



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



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

Vision in doubt

30% of drivers have doubted whether their vision is good enough, yet continued to drive

Delayed a vision check

Two-thirds (62%) of people who wear glasses or contact lenses are "putting off going to the opticians"

Out of date prescriptions



36% say they are wearing an out of date prescription

Won't stop driving



10% say they would continue to drive as normal even if they were told their vision, with glasses or contact lenses, was below the legal standard



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



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

How is eyesight tested?



Number plate self-test

UK, Cyprus, France, The Netherlands and Norway



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:

UK, Cyprus, The Netherlands and Norway

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



Visual assessment every 10 years:

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



No further visual tests:

UK, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany and Sweden



Visual tests from the age of 65 (or younger):

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



Association of
Optometrists

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) is the leading representative membership organisation for optometrists in the UK. We support over 80% of practising optometrists, to fulfil their professional roles to protect the nation's eye health.

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

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 2012 study estimated that over 2000 drivers in the UK were involved in accidents due to poor vision, causing nearly 3000 casualties.¹

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

The UK law on vision and driving falls below many European countries. After the driving test, the law doesn't require drivers to have another vision check ever again² — 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 adults³, believe that the rules should be stricter and the law needs to change.

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.

Ditching inaccurate tests



UNRELIABLE

The number plate test isn't a reliable indicator of whether someone can drive safely because it does not check all the relevant aspects of visual function. Someone may pass the current driving standard without having good enough vision to drive safely. The solution is to replace the number plate test with a modern and reliable evaluation process.

1. RSA Group (2013) Fit to Drive: a cost benefit analysis of more frequent eyesight testing for UK drivers.

2. This applies to drivers of private vehicles and light commercial vehicles (Group 1). Drivers of large lorries and buses (Group 2) must have a check every five years after age 45. 3. 2007 adults, Opinion, October 2017