Driver & Vehicle Agency
148-158 Corporation Street
Town Parks
Belfast BT1 3DH
Tel: 028 9025 4125
Email: fionnuala.donnelly@doeni.gov.uk

Ms Mary Carr
request-154113-966ebecb@whatdotheyknow.com

Our Ref:	**DO2-13-164**
Date:	**19 April 2013**

Dear Ms Carr

Freedom of Information Act 2000

I am writing to confirm that the Agency has now completed its search for the information about accessibility of taxis and private hire vehicles which you requested on 22 March 2013

Your email raises a number of queries and I shall respond to each of these in the sequence you raised them. I should add that all figures were sourced from DVA information systems and have not been verified by DOE/DVA Official Statistics.

1. You ask for the number of current hackney carriage licensees. At the 9 April 2013 there were 7298 public hire taxi vehicles including 424 licensed hackney carriages.

2. You ask the number of private hire vehicle licences. At 9 April 2013 there were 1922.

3. You wish to know the accessibility requirements for hackney carriage vehicles. Only those taxis licensed for public hire in the City of Belfast are required to be fitted with wheelchair facilities in compliance with regulations 47, 48 and 49 of the Public Service Vehicles (Conditions of Fitness, Equipment and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland)1995. These regulations provide for the fitment of anchorage points and related restraints designed to secure the wheelchair and its occupant. These taxis are also required to be equipped with a ramp suitable for loading and unloading the wheelchair and its occupant.

4. The Department does not currently require hackney carriage licensees to undergo training in disability awareness. However proposals under the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 at present being considered, should make disability training compulsory. This will apply to all licensees including those presently licensed as private hire.

5. See the response at four above.

6. Taxis are subject to inspection prior to their first use on NI roads, and annually thereafter. Wheelchair restraining devices are subject to a condition check to ensure they have been safely fitted and maintained, and are unlikely to cause a danger.

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7. In response to your query as to whether DVA carry out spot checks for safety including ensuring that wheelchair users are positioned so that they can use the seatbelts, I can say that DVA officers exercise enforcement powers to stop and inspect taxis on roads to ensure they are maintained in a suitable roadworthy condition. Furthermore they are checked for compliance with the requirements of the Public Service Vehicles (Conditions of Fitness, Equipment and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995.
The enforcement of wearing seatbelts is the responsibility of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and does not fall within the remit of DVA. Enforcement officers, when inspecting Belfast Public Hire Taxis, will check that all seatbelts and anchorage points in the vehicle are operational and that the vehicle is carrying a suitable ramp for the loading and unloading of a wheelchair and its occupant.

8. Steps fitted to taxis are subject to a general construction and condition check to ensure they have been soundly and properly designed and constructed to withstand normal operating loads and stresses. The lowest passenger step, located at every entrance or exit, must not exceed 435 millimetres above the ground.

9. ' Mystery disabled customers' are not involved in any of the vehicle testing processes.

10. Three complaints were received in respect of public hire taxis. This represents approximately 8% of the total.

11.No complaints were received from disabled passengers in respect of private hire vehicles.

12. The 3 drivers referred to above were all called in for interview. Two were given verbal warnings and reminded of the terms and conditions of their taxi driver licences. No further action was deemed necessary in the case of the third taxi driver.

13. Taxi vehicles fitted with wheelchair facilities in compliance with the Department's regulations have access to bus lanes and pedestrian areas.

14. No public hire licensed taxi drivers to date have been exempted from carrying wheelchair users.

In conclusion the Department has commissioned research into the supply and demand for taxis generally, and for wheelchair accessible taxis in particular. Part of this research involves a recommendation on the way forward for the technical specification of a wheelchair accessible taxi, which would modernise the specification used currently. It is anticipated that the results of this research will be available in autumn 2013, when the Department will publish the report and consult widely on its findings. Any changes to the current wheelchair assessable taxi specification which result from this process would come into force in the autumn of 2014.

I trust you find this information helpful.

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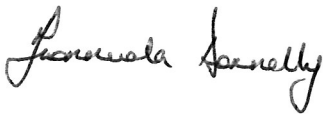
 However under the terms of the legislation, if you are unhappy with this response you have the right to seek a review by the Department in the first instance, within two calendar months of the date of this letter. If you wish to do so, please write to:

Departmental Information Manager
Room 6.20
Department of the Environment
Clarence Court
10 – 18 Adelaide Street
Town Parks
BELFAST BT2 8GB.

If after such a review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner who will undertake an independent review.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Fionnuala Donnelly