

Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL)

Graduated driving licences set restrictions on new drivers once they have passed their practical test which are gradually lifted (usually between 6 - 24 months).

Current Government policy

- GDL does not exist in England, Wales or Scotland. In 2019, the UK Government looked at the possibility of introducing the scheme¹, however the then-Minister for Roads Baroness Vere confirmed in October 2020² that Ministers would not be pursuing the policy over fears it would impact on younger people's abilities to work and their personal freedoms. A bill introduced in June 2024 by Kim Leadbeater MP to implement GDL did not progress due to the 2024 General Election.
- In April 2018 it was revealed that a 'pilot' graduated scheme will be launched in Northern Ireland during 2019/20, however this was never implemented in full. Currently in NI, after passing the driving test for a motor car or a motorcycle, you must display amber R plates for a period of one year from the date of passing the test.

IAM Research

In 2020³, an IAM survey of more than 2,000 motorists found that more than two-thirds (68 per cent) strongly backed the suggestion that all new drivers, regardless of age, should undergo at least a year's training and supervised practice before being allowed to take their practical test.

The 2024 IAM RoadSmart Safety Report found that there is broad support across age groups for a form of graduated driver licensing.

- 75% of respondents supported a 'Zero-blood alcohol limit during the intermediate phase'
- 55% supported a nighttime driving curfew (between 23:00-6:00) during the intermediate phase
- 50% supported a ban on carrying passengers aged 25 and below during the intermediate phase

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-looks-at-steps-to-make-new-drivers-safer>

²<https://www.racfoundation.org/media-centre/ministers-rule-out-graduated-licensing>

³<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/motor-vehicle-documentation-learner-and-restricted-driver-requirements>

External research

- TRL research⁴ conducted for the RAC Foundation and the Rees-Jeffreys fund in 2022 found that none of the following areas would be impacted by GDL:
 - (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 will not work as well in Great Britain, which has generally safer roads).
- Research published for the RAC's Report on Motoring 2019 showed that over a third (35%) of young drivers feel the standard driving test does not cover all the skills required to cope with the demands of driving today.

RAC Report on Motoring, 2024 :

- 13% of young drivers believe they have been a passenger in a car where the driver has taken drugs that could impair their driving.
- Drivers aged 17 to 24 are much more likely to admit to either drink-driving themselves, or being a passenger when they knew or suspected driver was over the limit.

IAM RoadSmart calls to action:

- Road crashes are the biggest killer of young people in the UK today and yet road safety does not merit the same priority as suicide, knife crime or drugs.
- IAM recognises that where GDL has been introduced around the world, it has generally proven successful and therefore we would be supportive of some form of GDL.
- Research has shown that concerns about impacting the opportunities of younger or newer drivers to be largely unfounded.
- In the absence of GDL, the Government should instead look at whether the learning process is fit for purpose and should look at the following options:
 - Introducing a minimum number of hours of lessons for learner drivers
 - A requirement for new drivers to undertake a tailored assessment at a discounted price within the first 12 months of passing their practical test to ensure skills are maintained and improved, with an opportunity for discounted insurance.
 - Practical driving test should include driving on high speed roads
- Road safety education should be part of the National Curriculum and theory and hazard perception training and testing should take place within the education system.
- IAM RoadSmart does not support night time curfews on young drivers as they reduce opportunities to gain experience, impact on the economy and job prospects and raise problems of enforcement. We do support an almost zero drink-drive limit.
- IAM RoadSmart is ready to provide its knowledge and expertise in developing the content of the minimum learning period and post test interventions, as well as on line learning and new recording systems.

COMMENT (2025)

Nicholas Lyes, IAM RoadSmart Director of Policy & Standards said:

"Drivers clearly want to see action on improving the learning to drive process. The Government should consider a statutory minimum period of learning or make a competency-based system for the instructor to sign-off on key skills that have been mastered."

"A lifetime of safe driving starts by gaining the right experience behind the wheel. Even the Government's own statistics show that one in five new drivers crash within their first year on the road, so further research on this should be considered."