

Young and Novice Drivers

RoSPA's Response to the Transport Select Committee enquiry to scrutinise governmental work on actions undertaken to reduce casualties of young and novice drivers

Date: August 2019



Response to Transport Select Committee - scrutiny of actions on young and novice drivers

Introduction

This is the response of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) to the Transport Select Committee scrutiny into the actions undertaken by government to reduce accidents involving young and novice drivers.

The Committee invites evidence on: the reasons why young and novice drivers are at a higher risk of being involved in a road traffic collision, and what the Government can do to reduce these risks—this could include the use of telematic devices, proposals for a system of probation or Graduated Driver Licensing, or changes to training and testing for new drivers.

RoSPA Response

The following is a copy of the information supplied on 30th August 2019 through the Transport Committee web portal:

Young drivers make up 7 per cent of UK full driving licence holders yet are involved in 22 per cent of fatal or serious collisions in which they were the driver and is the biggest killers of young people. It was for this reason that RoSPA urged all political parties to include a commitment in their General Election Manifestos in 2015 to publish a Green Paper to explore the potential options for achieving a step change in reducing crashes and casualties involving young drivers. Our recommendations for the range of options to be considered for inclusion in the Green Paper included:

- Introducing graduated driver licensing
- Developing and widening the use of telematics, if ongoing research showed they were effective at reducing crashes and casualties
- Improving the learning-to-drive regime, including a minimum learning period, mandatory logbook and help for parents (and others) who act as supervising drivers
- Introducing improvements to the driving test
- Providing incentives for drivers to take evaluated and effective post-test driver education and training.

Since this date, telematics have improved and there have been changes to the driving test; yet, still the problem remains. In 2017, road traffic collisions accounted for 15% of deaths for people aged 15 to 24. Therefore, RoSPA is delighted that this matter is being considered by the Transport Select Committee.

Our submission primarily focuses on the merits of graduated driving licensing (GDL). RoSPA is currently involved in one element of the Driver2020 project which is evaluating the effectiveness of a number of young driver interventions. The intervention for which we are responsible involves some elements of GDL where the young driver and the parent agree a series of voluntary driving restrictions in the first few months after passing their test. This involves:

- Restrictions on the number of peer passengers carried during the day
- Restrictions on the number of peer passengers carried at night
- Restrictions on night time driving.



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The above restrictions are relaxed following discussion and agreement with the parent as the young driver gains experience at pre agreed time intervals.

Graduated driver licensing (GDL)

GDL provides phased driving experience for new drivers in their first year or two of driving, which is when they are most at risk. It reduces their exposure to situations that are most dangerous for them, while allowing them to build up their driving experience.

Many countries have GDL schemes, which often impose requirements for the initial learning period and a post-test period of restricted driving before full, unsupervised, driving privileges. Typical restrictions are:

- Minimum learning period and minimum supervised practice
- Restrictions on night-time driving (unless there's an experienced driver in the vehicle)
- Restrictions on carrying young passengers (unless there's an experienced driver in the vehicle)
- Lower drink-drive limit.

Researchⁱ has found that fatal collisions among young drivers reduced by 9% to 60%, and overall casualties by 5% to 32% in countries that introduced GDL schemes.

It has been estimated that a GDL system in Great Britain would result in 81 to 114 fewer deaths and 538 to 872 fewer serious injuries annually (depending on the extent of night-time and passenger restrictions applied).ⁱⁱ

A different analysis of the potential safety impact that GDL could have on regions across England, Scotland and Wales concluded that in an average year, it could save 4,478 casualties, including 433 deaths and serious injuries and deliver social and economic benefits valued at £200.1million. This analysis included only 17 to 19 year old drivers; a GDL system that applied to all novice drivers would, therefore, result, in even greater casualty and cost savings.ⁱⁱⁱ

Other research has suggested that GDL would decrease crashes, casualties and fatalities involving 17-19 year old drivers in Britain by 20% to 40%.

In May 2014, the RAC Foundation published Graduated Driver Licensing: A regional analysis of potential casualty savings in Great Britain written by TRL^{iv}. This report used road safety data from 2008 to 2012 to estimate the potential casualty and collision reduction for Great Britain based on the introduction of restrictions for newly-licensed drivers typical to most GDL schemes. The updated estimates show that the potential savings from the introduction of a GDL system would have less of an impact, in terms of expected reductions in casualties and collisions, now than if they were introduced in 2014 although the reasons why are unclear. However, dependent upon the restrictions, significant casualty savings would be achieved were GDL introduced.

In addition to the lives saved and injuries prevented, these studies indicate that the economic benefits of GDL would be in the region of hundreds of millions of pounds. These savings would make a major contribution to reducing the burden of accidental injuries on the NHS.



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There are concerns about unintended consequences for young people, such as reducing access to education and employment, and enforcement difficulties. However, the extent to which a GDL scheme is likely to restrict such access, if at all, is not clear since only about 30% of 17-20 year olds hold a full car driving licence.^v In any case, these concerns are not insurmountable, and there is considerable enthusiasm in the road safety community to address them.^{vi} If necessary, exemptions could be included to allow young drivers to access education and employment, although such exemptions are being phased out in other countries that have introduced them in their GDL schemes because the risk is still high.

A survey^{vii} indicates that GDL would secure majority public support. It found that 68% of the British public support its introduction, with only 15% opposed. Unsurprisingly, young people themselves were less keen to see GDL implemented.

Minimum learning period

Inexperience and over-confidence play a major part in explaining why one in five new drivers will be involved in a collision in their first six months of driving. Research suggests that lack of experience can be overcome by around 1,000 miles of solo driving. By the end of these 1,000 miles, the new driver should have experienced most of the situations they will face and will consequently be better able to recognise potential hazards early, giving them time to react accordingly. GDL schemes allow young drivers to gain experience, whilst reducing some of the riskier situations such as driving late at night and carrying multiple peer passengers.

Learner drivers tend to pick up the basic vehicle handling skills within just 15 hours, however other driving skills such as hazard perception do not develop as quickly, which can lead a young driver to believe that they are a “better driver than they really are” and consequently place demands on their ability which are inappropriate for their level of driving experience and skill. Young drivers have poorer visual awareness than more experienced drivers and display a smaller range of horizontal scanning of the road, look closer to the front of the vehicle, check their mirrors less and focus more on stationary objects than moving objects. This is not deliberate but a direct result of inexperience. The longer the pre-test period, the greater the supervised training and experience gained and therefore RoSPA calls for a minimum learning period of one year to encourage learners to gain more driving experience during their learning period. As most learners take many months to pass their test, this would not impose much additional burden on learner drivers. This would also prohibit short intensive training courses which teach pupils to pass the test rather than providing extended periods of supervision and training by a qualified ADI (approved driving instructor).

Drink driving

RoSPA does not believe that a lower drink-drive limit for young or novice drivers is a practical option, partly due to the difficulties in enforcing a separate limit for a specific group of drivers, which would require the police to be able to check the driver's age (or licence status). This would be difficult as drivers are not required to carry their driving licence in Britain.

There is also a risk that young drivers who are subject to a lower drink-drive limit may be more likely to drink and drive when they reach the age at which they became subject to the higher limit for other drivers because they think they could then “drink more and drive”.



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There were 8,210 drink drive casualties ^{viii} in 2017 involving all road users. Final estimates show there were 250 drink-drive related deaths in Great Britain during 2017, a year-on-year rise of nine per cent. The figures, published on August 28, show that between 230 and 270 people were killed in collisions where at least one driver was over the drink-drive limit, leading the DfT to produce a central estimate of 250 deaths.

The 80mg/100ml limit was based on evidence that the likelihood of a road accident rises sharply at and above that level. However, the evidence also showed that most drivers are impaired and their risk increases below this limit.

Drivers with a blood alcohol level of between 50mg and 80mg are 2-2.5 times more likely to be involved in an accident than drivers with no alcohol, and up to 6 times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash. ^{ix} Even a small amount of alcohol when combined with a lack of driver experience is a dangerous cocktail which increases the likelihood of a young driver crashing. If the current 80mg/100ml limit was reduced to 50mg for all drivers it would have a beneficial road safety benefit to both young drivers and more experienced drivers alike and would overcome the practical difficulties of enforcement.

Conclusion

RoSPA recommends:

- Requiring learner drivers to complete both a minimum learning period of at least 12 months, and a minimum number of hours of driving lessons under professional instruction
- A limit on carrying passengers at night for a set period after a novice driver has passed their driving test
- A limit on the number of peer passengers carried during the day for a set period after a novice driver has passed their driving test
- Increasing the period after passing their test during which a driver will lose their licence upon accumulation of six points to 24 months
- Reducing the drink-drive limit to 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood for all drivers.

RoSPA has no further comments to make on the consultation process, other than to thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment. We have no objection to our response being reproduced or attributed.

ⁱ Hartling L, Wiebe N, Russell KF, Petruk J, Spinola C, Klassen TP. Graduated driver licensing for reducing motor vehicle crashes among young drivers. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2011

ⁱⁱ Sarah S Jones, Dorothy J Begg & Stephen R Palmer. (2013) Reducing Young Driver Crash Casualties in Great Britain: Use of Routine Police Crash Data to Investigate the Benefits of Graduated driver Licensing. International Journal of Injury Control and Safety Promotion Vol 20, No. 4, 2013

ⁱⁱⁱ Kinnear N, Lloyd L, Scoons J, & Helman S (2014). Graduated Driver Licensing: A Regional Analysis of Potential Casualty Savings in Great Britain. RAC Foundation



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- iv Bhavin Makwana (2018) The modelled impact of a range of GDL schemes. An update of the 2014 TRL report.
- v "Table NTS0201 Full car driving licence holders by age and gender: England, 1975/76 to 2013", National Travel Survey, Department for Transport, 2014
- vi Ben Miller (2014). Views on Graduated Driver Licensing. RAC Foundation
- vii Ben Marshall & Alpha Parish (2014). Young Driver Safety - A public attitude survey. RAC Foundation and IPSO MORI Social research Institute
- viii Reported Road Casualties Great Britain
- ix DETR (1998) "Combating Drink Driving: Next Steps: A Consultation Paper"

