

The impact of identification requirements on young people's enrolment.

It is our understanding that the new legislation provides three options for enrolment.

Option 1 – Person enrolls with a driver's licence as identification

Option 2 – Person enrolls by showing a birth certificate or passport as identification to an enrolled person (non-relative) who verifies and witnesses the identification

Option 3 – Person enrolls by having two referees (non-relative) with a driver's licence verify and witness that they have known the person for at least one month.

YAPA is concerned that this legislation will disenfranchise many young adults.

In regards to Option One - Young people are significantly less likely to hold a driver's licence than older age groups.

According to the *NSW Driver & Vehicle Statistics 2005* publication produced by the RTA and phone advice provided by the RTA

- 69.2% of 16–19 year olds hold a driver's licence
- 85.8% of 20-39 year olds hold a driver's licence
- 90.5% of 40-59 year olds hold a driver's licence

It is our view that young people from low socio-economic status are far less likely to hold a driver's licence.

Firstly, young people are only likely to apply for a licence if they have access to a household vehicle. However 14% of households in NSW do not have any registered vehicles (*Source: ABS Environmental Issues, People's Views and Practices, Cat. No. 4602.0*)

Secondly, the high cost of applying for a licence is a real disincentive to many low income earners. The current cost of obtaining a full licence is as follows:

| Cost of learning to drive | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Stage</i> | <i>Cost</i> |
| Road handbook | \$10 |
| Driver Knowledge Test | \$34 per attempt |
| Learners Licence | \$17 |
| Driving Ability Road Test | \$42 per attempt |
| Provisional P1 Licence | \$41 |
| Hazard Perception Test | \$34 each attempt |
| Provisional P2 Licence | \$66 |
| Driver Qualification Test | \$34 |
| Full (silver) Licence | \$41 (one year) |
| TOTAL | \$319 minimum |

The figure of \$319 represents more than a week's worth of wages for a considerable number of young people. For example, the weekly wage of a 1st year indentured apprentice in the Building Construction Industry is \$231, the weekly salary of a clerical and administrative employee starts at \$214, and the maximum rate of Youth Allowance (with Rent Assistance) for young job seekers and students is \$217 per week.

Further, the RTA now requires learners to complete 50 hours of supervised driving. Young people who do not have access to an adult with a vehicle are forced to pay professional driving instructors for each of the 50 required hours. A conservative estimate of \$60 per hour means that such young people need to pay an additional \$3000 to gain their licence.

A driver's licence is simply out of financial reach for many young people.

Thirdly, the impact of unpaid fines on the suspension of licences should be acknowledged.

Currently if a person is unable to pay a fine for not wearing a bike helmet, for illegal parking, or for a train related incident such as not carrying the correct concession fare card their driver's licence will be suspended and they are prevented from obtaining a licence until such a fine is paid.

In NSW we now have a ridiculous situation where a young person who does not wear or cannot afford a bike helmet is penalised by a fine, is then barred from obtaining a driver's licence and now faces additional barriers to enrolling to vote.

In research carried out by YAPA with 276 young people last year (copy attached), we found that the current system of fines on CityRail disproportionately affects young people, and those young people from low socio economic status. The NSW Justice Coalition of NSW has verified that some young people have accrued thousands of dollars of unpaid fines on CityRail trains because they have been unable to pay full fares to travel to and from work.

In relation to Option Two – Many disadvantaged young people do not possess a passport or do not have access to a birth certificate. While we hope that all families keep a copy of the birth certificate in a safe place and provide this to their son or daughter this is not always the case. Young people may not have access to a birth certificate for a range of reasons such as

- homelessness / leaving home early due to family dysfunction
- high level of transience in the family unit, including change of last names if living with different family members. Sometimes this results in identification documents (eg, Year 10 Certificate) being in different names making it difficult to access a birth certificate.

The cost of obtaining a birth certificate is \$36 and is contingent upon a young person having access to other forms of identification such as Medicare cards, credit cards, tertiary education cards, utility accounts. Not all young people have access to these forms of documentation.

In relation to Option Three – YAPA believes that many disadvantaged young people may have trouble accessing two non-relative adults with a driver's licence. As stated above, many disadvantaged families and communities have a lower percentage of licence holders.

In addition we believe that the requirement may be for a referee with a Full Licence, rather than a Learner or Provisional Licence. In NSW it is not possible to attain a Full Licence until 20 years of age. This means that 18 and 19 year olds may not be allowed to referee for other young people. This situation is currently in place in NSW with the RTA's requirements for referees for licences.

As outlined earlier, persons who have unpaid fines have their licence suspended. We therefore anticipate that older adults with unpaid fines will not be able to be a referee for young people because their licence is not current.

Strategies to address identification issues

YAPA believes that the State Electoral Office and Australian Electoral Office can adopt a number of strategies to overcome these difficulties such as

- Outreach activities to places that young people attend such as the Big Day Out, Football games, Youth week activities etc
- Community education to be conducted by the SEO. More information should be provided after enrolment. At the moment newly enrolled voters receive a confirmation of enrolment card in the mail. This could be expanded to include more information on how to actually vote, how preferences are distributed etc
- Requesting schools and TAFE's, particularly Year Advisors, to distribute enrolment forms to 17 year olds and verify identification.
- Wide distribution of enrolment forms via government agencies such as the RTA, Medicare, Centrelink, ATO, libraries, and non-government agencies such as community, cultural and sporting organizations. Currently these forms are difficult to access as they are only available on the web and at post offices and young people may not know how to access the forms.
- Enrolment forms should be printed in publications such as the Daily Telegraph, the Sydney Morning Herald and magazines which appeal to young people such as Drum Media, TV Hits, Dolly magazine etc