

MERIT PROJECT

A meeting held in Brussels on 12 and 13 February 2004 saw the launch of the project MERIT (**M**inimum **E**uropean **R**equirements for **D**riving **I**nstructor **T**raining). The project is 100% funded by the European Commission and is the first EU funded project to focus upon the skills and competencies of the intermediary for road safety issues in the case of learner drivers, namely the driving instructor.

The MERIT project team is lead by Dr Gregor Bartl. Dr Bartl is a psychologist who until recently worked at the Austrian Road Safety Board (KfV), but has now set up his own company, Institut Gute Fahrt, where he is responsible for research, psychological driver testing and leading group discussions in the new Austrian multiphase driver training programme. Dr Bartl has contributed to several EU projects, including ANDREA and DAN in the role of project manager. Dr Bartl considers that the main objective of MERIT is to save lives and make traffic safer, while at the same time, safeguarding the future of the driving instructor profession in Europe.

The project consortium brings together experienced traffic psychologists, influential contacts within the driving instructors' associations by the representation of EFA and the driver testing organisations by CIECA. CIECA is partner in this project in two ways: it will give expert input in the discussion, and it will provide the secretariat for this project. The expert input is given by Mrs. Deirdre Walsh from the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency in Northern Ireland. Nick Sanders from the CIECA project office will have the secretarial function.

Following the Advanced and (ongoing) NovEV projects, MERIT is a further study highlighting CIECA's growing involvement in driver training, as opposed to testing alone. MERIT consists of 3 main phases: a survey of existing standards for driving instructors in 19 European countries, the development of educational goals for driving instructors based on the GDE Framework and, finally, a consultation phase with the driving instructor sector and their representatives. The GDE Framework is the new name for the 'GADGET matrix' which depicts 4 levels of driver behaviour and the various means to train them. A major aim of the project is to introduce driving instructor training requirements on the higher levels of driver behaviour, and the teaching methods to train learner drivers on these levels.

The project which is due to run for 18 months, ending in the summer of 2005, will include workshops for which participants will be chosen from relevant ministries, government agencies, driving school associations and/or driving instructor training institutes and will culminate in recommendations which will lead to a proposal from the European Commission for a Directive on minimum requirements for driving instructors. It is anticipated that such a proposal will be drafted in 2005 with a view to the law entering into force around 2008-9.

A project brochure will be developed in paper format and a MERIT web page will be added to Institut Gute Fahrt's website. Further information about MERIT can be obtained from Nick Sanders, Project Secretariat, at nick.sanders@cbr.nl.

Deidre Walsh and Nick Sanders