Cohort Study of Learner and Novice Drivers

Funding: National (United Kingdom)
Duration: Jul 2001 - Jun 2007
Status: Complete

Background & policy context:

The main source of information concerning methods used in learning to drive and experience gained during the learning period, and concerning the accidents which novice drivers have in the early post-test period, is the original cohort study conducted in 1988/9.

There have been many changes in the intervening period, and it is important for policy development, and for monitoring of the effects of measures introduced as part of the Road Safety Strategy, that up-to-date information is gathered. There will be 4 survey weeks in each year, during each of which 8,000 practical driving test candidates (out of a possible 25,000) will be selected at random and sent a questionnaire about learning to drive.

The questionnaire will cover learning strategies in general, including distances driven, types of road and weather conditions experienced, mix of professional training and private practice, etc.

Questionnaire responses will be analysed in relation to driving test report forms. Respondents who have passed will be sent further questionnaires at various stages during their first 3 years as a qualified driver, in order that information can be gathered about the amount and type of driving they have done, their attitudes about road safety related issues, their driving behaviour, and any accidents and near accidents they might have had.

A separate survey will also be undertaken of theory test candidates to determine how learners prepare for that element of the driving test and how that relates to their actual performance in the test.

Objectives:

The objectives of this research are to:
• carry out a detailed analysis of performance in both the theory and the practical driving tests in relation to candidate characteristics;
• investigate the methods used and experience gained while learning to drive, and in preparation for each part of the test, and following test failure;
• investigate the relationship between learning methods and driving test performance; investigate the attitudes and reported behaviour of drivers in the early post-test period;
• gather information about exposure to traffic situations, any accidents (and near accidents) experienced, and traffic offences committed during the first 3 years after passing the driving test;
• carry out an evaluation of the effectiveness of measures introduced, e.g. the introduction of hazard perception testing and the possible introduction of a mandatory logbook for learner drivers;
• and provide recommendations for the improvement of novice drivers’ safety records. We are working closely with DSA staff, who are involved in the project steering group.

An advisory group including representatives of the driver training industry will also be established.

The first sample of test candidates was drawn in the week beginning 5 November 2001.

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