

Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Resource for New Drivers

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Biography

Susan Cambridge has worked in road safety for fifteen years. With a background in education and promotion, and an MA (Hons) in English, Susan began working for the NZ Roadshow Trust in 1988 and was appointed Christchurch Road Safety Co-ordinator for the Christchurch City Council in 1989. In 1997 she became a consultant with Francis and Cambridge Ltd, continuing as road safety co-ordinator on contract and continuing to work for the NZ Roadshow Trust. Susan's work includes planning and implementing road safety education and awareness programmes, evaluations of programmes and road safety research.

Abstract

This study evaluated the resource produced by the NZ Roadshow Trust for novice drivers. The resource consisted of an information booklet, a log book and a puzzle, one half of which was addressed to parents/caregivers and the other half to the students. A telephone survey three months after delivery determined how the resource was perceived and whether there was a difference in the number and variety of hours of practice between students given a copy of the resource and a control group without it. Both study group and control group were recruited from schools and had held learner licences for no longer than three months when recruited. The study found:

- Almost 80% of parents had been given their part of the key puzzle
- 80% of study group respondents completed the key puzzle
- Just over 85% of this group used the information booklet, most found it easy to understand
- 51% said the information booklet was 'Very useful' or 'Useful' with 30% saying it was OK.
- 64% of the study group did not use the logbook. About 40% of this group said they were not driving enough to use it yet.
- Most drivers using the logbook said it was easy to use and useful.
- More than half the study group respondents made positive comments about the effect of the resource on their driving practice.
- Differences between study group and control group included:
 - More lessons/practice sessions in the average week by study group members.
 - Greater average time spent on each session by study group members.
 - Wider variety of roading conditions experienced among study group members

1. BACKGROUND

Young drivers in New Zealand contribute disproportionately to injuries and deaths on our roads. In 1999 the 15-24 year age group accounted for 25% of road deaths and 31% of reported injuries (Motor Accidents in New Zealand 1999). Reducing the numbers of road crashes in this group would make a huge difference to the crash statistics.

In Victoria, where strategies using enforcement and promotion have achieved huge reductions in road fatalities, young people are still over represented in road crashes (Cockfield et al 1999). To address this issue TAC and VicRoads have developed several programmes for novice drivers including "HELP", and "Ls to Ps (Cockfield et al 1999). The aim of these programmes is to

increase the amount of supervised driving undertaken by students during the learner phase of their licence. Studies in Sweden indicate a 30% reduction in crashes where students had 120 hours or more of supervised experience before driving solo (Cockfield 2000). This is considered the optimum number of hours to improve the crash rate.

Warren A. Harrison (1999) found that many new drivers were getting their licences with much smaller amounts of driving experience. Parents were found to be the most frequent supervisors of driving in the learner phase. The Australian programmes used advertising, resource packs, manuals and log books to persuade parents to give more supervised driving sessions to their sons and daughters.

Following the introduction of these programmes in Victoria the NZ Roadshow Trust carried out a survey of young drivers to find out whether the issues targeted by these resources in Australia applied equally to New Zealand learner drivers.

The survey results reported by Cambridge (2001) showed that the situation in New Zealand was similar to Australia with drivers at the Learner Licence stage having far fewer hours of supervised driving experience than recommended in the Swedish study. The survey also showed that a quarter of these drivers, most of whom were under 19 years of age had had a crash. Many had had more than one.

The NZ Roadshow Trust worked with the creative agency UMC to produce a package of resources to encourage new drivers to get more supervised driving experience while at the learner stage of their licence.

The resource consisted of a small information book, a log book, and a puzzle in the shape of a key. One part of the key puzzle was in an envelope addressed to the parent/care giver, the other in an envelope addressed to the novice driver. To read the messages on the puzzle the two pieces had to be put together. This was to encourage the students to talk with parents and pass the information on to them. The information booklet is clearly about practice, not lessons.

The draft resource was tested with a group of 10 young people from Christchurch schools. Their comments on the content and design of the resources was taken into account and changes made in the final version.

Overall their comments were positive. They felt that encouraging more supervised driving practice was a positive step, and that involving parents in the process was a good thing to do. They felt that the package was most likely to be used if it was distributed to new drivers as they received their learner licence.

Having completed the resource package the trust wished to trial it and carry out an evaluation.

2. OBJECTIVES OF EVALUATION

1. To determine how the resource was perceived by novice drivers who had received it.
2. To ascertain whether there is a difference in the number and variety of hours of practice between students who were given a copy of the resource and a control group who had not received it.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Trial with Automobile Association

The Trust worked first with the Automobile Association hoping that they could distribute the resource to new drivers through their testing outlets. Outlet managers were asked to take contact details of those who received the resource as well as a similar number of contact details of new drivers not receiving the resource. In this way a control group would be established so that the driving experience of those using the resource could be compared with those who did not receive it.

This trial did not work. Although the outlet managers were positive and enthusiastic various issues intervened and the resource was distributed to only a small number of new drivers. Many of those in the control group had had their learner licence for over a year. The main group had had their licences for a shorter time. Comparisons between the two groups were not valid.

3.2 Trial with school students

The Trust looked at other ways of distributing the resource and achieving a sample and control group of young drivers. They asked Gary Nicol Associates to approach a sample of schools and ask for help in recruiting students to take part in the trial. The groups were made up of students who had held their learner licences for no longer than three months at the time of recruitment. The students would be interviewed by telephone approximately three months after they had been recruited.

Schools were offered a sum of money as a thank you for the teachers work in recruiting students. A prize was offered to students taking part in the survey as an incentive. Two playstations were offered as prizes, one to the study group and one to the control group.

Those in the control group were recruited from different schools from those in the study group to minimise the likelihood of control group members seeing the resource. Schools were chosen to represent a variety of urban, rural, state and private schools.

The sample sizes for the two groups were 50 students in each. There were slightly more male than female students in each group, 46% female to 54 % male in the study group and 40% female to 60% male in the control group.

Questionnaires for the telephone interviews were drawn up by Gary Nicol and members of the NZ Roadshow Trust.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Recall of resource

Unprompted 92% of the study group recalled receiving the envelope addressed to the novice driver and 92% recalled the envelope addressed to parents. The log book was recalled by 62% and the information booklet by 54% of the group.

In all 78% said they had delivered the envelope addressed to their parent/caregiver while 80% said they completed the key puzzle.

4.2 Usefulness of resource

A total of 86% of the study group said they used the information booklet. Of those using the information booklet 70% rated the booklet as very easy or easy to understand and the other 30% rated it as OK. In addition 51% said it was useful or very useful and 30% said it was OK.

Only 36% of the study group said they used the logbook. However 38% of those not using it said it was because they were not driving enough yet to be worth it. This means there is potential for over 50% to use the log book.

Of those using the log book, 89% found it easy or very easy to use and 83% said it was useful or very useful.

Respondents were asked how the package as a whole influenced their approach to learning to drive with 52% making positive comments, mainly about being more aware of safety issues. Of the others, 8% were undecided and 10% did not read it.

4.3 Comparison with control group

The next part of the survey was to find out if there were differences in the supervised driving experience between the study group and the control group. Responses indicated slightly more time actively learning among the study group.

When the two groups were asked about the number of lessons/practice sessions undertaken in the average week, a greater percentage of the study group were having three or more lessons per week than the control group, even though 14% of the study group were not yet driving. Only 26% of the study group as opposed to 44% of the control group said they were having one session per week while 14% of the study group as opposed to 6% of the control group said they were having three sessions per week.

When asked about the average time spent on driving sessions there were clear differences between the two groups.

More of the study group had used driving instructors (30% of study group, 22% of control group).

In sessions with parents 14% of the study group as opposed to 8% of the control group had sessions of over 1 hour. Only 38% of the study group as opposed to 66% of the control group had sessions under one hour.

To see whether the resource had influenced the variety of driving conditions experienced by the new drivers, both groups were asked about their experience of different driving conditions.

There were differences between the two groups in most areas relating to more challenging driving conditions. These included:

- Open road driving (66% of study group, 50% of control group)
- Wet conditions (66% of study group, 42% of control group)
- Inner city (58% study group, 42% control group)
- Heavy traffic (58% study group, 32% control group)
- Night time (58% study group, 34% control group)
- Motorways/median divided roads (52% study group, 28% control group)
- Main roads without median strip (40% study group, 20% control group)

- Dusk (30% study group, 8% control group)
- Dawn (24% study group, 8% control group).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Novice Driver package was well received, with most students reading the information booklet and completing the key puzzle. Nearly 80% of students gave the envelope with one half of the puzzle to a parent/caregiver, thus involving them in the process. Most students found the booklet useful and easy to use. More than half the students receiving the resource made positive comments about its effect on their driving practice.

The log book was used by only 36% of the study group but 38% of those not using it said they were not driving often enough to use it yet. Most students found the information book easy to use and useful or OK. Most of those using the log book thought it was easy to use and useful. Students may need to be given some motivation to encourage them to use the log book.

When the study group was compared with a control group who had not received the resource it was found that the study group had more lessons/practice sessions per week on average than the control group. In addition more of the study group had sessions of over one hour. More members of the study group had lessons from a driving instructor.

When the two groups were asked about the different driving conditions they had experienced there was a consistent difference between the two groups with more of the study group experiencing each of the more challenging driving conditions.

The evaluation of the resource is positive and indicates that it had a positive effect on the amount and variety of supervised driving experience of those using it.

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Keywords

Novice drivers, parents, driving practice, evaluation, learner driver