

ABSTRACT TITLE

Northern Ireland Graduated Driving Licensing Scheme – The Driving Force for Safe Driving for Life

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ABSTRACT

Learning to drive is an important skill for many people and is often seen as a rite of passage that will open up a range of opportunities for educational, social and vocational activities. With this comes a great deal of personal responsibility which is often missing from the qualities expected from Learner and Novice drivers. This is evident with the unacceptably high number of new, particularly young, drivers involved in collisions each year.

Statistics show that the majority of road deaths are due to preventable human error. The main causes of road death and serious injury are consistently shown to be inattention or attention diverted, speeding, drink or drug driving/riding and failing to wear a seatbelt.

We have been looking at attitude and behavioural change for learner and novice drivers. We aim to empower them with the skills needed to be a responsible safe driver, thereby reducing the carnage on our roads. Our plan is to improve how we train and test drivers to be competent, safe and responsible for when they first start to drive unaccompanied.

Safe driving is about developing the right attitude and approach, combined with safe driving techniques. New drivers, particularly young drivers, will start driving thinking why they want to drive? What each journey will involve? And, how can I make every drive a safer drive?

Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) is not new, it has been around for quite some time in some form or other, but is not common in Europe. We have had a form of GDL since 1968 where we have a 72kph speed restriction for learner and new drivers for the first 12 months after they pass their driving test. So, after consultation, it was decided to introduce additional GDL measures aimed principally at driver training.

Our scheme will introduce a number of measures governing learner and new drivers:

- A six month Mandatory Minimum Learning Period (MMLP).
- The removal of the 45mph speed restriction to allow training at higher speeds.
- Mandatory Programme of training and logbook.
- Night time passenger restrictions.
- Mandatory display of a new driver plate for two years.
- Optional motorway lessons with an Instructor (ADI) in a vehicle fitted with dual controls.

Learner drivers will follow a Programme of Training to acquire the experience, knowledge and skills to become a safe and responsible driver over time in lower risk environments.

Our GDL presentation will primarily focus on the new mandatory modular based Programme of Training. The Programme, which must be completed before taking the driving test, will be evidenced by a logbook which must be completed by the learner driver and their trainer.

The Programme is designed to cover the practical skills a driver needs and a “skills for life” section. The skills for life section describes three important principles: *Self-reflection and evaluation; Continuous learning; Ability to understand consequences: What’s driving the driver?*

The Programme focuses on driver awareness and those human factors which show that the personality of drivers has an effect on their thought processes and decision making when driving and when preparing to drive.

The Programme includes worksheets for each module which set out scenarios based on the subject matter the module is covering. Learners will record all possible actions and consider the consequences of those possible actions. Learners will use this during their training and continue to do so after they pass their driving test.

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. GDL will prepare our learner drivers for a life of safe driving, better understanding that all actions have consequences, but those consequences can be positive.

AUTHOR'S CV

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 Organisational Design and ICT in a major organisation where he delivered a significant change programmes that allowed savings and efficiencies to be re-directed to support crucial frontline services.