



Department for Transport

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Dear Dr Adeley,

Thank you for your report made under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and Regulations 28 and 29 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013, following the inquests you conducted into the deaths of Mary Frances Cunningham, Grace Foulds, Anne Elizabeth Ferguson and Peter Anthony Westwell. I am responding as Minister for the Future of Roads, and am grateful for the opportunity to consider and respond to the concerns you have raised.

I was very sorry to learn of the tragic circumstances that led to these deaths and would like to express my sincere condolences to the families of those involved.

I have considered your report and its recommendations very carefully. Your report raises concerns regarding the effectiveness and safety of the system of self-declaration for ensuring that drivers meet the necessary vision standards required for safe driving.

All drivers have an ongoing legal responsibility to ensure that they meet the vision standards for driving, wearing glasses or corrective lenses if needed. Drivers must declare their medical fitness when they apply for and renew a driving licence and must notify the DVLA of any medical condition that may affect their fitness to drive at any time during the validity of their licence. Drivers are also encouraged to regularly check their own vision by reading a number plate from a distance of 20 metres.

The number plate test is currently the baseline assessment for visual acuity as it is straightforward, cost effective and easily administered, making it a practical and functional assessment of vision in real time.

Its simplicity provides drivers with a good indication that they can meet the required visual acuity standards for driving and scan information accurately from a distance. I acknowledge that there are concerns about the efficacy of the number plate test and the DVLA will continue to work closely with the Secretary of State for Transport's Honorary Medical Advisory Panel on visual disorders and driving to discuss the points raised in your report and consider possible alternatives.

Driving with uncorrected vision can have far-reaching consequences that affect personal safety, motor insurance status and the safety of other road users. It is therefore essential for drivers to prioritise regular eye examinations and take corrective measures to ensure they meet the necessary vision standards for driving. The Government fully supports the NHS's recommendation that adults have their eyes tested every two years.

As you are aware, it is a legal requirement for all drivers to inform the DVLA if at any time they are no longer able to meet the vision standards for driving or they develop a medical condition that may affect visual field. The DVLA is legally required to investigate such notifications and arrange for a formal vision test where necessary, to establish whether the eyesight standards can be met.

Eye healthcare professionals, including optometrists and ophthalmologists, play a vital role by advising their patients whether they meet the vision standards for safe driving and when they need to inform the DVLA about an eye condition. To support healthcare professionals, the DVLA publishes guidance on GOV.UK called "Assessing fitness to drive: a guide for medical professionals". The DVLA also provides a dedicated email for healthcare professionals to contact one of its doctors for either case-specific advice or general guidance. Notifications received from healthcare professionals are treated as a priority. The DVLA also investigates notifications from others who may have concerns, including the police, relatives and friends. This recognises that there may be occasions where a driver lacks awareness of the potential effect of their vision on their ability to drive safely.

Police officers also play an essential role in maintaining road safety by conducting roadside number plate reading tests when they suspect a driver has impaired vision. As you are aware, the DVLA also prioritises notifications from the police. Where the DVLA is informed by the police that a driver has failed to read a number plate from 20 metres at the roadside, immediate action is taken to revoke the driving licence.

Although the self-declaration process for notifying medical conditions to the DVLA is intended to empower drivers to take personal responsibility for their fitness to drive, I understand that there may be circumstances where drivers may not fully recognise the deterioration in their vision or the implications that a visual impairment may have on their driving abilities.

Officials will conduct a comprehensive review of the self-declaration forms and the customer facing information to ensure it communicates the importance of regular eyesight testing as clearly as possible. The review will also look to highlight the importance of notifying conditions to the DVLA and the potential far reaching consequences of failing to meet the vision standards.

As you are aware, the drivers involved in these tragic incidents wilfully chose to ignore the advice of their healthcare professionals, did not inform the DVLA and continued to drive despite being aware that their vision did not meet the required standards for driving. While eye healthcare professionals are not legally obliged to notify the DVLA about a patient who is no longer able to meet the vision standards for driving, they are advised by their regulatory body, the General Optical Council, in its guidance to consider the safety of their patient and the public and notify the DVLA without the patient's consent if it is in the public interest to do so.

However, I recognise that this may be challenging where there are concerns about confidentiality and the ethical implications of disclosing sensitive health information without a patient's consent and where drivers dishonestly declare themselves to be non-drivers. I also acknowledge that this often involves protracted negotiations between healthcare professionals and their patients before a notification is made to the DVLA. My Department will work with eye healthcare professionals and their regulatory bodies to identify and aim to address any concerns and issues that may be preventing them from notifying the DVLA when it is in the public interest to do so.

My officials have advised that the STATS19 system for collecting and reporting road traffic collision data is unable to capture detailed information that identifies the causes of collisions. Many vision-related conditions may not manifest in ways that are immediately apparent following a road traffic collision. My Department will work with the Standing Committee on Road Injury Collision Statistics (SCRICS) to review and improve the collection and collation of STATS19 data. Officials will also continue to engage with police forces to develop a more standardised approach to roadside eyesight testing at the scene of the accident or shortly after to ensure that all relevant data is captured and reported accurately. DVLA officials are also considering why there has been a reduction of notification of diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration between 2019 and 2023, with a view to understanding the cause and identifying what action may need to be taken.

In 2023, the DVLA carried out a call for evidence about driver licensing for people with medical conditions. The call for evidence sought views on the current legislative basis for establishing whether an individual is medically fit to drive and what may be improved and changed. The DVLA is considering the research and evidence provided and the additional research needed.

The DVLA will also consider the evidence presented during the inquest hearing, to inform potential changes to the law that governs driver licensing for those with medical conditions. Work in this area is ongoing and includes consideration of the process of self-declaration and the challenges posed by an ageing population where certain conditions, including vision conditions, may become more prevalent. Consideration is also being given to policy options as part of the Government's Road Safety Strategy, which is being developed and the details of which will be provided in due course.

Thank you for raising these important issues. I recognise that good vision is crucial for safe driving. I can assure you that the Government takes road safety very seriously and we are focused on ensuring that only those who are fit and safe to drive are issued with a driving licence. My Department will continue to work closely with the police, healthcare professionals, driving organisations and regulatory bodies to enhance the safety of our roads and ensure that those who do not meet the medical standards for driving are appropriately identified, managed and assessed.

Best wishes,



MINISTER FOR THE FUTURE OF ROADS