



Safe mobility for young people – driving

Background

Enabling young people safe access to education and employment opportunities and to make social connections is important for promoting economic and social health. For many young people the ability to drive is an important part of the transport mix, as even where public transport options exist, they might not cater for all trips (e.g. shift-working). More than 8 out of 10 (85%) of 17-24 year olds think it is certain or likely that they will be driving a car or van at least once a week by 2035¹.

Helping young people become safe, responsible drivers extends beyond merely passing a theory and a practical test, it includes gaining experience across a variety of driving environments – across night and day, major motorways to minor country lanes, and in diverse weather conditions.

The purpose of this note is to put forward a specific, practical proposal for consideration and discussion on a topic which has long been debated within the road safety sector domestically and applied with a variety of different elements internationally.

Key facts

Younger drivers (aged 17-24) are disproportionately represented in our road casualty statistics:

- Younger drivers are involved in a fifth of all road collisions resulting in deaths and serious injuries² (KSIs), but only account for 7% of all licence holders³
- Inexperience and risk-taking are known to be primary factors in collisions involving younger drivers⁴, with the presence of passengers also leading to an increased collision risk⁵. Crash risk is highest during a young driver's first few months of driving⁶
- Male drivers in this age group are 1.6 times more likely to be killed than all male drivers⁷
- The number of individuals in this age group in the UK, many of whom will be seeking to start driving, is projected to grow up to 2030⁸.

¹ Rigby et al. (2023). Young People and Driving. Report prepared for the RAC Foundation. ([Link](#)).

² DfT (2023). Reported road casualties in Great Britain: Younger Driver Factsheet, 2022. Table 2. ([Link](#))

³ DVLA (2024). Table DRL0101 Provision and Full driving licences held, by age and by gender, Great Britain ([Link](#))

⁴ DfT (2023). Reported road casualties in Great Britain: Younger Driver Factsheet, 2022. Table 9. ([Link](#))

⁵ Ouimet et al (2015). Young drivers and their passengers: A systematic review of epidemiological studies on crash risk. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 57 (1 Suppl): S24-S35. ([Link](#))

⁶ Maycock, G. (2002). Novice driver accidents and the driving test. TRL Report TRL527. ([Link](#))

⁷ MASTOnline, May 2024 figures.

Proposal

To help younger drivers build up the experience they need we advocate that, in addition to passing a theory and practical driving test, 17 to 19 year olds (i.e. only the youngest drivers) seeking to obtain their full car driving licences:

- should be required to undergo a minimum 6-month learning period before being eligible to take a practical test
- should not be entitled to carry any passengers 25 or under unless accompanied by an older adult (e.g. aged 35 or older) for the first 6 months after passing the practical test (or until the date of their 20th birthday, whichever is sooner)
- the penalty for doing so being 6 points (resulting in immediate license suspension and requirement to re-take the practical driving test under the New Drivers Act, 1995).

This proposal is subject to the exemptions detailed below, and is drawn from extensive investigation of the successful adoption of graduated driver licensing (GDL) approaches internationally, which seek to phase-in driving entitlements for newly qualified drivers as they gain driving experience⁹ ¹⁰, applied to the practical realities of the driving environment in Great Britain¹¹.

Benefits

RAC Foundation analysis of reported road casualty data in Great Britain for the period 2004 to 2022 suggests that in 2022, if strictly observed, these measures could have saved up to 44 lives in collisions involving 17-19 year old drivers. The measures place limited restrictions on a small proportion of new drivers – less than 1.5% of the driving population as a whole¹² - whilst still giving individuals access to personal mobility (i.e. 17-19 year olds can drive unrestricted on their own post-test). 44 lives saved would account for 2.6% of all road fatalities in 2022. For road-related deaths and serious injuries combined the total prevented in 2022 could have been as many as 537 (some 1.8% of all KSIs) under our proposals.

Additionally, the minimum learning requirement should result in more candidates passing the practical driving test first time, thus cutting waiting times and reducing the overwhelming pressure for tests.

Age group

Focusing on drivers aged 17-19 is based on evidence¹³ that it is this cohort within the 17-24 age group that exhibits the highest risk of involvement in road traffic collisions, with risk assessments show a sharp decline in collision rates as drivers age and gain more experience. Figure 1 shows that as age and experience increases, collision liability decreases and that this occurs more rapidly for those aged 17-19 years old.

⁹ Williams A.F. (2017). Graduated driver licensing (GDL) in the United States in 2016: A literature review and commentary. *Journal of Safety Research*, 63(2017), 29–41. ([Link](#)).

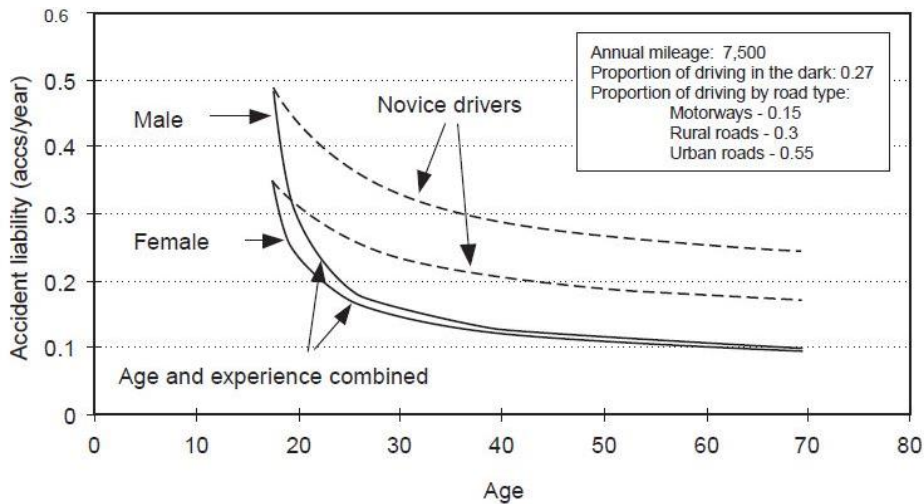
¹⁰ Helman et al (2022). Supporting New Drivers in Great Britain ([Link](#))

¹¹ e.g. Makwana (2018). The modelled impact of a range of GDL schemes. An update of the 2014 TRL report ([Link](#)) and Kinnear et al. (2014) Graduated Driver Licensing: A regional analysis of potential casualty savings in Great Britain ([Link](#)).

¹² DRL0101, Feb 2024 ([Link](#))

¹³ Maycock, G. (2002). Novice driver accidents and the driving test. TRL Report TRL527. ([Link](#))

Figure 1: The influence of age and experience on collision liability (i.e. likelihood of involvement in a collision) – note the rapid improvement (decline) in risk exposure



Source: Maycock (2002), Figure 4, p.10

Limiting the scheme to 17 to 19 year olds (up until a driver’s 20th birthday) avoids imposing restrictions on young adults in their early twenties, who may have more employment and family commitments. While applying the proposed approach to a broader age-range *could* generate more benefits, by virtue of bringing more people within the scheme, it is impossible to say from the data available what number of drivers in the 20-24 bracket are also involved in crashes *in the early months after passing their practical test*.

Minimum learning period

The proposed minimum learning period of 6 months aims to ensure that young drivers gain sufficient driving experience before obtaining a full licence. While more experience is always beneficial, 6 months would at least provide time for a mix of professional lessons and privately-accompanied practice, (and is comparable to the current waiting-time for a practical test in some parts of the country).

Ideally the minimum learning requirement would be best defined by the number of driving hours completed, with a logbook to demonstrate practice secured. Research¹⁴ shows that, on average, it takes people 45 hours of driving lessons with a driving instructor plus 22 hours of private practice to pass their test - those who manage 100 hours of driving practice are much safer on the road after their test.

However, a purely time-based requirement offers the advantage of administrative simplicity: for example candidates could prove they have met the six-month stipulation by providing either their insurance policy showing the date they were first insured to drive or receipts for professional driving instruction.

Carrying passengers

Under the proposal newly qualified younger drivers would not be able to carry passengers aged 25 and under unless accompanied by an older adult (e.g. aged 35 or over). Road casualty data shows that the highest risk for young drivers occurs when carrying passengers particularly when driving at night. Implementing a restriction on carrying passengers would address the more significant of

¹⁴ DVSA (2024). Ready to Pass Campaign. ([Link](#))

these two risk-related factors¹⁵ whilst still enabling younger drivers to access employment opportunities, such as shift work requiring night-time driving. Additionally, a restriction applied this way would enable newly qualified younger drivers to continue gaining experience, for example by driving with older adults.

Penalty points

A 6-point penalty for breaking the passenger restriction would serve as a strong deterrent and underscore the seriousness of adhering to the scheme. This proposal partly aligns with the provisions of the New Drivers Act 1995, which mandates automatic licence revocation for newly-qualified drivers who accumulate 6 or more penalty points. The difference is that the proposed new restriction would apply for 6 months, rather than the 24-month period specified by the Act, which relates to committing one or more road traffic offences whereas this restriction focuses on gaining experience safely.

Application/exemptions

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. Nor would the proposals apply to people qualifying for the enhanced rate of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP), to members of the armed forces and potentially to others driving in the course of their in-work duties.

Compliance

As with other motoring offences, police resourcing makes 100% enforcement implausible, though targeted enforcement and the threat of prosecution being a reality would be important.

That said, the effectiveness of these proposals relies to a large extent on the legal backing they would provide to the advice and guidance parents and guardians offer to young people. Parents and guardians often cover the costs of motoring, insurance and other related expenses and therefore they can (and often do) provide an important influence.

Changing the law in this way would also highlight to parents and guardians the risks associated with the early stages of independent driving, something that many bereaved families have indicated is not currently widely understood.

It follows that to be successful the proposed legal measures would need to be supported by a substantial communication campaign to raise awareness of the changes and rationale behind their implementation. The involvement of the driver training community and the motor insurers would be crucial to the success of the campaign.

For all the qualifications and challenges in making the proposed approach work, even at a 50% success rate it could save 22 lives a year or 268 KSIs – meaning two fewer bereaved or twenty-two fewer bereaved and affected families for every month of the year.

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¹⁵ TRL (2014), Makwana (2018)