

'How To' Guide

Driver Licensing in Northern Ireland

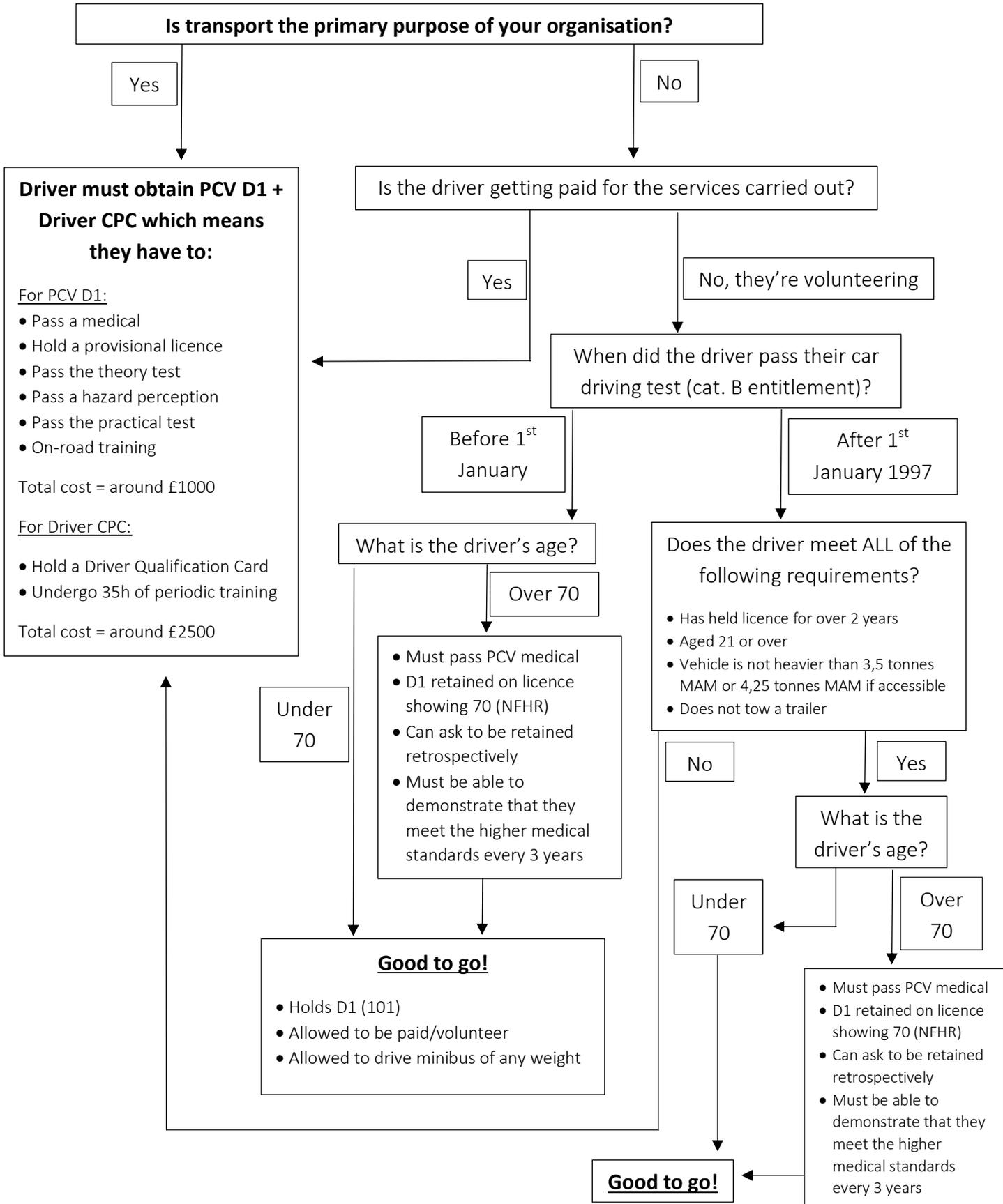
This guidance will be useful for: anyone who wants to run a service using a minibus in Northern Ireland.

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Licences before and after January 1997

A number of factors influence what licence is required to drive a minibus. These include when the licence was obtained and whether the driver is being paid. To help you navigate this, we have set the information out in a quick look flowchart, as well as more detailed information below.



Is transport the primary purpose of your organisation?

Yes

No

Driver must obtain PCV D1 + Driver CPC which means they have to:

For PCV D1:

- Pass a medical
- Hold a provisional licence
- Pass the theory test
- Pass a hazard perception
- Pass the practical test
- On-road training

Total cost = around £1000

For Driver CPC:

- Hold a Driver Qualification Card
- Undergo 35h of periodic training

Total cost = around £2500

Is the driver getting paid for the services carried out?

Yes

No, they're volunteering

When did the driver pass their car driving test (cat. B entitlement)?

Before 1st January

After 1st January 1997

What is the driver's age?

Over 70

Under 70

- Must pass PCV medical
- D1 retained on licence showing 70 (NFHR)
- Can ask to be retained retrospectively
- Must be able to demonstrate that they meet the higher medical standards every 3 years

Good to go!

- Holds D1 (101)
- Allowed to be paid/volunteer
- Allowed to drive minibus of any weight

Does the driver meet ALL of the following requirements?

- Has held licence for over 2 years
- Aged 21 or over
- Vehicle is not heavier than 3,5 tonnes MAM or 4,25 tonnes MAM if accessible
- Does not tow a trailer

No

Yes

What is the driver's age?

Under 70

Over 70

- Must pass PCV medical
- D1 retained on licence showing 70 (NFHR)
- Can ask to be retained retrospectively
- Must be able to demonstrate that they meet the higher medical standards every 3 years

Good to go!

Licences before January 1997

Drivers who passed their driving test before 01 January 1997 will normally have a D1 with a 'nfhr' (not for hire or reward) code – minibus, not for 'hire and reward' – entitlement on their licence. This will remain on the licence until it expires when the driver reaches 70 years old or unless removed by DVA, usually for medical reasons. Even though the licence code stands for 'not for hire and reward', these licence holders can drive a minibus operated under a section 10B permit without additional conditions.

Drivers who hold a category D1 nfhr on their driving licence can drive a minibus of any weight and provide their services as a volunteer for an organisation whose primary purpose is other than the provision of transport services.

Drivers who hold a category D1 nfhr are not exempt from PCV D1 if:

- they're providing their services as an employee/volunteer for an organisation whose primary purpose is the provision of transport services; or
- they're providing their services as an employee for an organisation whose primary purpose is other than the provision of transport services.

Licences after January 1997

Drivers who passed their driving test after 01 January 1997 do not have a D1 nfhr entitlement on their licence and they will only have a B entitlement. In this case, a driver can still drive a minibus on behalf of a non-commercial body for social purposes as long as ALL of the following conditions are met:

- The driver has held a full B licence for an aggregate of at least 2 years;
- The driver is aged 21 or over, but under 70 (unless the driver has passed a PCV medical and has gained the restriction code 120 or 79 (NFHR));
- The driver receives no payment or other consideration for driving the vehicle other than out-of-pocket expenses;
- The vehicle has no trailer attached;
- The vehicle weighs no more than 3500kg (MAM - Maximum Authorised Mass) when not carrying specialised equipment, or 42500kg when carrying specialised equipment.
 - 'Specialised equipment' means equipment intended for the carriage of disabled passengers, like lifts.

Where any of the above conditions cannot be met, the driver will need to pass a second driving test in a minibus, which will gain them a full PCV D1 entitlement.

Vehicle weight restriction

The additional 750kg attributed to 'specialised equipment' is the maximum allowance permitted to directly offset the additional weight of equipment that is intended for the carriage of disabled passengers. Therefore, any allowance claimed over the 3500kg limit must be attributed to this equipment. Operators and drivers must ensure that any specialised equipment stays on the minibus for this concession to apply.

Both operators and drivers need to take care with the Maximum Authorised Mass of any vehicle they are operating or driving. The Maximum Authorised Mass is the maximum carrying capacity of the vehicle, this is, the weight of the vehicle when it is full of diesel along with all the passengers and driver. It is possible to overload a vehicle where heavy wheelchairs are carried or where the payload is small.

Driving as an employee

Drivers, such as teachers, health workers and caretakers who drive a minibus as part of their employment are deemed to be paid drivers. These drivers will need to hold a full PCV D1 driving licence gained by taking a second test. They will also need to hold a Driver Qualification Card to demonstrate that they have taken the required periodic training, called Driver Certificate of Professional Competence or Driver CPC.

Renewing a driving licence

You must renew a photo card licence every 10 years – you'll receive a reminder before your current licence expires. For more information on how to renew your driving licence, see [gov.uk/renew-driving-licence#more-information](https://www.gov.uk/renew-driving-licence#more-information).

In addition, you should also renew your driving licence if:

- You reach the age of 70 - [gov.uk/renew-driving-licence-at-70](https://www.gov.uk/renew-driving-licence-at-70)
- You hold a bus or lorry licence, every 5 years - [gov.uk/renew-lorry-bus-coach-licence](https://www.gov.uk/renew-lorry-bus-coach-licence)
- You have a short-term medical driving licence - [gov.uk/renew-medical-driving-licence](https://www.gov.uk/renew-medical-driving-licence).

Checking a driving licence

It is important that drivers' licences are checked by a knowledgeable person at least every six months to ensure that they still comply with the legal, insurance and organisational requirements. Drivers are required to inform the operator if anything changes regarding their driving entitlement, such as medical conditions, penalty points or disqualifications. This is defined as 'personal information' by the Data Protection Act 1998, which means that it is a criminal offence to obtain this information without the individual's permission.

The DVA controls the driver register database and only authorised staff can access driver entitlement information. However, legislation allows DVA to disclose information to those who have a legal right to receive it. Driver information can be shared, with the consent of the driver, to organisations, such as car hire companies, or employers wishing to confirm a driver's entitlement to drive. You can ask the DVA for information held about you on your driver record by writing to:

Driver Licence Division
Correspondence Team
Coleraine County Hall
Castlerock Road
Waterside
Coleraine BT51 3TB

For more information on checking someone's driving licence and qualifications in Northern Ireland, see nidirect.gov.uk/articles/release-information-dva-records#toc-2.

Additional information

In April 2018, the Department for Infrastructure issued new guidance for Northern Ireland, which is different to the one issued for GB: nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Driver-Licensing-Requirements-for-Minibuses-April-2018.PDF