



Department for Transport

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Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your email of 25 June to Minister [REDACTED] about the Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) scheme. I am replying as the Minister responsible for road safety.

I would like to start by saying that I am aware of the tragic incident involving Ms Huddleston and Ms Mitchell. I have met with Ms Huddleston's family, their local MP and a number of road safety charities on the matter of GDL.

Since your letter with [REDACTED] MP in 2018, the Department has continued to improve road safety in the United Kingdom. In 2019 the Department published its refreshed Road Safety Statement – 'A Lifetime of Road Safety' and two-year action plan. 15 of the 74 actions in the plan addressed road safety risks faced by young adults learning to drive.

For young road users the Department's broad aim is to improve road safety for young people through new technology and research; and particularly for young drivers, developing better learning opportunities and targeted educational messaging.

The latest statistics show that the number of young car drivers (age 17-24) fatalities on Britain's roads is falling.

However, we do acknowledge that in terms of population and in the number of miles driven, 17-24 year olds remain one of the highest fatality risk groups, especially males, both as car drivers and passengers.

In the 2018 letter to [REDACTED] MP there is reference to the Driver 2020 project. The Driver 2020 project (an evaluation of interventions to improve the safety of young novice drivers) commenced in January 2019 and over 28,000 learner and novice drivers have been recruited. We expect the project to report in early 2023.

Our work in educating the Young Driver group has also progressed with the following actions undertaken:

- In March 2019, DfT's THINK! team ran a campaign directly targeting new drivers "The Road Whisperer" campaign. As 1 in 5 drivers crash within the first year after their test, this campaign is aimed at young drivers who feel vulnerable on the road and may take risks on the road to overcompensate for their inexperience. Through the character of the Road Whisperer, who shared wisdom with young drivers about challenging situations like driving at night or on country roads, the campaign communicated the message that it takes time to learn the ways of the road. This campaign was viewed on social media by an estimated 13.8 million times within the young people community.
- In March 2020, we funded the Driving Instructors Association (DIA) to develop a modular approach to learning. The vision of modular learning is to potentially reduce young driver collision risks without posing greater restrictions on young people, or increasing the costs or time taken to learn to drive. Whilst the Driver 2020 project includes interventions designed to increase the amount and variety of pre-test practice (the logbook), this intervention is distinct as it also uses e-learning and includes assessment of learners' competence during the training period.
- The Driver and Vehicles Standards Agency's (DVSA) 5-year strategy, "Helping you stay safe on Britain's Roads", includes actions to ensure that new drivers are better prepared for a lifetime of safe driving and have access to guidance, advice and training that helps to keep them safe.
- Changes were made to the practical driving test in December 2017. The independent driving section, where the candidate must drive for 20 minutes without detailed guidance by the examiner, provides more relevant 'real world' situations for the assessment of a candidate's ability to manage the vehicle, route and traffic simultaneously. The new test means that they spend less time on minor roads for manoeuvres enabling test routes to focus on high risk areas, such as busier roundabouts, rural and higher speed roads, where collisions occur.

Whilst the Department for Transport acknowledges the recommendation on continuing research into Graduated Driver Licensing, the Department will not be commissioning any research into the social and economic consequences of GDL.

In March 2020, the Government submitted evidence to the Transport Select Committee on Young and Novice Drivers on GDL and I attended an evidence session in October 2020. The Department for Transport take any consideration of restrictions on any road users very seriously, particularly those in rural areas for access to education, employment and leisure.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this Government has no current plans to enforce any further restrictions which could be detrimental to the younger generation. We are also conscious that any move to place any form of restrictions on young and novice drivers would be detrimental to their education and employment prospects, as well as the potential to negatively affect their social and mental health during the national recovery from COVID. These effects would also be felt more severely in rural or socio-economically challenged areas in the United Kingdom.

We remain of the opinion that statistics from other countries who use a form of licensing restrictions show that it is not comparable nor necessary in the United Kingdom at this time for young and novice drivers.

The Department for Transport is also regularly in touch with its counterparts at the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The Graduated Pilot Scheme due to be trailed in Northern Ireland remains a priority for their Minister, however COVID has greatly affected their plans and time scales for the project. The scheme has not yet started and is expected to be delayed by the disruption to services.

The Northern Ireland Executive are unable to provide any findings at this time. To that end, the Department is also unable to offer any conclusion on the impact of GDL in Northern Ireland. We remain in close contact with colleagues and look forward to any update in the future.

