

The fast and the curious:

young people's attitudes
to driver training



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Introduction

The IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) to analyse young novice drivers' attitudes and opinions towards post-test training. The full results can be found in TRL's 'A Segmentation of Novice Drivers in Great Britain: Factors associated with intention to take advanced driver training', published separately on the IAM's website.

This summary discusses how the IAM will respond to this research and some of the wider policy implications of the findings. The views expressed here are those of the IAM and are not necessarily held by the Transport Research Laboratory, or its staff members.

The IAM and young drivers

The over-representation of young drivers in road accidents is well known and widely reported. Thirty per cent of car occupant fatalities are drivers aged 17-24, or passengers of a driver aged 17-24¹. Yet this group only forms eight per cent of all licence holders².

As the UK's largest independent road safety charity the IAM is committed to reducing accidents involving young drivers. By offering advanced training, assessments and advice we improve drivers' skills and awareness. We also highlight trends and issues relating to young drivers through our policy and research division.

Previous IAM research analysed where young drivers are most at risk³, and the contributory factors⁴ which lead to so many collisions involving young people.

We know that young drivers are more likely to be in accidents which:

- happen at night time and weekends
- take place on bends, particularly on rural roads
- have three or more casualties in the car
- involve skidding, and overturning
- happen in rural areas with a 60mph speed limit
- take place on wet road roads, or in rain, fog or mist.

Our response to this research was creating Momentum, a dedicated driving assessment initiative for those under 26. This introduces them to further training by highlighting where they are most at risk.

The need to understand young people's attitudes

While feedback on IAM advanced driver training and Momentum has been positive, we know that it only reaches a small number of drivers. Errors and behaviour contribute to the vast majority of accidents involving young drivers, yet few take the additional training which would improve their safety.

We are concerned that many young novice drivers are not aware of advanced training, or may not take up further training for economic and social reasons. In order to engage young people in further training it is vital to understand their opinions and attitudes. The best way to do this is to ask them what they think. We wanted to hear the opinions of a wide range of young people, from across the country, and decided the best method would be a large scale survey.

We needed an in-depth analysis in order to understand the complex associations between driver behaviour; motivations, personality traits, social factors and the willingness to take further training. The IAM commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) to do a segmentation analysis of the survey results.

Segmentation analysis creates an understanding of how a wide variety of factors relate to each other and impact on a person's decision to make a certain choice, or buy a product. In this case we wanted to understand which factors impact on young peoples' attitudes to taking advanced driver training. We chose TRL because of their knowledge and expertise in driver training, road safety issues and behavioural psychology.

A segmentation of novice drivers in Great Britain: Factors associated with intention to take advanced driver training

TRL's survey covered young novice⁵ drivers' experience of learning to drive, their opinions on driving and road safety, and attitudes to cars and risk taking. For example, participants were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with these statements:

- I get nervous driving in bad weather
- People stopped by police for speeding are unlucky because lots of people do it.
- A car is essential for the sort of life I lead

They were also asked how skilled they were in undertaking a range of driving manoeuvres and situations; and for information and opinions on non-driving related topics such as demographic and social information.

The segmentation analysis looked at factors associated with young novice drivers' willingness to take each of the following forms of advanced training:

1. Training that provides experience of a wide range of road and traffic situations
2. Training of vehicle control skills
3. Training to develop anticipation and safer attitudes to driving

It does not identify those who would most benefit from taking advanced training; it simply indicates the characteristics or factors which can be used to identify who is more likely to be interested in it.

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1,007 novice drivers aged 17-30 responded to the survey from across the UK. Full details of the techniques used for TRL's segmentation analysis can be found in their report. The key factors⁶ which can identify those willing to take advanced training are shown below, alongside those which have no apparent impact.

Results from the segmentation analysis

Factors which identify people open to taking further driver training

- Motivation to reduce insurance costs through training
- Fewer miles driven since passing the practical driving test ('experience training' and 'anticipation and attitudes' training)
- Fewer attempts to pass the practical driving test (more likely to be a first time passer - ('experience' training and 'vehicle control' training)
- Nervousness about driving
- Greater tendency to report committing more driving violations and general driving errors
- More positive attitudes about the benefits of training (including acceptance by peers)
- More likely to use a bicycle ('vehicle control training')

Factors which did not identify people open to further driver training

- Demographic variables (for example, age, gender and employment status)
- Self-rated driving skill (confidence on manoeuvres)
- Concern about accidents and their consequences
- Avoiding accident risk

Interestingly, demographic variables are not associated with young novice drivers' willingness to take advanced driver training. This means that simplistic assumptions on attitudes to training based on gender, age and employment status

should not be made. 'Concerns about accidents and their consequences' are not associated either, this is likely to mean that simply highlighting young people's risk is not enough to engage them in further training.

'Greater tendency to report committing more driving violations and general driving errors' is a factor associated with a willingness to take advanced training; suggesting that young novice drivers who already have an awareness of their mistakes and errors are more likely to express an interest in further training.

There are also correlations between 'fewer attempts to pass the practical driving test' and an interest in training. This suggests that young people considered to be good drivers (by passing first time) are often amongst those who would find additional training most useful.

Financial incentives provided by reduced insurance premiums were a significant factor which would encourage all forms of driver training.

The IAM wanted to establish what types of training appealed most to young novice drivers, and find out what format of training they would prefer (For example: e-learning, on an off-road track, on the road or classroom based activities).

1. Training that provides experience of a wide range of road and traffic situations.

Focusing on areas that are not necessarily experienced before the driving test, such as motorways, night time and bad weather.

This type of training was considered the most popular. It links to the fact that 'driving nervousness' and 'fewer miles driven' were factors associated with the willingness to take further training.

2. Training for vehicle control skills.

Drivers are taught techniques to improve their ability to control their vehicle, such as cornering, accelerating and braking. A variety of providers, including the IAM, organise skills days and experiences which are similar to this type of training.

This training was also preferred by young drivers. There was an interesting association between drivers who cycle and willingness to take this training, suggesting that cyclists are more aware of the need for greater vehicle control.

3. Training to develop anticipation and safer attitudes to driving.

This focuses on improving skills to anticipate hazards, giving drivers insight into their limitations, highlighting key dangers, and how to avoid dangerous situations developing.

This was the least popular, linking to the fact that 'concern about accidents' and their consequences', and 'avoiding accident risk' were not key factors associated with the willingness to take further training.

The IAM will use TRL's analysis to explore how our training appeals and responds to young people.

The survey results

This section looks at some of the main survey results – it does not form part of the segmentation analysis. The results are shown here to give an indication of the types of questions asked and the nature of the responses.

- 74.4 per cent of novice drivers said that they would definitely take further training if it saved them money on their car insurance.
- Only 52.3 per cent of recently passed drivers reported positively on feeling fully prepared for driving on their own.
- 61.5 per cent of male respondents said they were more skilful than the average driver, compared to only 32.2 per cent of females.
- 51 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'I think I know exactly how much I can drink and still be under the limit'. Women were slightly more likely to be unsure (54 per cent of females, 48.2 per cent of males).

Gender differences

As well as confidence about driving skills there were some strong gender differences in the survey results in terms of driving experiences. Young male drivers were more likely to have been stopped by the police; 19.2 per cent of males said they had been stopped at least once, compared to 8.8 per cent of females. 10.8 per cent of males said they had been flashed by a speed camera at least once, compared to 3.7 per cent of females.

Although the segmentation analysis showed that gender is not associated with the willingness to take advanced training the apparent differences in the confidence and attitudes of male and female novice drivers is worth exploring further.

Young male drivers are more than twice as likely to be killed or seriously injured than young female drivers⁷, making them a key target for advanced training.

Car use and experience of driving

37 per cent of respondents with regular access to a car agreed or strongly agreed that they couldn't manage without one.

Young novice drivers were more likely to disagree with the statement 'I would like to own a faster or larger car'; 45 per cent disagreeing compared to 37 per cent agreeing.

47.4 per cent of young drivers disagreed with the statement 'It's ok to drive faster than the speed limit as long as you are being careful'.

Over 50 per cent of young drivers admitted to sometimes failing to notice pedestrians, crossing a junction when the lights have already turned, and sometimes having no clear recollection of the road they had been travelling down.

Policy implications from the research

The IAM believes that TRL's research has wider implications for policy relating to young novice drivers. In this section we open up a discussion with some recommendations for government, and set out some actions for the IAM.

Incentivising young people to be safer

'A Segmentation of Novice Drivers in Great Britain' shows that simply informing young people that they carry a high risk of being involved in an accident is not enough. Offering a real incentive through reduced insurance premiums would encourage the majority of young novice drivers to consider further training.

We are concerned that there is currently no universally accepted link between advanced driver training and reduced insurance premiums. A clear and well-defined relationship could be used to promote and increase safer driving. A link could also respond to concerns that young people are being priced out of driving by high insurance, and potentially reduce insurance fraud.

We would like to see closer working between government, advanced driver training providers and the insurance industry to provide incentives.

The IAM believes that the government should bring the insurance industry and advanced driver training providers together to establish a clear way to link advanced training with reduced insurance.

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The government's strategic framework for road safety commits to establishing an indicator on the take up of advanced training. The IAM would like the Department for Transport to explore how this can be connected to analysis of accident rates.

We appreciate the fact that for insurance premiums to go down we need clear evidence of the link between advanced driver training and reduced risk. We will work on providing evidence of the impact of our training wherever possible. We will also work with the government and the insurance industry to establish a link.

Educating rather than restricting young drivers

There have been recent calls for the introduction of further regulations for young drivers in the form of curfews and restrictions on passenger numbers. While we appreciate the objective to increase safety, we believe that the poor behaviour of a few individuals should not restrict the mobility of the majority of safe young drivers.

Furthermore, we feel that giving young novice drivers greater experience in real situations is vital for preparing them for the road. 'A segmentation of novice drivers in Great Britain' highlights the important fact that those who pass first time and those who have driven fewer miles are often among those who would find additional training most useful.

TRL's research shows that training that provides experience of a wide range of road and traffic situations was the most popular amongst young novice drivers. Instead of inhibiting young drivers we should be making it easier for them to gain experience of settings such as motorways, night time driving and rural roads accompanied by an observer or advanced driving instructor.

The IAM believes that post-test training, similar to the Austrian system⁸, would be a successful way of enabling people to gain the full experience they need. Post-test training could be accredited by government but delivered through a variety of public, private, social enterprise and voluntary providers. This could help ensure that further training provides value for money.

The IAM believes the government should review the driving test process, learning from Pass Plus and international experiences, with the Austrian model providing the best example.

The IAM will continue to work to highlight the potential benefits of post-test training through research and evidence.

Putting young people's views at the forefront of driver training

TRL's research shows that making assumptions about young novice driver's willingness to take advanced training based on gender and age is wrong. It is important to look at a wide range of factors relating to attitudes, behaviours and experience.

Young people are rarely given the opportunity to engage in policy decisions which impact on driving and road safety. The IAM believes that they should be more involved in designing training and safety awareness messages to improve their success.

TRL's evidence also showed how vital it is to engage young drivers within the first year of passing their driving test. It is important to respond to when and where young people are most likely to take up advanced driver training, as well as providing incentives.

The IAM would like the government to consider how it engages young people in decisions about driver safety. We would also like the government to consider how it promotes opportunities for advanced training during the first year after test passes.

The IAM will explore the survey results in more detail over the coming months, looking at their implications for how we target, engage and train young novice drivers. We will work to become more responsive to the needs, attitudes and behaviours of young people in order to further improve our offer and appeal.

The IAM would like to thank the Transport Research Laboratory for its sound and in-depth analysis.

‘A Segmentation of Novice Drivers in Great Britain: Factors associated with intention to take advanced driver training’ (PPR590) is available on the (IAM) Institute of Advanced Motorists website.

www.iam.org.uk

Notes and references

1. Department for Transport (2010) ‘Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain’, Table RAS40006
2. DVLA, ‘Driving Licence Statistics by age as at 25 September 2010’
3. Hopkin, J (2008) ‘Young drivers –where and when are they unsafe: analysis of road accidents in Great Britain 2000-2006’ IAM Motoring Trust, London.
4. Hopkin, J (2010) ‘Licensed to Skill -Contributory factors in road accidents: Great Britain 2005-2009’ IAM, London
5. For the purposes of the research young novice drivers were defined as someone aged 17-30 who had passed their driving test within the last three years.
6. It is important to note that all responses were self-reported.
7. Calculated from Department for Transport statistics ‘Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain’ (published 2010) Table RAS30011. Between 2008 and 2010 5,903 male drivers aged 17-29 were killed or seriously injured on Britain’s roads, compared to 2,479 female drivers.
8. In Austria new drivers have at least three further contacts with qualified instructors after passing their driving test. This has successfully reduced the number of deaths of young male drivers by nearly 43 per cent. After taking the test, drivers have an initial assessment to gain knowledge of their experience and to highlight any deficiencies. This is followed by visits to a road safety centre to demonstrate handling in the wet, speed into corners and the impact of speed on stopping distances.

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IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists)

IAM House, 510 Chiswick High Road, London W4 5RG

T 0845 126 8600 **F** 020 8996 9601 **E** enquiries@iam.org.uk **W** iam.org.uk

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