

Queensland Young Driver Community Engagement Process

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ABSTRACT

A young driver discussion paper was released by the Queensland Government in November 2005 providing 22 possible initiatives to reduce the high incidence of young road user fatalities on Queensland Roads.

A number of community engagement techniques were utilised including focus groups, a telephone survey and community forums across Queensland. The results showed two of the 22 initiatives were strongly supported, eight had general support, two had some support, nine received mixed support and one was opposed.

As a result of the engagement process, on the 12 August the Queensland Government announced a number of changes to the Queensland graduated licensing system (GLS) for young drivers. Initiatives to be introduced included 100 hours of on-road driving experience, reduction of the learner age to 16 years of age, minimum 12 months on a learner licence, split provisional phase (P1/P2), peer passenger restrictions from 11pm to 5am, late night driving restrictions (as a penalty), power restrictions, introduction of a hazard perception test from P1 to P2 and a multimedia package for learner drivers and supervisors.

INTRODUCTION

17-24 years olds are one of Queensland's most at-risk groups on the road. In 2004 young people accounted for only 13% of all licence holders, but 28% of the road toll. In 2005 there were 106 fatalities as a result of young driver crashes. During 2001 to 2005, 558 people died as a result of young driver crashes within Queensland. This represents 35.0% of the Queensland road toll.

From 2001 to 2005, the top three contributing factors associated with young drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes within Queensland were:

- 42.1% Inexperience;
- 23.6% Driving over the illegal BAC (drink driving); and
- 21.5% Driving too fast for the conditions or in excess of the speed limit (Speed).

Of the 558 people who died in Queensland, 246 people (or 44.1%) were the young driver or rider, 160 people (or 28.7%) were the passengers of the young driver/rider's vehicle and 152 people (or 27.2%) were other road users (drivers, riders, passengers, pedestrians or cyclists).

Generally young people are more susceptible to taking risks (WHO, 2002). Deaths from external causes (including transport related crashes, suicide, drowning) account for 70% of deaths of 15-24 year olds. As noted above, the main causes of young driver crashes are inexperience, alcohol/drugs and speeding. The youthfulness and inexperience of young drivers is a world-wide road safety problem and Australia compares well with many other western countries with young drivers (WHO, 2004).

To address this issue on 2 November 2005 the Queensland Government released a young driver discussion paper titled, *Queensland Youth – on the road and in control* (Queensland Transport, 2005). The discussion paper outlined 22 possible initiatives that could be introduced to improve Queensland's Graduated Licensing System (GLS).

The 22 initiatives were presented in three phases pre-learner, learner licence and provisional licence. The community consultation process closed on 10 March 2006.

A GLS is a best-practice approach to managing the risks associated with young drivers. It is often referred to as an ‘apprenticeship’ system where new drivers can gain experience under the less risky conditions incorporated into a learner and provisional phase, before ‘graduating’ to an unrestricted open licence (Simpson, 2003). A GLS also relies on parents having a major influence on the driving behaviour of their children. Their involvement has been shown to enhance compliance with a GLS by young people (Hedlund & Compton, 2005).

METHOD

The discussion paper was distributed widely with direct mail of copies to secondary schools, Councils, public libraries, all Technical and Further Education (TAFE) locations, Universities, Queensland Government agencies, Members of the Queensland Parliament, driver training organisations, Queensland Transport (QT) Customer Service Centres (CSCs) and other key road safety organisations. The general public could call a toll free number and a discussion paper would be posted directly to them, or it could be accessed online.

To capture the responses a number of qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. These methods included:

- a feedback form provided within the discussion paper;
- written submissions;
- focus groups;
- a telephone survey; and
- community forums.

Feedback form

The discussion paper contained a feedback form which could be detached and mailed reply paid back to QT. The form consisted of 33 questions with respondents asked to indicate on a 5 point likert scale the degree of support (strongly oppose; oppose; neutral; support; strongly support). Space was provided under each question for a separate comment. The form also asked for demographic details such as gender, age, licence type, postcode and role in teaching young drivers (eg. parent, driver trainer, learner driver etc.).

People aged 17-20 represented the greatest proportion of the respondents, although there was about a 50/50 proportion of young (under 20) to older (over 20). Most respondents held an open licence, followed closely by a provisional licence.

Written submissions

Any member of the community whether an individual or an organisation was able to submit a written submission on the initiatives released in the discussion paper either by mail direct to QT or via email. Submissions were not required to be provided in any particular format.

Focus groups

An independent market research company, Market & Communications Research (MCR), was engaged to conduct focus groups on behalf of QT to gauge the potential support for the initiatives in the discussion paper. MCR conducted 13 focus groups with learner licence holders, provisional licence holders and parents in four metropolitan and regional/rural areas of Queensland (Brisbane, Gladstone, Gympie and Emerald). MCR also conducted three mini focus groups with members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) community in Woorabinda and Cherbourg.

Focus groups were recruited by SRS Research, an accredited recruitment agent. ATSI participants were recruited by a representative of the Woorabinda Community Justice Group and a representative of the Cherbourg Council. All focus groups took place between 14th and 23rd November 2005.

Telephone survey

MCR also conducted a telephone survey with recently licensed learner and provisional licence holders (n=200), as well as open licence holders (n=100). Learner and provisional licence holder respondents were drawn from a randomly generated sample provided by QT. A quota was applied to the process to ensure that the sample reflected the true composition of the learner and provisional licence holder population.

The open licence holders sample was generated by a random sampling technique and included open licence holders aged 18 years and over, who drive more than one hour per week. The quotas consisted of:

- 50% aged under 40 years and 50% aged 40 years or older;
- 50% male and 50% female; and
- 40% South East Queensland, 20% Southern, 20% Central and 20% Northern region.

The questionnaires applied in the survey consisted of predominately closed-ended questions where response options were pre-coded. There were also a number of open-ended questions where code frames were developed from respondents' verbatim responses.

A subcontractor to MCR, Ozinfo, conducted the survey. The interviewing took place between the 12th and 15th December 2005. The results were analysed using the data processing and analysis system OzPro. The analysis included frequency counts for each question, and cross analysis of responses to all questions by selected demographics and behavioural factors.

Community forums

Ten community forums were held across Queensland between 1 February and 8 March 2006. The ten forum locations were Toowoomba, Gold Coast, Mackay, Townsville, Cairns, Brisbane, Caboolture, Rockhampton, Sunshine Coast and Logan.

The forums were open to the general public and were generally held in the evening from 6:30-8:30pm. Two forums were held at lunchtime 12:30-2:30pm (Mackay and Cairns). All forums were promoted in the local media (newspaper, radio and television – where possible) and posters were provided to CSCs where forums were being held, Councils, secondary schools, Police Stations, TAFEs, Universities and public libraries.

The forums consisted of two major components. The first component consisted of an introduction to the young driver problem through a presentation. This presentation was conducted by the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, the Honourable Paul Lucas MP at six forums. The then Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, Lindy Nelson-Carr MP presented on behalf of the Minister at four forums.

An expert young driver panel was present at each forum with each panel member providing specific expertise on young driver issues. At each forum the panel included representatives from QT, Queensland Police Service (QPS), Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ), a youth representative and a young driver research expert.

A facilitator was engaged for each of the ten forums to assist the group discussions and manage timing.

RESULTS

A total of 1873 feedback forms, 26 written submissions and 405 emails were received from the community. In addition 545 people attended the ten community forums. The results of the various

community consultation methods are provided below. They are discussed in the order they were presented in the discussion paper.

Pre- learner phase

Pre-learner education package

A pre-learner education package could be developed for new drivers which could be provided 12 months before the minimum licensing age. The package could provide information on the positive and negative components of driving.

Strong support was received from the community for this initiative with strongest support obtained during the telephone survey (over 95% from all groups). However, the Department of Education and the Arts opposed the package on the basis that:

"no research evidence that pre-learner education reduces crash rates" and that

"distribution through schools may implicate schools as having an increased responsibility in delivering the package rather than just being a conduit for distribution"

First aid training

First aid training, made either compulsory or voluntary, could be provided at the pre-licence level to increase the awareness of risk among young people, particularly on the roads.

Some support was received for this initiative from the various engagement methods. The feedback forms showed moderate support of 64% from all respondents. This initiative was considered a low priority to be implemented by the community, as expressed at the forums, however it was also commented that it would be useful for young people to have first aid skills.

Concerns were particularly expressed about the cost of the training and whether government would subsidise such training. In addition the currency of the training was believed to reduce its effectiveness.

Learner phase

120 hours of driving experience with a logbook

120 hours of compulsory supervised on-road driving experience, recorded and certified in a logbook. The logbook would be checked before being tested for a provisional licence.

A great deal of comment was generated about this initiative. Strong views were expressed both for and against.

Generally most respondents agreed with the concept of increased on-road driving experience and its potential road safety benefit. Concern was expressed about a number of the aspects of such a program, including:

- administration of the logbook system particularly the potential for fraud;
- the high number of hours proposed (120) to be completed and whether families could assist their young drivers to complete a large number of hours;
- access to vehicles and supervisors for disadvantaged youth to achieve 120 hours of on-road driving experience; and
- the ability of non-qualified supervisors to provide a large amount of supervision to young drivers and whether a layperson would create less safe drivers as a result.

Education for learner drivers, supervisors and parents

Learner drivers and supervisors could be encouraged to attend an information session detailing what experience should be gained and techniques on how to supervise novice drivers. A multimedia package could also be considered as an alternative to face-to-face sessions.

Overall respondents expressed general support for this proposal however more support was expressed for a multimedia package rather than a face-to-face information session.

Some organisations expressed concerns:

"...further research be conducted into the success and value of information sessions held in other jurisdictions for parents/carers/supervisors for learner drivers" (RACQ)

"There is no evidence that this initiative reduces crash rates" (Department of Education and Arts).

Hold a learner licence for at least 12 months

Learner drivers could be required to hold their licence for a minimum of 12 months so that drivers can obtain 120 hours of supervised driving experience. To assist with this increase, the learner licence could be issued for three years instead of the current one year.

There was some support for an increased minimum learner period. Parents and open licence holders showed strong support. Mixed support was shown from young drivers, however, females were more likely to support than young males who believed 12 months was too long.

"...a longer learner's period would encourage and facilitate more experience" (Australian Driver Trainers' Association – ADTA-Q)

Reduce the learner licence age to 16 years

The learner licence age could be reduced from 16.5 years to 16 years to give learner drivers more time to obtain the 120 hours supervised driving experience.

This proposed change received mixed support. Most parents opposed such a change, however when this proposal was grouped with mandatory on-road experience and an increase in the minimum learner period to 12 months most respondents strongly agree with the proposal.

Concern was expressed about the maturity of 16 year olds to drive on Queensland roads and whether this proposal would increase crash rates. However, general community support was shown with comments such as:

"RACQ supports reducing the learner licence age to 16 years, but only on the condition that it be accompanied by the requirement to obtain 120 hours of driving experience and that a provisional licence can not be obtained until 17 years old" (RACQ)

Review of penalties and sanctions for learner driver who break the law

New penalty and sanction options could be developed for learner drivers who break the law to deter them from re-offending.

There was moderate support overall for this proposition, although it was not canvassed within all the engagement methods. Focus group respondents generally considered that the most effective penalties for young people are fines. However, respondents pointed out that the system should distinguish between serious and mild rule-breaking.

Other comments included:

"The Commission supports reviews of penalties and sanctions because they provide opportunities for reviewing and applying the latest evidence on their effectiveness" (Commission for Children & Young People)

Review current Q-SAFE practical driving assessment

The Q-SAFE practical driving assessment could be reviewed and updated to suit the changed licensing system and ensure more modern testing practices are used.

There was general support for this proposition, although it was not canvassed within all of the engagement methods. The majority of responses received from the driver training industry expressed support for a review of the Q-SAFE practical driving assessment.

"The current Q-SAFE assessment is outdated and does not reflect real life driving situations" (Driver Trainer)

Introduce competency based training and assessment (CBTA) for learner drivers

Queensland could examine introducing CBTA for learner drivers to assist the management and operation of the Queensland licensing system.

The possible introduction of CBTA for learner drivers received mixed support across the community. Some commented that it was the way of the future while others were not convinced of its road safety benefit and that it was no substitute for supervised on-road driving experience. Another concern expressed was that a rigorous auditing program would have to be conducted by QT if such a program was introduced.

Peer passenger restrictions

A peer passenger restriction, of no more than one passenger aged under 21 who does not hold an open licence, could be introduced for at least the first 12 months of solo driving. Exemptions could be considered for family members to be carried as passengers.

Strong reactions were generated to this proposal. Overall, the road safety benefit was acknowledged and the community understood that the initiative had been successful overseas when this evidence was presented.

The concerns raised included:

- social justice and equity concerns about restricting young people;
- restrictions on mobility;
- concerns about safety, particularly young women at night;
- lack of access to public transport across Queensland, strongly expressed in rural and remote areas;
- ability to enforce a passenger restriction; and
- implications on resources of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to enforce.

Given these concerns some groups suggested imposing these restrictions only on offenders.

"... Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland would support introducing some of these restrictions on drivers who have accumulated demerit points, as penalties" (AMA)

Specific comments in support included:

"RACQ would support the introduction of passenger restrictions for the first 6-12 months of the provisional licence period for novice drivers less than 21 years of age" (RACQ)

The majority of young people were particularly opposed to this proposal, viewing it as a restriction on their freedom and their "rite of passage" in obtaining a solo licence.

Late night driving restrictions

A late night driving restriction could be introduced for at least the first 12 months of solo driving. Exemptions could be made for work, educational and family purposes.

Respondents made similar comments about this proposal as made in relation to passenger restrictions. Again it was understood that restricting the exposure to night driving of young drivers would likely reduce crash rates. However issues of social justice, equity and mobility were again raised by young people.

Parents and current open licence holders were generally supportive of this proposal and generally only had concerns about enforcement by QPS. Comments included:

"Consider the introduction of late night driving restrictions for unsupervised provisional drivers for the first 6-12 months of the three year probationary period with the option of removing the restriction subject to traffic offence history and at-fault crash free periods" (RACQ)

"...this will have significant implications for QPS. Such implications include the duty of care placed on police in circumstances where a vehicle containing juveniles may be stopped at the roadside. At present no legislative authority exists for police to take persons to a police station or a place of safety in such circumstances" (QPS)

Split provisional phase (P1 and P2)

The provisional licence stage could be split into two phases (P1 and P2). The first phase could be subject to greater restrictions and conditions than the second, ensuring newer drivers were more thoroughly monitored.

There was a mixed response to the proposal of splitting the provisional phase into two periods (P1 – 1 year and P2 – 2 years). Written submissions showed support for the proposal with RACQ, Department of Education and Arts, ADTA-Q and Toowoomba City Council all indicating support.

However, the general community provided a mixed response. The feedback forms showed only 43% support, 16% neutral and 41% opposed. In the telephone survey parents were strongly supportive (95%) whereas 18-20 year old provisional licence holders strongly opposed the initiative with only 20% support.

P Plates

Provisional drivers could be required to display P plates for the duration of the provisional period to ensure they are recognised as novice drivers and to assist enforcement of any restrictions.

There was a mixed response to the introduction of P plates. Written submissions showed overwhelming support but most young drivers opposed the re-introduction of P plates as they expressed concern that they will become targets of abuse and harassment by QPS.

Screen-based hazard perception test (HPT)

The process of graduating from one licence level to the next could include a HPT to ensure new drivers have the skills required at that level.

There was a mixed response to this initiative across all engagement methods.

Positive comments included that it was a good modern concept to test reactions. It may be helpful if it tested various driving situations eg. urban and rural situations.

Negative comments included that it would be equivalent to a "computer game" to young people and therefore not reliable as a testing method. Concerns were expressed about access to the test for rural people and potential for fraud if able to complete on the internet. The cost of the test was seen as an additional burden on young people.

Working with driving instructors after changes to the GLS

Working with driving instructors after changes to the GLS are implemented could ensure they clearly understood the new requirements.

General support was shown for this proposal. Comments from driver trainers included:

“QT and Driver Training Industry are in ‘partnership’ in improving standard of young drivers and must work together for their common goal” (ADTA-Q)

Develop an education and media campaign on driver distraction

An education and media campaign to inform the community on the dangers of driver distraction and inattention could be developed.

There was general support for an education and media campaign on driver distraction. However, many wanted the campaign to be expanded to all drivers.

Prohibit all mobile phone use for learner and provisional drivers when driving.

To limit the risk of distractions, it may be useful to prohibit learner and provisional licence holders from using their mobile phones, while they are driving (including the use of hands-free kits).

Moderate to strong support was shown for this idea depending on the engagement technique. During the community forums the response was overwhelming with support both for this proposal, and for extending it to all drivers. Some support was shown in the written submissions but some organisations expressed strong opposition.

Positive comments included:

“This should be introduced for all drivers, including hands-free. It is the call itself that distracts the driver and causes crashes, not the physical handling of the phone” (ADTA-Q)

Opposition was also based on what respondents believed was a lack of evidence of a road safety benefit.

“...research into the level of risk associated with hands-free mobile phones while driving among the general population compared to the risk for probationary drivers should be conducted before a ban on mobile phone use for any specific group of drivers could be introduced” (RACQ)

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) agreed that novice drivers need to concentrate on primary task of driving and confirmed that young drivers are more likely to use mobile phone while driving. However, they provided information that, in their view, indicated that illegal mobile phone use when driving is overestimated.

“...a more recent Australian observational study found less than 2% of Melbourne drivers illegally used a handheld mobile phone at any one time. This was also confirmed in a 2005 Australian study of drivers in Perth”

The AMTA also make comments regarding the crash risk associated with all forms of driver distraction.

“...there is now a large body of research into driver distraction that shows mobile phones are only one of the many distractions faced by drivers and mobile phone use is far less of a risk than tasks routinely performed behind the wheel”

“If such a proposal is to have a significant impact on young driver safety, more significant distractions such as in car entertainment systems, other passengers and climate controls should also be restricted”

The benefit of mobile phone use was also highlighted by the AMTA.

“...it should be remembered that mobile phone subscribers also provide the extra eyes and voice for police and road safety authorities in reporting aggressive, reckless or drunk drivers, accidents and other road hazards”

Review of the penalties and sanctions for provisional drivers who break the law

Detering provisional drivers from breaking the law or their licence conditions could be helped by reviewing the current penalties and sanctions.

As with additional penalties and sanctions for learner drivers there was moderate support overall for this proposition, although it was not canvassed within all the engagement methods. Strong support was shown in the written submissions and moderate support 65% was received in the feedback forms.

Incentive and reward options for provisional drivers

Rewarding young drivers who continue to comply with road laws and their licence conditions could be an option for Queensland.

General support was shown for incentives and rewards for young drivers. Suggestions for incentives from the telephone survey that were unprompted included:

- free open licence;
- obtaining the open licence earlier (e.g. at the 2 year or 2 ½ year mark rather than 3 years); and
- being allowed to accumulate extra demerit points (currently can only accumulate 4 points).

Some males in regional areas believe a strong incentive for not breaking the law (especially speeding) would be the creation of special venues where fast driving or drag racing is permitted under the supervision of police.

Education and training support for provisional drivers

Education and training support could be developed for provisional drivers to help them understand issues including safe following speeds, hazard perception and vehicle maintenance.

Strong discussion was held on this proposal with very mixed views across all engagement methods. For example 55% of respondents to the feedback form supported such a proposal and 58% of provisional licence holders canvassed in the telephone survey agreed.

Comments in the written submissions included:

“The RACQ does not support the introduction of a purely skills-based training program for young drivers” (RACQ)

“As a requirement for obtaining a provisional licence, learners should show that they have attended a certified Defensive Driving Course” (AMA)

Comments about defensive driving courses for young people were often raised in all of the engagement techniques. In particular, significant discussions were held at the community forums regarding this issue. A feature of every forum was the substantial interest amongst participants in expanding the arrangements for education and training amongst young novice drivers. Many participants spoke passionately about their positive experience in completing defensive driving and off-road driver training programs describing them as of great benefit to themselves.

These views were supported by representatives of organisations who conduct such programs. These organisations were well represented in each of the forums and often the view was expressed that the particular course or program being offered was effective and should be adopted across the state.

During the forums participants were advised that the research literature on the road safety effectiveness of current driver training and education programs shows little or no benefit for these programs and in some cases crash increases, especially amongst novice male drivers. While many forum participants acknowledged the facts presented, there was still a strong view expressed that additional education and training should be provided as an adjunct to the key initiatives being presented.

Restricting the cars that provisional drivers may drive

Vehicle restrictions could be introduced to stop provisional licence holders from driving certain types of high-powered cars such as V8 or turbo charged cars. Modified vehicles could also be banned.
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This initiative received extensive comment with differing views. The feedback forms indicated 45% support, 22% neutral and 33% opposed. The focus groups showed general support from all groups. In contrast the people who attended the community forums were generally opposed to the initiative.

This initiative was subjected to scrutiny at the community forums on the basis of the difficulties of implementation. These included how to differentiate vehicles, the need to constantly update a list of restricted vehicles, the position of families where their only car is on the list of restricted vehicles, the ability to change vehicle power profiles readily with computer technology and the substantial problems of on-road enforcement.

Written submissions also generally opposed the initiative with comments such as:

“...considering the acceleration rates and top speeds of most modern vehicles – regardless of the engine capacity and power – the RACQ believes this (power restrictions) could have minimal effect” (RACQ)

Speed limit restrictions

Queensland could consider limiting the speeds at which learner and provisional drivers are allowed to drive.
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The overall response to this scheme was opposition, with 67% of respondents to the feedback form being opposed. Written submissions strongly opposed the proposal. People acknowledged the potential road safety dangers of imposing such a restriction.

DISCUSSION

The results showed of the 22 initiatives two were strongly supported (pre-learner education and mobile phone ban), eight had general support (first aid training, education for learners & supervisors, additional penalties for learners and provisional drivers, review of Q-SAFE, working with driving instructors, education and media campaign on driver distraction and incentives and rewards), two had some support (12 month minimum learner period and 120 hours of on-road driving experience), nine received mixed support (reduce minimum learner age to 16 years of age, introduction of competency based training and assessment for learner drivers, peer passenger restrictions, late night driving restrictions, a split provisional phase, P plates, hazard perception test (HPT), education and training for provisional drivers and power restrictions) and one was opposed (speed limit restrictions).

Following analysis of the research and evidence on each of the initiatives, responses from the community, and consideration by Government, on 12 August 2006 the following changes to Queensland's GLS were announced:

- gaining 100 hours of certified supervised on-road driving experience for learners under 25 years of age, recorded in a logbook;
- package for learner drivers dealing with access to supervisors and vehicles to achieve the 100 hours of on-road driving experience;
- education package for learner drivers and supervisors (parents);
- a split provisional phase (P1 and P2);
- compulsory P plates (a red plate for P1 and green plate for P2);
- restricting all mobile phone use, including hands-free, blue-tooth accessories, and loud-speaker functions, for learner and P1 provisional licence holders under 25, and restricting mobile loud-speaker functions for supervisors and passengers of learner and P1 provisional licence holders under 25 while under instruction;
- peer passenger restrictions (carrying no more than one passenger aged under 21) from 11pm to 5am for P1 drivers under 25 years of age;
- young drivers under 25 years of age disqualified from driving will return to P1, with a night driving restriction;
- high-powered vehicle restrictions for provisional drivers under 25 years of age;
- motorbike learners will be required to hold a provisional car licence for 12 months prior to obtaining a learner motorbike licence; and
- introduction of a hazard perception test following 12 months driving on P1, licence holders must pass to progress to a P2 licence.

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