



3000 people are injured or killed by a driver with poor vision every year



It's deeply concerning that a 17-year-old who can read a number plate from 20 metres away when they take their driving test, may continue to drive with no further checks for the rest of their life. We have to ask ourselves why the UK system, which relies on self-reporting and a number plate test, continues to operate under a law first introduced in 1937 to the detriment of individuals' safety.

Adam Sampson
Chief Executive

Association of Optometrists

IN NUMBERS

Vision and driving in the UK

56%

Below vision standard

Over half (56%) of UK optometrists have seen a patient in the last month who continues to drive despite being told their vision is below the legal standard

29%

Won't stop driving

Almost a third (29%) of motorists admit they would continue to drive despite knowing their vision was below the legal standard

26%

Vision concerns

More than a quarter (26%) of people say they are concerned about someone they know driving despite having poor vision



Rigorous rules needed

Two fifths (38%) of UK adults think that the current laws on sight requirements in the UK for a normal car driver should be more rigorous

Breaking the law

1 in 7 have a relative, friend or co-worker that they know to be breaking the law over the eyesight



Source: 2081 UK adults by Mortar, October 2024. 2007 adults, Opinium, October 2017.



How the UK's visual standards for driving compare with other European countries

How is eyesight tested?



Number plate self-test

Visual acuity/visual field test

Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland



Who conducts the test?



Driving test employee

Optometrist/Ophthalmologist/Doctor

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta and Poland

After someone gets their licence



No further visual tests

Visual assessment every 10 years



Algeria, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Spain and Turkey

Visual tests from age 65 or earlier



Algeria, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and Turkey



TIME2ACT

The number plate test is inadequate for assessing safe driving vision, as it misses key aspects of visual function; it should be replaced with a standardized, reliable vision test that thoroughly evaluates drivers' ability to see safely.

We can make our roads safer

Motorists' poor vision is causing road accidents every year. It's that simple. We don't know exactly how many, because accidents can be caused by a combination of factors. There is also no requirement for a driver's vision to be checked when an accident happens.

But a recent study shows that there were six fatalities in 2023 alone due to the driver or rider's uncorrected or defective eyesight. Eyesight is also recorded as the cause in 62 road deaths over the past 10 years (2014–2023) and 2,648 road casualties during the same period. Due to the way accidents are recorded the actual number is likely to be far higher.¹ In fact, An earlier 2012 study estimated that over 2000 drivers in the UK were involved in accidents due to poor vision, causing nearly 3000 casualties each year.²

The UK law on vision and driving is out of step with many European countries. After the driving test, the law doesn't require drivers to have another vision check ever again³ — and the UK's number plate test isn't accurate or fit for purpose. The law should require all drivers to have their vision checked every time they renew their driving licence.

Drivers should also have their vision evaluated regularly. Ideally this would happen every two years, because changes to vision can be gradual, and a driver may not realise that their sight has become too poor for driving.

We at the AOP, along with two fifths of UK adults⁴, believe that the rules should be stricter and the law needs to change.



What we're calling for

- 1 All drivers should get their **sight tested at least every two years**, or more often if their optometrist recommends
- 2 All drivers should be **legally required to have their vision checked when they first apply** for a licence, and when renewing their driving licence — **every 10 years** for most people, and every three years for those over 70
- 3 The check should involve **standardised reliable tests**, rather than the inadequate number plate test

Optometrists

Optometrists are eye care professionals who test sight, identify disease and provide treatment for certain eye conditions. They are community-based: there are around 6000 primary care optical practices (commonly known as opticians) across the UK, as well as in hospitals.

It is optometrists who supply eye wear prescriptions. However, optometrists are qualified and equipped to do far more NHS work than they carry out. Many have additional, higher qualifications including the ability to prescribe medications and even those without higher qualifications have an extensive portfolio of skills that are currently underutilised.



For more information, visit www.aop.org.uk/dontswerve