

## 2020 Update on the Driver Crisis in Britain, by Kirsten Tisdale – 25 Oct 2020 with postscript added 10 Nov 2020

I know I've said much of this before, but here are some of my thoughts on the subject.

I'm the person who eventually got to the bottom of the question of how many people there were with HGV licences in the UK – lots. The piece I wrote in 2016 resonated with many people and challenged others. Since the so-called driver shortage appears to be a topic of debate again, I've updated all elements of the graph below (it doesn't tell a different story to 2016, it's just more up to date) and also included a short paragraph on the number of vehicles this time.

I continue to be very concerned about the age profile - it looks as if nearly half the loss between Q1 and Q2 this year in people who actually worked as HGV drivers was in the under-30s. And over half the CE licence holders with a DQC are over 50. But it is the people who **work as drivers** who are ageing, **not those with licences** as the graph shows.

My conclusion remains that most people who have gone to some cost, time and effort to get qualified as HGV drivers do not use those qualifications. So, this is about re-inspiring people who've already taken their licences – we need to look at why people haven't stuck with the industry.

In 2016, the House of Commons Transport Select Committee agreed – the first conclusion started: “We believe that the driver shortage is a shortage of people willing to work in the sector rather than a shortage of people with the right qualifications and licences.”

[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmtrans/68/6809.htm?utm\\_source=68&utm\\_medium=crbullet&utm\\_campaign=modulereports](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmtrans/68/6809.htm?utm_source=68&utm_medium=crbullet&utm_campaign=modulereports)

There are various routes out of this problem, they include looking after drivers:

- Give them self-respect by paying them an attractive rate for sensible hours
- We need to be embarrassed at wasting driver time
- Providing decent facilities at DCs and out on the road

Except for the very last, these are all in the control of logistics companies, their customers and customers' suppliers.

If there is one positive thing that could potentially come out of Brexit it would be a move away from EU Driver Hours Regs combined with the Working Time Directive. Simplify them (it's ridiculous that the current 'simplified' guidance is 23 pages) and return to a sensible and more predictable working day/shift. For my response to the House of Lords Brexit Committee, see footnote 63:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldecom/355/35505.htm>

I'd be very interested to know the total time taken as PoAs, which are often effectively an admission of wasted driver time. However, any money saved from reducing these would need to be passed on to drivers – it's no good expecting them to earn less for the greater good.

As far as women and ethnic minorities are concerned, there should be absolutely no barriers, but they should not be seen as the solution to young white men not wanting to do the job – that is not equality, it is exploitation.

The taxpayer should not be paying for more drivers to be trained, only for them to put their licence in a drawer. But, equally, it is unfair to have to pay apprentice tax and not benefit. There *may* be an argument for companies subsidising upgrades for younger drivers from C to CE, but only where it is known that those people actively intend to use that licence.

**In 2020, in total, there are about 940K people with C or CE licences**

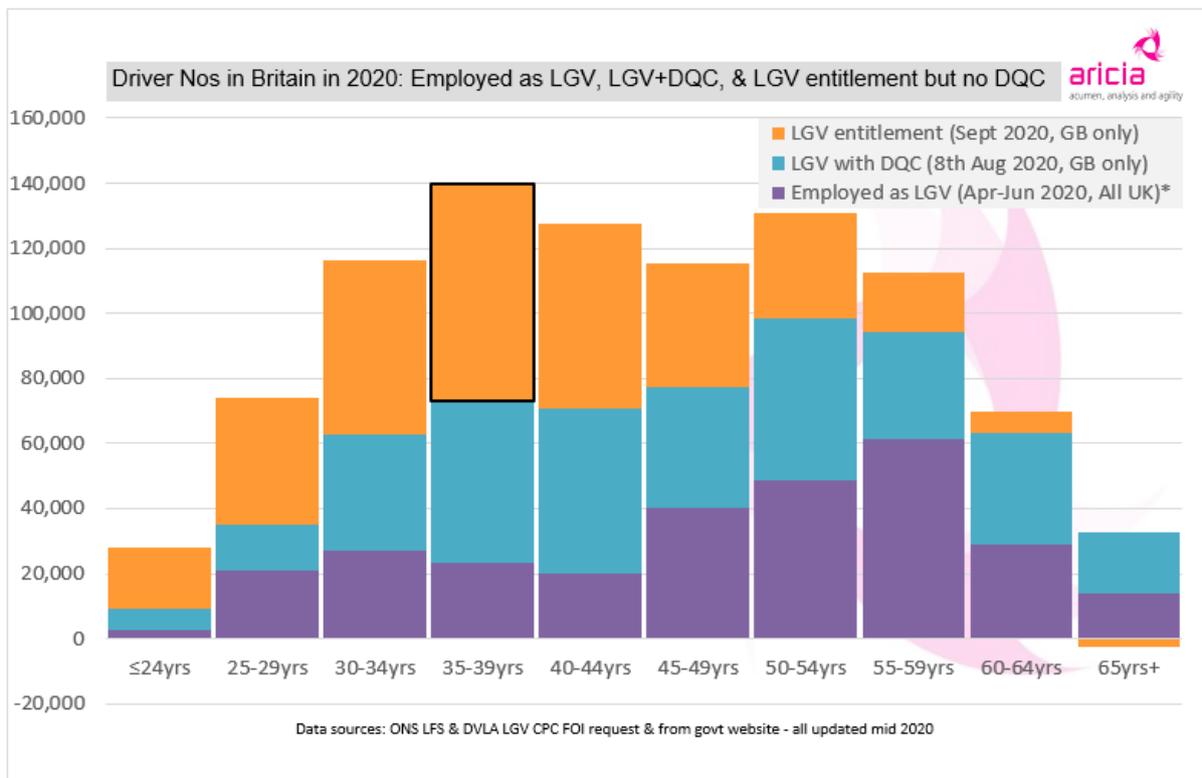
In Q2 2020, **c287K people in the UK described themselves as large goods vehicle drivers**, down from 301K in Q1 – I still tend to use the term HGV as it avoids the muddle caused by LGV also meaning Light Goods Vehicle if you're DfT!

**A further 330K people in GB with C or CE have a DQC** – some because they have a current or likely need to drive heavy vehicles, some of which may not be counted as goods vehicles (someone who works in waste management, say) – so they may not, if questioned, reply that they were an HGV driver. Some of these will be keeping their licences active to keep their options open for a rainy day.

There's **a further 327K people in GB with C or CE with an up to date licence, but who haven't got a DQC** – could be in the military, but mainly they will be people who aren't using or likely to use their licence, but they *are* people who could work as an HGV driver provided they did a week's CPC training and got their DQC sorted out.

Then there's people like me, who are *not* included on the graph below, with a full CE licence, a lapsed medical (but no known reason why I wouldn't pass it), who, again, could get a DQC with no exam to take.

Now, I've been told that my 2016 graph was tasteful to the point of being difficult to print and interpret, so I'm throwing taste to the wind!



**What this graph shows**

The **purple** elements of the bars, at the bottom of the graph, show the ONS Labour Force Survey data. This data is for people who say that they are employed as large goods vehicle drivers in a

sampling survey for April to June 2020 for the whole UK\*. This is paid-for data from the Office of National Statistics.

The **blue** elements in the middle, **combined with the purple**, show the DQC data - drivers with C-only or C+E entitlement who had driver qualification cards in August 2020 - this data is GB only. I obtained this data from DVLA through a Freedom of Information Request.

The **orange** elements at the top, **combined with both the purple and blue**, show the DVLA LGV entitlement data. It shows drivers with C entitlement, which will include those with C+E, and again this data is GB only. This last element of data is freely available – go to just below the search box: <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/d0be1ed2-9907-4ec4-b552-c048f6aec16a/gb-driving-licence-data> This will include people with LGV entitlement who don't require CPC/DQC as they are currently serving in the military and are therefore not available for civilian work right now - when I made a Freedom of Information Enquiry in 2016 there were c32k members of the military who held an HGV licence.

\* The number of people working as large goods vehicle drivers is the least accurate set of figures included in this piece. The Labour Force Survey is a survey which is then projected to produce national figures. It asks questions such as: "What was your main job in w/e [date]?", "What did you mainly do in your job?" and "What did the firm/organisation you worked for mainly make or do?". The surveys also ask about work-related and vocational qualifications such as HGV and forklift licences.

The purple bars for bands covering 45-64 years are based on a larger samples - this is likely to result in estimates of higher precision, although they will still be subject to some sampling variability. The other purple bars (up to 44 years old & over 65s) are based on smaller samples - this may result in less precise estimates. Although the ONS stresses that some of the estimates may be less precise, the number of drivers between 30 and 44 in April to June is only 1% different from the number in that 15-year band for January to March. Funny enough, in comparing the two sets of figures, the 45 to 60 age group demonstrates more inconsistency! Please note this data is not seasonally adjusted.

I don't know the extent to which this element may include some C1 drivers. Within our own industry the requirement to have a C1 for a 7.5T has blurred the distinction of HGV driver, but that means that this element of the graph is likely to be an over-estimate rather than an under-estimate. Also because it is for the UK and other elements are for GB, it will be over-represented in comparison.

### ***Number of HGVs in Britain***

The stats the government publishes for vehicles don't match licence requirements. However, a lady called Steph Peters did a Freedom of Information Request a while back, asking how many HGVs over 7.5T were registered in Britain. Answer: in 2013 there were 293K of which 119K were artic units: [https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/number\\_of\\_hgvs\\_and\\_trailers\\_in\\_u](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/number_of_hgvs_and_trailers_in_u)

Looking at current data, in 2019 there were **c335K HGVs over 7.5T**:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/veh05-licensed-heavy-goods-vehicles>

And applying a straight proportional increase, based on the 2013 mix, that figure is likely to include **c136K artics**.

That's **c136K artics - compared with 425K** people with CE entitlement and a current DQC.

### ***Couple of other comments on the graph***

That 'below the line' bit for the over-65s is due to the timing of the different snapshots – what we are seeing is people letting their medicals lapse or dying between August and September.

In October 2019, the FTA estimated the driver shortage to be c59K:

<https://logistics.org.uk/media/press-releases/2019/october-2019/hgv-driver-shortage-climbs-to-59-000>

If you're wondering what the orange bit with a black line around it is on the graph, that's c12% more than the size of the shortage. There are more than 66K people just in the 35-39 band with licences and medicals but no DQC – it would only take a week and they could all be available

...if they wanted to!

### ***So, why do people pay good money to take an HGV licence and then not use it?***

I think many potential drivers don't really get started. They turn up as an inexperienced agency driver to a client's traffic office, where sometimes (...only sometimes. Before you howl, I do know there are plenty of good companies where this is not the case) they are treated with lack of respect by the person behind the window, by other drivers in the yard and then at the client premises they are delivering to. And that may be after they've already had the start time of their assignment changed from something they agreed to something else that suits a lot less, mucking up all sorts of elements of their family and social life. Then they have to use a layby. They realise that not only are they not King of the Road, but they're never going to be. They get a different job with more social hours and not dissimilar pay. And regret the money they spent. And then when they get to 45, they let their medical lapse – we can see that from the graph.

As I've said before, if it was just one person with unrealistic expectations, we could dismiss it, but it's not, it's thousands.

I did try to get some interest from the industry in carrying out a survey which would have required financing. A survey *not* of managers, or even of drivers, but of people who had licences and weren't using them, to find out why they'd sought them and now weren't using them. I didn't get any interest from any of the main players.

### ***Postscript added 10 November 2020***

The good news: I was encouraged to explore how these figures had changed over time. In 2020, we now have a much larger and younger pool of C&CE drivers with DQCs than in 2015, 19.3% larger:

- In 2020 there were nearly 100K extra C&CE drivers with DQC (just 62 short of 100K), and of those extra over 50% are under 45
- 48K of that extra 100K are CE drivers, of which nearly 60% are under 45
- And that 2015 figure was over a year after the first DQC deadline of Sept 2014

The bad news: Just today the Office for National Statistics released fresh stats, which indicate that there are now about three quarters of a million less non-UK born people than in 2019, presumably encouraged to return home by a combination of Covid and Brexit. That's about 10% of non-UK born people who have left the country – how many of them were truck drivers?

***Who am I?***

I'm Kirsten Tisdale and I'm a logistics consultant - I do anything in logistics and supply chain that requires:

- Mathematical analysis and modelling – I put facts and figures round changes that directors are thinking about so they can make that decision with confidence
- Geographical analysis - looking at customer locations and logistics networks on maps etc - also useful for marketing, service engineers...
- Industry research – digging out data or reporting on developments in a particular area of interest, to help you focus your time

If you think I can help you then please do get in touch: 01295 758875, [kirsten@aricia.ltd.uk](mailto:kirsten@aricia.ltd.uk)