

To: Transport & Health Policy Makers, & Practitioners
From: Professor Adrian Davis
Date: 8th November 2024
Subject: Essential Evidence 4 Scotland No.93 Graduated Driver Licensing

Top Line: In countries implementing Graduated driver licensing, the licensing regime has reduced collisions and trauma from collisions involving a young driver, typically by 20–40%.

Graduated driver licensing (GDL) is a form of phased licensing that introduces various requirements on new drivers to support them through their early driving career, when they are at greater risk of injury, and of injuring others in collisions. Young and novice drivers are over-represented in these collisions. As well as encouraging greater and more varied practice during the learning phase, GDL targets the known risk situations of driving in the dark and carrying peer-age passengers, by imposing restrictions on these activities for a period after they have passed their test.

A 2021 UK Government report¹ included an examination of the case for implementing GDL in Great Britain. It noted that there is evidence for injury reduction from GDL, but also that there are concerns about the impact on other outcomes such as access to employment and education for young people. Previously there had been a commitment by the UK Government to undertake research into these social and economic consequences of GDL. However, the Minister for Transport, when giving evidence to the Transport Select Committee's (TSC) inquiry, noted that this research was not progressing, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns about the potential effects of GDL on employment. In response, researchers examined questions which remained unanswered in terms of the social and economic consequences of GDL.² Their report addressed the areas of concerns the TSC report raised, using a rapid evidence review of published literature, and through interviews with young people and international GDL experts.

Eight areas of concern were addressed: (1–4) potential impacts on access to employment and education, on the needs of specific groups (such as carers), on those in rural areas, and on social and health outcomes; (5) difficulties concerning enforcement; (6) lack of support from young people; (7) equivalent benefits being possible with telematics technology; and (8) the reliance on evidence from other countries (the implication being that GDL would not work as well in Great Britain, which has generally safer roads). On the basis of the evidence currently available, including the opinions of experts and young people interviewed, serious adverse impacts are not seen or expected in any of the areas considered. This is because all stakeholders (new drivers, and their friends and families; employers; and service providers) were found to adapt to restrictions, with evidence showing that exemptions and changes in travel patterns help people to maintain the most important elements of their mobility, yet still benefit from well-evidenced safety improvements.

GDL systems are designed to benefit all new drivers, but most new drivers also tend to be young. Around 73% of driving test passers in GB are aged between 17 and 24. The debate about GDL in Great Britain has stalled after over two decades of inquiries and evidence gathering. This is likely to be partly due to the perception that GDL is a 'one size fits all' approach, whereas in reality it is a pick-and-mix suite of measures (for example minimum learning periods, and rules on how many passengers can be carried) that can be tailored to different situations and contexts, and which can support new drivers in their early driving, easing them through the riskiest aspects of being behind the wheel while they develop their skills.

¹ House of Commons Transport Committee, 2021 Road Safety: Young and novice drivers. HC 169, Fourth Report of Session 2019–21. Accessed 1 August 2022 from <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4871/documents/49009/default/>

² Hellman, S., Kinnear, N., Hitchings, J., Jones, S, 2022 Supporting New Drivers in Great Britain, London: RAC Foundation. [Supporting new drivers in GB Helman et al Oct 2022.pdf](#)