



Association of British
Dispensing Opticians



Department of Transport and Driving Standards Agency Learning to Drive – A consultation paper

Together ABDO, AOP and FODO represent the 10,699 optometrists and the 5,303 dispensing opticians as well as optical businesses in the UK who provide high quality and accessible eye care services to the whole population.

We have confined our response to those questions which are most appropriate to our organisations.

Q1. What views do you have about our explanation of the high accident rate among newly-qualified drivers?

As healthcare professionals we are concerned about the real risks of people driving with vision below the required standard and welcome any move to improve the safety of all road users. We believe that the testing process must ensure drivers are aware of the dangers of driving with poor vision and the need to wear their spectacles or contact lenses at all times behind the wheel. Changes to the testing process are long overdue particularly with the way the driver's vision is tested

We recognise that good vision on its own does not prevent all accidents as the attitudinal issues of driving within ones limitations play a part, but if a driver believes that their vision is excellent when it is not, they are likely to drive inappropriately. Whilst the current number plate test used for checking a driver's distance vision may be useful as a cheap way for drivers to self assess their vision performance, it is not a satisfactory or consistent 'standard' assessment. This is because it depends on lighting conditions, the precision of viewing distances etc and doesn't assess visual fields. Provisional drivers should have their vision adequately checked before being allowed into a car. Once a driver has passed the test, regular eye tests should be encouraged to stress the importance of driving safely with good vision. We look forward to the forthcoming consultation on the testing of driver's vision as mentioned on page 23 of the consultation document.

Q.3 What are your views about our analysis that improved training and testing is the best way of improving the safety of newly-qualified drivers?

Improved training and testing will help to improve safety. We believe that changing the distance vision test will help to improve the safety of drivers.

We believe that the current vision distance test, carried out as part of the practical driving test, is not sufficient to make an adequate assessment of a driver's vision. The vision test is only a basic distance test and does not check a person's peripheral vision or check for early signs of eye disease which could lead to visual impairment and sight loss. The basic distance test does not place enough importance on the need for good eyesight and that good vision is important to drive safely.

Drivers (other than PSV etc) are not legally required to confirm their visual status for driving after their initial driving test until they are 70, which means that many people could be driving with undetected visual problems, putting themselves and others at risk of a road accident. Normal eyesight changes with time and there are some eye diseases that gradually affect a person's eyesight.

Strengthening the current system of checking drivers' vision through introducing a requirement for a full sight test before a provisional and full licence is issued and regular sight tests (every two years unless more frequently indicated) thereafter, would significantly help to make drivers more aware of the importance of driving with the required standard of vision and help to ensure that they continue to think about driving safely throughout their lives. We support the view that extra tuition could be rewarded with lower premiums. If drivers were encouraged to have an eye test before their test, lower insurance premiums could offset this cost.

Q14. What are your views about the proposed student workbook? How useful would a voluntary document be for all learners when they start learning to drive?

The student workbook should include information about driving at night. As the consultation document rightly states, learners need to be prepared for the full range of driving conditions such as driving at night. Drivers need to be aware of the changes to visual perception in respect of viewing distances, speed judgement and peripheral vision in low illumination (dusk) and at night and to be prepared for the added factor of glare from oncoming vehicles.

Q24. As well as the subjects mentioned in this Paper, what else should be covered in the pre-driver qualification in safe road use?

If the pre-driver qualification is introduced the dangers of driving with poor vision should be included, for the reasons mentioned above.