

Encouraging nature recovery at DVLA

As Senior Sustainability and Travel Services Manager, my role involves ensuring DVLA meets its legislative responsibilities for the natural environment across the estate. Additionally, I encourage and recommend ways to increase biodiversity in line with our [Greening Government Commitments \(GGC\)](#). We have created a biodiversity steering group and meet every quarter to talk about the opportunities available to progress towards targets and ensure we keep on track to meet our [Biodiversity Action Plan \(BAP\)](#) measures and the GGCs, which are inextricably linked.

In our commitment towards a more sustainable future, I'm pleased to report that last December we successfully completed a business plan measure. This was to enhance habitats which are designed to increase biodiversity on our estate. So, what did we do to achieve this milestone?



Improving the biodiversity of our estate

Ecological assessments were carried out to inform the findings and conclusions of the biodiversity action plan. The rationale was to work with what we have rather than try to artificially create habitats that would be difficult to maintain. We then identified two areas at one of our sites with different habitats which would benefit from a project to enhance conditions for wildlife.

First habitat

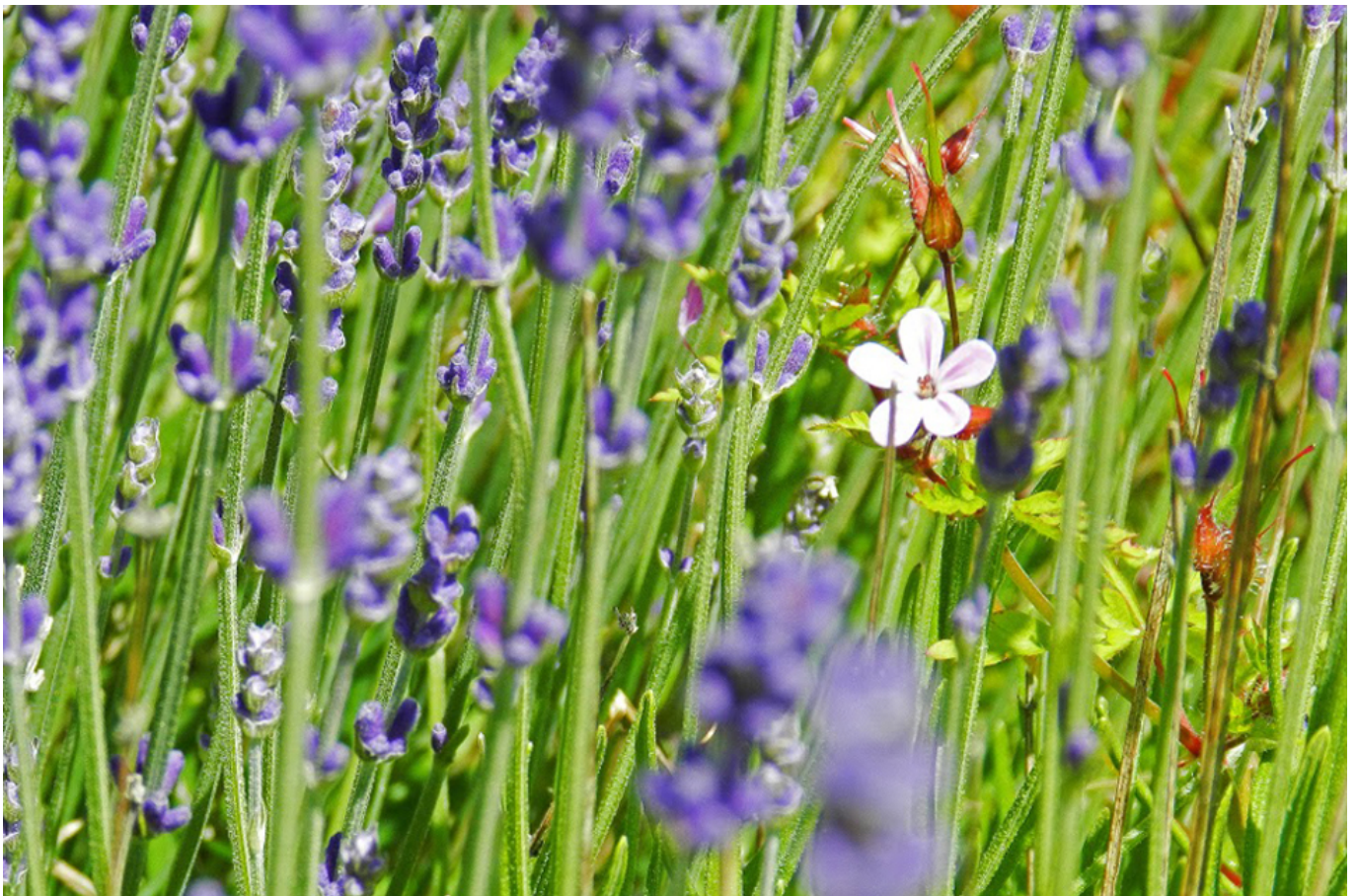
The attenuation pond was created to make sure rainwater is properly managed. If the pond becomes choked with vegetation, it can lose its ability to work properly and have a detrimental effect on some species of wildlife. There is no ideal amount of vegetation from a wildlife perspective, although more is often better. Frogs, toads and newts need both cover and a more open aspect.

Work in this area included removing a third of the vegetation. This will give ample opportunity for amphibians to use the open water. An added benefit is removing nutrients from the water to prevent algae building up to levels which do not support wildlife. The vegetation has been left around the pond, which provides natural shelter for a variety of wildlife including amphibians, reptiles and small mammals.

Second habitat

Large grassy areas have become increasingly covered by scrub and tall ruderals. This sort of scrub is great for many species, such as birds, but does increasingly become less beneficial for others. For example, common lizards that can be found on site require open spaces to enjoy the sunshine. However, they still need cover to hide from predators.

Clearing an area of scrub opened it up to encourage wildflowers to grow as the natural seedbank permits. We left plenty of cover for birds and some small mammals, but this open aspect also provides suitable areas for the common lizard to bask.



What's next?

This year, we plan on using native meadow seed mix to encourage more pollinator friendly species and to introduce some native hedging to increase the habitat for birds and mammals. We will do our best to make sure that current species using our estate will always be present in healthy numbers for years to come.

The biodiversity on our estate is a natural asset which we need to protect and can use to enhance our quality of life. Through our [Biodiversity Action Plan](#), the Sustainability team aim to encourage staff, local communities and organisations to work with us to help conserve and enhance the rich diversity of habitats and species and ensure they are protected for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

If you are interested in biodiversity on the DVLA estate, you can find out more in our [Biodiversity Action Plan](#), and read more about our goals for a sustainable future in [our Sustainability Report](#).

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[Tax it, don't risk it – DVLA hits the road to highlight the risks of vehicle tax evasion](#)

The law is clear – you must [tax your vehicle](#) if you're using it or keeping it on a public road. If you're keeping the vehicle off the road, it must either be taxed or have a [Statutory Off Road Notification \(SORN\)](#). You must tax your vehicle, even if you [do not have to pay anything](#).

Motorists who do not tax their vehicle can face financial penalties, court action and the risk of having their vehicles clamped or impounded. While more than 98% of vehicles are correctly taxed, it's right that DVLA takes action against those who continue to break the law and evade taxing their vehicle.

As National Wheelclamping and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Manager, I manage a strategic DVLA contract that aims to reduce evasion through wheelclamping and ANPR activity. Our enforcement teams travel around the UK as part of our day-to-day activities and work closely with local authorities and police forces, who can be given [devolved powers to remove untaxed vehicles from our roads](#).



Paul Davies, National Wheelclamping and ANPR Manager.

Earlier this year, as part of the agency's long-term strategy to keep vehicle tax evasion low, DVLA's Communications team [launched a campaign](#) with a clear message to evaders – untaxed vehicles are 'hard to hide, easy to tax'. To support the campaign, I travelled with our wheelclamping partners and press team to some of the areas in the UK with the highest evasion levels. Here's what we got up to...

Hitting the road

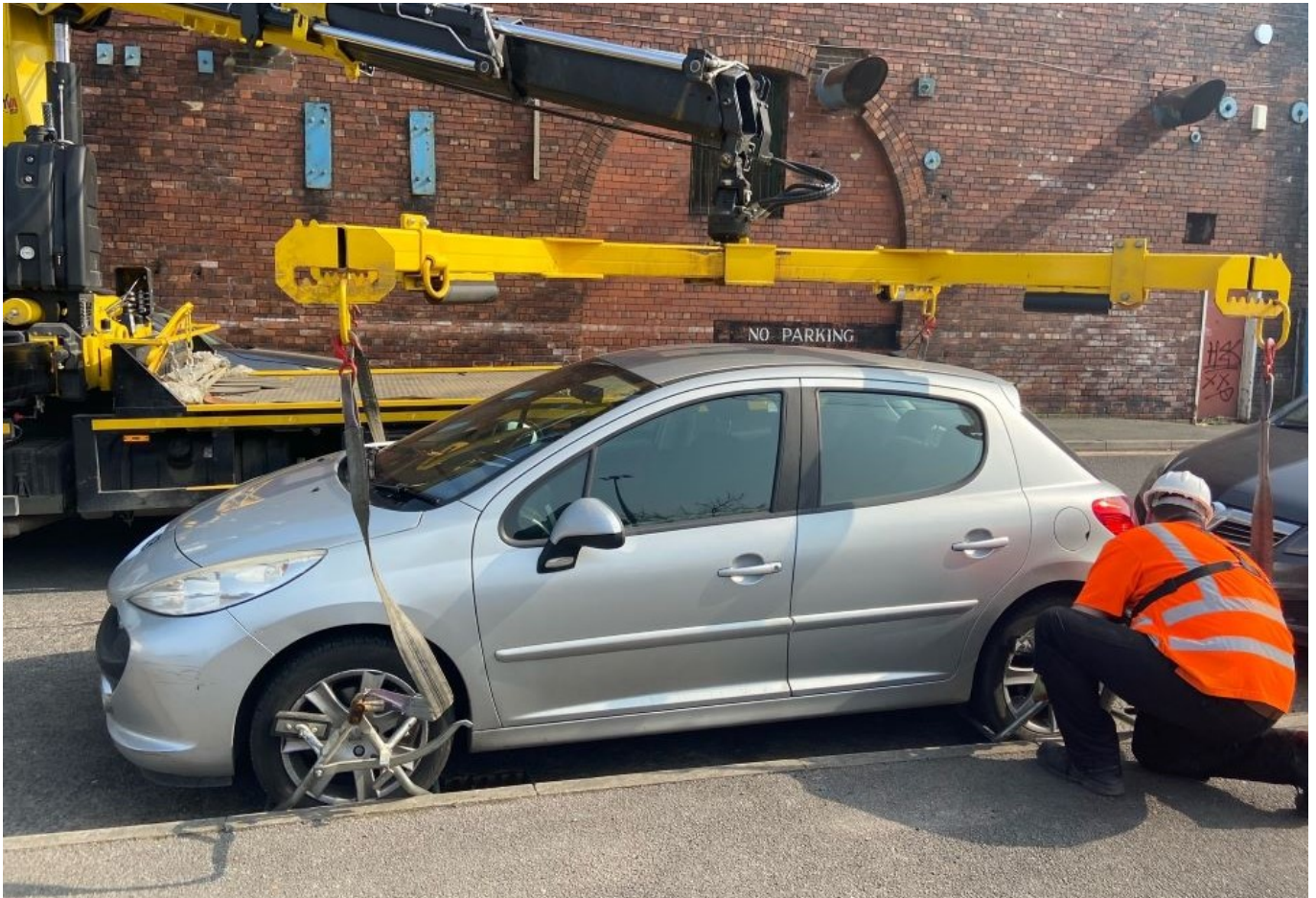
We recently visited Birmingham, Reading, Leeds and Swansea this month, where there were a combined 99,796 enforcement actions taken last year. These included fines, penalties and clamping.

As part of the campaign, we organised media opportunities around our usual wheelclamping operations undertaken by NSL on behalf of DVLA. These wheelclamping operations were an opportunity to highlight the risks for motorists in their local area and remind motorists of the real risk if their vehicles are untaxed.

This is the first campaign I've been involved with, so I undertook media training to prepare for questions from journalists. It was certainly an intense but enjoyable experience, thanks to the support of the agency's press team.

Each wheelclamping operation involved journalists and photographers attending the wheelclamping pound, managed by the press team. I showed them around the facility and answered questions about how our operations are undertaken. They got to see untaxed vehicles returning following an impoundment, before heading out to find an untaxed vehicle to observe a clamping in action.

So, what did we find?



One of several untaxed vehicles we took enforcement action against.

We took enforcement action against several vehicles, in all 4 areas we visited. A car was clamped on a neighbourhood street, while another was towed away and impounded. In another case, we identified an untaxed vehicle in a car park using our ANPR data. The vehicle was clamped, and a warning of impoundment was issued to the driver.

This is a typical day for our enforcement teams and wheelclamping partners who, last year, took [360,655 enforcement actions](#) across 12 of the highest evading areas in the UK. It only reinforces our message of 'hard to hide, easy to tax'. So why risk it?

Looking forward, we will continue to take action against untaxed vehicles by carrying out computerised and roadside checks. Part of my role is also to manage our Devolved Partners Power Scheme, which will continue to support a range of local authorities to deliver enforcement activities on our behalf.

Tax it, don't risk it

Taxing your vehicle is always the easiest and cheapest option. It's never been easier to tax your vehicle, so use GOV.UK to [check if your vehicle is taxed](#). If you need to tax your vehicle, you can do so [quickly and securely online](#) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can even [pay by Direct Debit](#) to spread the cost of your vehicle tax.

So help spread the word to your family and friends – tax it, don't risk it!

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Be a 'Road Safety Hero' by making sure your eyesight is fit for driving

This week is [Road Safety Week](#). At DVLA, we take road safety very seriously – one of the ways we do this is by ensuring drivers meet the vision standards required by law to drive. This involves [assessing drivers with visual disorders](#) and encouraging all road users to regularly check their own eyesight.

As the dark winter months draw near, it's important to be aware that fewer daylight hours and poor weather can lead to reduced visibility when driving. Therefore, meeting the minimum eyesight standard for driving is essential for being safe on the road.



Be a 'Road Safety Hero' this winter

This year's Road Safety Week theme is '[Road Safety Hero](#)' and it's important to remember that everybody can be one this winter, including you.

Seasonal changes such as heavy rain, hail, sleet and snow, along with darker days, can all impact your vision when driving. Adverse weather is a challenge for all drivers, especially if you already have an eyesight condition.

Fog, ice on the windshield, and even glare from low sun can make driving more hazardous during the winter months. If you're planning a journey this winter, whatever the distance or time of day, then be a '[Road Safety Hero](#)' by being aware of the hazards before setting out.

Is your eyesight fit for driving?

No matter the weather or time of year, your eyesight must be fit for driving at all times. And remember – seasonal changes and poor weather aren't the only things that can affect your vision.

Eyesight can naturally worsen over time, so make sure you have regular eye tests, at least every 2 years, or more often if your optician advises this. If you're concerned about your vision, don't wait for your next eye appointment – book a test with your optician as soon as you can. If you don't meet the minimum eyesight standard, you must stop driving and [tell DVLA](#).

If you need to wear glasses or contact lenses for driving, make sure you wear them every time you drive to stay safe and reduce the risk of accident, injury or damage to others on the road. In good daylight, drivers must be able to read, with glasses or contact lenses if needed, a car number plate made after 1 September 2001 from 20 metres.

Take the 20-metre number plate test

But how far away is 20 metres? You won't have a measuring stick in the car with you! 20 metres is around the length of 5 parked cars, or the length of 2 double decker buses.



A survey by DVLA found that [less than 50% of motorists are aware that they must read a number plate from 20 metres](#). That's why we've launched a campaign to raise awareness of the 20-metre eyesight test. The number plate test is a simple and effective way to check if your eyesight meets the required standard for driving. Anyone can do the test at any time.

Visit [our page on driving eyesight rules](#) for more information, and [check if you need to tell DVLA about your eyesight problem](#). Our driving eyesight rules are also [available in Welsh on GOV.UK](#).

You can also visit [Brake's Road Safety Week campaign](#) to find out how you can take action and become a 'Road Safety Hero' this winter.

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[**DVLA wants your views on proposals to widen the pool of medical healthcare professionals needed to fill in DVLA medical questionnaires**](#)

By law, all drivers must meet [medical standards for fitness to drive](#) at all times, and there are additional checks for bus and lorry drivers.

All drivers are legally obliged to [tell DVLA about a medical condition](#) that could impair their ability to drive, such as diabetes, glaucoma and epilepsy. We use this information to [decide what further actions to take](#).

We want as many people as possible to enjoy the freedom of the open road for as long as possible, but only if they are safe to do so. Currently this means [we need to contact GPs and hospital doctors in certain instances](#), when a driver tells us about a medical condition that could affect their driving.



Dr Nick Jenkins

Impact of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The impact of COVID-19 on the NHS and GP surgeries is unparalleled. We greatly appreciate the significant support of a driver's doctor, providing vital medical reports to help us decide if it's safe to issue a driving licence. When an application involves a medical condition, we're often wholly dependent on receiving this additional information.

We know that the ability of NHS doctors and GPs to respond to our queries was impacted by the pandemic. And while the provision of such reports may not be clinically urgent, receiving a driving licence in a timely manner can be vitally important to an individual's wellbeing and livelihood.

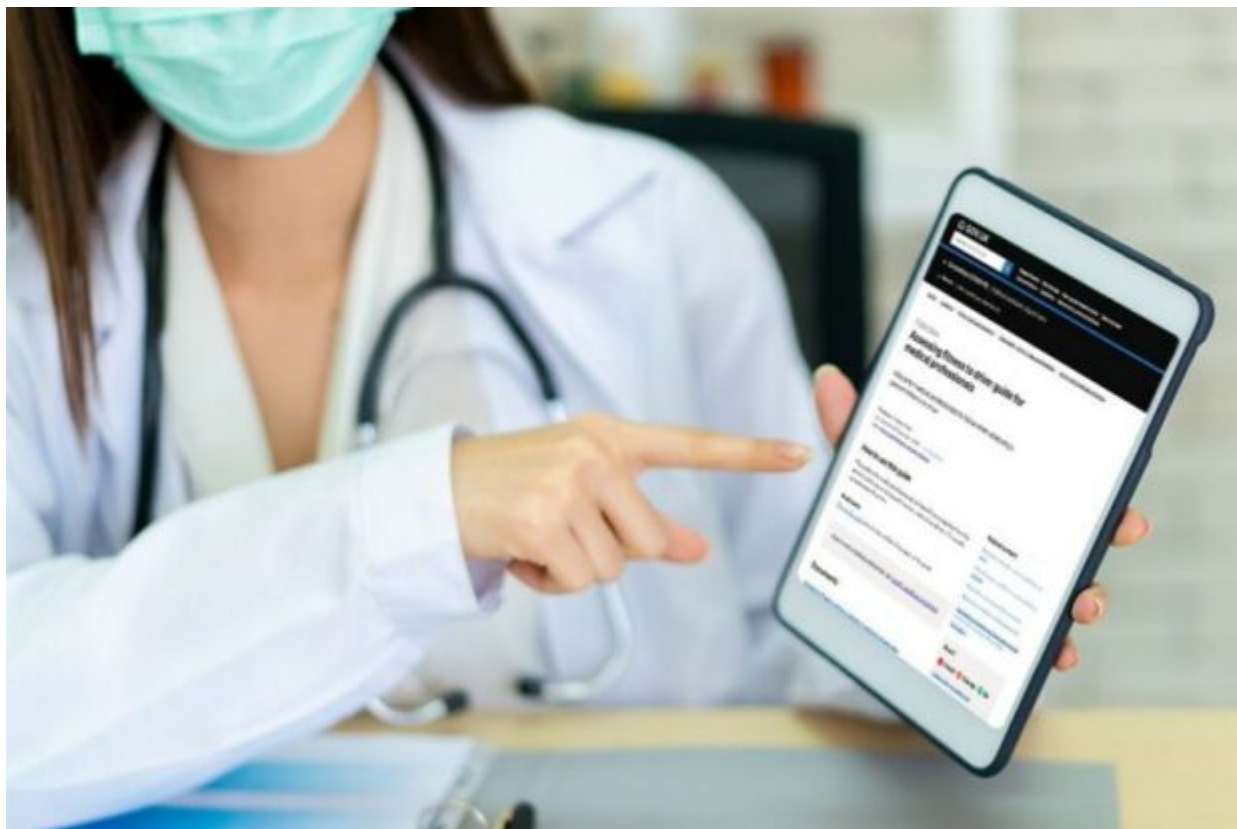
In addition to helping the ordinary motorist, [making sure bus and lorry drivers stay safe and legal on the road](#) is of particular importance for us. This will help drivers delivering essential goods and transporting passengers throughout the UK.

New proposals

We're very much aware of the need for GP practices and hospital teams to prioritise and manage their resources in such times. With the support of the Department for Transport and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) we

propose amending current legislation to increase the pool of healthcare professionals authorised to fill in medical questionnaires and we want your views on doing so.

Only registered medical professionals – doctors with full general medical council (GMC) registration [are currently authorised to provide medical reports to DVLA](#).



Changing the law to allow an appropriate registered healthcare professional, other than a doctor, to fill in a medical questionnaire, will give surgeries greater flexibility and improve turnaround times. This proposal also supports DHSC's aim to reduce bureaucracy in general practice.

We're seeking your views

We want to involve you in decisions that affect you and welcome your views, thoughts, and insights on [this proposal](#).

The consultation will run between 8 November and 6 December 2021 and will only take you 25 minutes to read and provide feedback. After the consultation the results will be analysed and details of the [outcome of the consultation will also be published](#).

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Celebrating 5 years of Unity at DVLA

We are Unity, one of several Staff Network Groups (SNGs) at DVLA that aim to support and connect staff throughout the agency. We celebrate the ethnic and cultural diversity within DVLA, while providing a safe and supportive environment for members to talk about race, religion, and culture.

Unity was founded on 21 March 2016, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, to provide a strong voice for DVLA's minority ethnic staff.

As the co-chairs of Unity, we're both passionate about diversity and inclusion, and we've always been interested in different cultures. To us, Unity provides a space not only to meet new people, but to support them. We are, after all, one community at DVLA.

And it's been a great journey for us so far! We want to share with you some highlights from the past 5 years.

5 years of Unity

Our story began with a staff poll to see how many people would join an SNG to support and encourage inclusivity and diversity at DVLA. The response was incredibly positive and, following discussions with DVLA's Diversity team, Unity was born!

Since then, we've helped make sure DVLA is an inclusive and diverse place to work. From 'Time to Talk' days to coffee-time discussions, we aim to change perceptions around race inequality through conversations. After all, the smallest things can sometimes have the biggest impact.



Unity team in 2016.

With the support of the agency's Diversity team and our Human Resources (HR) colleagues, we've successfully raised awareness of vital issues with senior management. Last year saw the launch of race awareness training for DVLA staff, along with workshops to highlight unconscious biases. To support this, we developed a toolkit and etiquette guide for managers and colleagues, with information about different cultures and religions.

As a group, we've worked with departments across the agency to improve policies and practices. This includes promoting facilities on site to support those who need them, such as a multi-faith prayer room.

We've also tapped into DVLA's strong learning and development culture by signposting staff to mentoring schemes, both within the Civil Service and in the wider community. This includes supporting staff in attending events like the [BAME Into Leadership](#) conference, which is a key event for individuals interested in improving and enhancing leadership opportunities for minority ethnic individuals within the Civil Service.

Building community

At Unity, we build relationships through education and discussion. That's how change happens – by supporting those who wish to become allies. Perhaps one of our most visible advocates is our director champion, Andrew Falvey, DVLA's Commercial Director.

Andrew spoke about the importance of having a diverse workforce at DVLA:

We live in a multicultural society and it's important that our services are built to reflect that. It's also important that we promote DVLA as an employer of choice amongst all communities.

We're proud of the diversity and inclusivity of our workforce, but we're always seeking new ways to provide equal opportunities for all. Drawing from a wider pool of experience and talent benefits our customers and the community at large.

We couldn't agree more. At Unity, we want people to feel included and supported at work. One of the ways we do this is by organising events and activities for staff to get involved in.

Events and activities

Unity is run by a steering group, made up of colleagues from different business areas who are passionate and dedicated to championing our cause. As co-chairs, we oversee the steering group and aim to meet up at least every 6 weeks to plan our events and campaigns.

Over the past year, the pandemic has made it difficult for us to run our usual activities and we've had to adapt. We've used video conferencing to stay in contact with our members and emails to keep them up to date with our activities. Despite working remotely, we've still managed to recruit new members – this was a big achievement for us and shows how valued the group is at DVLA!

Over the years, we've organised a variety of events, from food tasting sessions to dancing classes. One of our proudest achievements was working with the Swansea Humanitarian Aid Response Project (SHARP) for staff to donate items for homeless people and refugees. We managed to collect over 10 cages full of donations!

Another highlight was welcoming Farhana Ali, Swansea's award-winning make-up artist, to DVLA to speak about how she overcame barriers to establish her successful career. Thanks to the success of these events, we now have around 50 members from across the agency actively engaged in the group.



Unity celebrating DVLA's 50th anniversary in 2019.

We run as many diversity and charity events as we can. Our fifth anniversary occurred during lockdown and we held 2 virtual photo competitions for staff to share their favourite cultural experience and recipes. It was heartening to see so many staff members from across the agency get involved and celebrate different cultures.

This month, we're promoting [Black History Month 2021](#) via our staff intranet. In the spirit of this year's '[Proud To Be](#)' theme, we'll be recognising the achievements and contributions that Black communities and individuals make, and have made, to our society.

Unity outside DVLA

While Unity exists to support staff at DVLA, we also actively support our local community.

We've worked with many local groups to support people with job applications and recruitment advice, including the [Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team \(EYST\)](#), [African Community Centre \(ACC\)](#), and [Swansea Council for Voluntary Service \(SCVS\)](#). By supporting our local community, we aim to inspire support from local businesses with our activities.

But learning from others is just as important. We visited the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) staff group, Embrace, at their Nottingham branch to share best practice and see how their organisation works. We're always keen to learn – after all, that's how we grow!

Making DVLA a great place to work

It's important that DVLA reflects the society in which we live. Seeing the positive impact Unity has had on DVLA, and [the people who work here](#), makes us incredibly proud to be a part of it. But we're not doing it alone – we're just one of 6 SNGs helping to ensure DVLA is a supportive and inclusive environment.

We've been lucky enough to watch Unity grow and evolve over the past 5 years, thanks to the dedication of our members and the support of our colleagues. But of course, there's always more work to be done!

Our future plans will see us commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2022, and we're also looking to increase our steering group membership.

Visit [DVLA's 3-year strategic plan](#) to see what the agency is doing to make sure we're a great place to work.

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