



# Relate

## Contents

Page No.

- 1 Driver licensing
- 4 Driving offences
- 6 Vehicle standards
- 7 Motor tax
- 8 Motor insurance
- 8 End-of-life vehicles

The journal of developments in social services, policy and legislation in Ireland

## Motoring in Ireland

This issue of *Relate* describes the requirements for driving a car in Ireland, including the driver theory test, learner permits and the practical driving test. It also covers driving offences and describes the penalties in place if the law is broken, including fixed-charge driving offences, penalty points and the law in relation to drink driving. It reviews vehicle standards and describes the National Car Test (NCT). Finally, it covers the areas of motor tax, motor insurance and disposal of end-of-life vehicles.

## Driver licensing

Since 2013 motor vehicles have been divided into 15 different categories for driver licensing purposes. These categories include the general categories of motorcycles and mopeds, cars and work vehicles, buses and trucks, and trailers.

The minimum age for driving a motor vehicle in Ireland ranges from 16 years old to 24 years old, depending on the vehicle type and several other factors. The minimum age for driving a car is 17 years old.

Whether you have a driving licence or a learner permit, you are only entitled to drive the category of vehicle for which the licence or permit has been issued.

## Driver theory test

In 2001, the driver theory test was introduced in Ireland. You must pass a driver theory test before applying for your first learner permit for any category of vehicle. If your provisional licence or learner permit has expired by more than five years, you must pass the theory test again before a learner permit will be issued.

**INSIDE:** Driver theory test p1, Learner permits p2, Essential Driver Training (EDT) p2, Driving test appeals p3, Restrictions on novice drivers p4, Fixed-charge driving offences p5, Drink driving p5, Exemptions from the NCT p6, Reserving a registration number p6, Vehicle off the road p7, Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme p7, Failure to have motor insurance p8

The driver theory test checks your knowledge of:

- The rules of the road
- Risk perception
- Eco-driving
- Hazard awareness
- Good driving behaviour

The car, work vehicle and motorcycle theory test is computerised and can be taken at any of the 41 test centres across the State. The test lasts for 45 minutes and contains 40 questions. You must answer 35 questions correctly to be successful. In September 2014 the driver theory tests for trucks and buses were modified and now consist of 100 questions.

There are various options to assist you if you have special reading needs, for example, there is a voiceover option that will read out the questions and possible answers to you over headphones. You can also apply to have extra time to take your exam and translator supported tests are available by special arrangement in certain test centres.

The fee for the test is €45 for mopeds, motorcycles, cars, tractors and work vehicles.

If you are unhappy with the result of your theory test, you have the right to appeal the decision. You must make your appeal within ten working days of your test. When your appeal is received, your test will be re-marked and you will receive the result within five to ten working days. The fee to appeal your test result is €15.

If you pass your driver theory test you will get a test certificate. You must submit your learner permit application form and test certificate to the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) within two years of passing your driver theory test to get your learner permit. An NDLS eyesight report is also required. After two years the driver theory test certificate expires and, if you have not obtained a learner permit within that period, you will have to take the theory test again.

## Learner permits

Before you begin to learn to drive on public roads, you must hold a learner permit covering the category of vehicle you wish to drive. You are required to carry your learner permit with you at all times when driving.

The Road Safety Authority (RSA) has been responsible for driver licensing since 2013. The RSA set up the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) to process applications for

learner permits and driving licences. When applying for a learner permit, you have to visit one of the NDLS centres. As part of the face-to-face application process, your photo and signature are captured digitally. You have to bring additional documentation to confirm your identity.

Plastic learner permits and driving licences were introduced in 2013 as part of an EU initiative to introduce a secure, compact licence format in all EU member states.

Learner permits for cars and work vehicles are valid for two years (or one year in certain circumstances). The fee for a learner permit for people under 70 years old is €35. Learner permits are free of charge to those aged 70 years old or over.

Exchanging your learner permit to update your address is free of charge.

In the case of motorcycles, cars and work vehicles, you cannot take a driving test for at least six months after getting your first learner permit.

### *Essential Driver Training (EDT)*

New first-time holders of category B learner permits (category B covers cars) are required to undertake mandatory Essential Driver Training (EDT). This training consists of 12 one-hour lessons with an approved driving instructor (ADI). A list of ADIs is available on the RSA's website. A record of your essential driver training is recorded in a special logbook.

You must also have an experienced driver (see below) who accompanies you during your driving practice outside of these mandatory lessons, and who also updates your logbook. When taking the driving test, you may be required to show your completed logbook to the tester.

### *Restrictions on car drivers with a learner permit*

Car drivers with a learner permit must at all times be accompanied by, and be under the supervision of, an experienced driver with a current driving licence for a car. They must have held their full driving licence for at least two years. If you hold a learner permit for a car, you are not allowed to:

- Drive a car drawing a trailer
- Drive on a motorway
- Act as an accompanying driver or carry other people for reward

If you have a learner permit for a car, you must display L-plates to the front and rear of the vehicle you are driving at all times. The plate should be a red 'L' on a white background and should not be less than 15cm high with a border of at least 2cm.

The drink driving limit for car drivers with learner permits and for those who have had their first, full driving licence for less than two years is 20mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood.

The penalty points disqualification threshold of 12 points for experienced drivers is reduced to seven penalty points for those who obtained their first learner permit on or after 1 August 2014. The lower threshold remains in place for the duration of the learner permit and during the first two years of holding a full driving licence.

## Driving test

Driver testing is carried out by the Road Safety Authority at test centres throughout the State.

A driving test is designed to determine that you:

- Know the rules of the road
- Possess the knowledge and skill to drive competently in accordance with those rules
- Drive with proper regard for the safety and convenience of other road users

You should also be able to explain how to perform certain technical checks on your vehicle.

There are a number of things you need to do in preparation for your driving test:

- You must have a current learner permit to sit a driving test
- You must display the following items on the vehicle you are using for the test, current motor tax and insurance discs and a National Car Test (NCT) disc (if applicable)
- You must display L-plates on the front and rear of the vehicle
- Your vehicle must be appropriate for the driving licence category for which you are being tested
- Your vehicle should be roadworthy, for example, all tyres should have a minimum depth of 1.6mm - the legal tread depth limit for tyres
- Your vehicle should be in good working order, for example, windscreen wipers, indicators and mirrors should all be working correctly
- The interior and exterior of your car should be clean
- You should bring your logbook recording the Essential Driver Training (EDT) you have completed

A driving test for a car or motorcycle costs €85.

If you have a hearing impairment an interpreter may accompany you for part of the test. Your interpreter may not be your driving instructor and they cannot accompany you on the practical part of your test. The tester may show written instructions for this part of the test and display them as appropriate; the tester may also use basic sign language. If you complete the test in a vehicle adapted to suit someone with a disability (eg it has additional controls), this will be noted on your full driving licence when it is issued. If you have special needs, you should indicate this on the application form for your driving test so that any necessary arrangements will be in place when you attend to do your test.

If you pass your driving test, you will be given a Certificate of Competency, which is valid for two years. If you fail to apply for a full licence during this two-year period, you will have to pass the driving test again.

If you fail your driving test, you will be given a certificate which you may need if renewing your learner permit. You will also receive a detailed list of the mistakes you made in the test so you can study them before you sit another driving test.

### Driving test appeals

Appeals against driving test results are heard in the District Court by a judge sitting alone - that is, there is no jury involved. An appeal must be made within 14 days of failing the test. In order to begin appeal proceedings, you must lodge your appeal with your local District Court Office. In a driving test appeal the District Court is the court of final instance. This means that whatever decision is made by the judge cannot be appealed and is final.

## Full licence

If you have an Irish driving licence, the licence is accepted for use or exchange in all other EU/EEA member states. If you are travelling outside the EU/EEA and intend to drive, you may require an international driving permit.

The cost of a driving licence is:

One-year licence	€25
Three-year licence	€35
Ten-year licence	€55

It costs €35 to add a new category to your driving licence. There is no charge for motorists over the age of 70 to renew their driving licence.

The period of time for which a driving licence is issued depends on the age of the applicant. There are four age brackets that affect the period of the licence:

If you are...	You may apply for...
under 60 years of age	a three-year licence (on medical grounds) or a 10-year licence
older than 60 but younger than 67 years of age	a licence that will expire the day before your 70th birthday
older than 67 but under 70 years of age	a three-year licence
over the age of 70	a three-year or a one-year licence – a certification of fitness to drive from your doctor is also required

A bus or truck driving licence is issued for a maximum of five years.

If your driving licence expired 10 years ago or more, then you cannot renew your driving licence. Instead you must complete a driver theory test, apply for a learner driver permit and you will have to sit your driving test again.

You are required to carry your driving licence with you at all times when driving.

## Restrictions on novice drivers

### *Novice plates*

If you obtained your first driving licence on or after 1 August 2014, you must display N-plates on your vehicle when driving for a period of two years. Motorcycle riders must wear an N-tabard. The novice period only applies once. It does not apply to a first driving licence obtained for a different category of vehicle after the original two-year period ends.

### *Disqualification threshold*

The penalty points disqualification threshold of 12 points is reduced to seven penalty points if you obtained your first learner permit on or after 1 August 2014. It remains at the lower threshold while you drive under a learner permit and subsequently during the first two years while you drive under your first full driving licence.

### *Drink driving limit*

The drink driving limits for drivers during the first two years on a full driving licence is reduced to 20mg/100ml of blood.

---

## Driving offences

---

The Road Traffic Acts set out the main provisions for motoring in Ireland. This legislation deals with issues such as vehicle licensing, vehicle standards and your obligations and responsibilities as a driver. Examples of motoring offences include drink driving, speeding, driving without evidence of insurance or motor tax, driving without due care and attention, driving while holding a mobile phone and driving without using a seatbelt.

Summonses issued for motoring offences are heard in the District Court and the presiding judge has the power to impose disqualifications for driving and endorsements of driving licences. Motoring offences that result in a charge of dangerous driving causing death are heard in the Circuit Court before a judge and jury unless the defendant pleads guilty prior to the hearing.

## Penalties

Penalties arising from a conviction for a motoring offence depend on the severity of the offence and on whether or not it is a repeat offence. Penalties can include monetary fines, endorsement of the driving licence, disqualification from driving for life, and in the most serious cases, imprisonment. In addition, there is a system of penalty points for certain motoring offences (see next page).

Penalties on conviction for dangerous driving causing death are the same as penalties for manslaughter and also carry a mandatory disqualification from driving for a minimum of four years. Since October 2011, all convictions in the District Court for drink driving offences carry a mandatory disqualification from driving for a minimum of six months.

If you have been convicted of motoring offences and disqualified from driving in a District Court, you can appeal the disqualification to the Circuit Court. You must lodge an appeal within 14 days of your conviction.

If you have been disqualified from driving and wish to apply to the courts for the early restoration of your licence, you may do so in person or through a solicitor following payment of the appropriate fee. You may apply for the early restoration of your licence when half your disqualification period is over. However, you cannot apply for an early restoration:

- If the disqualification is for two years or less
- If the disqualification is not your first disqualification order within the previous 10 years

The court can reduce the period of disqualification to two-thirds of the original period of disqualification or to two years, whichever is the greater.

An endorsement is a record that gives details of your motoring convictions. Endorsements arising from the penalty points system are entered on your driving licence record. Endorsements remain on your licence record for three years and you must notify insurance company of them when applying for or renewing your motor insurance. Your driving licence record is held on the National Vehicle and Driver File operated by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

### ***Fixed-charge driving offences***

A system of fixed-charge driving offences allows the driver of a vehicle who has been detected committing certain offences under the Road Traffic Acts to pay a fixed charge or fine as an alternative to going to court. These apply to a range of non-penalty point offences as well as penalty-point offences. Among the offences covered are illegal parking, seat belt offences, speeding offences, driving in a bus lane and holding a mobile phone while driving.

You have 28 days from the date the fixed-charge notice was issued to pay the fine. If it is not paid within 28 days, the charge is increased by 50%. If it is still unpaid after a further 28 days, then court proceedings are initiated.

If you receive a fixed-charge notice for a driving offence and you were not the driver of the vehicle, you must return the notice to the Gardaí and include the details of the person who was driving using the Statement of Nomination of Name and Address of Driver form attached to the fixed-charge notice. The Gardaí will then issue a fixed-charge notice to the driver of the vehicle.

### ***Penalty points***

The law governing penalty points is contained in the Road Traffic Act 2002. A penalty point is essentially a formal reprimand by the Gardaí, endorsed on your driving licence record, which shows you are guilty of a specified driving offence.

In August 2014, the penalty points for some driving offences were increased. In December 2014, a number of changes were made to the penalty points system, including the introduction of 14 new penalty point offences.

Penalty point offences are recorded on your driving licence record if:

- You are convicted of a driving offence that attracts penalty points, or
- You are served with a fixed-charge notice in respect of an alleged offence that attracts penalty points and you opt to pay the fine rather than having the matter referred to the courts for determination

You are not allowed to drive a vehicle if you have 12 current penalty points on your driving licence. Any driver who receives 12 penalty points in any three-year period is automatically faced with a six-month disqualification from driving.

Penalty points have a three-year lifespan. That means they will remain on your current driving licence for a period of three years from the start date (*effective date*). Any period where your licence is out of date will not count as part of the three years. Where you accumulate 12 points and are disqualified for a period of six months, the points that led to the disqualification are removed at the end of the six months.

To find out how many penalty points are on your driving licence record, contact the NDLS and quote your driving licence number.

### ***Drink driving***

The Road Traffic Act 2006 gave the Gardaí the power to breathalyse any driver stopped at a mandatory alcohol checkpoint without the need to form any opinion in relation to the driver of the vehicle. The ability to breathalyse any driver is commonly known as random breath testing.

The Road Traffic Act 2010 reduced the drink driving alcohol limits for all drivers. New offences were introduced that differentiate between experienced drivers and new drivers. Lower alcohol limits apply to new drivers than those that apply to experienced drivers. The lower alcohol limits also apply to drivers of buses, lorries, trailers, work vehicles, taxis and other public service vehicles.

Under the Road Traffic Act 2011, Gardaí must conduct a preliminary breath test where they believe a driver has consumed alcohol and can also conduct tests at the scene of a crash where someone has been injured and requires medical attention.

Under the Road Traffic Act 2014, it is possible to take a specimen of blood from a driver who is incapacitated following a serious road traffic collision and to test that specimen for intoxicants. The driver is asked, on regaining capacity, whether they consent to the issuing of a certificate of the test result on the specimen. Refusal is an offence.

Penalties for a conviction of drink driving vary depending on the amount of alcohol that has been detected in a driver's system. On 28 October 2011 (through the Road Traffic Act 2010) the penalties for drink driving offences were changed to include an administrative penalty system, which generally includes a disqualification period. If you are summoned to court the court will take account of whether the offence is a first offence or otherwise.

If you have been convicted of drink driving in the District Court you may appeal the conviction to the Circuit Court. The appeal must be lodged in the District Court Office within 14 days of your conviction.

### *Drug driving*

Under the Road Traffic Act 2014, the Gardaí have additional powers to test drivers whom they suspect of driving under the influence of drugs. Drivers can be required to undergo Roadside Impairment Testing, for example, touching your finger to your nose or walking in a straight line.

## Vehicle standards

### **National Car Test**

Compulsory car testing was introduced in Ireland in January 2000 as part of an EU Directive that makes car testing compulsory in all member states. The test is called the National Car Test (NCT). It is an offence to drive a car that is liable for testing without displaying a National Car Testing Service (NCTS) disc and non-compliance can result in fines as well as penalty points.

Since 2002, all cars that are four or more years old are tested. Vehicles that pass the test have to undergo repeat tests every two years. Since June 2011, cars over 10 years old are tested each year.

An NCT costs €55 and takes between 40 minutes and an hour to conduct. You must bring your vehicle registration/licensing certificate with you to the test centre. You are also required to produce your driving licence or passport as identification.

The test checks the vehicle's brakes, exhaust emission, wheels and tyres, lights, steering and suspension, chassis and underbody, electrical systems, glass and mirrors, transmission, interior and fuel system.

A pass certificate or a failure report is issued after the test and if the car fails, the report explains why and what needs to be done. Once repairs have been made, minor faults can be checked again by the NCTS without the need for a full retest.

### *Exemptions from the NCT*

Vehicles registered before January 1980 are not required to be tested.

Cars permanently based on islands that are not connected to the mainland by road do not have to be tested.

### *Appeals*

If you are dissatisfied with the test result you may appeal it using the NCTS appeal process. You must appeal within seven days of the date of the original test.

### **Seat belts**

In general, people travelling in motor vehicles in Ireland are required to wear a seat belt or child restraint at all times. Drivers have a responsibility to ensure that all passengers under the age of 17 years comply with this obligation.

### **Registration plates**

There are strict rules in place regarding the format, dimensions and technical specifications of vehicle registration plates that are displayed on vehicles in Ireland. In general, registration numbers are automatically assigned in sequence at the time when the vehicle is first registered. Failure to have a vehicle licence plate that conforms to the standards can result in a fine.

### *Reserving a registration number*

It is possible to reserve a particular registration number. You can apply to reserve a vehicle registration number plate on or after 1 November of the year before you intend to bring the vehicle into use. For example, you can only apply to reserve a vehicle registration number plate on or after 1 November 2015 to use this plate in 2016.

The number you reserve must be in the normal format and must correspond with the licensing authority area where you normally reside. It must also show the year and half year in which the vehicle is to be first brought into use, for example, 161-D-111 may only be reserved by someone living in Dublin for a vehicle intended to be brought into use in the first half of 2016.

The registered owner of the vehicle on which the plates are to be displayed must be the person in whose name the number was reserved. You cannot transfer a reserved number.

---

## Motor tax

---

The amount of motor tax you pay for a vehicle registered before July 2008 is proportionate to the size of your vehicle's engine – in other words, the more powerful your vehicle, the higher your motor tax. For new cars registered since July 2008, motor tax charges are determined on the basis of seven carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emission bands with lower emissions resulting in lower charges. Cars that are 30 or more years old are classed as 'vintage or veteran' and incur a flat rate of motor tax.

New cars registered between January 2008 and June 2008 had their motor tax charged on the basis of engine size initially. If it was beneficial for those cars to switch to the CO<sub>2</sub> based motor tax system, this happened on the first renewal of motor tax after June 2008. The CO<sub>2</sub>-based system does not apply to second-hand imports that were registered abroad prior to 2008.

## Electric vehicles

Electric vehicles qualify for Vehicle Registration Tax relief of up to €5,000. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) also offers grants of up to €5,000 for a battery-powered electric vehicle or a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle purchased and registered before the end of December 2015.

## Vehicle off the road

Where a vehicle has been declared as being off the road for a period, you do not have to pay motor tax for that period.

Since 1 October 2013, you are required to declare in advance that your vehicle will be off the road and not in use for a period of between three and 12 months using the Declaration of Non-Use of a Motor Vehicle Form RF150, which you submit to your local Motor Tax Office. The declaration of non-use must be made in the same month that your current motor tax disc expires. If arrears in motor tax are due, these must be paid in full and you must also pay a minimum of three months' motor tax before a declaration of non-use can be made.

All registration numbers are available for reservation, with the exception of the first number of each registration period issued in the following cities: Cork, Dublin, Limerick and Waterford. These registration plates for 2016 are 161-C-1, 162-C-1, 161-D-1, 162-D-1, 161-L-1, 162-L-1, 161-W-1 and 162-W-1. These plates are reserved for the Mayor or Lord Mayor of each of these cities and are not available for reservation by anyone else.

## Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme

The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme provides a range of tax reliefs linked to the purchase and use of vehicles by drivers with disabilities and passengers with disabilities. The rules of the scheme are set out in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 (SI No. 353/1994) as amended. Under the terms of the scheme, you can claim remission or repayment of Vehicle Registration Tax, repayment of Value-Added Tax (VAT) on the purchase of a vehicle, and repayment of VAT on the cost of adapting a vehicle, up to a maximum of €9,525 for a driver with a disability and €15,875 for a passenger with a disability.

Relief is limited to a vehicle that has been specially constructed or adapted for use by a disabled person and that has an engine size of less than 2000cc in the case of the driver and 4000cc in the case of the passenger.

Up to December 2014, if you qualified for tax relief under the scheme, you could also claim repayment of excise duty on fuel used in your vehicle for the transport of a person with a disability, up to a maximum of 600 gallons per year. Since 1 January 2015, if you qualify for tax relief under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme you are also eligible for a fuel grant. The amount of grant available is the same as the relief under the excise relief scheme. In addition, your vehicle may be exempt from the payment of annual road tax on application to a Motor Tax Office.

Vehicles adapted for disabled drivers or passengers are also entitled to exemption from toll road fees. Toll road operators issue special passes that are recognised by all other toll road operators and which allow such vehicles pass through the tolls without paying. To obtain a special pass you should apply to your nearest toll road operator.

The Citizens Information Board provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie), the Citizens Information Phone Service and the network of Citizens Information Services. It is responsible for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and provides advocacy services for people with disabilities.

**Head office** t 0761 07 9000  
**Ground Floor** f 01 605 9099  
**George's Quay House** e [info@ciboard.ie](mailto:info@ciboard.ie)  
**43 Townsend Street** w [citizensinformationboard.ie](http://citizensinformationboard.ie)  
**Dublin 2**  
**D02 VK65**

## Motor insurance

It is a legal requirement to have motor insurance if you want to drive your car in a public place. You must have a current certificate of insurance to pay motor tax. Failure to have motor insurance when driving is a very serious offence. Drivers without insurance can incur fines, penalty points and may be disqualified from driving or imprisoned.

The most basic insurance is third party insurance and this is the minimum required by law. The other main categories of insurance available are comprehensive and third party, fire and theft.

### Failure to have motor insurance

Failure to have motor insurance or driving without insurance is generally punishable by:

- Five penalty points, and
- A fine of up to €5,000
- At the discretion of the court, a term of imprisonment not exceeding six months

A court may decide that you be disqualified from driving instead of incurring penalty points. In that case, you will be disqualified for two years or more for a first offence and four years or more in the case of a second offence committed within three years of the first.

Where a member of the Gardaí believes that a vehicle is being used in a public place without insurance, the vehicle may be impounded.

### If you are refused motor insurance

Individual insurers have the right to refuse you insurance cover, but they must provide you with a reason for the refusal should you ask for one. However, even though you have been refused cover, you are entitled to go to the Declined Cases Committee of the Irish Insurance Federation, who will obtain an insurance quotation for you. In order for the committee to consider your case, you must first have sought and been refused quotations in writing from at least three insurers.

## End-of-life vehicles

An end-of-life vehicle is a vehicle which has reached the end of its useful life and is to be discarded as waste. The disposal of end-of-life vehicles is controlled because they can pose a threat to the environment.

Owners of intact end-of-life cars and vans must deposit such vehicles at an appropriately permitted or licensed authorised treatment facility (ATF). An ATF may not charge for accepting an intact end-of-life vehicle. If essential parts of the vehicle are missing, you may be charged. When an end-of-life vehicle is deposited at an ATF, the owner will receive a certificate of destruction. Each local authority has a list of approved centres in their area.

### Relate email subscription

If you would like to receive *Relate* by email you can subscribe by sending an email with the subject line SUBSCRIBE to [relate@ciboard.ie](mailto:relate@ciboard.ie)



## Citizens Information

**LOG ON**  
[citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie)

**CALL**  
0761 07 4000 Mon to Fri, 9am to 8pm

**DROP IN**  
260 locations nationwide