



Suzanne Wylie  
[wylies@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:wylies@belfastcity.gov.uk)

DoE Private Office  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Goodwood House  
44 - 58 May Street  
Town Parks  
BELFAST  
BT1 4NN

Telephone: 028 902 56019

Email: [private.office@doeni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@doeni.gov.uk)

Your reference:

Our reference: COR/1001/2015

18 February 2015

Dear Suzanne

I refer to your letter of 6 February 2015 regarding the Motion passed at the Belfast City Council meeting on 2 February 2015 in relation to the Union flag on Northern Ireland Driving Licences.

You may be aware that a similar motion was debated on the floor of the Northern Ireland Assembly on 27 January 2015. During this debate, I clarified that Great Britain and Northern Ireland driving licences are issued by separate and independent licensing authorities and that there is no UK licensing authority. Driver licensing is a transferred matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1988 and, under the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, my Department has responsibility for a broad range of matters relating to the licensing of vehicle drivers, including the form of the driving licence.

In 2012, when the UK Government announced its intention to include the Union flag on Great Britain driving licences, Department for Transport (DfT) Minister, Mike Penning, wrote to my predecessor to advise him of this intention. Minister Penning's letter noted that driver licensing is a devolved matter but that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) of DfT prints Northern Ireland driving licences under contract. Minister Penning [recognised the particular sensitivities around symbols here and proposed](#) that DVLA would continue to print Northern Ireland driving licences without change to the existing design. He asked for a view on this.

Further to this correspondence, officials in my Department engaged with DVLA to ascertain whether it would be possible to provide individuals with an option to choose whether to include or exclude the flag. DVLA however indicated that this would not be possible, as the costs involved in making the system and associated changes required to offer such a choice were prohibitive.

The response to DfT confirmed agreement to Minister Penning's proposal. This took account of the sensitivities identified in the Good Friday Agreement about the use of symbols and emblems here.

My Department received no further correspondence in respect of the UK Government's plans for GB driving licences until a letter from DfT Minister John Hayes dated 23 December 2014, indicating that the plans for GB licences would be announced over the Christmas period, and that Northern Ireland driving licences would continue to be printed by DVLA without the Union flag.

I hope this provides you with some clarity around the events leading up to the announcement by Great Britain to amend their licences.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Durkan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping underline.

**MARK H DURKAN MLA**  
**Minister of the Environment**