

ABSTRACT TITLE

The GB practical driving test as a safety intervention: past, present and future.

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ABSTRACT

Practical driving tests can have an impact on safety in early solo-driving in at least three ways.

First, a test necessarily delays licensure (even if only in terms of the time needed to undertake administrative tasks to book and sit the test); this will result in drivers being slightly older when they begin driving than would otherwise be the case, which evidence shows will make them safer, all other things being equal.

Second, a test is designed to ensure that those individuals who wish to have access to driving without supervision have demonstrated an accepted level of competence in the driving task before being permitted such access; to the extent that the competencies tested are linked to safety in post-test driving, the test therefore ensures that people driving solo have the relevant skills to keep themselves safe.

Third, a test can have an impact on the amount and types of learning, experience and practice which drivers undertake when preparing to sit it; certain types of pre-test experience (for example amount and types of on-road experience) are known to have safety benefits post-test, and therefore if the test can be designed to encourage such pre-test experience, it can have a safety benefit.

This presentation will examine the evidence for the above mechanisms being at play in the GB practical driving test. It will conclude that evidence exists for the first two mechanisms, and preliminary findings from an ongoing trial will also be reported regarding the third. Finally, the presentation will consider potential future directions which might be taken in driver licensing to maximise the safety benefits that accrue from practical driving tests.

AUTHOR'S CV

Dr Shaun Helman is TRL's Head of Transport Psychology, and is a cognitive psychologist who has been involved in researching road safety and driver behaviour for the last 15 years. He is particularly interested in the links between driver behaviour and safety outcomes such as collisions and injuries, and in high-risk groups such as young and novice drivers, those driving for work, and motorcyclists.