



Memorandum from:

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Motor Schools Association of Great Britain (MSA) is pleased to take the opportunity to provide comments for the enquiry into Young and Newly-Qualified Drivers: Standards and Training.
- 1.2 The MSA is the national trade association for driving instructors and schools founded in 1935. Full members of the association are all Driving Standards Agency Approved Driving Instructors (ADI).

## 2 GENERAL COMMENTS

- 2.1 We make little comment on the first three points the committee wish to examine, - levels of accident and trends – cause of accidents – number of convictions – as you will doubtless receive statistical evidence from a variety of expert sources. However, regarding – what causes accidents – we would suggest that the committee look beyond such popular explanations as speed, drug abuse and inexperience, to what we believe to be the real cause of most accidents. The attitude of the driver who causes what should perhaps more appropriately be called a crash or collision.
- 2.2 We believe (with some reservations discussed towards the end of this memorandum) that the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) together with Driving Instructors, Road Safety Officers and other road safety professionals are doing a good job for road safety in Britain.
- 2.3 However, much of that work is wasted because of the attitude of *some* prospective learner drivers, members of the public, members of parliament, ministers, police forces, magistrates and the judiciary, to safe driving. The attitudes of all these groups rubs off on to new learner drivers and therefore this memorandum looks not just at newly qualified drivers but seeks to widen that debate to encompass the attitudes of all drivers.
- 2.4 In the UK we place great importance on testing but attach little importance to training, therefore, the training that takes place is entirely focused on teaching people to pass specific

tests. The tests look at factors that are easy to assess such as skills or simple knowledge recall, rather than examining items that are likely to be useful indicators to future safety, like attitude and understanding. As there is no specific tests for attitude there is little training for it currently taking place yet research would seem to suggest that it is only by changing attitudes that we will actually change outcomes and make Britain's roads safer.

2.5 To quote from a 1992 report to the USA Congress

*"We must learn to measure what we value rather than valuing what we can easily measure."*

2.6 It is generally accepted that attitude is difficult to measure successfully, although various pieces of research suggest that attitude change can be brought about by training. It is therefore logical to suggest a system or changes to the system, that will encourage or require prospective new drivers to take proper training.

### 3 THE SEPARATE THEORY TEST FOR LEARNER DRIVERS

3.1 The introduction of a separate theory test was a long campaigned for addition to the driving test in the UK. This association had hoped that the test questions would be phrased in such a way that young people would be encouraged into classrooms in order to study for it. In this way their training could extend beyond the actual requirements of the test and training courses could include peer group discussion on attitudes towards driving, such as speed, alcohol, risk taking etc.

3.2 The current attitude of new learner drivers is to learn the published questions and answers for the theory test without really understanding the material being tested. We believe the effectiveness of the separate theory test would be improved by the addition of hazard perception testing and look forward to the results of the current research into this subject.

3.3 However, we do not believe that simply adding hazard perception questions to the test will necessarily encourage new drivers to take training. We have been privileged to view the experimental hazard perception-training course that the Driving Standards Agency have prepared as part of their research programme with the Transport Research Laboratory and believe it to be excellent. However, we are concerned that a hazard perception test will not be able to be constructed that will require people to take training for it. We believe that training of the type we have seen is vital in order to obtain the best possible results in terms of road safety.

**3.4 We ask the select committee to consider compulsory group theory training for all learner drivers.**

### 4 THE PRACTICAL DRIVING TEST

4.1 The recent changes introduced to the practical driving test have not yet been in place long enough to evaluate properly, we believe they will be beneficial in that they will require learner drivers to have training on a wider variety of roads and cover more varying traffic conditions.

4.2 Most learner drivers have some driving lessons but many do not have enough to pass the driving test at the first attempt. Driving Instructors do their best to encourage all learner drivers to have sufficient lessons to cover the whole of the DSA recommended syllabus for learner drivers. However, the attitude of many learners and sadly their parents is that they wish to keep the number of lessons to the minimum required just to pass the driving test.

4.3 Consideration is currently being given to requiring driving instructors to complete a Log Book for each learner driver, they teach. Whilst this may help to ensure that learners cover the full recommended syllabus, it may dissuade some learner drivers from taking professional driver

training. Some may prefer the cheaper option of learning with Mum and Dad. In order to ensure that all learner drivers are properly trained they should all complete the DSA recommended syllabus with an ADI. Additional practice with a parent or friend may also be beneficial providing it is carried out under the guidance of the ADI.

**4.4 We ask the select committee to consider that all learner drivers should be required to complete the DSA recommended syllabus with an ADI before taking a practical driving test.**

## 5 PASS PLUS

5.1 The MSA has fully supported Pass Plus training since its conception however like most other individuals and organisations involved we have been extremely disappointed with the number of newly qualified drivers taking the course.

5.2 Most learners and their parents support the idea of post-test training but once the test is passed the attitude of the vast majority is “I can’t be bothered” or “I need the money to buy a car.” It is frightening to consider that over 95% of all new drivers never have any professional training on motorways.

**5.3 We ask the select committee to consider that all newly qualified drivers should be required to complete a Pass Plus course.**

5.4 If this is considered too draconian

**5.5 We ask the select committee to consider that all learner drivers be allowed to drive on motorways with an ADI prior to taking their practical driving test.**

## 6 COST OF LEARNING TO DRIVE

6.1 Many young people are put off learning to drive properly because they consider the costs prohibitive. The table below gives an idea of the notional cost.

Item	Unit Cost	Totals
Forty driving lessons	15.50	620.00
One Theory test	15.50	15.50.
Two practical tests	36.75	73.50
Pass Plus course	93.00	93.00
		£802.00

6.2 When prosecuted for driving without a licence the offender is likely to receive a fine of less than £100. Many young people perceive that the risk of detection is low and choose to take the risk on the basis that even if they are caught the fine is cheaper than driving lessons. In some cases, the vehicles they drive belong to their parents!

**6.3 We ask the select committee to consider that the police should be empowered to impound a vehicle if an unlicensed driver is driving it and that the courts should be empowered to confiscate the vehicle permanently.**

- 6.4 For some young people learning to drive properly is beyond their means perhaps because they are unemployed. For many young people a full driving licence is the opportunity to take up employment.
- 6.5 We ask the select committee to consider that the funding of professional driver training for some young people would be a sensible use of government resources.**

## 7 UNLICENSED DRIVING

- 7.1 The fall in the number of people coming forward for test over recent years would appear to be matched by the number of people driving illegally on Britains roads. Whether they are put off driving legally because of the cost of learning to drive, or the inconvenience, or the perceived difficulty, is of little consequence, the problem is that people are simply not learning to drive properly.
- 7.2 It is believed that as many as one million people are driving in Great Britain without being properly licensed. We believe that many of these are newly qualified drivers who have been returned to provisional licence status and continue to drive illegally.
- 7.3 We appreciate that police forces throughout Great Britain are burdened with huge amounts of work, however, it seems to us regrettable, considering the presumed numbers of unlicensed drivers, how few are prosecuted.

## 8 DRIVER IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES

- 8.1 We believe the introduction of driver improvement courses to be an excellent road safety measure. However, we have been saddened that these courses have not been introduced nationally. We understand that in Scotland none of these courses are running. Whilst we appreciate that the full value of these courses are still being evaluated, we believe them to be an excellent benefit to road safety.
- 8.2 We ask the select committee to consider the introduction of driver improvement schemes to all areas of Great Britain at the earliest possible opportunity.**

## 9 QUALIFIED DRIVERS

- 9.1 About 5% of crashes in this country are caused by vehicle faults - New vehicles are carefully checked before they go onto the road. They have to receive type approval for driving in all types of road conditions, rain snow etc. and on all types of roads and different traffic conditions from low speed traffic jams to high-speed motorways. Vehicles that are three years old are required by law to be checked annually.
- 9.2 About 95% of crashes in this country are caused by driver faults - New drivers are carefully checked before they go onto the road. They have to drive in one type of road condition, (but never snow or ice) and on some types of roads and different traffic conditions (but never on motorways). Once they have passed the basic driving test, they are never checked again.
- 9.3 Ask any motorist – “if you took a driving test today would you pass?” Almost without exception, the vast majority would say “no.” Result the popular myth that most motorists think that passing the driving test is something they have to do before they learn to drive properly!
- 9.4 Experience teaches many motorists how to drive badly and not have crashes most of the time. This attitude tends to rub off on young people who learn from observation of the general driving population how to drive badly but do not have the experience to avoid accidents.

**9.5 We ask the select committee to consider the re-training of all drivers on a regular basis. And as a sign of their commitment to road safety, we challenge those members of the committee who hold a full driving licence to take a driving assessment that we would be happy to arrange for them.**

## 10 THE DRIVING STANDARDS AGENCY

10.1 We believe that generally the work driving examiners carry out is excellent. We applaud most of the work of the Driving Standards Agency and support all that they are doing to try to raise standards of driving and driver training. However, we would like to put two matters before the committee that we consider are having a detrimental effect on the driver training industry.

10.2 Recent changes in the management structure of the agencies examining staff has resulted in an increase in complaints about the attitude of a number of examiners including Supervising Examiners (ADI). This appears to be creating a crisis of confidence amongst driving instructors. We believe that a return to the old style management structure where the reporting chain for examiners led directly to the Chief Driving Examiner through headquarters' staff would be an improvement.

10.3 The standard of the DSA practical test booking service is currently appalling. The recent debacle over test bookings when a new computer system was introduced at the same time as the revised practical test is not the first occasion on which they have caused severe disruptions to the driver training industry in this country. We feel that consideration should be given to privatisation of this part of the agency's business.