-day period.

Over the past 15 days, Network Rail's team of engineers has been working tirelessly, upgrading parts of the 14-mile stretch of Dartmoor Line. Along the line, at Fatherford and Coleford, engineers have completed further improvements to the drainage and track bed to enable faster line speeds ready for the increase to hourly services.

GWR identified suitable rolling stock and developed a robust timetable with franchise funding ahead of funding being agreed for the infrastructure elements of the project.

The project has also hugely benefitted from strong local support spearheaded by Devon County Council, without which it would have taken far longer to reach the point where regular year-round services can be restored after almost 50 years.

GWR, Dartline Coaches and Devon County Council have also made sure that local transport is all coordinated, ensuring easy bus and train connections to the rest of the country are easily accessible from the Dartmoor Line.

This includes better bus links to Tavistock, 7 days a week direct from Okehampton station, as well as the existing facilities for cycling and walking, enabling more people to explore this wonderful area.

More work is currently being undertaken on the station buildings to enable the restoration of the cafe and other facilities.

Darlington pair sentenced after major diesel fire leads to evacuation of homes

In a case prosecuted by the Environment Agency at Peterlee Magistrates Court on 10 May 2022, Malcolm Smith (68) of Norwich Grove, Darlington received a 23-week suspended sentence. His daughter, Lisa Palmer (38) of Eggleston View, Darlington, received a suspended sentence of 18 weeks. Both were each fined £500 and ordered to pay a £128 victim surcharge.

Magistrates found both to have acted recklessly and were wilfully blind to the risk of what could happen when storing such large quantities of oil in close proximity to residential property.

On Thursday 14 June 2018 County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service attended a fire at the Ramshaw Storage removals firm on Swan Street, Evenwood, following a report of a small amount of rubbish on fire in a metal container.

Upon arrival, the fire service was presented with a significant blaze within one of a number of steel shipping containers stored on site. They were told these containers only held furniture from removals. However, it quickly became apparent that shipping containers were actually being used to illegally store approximately 50,000 litres of diesel.

On the day of the fire a significant number of properties surrounding the commercial site were evacuated. Most households were allowed to return to their homes the following day but seven properties on Newholme Crescent remained unoccupied for six months due to diesel contamination, odour, and firewater run-off.

Black smoke from the fire could be seen for miles, a strong smell of oil persisted for several days and asbestos from a building at the yard was found in the adjoining gardens. Contaminated soil to a depth of one metre had to be removed from the affected gardens to make them safe and the ground floor of the properties had to be stripped away to enable diesel to be pumped from under the floorboards.

Investigations found the incident had caused significant levels of hydrocarbon pollution to land and groundwater, and huge volumes of oil had entered the sewerage network. This meant Northumbrian Water had to undertake a massive operation to make sure the local water supply was safe. They recovered 18,000 litres of oil and 7.2 million litres of oil contaminated effluent from the local sewage treatment plant, which was transported away for recycling. The filters were re-seeded and flushed with at least £66,000 spent on tankers, disposal and staff overtime. They also replaced the water supply pipework as a precaution.

Malcolm Smith and Lisa Palmer admitted failing to comply with the Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) Regulations 2001, which set out how diesel must be stored to prevent the risk of harm to people and the environment.

They also admitted responsibility for causing groundwater pollution, as a result of the illegally stored diesel escaping and polluting the environment.

Lisa Palmer additionally admitted a third charge related to illegal waste burning, which sparked the major fire.

A third family member who denied the charges, was acquitted after the court found that they had not had any custody or control over the stored diesel.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

Businesses must take their environmental responsibilities seriously. We welcome this judgement and hope that it sends out a strong message to others that they will be held to account if they fail to meet their environmental obligations. Thanks to the swift response from the various agencies who attended the incident, even more widespread damage to property and river pollution was averted.

We will continue to collaborate with businesses to help them to make the best choices for water quality, but anyone caught breaching environmental laws faces enforcement action, up to and including prosecution.

[Political repression and death penalty in Belarus: Joint statement](#)

Mr Chair, I am reading this statement on behalf of Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom. We join other participating States in condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, in which Belarus is complicit. We commend the bravery of the Belarusian people in withholding their support for this war, and we deplore the harsh repression of those who speak out against the Lukashenko regime.

We strongly condemn proposed changes to the criminal code in Belarus to include new grounds for the death penalty, and share the assessment of other participating States that this will be used as an enhanced instrument of political repression. We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances, as a matter of principle. While much of the world is moving towards abolition of the death penalty, the Lukashenko regime takes a clear step back. We urge Belarus to reconsider this action.

We commend the tireless work of civil society organisations and human rights defenders in Belarus, despite the very real dangers they face in conducting their vital work. We once again call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus.

In their reply under the [Vienna Mechanism](#), the Delegation of Belarus stated there is no such concept as "a political prisoner" under Belarusian legislation. However, that does not mean an absence of political prisoners in Belarus; we now know that there are close to 1200 people detained for politically motivated reasons such as peacefully exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association. There is further evidence that detainees are faced with torture, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. We will defend these fundamental freedoms of the Belarusian people and work with others in a network of liberty to hold those who seek to silence them to account.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to fully implement their international obligations and OSCE commitments, and to make use of the OSCE's tools and mechanisms to help resolve the continuing crisis in Belarus.

Thank you Mr Chair

[New Bill to set up UK Infrastructure Bank announced in Queen's speech](#)

- The UK Infrastructure Bank Bill is the final step in setting up the UK Infrastructure Bank as an operationally independent institution
- The Bill will remove legal obstacles so the Bank can lend directly to local authorities and the Northern Ireland Executive for infrastructure projects
- The Bank, launched in June 2021, is a key part of the Government's National Infrastructure Strategy and is already investing in infrastructure across the UK

The UK Infrastructure Bank was launched in interim form at its headquarters in Leeds in June last year. It was tasked with accelerating investment into ambitious infrastructure projects, cutting emissions and levelling up across the UK.

This Bill will complete the Bank's set up as an operationally independent institution and give it the power to lend directly to local authorities and the Northern Ireland Executive. It will also support the Bank's operational independence by setting out clear accountability for how it is to be run.

Since its launch, the Bank has completed five deals, including financing the UK's largest solar farm in south Wales, investing £100 million to provide high-capacity broadband to around 500,000 properties in hard-to-reach UK premises and a further £50 million to improve digital connectivity for rural homes and businesses across Northern Ireland.

John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, said:

Since its launch nearly a year ago, the Bank has already invested in important projects that will support people, businesses and communities across the UK.

This Bill sets out the Bank's long-term purpose as an enduring institution to continue to do this, helping tackle climate change and support levelling up.

The CEO of the UK Infrastructure Bank, John Flint, said:

We welcome the introduction of the UK Infrastructure Bank Bill, which underlines the government's commitment to our mission.

As the government moves to place the Bank on a statutory footing, we will now focus on the recruitment of people who are excited by our purpose, and who will ensure that the Bank delivers on its mandate.

The Bank is an essential part of the Government's National Infrastructure Strategy and will have £22 billion of financial capacity to invest in infrastructure to help tackle climate change and to support regional and local economic growth across the UK.

The UK Infrastructure Bank will have an initial £12 billion of capital to deploy and will be able to issue £10 billion of government guarantees, helping to unlock more than £40 billion of overall investment.

Working in partnership with local government and the private sector, the Bank will harness investment tailored to the needs of specific infrastructure projects, offering a range of financing tools including debt, equity, and guarantees.

Measures in the Bill will:

- Complete the Bank's set up as an operationally independent institution, able to deliver on its objectives effectively and with a clear long-term policy mandate. By enshrining the Bank's objectives and activities in legislation, the Bill will provide clarity for the Bank and the market as to the Bank's long-term purpose as an enduring institution.
- The Bill will also support the Bank's operational independence by setting out clear accountability for how it is to be run, including reporting and board requirements.
- Finally, the Bill will give the Bank the power to lend directly to local authorities and the Northern Ireland Executive which is one of the Bank's key activities.

Further information

The UK Infrastructure Bank has already completed five deals:

- investing £100 million to provide high-capacity broadband to around 500,000 properties in hard-to-reach UK premises
- Financing the UK's largest operational solar farm at Llanwern in south Wales and catalysing a £500m fund which could double the amount of subsidy-free solar power in the UK with Next Energy
- investing £107 million in the South Bank Quay development at Teesworks in Teesside (North-East England) supporting around 800 direct jobs
- partnering with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to invest £10 million in phase 1 of the new Sprint Bus Route in Birmingham along the heavily congested A45 corridor
- investing £50 million as a co-lender to the broadband provider Fibrus, which is delivering high-capacity broadband to rural homes and businesses across Northern Ireland