

despatch

The DSA magazine for trainers of learner drivers/riders



Special Issue: Learning to drive: a consultation

May / June 2008

Welcome to a **special supplement** of Despatch

Learning to drive, passing the driving test and acquiring a full driving licence are important milestones in life, in particular for young people who are looking to acquire independence for the first time. Being able to drive is an important part of life for many of us as we go about our daily business.

Ensuring good standards of driving has always been important, but perhaps never more so than at present. With more vehicles on our roads the chances of incidents occurring increases, so drivers, particularly newly-qualified drivers, need to be more vigilant when they are out on the road.

In order to address the realities of modern driving conditions and to better equip learners to deal with everyday road situations, we really need to look at how we can improve how we teach young people to learn to drive. Young people start to develop their attitudes to driving and road safety from an early age, observing their parents' and others' driving habits, and we need to engage with them before they start the process of learning to drive if we are to influence attitude.

Over the next few months, we are carrying out a major consultation to review all aspects of the learning to drive process and what learners will need to demonstrate in order to obtain a full driving licence. We want to consult with a wide range of people of all ages and from all walks of life including those who are learning to drive; all views will be taken into account.

We want to hear your views and invite you and your students to get involved. Your opinions from both the training industry and learning side are crucial to the consultation. Please visit our website

www.dsa.gov.uk/consultation which provides details on how you can participate in this exciting and important project regarding the future of driver education and testing, or ask for a copy of the consultation document by sending an email to consultations@dsa.gsi.gov.uk or by telephoning 0300 2001122.

More in-depth detail about the "Learning to Drive" consultation and its background can be found in the following pages of this special issue of Despatch.

I hope this gives you a fair idea of where we are going in our continued drive to improve road safety for all.

Rosemary Thew
Chief Executive
Driving Standards Agency



Learning to Drive

The Challenge

Newly-qualified drivers have a higher chance of being involved in a crash within the first two years of passing their practical test. Being young isn't the issue; anyone who has just passed their practical test is at risk whether they're 17 or 70yrs old, despite all the best efforts of instructors to make learners safe and responsible.

The Learning to Drive consultation which was launched on 7 May by Secretary of State, Ruth Kelly, is about how we deal with this by making sure learners get thorough training that prepares them to drive alone, and making sure that they understand what they're taught.

During the course of the consultation, we will look at:

- improved driving tests
- an improved learning process
- better information about instructors and improved instructor training
- further options for learning and qualifications



Improved tests

The driving test, which checks if a learner is ready to drive alone, is only as good as the learning and training that leads up to it. Any changes made to the test will aim to make sure a better job is done of checking that training.

The test may be split up into smaller units, so that people can take it at a more helpful pace or when they have more on-road experience, for example, by separating the theory test and the hazard perception test. We might also split the manoeuvres from the main part of the practical test.

We want to develop our theory test so that it provides a thorough check of understanding safe driving. We shall be introducing case studies alongside the multiple choice questions, so people have to explain their thinking more. We are also considering stopping access to the multiple choice question bank.

We would like students to see hazard perception as an important part of learning to drive more generally, especially the practical elements of learning to drive. We want to take a thorough look at the current test format, what parts of the learning to drive syllabus the test should include, and what assessment methods are used.

We are trialling changes to the practical test to make sure candidates are ready to drive alone without any instructions, including a section of independent driving, where the candidate has to drive without directions given by the examiner perhaps following directions system, or to a specific location. A situational judgement exercise is also under consideration, where learners have to explain what they were thinking in a particular situation. We might also switch to a positive marking system. We plan to provide better feedback on all parts of the driving test, even for successful candidates.

Improved learning process

Our research shows that learners only have a very general idea of what is involved in learning to drive, and are hazy on the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to be a safe and competent driver. To give them a clearer idea, we are going to produce a new syllabus for learning to drive, and an accompanying student workbook.

The syllabus and workbook will include a lot of what instructors already teach, but they will help learners to understand why they have got to learn certain topics, making sure they can become fully rounded drivers, not just focusing on mastering vehicle control.

We also want to investigate ways of getting the syllabus across, such as structured in-car learning. Instructors in the Netherlands currently offer a programme called 'Stepwise', where learners go through a set of 39 'scripts', covering every bit of their driving syllabus. Using this method, learners manage to improve their pass rate from 40-45% to about 60%, so we want to help instructors offer a similar package here.

Better Information

We asked learners what information they used to choose their instructors. Many of them said that they relied on a personal recommendation, or on the reputation of the driving school. What emerged was an absence of clear guidance. Some chose an instructor at random.

This isn't good for learners or instructors, so we want to introduce a 'star rating' for instructors – which will tell learners all of the important information they need to know about an instructor they are likely to choose.

We also want to give instructors a greater stake in their pupils' performance, for example, learners acquiring a signed 'test readiness certificate' before they can go for their practical test, this might be provided by an instructor, or by a parent if they are teaching their children to drive. We might require practical test candidates to be accompanied on test by the person who signed the certificate and at the post-test debrief.

We also want to look at training and testing arrangements for instructors, and will start the discussions with instructors' both before they qualify and subsequently representatives before launching a full consultation.

Further options

Our aim is to give learners more options and ways to learn.

To help instructors to improve learners' attitudes, we're researching an 'Attitude Advisor'. This is a guide, which asks learners a series of questions about how they'd react in different driving situations. Answers given build up an attitude profile, which learners can share with their instructor to help tailor their learning and approach to risks.

We want to make sure that all learners get a fully rounded education as some things are best learnt away from the road. It is a common assumption that young people like risky driving, however most of them don't and only do it because of peer pressure, or because they haven't understood the risks they are taking. The opportunity to participate in discussion groups can help young learners realise that risk-taking isn't as popular as they've been led to believe.

Learning about road safety needs to start before young people even get in a car. We will offer a course aimed at pre-drivers, where they can learn about becoming safe road users, including basics, such as the Highway Code, and more advanced things like how to respect other drivers. People who take this course will be safer, and properly prepared for learning. We're planning to pilot this course in Scotland.



Getting involved

The consultation will run until 8 September and you can find out more by visiting the consultation website at www.dsa.gov.uk/consultation. We welcome your input, so please get involved - we are keen to hear as many views as we can over the next few months. You can register online.

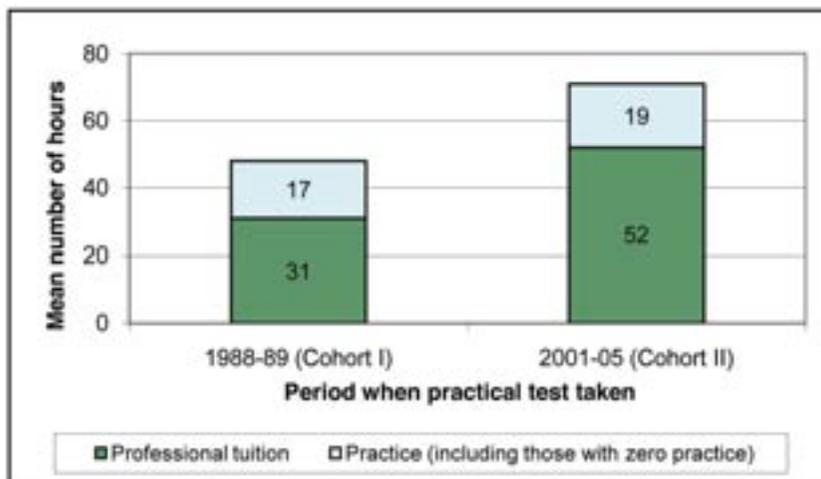
Key findings from the Cohort II study of learner and new drivers

By Transport Research Laboratory

Background - Cohort II' was a major study, funded by the Department for Transport, which provides an up-to-date picture of how 'cohorts' of learner drivers in Great Britain learned to drive and their subsequent experiences as new drivers. More than 42,000 practical car test candidates responded to the original survey questionnaire in 2001-2005; these respondents were invited to complete and return further questionnaires at six, 12, 24 and 36 months after their test. This data has also helped to develop a profile of their involvement in accidents and to assess the effects of hazard perception testing.

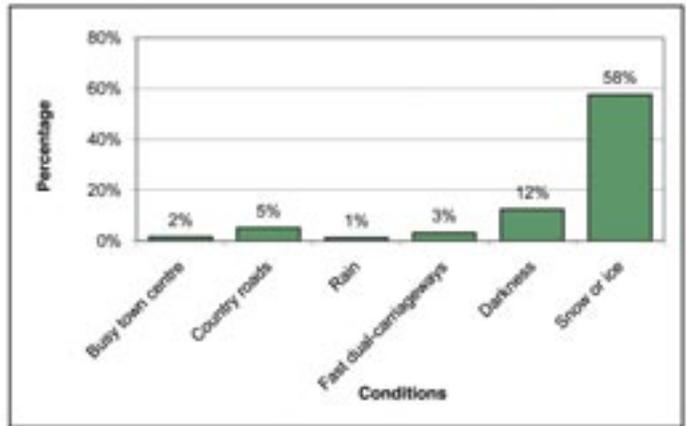
Learning to drive - The majority of respondents (90%) gained some driving experience before taking their theory test; although one in ten respondents (10%) reported that not having any driving experience (either professional instruction or practice) prior to taking the theory test. The first Cohort Study of learner and new drivers in 1988-89 found that virtually all respondents had taken some lessons with an ADI (98%); for Cohort II, the equivalent figure was 99.5%. The average number of hours of professional instruction for candidates coming to test has increased during this time, from 31 hours in 1988-89 to 52 hours in 2001-2005. Graph 1 shows the mean total driving experience for all respondents in 1988-89 and 2001-2005.

Graph 1: Mean reported total driving experience of all respondents in 1988-89 and 2001-2005



The study showed that pass rates tended to increase with private practice, but decrease with more professional tuition. This reflects the fact that those candidates who have difficulty in learning to drive and passing the test need the most tuition.

Graph 2: Percentage of passers without any driving experience (either professional tuition or private practice) in different conditions



Some of those who passed the practical test had not experienced a full range of driving conditions, for example one in eight, (12%) of those who passed had not driven in darkness (see Graph 2).

Accidents - In the first six months after passing the practical test, nearly two in ten respondents (19%) reported having an accident and seven in ten (70%) reported having a near accident. As new drivers gained experience, the number of accidents they reported and corresponding accident rates decreased. However, the average severity of the accident increased as more occurred on public roads. Respondents with ‘bad’ attitudes to driving and who reported committing driving violations had higher accident rates than those with ‘good’ attitudes and behaviours.

Hazard perception test – Significantly, the data showed that the introduction of the hazard perception test was associated with some reduction in subsequent accident liability in the first year of driving, depending on the type of accident. For reported non-low-speed accidents on a public road where the driver accepted some blame, the accident liability of those who had taken the hazard perception test was significantly lower than those who had not. In addition, those who achieved higher scores in hazard perception, tended to have lower accident rates. Hazard perception training and testing has had a safety benefit, however there is scope in future to build on this.

Important findings for ADIs from the study were:

- Those who passed the practical test have more hours of total driving experience prior to their practical test today compared with nearly 20 years ago – most of this increase is accounted for by an increase in the number of hours of professional instruction; private practice with friends or family is associated with higher pass rates;
- There are gaps in practical driving experience which need to be addressed for safer driving;
- Hazard perception testing demonstrated a safety benefit, which could be improved further in future.

More information on this research can be found at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/research/rsrr/theme2/cohort>

A Competence Framework for Car and Light Van Drivers

It is widely recognised that driver training and testing needs to improve and to be updated. Many drivers are poorly prepared when they attend for their practical test, and the accident figures show that even those who do pass still lack some of the competences required to drive safely.



Learners need to gain a fuller understanding of the driving task. Qualified drivers, too, should maintain and build on their driving skills. To underpin a more thorough approach to learning to drive, the DSA has commissioned a competence framework for car and light van drivers (Category B licence holders). The use of competence frameworks to underpin training and assessment is a well established approach elsewhere in industry and in the education sector.

The competence framework describes the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to drive safely and responsibly. It includes a range of levels which provide increasing detail about the specific skills required. At the highest level, the framework identifies five key aspects of driving:

- preparing the car/light van and its occupants for the journey;
- guiding and controlling the car/light van;
- using the road in accordance with the Highway Code;
- interacting appropriately with other road users;
- reviewing and adjusting driving behaviour over your lifetime;

At the lower levels a more detailed breakdown of skills, knowledge and attitudes is included (e.g. use effective scanning techniques, identify hazards and brake safely using appropriate braking techniques, etc). These identify what needs to be trained and assessed, what standard of performance is required, what knowledge is required to underpin driving skills and which attitudes support or impede desirable driving behaviours.

DSA will use this framework to underpin the development and implementation of education programmes and materials, training programmes, and testing and assessment protocols for drivers. The potential to set different levels of assessment will mean that we will be able to set levels for drivers at different stages of their driving career not just learners, for example as part of work-related road safety initiatives.

The contents of the framework have been validated against driving accident data and driving research. In the longer term, we intend to extend this framework for other groups of drivers and riders.



Researching new and assessment:

As part of the fundamental review of the current arrangements for learning to drive, the DSA is looking to pilot and trial potential new ways of learning to drive. We want to be sure that our proposals are based on sound research evidence, and that they will deliver the benefits we expect.

Therefore, we are undertaking trials, research and pilot projects to test out ideas, investigating whether they are feasible, and evaluating their effectiveness. Work has begun on the following research-led prototypes:

Pre Driver Education

DSA is working in partnership with the Scotland Qualification Authority, Scottish Education Department and other road safety stakeholders to develop a foundation level pre-driver qualification to be piloted in schools and colleges in Scotland. The pilot will run for around 24 months.

Peer Group learning for pre-drivers

DSA, in partnership with Kirklees Metropolitan Council, has developed a set of materials for use in schools comprising a young person's documentary drama with accompanying lesson plans. This material is designed to inform classroom discussions on safe road use and, in particular, attitudes to driving.

Attitude Advisor for drivers

DSA is developing an attitude assessment tool to help drivers identify risky attitudes and behaviours. We expect that their tool would inform a learner's subsequent driver training. A draft questionnaire is currently being trialled with a number of different cohorts, including learners, newly-qualified and experienced drivers. We are also planning further trials with groups of young and adult offenders.

Developing knowledge and understanding when preparing for the Theory Test

Some people are concerned that candidates' preparation for the theory test is not always linked to their practical driving experience. DSA is working with the National Offender Management Service and Devon County Council's Driver Centre to compare a range of learning approaches for candidates preparing to take the Theory Test. This research is meant to establish how learners gain an understanding of driving theory as well as a knowledge of the rules of the road.

ways of learning piloting the future



Independent Driving and Situational Judgement Testing

We have built some prototypes of Independent Driving and Situational Judgement Testing - two ideas that we are thinking about introducing into the practical test. Independent driving will assess learner drivers' ability to take greater control in the test, reducing their reliance on the accompanying driver. Situational judgement exercises should give an insight to how they process information about complex driving situations. The AA Driving School and BSM are taking part in these trials.

Publicity for the Learning to Drive Consultation

So that as many people as possible have the chance to hear of the 'Learning to Drive' consultation and register their views, we have carried out various initiatives to promote the consultation.

Involving ADIs in the preparation of our proposals

Four ADI workshops were held in the first week of December 2007, in Cardiff, Norwich, Manchester and Glasgow. Their purpose was to engage ADIs and obtain their views to help shape the Learning to Drive consultation exercise.

Discussion at all four ADI workshops was lively, and in the main positive. They addressed two focal questions:

- how the learning to drive process could be changed to produce safer drivers; and
- how the driver training industry and testing regime would need to change to make this happen.

Many ideas were forthcoming. There was a clear recognition of the need for change, and in many respects support for the direction of travel for this change.



Involving young people in the preparation of our proposals

In November 2007, we commissioned a Young People's Forum as part of our pre-consultation engagement activity that would continue to meet and work throughout the consultation period. The Young People's Forum is an activity-based programme that creates the opportunity for us to work collaboratively with young people as key stakeholders in the learning to drive process because:

- young people account for a large proportion both of those learning to drive and of those subsequently having accidents;
- any new approach to driver learning and testing needs to engage and be comprehensible to those to whom it will apply; and
- once young people are involved they can act as ambassadors who will subsequently encourage others to take part in the consultation process.

The Young People's Forum focussed on three key areas:

1. Content of the Consultation.

The young people helped us to develop and review elements of the new approach to learning and testing, took part in and fed back on prototype activities.

2. Consultation Presentation.

The groups helped us to shape the presentation of consultation materials so as to make them meaningful and accessible to young people. They also helped us to develop an approach that would proactively engage young people outside the Forum.

3. Communication.

Many of the Forum members are now ambassadors during the consultation period and are encouraging other young people to become actively involved.

We recruited three groups, based in England, Wales and Scotland, and where possible we aimed to ensure diversity for each group in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, educational/working backgrounds, and stage in driver learning (e.g. pre-learner, learner, driver etc)/learning/driving history (e.g. first-time failers, offenders).

Seeking everybody's views

We have developed a special Learning to Drive website which can be found at www.dsa.gov.uk/learningtodrive

The website is designed to capture the interest of young people in particular, throughout the consultation period. The young people who were involved in the Young People's Forums feature on the website where you can see video footage of them expressing their opinions on the current learning to drive process.

There are several areas of the website where members of the public can actively get involved. There is an online forum, where people can take part in live discussions about a number of related topics. This gives everyone a chance to hear about the various strands of the consultation and share their views informally before they complete the official consultation questionnaire.

There are also lots of useful downloadable documents on the website. One of these is a Young Person's Booklet which is a condensed version of the Consultation Paper, explaining key areas of the proposed changes which are particularly relevant to young people. Other documents include lesson plans for use by schools, colleges and road safety groups to help introduce the Learning to Drive consultation within an educational setting.

Everyone, of course, from young people and the general public, to the professional driving industry can take part in the consultation online, by completing the consultation questionnaire.

Also on the website are details of public events that we are holding around the country during the consultation period. You can book yourself a place free of charge, online.



Public Meetings

DSA is on the road!

We are holding a number of events in cities and towns throughout Great Britain that are free of charge, and that present everyone with the opportunity to meet senior members of the Learning to Drive consultation team, ask questions and express views in person.

Regardless of your driving age or status everyone is welcome to book a place at these events, but you should make sure that you book on the type of meeting appropriate to you. We are running two types of event at each venue. One session is for Stakeholders (e.g. driver training and road safety professionals) which will start at 2pm. The other is for members of the General Public which will start at 6pm.

Details of dates and venues can be found below. Book a place now at www.dsa.gov.uk/learningtodrive

Venues and Dates

Leicester,	Walkers Stadium, 10 June
Llandudno,	St George's Hotel, 16 June
Norwich,	Carrow Road Stadium, 23 June
Leeds,	Marriott Hotel, 1 July
Wolverhampton,	The Molineux Conference Centre, 8 July
Manchester,	Hilton Manchester, Deansgate, 15 July
Brighton,	De Vere Grand Hotel, 21 July
Cardiff,	Millennium Stadium, 25 July
Newcastle,	St James's Park Stadium, 29 July
Glasgow,	Radisson SAS Hotel, 12 August
Inverness,	Royal Highland Hotel, 19 August
Croydon,	Hilton Croydon, 28 August
Exeter,	Thistle Exeter, 2 September



To find out more
and get involved, visit
www.dsa.gov.uk/consultation

Despatch is published bi-monthly by the Driving Standards Agency.

Our Agency conducts Britain's driving tests for cars, motorcycles, lorries and buses, including the theory tests and also maintains the Register of Approved Driving Instructors, the voluntary register of lorry driving instructors and oversees motorcycle Compulsory Basic Training.

DSA is an executive agency of the Department for Transport.

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Designed & printed by



Tel: 01709 710000

Email: sales@bbpress.co.uk

Printed on 130gsm 9lives 'born again' gloss (containing
80% recycled fibre and 20% T.C.F virgin pulp).

*An executive agency of the
Department for
Transport*