

INQUIRY INTO YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Organisation: Youth Action Policy Association (YAPA)
Name: Mr Reynato Reodica
Position: Executive Officer
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youthactionpolicyassociation

ABN 17 209 492 539

State Office

146 Devonshire Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010
Phone: 02 9319 1100
Fax: 02 9319 1144
email: info@yapa.org.au
Freecall: 1800 627 323

Western

Sydney Office

Suite 7, Level 1
48 Macquarie Street
Parramatta NSW 2150
Phone: 02 9687 1466
Fax: 02 9687 1229
email: yapaws@yapa.org.au

YAPA is the peak
community group
working in the interests
of young people and
youth services in NSW.

YAPA strives to achieve
social justice for
young people, including
the appropriate
provision of services
for young people

Mr Geoff Corrigan MP
Chairperson
Staysafe (Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety)
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

29 November 2007

Dear Mr Corrigan,

Re: Inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education Programs

YAPA is the peak community group working in the interests of young people (12-25 years) in NSW. YAPA strives to achieve social justice for young people and believes that appropriate education programs are appropriate and viable options that have been under-utilised in the plethora of road safety initiatives that have been imposed upon young people over the past few years. As such, YAPA welcomes the current Inquiry conducted by the Staysafe Committee.

Guiding Principles

Young people consulted by YAPA over a number of years have noted the significant concern they have with their own safety and that of their peers. This level of concern is often underestimated in decision-making processes. Young people are significant stakeholders in the NSW graduated licensing system and should be involved in associated decision-making processes, at all levels. This can also help to ensure that any changes to the current system will be effective, practical, workable and accepted by young people and the community as a whole.

The NSW Government already recognises the importance of young people's involvement in government decisions in the current NSW Youth Action Plan, and the recent Premier's Memorandum on Youth Participation, where it commits the NSW Government to, *inter alia*:

- "recognise young people's rights to participate in developing Government policy, programs and services that impact upon them..."
- promote respect by listening to young people's views and taking them seriously...
- provide young people with appropriate and timely information on Government processes...
- recognise young people's different situations and backgrounds...
- organise participation processes that take into account the needs of young people, such as training and transport..."

Whilst YAPA appreciates that the Committee is not technically bound by prevailing Government policy, we believe these are strong

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principles that should be applied to the current and future processes of the Staysafe Committee as it relates to young drivers.

YAPA stresses that active participation of young people requires Governments, at all levels, to **work in partnership with young people** to:

- identify young people's needs and priority issues
- develop appropriate policies to address these needs and issues
- carry out strategies that address these needs and issues
- evaluate policies and all actions taken¹

Each of these steps must be taken to ensure young/novice driver issues are addressed in the most appropriate and effective way.

<i>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</i>	<i>That the Committee plays an active role in encouraging the involvement young people in all levels of decision-making on policies, programs and services that seek to address the issues relating to young/novice drivers.</i>
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<i>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</i>	<i>That the Committee consult widely with young people prior to making recommendations on any changes to policies, programs and services that seek to address the issues relating to young/novice drivers.</i>
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Furthermore, the following principles underpin our discussion of the issue of young driver safety, being that YAPA:

1. Recognises the significant body of research that indicates young/novice drivers are over represented in statistics relating to motor vehicle accidents involving serious injury and/or fatalities.
2. Believes that the NSW Government, the community as a whole, parents of young drivers and young people themselves all have a role to play in the reduction of motor vehicle incidents for young drivers.
3. Believes that Government policy relating particularly to novice drivers must respond to the realities facing young people, to deliver fair, just and effective initiatives and programs that are accountable to young people and their communities.
4. Notes that NSW novice drivers are already heavily restricted under the current graduated licensing scheme (GLS). As such, the significant gains made from other restrictions in different jurisdictions are unlikely to be replicated and alternatives that are less detrimental to the mobility of young people should be given priority.

With particular reference to principle 4, as articulated above, YAPA believes that support for young people, including diversionary and educational programs, are preferable alternatives to over-zealous regulation of young drivers. Such proactive programs have the capacity to increase safe driving

practices in novice drivers, improving safety without unduly impacting upon young people's lives.

Whilst YAPA does not purport to be abreast of all the latest academic literature that relates to the present inquiry, we wish to highlight to the Committee the importance of giving due consideration to the importance of driving mobility for young people. Such consideration must make reference to the impact of mobility (or lack thereof) upon vital social and economic factors for this group, particularly for young people in rural and regional NSW. These considerations are often overlooked in these processes and YAPA considers one of the most significant gaps in current academic research to be the wider, often overlooked, implications of young driver policy reforms.

Transport plays an important role in the lives of young people. It is the means by which young people access a wide range of opportunities, including educational, employment and social opportunities. It also assists young adults to achieve independence and responsibility in their families and communities.

For many young people, particularly those in rural areas, access to public transport is unavailable, inaccessible, unaffordable or simply unsafe. As such, young people in many areas rely upon their own ability to drive, or that of their peers, for transport.

Context: The NSW Driver Licensing System

YAPA notes that the NSW graduated licensing system, in conjunction with road safety laws and programs that apply to all NSW road users, provides one of the most comprehensive approaches to road safety in any jurisdiction around the world. The NSW Government should be applauded for its ongoing commitment to the safety of NSW road users and there is little doubt that the Staysafe Committee has played an important role in this area over a number of years. However, due to the comprehensive nature of the current system, the impact of any particular intervention for young drivers, as experienced in other jurisdictions, is likely to be lower in the NSW as a result of the already substantial level of safety that NSW drivers enjoy.

With particular reference to novice driver safety initiatives during the greater part of the past decade, there have been some significant modifications introduced to the original NSW GLS, including:

July 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of occupants limited to number of seat belts• Drivers prohibited from driving with any passengers in or on the boot of the vehicle
May 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Zero blood alcohol concentration for Learner and Provisional Licence holders.
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New P plate drivers prohibited from driving certain high performance vehicles.

July 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P1 licence suspension for any speeding offence • Ban on all mobile phone use • Peer passenger restrictions for P1 drivers between 11pm and 5am • Increase in supervised driving hours from 50 to 120 hours (20 of which must be at night)
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However, no evaluation of these amendments has been undertaken. YAPA strongly believes that any tightening of restrictions under the current GLS cannot be justified without ensuring that measures already in place have been implemented to their full potential.

<i>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</i>	<i>That the Committee recommends to the NSW Government that a comprehensive, independent evaluation of the effectiveness of recent young driver initiatives is undertaken by the end of 2008.</i>
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Driver Experience and Education

YAPA understands that the research on the issue of novice drivers clearly shows that all new drivers, no matter what their age, are more likely to suffer from serious injury or loss of life in the first six months of driving.

The current requirement for supervision/teaching of skills to drivers during the Learner licence phase of the graduated licensing scheme is that the supervisor be on an unrestricted licence. There is no requirement that the supervising driver display any competence in driving, let alone safe driving. Furthermore, older unrestricted licence holders may not be aware of changes to road rules that have been implemented in the years or decades since achieving unrestricted status in the licensure. Yet it is the supervisor that gives the Learner driver instruction in the skills required to handle a motor vehicle and how to approach driving more generally.

Considering the importance of giving novice drivers proper guidance on safe driving in the supervised stage, more stringent requirements for supervisors would increase the safety of all new drivers.

<i>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</i>	<i>That the Committee recommends that all unrestricted licence holders who wish to supervise Learner drivers are required to demonstrate a level of competence in safe driving, along with an understanding of any changes to driving laws.</i>
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Research indicates that overconfidence and avoidable risk-taking are major factors in the higher representation of novice drivers in crash statistics. However, YAPA is of the understanding that overconfidence of novice drivers is not sufficiently addressed under the current graduated licensing system until drivers undertake the Driver Qualification Test for an unrestricted licence, at least three years after the risk for novice drivers is at its highest (i.e. the initial period of unsupervised driving in the P1 licence stage).

Appropriate professional driving instruction could also serve to give young drivers a greater level of skill prior to attaining a Provisional licence and influence the attitudes of drivers, prior to being exposed to the risks of driving alone. In particular, driver education programs that address overconfidence and risk-taking attitudes and behaviours of young drivers should be encouraged.

<p>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</p>	<p><i>That the Committee recommend that the Roads and Traffic Authority conduct a review of the Driver Knowledge Test, Driver Ability Road Test, Hazard Perception Test and Driver Qualification Test to ensure that the knowledge and skills required to pass each test stage is most appropriate to the risks faced in the subsequent licence phase, particularly that drivers are required to have some competence in safe driving prior to undertaking the DART.</i></p>
<p>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</p>	<p><i>That the Committee recommend that the Roads and Traffic Authority ensure that novice drivers are sufficiently aware of the role that risk taking and overconfidence plays in escalating crash risks, prior to progressing to the P1 licence stage</i></p>
<p>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</p>	<p><i>That the Committee recommends that the NSW Government provide incentives and other support for young drivers to access education programs that target attitudes of drivers and encourage safer approaches to driving, with particular regard given to the barriers faced by young people from low socio-economic, geographically isolated and other disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing education programs.</i></p>

<p><i>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</i></p>	<p><i>That the Committee recommend that the RTA review the accreditation guidelines for driver training schools/programs, to encourage more holistic training for young drivers in crash risks and addressing overconfidence, rather than undue focus on the mechanics of passing the DART.</i></p>
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Parental Involvement

YAPA believes that parents of young drivers are best positioned to assess whether or not some form of intervention is required to increase the young driver's safety, which must take into account the young person's maturity, need for mobility (including geographic, social and economic factors), driving experience/skill, etc. Such complex considerations are difficult for governments to address satisfactorily when applying policy to whole population groups. This is particularly the case in such a large and diverse state as NSW.

However, parents of young drivers in the current culture are unlikely to take an active role in driver safety past the Learner phase of licensure. Part of this is likely to be due to parents being unaware of the extent to which novice drivers are at risk of being part of a serious accident, particularly within the first few months of unsupervised driving.

<p><i>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</i></p>	<p><i>That the Committee recommend that the NSW Government work through various media and stakeholders to increase parental awareness of the crash risk of novice drivers in the first few months of unsupervised driving.</i></p>
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YAPA is aware that parent/young driver contract schemes have been under trial in various US jurisdictions. Depending on the finding of the pilot programs, an appropriate model of such agreements could be useful in empowering parents to take an active role in their child's safety on NSW Roads.

<p><i>Proposal for the Committee's consideration</i></p>	<p><i>That the Committee consider the US parental contracts trial, with a view to implementation in NSW, if appropriate.</i></p>
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Concluding Remarks

Safety for young people on NSW roads is a priority that YAPA shares with Government, the community, parents and young people alike. However, failing to take into account the voices, needs and desires of young people in the development of NSW road safety policy does a disservice to all these groups.

YAPA believes that educational programs, with adequate support provided by the NSW Government, are a key component that has the potential to add value to NSW road safety policy, without unduly affecting the mobility and associated needs of young people.

Several proposals have been put forward for the Committee's consideration. I commend each of them to you.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly on 02 9319 1100 (ext.1) or at eo@yapa.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'R' followed by the name 'Reodica' written in a cursive script.

Reynato Reodica
Executive Officer