

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: Young and novice drivers, HC 169

Wednesday 21 October 2020

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 21 October 2020.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Lilian Greenwood; Robert Langan; Chris Loder, Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith; Sam Tarry.

Questions 188 - 277

Witnesses

I: Dr Kiron Chatterjee, Associate Professor in Travel Behaviour, University of the West of England, Bristol; and Malcolm Heymer, Alliance of British Drivers.

II: Baroness Vere of Norbiton, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport; and David Buttery, Director for Road Safety, Standards and Services, Department for Transport.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Alliance of British Drivers ([RSY0021](#))
- Department for Transport ([YND0003](#))



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Kiron Chatterjee and Malcolm Heymer.

Q188 **Chair:** This is the Transport Select Committee's final evidence session of our inquiry on young and novice drivers. I start by asking both of our witnesses on our first panel to introduce themselves.

Malcolm Heymer: I am Malcolm Heymer, and I am the traffic management adviser to the Alliance of British Drivers. My professional background is in highway and traffic engineering, which I have done for 30-odd years.

Dr Chatterjee: Good morning, Committee. My name is Kiron Chatterjee, and I am an associate professor in travel behaviour at the University of the West of England in Bristol. My expertise is researching travel trends and understanding travel behaviour among different groups of the population.

I led a study for the Department for Transport on the reasons why young people have driven less since the 1990s. I also look at how travel impacts on people's lives and have done research for the Department for Transport on how transport access affects certain people's life opportunities.

Q189 **Chair:** Mr Heymer and Dr Chatterjee, welcome and thank you for being with us.

As a recap, this is our fourth and final session. In our first session, we heard from academics and organisations that, it is fair to say, favour some form of change in restrictions. In our second session, we were delighted to hear via Zoom from young people from colleges across the country who are either novice drivers or about to start learning. In our third session, we heard from the insurance industry and motoring organisations.

Today, we are going to further the interest we have in social mobility and how that impacts. We will hear from Mr Heymer, where, it is fair to say, his evidence suggests less change should be brought forward. We will hear from the Minister as a wrapper. We will then write our report with our recommendations, and we will see where we flow from there. That is a recap.

Let us go straight into the questions. I will ask the first one of Mr Heymer. Department for Transport statistics show that young drivers are over-represented when it comes to traffic collisions. They make up 7% of licence holders but they are involved in 16% of fatal and serious collisions. To what extent do you think further regulation and policy measures are required in order to tackle such a tragic statistic?

Malcolm Heymer: When you look at the figures, while novice drivers have a high crash rate in their first year, it rapidly reduces over years two and three, which suggests that drivers learn from their mistakes. The main reason why we have these high crash risks for young drivers is that driving instruction does not include teaching the management of risk, which would make a big difference. We believe that there should be mandatory training



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in risk management during the process of learning to drive. In that way, you would reduce that initial high car crash risk for the first year or so.

Q190 **Chair:** When you say there should be mandatory training at the initial stage, can you explain a little more?

Malcolm Heymer: It should be a requirement that drivers are taught how to manage risk, including things such as how to resist peer pressure from young passengers, which is an issue with young drivers. If there are young people in the car, the driver may be goaded to drive faster. It is possible to teach people to resist that. These things should be included in the run-up to the driving test, and the driving test should include questions on those measures.

Q191 **Chair:** That is a great opening statement. We will come back to some of those points, so I will not delve further now.

Dr Chatterjee, do you have a view on that? I know you are here to talk about the social mobility issues for young drivers, but equally I would be interested in your views on that statistic.

Dr Chatterjee: The increase in accident risk for young drivers has been well covered by the other witnesses and in submissions from the Department for Transport, TRL, et cetera. The overall number of young drivers killed on the road has decreased substantially since 1990. We heard that it has gone down from 450 in 1990 to about 100 in the last couple of years. That is really welcome, but it is not unexpected given the point I wish to cover later, which is that young people are driving far less than they were 20 or 30 years ago. The risk remains very high for young drivers compared with other age groups, apart from those that are very senior in years. Further steps to improve the safety of young people would be appropriate and potentially welcome for young people themselves to reduce the stresses of driving.

Q192 **Sam Tarry:** Dr Chatterjee, we read your research and also the research from the DFT. There is some pretty serious evidence that personal car access can enhance social mobility, particularly in access to employment, ability to visit different services and social participation. My colleague, Greg, will come in about the rural aspects of that, but I want to focus on the urban aspects.

I have two questions. First, could you tell us more about the specific ways you think that car access influences social mobility for young people, and, secondly, do you think that that is more or less necessary for people in urban areas? I represent a constituency just into Essex where, for many people, car is still king.

Dr Chatterjee: First of all, we need to recognise that fewer people have a driving licence and car access than you might think. We need to put aside our experiences from when we were at the age where we could drive. Things have changed very recently, at least for me since I was that age. The situation 20 years ago was that about half of 17 to 20-year-olds had a driving licence. It has gone down to a third now. Of those who have car



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access and a car available that they can drive when they want to, only a third of 16 to 24-year-olds—the group you are concerned with here—have that access.

The majority of young people are, for various reasons, having to manage without cars at that stage in their lives anyway, but I would not say that that presents a good situation at the moment. I think transport, along with other factors, leads to issues about life opportunities and forms a barrier for young people getting on in their lives. That is not purely an issue about car access. It is an issue about the wider transport system.

We see a mixed position from the perspective of young people themselves in that those living in urban areas—where there has been an increase in the proportion of young people over recent decades—are more accepting and happy to forgo moving into car use early on in their adult lives. When we speak to young people, they often say they have other priorities and are reasonably comfortable with managing until their life moves on to when they start a family and move to full-time employment.

We see that there are young people in rural areas but also on the peripheries of urban areas who are struggling to reach opportunities, and for those young people the car could be very valuable for reaching employment and other opportunities, but it is exceptionally expensive. The key issue with car access is not so much the learning process; it is more the costs involved—the cost to learn to drive to start with but also, subsequently, the cost of insurance and running a car.

The big issue for social mobility is the transport cost. That is consistently cited by young people themselves in the evidence as being the key barrier. The issue is just as much public transport where getting a car is not really a realistic option, certainly at 16, and in the next few years. It is the cost of public transport and the wider transport system and availability of transport that is an issue. I would suggest the focus needs to be more broadly on the overall transport system.

Q193 Sam Tarry: My experience in Ilford South is that we have some of the highest postcode costs for insurance anywhere in the country, and, more often than not, young people especially but even people into their 20s and early 30s face paying more for their insurance than the actual value of their car. That is definitely a major factor.

Do you think this is going to get worse? There were announcements overnight about potential cuts, in London, to the discounted cost of travel for young people. It does not leave too many options if people cannot afford public transport, if private transport is too prohibitive already.

Dr Chatterjee: We have seen over the past two decades a reduction in the real incomes of young people, or they are static, while the incomes of other age groups have risen with costs. On top of that, we have increased housing costs for young people, so their overall disposable income has shrunk. Transport affordability has become more of a problem for them,



especially when transport costs have risen more than inflation, particularly public transport costs. As I said earlier, two thirds of young people do not have regular access to a car and are reliant on public transport. So those increases in public transport costs are real problems.

Studies have shown that they discourage young people from staying on in education at 16 or 17 years of age where education is some distance away and the transport costs prevent them. We know that public transport availability and costs discourage young people from looking for jobs further afield from their local area.

You mentioned that London had a scheme for free bus travel for those under 18. Evidence shows the value of that to young people. That is under challenge at the moment with difficult circumstances. Manchester took the approach of providing free bus access up to the age of 19, which is an example of the type of step that can keep opportunities open for young people.

Sam Tarry: I couldn't agree more. Thank you very much.

Q194 **Greg Smith:** Some of the points have been covered in your earlier answers, but I would like to drill into the urban-rural split from a rural perspective. Just as Sam talked about his constituency being majority urban, my constituency is 335 square miles of north Buckinghamshire countryside where most constituents have at least a 20-minute drive to the nearest railway station. Buses are few and far between. I am not saying there is no bus service, but bus services are limited.

Dr Chatterjee, from your research, is there an ability to put a number, a statistic or some sort of quantitative data on the impact particularly on young residents in rural areas reliant on access to a vehicle or getting lifts, travelling via car—whether it is them driving themselves or being driven—which then impacts their life chances and ability to access further and higher education, employment, and their ability to take those first steps on the ladder of their career?

Dr Chatterjee: First of all, before looking at the effect it has on their opportunities, let us be clear that young people in rural areas use cars more than those in urban areas: 17 to 19-year-olds drive three times as many miles per year as those in urban areas—2,500 miles per year compared with 800 miles per year. That is not their only means of travel. You expect them to be travelling about double that. It is still not the entire picture.

Additional barriers to driving for young people who live in rural areas and peripheral urban areas would not be welcome given the distances they need to travel to reach opportunities. On the other hand, measures that would genuinely improve the safety of driving would widen confidence and abilities among the young population to drive. Those increases in safety could drive down insurance premiums, and you heard about the link there.



Further barriers to driving in rural areas would not be welcomed by young people and would not be helpful for the opportunities for those people. There will always be, even in rural areas, a significant proportion of young people who are not keen on driving, not able to start driving straightaway, and we need to see what can be done creatively with other options of public transport. New options are becoming available with technology, smartphones and apps, for example, connecting people to shared transport, shared ownership and shared lifts, and more efficient public transport services, which can be tailored to pick up young people for essential needs.

Q195 **Greg Smith:** Mr Heymer, can I briefly get your thoughts on that from those whom you represent? What are your views on the necessity of ensuring that as many opportunities are available as possible—if we might say as liberally as possible—to enable young people in rural areas to learn to drive and to drive particularly through the lens of social mobility and their own life chances?

Malcolm Heymer: Access to cars in rural areas is vital. I live in the centre of Norfolk, which is even more rural than Buckinghamshire. Apart from acknowledging that there are good transport links into Norwich—other than that—anywhere you want to go you have to go by car. The distances are quite large. We are certainly in favour of any measures that would bring down the costs of car ownership for young people, and that would include better training in risk management. They would have fewer accidents and, hopefully, as the accident risk comes down, so do the premiums.

Chair: Mr Heymer, could you approach the microphone a bit closer? Project yourself a little more, because you are coming through quite quietly.

Let us move to the cost of insurance and other barriers to car access. I mentioned before that we have had the insurance industry before us and we would like to delve a little deeper.

Q196 **Chris Loder:** I wanted to ask a little bit more about insurance. To begin with, I would be very interested to understand your opinions on the effect that insurance costs have on the social mobility of young people.

Dr Chatterjee: To start with, cost is an issue, but it is not the only difficulty for young people starting to drive. When asked the main reason for not learning to drive—I will come to insurance in a moment—the cost of learning is cited by 25% of 17 to 20-year-olds. Not being interested in driving is cited by 16%, and being too busy to learn by 15%. Compared with 10 years ago, the trend has been that cost is being referred to less often: 10 years ago it was 34% and it is now down to 25%. Young people more often say that it is for other reasons: they are not interested; they are too busy; there are other ways for them to manage.

Q197 **Chris Loder:** Do you think these statistics are distorted in that they favour urban areas over rural areas, simply because those in rural settings, as my colleague, Greg, said just now, have no choice, and as a result we



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sometimes see the results of surveys such as these imbalanced because of the level of urban response?

Dr Chatterjee: That is a fair point. That is the overall average. Yes, I agree. If you drill that down, you would see that those in rural areas are likely to cite costs more given that the need for them to have a car will be greater.

Q198 **Chris Loder:** In terms of social isolation, would you agree with the point that insurance costs have a huge effect in reducing social mobility and increasing social isolation for those youngsters in rural settings?

Dr Chatterjee: I do not think we should over-blow the cost of insurance. The cost of insurance is cited by only 2% as a reason for not learning to drive. At the stage of not having learned to drive, the cost of driving lessons will be uppermost in your mind and not subsequent insurance. Still, 2% is a low percentage. When you drill down, those with lower incomes cite costs, and they are not so likely to cite not needing to drive. For those with less means, costs feature highly. There has been an important trend in employment locations over the past 20 or 30 years.

Q199 **Chris Loder:** With the greatest of respect, the purpose of these questions is to focus on the insurance bit—I am sorry to push you on it—rather than the other areas, which other colleagues will cover. We very much need to tease out the insurance bit. You have answered the first bit. Can I ask Mr Heymer that question and then I will come back to you, Dr Chatterjee?

Malcolm Heymer: My view is that insurance costs are an issue, and some of the prices of insurance premiums are quite mind-boggling. Clearly, people on low incomes are going to find it almost impossible to learn to drive and get insured. That is particularly important in rural areas.

Q200 **Chris Loder:** Would you share the view that those youngsters in rural areas suffer more because of high insurance costs than those in urban areas?

Malcolm Heymer: I would say so, yes.

Q201 **Chris Loder:** Dr Chatterjee, do you have a clear breakdown of survey responses for urban and rural youngsters? It would be good to compare the two.

Dr Chatterjee: I have not seen an opinion on insurance costs split by urban and rural, but, as I was saying previously, I have seen a split on income. We do see lower incomes—

Q202 **Chris Loder:** How does the income split relate to urban and rural?

Dr Chatterjee: Geographically, whether it is rural or peripheral urban areas, you have a higher proportion of people on lower incomes these days.

Q203 **Chris Loder:** Did you say a higher proportion of lower incomes in rural areas?



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Dr Chatterjee: Young people in rural areas and in peripheral urban areas where using a car is a more important option. It ties in with your concern about those young people with lower public transport access. Those with lower incomes are concerned about cost.

Q204 **Chris Loder:** How would you like to see insurance premiums reduced? Do you have any observations about that?

Dr Chatterjee: You have heard from the insurance industry. They are setting their prices according to risk. I am not an expert on the insurance industry. It is a reasonably objective process. Anything that can be done to improve safety for young drivers will in turn reduce insurance costs. We need to identify which of the measures under consideration—whether it is improved driver learning requirements, graduated driving afterwards or black boxes, but whatever is effective at reducing risk for young people—could help to bring down those insurance costs and make mobility more easily available to those in all areas.

Q205 **Chris Loder:** Do you have a view that the insurance companies make too much money in terms of profit? The reason I ask that question is simply because there could be a situation where we could do things to reduce the safety risk, but if the insurance companies have no change of opinion on their profit, they could continue to charge very large amounts of money for premiums.

Dr Chatterjee: I am not an expert on that, but it is important to scrutinise whether their insurance rates reflect risk in a fair way.

Q206 **Chris Loder:** Maybe not to answer now, but if you have any insights as to how you think that could be done or how you think we as a Committee could scrutinise that, I would be very pleased for you to share that with us. May I just ask the same question of Mr Heymer, please? How would you like to see insurance premiums reduced? Do you have any views on that?

Malcolm Heymer: If we can get the standard of driver training up so that people have fewer crashes anyway, then hopefully the premiums should come down. As long as there is a reasonable market for different insurers, that should sort itself out.

Q207 **Chris Loder:** Do you think that driver training is substandard today?

Malcolm Heymer: I think it is. As I said in my initial comments, it does not cover things like risk assessment and risk control. In the written evidence I submitted to the Committee, we mentioned quite frequently something called *Mind Driving*. I would recommend to every member of the Committee that they obtain a copy. There is evidence that using the system of *Mind Driving* to train young people does work. There is an organisation called the Under 17 Car Club, which allows people of non-driving age to get experience of off-road surfaces and that sort of thing. They teach according to the *Mind Driving* layout. Their records show that graduates, if you can call them that, from the Under 17 Car Club have a



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third of the accident risk of those who have not had that training. So it can work.

Q208 **Chris Loder:** Several weeks ago, we spoke to a number of schools and sixth-form colleges. We asked their opinions about this area. They said pretty much unanimously that they would be happy for a black box to be fitted to cars if that were to reduce their insurance premium. Do you have a view about that?

Malcolm Heymer: I think that does work to a certain extent, and it reduces the premiums. Premiums for youngsters with a black box are probably about half of what they would be without one, but that is not something you would want to do in perpetuity. It should not be necessary if people were trained properly in the first place before they took to the roads without supervision.

Q209 **Chris Loder:** Are you saying that, if training and tuition beforehand was better and improved, the need for a black box would not be required?

Malcolm Heymer: That is right.

Q210 **Chris Loder:** Dr Chatterjee, can I ask the same question about the black box? Do you agree with the children we spoke to a few weeks ago?

Dr Chatterjee: We are probably moving in the direction where we will all have black boxes in our vehicles for wider reasons in the future such as to have a rapid response if you have an emergency or a problem, and for various other reasons. In general, on the measures that might be taken, as an educator I would say—without road safety being my area of research—that more of a transition phase for learning to drive could be helpful. We have that for many other skills that we learn. It could reduce the stress on learners to have a more phased learning process where they move on to faster roads before they take the motorway driving test.

Q211 **Chris Loder:** I asked specifically whether you think those black boxes, as a way of reducing insurance premiums for youngsters, are a good thing. Do you agree with them or not?

Dr Chatterjee: I confirm I have heard it previously that black boxes bring down insurance costs because they are—

Q212 **Chris Loder:** In your professional opinion, do you think that is a good thing to do?

Dr Chatterjee: I do not see any concerns as long as privacy issues are protected.

Q213 **Chris Loder:** Therefore, you would not agree with Mr Heymer that training should be improved or can be improved to the extent where black boxes are not required.

Dr Chatterjee: I would agree with Malcolm very much that what we can do to improve the learning process is a higher priority than the black box. The black box is an added benefit.



Q214 **Chris Loder:** That is good to know. Moving on briefly, Dr Chatterjee, car access for people aged 17 to 24 is less than half that for the rest of the population. We began to speak a little earlier about other things than insurance costs that affect decisions. Could you very briefly and succinctly outline the other barriers to car access for young people?

Dr Chatterjee: I do not know if you would call it a barrier, but the pivotal importance of driving has lessened over the last decade as young people are spending longer before they move out of education into employment, before they settle down and have a family, and before they move into their own home.

Q215 **Chris Loder:** You made those points earlier. I am sorry to challenge you on this, but I am not sure that is accurate for those in very rural areas. Would you agree?

Dr Chatterjee: We see across the population of young people that they own their own home later and at lower levels. That will apply across all geographical areas, but it may be more accentuated.

Q216 **Chris Loder:** Indeed, but my point was that, if you are far away from facilities and you needed to access them, whether it is college, work or sixth form, you would need a car to access them at the 17 to 18 age range, whereas you could use a bus in an urban setting.

Dr Chatterjee: Like it or not, two thirds of young people aged 16 to 24 do not have regular access to—

Chris Loder: I think, Chair, we have lost Dr Chatterjee. I will move on to Mr Heymer, if that is all right.

Chair: I am going to have to move on. We have done 16 minutes on insurance, and that is over a third of what we have for this session. We will move on to policy interventions and reforms to the learning process.

Q217 **Greg Smith:** We have touched on some of the reforms to the learning process that the ABD has proposed in the past in answer to earlier questions. Mr Heymer, what exactly will these reforms look like in practice if the Government adopt everything you suggest? What will the impact be on an individual turning 17, deciding they want to drive and getting to the point where they are free to drive on the roads with a licence?

Within that, I would like to dig into exactly what the differences in practical learning will be—for example, some sort of mandatory rural road driving. We heard evidence from the Under 17 Car Club in a previous session of the benefits of going out on a skid pad or driving significantly higher-powered vehicles. What are the limits of where you think reforms to the learning process should go, and what should be included?

Malcolm Heymer: In addition to the usual mechanical skills of driving a car and knowing the highway code, it is basically instilling in people ways of managing risk. One of the processes included in *Mind Driving* is the speed/surprise/space model. Those three categories have to be kept in



balance for safety. For example, if you are on an almost empty motorway on a Sunday morning in good weather conditions, there is not going to be much traffic about; you will have lots of space; there will be very little risk of surprise; so obviously you can drive up to the speed limit. Whereas, at the other extreme, if you are in a town centre on a market day when there are lots of pedestrians, cyclists and people crossing the road at random, you have very little space, a high risk of surprise and, therefore, speeds have to be kept really low. In between those two extremes, you have to make that sort of judgment. Teaching people how to make those judgments is a vital part of the process.

Q218 Greg Smith: Digging into that, in evidence we have heard in previous sessions, some have suggested that young people are more likely to have an accident if they have passengers in the car and their mates are chatting away about whatever it is they are chatting away about. As part of that process of getting people to understand risk better, to get young people to be more mentally aware, if you like, of the other challenges of driving that you have talked about in your evidence, should we put into the learning process that, once someone is competent to control a vehicle, they actually go out for some lessons with people deliberately sitting in the back of the car chatting away to try to get them used to the sort of distractions that are just everyday life?

Malcolm Heymer: I suppose that is one possibility. Young drivers need to learn how to avoid distractions and peer pressure, particularly if somebody is egging them on to go fast and that sort of thing. Drivers are a bit like the captain of a ship: they have absolute responsibility for the safety of the car and everybody in it. They have the right to tell other people to shut up if they are interrupting.

Q219 Greg Smith: What we are trying to dig into here is what that actually looks like to the 17-year-old who is excited to be able to drive a car and to have the freedom that having a car brings for them. What does that reformed learning process actually look like? Is it classroom based? Is it in-vehicle based? Is it abstract or is it practical?

Malcolm Heymer: It should be practical. It could be classroom based, but it should really be within the vehicle under normal driving conditions in the learning process. It certainly should not be secondary.

Q220 Greg Smith: There have been some who have given evidence that suggests a minimum period of learning, extending it out. When I learned to drive in the mid-90s, I went from learning to passing my test in about five or maybe six months, and that was fine. There are some who have given evidence to suggest that perhaps it should be a minimum of six months or 12 months. It does not matter what the number is. Are you supportive of that, or are you of the view that it depends on the individual and that individual's personal development through their driving experience that might get them to the point where they are perfectly safe in three or four months as opposed to that minimum period?



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Malcolm Heymer: I do not think you can have a hard-and-fast rule. As you say, people learn at different speeds and they need to take as much training as is necessary to bring them up to an acceptable standard, whether that is three months, six months or even a year, which some people can take. It cannot be a fixed term.

Q221 **Greg Smith:** Dr Chatterjee, do you have a view from your research on any of those factors, such as the reforms to the way young people learn to drive, or anyone learns to drive for that matter, or do you have any evidence to suggest that there should be minimum periods for the time it takes to get somebody into that place where you could be satisfied they are safe?

Dr Chatterjee: From interviewing young people and hearing what they have to say about learning to drive, there are some who are in a rush to get their licences and get on with driving, and there are others who are nervous about driving and who welcome opportunities to develop their skills. There is a mixed picture, but it is certainly not to be disregarded that there are young people who would welcome more help in the learning process and immediately post the learning process as a general point. It is not necessarily throwing up a barrier. If done appropriately, it could be facilitating young people with the confidence to drive as well as safety in driving.

Chair: We have the Minister and team in the room, so we must wrap up in five minutes, but we want to drill down here on graduated driving licence proposals.

Q222 **Lilian Greenwood:** Mr Heymer, in your written evidence, you note that young drivers have a high crash risk during their first two years of driving. The Department for Transport, in its evidence, says that young and novice drivers are particularly at risk in the first six months after passing their test. But you do not support restrictions for young and novice drivers. We know from evidence presented around graduated driving licence restrictions in Canada—including passenger restrictions and a lower blood alcohol limit—that that resulted in a 46% reduction in crashes among young drivers. Does that not strengthen the case for implementing a graduated driving licence here?

Malcolm Heymer: I do not think it does necessarily. If you have a graduated licence, there are going to be restrictions to go with that, which may be very inconvenient for those young people who have to drive during the evenings. For example, if they have jobs that last until late in the evening, they are going to be restricted as to what they can do.

Q223 **Lilian Greenwood:** What about the fact that the graduated driving licence improves safety and could save lives?

Malcolm Heymer: Possibly, but there is an alternative way of doing it. If you had better training prior to the test, the graduated licensing would not be needed.



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Q224 **Lilian Greenwood:** Is there not the same evidence that proper training prior to the test would lead to the same reduction in crashes?

Malcolm Heymer: I do not have detailed evidence of that. As I mentioned earlier, with the Under 17 Car Club, there is approximately a third of the crash risk with their members compared with those who have not had that training. It is quite significant.

Q225 **Lilian Greenwood:** The people who undergo training with the Under 17 Car Club are not typical of all young drivers.

Malcolm Heymer: No, they probably are not, but there is no reason why the same training could not be provided to other young drivers.

Q226 **Lilian Greenwood:** Do you think that training should be mandatory for all young drivers?

Malcolm Heymer: As I said, training in risk management should be mandatory, yes. There are different ways of going about it, but risk management should be incorporated into the training experience.

Q227 **Lilian Greenwood:** Dr Chatterjee, as we have seen, some of the most controversial aspects of a graduated driving licence are restrictions on driving between 11 pm and 5 am, and restrictions on carrying younger passengers. Both of those, it is suggested, could apply for six months after a young person passed their test. The Transport Research Laboratory told us there was no evidence that those sorts of GDL restrictions would reduce social mobility. Does your research support or refute their view?

Dr Chatterjee: The TRL reviewed studies carried out internationally—experiences in Canada, Australia and the US—and they found those positive impacts of safety you referred to earlier. There was no evidence available to show restrictions on social mobility. I do not think those are necessarily in other countries. I am not aware that they homed in on those social impacts. If we go for a graduated driving licence model, we would need to look at ways of mitigating adverse impacts on, for example, the young person in a rural area who has a night-shift job some distance away, whether through requiring employers in those situations to provide transport as a substitute or through having special dispensation for young people in that situation, perhaps having some sort of short test of their capabilities, to allow them to be an exception if they are using the car for work. We need to consider those mitigations if we are to introduce what could be a highly effective measure to improve safety.

Q228 **Lilian Greenwood:** Do you have a view on whether those are measures that you would like to see? I know when we had a small group of young people that they were very resistant to those restrictions for six months after passing the test. What does your evidence say about young people's views?

Dr Chatterjee: I have not seen, beyond the group you spoke to, detailed discussions with young people about this particular proposal on these restrictions. In general discussions around driving, you get a mixed picture.



You see young people who are nervous, even those who have learned about the confidence of driving. In some segments of the young driver population, they indicate that they welcome further training and other support after the test.

The broader picture when it comes to mitigation is that society in general and employers need to do more to help the transport access of young employees. This might be part of that, apart from generally helping young people to be able to access jobs, for example, with the free public transport that we see in some cities. There could also be ways of giving young people mobility credits to help them get to their jobs, which could overcome any barrier from not being able to drive at night-time to a night shift.

Q229 Chair: We have come to the end of the session. I want to thank you both. I have one last point that I am going to put to Mr Heymer. I do so because, when we had Brake in, I challenged their evidence that young people should be restricted compared to generations beforehand, so I am going to take the contrary view with your evidence. If it is the case that, as people often say, you only start learning to drive once you have passed your test, what is so wrong with asking for changes so that younger people do not drive between 11 at night and 4 in the morning, or that young people are restricted in the number of other young people who could be in their car? Why is that so wrong? I would have thought it would save lives.

Malcolm Heymer: It might, but the alternative, as I said before, is that, if you have better training in risk management, resisting peer pressure and so on, it should not be necessary. Individuals are all different. In some cases, perhaps a graduated licence might be appropriate, but it should not be a one-size-fits-all policy.

Q230 Chair: An overhaul of the driving test and lesson system, as opposed to changes after the test is passed.

Malcolm Heymer: Yes. It would mean an overhaul of driving education and testing.

Chair: It is good to get your view on that as well. Thank you both, Mr Heymer and Dr Chatterjee, for such an interesting evidence session. You have certainly added to the mix, and we are very grateful to you for joining us this morning. I hope you will look forward to seeing our report and recommendations when it comes out.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Vere of Norbiton and David Buttery.

Q231 Chair: We turn now to our second panel, who I am delighted to say are in the room with us. Could I ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, please?



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Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I am Baroness Vere of Norbiton. I am the Minister for roads, buses and places, and I cover road safety at the Department for Transport.

David Buttery: I am David Buttery, co-director for road safety, standards and services.

Q232 **Chair:** Baroness Vere and Mr Buttery, thank you so much for being here as the second panel of what has turned into a four-session inquiry on young and novice drivers. I seem to have put this question to almost everyone, so I put it to you as well, Baroness Vere. The Department for Transport's own statistics state that young drivers make up 7% of licence holders but are involved in 16% of fatal and serious collisions. Why does this demographic continue to be over-represented in collisions despite our awareness of this danger for so many years?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Indeed, it is the case that young drivers are over-represented in fatalities and serious injuries. It is also the case that older drivers, perhaps even more so, are over-represented in the casualty statistics. That is why in the Department for Transport we have a specific focus. Our road safety statement last year focused on four areas: young drivers; older drivers; motorcycles; and those who use rural roads. All of those areas need more focus than a more general approach to road safety.

Q233 **Chair:** Do you accept the assertion that successive Governments have failed to address this problem satisfactorily? I know there have been moves by the current Government to look at this again, but has this been a failure over the years, or have things improved?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Over the long term, if we go back 10 years, we can see that things have very significantly improved. We have now reached a bit of a plateau, but that is the case across all of road safety. We must not forget, though, that our roads are much safer than many other countries. We are probably in the bottom three in terms of fatalities and serious injuries. There has been a lot of progress over recent years, but more always needs to be done as technology changes and the way people learn changes, but that is why we are focusing on it.

Q234 **Chair:** You touched on the older cohort or more experienced drivers, I should say. Do we know how the statistics compare? I mentioned 7% of young drivers being involved in 16% of fatalities and serious collisions. Do we know what those statistics would look like if we were looking at the over-75s, for example, or is the data just not there?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Unfortunately, I do not have those statistics to hand today as I was not aware we would be covering it. I am very happy to provide it.

Q235 **Chair:** That is a fair point. We have tried other organisations as well. It may well be they are not there.



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David Buttery: In the evidence we put forward we have a number of figures that cover fatalities per billion miles travelled by age group. It is not quite the same as licence holders, but it shows that, for fatalities per driver, for a 17 to 24-year-old it is 7.2 per billion miles; for 80 to 84 it is 9.8; and for 85 up it is 31.4. So younger drivers are the most at risk of fatality up until you get to 80, but then it goes very high.

Chair: I ask that purely in terms of whether we have been looking at one particular cohort, but there is another cohort that equally needs to be looked at.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: There is.

Chair: I will stop there. We are going to look at the lack of data on novice driver collisions.

Q236 **Gavin Newlands:** Those are interesting responses as to the lack of data. Research that we have seen found that 28% of older novice drivers between the ages of 25 and 34, which is a fraction more than the youngest group, admitted to having a collision in their first year of driving. Why does the Department not hold this data on the number of older novice drivers involved in collisions?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I don't know the answer to that question. Do you know the answer to that question?

David Buttery: I do not.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We can certainly look into it and see what data we have on slightly older novice drivers. We collect a vast amount of data on collisions, collision risk and their implications, so we will have to come back to you on that.

Q237 **Gavin Newlands:** Do you accept that that lack of data and knowledge hinders your development of policy when it comes to this particular demographic?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: No, I do not accept that at all. What we have to recognise is that, across all of road safety, there is no single silver bullet that will solve fatalities and serious injuries for any particular demographic with any number of years' experience of driving, but what we do know—this comes from STATS19 data—are the sorts of things that contribute to incidents and the areas on which we should be focusing. That is the really important bit here. In general, it is very good to have the data. I will make sure we provide you with the information that you have asked for, if we have it, but I do not think at all that that is hindering our ability to come up with road safety strategies that work.

Q238 **Gavin Newlands:** Do you not think that better data makes better policy?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: As I have said, I will investigate your exact concern and write to you with the information and any implications I can



see as to how that would not be able to feed into the work we do across the road safety piece.

Q239 Gavin Newlands: Moving on to DFT policy with regard to road safety, the Committee was lucky to hear from the Under 17 Car Club, which said that we needed fundamental change in the way we teach youngsters about driving. It also said that the road safety statement and two-year action plan, which contains 74 actions and is a fairly weighty piece of work, does not go far enough to reduce young driver collisions. How do you respond to the criticism that the measures are unambitious and modest?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I disagree that they are unambitious and modest, and certainly I propose that over the course of our evidence session today I will set out all of the different things that we are hoping to do. As you rightly say, there are 74 actions in the plan, 15 of which are related specifically to young and novice drivers, but of course every single action in the plan is related to young people in some way.

I happened to overhear what was said about training for young drivers. We have given funding to the Driving Instructors Association, and they are developing a modular learning project. This is adapted for the way that you look at pilot training. You go through certain modules. It is developing the content for this project, and it will be ready by the end of November. We will start piloting it from January of next year. There will be various modules: for example, one covering driving in adverse conditions; one covering driving after dark; one covering driving at high speed; and one about distracted driving. All of those things are really important. It highlights that what we have been able to do is translate the outcomes from the data we have. Why did a collision occur? Sometimes it occurred because it was dark and visibility was poor.

We are focusing on those particular outcomes and putting that back into how we look at driver training over the course of the whole training. It is not just about passing the theory and practical test. It should be a very organised and well-evidenced way of going through the entire undertaking of learning to drive, and it must focus on those areas that people find the most difficult.

Q240 Gavin Newlands: Will you commit to engage with the Under 17 Car Club to hear its specific concerns about the action plan?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I do not know whether I was listening to its particular concerns. I have not spoken to it in the past; maybe I will loop in with it in due course.

Q241 Gavin Newlands: The action plan was launched in July of last year. Obviously, the pandemic may have delayed things, but it has been over a year. Where are you in terms of progress on those 74 actions?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We are doing very well. You are right that some of the things have been slightly delayed by Covid-19, but, of the 15 actions related particularly to young and novice drivers, seven have



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been completed, nearly all are under way and just a few are paused. It is a longer-term plan than just one year, but we have made good progress.

Chair: Let us look at Driver 2020, which is the Transport Research Laboratory project on behalf of the DFT.

Q242 **Grahame Morris:** The Committee is interested in the Transport Research Laboratory's work on behalf of the Department for Transport, particularly the aspects exploring technology and educational measures that could be implemented without legislation to improve young and novice driver safety. Minister, how important is this project to the Department's road safety strategy, and what are you hoping it will achieve?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is a very important project for us. In road safety we often talk about evidence. We all know that research can be directed in all sorts of different ways to produce the sorts of evidence that you want. What we are doing with Driver 2020 is creating a randomised control trial that will give us proper evidence as to what does and does not work. This is a very significant undertaking costing £2 million. We are recruiting 15,000 young drivers and, so far, have recruited 13,000.

We are looking at educational, technological and training interventions. There are five of them. We are going to break up into five different groups however many young drivers there are, plus a control group, to see which things actually work. Do they or do they not have a collision in their first year? There are three interventions that look at the learner phase and two interventions that look at the post-test phase. As you say, one of those involves telematics.

We are looking for results. The full report should be ready by early 2022. As you know, driver testing was completely paused during the pandemic. That has caused a delay because we need young drivers to be coming through the system to get the evidence. Apart from the slight delay, we are very pleased with how the project is going.

Q243 **Grahame Morris:** On the same theme, I hope you heard the evidence from the previous panel about the potential benefits of pursuing education. I am very pleased to hear about the reports on Driver 2020. Can I draw your attention to the Transport Committee's previous report on mobile phone use? In response, you said that the THINK! campaign's Party Car would help to educate young people on the risks of mobile phone use while driving. Recent survey evidence has been published indicating that mobile phone use while driving is still a matter of concern. What has happened with the THINK! campaign and the Party Car in terms of educating young and novice drivers? Have you been able to make any assessment of its effectiveness?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Yes. The THINK! campaign is the overarching brand for a number of more specific campaigns. For example, you have mentioned Party Car; that is one of them. Mates Matter is something else, as is Road Whisperer. They are all highly targeted at the



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sort of people we need to get to: young male drivers. When I say to my officials that I have never seen any of these campaigns, they say, "First, you're female; secondly, you are middle-aged, at best." It really homes into exactly where you would expect to find these people.

I do not have the figures for the Party Car campaign, but I will get back to you on that. Road Whisperer, which has been seen 13.8 million times on social media, targets exactly the people that we want to see. In two in five cases those people felt much more confident about driving their cars. So the THINK! campaign really does work. It is award winning and will continue, and it will home in on exactly the sorts of risks that you are talking about—for example, distracting the driver or mobile phones.

Q244 Grahame Morris: I know time is short. I will turn to telematics later, if we have time. A survey published earlier this week showed that 58% of young car drivers admitted to using mobile phones while driving, and, incredibly, 18% admitted to using handheld devices to access videos while they were at the wheel. Do you share our concern about these findings? I fully appreciate that there are already fines of £200 and six licence points if the police are able to apprehend people using handheld devices. How concerned are you that this survey continues to show very high percentages of younger people using handheld devices such as mobile phones?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I am very concerned. That is why last Saturday we announced the consultation on extending the range of uses to which the six licence points and £200 fine apply. In the days when phones were phones, we focused very much on the nature of their interactive communication. It is absolutely illegal to use a handheld phone to call, text or send an email, but we had a case in the courts where Mr Barreto said he was not calling or texting but taking a photo of an accident, which is also not very wise.

What we have done is launch this consultation. The reason we are doing the consultation is to check, first, that we get the law right, but, secondly, we are also making some changes to the highway code so that everybody is absolutely clear, "Do not pick up your phone in the car."

Grahame Morris: Chair, if there is time at the end, I would like to come back on telematics.

Chair: I am sure there will be time at the end. We are going to talk next about young male drivers and issues relating to drink driving.

Q245 Karl McCartney: I have a question on some of the evidence the Committee has received so far. It has been calling for the blood alcohol limit for young and novice drivers to be lower than for the rest of the driving population. How effective do you and the Department think this would be as a policy solution? Would you go further, maybe lowering it for older drivers who are perhaps more susceptible to alcohol, or even for female drivers, as the female body does not deal as well with alcohol as a male



body? I would like your opinion on that.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: You have highlighted one of the problems with that sort of thing. Everybody is different. You might be a woman; you might be young; you might be old. Alcohol affects people in different ways. We have no plans at the moment to lower the blood alcohol limit for anybody. I am certainly not a great fan of being able to scoop out certain types of people and say they are allowed more or less alcohol, but I think we should all admit that drinking if you are driving is a very bad idea. It is better not to drink, but, if you do, make sure you are within the limits.

We looked at the evidence put together by the University of Glasgow on whether there was a significant impact when Scotland introduced a lower level. That report found there was not.

It is generally being kept under review, but there are other interventions we can make in terms of alcohol usage. The THINK! campaign is really positive in making sure that young people in particular are not tempted to have an extra pint at the pub and that, if they are the designated driver, they should not be drinking at all. There are more technological interventions that we will be looking at in due course around, for example, alcolocks—ignition alcohol interlocks. We might use those as part of a rehabilitation programme. There are lots of interventions that we can make around alcohol, but I do not support differential limits for different types of people.

Karl McCartney: Thank you for that very detailed answer. You have covered my supplementary as well.

Q246 **Chair:** Young males account for 80% of young driver fatalities. Why do you think this is the case? Eighty per cent. is extraordinary really.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Yes—isn't it?

Chair: I am not making any judgment on the male-female balance, but it is a startling statistic.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is startling. We could go into the psychology of the young male brain and all sorts of things, but we do not have any evidence to go into the psychology of the young male brain. What we do understand is that they take different levels of risks from other people. Looking at the STATS19 data, when a police officer turns up at the scene, they will make an assessment as to what might have gone wrong. I have been looking in some detail at the sorts of things that are more prevalent among young people. They might be speeding; they might make a poor decision at a junction. There are all sorts of different things that young males do. What we really have to do is improve our training and education to make sure they are less likely to do them.

Q247 **Chair:** We have also heard evidence that the cognitive part of the brain does not fully develop until 25, and that impacts on decision making when it comes to driving. Perhaps it may be a lower age for females. Is that



something the Department has looked at, or have I just sprung that bit of research on you?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I am still not keen on gender segregation when it comes to driving. I think I am a very good driver, but I do not know that all women are. It is very interesting. If you make comparisons of international statistics—I always say we have fairly safe roads—Canada and Australia have twice our mortality rate; New Zealand has three times our mortality rate; and the US is approaching four times our mortality rate. I think we are doing fairly well. I accept that every death is an absolute tragedy and we should try to reduce the numbers. The country I would like to get to and beyond is Sweden. It does very well in this area, but I do not think there is any country across the world that does not have a challenge in making sure that young drivers are safe. One could take the view that brain elasticity continues to 25, but many of the countries I have just mentioned allow driving from the age of 16. I would not favour changing the age at which you are able to drive, but we have to get the balance right because young people's mobility is really important for so many reasons.

Q248 **Chair:** We had a fascinating Zoom session with four colleges around England. It was absolutely invigorating for us. By and large, it is probably fair to say that they did not seem to favour that much change, but on the alcohol intake front all bar one person thought that it should be zero. I am not saying they felt that just for themselves; they might have felt that for all. Do you accept that perhaps young people's perception when it comes to alcohol and driving is different from that of the older cohort, and that is perhaps where the focus needs to be?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is a really interesting point, is it not? The whole perception of alcohol when you are driving has utterly changed in my lifetime. There was a time when it was all right to have a couple of drinks and then drive. Now it is absolutely not all right. If young people perceive that you should not have a drink at all and drive, that is all to the good. We do not propose to reduce the alcohol level any further, but if young people think that, and they are going to take that into their driving careers, that is really good.

Chair: We want to move on to why there are higher collision rates for young drivers on rural roads.

Q249 **Robert Lorgan:** The Peak District is very lucky to have some of the most scenic roads in the country, but in terms of fatalities it also has some of the most dangerous ones. The Cat and Fiddle, Long Hill and Snake Pass are in the top five most dangerous roads in the country, and all of them are in my constituency. Recent figures have shown that four out of five fatal casualties involving young drivers have occurred on rural roads. With that in mind, can you talk us through what the Department is doing to try to improve safety on rural roads, in particular for younger drivers?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is a really important point. If you look at the stats as to where younger drivers, or any drivers, are killed, it is on



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rural roads. There is a lot of focus on motorways, but it is not motorways: it is rural roads that absolutely take the toll. That feeds into the education that we are looking at and making sure that people understand that rural roads are different.

In all these things we have to balance speed and efficient mobility. Local authorities need to look very carefully at the speed limits on their roads. Part of the education has to be that a speed limit is not a target, as I keep trying to tell my young son when he is driving. It is really important that people understand that just because it says you can go at 30 mph does not mean you should, because different driving conditions, particularly in the Peak District, have very significant implications.

As you know, roads are categorised according to how dangerous they are using the iRAP system. I am well aware that there are a number where you are and, tragically, there have been some fatalities.

As to what we are doing, the Safer Roads fund announced in the 2016 autumn statement put £100 million into the 50 most dangerous roads in the country. Sometimes it is the infrastructure that is dangerous and we can do something about that; at other times it is the driver who is not coping well with those elements.

One of the things we said we would do in the road safety statement, which has been delayed by coronavirus but is now at a stage where we can restart it, is to set up a rural roads working group. I will have working groups with more professional drivers on rural roads—farmers and people like that, who use them for work—but there will be a specific focus as well on younger drivers who live in the countryside and need to get from A to B using a car. How do they perceive safety on rural roads? Depending on what they say, we will take it from there.

Q250 Robert Largan: Has the rural roads working group met yet?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It has not. Before the coronavirus pandemic we started scoping out what we thought it would look like and thinking about different groups we would want on it. It has not met yet because I am afraid the pandemic has taken over, but it will now start to meet.

Robert Largan: I look forward to hearing what comes out of those meetings.

Chair: As you may have heard when you came in, one of the witnesses suggested that there needed to be greater reform of the learning process, perhaps before the test is taken rather than changes and restrictions afterwards. We will look now at reforms to the learning process.

Q251 Greg Smith: As the Chair said, we heard some pretty compelling evidence earlier from the ABD about the need for a radical reform of the learning process. We have heard evidence from other witnesses in previous sessions, for example the Under 17 Car Club, which put together, under its own remit, a very wide-reaching programme of getting young people out



on to skid pads, driving different vehicles, experiencing different conditions and things like that, all on private land, to get them more used to the different ways vehicles behave—front-wheel drive, rear-wheel drive and so on—in different conditions.

Can you give us some thoughts about how up the Government are for having that debate about changing the learning process to ensure that anyone learning to drive, bluntly, but we are focusing on young people today, experiences rural roads, motorways, driving at night and perhaps with a car full of passengers yacking away in the back seat, so that we are preparing them much better for their driving careers, and there is no need for restrictions on freedom and liberty once they have got their licence?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is a really important thing. The whole process of learning to drive and what is tested in the two different tests that you have to take is continually under development. We are always getting new evidence and doing new things. For example, since the road safety statement, DVSA has refreshed its entire learning-to-drive publication to think about exactly the sorts of points that you are talking about. It has published an online driver record where people are encouraged to do those things: driving at night, driving in the rain and all those different things. DVSA has also revised its national standards to reflect what is required of a safe, responsible and competent driver.

The practical test is very different from when you and I took it. There are no more three-point turns in a cul-de-sac. I know, it is a shame, but it is much more challenging. It is about busy roundabouts; more high-speed roads; it is rural roads. It is about getting people prepared for a test that will have all those situations. It may well not be a route that they are comfortable with or have driven before. The other point we used to have is that everybody knew where the routes were. You just drove round it a few times and you passed. It does not happen any more.

We are taking gradual steps. We are constantly looking at what we test and what benefit it has. On the theory test, one of the things that we have introduced is much more hazard perception testing. That is based on CGI. Candidates have to look for a hazard and respond accordingly to get them in the mindset of not waiting until something has happened; you have to think about what might happen when you are driving.

Q252 **Greg Smith:** That is very helpful. We have come a long way on this, but, as I look through the lens of some of the evidence that we have heard from groups, both the quite extreme view of restricting young people until they are way into their driving careers to getting it right before you issue a licence, there has been a suggestion about the time it takes to get people to that safe place where they are hazard-aware and are fully au fait with all the different conditions they might encounter. The ABD was pretty clear that there is not a one-size-fits-all policy, which I agree with, but there are others who say differently. Do you think that some sort of minimum period of time, even if it is a sliding scale, needs to be introduced to the learning process?



Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I do not, because, as you say, everybody is different. The key is whether the person is going to be a safe and competent driver. People are different. Some people will take a much shorter period; some people take a very long time to be able to pass their test and be a safe and competent driver, but we have to look at the evidence of what works and does not work, which is where Driver 2020 comes in, so that we are continually evolving how we train our young drivers, what we test them on in the two tests and how confident we are that, when they come out the other end, they are safe drivers.

Q253 **Greg Smith:** Absolutely. While it is very welcome that we now have rural road testing and following satnav, which is now just a fact of life, in the test, should there be minimum proportions of somebody's learning? While I think that everybody who learns to drive needs to understand rural roads, inner city roads, motorways, dual carriageways, et cetera, it would be inequitable to say to someone who has lived in the middle of London their entire life, "You have to spend 50% of your time driving on a country lane." Equally, they need to be safe on it. Should we be looking at putting in some sort of logbook system that says they have to have done a minimum number of hours, or a proportion of their learning, on those different road types rather than, "Well, we did it once and it was okay"?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is one of the things that we will look at in Driver 2020. Logbooks is one of the five strands we are looking at. Combined with the work the DIA is doing, the modular learning project, I think we will have a better idea of how we can deal with people who live in rural areas and others who will literally never see a tree. We have very different learners, but we need to make sure that when an urban driver leaves that environment they can cope with a rural road.

Greg Smith: That is very helpful.

Q254 **Robert Largan:** It is worth noting that there are rural roads and rural roads. The challenge of driving in Devon or the Norfolk broads is very different from the challenge of driving in the Peak District. One of the things that is very difficult and quite dangerous is driving up and down steep hills. When it comes to learning, is any consideration being given to making certain that hill driving is included in that and is being looked at?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is a really good point. I do not know whether it has been specifically looked at, but as a Devon girl I take exception to that. I am afraid there are some pretty hairy roads in Devon.

Q255 **Robert Largan:** They are hairy for different reasons.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: But they have all sorts of challenges. I agree with you that one of the big challenges is driving uphill and meeting another car coming the other way. That is one of the big issues. So I will take that away and put it into our thinking.

Chair: Let us turn to whether graduated driving licensing would be a good measure to reduce some of these tragic fatal and serious collision rates.



Q256 Lilian Greenwood: Minister, as you said earlier, and it is in your evidence, a road traffic crash is the single greatest cause of death for 15 to 24-year-olds. It is pretty sobering stuff. The Transport Research Laboratory conducted an in-depth review for the Department in 2013 and recommended introducing a form of graduated driving licence. The Department committed to commissioning research into the social and economic consequences of GDL in its 2019 road safety statement. Is that work ongoing, and how open minded are you personally about the benefits of a GDL system?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We have to remain open minded about the benefits of any intervention, but GDL is not consistent the world over. All sorts of things fall into the GDL system, and different countries have different interventions. At this moment we are not progressing work on GDL but focusing on the Driver 2020 intervention, because that is £2 million-worth of research that we believe will give us the evidence to set out what we need to do further. While it was under consideration for a while, we are not taking it further forward at the moment, in particular because of the coronavirus pandemic and the impact on young people's employment. It is not something that we are proceeding with.

Q257 Lilian Greenwood: I think that is an incredibly disappointing answer. In your own evidence you cite the TRL report, which says, "Some interventions, such as graduated driving licensing systems that entail minimum learning periods and restrictions on night-time driving and carrying peer-age passengers when solo driving begins, have been well researched and evaluated." We know they work; we have known it for a long time. Why are you looking for new evidence about alternative interventions and discounting ones that you know are effective?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: As I said previously, there is no single definition of what graduated driving licensing is. There are elements of graduated driving licensing that we will look at within Driver 2020 and other interventions we might put in the test, including the theory test. There are all sorts of different things. It is absolutely not the case that GDL is a silver bullet—absolutely not—and we have taken the decision that we want to try other routes.

Q258 Lilian Greenwood: Has the Department dropped that commitment in the 2019 road safety statement? Whose decision was that?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We are not taking it forward at this time.

Q259 Lilian Greenwood: What level of consultation have you had with the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure, which, as you know, is considering the implementation of GDL in the near future?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: That is interesting. We are in contact with the Department for Infrastructure, and we will very much look at the system of GDL it is looking at. Remember that Northern Ireland starts in a very different place anyway. It already has a 45 mph speed limit for learners, so its learners are not getting used to higher speeds when



learning. It is an unusual approach, but it is one that it has decided is right for Northern Ireland. Each country is looking at this separately. I believe that Northern Ireland is looking at a minimum learning period of six months, a logbook and some passenger restrictions. It has different number plates; it has learner and novice driver plates. Of course, we will look at what happens in Northern Ireland and all over the world, but, as I said at the outset, quite interestingly the countries that do have a form of GDL—if you look at the road safety statement, each country is very different—they start from massively higher mortality rates than we do. In the US it is four times more, and that is a very high number.

Q260 Lilian Greenwood: Is that an argument for not doing anything? When you receive research conducted by TRL finding that graduated driving licences could save 41 lives and £191 million a year, is there not a strong case for taking action? In Great Britain their estimate is 41 lives.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: But there are many different things that you can do to reduce road traffic deaths.

Q261 Lilian Greenwood: Some of which are evidenced and evaluated, and some of which are not. This evidence has been evaluated.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Our Driver 2020 programme will also be providing evidence. This is a unique programme; it has not been done anywhere in the world, and it is huge in terms of its intervention. We are going to look at what happens to Driver 2020 rather than jump in and put restrictions on young people at this time.

Q262 Lilian Greenwood: Sixteen to 17-year-old drivers are four times more likely to die in a crash when carrying young passengers than when driving alone. There was a case just this week when four young people were killed in an accident in the west midlands. What is your view on implementing passenger restrictions on young drivers as part of a GDL scheme for a six-month period after they pass their test? As you say in your own evidence, young and novice drivers are at greatest risk in that first six-month period. Why is that not worth looking at?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is not that it is not worth looking at; everything is worth looking at, but it is not the case that we are going to put those restrictions on at this time.

Q263 Lilian Greenwood: Collisions involving young drivers happen disproportionately at night. TRL told us that night-time driving restrictions for young drivers from midnight to 5 am could save 453 casualties a year. Will you be considering any night-time driving restrictions as part of a GDL scheme?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: There is always a balance between safety, efficient mobility and making sure that young people can get to where they want to be. There are other ways to achieve the same outcome, and that involves education and making sure that the training and testing is really good. Saying that for the first six months you should not drive at night and



after six months, all of a sudden, you can drive at night, but you have had no practice at driving at night for six months, does not strike me as being sensible.

Q264 Lillian Greenwood: But it is not saying they should not drive at night; it is saying they should not drive after midnight. You will have had six months' practice driving in the dark and gaining experience. I simply make the point that 99 families last year were devastated by the loss of young people. How many lives have to be lost before you will consider action that you know will have an impact rather than actions you are currently testing out that might or might not have an impact?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Lillian, as you know, road safety is a very difficult subject, in that every situation is unique. The type of drivers is extremely diverse, and at this time we are not taking a blanket approach to a very diverse set of people.

Q265 Karl McCartney: Minister, thank you for your answers so far in this section. I want to be perhaps a little less emotive than the former Chair of the Committee. It might not surprise you that I come at this from a slightly different angle.

I do not think graduated driving licences are a particularly good idea. The vast majority of young people we spoke to in one of our witness sessions did not think it was a good idea either. If graduated driving licences per se were to be brought in, do you think they should apply to people in their 30s who have just passed their test? Because people's night vision degenerates as they get older, should there be graduated driver licences for older people rather than picking on young people?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Thank you for an extremely hypothetical question. What you have highlighted is that we have to be really careful when we put in place restrictions that affect a large number of people, whether they are young or old. There are all sorts of things you can do in road safety to save a very significant number of lives. You could make every single car have a speed limit of 20 mph. We would be golden, but you would not do that. Therefore, we must have a very careful balance in terms of what can be done to make sure that drivers are as safe and competent as possible, whether they are young, middle-aged or old. That is absolutely what we have to achieve, and I do not think that looking at specific restrictions at this time is wise.

Karl McCartney: Life is risky, but we want to minimise the risk.

Q266 Chair: We have had a lot of evidence, some of which has been contradictory, about whether we should or should not have more restrictions. A lot of the evidence has been weighted towards the learning process before you get to tests and whether it should perhaps be changed to suit all conditions, or seasons, et cetera. I want to ask about intensive driving courses. I looked up one of these courses. It is called Seven Days Driving, albeit they offer nine days on this one. This would be suitable for a complete beginner. It comprises 45 hours in nine days, which is five



hours a day. Do you think this is the way to teach people to drive, bearing in mind that they will not get the full range of seasons and it is also quite tiring for first-time drivers who have to drive for five hours a day?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We are not proposing to ban those sorts of courses. They might be suitable for certain people, but I recognise that they have their limitations. It is something we will take away and consider further, but I agree with you that you cannot possibly have all seasons and you may not be able to do it in all environments. At the end of the day, is there evidence to show that people who pass their tests on those sorts of courses are any less safe? I am not sure there is. For the right sort of person it could be perfectly suitable.

Q267 **Chair:** Do we know that? It is an interesting point. In terms of data, do we track collision rates for those who have passed on an intensive-driving course versus those who have taken a more conventional one?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I am not sure that we have the data. Our data is based on the individual. If an individual books a test, we would not know where that person had previously learned to drive.

Q268 **Chair:** In my day I remember that those who took this course tended to have some driving experience already. They also potentially tended to be individuals who did not necessarily consider carefully the risks; they already felt confident enough to even do an intensive-driving course. I just wonder whether the data show that, while those people may pass because they know how to handle a car to get them through the test, they are not the most careful drivers because they might be less risk averse.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Or you might be the sort of driver who needs to drive for your work and pass a driving test very quickly because it is very important. I am trying to think of an example for another form of transportation where there is a time-elapsing element to it. If you are learning to fly, are you a better pilot if you learn over two years or if you do the modules back to back, because you remember more from the last one and accumulate experience and knowledge much more quickly? I do not know. David, do you have anything on this one?

David Buttery: No. The Minister is right. We will not have data on exactly how individuals learn from the information we get from DVLA and DVSA, but it is certainly something we can think about in how we look at the risk factors that exist around intensive courses. It is something we need to take back and have a look at.

Q269 **Chair:** Notwithstanding there is no data on it, there are no plans to change and review intensive driving courses.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: There are no plans to do that, but, as David says, we will take that away and look at it, and see if we can find any evidence that they are not doing what they should.

Chair: We are going to talk next about telematics. We heard from the



insurance industry in our previous session.

Q270 Grahame Morris: Minister, earlier you mentioned Driver 2020 and touched on telematics. It is absolutely clear from the earlier exchanges how important robust evidence and reliable data is before we can make decisions that will help to reduce collision rates for young and novice drivers. Black boxes have been shown to reduce the crash risk by 46%. What is your view on how effective black boxes can be in improving young and novice driver safety?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I am a big fan of black boxes and those sorts of interventions that provide real-time feedback on how people are driving. It is one of the items we are looking at in Driver 2020. One of the post-test interventions is: can telematics provide the right sort of feedback? Next time I speak to the insurance industry I am going to raise it with them, because it is a very useful intervention. I do not think we are going to be mandating it any time soon, but certainly within their pricing structures it would be very interesting to see whether they can do more to encourage young people to have telematics and a black box in their car.

Q271 Grahame Morris: You might be aware that the Committee held an engagement session with young drivers and students. They were quite enthusiastic about the value of black boxes maybe, as you alluded to just now, because of the potential for financial savings on insurance premiums. Given your enthusiasm in response to my first question about the introduction of these black boxes and their proven benefits, did you just say you were ruling out legislation for the mandatory use of such black boxes for a particular period after someone has passed their test? Can you clarify that?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We are not going to make them mandatory now. That does not necessarily mean that we would not do so in the future. For example, imagine that Driver 2020 shows that the telematics feedback system is the standout winner of all the different interventions that we are proposing. We would then look at it and take a different view. We would also look to speak to the insurance industry. Why do people take up telematics and why don't they? That is a really important question. From my personal point of view, it can be a very positive feedback loop for young drivers to know how their driving is going, because they know that somebody, usually their mother, is getting the texts.

Q272 Grahame Morris: I can understand that. Technology is changing all the time and there are myriad different phone-based apps. It is perfectly feasible to have not a hard-wired black box in the car but a device-based app that could provide the same data and information and be effective in improving safety. I understand that bit.

Moving on, you mentioned discussions with the insurance industry. The AA, RAC and British Insurance Brokers Association have all called for the insurance premium tax to be waived for telematics-based insurance policies. Does the Department, or do you personally, have a view on this



suggestion?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I would not want to have a view on it. That is a matter for the Treasury.

Q273 **Grahame Morris:** You do not think there would be value in that? Is it a financial decision that you could not even seek to influence by venturing an opinion?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Grahame, as you know, the insurance industry is a highly competitive market, and it is also a private market. Particularly for very new drivers, it is the case that telematics policies are cheaper, so I would put the emphasis back on to the insurance industry and just say, "If we really do want to make sure that young people are not making claims, you need to think about your pricing for telematics products."

Grahame Morris: We definitely agree on that point. I know that time is short, so I will hand back to the Chair in case I have missed anything or other areas need to be covered.

Q274 **Chair:** We are doing very well for time; we have been very efficient. I want to ask one further question related to insurance. In this country insurance pricing tends to be by class. Therefore, young people are all grouped together as being young and therefore at risk. I believe that in the States, where it is more regulated, one looks more at the risk profile of the individual being insured. Do you believe that insurance is delivering value for money to young people, or is there a danger that it just makes sweeping generalisations about the way they drive, which is not necessarily relevant to that type of person and risk?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The insurance market is highly competitive. With the advent of price comparison websites, it has become even more competitive. I am sure you have had the same experience as me sometimes when you look at a policy and cannot quite imagine how two different insurers have hugely different prices, but we have to let them price their own risk. They know more about their market than we do. I think that intervening in that way would result in disincentives and also make the market not as competitive as it is now.

Q275 **Chair:** We saw previously a differentiation in policy—again, the insurance industry tends to take a rather wide view—between male drivers and female drivers, working on the basis that a male driver is more likely to have a collision than a female driver. That was found by the European Court of Justice, or its predecessor, to breach anti-discrimination laws. Obviously, we will be free from the boundaries of Europe next year. Would there be any plans to allow changes in law so that that differentiated pricing policy between genders could be brought back in, or is the idea just to leave it?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is not something that I am aware is being considered, but insurance is a policy area that falls more under the Treasury. I am not aware that it is being considered.



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Q276 **Chair:** When we leave the European Union, all of a sudden we could find that, if women make statistically safer drivers, they might be able to be priced differently on that basis.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: And perhaps women across the country would rejoice.

Q277 **Chair:** I am sure they would. If there are no other questions from colleagues, that is the end of our inquiry. Minister, I would like to thank you and Mr Buttery for all your evidence. We are looking forward to getting together and coming up with our report and recommendations, which will be winging its way to you.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I look forward to getting it.

Chair: Thank you.