

EC's consultation on driving training and traffic safety education

Position of the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)

A. General remarks

The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)¹ welcomes the European Commission's consultation on driver training and traffic safety education.

ETSC considers the consultation paper as providing a solid basis for a broader discussion and is particularly pleased that scientific evidence is extensively used in this consultation. It however regrets that it is not accompanied by an assessment of various education and training systems in use in Member States.

It further estimates that the elements under discussion have a great potential in reducing the number of road deaths in the EU. As a matter of fact, the novice drivers have increased risk in road traffic, partly due to the fact that they are typically young drivers. Young novice (18-24 year old) motorists have indeed a more than four times greater crash rate compared to experienced (30-59 year old) drivers². Risk reduction of these drivers could be achieved in a number of ways, but none of these should jeopardize the equal access to driving licence. Any new schemes should also seek to contribute to social cohesion in the EU.

In ETSC's view, a training programme for drivers could be most effective when combined with additional measures aimed at lowering risky behaviour of novice drivers on roads. Graduated licensing systems consisting of a classic theory exam, followed by a practical training and closed off by a practical driving exam accompanied with a beginner drivers' licence linked to a demerit points system is preferred. This may be supported by

¹ The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC), founded in 1993 is a Brussels-based independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of the number and severity of transport crashes in Europe. The ETSC seeks to identify and promote research-based measures with a high safety potential. It brings together 42 national and international organisations concerned with road safety from across Europe. (www.etsc.eu)

² SWOV, Fact sheet: Novice drivers, SWOV, Leidschendam, 2008

appropriate amendments to the current Driving licence Directive. Driver training is indeed more effective if it is part of a well-designed licensing system and if more emphasis is given to self-evaluation and socio-psychological influences on driving³. Moreover, in order to assure equity and fair treatment, no distinctions should be made between young and older novice drivers in their access to full driving licence. Notably, the approbatory period with stricter rules under penalty point system could be effective when applied also for older new driving licence holders.

ETSC maintains that it is of vital importance that the European Commission develops minimum standards for driver training and traffic safety education. It further recognises that finding a benchmark could be a challenging task given a variety of schemes currently existing in EU Member states.

Also, ETSC would like to see a gradual alignment in the form and content of driving courses across the EU. This is a logical step given the application of an EU driving licence scheme.

B. Position to specific questions

1. Do you think that driver training systems should be harmonised in the EU? If so, what advantages would it have for traffic safety, and what problems do you expect?

ETSC would welcome a harmonisation of driver training schemes, leading to the same level of education in Member States. In particular, the evaluation criteria and examination tests should be harmonised. Such a measure could indeed contribute to the further development of the Common Market and bring numerous advantages to citizens. The schemes with highest standards should be applied.

Harmonisation in the driving training systems would also mean cost benefits and bring higher standards for the systems, equipment and material used (e.g. multimedia software tools with animated videos, driving simulators, etc.).

A thorough understanding of the safety effects of various schemes existing in different Member States would provide a sound starting point in this respect. Existing differences in Highway Codes and different driving cultures could represent an obstacle in attempts towards harmonised training systems.

³ Siegrist, S. (Ed.) (1999). Driver Training, Testing and Licensing - towards theory-based management of young drivers' injury risk in road traffic, EU-Project GADGET

2. Should traffic education at school be mandatory?

ETSC believes that road safety education should be mandatory and start no later than in primary school and should continue during high school/grammar school. In the absence of road traffic education at elementary and secondary school, bad habits appear to be difficult to overcome during regular driver training. This can be tracked in several EU countries⁴. Clearly, the learning potential is decreasing with age and fixing the right habits at early age would provide a robust habit and knowledge base for any later training.

Such an education could be part of some general subject on citizenship education and would preferably include in-site training at traffic grounds as pedestrians and cyclists. It must be assured that such a subject on citizenship education will be treated equally to other obligatory school subjects. The idea of a cyclist riding licence for children/youngsters could provide an additional stimulus for raising awareness and initiating a stimulus for later driving training. It is essential that children learn about the need to work to obtain such a certificate by improving knowledge, skills and what is equally important by improving their behaviour and attitudes.

3. Should driving instructors undergo continuing professional development?

ETSC believes that driving instructors should indeed undergo continuing professional development, not only because traffic law rules change over time, but also the development in vehicle and road design bring new challenges which should be reflected in education.

4. Should coaching be emphasized more as a teaching method for driving instructors?

ETSC estimates that coaching could stimulate the development of good driving habits by placing the learner in a more active role. It certainly has a place in the learning process and should be ideally accompanied by eco-driving lessons taken in a later stage of the training. Inclusion of peer-passengers would be another logical step in this direction, allowing the learning drivers to stand as observers together with the coach.

Moreover, coaching can be further empowered by emerging training technologies, such as cooperative driving in simulators.

⁴ Hoeschen A. and Bekiaris E. (Eds.) (2002). TRAINER (GRD1-1999-10024) Deliverable 2.1 'Inventory of driver training needs and major gaps in the relevant training procedures'

5. Should post-test practical experience models be encouraged?

ETSC believes in the usefulness of keeping a contact between newly licensed drivers and relevant authorities, increasing a sense of responsibility and supervision in the first years of solo driving. But post-test practical experience for everyone could prove to be less cost-efficient and impose unnecessary financial burden on new drivers. Moreover, some evaluation studies showed that these courses do not always have the desired effect on driver attitudes.

ETSC considers more effective the application of an probation driving period, during which, stricter legislation is applied and could eventually impose additional training on novice drivers. It would help assure a safe behaviour in a longer term.

During probation driving period it would be advisable to organise a series of mandatory meetings for novice drivers accompanied by an experienced and highly qualified. The aim of such meetings would be discussing risky behaviour and its consequences including young drivers' personal experiences, emotions and observations.

Moreover, the new technologies such as ISA could be more efficient than relying on measures such as lay instructors, or post-test trainings.

6. Should accompanied driving systems be encouraged? Should they be harmonised at EU level?

The effectiveness of accompanied driving has been questioned. For example, in France, it has proved to be far less effective than expected and young drivers undergoing such a scheme have similar crash rates⁵ and tend to speed as often as novice drivers who have taken traditional training⁶.

Thus, if the system is to be supported in light of new evidence, it shall be in a form of non-binding recommendations. Since different accompanied driving systems exist in Member States, which do not differ that much from one another, such recommendations would be sufficient to create a level playing field. As in other areas, the recommendation should be based on the best practices in Member States. Also, in case of accompanied driving, a minimum training with a professional instructor shall be fixed. But since not all citizens have the same access to accompanied driving, typically assured by parents in a family car, it should be an alternative to a traditional driving-school based model.

⁵ Page, Y. (1999). Young drivers, "Apprentissage anticipé à la conduite" and road accidents. Les cahiers de l'observatoire, 15-55, 1995

⁶ Chatenet, F. and Leroux, P. (1999). A quantitative assessment of a training method. L'apprentissage anticipé de la conduite, INRETS ; Lyon 1999

7. Should accompanied driving systems with “lay instructors” be encouraged? Should there be training requirements for “lay instructors”?

ETSC considers that such a driving system could be useful, but the concrete setting could be fixed only once the framework for driver education is developed and the role of lay instructors defined. Moreover, the effectiveness in terms of costs and benefits shall be assessed beforehand.

8. Do you agree that the minimum age of solo driving (with a category B licence) should be 18?

ETSC fully supports a minimum age of 18 for solo-driving and 17 for accompanied driving.

9. Should more use be made of computer-based training systems? If so, in which areas?

PC-based training should be made mandatory, as young people are familiar with the PC use and the relevant lessons can be more effective than in a book. PC-training has some unique advantages:

- With the use of multimedia material, it allows trainees to visualise good and bad practices and their consequences, through videos or animations (e.g. the correct safety distance to the vehicle ahead, the accepted gap to the vehicle of the on-coming traffic for left turn, etc.).
- Specific PC tests can be designed, with multimedia elements and not only multiple-choice questions.
- The progress of the trainee can be monitored (log files) and the areas where he/she has problems recorded, thus, the system can propose personalised re-training, according to the needs of each trainee.
- PC-based training is applicable for all aspects of theoretical training (laws, traffic signs,...) but also for some aspects of practical training (e.g. presentation of videos or animations with the consequences of good and bad practices while driving).

10. Should more use be made of e-learning? If so, in which areas?

As a quickly developing form of learning, particularly among teenagers, the e-learning methods could bring an additional value to the learning process. Two areas are to be considered: traffic rules and traffic situations.

A sophisticated and high quality material that is well designed and user friendly is of particular interest. On the other hand, if this kind of program is not adequate or correctly

designed, it becomes less interesting and tedious and its use should be avoided. There is therefore a need to determine in which cases “e-learning” would be appropriated.

Nevertheless, and as it was exposed previously, e-learning becomes a useful tool to assess or test knowledge, attitudes, habits, cognitive learning style, etc.. It may provide the opportunity to sort out the evaluation process and to measure user’s performance. The tool gives substantial feedback to learners and let them know the level of what it is being analyzed.

Last, but not least, while e-learning could be beneficial for theoretical training, it cannot replace traditional training with the presence of an instructor.

C. Additional comments

There may be a couple of potential conceptual shortcomings and misinterpretations in the consultation paper.

1. Young novice drivers have higher risk due to their lack of experience and higher level of risk acceptance. The notion of developing automated behaviour could be misleading, as in road traffic, the driver is confronted with unique situations which cannot be always learnt, thus permanent attention is more important than automated behaviour. The lifestyle factors apply to all groups of drivers and do not relate exclusively to young novice drivers.
2. The notion of harmonisation of user behaviour could be misleading. Harmonisation usually refers to reaching similar properties within a technical environment, while in a complex area of behaviour of unique individuals it could prove senseless. Harmonisation should therefore be limited to skills, knowledge...
3. The interpretation of data presented in Figure 2 suffers from fallacy. First, the number of all road fatalities in EU-15 dropped by almost 45% and at the same time, there were some demographic changes. Thus for young drivers, even when not accounting for higher exposure in traffic, no visible difference in road deaths age distribution between 1991 and 2007 could be identified. This is reflected in Annex 3, Table 1. As for higher proportion of killed older car drivers, this could be partly explained by increased exposure due to population ageing and higher mobility. Moreover, drivers in many EU countries joining the EU in 2004 aged 45 or so underwent better driver training than their younger counterparts⁷. Last, but not least, it is essential to realise that the likely effects of education and training may disappear in certain ages.

⁷ Eksler V., Hollo P., Bensa B. et al. (2005). SUNflower+6: A comparative study on the development of road safety in the Czech republic, Hungary and Slovenia, CDV

Also, the rise in young driver deaths in countries that joined the EU in 2004 is the result of demography (high birth rate in 1980s) and higher mobility (car ownership by young people, more driving without supervision).

4. The interpretation of data in Fig.3 could be strengthened by acknowledging the benefits of graduated driving licence schemes being introduced in several countries in respective period and by pointing towards non-existence of such schemes for new mid-age riders.

Consultation document referred in the text:

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/consultations/2009_06_22_training_education_en.htm

ETSC Contacts:

Vojtech Eksler
Policy Analyst
vojtech.eksler@etsc.eu
Tel.: 00 32 2 230 41 06

Ellen Townsend
Policy Director
ellen.townsend@etsc.eu
Tel.: 00 32 2 230 41 06