



Exploring young people's attitudes to Graduated Driver Licensing

**Deliberative research findings report,
prepared by Ipsos UK
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Executive Summary

Introduction to the study, its aims and methodology

Ipsos UK was commissioned by the RAC Foundation to conduct deliberative research on young people's attitudes to Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL), ahead of a new National Road Safety Strategy. The research was conducted with people aged seventeen to nineteen (inclusive), who would be directly impacted by GDL if it were in place today.

Participants discussed an approach to GDL as suggested by the RAC Foundation, in which in seventeen-to-nineteen-year-olds seeking to obtain their full car driving licences:

- should be required to undergo a minimum six-month learning period before being eligible to take a practical test
- should not be entitled to carry any passengers aged twenty-five or under unless accompanied by an older adult (i.e. aged thirty-five or older) for the first six months after passing the practical test (or until the date of their twentieth birthday, whichever is sooner)
- the penalty for doing so being six points (resulting in immediate licence suspension and requirement to re-take the practical driving test under the New Drivers Act, 1995).

An exemption is proposed for a young parent carrying their own child/children (or dependants), for people qualifying for the enhanced rate of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP), for members of the armed forces and those driving as part of their in-work duties.

The objective of the study was to find out young people's views of the suggested policy and explore how these evolve through structured discussions and after learning new information about it. A key aim of the research was to identify aspects of GDL and its perceived impacts which promote or prevent its acceptance. The research sought to understand the range of views on the policy among participants of this age group, what is driving them, and what causes them to shift.

Ipsos UK conducted six online workshops with sixty-six participants in total, to hear the views of diverse people aged seventeen to nineteen. This included fully licensed, learner, and non-drivers. It also included people living in rural and urban areas across England, with a range of demographic characteristics. Fieldwork was conducted during April-May 2025.

Perceptions of driving, the risks and challenges involved, and suggested solutions before learning about GDL

Early discussions in the workshops, before information about GDL was shared, highlighted the importance of driving to participants' sense of independence and freedom. They held concerns about driving too – including the cost of becoming fully licensed, a general sense of pressure to pass and drive well, coupled with the challenges of driving while relatively inexperienced.

When presented with information about the risks associated with young drivers, the disproportionate representation of young people in road casualty numbers sparked several in-depth discussions and in some cases surprise. However, this did not necessarily result in strong calls for change, or support for a *full* GDL approach.

Participants spontaneously suggested potential measures which in some cases bore similarity to GDL rules, such as limits on passengers and extended learning periods, as well as greater use of technology (e.g. black boxes) to help reduce driving risks. In general, participants' suggestions revealed a preference for support and an enhanced process for learning to drive, and an aversion to measures which are punitive, or which could be seen to place blame on young people.

Views of GDL, the rules and exemptions presented, and how this evolved throughout deliberations

Across groups of learners, drivers, and non-drivers, participants were largely negative in their initial views of GDL after learning about it. They described it as too harsh, and unfair due to its 'blanket' targeting of all young drivers because of a dangerous minority. They accepted the overall intention of GDL to improve road safety but considered the passenger rule to be a restriction to young people's personal freedom. Not everyone connected the rule to the information they had been presented with on the increased risk of driving with passengers for all newly qualified drivers, not just high-risk drivers.

By the end of deliberations, participants' opinions of certain aspects of GDL became more positive in some cases, leading to a wider range of standpoints than at the start. Some concluded that GDL strikes the right balance between safety and restrictions for young drivers, and some felt that it has the potential to, with certain amends (such as making the passenger rule less restrictive). Among those who rejected the idea of GDL initially, some later recognised the need for change from the status quo, and some remained opposed because they could not reconcile perceived restrictions to personal freedoms with the safety case.

Key factors which influenced participants' views to change were learning about examples of GDL approaches in other countries (which participants considered stricter than the rules discussed for England) and learning new information about young driver risks and the safety benefits of GDL.

Participants' views of the minimum learning period were more positive than of the passenger rule – reflecting their earlier preference for an approach which prioritises learning and education over perceived restrictions to personal freedom and independence. The penalty for breaking the rules was considered severe, but therefore, an effective deterrent. The exemption for young parents made most sense to participants, although they were unsure about whether some of the other exemptions were the right choice (e.g. for young people in the armed forces).

Underlying factors shaping deliberations and the trade-offs discussed

When weighing up the potential benefits and drawbacks of GDL, participants' discussions were shaped by several underlying arguments. These focused on the perceived acceptability,

effectiveness and practicability of the GDL approach discussed, and its impacts in terms of fairness for different groups, and potential unintended consequences. This meant several factors stacked up, which participants traded off with safety. As a result, the safety case often came out weaker in discussions.

Moreover, while participants could see the benefits of GDL at the societal level, they most readily saw drawbacks for them personally, at the individual level. It was less easily recognised by participants that GDL would be designed to protect and benefit them as well as wider society, and not just restrict young people. Participants' viewpoints often showed some degree of optimism bias about their own driving. Those arguing that GDL would be unfair for young people typically considered themselves to be good, safe drivers and the idea that all newly licensed young drivers are at risk due to age and inexperience did not always land well.

Suggested modifications and alternatives to GDL

Participants suggested modifications and alternatives to GDL which they felt could increase its acceptability, practicability, effectiveness and fairness, and avoid possible unintended consequences. This included the suggestion to implement GDL in a phased approach, with piloting, to test how well it works and evidence its benefits before it is rolled out fully.

Participants' suggested amends to the individual rules represented a preference to add elements to and modify the minimum learning period, to help build learners' skills and experience. Meanwhile, most proposals regarding the passenger rule were to make it more lenient, for example reducing its duration.

Participants' proposals for exemptions reflected the groups they felt could be unequally and unfairly impacted by GDL. This included those who need to drive young siblings, and/or drive in emergencies like medical situations.

Conclusions and policy implications

Although participants were not generally supportive of GDL at the start of deliberations, their views did evolve after learning new information about it. This highlights the importance of sharing evidence to demonstrate and explain the safety case for GDL. Arguments against GDL about fairness, effectiveness, acceptability, practicability and possible unintended consequences were weighed up against the safety case.

Implementing GDL measures requires public acceptance to ensure young drivers comply with the rules, for the safety benefits to be realised. Any policy proposition for introducing GDL must be guided by the evidence on what works. It should also be grounded in the views and lived experiences of the people it will impact. Through participants' deliberations, this study has generated evidence on the potential arguments for and against GDL which could emerge if it were to be introduced, which could shape its overall public acceptability. It has also pointed to where public views could shift marginally, as well as bases of support.

A key implication for policymaking and implementation is that regardless of participants' views of the minimum learning period and the passenger rule, the penalty was considered significant enough to be an effective deterrent. Regarding the other rules presented, participants were generally more supportive of the learning, training and educational aspects of GDL, compared with the passenger rule. However, the evidence base shows that the safety benefits of GDL cannot be achieved only by applying a minimum learning period. This underscores the need to build greater public understanding of how GDL can reduce young driver risks, especially the passenger restriction. It also highlights the need to build social norms around the importance of supporting young people to drive safely more generally.

Introduction

The RAC Foundation commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct deliberative research to better understand attitudes towards Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) among people in England aged seventeen to nineteen.

Study background

The UK Government has committed to develop and publish a new National Road Safety Strategy.¹

Younger drivers (aged seventeen to twenty-four) are disproportionately represented in road casualty statistics. They are involved in a fifth of all road collisions resulting in KSIs² but only account for 7% of all licence holders.³ Inexperience and risk taking are known factors in collisions involving younger drivers.⁴ The presence of passengers and the period during a driver's first few months of driving have also been associated with increased collision risk.

Graduated Driver Licensing

To help younger drivers build the experience they need, the RAC Foundation has researched the impact that GDL would have in the UK, based on international experience.⁵ In a GDL policy proposal published in October 2024,⁶ the RAC Foundation proposes that, in addition to passing a theory and practical driving test, seventeen-to-nineteen-year-olds (i.e. only the youngest drivers) seeking to obtain their full car driving licences:

- should be required to undergo a **minimum six-month learning period** before being eligible to take a practical test
- should **not be entitled to carry any passengers twenty-five or under** unless accompanied by an older adult (e.g. aged thirty-five or older) for the first six months after passing the practical test (or until the date of their twentieth birthday, whichever is sooner)

¹ UK Parliament (updated 2024). Written questions and answers – Written questions, answers and statements. (<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-10-15/9128>)

² DfT (2023). Reported road casualties in Great Britain: Younger Driver Factsheet, 2022. Table 2. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-older-and-younger-driver-factsheets-2022/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-younger-driver-factsheet-2022>)

³ DVLA (2024). Table DRL0101 Provision and Full driving licences held, by age and by gender, Great Britain (<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fdata.dft.gov.uk%2Fdriving-licence-data%2Fdriving-licence-data-may-2024.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>)

⁴ DfT (2023). Reported road casualties in Great Britain: Younger Driver Factsheet, 2022. Table 9. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-older-and-younger-driver-factsheets-2022/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-younger-driver-factsheet-2022>)

⁵ Helman et al., (2022). Supporting New Drivers in Great Britain. (https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Supporting_new_drivers_in_GB_Helman_et_al_Oct_2022.pdf)

⁶ The RAC Foundation (2024). Safe mobility for young people – driving. (<https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Safe-Mobility-for-Young-People-RAC-Foundation-Proposal-Autumn-2024.pdf>)

- the penalty for doing so being **six points** (resulting in immediate licence suspension and requirement to re-take the practical driving test under the New Drivers Act, 1995).

An exemption is proposed for a young parent carrying their own child/children (or dependants) to take account of the fact that young parents may need to travel with their children. Exemptions are also suggested for people qualifying for the enhanced rate of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP), members of the armed forces and those driving as part of their in-work duties.

The above approach to GDL was presented to participants part-way through the workshops (explained further in the Methodology below). Researchers explained, in presenting the information about GDL, that this policy does not exist currently – references to ‘proposed’, ‘possible’, ‘potential’ or ‘suggested’ GDL rules and exemptions should be interpreted in this context, both in the discussion guide and this report.

Aims of the study

The purpose of this study was to facilitate deliberative research with seventeen-to-nineteen-year-olds, who would be directly impacted by GDL if it were in place today. It aimed to find out their views of the suggested policy and how these evolve through structured discussions and after learning new information about the policy. It sought the views of diverse members of the public in England within this age bracket, including non-drivers, learner drivers and fully licensed car drivers.

Deliberations were designed to allow participants to become informed about the issues involved. As such, a key aim of the research was to identify aspects of GDL and its perceived impacts which promote or prevent its acceptance, and to understand the range of views on the policy, what is driving them, and what causes them to shift.

Methodology and approach

A deliberative research approach

A deliberative approach was chosen to address the research questions. This was achieved by conducting six online workshops, each of which lasted three hours and was attended by a different group of participants, using the same topic guide of questions and stimulus material for every workshop. Participants were aged seventeen to nineteen (inclusive) and all lived in England, meaning the research was conducted with those who would be directly impacted by GDL, if already implemented.

In this study, deliberative research enabled participants to learn new information about the subject matter, share their views and the detailed reasons and factors shaping them, hear others' opinions and reflect on them, deliberate in detail and reach conclusions, suggestions and recommendations. It generated detailed qualitative data on participants' views, how these evolved throughout discussions, and why.

As a result, participants and their responses became more informed than people from this age group among the wider public (and it is important to interpret the findings with this in mind), as their discussions were based on hearing new information and evidence. By speaking to diverse members of the public aged seventeen to nineteen, we sought to hear from people with a range of characteristics, views and experiences. This approach also meant that the opinions and suggestions shared by participants were grounded not only in their own lived experiences and the evidence we presented, but were also a product of having heard, and reflected on, the perspectives of those with different views and experiences.

Three core principles of deliberative research are informing, deliberating and concluding. These are explained below, with details of how each was achieved in this study:

- In the **'informing'** stages of deliberative research, participants are provided with new information and evidence to discuss and reflect on, bringing people with different degrees of prior awareness of the subject matter to the same level of understanding. In this study, participants were informed during the workshops via presentations and stimulus (including fictional personas) which were designed to share information in a digestible manner and prompt participants to consider how the proposed GDL would affect others. This enabled the researchers to assess which pieces of new information led views to change, and how. As such, the information and evidence were not shared in one single presentation – rather, the 'informing' and 'deliberating' parts of the research were iterative. In separate short presentations, each followed by discussion, participants were introduced to information concerning young drivers and the road safety risks they encounter, followed by rules for a possible GDL approach (see Appendix B for the information presented), before learning about existing GDL schemes in other countries.

- In **deliberations**, participants share their views, experiences and arguments, hear from others, and reflect on what they have learned and heard. Within each workshop in this study, deliberations primarily took place in two smaller 'breakout' group discussions, each facilitated by an Ipsos researcher. Throughout deliberations, participants were asked to share and explain their views and consider and discuss the trade-offs they would be willing to make (for example between an approach to GDL designed to improve road safety, but which might restrict aspects of their personal individual freedom to drive after passing their practical test). Participants were also asked during deliberations to consider how the GDL rules could impact them personally and other people their age, and what would increase the acceptability of the GDL rules presented to them.
- In **concluding** stages, participants are asked to formulate their own priorities, conclusions, suggestions or recommendations, based on the in-depth discussions which they have taken part in. Workshops for this study reached the concluding stage of discussions by asking participants to suggest how they thought GDL in England could or should look (if at all) and why. This included revisiting suggestions for GDL which participants had made throughout the workshop sessions, inviting participants to tell us whether they would amend, keep or drop their previous suggestions, and why. When breakout groups reconvened, facilitators shared their group's discussions with the rest of the workshop, further informing each breakout group's discussions and providing them with potentially alternative perspectives.

Discussion structure

Workshops were conducted online in the following format, using a semi-structured topic guide of questions and stimulus to ensure consistent and comprehensive lines of questioning across all workshops and breakout groups (the topic guide can be found in Appendix C):

- **Introduction and welcome:** The lead facilitator (workshop chair) welcomed participants, explained the format for the workshop, gathered informed consent and delivered the first presentation on young people's driving habits.
- **Group discussions in virtual breakout rooms:** Participants introduced themselves, shared their reactions to the evidence they were presented with, heard new information about young drivers and the road safety risks they face, discussed this information and shared spontaneous thoughts on possible solutions to address such risks. There was no mention at this stage of GDL.
- **An introduction to GDL:** In a plenary session, the workshop chair presented a set of possible rules and exemptions for GDL, the rationale, and a set of fictional personas of people who could be differently impacted by it. Facilitators gathered participants' immediate reactions to this information in plenary, before participants were presented with a short poll aiming to gauge their initial views of the GDL.
- **Breakout group reaction to GDL:** Participants discussed the proposed GDL scheme in more detail, sharing perceived benefits, drawbacks, risks and other potential impacts, before discussing each rule and exemption individually. The conversation then broadened to cover

the scheme's fairness, practical trade-offs between safety and mobility, and how the rules might have personally affected them or people they know. This was followed by a short break.

- **International comparisons and breakout group discussion:** In a plenary session following the break, participants were presented with examples of GDL approaches from other countries, which they then further discussed in their breakout groups. Here, they were prompted to reflect on the proposed GDL in England given this additional context.
- **Trade-offs and acceptability breakout group discussion:** Participants discussed what would make the proposed GDL more or less acceptable and were prompted to consider what trade-offs they would be most and least willing to make. Participants were also asked their opinion on the GDL, whether this had changed, and if so, how and why.
- **Policy recommendations breakout group discussion:** Participants discussed the rules and exemptions they would implement (if at all) to reduce collisions and risks among young drivers if they were in charge of making this policy. They were also invited to propose changes to the rules and exemptions they had been presented with earlier in the workshop.
- **Conclusion:** In plenary, participants were invited to share their closing views, whether and how these had changed since earlier on in the workshop. They were given a final opportunity to share any further thoughts, thanked, and told how the findings from their discussions will be analysed and reported upon.

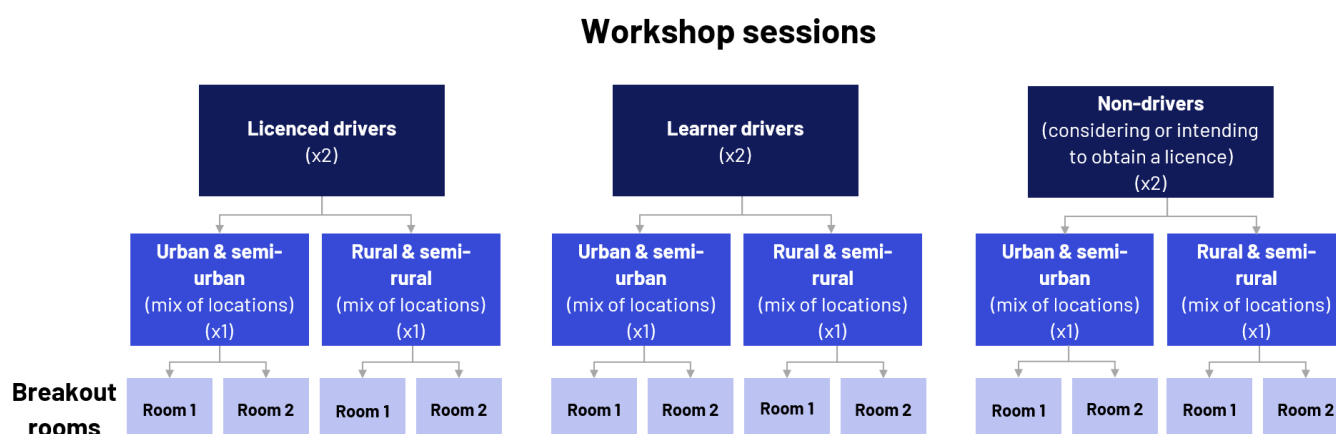
The term 'GDL' was not used by facilitators – rather, 'Graduated Driver Licensing' was used, and this was only after the point at which it was introduced in the presentation.

Workshop sessions and sampling

All workshops were conducted online, enabling the research team to engage with participants in different locations across England in the same sessions. Fieldwork began on 22 April 2025, completing on 6 May 2025, with each workshop taking place in the evening for three hours.

The workshops were organised into three pairs: of licensed drivers, learner drivers, and non-drivers who were considering obtaining a licence. Organising the workshops in this way was intended to hear from each group separately. This was to avoid mixing those who may have different views of GDL based on their driving experience, which could discourage some participants from sharing their personal experiences and opinions.

Each pair included a workshop attended by participants living in urban and semi-urban areas across England, and a workshop attended by participants living in rural and semi-rural areas across England (Figure 1.1). Rural and urban classifications were self-described by participants based on the area they live in (rather than recruiters assuming urbanity/rurality based on the participant's region or county). These areas were carefully chosen to include more rural and more urban locations in different counties with varying rates of young driver casualties. This could impact views on the risks involved in young people driving and the types of measures that could reduce them and was therefore considered an important sampling criterion.

Figure 1.1: Division of workshops

Each workshop consisted of 10-12 participants, who were split evenly into two breakout groups for in-depth discussions. This number of participants per workshop was large enough to hear from diverse voices and experiences within and across workshops, while allowing the facilitation of breakout group discussions with a manageable number of participants who would each have time and space to share their views.

Breakout groups were composed of participants with a mix of demographic characteristics to ensure diverse participants were involved in each discussion. This included ensuring a mix of gender, age (seventeen, eighteen or nineteen), ethnicity and socio-economic grade in each breakout group, as well as including participants with a range of attitudes and behaviours related to driving.

To achieve this sample composition, a recruitment screener questionnaire was used with target quotas set on the above characteristics. A full quota table can be found in Appendix A.

In total, sixty-six participants aged seventeen to nineteen took part in the study and all target sample quotas were met. In line with standard social research practice, participants were paid an incentive after completing their workshop.

Understanding the findings in this report and limitations of the research approach

The research findings have been arrived at through a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the qualitative data generated in workshops, which has been validated by researchers. These findings are based on the views expressed by participants, which are reflective of the diverse voices we might hear if people are given enough time, space and information to discuss the issues in depth. This means the views, suggestions and ideas shared are more informed than those of a typical person who has not been taken through the deliberative process and should be interpreted as such. Likewise, the nature of the study's sampling and methodology mean its findings are not designed to be statistically representative in any way and should not be interpreted as such.

As in any social research, it is important to balance the chosen research design to meet the study's objectives with the time and resources available, and to recognise limitations of the selected

approach. In this study, the workshops were conducted exclusively online, meaning they did not include any digitally excluded participants. To ensure the study was as inclusive as possible for those who were able to take part online, the research team offered one-to-one technical support to all participants. The online approach also meant participants were brought together from across England and from a range of urban and rural areas, which would have been more challenging using a face-to-face approach and could risk excluding those unable to travel long distances.

The deliberative process involved sharing detailed information with participants, including statistics and fictional personas. Participants may differ in how easy they find it to absorb, understand and retain such information. To avoid overwhelming participants with too much information at once, the evidence and other stimulus were carefully curated to present information in stages (and to hear reactions to each individual piece of information shared). Stimulus materials were also presented visually on screen as well as verbally, to support those who preferred different approaches. Facilitators kept the information on screen so that participants had time to read it again and could ask clarification questions if needed. In future similar studies, to support participant engagement, it may be beneficial to use a wider range of presentation formats (including short films) and speakers, so that participants hear diverse speaker voices.

The study's sampling approach meant diverse young people took part, which was apparent in the range of views they held. While it can be the case that 'group think' sometimes leads participants to adopt a narrower range of shared views by the end of a deliberative research process than at the start, there did not appear to be 'false consensus' in this study. Participants in many cases disagreed with one another throughout discussions and made different suggestions to one another for GDL at the end of the workshops. What participants were willing to share in their discussions may, however, been influenced by the group setting, where it may be more difficult to admit to undertaking risky driving behaviours or feeling fearful about some of aspects of driving, for example. In future similar studies, individual interviews would be useful for this reason in addition to group discussions.

Perceptions of driving, the risks and challenges involved, and suggested solutions before learning about GDL

This chapter explores participants' perceptions of driving, their awareness of the risks regarding young drivers, and their top of mind potential solutions to reduce those risks. This was discussed at the start of each workshop before the concept of GDL and the three rules were introduced. These discussions provided important context to understanding participants' reactions to GDL later in discussions – for example, by surfacing the perceived benefits, opportunities, challenges and risks which participants experienced and associated with driving. This often shaped participants' views later in discussions.

Perceptions of driving among young people and the risks involved

Participants were highly aware of the risks and pressures associated with driving, including the affordability of learning to drive and running a car, safety concerns, and social expectations. A theme of pressure emerged during early discussions – to pass the practical test, manage the costs of driving, drive well, and manage distractions while still appearing confident among friends.

Financial pressures and driving affordability

Participants described the cumulative cost of driving lessons, tests, vehicle purchase, insurance, and maintenance – often in the context of limited earning capacity and the rising cost of living. Insurance costs were mentioned as particularly challenging, with some participants exploring alternative options like pay-as-you-go insurance to manage these expenses.

“You pay for your lessons, then you pay for your test, and then if you pass your test, you’re probably going to want a car and if you get a car, you’re gonna have to pay for insurance. And it all piles up.” (Learner, rural area)

The financial implications of limited test availability (i.e., the need to continue paying for lessons while waiting for a test slot) were a concern for learners and there was frustration about this among those who had recently passed. The pressure to own a “nice” car was also mentioned by some participants, suggesting that social or cultural expectations around their first car may add to financial pressure for young drivers.

While these financial pressures were common across participants living in different areas, some challenges were more pronounced among those living in rural areas because for them, the limited availability of public transport increased the need to own a car.

Other drivers' behaviour

Other drivers' behaviour emerged as a pressing concern for learners and newly qualified drivers. They described more experienced drivers acting with impatience, aggression and intimidation, which manifested in various ways including dangerous overtaking, horn beeping, and verbal confrontations. Learner drivers felt especially vulnerable to intimidation. One participant, for example, recounted feeling stressed, pressured and like other drivers took advantage of their learner status when sounding their horn at them. Newly qualified drivers also reported feeling targeted, with some noting that 'P plates' seemed to make them stand out and invite aggressive behaviour from others.

Participants also expressed concern about dangerous driving by others, including drunk driving and disregard for speed limits, particularly in rural areas. These behaviours contributed to some participants feeling vulnerable on the road.

Participants across the workshops worried about being blamed for collisions due to their inexperience, especially without evidence like dash cam footage. This added to the pressure they felt while driving.

Poor road conditions

Participants (particularly learners and new qualified drivers) highlighted poor road conditions as a significant challenge which makes the already complex task of driving even more difficult. Potholes were mentioned as a specific hazard – one participant recounted a recent experience where hitting a pothole led to a flat tyre the following day, leading to increased maintenance costs.

"Well, obviously areas that have, like, potholes, stuff like that, that can cause more incidents between young drivers." (Non-driver, urban area)

Rural roads were mentioned too. A participant described the difficulties of driving on roads covered in manure, which created slippery conditions and posed a safety risk.

Roadworks were often cited as a source of difficulty. Participants noted that ongoing construction can force them to change their usual routes and learner drivers explained this requires them to adapt to unfamiliar situations while still developing their basic driving skills.

Some participants linked poor road conditions to a lack of funding for infrastructure. One noted that in their area, limited road maintenance budgets resulted in frequent roadworks and road closures, further complicating the driving experience.

Inexperience

As discussions progressed, participants indicated that inexperience and learning gaps were a concern, even though these were not always explicitly highlighted as risks of driving. Participants

across different stages of their driving journey – from prospective drivers to those recently qualified – recognised various challenges stemming from their own lack of experience.

Some prospective drivers expressed feeling nervous about the responsibility of driving, acknowledging that they might not feel ready for the task. Learners and newly qualified drivers noted the differences between learning to drive and real-world driving experiences.

"I feel like real-world driving, as opposed to driving to pass your test is completely different." (Fully licensed driver, rural area)

This sentiment was echoed by others who used the term 'real-world' driving and felt that driving lessons primarily taught them how to pass the test rather than how to handle day-to-day driving situations safely.

Participants identified several specific challenges related to inexperience: responding quickly enough to react to unexpected events, driving on unfamiliar road layouts (e.g. complex junctions, roundabouts, motorways), driving alongside large vehicles like HGVs which can be intimidating, and driving in different conditions like poor weather, darkness or in rural areas with agricultural vehicles on the road. All were described as situations where inexperience could be problematic, particularly in the transition from learner to independent driver.

Managing distractions

Mobile phone use while driving was widely recognised across all groups as a problematic distraction because of its prevalence and its potential to divert attention from the road. Phone-related distractions were more openly discussed than other distractions, although the influence of passengers, particularly friends, was also mentioned as a potential distraction. However, views on this were mixed. More nervous participants expressed anxiety about driving with friends shortly after passing their test, citing concerns about noise in the car and the pressure to engage in conversation while trying to focus on driving. This perception of passengers as distractions shifted when discussing potential restrictions on carrying passengers later in the discussions (see findings on participants' views of the GDL passenger rule).

The temptation to show off or succumb to peer pressure was acknowledged. Learners and non-drivers said that newly qualified drivers might be inclined to engage in risky behaviours to impress their friends, potentially leading to crashes.

Participants did not tend to discuss strategies and solutions for managing these challenges, they instead seemed to accept them as part of the driving experience. Notably, they often attributed responsibility for these issues to external factors, such as the (distraction related to the) size of mobile phone screens or the behaviour of passengers, rather than considering their own role in managing these challenges.

Links made between driving risks and challenges

The driving risks and challenges described by participants appeared in some cases to be linked, where one issue compounds another. This was something participants recognised, saying it could feel overwhelming. They explained that financial pressures, for instance, can exacerbate inexperience because the high costs of learning to drive may lead some young people to rush through the process, potentially limiting their exposure to diverse driving conditions. As one participant noted, there is “added pressure to kind of pass first time” to avoid additional costs, which could result in less comprehensive learning.

Poor road conditions were another example given. Dealing with potholes and other road surface issues, challenging driving conditions like darkness and frequent roadworks requires skills that participants explained new drivers may not have fully developed.

Newly qualified drivers also reported feeling pressured by impatient or aggressive drivers, which could cause stress, and this could combine with sometimes experiencing peer pressure to drive in a certain way, potentially leading to risky decisions.

“When people first pass the test, if they've got the friends in the car, they might show off...which could cause an accident.” (Learner, urban area)

Finally, newly qualified drivers explained that managing distractions, particularly from phones and passengers, can be amplified by inexperience and as one participant put it, having friends in the car made it feel like they had to “learn how to drive again”.

Reflecting on risks associated with driving

After opening discussions about young people and driving, participants were presented with evidence about young people and road traffic collisions and casualties. This included information about the disproportionately high representation of young drivers involved in road collision deaths and serious injuries, the link between deprivation and road casualties, between gender and road casualties, between the presence of passengers and increased collision risk, and heightened risk of collisions during the first few months of driving. This information was designed to provide participants with an overview of the challenges and risks facing young drivers and to give context to discussions about potential interventions like GDL. The following sections detail participants' reactions to each of the key statistics in order of their impact on generating the most discussion (highest impact first).

Disproportionate representation of young drivers in road casualty numbers

One of the most impactful statistics presented to participants was the disproportionate involvement of young drivers in road casualty statistics. Participants learned that while drivers aged seventeen to twenty-four account for only 6% of all licence holders in Great Britain, they are involved in 18% of all road collisions resulting in deaths and serious injuries.

Participants were surprised to learn this, particularly as some perceived younger drivers as potentially more alert than older drivers and so better equipped to avoid driving risks. They were surprised that such a small proportion of drivers could have this impact on the statistics and when recalling the information presented, participants across workshops felt this statistic was a key takeaway from the information presented. Those who were confused by the information needed more time to process the idea of young people's disproportionate representation in road casualty numbers and consider what this means. There were also some participants who had already expected young drivers to be at higher risk and were less surprised by the statistic.

Despite the statistic's impact, it did not provoke strong emotional responses or calls for immediate action. Instead, there was more of a sense of resigned acceptance among participants, with some defensiveness about whether young people were to blame.

Higher risk in deprived areas

Participants learned that the more deprived an area is, the higher the proportion of casualties involving young drivers. Participants were interested in why this might be, and tended to say it was something they had not considered before. Participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (and not just those from lower social grades) found it counterintuitive, having expected that people in less affluent areas might be more cautious drivers due to the financial risks of having a collision and needing to pay for car repairs. They were eager to understand the reasons why and offered several potential explanations:

- Road conditions: those from smaller towns or rural areas suggested that poorer road conditions in deprived areas might contribute to higher collision rates. They drew on their awareness of incidents and crashes on country lanes near their homes.
- Limited access to driving education: some speculated that young people in deprived areas might have less access to comprehensive driving lessons, potentially leading to a "crash course" approach to learning.
- Misconceptions about urban versus rural risk: some participants had initially assumed that busier, built-up urban areas would have higher casualty rates.

While participants viewed this statistic as something that was unfair (for those in more deprived areas), again, it did not provoke strong calls for action. However, it prompted some consideration of the need to ensure that young people in deprived areas have equal opportunities to learn to drive and access driving lessons.

Overrepresentation of young male drivers

The statistic highlighting that male drivers aged seventeen to nineteen are overrepresented in road casualty data compared to all male drivers prompted a range of reactions – some participants were surprised, and some said it confirmed what they had already assumed. Female participants tended to be less surprised – they often drew on anecdotes about young male drivers being more likely to engage in risky behaviours like swerving between cars or "showing off" while driving. The

“boy racer” stereotype was frequently discussed and participants recalled news stories about groups of young men involved in crashes.

“There’s a bit of a culture of sort of boy races, isn’t there? So, you know, it’s sort of to be expected that young people that are inexperienced at driving are going to crash the most.” (Driver, urban area)

Unlike their reactions to the statistic about casualty rates in deprived areas, participants felt less need to understand the reasons for the overrepresentation of young male drivers. Their own explanations focused primarily on behavioural factors rather than inexperience, physiology, or brain development, for example.

Presence of passengers and driving risk

The statistic highlighting the link between the presence of passengers and increased collision risk for young drivers received less attention than the other statistics shared in the same presentation.

This is noteworthy, especially considering that passenger restrictions later emerged as one of the most contentious aspects of the GDL system discussed. It was not clear whether participants were more reluctant to discuss this aspect of young driver risk because it was uncomfortable or unwelcome, or whether the statistic was simply less top of mind than the others.

The information resonated more strongly with learner drivers compared to those who have not yet started learning or those who have already passed their test. They were more likely to acknowledge the potential for passengers to be a source of distraction while driving.

Higher risk during the first few months of driving

The evidence that risks are highest during a young driver’s first few months of driving generally prompted a smaller response from participants compared to other statistics. Participants felt this was logical and an expected consequence of inexperience.

Those planning to learn to drive and current learners interpreted this as an understandable outcome of being new to driving. They drew parallels with other learning experiences, such as riding a bike for the first time. Some learner drivers showed a slight defensiveness in their responses and were keen to emphasise that this increased risk was not necessarily their “fault”, but rather an inevitable part of the learning process. In contrast, those who had already passed their test engaged less with this particular piece of information.

Spontaneous ideas which aligned with GDL principles

At the start of the discussions, before any information about GDL was presented, participants occasionally mentioned rules or ideas that align with GDL principles. However, these mentions were sporadic and not part of a comprehensive understanding of GDL systems. (It is important to note that ‘GDL’ itself was not explicitly mentioned at this point). These GDL-like suggestions were

not top of mind for participants. They were often brought up in response to discussions about risks faced by young drivers, when asked about potential solutions, or when making comparisons to driving in other countries.

Participants mentioned:

- Limits on passengers: This was the most common GDL-like suggestion among those who raised them, which included licensed drivers, learners, and non-drivers. Participants who had family abroad were aware of similar rules in other countries, particularly Australia and New Zealand. They understood these restrictions as lasting for a significant period after obtaining a licence, with the rationale to reduce distractions and the temptation to show off, thereby improving safety.
- Extended learning periods: Some newly licensed drivers spontaneously discussed the need for longer learning periods. They felt this would help build confidence and experience, addressing the perceived gap between the controlled learning environment (which may not provide sufficient preparation for independent driving) and 'real-world' driving.
- Minimum supervised hours: A group of urban learners suggested a requirement for a certain number of supervised driving hours *after* passing the test, to gain additional experience and comfort before driving solo. Suggestions typically involved having an experienced driver accompany the new driver for a set number of hours before they could drive independently.
- Probationary periods for new drivers: Participants across two workshops suggested a period of stricter rules or consequences for new drivers. This included higher penalties for speeding or other rule-breaks during the first year of driving, and the possibility of licence revocation for major mistakes within the first few months. However, this was contested by others in the group.

It is important to note that while these ideas were spontaneously raised, they were not universally supported or extensively discussed at this stage. Attitudes towards these suggestions by others were mixed – some reacted positively, some were sceptical.

Discussions surfaced several underlying needs and concerns about the transition from learner to independent driver. While participants did not explicitly suggest a GDL system as a solution, some of the needs they articulated aligned with measures that are similar to components of GDL. For example, participants discussed the need for ongoing learning support after passing the driving test, ways of bridging the gap between gaining the skills required to pass the test and real-world driving, ways of mitigating risks during the initial higher risk period after becoming fully licensed and generally having a more structure transition to independent driving. GDL could provide potential opportunities which could help address these needs, such as structured post-licence learning periods with supervised driving requirements, learning requirements to give exposure to more challenging driving conditions (e.g. nighttime driving), passenger restrictions or a phased approach to full licencing with restrictions incrementally lifted. GDL could also address more specific challenges and needs that participants identified, like peer pressure and distractions, through greater education and awareness integrated into the learning process.

However, it is important to note that these connections have been arrived at through analysis as opposed to being explicitly made by participants. Although participants recognised these needs early in the workshops, they did not automatically endorse or suggest GDL-style restrictions as solutions, even when presented with them.

Early suggested solutions to risks faced by young drivers

Participants across all workshops spontaneously suggested a range of solutions to address the challenges faced by young drivers. At this early stage in discussions, they were more enthusiastic about ideas that did not limit freedom or increase costs. Their suggestions primarily focused on technological innovations and enhanced education – many of these proposed solutions are not currently part of typical GDL plans in other countries.

Black boxes and other car technology

Participants saw black boxes, also known as telematics devices, as a potential tool to encourage safer driving habits by monitoring speed, acceleration, and other driving behaviours. They noted that the risk of insurance cancellation or price increases due to risky driving detected by these devices could serve as a strong incentive for safer driving.

However, opinions on black boxes were not uniformly positive. Some participants, particularly urban drivers including both learners and those recently licensed, raised concerns about privacy and data security. Others questioned their effectiveness for certain professions, such as emergency responders who might need to drive at high speeds. There was also scepticism, with some suggesting that drivers might revert to risky behaviours once the black box period ends.

Other technological solutions proposed included:

- Smartphone apps that could monitor driving and provide feedback, similar to black boxes.
- Restrictions on vehicle 'horsepower' for younger or newer drivers to reduce the risk and impact of collisions.
- Promoting cars with advanced safety features like automatic emergency braking.
- Mandatory dashboard cameras for new drivers to provide evidence in case of crashes and potentially improve driver behaviour.

These technological solutions were generally viewed favourably as they were seen as ways to improve safety without directly restricting drivers' freedom.

Changes to learning, testing, and post-test learning

Participants proposed numerous modifications to the current driver education, testing, and post-licencing systems. These suggestions reflected a desire for better preparation for 'real-world' driving – a need they had previously identified when discussing risks. Their ideas also indicated a willingness to receive more guidance and support, even after obtaining a licence.

Changes to driving tests were a common theme. Participants across workshops advocated for more realistic and comprehensive assessments, suggesting the incorporation of unfamiliar routes and diverse driving conditions. Some proposed making the tests more challenging, arguing that this would result in better-prepared and more adaptable new drivers. There were also calls to include a greater focus on the consequences of unsafe driving in the theory test.

“But I think they should also adapt the way the driving tests are done and make them more realistic.” (Driver, rural area)

Regarding driving lessons, participants suggested several approaches that they felt were novel, would help bridge the gap between controlled lessons and real-world driving, and would involve handling the more unusual and difficult aspects of driving with the instructor:

- Integrating distractions into lessons, such as having passengers present, to better simulate real-world driving conditions.
- Incorporating motorway driving into the learning process.
- Implementing a gradual transition to solo driving, where instructors reduce their level of control as the learner progresses.
- Creating designated practice areas for learner drivers, potentially with signage to alert other road users.

Post-test learning emerged as a significant area of interest, with participants recognising the need for continued support and education after passing the driving test, with openness to the idea of ongoing assessments of their driving. Suggestions included:

- A period of supervised driving after passing the test, without formal examination.
- Mandatory refresher courses, up to a year after passing the test.
- Using technology like black boxes to monitor new drivers and provide targeted feedback and support.
- Having extended driving licences or additional qualifications.
- Mandatory ‘P-plates’ for a period after passing the test to alert other drivers to a driver’s inexperience.
- A post-test “check on ability”.

Wider education, communications and awareness-raising

Participants, particularly those who had already passed their test and prospective drivers not yet learning, emphasised education and experience-based solutions rather than purely punitive measures. They favoured interventions that would equip young drivers with the awareness of driving risks and the skills and confidence to drive safely.

Participants proposed incorporating more risk awareness training into the learning process, potentially including statistics and real-world examples of collisions and their causes, to proactively address risky driving behaviours. There was also strong support for integrating driver

education into school curricula. Participants suggested this could cover driving risks and benefits, peer pressure awareness, and general road safety.

Participants called for public campaign messaging and wanted it to show the 'hard reality' of risky driving, akin to public health messaging (this may be related to participants having just been presented with road casualty statistics, which surprised some). They recommended impactful presentations by police or firefighters, sharing real-life consequences of risky driving to create a lasting impression. They felt that such graphic content would be more likely to 'stick' with young people and influence their behaviour.

(These points about campaigning and awareness were not raised by learner drivers, who seemed more focused on the learning process and how instructors could help them).

Regulation and enforcement

Participants suggested various regulatory and enforcement measures to improve road safety, particularly for young and learner drivers, in order to target those who are driving dangerously.

Several participants advocated for harsher penalties for specific offences. They wanted to see stricter punishments for drink driving (including higher levels of fines and licence revocation) and increased penalties for speeding. Some also wanted to see these harsher penalties for new drivers during the first year of driving, to deter these behaviours among new drivers and young people especially, and to promote safer driving habits early on. However, not everyone supported this idea as some felt it may not be fair.

To tackle harassment of learner drivers, some participants called for rules and penalties to create a safer learning environment. Learner drivers wanted to see more protection through rules, explaining they often felt targeted or vulnerable on the road. This also revealed an 'us versus them' mentality, where learners were more focused on solutions that would protect them specifically, rather than considering broader measures that might protect all road users.

Addressing infrastructure

Participants made suggestions to address road infrastructure related issues, including those which make their driving experience more challenging than necessary. While they did not necessarily view these as direct solutions to the disproportionately high collision rates among young drivers, they felt that current infrastructure issues exacerbated the problem and often these external factors relating to the road environment were top of mind.

Suggestions included widening roads, particularly in areas with on-street parking; using more speed cameras, speed bumps and reducing speed limits in built-up areas; improving road signage (especially in rural areas) to reduce reliance on satellite navigation devices which might cause distractions; and increasing roadside lighting (especially in deprived areas) to improve visibility.

Insurance incentives

Insurance costs were a concern for some participants who were feeling the financial strain of driving, particularly in relation to the overall expense of driving. In response, they suggested a system of insurance incentives to encourage safer driving practices. The primary suggestion was reduced insurance premiums for demonstrating safe driving behaviours. Participants viewed this as a potential 'win-win' solution: it could motivate young drivers to adopt safer driving habits while also addressing their concerns about high insurance costs. This was a popular idea among some learner drivers who were apprehensive about the costs they would face once they pass their test, highlighting how financial considerations play a role in how young people think about driving.

Levels of enthusiasm for solutions and views on government intervention

Views on government intervention – before introducing the idea of GDL – were mixed. There was implicit support for government involvement in the above suggestions for regulation and enforcement. One participant suggested local government should implement infrastructure changes like increasing the number of speed bumps, and central government should fund initiatives like refresher courses.

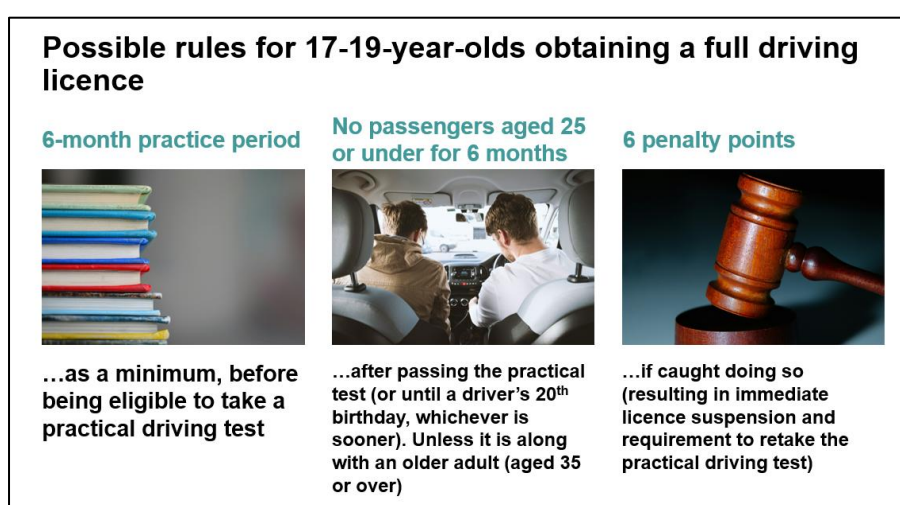
However, some expressed scepticism about the government's ability to effectively influence driver behaviour. Concerns were also raised about the potential for the government to unfairly blame young drivers for collisions. Despite these reservations, the idea of government-funded initiatives was appealing, with participants suggesting that young people would find this "very attractive".

Overall, participants seemed more enthusiastic about solutions that offered support, education, or financial benefits, rather than those that imposed restrictions or punishments. This preference aligns with the needs they had expressed earlier in discussions for more preparation and support in transitioning to independent driving.

Views of GDL, the rules and exemptions presented, and how this evolved throughout deliberations

This chapter begins with participants' initial reactions to the overall GDL approach presented to them (Figure 1.2) and their concluding views following in-depth discussions. It then outlines participants' detailed deliberations over each GDL rule and the exemptions, and key arguments and information which led views to evolve.

Figure 1.2: GDL approach presented to participants



By the end of the deliberations, some participants' opinions had evolved in response to learning new information, discussing the details in depth, considering the implications for themselves and others, and hearing other people's opinions on GDL. This included debating the proposed rules and exemptions, the discussions of which are explained following the details of participants' 'start and end' points. The findings in this chapter also identify the key moments, debates and pieces of information which influenced perspectives along the way.

As a reminder, participants were presented with information about GDL including three possible (or sometimes referred to as 'proposed') rules: a six-month minimum learning period, the passenger rule, and penalty points for breaking it. They were provided with the rationale for each, and a possible set of exemptions. They were later introduced to personas of fictional young people whose lifestyles would be differentially impacted by GDL, before examining comparisons to existing GDL schemes in other countries.

Participants' initial reactions to the concept of GDL

Upon hearing about GDL, participants' reactions were largely negative, and this was consistent across different driver types (learners, new drivers, and non-drivers). None fully endorsed the approach presented.

Many said it was too extreme (before later learning about examples from other countries), “harsh” and “strict”. Some described it as a blanket approach which would impact all young drivers in society, which they felt was disproportionate to the potential safety gains and unfairly targets a minority of unsafe young drivers. They referred to ‘boy racer’ young driver types they had mentioned in earlier discussions at the start of the workshops, who they felt the risks primarily lie with, and whom GDL should target. These conversations were often framed in terms of talking about other people (as opposed to themselves) engaging in risky driving behaviours like speeding. Participants felt that punitive measures should be focused on these ‘other’ types of drivers, rather than all young drivers.

While participants generally accepted the purpose of GDL to improve road safety, they found it difficult to balance this with what they perceived as a restriction on their personal freedom and mobility (details of how this trade-off was discussed are in the next chapter). As mentioned, some of the safety statistics stood out to participants as surprising, such as the disproportionately high representation of young drivers in road casualty numbers. This evidence was sometimes drawn upon later in discussions when discussing the need for GDL to reduce risks among young drivers and improve road safety. However, participants did not always find it easy to connect these road risk statistics with what they perceived to be the more problematic elements of the proposed GDL rules (namely the passenger restrictions).

“Obviously, I do think it's very important to try and protect safety where you can, but I think considering that it's around 20% of the like serious injuries and stuff from the young drivers, that still leaves 80% of deaths and serious injury from everybody else...and in that group there's no kind of restrictions on their driving.” (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

Road safety was not ‘top of mind’ at the start of workshops, nor was it a problem that all participants necessarily thought needed to be urgently addressed. Therefore, despite being presented with the evidence on young drivers and road risks, participants did not necessarily consider GDL a proportionate solution in their immediate reflections after learning about it.

This led to the shared opinion that the principle and concept of GDL is unfair on young people – a viewpoint around which there was broad consensus across and throughout workshop discussions. Participants explained the restrictions to their personal freedom, were GDL in place, would compromise the benefits of driving which are the very reason many young people gain a licence. In these early discussions about GDL, the fairness argument focused on the impact on young people’s independence, and their ability to drive with friends for social reasons and to meet responsibilities such as giving lifts to family members (other fairness arguments emerged later too, which are discussed in this chapter and the next). Participants who were frustrated to hear that GDL would in theory impact this via its passenger rule did not necessarily connect this with the evidence on the risks of having passengers in the car with them (others did make this connection but still reacted negatively to the idea of passenger restrictions).

"I think the not having people in your car is quite harsh... I think it would be really frustrating if you just passed and you can't give your friends... lifts around." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

By comparison, the extended learning period was generally more acceptable to participants when initially presented, as it was not seen as an infringement on young drivers' independence or freedom of mobility, nor was it considered as unfair as the passenger rule.

The other main top of mind concern about GDL when initially presented was the ability to implement and enforce it. Some participants were sceptical as to how it could be policed in practice and whether, therefore, this would compromise its credibility and effectiveness. At this stage in discussions, this was typically articulated through questions or confusion about how GDL could work. Later, participants pointed to more specific enforcement challenges which are detailed below and in the next chapter.

How views of GDL had evolved by the end of deliberations

While most participants' views did not change dramatically by the end of their workshop discussions, opinions in some cases softened, leading to greater open-mindedness or acceptance of certain aspects of GDL, and a wider range of views than at the start of workshops. Key discussions and information which caused participants' views to change are outlined later in this chapter.

"It's opened my eyes...it's something to think about." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

Where views did change, they tended to become more positive rather than negative. However, concerns about passenger restrictions and to some extent the practicalities of enforcement persisted across all workshops (of learners, new drivers, and non-drivers) and some participants were ambivalent or had mixed feelings throughout. This left a range of stances on GDL by the end of deliberations as follows, and at various points in the workshops, some participants shifted between these standpoints:

- **GDL strikes the right balance between safety and restrictions for young drivers:** in this viewpoint participants concluded that the approach discussed was reasonable, the least restrictive option among the international examples discussed and strikes a good balance and compromise between safety and personal freedom.
- **GDL is nearly the right balance:** participants arriving at this conclusion felt the approach discussed is on the right track but requires fine-tuning – their acceptance of it would be subject to certain conditions or amends. While they viewed the proposal as less harsh and more proportionate than the international examples, they felt that adjustments were needed to strike the right balance between safety and personal freedom (including making the passenger rules less restrictive), and to avoid unfairly disadvantaging some young drivers (including adding certain exemptions).

“There are the positives and the negatives to it. So, I think it could be altered in a way that it still is a thing, but... there's a bit more flexibility with it.” (Fully licensed driver, rural area)

- **Shifting from outright rejection to recognising the need for action:** some participants became less opposed to the idea of GDL as discussions progressed, in recognising that action is needed to improve young driver safety and the status quo is not sufficient. However, they were unsure that GDL is the right solution and advocated for more significant modifications to it than in the above viewpoint (see the chapter on suggested modifications and alternatives to GDL).
- **Consistent rejection of the need for change:** for these participants, the version of GDL discussed, especially the passenger rule, were too restrictive and impractical and these views did not change throughout. They started and finished by describing GDL with terms like “outrageous”, arguing that it fails to adequately consider young people’s social and economic needs and imposes excessive limitations on young drivers’ freedom and mobility. They could not reconcile this with the safety case.

Views of the six-month learning period

The practice period of at least six months before becoming eligible to take a practical driving test was generally the least contentious of the three rules discussed in group deliberations.

When discussing this rule in depth, participants could see the potential road safety benefits of ensuring a minimum amount of practice and learning time for young drivers to build driving skills and experience, with limited impact on their medium- or long-term freedom and independence. This view was shared across learners, drivers and non-drivers – learners, in particular, could see the benefit of this rule helping to build confidence, reduce the feeling of pressure when learning to drive, and reduce risks relating to inexperience.

This rule was the component of GDL which led some participants to take the stance that such a policy could strike the right balance between safety and restrictions for young drivers (the first of the four standpoints above). They felt that it would do this by balancing any individual inconvenience with the wider societal benefit of having more competent and safer drivers on the road (by contrast, participants tended to be less convinced that this ‘end’ could be achieved through the means of passenger restrictions). Some participants therefore described it as “fair enough”.

Participants identified benefits of this rule at an individual and societal level. A commonly mentioned perceived benefit was building young drivers’ confidence. Participants recognised that a minimum six-month period spent building driving skills would also expose learner drivers to a greater range of circumstances and experiences on the road than if learning in a much shorter ‘crash course’ approach. This in turn could build confidence and reduce the perceived pressure to rush the learning process (benefits at the individual level) and lead to safer young drivers (with safety benefits at the societal level).

Some learner drivers felt that knowing this rule was in place could reduce feelings of anxiety about passing the practical test, potentially making it less “nerve-wracking” and allowing learner drivers to progress at their own pace. They thought it could promote a more supporting learning environment which puts the right emphasis on developing the skills required to drive well and safely. Hearing some participants share this view in the context of their own feelings about driving led others, in some cases, to become more accepting of this rule.

Some participants thought it would be easy to enforce the minimum learning period through documentation used during driving lessons and through existing learning structures. However, many participants had doubts about how it would work, and how effective it would be at improving driving skills, in practice.

These participants argued that a minimum number of learning hours, rather than a minimum number of months spent learning, would more effectively achieve the intended aims of ensuring learner drivers build the right level of driving skills and experience. They thought six months sounded arbitrary. They also pointed to the risk that some young people learn for very few hours, or sporadically, with intense learning at the start and end of the six months but with little practice in between – a potential loophole. Those who had passed their practical driving test argued that regular and frequent practice was just as important, if not more important, than the practice sessions spanning six months. This led to suggestions of a log book approach to record hours spent learning, skills learned, and driving conditions experienced, as a measurable way to track progress (this is detailed further in the chapter on suggested modifications and alternatives to GDL).

As well as concerns about potentially inconsistent practice during the six months, some participants felt this rule would not account for individual learning paces. They explained that fast learners who have accrued lots of hours of driving practice may be ready to pass their test more quickly. Meanwhile, slower learners may need longer but may consider the six months an expected timeframe in which to pass their test – moreover, this may cause frustration if it is not possible to book a practical test in this timeframe.

“[What] if you're a fast learner...but then you have to wait the rest of the months...” (Fully licensed driver, rural area)

When thinking about how this rule could interact with the system for booking driving lessons and practical tests, some participants pointed to the potential for ‘system overload’. They explained that instructor availability can be limited in some places, especially in rural areas, and this rule could further stretch their capacity by causing some learners to undertake more lessons than otherwise (meaning instructors have less time available to take on new learners). Consequently, they argued that this could delay young people in rural areas obtaining a driving licence, especially given the demand for practical test already appears to outstrip available test slots.

The other key concern relating to the potential impact of this rule was that it could disproportionately affect young people in lower-income households. Participants suggested that learning for six months would require more driving lessons than otherwise, increasing the overall costs of learning to drive and making it difficult for some young people to afford. Some felt this would be unfair and could contribute to inequalities, especially if delayed learning, or choosing not to learn to drive, leads young people to lose out on employment opportunities because they cannot drive to work. Participants living in rural areas explained young people where they live could be disproportionately impacted because it is so much harder for them to get to work without the option of driving.

"I think the six months minimum of learning, for some people, might not be financially achievable."
(Learner, rural area)

Views of the passenger rule

Compared to the other GDL rules, passenger restrictions were received the least well among participants. In some cases, even participants who saw potential value in other aspects of GDL, like the minimum learning period, consistently rejected the overall concept because their opposition to the passenger rule outweighed their appreciation of the safety benefits.

Those who did identify positives of this rule – and these participants were across driver, learner and non-driver workshops – recognised that it could improve road safety by addressing the “root cause” of young driver risks. Some of these participants acknowledged that having others in the car may be a distraction for drivers and this could be dangerous – therefore, by removing passengers aged twenty-five or under for the first six months after passing, newly licensed drivers may drive more safely during this period.

"I think that's pretty good, based on the stats, because a lot of people, they get their driver's licence just so that they can drive their friends around and obviously that can lead to more accidents." (Non-driver, urban)

However, as mentioned, not everyone made the connection between the intention of the passenger rule to improve safety, and the statistical evidence shown earlier on the increased risks associated with having passengers in the vehicle. Those who did still found it difficult to accept the idea.

Participants identified several drawbacks of this rule in terms of the impact it could have on individuals, and the ability to enforce it.

Throughout deliberations, they returned to the argument that this rule would restrict young people's independence and freedom, which are a key incentive to learn to drive. They felt disheartened by the idea of not being able to drive with friends immediately after passing their test, with concerns about the impact on their social lives and mobility, and that of other young

people. One participant raised the example of a couple under the age of twenty who would not be able to drive to go on a date together fewer than six months after the driver gained their licence.

As mentioned, these arguments led to claims that the rule would not be fair on young people – without much wider consideration of fairness at the societal level – this view generally did not shift much after learning new information throughout the workshops.

"I think the whole point of getting a driving licence is like independence... being told who I can and can't have in the car kind of defeats the whole point." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

"The point where you do pass your test is the point where you get your independence and freedom." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

Across the workshops, participants also commonly pointed to practical challenges that this rule could pose to young people who learn to drive in order to give lifts to young family members, among other reasons. Some drivers, for example, said they need to drive their younger siblings to or from school, which the passenger rule would prevent for six months after passing. As such, they felt this rule would disproportionately affect those with family responsibilities beyond young parents, and those in rural areas where alternative transport methods may be limited and it may be more necessary and practical to lift-share with friends.

"If he's got a doctor's appointment or hospital appointment, I take him because my Mum and Dad work all the time... So, me and my older brother, we take care of my younger brother. And he's seventeen... I think they need to take in consideration like the siblings part of it because I just feel like they don't want to say that they don't want friends in the car together." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

From an enforcement perspective, participants felt the passenger rule would be difficult to implement. They argued it could take large amounts of police time to pull over young drivers they suspect have underage passengers in the car and thought this would divert police resources away from more serious offences such as drink driving. They questioned how passengers' ages would be verified once a driver is stopped. Because of the perceived difficulty of enforcing the rule, some said this would lead to widespread non-compliance, which in turn would impact the effectiveness of GDL at improving road safety.

Some participants argued the rule would simply delay the experience of learning how to drive with passengers in the car – for example, if they drive with a friend for the first time six months after passing their test or when they reach the age of twenty, it could be dangerous as they may not know how to handle the potential distraction.

There was confusion about why this restriction was purely based on age and some said the rule as presented did not consider the driving experience of passengers, which could be more important. For example, someone aged twenty-four or younger with several years of driving experience may

be a 'safer' passenger than a twenty-six-year-old with no driving experience, as they may have a better sense of how to behave safely in the car (for example, avoiding causing distractions).

Some also felt the age bands were arbitrary and illogical – for example, pointing out that a twenty-one-year-old could supervise a learner driver but could not be a passenger for a newly qualified driver of the same age.

Participants suggested possible amends to this rule which they felt would make it more acceptable and less unfair, such as a more gradual approach to transitioning to having passengers in the car, or shortening the restriction period. Further details are in the chapter on suggested modifications and alternatives to GDL.

Views of the penalty for breaking the passenger rule

Receiving six penalty points for breaking the passenger rule, resulting in immediate licence suspension and the requirement to retake the practical driving test, elicited mixed reactions throughout deliberations. Participants across the workshops of different driver types reacted to the rule by saying it would be severe, and some were surprised to hear the number of points would be as high as six because they felt that carrying passengers is less risky than other behaviours like speeding or drink driving.

"Six points, I don't really [think it] warrants driving your friend back home... So, I think that's probably a little bit extreme." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

However, because of its severity, they followed on to point out that therefore, the penalty had the potential to be effective as a strong deterrent to breaking the passenger rule.

"With the six penalty points, I wouldn't risk that at all because that's your whole licence plan completely." (Learner, rural area)

"I think if the six months is in place, then six penalty points is strong enough to actually get people to stop driving people in their car." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

In commenting that receiving six points would be a very harsh level of punishment, participants typically made comparisons to the penalty for other driving offences like speeding – which, as above, they felt was more dangerous than having passengers in the vehicle. One participant added that someone older than twenty-five could drive in a much riskier manner without receiving a high penalty for carrying young passengers.

"I could be driving perfectly... And someone who's older than 25 could do something much worse." (Non-driver, rural area)

However, some could see how this rule could lead to improved road safety by encouraging safe driving among young people more generally (not just in relation to having underage passengers in the vehicle). Participants also thought it would be relatively easy to administer the penalty, since

the points system already exists, and having an immediate consequence for breaking the passenger rule would mean young drivers would take it seriously. Some commented that although the penalty is severe, it should be easy to avoid being penalised if the rules are followed.

A possible drawback that some participants considered was the penalty causing unintended consequences, albeit in rare situations. They suggested it could lead to more dangerous scenarios such as young people choosing to drink drive rather than travelling as a passenger with a driver their age who has not consumed alcohol. They also questioned whether there might be emergency scenarios where a young person needs to drive a passenger aged twenty-five or under (for example, to seek medical help) but they choose not to, for fear of losing their driving licence, meaning the passenger does not receive the medical assistance needed. Participants who had earlier pointed to young people who give lifts to their siblings also thought the penalty could discourage what they considered to be responsible lift-sharing behaviours. They mentioned lift-sharing more generally with friends for environmental reasons in this context, too.

Because participants did see the importance of having a strong deterrent in place which is easy to enforce for the GDL rules to be effective, they suggested amends to the penalty which they felt would make it fairer for young people. These included a smaller number of points received – this is explained further in the chapter on suggested modifications and alternatives to GDL.

Exemptions

Participants had mixed reactions to the exemptions included in GDL, presented as follows:

- Young parents with their own child(ren), so they can travel with their child(ren).
- People who qualify for the enhanced rate of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
- Members of the armed forces.
- Those driving for in-work duties.

They agreed there would need to be exemptions in place, but thought the rationale behind the selection of the exempted groups was not always clear or fair.

“Why armed force members? I don't really understand.” (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

For example, some learner drivers accepted the suggested exemption for young people in the armed forces. By contrast, some fully licensed drivers were confused about why armed forces would be exempted. They did not think young people in the armed forces are any less prone to risk-taking than the average young person while driving in their own time, and they pointed out that any driving done as part of work duties would already be excluded from the rules.

Some participants thought that essential workers, such as NHS staff and police officers travelling to and from work (which would be outside any in-work driving they do), should also be exempted as they may still need to carry passengers (e.g. lift-sharing with colleagues). They felt it was not right to make it more difficult, potentially, for young essential workers to drive to and from work.

While participants generally accepted the exemption for those driving for in-work duties, because it seemed practical, they raised concerns about the potential for people misusing this exemption. They questioned whether it might lead to some young people dishonestly claiming to be driving for work when they are not, especially if there would be no set means to verify this. One learner driver suggested that employers should have a responsibility to assess whether their younger employees are safe to be driving for work with passengers in the car.

“How do you prove what you're doing is for work or not? You know, can you only be in a like business registered vehicle or something like that?” (Fully licensed driver, rural area)

The exemption for young people receiving PIP was generally uncontentious. Participants across workshops either agreed with this suggestion or asked for more clarity on the rationale. For example, some questioned why this would be based on receipt of PIP rather than on having a disability or illness and did not make the link that the PIP exemption may be easier to enforce administratively compared to case-by-case medical exemption. Some asked how fair it was that those with a disability could have passengers in the car, whereas those taking sick or unwell siblings to hospital who did not qualify for PIP would not be exempt.

The suggested exemption for young parents with their own children was often the last exemption participants chose to discuss. It was typically the one which elicited the least concerns and questions, and “made the most sense”. Some asked why young parents had exemptions but not young carers, and some returned to arguing that the proposed GDL would be unfair for young people who needed to drive their siblings.

Key factors, discussions and pieces of information which caused participants' views to evolve

Some participants felt positive about certain aspects of GDL (such as the minimum learning period), and negative about others (such as the passenger rule). Having mixed opinions throughout was more common than participants showing outright support or opposition for every element of the GDL presented to them – views were not especially polarised at the start or the end of deliberations.

Some participants became more open to the concept of GDL as they learned new information. Some went back and forth over the details, and some thought it could be acceptable with amends. While no one started from a position of outright support for GDL, participants typically became more supportive of elements, rather than more opposed. These participants ended the deliberations feeling that GDL strikes the right balance between safety and restrictions for young drivers, or that it had the potential to, with some conditions or modifications.

On balance, it was participants living in rural areas who tended to be more negative than those in urban areas. This was because of concerns about restrictions to the social and work lives of people like them, with poor public transport alternatives to driving.

For those participants who did end the deliberations feeling opposed to GDL or an aspect of it, this was often due to the passenger rule and view that it was an unfair infringement on young people's independence and freedom.

Discussions about key pieces of evidence and information which caused participants views to shift were as follows:

- **International country comparisons:** Presenting examples of existing GDL approaches in Australia (New South Wales), New Zealand and the United States (California) had the most significant impact participants' views of the approach suggested for England. This was because the learning requirements, timescales and passenger rules seemed more extreme and restrictive by comparison (details of these international examples can be found in Appendix B). After seeing the minimum twelve-month learner licence and twelve-month provision licence periods in New South Wales, and the eighteen-month passenger restriction period in New Zealand, some participants returned to the equivalent suggested rules for England and felt they were more reasonable than they had earlier on. Some participants also identified aspects of the international examples they thought were a good idea, such as the requirement to prove nighttime driving experience in New South Wales. They felt this was a more valuable test of experience than an arbitrary timeframe for the minimum learning period.
- **Learning new information about the safety benefits of GDL:** Revisiting the safety statistics shown at the start of discussions sometimes led to a softening of views on GDL, and often these were the individuals who ended the deliberations feeling that GDL strikes the right balance between safety and personal freedom. Specifically, it was the statistics on potential lives saved and serious injuries avoided which shifted views. This had a greater impact on these participants than the evidence suggesting GDL would lead to a better pass rate for drivers taking their practical test for the first time, cutting waiting times for test centres.
- **Anecdotes and personal stories:** Considering the personas of fictional young people impacted in different ways by GDL, and hearing personal anecdotes from others in group discussions, sometimes changed views. This worked both ways – the persona of Samira, who cares for her 16-year-old sister and needs to take her to regular medical appointments, led some to suggest the rules or exemptions would need to change for them to support GDL. The same was the case when participants who heard from people in their group who explained they would no longer be able to drive their younger sibling to school as they had only recently passed their practical test. On the other hand, some recounted young people involved in collisions, and this made the safety arguments more tangible and relatable to the group. For example, one participant mentioned a news story about a newly qualified driver involved in a fatal crash, suggesting that a longer learning period might have prevented it.
- **Financial benefits of lower insurance for young drivers:** Discussing the potential for reductions in insurance with GDL in place, because of a demonstrable improvement in road safety among young people, was appealing to some. This was one example of considering the

individual-level benefits of improved road safety, as opposed to taking a 'citizen' view of the wider societal benefits (such as reduced collisions).

Underlying factors shaping deliberations and the trade-offs discussed

The opinions shared and points made by participants during deliberations – particularly those who disagreed with certain aspects of GDL – related to several underlying arguments. These were the perceived acceptability, effectiveness and practicability of the GDL approach discussed, and its impacts in terms of fairness, and other unintended consequences which could occur alongside the benefits of improving road safety.

Often the above underlying arguments were interlinked and participants addressed more than one, for example, when explaining ways in which the effectiveness of GDL could be reduced if it is not practical to enforce. Arguments relating to the acceptability of a temporary reduction in young people's personal freedoms, and to fairness, were particularly powerful in shaping participants' views and were commonly traded off with safety.

These arguments underpinned participants' overall views to greater and lesser degrees as discussed below. They represent likely topics of opposition if GDL is introduced in England as they are a product of the arguments that proliferated among young people once the topic was socialised through workshops and after participants became more informed.

Acceptability of GDL in restricting personal freedoms

Despite discussions at the start of the workshops about risky driving among "boy racers" and young people driving dangerously "for the buzz" after passing their test, there were no early calls for a *full* GDL policy with the rules later discussed. The status quo – of no existing GDL in England – seemed acceptable to participants until learning about the risks associated with young people driving. Largely, the current system was considered acceptable because of the perceived importance of driving to young people's freedom, independence, and opportunities that this affords. Reactions to GDL when initially presented were often understood to be limiting these freedoms.

This starting point (of perceived acceptability of the status quo) then changed for some, who concluded that GDL would strike the right balance between reducing risk and restricting a degree of freedom of mobility for a period of time. Some disagreed but felt GDL could be made acceptable to them – and other people their age – with conditions or amends. However, some found it unacceptable in any form (usually because they felt the passenger rule was too restrictive to personal freedoms).

"They might not want to do them, but at the same time it's put in place to help keep a safer society... The more rules that are enforced, the less silly accidents... hopefully then decrease the amount of accidents which occur in general for not only the driver himself but for the road users."
(Learner, rural area)

These views influenced what participants thought others would make of GDL too, and how acceptable it might be to the wider public. Participants did not tend to point to examples of groups who might be more inclined to support GDL. When prompted, opinions were mixed on what people of other ages might think – especially when considering parents of young drivers. Some said their own parents would be reassured by GDL, while some said their parents would prefer them to travel with a friend straight after passing their test, to provide help if needed.

In general, participants – even non-drivers and learners – often found it difficult to see how GDL could be accepted as something which benefits wider society until revisiting the information shown earlier on this, highlighting the importance of sharing up to date evidence such as road safety statistics.

Perceived practicability and feasibility of enforcement

Participants could see how some aspects of GDL would be easy to administer – especially those relating to the minimum learning period, given the system for driving lessons is already in place. They also felt the principle of using penalty points made sense and would be easy to administer since this system already exists for other driving offences.

However, concerns about practicability were raised in terms of the feasibility of police being able to identify and stop young drivers breaking the passenger rule and verify passengers' age. Some were worried that this approach could lead to discriminatory practices when police are deciding which young people to pull over.

Participants also pointed to the administration of exemptions as potentially problematic. They were unsure how it would be possible to verify whether a young driver was exempted (although this quickly led to solutions being suggested, such as identification for young drivers in receipt of PIP).

"I mean, surely it would mean a cop car pulling over any car they suspect and doing lots of checks on the side of the road... I don't think they'd be very practical." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

More generally, participants felt that properly policing the roads to enforce the passenger rule would take too much police time. They explained it would divert resources away from what they perceived to be more dangerous and serious offences like drink driving. This indicates the comparatively lower perceived risk they attach to newly qualified young drivers with passengers in the car.

"I just think it'd be a waste of police resources, pulling over kids for having two 19-year-olds in a car when you've got someone that's drunk driving." (Fully licensed driver, rural area)

When participants discussed an aspect of GDL they thought could be challenging or problematic to administer or enforce, this also impacted their view of how effective GDL could be. They noted that in practice, the deterrent effect of breaking the rules will only work if young people are convinced that they are being enforced.

"It's going to take a lot of policing to keep it under control. I think most people would just be like, if I get caught, I get caught. I'd rather have my mate in the car." (Learner, urban area)

Views on the potential effectiveness of GDL

Different components of GDL were thought by participants to have different levels of effectiveness.

By the end of deliberations, participants were broadly convinced by the road safety benefits of the minimum learning period (some also viewed it favourably because it was preferable to the international examples, rather than judging it solely by its potential effectiveness at reducing young driver risks). Some were even keen on the idea of even building more elements of learning into it – such as a requirement to gain experience of driving at nighttime or in severe weather conditions before taking the practical test – to enhance its impact.

Although the passenger rule was generally the least preferred component of GDL, some participants could see how it could be effective in reducing risks by removing potential distractions in the car. Others disagreed and were less convinced by this, despite seeing the earlier statistic on increased collision risk with passengers in the car.

The penalty, because of its severity, was considered an effective way of deterring young people from breaking the passenger rule. However, as mentioned above, participants also thought it was likely that some would still take the risk and break this rule, if they were not convinced it could be enforced. They felt this would undermine the policy as risks associated with young drivers would not be reduced, and in turn, this would make it less fair that responsible drivers are subject to a GDL which may not even improve road safety.

The above effectiveness discussions focused on compliance with the policy among young people, and effectiveness at supporting young people to drive more safely as a result of the learning and passenger rules. There was less discussion about how this could, in turn, improve road safety statistics and therefore demonstrably evidence the benefits of GDL.

Participants also did not tend to readily reach the conclusion that some of the risks present in young people's driving are age-related. Instead, some held the view that GDL would be more effective if it targeted experience rather than age. This points to possible information gaps – about the impact of age on risky driving behaviours, and demonstrable road safety benefits of GDL – which could be addressed through communication or education on brain development and driving among young people.

Perceived fairness for young people

While participants understood that GDL would impose the same rules on all young people (except exempted groups), they argued it could have differential impacts, which could make it unfair.

As mentioned in the above chapters, participants said the passenger rule could unfairly disadvantage young people with responsibilities for driving siblings in the first six months after passing the practical test, leaving these individuals unfairly impacted.

Likewise, participants in rural areas felt that young people like them would be disproportionately impacted as they (and their friends) rely on lift-sharing. They thought this could prevent young drivers in rural areas undertaking the same social and work activities as their urban counterparts who have better access to public transport alternatives. One rural driver highlighted how the passenger rule could impact shared transport arrangements for work, stressing the importance of sharing petrol costs and getting home safely at night with colleagues the same age. This made him worry about GDL's potentially negative impact on job security, especially for young people working night shifts or in areas with limited public transport.

The minimum learning period also led some participants to say that the overall cost of learning to drive could end up being higher, which would disproportionately impact those in low-income households. They explained those who cannot afford this may need to delay getting a job, with financial impacts. However, reduced insurance costs for all young people also emerged as a potential financial benefit throughout discussions.

The above arguments focused on differential impacts for certain groups of young people. In addition, participants made the fairness argument that targeting young people (rather than older drivers who may also cause collisions), made them feel unfairly blamed for risks associated with an irresponsible minority of people their age. These views showed a degree of optimism bias about their own driving, among participants who considered themselves to be safe drivers compared to others who drive dangerously. They referred to GDL being a "blanket approach" which would restrict all young drivers, including responsible ones, to provide a road safety benefit to everyone. The counterargument, that victims of collisions, fatalities and serious injuries caused by young drivers can also be experienced by anyone in society, was raised far less often.

"It's done to appease the collective, not the few who don't fall into that... dangerous role." (Learner, rural area)

The feeling that various aspects of GDL were unfair, especially the passenger rule, was widespread across different groups, including those of fully licensed drivers, learners, those who had not yet learned to drive, and participants from both urban and rural areas.

Anticipated unintended consequences

Some participants argued that the passenger rule contradicts policy ideas to promote lift-sharing for environmental reasons, because restricting young drivers from carrying passengers for a period of months would lead to more cars on the road, increased fuel consumption and higher emissions.

There was a concern that the minimum learning period could worsen existing test backlogs. Participants noted that test availability is already a problem, and adding further requirements could exacerbate this.

In relation to the suggested exemptions, some participants said it was likely that young people may break the passenger rule and falsely claim the passenger is over the age of twenty-five. 'Cheating' the system in this way they said would undermine its effectiveness.

More generally, some felt the principle of GDL contradicts wider social norms and messages which encourage young people to become more independent, by limiting this independence for a period of time.

Some participants also claimed GDL could lead to *more* dangerous driving practices, like drink driving. They gave the example of someone consuming alcohol at a party, calling a friend who has recently passed their practical test for a lift home, the friend needing to refuse this to avoid breaking the passenger rule, and the person who has consumed alcohol might choose to drive instead.

There was a concern – especially among drivers – that GDL may delay the period of learning how to drive safely in different conditions and with passengers, because people may choose to wait until their twentieth birthday to avoid the passenger rule. They felt this would displace the risk of driving with passengers rather than reducing it, because drivers would face the same challenges but at a slightly later age. They did not make the link that with age, the risks associated with young people's driving (including the presence of passengers) are reduced, meaning driving after passing the test may be less risky at the age of twenty than seventeen, for example. Some also mentioned the potential for irresponsible driving behaviour after the six-month period ends, because of the excitement of being able to finally take friends in the car.

Debating the trade-off between societal safety and counterarguments for GDL

All the above underlying arguments were traded off against the safety case. The acceptability of a perceived restriction to young people's freedom and independence while the rules apply, and arguments relating to fairness, tended to be particularly powerful. As mentioned, for some people this outweighed the safety case.

This leaves it difficult for the safety argument to 'win' in the trade-off, since several arguments stack up against it. The statistics on the risks associated with young drivers were impactful in shaping deliberations on GDL throughout the workshops, but not always remembered, top of mind, or convincing enough to participants. This highlighted the challenge of proving the safety benefits of a policy before it has been put in place and had time to make a demonstrable impact. However, given the influence of the international examples of GDL on making some participants view the suggestions for England more favourably, there is a potential for combining this with those countries' own impact statistics, to show the effect GDL has already had elsewhere.

Suggested modifications and alternatives to GDL

As discussions progressed, participants proposed various modifications to the overall GDL approach and each of the three rules presented to them. They also made suggestions for additions or alternative components of GDL they thought could increase its acceptability, practicability, effectiveness and fairness, and reduce unintended consequences.

At the overall level, participants suggested GDL could be implemented in either a phased approach, to test the effectiveness of the minimum learning period and the passenger rule individually, and/or to test both in a trial period. The idea was that this would create a pilot to test how well the approach works and evidence the benefits of GDL before it is rolled out fully.

Participants also generally expressed a preference for enhancing the learning, training and educational aspects of learning to drive, over comparatively restrictive measures, because they felt this would present a fairer compromise and trade-off between safety and limits to young people's freedom and independence.

Another suggestion for GDL overall made by a non-driver living in a rural area was to raise the minimum driving age altogether, to avoid the risks associated with young people driving (this comment was made in the context of learning about the passenger rule, and the idea of reducing the overall driving age was not a widely held view).

"If I feel like if there had to be something...the age that you should start driving then should increase as opposed to not being able to...banning you having somebody under 25." (Non-driver, rural area)

Modifications to the suggested GDL rules

Participants suggested amends to the **six-month minimum learning period**, which they felt should be altered but not removed or replaced, as follows:

- Applying a minimum number of hours of practice instead of the six-month period. This was suggested by drivers, learners and non-drivers, as they believed this would provide a more consistent measure and ensure everyone achieved a base level of practical experience. Some suggested a minimum number of hours per week or month, and some proposed using a logbook to track these hours.
- Participants' views were mixed on whether it should be stipulated that the hours of driving practice are with an instructor. If so, this could offer better quality teaching (participants pointed out that practice with a parent, for example, may not be a good idea if the parent is not a good driver), but incur much higher learning costs.

***"I also think with the hours things doesn't specifically have to be with a paid driving instructor because obviously not everyone can afford it."* (Learner, urban area)**

- The logbook was also suggested in the context of recording competencies and skills and tracking progress, including driving in different weather conditions and darkness (a suggestion made by those who had passed their test), as opposed to simply recording hours spent driving. Participants felt this would be more likely to make real changes in the quality of young people's driving by exposing them to different conditions which those learning during summer, for example, may otherwise not experience. (The nighttime driving requirement presented in the example of GDL in New South Wales, Australia, was popular among some drivers).
- Participants across workshops suggested shortening the minimum learning period, as a compromise to make it more acceptable and reduce the risk of increased costs of learning to drive. Suggestions ranged from a minimum learning period of one month, to four months.
- No one suggested replacing the extended learning period altogether, although as mentioned, some raised concerns about how learners would fund this and questioned whether there could be financial support for young people from low-income households.

***"I think if you're doing that as well, then the government should... give you some money because you could so easily not afford 20 hours... I think lessons can be like 40 pounds an hour..."* (Non-driver, rural area)**

Participants suggested a range of modifications to the **passenger rule** which they felt would make it more acceptable, by better balancing safety with the perceived restriction to young people's independence and freedom to drive:

- Participants across workshops wanted the passenger restriction period to be reduced to three months instead of six.
- Some proposed allowing passengers of any age if the passenger has held a driving licence for two years without any penalty points. This arose in response to questions of whether it would make sense, under this rule, to even allow older passengers over the age of twenty-five if they do not hold their own driving licence.
- One participant suggested restricting passengers only at night, as they felt it was impractical to do so during the day, while another suggested allowing only two passengers as a maximum.
- Participants suggested allowing passengers if the passengers had completed an additional 'good passenger' test which would teach and encourage safe passenger behaviours (such as not causing distractions). This was an example of the preference for education-based approaches rather than restrictions, to raise awareness among people more widely (than just young people) of the importance of safe passenger behaviour.
- Some participants proposed a phased implementation of the passenger rule, activating it only after a young driver has been caught for a driving offence. This reflected calls to target

specific 'bad' drivers and promote individual responsibility, and a general dissociation with or 'othering' of, dangerous young drivers.

"If you get like caught driving dangerously or something like that, get in a crash, then I'd enforce that rule with the no passengers." (Learner, urban area)

- Some suggested gradually scaling back the passenger rule so that young drivers could be allowed more passengers in their car over time.
- Those who found this rule completely unacceptable suggested removing it entirely.

When prompted to discuss the third rule regarding **penalty points**, participants made suggestions in their view, would make it fairer and more proportionate to the offence of breaking the other rules, and more effective at rooting out dangerous young drivers:

- Some suggested a tiered penalty points system, where points on their licence would increase (from a smaller number than six) with multiple infractions of the passenger rule.
- Some participants in the driver groups suggested a smaller number of points (such as three) in general, because of how severe they felt the penalty was.
- However, because participants broadly agreed that the penalty of six points would be an effective deterrent, many suggested no changes to it at all.
- There were also no suggestions that a direct financial incentive, such as far cheaper insurance, would make GDL significantly more acceptable. This also indicated that participants did not readily make the link between safer driving under GDL and savings through insurance.

"I'd definitely say the penalties would be the best option due to the fact that drivers know that if this, like, if they get caught doing something wrong, they will get their licence taken off of them." (Fully licensed driver, rural area)

Exemptions

Participants spontaneously suggested extensions to the exemptions discussed, as well as entirely new ones, because they felt that the proposed GDL was too restrictive and did not accommodate the diverse needs of young people. However, some believed that additional exemptions would defeat the purpose of the GDL (by exempting too many young drivers, reducing its effectiveness in improving road safety). Some also argued it would be simpler and easier to administer and enforce if the restrictions were relaxed rather than managing a complex system with numerous exemptions.

A key theme was family responsibilities, health, and emergencies. Participants suggested exemptions should be in place to enable young people to drive family members, especially younger siblings and those with limited mobility. Drivers, learners, and non-drivers all referred to driving family members, although drivers had the strongest focus on driving siblings and provided more

concrete and detailed examples of what should be exempt, in some cases due to their current personal experiences.

Participants from both rural and urban areas also cited medical appointments as a cause for exemption, and driving someone due to health emergencies or emergencies in general, with these typically made by drivers. However, some participants also raised the issue of how authorities would police or verify such emergency situations.

"I think the exemptions are fine, but a lot needs to be added to them based on circumstances."
(Fully licensed driver, rural area)

Participants also called for exemptions from the passenger rule for those travelling to work and university/college to allow lift-sharing and carpooling. They cited the financial cost of not being able to do this, and argued that without this exemption, some would be unable to attend school or education. One participant argued that if someone is exempt from the rules while driving for work-based duties, they should also be exempt during their commute. These suggestions were made the most strongly by rural drivers (although they were suggested by those from urban areas too), who cited poor transport links as a reason for an exemption from the passenger rule for commuting.

"I think it should be exempt for, like, students at college or uni as well, because I think they should be able to, like, share lifts with friends..." (Learner, rural area)

"Especially in rural areas, public transport is so bad, but it doesn't really give you much option."
(Learner, rural area)

Despite the stronger sentiment from rural drivers, one rural driver acknowledged that allowing students to drive together might defeat the purpose of the GDL in the first place.

"Obviously, making students an exemption kind of goes against the whole point..." (Learner, rural area)

Concerns about exploitation and fairness arose when participants discussed exemptions. Participants questioned how authorities would police and verify existing exemptions, as well as exemptions for emergencies and driving siblings if these were implemented. This pointed to both a practical concern and a focus on fairness, with some participants worried about their peers breaking rules they would follow. To counter this, some participants suggested that those with exemptions could receive a special card like a library card, to prove their exempted status.

While less pronounced, some participants either did not support further exemptions or opposed exemptions altogether. Some argued that too many exemptions would nullify the point of the GDL, while another opposed them entirely and wanted the rules to apply to everyone.

"I think it'd be better just to just keep it sort of standardised across everyone." (Non-driver, rural area)

Discussions about exemptions provided practical suggestions and highlighted concerns, but also underlined the aspects of GDL which participants felt were too restrictive and rigid. The strong focus on the passenger rule again showed this to be one of the most contentious aspects of the policy.

Suggestions for new and additional components of GDL

Participants offered several suggestions which go beyond the GDL presented to them. These broadly related to education or technological and physical solutions.

In terms of ideas which participants felt would **improve young people's driving by educating them on the risks involved**, they proposed changes to both the learning phase and practical driving tests.

Participants suggested including the specific risks that young drivers face in the theory test, and even having education on this in schools, as well as including it in free theory test apps. They also suggested increased diversity in the learning phase such as learning to drive with distractions and having mandatory lessons in adverse conditions like rain or at night (as above, the latter was mentioned in the context of changes to the minimum learning period). Similarly, there was some support for a more varied practical test, for the same rationale, to better prepare learners for 'real-world' driving. Drivers, learners, and non-drivers supported this – for the latter two groups, this was despite them knowing it would potentially impact them if it were to be introduced. One participant also suggested driving simulations to further prepare young drivers as they learn.

"Because I feel like a lot of people I've spoken to, their driving test is just kind of in like, or go down like the A52 and go on a roundabout...But I feel like if we kind of expand the test more then drivers will definitely be comfortable with kind of all aspects of driving." (Learner, rural area)

"... Not distractions, but sort of like background noise where you still have the instructor with you so that they can control the environment..." (Non-driver, rural area)

As mentioned regarding the passenger rule, there was also support for young drivers and passengers to take additional training and a 'passenger driving test' that would inform both drivers and passengers on how to travel safely together. This is an example of education being favoured, especially in relation to the passenger rule, was less popular than the minimum learning period.

Participants suggested a range of solutions involving **technology or physical changes to cars and roads**, indicating that being monitored or having the vehicle restricted is favoured over having personal freedom or mobility restricted.

There were several suggestions to restrict the 'horsepower' and engine size of cars driven by young drivers, with one participant noting that this was already the case with motorbikes. Another participant advocated for these restrictions as a replacement for the passenger rule. One participant did acknowledge that the insurance costs for higher-powered cars already acts as a deterrent to risky driving.

"Maybe putting a limitation on...the horsepower of the car they can actually drive...limitations on the car rather than the passengers is probably better." (Fully licensed driver, urban area)

Participants' preference for limiting the speed or power of cars were often made in the context of targeting the 'bad drivers' (who driver in a faster and riskier manner) rather than all young drivers. This points to the disconnect among participants between the risks associated with all young drivers which were presented earlier in the workshops. Risky driving was associated more with dangerous young drivers who were felt to make up a minority, than with the effects of age and inexperience – both of which increase driving risk.

Participants also suggested mandatory use of 'P-plates' for a period of a year after passing, and mandatory use of dash cams and black boxes, which they argued would promote safer driving due to the feeling of being watched. One participant also noted that black boxes could be used to track practice hours, with another participant proposing a mileage tracker to track these.

"...If you have a dash cam you're more responsible for how you're driving because it's almost as if you're being watched..." (Fully licensed driver, rural area)

The preference among participants for being monitored rather than having their mobility restricted is an example of a trade-off participants were willing to make.

Conclusions and policy implications

Conclusions reached by participants on GDL

Deliberations between young people aged seventeen to nineteen have shown that although people of this age group may not be fully supportive of GDL in their initial reactions to the idea, views can change after considering new information and evidence. When this happened, some young people became more accepting of GDL (or at least under the condition of some amends). Learning about examples of existing GDL approaches in other countries, and learning about the safety evidence, shifted views the most in this study.

Participants' deliberations revealed numerous underlying views which were articulated through counterarguments to GDL and the rules and exemptions presented. These were often interlinked, and strengthened opposition to GDL, such as doubts about the ease of enforcing it leading to scepticism about its effectiveness.

Participants weighed up GDL in terms of its acceptability (largely in terms of perceived restrictions to personal freedoms), effectiveness, practicability, fairness, and potential unintended consequences. This meant several factors stacked up which were traded off against safety. And while the benefits of GDL could be seen at the societal level, participants most readily saw drawbacks for them personally, at the individual level. It was less easily recognised that GDL would be designed to protect and benefit, and not just restrict, young people as well as wider society. Discussions were commonly framed in terms of something being done to young people, rather than *for* them and others in society.

As a result, in some cases the safety case came out weaker, especially in the absence of demonstrable evidence of the impact of GDL in England (where the policy does not yet exist).

Implications for policymaking and implementation

Should GDL become a potential part of road safety policy in England, a lack of acceptance by the public could not only make it difficult to introduce, but risks the approach being 'watered down' to a level that may be acceptable but not effective. It also risks the potential for people to break the rules or find ways they would not apply to them, which was to some extent manifested in the suggested amends that participants made (for example, applying the passenger rule only after a young driver has been caught for a driving offence).

Any policy proposition for introducing GDL must be guided by the evidence on what works and should be grounded in the views and lived experiences of the people it will impact. By socialising the concept of GDL through deliberations, where participants became more informed about the 'how' and 'why' of the potential policy, this study has generated evidence on the potential arguments for and against GDL if it were to be introduced. It has also highlighted where public views could shift marginally, as well as bases of support among those who considered it an acceptable approach.

In considering what the findings from this study mean for policymaking and measures to support implementation, a key implication for regulation and enforcement is that regardless of participants' views of the minimum learning period and the passenger rule, the penalty was considered significant enough to be an effective deterrent.

Regarding the other two rules, the minimum learning period was, on balance, more positively received than the passenger restriction. This reflects the appetite for further education and awareness-raising of young driver risks expressed early in discussions on what should be done to improve road safety. Suggestions to add elements of training to the minimum learning period (such as mandating learning in different weather conditions and at night) were made for the same reasons: participants thought this would be logical and beneficial, and importantly, that it would not present a restriction to individuals' freedom.

However, evidence shows that in isolation, education, information-provision and enhanced driver training would not provide the same road safety benefits without the passenger rule. This leaves implications for policy in terms of how to build greater public understanding of how GDL – including passenger restrictions – can reduce young driver risks. It also highlights the need to build social norms more generally around the importance of supporting young people to drive safely. Without a future GDL policy enforced through law, it could be argued that norms will need to 'work harder' to influence safer driving behaviours (for example choosing to drive without passengers), since these behaviours will need to be taken up voluntarily rather than enforced.

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Ipsos' standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a "right first time" approach throughout our organisation.



ISO 20252

This is the international specific standard for market, opinion and social research, including insights and data analytics. Ipsos UK was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



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ISO 9001

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