



SAFER VEHICLES, SAFER DRIVER, SAFER ROADS

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In Northern Ireland, young newly qualified motorists are at a much greater risk of being responsible for a collision resulting in serious injury or death than more experienced motorists.

To combat this our Road Safety Strategy, which links together road safety education, policy, legislation, engineering and enforcement through four strategic targets and 224 action measures, targets road user behaviour which research shows is the cause of more than 95% of road traffic collisions causing death and serious injury. Alongside this, improvements to the driving test and driver instructor industry all assist in minimising risk and help reduce the number of people, particularly young inexperienced drivers, killed or seriously injured.

New Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) legislation is aimed at risks associated with novice and young drivers. GDL will change the way drivers are educated by introducing a minimum mandatory learning period and a mandatory Programme of Training for learner drivers. It will also impose restrictions on newly qualified drivers including tighter controls on alcohol consumption; night-time passenger restrictions and the display of a 'novice' plate for two years' post-licence. GDL also provides the opportunity to address, not just the training of practical skills, but also the challenges around assessing the higher levels of the Goals for Driver Education (GDE), which requires a more creative approach. Through engagement with the driver instructor industry, the Programme of Training, which details the learning required to become a safe driver, introduces a compulsory logbook that will provide evidence of learning. This will ensure that the driver gains experience of "real world" driving, including driving in different weather, light and traffic conditions, along with gaining experience on different types of roads. The structured approach to the learning process also reinforces that learning to drive is a progressive process. In this context, driving instructors will teach learner drivers how to drive based around certain competencies which, in theory, will mean that these drivers will be trained to a uniform minimum training standard with desired learning outcomes established prior to the commencement of each lesson, which will be assessed during the driving test.

The Programme of Training also attempts to address the higher levels of GDE through the learning syllabus and logbook by initiating discussions around scenarios and challenging the driver to judge how they would act. Our aim is early development of drivers' attitudes to driving and to help them to quickly identify negative and unhelpful traits and behaviours. The



programme is designed to encourage drivers to evaluate their knowledge and skills and identify and eliminate gaps in their driving skills and knowledge.

Our Road Safety Promotion Unit uses various channels to ensure road safety messages reach our audience. While TV, radio and outside advertising are still important media we've now added social media to the mix, especially whilst watching TV, and various different approaches to online activity including digital advertising 'Share the Road to Zero' email blogs, Facebook and Twitter pages. The social media activity shows there to be a strong opinion on road safety and, through YouTube, our campaigns now reach well beyond Northern Ireland.

To embed this we are also reviewing how we deliver the practical driving test. On 17 October 2016 the driving test in Northern Ireland will be 60 years old and, whilst there have been some changes during that time, no evaluation of its effectiveness has ever been undertaken. We are now carrying out a review of the driving test. However, we recognise that the driving test, which has its limitations, is only one element in encouraging safer driving. Evidence suggests that it is not possible to include the higher levels of the GDE matrix in the driving test, so we must find an alternative. The review of our driving test will be conducted in parallel with the GDL project with the aim of modernising the practical driving test, improve driver behaviour and drive up driving standards. The review will cover the relationship between education, training and testing to radically change and improve the way people learn to drive, how and what they are tested in and how that learning can be continued post-test.

Through education, we want to change public perception of the objective of the driving test. Too often following serious road traffic collisions the validity and effectiveness of the driving test is questioned, rather than driver behaviour which is often the primary cause of the collision. Our review will include working with a wide range of stakeholder groups to educate citizens to make them more aware of the "whole" learning process not just the driving test. For us, the driving test is like any examination: it is not the certificate that is important, it is the amount of time and effort that is put in to getting it and how it is used afterwards that's really important.

Author

Pat Delaney is the Director of Operations in the Driver & Vehicle Agency in Northern Ireland. Pat took up this post in May 2012 where he has responsibility for driver testing as well as vehicle testing and driver licensing in Northern Ireland, and is the change lead for his directorate in the Agency's Business Transformation Programme.

Before joining the Driver & Vehicle Agency in 2012, Pat was head of Organisation Design and ICT in a major organisation where he delivered a significant change programme that allowed savings and efficiencies to be re-directed to support crucial frontline services.

Pat's professional background is in ICT and he has recently completed his professional qualifications in Human Resource Management.