



CSSC Minibus driving licence requirements consultation

Context

The Department for Infrastructure opened a consultation on the existing guidance on minibus driver licencing requirements on 22 September 2017. The proposed changes mean that staff in schools will no longer be able to drive school minibuses without a full D1 licence and a driver qualification card. This is an issue which affects many schools.

CSSC survey

To ensure that the views of controlled schools are voiced, CSSC surveyed member schools (512) on the changing requirements. The responses will be used to inform our discussions with EA, the Department of Education and politicians.

In total, 98 schools responded to the consultation (19% of member schools), which took place between Friday 13 and Monday 23 October 2017.

Key findings

- Just under half (49) of responding schools had between one and three minibuses. No school had over three buses.
- Post-primary and special schools relied on minibuses more than nursery and primary schools.
- Within the 49 schools which used minibuses, there are over 530 staff who drive them.
- Post-primary and special schools have higher volumes of staff within schools who drive buses.
- 92% of staff drive the minibus on a voluntary basis.
- 96% of schools could not afford to cover the cost of meeting the new requirements.

Key messages from schools:

Schools were invited to outline the impact of the change in minibus licensing requirements. The feedback can be summarised under the following four headings, and some direct quotes are included.

a) Concerns about the impact on children and young peoples' education.

“The fabric of school life is supported by the ability of school staff to transport pupils to an enormous range of co- and extra-curricular activities. The introduction of the proposed

requirements would have a deeply debilitating effect on the totality of our young people's education" (Principal).

b) There will be a detrimental impact on both curricular and extra-curricular activities.

"[The change will] greatly reduce our opportunities to educate our pupils offsite. Pupils will receive a much more limited education" (Principal).

c) Schools are already in crisis due to budget cuts, they cannot afford the additional costs this change will incur

"School budgets are already becoming impossible to manage. This sort of expense would be considered a 'luxury' and therefore would not be even considered. A bill for training several members of staff would run into several thousand pounds and could not be justified in today's climate" (Principal).

d) Schools questioned the rationale behind the changes. There was a lack of understanding about why this change is being implemented.

"It is not needed, it is not wanted and it should be abandoned. The driving of a minibus is well within the skills and capabilities of those drivers who already have D1 entitlement in their licences and they should be allowed to continue driving pupils unencumbered by new rules that are more to do with adding layers of needless bureaucracy than doing anything to improve Health and Safety" (Principal).

Conclusions

Controlled schools' principals have highlighted the devastating consequences these changes will have on children and young people's education, amid confusion regarding the Department of Infrastructure's consultation.

Considering the number of drivers identified in just 49 schools, scale this up across Northern Ireland and the number of staff affected by the changes runs into thousands.

CSSC Chief Executive Barry Mulholland said:

"Schools will be left with the choice to either pay for drivers to complete the necessary steps to meet the requirements, rely on private providers or curtail their activities as a result of the incoming changes. In the current financial climate this is just not possible or realistic for schools. Goodwill is being eroded and many activities that pupils take for granted will cease."

"While we agree that staff who are required to drive a school minibus as an explicit function of their job should be appropriately licensed, our consultation has shown the detrimental impact these changes will have on the quality of education provided to pupils."

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