

**Submission
No 21**

SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS

Organisation: Road Safety Education Limited

Date Received: 13 May 2021

Submission

**To: Parliament of New South Wales
The Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety
(The NSW Staysafe Committee)**

An Inquiry into Support for Rural and Regional Learner Drivers

From: Road Safety Education Limited (www.rse.org.au)

May 2021

Terms of Reference (ToR):

- a) challenges faced by learner drivers in rural and regional areas to get the required training and experience to obtain a licence
- b) options for rural and regional learners to access driver training opportunities
- c) support for rural and regional learner drivers in other jurisdictions
- d) the use of driver simulators and other technology to assist rural and regional learners
- e) changes to driver training and testing in New South Wales since Staysafe's 2017 report into driver education, training and road safety, and
- f) any other related matters.

Our Credentials

Road Safety Education Limited (RSE) is a ***not-for-profit organisation*** with a mission of providing world class road safety education to youth and a vision of saving lives. RSE is the provider of RYDA, an evidence led best practice program which has been delivered in New South Wales for over 20 years.

RYDA is a whole-school approach road safety education program for senior secondary school students. RYDA is developed under the guidance of the RSE Advisory Council consisting of globally recognised road safety researchers, educators and psychologists and is evaluated for effectiveness. Approximately 45,000 students from over 650 schools across Australia and New Zealand typically attend RYDA each year. In Australia, around 45% of participants are from regional schools (with 35% of those being from NSW). To date, two thirds of a million students have participated in the RYDA program, making it the largest youth focussed road safety education program in Australia.

The Issue

Getting in a car as a young driver, or passenger of a young driver, is among the most dangerous things a person will ever do.

Despite only making up less than 12% of NSW population, people aged 17-25 make up 21% of all driver and passenger fatalities, and 22% of injuries. Between 2015 and 2019, 317 17-25 year-olds lost their lives, with a further 5,089 receiving serious injuries.

Despite making up less than a quarter of NSW 17-25 year-old population, 73% of all fatalities and 47% of all serious injuries are in country NSW. Young drivers and their passengers in country NSW are 9 x more at risk of dying on our roads, and 3 x more at risk of serious injury.

Youth road trauma is both horrific and unacceptable. Lives are lost, futures are ruined and families are put through never-ending distress. The special challenges and increased risk on our regional roads is well documented in the public domain and known to the Government. Solutions, unique to issues facing drivers and passengers on our regional roads must be found in order for the Government to reach its target of zero road trauma.

Our Submission

We seek to address elements of the Terms of Reference as they relate to the cognitive development of young road users by drawing on our singular experience as the leading, and only, national road safety educator of youth in Australia.

Background

The NSW Government's comprehensive graduated licensing scheme is designed to give learner drivers an opportunity to practice all elements of driving across time, under the protection of various restrictions born from crash and policing statistics. The 120 learner hours is in place to allow novice drivers the time and practice to develop the necessary mechanical, and importantly, cognitive skills to be safe on our roads. While accumulating the 120 hours (**ToR (a)**) is a challenge driver training organisations will likely address in their submissions, RSE addresses the issue of providing education essential to supporting on-road driving practice and mechanical skills; education that speaks with teens in their peer groups, helps them devise strategies to mitigate the challenges they face and develops critical cognitive thinking as both drivers and passengers to help with decision-making. This education is essential and supports one of the four pillars of the Government's Safe Systems approach - Road Users.

The most effective approaches to road safety education involve a whole school approach which is embedded in the school curriculum, reinforced by the classroom teacher and happens over time. However, teachers are not road safety experts and often do not have a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies involved in teaching this specialty topic. RSE addresses this through the RYDA whole school approach: RYDA front-loads students with the knowledge and the motivation to use that knowledge through its highly engaging and interactive workshop, and pre-workshop discoveries and post workshop classroom lessons.

Guidelines for best practice youth safety education are generally universal throughout Australia and New Zealand jurisdictions and the guidelines published by the NSW government are, in brief:

What works?

- small groups catering for individual/personalised learning needs;
- explicit, age appropriate, contextually relevant and appropriately challenging content;
- targeting risk behaviour;
- supporting the curriculum with the ability to co-design resources;
- delivered across time (whole school/year approach); and
- evaluated for impact.

What is proven not to work (and in some cases, do harm)

- fear and shock tactics/focus on trauma and long term consequences;
- one-off approaches/one day events;
- presentation of information to large groups of students;
- one size fits all approaches;
- not allowing for each student's voice to be heard;
- a focus on vehicle emergency handling skills; and
- promotion of early licensure.

RSE believe that all schools should have access to education partnerships they can trust, and that are proven, to meet Government's best practice guidelines and help them co-design their classroom learning, using road

safety as an authentic context. Further, regional students should not be at a disadvantage to access face-to-face, best practice education because of their remote location (**ToR (b)**).

There is a strong correlation between regions that experience high rates of road trauma per capita and socioeconomic disadvantage, meaning that those areas where the need for road safety education is critical are also those where the capacity for user-payment for that education is lowest and cost of delivery often higher. This highlights the need for an additional investment in road safety education for regional areas.

Our submission includes that the NSW government should support only those programs that comply with the government's published guidelines while actively discouraging those that don't. This is especially important given that schools have limited time in a crowded senior school calendar and that time should be directed to where students will receive the best benefit – in other words from programs that comply with the government's best practice guidelines.

In support the Government's Road Safety Strategy and 'Towards Zero' vision

In respect of youth road safety education for all students – drivers, intending drivers and passengers - RSE advocates that the NSW Government invest only in road safety programs for rural and regional areas that:

1. Are consistently delivered (regardless of location), evidence based and comply with the published NSW Government program guidelines.
2. Offer resources to teachers to help continue the learning back in the classroom and meet the criteria of a whole-school approach, leading to lasting behaviour change in students and, by extension, the community.
3. Are targeted to the personal needs and experience of students and relevant to the challenges they face on their roads.

RSE further advocates that in addition to supporting the accessibility and affordability of compliant youth road safety education programs, the NSW government:

1. Encourages attendance at such programs by crediting students with 5 hours towards their learner logbooks representing the acquisition of higher order road safety skills, complementing the remaining 115 hours of mechanical driving skills. RSE asserts that there is a significant net benefit to novice drivers' capability from RYDA program participation. The administration can be robustly regulated, similar to the NSW Safer Driver Course but RYDA has the added benefit of the inclusion of peers and passengers in the learning.

Note: this submission is focused on the cognitive development (higher order skills) associated with safe road use practices (the role of the RYDA program) and is not directed towards driver training - vehicle manoeuvring, an equally important but not sole component of safe road use.

Our Approach

It has long been the mission of RSE to equip young people with the tools they need to make good choices on the road, laying the foundation for them to become active citizens with positive, socially connected road user identities.

The **RYDA Program** (version - RYDA 5.0) is a comprehensive, best practice road safety program which is boosted by the highly engaging workshop delivered by road safety and youth education professionals drawn from the local community. It is the largest program of its kind - linked to the curriculum, embedded in the community and giving young people an opportunity to create safety strategies alongside the peers they will most likely be riding with - as drivers or highly influential passengers.

Our comprehensive **Implementation Guide** takes teachers through, step by step, how to achieve the gold-standard of road safety education for their students. The guide includes overviews and instructions on the following topics:

- Best practice (approaches that work and approaches that don't);
- Applying the whole school approach to road safety;
- 12 steps to adopting RYDA for a school - steps include promoting road safety resources at staff meetings, consulting with parents and community, reviewing school policies, working with RYDA coordinator to ensure workshop messaging is personalised to recognise the experience of the students participating, and supporting student led action.
- Pre workshop resources including discovery experiments for students
- Post workshop resources including workshop debrief, session boosters and lesson plans, student reflection and evaluation journals and a school led impact evaluation
- Government Curriculum links

While the RYDA program is built around the leading causes of death and injury in young people - speed, distraction, impairment and seatbelts, it approaches the topics in an innovative way, allowing students to think deeply about road safety and acquire essential life skills as they go.

As a not-for-profit, organisation, RSE is in a unique position to bring together community organisations, major corporations, all level of government and schools. This grassroots approach has proven to be a winning formula to get local engagement and often has flow on effects to other groups like Rotarians, teachers and police who regularly comment how valuable they find the workshops for their communities. This approach also enables prudent fiscal management with top-down support from corporate partners which is in turn combined with local supporters to provide a very cost effective, consistently high quality and sustainable program to the students. The RYDA workshop element draws on local facilitators (trained by RSE) who ensure that the strategies and issues discussed are meaningfully drawn from the students' own experience. ***This is a critical element for regional students to be able to personalise and act on the road safety messaging.***

RYDA 5.0 has been embraced by teachers and students alike. Teachers are gaining a better understanding of how to include road safety in their curriculum learning. They are now better supported with evidence-led resources and are ensuring the road safety conversation continues beyond the workshop day. Student feedback shows evidence which directly supports the learning objectives of the program.

RYDA 5.0 has been subject to an in-depth review by a leading and independent educational research organisation with the outcome reporting that RYDA 5.0 meets and/or exceeds all criteria for best practice road safety education. We are not aware of another road safety education program that has held itself to and achieved this standard.

It is established by all jurisdictions that programs that comply with best practice guidelines for effective road safety education, adhering to what works and eliminating what doesn't, can reasonably be expected to save lives and also reduce the hidden cost of serious injury. It is critical that a program of RYDA's calibre be supported and made easily accessible for regional students. Programs that do not meet this standard should not be supported or considered by teachers and/or the communities they serve. GLS hours of driving practice is only half the equation; a deep understanding of, and motivation for, positive road user behaviour is the other.

Concluding

The terms of reference of this Enquiry are understandably strongly influenced by the overrepresentation of DSIs in rural and regional Australia, especially by young people.

The student knowledge gap: In many jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand, without RYDA, there is a dearth of evidence-led and evaluated education which would give students access to the right knowledge, equip them with usable mitigation strategies or provide the motivation to use either. We know this from pre workshop surveys. RYDA collaboratively partners with governments to help fill that gap.

The need continues unabated with deaths and serious injuries a blight on our community and a burden on the public purse through the health system. It is unquestioned that RYDA contributes to the abatement of this

tragedy and with more resources, RYDA can do more – increasing the availability of program delivery and thereby equipping more students to effectively manage personal risk and keep safe.

As a leading learning organisation, our submission reflects our understanding and experience of youth road safety education and has addressed the terms of reference within the contextualisation of a safe road user – both driver and passenger.

Consistent with the ***NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012-202 and the Safe System***, RSE through its RYDA program focuses on the young road user with evidence led and best practice education.

RSE has the education program, systems and procedures which produce learning outcomes, the evidence suggests will reduce road trauma. It complements an intensive one-day workshop with a whole school approach incorporating classroom lessons available throughout the year. Evaluation indicates significant increases, across time, in knowledge, understanding and application of critical road safety issues.

How best then to enable RYDA to be made more readily accessible and affordable especially in rural and regional New South Wales?

TfNSW's current support of RSE while valued, is minor with the majority of support coming from RSE's partners (corporate and community). Increased government support would enable RSE to further broaden its coverage in rural and regional NSW.

There are different environments in other jurisdictions (ToR (c)) calling for different solutions. Illustratively, while Tasmania has its fair share of rural and regional locations, the distances are not as great as, particularly Queensland or indeed NSW. However, in Tasmania funding for RYDA is included in motor vehicle registration. Through a government partnership, the government's contribution along with RSE's provision of the program content, resources and facilitator training, etc means that attendance is free of charge. This financial benefit is supplemented by participation in the RYDA program earning students a credit of five hours towards their learner logbooks. Both elements of support encourage RYDA school attendance many fold higher than NSW, for example, enabling the broader reach of RYDA and the benefits of that program's road trauma reduction. Similarly, in Queensland, in areas where government grants allow for some school regions to attend RYDA for free, there has been near universal attendance from school students.

A cost-effective way for TfNSW to make a difference: The opportunity exists for NSW government to package such support for the broader availability of RYDA in a manner which is a strong investment with each dollar of government investment leveraged by many dollars from RSE's corporate and community partners. Such a worthwhile investment would be completely in accord with the government's own guidelines for best practice. The source of such funding may well be available from programs previously supported and which may not comply with these guidelines.

Simulation (ToR (d)) is no substitute for engagement and best practice in person education, education which is interactive and meets the Government criteria which we have outlined. Further, education of peer passengers, which the evidence is quite clear, is a huge influencer of learner drivers, would miss out. When it comes to personal risk education, particularly in relation to road safety there is a universal limitation of resources both in terms of time allocated by schools and funds available from parents. Simulation advocacy would likely represent a high-risk strategy, as in many instances something would have to give – would it be best practice education or the fun of a simulator, absent both peer passengers and evidence of efficacy.