

Discussion Paper

Queensland youth

on the road and in control

A discussion of ways to improve young driver safety

October 2005



Message from the Minister

For most young people, next to their choice of a career path, their decision to get a driver's licence will make a fundamental difference to their life.

Whilst getting a licence gives new freedoms and the ability to expand work, family and social horizons, for all too many young Queenslanders and their families, it can come at a terrible cost.

Tragically, people are killed and injured on our roads every day and these crashes devastate families, friends and whole communities. What is even worse is that young drivers are two and a half times more likely to be killed in crashes as the rest of us.

Many parents have told me that they lie awake at night waiting to hear the sound of their son or daughter's car pull into the driveway, or hear the door close, knowing that they are at last at home safe and sound. Parents not only have a key role in their children's educational and physical development, but want to play a greater role in areas such as their driver training.

We know that the first few years of driving are risky and that is when young drivers most need our assistance.

Our road safety efforts have resulted in the Queensland fatality rate decreasing by over 40% from 1993-2004. This is a significant decrease, and one that we are working hard to continue even further. During this time there was a 26% decrease in the young road user fatalities, however, young drivers are still twice as likely to be involved in a fatal crash.

As Transport Minister, travelling around the state and reading the media, it is clear that the community wants to play more of a role in reducing the youth carnage on our roads.

This discussion paper contains a number of initiatives that I would like you to consider and provide comment on. Some of these initiatives have been adopted in other Australian states and overseas. They are designed to better prepare young people for the hazards of driving. This paper builds on the good work undertaken by the Government's Travelsafe Committee in 2003 in their two reports concerning young drivers.

This conversation with the Queensland community is about various initiatives that could possibly be introduced to save young lives. Not all would be feasible and some might attract negative reactions from some groups. But this is an issue we need to address.

Addressing youth road deaths is not "someone else's responsibility" – it's the responsibility of all of us. Government has a role – but if it's left up to government alone it can never work. Young drivers themselves, parents, motorists and the general community all need to get involved in this important issue.

There is a feedback and comment form at the back of this paper that you can use to provide your views. We will also be conducting a series of consultation meetings around the state so that you can have your say personally.

Don't be afraid to express your views even if they might be different from others. What would be far worse would be not to care or not have a say.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Paul Lucas
Minister for Transport and Main Roads

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Our young drivers at risk

Too many young Queenslanders are being killed and injured on our roads. 17-24 years olds are one of Queensland's most at-risk groups on the road.

In 2004 young people accounted for only 13% of all licence holders, but 28% of the road toll. During that time 88 young people were killed.

From 1993-2004, the Queensland road fatality rate has decreased by over 40%. This represents a cumulative saving of over 1,500 lives. During this time there was a 26% decrease in young road user fatalities, and a saving of 353 lives.

However, in 2004 the fatality rate among young drivers was two-and-a-half times the rate for drivers over 25 years.

Generally young people are more susceptible to taking risks. Deaths from external causes (including transport related crashes, suicide, drowning) account for 70% of deaths of 15-24 year olds.

The main causes of young driver crashes are inexperience, alcohol/drugs, inattention and speeding. All of these things we can do something about.

What is this paper about?

This discussion paper presents a range of initiatives to improve the safety of young drivers aged between 17 and 24. Most of the initiatives are based on research or best practice which has shown an improvement in the safety of young drivers. Some are also provided to improve the operation and management of Queensland's licensing system.

International and national research shows that a young driver's risk of crash, injury or death can be reduced by improving the way they are managed in the licensing system.

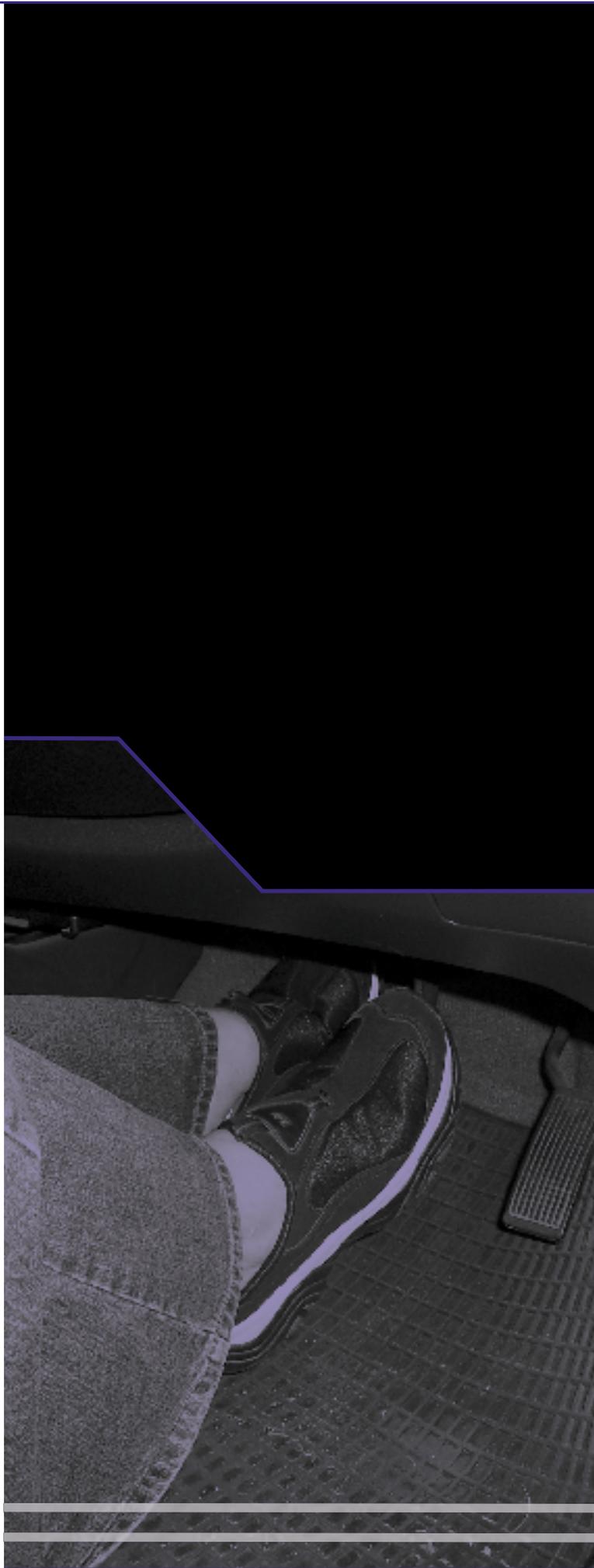
Therefore, possible changes to pre-learner, learner licence and provisional licence processes are outlined in this paper. It is important to understand that nothing has been set in stone. We want your comments before any changes are made.

We want to work with the community to find effective solutions to reduce the number of young people, their passengers and other road users being killed or injured. Everyone in the community can have their say about these measures by completing the feedback form on pages 20-24 or online at www.transport.qld.gov.au/youngdrivers.

“Your feedback will shape how

Queensland responds to this

serious problem.”



Why are young drivers at risk?

In 2003 and 2004 the biggest factor that caused young people to die on Queensland roads was inexperience.

Other reasons our young drivers are at such high risk include:

- less developed visual and perceptual skills
- inability to accurately identify and respond to risks or hazards when driving
- overconfidence
- inattention caused by inexperience with coping with distractions while driving
- tendency to drive at high risk times (for example at night and with a number of other young people in the car)
- alcohol/drugs
- deliberate risk-taking (for example high speed driving and tailgating).

Young drivers are most at risk during the first year of their provisional licence. (See Figure 1)

It takes about three years of solo driving before a young driver's crash risk is reduced to the same as a more experienced driver.

Learner drivers have the lowest crash risk of all drivers, generally because they are supervised. This shows that the learner period is a vital time for young drivers to develop driving skills.

It is important to note that although the crash risk is high for young drivers, only a minority of young people will be involved in a crash.

Rural Issues

Across the state young drivers are at risk regardless of whether they're in Brisbane, a provincial city such as Townsville, Mackay, or Toowoomba or a more rural or remote area such as Longreach or Mt Isa. However, the crash rate for young drivers is higher in rural areas.

Drivers in rural or remote areas are more likely to be involved in single vehicle crashes and to drive without a seatbelt. Speed and fatigue are major factors in these crashes.

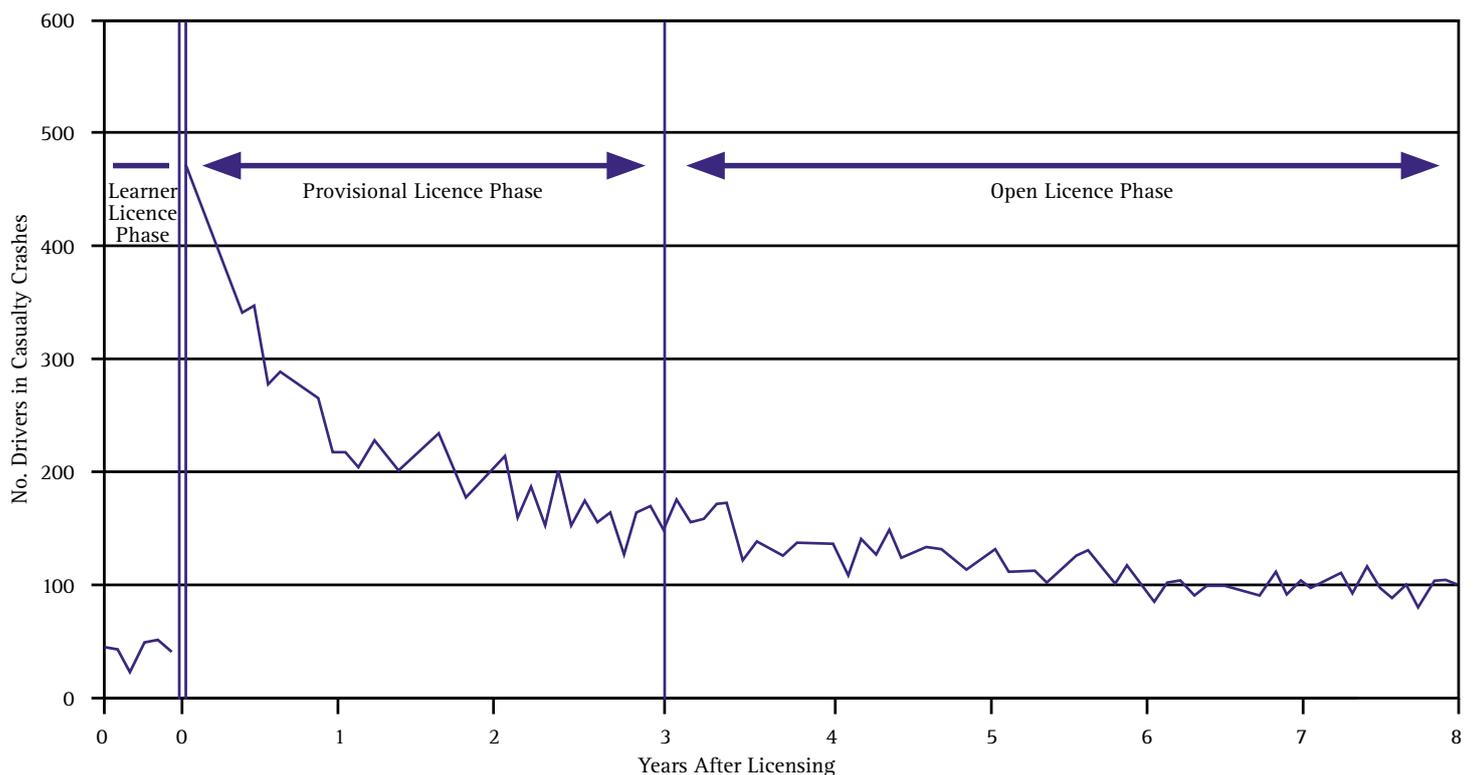
Recent research by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) has found that rural and remote drivers believed that they had a low risk of being involved in a crash relative to others, that they were more skilled drivers than others and were quite optimistic about their driving skills and safety. However, despite this, the crash rate for young drivers is higher in rural areas.

While there are certain factors that appear more common among rural and remote crashes, the options outlined in this paper will impact on all young drivers.

Some of the options proposed in this paper may have more severe impacts on the mobility of young people living in rural and remote areas. These impacts need to be balanced with the possibility of saving young lives.

Further exploration on how initiatives will work in rural areas will take place in the implementation phase.

Figure 1. Learner, Provisional and Open licence casualty crashes (2001-2003 data)



The bigger picture

The youthfulness and inexperience of young drivers is a worldwide road safety problem.

In 2004, Queensland's young driver fatalities (per 100,000 population) was mid range in Australia. However, overall Queensland fatalities (per 100,000 population) were one of the lowest in Australia.

Australia compares well to many other western countries when looking at road fatalities for young drivers. Australia sits well below the number of United States of America's (USA) young driver fatalities but above the United Kingdom's.

Worldwide, young male drivers are at a higher crash risk than females.

In Australia, men drive more often, are more likely to have a licence and take more driving risks than females.

Young Australian females are over-represented among those killed and injured as passengers of male drivers or riders.

Mobility

Between the age of 17-24 young people get more mobile, they leave school and get jobs or start further study, and generally have more independence.

Driving is often critical for getting to and from jobs, study, or sporting and social events, particularly in rural areas. It is not surprising that most eligible 17-24 year olds get their driver licence as soon as possible. With this increased mobility and independence comes the increased exposure to risk on the roads.

“Provisional drivers have the highest crash risk of all drivers.”



What's already happening in Queensland to improve young driver safety?

Queensland uses initiatives such as speed enforcement, random breath testing and public education campaigns to help keep people safe on the road.

Queensland Government has introduced a number of specific programs to educate young drivers.

Current activities include:

Pre-Learner

- Developing school-based education materials including teaching aids, student activities and lesson plans for pre-school – year 10 (see Example 1).
- Student Driver Education website available at www.roadsafety.qld.gov.au provides information for teachers, activities for students, and links to related resources. Targeted at students in years 11 and 12.
- Road Accident Awareness Program (RAAP) delivered by Department of Emergency Services.

Learner

- L plates three year trial for learner licence holders (started January 2005)
- 0.00% Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)
- New penalties for high speed offences, racing and speed trials are being introduced.

Provisional

- DVD information kit – *Never the Same Again* sent to provisional licence holders aged 17-18 years once they receive their licence. The kit promotes discussion between the young driver and their parent/s about risk taking. (see Example 2)
- 0.00% BAC - for under 25 years
- 0.05% BAC for over 25 years
- New penalties for high speed offences, racing and speed trials are being introduced.

But more can be done.

Example 1

School Road Safety Education Framework

A School Road Safety Education Framework provides Queensland teachers and other agencies with a comprehensive and consistent approach for effective road safety education.

The framework supports the School Road Safety Education Curriculum which is being developed in consultation with Queensland Department of Education, Queensland Studies Authority and other government agencies.

The curriculum will encourage a school and community approach to improving road safety. This approach will integrate road safety education throughout the whole school curriculum.

Example 2

Never the Same Again

Two weeks after a new driver gets their provisional licence and begins to drive unsupervised, they get a special DVD kit mailed direct to their homes. This is the most dangerous time for a new driver because they start to take risks they would not have taken if they were with a supervisor. The kit – Never the same again delivers critical information about road safety at the time new drivers need it.

The kit targets 17 and 18 year olds and their parents with a DVD that runs through three real Queensland stories. In their own words, survivors of road crashes and their friends and families talk about the consequences of road crashes and the impact on the young driver, their family and friends. Sent with the DVD is a booklet with practical information about buying your first car, keeping safe on the road and how to avoid breaking the law. Parents are encouraged to watch the DVD with their novice driver so they can discuss the important issues it raises. The kit is supported by a youth-friendly website www.neverthesameagain.com.au where young drivers and parents can find more road safety and licensing information.

What is the current Queensland licensing system?

Queensland operates a graduated licensing system (GLS) that progressively introduces new drivers to more complex road conditions as they gain their on-road experience (see Figure 2). This means that drivers demonstrate their ability before moving onto the next stage.

There are three stages: the fully supervised learner licence, the restricted provisional licence, and the unrestricted open licence.

This lets new drivers gain experience under less risky driving conditions before getting their open licence.

Queensland has minimum learner and provisional licence ages, requires supervision for all learner drivers and has alcohol restrictions for both learner and provisional drivers.

All Australian states and territories have a GLS as do many places around the world, including New Zealand, parts of the USA, and Canada. While each system differs slightly, international and national research indicates they have all been successful in reducing young driver crashes.

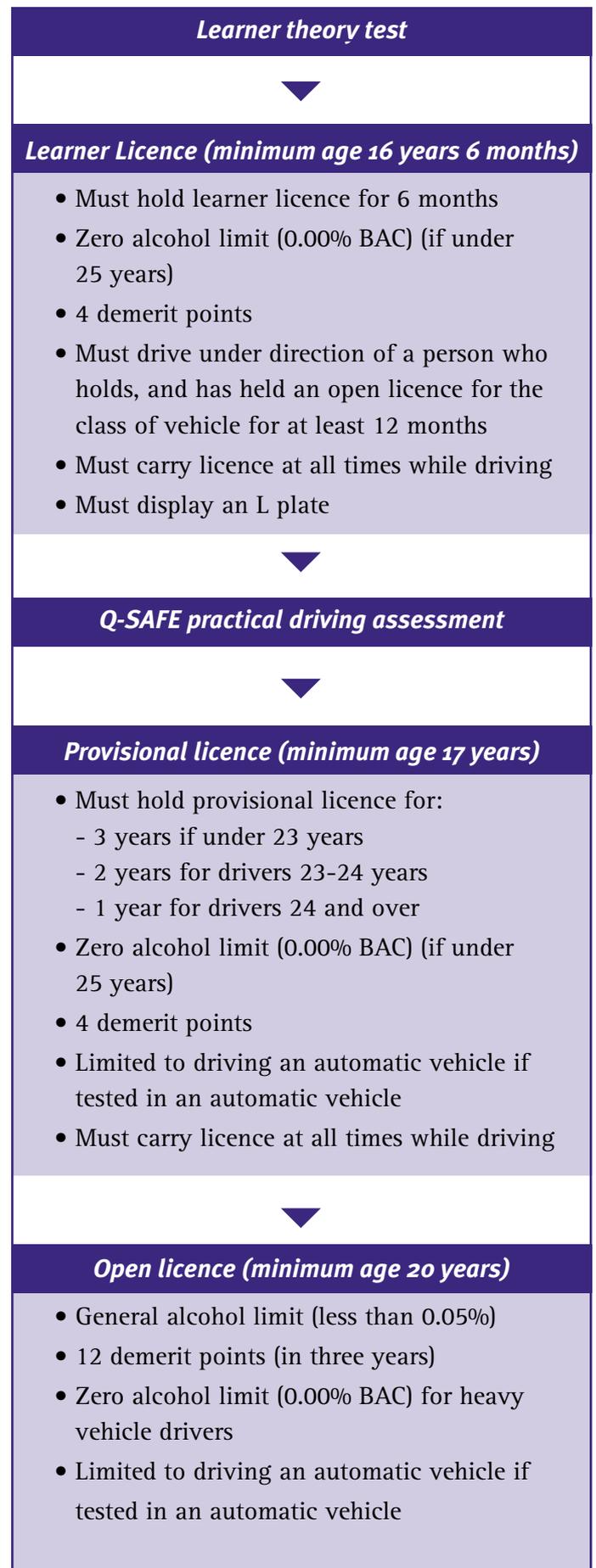
So why the need for change?

Throughout the world the risk to young drivers is high and the dilemma faced by the community is that there is no one, simple solution. The best way of tackling this problem is to use a combination of approaches that work together to change young driver behaviour.

We recognise that some of the changes considered in this paper may impact on mobility and convenience for young drivers, and also affect parents, other family members and friends. However, some inconvenience may be necessary to achieve the benefits from these changes. We are confident that adopting many of these changes would result in fewer deaths and injuries for young drivers, their passengers and other road users in Queensland.

“The GLS is like an apprenticeship system for new drivers – they gain experience under less risky driving conditions before graduating to an open licence.”

Figure 2: Current Graduated Licensing System in Queensland



Role of Parents



International research shows that parents have a major influence on the driving behaviour of their children. Young drivers tend to follow the behaviour patterns set by their parents and are more likely to follow the rules when supervised by a parent. This also means that often the parent's traffic violations and errors are repeated by their children.

The USA National Safety Council's *A Family Guide to Teen Driver Safety* provides advice for young drivers and their parents at provisional licence level. Research in the USA shows that parents can have a positive influence on their teenage children with provisional licences in helping them to comply with the licence conditions.

The role of parents as everyday models of good or bad driving behaviour for their teenagers, needs to be communicated and understood. A survey of 403 Queensland learner and provisional licence holders found that 75% of provisional licence holders had taken paid lessons from a professional driving instructor. However, 85% were taught by other persons as well as a driving instructor, with 88% of these being also taught by parents.

USA research found that in fact parental involvement in supervising logbook entries greatly improved compliance. In particular, the amount of supervised driving experience undertaken by learners was at a level that exceeded the requirement. While 50 hours were mandated, on average, 75 hours were reported. Mandating such regulations and involving parents/guardians reinforces the importance of the supervisory role.

Since parents are often the main driving instructors for young drivers it is vital to educate them about the benefit of supervised driving experience for their child. Parents can also help shape sensible drivers with a realistic view of their children's driving abilities and motives. Graduated licensing allows a longer and more involved role for families in the driving process.

HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you think about the role of parents in teaching young people to drive?

Have your say on page 24.

1. Pre-learner education package

A pre-learner education package could be developed for new drivers which could be provided 12 months before the minimum licensing age. The package could provide information on the positive and negative components of driving.

Getting young people and their parents thinking about road safety before they even get into a car and have a chance to take any driving risks is a positive step. Parents have a major influence on the driving behaviour of their children – what parents do and say about driving is important.

Pre-learners could be provided with an education package in the 12 months before applying for a learner licence. This package could encourage young people to consider the positive consequences of driving (mobility, freedom, convenience) against the potential negative consequences (crash risk, injury risk, costs) before they get behind the wheel of a car.

The package could provide parents with information about the risks that their children may face as young drivers and show them ways to reduce these risks. It would remind learners and their parents that the risk of dying in a car crash in Australia is greater than the combined risk of being killed by assault, drowning, fire, plane crash or a shark attack.

How could it be delivered?

The package could be distributed to year 10 students through schools or made available on the internet or on DVD or CD Rom. Printed versions could also be mailed out to people without multimedia access.

What happens in other states?

Some other states in Australia provide information to drivers before their learner licence. The ACT runs a pre-learner interactive classroom based program called *Road Ready* designed to make young people aware of issues about safe road use. Most secondary school students are able to take the course for free. (www.roadready.act.gov.au/c/roadready)

Victoria promotes *Motorvation 2*, a multimedia pre-licence education resource designed to encourage young people in Year 10 to think about the complexity of driving a car or riding a motorcycle. It addresses recognising hazards in the traffic environment, the consequences of unsafe/irresponsible road use and encourages self-appraisal of their own skills and abilities as potential drivers. More details are available on the secondary school road safety education webpage of the Vicroads website at www.vicroads.vic.gov.au.

Pros

- Gets young people thinking about risks and driving safely
- Learner drivers benefit when there is cooperation between driving instructors and parents

Cons

- School curriculum is already full
- Knowledge may not be retained 12 months before driving
- Multimedia initiatives rely on internet or computer access
- No research evidence that pre-learner education reduces crash rates

HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you think about a pre-learner education package?
Have your say on page 20.

2. First aid training

First aid training, made either compulsory or voluntary, could be provided at the pre-licence level to increase the awareness of risk among young people, particularly on the roads.

Research from the United Kingdom and Norway shows that secondary school students become more safety-conscious and aware of risks after completing first aid training.

First aid training could be made either as a voluntary or compulsory part of the Queensland licensing system. Training young people in first aid may help reduce the risks they take when driving and would also benefit the overall community.

Training could be delivered through traditional face-to-face teaching or via a multimedia or online course. Queensland Transport could link with a recognised first aid provider like St Johns Ambulance or Queensland Ambulance Service. The cost of the course is estimated at \$130, but drivers could be offered licensing or registration incentives such as a free licence for 12 months once they have completed the course.

Pros

- Improved knowledge of risks relating to driving
- Ability to use first aid skills at crash sites

Cons

- Training is only valid for 3 years – time/cost to retrain,
- Additional cost for young people or parents/guardians if made compulsory
- No research evidence that initiative reduces crash rates

HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you think about first-aid training for pre-learners?
Have your say on page 20.

Supervisors (including family, friends with an open licence, or driving instructors) would sign off the time in the logbook. Logbooks would be checked when the learner applied for their provisional licence. The logbook would be compulsory and legally enforceable.

In the event that a learner driver lost a partially completed logbook they could re-enter the entries in a new logbook and the supervising driver would need to re-sign each entry. New South Wales currently operates this way, however this is not allowed in Western Australia where learners must redo hours if they lose their logbook.

Inexperience is one of the main causes of young driver fatalities. A compulsory 120 hours would almost triple the amount of experience most learner drivers get before they drive unaccompanied. While the extra hours may be an inconvenience to parents and learners at first, the result is more experienced drivers on our roads.

What's happening in the rest of the country?

Western Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia enforce compulsory supervised driving hours. Victoria is also considering introducing 120 hours (among a number of initiatives) following the release of a young drivers discussion paper.

Most states offer free logbooks, but where there is a cost for learners it is no more than \$10. Some make the logbooks available for downloading from the internet. In most instances, the driving examiner assesses the logbook the day before the practical driving test is taken.

Each state reports that most people complete and submit the logbooks honestly with few people being prosecuted for falsification.

Pros

- Research shows initiative reduces crash risk
- Structured process provides a more complete learning experience

Cons

- 120 hours would not be achievable in current system of 6 months minimum learner licence period
- Potential fraudulent use of logbooks
- Learner drivers in rural and remote areas may not be able to access different traffic and road conditions

HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you think about 120 hours of compulsory driving experience and recording the experience in a logbook?

Have your say on page 20.

4. Education for learner drivers, supervisors and parents

Learner drivers and supervisors could be encouraged to attend an information session detailing what experience should be gained and techniques on how to supervise novice drivers. A multimedia package could also be considered as an alternative to face-to-face sessions.

We recognise that parents are looking for help and support to provide information and advice to learner drivers and that this parental involvement is very important.

Information that could be supplied may include:

- what young drivers should be learning
- risks faced by new drivers
- tips about when, where and how to accumulate on-road driving experience
- driving in a variety of conditions, such as night, wet weather, heavy traffic or in the country
- how to complete learner logbooks.

It is also important for parents and supervisors to understand that any material of this nature does not provide them with technical or expert qualifications. The role of parents and learner driver supervisors is vital but does not take the place of qualified driving instructors/educators.

A multimedia kit for parents and learners to use at home could deliver this important information as it is a convenient way of reaching all Queenslanders including those who live in regional or remote areas. However, delivering this information through face to face sessions would allow supervisors and learners to focus on the information and not be subject to the distractions at home.

Both the learner driver and their parent/supervisor could attend these face-to-face sessions. These sessions could be provided through schools.

What about other states?

Victoria encourages learner drivers and their parents to attend Keys Please – a free two hour forum showing learners how to get the maximum benefit from the learner period and become a responsible and safe driver.

The RACV (Victoria) Driving School's Parents Plus program offers a free parent lesson where parents can observe their child driving with an instructor and obtain advice from the instructor on how to manage on-road supervision. Swedish research suggests that learners benefit when there is cooperation between driving instructors and parents and the RACV's program promotes that cooperation. More details can be found on the DriveSchool webpage within the RACV website at www.racv.com.au

Pros

- Provides an increased knowledge of driving tasks
- Learner drivers benefit when there is cooperation between driving instructors and parents
- Parents Plus program offered by the RACV Driving School in Victoria has been a popular program

Cons

- Additional cost for young people or parents/guardians if made compulsory
- Ability for learner drivers and supervisors in rural and remote areas to access information sessions
- No road safety evidence that initiative reduces crash rates
- Multimedia initiatives rely on internet or computer access

HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you think about an education kit for learner drivers and their parents?

Have your say on page 21.

5. Hold a learner licence for at least 12 months

Learner drivers could be required to hold their licence for a minimum of 12 months so that drivers can obtain 120 hours of supervised driving experience. To assist with this increase, the learner licence could be issued for three years instead of the current one year.

If learner drivers are required to gain 120 hours of supervised driving before they get their provisional licence, many will need more than 6 months to do this. If they had their licence for a minimum of 12 months, it would be easier to complete 120 hours in changing weather and traffic conditions.

Further, at present learners must renew their licence every 12 months. It may be useful to consider increasing the period a learner licence is valid to 3 years.

Extending the learner licence period may stop learners from rushing the learning process when they may not be ready. Extending both the mandatory learner period and the learner licence validity period may take the pressure off learners (and their supervisors), giving them the time to gain driving experience at their own pace.

Research conducted by Queensland Transport in 2004 indicated that learner drivers in Queensland currently spend an average of 11 months on their learner licence. Therefore an increase in the minimum time may not greatly inconvenience the majority of drivers.

What about other states?

Most Australian states currently have a 6 month minimum learner licence period.

New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia are investigating increasing the learner licence period from 6 to 12 months in combination with increasing their compulsory supervised driving experience to 120 hours.

Pros

- Allows an extra six months to gain more experience driving
- Ability to experience conditions all year round as a supervised driver eg. all seasons, wet weather

Cons

- Disadvantages learner drivers who have completed their training in less than 12 months

HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you think about changing the minimum learner licence period to 12 months and it being valid for three years?

Have your say on page 21.

6. Reduce the learner licence age to 16 years

The learner licence age could be reduced from 16.5 years to 16 years to give learner drivers more time to obtain the 120 hours supervised driving experience

If 120 hours of supervised on-road experience was introduced and the minimum time for holding a learner licence was increased to 12 months, it may be practical to lower the minimum learner licence age to 16. This would bring Queensland into line with most other Australian states. There are no plans to allow solo driving before the current minimum age of 17.

Learner drivers have a low crash rate because they are under the supervision of an experienced, fully licensed driver (see Figure 1). While reducing the learner licence age to 16 may appear to work against the goal of improving road safety for young drivers, research suggests that combined with increased experience, it actually reduces the crash risk of young drivers when they get their provisional licence and are able to drive on their own.

According to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) the age for a private pilot licence flight test is 16 and people can learn to fly at any age as long as they are accompanied by a flight instructor.

Changing the learner licence age to 16 years would give learners the benefit of an extra 6 months to gain experience in a safe and controlled driving environment.

Has this worked in other countries?

In 1993 Sweden lowered the age limit for learners to 16 years. This was accompanied by a program to encourage learners to gain extensive amounts of supervised, on-road experience. Following this initiative, which was the only change to the licensing system at that time, Sweden experienced an overall 17% reduction in crash rate for all novice drivers.

Pros

- Learner driving period is the safest
- Combined with 120 hours and minimum 12 months creates increased experience which reduces crash rate
- Provisional licence age would not change
- Brings Queensland in line with majority of other states

Cons

- Community perception of increased crash risk

HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you think about reducing the learner licence age to 16 years?

Have your say on page 21.