

How does the pass/fail rates at NCT compare to the UK and Northern Ireland?

In Northern Ireland (NI) there are less variances in pass / fail rates across its network of 15 test centres. While we do not routinely assess variances in other jurisdictions, there are a number of differences between Northern Ireland testing regime and ours. NI has a smaller geographical area, vehicles are tested every year once they are 4 years old and the pass rate for cars in 2015 was just over 80%. The variation in pass rates in NI is much lower than at NCT. In Q4 2015 the highest pass rate was in Belfast at 81.4% and the lowest in Larne at 75.2%. However this does correlate with NCT where the highest pass rate (57.7%) was in Kilkenny, an urban area, and the lowest in Clifden (35.2%), a coastal area.

Likewise in the UK, cars that are MoT'd in coastal and rural areas have the lowest pass rates. The UK's worst three postcodes – Dundee (49%), Kirkcaldy (50%) and Plymouth (52%) - all cover large coastal areas and it's a similar story for Exeter, Lerwick and Truro (all 53%). Areas in and around London dominate the other end of the table and if a car is tested in Romford, there's a 71 per cent chance that it will pass.

There are a large number of factors that can affect the rate of test failure. However, it is worth remembering that the focus of a good testing service is not on attaining a common pass rate in every test centre, but on ensuring that each test is conducted to the required standard. The NCT pass rates across the majority of test centres lie within 6% of the national average. This is not considered excessive and is in line with international experience because of the reasons which can account for differing fail rates between test centres. Some of the most significant factors include:

- The age-mix of vehicles tested in one location compared with another
- The mileage that a car has undergone also has a marked effect on pass rates, with larger mileage vehicles more prone to failure. This particularly affects some rural locations.
- The prevalence of particular makes and models of vehicles tested makes a marked difference to pass rates. For example the pass rate for some makes is as high as 59% nationally. This is very different to the pass rate for another leading brand at 39%. Local differences in vehicle types will affect the pass rate.
- Differing profiles of use of vehicles and impacts of the different environments e.g. rural, coastal, urban.
- Differences in the condition of the roads in a particular locality, which can lead to the prevalence of particular failure items such as brakes or suspension components, for example.

One of the factors affecting test pass rates is the age of cars being tested – or, more importantly – the mileage they have covered. For example, 4 year old cars have a pass rate approaching 80% while cars 10 years old and over have, on average, a pass rate of only 39%. Any differences in the age profile of vehicles – and more particularly, where the average

odometer reading at the time of the test is higher, as tends to be the case in rural areas, will result in differing overall pass rates.

Another telling reason for different pass rates lies in the fact that some makes and models of vehicles are more prone to failure than others. For example, if we take three reasonably popular makes that are the most failure prone, their average pass rate is only 41% nationally. In contrast, 3 popular makes with the lowest failure rates have an average pass rate of 66%. In both cases the difference in pass rates between various centres lies within plus or minus 5% of the national average for those vehicles, even before other factors are taken into account.

Another factor that is relevant is that an estimated 1/3 of customers do not service their cars before testing and the failure rate of these is, on average 11% higher than those that have been serviced ahead of the test. Again, any variance in the number of people using the test as a diagnostic will affect the pass rate at particular centres

Cahirciveen/Clifden – variation in Pass Rate at NCT

Cahirciveen (pass rate 48.5%) and Clifden (35.2%) are both test centres located on the coast. It should be noted that results in Cahirciveen are very much in line with the national average (49.11%), whereas the failure rate in Clifden is higher. Some of this difference can be attributed to the larger average mileage of vehicles presented for test in Clifden. For example, in 2013, 2014, 2015 the NCT centre at Clifden had the highest fail rate in the country. Odometer readings on cars in Clifden were between 15,000 and 25,000 higher than the centres with the lowest fail rate in those years. However, since the results of the automated aspects of the test e.g. brake performance and light beam tests show the same marked differences as visual items such as wheels and tyres, or chassis and bodywork, it seems likely that local factors relating to the quality of vehicle maintenance and/or preparation for the test, contribute significantly to the outcome. Both centres are subject to the same degree of external scrutiny/audit, as other test centres and we are confident that the actual test is consistent in both locations.

