

Youth at Risk – How Do They Get Their Driver’s Licence?

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ABSTRACT

How are young single mums, homeless youth, rural and remote young people or migrant and refugee young people going to achieve 120 hours of supervised driving?

The Road Aware Access & Equity Project has specifically targeted “at risk youth” who, for genuine hardship and disadvantage reasons, are at risk of not being able to get the required supervised driving experience through lack of access to a suitable driving supervisor and/or vehicle.

The Project acknowledged that there are many groups of young people within the population that fall into the category of “at risk” and will find it difficult ... if not impossible to achieve 120 hours of supervised driving.

Road Aware has conducted extensive state-wide consultation to determine the extent of the risk factors that might cause a young person to be at risk and to estimate the number of young people in the state who are affected by each of the risk factors. It also identified existing successful strategies and models which assist at risk young people to meet the current requirements, and which may be useful in assisting them to meet the proposed requirements. The findings from this consultation have been presented as a set of recommendations to Cabinet to support young people.

ROAD AWARE PROGRAM

In November 2000, Barry Elliott, Independent Research and Communication Psychologist, presented his paper, *Review of Good Practice: Children and Road Safety Education to the Road Safety Council of Western Australia*. The review investigated a number of Australian and international road safety education programs and made recommendations for the development of a comprehensive road safety education program for young Western Australians.

The report, which highlighted the importance of identifying key target age groups; focusing on the role of parents in road safety education; and developing strategic alliances for effective implementation lead to the Road Safety Council establishing the Children and Road Safety Steering Committee. This committee coordinated the initiatives of a number of working parties during 2001 and 2002.

Following Elliot’s report and consultation with the working parties, a policy document titled *Road Safety Policy for Infants, Children and Young People in Western Australia*, describing all the initiatives to be implemented, was endorsed by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in August 2002. The Road Aware Program (Road Aware) was subsequently launched in September 2002 and strategically linked to the School Drug Education Project in 2003.

TARGETED APPROACH

The main recommendations in the policy paper related to the identification of three key age groups as ‘windows of opportunity’ for road safety education: 0 to 4 year olds; early childhood students aged 4 to 8 years; and pre-drivers aged 15 to 17 years. These age groups were identified as being significant times at which children and young people are engaged in a number of specific road safety issues, including car child restraints for infants, pedestrian safety for school aged children and driving safety for pre-drivers. In addition, these key times represented periods where parents/carers are actively engaged in their child’s road safety.

Road Aware has comprehensively planned three strategies with supporting initiatives in accordance with these key target age groups. They include:

- Road Aware Parents (parents/carers of 0 – 4 year olds)
- Road Aware Kids (4 – 14 years and their parents/carers)
- Road Aware Drivers (15 – 20 years and their parents/carers).

NOVICE DRIVER REVIEW IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In 2005 the Road Safety Council of WA conducted a public consultation as part of a Novice Driver Review. The Review aimed to explore nine recommendations to the current Graduated Driver Training and Licensing System that would significantly reduce the number of young drivers, aged 17-24 years, killed and injured on WA roads.

The general feedback from the consultation was positive and the Review continued to take all nine recommendations to Cabinet for approval. The recommendations were to:

1. increase the minimum number of supervised driving hours from 25 to 120 over a longer period
2. specify a minimum of six months for the Learner Phase 2 period
3. increase the maximum time a learner can stay on their Learner’s Permit to three years
4. extend the Provisional (P-Plate) licence period from two years to three
5. tighten requirements for supervising drivers, including lower blood-alcohol levels and increasing the level of driving experience needed
6. introduce night-time driving restrictions for P-Plate drivers for the first six-months
7. limit the number of “peer group” passengers for P-Plate drivers in the first six months
8. introduce a zero blood-alcohol concentration for both L-Plate and P-Plate drivers
9. introduce a graduated demerit point system for novice drivers and issue warning letters for unsafe driving practices.

ACCESS AND EQUITY PROJECT

The *Road Aware Access and Equity Project* commenced in January 2006 with the appointment of a dedicated Project Officer. The Project is linked directly to *Arriving Safely, the Road Safety Strategy for Western Australia 2003 – 2007*, in particular *Preparing Tomorrow’s Road Users* and is funded by the Insurance Commission of Western Australia through the Road Safety Council of WA.

The Project was developed as the Review highlighted many issues for young people in relation to Recommendation 1: *To increase the minimum number of supervised and logged driving hours required from 25 hours in one Learner phase to 120 hours over two Learner phases*. This recommendation is based on research that shows that the minimum driving experience needed to reduce crash risk, when first licensed, is 120 hours¹.

¹ Senserrick, T. & Haworth, N. (2004)

The identified issues included not being able to complete the proposed 120 hours of supervised driving practice for example due to the lack of access to a vehicle and to a supervisor.

Aim

The Access and Equity Project, in the context of the Western Australian Novice Driver Review, targets recommendation one and aims to:

- identify the range and extent of youth (aged 15 to 20 years) who are ‘at-risk’ of not being able to legitimately obtain their driver’s licence
- suggest strategies and solutions to alleviate the range of risk factors identified.

Specifically, the project intends to:

- identify the range of risk factors that might cause a given individual young person to be at risk, including the interactions of these factors
- estimate the number of young people in the state who are affected by each of the risk factors
- identify any existing successful strategies and models which assist at risk young people to meet the current requirements, and which may be useful in assisting them to meet the proposed requirements
- generate new ideas and strategies which may be effective in assisting at risk young people to meet the proposed requirements.

Definition of ‘at-risk’ youth

One of the objectives of the Project was to clearly define ‘at risk’ youth in the context of learning to drive. Ideally all young people would be able to legitimately obtain their driver’s licence within the timeframe that is desired by them and within the minimum timeframe, that being a statutory restriction. However there are a number of possible ways in which an individual could be at-risk in relation to this ideal. The Project through consultation with Government and non-Government agencies defined the following four:

1. inability to obtain a drivers licence
2. inability to obtain a drivers licence before a critical point in time
3. direct cost expenditure associated with completing licence requirements
4. insufficient level of quality within the training experiences

Who are youth at risk?

Being ‘at risk’ was also considered in the context of not being able to complete the licensing process due to lack of access to a suitable driving supervisor and/or vehicle. Identification of at-risk youth was initially through schools, as staff and local community based agencies were in a unique position to identify and refer young people to locally developed community based support schemes. The process was facilitated by the Project in collaboration with local road safety stakeholders, community organisations and local businesses.

Though no assumption was made that all youth fall into the categories described below or that all youth who fell within one or more of these categories were necessarily at-risk, some included:

- juvenile justice/ Department of Justice clients
- young people in juvenile detention i.e. Banksia Hill, Rangeview Remand Centre
- homeless youth
- youth that live on remote communities
- refugee/migrant youth
- low income families
- independent young people under 18 years old e.g. those on “unreasonable to live at home allowance” from Centrelink

- youth that have English as a 2nd, 3rd, 4th language
- indigenous youth
- low literacy youth
- homeless youth
- teenage parents.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in the study of ‘at-risk’ youth was primarily qualitative to measure the magnitude of issues, although some quantitative data was generated through the study. The emphasis on qualitative techniques reflects the exploratory nature of the study. The methodology was also quite iterative, in the sense that it evolved as the study progressed and issues to be covered were added and dropped as appropriate.

In addition to the primary data collection, the study made use of existing research in a various ways such as informing the Project on issues for inclusion in the study; supporting (or otherwise) outcomes from the primary data collection; and providing additional information beyond the scope of the primary data collection. Such data sources will be referenced and acknowledged in the final report.

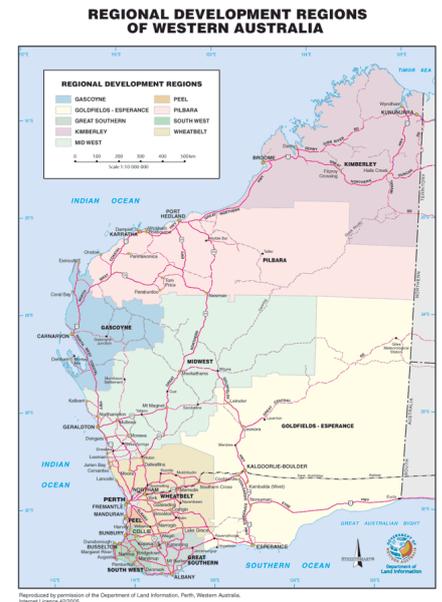
Geographical areas

The target for the study was the total population of the state of WA. Given the size of this population, and the geographical distances involved, it was clear that an approach using a representative sample of the population was required.

There were several relevant variables in choosing representative sites from which to collect information, such as:

- size of population centre and the services available within it
- proximity to larger population centres and services
- cultural factors related to the region.

To cover each of these variables, the state’s population was broken down into categories of population sizes and geographical distribution.



Category	Metropolitan (M)	Major regional (R1)	Medium regional (R2)	Small regional (R3)	Tiny regional (R4)	Rural and remote (R5)
Definition	100,000+	20,000 – 99,000	5,000 – 19,999	1,000 – 4,999	100 – 999	<100
Regions	Perth + Mandurah	Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie	Kununurra Narrogin	Warburton Fitzroy Crossing Corrigin Leonora	Looma Bidyadanga Nannup	-

This categorisation provided sufficient experiences to reveal the full range of risk factors that currently confront young people, families and communities in terms of young people learning to drive, and the additional factors that might be introduced if and when the proposed Review recommendations come into effect. While these categories run across the state, there were further geographical considerations in terms of proximity to larger population centres and cultural factors. These were catered for by distributing the selected sites into regional areas.

For practical reasons of time and budget, only four regions were included in the study. They were chosen to give maximum representativeness of experiences. The table below summarises why each selected region was chosen, and how non-selected regions were to be represented.

Region	Included	Comment
Metropolitan	Yes	Major population centre; accounts for largest proportion of crashes.
Gascoyne	No	Towns similar to Wheatbelt, Kimberley and South West.
Goldfields	Yes	Remoteness; cultural issues.
Great Southern	No	Towns similar to South West, Wheatbelt and Goldfields
Kimberley	Yes	Remoteness, cultural issues.
Mid West	No	Towns similar to Wheatbelt, Kimberley and South West.
Peel	Yes	Included with Metropolitan.
Pilbara	No	Towns similar to Goldfields and Kimberley.
South West	Yes	Second largest population; different driving conditions.
Wheatbelt	Yes	High level of crashes; ability to represent surrounding areas.

Two towns from each of the four non-metropolitan regions were selected for inclusion. They were from two different categories, from R1– R4, with two of each being included across the whole study. Rural and remote (R5) issues were explored specifically in the Goldfields and Kimberley regions

SOURCE GROUPS AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The target groups for the consultation included schools, young people, parents and caregivers, stakeholders and community agencies. Data was sourced from five key groups, and a range of specific techniques were used with each of these.

School staff

Schools had an important role to play, both in providing information about youth experiences and also because of their potential role in strategies to limit the negative impacts of an increase in required supervised driving hours. Because the type and number of schools in the target areas varied considerably the nature of the data collection with schools also varied.

The project team ran two school staff workshops in the metropolitan area with invited representatives such as Student Services Team members, Principals, Deputies, Teachers, District Office staff and other Teaching Assistants. Regional workshops were also held and were largely organised by the SDERA Regional Project Officers based on their knowledge of the particular people specific to each region. Attendance at these workshops varied however discussions provided relevant information for the region.

The consultation with the schools from all systems and sectors, covered a very broad range of students including those from rural and remote areas, migrant and refugees, paying International students, Indigenous students and those from a middle to high socio-economic suburbs.

Youth

The purpose of including young people as a data source was to identify their attitudes towards obtaining their driver's licence and the barriers they perceived to doing so. Because these issues are unlikely to be obtained in an open setting, it was necessary to allow young people the chance to provide information in a non-threatening, anonymous manner. A written survey was sent to participating Year 10 to 12 students (aged 15 to 17 years) approximately 1 to 2 weeks prior to the school being visited by the Project Officers. Discussions occurred between the Project team and the selected schools who were encouraged to include 100% of students in the targeted years. The survey was administered in-class to maximise the participation rate.

The survey was followed up by two discussion groups per school, moderated by the Project Officers. The discussions focused on the outcomes of the survey and the implications of the results. To provide a relatively diverse cross section of young people the sessions were, where possible, conducted in various learning areas including Senior English and Fast Track classes.

These school-based activities only included the views of young people within the school system. While participation is now mandatory until Year 11 (16 years of age), it is a known fact that at least a proportion of young people are either chronic truants or effectively not in the school system at all. The level of both of these varies significantly by geographical and socio-economic areas. Additionally, there are those young people who have legitimately left school after Year 11. It was difficult to directly reach these groups, although by their nature they were of interest to the Project. Secondary information about these groups was obtained via the Agency and Stakeholder channels and where the opportunity presented, primary data in the form of individual interviews – formally and informally, was generated via these channels.

Consultation also occurred with the Department of Education and Training, Director of Retention and Transition and other education systems and sectors, to access the state-wide database on students at educational risk.

The Project also consulted with young people in Banksia Hill Detention Centre and Rangeview Remand Centre. Several focus groups comprising of 14 to 17 year olds was held and surveyed using the survey given to students in educational settings.

Parents / primary care givers (P/PCGs)

Parents / primary care givers were a key inclusion in the study because of the (assumed) additional demands in terms of time and /or cost that would result from the change to 120 hours of supervised driving. They play an important and pivotal role as their behaviour and attitudes are potential risk factors in themselves, while they are also potentially the solution to other risk factors.

Primary information from P/PCGs was obtained by using a focus group methodology. One focus group was recruited and conducted in each of the regional centres visited (up to eight groups) and up to four groups in the metropolitan area.

An eligibility criterion for the groups was having a child in the 15 to 17 year old age range. This picked up P/PCGs whose children ranged from not yet having begun to learn to drive through to those who had recently obtained their driver's licence, and allowed the issues and potential issues for P/PCGs to be clearly defined.

Stakeholders

These were identified as organisations directly involved in the Project itself, in road safety and in youth education (including Professional Driving Schools). Stakeholders were asked to provide feedback about the issues currently affecting the driver licensing process in their area and the expected impacts of the recommended changes. This requested information was not from individual experiences but more focussed on systemic issues that may then impact on individuals. Four regional stakeholder workshops were conducted.

Community agencies

The Community Agencies included in the study were organisations who provide services and support to young people and their families. Some of the agencies worked specifically with disadvantaged and / or disenfranchised young people, who it would be expected were more at-risk as a result of the proposed increase in supervised driving hours. The Agencies were one of the primary avenues for obtaining information about young people outside the school systems.

The identified agencies within each target area were invited to send a representative to participate in a workshop. At the conclusion of the session participants were asked to complete a survey, which served to generate more specific data that was used to quantify the extent of risk factors

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND EMERGING ISSUES

Throughout the metropolitan and regional consultation a number of common issues emerged in relation to the proposed increase of supervised driving hours. These included:

Top 4 positive themes

1. More hours, more practise = better driver.
2. Greater proficiency of driving skills.
3. More time to get to know the roads and identify hazards.
4. Increased experience.

Top 4 concerns

1. Limited access to a vehicle.
2. Limited access to a supervisor.
3. Financial issues e.g. due to increasing costs in fuel.
4. Time issues for young people due to extra curricular activities such as sport, part time work and study.

Area specific issues

The consultation also highlighted that there were many distinguishing factors unique for a number of towns. These factors reflected area specific issues such as few people in a town holding a driver's licence (e.g. in Warburton no resident has held a driver's licence for the last 4 years): and in the remote town of Oombulgurri (Kimberley region) there are no roads in or out of the town with access only by plane.

The Kimberley town of Kununurra is situated 1045kms from Broome and 830kms from Darwin. Community members reported that on average most residents would not drive longer than one hour a week around the town due to the very close proximity of shops, schools and sporting facilities. They highlighted the fact that if young people were required to complete 120 hours in Kununurra without leaving the town it would take approximately 2 years and 4 months to complete the full hours (i.e. is at 1 hour per week). Additionally, community members highlighted that learner drivers would not be able to develop skills required for various driving conditions as they would be driving the same roads week in week out. Furthermore, as it is a condition of the West Australian Learner's Permit that 'L' plate drivers may only drive within the state borders, taking an extended journey to increase hours could only be to Broome or the smaller town of Halls Creek which is 360kms away. This in itself carried issues such as high fuel costs and the time required for the supervising driver and learner driver to participate in this type of journey.

CONCLUSION

At the time of writing this paper:

- Cabinet had endorsed the safety principles behind the recommendation to increase supervised driving hours from 25 to 120 hours
- initial findings were being compiled and considered for representation in a final paper with specific recommendations being made for addressing access and equity issues
- the additional recommendations from the Novice Driver Review had been approved (except Recommendation 4: to extend P plates from 2 year to 3 years) by Cabinet and will be implemented in July 2007.

Implementation of Recommendation 1 will not be considered until the final report from the Road Aware Access and Equity Project has been completed and appropriate access and equity support programs are in place throughout Western Australia to enable all learner drivers to access a suitable supervisory driver and/or vehicle.

Consequently the findings from the consultation will be endorsed by the Road Safety Council and then presented to Cabinet to assist in determining the legislative changes regarding increasing supervised driving hours. Depending on Cabinet's decision it is anticipated that the implementation of this recommendation will occur in 2008.

REFERENCES

- 1 Senserrick, T. & Haworth, N. (2004) *Review of literature regarding national and international young driver training, licensing and regulatory systems: Report to Western Australia Road Safety Council*. Monash University Accident Research Centre, Clayton, Victoria.