

Major Viewpoints

Learner Licence Initiatives

A package of measures, including 120 Hours of driving experience with a logbook, education for learner drivers, supervisors and parents, holding the learner licence for at least 12 months and reducing the licence age to 16 years.

Participants were enthusiastically involved in discussion about this package of initiatives.

Participants understood the intent being to increase road experience under conditions which were the safest available and therefore ideal to exploit. Despite these feelings, there were concerns which most participants felt had to be addressed if the concept was to be successful. These included:

- That the total of 120 hours was a lot. Concerns were expressed that parents may not be willing to give the time and effort required. Others however, expressed that parent responsibility needed to be encouraged in relation to learning to drive just as much as other issues.
- The need to advise, train and encourage parents in the role of supervisors of practice.
- The need to provide information to ensure that young drivers were exposed to a variety of different experiences during the practice. Participants endorsed suggestions that a range of experiences should be outlined, or perhaps even required in the logbook arrangements.
- The need to establish mechanisms to prevent or limit the potential of fraudulent preparation of the log book.
- The need to put in place special arrangements to ensure opportunities for access to vehicles and licensed drivers were available for disadvantaged, remote and unsupported youth

Some innovative approaches were raised during discussion. One participant suggested extending the L period to two years to allow for extended practice. Others suggested the package needed a further educational component with some suggesting school based activity as pre-drivers; others endorsed experiences with motor sport organisations, while the potential of augmenting the experience with off-road activity was also raised.

Review of penalties and sanctions for learner drivers who break the law

There was no discussion of this initiative.

Review current Q-SAFE practical driving assessment

Participants generally agreed with approaches to improve the practical on-road test. One young participant was concerned that the current arrangements encouraged learners and instructors to teach for the test, rather than broader safe driving.

During this discussion there were calls to augment the system with some additional training, perhaps defensive driving and/or vehicle control skills such as reaction braking. Parking competence was raised in this discussion but participants had conflicting views on whether this was important for safety.

Introduce competency based training and assessment (CBTA) for learner drivers

This initiative received qualified support. One participant felt the approach was open to dishonest assessments and a substantial audit program would be required alongside such a program to ensure standards were not compromised.

There were concerns that the progressive training and testing approach might well cost more but others in the group felt the approach to learning associated with CBTA was in principle a sensible way to address driving. One participant described the arrangement undertaken with pilot training and saw parallels in a number of areas of the initiatives being presented to participants.

Provisional Licence Initiatives

Peer passenger restrictions

There was an extensive and constructive discussion around this initiative. The potential of good injury reductions being achieved was noted and many participants felt that if problems could be addressed the idea would be worth considering.

Despite this participants raised a number of issues including:

- A high level of inconvenience which was foreshadowed by some young participants who raised a range of potential circumstances where they might be subject to breaking the law.
- Existing car pooling and designated driver arrangements undertaken by groups of young people would be threatened
- Expected difficulties with enforcement associated with identifying those people subject to the provisions and those who were not. Inspector Mitchell provided advice that a method of identifying those subject to different conditions would be required and referred to P plates in this context.
- There was a need for exemptions for activities such as ferrying family members, work group arrangements, study arrangements, sports club group arrangements and the like. Many participants felt this would result in a complex system to administer.
- There would be difficulties in rural areas where other transport options did not exist or were very infrequent.

Whilst acknowledging these problems participants were keen to find some way in which a system could apply. Suggestions included apply the restriction for a short period, perhaps the first 6 months or 12 months of the Provisional period.

Late night driving restrictions

The discussion around this initiative was integrated into the discussion on peer passenger restrictions. Many participants saw them as complementary activities working together to limit the exposure of young provisional drivers to the greatest risks during the earliest part of their driving careers.

One participant summed up the feeling well by identifying the potential benefits of the proposal but expressing major concern about the practicalities of implementation. Concerns raised were similar to those in respect of peer passenger restrictions and included:

- Worries about complexity with an exemptions process
- The need for a substantial exemptions process for legitimate late night usage
- Those with part-time and shift work arrangements were concerned about their position despite information about exemptions.
- The likely contradiction where driving in a range of conditions, including at night is encouraged as a learner under 120 hours and would then be prevented as a provisional driver.

Again the idea of a short period to apply for the first 6 months was raised. Additionally one participant opposed parents concerns about inconvenience should occasions arise where children might need to be collected rather than break the restrictions. The view was expressed that prior to receiving a provisional licence parents accepted their responsibilities in this regard and should continue to do so in the first six months of provisional licensure.

Split Provisional phase (P1 and P2) incorporating the use of P plates

This idea was generally supported provided there was a community education campaign to explain the role of P plates and to encourage supportive on-road actions by other drivers. In response to direct questions young participants in the audience appeared unfazed by the potential of wearing P plates and understood the need for identification in the case of differential conditions being applied to part of the provisional licence period.

Some excellent descriptions of poor driving behaviour on the part of fully licensed drivers to those displaying L plates at the moment were provided with the fear that this would be repeated under P plates unless the public were encouraged to react responsibly.

A colour coded approach reflecting the different conditions for different parts of the provisional licence period was recommended.

Screen based Hazard Perception test (HPT)

Participants supported the idea as a method to assess progress with safe driving. Comments raised included that the approach should be viable, it was a valuable component of the process and the issue of hazard recognition was a key factor in safe driving. A concern to ensure that the test was not viewed as 'another computer game' was raised as an issue to be addressed other wise the test's credibility may suffer.

There were calls to augment the test with additional arrangements such as a requirement for people to be faced with the consequences of crashes or to be subject to some additional driver training.

Participants were opposed to any automatic progress of drivers from the P1 to P2 phase and supported the idea of a test at this point.

Working with driving instructors after changes to the GLS

There was no discussion of this initiative

Initiatives aimed at driver distraction including an education and media campaign on driver distraction and prohibiting mobile phone use for L and P drivers.

Participants agreed with the problem of distractions and specific distractions such as cigarettes, loud music, other passengers and the like were cited. The idea to provide public information on the nature and effects of these was felt to be positive.

On the specific issue of mobile phones participants argued that they were a distinct problem and supported the research information outlining problems with both hands free and hand held devices. There were calls for a total ban for all drivers from many of the group.

Younger people, who are likely to be high level users of phones, were also in support of some control of their use in cars and did not think a ban would be unduly difficult for them to comply with.

Review of penalties and sanctions for provisional drivers who break the law and incentive and reward options for provisional drivers

There was no discussion of this initiative

Education and Training support for provisional drivers

Participants felt strongly there was a place for some education and training for provisional drivers and this was a feature underlying many of the comments received where people recommended some augmentation or addition to initiatives raised in the discussion paper. There was vigorous endorsement of defensive driving or off-road training programs featuring vehicle control and driving techniques.

During discussion on a number of initiatives, individual participants spoke very supportively about their experiences with defensive driving and advanced driving programs.

Information about the very robust international research on the lack of overall safety benefits in the form of lower crash rates from drivers undertaking these courses compared to those not taking the courses was provided.

Despite this information some participants still felt their own personal experience was very rewarding and could not accept that a similar effect would not apply to others.

Other provisional licence restrictions including restricting the cars that provisional drivers may drive and speed limit restrictions

Participants generally were opposed to the concept of different speed restrictions to apply to provisional drivers. Many descriptions of high speed tailgating, particularly by trucks, were presented with the fear that this would be worse under a lower speed regime for provisional drivers. Advice on the lack of safety benefits from differing speed arrangements was provided.

The response to the potential of a restriction on high powered vehicles was more mixed. Some participants felt this was a good idea and was a good fit with some of the other initiatives designed to reduce risk in the first 6 to 12 months of solo driving.

Others however pointed out the problems where there is a single family car which might come into the category, or how to classify vehicles. Advice on the ability of modern electronics and turbo equipment modifications to change substantially the power output of models was also presented as an issue.

There was an acknowledgement that there would be a more difficult enforcement issue with such a proposal than with some of the others. The group feeling was that the practical difficulties might be too great to make this approach worth the effort.

Pre-Learner Phase Initiatives

Pre Learner Education Package

There was no discussion of this initiative specifically, however during discussions on the nature of education programs suitable for provisional licence drivers a number of participants felt there was a need for some introductory information, probably delivered through schools, before young people were able to drive on roads

First Aid Training

There was no discussion of this initiative



Ray Taylor
March 3 2006