

**INTRODUCING
A MORE
STRUCTURED
APPROACH TO
LEARNING TO
DRIVE**

Views of the AA

June 2002

Definitions

To avoid long and complex descriptions, the AA responses in this document use the following terms:

Young driver – someone who has passed their driving test and who is under 25

New Driver – someone under 25 who has held a full driving licence for under two years

Probationary Driver - someone covered by the AA's proposed probationary licence code (and is therefore under 25 and has held a full licence for under 2 years).

Learner driver – someone who holds a provisional driving licence

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Summary of AA views

Younger drivers are about twice as likely to be involved in an accident resulting in death or serious injury. One in five newly qualified drivers will have an accident in which someone is injured in their first year of driving.

Research commissioned by the AA Foundation for Road Safety Research suggests that a significant minority of these young drivers (about 35%) are unsafe drivers. This is not because they do not have the driving skills, it is because they choose not to use them. Often this is through peer group pressure.

Many drivers of all ages – well over 500,000 – choose to drive without a licence at all. The risk of increasing this number by introducing a stricter licensing regime is real. What is needed are measures that will make young drivers safer without increasing unlicensed driving.

Newly qualified drivers need to gain more experience as learners, particularly to build better hazard perception. They need to be better shielded from peer pressures that are known to increase risky driving and all too often kill or maim the driver, passengers or others. Both methods have worked overseas. Lessons learned overseas need to be applied in Britain.

Key features of the new approach should be:

- * Learner drivers should be encouraged to gain as much practice as possible before taking their tests. To make this happen:
 - There should be a mandatory gap of six months between applying for a provisional licence and taking the test.
 - It should be possible to take out a provisional licence at 16½ although it should not be possible to take the test until 17½.
 - Government should work with the insurance industry to review the premiums charged to parents wishing to include their learner driver children on their policies so that premiums follow actuarial risk distinguishing between driving alone and driving supervised by parents.

- Logbooks of driver training should be encouraged but only on a voluntary basis because any compulsory system is wide open to abuse and could bring the driving test itself into disrepute
 - There should be at least a four-week gap between test failure and retaking the test.
- * New drivers should be shielded from known dangers such as driving late at night or with young passengers who may be likely to encourage showing off. Experience in the US showed significant casualty reduction from licensing restrictions.
- A two-year probationary driving licence code should be part of a newly qualified driver's licence. Such drivers should sign their acceptance of it. Along with clear information on the maximum six-point limit allowed under the New Drivers Act, this code should include other advice for new drivers that should have a broadly similar legal status to the Highway Code. This would mean that while ignoring the advice would not be an offence in itself, it may well lead to tougher action by police and courts if it is ignored and an offence is committed. The code should also allow reasonable exemptions, for example travelling to late night shift work. The advice section of the code should apply for two years from passing the driving test, or until the age of 25 was reached, whichever occurs sooner.
 - The Code should advise particularly against carrying young passengers, and driving between 0100 and 0500. It can also suggest that "P"plates are displayed and that new drivers do not use high-powered cars. Other behaviours shown to be linked with accidents among young drivers should be covered.
 - A major publicity campaign should be run to explain the changes and the reasons for them aimed at new drivers and particularly the parents of young and new drivers.

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AA VIEWS – MAIN POINTS

Introduction

The AA represents people who are responsible motorists and for nearly 100 years road safety has been at the heart of AA policy.

Young drivers are heavily over represented in accidents, a reflection of a worldwide trend.

However, research by the AA Foundation for Road Safety research raises two important points. Firstly, only a significant minority of young drivers (about 35%) do not drive safely, and the driving behaviour of this group is often more the result of a choice to drive unsafely than a lack of the skills needed to drive safely. This is often because they feel that risky driving earns peer approval.

Secondly, it has also been shown that around 750,000 drivers of all ages now choose to drive without a licence, in many cases because getting a licence by passing the driving test seems too difficult, too expensive or too time consuming.

It is important, therefore that any new structure does not bite too heavily on those who drive safely and neither should it make more people choose to drive without a licence.

Within the consultation paper the AA believes there are three main areas that can tackle the problem:

- * Measures to encourage learner drivers to gain more practice;
- * Restrictions on new drivers;
- * A probationary driving licence code for new drivers.

The AA believes that a combination of these measures should be introduced. While full responses to the consultation questions constitute the last part of this response, the following section makes specific points that the AA believes are crucial to treating the problem effectively.

Measures to encourage learner drivers to gain more practice:

The AA supports this goal, as overseas evidence shows that it is effective. However the AA believes that three major points require attention:

Logbooks

The best way of learning to drive is to have a combination of formal, qualified instruction augmented by extensive experience supervised by an experienced driver, typically a parent. Logbooks can be a supporting tool, particularly to help both learner driver and parent.

There must not be a requirement for logbooks to be “signed off” only by ADIs - this should be open to any driver entitled to supervise a learner. Confining this to ADIs would give them control over whether or not a driver could take the test and undermine the role of practical experience. The government should consult separately if this is its intention. There is a threat that some may treat “signing off” a logbook or parts of a logbook lightly. If the logbook system is abused, or felt to be abused, there is every risk that the driving test itself could fall into disrepute. The purpose of the logbook however should be to support the integrity of responsible drivers in learning to drive safely

Insurance

The goal of the new structure is to encourage learner drivers to practice. Parents and other adults with extensive driving experience must be encouraged to have a role in this. However, it seems common for insurance companies to charge considerable extra premiums on the motor policies of parents wishing to cover their children as learners. As an example, an insurance quote was obtained for a fictitious 47-year-old male. This showed his premium for a 1999 Ford Focus to be £215.20 as a sole driver. However, when his 17 year old single son, with a provisional licence, was added this rose to £690.35. This was the same premium for the son after he had passed his test and was able to drive alone.

Many parents will not be able to afford to pay substantially more for their motor insurance (equivalent to some 25 driving lessons) to encourage their children to gain extra practice. Government should work with the insurance industry to review the premiums charged to parents wishing to include provisional licence holders on their policies so that premiums follow actuarial risk distinguishing between driving alone and driving supervised by parents.

More mature drivers

The AA supports proposals:

- * to reduce the minimum age at which drivers can start to learn to 16½;

- * to raise the minimum age at which drivers can take the test to 17½; and
- * to require that learner drivers spend at least six months (more if they take out a provisional licence while under 17) between getting a licence and taking the test.

All these steps would help many gain more driving experience than they do at present. The AA proposes however that drivers over 25 years of age should be exempt from any minimum learning period as there are too many circumstances where these rules would be unreasonable.

Restrictions on New Drivers

The consultation paper discusses ways that new drivers could be restricted until driving experience is built up. Abroad, some of these restrictions have been shown to be supported by the drivers subject to them and have demonstrated considerable success in reducing death and serious injury, albeit in different circumstances to those encountered in this country.

The AA believes that there are a number of situations that the available evidence says a new driver should try to avoid. These include driving high-powered vehicles, especially without the calming influence of a parent or an older person, carrying passengers of their own age group, and driving late at night or early in the morning. Some new drivers already choose to display “P” plates. The new code proposed (see below) should encourage the use of “P” plates, not least because they can help warn other young people that they are going to be driven by an inexperienced driver. This also helps take pressure off new drivers who know they should not be carrying young passengers.

However laws imposing driving restrictions would be complicated and very difficult to enforce properly and economically. Failure to enforce laws specific to new drivers would give the message that traffic laws in general are not well enforced, and risk lowering respect for them among the wider community of drivers. It is for this reason that the AA favours extension of the proposed probationary driving code rather than legal restrictions.

A probationary driving licence code for new drivers

The consultation document looks on the proposed probationary licence code as an addition to the driving licence that brings transparency to the provisions of the New Drivers Act. The AA agrees this but believes that the Code could and should go further.

The right to a full licence in some jurisdictions is earned through accident and conviction free driving and the message that safe driving does not come with passing the test alone is an important one.

The main role of such a code would be to set out ways that new drivers should reduce their risk of being involved in serious road accidents. As with the Highway Code it will be for the police and courts to take into account breaches of the code when other offences are committed.

The AA has developed an outline of the Code which should be short, direct and to the point, telling probationary drivers why the code is important and telling them:

- * The use the courts will make of the Code;
- * the limit of six points under totting up;
- * to avoid driving between 0100 and 0500;
- * to avoid carrying passengers under 25, especially those who are not close relations;
- * to avoid driving after consuming any alcohol; and
- * reinforcing the role of speed in accidents causing death and serious injury.

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AA RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ASKED ON RESPONSE FORM

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Option 1

Do you agree with the intention to introduce mandatory logbooks for provisional licence holders?

No – but we do not disagree with the principle

We would prefer to be sure that the logbook was seen as a practical tool for responsible learner drivers and parents rather than risk it falling into disrepute as a necessary evil to pass the driving test which can be easily circumvented.

If yes, who should sign the logbook: the test candidate/accompanying driver/ADI?

If it were made mandatory a full licence holder (which of course includes ADIs) who meets the requirements to supervise a learner. The signatory should be required to give his or her address and driver licence number and sign a declaration stating that he or she was satisfied that the logbook requirements have been met. The AA would not support this role being confined to ADIs.

A logbook has a considerable value to the learner driver. If the government decides it is necessary for only ADIs to sign the document, some procedure must exist for the procurement of duplicate copies should they be needed. A logbook could cost considerably more to replace than, say, an MOT certificate for which duplicates are readily available. The AA would also expect the Government to consult further on any proposal to restrict authorisation of the logbook to an ADI.

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

Logbooks should ensure that more learners learn to drive and gain the necessary expertise to do so rather than just take enough lessons to be able to pass the test as is so often the case at present. They will also help direct parents and other volunteer supervisors into covering the whole driving syllabus. This is particularly important if learners are to undertake more driving practice during the period of learning to drive.

The AA would not support logbooks becoming effectively a compulsion to learn with a professional instructor.

While concerns about logbooks being signed lightly or even frivolously have already been discussed, the government should also note that there will be some parents who would lack the confidence to certify that their children have completed the training specified in the log book. Similarly there will be some learners who for one reason or another find it impossible to obtain a signature. The question of whether there should be some provision for official assessment in these cases (ie an optional test to take a test), rather than learners having to visit an ADI, should be considered.

Option 2

Do you consider that the learning period should be extended?

Yes

If yes, how long should it last?

Six months. Although there are safety advantages to a one-year learning period, the AA feels that this will lead to much unlicensed driving. Six months strikes an effective balance.

What, if any, exemptions should be permitted?

Ideally, drivers over 25. It seems unfair to impose restrictions on learners older than this who may be under time pressure to pass. Among these could be expectant mothers wanting to pass before their child is born, drivers with extensive experience overseas, and older drivers who perhaps have to start driving soon when a partner dies or ceases driving.

Should there be any changes to the licensing age requirements?

Yes

If yes, what changes should be introduced?

Drivers should be allowed to start to learn at 16½. They should not however be able to take their test until they are 17½.

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

Experience abroad, particularly in Sweden, suggests that the more practice drivers have as a learner, the safer they are likely to be as a newly qualified driver. The system should encourage learners to obtain additional practice, most likely with a parent, before they take their test, both by making more time available and by stopping the learner's goal being to pass the test in the minimum possible time.

According to data in the consultation document this change will not require many people to pass their driving test later than they do at present. It also will have no effect on the majority of drivers who pass their tests and drive safely.

Option 3

Do you consider that new pre-test requirements should be introduced?

No

If yes, what requirements should be introduced and how would they be enforced?

Not applicable

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

Effectively logbooks could achieve this.

Option 4

Do you consider that compulsory off-road basic training for learner car drivers should be introduced?

No

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

The main advantage of off-the-road training for motorcyclists is that it ensures that some practice off the road is gained before the rider can drive legally and unaccompanied on the highway. As learner car drivers have to be accompanied, and as professional instructors accompany many, it is hard to see any benefit that would accrue from this measure.

Option 5

Do you consider that compulsory theory training should be introduced?

No

Do you have any suggestions for improving theory learning on a voluntary basis?

No. The AA has yet to be convinced that the theory test has any benefit for road safety.

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

The nature of the driver training industry makes it hard to see how compulsory training could be implemented and as it is hard to see what benefits would accrue there seems no point in changing current arrangements.

Option 6

Do you consider that accompanying drivers should be required to take a compulsory training course?

No

Do you have any suggestions for voluntary initiatives to assist accompanying drivers?

It is vital that the approach of insurers to the addition of learners to their parents' insurance policy is changed. As highlighted in an earlier part of this response, the financial implication to a parent of providing a child with the opportunity to practice is considerable. For many people the decision not to help a learner gain practice will be made on financial, rather than any other grounds. The government should work with the insurance industry to review the actuarial evidence of a learner driver being involved in an accident while supervised compared with the risk of driving unsupervised after passing the driving test. The premiums in the AA's own research are the same, suggesting that the risks should be the same when most indications are that they are not.

Official guidance for accompanying drivers should be made widely available.

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

One of the goals of a structured approach to learning to drive is to increase the pre-test practice gained by learner drivers. Parents and other volunteers are crucial to this. The goal should be to encourage such practice, and remove those hurdles that do exist, rather than to place hurdles in the way of obtaining it.

Option 7

Do you consider that learner drivers should be compelled to take professional tuition?

No

If yes, how many hours should be the minimum requirement?

Not applicable

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

At the moment almost all learners take some professional instruction. There is no indication that those who take more professional instruction become safer drivers. This in itself argues against any requirement.

It has also been shown that professional instructors give the most instruction in the early stages of learning to drive. This suggests that any minimum requirement may have to be set at such a low number of hours that it could actually lower learner drivers' perception of the number of lessons and the amount of other practice that is needed to become a safe driver. This could be counter productive.

Option 8

Do you consider that learner drivers should be permitted on motorways?

Yes

If yes, do you think they should be subject to any special accompanying driver rules or restrictions on the type of car they may drive?

No.

Were a restriction to be imposed the most appropriate may be to make it a requirement for the learner to carry an up-to-date logbook.

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

Motorways are a day to day feature of driving life in many areas of the country. It seems absurd that learner drivers should not be able to practice on them.

If there are concerns about irresponsible use of motorways by learners, requiring a logbook to be both up to date and carried when on a motorway should help concentrate the mind of the supervising driver before he/she decides to let the learner join the motorway.

Option 9

Do you consider that skid training should be compulsory?

No

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

There is some debate on the effectiveness or otherwise of this in Scandinavia. This, coupled with climatic differences between the UK and Scandinavia, suggests the measure to be unnecessary here.

Option 10

Do you consider that a longer delay period should be introduced before an unsuccessful candidate could retake the practical driving test?

Yes

If yes, how long should the period be?

The 4-week rule should be reintroduced

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

The application of the four-week rule should mean that drivers who fail get more practice or take extra lessons. It should also reduce the number of applications by drivers who are not ready for a test.

Option 11

Do you consider that a new probationary licence code should be introduced for the first two years after passing the practical driving test?

Yes

If yes, should drivers be required to renew their licences after 2 years?

Yes

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

There is some evidence that the New Drivers Act provisions are not understood by those that they affect and the code would explain this to them. Renewing the licence would make it plainly clear when this “probationary” period had ended.

There is some concern within the consultation about the fee for renewal of the licence at the expiry of the probationary licence code and whether this will create more unlicensed driving. It has to be asked whether the exchange licence system,

as used for endorsements, could not be used in this case. If a driver chooses to continue to drive with a licence containing the probationary licence code when it no longer has any effect, it has no more impact than one driving with a spent endorsement still on the licence.

Most of the remainder of this consultation is devoted to looking at restrictions on new drivers. The Code could give details of any of these that are implemented. But an alternative approach would be for the code to include some “advice” for new drivers, “advice” of similar status to that in the Highway Code in that disobeying it is not a specific offence, but can be taken into account in deciding what action to take, and what penalty to impose following an offence. Such “advice” should be directed at new drivers under the age of 25, and should not apply once the age of 25 is reached. Effectively they would become probationary drivers to a greater extent than just being covered by the New Drivers Act.

Any of the options discussed later in the consultation could be included in the code, along with a warning that non compliance could be taken into account in deciding what action to take, and the penalty to impose, following any motoring offence committed. As an example, a careless driving charge could be treated more severely for a probationary driver carrying young passengers, than for one driving alone.

This approach would encourage probationary drivers to drive in the way felt most likely to improve their safety. At the same time it would provide for unexpected eventualities (taking over driving from a tired family member, getting lost and arriving home after a curfew, driving to work) which otherwise would require exemptions from a regulation. It is also less onerous for the police to enforce.

A fuller description of this proposal is given at the end of Part 2 of the AA response.

Option 12

Do you think that displaying P-plates would improve road safety?

Yes in the sense that it supports probationary drivers in adhering to the code

If yes, do you consider that it should be compulsory to use such plates after passing the driving test and how long should the compulsory period last?

It should not be made compulsory but should be included in the advice section of the probationary licence code for new drivers.

Were it to be made compulsory the period over which “P” plates must be displayed must apply for the same length of time as the probationary code (ie two years). Any other arrangement would only create confusion.

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

It would help new drivers adhere to the proposed code

Option 13

Do you consider that there should be a requirement to take a second practical driving test?

No

If yes, what would be the nature of that test and how should it differ from the current statutory driving test?

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

Drivers' accident risk declines and abilities improve rapidly from passing the test. A second test would, to most intents and purposes, be unnecessary.

Option 14

Do you consider that a lower blood alcohol level should be introduced for new drivers?

No

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

This would be administratively difficult and difficult to enforce. It may also make it appear that drinking and driving is more acceptable at a later stage in driving.

A probationary drivers' code could include advice on this, along with advice on drugs and driving.

Option 15

Do you consider that new drivers should be restricted to low powered vehicles?

No

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

Few new drivers have access to very high-powered vehicles and most if not all vehicles available now can easily exceed all speed limits. Insurance effectively controls access to powerful vehicles for new drivers.

A probationary licence code along the lines advocated above should advise against using high-powered vehicles (over 2000cc) which do not belong to the driver's parents.

Option 16

Do you consider that a lower speed limit should be introduced for new drivers?

No

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

This would pose enforcement problems, and cause frustration to following drivers and possibly overtaking accidents, particularly on roads outside built up areas. There would be no advantage in imposing lower limits on probationary drivers inside built up areas.

It must be remembered that newly qualified drivers already face a greater potential penalty for speeding – because of their lower points entitlement under the New Drivers Act. This would be yet further reinforced by the proposed probationary code.

Option 17

Do you consider that new drivers should be prohibited from driving during certain periods at night?

There is international evidence to support such a measure. However, it has to be accepted that much of this is from countries with driving ages lower than those in the UK. Many also appear to have exemptions, and to rely on parental pressure for enforcement.

The AA feels that this issue should be addressed within the probationary drivers' code (as advocated above) rather than in law. This would send a strong signal to drivers, parents and passengers, while not requiring specific enforcement.

If yes, please say when the prohibition period should apply:

0100 to 0500hrs

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

New drivers are seriously over represented in accidents at these times. Application of the code rather than an outright ban should mean that those probationary new drivers, who must use their cars during these hours, for example during the course of work, and to get to and from work, would not be affected unless they committed another motoring offence. Even then they would have the opportunity to tell the stopping police officer or a court why they were driving at these times.

Option 18

Do you consider that new drivers should be prohibited from carrying passengers?

There are strong indications from abroad that such measures are effective, both in protecting passengers and in reducing peer effect on new drivers. The AA feels that advice on this matter should be included in the probationary drivers' code as outlined above.

If yes, what restrictions should apply?

The advice should be against carrying passengers under the age of 25 who are not close relatives of the driver, particularly late at night - say between 0100 and 0500.

It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons:

Peer pressure is a major cause of new driver accidents and discouraging the carrying of passengers would make young drivers safer.

Do you have any other comments or suggestions for improving novice driver safety?

Many of the suggestions in this response have been based upon the AA's proposals for a probationary drivers' code of a significantly different nature to that envisaged in the consultation. If this approach is not practical the AA would support a restriction on new drivers carrying passengers under 25 years of age between 0100 and 0500.

Do you have any comments on the partial Regulatory Impact Assessment (Annex 3)?

No

Do you have any comments to make on the consultation process?

No

If you have any concerns about the way the consultation has been conducted, you may send them to Martin Leppert, DTLR, 6/10 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU or email: martin.leppert@dtlr.gsi.giv.uk

Do you agree to your comments being made public?

Yes

Please return this form by 7 June 2002 to:

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