

Trial of improved procedures for driver licence tests administered by occupational therapists

John Catchpole^a, Dr Marilyn Di Stefano^b & Kim Mestroni^c

^aAustralian Road Research Board, ^bVicRoads, ^cOccupational Therapy Australia–Victoria Division

Abstract

VicRoads, ARRB and Occupational Therapy Australia–Victoria Division are supporting the implementation of improved testing procedures for use by occupational therapists trained in driver assessment (OTs) who conduct driver licence tests for people with medical/disability issues. A trial was conducted in 2016–17 to establish the feasibility and OT acceptance of the improved test. Twenty OTs participated in three trial phases using iterative processes to develop 15 compliant routes and test 156 clients, completing feedback forms after each test. Based on the trial outcomes, further improvements were made to test procedures, assessment criteria, route requirements and associated documentation.

Background

OTs specialising in driver assessment conduct on-road practical driving tests with drivers who have a cognitive, psychiatric or physical impairment or require adaptive aids or vehicle modifications. A review of licence test procedures used by OTs found the test documentation available to OTs lacked detail and was partially based on an obsolete probationary licence test. Baseline research identified large variations in test duration and driving task complexity across different test routes and locations.

VicRoads conducted a series of projects to examine current practice with a view to improving the validity, reliability and fairness of OT licence test procedures, harmonisation with other licence tests currently in use in Victoria and test documentation. A draft test manual setting out proposed test procedures, including assessment criteria and test route requirements, was developed by VicRoads for comment by OTs. A trial of the new procedures was conducted in late 2016 and early 2017.

Method

The trial comprised three strands:

- i. assessment of drivers wishing to retain an unrestricted licence ('open area' tests), using the new assessment criteria but using existing (non-compliant) test routes
- ii. open area tests conducted using the new assessment criteria and upgraded test routes
- iii. assessment of drivers who chose to accept a licence condition limiting driving to a defined area around their home ('local area' tests).

For use in the second strand of the trial, 15 existing open area test routes were upgraded to comply with the new route requirements. Feedback questionnaires were completed by participating OTs, capturing data from each licence test conducted during the trial. Feedback was also collected from OTs who upgraded test routes. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Upgraded test routes underwent iterative process improvements with multiple reviews. Errors and non-conformances indicating difficulty in complying with requirements were discussed and consensus reached to resolve issues.

Results

Twenty experienced OT driver assessors participated in the trial. Across the three strands, 156 completed post-test feedback questionnaires were received.

Common feedback themes included licence test duration; standard tasks required in all licence tests; assessment of non-standard ('client-specific') tasks; detail required when documenting test routes; and additional test procedures. The upgrade process also identified challenges in complying with standard requirements.

Conclusions

Trial feedback resulted in several test adjustments, including reducing the minimum number of compulsory driving tasks in an open area test route and provision of a formal time allowance for client-specific task assessment if required. The emergency stop and three-point turn tasks were reclassified as client-specific rather than standard tasks. The test manual was enhanced to clarify driving performance assessment, standard test route development, suitability of vehicles for use in licence tests and other test procedures.

The revised test manual has been delivered, together with training to support compliance with the new requirements. Assistance is also available to OTs who need to upgrade or create standard test routes. Implementation of the upgraded test procedures is expected to be completed late in 2018.