

**Submission  
No. 58**

## **DRIVER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ROAD SAFETY**

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The Parliament of New South Wales  
Staysafe (Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety)

Inquiry into Driver Education, Training and Road Safety

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## **Our Organisation**

The Australian Driver Trainers Association (NSW) Ltd is the peak New South Wales and National body representing Driving Instructors that cover every license class from Motor Cycles and Cars through to Road Trains and B-Doubles.

We hold membership of approximately 775 in NSW, 245 in QLD and in excess of another 100 shared amongst the other states. This is a collective voice of in excess of 1100 dedicated and passionate Driver Trainers.

We exist to provide advocacy, support and education to new and existing Driving Instructors as well as acting as a conduit to various state regulators and other bodies. The ADTA is administered by a board of 10 directors that meet monthly and also a General Manager and an Administrative Support Officer.

Our directors are all actively involved in the driver education space and, as GM, I am also still an active driving instructor. Even our Admin officer has worked in a large driving school as an Administrator before taking on her role with the ADTA.

This submission is sent on behalf of the Directors and the Association.

Compiled and written by

Mick Humphries  
General Manager



*Notes surrounding our submission.*

*There are many areas of the guidance document that sit well outside of the expertise of our board and have been researched and investigated in great depth by other organisations. We have only made comments in those areas if we can add to what has already been found or if we strongly disagree.*

## **Discussion topic (a)**

### **Trends in road safety research and road safety**

The key trend is the over-representation of young people in our crash statistics and the absolute agreement that it is too high and far too great of a societal cost. Other organisations will present this data to the StaySafe Committee and it will all re-iterate that the current scheme of simply learning and testing just doesn't work.

We need to add a further arm of qualification being aimed at the psychological level of the learner. Simply demonstrating the ability to live for 17 years isn't a sufficient filter. I'm certain there will be other gems to come from the hearing that may lead the way to a new test or qualification of some sort.

Most importantly, we need to stop apologising that the licensing process is hard. It needs to be a solid and robust system that only allows suitable applicants to share the road with the balance of the law abiding drivers out there.

## **Discussion topic (b)**

### **Evaluating current driver training, including the effectiveness of refresher training and skills updating, and adaptations to changing vehicle technology**

Young people in this space are in a history leading position as they are dealing almost exclusively with cars that are fitted with modern fuel injection systems, easy to use transmissions and have safety features not even dreamed of only a decade ago.

There is a massive skills gap with mature drivers suddenly being faced with ABS, EBS, Stability Control and even Climate Control. Sadly, the introduction to these modern and efficient systems is by a quick chat from the local dealer before picking up our new car. People rent and use pool cars with no idea that the vehicle is even fitted with many of these features, let alone the operations and potential pitfalls.

It seems that large fleets and Heavy Vehicle operators both know, and see the value of, familiarisation and updating drivers in line with vehicle systems. Most transport companies will have the OEM come and train the training staff therein on how to use the new technology and how to

have it best meet the needs of the driver in conjunction with the optimum operation of the vehicle. This cost when spread across the whole fleet and measured in line with the vehicle running savings gives us, generally a cost neutral / safety enhanced model which is a genuine win for everyone.

In my military exposure we are seeing drivers being retrained from the incumbent LandRover product being a mix of utes, wagons and sedan variants across to the Mercedes G-Wagen which presents the same basic machine, yet the nuances and advances in each see the need for a drivers conversion course. Again we allow ourselves and our kids to operate different vehicle types with little or no crossover education.

Existing training by professional instructors should be carried out in technologically current vehicles with excellent safety features (a 5 star ANCAP is the benchmark) with the instructor being able to identify, describe and impart understanding of all advanced componentry.

New cars as they are delivered should be including a training package for all vehicular features whether the training is provided by the OEM or a suitable third party provider.

Not only have the cars come a long way but the design, construction and usage of roads has also changed significantly. This has led to a reduction in the seriousness of many collisions but prevention at skills level is still preferable.

Professional driving instructors should be building in vehicular advancements into their training syllabus. Our Master Driver Trainer program has a strong emphasis on this.

## **Discussion topic (c)**

### **The needs of any particular driver groups**

All drivers benefit from initial and ongoing education and training. All other endeavours in life we are re-training and learning new methods of performing tasks. For some reason we exclude driving from the need for ongoing education and refreshment, yet it is one of the most likely areas in life where we will come up against injury.....or worse

Ideally refresher training could be delivered to all groups using a combination of in vehicle, on line or even mentoring.

#### **Young people**

Our youth need solid and firm guidance on the responsibility of operating a car. Sadly, this is seen as a "cost" or an "impost" by parents and guardians. The conduct of 120 hrs of training is seen as a duty which is to be done as quickly as possible and generally without a plan or guidance.

As our young people are learning, structured training, best delivered as a partnership between the guardian and a professional driver educator, is the very best approach.

In our society we see parents are too busy, cant spare the time, happy to allow someone else or unable to afford the correct approach to educating and looking to the long term safety of the young person.

With a combination of thought and some bending there are many car trips that can be made every week that the young person can drive and grow skills. When this is further coupled to regular and consistent professional training, the skills of the learner, the reinforcement and the progress is all in line with a plan to see the student commence as a Provisional Driver with both skills and a mindset of excellence in their driving skills.

The ADTA is building a program through adaptation of the Master Driving Instructor course that will be aimed at sharing the learning task and through consistent lesson progression and dialogue with the supervisors and the learner concerned, creating a platform of excellence.

### **Older Drivers**

The older driver space in NSW is highly regulated with a combination of options including medical and skills assessments to determine the best outcomes for drivers in this area. It is in many instances a hard road when the driver arrives at the stage where they are entering this scheme. In most instances half a century will have elapsed since their last driving test (if indeed one was conducted) and the last look at road law or assessment in that area.

Many older drivers also find it hard to accept that their own assessment of ability is far from the required standard on busy roads in modern cars. By commencing ongoing refresher training during the life cycle of the license all drivers remain current as well as not having to “catch up” when its too late.

### **Upgrading Drivers**

The biggest challenge in this space is when drivers are upgrading to their first heavy vehicle license. Again it can be decades since their last assessment and the level of road law knowledge and correct driving habits are both somewhat eroded.

Drivers making subsequent upgrades tend to be less difficult as there is a level of preparedness and readiness which assists in the process.

Almost unanimously the feedback from upgrading drivers is that they are pleased to have gone through the process and feel more equipped in every part of the driving task when they conclude their training courses.

Much more emphasis needs to be placed on the outcomes of Heavy License courses in terms of vocational outcomes. Many RTO's are of the opinion that simply delivering a license outcome is sufficient. Many RTO's are also shortcutting the system and working with clients to minimum hours to make courses cheaper in a competitive marketplace.

The ADTA is seeking both increased mandated hours (as demonstrated in the aviation industry) and a greater emphasis on vocational outcomes for applicants, that is having them work ready.

## Discussion topic (d)

### The needs of driver trainers both professional and non professional

The professional driver trainer is seen as a valuable tool by many stakeholders in imparting both skills and seeds of attitude in students. The industry has a reasonably robust entry path but doesn't have any requirement for ongoing professional development.

The ADTA has addressed this issue and is running ongoing programs for instructors on:

- Skills improvement
- Teaching methods
- Use of resources
- Partnering with parents
- Business
- Setting your business apart

These skills then will hopefully be used to assist the growth of one group of non-professional instructors wherein the guidance and feedback from lessons is also disseminated to supervising drivers in such a way that all instructors are on the same page as the non-professional supervisor.

We are hopeful to run Parent Partner Programs in line with our Master Driving Instructor practitioners. This will be a paradigm shift as we are looking at a triangle of accountability between the Professional Instructor, the Supervising Driver and the Learner.

The other group of non-professional instructors are the Driver Mentoring programs that have been established in particular at rural and regional locations. The role of these mentors is to see hours logged in books to achieve the required targets to allow the young person to take a driving test.

Driver mentoring programs are a vital key, especially to many indigenous learners, that simply can't get sufficient hours behind the wheel. I have personally seen the success of these programs and can confirm they are well worth the effort.

Ideally we should be upskilling the mentors on these programs and looking to a pathway of obtaining their professional qualification as part of what they do.

## **Discussion point (e)**

### **The needs of metropolitan, rural and regional drivers**

In a perfect world all drivers would be required to drive in all traffic and weather conditions as part of their accredited training. The European model covers this to a degree with snow and terrain driving. In the USA with compulsory Drivers Ed at school we see the delivery of lessons in a number of locations as well as on the interstate highways where possible.

Sadly, in Australia we see incredibly long distances between remote towns, service towns, regional centres and cities. Most remote learners do report that they get to drive in at least a regional centre as part of their training hours.

There are driving instructors operating professionally in all cities and regional centres as well as a large number of service towns. Most young people will have professional lessons when they come from their home in a remote location to larger centres and fit the lesson around the days task whether it be sport, shopping, socialising or school related.

Having more instructors working professionally in regional and remote areas would be ideal but the instructor also needs to run a viable business and this may not be possible in many small towns.

Rural learners will generally log their 120 hours easily but sadly they are mainly logged on long trips from farm to town or farm to farm. Whilst all time behind the wheel is valuable, some of these hours would be of lesser value as few, if any, educational situations will arrive.

Conversely, training for learners in metropolitan areas cannot encapsulate the long distance and high speed model we see as well as methods for interacting with trucks and other hazards on those roads. In some regional areas learners will pass road trains running at up to 36.5 meters coming the other way on roads that are not of the high standard that we see in the metro areas.

Each group of learners develops skills which don't transpose well into each others space. Whilst physically driving to these locations is in many instances impractical, an on line tutorial would go long way to filling the gap. Also training regarding fatigue management and maintenance

## **Discussion point (f)**

### **The needs and expectations of passengers and other road users**

Firstly, other road users are warned of the lack of experience of the learner by the display of L plates on the vehicle. Professional driving instructor cars will generally be marked even more conspicuously.

One problem that is prevalent is when being supervised by a family member often there is need to combine the supervised driving with another task. Generally the supervising driver wont be able to be as responsive to the learner when selecting driving areas and understanding the importance of

gauging the learners skill and ability with the areas in which they are being driven. This can lead to the learner being taken well beyond an acceptable comfort zone and into an area of danger.

The professional instructor will plan each lessons location and travel plan in line with the students needs. As there are no other tasks to be performed, the lesson should always be comfortable but gently stretching the student.

Passengers are at greater risk in these situations. Supervising drivers should never allow the learner to drive out of their skills base when there is a risk to others in the car. We can still use the analogy of combining the practice driving with other tasks. Often times that task may be to ferry a third party as a passenger. I think educating supervisors as to the dangers of carrying passengers as part of the learner process until the risk is correctly mitigated.

This can also be reflected in our older drivers who may carry friends to various locations or outings and put these passengers at risk. My hope is that the other passengers will speak up and action can be taken before it becomes an accident. Refresher training off the back of peer comments will almost certainly be successful as the license holder has recognised there is an issue by virtue of seeking assistance.

## **Discussion point (g)**

### **The cost of driver training standards and how the costs should be allocated**

Societally we need to start to value the education of our kids especially in the area of driving. I'm never more amazed than when I see parents balk at spending \$1,000 on driver training for their children but will happily part with many times more than that on an end of year schoolies trip, or spending over \$1,000 on a dress for a school formal.

Nothing is wrong with either of those expenditures but we need to value educating young people in cars at least as highly, if not more so.

Driving instructor entry standard is currently at a Certificate IV level on the AQTF. This sees a person with a reasonable level of skill. The cost of that training is then built into the cost of establishing and running a business. Ongoing professional development is not costly, in fact we subsidise many programs for our members.

Market forces will always dictate the price of lessons, but generally they are quite affordable. There are concessions already given by the NSW Government being 3:1 lessons (up to 10) and a 20 hour credit in the logbook for completing the safer driver course.

For our older drivers, a private assessor can be engaged at a market fee or a driving test is still available from Service NSW at no cost.

Upgrading drivers do pay a significant cost to obtain a higher license class but are generally moving into a better paying role which then becomes a commercial decision.

The ability to obtain, upgrade or maintain a license is at a reasonable cost and there are other programs in place that offer financial assistance to certain society groups that may need extra professional tuition as they cannot access a suitable non-professional instructor. I have worked



personally on funded migrant, indigenous and disability support programs that will allow hours to be logged to see the learner progress.

The cost of the professional instructors licensing and skills maintenance is not an issue for the public domain as it is a commercial arrangement. When amortised across a year of professional lessons in a multiple year business plan it runs at less than \$1 per lesson.

## **Discussion point (h)**

### **The experience of other jurisdictions and interstate cross-border issues.**

The states that share borders with NSW are as follows

Queensland. In QLD the hours and training requirements are quite similar. The testing regime is also similar but less regulated than NSW.

Australian Capital Territory. The ACT has had a Competency Assessment Scheme administered by professional driving instructors for some years. The ACT market is small and was, and still is, carefully and tightly controlled by the regulator. Crash rates from the ACT in relation to license outcomes are somewhat skewed as the geographical area of the ACT is so small many incidents occur "interstate".

Victoria. There has been an 18 year old Provisional License requirement in Vic which is currently being reviewed. This has been a contentious issue balancing the needs of metropolitan and rural applicants needs. A large number of Victorian young people "move" to NSW to obtain their learners permits and then get tested at 17. Yet another example of state borders creating a problem.

South Australia. Firstly there is little flow to or from SA as we are dealing with sparsely populated areas. SA did have a CBA scheme which created a large number of problems as there was insufficient controls. The scheme is being reviewed.

None of the interstate schemes have had significant changes in the figures concerning over-representation of young people in the crash statistics.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The key issue basing the whole licensing process on age is a result of young people finishing school and starting apprenticeships and other employment, or having to move further daily for study at tertiary institutions.

A Competency Based Assessment scheme would be an exceptional outcome if using very professional instructors. I would suggest our pool of Master Instructors. These instructors have a long period with clients and can make accurate and balanced assessments of the student.

I would advocate, however, that the regulator still has a stake in the final decision. A combination of partnering with parents, ongoing competency assessments and a shortened "exit test" with the regulator would lead to a much higher end product.